

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities: A Collaborative Approach for Smart Growth Solutions

*Supporting locally led, community-driven
development strategies that protect human health
and the environment, expand economic
opportunity, and revitalize neighborhoods*

May 26, 2021

About the Office of Community Revitalization

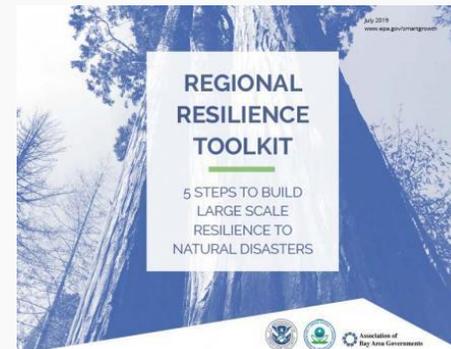
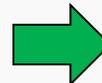


- We help communities grow in ways that protect health and the environment; strengthen their fiscal bottom line and attract private investment; and create better housing, transportation, and jobs for the entire community.
- Non-regulatory; work on cross-cutting environmental issues related to land use and economic development
- Work with other EPA programs and regional offices, other federal agencies, states, tribes, local gov'ts, private sector, nonprofits
- Direct technical assistance with communities, tribes, states, and regional entities
- Research and policy evaluation
- Publications and tools on a wide range of topics

