

## Humboldt's 2nd phase is under way

*A neighborhood in north  
Minneapolis is being  
transformed thanks to  
the Humboldt Greenway*

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SPECIAL TO FINANCE AND COMMERCE

Hennepin County Community Works Manager Larry Blackstad remembers going to a neighborhood meeting near the once-blighted area of north Minneapolis where the Humboldt Greenway development now stands.

"It was a resident who said, 'I bought my house five years ago for \$50,000 and went to get a home equity mortgage and found out I have negative equity,'" Blackstad recalled.

"You need to do something with this neighborhood,"

the resident complained.

Now, after roughly \$28 million in public investment from county, regional, state and federal sources, the stretch of Humboldt Avenue that is bounded by Victoria Memorial Parkway to the south and 53rd Avenue to the north (near the Minneapolis/Brooklyn Center border) has been completely redefined.

Only five years ago, the area was mostly a collection of poorly maintained, declining, dilapidated and condemned homes and commercial buildings. Today it's blossoming into a modern-day extension of the city's quaintly charming Victory Memorial Parkway.

In 2001, the distressed neighborhood was completely razed and redesigned to make way for the Humboldt Greenway, which comprises market-rate, single-family homes and townhouses being marketed by The Jerry Fladmark Group with Coldwell Banker Burnet.

Phase I of the construction project began in 2001 and included 58 single-family homes and 36 townhouses.



**Developer Ross Fefercorn says the area surrounding the Humboldt Greenway project was a "pretty scary place" before redevelopment helped help turn around the neighborhood. (F&C photo by Bill Klotz)**

## Humboldt Greenway: 'Property value around the project has doubled.'

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The development's signature parkway, a new 2-acre park, a regional trail, a pedestrian greenway and improvements to Shingle Creek were also completed during Phase I.

Phase II, which was launched in May, will include 55 single-family homes and 53 townhomes. Homes range in size from 1,480 to 1,986 square feet. Townhomes start at \$229,000, and single-family homes are priced from \$259,000.

The development also includes Kingsley Commons and Shingle Creek Commons (completed during Phase I), a pair of special needs and senior housing complexes managed by CommonBond, a nonprofit affordable housing provider.

"The people who have stuck with us have gotten a lot of equity back into their property," Blackstad said. "The average price of the property we demolished was \$60,000, and the average price of a new house in the neighborhood is \$250,000.

"Property value around the project has doubled, and you see a lot of improvements in the housing around the area that wasn't directly affected by the project."

Blackstad has helped guide the project since its inception in the mid-1990s as one of the first redevelopment initiatives of Hennepin County Community Works. The county agency aims to stimulate economic development, improve natural systems and ultimately enhance the county's tax base. Other Community Works projects include the Midtown Greenway redevelopment and the Lowry Avenue Corridor, which broke ground in May.

Ross Fefercorn is chief manager of Humboldt Greenway Development, the project's developer. As Fefercorn describes it, the old neighborhood was a textbook case of urban decline before it was razed.

"It was grid-patterned streets with gas stations, funky old grocery stores and houses that were boarded-up. Many of the houses had some pretty rough tenants. I would say it was a pretty scary place," he said.

"Now we've built a beautiful, family-friendly community with market rate residences that are modeled after the homes along the Victoria Memorial Parkway ... I'm proud that I've played a role in revitalizing this community," he said.

"This street is really something that looks great," he said, pointing to neighborhood amenities like hiking and biking trails, parks and water features that include the adjacent Shingle Creek.

Fefercorn said he was especially enthusiastic about working on the development, having grown up along a contiguous stretch of the Victoria Memorial Parkway.

A trained architect with an architectural degree from the University of Minnesota, Fefercorn said he took an active role in researching the design of the existing post-World War I homes along the historic parkway.

"I went out with a camera and shot up about 500 homes," he said.

He then worked with B. Aaron Parker & Associates/Metropligo and Nelson Tremain Partnership on a design strategy that netted more than 12 different plans, each referencing the styles of the stucco, bungalow, Tudor and foursquare homes in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The exterior of the new homes are customizable in a variety of materials, including brick, stone, stucco and low-maintenance siding, he said. Homes may also include professional landscaping, double garages and private fenced yards.

The building contractor is CountryHome Builders Inc., another of Fefercorn's companies. Fefercorn extolled the site design of properties as unique, saying they were created to maximize each lot's usable outdoor space. He calls the site design a "reverse Charleston."

"In old southern neighborhoods [in cities like Charleston, S.C.] that were designed in the 18th and 19th century, you see city homes built to the south side of the lot to maximize the usable space on the north side," he said. "That's where all of the activity is — on the north side of the yard — because it's out of the sun."

In Minnesota, where people tend to seek sun and heat when it is available, the idea is to reverse that configuration and increase usable space on the south side.

Another unique design feature, Fefercorn said, is that the homes are actually built 5 feet into the neighboring home's property line to maximize the "active side" of the yard of the narrow city lots.