

SUSTAINABLE CONGRESS HEIGHTS

WASHINGTON, DC, USA • AUGUST, 2017



RENDERING OF ST. ELIZABETH'S EAST CAMPUS

NEIGHBORHOOD OVERVIEW

Sustainable Congress Heights is one of three EcoDistricts piloted in Washington, D.C. and aims to implement the award-winning Sustainable DC plan, a major planning effort to make D.C. the most sustainable city in the nation, at the neighborhood scale. Congress Heights is a predominantly African-American residential neighborhood in Ward 8, rich in community character and historic significance. Located on hilltops overlooking the Anacostia River, Congress Heights takes its name from its undulating topography that offers exceptional views of the U.S. Capitol, and is defined by late nineteenth century through mid-twentieth century residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. Congress Heights has historically been isolated from central Washington by the I-295 and the Anacostia River, but is currently experiencing significant redevelopment and public investment particularly with the planned redevelopment of the historic St. Elizabeths East Campus, a formerly federal 183-acre site that sits at the heart of the neighborhood.

Sustainable Congress Heights represents a multi-agency effort to implement innovative projects that will create an economically vibrant, socially equitable, and environmentally responsible Congress Heights community. Sustainable Congress Heights builds on the substantial planning work already completed, and leverages investments and programs within Congress Heights to achieve neighborhood sustainability. The establishment of the Sustainable Congress Heights initiative created an unprecedented opportunity to meet the goals of Sustainable DC and will help guide future investment.

SNAPSHOT

PROJECT TYPE: Community Revitalization

SITE SIZE: 500 acres

RESIDENTS: 7,649

HOUSEHOLDS: 2,965

DEMOGRAPHICS:
- 96.1% African American

ECONOMY
- Average income: \$53,511
- Median Income: \$37,263

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES:

Reduce energy consumption, increase resiliency, enhance connectivity between community assets, reduce stormwater runoff to improve the health of the watershed and its habitats, support resource conservation, strengthen economic vitality, support affordable housing, and support a healthy and active community.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:

- District DOE
- DC Office of Planning
- Career Path DC
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- LISC
- Urban Green
- Georgetown University
- George Washington University

TECHNICAL SUPPORT PARTNERS:

- Career Path DC
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Urban Green
- Georgetown University
- George Washington University



GATEWAY DC PAVILLION

The Sustainable Congress Heights initiative took the form of a multi-agency effort, launched to enhance integration and cooperation among District agencies in order to deliver enhanced ecological performance, sustainability, and economic opportunity for Congress Heights residents as part of public investments and programs. The work supported citywide sustainability efforts in stormwater and energy management, neighborhood revitalization, and resource sharing. Sustainable Congress Heights formed inter-agency working groups around seven core topic areas, and identified goals and the priority projects to achieve them. The seven topic areas were: 1) Access and Mobility; 2) Housing Affordability and Stability; 3) Economic Workforce Development; 4) Healthy and Active Living; 5) Materials Management; 6) Watershed and Habitat; and 7) Energy.

Unlike traditional planning initiatives, the goal of Sustainable Congress Heights was to maximize benefits for residents by implementing innovative projects that address recommendations as identified in the Congress Heights Anacostia Saint Elizabeths Action Agenda, the Vibrant Retail Streets Toolkit, the 2011 and 2012 Ward 8 Summits, the St. Elizabeths East Master Plan, and the Sustainable DC Plan. The Sustainable Congress Heights team focused their attention on enhancing coordination between government agencies and aligning sustainability targets that relate specifically to projects and programs in Congress Heights. In addition to larger scale investments, the group also explored opportunities to deliver small-scale projects to demonstrate objectives and better involve the community.

SUSTAINABLE CONGRESS HEIGHTS + TARGET CITIES

The partnership between Sustainable Congress Heights and EcoDistricts began in June 2014 with the District of Columbia's recruitment into EcoDistricts Target Cities, a two-year pilot program designed to advance sustainable, district-scale development while creating replicable models for change. Sustainable Congress Heights represented a collaborative effort by District government agencies to implement innovative projects that support an economically vibrant, socially equitable, and environmentally responsible Congress Heights community.