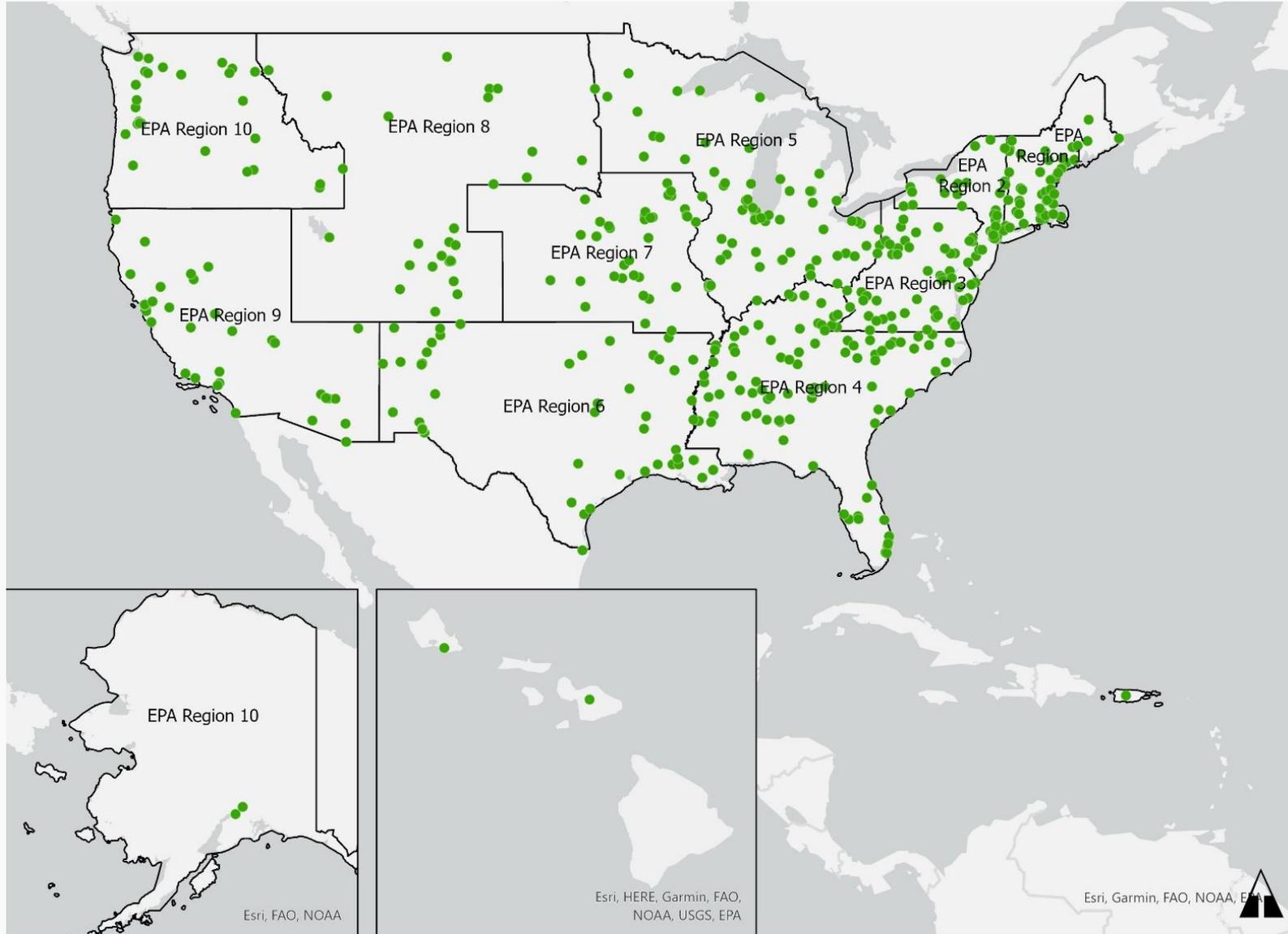


Technical Assistance

- Communities often need help establishing a clear vision, developing effective implementation strategies, and identifying barriers that might be created by their own policies
 - We lower the entry barrier to federal assistance and access to national expertise
 - We act as a convener and help communities have conversations with key stakeholders (from individuals in the community to external public- and private-sector partners)
- We use what we learn from technical assistance projects to create tools any community can pick up and use



