

Lawrence hosts international lesson in history, development

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LAWRENCE — The city became a classroom last Friday for a dozen Japanese visitors.

Employees from the Japan Intercultural Academy of Municipalities, who came to the United States from a number of Japanese cities, visited Lawrence to learn more about the city's history, downtown development, and municipal government structure.

The visit was an opportunity to showcase how local government, private investors and nonprofit groups are working together to improve Lawrence, Mayor Michael Sullivan said.

Sullivan stressed this is another way to promote the city as a "global community," committed to development and economic expansion.

In the morning, the visitors toured Heritage State Park downtown. From 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sullivan hosted an event at Salvatore's conference center. All City Hall department heads were invited to introduce themselves to their Japanese counterparts.

The group included a tax collector, foreign exchange teaching coordinator, Web site director, welfare supervisor, event organizer, and bid manager from the Japanese cities of Hitachi, Takamatsu, Iwaki, Fukuyama and more.

"We had a lot of very healthy discussion about the type of development going on in Lawrence," said Thomas Schiavone, the city's acting chief economic development director.

In the afternoon, the group toured the Union Crossing mill redevelopment project and met with Groundwork Lawrence to learn about open space projects that nonprofit group is working on.

A Japanese interpreter translated for the visitors, none of whom spoke English, using an earpiece system, Schiavone said.

Other international delegations have visited the city in recent years, including groups from Southeast Asia, Russia and Ireland.

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