ABOUT THE ECODISTRICTS TARGET CITIES PROGRAM

Target Cities was a two-year immersion program that has benefited 11 districts across nine North American cities. Launched in 2014 as a Clinton Global Initiative Commitment, the program was designed to advance sustainable, district-scale development while creating replicable models for change. By providing peer learning and technical assistance, Target Cities helped participating teams elevate their sustainability strategy with an emphasis on project governance, performative roadmapping and EcoDistricts Certified readiness.

Together, the cohort of 30 practitioners from 11 industry sectors participated in four peer learning workshops and a series of best practice webinars.

Key program partners included Enterprise Community Partners, Global Green, USGBC, Reshape Infrastructure Strategies, Biohabitats, McGuire Woods, Neighborworks America and iSEED. A key outcome of the program was the production of the EcoDistricts Protocol and certification program, EcoDistricts Certified.

Learn more at:

www.ecodistricts.org/target-cities

Sustainable Congress Heights represented a collaborative effort by District government agencies to implement innovative projects that support an economically vibrant, socially equitable, and environmentally responsible Congress Heights community. The Target Cities program focused on collaborative governance training, technical assistance, and peer networking to help projects align stakeholder interests and responsibilities. The Sustainable Congress Heights Team was brought together six times over the course of eighteen months, both independently and with the entire cohort of Target Cities. For each convening, EcoDistricts assembled a team of staff and experts to support the Ecodistrict's urban regeneration goals.

To avoid fragmentation and overlap, an interagency approach was used for the Sustainable Congress Heights Initiative. This approach was developed to serve as a resource for gathering and sharing pertinent information across agencies for the initiative's topic areas, as identified above. Interagency coordination promoted an exchange of ideas, technical expertise, and improved data/information sharing. Interagency coordination improved the overall quality of decision-making by introducing multiple perspectives and specialized knowledge, along with providing the financial capacity for implementation of identified projects. Each working group had its own set of goals and targets that were developed at the outset of the initiative.

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The Sustainable Congress Heights EcoDistrict is guided by a project leadership team led by the Office of Planning, with support from the Department of Energy and the Environment, Department of General Services, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, Department of Employment Services, Department of Transportation, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. Staff in the Office of Planning provided the primary project management support for the project. In addition to project management, OP staff provided guidance and support to interagency working groups and sought input from research and technical partners. Additional staff from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, Department of Employment Services, District Department of Transportation, and the Department of Housing and Community Development also participated in the interagency working groups.

The interagency working groups were successful in identifying the necessary tools for data collection and target setting. The integration of subject matter experts from different agencies within District government added to the completion and success of the final report. Directors of the agencies that participated in the working groups met in late May 2015 to provide additional guidance and input to staff concerning the project. Guidance focused on common talking points, creating more focused messaging for the Ecodistrict, and building on existing partnerships.



