



WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON
STRONG CITIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative (SC2)

is an innovative approach for supporting cities experiencing population and job loss, persistent poverty, capacity constraints, and similar challenges in an era of dwindling resources. Each SC2 city shares a common narrative: despite having faced tremendous economic and demographic challenges for the last few decades, local leaders and stakeholders have a strong vision for change and seek a better federal partner.

SC2 communities, including Rockford, IL, received intensive technical assistance from federal interagency Community Solutions Teams that worked in city hall to support the city's vision for economic development. Through a cooperative partnership of federal, state, regional and local partners, community leaders and local residents, the City of Rockford and SC2 were able to make progress on four priority areas: (1) ending veteran homelessness, (2) economic and business development, (3) housing and community development, and (4) public safety.

MAJOR SC2 ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN ROCKFORD

- Ending veteran homelessness
- Economic and business development
- Housing and community development
- Public safety

ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Zero:2016 and The Mayors' Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness

With the support of SC2 Federal team members from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), the City of Rockford was recognized as the first community in the national Zero:2016 movement to reach "functional zero" and effectively end homelessness among local veterans, as well as one of the first communities to successfully complete the national Mayors' Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.

The Zero:2016 movement, coordinated by national non-profit organization Community Solutions and with coaching from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, consisted of 75 communities working to end veteran and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016. The national effort supported participants to optimize local resources, track progress against monthly housing goals, and accelerate the spread of proven homelessness reduction strategies. Rockford was selected for Zero: 2016 through a competitive, national application process.

The Mayors' Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness called upon mayors and other state and local leaders across the country to publicly express their commitment and provide the leadership to implement the strategies necessary for their communities to end homelessness among all Veterans within their communities. The City of Rockford Human Services Department led local efforts to end veteran homelessness in partnership with the Winnebago County Veterans Assistance Center, the Illinois Department of Employment Security Veteran's Program, Rosecrance Ware Center, and Carpenter's Place, among other agencies serving Veterans.

The City of Rockford drew on a number of key best practices in its efforts to end veteran homelessness. Notably, the City of Rockford Human Services

Department created, and continues to maintain, a master by-name list that they provide to all partner agencies to facilitate a coordinated case management process and identify permanent housing options for individuals. Clients placed in transitional housing are kept on the list until permanent housing is secured and partners furnish updates as needed to keep the list current in real time. Other strategies include a single-point-of-entry system for coordinated intake and assessment, the development of a veteran's committee comprised of community partners who often encounter and provide outreach to homeless veterans, and the strategic cultivation of relationships with local fire, police, and park personnel who provide notification of unsheltered veterans.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

UW-Health Sports Factory

In June 2016, the City of Rockford along with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and various local partners celebrated the grand opening of the UW-Health Sports Factory in the downtown area of Rockford. The new \$24.4 million facility on the east bank of the Rock River is hailed as a new economic superstar. Half a million people — visitors and locals — are expected to use the 105,000-square-foot sports facility in the coming year. The facility created approximately 200 construction jobs during redevelopment and another 25 permanent FTE jobs upon opening.

Due to the SC2 engagement, the EPA brownfields program awarded the City of Rockford almost \$2 million in grants (assessment, direct clean-up, and revolving loan funds) for the environmental studies, planning, and remediation of over 100,000 square feet of buildings on the 5-acre site. This includes 1,000 feet of riverfront for new redevelopment. Site work included petroleum remediation, asbestos removal, and reestablishing the engineered barrier after raising the floor 12 inches to address 100-year flood plain issues. These investments began the transformation of

this defunct industrial property into a \$24 million Indoor Sports Facility, complete with a new riverside boardwalk, which will be able to accommodate Park District and community programming for the surrounding, underserved neighborhood. Those EPA funds leveraged \$3.8 million in Illinois Rivers Edge Redevelopment Zone funds, \$4 million in FEMA disaster funds, and \$14 million in local funds. The riverfront boardwalk now connects to a new biking and walking path converted from an abandoned Illinois Railway bridge, funded by the U.S. DOT.

