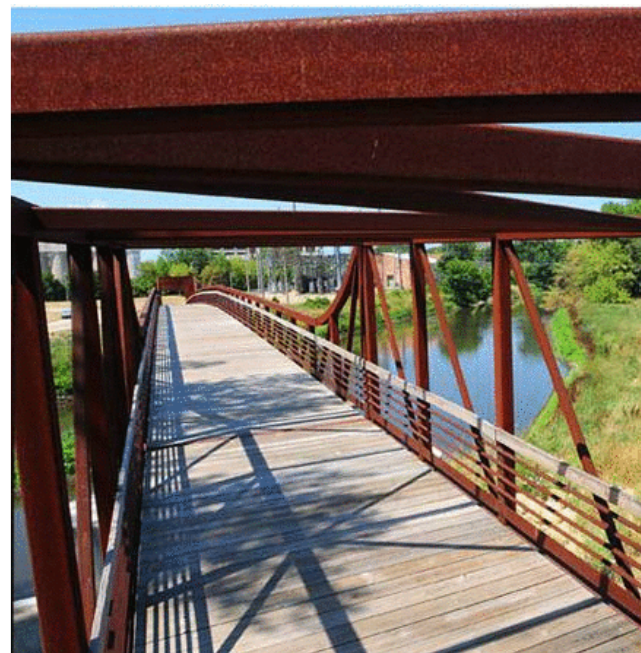


FREEPORT FORWARD!

Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan

Freeport, Illinois
August 2016



INTRODUCTION

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OVERVIEW

The City of Freeport is on the move! Over the past decade, the community has come together to build momentum for revitalization of Freeport's historic downtown, scenic riverfront and neighborhoods in the Riverfront Enterprise Area (Figure 1). Efforts have resulted in redevelopment of several historic Rawleigh complex buildings, renewed private investment downtown, demolition of unsafe houses across the Third Ward, environmental remediation of the CMC Heartland site, construction of the Jane Addams trail, funding to extend the Pecatonica Prairie Trail, and identification of stormwater best management practices to mitigate flood impacts. This report is intended to leverage existing efforts and identify additional opportunities for equitable development and broad-based revitalization across the Riverfront Enterprise Area.

In 2014, with funding from a U.S. EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant, the City of Freeport launched the Riverfront Enterprise Area planning process to chart a course for revitalizing Freeport's Riverfront communities. The City of Freeport selected consultant team, Fehr Graham and Skeo, to guide the two-year planning effort. The outcomes of this process are summarized in this *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan*, including:

- Equity principles and quality-of-life goals,
- Existing conditions and a market analysis,
- Revitalization action plan strategies for three focus areas - Downtown Revitalization, Neighborhood Transformation, and Riverfront and Recreation,
- Stormwater and sustainability recommendations, and
- Best practices, case studies and models for success.

The *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan* charts a course to carry Freeport forward into a new decade of locally driven investment, proactive efforts to address environmental justice concerns and renewed action for a healthy, vibrant Riverfront community.

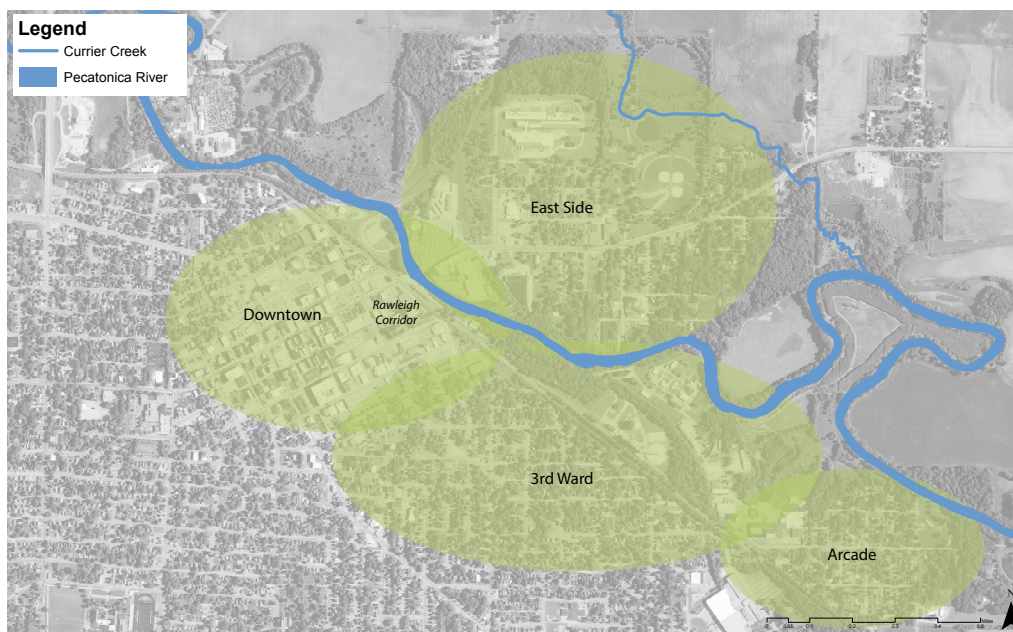


Figure 1. The Riverfront Enterprise Area

Map credits: Zoning, city boundary and waterway data in the maps throughout this report are from the Stephenson County Database, courtesy of Stephenson County, IL.

EQUITY PRINCIPLES

Early in the process, community stakeholders agreed that the *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan* should reflect both environmental justice and equitable development principles, ensuring that all Riverfront communities benefit from current and future investments:

- *Environmental Justice*: Equal access to clean air, land, food and water, and equal protection from activities that threaten these fundamental rights regardless of race, country of origin and economic status.
- *Equitable Development*: Approaches that incorporate environmental justice and enable communities to prioritize and pursue development that benefits current residents and contributes to neighborhood resilience and quality of life.

QUALITY OF LIFE GOALS

Over the course of several discussions, community members agreed on the following goals to benefit local quality of life for residents living in the the Riverfront Enterprise Area:

- Enhance the Riverfront as a welcoming local and regional destination.
- Support the cleanup and development of undeveloped brownfield sites.
- Increase access to affordable, neighborhood-oriented goods and services, including access to a grocery store, public transportation and multi-modal transit options.
- Maintain quality industrial, office and retail locations.
- Provide employment opportunities for residents and support for neighborhood entrepreneurs.
- Improve housing conditions, removing dilapidated buildings, supporting neighborhood cleanups, and guarding against displacement of current residents.
- Increase access to health care services and health education.
- Improve stormwater infrastructure and reduce flooding impacts.
- Increase access to recreation opportunities and community activities for youth and people of all ages.

REVITALIZATION THEMES

Based on the equity principles and planning goals, community participants identified the following three focus areas for the *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan*:

- Downtown Revitalization
- Neighborhood Transformation
- Riverfront and Recreation

These themes are explored in detail in the Revitalization Action Plan section of this report. The *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan* acknowledges that many efforts are already underway. The Revitalization Action Plan section focuses on identifying additional needs and opportunities that can solve problems and provide benefits simultaneously.

PLANNING PROCESS

The *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan* was developed during a two-year planning process. The Riverfront Advisory Committee (RAC), a group of community representatives, came together to help guide the process.

Each phase outlined below included a public meeting as well as one or more meetings of the RAC. Each phase lasted from one to six months; dates indicate the timing of the public meetings.

- *Kickoff and Existing Conditions Assessment* (February 2015)
- *Market Study and Infrastructure Study* (September 2015)
- *Scenario Development and Citizen Design Workshop* (May 2016)
- *Implementation Planning* (June 2016)
- *Draft Plan Review* (July 2016)
- *Final Plan Published* (August 2016)



EXISTING CONDITIONS

RIVERFRONT STUDY AREA

The study area for the *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan* includes four neighborhoods next to the Pecatonica River: Downtown, the East Side, the Third Ward and the Arcade. Together, these four neighborhoods form the Third Ward political district.

Traditionally, these neighborhoods have maintained a strong internal sense of community, neighborliness and belonging among residents. However, the railroad tracks and the river have also physically divided the East Side neighborhood from the other neighborhoods in the Third Ward and other parts of the city.

REVITALIZATION CONSIDERATIONS

- Downtown neighborhoods have experienced a nine percent population decrease since 2000.
- Decline and disinvestment in downtown Freeport have been fueled by closure of the Rawleigh Industrial Complex and closure and downsizing of other local manufacturers.
- Health concerns disproportionately affect people of color in Stephenson County. Some health concerns of Third Ward residents can be addressed by increased access to green space.

While the railroad tracks and the river have traditionally divided Riverfront neighborhoods, the river and underused properties throughout the study area represent opportunities to rebuild community cohesion around shared quality-of-life goals.

ADDRESSING DISPARITIES

The *Third Ward Healthy Neighborhoods Project Report* completed in 2013 includes a demographic analysis that highlights significant socio-economic disparities between the Third Ward and the rest of the city (outlined in the chart below). These challenges emphasize the need for equitable development and investments that support and strengthen the existing community.

Indicator	Third Ward	City
% Female head of household with children under 18 years old	15.5%	9.6%
Percent persons of color	46.8%	22.9%
Poverty rate	35.2%	19.5%
Median household income	\$27,726	\$37,039
Median owner-occupied home value	\$41,467	\$82,500

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Despite these challenges, participants at the early community meetings for the project identified community assets in the Riverfront area, including:

- Strong sense of community, neighborliness and belonging among residents.
- Quiet atmosphere.
- Actively engaged community and downtown leadership.
- Pecatonica River, Taylor Park and other public recreation facilities.
- Public assets: schools, exemplary public housing and library.
- Opportunities for reuse of brownfields and other underused properties.



