



NATIONAL AWARD FOR
Smart Growth
ACHIEVEMENT

2015



A Message from...

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy

Gina McCarthy
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



On behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), I am proud to honor the 2015 winners of the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement. Making a visible difference in communities is one of our top priorities at EPA. And we want to recognize the communities that lead the way, and provide a model for making a difference. Each of the entries we received is a testament to how smart growth development can benefit a community, and how it is quickly becoming the new standard for communities of all sizes.

This year's winners show how development projects can align with local residents' priorities and values.

- In Hamilton, Ohio, a public-private partnership transformed a historic building into a mixed-use space with retail stores and residential apartments. Those apartments were quickly occupied, and now there's a waiting list as more residents seek the area's amenities.
- Downtown Jackson, Tennessee was once devastated by tornadoes—but the community was determined to build back better and stronger. What used to be a 20-acre brownfield site in the heart of downtown is now Jackson Walk, where residents can visit new businesses, and a farmers market attracts 1,500 visitors each Saturday.
- In Newark, New Jersey, it took vision and over two dozen funding sources to transform a riverfront area plagued by environmental hazards into a vibrant park. Now residents enjoy beautiful recreational space and the only public access point to the Passaic River.

While this award recognizes excellent outcomes, these projects would not have been possible without the hard work, creative energies, and public engagement that went into the planning process.

The smart growth strategies behind this year's award winners will leave current and future generations with greener, healthier, more prosperous communities. Please join me in congratulating the winners of the 2015 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement.

Winners

Corridor or Neighborhood Revitalization

Jackson Walk, Jackson, Tennessee

After devastating tornadoes destroyed the downtown, the city rebuilt and revived this 20-acre redevelopment district, which is sparking economic development in surrounding areas and transforming downtown Jackson into a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood with a strong health and wellness focus.

Built Projects

City of Hamilton and Historic Developers, LLC Public-Private Partnership, Hamilton, Ohio

The city worked with Historic Developers, LLC to complete three mixed-use projects that catalyzed investment in Hamilton's downtown. The new amenities, jobs, and housing options are reinvigorating the city's central business district and setting the stage for new economic development. The partnership has led to an ongoing, innovative collaboration among several entities to promote and finance redevelopment in Hamilton.

Plazas, Parks, and Public Places

Riverfront Park, Newark, New Jersey

Community input was integral to the design of this park, built on a formerly contaminated site. The park reconnects Newark to its river for the first time in decades and is attracting economic development in the adjacent downtown, giving a working-class neighborhood a beautiful and much-needed place to play and relax, and preserving open space along the river that can protect neighborhoods from flooding.

ABOUT THE AWARD

EPA created the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement in 2002 to recognize exceptional approaches to development that respect the environment, foster economic vitality, enhance quality of life, and provide new opportunities for disadvantaged communities. Over the past 13 years, EPA has received 934 applications from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. This year, EPA received 48 applications from 19 states.

The winning entries were selected based on their effectiveness in creating sustainable communities; showing innovative smart growth planning and implementation; establishing a robust public involvement process; generating partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders; and serving as national models.

Award winners were selected by two separate panels. The first consisted of experts from the planning and design professions, nonprofits, academia, and federal agencies. The second was an internal EPA panel that provided additional comments. EPA's Associate Administrator for Policy made the final award determinations.

How Smart Growth Protects the Environment

Through the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, EPA recognizes and supports communities that use innovative policies and strategies to protect the environment while achieving other economic, health, and social benefits. The EPA report *Our Built and Natural Environments* reviews the literature on how development affects the natural environment and human health. The following excerpt from the publication's executive summary explains how smart growth strategies can help protect the environment.

Patterns of development, transportation infrastructure, and building location and design—the built environment—directly affect the natural environment. Development takes the place of natural ecosystems and fragments habitat. It also influences decisions people make about how to get around and determines how much people must travel to meet daily needs. These mobility and travel decisions have indirect effects on human health and the natural environment by affecting air and water pollution levels, the global climate, levels of physical activity and community engagement, and the number and severity of vehicle crashes.

