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What Went Wrong in Greensburg, Kansas? An Economic Development Perspective

The town of Greensburg, Kansas, was supposed to be the model for green economic development. After an EF-5 tornado in 2007 obliterated the small town, Greensburg rebuilt and boasted the highest concentration of LEED Platinum buildings in the country years later. Today, it is suffering a perpetual economic tornado of its own making. What went wrong? What lessons can we learn from it? Is green economic development an appropriate post-disaster recovery approach? All of these questions and more will be asked and answered in this presentation geared toward sustainability advocates, post-disaster recovery professionals, officials who work in rural areas, and those with little knowledge of economic development. This 10-year report card is given from an economic development and site selection perspective.

Hypothesis 1: The town of Greensburg and Kiowa County will regain its population as projected by the designers of the Greensburg comprehensive sustainable plan evidenced by sales tax increases.

Hypothesis 2: The town of Greensburg and Kiowa County will experience sustained housing prices for the newly built environmentally friendly homes due to people moving into the city.

Hypothesis 3 The town of Greensburg will reach energy goals that save 30-40 % on its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED-rated) public buildings compared to typical buildings of similar size, which will result in lower utility and water costs over the five-year period.

Hypothesis 4: Neighboring cities and counties will experience some minor declines to their financial health when the Greensburg population moves back to Greensburg.

COLLABORATORS: University of Southern Mississippi and University of Maryland-College Park