

Sustainable Development in Iowa and Kansas

EPA Region 7 and EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities, with funding from the Land Revitalization Program, are helping several communities in Iowa and Kansas to incorporate sustainability and green infrastructure into their community redevelopment plans.

In Kansas City and Ellis, Kansas, Region 7 and EPA contractors conducted audits of local development codes and policies that govern the ways in which properties in each community can be developed or reused. The audits focused on the downtown area of Ellis (population 2,000) around a former auto dealership, and the area around a closed landfill in Kansas City. Site visits were held in each community in June 2010, with the audit reports completed shortly thereafter. The audits resulted in recommendations on the potential use of vacant lots, improved streetscaping, anticipated transit-oriented development, and other infrastructure design possibilities in each of the communities.



Former auto dealership in Ellis, KS



Closed landfill in Kansas City, KS

In Sioux City, Iowa, Region 7, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Survey, and EPA contractors conducted the day-long green infrastructure workshop for local government staff and local environmental consultants. Approximately 25 people attended the workshop, which focused on applying green infrastructure techniques to the former stockyard properties in Sioux City.

Green infrastructure involves the use of landscape features to store, infiltrate, and evaporate stormwater. This reduces the amount of water draining into sewers and helps reduce the discharge of pollutants into area water bodies. Examples of green infrastructure include rain gardens, swales, constructed wetlands, and permeable pavements. Building green infrastructure on underused and vacant properties, including brownfields, can be an innovative environmental solution that goes beyond conventional regulatory fixes for controlling stormwater runoff. Green infrastructure also can provide important environmental and socio-economic benefits to communities.

Region 7 also is working with six other Iowa communities—Iowa City, Coralville, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, New Hartford and Waverly—to incorporate sustainability and green infrastructure projects into their redevelopment plans for long-term recovery after widespread flooding in 2008. Assistance includes supporting community design charrettes, developing plans for new green infrastructure to improve stormwater management, and helping the communities review and propose improvements to existing policies and codes that will promote better land use and smart growth.