Changing where and how we build our communities can help mitigate these impacts, improving how development affects the environment and human health:

- **Where we build** involves locating development in a region or land area. It includes safeguarding sensitive areas such as riparian buffers, wetlands, and critical habitat from development pressures; directing new development to infill, brownfield, and greyfield sites to take advantage of existing infrastructure and preserve green space; and putting homes, workplaces, and services close to each other in convenient, accessible locations.
- **How we build** includes developing more compactly to preserve open spaces and water quality; mixing uses to reduce travel distances; designing communities and streets to promote walking and biking; and improving building design, construction, and materials selection to use natural resources more efficiently and improve buildings' environmental performance.

These elements are interrelated and often work most effectively in combination with each other rather than individually. Although findings might differ on the magnitude of the effects of different practices, the evidence is overwhelming that some types of development yield better environmental results than others. Used in combination, these practices can significantly reduce impacts on habitat, ecosystems, and watersheds and can reduce vehicle travel and energy use, which in turn reduces emissions that cause local, regional, and global air quality concerns. As communities nationwide look for ways to reduce the environmental and human health impacts of their development decisions, the evidence is clear that our nation can continue to grow and can build a strong foundation for lasting prosperity while also protecting our environment and health.¹

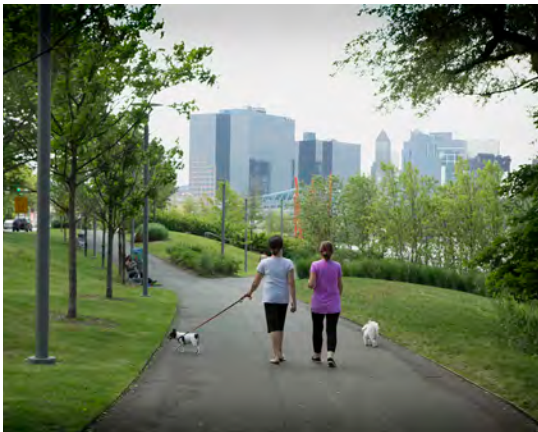
¹ Excerpted from: EPA. *Our Built and Natural Environments: A Technical Review of the Interactions Among Land Use, Transportation, and Environmental Quality*. 2013. www2.epa.gov/smart-growth/our-built-and-natural-environments-technical-review-interactions-between-land-use.



Trees and grass buffer Central Creek, which runs through Jackson Walk in Jackson, Tennessee, protecting the creek while also beautifying the neighborhood.



Downtown redevelopment in Hamilton, Ohio, puts a mix of uses close together, which makes it easy for people to walk and bike and helps reduce pollution from vehicles. Encouraging development downtown reduces pressure to build on undeveloped land outside the city.



Parks, such as Riverfront Park in Newark, New Jersey, provide environmental benefits by absorbing and filtering pollutants to protect air and water quality. They also help people live healthier lives by giving them a pleasant place for recreation and exercise.

SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Partners:

Healthy Community, LLC
Jackson Community Redevelopment
Agency
Jackson-Madison County General
Hospital
Looney Ricks Kiss
Tennessee Department of Health
Tennessee Department of
Agriculture
U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development Community
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Corridor or Neighborhood Revitalization

Jackson Walk

For years, Jackson, Tennessee, struggled to revitalize its downtown. Then, in 2003, powerful tornados ripped away much of the downtown, destroying property and displacing residents and businesses. Local leaders saw the opportunity to bring residents together to create a new vision for downtown Jackson, rebuilding to establish a stronger and more vibrant community.

The May 4, 2003, tornadoes that hit Jackson, Tennessee, did further damage to a downtown that many residents already saw as dilapidated, unsafe, and an eyesore. Recovering from the tornadoes brought residents together, and the city took advantage of this community spirit to engage residents, neighborhood associations, businesses, and other stakeholders to help create a vision for rebuilding downtown. The city hired Looney Ricks Kiss to create a long-range redevelopment plan for the Center City District. The plan development process included community-wide sessions to get public input. The plan, adopted in 2009, established what would become Jackson Walk, a 20-acre redevelopment district around Central Creek and a brownfield site.