Figure 2. Community Assets

This map shows community assets in the Riverfront Enterprise Area, including four brownfield sites identified by participants as potential catalyst sites for revitalization, which are identified with stars.

Map credits: Symbols in this map courtesy of the Noun Project and contributors including James Fenton, Thibault Geffroy, SuperAtic LABS, Lori Shaull and Chris Cole.

TARGETED MARKET STUDY

A targeted market study was a part of the planning process. The Riverfront Advisory Committee and community stakeholders identified grocery stores, restaurants and pharmacies as potential future uses in the Riverfront Enterprise Area for further consideration and analysis.

A market study that examined economic data related to retail sectors for Freeport and five comparison communities in rural Illinois found that Freeport is generally in line with services per capita relative to the other communities.

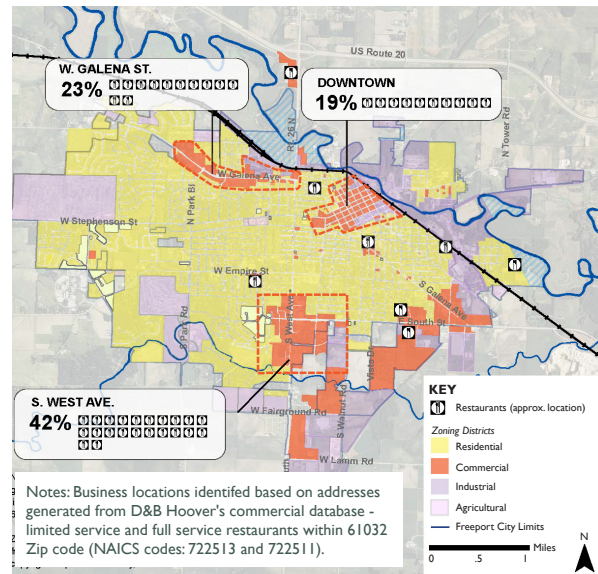
- **Grocery Stores:** Freeport has fewer grocery stores per capita than Sterling, Dixon and Edwardsville but slightly more than Sycamore and Galesburg.
- **Restaurants:** Freeport has the fewest restaurants per capita relative to the comparison communities.
- **Pharmacies:** Freeport has the second highest number of pharmacies per capita relative to the comparison communities.

A proximity analysis of the three retail sectors found that:

- There are a variety of restaurants in downtown Freeport. However, there are only two other restaurants in study area neighborhoods (Figure 3).
- There are no pharmacies or grocery stores within a mile of the study area neighborhoods (Figures 4 and 5).
- Rail lines and the river physically isolate the East Side neighborhood from retail services.

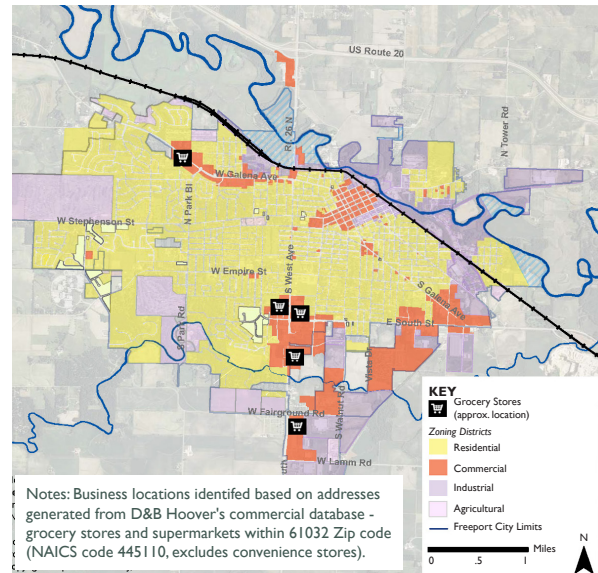
Additional considerations include:

- Future downtown uses can draw from a diverse range of users, including workers, downtown residents, hotel patrons, Riverfront neighborhood residents and regional trail traffic.
- Future uses that could complement existing downtown businesses include Pretzel City Kitchen, a downtown grocery store, recycling and architectural salvage operations, an arts district, additional restaurants, social enterprises and community-based businesses, community gardening and recreational uses.
- There is likely enough vacant retail space downtown that most downtown brownfields may not be well-positioned for reuse in the near term.
- Creating momentum through reuse of underused properties downtown can help develop a market for reuse of nearby brownfield properties.



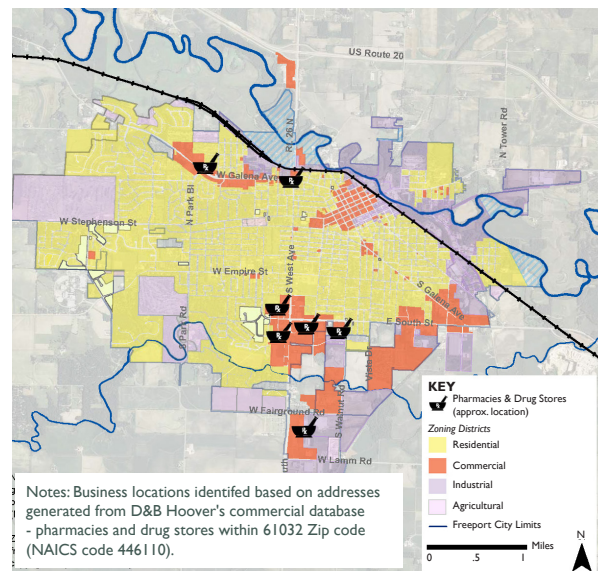
More than half of Freeport's estimated 52 restaurants are located on commercial corridors outside of study area neighborhoods. Twelve restaurants are located within Study Area neighborhoods, including: Downtown (10), Third Ward (1), East Side (0), Arcade (1).

Figure 3. Distribution of restaurants



There are no grocery stores in study area neighborhoods. East Side and Arcade neighborhoods are more than one mile from the nearest grocery store.

Figure 4. Distribution of grocery stores



All of Freeport's pharmacies and drug stores are located on commercial corridors outside of study area neighborhoods. The East Side and Arcade neighborhoods are more than a mile from the nearest pharmacy.

Figure 5. Distribution of pharmacies

REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

A VISION FOR THE RIVERFRONT ENTERPRISE AREA

The Riverfront Enterprise Area is strategically positioned for revitalization efforts that lift the City of Freeport as a whole, while:

- Benefiting the residents of existing riverfront neighborhoods.
- Building on the community's many assets and the achievements of the past decade.
- Strengthening connections between the neighborhoods, the downtown and the riverfront.

The following set of revitalization strategies reflects the input of community residents, business owners, downtown stakeholders, the Riverfront Advisory Committee, City staff and elected officials and the many other stakeholders who participated in the planning process.

The pages that follow provide more detailed strategies and recommendations for the three revitalization focus areas:

- Downtown Revitalization
- Neighborhood Transformation
- Riverfront and Recreation

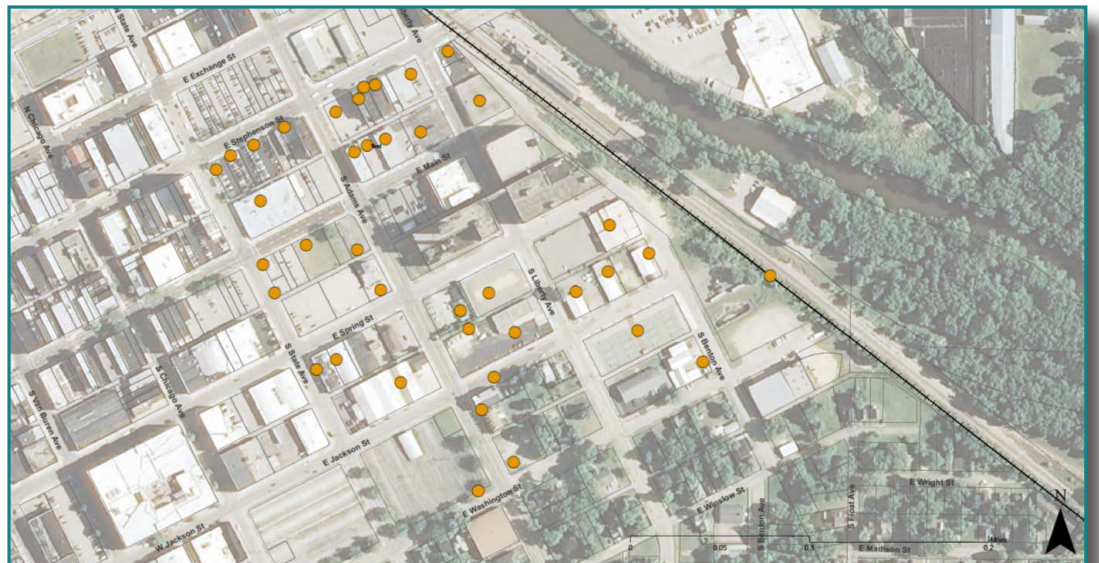
For additional details on implementation phasing and resources, see the *Riverfront Enterprise Area Implementation Strategy Addendum* that accompanies this report.



