

Planning for Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment

A VISION FOR A MID-CITY PARK

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA, EPA REGION 7

Council Bluffs, Iowa, is transforming its historic industrial core into a progressive and active neighborhood. The Mid-City area is currently characterized by rail corridors, industrial sites, and vacant or underutilized properties. The area is also home to a central point in the Council Bluffs Trails System, connecting the existing north-south and east-west trails within the city. The City of Council Bluffs is seeking to develop the area into a thriving, mixed-use neighborhood, using a dynamic framework for redevelopment.

In 2016, the city was finalizing its Mid-City Brownfield Area-Wide Plan, which will serve as an amendment to the city's Comprehensive Plan. One of the priority projects identified as part of the community engagement process for the plan was the location of a new park. A five-acre site within an existing industrial area, but surrounded by residential neighborhoods, was identified as an ideal location for a park. The new park is intended as a strategic amenity that will catalyze redevelopment of surrounding sites and link the Council Bluffs Trails System.

EPA's Land Revitalization Team assisted Council Bluffs with the convening of a conceptual design and master planning process for the Mid-City Park. The process will support the goals of the Mid-City Brownfield Area-Wide Plan in two important ways: first, by ensuring that land use supports the community's vision for cleaning up and reusing the area; and second, by physically enhancing the area. The Land Revitalization Team initiated the convening process by holding interviews with city staff from the Community Development, Parks, and Public Works Departments to guide the design effort.

A two-day design workshop was held on July 6 and 7, 2016, in Council Bluffs. The Land Revitalization Team assisted participants in generating concept plans for the park. The conceptual plans were presented at pin-up sessions held throughout the workshop. After each pin-up, the Team consolidated comments and refined the design. The final design concept includes a park with a traditional trailhead facility (with restrooms, water station, bike racks, and service centers), a bike-share station, a graffiti wall and industrial sculpture garden centered on a repurposed salt dome, and an active recreation area that includes a pump track, a progressive jump course, and a climbing center. To the south of the main park site, an existing public works storage yard and building are proposed to be repurposed as an event / market space with a dog park located further south of the area.

The Land Revitalization Team provided Council Bluffs with a summary document, including graphics and text, describing the plan in detail. Also included is an analysis of the area's existing infrastructure for redevelopment potential, a phasing plan for improvements, and an estimate of costs for the proposed park amenities. City officials will now begin planning for phased implementation of the master plan. It will be important for the city to develop a funding strategies for the project's capital costs, including a plan for the park's long-term operation and maintenance, that will sync with planned project phases. Presentations to local stakeholder groups and the general public will help generate support for the project's implementation.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Morris, EPA Region 7, at morris.jennifer@epa.gov.



Figure 1: Rendering of the proposed graffiti wall and industrial sculpture garden.



Figure 2: Rendering of the proposed pump track, progressive jump course, and climbing center.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Collaborative engagement with city departments leads to more effective and efficient decision-making. Creating a park space focused on active uses, such as a pump track and a climbing center, can energize a neighborhood and enhance community interest.

PLANNED POST-TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

- Hold meetings with local stakeholder groups and the general public to foster support for the project.
- Develop a capital cost funding strategy that follows the project phasing plan toward implementation.
- Create long-term operations and maintenance plans for the park amenities.