

PCI developed the Solutions System, where leaders convene all sectors to provide solutions to community issues that no sector could achieve on its own. Oregon Solutions, PCI's affiliate program in Oregon, provides a mechanism for communities all over the state to work across sectors, jurisdictions, and interests in implementing sustainable solutions through collaboration.

**Oregon Solutions Project:
Vernonia Schools**

The Problem

For the second time in 11 years, downtown Vernonia was flooded in December 2007, damaging and destroying homes, businesses, and essential services. Some of the casualties were Vernonia's three schools, which were inundated with water and debris. Recently, the Army Corps of Engineers issued new flood plains maps, placing the schools squarely in the high-risk one, making it impossible for the schools to obtain private insurance on the buildings in their current location.



To add to the buildings' dire situation, the city required the rebuilding of safe, healthy and vibrant schools in order to drive economic development. The community viewed the schools as the civic center and gathering place in the city, and families choosing to stay or move to Vernonia would make that decision based on the schools.

The Process

Using the Solutions System model, Governor Kulongoski designated an Oregon Solutions project to initiate a formal collaborative process to draw together a wide range of agency representatives, community leaders, and citizens with resources to ensure that Vernonia's school children have safe, healthy, and educationally sound school facilities. The Governor appointed respected community leaders Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde and Tom Kelly, President of Neil Kelly Remodelers, as co-conveners of the project.



The Oregon Solutions team of more than 50 members worked to find a location and funding sources for a renewed school system. The project goals were to involve the community; conduct a fair, open and participatory process which seeks consensus while local officials make difficult decisions; document and evaluate estimated costs as potential sites; evaluate transportation advantages and disadvantages; evaluate the potential for each location to serve as the focal point of a neighborhood and the community at large; and identify the estimates costs and feasibility of elevating and flood-proofing buildings.

Results / Outcomes

The project team found an appropriate new site for the school system and got the appropriate land use documentation prepared for filing. The team has leveraged hundreds of thousands of dollars to the project and has engaged the businesses, regulatory agencies, and the public in the process. In November 2009, the community overwhelmingly approved a \$13 million bond to replace the three schools.

In November 2010, community members and students gathered with leaders from across the state to break ground on an innovative and much-needed \$38 million K-12 school and community center. As part of its funding, Governor Kulongoski announced a \$3.8 million award from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and four foundations committed to an additional \$1.75 million.

The new Vernonia schools will be:

- Carefully located in a central, accessible and safe location high above the floodplain;
- Built for current classroom capacity and at least 30 years of projected population growth;
- Designed with “green” environmental features and indoor/outdoor spaces that provide operating cost savings and powerful learning opportunities and curricula that link to emerging Oregon economic opportunities;
- A unique-to-Oregon integrated K-12 model; and
- A case study in investing in schools as a means to catalyze rural economic development and recovery.

Graphic from Catalyst: The Campaign for Vernonia’s Schools - <http://www.vernoniaschools.org/about/schools-for-the-future/project-budget/>

Total Projected Income: \$38 Million
(all \$ in millions)