OCR Technical Assistance Programs

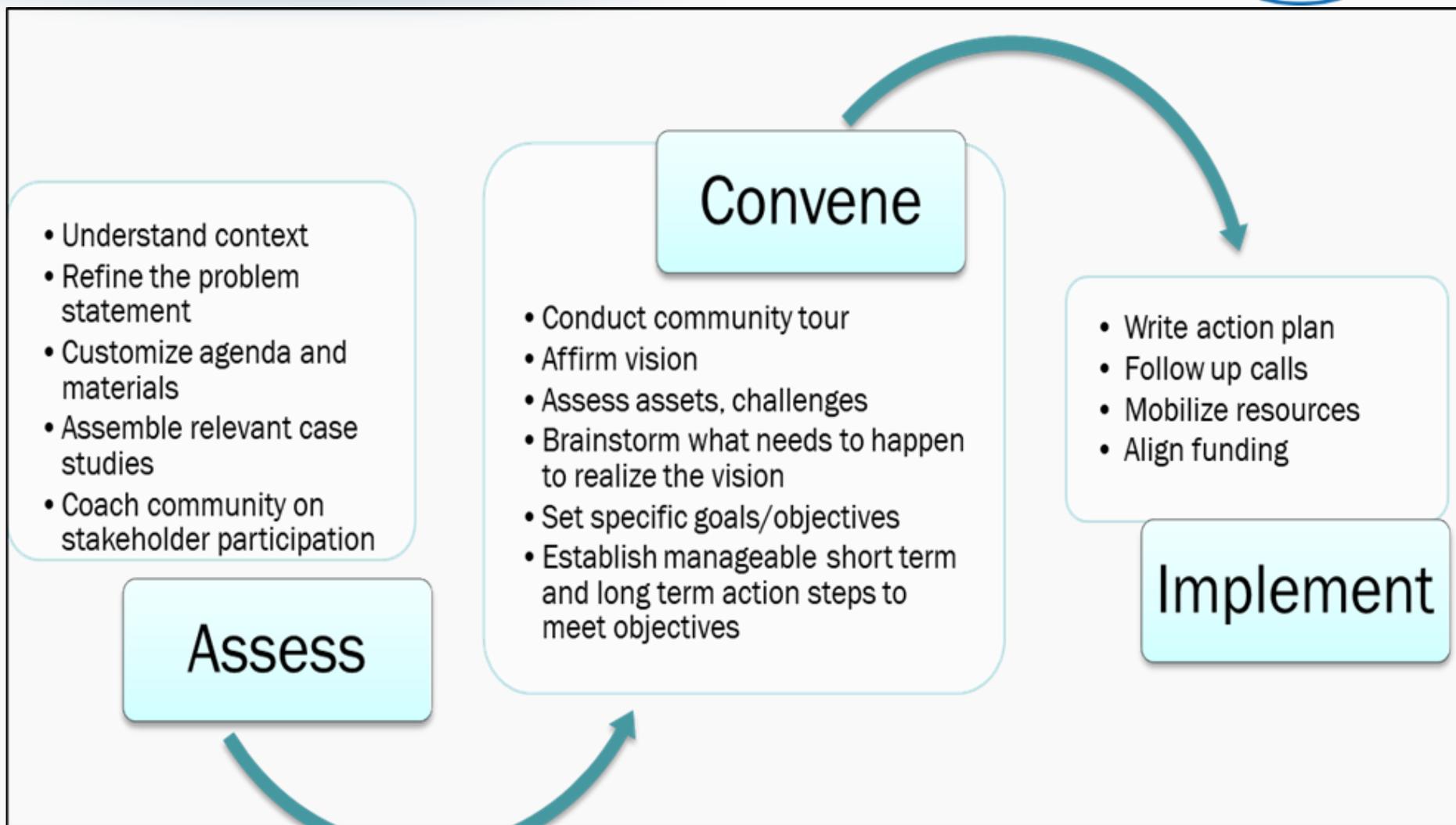


Program	Total projects
Building Blocks – Grantee (2012-17)	157
★ Building Blocks - Sustainable Communities (2011-20)	212
Cool & Connected (2016-17)	17
Governor's Institute (2010-15)	18
★ Greening America's Capitals/Communities (2010-20)	38
★ Healthy Places for Healthy People (2017-18)	16
Livable Communities in Appalachia (2012-14)	15
★ Local Foods, Local Places (2015-20)	127
Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (2010-19)	31
★ Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (2020)	10
★ Regional Resilience (2020)	4
★ Special TA (2010-20)	38
Total, 2010-2020	683

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities

- ✓ Planning technical assistance on a variety of topic areas centered on the intersection of the built and natural environments
- ✓ Aimed at empowering communities and building local capacity
- ✓ Education in topical areas with local context
- ✓ Technical guidance on best practices
- ✓ Facilitation and engagement of the public and stakeholders
- ✓ Coaching on most promising next steps