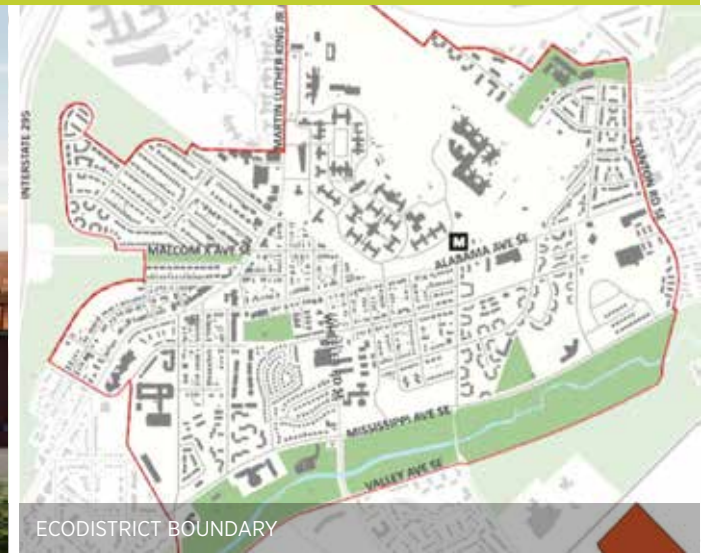
R.I.S.E. DEMONSTRATION CENTER



CONGRESS HEIGHTS COMMUNITY GARDEN



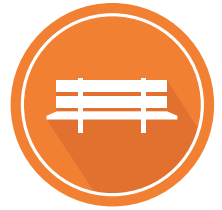
RENDERING OF GATEWAY DC PAVILLION



ECODISTRICT BOUNDARY

EARLY WINS

PLACE: Sustainable Congress Heights built upon the success of Gateway DC, an innovative, state-of-art park and pavilion developed in 2013 which provides a venue for community, cultural, culinary, and art events in the heart of Congress Heights. Through a partnership between the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and Events DC, Gateway DC presented a unique opportunity to further attract, drive, and execute local DC event programming and community benefits for Congress Heights residents.



Gateway DC is a sustainable, 400-foot-long facility featuring a 16,300 square foot space for 40 vendors, and 3,100 square feet of enclosed civic space. It also features a 21,000 square foot vegetated green roof and a raised park for festivals, farmers’ markets, concerts, and outdoor events. Adjacent to the pavilion is an indoor café featuring a test kitchen and a seating area with glass doors that provide an uninterrupted view of the lawn, outfitted with picnic tables and open space. Gateway DC helped set the stage for the implementation of innovative projects within the EcoDistrict.

In addition, staff from the Sustainable Congress Heights team participated in several activities that assisted with the promotion of Sustainable Congress Heights. These activities included a clean up of Oxon Run Park, participation in Congress Heights Week, and presentations at the American Planning Association National Conference (2015) and the EcoDistricts Summit (2016) to share experiences and best practices on sustainability at the neighborhood level.

PROSPERITY: As part of the St. Elizabeths East Campus redevelopment efforts and in advance of the formation of the EcoDistrict, the R.I.S.E. Demonstration Center, built in 2014, introduced a vibrant, world-class sustainability project. Selected by the community, R.I.S.E. stands for Relate, Innovate, Stimulate, and Elevate. R.I.S.E. is the adaptive reuse of the St. Elizabeths East Chapel to create an interim innovation hub and community gathering space. The Chapel is a symbolic landmark for the local community because of its visual prominence from Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue. Sensitive to this proximity, the renovation preserved the historic essence of the building, yet altered its function into an innovation hub.





With \$8.3 million in city investment, R.I.S.E. features a digital inclusion center, offering computer training classes, lecture halls for entrepreneurship and technology training seminars, and spaces designed to host job training and placement services to prepare potential employees for jobs and career opportunities located at St. Elizabeths East. As R.I.S.E. continues to build out, it aims to provide innovative programs, classes, and exhibits on sustainability, creativity, health, and technology.

Additionally, District government completed the modernization of Ballou Senior High School in January 2015. The high school now has a new main academic building that includes 37 new classrooms, as well as science labs, auto mechanic and cosmetology training centers, a culinary arts kitchen, a greenhouse, performing and visual arts spaces, and a swimming pool. The modernization has enabled the school to accommodate 1,570 new students.

HEALTH + WELLBEING: Beginning in 2011, the Department of Small and Local Business Development had provided six months of low-cost fresh produce to small food retailers through the Healthy Food Retail Program. Fifty-eight stores have benefitted from this program since its inception. Sustainable Congress Heights partnered with the DC Central Kitchen in efforts to develop affordable systems in order to deliver healthy produce to corner stores in food deserts which overlap with underserved neighborhoods.



In addition, the Ward 8 Farmers Market relocated to the Congress Heights Recreation Center in Sustainable Congress Heights in June 2016. The market was founded by Congress Heights residents in 1998 in response to the closing of what was then the only grocery store in the ward, an area with over 67,000 residents. The Ward 8 Farmers Market aims to empower residents to choose healthy foods and an active lifestyle. Along with enhancing access to fresh, local, and affordable produce, the Ward 8 Farmers Market also offers nutrition and health education, health screenings, and events promoting physical activity and environmental sustainability.

