

Partnership for Sustainable Communities Brownfields Pilots – National City, California



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

The Westside Affordable Housing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in National City, California, is the direct result of five years of community involvement by residents of the Westside Neighborhood; it is intended to be the catalyst for overall neighborhood change through the Westside Specific Plan (the city’s plan for the area). In 2004, a series of community workshops was held in which hundreds of residents and business owners discussed priorities for reinventing the neighborhood. Of top importance was the elimination of toxic hazards believed to be the cause of high asthma rates. The second priority was the community’s desire to reclaim the neighborhood for residential uses, especially affordable housing for families. In fall 2008, the city held a community design workshop that was attended by more than 80 residents and business owners. As project predevelopment for the Westside Affordable TOD is now underway, the development team hosts community meetings and attends the Westside Neighborhood Council to facilitate open communication about the project.

The Pilot focuses on a 14-acre, city owned public works site – the proposed site of the \$69 million TOD project. The project will consist of 201 affordable housing units located immediately adjacent to the existing 24th Street Trolley Station (light rail serving metropolitan San Diego). The site is contaminated with hazardous materials (metals, benzene and hydraulic fluid), as identified during an ongoing EPA Brownfields Assessment grant and through two Targeted Site Investigations performed by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). DTSC will oversee required remediation of the site for redevelopment.

Pilot Technical Assistance Activities

- Develop recommendations on green remediation techniques, habitat restoration and open space analysis
- Host community workshop to engage the community and promote community participation and input
- Develop recommendations for developing a formula to rank sites with incompatible industrial uses for amortization

Pilot Activities

National City is seeking to redevelop the 14-acre site in a sustainable manner by incorporating green remediation components into a site design that promotes energy efficiency, stormwater and flood control management, walking and park trails, and reduced dependence on fossil fuels. The city is also addressing the toxic hazards believed to be contributing to the high asthma rates in the neighborhood by preparing an amortization plan to relocate and/or close highly polluting industrial uses that are not compatible with the Westside Specific Plan.

Through the Pilot, the technical assistance team conducted a community workshop on November 4, 2010, to educate and inform the community on green remediation on brownfield sites. The workshop addressed the 14-acre site and provided information on brownfields redevelopment in a broader context to educate the community on the benefits of sustainably cleaning up and reusing brownfields. During the workshop, participants engaged in an interactive exercise to obtain input on the preferred open space reuse (e.g., community garden, active recreational

space) of the former gas station portion of the 14-acre site. The final plan to redevelop the 14-acre site as a community garden or active recreational space is being informed by the November 2010 community workshop and will be further shaped by the ongoing Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) process.

Input from the community workshop, site visit and existing conceptual plan fed into a recommendations report that addresses open space reuse on the former gas station; green remediation and habitat restoration approaches for the 14-acre development; and the broader development context. The recommendations focused on the economic, social and environmental impacts of cleanup and remedial action. The technical assistance team will also provide recommendations for developing a formula to rank sites for amortization, beginning with the most polluting and underutilized uses.

Outcomes

The expected outcomes from this Pilot include:

- Using National City's former public works property for affordable housing as a test of HUD's new policy for building affordable housing on former brownfield sites.
- Identifying strategies for National City and other similar communities to transition from their industrial pasts, identify new commercial activities, and relocate or reduce the impacts of incompatible industrial uses, located in primarily residential areas.
- Documenting barriers and opportunities for federal agency cooperation in the restoration and expansion of urban waterways through the integration of the Paradise Creek habitat area into the site and improving connectivity of the former public works property into the neighborhood.
- Producing a report summarizing recommendations for revitalizing the 14-acre former gas station portion of the larger Westside Affordable Housing TOD project as open space or natural habitat.
- Producing a report summarizing recommendations for amortizing incompatible industrial uses near the development site.



Conceptual plan for the Westside Affordable Housing TOD project

Major Technical Assistance Partners

Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Housing and Urban Development
Department of Transportation
City of National City, California

The expected completion date for the National City Pilot is March 2011. For more information on this Pilot, please contact Sara Russell at (415) 972-3218 or russell.sara@epa.gov.