Key Project Lesson: Collaboration between two adjacent cities and a key end user to create and implement an ambitious “Commerce Corridor” reuse vision for a polluted and vacant municipal border created revitalization benefitting the entire community and region.

Overview
For over a decade, Ranson and Charles Town have been committed to making the Commerce Corridor initiative the foundation of a vibrant, mixed-use downtown on what had been a polluted, vacant corridor of brownfields straddling the municipal boundaries. The cities used EPA brownfields grants and other resources to create an ambitious reuse vision that called for development of technology-oriented commercial buildings and renewed community spaces. The redevelopment was designed to be transit-oriented, walkable and cyclist-friendly, enabling residents to live where they work and play while also providing them with easy and affordable access to regional job centers and community facilities. These small but pro-active communities have leveraged this brownfields revitalization with tens of millions of public and private investment to create a vibrant new district with the largest solar power site in West Virginia, green infrastructure, community parks and recreational improvements, and other redevelopment in this once-blighted area.

Featured Partners
• The Cities of Ranson & Charles Town, West Virginia;
• American Public University System (APUS);
• Environmental Resources & Consulting, LLC;
• Sustainable Strategies DC;
• Stromberg Garrigan & Associates, Inc.; and
• Gaito & Associates, LLC.

Primary Reason for Redevelopment
The 1.5-mile Commerce Corridor straddles the border of the two cities and is a primary transit route through the towns. A significant number of brownfield sites that had sat idle for decades were located along this corridor, dividing the communities, spreading blight, and posing a danger to area youth and vagrants. While the central downtown area stagnated, sprawl spread out in the surrounding, ex-urban areas. To keep the core community strong, Ranson and Charles Town needed to find a viable redevelopment approach to these challenging brownfield areas.

Approach
Keys to success on this project included “beginning with the end in mind” through creating strong reuse visions and plans early in the process, convening a multi-stakeholder Corridor Council to guide the effort, composing a strong and multi-disciplined consultant team, using environmental assessments to build confidence for both landowners and developers, and partnering closely with the EPA.

Innovative Techniques
The Commerce Corridor project utilized what is now known as the “Brownfields Area-Wide” approach to corridor-wide development a decade before this became a signature EPA priority. The initiative used EPA assessment funds to plan and promote reuse in a comprehensive way, driven by stakeholder involvement, and looking at the “big picture” needs of the community in the context of the larger regional economy of metro Washington, DC. The initiative made use of well-crafted marketing brochures, artist renderings, visual reuse visions, and web-based documents that outlined the potential for the Corridor, and drove developer interest in the sites. The cities were also pro-active in inviting Congressional, senior EPA
and other federal/state officials to take part in groundbreakings, ribbon-cuttings, and community workshops.

The collaboration between the Cities and another key partner – APUS was vital to success. The successes include the development of the APUS Academic and Finance Centers on two former brownfields properties, the repurposing of a former Maytag Spray Painting/Dixie Narco facility into the Ranson Civic Center, and the expansion and improvement of park, recreation, and green infrastructure areas around these developments. Key outcomes of this process include:

- **Ranson Civic Center**: A 40,000 sq. ft. facility with a ¼-acre pocket park, adjacent to the Boys & Girls Club and the Evitts Run Park system. The Center is home to the Ranson Parks & Recreation Commission which uses the facility for public athletic events, social functions, trade shows, job fairs and as a youth and family activities center. The Center was repurposed with $500,000 in City funding from an idle industrial building that had been set up to be a Maytag Spray Painting facility. The building sat idle from 1989 to 2008 when Ranson purchased the building and repurposed the facility in 2010. Highlights include: occupancy for 1,500 people; two full basketball courts, bleachers and batting cages; office area, full service concession and eating areas; multi-purpose flex flooring; new lighting, sound systems and wireless Internet; and a stage for bands and other performances.

- **APUS Academic Center**: A LEED Gold, 45,000 sq. ft., $12 million dollar privately-funded, four-story brick facility built on the site of a former metal salvage yard. The Salvage Yard was operational for over 100 years, but sat vacant and polluted following its closure in the 1960s, until redevelopment in 2010. Highlights include: capacity for 330 employees; 170 initial new high-skills jobs; environmentally-friendly features employed in construction and in material selection designed to reduce greenhouse gas emission and contribute to a healthier work environment; energy-efficient design featuring advanced thermal insulation, variable lighting and cooling to manage energy use, and 99 roof solar panels to provide a portion of the Center’s energy requirements; and a library with one of the nation’s major collections for research in military studies and military history.

