Low2No
A Sustainable Development Design Competition
Jätkäsaari, Helsinki

it's in the mix
A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DESIGN COMPETITION

The built environment is now the largest negative factor in the stability of ecosystems and the climate. And as populations become increasingly urbanized, the evolution of cities will largely shape the outcome of our long dependence on natural resources. Two pathways of evolution are evident: an urban society that is in balance with the environment, or one that has depleted available natural capital. The decisions that will direct this evolution over the next 50-100 years are being made now.

It is clear that no single organization, profession or nation can achieve the goals of sustainable global development. It will require an architecture of solutions including low/no carbon buildings, sustainable economic systems, enhanced/targeted mobility; sustainable planning and energy policies; resilient social systems (access, equity and capacity), among countless others.

Recognizing the need and opportunity to significantly improve sustainable building development practices, Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund—in collaboration with the City of Helsinki—is launching a sustainable development design competition. The competition will be launched March 31, 2009 with a global request for qualifications. The goal is to attract and identify the best teams to design a large building complex on an approximately 3/4 hectare site on the reclaimed goods harbour at the western edge of Helsinki’s central business district.

Given that the repertoire of sustainable urban development models is still in its infancy, the question of “who & how” is our question of first order. WHO: We believe that identifying the best team and approach is the key factor impacting the long term quality and robustness of the final solution. HOW: Our sustainable development design competition is designed to seek approaches for four central objectives applied at the scale of a city block:

1. energy efficiency
2. low/no carbon emissions
3. high architectural, spatial and social value
4. sustainable materials and methods

As part of their proposals, entrants must also consider the context and dynamics beyond the city block that will impact the project in the near and long terms. As such we will select teams with a robust and mixed set of competencies (such as architecture, engineering, economics, landscape, technology, urban planning and energy infrastructure), representing the mix of stakeholders and issues at play in urban development. We expect that architects will lead these teams in most cases, but are open to other team configurations.

Our program is a mixed-use development that includes: headquarters for an innovation driven organization; housing; retail; and potentially other programs that support a sustainable approach to urban development.

Our site is located on 100 hectares of reclaimed land known as Jätkäsaari. The relocation of Helsinki’s port facilities to the eastern edge of the city in 2008 has initiated the largest transformation of land use in the city since the industrial era. As many as six large areas in metropolitan Helsinki, including Jätkäsaari, are in various stages of planning as a result.

Jätkäsaari will be developed over the next two decades to house 16,000 residents, 6,000 jobs, offices and public services. Several new tram line extensions will provide access to the city centre only three kilometres away while parking space and vehicular traffic will be minimized through a mobility management plan.

It is our intention to stimulate innovation in sustainable architecture, energy efficiency, and city-building solutions. We hope that a model of sustainable urbanism emerges from the proposals that will not only serve the City of Helsinki and its inhabitants, but more broadly, be a learning model for development globally.
COMPETITION PROCESS

After an initial request for qualifications, up to five teams will be selected to participate in the competition. Resources will be allocated to each team to enable them to develop the following outcomes:

- a design strategy and approach suitable to the challenge
- a framework for developing an indicator of sustainability suitable to the challenge
- a vision for the project that will inspire stakeholders to overcome the challenges of systemic change

Selected teams will travel to Helsinki for a 2-3 day workshop on the competition and development context. At the conclusion of the workshop, teams will have approximately four weeks to design and develop their proposals. A local and international interdisciplinary jury will review the proposals and select a winning team and concept.

Our goal is not to lose the valuable content of the other proposals by selecting one winner and discarding the rest. For this reason, we are scheduling the final meeting with the competition teams after the selection of a “winning” team. This will allow us to align future opportunities with other teams and disseminate know-how generated by the competition to the community.

In the short term, Sitra is working to identify the best team rather than the best solution. In the long-term, it is expected that the competition process will:

- implement an innovative sustainable urban development solution in Helsinki
- develop a sustainable development framework applicable to other contexts
- develop a sustainability indicator to evaluate performance
- spur innovation in the field of energy efficiency and sustainable development

Because Sitra is a public procurement entity under public procurement legislation (Finnish Act on Public Contracts), public procurement rules shall apply to competition process.

FAQ

Is this an architectural competition?
No this is not an architecture competition, but rather a sustainable development competition which has a significant architecture component. It is our belief that effective and robust solutions will need to take a broad, deep, and systemic integration of diverse dynamics. As such we expect teams to integrate deep knowledge in business, technology, economy, policy, urban design, landscape design, environmental technology, and architecture.

