



# Green Streets Promote Creative Ways to Re-Use Stormwater

**W**hen it comes to rain, it pours, and the first inch of stormwater runoff is the dirtiest. Downtown Mobile is prone to flooding and the water eventually makes its way to Mobile Bay. That's one reason Auburn landscape architect professor **Charlene LeBleu**, armed with a grant from the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and a cadre of graduate students, headed up an outreach project last fall to design innovative ways to handle downtown Mobile's stormwater and, at the same time, create livable urban spaces. Known as "Green Streets," the initiative, pending funding, is now ready to be put in place.

"We targeted Mobile because it has so much going for it. Downtown is the heart of the city's history," said LeBleu.

The initiative addresses a four-block segment along Dauphin Street, including Bienville and Cathedral Squares. With support from Envision Coastal Alabama,

the city of Mobile, Mobile Area Chamber and the Downtown Mobile Alliance, students pitched ideas such as vegetation on rooftops, an open-air market on St. Joseph Street and walls of plants that act as natural water filters and cooling systems.

Planners and landscape designers with Birmingham-based Barge Waggoner Sumner & Cannon Inc. worked with LeBleu to glean the best suggestions and distill the list of potential green infrastructure projects to three – stormwater planters, continuous tree pits (permeable cobblestones and pavers) and cisterns to harvest rainwater.

"This is on a scale that is very doable from an implementation standpoint," said Bob Wilkerson, the Barge Waggoner planner who worked on the project. "Our hope is, it gets done, people see it and eventually the private sector replicates it."

The team identified a vacant lot on Dauphin Street adjacent to the Downtown Mobile Alliance and the Saenger Theatre to try out its first design. Architectural drawings suggest turning the empty space into a multi-use courtyard with stormwater planters to collect and filter rainwater and a corrugated metal cistern to harvest rainwater from neighboring roofs.

LeBleu said revitalizing an empty lot demonstrates how the "Green Streets" initiative not only works toward flood prevention but also begins to stitch the main street fabric back together. "We're filling in the missing teeth in the façade," she added.



Proposed stormwater water planters along Dauphin Street. If the planters are successful they could be considered for widespread installation throughout Mobile.

The project's designers also advocate using continuous tree pits made of permeable cobblestones or pavers along the Dauphin Street parade route. "People could still stand on these. It's about treating the street as one public space and fully maximizing that space," said Barge Waggoner landscape designer **Judd Langham**.

**Fred Rendfrey**, Downtown Mobile Alliance's director of downtown economic development, said his organization is committed to the environmental sustainability "Green Streets" represents and sees Mobile as potentially becoming a model for other communities. "What we

can do is set a good example and encourage, through design and financial incentives, other green projects in the future," Rendfrey said.

LeBleu said Mobile Mayor **Sam Jones** wrote letters supporting the project but she is looking for a greater consensus from other municipal officials. And like all projects, this one takes money. According to LeBleu, Auburn University is including "Green Streets" in upcoming federal lobbying efforts in hopes of securing a three-year, \$3 million federal grant to implement the project. If that happens, Mobilians could see a greener downtown by 2012.



Images depict day-to-evening uses for the vacant lots adjacent to the Downtown Mobile Alliance and the Saenger Theatre along Dauphin Street. The proposed courtyard includes a water well, stormwater planters and rain gardens, retractable movie screen and a seating area.

## FDIC Chairman Sheila Bair to Headline Coastal Economy Outlook



Sheila Bair

Sheila Bair, Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) chairman, will headline a list of noteworthy national and regional leaders speaking at the 2010 Coastal Economy Outlook.

The event will take place Wednesday, Sept. 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at The Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa. Bair will speak on current conditions in the U.S., regional and local markets and perspectives on the future direction of the U.S. economy.

In 2009 Bair was named one of *Time Magazine's* "Time 100" most influential people, was awarded the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award and received the Hubert H. Humphrey Civil Rights Award. In 2008, Bair topped *The Wall Street Journal's* annual 50 "Women to Watch List." That same year, *Forbes* magazine named her as the second most powerful woman in the world.

The annual seminar provides current information, facts, analysis and opinions on the area's financial resources. "This program is the best source of information on the coastal economy from the people who are actively involved in regulation and policy," said Dr. Don Epley, distinguished professor of real estate and the current director of the Mitchell College of Business Center for Real Estate Studies. "These three hours are critical to anyone interested in local and regional credit and economic trends."

The event will also include local and regional speakers addressing Southeast banking and credit markets, property insurance and contaminated real estate, and Mobile and Baldwin counties' current and potential credit markets.

Coastal Economy Outlook is sponsored by BB&T and the University of South Alabama Center for Real Estate Studies. Other supporting sponsors include the Mobile Area Chamber, Envision Coastal Alabama and the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance.

Registration deadline is Wednesday, Sept. 1, and the cost to attend is \$100. For more information visit the USA Center for Real Estate Studies web site <http://cres.southalabama.edu>. To register online visit the Mobile Area Chamber web site [www.mobilechamber.com](http://www.mobilechamber.com) and click on 'Calendar of Events' or register by phone by contacting Shelly Mattingly at 431-8655 or [smattingly@mobilechamber.com](mailto:smattingly@mobilechamber.com).