The 5-acre riverfront Sports Factory was once an abandoned brownfield site, emblematic of the industrial abandonment lining the downtown Rock River corridor and the surrounding neighborhoods. The City of Rockford used EPA Brownfields funds to assess and remediate the former Ingersoll Building for reuse as a Health Sports complex. Conceived in 2010, during the aftermath of the Great Recession, and nourished by a 2 percent Winnebago County hotel-motel tax, the project was part of a strategy to provide recreational facilities to meet citizen needs, and retain, regain, and grow the city as an amateur sports tourism destination. Already, new stores and restaurants have snapped up available development space as developers build and plan to cater to visitors.

ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Attracting Private Investment through a strategic partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago

Through their SC2 Federal team, the City of Rockford partnered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago to host a Lenders' Convening in April 2015 as part of a larger strategy to advance four local priorities: establishing a regional land bank; forming Rockford's first Treasury-certified Community Development

Financial Institution (CDFI); developing a workforce training center in a distressed neighborhood; and supporting the Rockford Promise, which works to remove financial barriers to Rockford Public School graduates in attaining post-secondary education. The Lenders' Convening had more than 100 attendees, including 14 financial institutions; federal staff from 12 agencies; academic institutions; Rockford Public Schools; faith-based leaders; non-profit organizations; and local, county, and state representatives. This landmark convening provided the city lasting relationships it continues to use as it works to implement its four priorities.

As a result of this convening, the City pursued and won a \$75k technical assistance grant from the Center for Community Progress, a national non-profit organization focused on blight elimination in American communities. In September 2016, the Center created a strategic document for the City entitled, *Laying the Foundation: Developing an Improved Approach to Problem Properties in Rockford*. The City and its partners are currently implementing the main recommendations from this report, even before the regional Land Bank is established.

Rockford Jet Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul Facility

SC2 Federal team member U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Agency (EDA) awarded \$2.6 million to Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) to support the \$40 million AAR Corporation (AAR) Rockford Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility, which provides check-level, heavy maintenance visits and modification services for a variety of narrow- and wide-body aircraft. Designed for next-generation aircraft, the 238,000-square-foot facility consists of two 10-story hangars. It is the only hangar in the United States, which is not linked to a specific airline, and capable of servicing the world's largest passenger airliner.

EDA's investment added to the \$7.35 million the Federal government awarded the airport in 2015, including \$6.7 million for infrastructure improvements and upgrades. These included an expansion of the terminal, and the construction of a 30,000-square-yard cargo apron. The City of Rockford contributed an

additional \$5 million, Winnebago County contributed \$8 million, and the airport contributed \$4 million.

The project also includes a workforce development component. Rock Valley College (RVC)'s brand-new aviation technology center began an aircraft maintenance training program in close proximity to the new MRO buildings. Courses are underway and there is already a long waiting list for the training program. When students complete the RVC program they qualify to apply for one of the 500 well-paying jobs that AAR will have at the facility.

Adaptive Reuse of the Amerock/Ziock Building

The City of Rockford has suffered economic and population losses for decades, but with the help of the SC2 Federal team, the city has been successful in acquiring Federal resources to systematically address a massive inventory of abandoned industrial buildings along the Rock River.

Gorman & Company acquired the 13-story, former Amerock/Ziock factory, a brownfield site, on the west bank of the Rock River with the intention of repurposing the historic building into a 160-suite Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center featuring restaurants, retail space, a swimming pool, business center and a top floor cocktail lounge.

Approximately 20% of the \$67 million total project cost will be financed through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) EB5 Immigrant Investment visa program. A resource identified by the SC2 team. The immediate benefit of the pedestrian bridge connecting the hotel and the UW Health Sports Factory will be indoor sports tourism. In the future, the bridge will also strengthen the connection to the Grand Illinois Trail, a 500-plus-mile loop of northern Illinois between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River that runs through downtown Rockford.