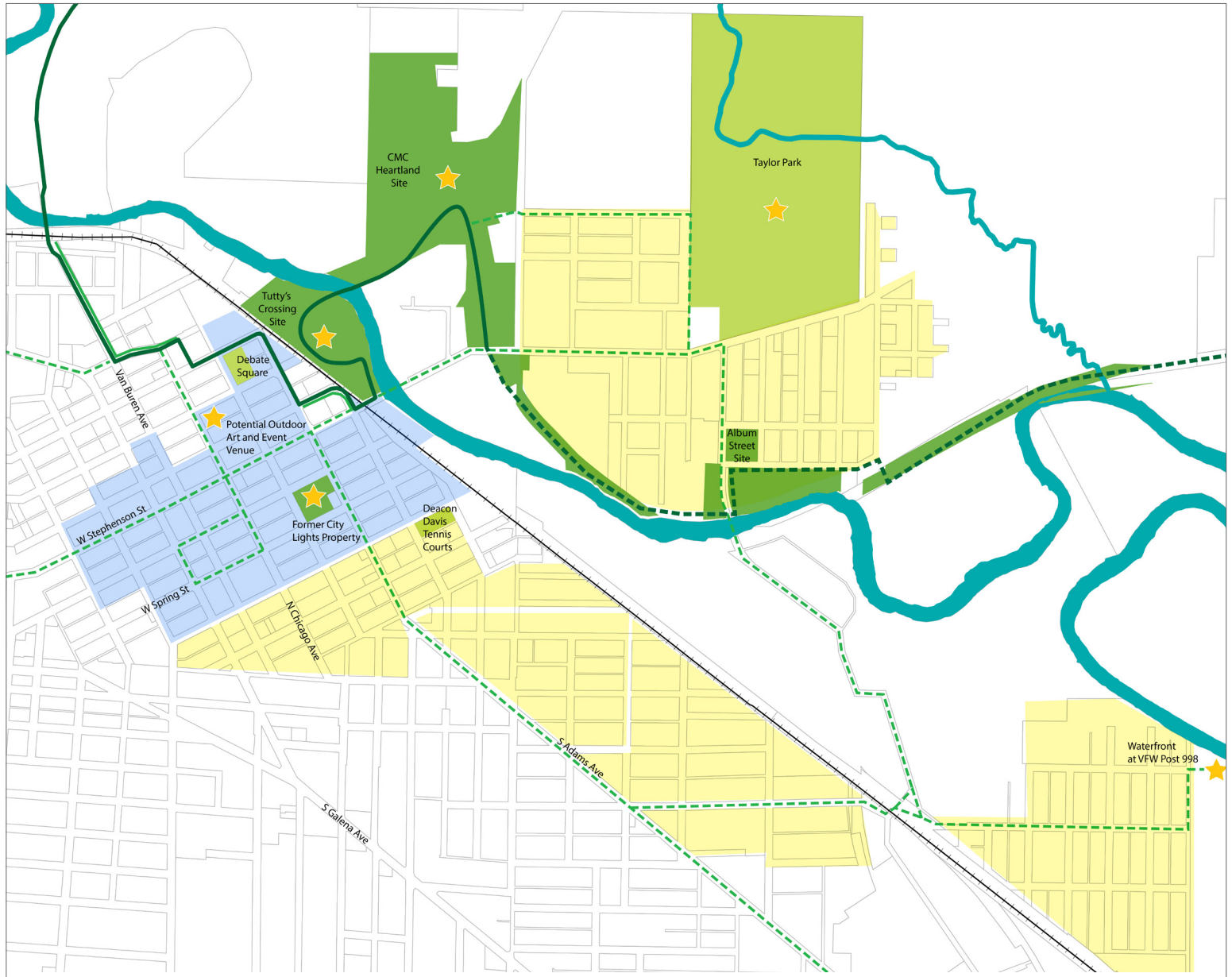
Figure 6. Brownfields in downtown Freeport

This map shows all currently designated brownfield sites in downtown Freeport (indicated by orange dots). There are so many underused sites downtown that some brownfields may be a low priority for redevelopment until there is a stronger real estate market in the area.

Brownfields that have been prioritized as potential catalyst sites throughout the Riverfront Enterprise Area are shown in Figure 7 in dark green.



RIVERFRONT ENTERPRISE AREA REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES



Legend










- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
|  | Downtown Revitalization Investments |  | Sites for Increased Programming (e.g., recreation, arts events, festival, outdoor classrooms) |
|  | Neighborhood Transformation Investments |  | Catalyst Sites Proposed for Recreation Investments |
| | |  | Existing Recreation Sites |
| | |  | Jane Addams Trail |
| | |  | Pecatonica Prairie Trail (proposed) |
| | |  | On-street Bikeway |
| | |  | On-street Bikeway (proposed) |

Figure 7. Riverfront Enterprise Area Revitalization Strategies

REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Downtown revitalization investments prioritized by community stakeholders support the integration of economic development and community development goals. Priorities include:

- Increasing opportunities to live downtown.
- Developing an identity/brand focused on the arts, recreation and sustainability.
- Promoting health and wellness through increased green space and recreational amenities.
- Increasing access to essential goods and services through locally-owned, community-oriented stores and social enterprises.
- Growing the economy through entrepreneurship, job training and job opportunities.

Efforts that form a foundation for the Action Plan include:

- A City Centre Plan, with funding from the City, is exploring funding strategies for building out upper floors in the downtown for residential development and occupancy.
- The City has been undertaking streetscape improvements downtown, but could benefit from a streetscape plan that builds a strong visual identity and includes an implementation and funding strategy.
- The City partnered with Comprehensive Community Solutions on a deconstruction and salvage pilot project in 2016. Rawleigh is providing storage for salvaged materials.
- The City is expanding its demolition bidding requirements to include salvage of building materials.
- Planning for Pretzel City Kitchens, led by a group of community partners and funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture grants awarded to the City, has been underway since 2012.

ACTION PLAN

1. Encourage development of residential units in the Downtown Loft District.

Encouraging the development of the Downtown Loft District could provide downtown property owners with an added source of income and encourage people to reinvest in downtown properties. Increasing residential density there could also increase foot traffic, strengthen the market for downtown goods and services, and contribute to a thriving, inviting sense of community in the area.

2. Promote food access and entrepreneurship.

Increasing access to healthy, affordable food in downtown Freeport is essential to attracting people to the Downtown Loft District and to supporting the health and well-being of surrounding neighborhoods. Priorities include:

- Supporting local entrepreneurship through the Pretzel City Kitchen (a social enterprise space).
- Attracting an affordable grocery store that could be co-located with Pretzel City Kitchen (see pages 22-23 for additional information and resources).
- Growing the Downtown Farmers' Market, and expanding fresh food access through vendors accepting SNAP benefits.

3. Develop an Arts District in downtown Freeport.

Building Freeport's identity as a center of arts and culture in northwestern Illinois will foster local creativity and attract visitors. The planned Arts District will include a Civic Plaza

as a new anchor for outdoor arts and cultural events and an Arts and Culture Corridor that extends along Chicago Avenue. Events and festivals anchored in the Arts District could also expand to include multi-site events in nearby neighborhood spaces such as Taylor Park.

4. Implement streetscape improvements and upgrade stormwater infrastructure throughout the Downtown Loft District and the Arts District.

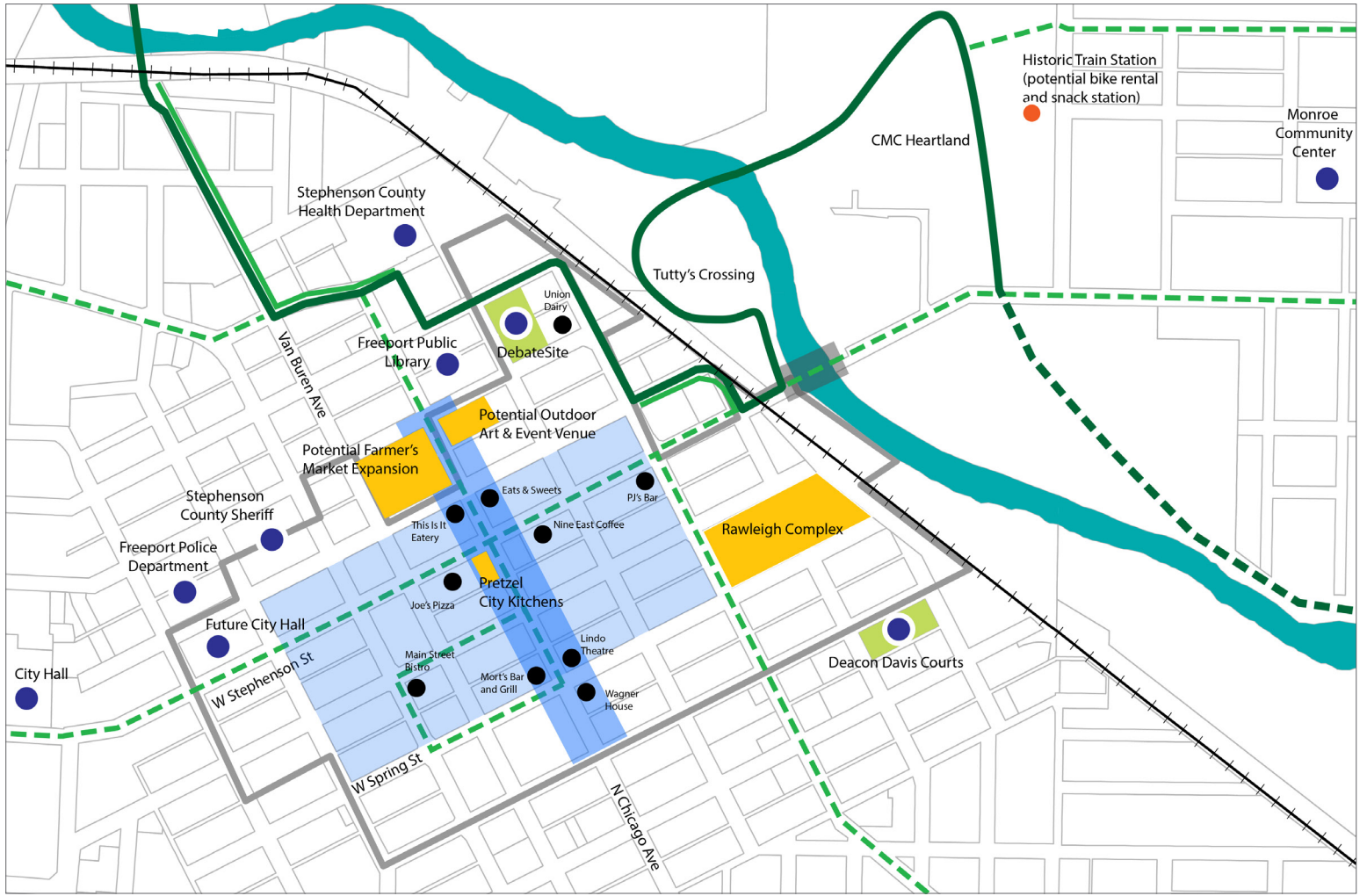
Complementing investments in the Downtown Loft District and the Arts District with beautiful and sustainable streetscapes will build a strong visual identity for downtown Freeport and improve stormwater management. Streetscape improvements may include green infrastructure and stormwater improvements, rooftop gardens, wayfinding, lighting, bike lanes and pedestrian improvements.

