

Revitalizing Greenville's West Side

Overview

At the turn of the 20th century, the west side of Greenville, South Carolina, was a thriving commercial district. However, as commercial activity shifted away from cotton, mills along the Reedy River struggled financially, and many Greenville residents left the city. The west side, home to 4,200 people (roughly seven percent of Greenville's population), became increasingly abandoned or blighted, with derelict manufacturing buildings, textile facilities, and vacant and abandoned service stations.¹ While a series of Federal, State, local, and private investments in Greenville's west side neighborhoods in the late 1990s and early 2000s began to incrementally increase economic activity, improve housing, and generally create amenities and destinations throughout the neighborhoods, the projects were conducted in relative isolation. Building upon these individual project's successes, the city is hoping to increase economic benefits by linking and coordinating development efforts. Key results of investment in the west side include:

- Developing Falls Park and the Liberty Bridge created a regional attraction on the west side and spurred local investment, including the nearby **\$65 million RiverPlace mixed-use development**;
- Gross business sales in the neighborhood increased from \$243.8 million in 2000 to **\$401.2 million in 2008**;²
- **The area has experienced a 300 percent increase in property tax revenue from 2002 through 2012**;³
- Construction of Fluor Field, a minor league baseball stadium, funded through a public-private partnership on a formerly contaminated site, has led to over **\$91.5 million in private development** on the neighboring blocks,⁴ contributing to the **31 percent annual increase in property value** in the West End since 2006;⁵
- **Redevelopment of several west side vacant or unused properties** into productive facilities serving the community, including construction of the Salvation Army Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center (Kroc Center) and the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School.

Though these individual accomplishments are significant, they lacked coordination. In 2010, the city of Greenville was awarded \$1.8 million jointly from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to support a three-year planning initiative through the [Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#). The project, [Connections for Sustainability: Linking Greenville's Neighborhoods to Jobs and Open Space](#) ("Connections for Sustainability"), aims to better connect affordable housing, transportation options, and economic development throughout the city. The planning initiative will focus heavily on Greenville's west side neighborhoods. This pointed analysis will lead to the development of the **West Side Comprehensive Plan**.

The Partnership agencies incorporate six principles of livability into Federal funding programs, policies, and future legislative proposals to support locally developed projects:

- Provide more transportation choices;
- Promote equitable, affordable housing;
- Enhance economic competitiveness;
- Support existing communities;
- Coordinate policies and leverage investment; and
- Value communities and neighborhoods.

The West Side Comprehensive Plan will provide a unified strategy for the neighborhoods by coordinating housing, public transportation and associated development, and park planning, and also by embodying the six principles of livability set forth by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities.



Figure 1: Map of Greenville's west side neighborhoods, highlighting key recent developments. [Sources: <http://www.greenvillesc.gov/CommDev/NeighborhoodMaps.aspx> ; <http://www.westendgreenville.com/maps.php>; http://www.greenvillesc.gov/Culture/forms/2011-12_WelcomeMap_LORES.pdf]

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is a collaborative initiative that helps communities improve access to affordable housing, increase transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment. The Partnership is a cooperative planning effort between HUD, DOT, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that coordinates Federal housing, transportation, water and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution. The Partnership agencies incorporate six principles of livability into Federal funding programs and policies to support locally developed projects.⁶

Catalysts for Economic Growth

After years of investments to improve and revitalize Greenville's downtown, in the mid-1990s the city shifted its focus to the west side neighborhoods: West Greenville, Southernside, and the West End. The city of Greenville identified these areas as "special emphasis neighborhoods" based on the higher concentrations of low-income households, higher crime rates, and more blighted infrastructure relative to the rest of the city. The city used a [HUD Section 108 loan](#) to spur economic activity on the west side by converting the historic Alliance Cotton Warehouse into the West End Market, with shops, offices, and restaurants. It also used funding from the EPA to evaluate contamination on abandoned properties. These Federal funds were key to supporting the locally-driven efforts. Initiatives focusing on the west side's neighborhoods are discussed below.

West End Market – In 1994, the city converted the former Alliance Cotton Warehouse into the [West End Market](#), a multi-use facility with shops, offices, and restaurants. The \$4.2 million project was funded by multiple sources, including HUD Section 108 loans, tax increment financing funds, and private investment. The city viewed the West End Market as an anchor for future development on the west side. It was also symbolically important for demonstrating the city's commitment to the district, as the city owned and developed the property.⁷ In 2003, the National Trust for Historic Preservation recognized Greenville with a Great American Main Street Award for the city's restoration work on the West End Market and its role in the revitalization of the West End District.⁸



This small-scale development brought art studios, offices, and small manufacturers, creating new job opportunities and reducing blighted conditions.⁹ These outcomes are reflected in the 230 building permits issued within a half mile of the West End Market between 1997 and 2000. Today, the West End Historic District is a successful arts district, and the West End Market continues to be a popular destination for tourists and residents, with 26 restaurants, 29 retailers, and 20 art galleries and studios in close proximity of the market.^{10, 11} The success of the West End Market has brought over 2,000 new jobs to the surrounding area, not including the jobs that were retained as a result of the redevelopment of the West End.¹²



Figure 2: West End Market. [Source: <http://www.westendmarket.net/about/>]

Falls Park on the Reedy River – As small businesses moved into the West End, the city sought to further improve the adjacent riverfront and the connection between the west side and downtown. In 2003, the city removed the Camperdown Bridge, which had obstructed views of the Reedy River Falls for over 40 years and created a barrier to public access of the river and falls. At the time, the bridge, though structurally adequate, carried very little traffic. Seizing the opportunity for riverfront development and accessibility to downtown, the city approached the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) South Carolina Division Office to discuss removing the Federally-funded bridge. The FHWA Division Office supported Greenville's vision of well-connected neighborhoods, as well as the bridge's demolition.^{13, 14}

With the bridge removed, the city developed the 20-acre **Falls Park**, with gardens and walking paths surrounding the falls. The park includes the Liberty Bridge, a 345-foot suspension bridge that provides safe and convenient pedestrian access between the west side and downtown, connecting residents to retail and job centers.^{15, 16} Falls Park was funded primarily through a local hospitality tax, and additional funds came from a mix of private and public sources. Falls Park on the Reedy River has become a regional attraction, transforming the previously unnoticed river area into a recreational amenity and focal point for the community. The project increased the walkability and livability of Greenville, connecting the west side to downtown, readying the riverfront for development, and creating a greenway that expanded the city's trail network.¹⁷

In 2005, **RiverPlace**, a \$68 million public and private development, was constructed in two phases across from Falls Park, expanding the economic opportunities.¹⁸ The mixed-use development includes a hotel, 73 apartments for sale, retail and office spaces, art studios, and restaurants.¹⁹ The city contributed over \$17 million in tax increment funds and parking revenue funds²⁰ for additional parking and improved connections to Falls Park.²¹



Figure 3: Falls Park and the Liberty Bridge along the Reedy River. [Source: C. Jordan, City of Greenville]

“Because [West End] is profitable and worthwhile, this development trend should continue.”
 — *Greg Strait, Economic Development Analyst, City of Greenville*²²



Figure 4: Rendering of the RiverPlace development adjacent to Falls Park. [Source: <http://www.riverplacesc.com/news/03-09-05-GSA.php>]



Brownfields Assessments – While the West End Market and Falls Park sparked local business interests, Greenville’s west side continued to be categorized largely by the presence of abandoned service stations, railroad properties, and other industrial sites. Perceived or known environmental contamination of these properties impeded the area’s development.²³ Greenville sought to expand the success of the West End Market and support local interest in the area, and in 2000, the city was awarded \$200,000 from the EPA to conduct a Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot. Through this effort, the city evaluated more than 50 potential brownfield sites in the west side, ranging in size from less than one acre to greater than 20 acres. The majority of the evaluated properties did not require remediation, which eliminated a major hurdle to local development and allowed the city to identify reuse opportunities within the west side neighborhoods.²⁴ Of the contaminated properties, the city facilitated environmental cleanup and redevelopment of 15 sites, totaling over 50 acres of property.

The city encouraged property owners and developers to return the sites to productive use by assisting in prioritizing brownfield sites, assessing contamination, and creating cleanup plans.²⁵ Recognizing these efforts, the EPA awarded the city an additional \$200,000 and \$400,000 in 2006 and 2009, respectively, to continue assessing properties on the west side.²⁶ Projects built on these properties include Fluor Field, a minor league baseball stadium, and the West End Fieldhouse, a mixed-use development with 40 residential units and 50,000 square feet of office space.²⁷ For these projects, the City of Greenville strategically invested public resources to attract and partner with the private sector. In addition to assessment through the EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot, Fluor Field received \$15 million from the city for acquisition, stormwater, and streetscape improvements, and millions in private investment for the facilities’ construction.²⁸ Since the stadium opened in 2006, 110 new businesses have opened within a half-mile of Fluor Field and the West End Fieldhouse.²⁹

