



Iowa River Landing

CORALVILLE, IA

2007 REGION 7 WINNER

Key Project Lesson: Small towns can think big—and achieve big—when it comes to brownfield revitalization.

Overview

Public input and productive public-private and state-local partnerships have allowed the small town of Coralville (population 17,000) to develop and execute a sensible growth plan and to transform a former brownfield into an impressive gateway that welcomes visitors into the Coralville/Iowa City community. Through Coralville's brownfields program and other initiatives, 190 separate parcels of a 160-acre former industrial park have been transformed into the Iowa River Landing, a "town center" type mixed-use development anchored by the Coralville Marriott Hotel and Conference Center and featuring a range of office, retail, open space, and residential uses known as "Iowa River Landing." More than \$140 million has been invested in the new river district to date. The City of Coralville has also expanded the designated brownfields project area beyond the boundaries of the former industrial park and is currently targeting 330 acres to receive environmental site assessments.

Featured Partners

- City of Coralville
- Terracon Consultants

Primary Reason for Redevelopment

During its visioning process, Coralville identified the Iowa River Landing site as the area within the community with the greatest redevelopment potential and potential economic viability. Iowa River Landing is situated in an excellent location for commercial development. It boasts good access to several regional and national highways, including Interstate 80, in addition to access to the local CRANDIC Railway. It is located at a major gateway to the Coralville/Iowa City area and is near the University of Iowa—at the time, the only Big Ten university without adequate conference space.

Redeveloping the Iowa River Landing also is a feasible option for combating sprawl and removing blight because the only significant sources of infill development land in Coralville are brownfields.

Approach

From the initial goal set in the visioning process of providing "a decent hotel by the Interstate" to the final project, which features a multi-million dollar hotel, conference facility, and commercial center, Coralville did not let its small size get in the way of pursuing and achieving its brownfield revitalization strategy. The town used a variety of public, private, and non-profit resources to move forward.

The industrial park was initially owned by 74 separate owners and was shaped by years of un-zoned mixed use. This meant that land assembly and environmental clearance for acquisition and construction was a continuous and overlapping process, from the project's launch in 1999 through 2007. Coralville's brownfield approach featured a consistent assessment and early cleanup process, which included identifying priority properties for reuse and producing realistic estimates of cleanup costs for a range of potential land uses. The process also identified potential funding sources that could support all these activities. In practice, this means that Coralville conducted more than 75 Phase I and 26 Phase II environmental assessments, acquired 60 acres of land, and cleaned up eight properties to advance the Iowa River Landing project.

Although land clearance costs were significant, this project illustrates that the stigma of contamination often is more costly to redevelopment than site cleanup, particularly when compared to the value of the end use. Coralville used the information from environmental assessments in property acquisition negotiations with the railroad and other owners to secure reduced land prices that took into account the need for environmental corrective actions. The town adjusted project designs and land uses to accommodate less costly remedies. For example, the project used "surgical" removal of areas of concentrated contaminants to lower public risk, made use of innovative as well as traditional cleanup technologies, and used land-use controls to support passive as well as active remedies of properties for reconstruction.

Innovative Techniques

Coralville employed a host of cost-saving design elements, innovative cleanup technologies, and institutional controls to reduce remediation costs. In addition, the town used a wide variety of financing strategies to secure the significant funding required to begin redevelopment and to support various activities. These strategies included using tax increment financing (TIF) funds to help acquire properties in the Iowa River Landing area and to finance part of the construction of the Coralville Marriott and Conference Center. In addition to the creation of the TIF district, hotel revenue bonds were issued and a turn-key agreement was implemented with the developer to fund the construction of the facility. The hotel and conference center were the initial Iowa River Landing redevelopment project. These funds, along with state and local economic development grants and loans, were used to structure financial packages with rebates and incentives to expedite the acquisition and demolition of existing facilities. The funds also were used to relocate current occupants to new, more appropriate locations in the area. Finally, the town worked in partnership with the University of Iowa's graduate planning program to fill its brownfield coordinator position, saving money and gaining fresh professional expertise in the process.