5. Support improvements and near-term programming options for the Rawleigh Complex.

Positioning the Rawleigh Complex as a near-term location for an architectural salvage business provides a market for recycled materials from local demolition projects, supporting the community's focus on sustainability, and provides local jobs and job training opportunities. For additional information on architectural salvage operations, see pages 20-21.

The City will also support physical improvements to the Rawleigh Complex to better position it for reuse.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGY



Legend

Downtown Revitalization

- Potential Commercial and Cultural Catalyst Sites
- Proposed Arts District
- Area Prioritized for Investments in Wayfinding and Lighting (Downtown Loft District)
- Active Downtown Eateries and Event Venues
- Civic Institutions
- Historic Downtown District

Selected Recreation Features

- Existing Recreation Sites
- Jane Addams Trail
- Pecatonica Prairie Trail (proposed)
- On-street Bikeway
- On-street Bikeway (proposed)
- Pecatonica River

Figure 8. Downtown Revitalization

REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN

NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSFORMATION

The neighborhood transformation investments prioritized by community stakeholders expand planned downtown investments in stormwater best management practices and housing to include nearby neighborhoods. They also focus on local investments – as well as state and federal policy changes – that could address environmental justice concerns in the East Side neighborhood.

Priorities include:

- Promoting environmental justice in Freeport’s East Side neighborhood.
- Addressing the interconnected nature of flood events by encouraging investments in stormwater management best practices in all neighborhoods.
- Exploring opportunities to generate revenue for stormwater infrastructure investments through a stormwater utility fee.
- Strengthening housing in all neighborhoods.

Efforts that form a foundation for the Action Plan include:

- Working with East Side residents, the City developed the *East Side Revitalization Plan*, which captures a set of goals that informed the green infrastructure study undertaken during this project (see page 17).
- The City’s ongoing housing rehabilitation and first-time homebuyer programs, as well the blight reduction program, (all funded by the Illinois Housing Development Authority) are helping to stabilize housing in the riverfront area.

ACTION PLAN

1. Promote environmental justice in Freeport’s East Side neighborhood.

The East Side has suffered disproportionate environmental and economic impacts from flooding and floodway regulations. Environmental justice for the East Side neighborhood includes:

- *Implementing recommended stormwater impact mitigation projects.* The City of Freeport is committed to funding the green and grey infrastructure projects recommended in the *East Side Neighborhood: Potential Stormwater Impact Mitigation Projects Report* to help address flood impacts (see page 17).
- *Addressing the impact of floodway regulations.* There is an opportunity for discussions with state and federal officials regarding ways to engage the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and reduce the impact of floodway regulations (see pages 18-19).

2. Address stormwater flooding by encouraging the conversion of abandoned lots and impervious surface into green infrastructure resources.

Flooding impacts all neighborhoods in the study area and excess stormwater flows back into the Pecatonica River, exacerbating flooding in the East Side. Green infrastructure

projects can help address stormwater flooding while also building Freeport’s identity as a sustainable community.

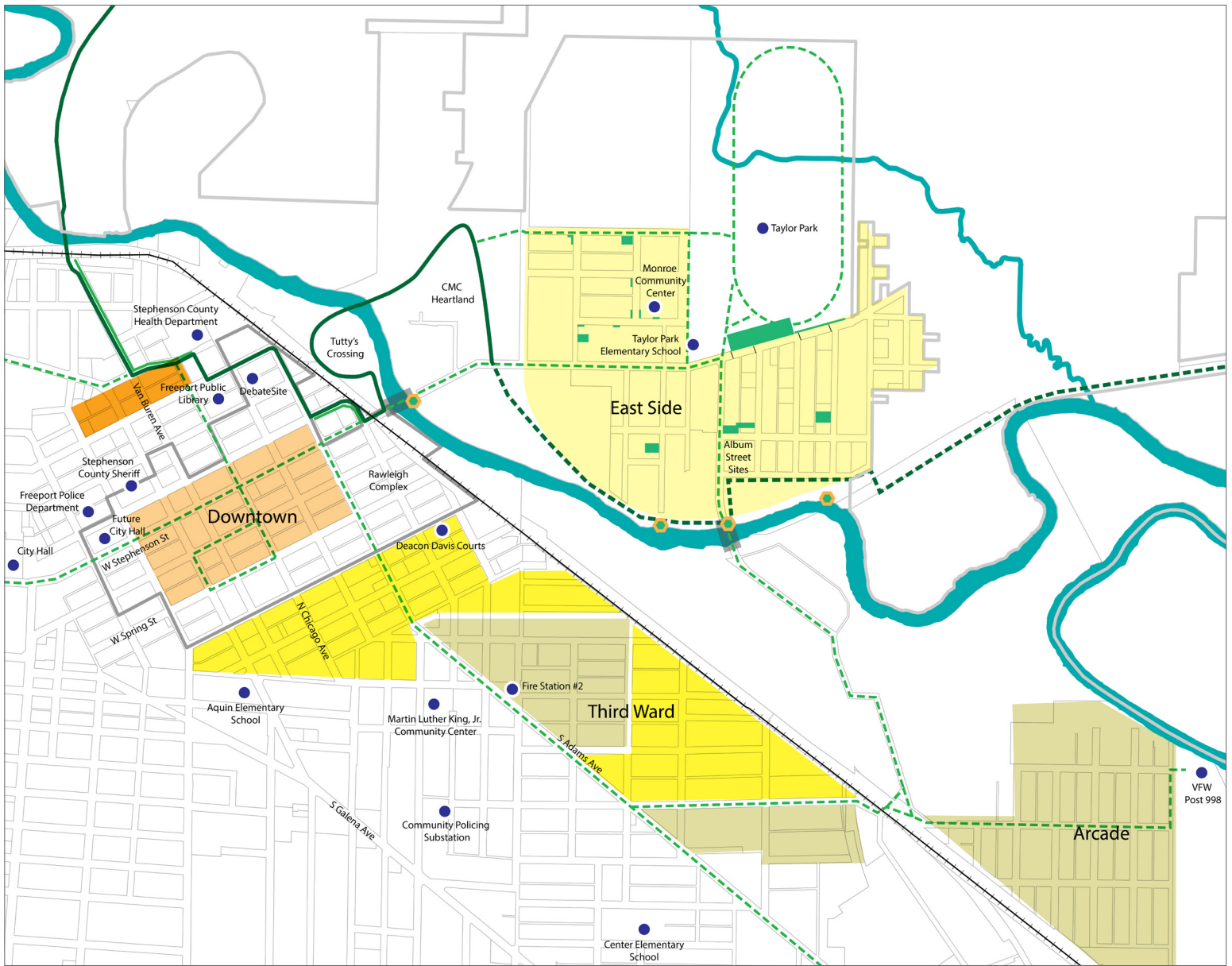
Priorities include:

- *Converting abandoned lots and impervious surfaces in neighborhoods for green infrastructure uses.*
- *Considering funding for city-wide infrastructure improvements based on stormwater best management practices through adoption of a stormwater utility fee (see page 16).*

3. Expand and stabilize housing options in the study area.

As shown in Figure 9, each neighborhood has different housing needs. The City of Freeport will support the expansion of housing in the Downtown Loft District, encourage new and rehabilitated housing in the Third Ward, and assist with housing maintenance and stabilization in areas impacted by the regulatory floodway. In the event the regulatory floodway is reduced in size, the City will also support resulting opportunities to expand and rehabilitate housing in the East Side neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES



Legend

Housing Strategies

- Fully Developed Downtown Housing
- Areas Prioritized for Expansion of Downtown Housing (Downtown Loft District)
- Areas Prioritized for New and Rehabilitated Housing
- Areas Prioritized for Housing Maintenance and Stabilization (consistent with floodway regulations)
- Stable Housing

Stormwater Impact Mitigation Projects

- Proposed Green Infrastructure Investments (detention basins, grass swales, bioswales)
- Proposed Storm Sewer Improvements and Flap Gates

Additional Features

- Jane Addams Trail and proposed Pecatonica Prairie Trail
- On-street Bikeway and proposed On-street Bikeway
- Historic Downtown District
- Pecatonica River and Currier Creek

Figure 9. Neighborhood Transformation

REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN

RIVERFRONT AND RECREATION

The riverfront and recreation investments prioritized by community stakeholders envision Freeport's riverfront as a shared recreational asset for all. Priorities include:

- Celebrating the riverfront.
- Reinvigorating underused civic and recreation spaces, especially Taylor Park.
- Converting once-contaminated properties into recreation amenities, including outdoor classrooms and trails.
- Creating recreation spaces that reflect the unique history and culture of Freeport's riverfront communities.
- Connecting local and regional recreational users with activities and amenities in downtown Freeport.