Is this an ideas competition?
No it is not an ideas competition in the typical sense, but good ideas are important to the project’s long term efficacy and impact. We see strong principles as a hedge against shifts in the market and the fragility of political support. Asking the right questions and determining the real dynamics of the problem will allow us and users of the information generated by the competition to overcome the countless legacy issues that will push back against a project seeking systemic change.

What is Sitra? Why is it developing this competition?
Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund is an independent public fund which under the supervision of the Finnish Parliament promotes the welfare of Finnish society (visit www.sitra.fi/en). Sitra’s Energy Programme is developing the competition to help stir innovation and competitiveness in the field of energy efficiency and sustainable development. In its work, Sitra frequently promotes and supports work on critical issues that are often left underdeveloped as they may fall between the seams of interests; where there is no one clear owner, or where other organizations would be unwilling to take risks.

Don’t Nordic countries have significant sustainability programs in place?
Some do. In any case, the mix of structures, policies and dynamics that will lead to the long-term sustainability of urban systems remains an open question. Demonstration projects (some with laudable outcomes) have been constructed throughout northern Europe, but these are often exemptions from their context and the day-to-day practices of development. It remains to be seen how Nordic states will spur large-scale sustainable urban development programs, especially given their challenging northern climate.

What is the goal of this competition?
This process is designed to identify and enable the best team to verify their solutions in design development. The team will then be charged with guiding the project through construction. Concurrent to the design process (which begins with this team and approach selection competition) is the development of financing, development and construction partnership.
Challenge

DESIGN THE MIX

Society has made incredible progress on the backs of specialists working in narrowly focused disciplines. But today we face complex problems with no single owner or discipline capable of providing comprehensive solutions. "Not unlike cooking, the solution today is not in any one ingredient, but in the mix."*

In their proposals, teams should declare the best ingredients for sustainable development, and illustrate how they will be mixed over time. The goal: to achieve a low carbon building complex and urban district that will transition to a no carbon complex as the energy context improves. This idea of transition underpins the Low2No competition title.

We are interested in three broad categories of outcomes for the competition. Entrants must:
1. design a strategy or model of the dynamics that support the architecture
2. design an indicator of sustainability by which the competition proposal and future projects can be measured
3. design a vision for the project that will ease the heavy lifting of systemic change

Solutions for the above outcomes should address these questions: What is a sustainable development framework that is both replicable and adaptable to our site needs? What is the design solution for our site? What is a robust indicator useful for evaluating the sustainability performance of our solution? How can it have large-scale applicability? What kind of change can it trigger?

The jury will be instructed to evaluate the proposals based on evidence of systemic thinking. More than a design, we are looking for a credible strategic framework for change, and the principals upon which the framework was built.

* Marco Steinberg, from the Stroke Pathways Project, Harvard Design School

DESIGN A STRATEGY

Entrants should develop design strategies for a low/no carbon emissions building complex completed in 2012. Projecting beyond 2012 and recognizing that radical changes to energy systems and policy will not be made in the short term, entrants must define possible scenarios that move net carbon emissions from the building complex and district toward zero. This should provide stakeholders with a road map for change.
DESIGN A VISION

Renderings and drawings will provide visual evidence of the architecture and systems that support entrants’ proposals. This vision will be used to activate existing stakeholders and engage new ones. As a distillation of complex ideas and strategies, the vision will be used to help us overcome the “fast no’s” and move mountains.

DESIGN AN INDICATOR

Sustainable development is a process fairly well designed at the policy level—but urban development requires ground-level solutions. Entrants must consider factors that contribute to a sustainable built environment, social & economic enterprise, strategic & sustainable use of natural capital, and an urban policy framework to delineate with metrics and relationships urban development that will help bring society into balance.
INFORMATION
Marco Steinberg
Competition Director
Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund
Itämerentori 2, PO Box 160
Helsinki 00181, Finland
competition@sitra.fi
www.sitra.fi/en

Tuula Laitinen
Communications
Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund
Itämerentori 2, PO Box 160
Helsinki 00181, Finland
tuula.laitinen@sitra.fi
www.sitra.fi/energy

WEB SITE
www.low2no.org/competition

Downloads, schedule updates, the RFQ and a comprehensive competition brief are or will be available on the web site.

QUESTIONS
competition@sitra.fi

SAVE THE DATE!

01 April 2009 RFQ submittal period begins
22 April 2009 RFQ submittal due
06 May 2009 Selection of best qualified teams announced
Week of 11 May 2009 Competition brief available at our website
01-03 June 2009 Selected teams in Helsinki for 2-3 day competition introduction & workshop
01 July 2009 Competition proposals due
01 September 2009 Winning team announced
September 2009 Selected teams return to Helsinki for a “next steps” workshop

*Dates subject to change...

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