



# Coralville Residents' Vision for Iowa River is Coming to Life

## Coralville, IA

**P**icture driving down Interstate 80 and, approaching Coralville, an Iowa town, you see a beautiful river—with a giant coal pile, an abandoned truck stop, an old municipal dump, and a rail spur next to it—not a pretty picture. Until recently, this was the view that greeted visitors arriving in Coralville. Now imagine arriving for a meeting at a new conference center with an exhibit hall and a hotel alongside the same river. As you stroll along a pathway on the river's edge, you rest at a gazebo and consider walking to Iowa City via a new pedestrian bridge. You may even picnic on the newly restored banks of the Iowa River. This more appealing scenario is what the Coralville community had in mind when it participated in a brainstorming session for the revitalization of the 157-acre, declining industrial park that had for so long been the gateway to Coralville. With the help of EPA, which in September 1998 awarded a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant to the City of Coralville, along with supplemental awards of \$100,000 in 2000 and 2002—and the \$1,500,000 in funding leveraged to date as a result, this scenario is now becoming reality.

Over the past 12 years, Coralville's City Council has been working to revitalize the old industrial park—home to heavy commercial and industrial businesses near the end of their life cycles. As commercial and industrial space became scarce in the city and residents often objected to using nearby space for these purposes, it became nearly impossible to bring new businesses to the area. As a result, assessing and cleaning up contamination at the industrial park became vital. To jumpstart revitalization, the Council first brainstormed different redevelopment scenarios and developed the First Avenue Revitalization Plan, which called for a new convention center/exhibit hall and hotel.

In 1997, a First Avenue Corridor Study identified \$15.4 million in roadway improvements needed to provide necessary access to the park. These improvements are being funded by the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) with matching funds from city bonds. Phase one of these improvements was completed in 2001, including sidewalk repair and construction to improve pedestrian access—an important step as the park provides the only access to the Iowa River. In 1998, the city used Pilot funds to begin Phase two environmental assessments of the park, which along with three subsequent assessments have acted as a catalyst for redevelopment. "After 12 years, the most difficult part was getting started with the assessment funding; the Pilot generated a lot of interest in the community, and even across the river—Iowa City is now looking towards the river for revitalization as well," said City Administrator Kelly Hayworth.

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## JUST THE FACTS:

- Over the past 12 years, Coralville's City Council has been working to revitalize a dilapidated industrial park that stood at the city's gateway.
- The city used EPA Brownfields Pilot funds to begin Phase II environmental assessments of the industrial park. These and subsequent assessments have acted as a catalyst for redevelopment.
- The city has developed an Urban Renewal Plan and issued municipal bonds to fund development of a \$58 million convention center and 200-room hotel complex. These two projects alone are expected to generate as many as 2,000 jobs.

***"After 12 years, the most difficult part [of redeveloping Coralville's gateway area] was getting started with the assessment funding; [EPA's Brownfields] Pilot generated a lot of interest in the community, and even across the river—Iowa City is now looking towards the river for revitalization as well."***

***Coralville City Administrator  
Kelly Hayworth***

Since the former Hawkeye Truck Stop site was expected to be the cornerstone of the planned redevelopment, the Pilot funded an assessment that revealed little contamination but reaffirmed the presence of known mixed petroleum contaminants from two underground storage tanks (USTs), one of which was a leaking underground storage tank (LUST). In the spring of 2000, after the city purchased \$10,000 in UST insurance, the state Department of Natural Resources used \$800,000 in LUST Fund monies to remove the tanks, pump out five to six feet of standing mixed-petroleum contamination, and treat additional chemical contaminants. The city also spent \$12,000 to demolish a gas station and restaurant on the site and purchased the property for \$4 million.

However, plans changed for the truck stop site once public opinion was solicited at open meetings held by a Steering Committee created by the City Council. Although residents still supported the conference center development, they wanted the Iowa River to be the focal point of revitalization efforts. As a result, a new location adjacent to the river was selected.

The second site to be assessed and cleaned up under the Brownfields Pilot was the Crandic Railroad property, where a 50-year-old, 13-acre coal pile once visible from the interstate was removed. The University of Iowa, which leased the property from Alliant Energy, removed the coal as well as a layer of asphalt and funded \$225,000 of the cleanup. The soil and coal removed were not toxic. However, from June 2001 until June 2003, the levels of cadmium that had leached into the groundwater will be monitored. The city purchased the site for \$1.8 million-\$500,000 of which came from the Iowa Department of Economic Development-and will use it for future mixed-use development and open space.

The third assessment conducted with Pilot funds is not related to the convention center, but was a high priority for the city because of the property's creek side location and its former use as a municipal dump. Assessment results on the Clear Creek property found ethelbenzene in the groundwater, which the city plans to clean up using a technique called airsparging. In this method, compressed air is pumped through water, separating the contaminants for removal. The city anticipates using a combination of private and city funding for the cleanup.

The city has developed an Urban Renewal Plan, which enabled it to obtain a designation that allows Coralville to issue municipal bonds to fund the \$58 million convention center and 200-room hotel complex in 2002. This includes the approximately \$2 million purchase of 50 acres (eight parcels of land). The city anticipates that construction on the project will begin in the summer of 2003 and that the convention center/complex will open in 2004. Between the hotel and the conference/exhibit hall, 2,000 jobs are expected to be created.

The conference center and hotel have opened the door to plans for a much larger redevelopment project adjacent to the conference center: the IOWA Child project. The city plans to acquire the land (they have already acquired approximately 15 percent of the 30 acres needed) that will be used to house an ecologically-oriented learning environment that includes a 4.5-acre indoor rainforest with an aquarium, as well as outdoor exhibits of Iowa's indigenous ecosystem including prairies and wetlands. The project is envisioned as a learning laboratory for visitors, students, teachers, and researchers. It is anticipated that \$230 million in state, federal, and private funds will be needed to fund the project, which was originally planned for 80 acres of greenspace until the brownfields site came to the attention of the IOWA Child Institute. The site's brownfields status, riverside location, and proximity to the conference center and hotel are well matched to the ecological project's aims. An exhibit about the location's brownfields history is a part of a planned development that is expected to generate \$116.6 million in annual statewide revenue and taxes as well as \$22.2 million in new wages.

## **CONTACTS:**

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Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>