PUBLIC SAFETY

U.S. Department of Justice Diagnostic Center Engagement

Through SC2 Federal team partner U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and their Office of Justice Programs' Diagnostic Center, the Rockford SC2 Federal team provided technical assistance to local public safety agencies and partners to develop data-driven strategies to address violent crime and heroin abuse in Rockford and enhance police-community relations.

The Diagnostic Center completed an assessment and report that included crime data analysis and a set of findings based on stakeholder interviews. Based on this assessment, the Diagnostic Center recommended training and technical assistance for coordinated community response to youth violence, interagency collaboration, proactive policing strategies, and enhanced community-police relations, including the following activities described below:

- ***Procedural Justice Training.*** Six Rockford Police Department (RPD) officers attended train-the-trainer Procedural Justice training in Washington D.C. in February 2016. The goal was to initiate the process of training the entire RPD on procedural justice, which focuses on fairness, respect, and trust in relationships between officers and the community (external) and between officers and their supervisors (internal).
- ***Peer Exchange with Boston Police Department.*** In May 2016, a team of six local representatives including Rockford police officers, State's Attorneys, a youth service provider, and faith leader visited the Boston Police Department to learn about best practices in homicide investigations and clearances, as well as police-community partnerships on youth violence prevention. The goal was to facilitate changes in Department practices that improve homicide/violent crime clearances, lead to greater partnership building and focus on youth violence prevention.

- ***Peer Exchange with New Orleans' NOLA for Life Initiative.*** In June 2016, a team of nine local representatives including RPD officers, a sheriff's deputy, youth service providers, public school officials, and other stakeholders visited New Orleans for a peer exchange about the city's NOLA for Life Initiative, a comprehensive communitywide strategic planning and collaboration, innovative programming, and program assessment indicators focused on reducing youth violence. The goal with this initiative is that key takeaways will lead to a comprehensive, communitywide strategic plan and collaboration in Rockford to build local capacity for preventing youth violence and promoting positive youth development.
- ***Social Network Analysis/Focused Deterrence Training and Technical Assistance.*** In April 2016, local law enforcement officials met with a veteran Madison, WI police expert and a U.S. Attorney to discuss best practices in offender-based strategies such as focused deterrence. Then in July 2016, a day-long training was conducted in Rockford for law enforcement officials focused on social network analysis—a method for identifying the worst violent offenders—and on focused deterrence for changing offender behavior. The purpose was to provide new police practices focusing on violent offenders.

children's environmental health and were introduced to a variety of EPA's school-related programs including Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools, Integrated Pest Management, and Sensible Steps to Healthier School Environments.

Those trained included at least one teacher from each of the five high schools and four of the six middle schools in Rockford. Teachers receiving the training returned to their respective schools to work with other science teachers to identify chemicals that were in excess or were unnecessarily hazardous, and put together an inventory of chemicals for disposal. In May 2015, EPA conducted non-regulatory technical assistance site visits, inspecting the classroom chemical storage areas, speaking with the school science instructors, and providing insights on chemical storage, inventory size and disposal. The site visits also included inspection of classrooms, laboratories, prep rooms, and storage rooms at each campus, and a site visit checklist was completed for each room. A copy of the site visit checklist was provided to each location, including recommendations relating to best management practices and/or procedures that were not being employed at the participating schools so that they could follow-up on any items which might be of potential concern. The site visits also helped Rockford schools to finalize their inventory of chemicals for disposal. In June 2015, EPA collected approximately 2,000 lbs. of waste chemicals from the schools and sent them for disposal at an EPA-approved off-site disposal facility. Chemicals included lead, mercury, oxidizing chemicals, water reactive chemicals, flammables and other toxic chemicals.

Chemical Management in Rockford Public Schools

Through SC2, EPA provided training and technical assistance to the Dean of Science and 12 science teachers from Rockford Public Schools (RPS) on ways to improve the management of chemicals used in science classes. The participants learned about safe chemical handling, laboratory safety, and developing a chemical hygiene plan. Participants also learned about green chemistry and micro-scale chemistry approaches using modified experiments to teach chemical principles appropriate to their science curricula. In addition, participants learned about