Efforts that form a foundation for the Action Plan include:

- The City is installing a kayak and canoe launch at Tutty's Crossing in fall 2016.
- As part of the Pecatonica Prairie Path construction, the City has plans for a building at Tutty's Crossing.
- The old Milwaukee rail terminal building on the former CMC Heartland site has potential for restoration and adaptive reuse as a museum or trail amenity, especially given its proximity to the Pecatonica Prairie Trail.

ACTION PLAN

1. Develop trail and bikeway connections that highlight the history and culture of the riverfront and support commuters and recreational users.

The Pecatonica River is a recreational jewel for the City of Freeport and a key component of the community's emerging identity as a center of arts, culture and sustainability. Completing planned trail investments along the riverfront and complementing them with multi-modal investments in prioritized streets throughout downtown and nearby neighborhoods will help connect local and regional users with all parts of the community.

These investments in green space and multi-modal transit also support the health and well-being of Freeport's residents, especially those living in Riverfront Enterprise Area neighborhoods. Wayfinding signage can be used to highlight the history and culture of surrounding neighborhoods, so that the new recreation resources feel welcoming to their nearest neighbors.

Recommended investments include:

- Completing the Pecatonica Prairie Trail.
- Implementing on-street bikeways, including associated street and bridge improvements, for prioritized routes.
- Designing and installing wayfinding signage that highlights local history and culture along area bikeways and trails.
- Supporting a bike rental and snack station next to the CMC Heartland site for trail users.

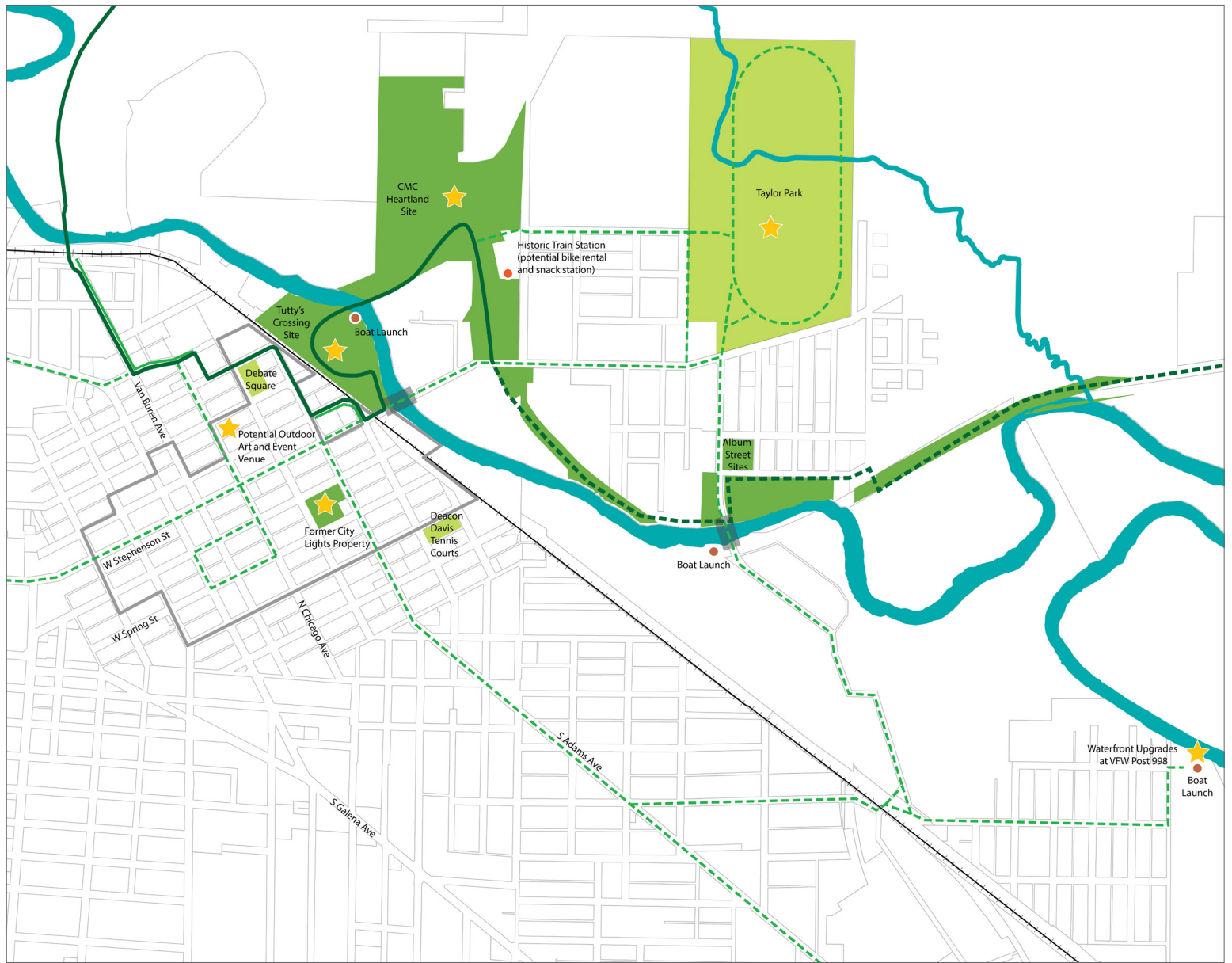
2. Increase programming for outdoor civic spaces and recreational catalyst sites.

As arts and culture programs expand downtown, there should be similar investments in civic spaces and recreation areas in nearby neighborhoods as well. In particular, Taylor Park is an underused civic space that could support more community events. These spaces could host events that build community connections as well as events that attract regional interest.

Recommended investments include:

- Increasing programming in Taylor Park, the Civic Plaza and Debate Square.
- Establishing outdoor classroom spaces and walking paths at the CMC Heartland site.
- Upgrade the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 998 waterfront with riprap, a boat ramp and improved fishing amenities.
- Promoting additional arts, recreation and festival programming – such as a multi-site festival – at all outdoor civic spaces and recreation areas.

RIVERFRONT AND RECREATION STRATEGIES



Legend











-  Sites for Increased Programming (e.g., parks and recreation, arts events, festivals, outdoor classrooms)
-  Catalyst Sites Proposed for Recreational Investments
-  Existing Recreation Sites
-  Existing Boat Launch
-  Proposed Bike Rental and Snack Station
-  Jane Addams Trail
-  Pecatonica Prairie Trail (proposed)
-  On-street Bikeway
-  On-street Bikeway (proposed)
-  Bridge Improvements for Pedestrians and Cyclist

Figure 10. Riverfront and Recreation

STORMWATER BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

OVERVIEW

The City of Freeport is faced with aging stormwater infrastructure and areas of the city that experience frequent flooding. These issues significantly impact local quality of life in many parts of the Riverfront study area.

The Revitalization Action Plan section of this report identifies an opportunity for the City of Freeport to cultivate an identity around the arts, recreation and sustainability. Addressing stormwater needs throughout the Riverfront Enterprise Area will be a key component of this effort (see Downtown Revitalization strategy 4 and Neighborhood Transformation strategies 1 and 2).

In addition, chronic flooding and restrictive flood regulations in the East Side continue to exacerbate disparities across the community that may limit the city's ability to fully realize the vision of riverfront renewal and economic revitalization.

Stormwater infrastructure investments and regulatory changes could help cultivate Freeport's identity as a vibrant community that prospers from investments in social equity and sustainability.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

Infrastructure investments, including investments in stormwater best management practices are a triple-bottom-line strategy that can address multiple challenges while contributing to the revitalization of downtown, residential and riverfront areas. Green stormwater infrastructure strategies can help the City of Freeport meet Clean Water Act and NPDES compliance requirements, replacing aging infrastructure, improving stormwater flow and combined sewer overflow management, addressing flood impacts, and supporting economic revitalization. Page 15 of this report provides examples of these strategies.

Broader benefits of green stormwater infrastructure investments include:

- Improved beauty and quality of the built environment, which can attract new residents, businesses and visitors.
- Increased property values, as newcomers are willing to pay more to locate near these amenities.
- Opportunities to provide project work for local firms. Green infrastructure projects are often smaller than grey infrastructure projects, and procurement policies can be used to create greater opportunities for local jobs.

