



Regenerative Community Progress Report

February 2014

"I'm hopeful because of young folks like Nick Tilsen. Nick built a community center that uses spiritual and cultural teachings to help young people stay off drugs and their parents live healthier lifestyles. It's making a difference. Today he's building something bigger, a clean energy community that will provide affordable housing and help more Lakota small businesses get off the ground. Day by day, family by family, community by community, Nick and his nonprofit have helped inspire a new beginning for Pine Ridge. Nick says we decided as a community to take ownership of our own future. And that makes me hopeful."

■ *President Barack Obama, The White House Tribal Nations Conference, Dec. 5, 2012*

Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, one of the poorest areas in the country, is the planned site for a cutting-edge sustainable community development project – the Regenerative Community. Planned in a community-wide process and being built by Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (TVCDC), the new community is being created from the ground up in ways that are culturally appropriate, energy-efficient, and transformative for the community. The Regenerative Community will feature affordable homes and rentals, pow wow grounds, skateboard park and ropes course, light industrial space, retail and business incubation spaces, spiritual spaces, and an aquaponics greenhouse. A key feature will be an Empowerment Center, a mixed-used building housing life-long education programs and workforce training, meeting spaces, a Cultural Arts Center, a daycare center, and fitness facilities.

"The entire development is a regenerative, sustainable system," said TVCDC Executive Director Nick Tilsen. "Every house is positioned to take in the maximum amount of passive solar. There will be 100 percent water reclamation. Building materials are sustainable. It will be a net zero community, producing all the energy it uses. This Regenerative Community can be seen as a living laboratory. It is potentially a national and even international model." The plan calls for residents to help build their own homes, as a way to create sweat equity in home ownership. And TVCDC aims to hire locally, as a way to create jobs and develop skills for those on the Reservation.

The project is driven by the need for jobs, housing, facilities and new opportunities that currently do not exist on the Reservation. To help make the development a reality, TVCDC has been working to create partnerships both nationally and locally. Design assistance has come from service-learning partnerships with the Oglala Lakota College and University of Colorado Boulder's Program in Environmental Design. A key firm drafting the Master Plan for the development is BNIM Architects and Planners from Kansas City, and another primary partner is Drennan Pyatt Architecture. A Capital Team of advisers has been put together by The Democracy Collaborative. Other partners and supporters of TVCDC include the Native

American Sustainable Housing Initiative, Enterprise Community Partners, South Dakota Community Foundation, Lakota Fund, First Nations Development Institute, Northwest Area Foundation, and the Hill-Snowdon Foundation.

Phase I of the project, which ran from 2010 to 2013, involved coordinating a planning process, purchasing 34 acres for the development, and drafting the master architectural plan and preliminary engineering report. This phase was funded largely by a \$1 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Program, a \$50,000 grant from Enterprise Community Partners and \$75,000 of pass-through funds from the Minnesota Housing Partnership. The 34 acres are owned by TVCDC, a nonprofit organization, which plans to serve as general contractor and developer for the development.

The next phase of the project will involve beginning construction on the first 30 homes. Infrastructure for these will cost \$2.3 million. TVCDC plans to submit a \$1 million grant application to USDA Rural Development for the water and sewer infrastructure portion of this. It likely will take on debt for the remainder. TVCDC recently submitted a grant for \$452,000 for the grading and building of roads, and paths to the South Dakota's Governor's Office on Economic Development Local Infrastructure grant program and have also conditional commitments of loan funds from the South Dakota Housing Opportunity Fund and Minnesota Housing Partnership.

Through the creation of the Thunder Valley CDC, the Oglala Lakota nation is managing a planning and revitalization effort that has succeed in attracting the support of multiple state and federal agencies. The Regenerative Community is the first project of the Model Community Development initiative envisioned in the Reservation's regional plan. The goal is to create sustainable and interconnected communities that provide better housing, places for business to thrive, and a healthy supportive environment for youth, elderly, and families. This project will explore new ways of living that build on traditional Lakota values to develop innovative, homegrown Native solutions to a variety of challenges.

As Tilsen said, "Our people are tackling many issues and coming up with their own solutions. For the first time, they're being asked what they want, not being told what others think they need."

The hard work of Thunder Valley CDC has been recognized by President Barack Obama, who in a 2012 speech at the White House Tribal Nations Conference publicly praised the CDC and Tilsen for creating "a clean-energy community that will provide affordable housing for folks who need it and help more Lakota small businesses get off the ground." The project was also recently praised by Angela Glover Blackwell, founder and CEO of PolicyLink, in her book, *All-In Nation: An America That Works for All*. Among other press mentions, Tilsen spoke recently about the planned community on South Dakota PBS.

Among the People Involved

Nick Tilsen, founder and executive director of Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation and a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, has more than a decade's experience working with nonprofit organizations and tribal nations on social mission projects. Nick was also project director for Oyate Omnicye, the HUD-funded process that created a reservation-wide sustainable development plan for the Oglala Lakota Nation. He sits on the SD Advisory Committee for the Bush Foundation.

Bob Berkebile, Principal, BNIM Architects and Planners, who led the architectural drafting of the Master Plan for the Regenerative Community. Berkebile is a leader in green building, recipient of the Heinz

Award from Theresa Heinz and the Heinz Family Foundation for his role in promoting green building design. He was listed No. 3 among Top 5 Individual Role Models for green and sustainable design in the 2009 Design Intelligence Sustainable Design Survey.

Capital Team includes **Marjorie Kelly**, Democracy Collaborative; **Rebecca Adamson**, First Peoples Worldwide; **Blaise Emerson**, Black Hills Council of Local Government; **Gilda Haas**, Antioch University; **Russell Kaney**, Enterprise Community Partners; **Jim King**, Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises; **Lisa Richter**, GPS Capital Partners.