

Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities
Partnership for Sustainable Communities
In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture
Webinar: January 18, 2012

This webinar presentation, featuring speakers from the EPA, USDA, FHWA, and FTA, reveals efforts and strategies to foster sustainable rural communities. Topics include livability principles, energy efficiency, water quality, waste, business, building improvements and restoration, transportation, and green building.

EPA, HUD, and DOT have been working with USDA to think through how the Partnership's activities can best serve rural America. One of the partnership's central efforts has been Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities. This initiative has revealed the value of Livability Principles, federal investments, rural stakeholders, and coordinated federal support. In particular, livability principles enhance economic competitiveness, support existing communities, provide more transportation choices, promote equitable, affordable housing, increase value in communities and neighborhoods, coordinate policies and leverage investment.

USDA provides three main services to rural development: Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-cooperative Service, and Rural Utilities Service. The Rural Housing Service supports Single Family Housing, Multi-Family Housing, and Community Facilities Program, which provides loans to develop essential facilities. The Rural Housing Service also promotes innovation in green building strategies (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/eehome.html>). The Rural Business-Cooperative Service supports energy programs such as biofuels and energy efficiency, business programs that facilitate access to capital, and cooperatives that promote local business cooperation. Rural Utilities Service supports water and environmental programs that focus on water and waste, electric programs that are efficient and reliable, telecommunications, and department-wide initiatives (USDA Sustainable Development Council <http://www.usda.gov/oce/sustainable> and Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food <http://www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer>)

Regarding the Region 7 Case Study, the Region 7 Federal Sustainable Communities partnership consists of EPA, FTA, FHWA, HHS, USDA Rural Development, FEMA, and HUD.

The goal of the EPA Historic Highways Project is to identify and overcome environmental conditions at former gas station sites and to redevelop those sites and surrounding areas. There are 218 stations in 115 communities. A major focus has been sites in Sutherland, Nebraska. The project's revitalization strategy is to make physical improvements to former gas station sites and other underutilized properties, organize and meet regularly to prioritize actions, and promote Sutherland, Nebraska's assets. Modes of involvement by USDA RD in this project include possibly serving as a funding resource; providing RD programs for infrastructure, community facilities, business development and housing; participating in community visits and meetings; and identifying funding options.

The Ranson-Charles Town Corridor Revitalization Case Study focuses on sustainable revitalization of the Green Corridor and Charles Washington Hall. Benefits of the revitalization include community involvement, economic development, preservation of recreational space, management of storm water runoff, enhancement of affordable housing supply, increased local transit use, accessibility to job centers, and improved livability and infrastructure. The outcome ultimately makes the community a place where people want to live and work.

For more information: www.ransonrenewed.com

The final segment of the webinar focused on performance measurement in sustainable rural communities. The purpose of this performance measurement is to enable rural communities to measure their progress toward Livability goals, improve understanding of decision impacts, observe effects of plans or projects, and monitor trends in performance. The framework for this measurement includes broad goals and specific strategies.

Some sample measures from the report include promotion of rural prosperity, support for vibrant and thriving rural communities, expansion of transportation choices, and expansion of affordable housing.

Partnership Next steps:

- Publish *Leveraging the Partnership in Rural Communities*
- Implement Sustainability Plans in Rural Communities
- Coordinate training, communications, policy guidance and rule making