This Stormwater Solutions section takes a deeper look at:

- Economic development benefits of stormwater infrastructure investments (page 14).
- Green stormwater infrastructure solutions (page 15).
- Strategies for funding green infrastructure (page 16).
- Engineering recommendations to reduce flood impacts in the East Side neighborhood (page 17).
- Recommendations to reduce flood regulation impacts to East Side residents (page 18).



Flooding in Freeport's East Side neighborhood.

STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

- [*Community-Based Public-Private Partnerships and Alternative Market-Based Tools for Integrated Green Stormwater Infrastructure: A Guide for Local Governments*](#) (EPA)
- [*Getting to Green: Paying for Green Infrastructure, Financing Options and Resources for Local Decision-Makers*](#) (EPA)
- [*Green Infrastructure and Economic Development*](#) (MIT Community Innovators Lab)
- [*Green Infrastructure Municipal Handbook: Funding Options*](#) (EPA)
- [*Green Infrastructure Municipal Handbook: Incentive Mechanisms*](#) (EPA)
- [*Guidance for Municipal Stormwater Funding*](#) (EPA)
- [*Local Stormwater Utilities, Authorities and Fees*](#) (Chesapeake Bay Foundation)
- [*The Value of Green Infrastructure*](#) (Center for Neighborhood Technology)
- [*The Value of Stormwater Utilities for Local Governments in the Chicago Region*](#) (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning)

STORMWATER BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Many communities are embracing stormwater best management practices that take a sustainable watershed approach as a strategy to build a vibrant and prosperous identity related to riverfront amenities. The City of Freeport has an opportunity to use green infrastructure – stormwater systems that mimic nature to soak up and store stormwater – to improve future stormwater infrastructure investments. Green stormwater infrastructure utilizes complementary green and grey infrastructure strategies to increase a community's capacity to absorb, collect, store and drain stormwater.

Grey infrastructure strategies may:

- Repair broken or blocked components.
- Upgrade undersized and dated infrastructure.
- Add new drainage networks.

Green infrastructure strategies may:

- Help address limitations of existing grey infrastructure to reduce flooding impacts.
- Temporarily and safely store stormwater until it can drain.
- Be used on vacant properties, brownfields and publicly owned lands or rights of way.

Using a green stormwater infrastructure approach for future stormwater infrastructure investments can help:

- Address city-wide flood impacts in a cost-efficient manner.
- Address environmental justice concerns for the East Side neighborhood.
- Cultivate a sustainable image for the City of Freeport.
- Contribute to the revitalization of downtown, residential and riverfront areas.

Several common green infrastructure strategies are highlighted on this page. Additional green stormwater infrastructure strategies identified for Freeport in a previous study can be found in the [2013 Flood Impact Reduction Addendum](#).



Swales that convey stormwater can be integrated with streets, sidewalks and bike lanes in neighborhoods and urban areas. Hardscapes such as streets and sidewalks can also be converted to pervious surfaces that help absorb rainwater.



Directing stormwater runoff into rain gardens or bioswales reduces street flooding and allows stormwater to infiltrate rather than enter the storm drain network.



Curb cuts provide a path for flooding water to move away from streets and sidewalks. In some situations, curb cuts can be created retroactively.

STORMWATER FUNDING

FUNDING GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Sources of funding for green stormwater infrastructure are available at the state and federal levels (see resources at right). Funding can also be generated at the local level through a municipal stormwater utility fee (see description below).

MUNICIPAL STORMWATER UTILITY FEE

Freeport's ongoing problem with combined sewer overflows and other drainage and water-conveyance issues, including Pecatonica riverfront erosion and persistent flooding, are all problems that could be addressed by a local stormwater utility fee. This fee provides a dedicated funding stream for utility operating costs and stormwater infrastructure investments. Best practices for stormwater utility fees include:

- Making the fee for each parcel proportional to the runoff generated by that parcel.
- Basing fees on the community's projected needs over time.
- Placing all revenue in a designated fund that is used solely for stormwater-related services (e.g., building capital projects, funding staff time).
- Giving fee credits to property owners who reduce or treat their runoff, encouraging investment in green infrastructure.

CASE STUDY: HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS

This city of 30,000 adopted a stormwater fee in 2006. The fee was introduced at a low rate with planned annual increases until revenues cover stormwater program costs. The community supported the fee because it generates funding for stormwater operating and capital expenses without increasing property taxes.

In 2012, the City of Highland Park projected that the fee – which appears on the water bill and is assigned based on a property's impervious area – would generate \$1.2 million in revenue. The fee is currently \$8 per Impervious Area Unit (1 IAU = 2,765 square feet of impervious surface). Credits are offered for properties that do not impact the stormwater system and properties that detain and treat stormwater through green infrastructure.

For more information: [The Value of Stormwater Utilities for Local Governments in the Chicago Region](#) (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning)

STATE AND FEDERAL GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING SOURCES

The City of Freeport can pursue the following state and federal resources to fund green infrastructure projects and system upgrades.

State of Illinois Funding Sources

- [Conservation 2000](#): Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Program, Soil and Water Conservation District Grants Program (Illinois Department of Agriculture)
- [Green Infrastructure Grant Program](#) (Illinois Environmental Protection Agency)
- [Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program](#): Green Streets Initiative (Illinois Department of Transportation)
- [Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Grant](#) (Illinois Department of Natural Resources)

Federal Funding Sources

- [Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program](#)
- [Department of Energy's Guide to Tax Credits, Rebates and Savings](#)
- [Department of Treasury's New Markets Tax Credit Program](#)
- [Economic Development Administration's Funding Opportunities](#)
- [EPA Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source Grants \(Section 319 Grants\)](#)
- [EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund \(CWSRF\)](#).
- [EPA Wetland Program Development Grants](#)
- [HUD Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\) Program](#)
- [HUD Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program](#)
- [HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants](#)
- [USDA Rural Development Water & Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Programs \(WEP\)](#)

ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONATE FLOODING IMPACTS ON FREEPORT'S EAST SIDE

While flooding impacts many parts of the city, the East Side neighborhood experiences disproportionate impacts related to both flooding and floodway regulations. This creates environmental justice concerns. (For more on environmental justice and on floodway regulations, see pages 18-19.)

In 2013, the City of Freeport and East Side residents worked with EPA to develop the *East Side Revitalization Plan*. During the planning process, a flood experience mapping exercise captured local knowledge about the locations and causes of flooding in the neighborhood.

The [East Side Revitalization Plan](#) documents the locations of publicly owned lands and brownfields that could support stormwater best management practices and the three priority areas for reducing flood impacts, as identified by East Side residents. Causes of flooding in these locations include overland flow from Currier Creek, a sidewalk beautification project that lacks storm drains and storm drain overflow followed by overland flow from the Pecatonica River. The *Plan* included recommendations for green and grey stormwater investments that could help reduce flood impacts in these priority areas.

INFRASTRUCTURE ENGINEERING STUDY AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2015, EPA's Area-Wide Planning Grant helped fund an engineering study to evaluate the *East Side Revitalization Plan's* recommendations. The engineering study recommended a suite of stormwater impact mitigation projects for the neighborhood that use green stormwater infrastructure strategies (Figure 11):

- Storm sewer flap gates at storm sewer outfalls with the Pecatonica River.
- Stormwater basins and grass swales at Stephenson Street / Illinois Route 75 / Taylor Park and throughout the East Side.
- Bioswales in the East Orin Street area.

The proposed stormwater improvements will not eliminate flooding issues on the East Side, but are designed to help address the priority areas identified by East Side residents in 2013. The stormwater improvements have been designed to reduce the impacts of flooding for events up to 10-year flood events and, to a lesser extent, larger storm events.

The improvements are estimated to cost \$352,500. For more details, see the *East Side Neighborhood: Potential Stormwater Impact Mitigation Projects Report*.

