

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

# Partnership for Sustainable Communities Brownfields Pilots – Iowa City, Iowa



The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Department of Transportation (DOT) are working together under the Partnership for Sustainable Communities to ensure that federal investments, policies and actions support development that is more efficient and sustainable. This partnership is based on “livability principles” that guide inter-agency collaboration and support the integration of: safe, reliable and economical transportation; affordable, energy-efficient housing; and sustainable reuse of idle or underutilized land. Pilot communities were selected by EPA’s Brownfields Program with input from HUD and DOT. Pilots receive technical assistance and support from EPA, HUD and DOT. The three agencies are working with the Pilot communities to build on past investments, as well as identify opportunities to link housing, transit and brownfields, and coordinate sustainability resources.

## Project History

In June 2008, Iowa City, along with many other communities in eastern Iowa, experienced unprecedented flooding. The federal government declared parts of Iowa City a federal disaster area and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took steps to address the recovery including development of a long-term community recovery plan. In 2009, EPA entered into an agreement with FEMA to provide technical assistance to Iowa City to assist with the application of smart growth redevelopment planning principles and techniques in the area south of downtown which is now known as the Riverfront Crossings District—a District consisting of a mix of student housing, auto-oriented commercial businesses and industrial uses. This assistance resulted in three reports focusing on real estate market analysis, development policy and transportation policy.

Through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, EPA and its partners are focusing on an approximately 10-square-block area in the southwest portion of the Riverfront Crossings District with a number of industrial and commercial properties, including brownfields. Change in the District is being pursued for and driven by a number of factors including flood plain management, market demand, growth management, and transportation needs. A large portion of the site resides within the 100 year flood plain and was seriously impacted by flooding in 2008; this required an in depth look at and change in land uses within the plain. With a growing population at the University of Iowa (i.e., largest enrollment class in history in 2010), Iowa City is exploring ways to accommodate growth in a sustainable manner that serves a population with increasingly diverse needs. Part of this includes establishing Amtrak service in the District as well as future plans for light rail service. The Riverfront Crossings

## Pilot Technical Assistance Activities

- Provide expertise in brownfields redevelopment issues
- Offer guidance in planning for transit oriented development, including integration of bicycles, walking and other forms of transportation into an urban setting
- Provide guidance in the integration of mixed-use development and appropriate densities
- Offer guidance on integration of amenities such as community parks
- Provide expertise in the application of green infrastructure/low impact development strategies and techniques
- Offer guidance on floodplain management principles, including identification of measures to minimize the impacts of flooding and the restoration of natural floodplains
- Facilitate focused three-day design workshop with Iowa City staff and other stakeholders

District is within blocks of downtown Iowa City and is seen to have the potential to accommodate anticipated growth and act as both an extension of downtown and a District with an identity all its own. Strong market demand for downtown Iowa City housing and commercial space further underscores this District’s potential and opportunities for focused assistance through this initiative.

## Pilot Activities

The technical assistance team supporting this Pilot is working closely with local and state partners to help advance Iowa City’s plan to revitalize and transform the Riverfront Crossings District. The team is developing a conceptual design framework, recommendations for zoning

code and design guidelines, and a brownfield revitalization strategy for the District. Plans for the revitalized District include walkable urban neighborhoods with a mix of sustainably built affordable and market rate housing, ground floor retail and office space, pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, entertainment and recreation facilities, public open space, an improved transportation plan, trails and other open space amenities along the Iowa River. Specific technical assistance activities being conducted under this Pilot include: facilitating design workshops to capture Iowa City development and design priorities; providing expert guidance on how to redevelop the area, sustainably reuse brownfields, and avoid damage from future flooding events; and facilitating a public forum presenting the conceptual design framework to the public.

**Outcomes**

The expected outcomes from this Pilot include:

- Developing a conceptual design framework with recommendations and guidance on how the city can redevelop the targeted area and minimize damage from future floods.
- Offering recommendations about zoning regulations and design guidelines as tools to realize development envisioned in the framework.
- Creating a brownfield strategy to address potential brownfield sites within the targeted area—including an inventory of known sites, a framework for identifying additional sites, and a strategy for acquiring resources for assessment, cleanup and technical assistance.
- Providing a focused design workshop with local planning department and housing department staff, local transportation planning officials associated with the local council of governments, and any other local partners such as area property owners and potential developers.
- Presenting the final conceptual framework and recommendations in a public open house.

The expected completion date for work under the Iowa City Pilot is February 2011. For more information on this Pilot, please contact David Doyle with EPA Region 7 at (913) 551-7667 or [doyle.david@epa.gov](mailto:doyle.david@epa.gov).



*Train tracks in the Riverfront Crossings District, just west of Clinton Street*

**Major Technical Assistance Partners**

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Transportation
  - Federal Transit Administration
  - Federal Highway Administration
- Iowa City
- Johnson County
- University of Iowa
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources