



ELLIS HEIGHTS  
**CHOICE**  
NEIGHBORHOODS

# TRANSFORMATION PLAN

DECEMBER 2013

ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY | CAMIROS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Development of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan was made possible through a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA). RHA and its Planning Coordinator, Camiros, Ltd. led the residents of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments and the Ellis Heights neighborhood, Winnebago County, the City of Rockford, and more than 38 local agencies and organizations in the development of this Plan.

### Rockford Housing Authority

Staff: Ron Clewer, CEO, Shelly Cassaro, CFO, Jodi Stromberg, Redevelopment Project Manager, Matthew Simpson, Community Development Manager, Gwenn Shirley/Zondra Carson, Fairgrounds Valley Manager, and the balance of RHA team.

Board: Jerry Lumpkins, Chairman, Phyllis Ginestra, Vice-Chair, Ricardo Cervantes, Alice Jenkins

Former Board member- Chandler Anderson

Special thanks to Winnebago County Housing Authority

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Fairgrounds Valley Focus Area



Neighborhood Planning Area

# 01. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

Rockford is one of 13 communities nationwide awarded FY2011 planning grants by HUD to begin locally-based efforts to revitalize distressed public housing and surrounding neighborhoods.

Located immediately west of Downtown Rockford, the Ellis Heights neighborhood demonstrates the larger struggle by the Rockford region to cope with impacts of economic downturn and population decline. Social indicators for the neighborhood demonstrate decreasing population, decaying housing and increasing fears by families and individuals that they are losing the opportunity to build a safe and secure life. The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan presents a path to reverse these negative trends and create a neighborhood full of opportunity and choice.

Developed by members of the neighborhood, working under the leadership of the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA), the recipient of a HUD Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant, our Plan sets forth a positive vision for the future that can be obtained by pursuing community-based initiatives that address infrastructure reinvestment, housing redevelopment, improved education opportunities,



job creation, health and human services, and public safety. Most importantly, our Plan does not presume that success can occur in a vacuum. It stresses coordination and integration with significant ongoing city and regional programs, and a reorientation of the neighborhood from one of isolation to one directly linked to the heart of the community.

Ellis Heights has many challenges that must be overcome to achieve this vision. The low concentration of owner-occupied housing when compared to other Rockford neighborhoods creates an image of a transient community that lacks stability. Violence, drug abuse and social issues, physical conditions, access to jobs and the lack of access to neighborhood retail and services are among the issues that need to be addressed.

Neighborhood assets include the Ellis Arts Academy, Lewis Lemon School, Lewis Lemon Branch Library,

Crusader Community Health, Fairgrounds Head Start site, and Fairgrounds Park. However, of even more significance is the West State Street Corridor Improvement Project, the most significant investment in the neighborhood in decades. West State Street is being totally rebuilt with new water and sewer lines and will be flanked by a new linear park system. Equally important are efforts by Rockford Public School District 205 to improve academic achievement, especially in Ellis Heights and other areas of concentrated poverty, through the Readiness Rocks Campaign and substantially improved educational facilities with proceeds from a recently approved \$139 million bond sale. Educational partners including Alignment Rockford, Rock Valley College, Rockford Department of Health and Human Services (Head Start), Judson University and Rockford College are working closely with District 205 to help make educational opportunity a strong Ellis Heights neighborhood asset.

Local government, agency partners, neighborhood residents and other community stakeholders worked together to develop the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan. Through the Choice Neighborhoods planning process, the RHA has addressed not only the needs of RHA's Fairgrounds Valley Apartments, but the needs of residents of the larger neighborhood. Our vision, developed by neighborhood residents as we engaged in Planning, is as follows:



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Enhancing neighborhood identity is a goal of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.

## A. ELLIS HEIGHTS VISION

All too often neighborhoods become known by headlines, statistics and obstacles... no longer. From today forward we believe in creativity, in opportunity, in power, in motivation, in ourselves. From today forward, we will promote, discover, believe and mix it up! Ellis Heights will be a desirable place to live! It will be creative, safe, affordable, clean and pleasant. There will be strong homeownership, with respectful and responsible neighbors looking out for the welfare of others. It will be a community where children are nurtured, families can grow, and seniors can enjoy their years. It will embrace the creativity of its residents and build a strong local arts economy in addition to homes for more traditional business enterprises. Ellis Heights will be a responsible community with active leadership and strong institutions.

The goal of our Plan is to transform Ellis Heights into a neighborhood of opportunity and choice by creating better connections to the regional economy and a new neighborhood identity. There are several key themes to make our vision a reality.

### 1. Better Connections

Ellis Heights has become more and more isolated from the mainstream of investment and community attention. This must be reversed. Ellis Heights must be viewed as an investment opportunity, not a liability.

### 2. New Neighborhood Image

A new Ellis Heights must be born out of the old. Perceptions must change so that the neighborhood becomes a center of activity rather than a backwater of the city.

### 3. Exploiting Economic Opportunity

Building a neighborhood arts economy is a purposeful action to rebrand the residential and market orientation of the neighborhood. Change must come to Ellis Heights, or abandonment will continue. Our proposed arts economy projects, while modest, will create new market opportunities for owners of vacant housing, provide job opportunities for area residents and provide outlets for entrepreneurial and apprenticeship activities.

## B. HUD'S CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE

Our Plan is organized around the three core goals that are the centerpiece of the HUD Choice Neighborhoods program:

### 1. Housing

Replace distressed public and assisted housing with high-quality mixed income housing that is well-managed and responsive to the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

### 2. People

Improve educational outcomes and intergenerational mobility for youth with services and supports delivered directly to youth and their families.

### 3. Neighborhood

Create the conditions necessary for public and private reinvestment in distressed neighborhoods to offer the kinds of amenities and assets, including safety, good schools and commercial activity that are important to families' choices about their community.



Neighborhood residents were engaged throughout the process to create the vision, initiatives and Plan.

HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development has developed a set of underlying principles to help it achieve its mission of developing partnerships among all levels of government and the private sector including for-profit and non-profit organization. Our Planning process was structured in concert with these principles:

- » Community building begins with job creation, employment and creation of safe, decent and affordable housing.
- » Planning and execution of community development initiatives must be bottom up and community driven.
- » Complex problems require coordinated, comprehensive and sustainable solutions.
- » Government must be streamlined to be made more efficient and effective.
- » Citizen participation in Federal, State and local government can be increased through communication and better access to information.

## C. CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS PLAN OVERVIEW

The core goals of Choice Neighborhoods informed and framed the development of the strategies and projects included in the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan. Our Plan is organized around seven strategic initiatives:

### 1. Neighborhood Improvements

Improve the physical conditions in the neighborhood by directing public and private investments to key neighborhood improvements designed to enhance neighborhood image and stimulate future redevelopment.

### 2. Housing

Develop new mixed income housing, while protecting and upgrading the existing housing stock.

### 3. Education

Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand, which reduces impediments to learning, increases school attendance, promotes the use of community learning facilities – all of which increase academic achievement and upward mobility through the “ladders of career opportunity” model.

### 4. Income and Jobs

Increase resident employability, employment opportunities and neighborhood business opportunities. Foster an environment of arts and culture to cultivate the creative talents of local residents in the community in order to help shape and move Ellis Heights forward.

### 5. Safe, Healthy Neighborhood

Improve connections between neighbors to create shared respect, understandings and communication, which help to connect residents to health and wellness services, build mutual respect and confidence in neighborhood ownership and confront issues leading to neighborhood violence.

### 6. Focus on Youth

Establish avenues for youth development leading to lifestyle and learning opportunities that enhance economic opportunity and personal choice.

### 7. Community Engagement and Capacity Building

Collaborative partnerships between city and neighborhood groups are being built to encourage community maintenance, safety and investment.



The strategies and projects included under the neighborhood improvement initiative form our Neighborhood Plan. Our Housing Plan is comprised of the strategies and projects listed under our housing initiative. Our People Plan includes our education, income and jobs, safe, healthy neighborhood, focus on youth and community engagement and capacity building initiatives.



The Task Force meetings helped to strengthen local connections while guiding and informing the Plan recommendations.

## D. REGIONAL CONNECTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

Dozens of partners have committed to help transform Ellis Heights into a vibrant desirable mixed income community. The Implementation chapter of our Plan identifies project sponsors and partners as well as a list of current initiatives being undertaken by key stakeholders that further the strategies of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan. Tracking educational progress and achievement are central to the efforts of Alignment Rockford and District 205's Readiness Rocks initiative. Our partners routinely use the "dashboard" model to monitor a variety of community indicators. We have established initial performance measures and target goals for each of our strategic initiatives.

Our Plan represents just one piece of a broader effort to rebuild Rockford's regional economy, which has struggled for more than two decades with high unemployment and disinvestment. Transform Rockford is a regional long-term planning effort to dramatically improve the social and economic conditions of the Rockford area. The initiative is about true transformation – not just incremental improvement – in which everyone's thoughts and voices will contribute to its success. This inclusive approach is based on the belief that better ideas and plans come to the forefront when those affected the most have input throughout the process of making the plans.

Much like the Choice Neighborhoods program is to Ellis Heights, Transform Rockford is a comprehensive and disciplined approach which is driven by shared values and vision to transform the Rockford region. By applying strategic planning processes used successfully in businesses, our community will develop our vision – together – for the future as well as strategies and detailed plans to achieve that vision. Every individual, through a public process, will be asked to provide insight, input and commitment to this transformational endeavor. Then, using the vision as a guide, an aggressive implementation plan will bring our collective vision to reality. Ellis Heights is one of many neighborhoods that will feed into this greater regional effort.

The Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) is documenting and assisting in analyzing this effort and has been one of RHA's most important partners in the development of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.

In 2009, RMAP recognized the need to document baseline strengths and weaknesses and developed A Blueprint to a More Sustainable and Dynamic Rockford Region. The blueprint outlined strategies to reverse the conditions weakening the community and to build on local strengths. This effort led to the 2011 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Partnership for Sustainable Communities grant award to create a Regional Plan



**RMAP VITAL SIGNS PROJECT**

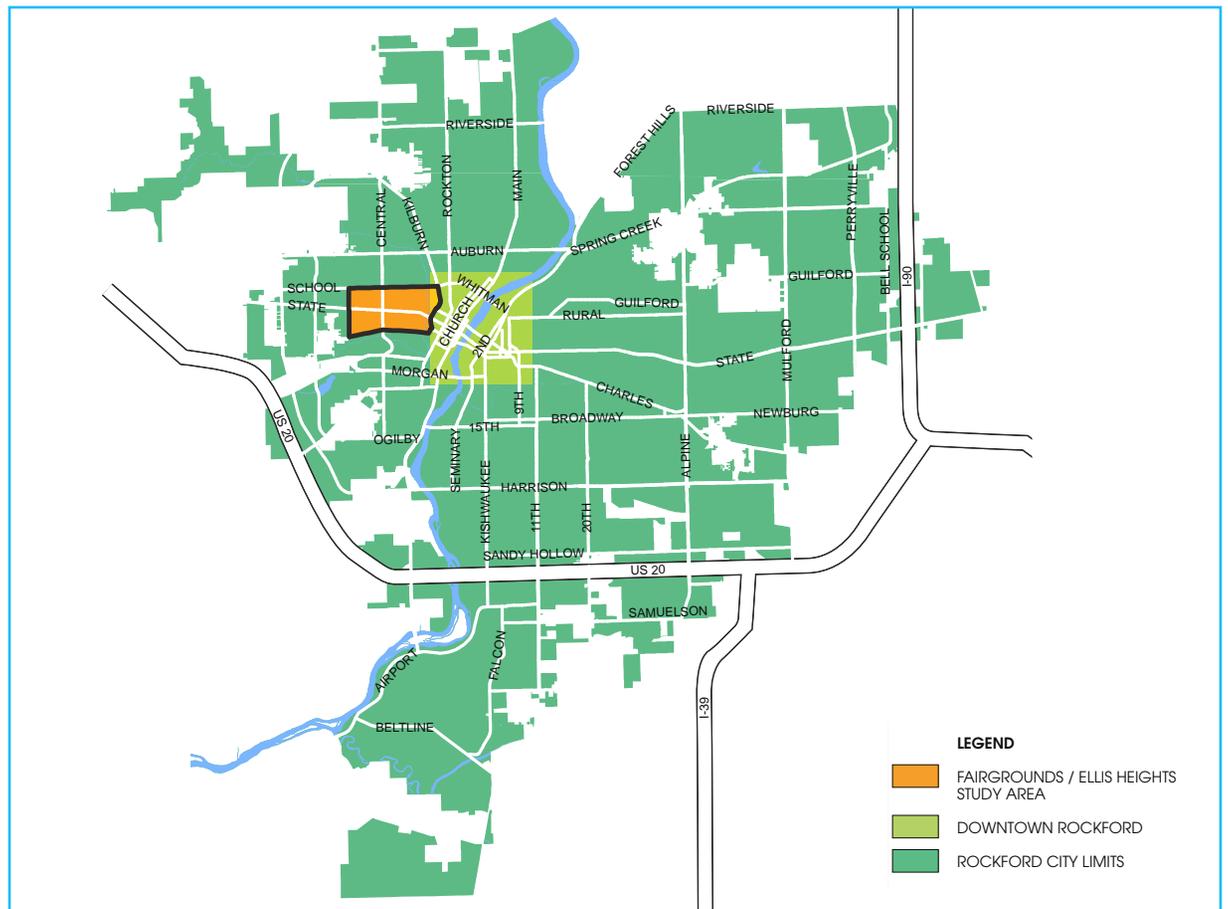
As part of the vital signs project, RMAP is seeking input on issues of Fair Housing and Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. Equal housing opportunities for all persons are critical to the current and future sustainability of the Rockford Region.

*Status: Ongoing*

**EARLY ACTION PROJECT**

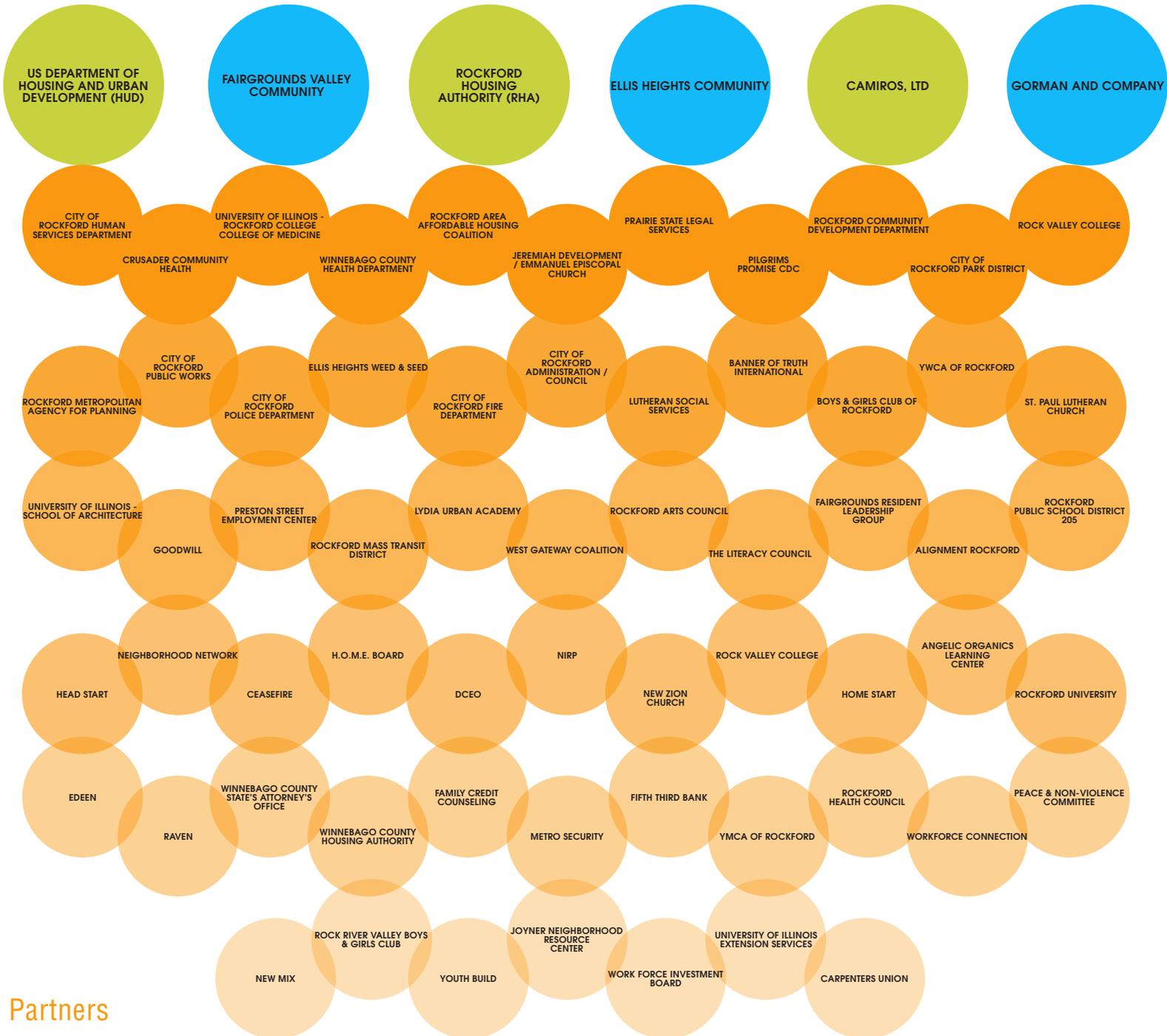
for Sustainable Development (RPSD) with five key deliverables: 1) an open data platform consisting of a “data commons” that contains publicly-available and privately-purchased data sets to help document current conditions in the two county region and guide future performance measurement, 2) a regional governance model that empowers the region to compete, receive and implement sustainability initiatives and to plan for the entire metro area, 3) a formal regional analysis of housing, defined for grantees as a “Fair Housing Equity Assessment” by HUD, 4) a toolkit of model codes, ordinances, policies, incentives and agreements known as “implementation tools” that can assist the implementation of the RPSD, and 5) the final RPSD document that will have a 20-year horizon and include strategies and action steps for all levels of the region including local governments, businesses, non-profits, neighborhoods and individual citizens.

RMAP also agreed to include a regional “Analysis of Impediments (AI) to Fair Housing Choice” that will position entitlement grantees within the region to align their HUD-required plans with a regional focus. RHA used this effort as the springboard for its own Poverty De-Concentration Plan, which guided planning for the redevelopment of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments, the target housing of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods planning grant.



**Regional Planning Context**

# TRANSFORM ROCKFORD



## Planning Partners

# 02. INTRODUCTION.

*Choice Neighborhoods is HUD's signature place-based initiative in support of the goal to build ladders of opportunity to the middle class.*

The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan builds on the collective regional efforts to rebuild the Rockford region, which has struggled for more than two decades in the face of a changing economy. A number of community and regional initiatives are underway to improve education and better position the region to compete in the global economy.

The Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) has also engaged in evaluating its traditional approach to public housing and is working to improve how it delivers housing and supportive services to some of Rockford's most vulnerable populations. It is against this backdrop that the RHA applied for and received a Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

## A. HUD'S CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE

HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Initiative is intended to help community partners rebuild neighborhoods, expand early learning opportunities, create pathways to jobs and strengthen families. It is organized around three core goals: Housing, People and Neighborhood. Choice Neighborhoods Plans must describe a course of action that will result in the transformation of distressed neighborhoods into communities of opportunity and choice. Grantees are expected to develop metrics based on the following objectives:

### 1. Housing

Housing transformed with the assistance of Choice Neighborhoods should be:

- » Energy efficient, sustainable, accessible and free from discrimination
- » Mixed Income
- » Well-managed and financially viable

### 2. People

People that live in the neighborhood benefit from:

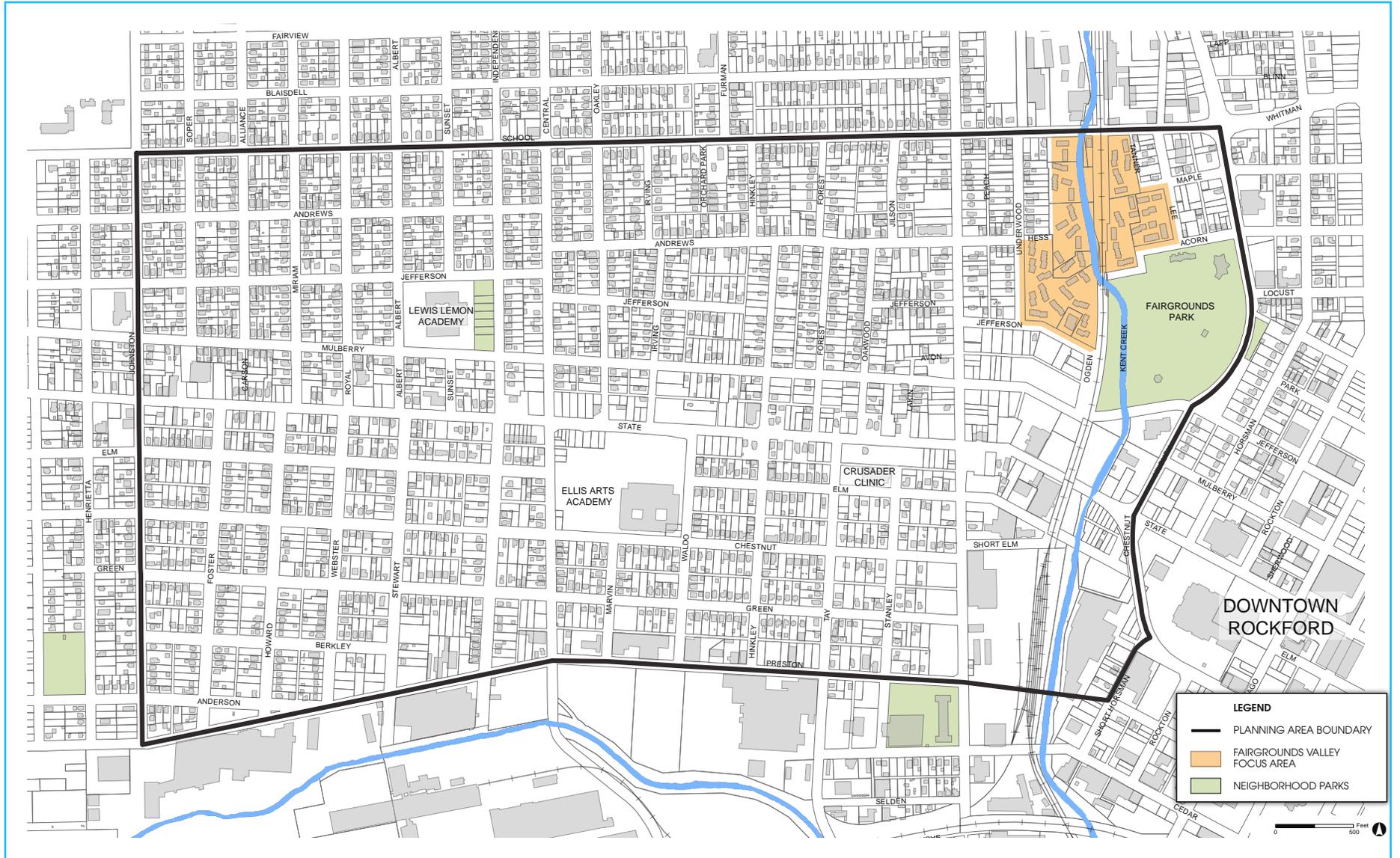
- » Effective education
- » Employment opportunities
- » Quality health care
- » Housing location, quality and affordability

### 3. Neighborhood

Through investments catalyzed with Choice Neighborhoods, the neighborhood has improved along the following dimensions:

- » Public and private investment in the neighborhood
- » Amenities
- » Effective public schools
- » Safety

HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all. HUD is working to strengthen the housing market to bolster the economy and protect consumers; meet the need for quality affordable rental homes; utilize housing as a platform for improving quality of life; build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination; and transform the way HUD does business.



## Planning Area



The planning area is primarily residential in nature.

HUD has also developed the following livability principles in partnership with several other Federal agencies:

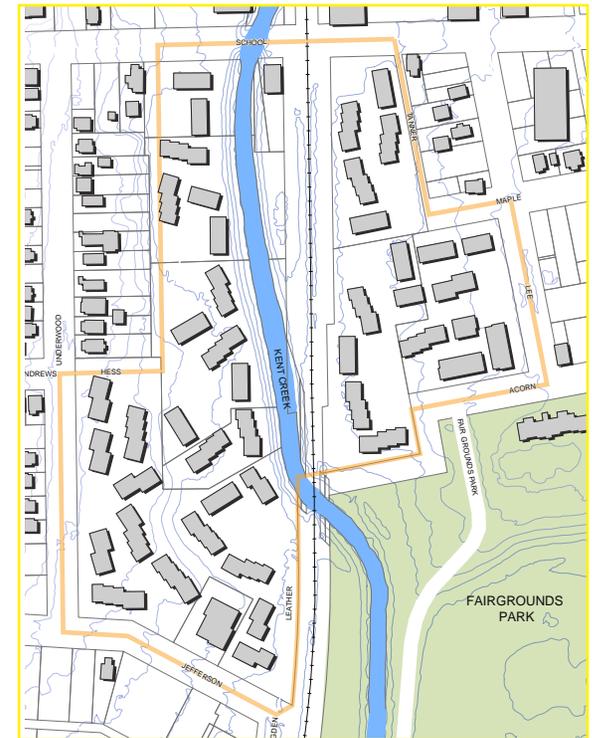
- » Promote more transportation choice
- » Promote equitable, affordable housing
- » Enhance economic competitiveness
- » Support existing communities
- » Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment
- » Value communities and neighborhoods

The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan is designed to further these livability principles and improve the lives of Ellis Heights residents well into the future.

## B. PLANNING AREA

Rockford has few identifiable or recognized neighborhoods. Local geographic areas are generally described as being either east or west of the Rock River. Consequently, the boundaries of the Ellis Heights neighborhood are somewhat arbitrary. While the downtown and Preston Street industrial area form fairly strong natural boundaries to the east and south, the residential character of Ellis Heights extends into areas to the north and west. Over the years, there have been several efforts to create a neighborhood identity for planning purposes – first with using cross streets such as Mulberry and Forest and more recently focusing on major projects such as the construction of the Ellis Heights Arts Academy, from which Ellis Heights currently draws its name. The Ellis Heights designation was used most recently for Rockford’s “Weed and Seed” effort..

The Planning area is generally defined by School Street on the north, Preston Street in the south, Kilburn Avenue on the east and Johnston Avenue on the west. The Fairgrounds Valley Apartments focus area currently includes 210 apartments on 15.6 acres between School Street on the north, Jefferson Street on the South, Lee Street on the east and Underwood Street on the west.



Fairgrounds Valley Focus Area



Members of the Planning team take HUD representatives on a neighborhood bus tour led by local residents.

## C. THE PLANNING TEAM

Key members of the Planning team include residents of the Ellis Heights neighborhood and Fairgrounds Valley apartments. There are also many stakeholders within and beyond the neighborhood who are investing their time, skills and money toward the continued improvement of the neighborhood, and the quality of life of its residents. The City of Rockford is a collection of such neighborhoods and organizations. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has also been a key member of the Planning team, providing guidance and technical resources to help us move forward. The Planning process was led by the RHA which strives to be a catalyst for positive change in the neighborhoods where its residents live. RHA operates under the belief that a quality home is the foundation of society and community and that a quality home life provides hope and the pathway to achieving the goals of its residents. RHA provides housing to low-income families, elderly and disabled citizens of Rockford. Camiros is the Planning coordinator for the team. Camiros is a professional urban Planning firm that provides a full range of services in the areas of planning, zoning, urban design, economic development and landscape architecture to both public and private clients. From innovative public participation methods to strategic implementation programming,

Camiros assists communities in identifying the key issues, developing appropriate concepts, and defining implementation strategies that help fulfill the local vision.

RHA selected Gorman and Company, Inc. as the developer for the mixed-income transformation of the Fairgrounds Valley housing site.

Gorman and Company is working the RHA to redevelop its Jane Addams/Brewington properties. The first phase of this redevelopment effort involved construction of a 38-unit supportive housing community to serve Rockford's physically and mentally disabled population.

## D. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

Creating a Plan that can actually transform a neighborhood is a daunting task – one that must begin with a vision that is embraced not just by those who live in the neighborhood, but those who will be asked to invest in its future. Rockford's Choice Neighborhoods Planning process began with a number of committed partners at the table. We worked diligently to make sure that neighborhood residents were actively involved in developing the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan. The goal has been to plan with rather than for the neighborhood.

An integrated and comprehensive approach was used to develop the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan. We engaged residents of the Fairground Valley Apartments and surrounding Ellis Heights neighborhood as well as a variety of organizational stakeholders including the City of Rockford (police, planning, Mayor, public works, health and human services), Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP), Rockford Public Schools, Rockford Park District, Winnebago County Health Department, Rockford Health Council, Rock Valley College, faith-based groups and a cross section of other service providers active in the area. Five major community meetings were held to allow the planning team to explain the planning process, understand neighborhood, issues and challenges and opportunities and identify strategies for improvement. A planning Task Force made up of key organizational stakeholders also met on a regular basis to build upon the work accomplished at the community meetings. These partners have continued to help refine Plan projects and make commitments for their implementation.

The development of the Plan was designed to occur at community meetings, with each meeting achieving specific results. We used a variety of interactive techniques to keep community stakeholders involved. Examples of these techniques include “dot maps” where participants respond to key questions like “where do kids



play” and “where are the crime hot spots” by placing sticky dots on the appropriate locations – facilitating geographic correlations. Keypad polling and discussion of results were used to quickly identify preferences with respect to locations for new housing and commercial development. To gauge relative priorities among the strategic initiatives that emerged through the issue identification process, meeting participants were asked to spend “Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds Neighborhood Bucks” on the strategic initiatives that they felt were most important. All this was repeated through our interactive website. However, person-to-person planning at the meetings remains the best way to gain insights, secure input and build support for implementation of the Plan.

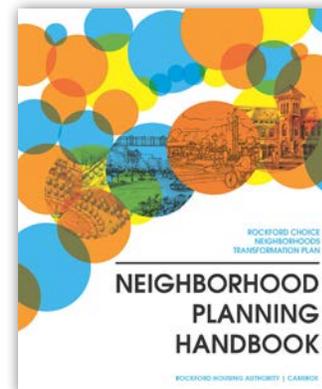
Like many other low-income, high crime neighborhoods, Ellis Heights is full of people living chaotic lives and having few options. Bringing neighborhood (65% of whom are renters) and public housing residents into the Planning process required persistence and a willingness to engage residents on their own turf. Getting people to come out to meetings required more than providing food and transportation. It also required one-on-one engagement (in Rockford’s case, this included the involvement of a neighborhood organizer) and a willingness to repeat sessions at locations where people were comfortable, and to include resident groups that may not have chosen to participate initially. All of the



hard work has paid off, with increasing neighborhood involvement in events designed to celebrate the Ellis Heights neighborhood and participation in specific activities designed to improve the quality of people’s lives.

The Planning process was also designed to build local capacity and commitment to implement the projects and programs that form the core of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan. It was structured to lead logically from the identification of neighborhood issues and assets, to development of a vision for the future of the neighborhoods and strategic initiatives to achieve the vision, to a specific program of projects and programs to improve the quality of life with committed project sponsors, to creation of an ongoing governance and coordination structure to manage the overall effort and track performance.

Key support materials and strategies used to support our community-driven planning process included:



Task Force and Community Meetings were important to the creation of the Plan.

## 1. Neighborhood Planning Handbook

The Neighborhood Planning Handbook was prepared to ensure that everyone understood what needed to be accomplished and how residents could participate in the process. It established a roadmap and common understanding for participants in the planning process and helped to structure development of the Plan. Understanding what was expected at each step along the way gave residents the confidence and ability to effectively engage in planning. Our planning process was designed to meet all of the requirements concerning the issues to be addressed by the Plan and ensure meaningful resident and neighborhood participation.

## 2. Neighborhood Data Book

The data book was a compilation of all available background data for the Ellis Heights neighborhood. This information was used to support issue identification and quantification and established baseline metrics for evaluating project implementation and tracking performance. The data book also serves as a resource for grant applications designed to secure funding for projects included in our Plan. This document constituted the core of our neighborhood-level comprehensive needs assessment to inform development of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.



## COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR

An evening resource fair intended to connect residents to educational, service and employment opportunities.

Status: July 2012

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT

### 3. Resident Outreach and Involvement

Ellis Heights and Fairgrounds Valley residents created the vision. Key to building consensus around the projects and strategies of the Plan, the planning process involved a series of major community meetings and numerous key person interviews with service providers and stakeholders active in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Resident leaders were identified and encouraged to engage in project design, implementation and program management.

A variety of participation techniques were used to secure meaningful community input. Residents identified problem areas and assets by placing dots on maps of the neighborhood. They suggested ideas for projects and programs that could improve the neighborhood at community meetings. They prioritized projects using keypad polling. And they have begun to engage in neighborhood improvement projects.

### 4. Interagency Coordination

As more partners came to the table a number of opportunities to pursue cooperative projects and program initiatives began to emerge. Several of these projects began with a broader community focus, but often led to more specific activities specifically focused on residents of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments or the

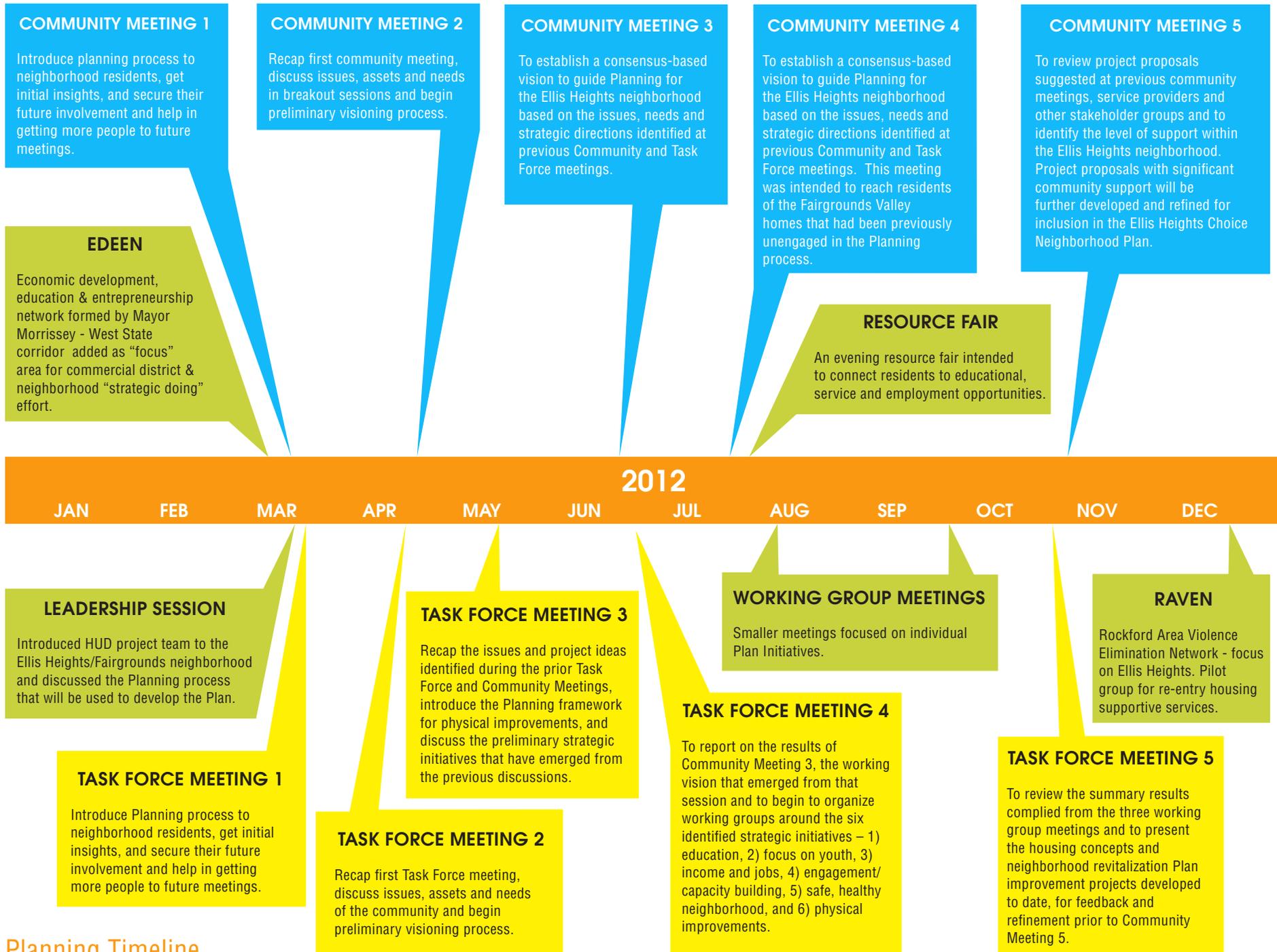
Ellis Heights neighborhood. Joint efforts to secure grant funds to support program initiatives identified through the Choice Neighborhood Planning process built local implementation capacity. These include the successful application to the Illinois Attorney General for funding under the National Foreclosure Settlement grant and a Byrne Criminal Justice Initiative grant application. As planning proceeded new partners emerged that have helped shape improvement plans. A number of “early action” projects were undertaken long before work on the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan was complete to move the revitalization efforts forward and improve the lives of Fairgrounds Valley residents. These efforts include:

- » University of Illinois School of Architecture – refinement of housing strategy and development concepts.
- » HUD Green Technical Assistance Grant – identification of financing opportunities related to incorporating energy efficiency and other “green” improvements into Planned housing projects.
- » University of Illinois Rockford College of Medicine- health fair & health assessments for Fairground Valley residents.

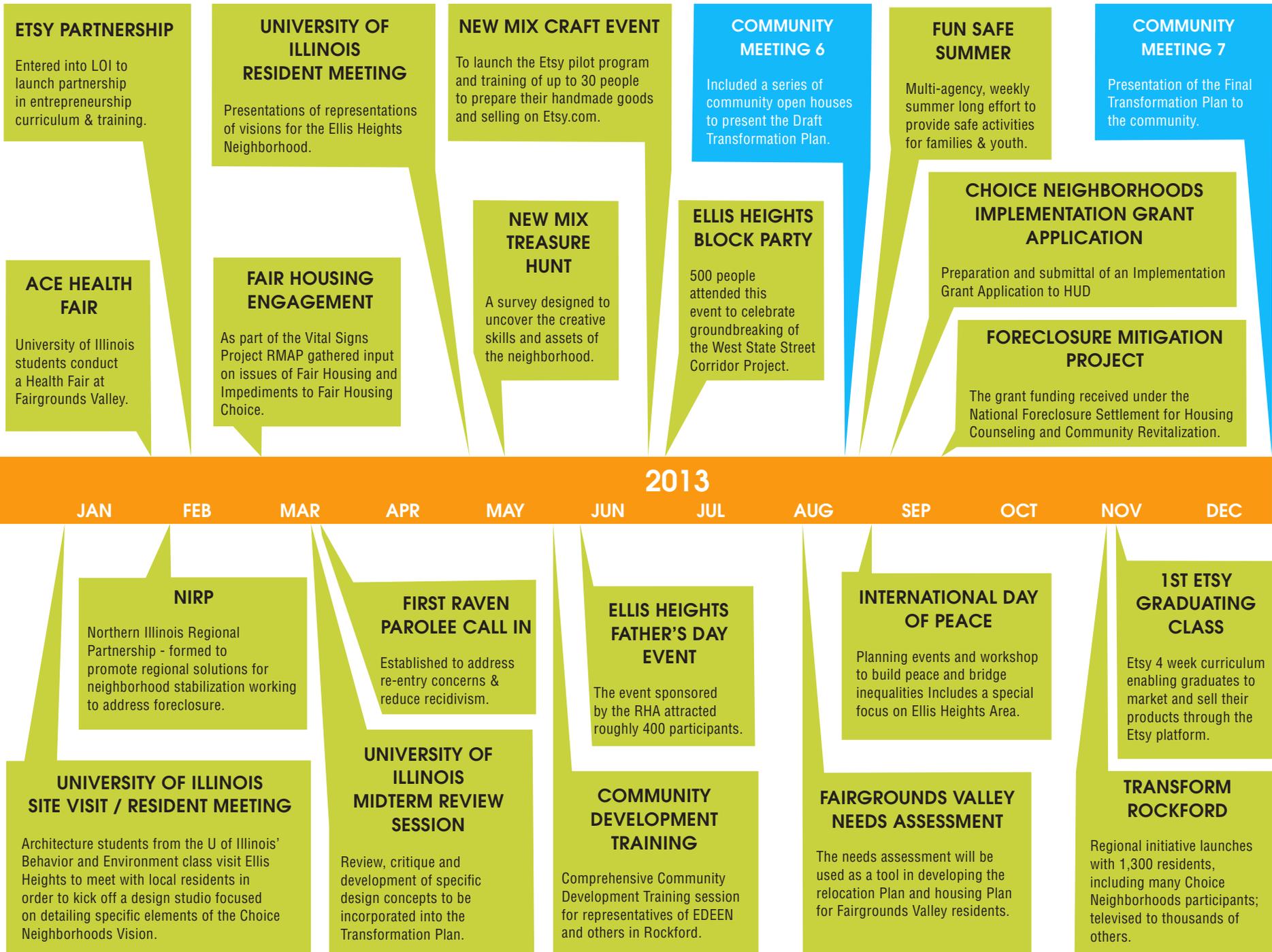
- » Arts Initiative – development of a creative arts education/entrepreneurship platform to support economic development initiatives
- » Rockford Region Vital Signs coordination with the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP).
- » Coordination with Regional Impediments to Fair Housing study undertaken by RMAP, focused on de-concentration of poverty strategies.

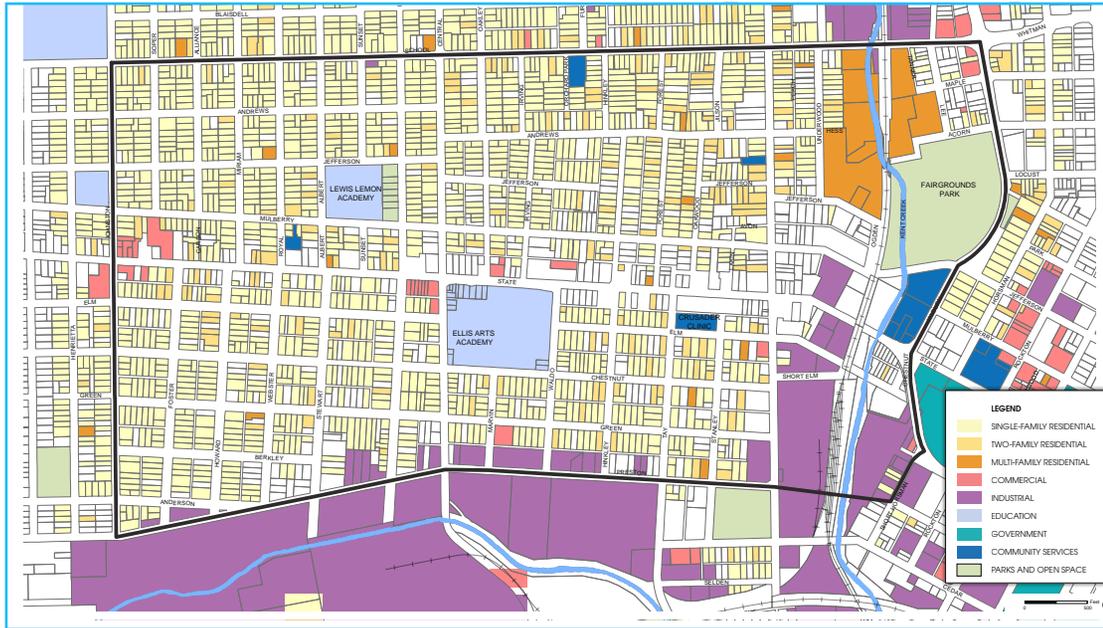
Our vision and strategic initiatives respond to the issues and challenges identified by neighborhood residents and our organizational partners at the community and planning Task Force working meetings. We have identified projects to help achieve our vision and organizations willing to take the lead on implementation. We have established desired outcomes, and building on RMAP’s Vital Signs efforts and other regional improvement initiative, we have identified metrics that can be used to measure program performance. We have already rolled up our sleeves and begun the hard work involved in setting the Ellis Heights on a new and positive course. We are looking forward to the journey ahead.



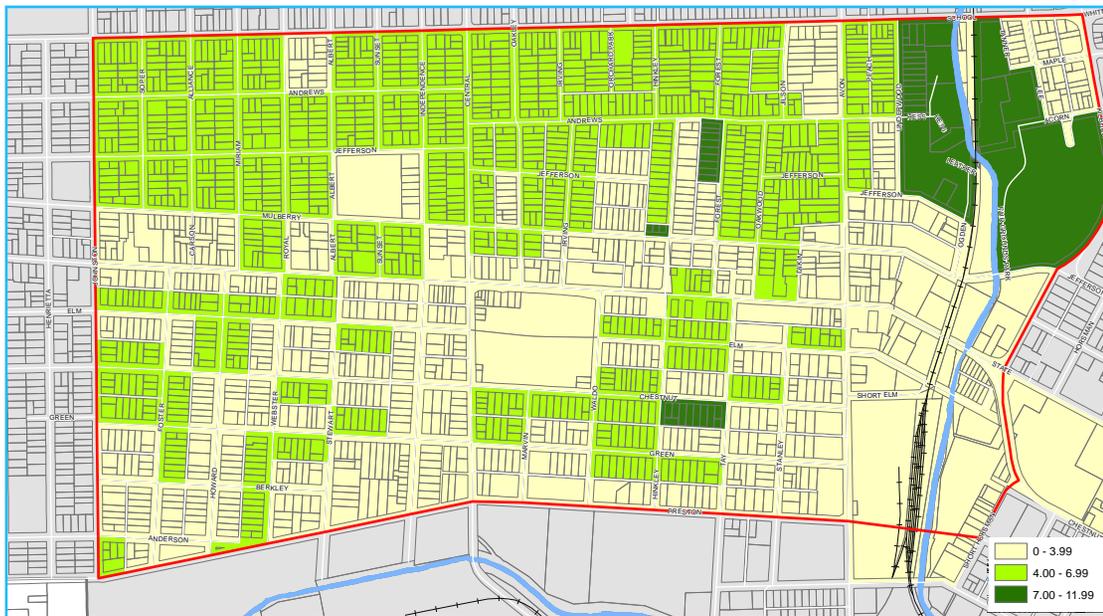


## Planning Timeline





Existing Land Use



Housing Units Per Acre

# 03.

# THE ELLIS HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood is located immediately west of Rockford's Downtown.

Ellis Heights is a predominately residential neighborhood with a development pattern that extends into areas to the north and west of the Planning area. To the south and east more distinctive land use changes delineate the neighborhood boundaries. The Kent Creek industrial area is located south of Preston Street.

## A. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ellis Heights was originally settled by Swedish and Italian immigrants. It was considered one of the most desirable sections of Rockford, west of the River because it was close to employment. Following World War I, African-Americans began moving into Rockford in search of an improved life for their families and the promise of better jobs. Although skilled as carpenters, painters and brick-layers these new residents could only find employment in foundries. African-Americans began moving into existing housing in the Ellis heights neighborhood after World War II. Segregation and redlining were prevalent. The process of gradual decline that began in the 1950s and 1960s was firmly rooted by the 1970s; a trend that continued despite periodic neighborhood revitalization efforts. This is the context for neighborhood planning.

## B. COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

The existing land use pattern generally reflects current zoning. The City's 2020 Comprehensive Plan calls for development of a linear park system on both sides of West State Street. Retail development is identified around the West State Street / Central Avenue intersection and across from Ellis Arts Academy. Retail and commercial development land use is also identified as appropriate development types for the eastern edges of the neighborhood.

image courtesy of EBAY user: missmichelle

7107, Arch Bridge, Fairgrounds Park, Rockford, Ill.



Historic Fairgrounds Park is shown in this vintage post card.

64% of neighborhood residents are african american

1,829 total number of housing units

65% of neighborhood is renter occupied

The neighborhood consists of a regular street grid. There is an extensive sidewalk network, with only a few locations where sidewalks do not exist. However, in many places the sidewalks have deteriorated. West State Street provides the primary east-west access through the neighborhood. Central Avenue is the only north-south street through Ellis Heights that provides access to areas located south of Kent Creek. The Ellis Heights neighborhood is served by several bus routes that terminate at the bus station in downtown Rockford. Reaching destinations in the eastern sections of Rockford require transferring to other bus routes. The limited hours of operation make it difficult for residents to access commercial facilities and desired services.

Kent Creek runs through the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments complex in the eastern portion of the Ellis Heights neighborhood. There are no issues with flooding along Kent Creek, which has been channelized and fully managed. A lightly used freight rail line parallels Kent Creek. The southeastern quadrant of the neighborhood (generally east of Avon Street and south of Elm Street) contains property originally in industrial use. These parcels may be impacted by environmental contamination.

Approximately 6,000 people live in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. With the exception of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments, housing density is fairly low, with

most buildings originally built as single-family houses. One of the observations of community residents from the very beginning of the planning process is that the density of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments is out of character with that of the surrounding area.

Ellis Heights is dominated by rental housing. Of the 1,829 housing units, 65% are occupied by renter versus 42% rental occupancy for Rockford as a whole. According to 2010 U.S. Census data there are 375 vacant units in the planning area. The housing vacancy rate is more than twice that of Rockford overall. Most residential blocks contain some owner-occupied housing. However, only a small portion of the single-family homes in the area have market values that are above 50% of average Rockford home values.

### COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR TRAINING SESSION

An effort to conduct a one-day session led by the Economic Development, Education and Entrepreneurship Network (EDEEN) of Rockford  
*Status: May 2013*

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

The condition of the neighborhood housing stock has been an issue for many years. A building condition survey conducted at the start of the planning process identified many buildings that were in fair or poor condition, including approximately 80 buildings that were vacant. Foreclosures have also been a significant problem in the neighborhood. The City of Rockford has lacked the funding needed to demolish all of the dilapidated and vacant buildings that dot the Ellis Heights neighborhood and some have become opportunity sites for criminal activity.

The deteriorated and vacant buildings and vacant lots represent a significant challenge but also a potential resource for rebuilding the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Additionally, there are a number of blocks where the majority of properties are well maintained and form anchor blocks for building a stable neighborhood.

Ellis Heights has a relatively young population, with lots of children and few seniors. The neighborhood is 64% black. Approximately 62% of Rockford's households consist of one or two persons. In contrast, Ellis Heights households are significantly larger, with 62% of Ellis Heights households consisting of three or more people. Twenty-five percent of Ellis Heights households contain five or more people, compared with approximately 11% of all Rockford households.

**55%** median household income for neighborhood residents is  
**of rockford's median income**

Ellis Heights residents are more reliant on public transportation and carpooling than residents of other parts of Rockford, where driving alone is the predominate mode of transportation to jobs. Especially in the eastern portion of Ellis Heights, a much higher percentage of residents lack access to a vehicle than for Rockford overall.

Fewer than half of Ellis Heights residents over the age of 16 are in the labor force according to 2006-2010 American Community Survey estimates. Rockford's unemployment rate has remained one of the highest in Illinois over the last decade. The percentage of Ellis Heights residents in the labor force is even lower. A significant number of Ellis Heights residents lack a high school diploma, which makes it even more difficult to find a job. Median income for these workers is also significantly below that of the Rockford's median earnings. Median household income for Ellis Heights residents is only about 55% of Rockford's median income. A substantially higher percentage of Ellis Heights residents receive food stamp/SNAP benefits than is the case for Rockford as a whole.

**60%** of housing built before  
**1940**

**375** number of  
**vacant housing units**

More than half of Ellis Heights residents have income below the poverty line compared with less than a quarter of all Rockford residents. According to 2006-2010 American Community Survey estimates only about 7% of Rockford's owner-occupied housing units are valued at less than \$50,000. In the Ellis Heights neighborhood prices below \$50,000 are the norm. However, median rents in Ellis Heights are similar to those in Rockford generally, due in part to the concentration of subsidized Section 8 units in the neighborhood. According to the data returned by HUD's mapping tool, which was used to develop the neighborhood planning area boundaries for the purposes of the Choice Neighborhoods grant application, the concentration of households in poverty in the Ellis Heights neighborhood is 50.97%. The concentration of extremely low income persons in the target neighborhood is 47.1%. The long-term neighborhood vacancy rate is 21.06%, 2.64 times that of Winnebago County where the long-term vacancy rate is 7.99%.

City-wide violent crime has remained consistently high in Rockford over the last five years, experiencing less than a one percent change over this period. Crime in the Ellis Heights neighborhood has also remained high with 1,627 Group A crimes (kidnapping/abduction/unlawful restraint, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, burglary/breaking and entering, destruction/damage/

**30%** of neighborhood is  
**18 or younger**

vandalism of property, drug/narcotics violations, weapons violations) and 1,796 Group B crimes (curfew/loitering/vagrancy violations, disorderly conduct, nonviolent family offenses, etc.) in 2010 and 1,261 Group A crimes and 1,333 Group B crimes in 2011. The Part I Violent Crime Rate of Fairgrounds/Ellis Heights is 2.28 times that of the City of Rockford. The average three year Part I Violent Crime rate in the Ellis Heights neighborhood is 28.41% compared with the Part I Violent Crime rate for the City of Rockford of 12.47%.

Rockford Public Schools has two elementary schools located in the target neighborhood: Ellis Arts Academy and Lewis Lemon. Lewis Lemon School is the designated neighborhood school for the Ellis Heights neighborhood and serves grades K through 5. West Middle School is located outside of the Ellis Heights neighborhood and serves grades 6 through 8. Ellis Arts Academy is also located in the Ellis Heights neighborhood and serves K through 8th grades. Neighborhood high school students are assigned to Auburn High School. These schools all have substantial low-income populations, chronic truancy issues and high mobility rates when compared to the school district and the state as shown in the table below.

## Student Attendance Characteristics

ATTENDANCE RATE	PERCENT LOW-INCOME	CHRONIC TRUANCY RATE	MOBILITY RATE	ATTENDANCE RATE
Lewis Lemon School	97.7	19.0	53.5	91.8
Ellis Arts Academy	93.4	19.6	54.3	92.2
West Middle School	95.7	31.0	44.7	90.0
Auburn High School	72.5	23.1	35.2	92.5
Rockford School District 205	77.8	15.8	34.5	93.7
State	48.1	3.2	12.8	94.0

A comprehensive needs assessment survey of Fairgrounds Valley households was undertaken as part of the planning process. Responses were received from 127 of 208 households, a 61% response rate. Residents were asked to provide basic household information including length of Fairgrounds Valley residence, prior living situation, and household composition. Also included were questions related to health, education, job training and involvement with local schools, computer/internet access and use, employment, transportation, safety and security, and availability/satisfaction with services and facilities used by residents.

Most Fairgrounds Valley households (93%) reported having a medical home, with many identifying Crusader Clinic, a federally qualified health center (FQHC) located just a few blocks away, as their medical home. Similarly the majority of respondents (81%) reported having health insurance, but a lower percentage (78%) reporting good physical health. Violence and safety are significant concerns. Most respondents (59%) reported feeling safe during the day, but far fewer (30%) reported feeling safe at night. In response to the question, "How much of a problem are shootings and violence?" 96 respondents (76%) reported this is a big problem.

When asked to rate satisfaction with living at Fairgrounds Valley, 70 respondents (56%) reported being very or somewhat satisfied and 50 respondents (40%) reported being somewhat or very dissatisfied. Fairgrounds Valley residents were asked to identify the types of businesses that were most needed in the neighborhood. A grocery store was the top pick (70 respondents, 56%), followed by clothing stores (58 respondents, 46%), local restaurants (52 respondents, 41%), and movie theaters (51 respondents, 41%). Priority service needs included jobs skills training/employment assistance (76 respondents, 60%), physical fitness for adults (66 respondents, 52%), youth programs (56 respondents, 44%) and healthcare/medical services (51 respondents, 41%), and transportation (49 respondents, 39%). The types of classes that were identified as being of most benefit and interest included computer skills (70 respondents, 56%), nutrition/cooking classes (56 respondents, 44%), and parenting skills (35 respondents, 28%). These results were very similar to the issues and needs identified by non-public housing residents of Ellis Heights.

### FUN SAFE SUMMER

Interrupt crime activity by targeting "hot spots" and offering safe alternatives for families and children.

Status: Ongoing - Annual Event

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT



Anchor blocks of preservation include housing in fair to good condition based on visual survey.

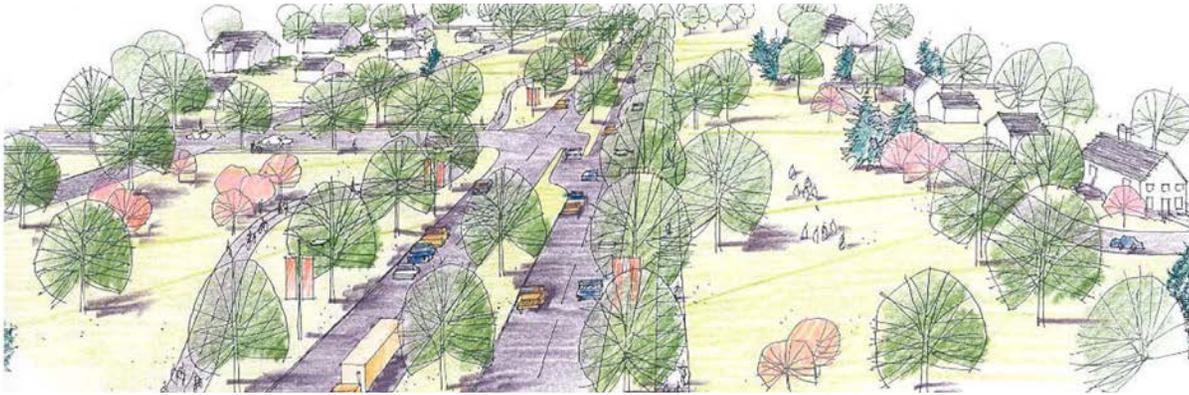
### C. ELLIS HEIGHTS ASSETS

Neighborhood assets include Lewis Lemon School and the Lewis Lemon Branch Library, Ellis Arts Academy, Fairgrounds Park, Crusader Community Health, Fairgrounds Head Start site, local churches, proximity to downtown Rockford, and the West State Street corridor improvements now under construction. The large number of vacant lots in the neighborhood provide potential locations for a variety of new uses that can help stabilize the neighborhood and bring new amenities to neighborhood residents.



**Anchor Blocks of Preservation** 75% or more properties rated fair to good condition based on visual survey



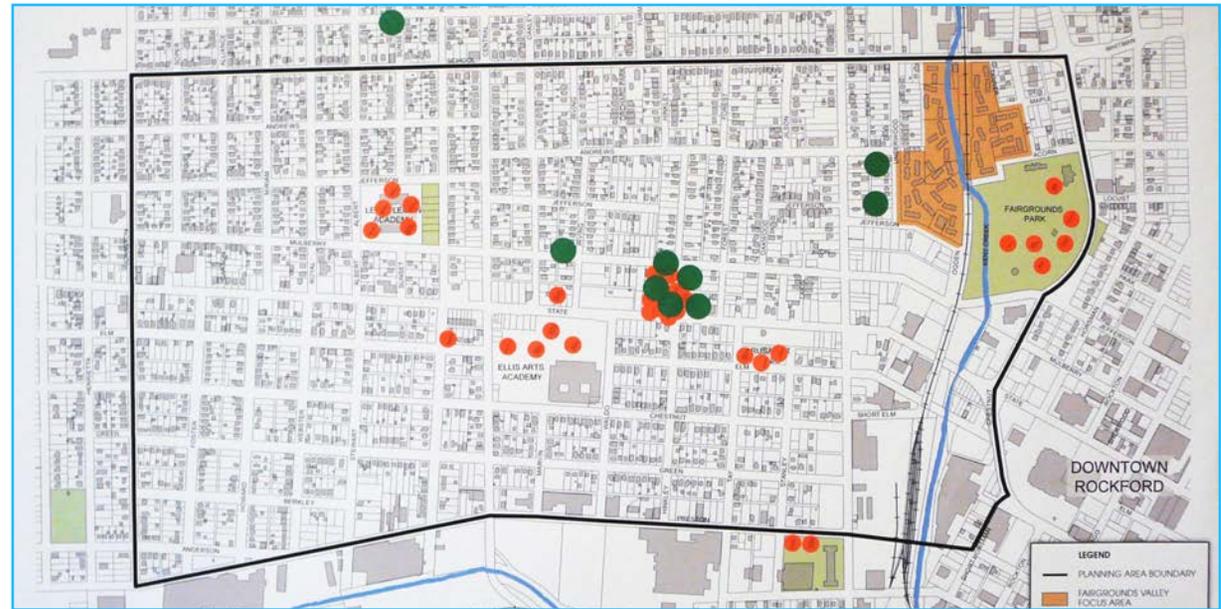


The West State Street Corridor Improvement Project represents a major public investment in the Ellis Heights Neighborhood.

Prior to the award of the Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds Choice Neighborhoods Planning grant, several local initiatives were well underway that provide a firm foundation for planning and project implementation. The most significant of these is the West State Street Corridor Improvement Project. Planning for the more than \$20 million in improvements that are now under construction began in 2003. West Street is being totally rebuilt with new water and sewer lines and will be flanked by a new linear park system. This project represents the most significant investment in the Ellis Heights neighborhood in decades and has sparked hope in the possibility of resurgence of this neglected part of Rockford.

The Ellis Heights Weed & Seed program created initial partnerships which have been continued and expanded. The Fun Safe Summer Partnership is a collaborative effort to curb violence includes many partners who have been central to the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Planning process.

The Rockford Housing Authority has engaged in several planning studies over the last few years to address housing deficiencies and determine how best to meet the needs of its residents at Fairgrounds Valley, which supported development of RHA's Choice Neighborhoods grant application.



What is the Best Part of the Neighborhood? From Community Meeting #1

## ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL FORECLOSURE SETTLEMENT GRANT

Foreclosure prevention training, housing rehab and acquisition, foreclosure mediation through the courts, loan pool.

Grant Amount Received: \$2,500,000

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT



Blocks of potential include large amounts of housing in poor or vacant condition based on visual survey.

## D. ELLIS HEIGHTS CHALLENGES

A healthy, desirable neighborhood requires good schools, a positive physical image, a safe environment, quality housing stock and a stable population. A substantial base of owner-occupied housing helps to reinforce neighborhood stability. Another ingredient needed to support neighborhood vitality is easy access to shopping services and jobs. Many of these elements are lacking in Ellis Heights today.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood is viewed by many residents who live there and people from outside of the neighborhood as a place to avoid. It is seen as one of Rockford's neighborhoods of last resort – a place to escape from as quickly as possible. The low concentration of owner-occupied housing when compared to other Rockford neighborhoods creates an image of a transient community that lacks stability. And yet, there are also homeowners who are committed to this neighborhood.

Community violence, drug abuse and social issues, physical conditions, the lack of access to jobs, goods and services are among the issues identified at the community meetings that began the planning process and an initial survey of residents of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments. These challenges relate to the neighborhood, people and housing goals of the Choice Neighborhoods program.



**Blocks of Potential** 25% or more properties rated vacant to poor condition based on visual survey



West State Street and Johnston Avenue showing portions of the area that will be transformed through the West State Street Corridor Improvement Project.

## NEIGHBORHOOD BRUTAL FACTS

### 1. Market Conditions

The neighborhood currently lacks retail uses including grocery stores, banks and drug stores. At issue is overcoming existing commercial market conditions that adversely impact potential retail investment. Current residential densities viewed as generally too low to support significant commercial activity. The residential market potential including the feasibility of market rate rental & home ownership is also a major challenge.

### 2. Neighborhood Perception

How potential investors see the neighborhood including the physical condition and appearance of buildings, streets and open spaces along with perceptions of crime and safety has a strong impact on investment potential. Vacant and boarded up houses contribute to an image of disinvestment and invite criminal activity and reinforce today's negative neighborhood image.

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

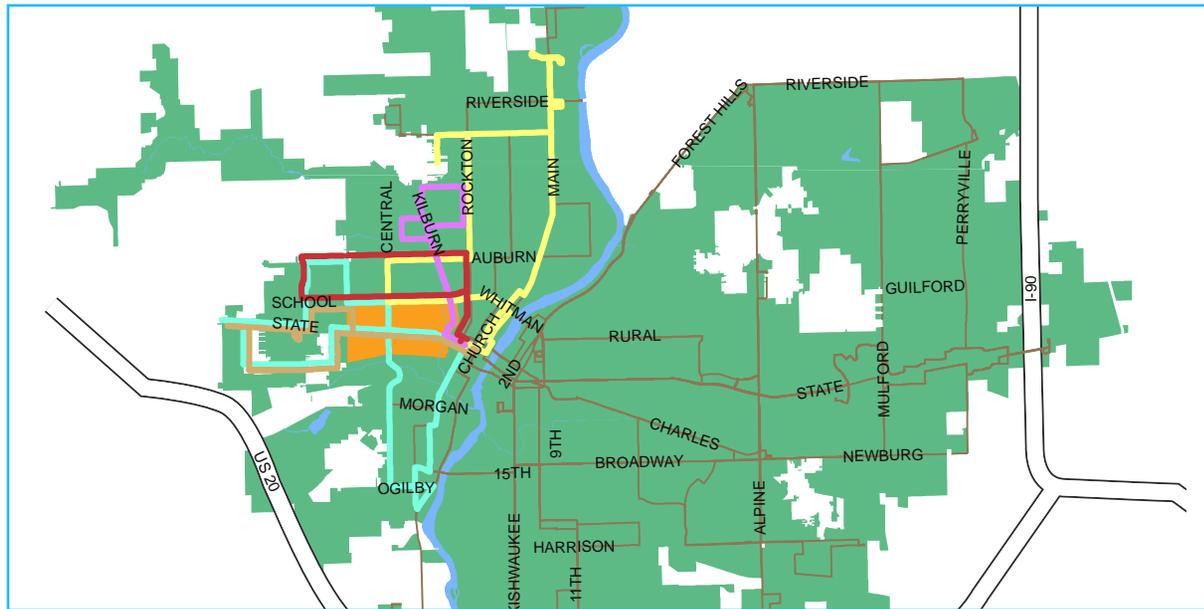
The 11th annual International Day of Peace at the Peace Plaza was held on Friday, September 20, 2013. The theme of the day will be "Who Will You Make Peace With?" Expanded to a monthly effort with Inside Out.

Status: September 2013

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT



What is the Worst Part of the Neighborhood? From Community Meeting #1



## Existing Bus Routes

### 3. Transportation

Poor public transportation access makes it hard for adults without cars to get to jobs or access educational opportunities. There are few jobs within the Ellis Heights neighborhood, which makes availability of reliable transportation more critical. Transportation to allow youth to access available activities outside of the neighborhood is also inadequate. Transportation is not currently provided for preschool programs operated by Rockford Public Schools. Distance and parental safety concerns associated with walking to school sometimes results in parents keeping their kids at home or arriving to school late.

### 4. Community Facilities

The lack of existing spaces to house youth programs in the Ellis Heights neighborhood is also a current challenge. There are few safe havens and activities for youth in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. There is also a

lack of classrooms and other physical spaces within the Ellis Heights neighborhood that can be used as a base of operations for educational service providers.

### 5. Neighborhood Connections

The transient nature of the large rental population that includes people not necessarily invested in the long-term success of the neighborhood is a community challenge. There are currently few active neighborhood resident organizations. The high percentage of renters makes it difficult to “know your neighbors” and establish neighborhood-based organizations.

### CODE FOR AMERICA FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Technology platform to cultivate educational & entrepreneurial continuum. Received recognition status & invite into Peer Network to solve education access with technical platform and create building inspection standards.

*Requested: Three Fellows and Application*

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

## PEOPLE BRUTAL FACTS

### 1. Violence and Criminal Activity

Stemming the violence and criminal activity that has defined the Ellis Heights neighborhood for far too many years is perhaps the most significant challenge facing Ellis Heights. Currently West State Street and Central Avenue form turf barriers for youth that negatively impact participation in programs provided in other parts of the neighborhood. The large minority population and concentration of ex-offenders in the neighborhood creates an image of an unsafe neighborhood in the minds of outsiders.

### 2. Concentration of Households with Limited Life Skills

Ellis Heights is home to a significant number of residents who lack the knowledge to successfully run a functional household. These life skills include the ability to find and keep jobs, housekeeping and property maintenance skills, healthy eating habits and lifestyles, parenting skills and the ability to be positive role models for youth.

### 3. Education

While there quality early learning facilities, public schools and a branch library in the Ellis Heights neighborhood,



Fairgrounds Valley exhibits signs of disinvestment and poor overall design.

parents and their children are not always well connected to these resources. During discussions with community residents and educational service providers a number of impediments were identified. Adults with undiagnosed learning disabilities find it difficult to pursue educational/employment advancement. Adults don't have the necessary reading skills and find it difficult to participate in GED programs. Previous parental educational experiences may cloud their children's opportunities and outcomes. The application process for participation in various educational programs is also difficult for some residents to manage. Required application information (school records, birth certificates, shot records, etc.) may not be available or organized.

#### 4. Support Services to Strengthen Families

Many parents enrolled in GED classes often lack reliable, affordable child care. At times, residents don't feel connected to or trust potential service providers. The cost of youth programs may also be limiting factor for local residents. Youth service providers have limited resources, making expansion into the Ellis Heights neighborhood a challenge. There is also a lack of consistency in the youth programs that are offered in the neighborhood from year to year.

## HOUSING BRUTAL FACTS

### 1. Home Values

Low housing values make it difficult to attract developers of new market rate housing to the Ellis Heights neighborhood.

### 2. Building Condition

Much of the housing in the neighborhood contains lead paint and is poorly insulated. These issues impact resident health and household energy costs. The condition of rental property, including Section 8 units is often poor.

### 3. Foreclosures

Foreclosures have resulted in many vacant housing units in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. The loss of owner-occupied housing in a neighborhood that is already skewed toward rental housing is particularly difficult.

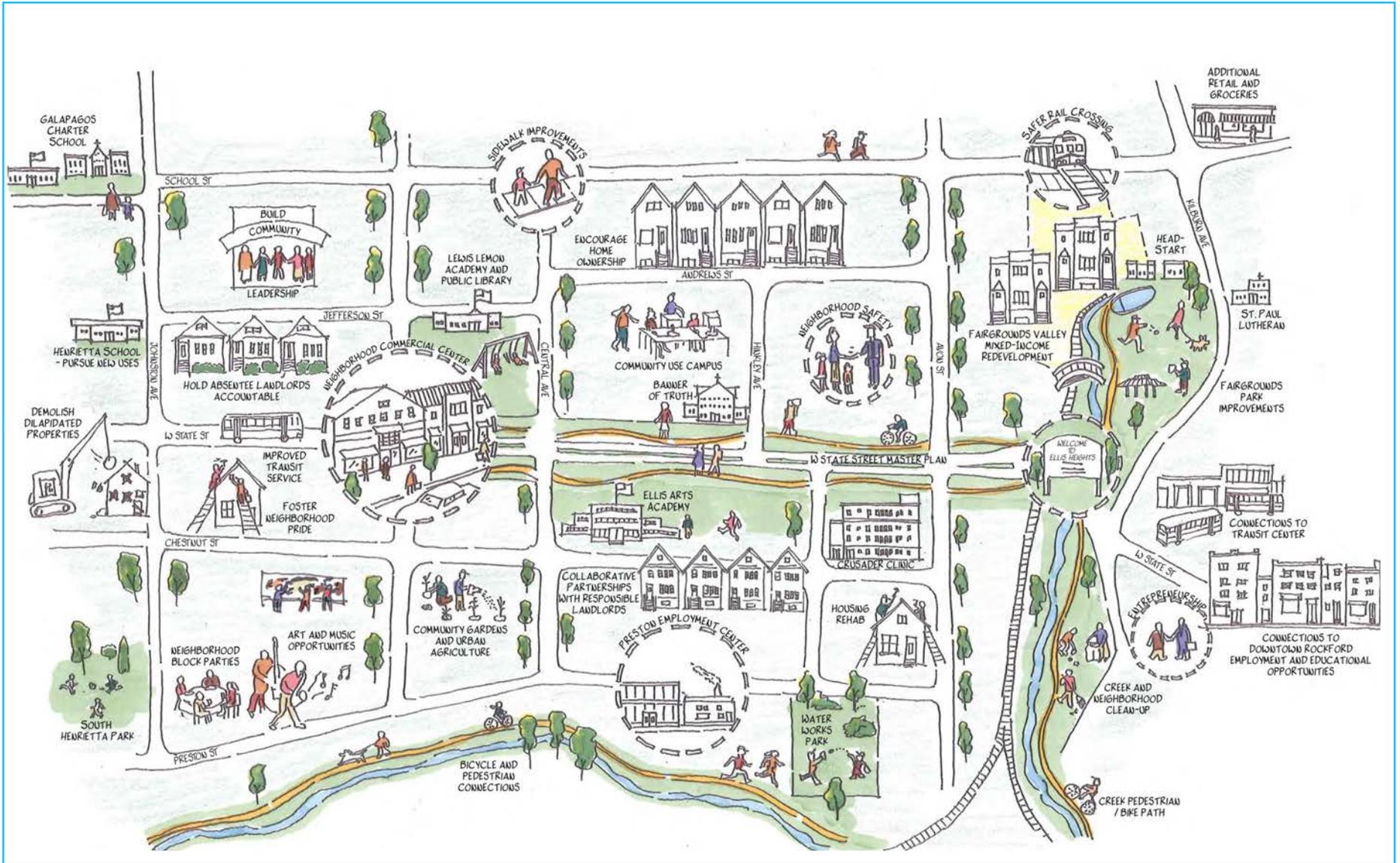
### 4. Vacant Residential Lots

While vacant land is among the neighborhood's many assets, it is also a significant challenge. If the neighborhood is to develop as a cohesive, family-friendly community, these gaps in the residential fabric need to be filled in.

The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan builds upon the historic foundations of the neighborhood, the assets that are here, and the challenges that we face. We understand the neighborhood as it exists today, and have already begun to work toward the neighborhood we want Ellis heights to become.



image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture



## Neighborhood Vision

# 04. VISION AND PATHWAYS FORWARD.

The goal of our Plan is to transform Ellis Heights into a neighborhood of opportunity and choice.

We have the opportunity to create a unified, desirable neighborhood, with a unique identity with better connections to the greater Rockford community – physically, economically and culturally. Through a program of focused investment and improvement, the Ellis Heights neighborhood can become a linchpin between the west side and greater Rockford, bringing these disparate parts of the city together. Our vision, developed by neighborhood residents as we engaged in planning is as follows:

All too often neighborhoods become known by headlines, statistics and obstacles... no longer. From today forward we believe in creativity, in opportunity, in power, in motivation, in ourselves. From today forward, we will promote, discover, believe and mix it up! Ellis Heights will be a desirable place to live! It will be creative, safe, affordable, clean and pleasant. There will be strong homeownership, with respectful and responsible neighbors looking out for the welfare of others. It will be a community where children are nurtured, families can grow, and seniors can enjoy their years. It will embrace the creativity of its residents and build a strong local arts economy in addition to homes for more traditional business enterprises. Ellis Heights will be a responsible community with active leadership and strong institutions.



Our priorities are:

- » Neighborhood – We will build upon the momentum created by the West State Street Improvement Project to make Ellis Heights a more connected place.
- » Arts and Culture – We will cultivate the creative talents of local residents to help change the community's perception of Ellis Heights and the people who live there.
- » Housing – We improve the condition of the existing housing stock and work to build new housing that is attractive to a broad range of income levels.
- » Income and Jobs – To make progress on other aspects of our vision, we must ensure that residents have the ability to sustain their households.
- » Safety and Health – We will work to create a safer neighborhood that focuses on opportunities for our youth. Residents will be connected to the resources needed to maintain healthy lifestyles.
- » Education – We will build on existing educational resources to better connect residents to quality early learning opportunities, good neighborhood schools, and higher education and career training.
- » Neighborhood Engagement – We will support neighborhood residents and help them become more involved as leaders and mentors.



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Enhancing neighborhood identity is a goal of the Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.

The goal of our Plan is to transform Ellis Heights into a neighborhood of opportunity and choice by creating better connections to the regional economy and a new neighborhood identity which will incorporate a rebuilt Fairgrounds Valley site as one of several mixed income development anchors within the neighborhood, and leverage investments in community revitalization to improve overall quality of life. This goal was articulated early in the planning process by neighborhood residents and used as a touchstone to guide the Plan's development from the identification of neighborhood assets and challenges, to the creation of a consensus vision of what the neighborhood could be, to the identification of the following key themes to make the vision a reality.

## 1. Better Connections

Ellis Heights, today, is not considered the most desirable place to live or visit. As a result, it has become more and more isolated from the mainstream of investment and community attention. This must be reversed. Ellis Heights must be viewed as an investment opportunity, not a liability. The City of Rockford recognizes this and committed more than \$20 million to improve the quality and attractiveness of the key arterial through the community – West State Street—and the adjoining land. More must be done to build upon this catalytic project including better direct connections to downtown

and improving Fairgrounds Park as a centerpiece of the community.

## 2. New Neighborhood Image

A new Ellis Heights must be born out of the old. Perceptions must change so that the neighborhood becomes a center of activity rather than a backwater of the city. The challenge in Rockford is to facilitate a de-concentration of poverty and open up its “weaker” neighborhoods to opportunities for investment, and make its stronger neighborhoods more welcoming to citizens with modest incomes. This theme is designed to support this effort.

A key strategy will be to stimulate reinvestment in the neighborhood as an incubator for the arts, attracting individuals who seek work live situations, modestly priced housing, studio space for artisans and places to collaborate with others. Given the vacant land and buildings within the neighborhood such opportunities abound and will not force relocation of existing neighborhood residents or businesses. This reorientation, tied to the efforts at connecting the neighborhood to the city, will stimulate new investment and employment opportunities for persons outside as well as within Ellis Heights.

## 3. Economic Opportunity

Building a neighborhood arts economy is a purposeful action to rebrand the residential and market orientation of the neighborhood. Change must come to Ellis Heights, or abandonment will continue. If successful, these arts initiatives will create new market opportunities for owners of vacant housing, provide job opportunities for area residents and provide outlets for entrepreneurial and apprenticeship activities. The key is to find multiple ways of connecting residents to viable work, training and educational opportunities. Other economic development projects in our Plan include better linkages to existing training programs, connection to the sports tourism project, improved transit access to major job centers, and training in construction that can be tied to projects undertaken within the neighborhood.

Our Choice Neighborhoods program is designed to improve the quality of life and economic development potential for current and future residents. Key elements of our Plan as they relate to the three core goals of the Choice Neighborhoods program are outlined on the following pages.



image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Infill mixed-income housing will help to create a community of choice.