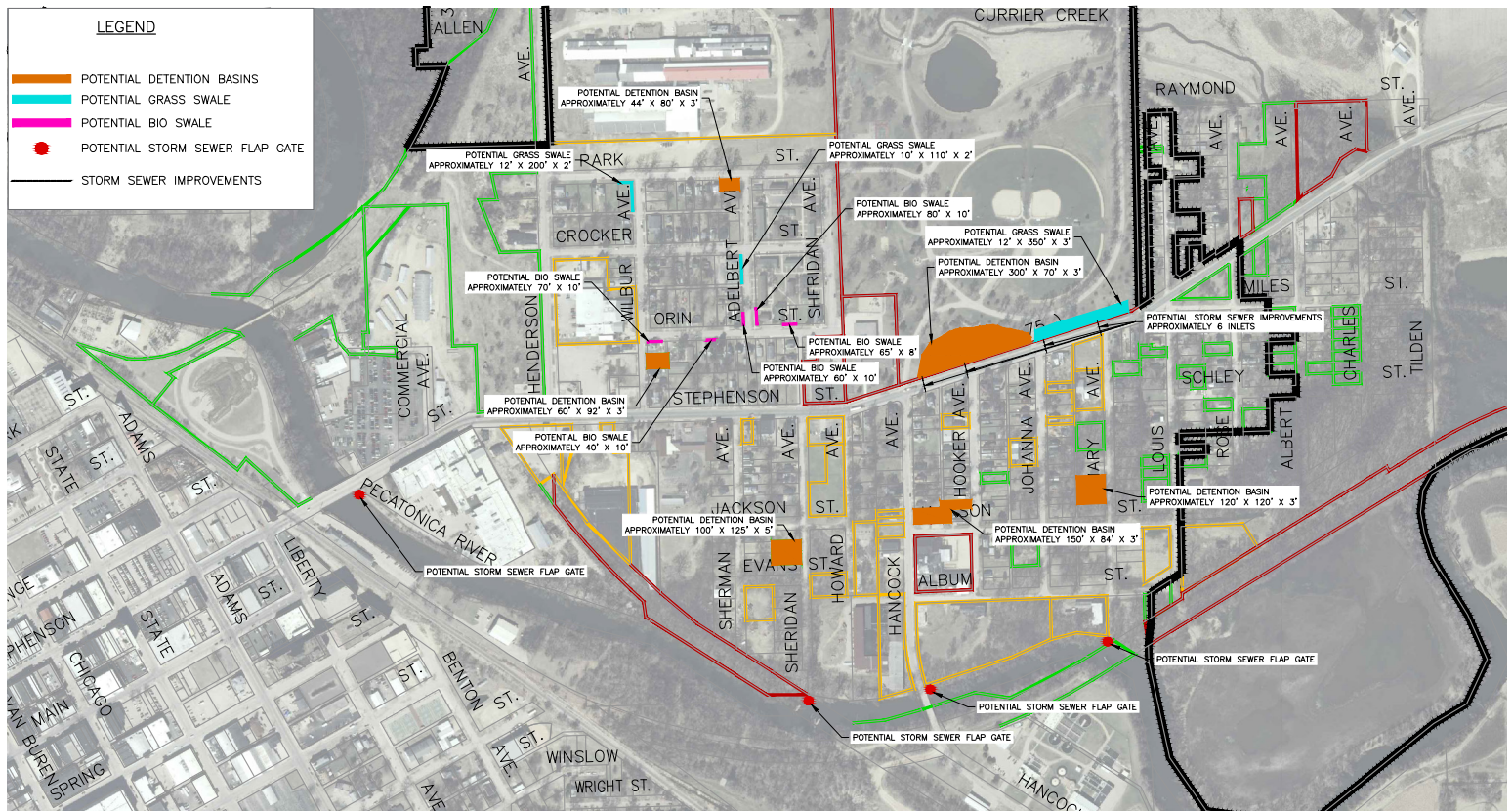


Figure 11. The engineering study found that the proposed improvements shown on the map above could help address flooding issues in the priority areas identified by Freeport's East Side residents.

EQUITABLE FLOOD REGULATIONS

ADDRESSING DISPROPORTIONATE FLOOD REGULATION IMPACTS ON FREEPORT'S EAST SIDE

For the community to fully realize its vision of riverfront renewal and economic revitalization, the City of Freeport will need to work closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to review agency policies and practices as they pertain to East Side homes and businesses.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CONTEXT

Low-income communities and communities of color across the United States have historically been disproportionately impacted by a wide range of negative environmental practices that have resulted in environmental, public health and economic harms. The conditions of environmental injustice and inequity in America are rooted in a century of local zoning and land use policies that segregated where people could live based on their race, ethnicity or national origin. Local governments then used the practice of expulsive zoning to place locally unwanted land uses in or next to these segregated neighborhoods. Another common practice was to locate these neighborhoods in the most ecologically vulnerable parts of towns, cities or counties, including floodplains, locations at or below sea level, near swamps and other areas that frequently flood.

LOCAL CONTEXT: FREEPORT AND THE EAST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD

Freeport's East Side community, the historic African-American part of the city, is one of these neighborhoods. Over a century of industrial activity in the community produced today's brownfield sites. The neighborhood's location in the state-designated floodway of the Pecatonica River has exposed residents to persistent flooding.

The East Side is also disproportionately impacted both by state floodway designations, which are more restrictive than comparable federal standards, and by FEMA floodway regulations, which limit improvements to structures located in a floodway to half of the structure's value (the 50 percent rule). Because property values in the neighborhood are already disproportionately low, this regulation severely restricts owners' abilities to maintain and improve their homes, further contributing to a cycle of neighborhood disinvestment. The end result has been declining economic stability and quality of life for East Side residents. For more information, see the [East Side Revitalization Plan](#) funded by EPA.

EAST SIDE REVITALIZATION

Reducing the Impacts of Flooding and Floodway Regulations
Freeport, IL

DECEMBER 2013



INTRODUCTION

EPA's Superfund Redevelopment Initiative (SRI) and EPA Region 5 sponsored a reuse planning process for the CMC Heartland Site and other contaminated properties in the East Side neighborhood of Freeport, Illinois. The project connects site reuse with area-wide neighborhood revitalization for this environmental justice community. This report summarizes outcomes from a 12-month community planning process, including considerations for reducing the impacts of flooding and floodway regulations on the East Side Neighborhood.

COMMUNITY GOALS

Neighborhood stakeholders identified two primary goals for this planning effort to set the stage for neighborhood revitalization:

- Reduce flood impacts.
- Reduce impacts of floodway regulations.

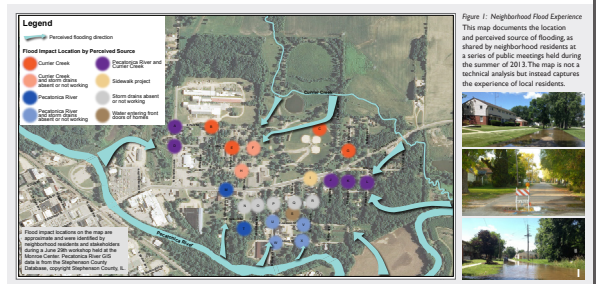
Additional neighborhood revitalization goals are documented on the back page of this report.

HOW DO FLOODING AND FLOODWAY REGULATIONS IMPACT THE EAST SIDE?

The East Side is an African-American neighborhood located in the floodway of the Pecatonica River. Residents of the East Side share a strong sense of community and deep affection for the neighborhood. Many families have lived in the neighborhood for generations. Long-time residents remember a time when the neighborhood supported quality housing and thriving businesses with neighborhood-oriented amenities.

The neighborhood's economic vitality and housing quality have been impacted negatively over time by the neighborhood's location in the floodway. Residents contend with recurring major and minor flood events, and are subject to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and State of Illinois floodway regulations, which limit improvements on structures located in a floodway. These regulations, which were not in place when the neighborhood was built, make it challenging to improve and expand both housing and neighborhood businesses. Over time, housing quality has severely declined and most commercial businesses have vacated the neighborhood.

Today, the community suffers from a lack of access to basic amenities, goods and services, and transportation options. Improving infrastructure, identifying strategies to reduce the disproportionate impacts of floodway regulations, and providing assistance for home repairs that may otherwise be cost-prohibitive could significantly improve the quality of life for East Side residents. These changes could also lay a foundation for addressing additional neighborhood revitalization goals.



The 2013 [East Side Revitalization Plan](#) recommends strategies for reducing flood impacts and reducing the impact of floodway regulations.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT AND THE EXECUTIVE ORDER ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Historically and currently, Freeport's East Side residents have lived in a segregated community in the floodway of the Pecatonica River through no fault of their own. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits intentional discrimination as well as programs and policies that have a "discriminatory effect" such as the application of the FEMA 50 percent rule upon home and business owners on Freeport's East Side. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that communities of color not be treated inequitably by recipients of federal funding or by the actions of federal agencies. The Executive Order on Environmental Justice reiterates this mandate and expands it to include low-income communities.

Given the impact of persistent flooding in the East Side, the application of the 50 percent rule is disproportionately impacting this community by dis-incentivizing investment, construction and repair of East Side homes and businesses. FEMA regulations and the IDNR floodway designations are depriving East Side residents from access to equivalent economic resources as people living in other parts of Freeport to financially recover and be made whole again after flood events.

STATE AND FEDERAL INTERVENTION NEEDED TO ACHIEVE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Actions by FEMA and IDNR to revise the current Pecatonica River flood maps and reduce the size of the regulated area on the East Side will be critical to the ongoing economic viability of the neighborhood and the City of Freeport as a whole. The City of Freeport should seek assistance from the community's elected officials at the state and federal levels to help FEMA and IDNR engage in substantive discussions of the topics below.

- *In light of Civil Rights Act requirements and given that IDNR's floodway designations are more stringent than federal floodway designations: Could the state revisit and reduce the parameters of the floodway impacting the East Side neighborhood?*
- *In light of Civil Rights Act and Executive Order on Environmental Justice requirements and given the disproportionate impact of the FEMA 50 percent rule: Could FEMA revisit the application of the rule to the East Side community?*

The City and community residents could also petition FEMA's Office of Civil Rights to initiate a civil rights investigation into the application of the FEMA 50 percent rule and its disproportionate impact on the East Side neighborhood.

