

Brownfields Success Story

A Testament to Teamwork Janesville, Wisconsin

Like many cities in the Midwest, Janesville, Wisconsin, has a long and rich history of manufacturing. Janesville's General Motors (GM) assembly plant was once the oldest in America and employed about 7,000 people at its peak in 1970. But industry trends and broader shifts in the U.S. economy forced the plant to close in 2008, leaving residents without an economic anchor and city officials without a clear path forward.

To complicate matters, the city's many different manufacturing operations resulted in concerns about potential environmental contamination. To spur private redevelopment and create a more modern and sustainable city, city officials needed a coordinated approach. "We knew we couldn't take on this project alone," says Duane Cherek, Janesville's planning director. "We're fortunate that we had a lot of help from a lot of different people." He adds, "We recognized the need for an action plan, a tool that defines measures to overcome barriers to redevelopment, particularly on brownfields sites."

The Site Assessments

Janesville officials met with representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to discuss their options. EPA provided a \$400,000 Assessment Grant to investigate potentially contaminated properties.

The next step was to prioritize which sites to remediate first. "It wouldn't be feasible for us to tackle all this at once, so we had to look at which properties would best facilitate economic investment," Cherek says. To no one's great surprise, a 2012 brownfield inventory revealed a concentration of sites in the city's core.

City officials held outreach events with residents and the local chamber of commerce to create a plan that considered all parties' perspectives. All agreed to prioritize the downtown area adjacent to the Rock River, and EPA provided a \$200,000 Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant to create a redevelopment strategy and jumpstart reinvestment.

An 80,000-square-foot parking deck spanning the river presented a major obstacle. The deck had begun to deteriorate over the years, creating potential contamination issues and a flood risk for businesses



EPA Grant Recipient:
City of Janesville

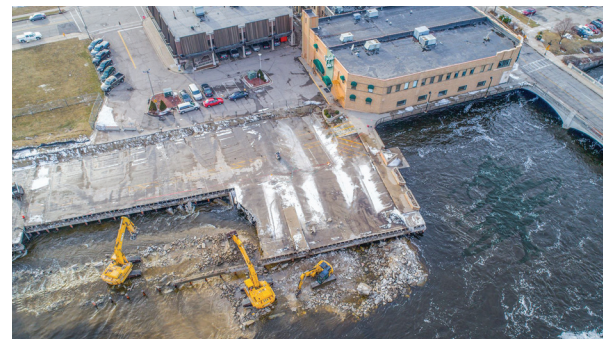
EPA Grant Types:
Brownfields Assessment,
Brownfields Area-Wide Planning

Former Uses:
Manufacturing, Other Industrial

Current Use:
Community Gathering Spaces,
Housing, Parks, Retail



A parking deck used to span the
Rock River in downtown Janesville.



Demolition of the parking deck took
about 11 months to complete.



A community gathering space replaced the parking deck on the west bank of the Rock River.

“**The ARISE Plan, made possible only with EPA funding assistance, allowed the community to establish a common vision for downtown revitalization and pursue its implementation vigorously. It was the right tool at the right time.**”

*Duane Cherek,
Planning Director,
City of Janesville*

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Jon Grosshans at 312-353-5617 or Grosshans.Jon@epa.gov.

and residences. The massive structure also limited waterfront accessibility, preventing redevelopment and public improvements to activate the waterfront.

The Redevelopment

The EPA funding allowed the city to develop its own locally driven revitalization plan, known as the Rock Renaissance Area Redevelopment and Implementation Strategy (ARISE). ARISE detailed plans to turn sites near the parking deck and along the river into a downtown destination, stimulating activity and reinvestment, complete with a riverwalk, iconic pedestrian bridge across the river, multifunctional communal areas, spaces for new business and housing opportunities. Equally important to the plan is the implementation. As part of its outreach, the city worked with state and federal agencies, private investors and the public to identify solutions to environmental and economic challenges. The city went back to many of these same stakeholders to identify funding and leadership support to make the vision a reality.

As a result of the city’s focus on implementation and stakeholder support, the parking deck demolition was completed in less than a year. To assist in that effort, the state of Wisconsin provided the city with roughly \$800,000 in grants to remove the structures. The state also stepped up to provide funding for outdoor recreational improvements along the river, the Ice Age trail and demolition of the GM site.

“The river has traditionally served as a divider rather than a connector,” says Cherek. “When we removed the parking deck, it showed the community how much potential this area has.”

The Benefits

Today, the ARISE projects are making a visible difference all along the riverfront. Upgrades to the area on the west side of the river are nearing completion, and improvements to the east side are underway. Construction of the pedestrian bridge that connects the two areas is slated to begin this year, and local organizations such as ARISE Now and Downtown Janesville, Inc., have stepped up as project champions. The city expects the centerpiece of the ARISE plan, the town square, to be completed in the coming year or two and to bring lasting environmental and economic benefits.

Private investment is beginning to return to the city as well. The GM plant has been demolished in preparation for redevelopment. Downtown retail occupancy has doubled since the project began. A community credit union is considering plans to invest \$30 million along the riverfront on former brownfield sites, including a new corporate office providing hundreds of jobs and a “Legacy Center” that honors GM’s contributions to the region.

Jon Grosshans, community planner for EPA Region 5, believes that Janesville’s revitalization can be an inspiration for other cities looking to accelerate redevelopment. “From the outset, this strategy focused on implementation,” says Grosshans. “What started as a brownfield redevelopment strategy on paper has quickly turned into a series of tangible projects that set the stage for additional investment in downtown Janesville.”