## NEIGHBORHOOD

Undertake targeted physical improvements designed to change the character of the physical environment, building on the substantial public investment currently being made through the West State Street Improvement Project. Develop dedicated space for community programming and work to rebrand Ellis Heights as a home for artisans and artistic endeavors. Work to attract economic development to the neighborhood, including a grocery store that is affordable and other retail services to serve existing households and attract new residents. Our neighborhood Planning framework identifies proposed improvement projects throughout the Ellis Heights neighborhood.

## PEOPLE

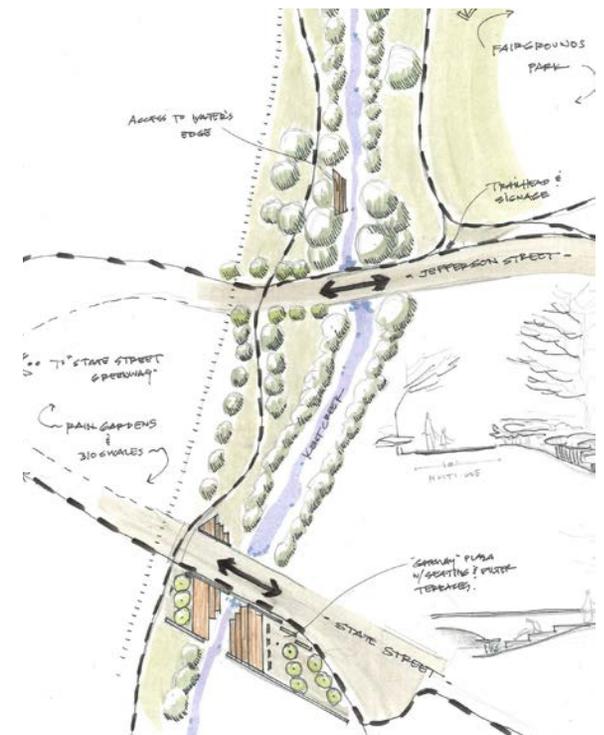
The “people” projects of our Plan are organized under our education, income and jobs, safe, healthy neighborhood, focus on youth, and community engagement and capacity building initiatives. Our emphasis on education involves working with our educational partners including Rock Valley College, Rockford Public Schools, Alignment Rockford, Head Start, YMCA and other partners to coordinate program initiatives, provide additional early

childhood education slots, and connect residents to educational resources. We will continue to work with the Rockford Police Department, Rockford Area Violence Elimination Network (RAVEN), neighborhood residents and other partners to make Ellis Heights a safer place to live and work. We will work with our partners focused on improving resident health and encouraging healthy lifestyles. Our income and jobs initiative identifies a number of ways to improve training and access to jobs for our residents.

## HOUSING

Rebrand the Ellis Heights neighborhood as an arts community of choice. Ellis Heights contains a significant number of vacant residential lots that could be converted into new housing, studios and businesses. The main focus of the housing element is on how RHA’s Fairgrounds Valley Apartments property and improvement and/or replacement of scattered site subsidized units can be used to spur and support private housing investment. Another Plan emphasis is holistically addressing foreclosure (from prevention to neighborhood renovation) through the process outlined in Rockford’s Illinois National Foreclosure Settlement Awards Housing Counseling and Community Revitalization application, which recently was awarded \$2.5 million in grant funding.

The strategic initiatives that we will pursue to achieve our vision for the Ellis Heights neighborhood are described in the following sections of our Plan.



The proposed Kent Creek Greenway would help to connect Ellis Heights to Downtown Rockford.



**STRATEGIC INITIATIVES - FOCUS ON YOUTH**

- Improve access to youth programming
- Provide positive role models and mentors
- Provide comprehensive youth guidance (home, school, neighborhood)
- Pursue long-term youth engagement
- Use creative/diverse youth engagement opportunities (community gardens, church groups, park district/sports programs)
- Emphasize education

Key: Sustainable  
Programs and  
Initiatives



Make youth sports more  
accountable re: academic  
performance of participants  
If you don't go to school  
you can't participate  
school any program in  
the game

Creative programs in writing, art, music and social skills  
 Tutoring facilities at Lewis Lemon School  
 Child care centers  
 Public waste cans decorated by local kids  
 Volunteer base repair program  
 "Fun Bar" program  
 NEED STASH PAID PARK FOR KIDS  
 ALTERNATIVE TO HARDWARE FOR SWIMMING  
 More jobs for adults for youth but adults

**STRATEGIC INITIATIVES - PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENT**

- 1. Build upon the New Urban Center Improvement Plan to increase a "Green Network"
- 2. Improve pedestrian, transit and bicycle links to the downtown and other destinations
- 3. Improve the quality and extent of the neighborhood walking paths
- 4. Engage residents and property owners in improving the quality of public housing
- 5. Make better use of existing vacant spaces
- 6. Improve public infrastructure (street lighting, sidewalks)
- 7. Identify locations for new community development

**STRATEGIC INITIATIVES - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- 1. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 2. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 3. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 4. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 5. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 6. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 7. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 8. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 9. Increase community participation in decision-making processes
- 10. Increase community participation in decision-making processes

# 05. STRATEGIC INITIATIVES.

The key to our ability to achieve our vision is the commitment of our neighborhood, people and housing leads and their partners to work collaboratively.

The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan addresses HUD's Neighborhood, People and Housing goals in a holistic manner, and fits into the Transform Rockford initiative. Congruency in these local and federal initiatives is important.

Many of the projects included in our Plan address two or more of the HUD core goals. We have also endeavored to identify small actions and catalyst projects that could be initiated even before our Choice Neighborhoods plan was complete. Rather than developing separate neighborhood, housing and people Plans to be implemented by different lead entities in isolation, we have chosen to let our implementation program evolve from the collective perspectives of neighborhood residents and other community stakeholders. The key to our ability to achieve our vision is the commitment of our neighborhood, people and housing leads and their partners to work collaboratively rather than in

isolation, ignoring the programmatic silos that have often limited creativity in the past. We have organized the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan around the following strategic initiatives:

## 1. Neighborhood Improvements

Improve the physical conditions in the neighborhood by directing public and private investments to key neighborhood amenities to enhance neighborhood image and stimulate future redevelopment.

## 2. Housing

Develop new mixed income housing, while protecting and upgrading the existing housing stock.

## 3. Education

Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand, which reduces impediments to learning, increases school attendance, promotes the use of community learning facilities – all of which increase academic achievement and upward mobility through the “ladders of career opportunity” model.

## 4. Income and Jobs

Increase resident employability, employment opportunities and neighborhood business opportunities. Foster an environment of arts and culture to cultivate the creative talents of local residents in order to help shape and move Ellis Heights forward.

## 5. Safe, Healthy Neighborhood

Improve connections between neighbors to create shared respect, understanding and communication, which help to connect residents to health and wellness services, build mutual respect and confidence in neighborhood ownership, and confront issues leading to neighborhood violence.

## 6. Focus on Youth

Establish avenues for youth development leading to lifestyle and learning opportunities that enhance economic opportunity and personal choice.

## 7. Community Engagement and Capacity Building

Create collaborative partnerships between city and neighborhood groups to encourage community maintenance, safety and investment.



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Most of the projects of our Plan were identified by neighborhood residents during the community planning meetings held during 2012.

Each of our seven strategic initiatives is addressed in a separate chapter of our Choice Neighborhoods Plan. An overview of the challenges and assets, desired outcomes, metrics to track progress, strategies and specific projects that will be pursued to advance our Plan are presented. Our vision and strategic initiatives respond to the issues and challenges identified by neighborhood residents and our organizational partners at the initial community and planning Task Force working meetings designed to identify neighborhood needs and assets.

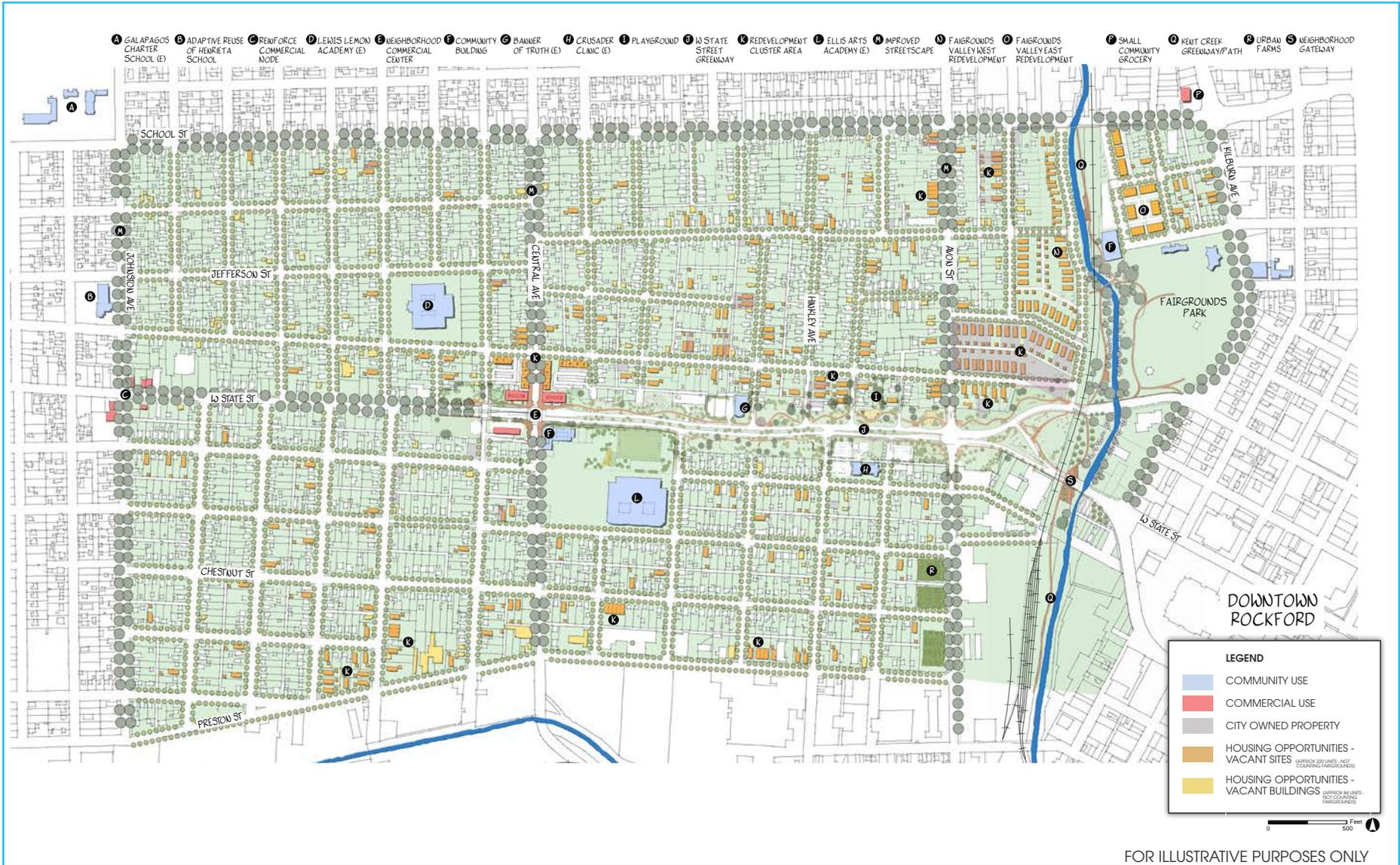
Most of the projects of our Plan were identified by neighborhood residents during the community planning meetings held during 2012. Residents were asked to rank proposed new projects through a keypad polling exercise at a November 2012 community meeting. Based on the priority rankings the planning team worked with Task Force members, City leadership, potential funders and other interested parties to identify organizations willing and able to take the lead on project implementation, as well as potential partners. Through discussions with our organizational partners we also identified a number of programs and projects that were being carried out by a variety of service providers that support the strategies included in our Plan.

Information on project sponsors, partners, potential funding, and implementation schedule for the projects included in the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan is provided in the project implementation matrix in the Implementation chapter of our Plan. We anticipate that these projects will be further refined through research on best practices and effective models being used elsewhere as they begin to be implemented. A description of the ongoing projects and programs being pursued by partner agencies that support our Plan are also described in our Implementation chapter. We have already learned a great deal concerning what works and what does not from the experiences of these partner agencies and expect develop much closer working relationships and collaborative efforts as we implement the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan.



Community residents and Task Force members helped to develop Strategic Initiatives.





## Neighborhood Plan Framework

# 06. NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE.

Improve the physical conditions in the neighborhood by directing public and private investments to key neighborhood amenities to enhance neighborhood image and stimulate future redevelopment.

Ellis Heights developed as a traditional urban neighborhood with walkable blocks and a mixture of different land uses including residential, retail, industrial and institutional. Manufacturing was generally located in the eastern and southern portions of the neighborhood, providing “walk-to” jobs for local residents. West State Street was the primary commercial corridor containing shops and services to support the local community.

There is an extensive sidewalk network, with only a few locations where sidewalks do not exist. However, in many places the sidewalks have deteriorated. At community meetings focused on identification of neighborhood assets and challenges, sidewalk improvements emerged as a major issue and planning priority. Sidewalks are an essential element of the neighborhood transportation network.

Over the past 50 years, much of the physical structure of Ellis Heights has slowly eroded due to changing economic conditions, community preferences and disinvestment. This disinvestment skewed the community indicators identified in the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) Vital Signs project and garnered attention for Rockford as a Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) Community. The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan seeks to evaluate the issues and opportunities of the neighborhood, and to identify important assets and anchors for redevelopment and reinvestment. As the community made choices regarding neighborhood improvement priorities, there was strong consensus that resources should be focused on improving the condition of the housing stock before moving on to sidewalks and other public realm improvements.

Planning for improvements to the West State Street corridor began more than a decade ago. Funding for reconstruction of West Street and development of a new linear park system has been secured, the necessary land acquired and construction is now underway. This project represents the most significant investment in the Ellis Heights neighborhood in decades and has sparked hope for resurgence of this neglected part of Rockford.

The neighborhood improvement projects included in our Choice Neighborhoods Plan are designed to build upon the multi-million dollar investment in rebuilding the West State Street corridor to create the places and spaces needed to accommodate commercial activity, programs and services that will allow Ellis Heights to grow as a vibrant mixed-income community. Some of the community facilities envisioned in our Plan are specific projects that emerged from the planning process, others represent long-standing improvement agendas advocated by Rockford’s 2020 Plan, Rockford Park District or other governmental entities. Neighborhood improvement projects envisioned by our Plan generally fall into the following categories.





Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Making better connections to Downtown Rockford and the surrounding neighborhoods is a goal of the Plan.

## A. GREEN NETWORK

The West State Street Corridor Improvement Project will transform West State Street by creating new passive open space and providing a more attractive gateway to Downtown Rockford from the west. Recognizing this significant public investment, our Choice Neighborhoods Plan recommends the development of a “green network” that will build upon the West State Street improvements to help connect other existing open spaces, schools and residential areas within Ellis Heights. The goal of the “green network” is to create an open space system where all Ellis Heights residents are within a 5-minute walk of a park, playground, garden or bicycle path. Recommended anchor projects within the “green network” include open space improvements at Ellis Arts Academy and at Fairgrounds Park along with the establishment of urban agricultural sites on large vacant properties along Avon Street. Smaller pocket parks and community gardens should be established on vacant sites throughout the community. As West State Street will provide the major east-west corridor of the green network, the Plan recommends a complementary north-south “green network” corridor be established along Kent Creek between School Street and Cedar Street. In order to provide safe, attractive pedestrian routes through the neighborhood as part of the “green network” the Plan

recommends focused streetscape improvements along the major corridors of Johnson Avenue, Central Avenue, Avon Street, Kilburn Avenue and School Street. The establishment of the “green network” will help to provide a framework and an asset for new private investment within the neighborhood.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood is currently both physically and psychologically disconnected from Downtown Rockford and the more affluent east side of the City. Poor sidewalks, an existing freight rail line, Kent Creek and various vacant and underutilized properties act as barriers between downtown uses and Ellis Heights. The creation of a neighborhood gateway where the West State Street Improvement Project and the proposed Kent Creek Greenway meet would help to beautify the area, foster a positive identity for Ellis Heights, create a more pleasant environment for people passing through and act as a gathering space for both residents and visitors, creating a vital axis for recreational users. The Plan recommends the creation of a plaza along both sides of West State Street that could act as an overlook to the Creek and a physical connection to Downtown Rockford. This plaza could contain public art created by local residents as well as space for outdoor community events such as farmers markets and job fairs.