Engaging FEMA and IDNR may require significant and substantive long-term dialogue. However, changes that address these issues above could ensure that Freeport's East Side residents are provided equal treatment before the law and could address the disproportionate economic and housing burden they have historically shouldered. These changes would also allow the City of Freeport to expand its revitalization plans to encompass the East Side in a more robust and meaningful way as part of the implementation of the *Riverfront Enterprise Area Plan*.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE RESOURCES

The following federal and state policies, regulations and laws provide support for state and federal actions to address environmental injustices impacting Freeport's East Side community:

- Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VI states that "no person" shall suffer racial discrimination by any entity that receives federal financial assistance, and empowered federal agencies to execute that right by withholding federal funding. Implementing regulations for Title VI prohibit intentional discrimination as well as programs and policies that have a "discriminatory effect." For more information: 42 U.S.C. sections 2000d, 2000d-1 and 40 C.F.R. sections 7.30 and 7.35
- Executive Order 12898. In 1994, President Clinton issued EO 12898 – Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. It orders each federal agency to "make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States." For more information: [Summary of Executive Order 12898](#)
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA environmental review process is the primary regulatory tool upon which the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) bases many of its determinations about environmental impacts of projects such as hazard mitigation projects located in floodways. NEPA has specific Environmental Justice Guidance that guides how FEMA complies with the tenets of the EO 12898. For more information: [Environmental Justice: Guidance Under the National Environmental Policy Act](#)
- Additional FEMA Oversight Policies. Some projects may receive a categorical exclusion from NEPA review and in such cases the Regional FEMA Director shall assess the impact of the proposed action on minority and low-income populations and make a finding on whether the proposed action would have a "disproportionately high and adverse effect" on the populations identified in EO 12898. For more information: [FEMA Environmental Justice Policy](#)
- Illinois EPA EJ Policy. IL EPA policy states that: "Environmental Justice" is based on the principle that all people should be protected from environmental pollution and have the right to a clean and healthy environment. Environmental justice is the protection of the health of the people of Illinois and its environment, equity in the administration of the State's environmental programs, and the provision of adequate opportunities for meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. For more information: [IL EPA Environmental Justice Statement](#)

ARCHITECTURAL SALVAGE

Freeport's vacant and underused commercial, residential and industrial buildings present a potential economic development opportunity. Architectural salvage and materials management is a process that allows for the removal and reclamation of salvageable building materials for resale. This rapidly expanding industry enables valuable, hard-to-find materials and architectural features to be reclaimed for resale and reuse. Everything - fixtures, flooring, shelving, architectural features, windows, doors, tiles, brick - are useful in the salvage marketplace. While care must be taken to separate lead-contaminated items, every other item in a building is potentially salvageable, reclaimable and marketable.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Supporting development of a local architectural salvage operation could help Freeport:

- *Promote Reuse of the Rawleigh Building:* Architectural salvage operations could be a good near-term fit for the Rawleigh Building, which is both a great source for architectural salvage and a good business space for salvage companies. It has large open rooms with high ceilings and several loading docks, and is easy to find.
- *Support Social Enterprise and Job Training:* Architectural salvage provides opportunities for social enterprise and volunteer-based non-profit businesses that also provide job training opportunities, especially for those who have experienced barriers to employment.
- *Build a Local Brand around Sustainability:* Sustainable deconstruction practices used by architectural salvage operations divert waste materials from building demolition out of nearby landfills. Supporting this kind of business, in conjunction with implementation of the green infrastructure and riverfront investments recommended in this report, could help the City of Freeport build a brand around sustainability.
- *Strengthen the Local Economy:* Architectural salvage operations often attract customers who travel regionally to visit multiple salvage operation in search of unique and valuable building components. These visitors may stay overnight, shop downtown and take advantage of Freeport's riverfront and arts district amenities.



RESOURCES

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance's [Waste to Wealth Initiative](#) provides resources and technical assistance for starting an architectural salvage operation.



MODEL 1:
NON-PROFIT SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

REBUILDING EXCHANGE (CHICAGO, ILLINOIS)

- Non-profit social enterprise 501(c)3 with a 16-member staff.
- Creates a market for reclaimed building materials:
 - » Divert materials from landfills and make them available for reuse at a retail warehouse.
 - » Promote sustainable deconstruction practices.
 - » Provide education and job training programs.
- Creates training and job opportunities for at-risk youth.
- Provides a range of training opportunities, including safe, sustainable deconstruction, architectural salvage, materials management, carpentry, warehousing and retail.

For more information, visit the [Rebuilding Exchange](#) website.

Image source: [Rebuilding Exchange](#)

MODEL 2:
MEMBERSHIP-BASED, VOLUNTEER-DRIVEN
NON-PROFIT

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION
ASSOCIATION (PACA) OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
(CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS)

- Membership-based, volunteer-driven 501(c)3 that fosters and encourages the preservation and conservation of the natural and built environment of Champaign County and east-central Illinois.
- Support is provided by membership dues, contributions, grants and fundraising activities.
- PACA also operates a popular architectural salvage warehouse.

For more information, visit the [PACA](#) website.

Image source: [PACA](#)



COMMUNITY GROCERY STORES

Public meetings and Riverfront Advisory Council meetings identified the need for a downtown grocery store that provides access to healthy, affordable food. A downtown grocery store would also encourage people to live downtown and increase foot traffic in the business district.

POTENTIAL OWNERSHIP MODELS

1. *Independent Retailer*: A privately owned, for-profit grocery store. This model requires the identification of a grocery chain willing to locate a small store in downtown Freeport or the emergence of a local entrepreneur prepared to start and operate the business.
2. *Community-owned Store*: A corporation that is capitalized through the sale of stock to local residents and run by an elected board of directors. Anyone in the community can purchase shares; there is typically a maximum limit on the number of shares each person can buy. The most important factor in raising money for a community-owned store (and its ultimate success) is how much the community supports the idea by purchasing stock and patronizing the business.
3. *Grocery Co-ops*: A democratically-controlled and operated grocery owned by community members who are investor-owners. Co-ops do not require high profit margins and return surpluses back to members. They often also provide community programming and other services.
4. *Social Enterprise Grocery*: Run by a non-profit with the purpose of generating revenue to support complementary community-based objectives. These stores have public health, economic and social impact objectives integrated into their core purpose and business models; revenues from from the store are used to support these objectives. The store seeks to have impact beyond sales and financial returns, becoming an anchor, steward and partner in creating community health, wealth and resilience.

The case studies that follow illustrate how small grocery stores can be successfully co-located with a community kitchen operation, such as Pretzel City Kitchen.

BRIGHTMOOR COMMUNITY KITCHEN & MARKET

(DETROIT, MICHIGAN)

- Community kitchen and artisans farmer's market.
- An Indiegogo campaign raised over \$10,000 for Phase 2 of a building rehab project.
- Community kitchen had dollar-for-dollar backing from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

For more information, visit:

[Neighbors Building Brightmoor Community Kitchen](#)
[Brightmoor Artisans Blog](#)



Image source: [Brightmoor Artisans Blog](#)

RESOURCES

- [Grocery Stores and Co-ops](#) (Healthy Food Access Portal)
- [Rural Grocery Store Start-Up and Operations Guide](#) (Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs)
- [The Cooperative Model of Grocery Store Ownership](#) (Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs)
- [How to Start a Cooperative](#) (United States Department of Agriculture)
- [Rural Grocery Toolkit](#) (Kansas State University)

RIVER MARKET COMMUNITY CO-OP (STILLWATER, MINNESOTA)

- A grocery co-op and community kitchen, which is mostly used to provide meals for those in need.
- Owned by community members who have made an investment by purchasing equity. Investment consists of an \$80 stock purchase rather than an annual or recurring fee.
- Anyone can shop there, regardless of membership.

For more information, visit:

[River Market Community Co-op](#)

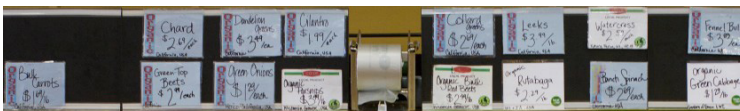


Image source: [River Market Community Co-op](#)

HARMONY CO-OP (BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA)

- Full-service cooperative grocery store with a commercial kitchen for lease by anyone in the community.
- Also provides community education through classes and activities.

For more information, visit:

[Harmony Co-op](#)

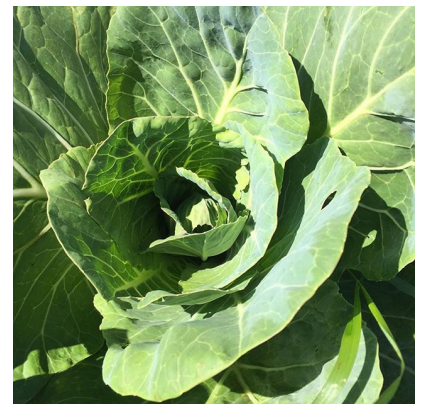


Image source: [Harmony Co-op](#)

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Patrick Busker, 5th Ward

Sally Brashaw, 6th Ward

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Arthur Ross – 3rd Ward Alderman

Bob Nickels – Tutty's Crossing Coalition

Brenda Myers – 3rd Ward Resident, Owner of 9 East Coffee

Brian Borger – Freeport Downtown Development Foundation

Cindy Shenberger – 3rd Ward Resident

Craig Beintema – Stephenson County Health Department

Danielle Rogers – Freeport Downtown Development Foundation

Dean Wright – Freeport Area Church Cooperative

James L. Gitz – City of Freeport Mayor

Jessica Modica – Freeport Art Museum

Joy Sellers – Owner of Sellnoir's Catering

LaFrancine Baker – East Side Resident

Larry Williams – City of Freeport Housing Authority

Randy Skeens – 3rd Ward Resident, Owner of This Is It Eatery

Steven Harrell – 3rd Ward Resident, Owner of Stene's Contractors

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For more information on neighborhood revitalization in Freeport, Illinois, please please contact the City's Department of Community Development at (815) 235-8202.