The city selected Healthy Community, LLC as the master developer for the site, with Looney Ricks Kiss leading the design team. Construction on Jackson Walk began in 2011, and the first business tenant opened in July 2013. The development has 149 market-rate

apartments and 10 single-family homes. Six of the houses were sold through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, a grant-funded, affordable housing program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Five other homes in the development have been sold with first-time homebuyer incentives. Another 20 single-family homes are planned.

The homes are close to shops, a dog park, an outdoor amphitheater, a 1.5-mile fitness trail, and a farmers market. Public transportation is available, and the city plans to expand bike lanes. The banks of Central Creek, once an 8-foot-wide concrete-lined drainage ditch, have new sidewalks, street lights, trees, and landscaping to make the area pleasant for walking.

The anchor of Jackson Walk, the large “Living In a Fit Tennessee” (LIFT) wellness center, opened for business in January 2013. The LIFT houses an urgent care clinic and outpatient rehabilitation center operated by West Tennessee Healthcare. The center, designed



Residents of Jackson Walk's apartments can easily walk to downtown, the farmers market, bike and walking paths, the LIFT Wellness Center, and other destinations.



Music fills the air in downtown Jackson as residents turn out to hear local talent performing at the Amp, a popular outdoor venue.



Jackson Walk's amenities, like the dog park, create a sense of community and make walking around the neighborhood fun and appealing.

to make health care and a healthy lifestyle more accessible to all residents, includes an indoor track, pools, climbing wall, café, and fitness equipment. It offers exercise, disease management, and nutrition classes. Reflecting its health mission, the LIFT building has environmentally friendly building materials, finishes, and lighting and is seeking LEED Silver, a national green building certification.

An important component to Jackson's success was piecing together resources to help fulfill the vision for downtown, including \$40 million in private investment by Healthy Community, LLC; a HUD Community Development 108 Loan; a HUD Neighborhood Stabilization Program grant for infrastructure improvements and affordable home construction; a Tennessee Department of Agriculture grant for tree planting; and a Tennessee Department of Health grant for the fitness trail. Jackson also secured a state tax increment financing district designation,

which allows expected increases in tax revenue to be used for redevelopment.

Private developers are building new homes, apartments, and commercial development near Jackson Walk, and the city plans to build a retirement community nearby. Increased property values have generated new tax revenues, and from 2012 to 2014, more than 30 new businesses opened, bringing many new jobs. The LIFT wellness center, urgent care clinic, and rehabilitation center added more than 80 full- and part-time positions.

Jackson Walk and the LIFT wellness center have brought more people downtown to live, work, shop, and play. Residents have a renewed sense of civic pride and healthier lifestyles. As Jackson's story continues to unfold, it demonstrates that a natural disaster can temporarily set a community back, but it can also spur residents to work together to build back and create a better, brighter future.

“We love it so much down here. Hope and I really like the fact that the downtown area has so much to offer so close to our home. The farmers market, dog park, LIFT, and the Amphitheatre are just a short walk away. We really like the things that Jackson is doing and are excited to see the area continue to grow!”

— Jon & Hope Vunk
Jackson, Tennessee residents

Partners:

Hamilton Community
Foundation
Historic Developers, LLC
First Financial Bank
Ohio State Historic Preservation
Office
National Park Service

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Built Projects

City of Hamilton and Historic Developers, LLC Public-Private Partnership

After years of disinvestment, the Rust Belt city of Hamilton, Ohio, has become an emerging hub of innovation and revitalization. With creative vision, strategic planning, and community engagement, the city and Historic Developers, LLC, completed three catalytic, mixed-use projects that reinvigorated the city's central business district and set the stage for new economic development. The projects helped create a walkable downtown with new amenities, jobs, and housing options and spurred the creation of a formal partnership to buy and redevelop downtown properties.

Since it was founded in 1791, Hamilton, Ohio, has been a center of industry and business activity. However, by the early 2000s, it was facing the same fate as many other Rust Belt cities, as major businesses, factories, and paper mills closed or left town, leaving the downtown with a building vacancy rate of over 50 percent.