## B. NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES

The Ellis Heights neighborhood currently lacks retail and commercial uses. Residents within the neighborhood are required to travel relatively long distances for many basic services, restaurants and shops. These types of uses previously occupied sites along West State Street between downtown Rockford and Johnston Avenue. With the implementation of the West State Street Improvement Project, many sites along the corridor will be dedicated as community open space, limiting commercial development potential. The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan recommends that new commercial investment be focused within three specific areas. The intersection of West State Street and Central Avenue is the traditional neighborhood commercial heart of Ellis Heights and currently includes a small retail strip center at the southwest corner. The community desires to see this area re-established as the primary shopping location for the neighborhood. New retail and/or mixed-use buildings are envisioned for the northwest and northeast corner of the intersection in order to create a local destination with daily shops and services. Secondary commercial centers should be located at the intersection of West State Street and Johnston Avenue and Kilburn and School Streets in order to serve the western and eastern portions of the neighborhood, respectively. The community has a strong



Kent Creek is a tremendous untapped resource for the neighborhood.

preference for a neighborhood grocery store at one of these three locations along with other uses including a pharmacy, restaurants and bank.

Our Plan also proposes a variety of neighborhood programs as strategies and projects intended to implement the strategic initiatives of our Plan. Apart from the local schools, the Lewis Lemon library and smaller spaces within various churches, the neighborhood currently lacks functional and flexible areas for community use. The Plan recommends the creation of new facilities as well as the adaptation of existing vacant buildings for community use. Rockford and Ellis Heights in particular have a rich athletic history. Fairgrounds Park was the principal site of one of the country's first professional baseball teams. As part of the Plan, the community has envisioned a new athletic and active recreational facility at the southeast corner of Central Avenue and West State Street or along Kent Creek near Fairgrounds Park. It is anticipated that this facility would be both a local and regional draw for fitness programs, organized sports and other events. The vacant St. Patrick's school building provides a tremendous opportunity to create a new Ellis Heights teen center. The teen center would be a safe, fun facility for young adults to congregate, learn and prepare themselves for their future. The teen center could provide spaces for a variety of uses including a recording studio,

multi-purpose classroom, art room, lounge space and performance area. Family resource centers could be created using portions of vacant homes in various neighborhood locations. Programming of the resource centers would be customized to fit the needs of the residents in the immediate area surrounding the center. The centers could provide educational, job training, health and entertainment services for all ages and could be constructed using recycled materials from other vacant neighborhood homes.

Many Ellis Heights residents rely on public transportation for their commutes, shopping trips and other excursions. Transportation improvements recommended in the Plan are focused on improving the usefulness, accessibility and attractiveness of transit for the local community. Currently, riders from Ellis Heights and the west side must transfer at the Downtown Rockford transit center in order to access locations on the east side. In order to better connect local residents with jobs centers that are primarily located on the east side of Rockford, the Plan recommends the establishment of a West State Street bus route that will provide a one-seat trip to major commercial and business areas east of the Rock River. Shelters and seating areas should be installed at major bus stops including Johnston Avenue, Central Avenue and Avon Street and sidewalks and crosswalks should be improved where necessary in and around these transit

hubs. The "green network" also includes additional transportation elements intended to provide new bicycling routes through the neighborhood along West State Street and Kent Creek.

The projects included under our neighborhood improvement initiative are organized under two strategies as presented as follows.



**Proposed Ellis Heights Food Market**  
image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture



## C. STRATEGY ONE

Build upon the West State Street linear park system to connect the neighborhood to the surrounding community.

### 1. Kent Creek Greenway Path

Kent Creek is a channelized stream running through the eastern portion of Ellis Heights and connecting to the Rock River just south of Downtown Rockford. The Creek is currently an underutilized resource that acts as part of a natural barrier between Ellis Heights and downtown Rockford. The Kent Creek Greenway improvement project is a unique opportunity to help restore the natural environment and to create a stronger connection between the West Side and Downtown. The greenway improvement project could consist of general creek clean up, the restoration of natural vegetation, the creation of a shared bicycle/pedestrian path and a series of small community gathering spaces. The proposed pathway would link directly to downtown Rockford and with the existing Mel Anderson Bike Path on the north which currently terminates near School Street. The Mel Anderson Bike Path connects several large parks, forest preserves and open spaces which are currently difficult for Ellis Heights residents to access. Establishment of

the Kent Creek Greenway would also help to connect the east and west sides of Fairgrounds Valley and to attract new housing to this portion of the neighborhood. As the major north-south corridor of the proposed “green network,” The Kent Creek Greenway would connect directly to the West State Street corridor and help to make Fairgrounds Park a more vital piece of both the local and regional open space system.

### 2. Neighborhood Gateway Connection

This project will use a multi-disciplinary approach to connect the neighborhood to downtown. Amenities include an open work space, commercial structure, park with music/performance area, playground, “life size” board games, gardens and market, and “heritage” sculpture to unify the residents and community.

### 3. Streetscape Improvements

This project involves construction of sidewalks where they do not exist and replacement of deteriorated sidewalks, street trees, benches and crosswalks along major streets to encourage safe pedestrian and bicycle circulation while also helping to improve neighborhood identity.

RHA resident youth preparing ground for urban farming.

## 4. Urban Farms Development

The neighborhood includes several larger vacant properties that could be converted to community farms in order to provide job opportunities and fresh food to local residents. These urban agriculture locations either become permanent neighborhood amenities or serve as interim uses until the market strengthens for housing or commercial development.

### WEST STATE STREET CORRIDOR PROJECT

The primary purpose of the West State Street Corridor Project is to provide an improved transportation facility along with linear parks on the north and south side of West State Street from the Kent Creek to Independence Avenue.

*Status: Planned in 2001, Currently Under Construction*

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

## TEEN CENTER

It aims to be a safe, fun facility for teens and young adults to congregate, learn, and prepare themselves for their future.

at the Lewis Lermon Elementary School and Ellis Afro Academy, the teen center will reuse the now vacant St. Patrick's at 40 and Franklin Ave. just blocks away from State St. and Central Ave.

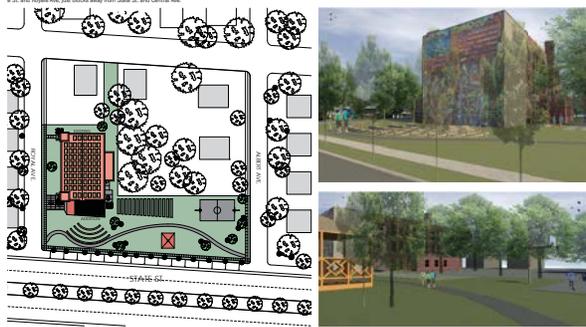


image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

## D. STRATEGY TWO

Provide opportunities for new commercial and community uses and link Ellis Heights to broader regional efforts to grow the economy.

### 1. West Side Grocery Store Development

Attract a full-service grocer to meet the needs of Ellis Heights shoppers, possibly through the use of an appropriate public-private partnership structure.

### 2. Neighborhood Commercial Center Development

The recruitment of businesses and development to appropriate neighborhood commercial center locations (consistent with City zoning and land use policy) to provide goods and services within walking distance of significant concentrations of neighborhood residents.

### 3. Neighborhood Teen Center

Acquisition and rehabilitation of the Old St. Patrick's School. The building will be home to the neighborhood teen center and New Mix. The rehabbed center will provide great space for education, performances, and local trade shows. The building currently includes a stage and gymnasium, kitchen, and eight large classrooms.

### 4. Community Learning Center

Establish a facility in the Ellis Heights neighborhood that can be used by a broad range of community service providers and neighborhood organizations to improve health outcomes, provide education and training, etc.

### 5. West Side Reclaiming First Initiative

Include the west side of Rockford in the ongoing regional sports tourism Reclaiming First Initiative to facilitate construction of additional basketball courts, soccer and baseball fields and activate currently vacant/inactive land uses. The Rockford region is a recognized leader in the sports tourism industry. Reclaiming First is about growing our economy, adding jobs and providing our residents with world-class sports facilities.

## NEIGHBORHOOD TEEN CENTER

The Ellis Heights Teen Center will provide spaces for a variety of uses. Chief among these are a recording studio, multi-purpose classroom, art room, lounge and stage.

Status: In Planning

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT



47 Auburn High School students participated in a charrette for the design and programming of the new teen center.



Proposed Commercial Center  
at State and Central.

In order to insure infrastructure, commercial and residential development meets the vision of the neighborhood a set of urban and housing design guidelines (UHDG) are being drafted for use by the RHA, the City of Rockford, and other neighborhood and housing project sponsors as these entities move projects forward. The UHDG will go beyond the aesthetic components typically included in these types of documents to include Healthy Homes and energy efficiency strategies and guidelines. It is the goal of the UHDG to provide a sustainable approach to redevelopment so that owners and occupants are offered the opportunity to reduce related living expenses and contribute to a healthier, cleaner, greener neighborhood and economy. These guidelines will detail the expectation for all development within the neighborhood.

## 6. Community Land Trust

Creation of a community land trust to hold vacant land and buildings for future development and/or maintain land control to ensure that properties remain affordable will allow us to manage the proper disposition of the large numbers of vacant lots in Ellis Heights. Vacant lots and deteriorated buildings are found in all parts of the neighborhood. The land trust will help guide development to achieve the goals of our Plan.

**PROJECT 10:13**

Multi-block neighborhood beautification project including both homeowners and renters focused on home repair, street and alley cleaning.  
*Status: June 2013*

**EARLY ACTION PROJECT**



**Blocks of Potential** 25% or more properties rated vacant to poor condition based on visual survey

# NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

Improve the physical conditions in the neighborhood by directing public and private investments to key neighborhood amenities to enhance neighborhood image and stimulate future redevelopment.

Desired Outcomes	Performance Metrics to Track Progress	Strategies to Achieve Desired Outcomes	Projects to Support Strategic Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The identity of Ellis Heights is enhanced through improvements to the physical environment.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights residents are proud of their neighborhood, take care of their houses and respect their neighbors.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights is considered an integral part of Rockford.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights has better physical connections to the Downtown and other employment centers.</li> <li>▪ Kent Creek becomes both a neighborhood connector and a local / regional amenity.</li> <li>▪ Fairgrounds Park becomes better utilized as a neighborhood amenity.</li> <li>▪ State and Central is re-established as the commercial heart of the neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ Vacant lots are used for new housing or as community gardens, urban farms or neighborhood open space.</li> <li>▪ Residents have improved access to commercial services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Owner-occupancy rate</li> <li>▪ Median home value</li> <li>▪ Number neighborhood-serving bus routes</li> <li>▪ Residential vacancy rate</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood-based community service providers</li> <li>▪ Number of vacant lots</li> <li>▪ Number of vacant buildings</li> </ul>	<p>Build upon the West State Street linear park system to connect the neighborhood to the surrounding community.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for new commercial and community uses and link Ellis Heights to broader regional efforts to grow the economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kent Creek Greenway Path – Creation of a pedestrian/bicycle path system along Kent Creek in order to provide public access to this important natural resource, improve north-south non-motorized transportation options and better connect the Ellis Heights neighborhood to Downtown Rockford.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Gateway Connection – This project will use a multi-disciplinary approach to connect the neighborhood to downtown. Amenities include an open work space, commercial structure, park with music/performance area, playground, “lifesize” board games, gardens and market, and “heritage” sculpture to unify the residents and community.</li> <li>▪ Streetscape Improvements – Construction of sidewalks where they do not exist and replacement of deteriorated sidewalks, street trees, benches and crosswalks along major streets to encourage safe pedestrian and bicycle circulation while also helping to improve neighborhood identity.</li> <li>▪ Urban Farms Development – Use of larger vacant properties as community farms in order to provide job opportunities and fresh food to local residents.</li> <li>▪ West Side Grocery Store Development – Attract a full-service grocer to meet the needs of Ellis Heights shoppers, possibly through the use of an appropriate public-private partnership structure.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Commercial Center Development – Recruit businesses and development to appropriate neighborhood commercial center locations (consistent with City zoning and land use policy) to provide goods and services within walking distance of significant concentrations of neighborhood residents.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Teen Center – Acquisition and rehabilitation of the old St. Patrick’s School to house neighborhood teen center and New Mix. The facility will provide great space for education, performances, and trade shows. The building currently includes a stage and gymnasium, kitchen, 8 large classrooms.</li> <li>▪ Community Learning Center – Establish a facility in the Ellis Heights neighborhood that can be used by a broad range of community service providers and neighborhood organizations to improve health outcomes, provide education and training, etc.</li> <li>▪ West Side Reclaiming First Initiative – Include the west side of Rockford in the ongoing regional sports tourism Reclaiming First Initiative to facilitate construction of add basket ball courts, soccer and baseball fields and work to activate a currently vacant/inactive land use. The Rockford region is a recognized leader in the sports tourism industry. Reclaiming First is about growing our economy, adding jobs and providing our residents with world-class sports facilities.</li> <li>▪ Community Land Trust – Creation of a community land trust to hold vacant land and buildings for future development and/or maintain land control to ensure that properties remain affordable.</li> </ul>



Fairgrounds Valley Conceptual Site Plan

# 07. HOUSING INITIATIVE.

Develop new mixed income housing, while protecting and upgrading the existing housing stock.

Approximately 60% of the housing stock in Ellis Heights was built before 1940. Only about a quarter of Rockford's housing stock is that old. Parts of the Ellis Heights neighborhood are well-maintained and in good physical condition; however, deteriorated housing can be found on nearly every block. The distribution of deteriorated housing contributes to an overall perception of neighborhood decline. While Ellis Heights is dominated by rental housing, most residential blocks contain some owner-occupied units. Of the 1,829 housing units, 65% are occupied by renter versus 42% rental occupancy for Rockford as a whole. According to the 2010 U.S. Census there were 375 vacant units in the planning area. The housing vacancy rate is more than twice that of Rockford overall.

According to 2006-2010 American Community Survey estimates only about 7% of Rockford's owner-occupied housing units are valued at less than \$50,000. In the Ellis Heights neighborhood prices

below \$50,000 are the norm. However, median rents in Ellis Heights are similar to those in Rockford; due in part to the significant concentration of Section 8 rental units in the neighborhood.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood has been particularly hard hit by foreclosures. This is reflected in recent sales activity within the planning area. Between 2009 and April 2013, there were 294 residential sales, only 31 of which were considered "valid" meaning that they were not distressed, did not have title problems, and were not foreclosures or short sales. The median price for all sales during this period was \$12,900, with the median price of the "valid sales" being only slightly higher at \$17,100. The recently awarded Illinois Attorney General foreclosure relief grant award (\$2.5 million) is intended to support neighborhood-based housing stabilization efforts through loan pool, housing improvements, foreclosure prevention training and mediation, housing demolition, and redevelopment and improvements to scattered sites in Ellis Heights.

The housing strategy for Ellis Heights is premised upon de-concentration of poverty and the creation of mixed income living environments. All housing proposals are aimed at creating housing opportunities that offer fair access to housing choices. And, all housing proposals incorporate to the greatest extent plausible green technologies and energy efficiency measures.

The residential housing market in the neighborhood surrounding Fairgrounds Valley is quite weak, especially for owner-occupied housing. Stronger demand for rental housing exists, including market rate rental housing. There are currently no market rate apartment complexes within the Ellis Heights neighborhood. As the housing market study of the neighborhood concluded, "It will be difficult to attract developers of new market rate housing to the Study Area until the low and moderate income units at Fairgrounds Valley Village are developed and fully occupied, and a new identity for the neighborhood is created." Consequently, the housing strategy of our Plan focuses on creating the conditions necessary to create a new neighborhood identity and address existing housing conditions.

