Crookston Green Step City: O'Connell completes six-month appointment at the forefront of local sustainability efforts

She led effort to achieve GreenStep City status

A group of well-wishers recently attended a reception at the University of Minnesota Crookston to thank DeAndra O'Connell for her efforts in community sustainability.

At the end of August, O'Connell completed a 6-month position as a sustainable community outreach coordinator. The cooperative position was co-sponsored by the UMC Center for Sustainability and with primary funding provided by the Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (NWRSDP) and the City of Crookston.

One of the major objectives of the position was to assist Crookston being designated a “GreenStep City.”

The GreenStep City program is sponsored by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and has a set of 28 best practices which contribute to a community’s health, energy savings, and long-term economic vitality. Categories include: building and lighting, transportation, land use, environmental management, and economic and community development. Crookston joins Warren and Bemidji as the only GreenStep cities in northwest Minnesota.

O'Connell began the part-time outreach position in January 2015 and became a familiar face in the community as she promoted the various dimensions of the GreenSteps program. Notable projects included: coordinated an assessment of a number of Crookston buildings for solar energy retrofitting, provided support to expand the trail development in the community and campus, led the effort to establish a community garden project on flood-zone land along Riverside Avenue, and helped energize the Sustainability Destiny Driver of the Crookston In-Motion planning initiative.

O'Connell graduated from the U of M Crookston at the end of fall semester 2014 with a degree in applied studies and a focus on environmental science and sustainability.