To plan for revitalization, the city worked extensively with the community to create a comprehensive plan, holding meetings, conducting a survey, and participating in community events to engage residents. The Vision 2020 committee, made up of residents and stakeholders, has been meeting since 2001 and helps implement the plan.

The comprehensive plan encourages the city to focus on its historic downtown. With that goal in mind, in 2003, the city bought the Mercantile Lofts, a highly visible complex in the heart of downtown that had been slated for demolition. It took until 2007 for the city to

find the right development partner in Historic Developers, LLC. As other challenges arose, the city found other partners to help. The Hamilton Community Foundation provided critical financing, and First Financial Bank provided the main loan for the project, even though the market-rate apartments planned for the Mercantile Lofts were an untested product in the city's real estate market. In 2011, when the project appeared to be stalled for good, the city signed a five-year lease for three apartments for fellows in the city's local-government fellowship program. The leases showed the city's willingness to invest and made Historic Developers, LLC feel comfortable moving the project forward.

The Mercantile Lofts opened in 2012 and was fully leased in nine months. It has 29 market-rate apartments and four street-level retail spaces. It also spurred more redevelopment and strengthened the partnership between the



The extensive damage to the Mercantile Lofts, including a caved-in roof, made redevelopment a risky proposition, but the public-private partnership and state and federal historic preservation tax credits made it viable.



The Mercantile Lofts apartments were the first market-rate housing options in downtown Hamilton in decades. Their popularity showed a demand for living downtown.



Business owners are excited to be part of Hamilton's downtown revitalization.

city and Historic Developers, LLC, leading to two more projects funded primarily through private resources. The \$4.1 million renovation of the former Journal-News building is a cultural hub housing Butler Tech School of the Arts and the Miami Valley Ballet Theatre, and the \$2 million renovation of the Robinson-Schwenn building, a former orchestra hall opened in 1866, houses three floors of office space and three first-floor retail spaces. The buildings also host civic and educational resources, including GED and literacy programs and a community technology center.

As of May 2015, the projects' collective \$17.2 million investment had spurred an additional \$15 million investment in surrounding buildings, and the downtown occupancy rate had increased by 14 percent. The redevelopment has also created a community in the downtown by bringing in residents, jobs, and amenities, creating a walkable

environment and a lively street. There is a Butler County Regional Transit Authority bus stop behind the Mercantile Lofts, connecting residents to the rest of the county.

Another important result from these initial projects is the CORE Fund, a formal partnership among the city, First Financial Bank, Hamilton Community Foundation, and US Bank to acquire key properties and provide gap financing. This partnership makes it easier to buy and redevelop properties that can spur further revitalization in the heart of the city, creating new economic opportunities for residents and a more vibrant, walkable community.

“Without the strong partnership with Historic Developers, LLC the revitalization of Hamilton’s downtown would have never materialized. These projects have catalyzed community revitalization, promoted civic pride, supported education, and provided new public amenities. Five, ten, and fifty years from now, Hamilton will view this public-private partnership as the catalyst for a new Hamilton.”

—Joshua Smith
City Manager, City of Hamilton

Partners:
Ironbound Community
Corporation
Newark Riverfront Revival
The Trust for Public Land

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Plazas, Parks, and Public Places

Riverfront Park

Riverfront Park fulfills a decades-long movement to reclaim the Passaic riverfront for the people of Newark, New Jersey. Situated on the site of a former metal smelting plant, the park is becoming an integral part of the community's identity and activity, hosting events and festivals and giving thousands of people a place to walk, bike, relax, and play. An inclusive design process guided decision-making throughout development. The park is expected to attract economic development, particularly to downtown Newark.

Parks provide many benefits, including giving people recreational space to help them lead healthier lives, improving air and water quality, and enhancing social and economic conditions. The Ironbound neighborhood, a blue collar, ethnically diverse neighborhood along the Passaic River and immediately east of downtown Newark, had significantly less access to parks compared to the national average, with less than a half-acre of parkland per 1,000 residents. The neighborhood was cut off from the river by industrial sites that were no longer in use but still created a barrier.