Other assessed sites include sections of the Swamp Rabbit Trail.³⁰ The 17.5-mile multi-use Swamp Rabbit Trail, opened in 2008, links the west side to both downtown and the suburbs west of Greenville. The Greenville Hospital System committed \$1 million to the trail’s construction and programming, demonstrating the private sector’s confidence in downtown and understanding that a walkable environment benefits not only local health, but business interests as well.³¹ A South Carolina Recreational Trails grant, part of the [U.S. DOT Recreational Trails Program](#), will fund a 1.75-mile extension of the trail north of the city. In its first year, the Swamp Rabbit Trail had over 359,000 users,³² and many businesses along the trail reported increases in sales and revenue ranging from 30 to 85 percent.³³ In 2008, the South Carolina Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department recognized the West End with an award for developing parks and trails that contributed to the revitalization of this neighborhood.³⁴

“Our public sector is willing to step up and take risks, and the private sector is willing to back them up... It takes both.”

— Nancy Whitworth,
Director of Economic Development,
City of Greenville³⁵

In addition to the Fluor Field and the Swamp Rabbit Trail, assessed properties have been converted into housing, including a condominium complex with over 100 units.³⁶ While these projects were approved for development and then constructed, Greenville’s current building and zoning codes and the lack of clarity regarding appropriate procedures can sometimes be a barrier to the redevelopment of underused properties.³⁷ Through the HUD and DOT planning grant, Connections for Sustainability will review the city’s building and zoning codes and procedures and suggest strategies for streamlining them to be more comprehensive and supportive

of innovation and redevelopment.³⁸ The code revisions will encourage more projects like the ones described above by facilitating a more efficient development process.

Kroc Center and A.J. Whittenberg School – Building upon the successes of the brownfields assessments, the city of Greenville coordinated additional Federal EPA grants to address environmental contamination on five adjacent properties in the West Greenville neighborhood.



In addition to using the Brownfields Assessments Demonstration Pilot, the city received \$100,000 through the EPA [USTfields Program](#) in 2002 and portion of the State's \$808,999 [EPA Brownfields Section 128\(a\) State and Tribal Grant](#) in 2003.³⁹

Following the cleanup, major redevelopment projects proceeded on these sites, including the 20-acre, \$67 million Kroc Center, a recreational, cultural and worship facility that provides the west side with family, personal, spiritual and youth services. The Kroc Center receives over 3,000 visitors daily and employs about 100 workers.⁴⁰

In 2009, Greenville County Schools purchased five acres of the Kroc Center's property to construct the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School, creating 60 full-time jobs for faculty, staff and administrators.⁴¹ The first new elementary school built in Greenville in 30 years,⁴² the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified building and the most technologically-advanced elementary school in Greenville County. The school, which opened in August 2010, serves students from the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as from overcrowded schools throughout the county.⁴³

In addition to the Federal investment, other public and private sources leveraged an estimated \$90 million to complete the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School and adjacent Kroc Center.⁴⁴ The school has received more than \$400,000 in sponsorships, donations and grants from local corporations, including Hubbell Lighting, Inc., Michelin, and General Electric, to implement an engineering-focused curriculum.^{45, 46} New young families are drawn to the neighborhood for this new facility and its technology-driven curriculum.

Partnership for Sustainable Communities Planning Grant

While each Federal investment in Greenville has improved conditions on the west side and demonstrates the area's potential, challenges remain. Nearly 22 percent of homes within the project area still remain vacant, and about 60 percent are rental properties. Sidewalk infrastructure is insufficient or nonexistent in many parts of the west side, and transit access is limited. Of the 12 fixed routes of Greenville's Greenlink bus system, just two routes pass through the west side, and then only on an hourly interval between 6 AM and 6 PM. Greenville is proactively building upon its prior successes to address these challenges.