In partnership with the local elementary school and the Congress Heights Recreation Center, the Ward 8 Farmers Market launched a community garden in March 2016. During the 2016 school year, over 300 students had the opportunity for hands-on experiences including gardening activities, vegetable tasting, and taking produce home to share with their families. Between April and December 2016, the garden produced more than 100 pounds of lettuce, spinach, arugula, kale, collards, chard, peas, beans, carrots, radishes, tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, herbs, and much more.

LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE: Oxon Run Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River, flows through the southern section of Sustainable Congress Heights. This creek is a significant natural asset that provides the community with a connection to nature. Sustainable Congress Heights has made watershed and habitat health a key priority in its EcoDistrict goals. From low-impact development to restoring Oxon Run Creek’s natural riparian and stream habitat, Sustainable Congress Heights aims to improve the quality of waterways to standards suitable to fishing, swimming, and wildlife habitat, as well as to create rainwater reuse and reduce demand for potable water. Long-term plans for the R.I.S.E. Demonstration Center include several stormwater demonstration projects to enhance the community’s knowledge of the importance of retaining stormwater onsite.



Educational signage will provide homeowners in the area with an understanding of what could be installed on their property, how much it would cost, and the required operation and maintenance. The overall demonstration itself will provide community members and visitors with a visual of how water moves throughout the urban environment – a cycle that is not often seen.

In addition to the 21,000 square foot green roof on top of Gateway DC Pavilion, it also has a bio-retention installation that sits at its base. The installation is made up of a native plant garden that collects and stores the site’s stormwater in a 10,000 gallon cistern for onsite irrigation. Educational signage will be displayed to provide information on local ecology and environmental stewardship.

RESOURCE REGENERATION: The new academic building at Ballou Senior High School achieved a LEED Gold rating. To meet the project’s goal of becoming a net zero energy facility, some of its notable sustainability components include a geothermal water-source heat pump for heating and cooling, energy recovery units, exterior shading, high efficiency glazing, 100,000 square feet of photovoltaic arrays, and enhanced lighting controls. Stormwater is detained and treated onsite with low impact development elements, such as bio-retention areas and rain gardens. Roof run-off stormwater is harvested, treated, and reused as nonpotable water onsite as well.



STUDENTS PLANTING AT COMMUNITY GARDEN



RENDERING OF SOLAR ARRAY ON BALLOU

LESSONS LEARNED + CONTINUED CHALLENGES

At the end of the two-year Target Cities program engagement period, each participating EcoDistrict was evaluated by its internal staff and board, and by EcoDistricts personnel. The comments below reflect assessments shared by all EcoDistricts participants and describe the very real challenges that multiple EcoDistrict communities face in their effort to regenerate underserved or blighted neighborhoods, even those with a reputation for advancing exemplary projects and/or demonstrating best practices.

1. It is important to continue establishing clear community benefit agreements from the offset to help to stave off displacement of low-income families and community members.
2. Careful collaboration between federal and District agencies, private entities and community based organizations to overcome the regulatory barriers and long-term governance issues associated with public-private partnerships.
3. Throughout the Target Cities program, it has been a challenge to relay to the community what sustainability means on a neighborhood scale.

NEXT STEPS

1. Continued/sustained interagency cooperation. Examples include Phase 2 of development on the East Campus of St. Elizabeths, as well as citywide work on place-based resilience as part of the District's participation in the 100 Resilient Cities initiative.
2. Incorporation of goals and targets into ongoing programs, investments, and plans; and
3. Furthering the dialogue between the private and public sector on equity and shared benefits of growth and development.

“Congress Heights is currently experiencing some of the most exciting redevelopment activity east of the Anacostia River. The EcoDistricts Protocol has given us guidance for tangible outcomes.”

—EVELYN KASONGO, WARD 8 NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING COORDINATOR

ABOUT ECODISTRICTS

EcoDistricts is nonprofit that advances a new standard for community development. Through its programs and certification standard, EcoDistricts helps create equitable, sustainable, and resilient **neighborhoods for all**.