

Memo from Nate Ela re Research Research Center

Expanding on what I mentioned yesterday in class, I am interested in researching the formation and development of the Resilience Research Center, a new food- and education-related social economy enterprise being developed on the south side of Madison.

I have attached a February 2010 "Conceptual Framework" of the Center, which is a joint venture between the [Center for Resilient Cities](#) and [Growing Power](#), and an article from a recent issue of Madison magazine describing it. The basic idea seems to be to combine: 1) business space; 2) a charter middle school (grades 6-8); 3) intensive food production operation (in which students and youth will take part); 4) an alternative energy service center run by the local power utility; 5) a neighborhood center; and 6) a research component.¹ The property was purchased from the county government in January 2010, and planting was begun this summer. A grant for the charter school has been applied for with the state department for public instruction, and the Madison Metropolitan School District is reviewing the plans for the charter school.

Some questions I'm interested in:

- What are/will be the RRC's sources of funding/revenue?
- What legal form or forms will the RRC adopt, and why?
- How is RRC being developed, and how will it be governed? Who will have a say in making decisions?
- How do participants in the project think about the project and present it to each other and to various publics? As a social enterprise, a social movement organization, a business, a nonprofit, something else?
- What formal or informal relations of support exist or are being envisioned between RRC and community organizations, state entities, and private firms generally?
- How has the project been influenced by the social and ecological history of the neighborhood in which it will operate (which is one of the more diverse and working-class parts of Madison, and as such has long been perceived as somewhat "problematic" by Madison's generally white and non-working class civic leaders), and of the particular plot of land on which it is being developed? What are the developers' visions of how it will relate to the neighborhood and the land?
- Who will work at RRC, and how will laborers be paid? What role will students at a charter school play in providing farm labor? How do laws and policies related to areas such as education, minimum wages, child labor, immigration, insurance and liability influence how farm and garden labor will be structured at the RRC?
- What criteria will govern how on-site businesses are selected? What will be the relationship between RRC and those businesses?
- What will become of the products of the RRC's farm/gardens?

Obviously, there are many more questions that can be asked about the RRC, and I invite anyone else interested in focusing on this project to jump in and add questions and ideas. There's also the possibility of asking the same or similar questions of a different social economy enterprise in or around Madison (such as the coop that Ann mentioned Hmong and Thai farmers are starting near Verona, or the organization Community Groundworks in Madison itself), or of an urban agriculture project in Milwaukee and/or Chicago.

In the near term, Emmanuel and I are planning to talk about this potential project with Michael Bell in the C&E Soc department, since it seems he has some ongoing research relationship with the RRC. Definitely get in touch with us if you're interested in joining up with this project in some way!

Best,

Nate

¹ See http://www.resilientcities.org/?page_id=650

