

Partnership for Sustainable Communities Brownfields Pilots – Boston, Massachusetts



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

Boston’s Fairmount/Indigo Corridor is a commuter rail line that passes through diverse, predominantly lower-income urban neighborhoods. Historically, this nine-mile rail line has traveled from suburban locations directly into the city’s central business district, bypassing several large, urban neighborhoods. As a result, these neighborhoods have endured the environmental impacts of the rail line without receiving any of the transportation and economic benefits associated with rail station access. Through EPA grants and other sources of public- and private-sector funding, several brownfields along this rail line have been assessed, cleaned up, and in some cases, redeveloped. However, there had not been a coordinated effort among EPA, DOT and HUD to collectively enhance the livability of these neighborhoods prior to the Partnership for Sustainable Communities Brownfield Pilot. Along with the technical assistance provided by the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, this project has attracted support from local entities such as the Fairmount Collaborative, a group of four community development corporations that are working together on area-wide revitalization, including creating a “Greenway” along the length of the Fairmount/Indigo Corridor: a chain of recreational land and multi-use, on-road paths for commuting and leisure.

Pilot Activities

The City of Boston, aided in part by EPA Brownfields Assessment and Cleanup grants, has already assessed and/or cleaned up multiple city-owned brownfields along this rail line and is planning to provide environmental assessments on several more. In addition, the Fairmount Collaborative has developed a master plan for the Greenway, identified opportunity sites, and is developing resources for its realization. The Pilot will build upon this momentum by supporting three projects related to the Corridor—one Corridor-wide project and two site-specific projects.

Pilot Technical Assistance Activities

Technical assistance for this Pilot is being provided for three separate but related projects, as indicated below.

- Offer planning and design consultation to complete project designs and zoning compliance evaluation, which is intended to meet funding application requirements for identified funding sources (Morton St. Homes Project)
- Assist with planning and public engagement for public review of site plans to be submitted to the city (Morton St. Homes Project)
- Ensure public participation articulates the dynamics of brownfield redevelopment and transit-oriented development (TOD) (Talbot Commons Project)
- Consolidate existing site inventories and development of prioritization framework to complement city brownfield efforts (Corridor-wide)
- Provide strategy for Collaborative and members to identify past site uses, likely contaminants, and site evaluations to determine viability for incorporation into the Greenway (Corridor-wide)

Fairmount/Indigo Corridor Project—In cooperation with the Fairmount Collaborative and the Boston Department of Neighborhood Development (DND), technical assistance under the Pilot was used to consolidate existing inventories of more than 150 potential opportunity sites that could be used for housing, economic development or other community-based initiatives including the Greenway. The inventory includes all properties located within one-half mile of the Fairmount/Indigo Line, and identifies known and potential brownfields. The technical assistance being provided under this Pilot will be used as part of the Fairmount Collaborative’s strategic approach to acquiring or otherwise using some of these properties for the Greenway.

Morton St. Homes Project—A site-specific design concept has been refined for a brownfield located close to the recently refurbished Morton St. transit station. The design concept will guide development of the property into mixed-use affordable housing and commercial operations. In turn, this will create a transit oriented development (TOD) on a former brownfield in an area that has had difficulty accessing commuter rail in the past. Technical assistance was also used to improve the understanding of brownfield implications on site design, real estate transactions, financing and development. The site-specific design concept was presented at several community meetings to gather support for the project necessary for its application for affordable housing grants and loan assistance.

Talbot Commons Project—To support the reuse of brownfields for a TOD with affordable housing and walkable access to transit services where none currently exists, a site-specific redevelopment strategy was created by a local community development corporation (CDC) for properties surrounding the new Talbot Avenue transit station. Previous public engagement efforts identified concerns over increased density and other issues related to the development. Technical assistance under this Pilot was provided to re-engage the community regarding the benefits of brownfields redevelopment and discuss the merits of increased density through TOD. Working with the local neighborhood association and CDC, a public forum was held to discuss the potential benefits of increasing density, including a facilitated community driven dialogue that identified and recorded their priorities that new development should reflect. This informed not only the potential future TOD development program and design but also started a longer community planning process that can inform broader community-wide change.

Ensuring that current residents are not displaced or otherwise disturbed is an ongoing priority for this Pilot. HUD, DOT and EPA will assist communities within the Corridor with TOD planning to help minimize displacement of residents and encourage development of affordable housing. Federal assistance will also help increase the capacity of nonprofit housing providers, such as CDCs, to clean up and redevelop brownfields within the Corridor.

Ultimately, this Pilot will help the city and local CDCs provide more accessible light rail service for the first time to residents in more vulnerable areas, as well as new recreational space and mixed-use redevelopment with a focus on affordable housing.



Brownfields redevelopment in progress along Boston's Fairmount/Indigo Corridor

Major Technical Assistance Partners

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Transportation
- Boston Department of Neighborhood Development
- Boston Redevelopment Authority
- The Fairmount Collaborative (*comprised of the following*):
 - Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation
 - Mattapan Community Development Corporation
 - Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation
 - Southwest Boston Community Development Corporation
 - Talbot Norfolk Triangle Neighborhood

Outcomes

The expected outcomes from this Pilot include:

- Increasing capacity within the Fairmount Collaborative and its members to pursue brownfield and other opportunity sites for the Greenway and provision of affordable housing in TOD.
- Improving capacity of local stakeholders to establish public- and private-sector partnerships within the targeted community that leverage investment in brownfields redevelopment.
- Creating a site prioritization tool that will help identify revitalization opportunities for sites in proximity to the Corridor, including TOD initiatives and the proposed Greenway.

The expected completion date for work under the Boston Pilot is February 2011. For more information on this Pilot, please contact Jessica Dominguez with EPA Region 1 at (617) 918-1627, or via email at dominguez.jessica@epa.gov.