Pittsburgh, PA: Allegheny Riverfront Green Boulevard Plan

Constructing Pittsburgh’s “Front Porch”

Pittsburgh has had much to celebrate in recent years. An influx of young professionals and a burgeoning knowledge-based economy are revitalizing the city. Once a faltering steel town prototypical of decline in the “rust belt,” Pittsburgh was recently named America’s Most Livable City by Forbes Magazine. However, these gains belie the city’s struggles with its waterfront. Burdened by aging, underutilized industrial properties, the 6.45 mile stretch of land along the Allegheny River is one of the largest undeveloped parcels of riverfront in the United States.

Residents old and new have made it clear that the Allegheny Riverfront must adapt to the city’s shifting needs and desires. As indicated in the 2011 Allegheny Riverfront Vision Plan, the river is now envisioned as both an economic hub and the city’s “front porch,” a bustling public space where the bonds of the community are sealed.

Pittsburgh looked to HUD to help realize their Vision with an action plan for a green boulevard, an ambitious, yet achievable effort that will preserve the riverfront’s green space, while also creating room for bikes, pedestrians, and passenger and freight rail. Now backed by a Community Challenge grant and D.O.T. TIGER II planning grant, Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl believes the winning combination of livability and economic development will keep Pittsburgh on the path to success. He says this of the plan:

“Imagine a riverfront destination that you can easily walk to, bike to, and take public transportation to - and you can easily envision a place that sustains and attracts new residents and businesses. I want to thank all of our partners in the federal government for recognizing the importance of this project that will spur economic development and ensure that Pittsburgh sustains its 'most livable city' status for years to come.”

Description
The Allegheny Riverfront Green Boulevard Planning project will include the development of a plan to convert an existing six-mile freight line into a green riverfront rail and trail corridor extending from downtown Pittsburgh to the city’s eastern edge.

Federal Grants
2010 HUD Community Challenge Planning Grant: $675,000
2010 Transportation Improvements Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) II Planning Grant: $825,000

Local Partner Commitments
Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh: $330,000
Allegheny Valley Railroad Company: $250,000

Local Partners
Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh Department of City Planning
Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission

Achievements
• Working to align new bicycle-pedestrian path along the entire six miles of right-of-way, creating important new bike/ped connections in a corridor that is home to thousands of residents.
• Incorporated hundreds of area stakeholders into their community process through public forums, interactive online activities, and subject-based working groups.

For more information visit:
http://www.greenboulevardpgh.com/
http://hud.gov/sustainability

“Imagine a riverfront destination that you can easily walk to, bike to, and take public transportation to - and you can easily envision a place that sustains and attracts new residents and businesses.” -Mayor Luke Ravenstahl
A Robust Economy Built on Robust Places

The Allegheny Riverfront Green Boulevard plan is built on three focus areas—open space, transportation, and neighborhood redevelopment. To create and preserve verdant parkland along the river, the Pittsburgh team will analyze existing ecological conditions on the riverfront and author a land use plan to guide developers. Through multimodal corridor planning, the transportation component will lay out how best to add additional modes to the boulevard, thereby improving public access to the riverfront. The redevelopment piece will focus on the 43rd Street District, crafting a housing master plan that will provide a framework for an amenity-rich neighborhood. These three initiatives will help reorient the city towards its “front porch.”

By making the Allegheny Riverfront the center of community life, Pittsburgh is following in the footsteps of other older, industrial cities like Chicago and St. Louis that have utilized multimodal transportation projects to raise real estate values and attract private investment. Mayor Ravenstahl is certain Pittsburgh can do the same. “The Green Boulevard Plan marks an exciting next step forward,” he stated. “By improving this neighborhood transportation system, job creation and development will continue to flourish along these riverfront neighborhoods.”

Putting the Gears in Motion with DOT

As a member of the interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities, HUD is working closely with its collaborators at the Department of Transportation (DOT) to ensure the success of the Green Boulevard. In a historic effort, HUD and DOT ran a single competition for both the HUD Community Challenge and DOT TIGER II Planning grants, resulting in a dual award to Pittsburgh of a Challenge grant and an $825,000 TIGER II Planning grant. The TIGER II grant funds an engineering study that will analyze how best to incorporate additional modes into the rail corridor. This will lay the groundwork for the Allegheny Riverfront that residents imagined in their Vision plan—a thoroughfare that provides a bevy of transportation options.

According to Green Boulevard project manager Lena Andrews, the combination of a HUD Community Challenge grant and a DOT TIGER grant is key to bringing the project to fruition. “This type of program is perfect for an older city like Pittsburgh where our transportation, housing, and environmental planning are already intertwined in a dense urban condition.” With help from HUD and DOT, the Pittsburgh team will work to turn their vision into reality.

THE HUD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE IN PENNSYLVANIA

Committed to building thriving, equitable communities throughout the Keystone State, the HUD Sustainable Communities Initiative has also partnered with Erie County and the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation. As recipients of 2011 Regional Planning grants, both will create regional plans for sustainable development.

Utilizing a $1.8 million grant, Erie County is taking a three pronged approach for their plan, Destination Erie. Not unlike Pittsburgh, the county will begin with public engagement, authoring a regional vision. They will complete the process with an action plan that offers strategies for fostering community development, enhancing natural resources, and building transportation infrastructure that balances the needs of both residents and businesses. The county has built a robust coalition of local partners, raising more than double the amount of their grant award in leveraged match funding.

The Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) is spurring affordable, transit-oriented development with their $3,400,000 award. Among other things, LVEDC’s Sustainable Communities grant will allow them to update their 2007 affordable housing assessment. Once the update is complete, their findings will be translated into policy to ensure that all Lehigh Valley residents have access to quality housing. Much of this housing will be near transportation. The local transit authority is among LVEDC’s key partners, and will monitor land development and pursue ordinance changes along key transit corridors as their contribution to this effort.