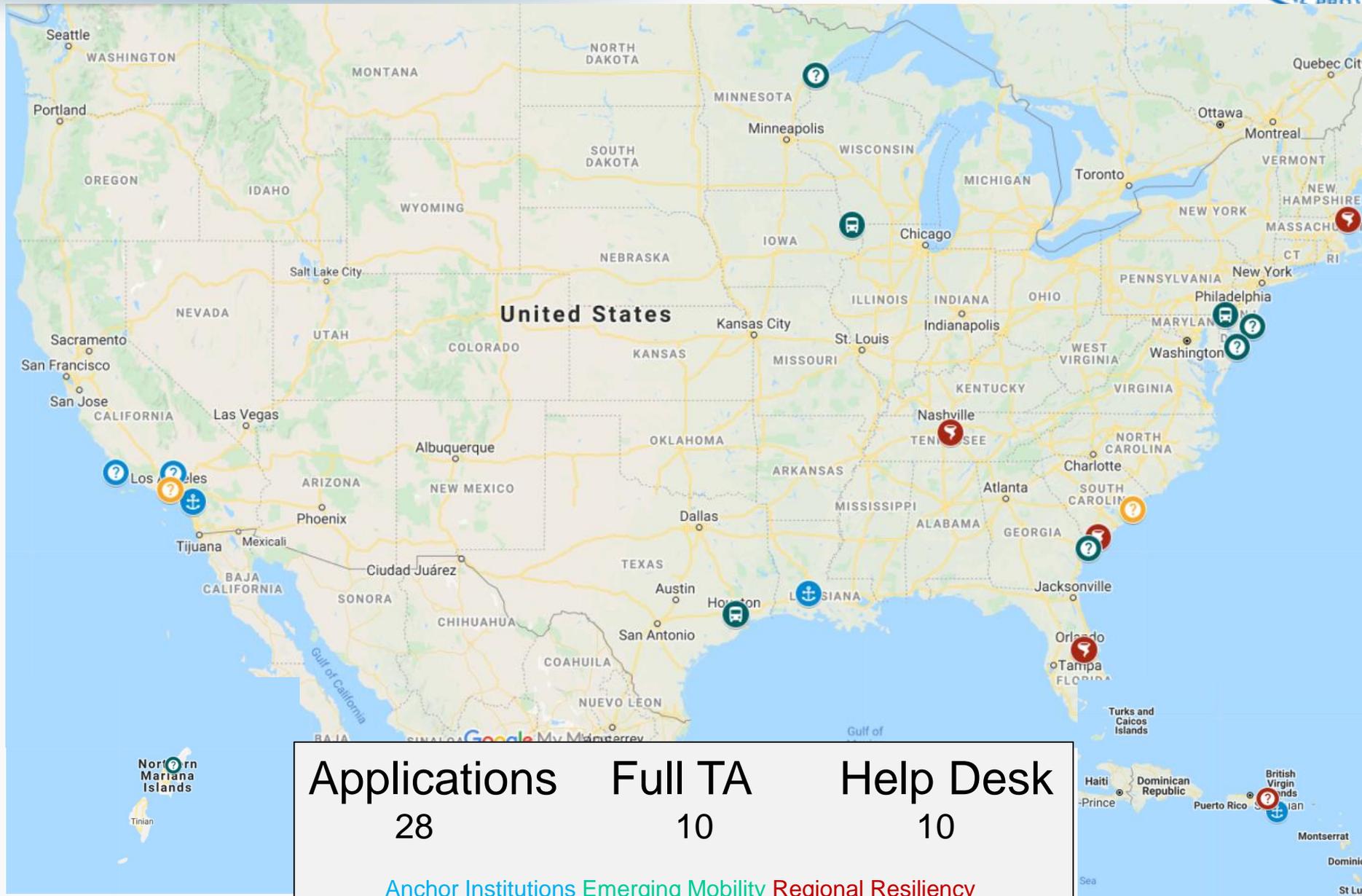


Building Blocks Topic Areas



Bikeshare Planning	Strategies for Neighborhood Reinvestment	Green and Complete Streets	Flood Resilience for Riverine and Coastal Communities
Building Regional Disaster Resilience	Leveraging Cultural Anchor Institutions	Linking Land Use and Water Quality	Neighborhood Planning for Healthy Aging
Creating Equitable Development	Preferred Growth Areas		Addressing Emerging Mobility
Sustainable Strategies for Small Cities and Rural Areas	Sustainable Land Use Code Audit	Using Smart Growth to Produce Fiscal and Economic Health	Walking Audit

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities



Community Outcomes

- Making progress towards smart growth implementation
- Implementation actions vary based on community capacity and tool focus



Points of Impact



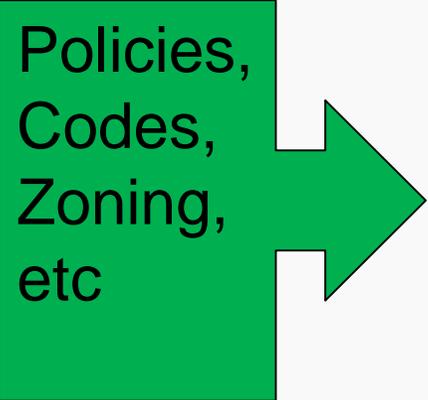
Building Blocks Technical Assistance
Creating Equitable Development
Kingston, NY

- **Goal 3 – Complete sidewalk network and make streets safe for all users**

- Action – Finish Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sidewalk inventory and ADA transition plan
- Action – Improve access to transit; improve communication between the city and county on consolidation of service issues
- Action – Expand ride share options; look into cooperative models for ridesharing
- Action - Create a citywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan



Physical
Infrastructure



Policies,
Codes,
Zoning,
etc

- **Strategy 1 – Policy and Code**

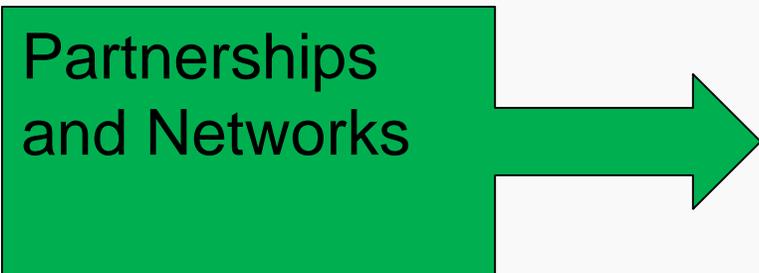
- Action - Establish a working group to evaluate the city's planning and zoning code, administration, and enforcement.
- Action - Draft an overlay zone for the city-designated downtown area addressing setbacks, pedestrian/ bicycle amenities, scale, signage, lighting, and parking.
- Action - Allow mixed use development (vertical with residential or office above retail) in the downtown district.
- Action - Create a complete and green streets ordinance that applies to new roads or reconstruction of roads. The ordinance would include stormwater plantings.
- Action - Update parking codes. Enforce minimums and maximums, and reevaluate and adjust periodically to provide the needed parking without oversupplying it.
- Action - Create policies for the city's land bank that support city decisions about where and when to make investments in purchasing key properties to support infill development goals downtown.