One of these sites, a metal smelting plant that went out of operation and was demolished, was acquired by the city and county and became the site of Riverfront Park. Cleaning up the environmental contamination removed a hazard from the community while creating Newark's first—and, so far, only—public access to the river. The park will ultimately create 19 acres of new parkland, connect to the 10-acre Riverbank Park, and be part of a string of

riverfront parks and trails that will stretch for 5 miles. The first segment opened in June 2012, the second in August 2013, and the third is scheduled to be completed in 2016.

The Newark Planning Office, The Trust for Public Land, and Essex County jointly developed Riverfront Park, guided by intensive public engagement. Between 2009 and 2012, the lead partners set a goal of getting input on the park from 2 percent of Newark's population, calling it the "2 cents from 2 percent" campaign. They exceeded their goal, engaging 3.2 percent, or more than 6,000 people. To further build a constituency for the river, the partners used innovative methods such as boat tours and interactive "walkshops." Starting in 2009, the team facilitated a participatory public design process to make sure the park reflects the community's history, culture, and interests. The priorities and design standards that the community helped create have guided decision-making throughout the entire process.



Riverfront Park offers Newark residents and visitors a beautiful place to bike, walk, and relax next to the previously inaccessible Passaic River.



Cultural events and performances, as well as distinctive design, draw people to the park.



Signs throughout the park educate visitors about the site's industrial and cultural history. This sign uses engaging anecdotes and drawings to teach people about the smelting works that used to occupy the site.

Local residents provided input to the project, and more than two dozen partners made financial contributions. The process fostered collaboration among the many government agencies involved. For example, for the first time, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were willing to jointly review a waterfront development permit, expediting what is typically a long review process.

Protecting the land along the river for the park encourages development to happen in the existing neighborhoods instead of along the river. Not only does this put new development closer to homes, commercial areas, and transportation, it also preserves the open space along the river to contain and absorb floodwaters from the tidal Passaic River, protecting neighborhoods from inundation.

The park's design incorporates recycled materials, native plants, and stormwater drainage. The community design process identified education as an important aspect of the park, so the design includes signs explaining the site's environmental and social history. The park hosts cultural celebrations reflecting Newark's diverse cultures, from hip hop to Ecuadorian dance. Newark's Penn Station, the largest multimodal transportation center in the state and a key connection to New York City, is blocks away, making it easier for visitors to come to the park and discover the surrounding neighborhoods.

“As you can see, with one park you can change the entire trajectory of how people relate to their environment, and to the water. I’m inspired and happy to have the opportunity to raise my girls to have a relationship with the waterfront and our Passaic River. I hope it will inspire them to be advocates for the long-term sustainability of the water and the use of our beautiful waterfront park.”

— Ana Baptista
Newark, New Jersey resident

Past Winners

ARIZONA

- City of Tempe—*Smart Growth and Green Building* (2009)

CALIFORNIA

- City of Pasadena Planning and Development Department—*Policies and Regulations* (2005)
- City of Sacramento—*Built Projects* (2013)
- Sacramento Area Council of Governments—*Community Outreach and Education* (2004)
- City and County of San Francisco—*Civic Places* (2010)
- San Francisco Housing Authority and Mercy Housing California—*Equitable Development* (2008)
- City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County—*Policies and Regulations* (2002)
- City of Santa Cruz Department of Housing and Community Development—*Policies and Regulations* (2004)
- Department of the Navy—SW Division (San Diego)—*Built Projects* (2003)
- City of Lancaster—*Overall Excellence* (2012)
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission (Bay Area)—*Programs and Policies, Honorable Mention* (2012)

COLORADO

- Town of Breckenridge Planning Department—*Built Projects* (2002)
- Denver Urban Renewal Authority—*Overall Excellence* (2005)
- City of Lakewood and Lakewood Reinvestment Authority—*Built Projects* (2005)
- Denver Housing Authority—*Equitable Development* (2012)

CONNECTICUT

- Town of Redding—*Small Communities* (2005)

FLORIDA

- City of Orlando—*Military Base Redevelopment* (2005)
- The Housing Authority of the City of Fort Lauderdale—*Equitable Development, Honorable Mention* (2012)