- **APUS Finance Center & Solar Array**: A LEED-Silver, 105,000 sq. ft., $18 million privately funded, four-story building that straddles the boundaries of both cities. Highlights include: capacity for 450 employees; a roof designed to eliminate the heat island effect; advanced energy-efficient construction; use of construction materials derived from recycled content including structural steel, studs, drywall, hardware and floorings; landscaping with native and adaptive plants; and the largest solar array in West Virginia – the 170-space parking lot is covered with 1,660 solar panels that generate enough electricity to supply 30 average sized homes, and also has 14 electric car charging stations for use by employees, visitors and local residents with electric/hybrid vehicles.

**Challenges**

A major challenge to the revitalization was the predominant growth pattern of sprawl in the region. At the fringe of the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area and with abundant farmland and greenspace surrounding the center communities of Ranson/Charles Town, growth has been scattered and disconnected. Lax zoning and growth management practices resulted in expanding like a donut, with growth on the fringe of the urban area and a blighted hole in the middle.

The overall success depended on changing the mindset of the community to believe in revitalization in the center of the communities as the proper focus for growth and development. The successes achieved in the Corridor has altered the thinking of the broader community and now, just a decade after the launch of this effort, County zoning has changed to make urban revitalization the highest priority, the two cities have undertaken joint inter-municipal efforts to foster urban revitalization, and extensive area-wide planning has created a vision and overall game-plan for growth. These efforts culminated in Ranson adopting one of the most progressive urban zoning codes in the nation, a “Ranson Smart Code” funded with a HUD Sustainable Community Challenge Grant, a DOT TIGER2 planning grant, a DOT TIGER4 construction grant, and an EPA Brownfields Area-Wide grant.

**Benefits**

Economically, the project has revitalized the customer base for surrounding merchants that was lost with the closure of the manufacturing facilities’ 800 local jobs through the growth of the APUS campus with more jobs anticipated as APUS continues to expand into further brownfields. The Ranson Civic Center by renting the facility for trade shows, job fairs, concerts and athletic events also spurs the local economy.

The sustainability benefits include the two APUS energy-efficient facilities – the LEED Gold Academic Center, and the LEED Silver Financial Center and Solar Array that includes more than 1,600 American-made solar panels Further, the Commerce Corridor is utilizing green infrastructure to manage stormwater runoff in an area that is part of the Chesapeake Bay Compact to manage stormwater pollution in the region.
Before

Future Ranson Civic Center (former Maytag Spray Painting facility)

Future APUS Academic Center (former Veiner Metal Salvage Yard)

Future Ranson Civic Center Pocket Park

After

Ranson Civic Center and adjacent Pocket Park

APUS Academic Center, Finance Center and Solar Array Parking Lot

and ribbon cutting with David Lloyd

Future Ranson Civic Center Pocket Park
The Commerce Corridor Project, Ranson & Charles Town, WV  
2012 Region 3 Winner

Address: Ranson Civic Center (431 W. 2nd Avenue, Ranson, WV); APUS Facilities
(330 N. George Street, Charles Town, WV).

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Number of Acres: 10+ acres
Former Uses: Ranson Civic Center – former Maytag Spray Painting facility. APUS Academic Center – former Veiner Metal Salvage Yard

Current Uses: Civic Center & Academic Center
Former number/Types of jobs: 560+ manufacturing workers
New number/Types of jobs: 600+ academic/technology jobs
Type of Site: Commercial & Academic
Regulatory Program: None
List of Major Contaminants: Heavy metals, petroleum hydrocarbons
Greatest Challenge: Overcoming urban sprawl and convincing developers to reuse existing brownfield sites

Length of Time to Remediate Site: 5 years
Primary Reason for Redevelopment: Revitalization of the 1.5 mile Commerce Corridor was necessary to save downtowns
Years Abandoned or Challenged: Civic Center – 10+ years, Academic Center 100+ years
Cleaned up under Consent Decree: No
List of Financial Assistance: USEPA Assessment Grants (3), State of West Virginia, Brownfields Assistance Center grant
Other Financial Techniques Utilized: Private Funding
New Tax Revenues: $100,000+
Community Outreach Activities: Planning Charrettes, Public Notices, Public Meetings throughout the life of the grants

Innovative Environmental Regulatory Techniques: Step-by-step coordination with West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection that overcame owner’s fear of stigma and liability
Innovative Remediation Techniques: Engineering controls
Innovative Economic Development: $1 Million in Energy Tax Credits (APUS Solar Array)
Land Conservation: NA
Sustainable Development: The APUS Campus is fully sustainable (10+ acres) with two buildings LEED certified Gold and Silver and the largest solar array in West Virginia

Federal & State Partners: US EPA; State of West Virginia