

Waterfronts That Work

Pittsburgh & Beyond | March 16, 2017

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What We Learned:

Anacostia, Washington, D.C.

The Anacostia River was historically the forgotten river in Washington, DC, and the site of many industrial uses, public housing, and municipal facilities. Through a grass-roots effort, the community was able to gain momentum and drive a visioning process. Given that there was limited capital available, the city used zoning as a tool to steer riverfront investment. The result is an eclectic riverfront with a vibrant mix of uses, anchored by a rich cultural heritage. Lessons for Pittsburgh include:

- Financial capital is not the only tool to encourage private investment - zoning can also be a tool
- Community engagement was an important component all along the way, and contributes to today's diverse riverfront programming
- Sometimes you have to think outside the box - Have to create new categories/building forms that don't currently exist
- Industry can remain an important element of reviving waterfronts

Cincinnati, OH

The redevelopment of Cincinnati's waterfront was a complex process of bringing together multiple public and private owners to address acres of brownfields along its riverfront. While the city faced the prospect of losing a major sports team, they were able to navigate a comprehensive planning process which resulted in a vibrant riverfront.

Takeaways:

- To define a vision for the riverfront, the City went through a methodical process with majority and minority developers

- Community engagement was a critical part of the process
- Created zoning that has flexibility
- Public investment inspired additional private investment
- Industrial tenants are a vital part of the riverfront, and can remain an active part of future redevelopment efforts
- Character preservation was of key importance

Milwaukee, WI

Milwaukee is an example of how a public-private partnership approach to riverfront development can result in a unified public amenity that everyone can enjoy. Thirty years ago a group of organizations came together to create a vision for the riverfront, and today this is one of the most prominent development corridors in Wisconsin.

Takeaways:

- A public/private partnership was an effective way to finance the Riverwalk
- Flexibility is important- not a single piece of Riverwalk has been built exactly as originally designed
- Education is key: The city has to work with developers to communicate the importance of designing buildings and sites with two “front doors,” that engage both the river and the neighborhood
- The design of the Riverwalk may vary, but the goal is to offer a continuous, attractive pedestrian experience
- You can have a huge diversity of uses along the river
- The Riverwalk itself has resulted in a huge increase in property values

New Orleans, LA

Unlike the other cities we heard from, New Orleans is in an earlier stage of development regarding its riverfronts. Just as they were beginning to consider the development potential of the rivers, Hurricane Katrina caused major devastation. Post-Katrina plans led to a revamping of riverfront zoning which recommended density bonuses to potential developers.

Takeaways:

- Density bonuses can encourage developers to provide public benefits such as public access, affordable housing, or public open space
- Rethinking engagement with a river can be a strategy for community resilience
- When engaging adjacent neighborhoods, balance vision for the future with the desire to preserve what people value about existing character

Portland, OR

Portland has built upon statewide policy that has prioritized riverfront goals as 1 of 19 statewide planning goals. The city has taken a variety of approaches to its riverfronts based on local context. Parts of their riverfront is used as a greenway, while others were reserved for the growth of a diversified employment district. Zoning helped the City accomplish both of these use goals.

Takeaways:

- A continuous greenway approach can work in certain contexts, but is not the only solution
- There are strategies to incentivize developers to create and maintain publicly-accessible green space on their riverfront properties
- Zoning regulations must facilitate the desired character of a district
- Can create employment districts that have a mix of traditional and newer industries, and still accomplish revitalization goals
- You can have a broad mix of institutional and creative industries and provide vibrant character
- Investing in public transit was a key component of Portland's riverfront revitalization efforts