## Baldwin County Education Coalition Raising the Bar for Baldwin Schools



Members of the South Baldwin Chamber Foundation gather to recognize teachers and students at Foley Elementary School to award education grants in support of school initiatives. The Baldwin County Education Coalition's seven enrichment foundations, annually provide funding to enhance student/teacher programs in Baldwin County schools.

There's a new movement to give Baldwin County residents a voice in improving the county's public schools. In July, the recently formed nonprofit Baldwin County Education Coalition, an Envision strategy partner made up of members from the county's seven local enrichment foundations, launched "Yes We Can Baldwin County." The initiative is a countywide community engagement process organizers say will set a local as well as regional vision for education.

"Our goal is to speak with one cohesive voice about our long-term goals for our community, including what we want our schools to look like, and to create a mechanism for continuous community involvement," said Denise D'Oliveira, executive director of Supporting Enrichment in Daphne Schools and a member of the new coalition.

The Baldwin program is modeled after Envision strategy partner Mobile Area Education Foundation's (MAEF) "Yes We Can," piloted in 2001 and later used successfully in Birmingham and Dothan schools. MAEF is serving as a consultant for "Yes We Can Baldwin County," helping guide the process and compile data.

Terry Burkle, Envision education team co-leader and vice president of the

South Baldwin Chamber Foundation, said momentum for "Yes We Can Baldwin County" grew from a 1 percent sales tax referendum Baldwin voters passed last



The Fairhope Educational Enrichment Foundation, also a Coalition member, offers tutoring assistance in math and reading at no cost for eligible students.

March. "We heard from the community that they weren't quite satisfied and they wanted the opportunity to have input on how their money is spent."

According to Burkle, the initiative gives residents that chance to be heard. Over the last three months, volunteers gathered ideas from residents through more than 90 countywide community meetings. Among other questions, residents were asked what

they have in common, what keeps them apart, what they want the community to look like and what role education plays.

The data generated will form a community agreement detailing areas for improvement within the school district as well as broader local and state problems the community must work together to solve. In November, the Baldwin County Education Coalition will present the resulting document to the Baldwin County Board of Education as a basis for creating a co-owned strategic plan.

Carolyn Akers, MAEF chief executive officer, said the Mobile "Yes We Can" movement was successful in moving Mobile schools and students to a higher performance standard by closing the education gap between African-American and white students and between poverty and non-poverty students.

As a former co-leader for the Envision education team, Akers said she believes the partnership between MAEF and the Baldwin County Education Coalition will be a positive force for education in the region, providing a means to focus on issues such as funding and equity. "Yes We Can" is a specific way we really can partner together to get the process done and also begin to look at shared expectations in order to act and move our children to a much better place," she said.

# Sustainability Requires Strong Roots to Endure and Prosper

There are many ties that bind us to our place in the world: ties to family and friends, ties to our work, and perhaps most importantly, ties to the things that make the place we live our home. In Alabama, we are bound as tightly to our natural resources as anything else – we fish and swim, boat and hike, take our sustenance from the dirt and the water, and make our living doing jobs whose success and long-term viability depends wholly on the quality and abundance of our natural resources – commercial fishing, agriculture, tourism and the maritime industry, to name just a few.

In the weeks and months following Deepwater Horizon, we realize just how connected we are to our natural resources and how tenuous those ties can be. In the wake of this unprecedented event threatening our coastal way of life, there has never been a better time to closely examine those interconnected threads that weave the fabric of our culture in Alabama. Sustainability has become one of those buzzwords that the more you use it, the less meaning it seems to have. I once hesitated to even mention the word simply because it is difficult to even explain what “sustainability” means to one person or another. Is it about protecting the environment (most people’s first thoughts) or is it something deeper and broader?

If you look up the etymology of the word, you will find that essentially sustainable means “to hold from below.” Much like a tree’s roots spread far and wide beneath the trunk, carrying nutrients and water and supporting the parts of the tree we can see above ground, a



By Bethany Kraft, Alabama Coastal Foundation

sustainable future for Alabama means our own roots reach far into every aspect of our economy and our lives are strong and have the capacity to endure and prosper from one generation to the next, and the ties that bind us are nurtured and protected. If one area falters, we will all be the weaker for it.

Moving towards a sustainable Alabama will require all of us to shift our focus from one of viewing the areas contributing to a growing and thriving state as separate problems to be tackled individually, to one incorporating an understanding of the interconnectedness of the economy and the environment, workforce development and transportation, education and public health. Without a healthy environment, our economy will suffer. Without access to mass transit, many

people who want to work will be unable to get to the businesses that want to hire them. Without a solid educational foundation, our students will not have the critical thinking skills necessary to compete in a global economy.

Laying the framework of creating a state with the capacity to endure and prosper is a much harder task than simply working to address one challenge at a time. Working towards a sustainable Alabama will require a vision and a commitment from every citizen and our elected officials to work together to

meet the challenges of creating a better life for our children and grandchildren. I think we are up to the task.