Points of Impact



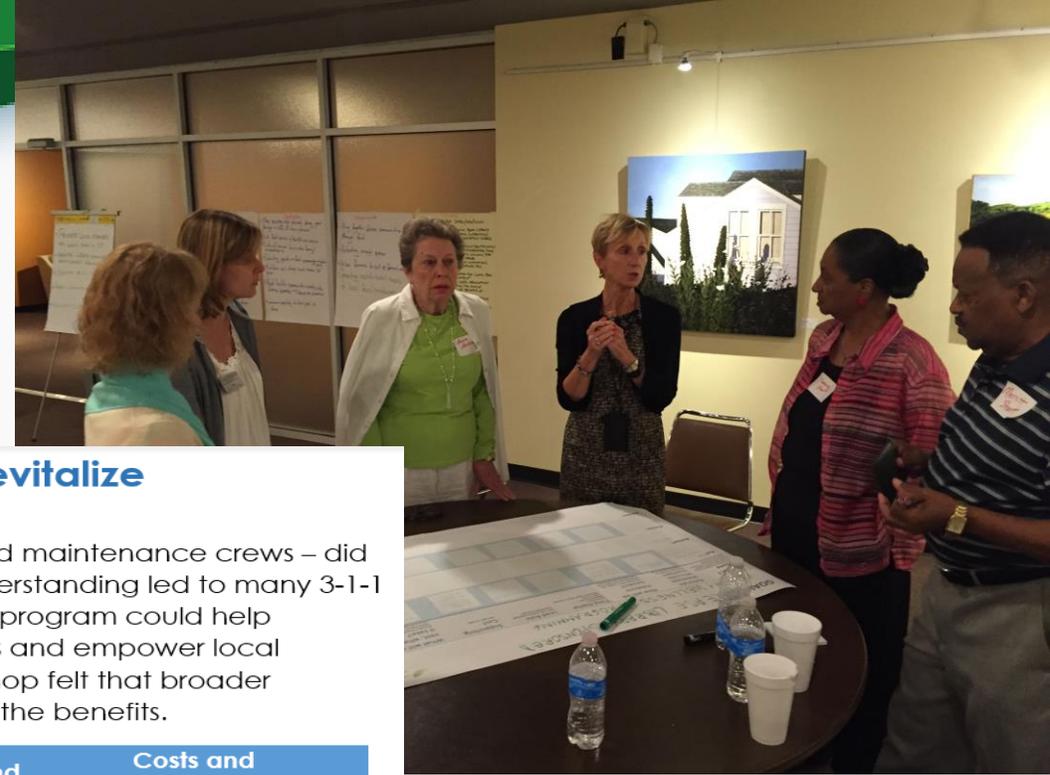
4. Make AJ a More Walkable, Distinct Place Where People Want to Be (GOAL 4)

- 4.1. Prioritize implementation of the citywide Multimodal Connectivity Plan – The ASU Capstone project identified a robust network of trails, streetscape improvements and other infrastructure to make the community a more pedestrian, bike and horse friendly. To reinforce the emphasis on downtown, the city could consider prioritizing multimodal investments that connect downtown to other points of interest – notably Flatiron Park and the Horizon Health and Wellness facility to also reinforce healthy lifestyles and active living. Additionally, some of the streetscaping and landscaping could incorporate green infrastructure⁴ to help address drainage and stormwater needs.
- 4.2. Revive, expand and implement branding, wayfinding and signage program – Building on the ideas presented in the ASU Capstone plan and DRIS along with branding efforts already completed, AJ could prioritize wayfinding and signage improvements to attract people to downtown and other points of interest.
- 4.3. Implement additional landscaping, green infrastructure, and lighting improvements – Major recent successes of AJ are Flatiron Park, Plaza Drive, and North Apache Trail streetscape improvements. These areas of the community create inviting, aesthetically attractive places where people are encouraged to walk. Continuing these improvements in downtown and with any new infill development projects will help reinforce the sense of place in the area.
- 4.4. Plan for the repurposing of Apache Trail – At six-lanes, the current design of a roadway is oversized for the estimated 12,000 Average Daily Traffic (ADT) at peak winter months. Given the constrained sizes of some commercial parcels, a narrower roadway, the city could narrow Apache Trail down to 4-lanes and re dedicate side to on-street parking, additional green infrastructure (to capture and reduce stormwater drainage), and streetscape enhancements. Doing so would help