GEORGIA

- Atlanta Beltline, Inc.—*Overall Excellence* (2013)
- Atlanta Regional Commission—*Policies and Regulations* (2008)
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs-Office of Quality Growth—*Community Outreach and Education* (2003)

ILLINOIS

- Chicago Department of Planning and Development—*Equitable Development* (2006)
- Chicago Housing Authority—*Built Projects* (2009)

- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning—*Policies, Programs, and Plans* (2013)
- Town of Normal—*Civic Places* (2011)

IOWA

- City of Charles City—*Plazas, Parks, and Public Spaces* (2013)
- City of Dubuque—*Corridor or Neighborhood Revitalization* (2013)

KANSAS

- City of Wichita—*Built Projects* (2006)

MAINE

- Gateway 1 Communities and Maine Department of Transportation—*Rural Smart Growth* (2010)

MARYLAND

- Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development—*Smart Growth and Green Building* (2010)
- Silver Spring Regional Center—*Overall Excellence* (2008)

MASSACHUSETTS

- Town of Barnstable—*Waterfront and Coastal Communities* (2007)
- Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development—*Overall Excellence* (2006)
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs—*Community Outreach and Education* (2002)
- Urban Edge Housing Corporation—*Built Projects* (2008)

MICHIGAN

- Detroit City Planning Commission—*Policies, Programs, and Plans, Honorable Mention (2013)*

MINNESOTA

- Metropolitan Council (Minneapolis-St. Paul)—*Overall Excellence (2003)*

MISSOURI

- City of St. Louis and the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group—*Overall Excellence (2011)*

NEW MEXICO

- City of Albuquerque—*Smart Growth and Green Building (2011)*
- San Juan Pueblo Office of the Governor—*Small Communities (2004)*

NEW YORK

- New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development—*Built Projects, Honorable Mention (2013)*
- New York City Departments of Transportation, Health, Design and Construction, and City Planning—*Overall Excellence (2010)*
- University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning—*Main Street or Corridor Revitalization, Honorable Mention (2012)*

NORTH CAROLINA

- Charlotte Department of Transportation—*Policies and Regulations (2009)*
- Town of Davidson Planning Department—*Overall Excellence (2004)*
- City of Greensboro Department of Housing and Community Development—*Built Projects (2004)*
- City of Raleigh and Wake County Public School System—*Public Schools (2003)*

OHIO

- Cuyahoga County Treasurer's Office—*Policies and Regulations (2003)*

OREGON

- Housing Authority of Portland—*Overall Excellence (2007)*
- Metro (Portland)—*Programs, Policies, and Regulations (2010)*

PENNSYLVANIA

- Lancaster County Planning Commission—*Overall Excellence (2009)*
- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development—*Policies and Regulations (2006)*

SOUTH DAKOTA

- Miner County Development Corporation and the Rural Learning Center—*Rural Smart Growth (2011)*

TEXAS

- City of El Paso—*Programs, Policies, and Regulations (2011)*

VERMONT

- City of Winooski—*Small Communities (2006)*
- State of Vermont—*Policies and Regulations (2007)*
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board—*Main Street or Corridor Revitalization (2012)*

VIRGINIA

- Arlington County—*Overall Excellence (2002)*
- City of Portsmouth—*Programs and Policies (2012)*

WASHINGTON

- Seattle Housing Authority—*Built Projects (2007)*

Acknowledgments

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How Smart Growth Protects the Environment (page 5)

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Award Winners

Corridor or Neighborhood

Revitalization – Jackson, TN (page 7)

Left: U.S. EPA

Middle: U.S. EPA

Right: U.S. EPA

Built Projects – Hamilton, OH (page 9)

Left: Mike Dingeldein

Middle: Mike Dingeldein

Right: U.S. EPA

Plazas, Parks, and Public Places – Newark, NJ (page 11)

Left: Damon Rich, Courtesy Newark

Riverfront Revival

Middle: U.S. EPA

Right: U.S. EPA



For more information about the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, winner videos, and EPA's other smart growth activities, visit:
www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Sustainable Communities (1807T)
EPA 231-K-15-001
September 2015