*Bethany Kraft is the executive director for the Alabama Coastal Foundation and Envision’s environment team chair for the Baldwin County. She can be reached at 990-6002 or bkraft@joinacf.org.*

## Coastal Economy Outlook

Wednesday, September 15

9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

The Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa

Featured speaker is

**Sheila C. Bair**

Chair, Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.



Visit the USA Center for Real Estate Studies web site for a full brochure and registration form at <http://cres.southalabama.edu>

Registration fee is \$100 through Wednesday, Sept. 1.

Register online at [www.mobilechamber.com](http://www.mobilechamber.com) or contact Shelly Mattingly at 431-8655 or [smattingly@mobilechamber.com](mailto:smattingly@mobilechamber.com)

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### Mission Statement

*Envision Coastal Alabama facilitates co-operative action for a unified coastal region with a healthy environment, sustainable economic development, equity for all and excellence in education.*

If you are interested in becoming an Envision volunteer, please log on to [www.envisioncoastalalabama.org](http://www.envisioncoastalalabama.org) and click on “Get Involved”.

Or contact Amanda Selph, Baldwin County coordinator, at 947-5721 or [aselph@baldwineda.com](mailto:aselph@baldwineda.com) or Shayla Jones Beaco, Mobile County director, at 431-8628 or [sbeaco@mobilechamber.com](mailto:sbeaco@mobilechamber.com).



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## Envision Sponsors First-Ever Housing Collaborative

When it comes to regional coordination and cooperation between housing providers in Mobile and Baldwin counties, a little talk could mean a lot of action. To that end, Envision Coastal Alabama's equity team recently sponsored its first-ever Housing Collaborative for area nonprofit housing agencies serving the two-county region. More than 15 nonprofit housing entities including governmental agencies, community and faith-based organizations, nonprofit developers and fair housing advocates attended the June meeting.

Earlier this year, equity team volunteers identified housing redevelopment as one of the committee's primary focus areas for the next two years. The Housing Collaborative provides a platform for exchange between housing development agencies to best maximize support for neighborhood revitalization efforts. Shirley Sessions, Envision equity team co-chair and vice president of community affairs for Regions Bank, said she hoped the meeting would result in a taskforce that would work collectively to promote the best housing outcomes.

"Your housing agency plays a critical role in our community's overall quality of

life. Consequently, it is Envision's goal to provide you with a forum to collaborate with other stakeholders in the nonprofit housing sector," Sessions told the group.

Before the meeting's conclusion, representatives in attendance expressed their desire and intent to stay closely involved with the new housing task force. The committee agreed its first undertaking would be developing an inventory of the region's current housing projects to better identify gaps. "One of the largest challenges we face is the ability to continue moving forward so our community can count on a single overall mission. That is, to provide equitable access to decent, safe and affordable housing in all its many forms and fashions," said Danny Patterson, director of community and economic development for the Community Foundation of South Alabama. The Envision Housing Collaborative would help bring opportunities to a common table and allow all stakeholders to participate in the solutions, he added.

To become involved with the Envision Housing Collaborative, contact Shayla Jones Beaco at 431-8628 or [sbeaco@mobilechamber.com](mailto:sbeaco@mobilechamber.com).

## City of Mobile Receives EPA Brownfields Grant

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded the city of Mobile a \$400,000 brownfields grant to conduct environmental site assessments on properties in Mobile's greater downtown area. Selected from a nationwide list of 697 proposals, this federal funding opportunity will help the city quantify and delineate contamination at the sites, facilitate cleanup and determine appropriate site reuse alternatives.

According to the EPA, brownfields are abandoned or underused properties where redevelopment is complicated by actual or perceived environmental contamination. Sites often sit idle for decades because of the cost of site abatement and cleanup. Examples of brownfields are abandoned gas stations, dry cleaners, railroad properties, factories and military bases.

Ray Olivet Richardson, the city of Mobile's environmental manager, will oversee the implementation of the brownfield assessment grant. According to Richardson, 10 sites will be assessed to determine the presence and extent of contamination. "Our goal is to ultimately transfer these properties back to the city's tax rolls," explained Richardson.

"Redevelopment of these properties will help to reverse the economic decline of the past by preparing sites for a wide range of potential community and economic development uses."

Keith Pyron, president of PPM Consultants Inc. and Mobile's brownfields grant consultant, agreed the federal funds bring new opportunities to the city. "I believe many properties will be redeveloped as a result of this funding, which will produce an increase in jobs and higher tax base for the city," he said.

Earlier this year, Envision Coastal Alabama assisted the city with its brownfields community kick-off meeting. Representatives from the EPA, state of Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and Department of Revenue briefed stakeholders on the specifics of the grant.

To learn more about the EPA brownfields program, including specific grant contacts, visit [www.epa.gov/brownfields/](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/).

For more information on the city's brownfields grant, contact Richardson at 208-7629 or [ray.richardson@cityofmobile.org](mailto:ray.richardson@cityofmobile.org).