Challenges

The greatest challenge facing the Iowa River Landing revitalization was the vast number of properties involved. While some brownfield projects target large sites with only a few owners, businesses, and uses, the City of Coralville dealt with many small parcels of land encompassing many different uses. The project involved more than 190 separate parcels for assessment, 74 property owners, and land uses that included industry, warehousing, commerce, residences, and recreation. As a result, negotiations involved many different points of view, personalities, and levels of understanding. Informing property owners of the town's vision for the area and obtaining property access agreements was very time-consuming and labor intensive. Many environmental site assessments were required, and many more are needed for properties still awaiting redevelopment. Financially, securing and packaging the range of resources necessary to acquire, prepare, and redevelop such a complex site proved to be daunting, especially for a small town with limited public-sector capacity. However, with significant effort and determination by Coralville's community leaders, the Iowa River Landing redevelopment has begun to take shape.

Benefits

Iowa River Landing consists of recreational, commercial, cultural, and residential uses that will enhance the quality of life in the Coralville community for many years to come. Through careful planning and aggressive pursuit of opportunities, Coralville's vision has progressed into reality with the hotel and Iowa River Landing projects. The latter features new, mixed-use, commercial- and residential-condominium structures. The Iowa River Landing also provides a new home for the Johnson County Historical Society and the Antique Car Museum of Iowa. More than \$140 million in public and private funds have been invested in the area so far, and much more investment is anticipated. The return on the investment to date includes the creation of over 250 new jobs and the addition of over \$14.5 million to the local economy since August 2006 through revenues generated from hotel rooms and over 200 conference center events. The program's success promises public benefit and attractive private investment opportunities from continued investment in the Iowa River Landing.

Because of its proximity to the University of Iowa, the hotel and conference center have emerged as a significant economic engine for Coralville/Iowa City region. More than 250 jobs have been created, and over 200 events were booked there last year. These activities added \$14.5 million to the local economy.



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Names of Participants:	City of Coralville, Terracon Consultants
Number of Acres:	330 acres
Former Use:	industrial park
Current Use:	mixed-use development including hotel and conference center
Former number/Types of jobs:	300, small business, truck drivers, maintenance
New number/Types of jobs:	700, service/entertainment sector, government, industrial, commercial, construction
List of Major Contaminants:	benzene, chlorobenzene, cis-1,2 dichloroethene, trans-1,2 dichloroethene, ethylbenzene, methyl-tert-butyl ether, tetrachloroethene, toluene, trichloroethene, vinyl chloride, xylenes, anthracene, chrysene, fluoranthene, fluorene, naphthalene, pyrene, arsenic, cadmium, lead
Magnitude of Contamination:	197,000 cubic yards of arsenic-impacted soils and fills removed from rail property; 74 cubic yards of lead-contaminated soils removed; 2000 cubic yards of subsurface coal fines/soil material removed; 80 cubic yards of petroleum-impacted soil removed; removed 58,844 gallons of free product from truck stop site; treated 103,000 gallons of petroleum-impacted groundwater
Greatest Challenge:	vast number of properties encompassed by the project
Length of Time to Remediate Site:	visioning process started in 1980s
Primary Reason for Redevelopment:	area with the greatest redevelopment potential
Years Abandoned or Challenged:	challenged since 1980s
Cleaned up under Consent Decree:	no
List of Financial Assistance:	TIF funds, EPA grants, Iowa Department of Economic Development Brownfields Redevelopment Grant/Forgivable Loans, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Planning Assistance to the States, Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) Rise Grant, Iowa DOT Clean Air Attainment Program, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Resource Enhancement and Protection grants
Other Financial Techniques Utilized:	revenue bonds, general obligation bonds
Community Outreach Activities:	public/private partnerships, public outreach field day
Innovative Environmental Regulatory Techniques:	risk-based assessments, baseline/threshold comparison levels of contaminants, and land-use restrictions developed reasonable environmental liabilities for property owners
Innovative Remediation Techniques:	backfill incorporating agricultural lime raised the pH of shallow groundwater to precipitate the dissolved cadmium
Land Conservation:	open space throughout Iowa River Landing site; use of brownfield space as infill
Sustainable Development:	25,000 tons of concrete and asphalt salvaged, crushed or ground, and recycled as sub-base for city streets and trails; four buildings completely disassembled, relocated, and reassembled as complete buildings; lighting and HVAC systems removed from all buildings for reuse prior to demolition
Federal Partners:	EPA, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Economic Development Administration