- **Strategy 4 – Improve collaboration among the institutions, community, and businesses for the benefit of all.**
 - Action 4.1 – Maintain a master list of every possible community partner. Invite them to periodic them update meetings for buy-in and input (in addition to a more directly involved core steering committee).
 - Action 4.2 – Develop and decide Explora's priorities and needs in order to make concrete asks to partners.
 - Action 4.3 – Involve stakeholders as core partners to collaborate with on: programming, building, connections to neighborhood access. Create a functional work group to address these areas.
 - Action 4.4 – 1st ask of the functional group: engage partner organizations to gather staff expertise to inform programming.
 - Action 4.5 – Parent outreach and involvement (collaborate with other organizations to accomplish outreach objectives).

Detailed Action Planning



Goal #1: Educate stakeholders on how green and complete streets can revitalize communities and address misconceptions

Throughout the entire two-day workshop, participants indicated that many people – including residents and maintenance crews – did not fully understand the function of green and complete streets and what they should look like. This misunderstanding led to many 3-1-1 complaints and negative reactions to future green and complete streets projects. A targeted educational program could help showcase the benefits of these projects and encourage implementation, but could also alleviate concerns and empower local residents to take pride and ownership in long-term function and aesthetics. Some participants in the workshop felt that broader acceptance of green and complete streets concepts was lacking because the public did not understand the benefits.

Specific Actions/Initiatives	Why is this important?	Immediate Next Steps	How will we measure success?	Time Frame	Lead and Support Roles	Costs and Implementation Resources
Assess the target audience	Understand constituent needs to tailor messaging and increase effectiveness of campaign.	Identify audiences and convene focus groups or prepare survey to understand motivations.	Defined outcomes that identify common interests and potential conflicts	1 year	Local non-profits with City support	Non-profit and staff time. Meeting support costs.
Create messaging to align with constituent interests	Increase acceptance and understanding of green and complete streets through consistent, scalable, and replicable messaging.	Compile best practices of other green and complete streets outreach programs to create a tailored program for Baltimore.	Establishment of a green and complete streets outreach strategy document	2 years	DPW and DOT with support from EPA and consultants for guidance	Staff time and consultant contracts
Conduct outreach specific to audience	Inform specific audiences and gather feedback on outreach strategy.	Identify partners and allies to help conduct outreach.	Fewer 3-1-1 calls and reduction in maintenance costs.	3-4 years	City with support from BWB, NWF, other community groups	Staff time and increased outreach budget
Assess effectiveness and measure success	Refine public outreach strategy and improve future campaigns.	Establish criteria to be used to assess outreach effectiveness.	Incorporation of measurement criteria into the outreach strategy document.	5+ years	DPW and DOT with support from EPA and consultants	Staff time and consultant contracts

Looking Forward



- EO 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
 - Looking at focusing on communities of color and low-income communities
 - Beefing up our engagement and inclusion efforts in our work
- EO 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad
 - Have current programs that focus on adaptation explicitly
 - Current programs address mitigation implicitly (i.e., smart growth reduces VMT)
 - Looking at ways to address adaptation more directly

After setting ambitious climate goals, a liberal Md. suburb struggles to take action



Advertisement

Similar frustrations are bubbling up in communities across the United States, experts say. In a 2020 Brookings report titled “Pledges and Progress,” researchers found that of 45 major cities that have established ambitious climate goals in the past three decades, two-thirds are not on track to achieve them. Some aren’t even tracking their own progress through regular emissions inventories.

“Having a well-intentioned, well-researched commitment is different from having a plan for execution — that’s where cities are struggling,” said Mark Muro, a senior fellow at Brookings and co-author of the report.





Questions for you

- Where are you seeing opportunities or challenges with using land use changes to reduce emissions?
- What type of assistance would you find helpful in this space?
- What federal programs do you work with that influence your land use decisions?
- What is your favorite kind of pie?