Jointly funded by a [HUD Community Challenge Grant](#) and a [DOT Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery \(TIGER\) II Planning Grant](#), Greenville's grant project focuses on connecting affordable housing, transportation options, economic development opportunities, and open space and developing a cohesive vision to strengthen and link existing community assets.⁴⁷ The Connections for Sustainability project comprises three components:



Figure 5: Participants mapping destinations they typically travel at Connections for Sustainability's kick-off meeting. [Source: J. Durant, City of Greenville]

1) Citywide Planning

- Review existing building and zoning codes to facilitate reuse of vacant properties.
- Plan for transit-oriented development (TOD) that provides housing for a range of income levels.
- Develop a seven-mile bus rapid transit (BRT) route that links the west side to the city's emerging technology sector, which is expected to eventually host over 10,000 jobs.⁴⁸

2) West Side Planning

- Use findings from citywide housing, BRT, and TOD plans to develop a comprehensive plan for the west side.⁴⁹

- Identify locations to increase low-income and workforce housing in the Southernside and West Greenville neighborhoods.
- Utilize Brownfield funds for environmental site assessments of west side properties.
- Develop a master plan for an 23.5-acre park on currently underutilized industrial and warehouse properties between the Southernside and West Greenville neighborhoods, tripling the amount of local park space (existing greenspace is just 10.8 acres of the 1,131-acre area).⁵⁰



Figure 6: Swamp Rabbit Trail. [Source: <http://www.southernliving.com/travel/south-east/greenvilles-swamp-rabbit-trail-00417000072658/>]

3) Education and Outreach

- Develop a Livability Curriculum to engage youth at the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School.
- Utilize space at the West Greenville Community Center for a Livability Studio that will promote community involvement in the planning effort.⁵¹

The citywide efforts will inform the west side planning efforts and the West Side Comprehensive Plan, which will focus on attracting business and jobs, and improving transit connections to other economic centers around the region.⁵² While Greenville has completed both citywide and neighborhood-level comprehensive plans in the past, the West Side Comprehensive Plan is the first plan to develop a unified strategy and vision for the west side neighborhoods. Identifying strategies for improving local transit and allowing for streamlined reuse of vacant and underused properties, the plan will develop a collaborative approach to development on the west side.

Relationship to Partnership Principles

The prior investments in the west side, alongside the Connections for Sustainability project in progress, demonstrate how targeted Federal resources can be leveraged to attract other State, local, and private support, ultimately benefiting the area in ways that no one effort could do alone. The benefits relate directly to the principles of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, as outlined below.

Provide More Transportation Choices

- The Swamp Rabbit Trail connects residents to the Kroc Center, A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School, RiverPlace, Falls Park, and downtown. Connections for Sustainability will identify corridors for improved sidewalk infrastructure, thus increasing options for walking and bicycling.
- Connections for Sustainability will plan for improved transit service to link community amenities, affordable housing, and economic centers.⁵³

Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing

- Connections for Sustainability's Housing Strategy will identify locations for increased workforce and low-income housing in the Southernside and West Greenville neighborhoods.

Enhance Economic Competitiveness

- The Fluor Fieldhouse, RiverPlace development, and West End Market created a combined 145,000 square feet of office space in the west side. Additional private investment constructed new offices there as well, with over **110 new businesses** opening within a half mile of Fluor Field.

- The West End experienced a **31 percent annual increase** in assessed property value from 2006 to 2011.⁵⁴ While South Carolina employment fell overall by 3.7 percent between 2000 and 2010, downtown and the west side registered a **0.9 percent employment gain** during this time.⁵⁵

Support Existing Communities

- The Kroc Center and A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School, constructed on a former brownfield site, were strategically located to jumpstart revitalization on the west side and act as anchors of the community.
- Connections for Sustainability includes planning for a 23.5-acre community park adjacent to the Kroc Center, tripling park space on the west side.⁵⁶

Coordinate Policies and Leverage Investment

- EPA-funded projects in the west side bolster HUD's investments in those neighborhoods, developing over 15 sites for a total of over **50 acres of property**. This brownfields cleanup provided new opportunities for community amenities and affordable housing.
- Connections for Sustainability will review and update building and zoning codes to facilitate reuse of abandoned structures.

Summary



Figure 5: A.J. Whittenburg Elementary School of Engineering. [Source: <http://www.greenville.ks12.sc.us/ajw/about/contact.asp>]

While much work remains to realize the full potential of the west side and the completion of the West Side Comprehensive Plan, the positive impacts of the prior investment are clearly visible. The successes of these projects demonstrate how targeted Federal investment, paired with local public and private sector initiatives, can advance and support neighborhood growth. Federal involvement and investment in West End Market, Falls Park, and other brownfield sites jump-started efforts to significantly improve conditions in Greenville's west side neighborhoods. Through the joint HUD and DOT grant, Connections for Sustainability will capitalize on these successes, developing a comprehensive plan that effectively locates and links housing, recreation, and employment opportunities, and sets the foundation for neighborhood-wide economic benefits to the west side.

All images included in this document were drawn from publicly accessible sources, which are fully referenced below.

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