## A. HOUSING STRATEGY

Establish a "New Housing for a New Neighborhood" program which advocates housing mix and new development in Ellis Heights to recast the image of Ellis Heights from an isolated community to a cohesive desirable neighborhood.



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture



Conceptual single family home designs.

This strategy has several focused sub-components that address rental housing, owner-occupied housing, vacant lots, and the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments (the target housing for the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods planning grant). The new City of Rockford Nuisance Abatement Ordinance will assist in reducing illegal and unhealthy behaviors in all housing products.

## RENTAL HOUSING

Rental housing includes market-rate rental units, scattered site public housing and other subsidized rental housing. The Fairgrounds Valley Apartments is the only large multi-family development in Ellis Heights. Most rental units are found in buildings originally built as single-family homes. Many of these units have defects that limit their long term viability. These conditions can be improved through a variety of programs, many of which are already in place.

Weatherization programs operated by Winnebago County, City of Rockford and YouthBuild will assist in help reduce energy costs and improve comfort. The Winnebago County lead-based hazard abatement program can be leveraged alongside the weatherization monies to increase the overall improvement to these units. Promotion of these programs will be done by direct market efforts.

Renovation programs are currently operating that offer landlords incentives to make unit improvements that also serve to improve the neighborhood and living spaces for all tenants.

## OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING

Current residential listings in Ellis Heights range from \$15,000 to \$60,000. The lowest priced houses have code violations, are vacant or foreclosed, or have been stripped of their fixtures. Low sales prices have discouraged many homeowners who would like to sell from putting their homes on the market. This has contributed to the conversion of owner-occupied homes to rental property.

Potential owner-occupants often have difficulty obtaining financing because banks are not interested in making such small loans because they are not saleable on the secondary market and may be impacted by usury limits. Potential buyers may need to pay cash or purchase a larger portfolio of homes to obtain financing. Low-income purchasers often lack money for a down payment, even if they could afford the monthly mortgage. Additionally, the cost of rehabbing physically distressed properties is prohibitive for most potential homeowners.

The Winnebago County, City of Rockford and YouthBuild weatherization and lead-based paint hazard abatement programs can also be used to assist in the improvement of owner-occupied units. In the case of pending foreclosures, the Illinois Attorney General Foreclosure Mitigation grant award is intended to keep people in their home. HomeStart mediation efforts are available and will be marketed to those in distress.

Increasing the percentage of owner-occupied units in Ellis Heights is an important long-term goal. However, significant progress toward this goal is dependent on the ability to establish a new neighborhood identity through the redevelopment of Fairgrounds Valley as a mixed income property and the acquisition and rehabilitation of strategically located foreclosed property for sale as affordable housing to eligible homeowners in strategic neighborhood locations.

## VACANT LOTS

Infill housing options have been analyzed. There are approximately 200 vacant residential lots scattered around the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Currently the housing market study shows little demand for new ownership units at market rates comparable to stabilized neighborhoods in Rockford. However, we believe that by



Before and after - scattered site redevelopment.

working toward a mixed income housing platform and building economic opportunities within the neighborhood, market demand can be grown over time. The first step in this initiative is to produce a small number of new construction units on strategically located vacant sites, offered at a steep discount to those who have the means to meet the mortgage requirements. There will be no maximum income limitation on these units. Units sold under this program may be encumbered by an equity sharing agreement.

## NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING PROJECTS

These broad housing improvement efforts will be supported by several specific projects that grew out of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods community planning process.

### 1. Illinois Attorney General Foreclosure Mitigation Project

The grant funding received under the National Foreclosure Settlement for Housing Counseling and Community Revitalization will be used to keep owners in their homes through a comprehensive foreclosure prevention and mitigation program target to the Ellis Heights neighborhood.

### 2. “Super CHDO”

Organize and build community capacity by connecting Community Development Corporations under one certified CHDO umbrella. This effort would build greater capacity in community agencies (housing focus) so that each entity is able to be more productive and achieve greater impact.

### 3. Rental Maintenance Program/ Housing Rehabilitation Partnership

This project is modeled on one operating in Springfield, Illinois and is designed to facilitate proper maintenance and improvements to Section 8 housing in Ellis Heights. Landlords would be responsible for purchasing materials for repairs, the RHA would undertake the required inspections and an organization such as YouthBuild would undertake the needed maintenance work.

### 4. Targeted Ellis Heights Mortgage Financing/Ownership Program

This effort would involve providing mortgage/financing assistance to encourage artists, teachers, police and fire personnel and entrepreneurs to move into the Ellis Heights neighborhood.

### 5. Enterprise Green Charrette Grant

Charrettes take into consideration the existing community context by using a holistic and total-systems approach to the development process to promote health and livability throughout the life cycle of the development. Holding a charrette at the schematic design phase helps developers establish green goals as early as possible so that the most cost-effective green strategies can be incorporated in the building and site plans through a Green Development Plan. This project involves securing funding to hold such design Charrettes to increase neighborhood use of green technologies.

### 6. Home Maintenance Program/ Renter Boot Camp

This project could involve a single program or sequence of classes open to any interested resident to teach basic home maintenance skills or more advanced home improvement training (Home Depot or other local retailers may be able to assist with classes on home repair and yard maintenance. A component of this program would be a tenant education program that would focus on the responsibilities and property maintenance obligations of renters and landlord.



Redevelopment at Fairgrounds Valley should be well-integrated with Fairgrounds Park and Kent Creek.

## 7. Infill Housing New Construction

Development of new housing on vacant sites throughout the neighborhood. The intent would be to cluster new housing in order to foster significant localized neighborhood improvement.

## 8. Infill Housing Rehabilitation

Focused effort to rehabilitate up to 85 currently vacant and blighted homes in the neighborhood. Includes both for sale and for rent options.

### GREEN STRATEGIES - Healthy & Affordable Homes

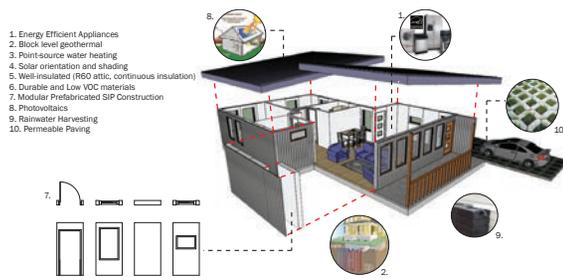


Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

## B. FAIRGROUNDS VALLEY TARGET HOUSING SITE

The Fairgrounds Valley project site is generally bounded by School Street on the north, Jefferson Street on the south, Lee Street on the east, and Underwood Street on the west. The site comprises 15.6 acres, and is previously developed. Kent Creek splits Fairgrounds Valley into two distinct sections, east and west.

The Fairgrounds Valley Apartments include 210 family units of which 208 units are occupied, the majority of them by single female head of household (98%). The development is home to 725 residents, including 476 children; 198 or 42% of the children are age 5 or under. The average earned income for working families at Fairgrounds is \$6,706 a year. Only 51 of the 208 households have earned income, representing 25% of Fairgrounds Valley households. One hundred eighty-nine families are in the extremely low income bracket (30% of median income), 16 families are very low (50% of median income) and three households are at 80% of median income.

Fairgrounds Valley contains structural, life-safety and design deficiencies that cannot be remedied through rehabilitation. The density of the development is not compatible with the low-density, single-family character

of the adjacent neighborhood. Fairgrounds Valley turns its back on the neighborhood; its design lacks defensible spaces and despite RHA, local law enforcement and other community efforts to reduce criminal activity, Fairgrounds Valley remains a dangerous place to live. Fairgrounds Valley is in an R/ECAP census tract, defined by HUD as an area of concentrated minority population and poverty.

Redevelopment of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments will advance RHA's goals and the goals of the City of Rockford by replacing distressed public housing and concentrated poverty with high-quality mixed-income housing that is well-managed and responsive to the needs of the surrounding neighborhood. Further, these activities will reduce racial segregation and overcome impediments to fair housing choice by employing regional-level housing strategies.

RHA is applying to convert all of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments replacement units to Project-based Section 8 under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program. The conversion would apply to replacement units on the current Fairgrounds Valley site and additional replacement units on two other sites located outside of the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Because replacement housing is proposed to be developed under a RAD application, these units will be contractually obligated to remain affordable for the initial 15 year compliance



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Conceptual single family home designs.

period. Additionally, RHA will commit that rental housing funded by Choice Neighborhoods will remain affordable to households earning up to 120% of Area Median Income (AMI) for the maximum extent practical.

## REPLACEMENT HOUSING PLAN

The Fairgrounds Valley site will be developed as a mixed-income housing development. RHA is subject to the one-for-one replacement requirement under the terms of its Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. The replacement housing plan calls for development of 270 units (210 replacement and 60 non-replacement units) on three sites. The designated replacement housing locations (including the Fairgrounds Valley site) are properly zoned for multi-family uses, which is the contemplated development type. The Fairgrounds Valley Apartments will be demolished.

RHA is under development contract with Gorman and Company, Inc. to build a 160-unit mixed income housing development on the Fairgrounds Valley site that will include 107 replacement units (53 30% AMI affordable units and 54 50-60% AMI affordable units) and 53 market rate rental units. The 103 remaining replacement units will be located on two sites that are in non-R/ECAP

census tracts and offer improved access to economic opportunities, community assets/facilities and supportive services. The Fairgrounds Valley site may be expanded to include additional adjacent property to further reduce density and accommodate replacement mixed income housing comprised of single-family and low density multi-family; including home-ownership and live/work components.

The proposed development will include fewer units than presently exist at Fairgrounds Valley and will include single-family units, which will help the development better blend into the surrounding neighborhood. Reduction of density of the Fairgrounds Valley site will be more consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The new Fairgrounds Valley development will blend into the surrounding land use pattern, be more walkable, have more “eyes on the street” (defensible space), and be more sensitive to environmental conditions in and around the site. The new Fairgrounds Valley will include the infrastructure needed to permit all housing units to have broadband internet connectivity – an important feature of all 21st Century housing.

Demolition will include deconstruction under the direction of YouthBuild, an RHA partner who has perfected a deconstruction strategy that drastically reduces landfill material and repurposes building material. RHA and

YouthBuild have partnered on multiple deconstruction efforts. One former Fairgrounds Valley housing building will be preserved as part of the new development. The building will not be used for housing, but rather will serve as a public housing museum that pays homage to the successful residents who transitioned to self-sufficiency and exited the supportive housing structure.

## 1. Resident Relocation Plan

Based on the Fairgrounds Valley Resident Needs Assessment completed for the grant application, most households expressed a desire to be relocated as part of the proposed revitalization plan. Residents were given three choices: 1) to return to a newly revitalized Fairgrounds Valley unit, 2) to move to another public housing unit, or 3) to receive assistance through a Housing Choice Voucher. The demolition of this site and relocation strategy is supported by the Fairground Valley tenant surveys; a portion of which is highlighted in the following section.



Existing views of Fairgrounds Valley.

Some improvements to Fairgrounds may require relocation. If you had the choice would you prefer to temporarily relocate or permanently relocate?

Temporary	<b>15%</b>
Permanent	<b>66%</b>
Don't Know	<b>12%</b>

If you chose permanent relocation, what type of housing would you prefer?

New Unit @ Fairgrounds	<b>6%</b>
Another PH Unit	<b>0%</b>
Section 8 Voucher	<b>77%</b>
Don't know	<b>5%</b>

If permanent relocation, would you like to stay in the same neighborhood?

Yes	<b>21%</b>
No	<b>73%</b>
Don't Know	<b>8%</b>

If you choose temporary, would you stay in the same neighborhood?

Yes **85%**

Once financing to redevelop Fairgrounds Valley has been secured, either through a Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Implementation Grant award or other financing source, all Fairgrounds Valley residents will have the opportunity to make a final decision on their housing relocation preference after meeting with a relocation specialist.

For any family, involuntary relocation is inconvenient at best and disruptive at worst. Some residents have lived in Fairgrounds Valley for years and have deep roots in the area. RHA recognizes the need to exercise great sensitivity in its relocation activities, and in the planning process housing choice was discussed. RHA will provide counseling to help residents meet their current and future needs for economic and personal growth and development. All residents will receive relocation assistance, housing mobility counseling and case management services. The planned CSS component includes a CSS Coordinator, three case managers who will assist with resident relocation, and full time drivers who will assure that relocated residents have transportation services to explore different housing opportunities.

RHA will conduct all local moves using a moving company at no cost to the household being displaced. RHA will coordinate and pay for all moves for households relocating outside the area with a Housing Choice Voucher as well. In addition, every household will receive a \$150 relocation allowance. All residents who are interested in receiving a Housing Choice Voucher will go to the top of RHA's HCV waiting list, in accordance with the Administrative Plan. Households that will be moving to the new and revitalized units will be housed first. Residents will be encouraged to consider and enroll in RHA's homeownership program if it fits within the context of their lives.

Currently, the case managers are helping to educate residents about the relocation process, as well as housing opportunities available to them, and help them analyze the pros and cons of various housing alternatives. Assistance will be provided in how to select the best housing type and neighborhood for every family. The benefits of selecting housing in non-poverty areas will be presented, and information relating to availability of shopping, services and access to transportation will be provided.

CSS services, which will be made available to all relocated residents throughout the program period, will include: case management, employment training programs



Existing views of Fairgrounds Valley.

through Section 3, the ROSS program, YouthBuild and Rock River Training Corporation, and the Neighborhood Network Center, transportation services provided by Rockford Mass Transit and RHA as well as health care programs and services delivered by partner organizations and coordinated by a health care ombudsman.

RHA will work to minimize the permanent displacement of the households throughout the construction and development process. RHA's Relocation Plan conforms to the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Policies Act of 1970 (URA), in both letter and spirit. The approach is based in part on RHA's successful relocation of 84 families from Jane Addams Village townhouses during a 2008-2012 redevelopment effort. The Jane Addams residents are still being tracked under this system, and of the voucher holders that are currently residing in the Rockford area, 44% are living in Opportunity Areas. RHA's Mobility Counseling program is currently staffed in-house and is fully operational.

## 2. Replacement Housing Unit Type

The 210 replacement units will mimic the current bedroom count. However, the functionality and livability of the replacement units will be modernized and contain amenities such as broad band access, in unit laundry facilities, microwaves, energy star appliances, passive lighting, a community center of sufficient size to allow

supportive living services and programmatic activities, community gardens and children's play areas (from tots to teens).

Unit mix will be presented in a variety of building types including single-family detached, low density multi-family attached, and low-rise multifamily product to produce the 160 units on the Fairgrounds Valley site. Included along the northern edge of the site, along School Street, incubator live/work spaces have been designed to meet the needs of entrepreneurial residents who are taking full advantage of the programs available to residents; including the FSS program for asset building. At project completion unit types and sizes are replicated 1 for 1, with more non-replacement market rate units introduced into the neighborhood.

Off site, the balance of units will meet the mobility needs of residents who expressed interest (as documented in the comprehensive needs assessment) in relocating offsite to be closer to specific education and/or jobs opportunities.

## 3. Affirmatively Further Fair Housing

While Ellis Heights contains a significant amount of vacant land, this property is found in R/ECAP census tracts (defined by HUD as areas of minority, poverty and low-income concentration and segregation).

Locating replacement units on these sites would be inconsistent with RHA's recently completed Poverty De-Concentration Plan and local and regional efforts to address impediments to fair housing and provide residents with greater housing choice. The intent is to reserve these sites for future market rate housing and/or homeownership models in order to increase economic, racial and ethnic diversity within the neighborhood in accordance with the vision created by community residents for Ellis Heights.

The reduction of the number of replacement housing units on the Fairgrounds Valley site will help to de-concentrate poverty in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. The plan to relocate a significant portion of the replacement units to non-R/ECAP areas will also affirmatively further fair housing policies. The Fairgrounds Valley replacement housing plan is designed to meet HUD's affirmative fair housing goals:

- » Economic, racial and ethnic diversity will be increased through the development of mixed-income housing on the Fairgrounds Valley site, and elsewhere in the neighborhood designed to appeal to artisans, entrepreneurs and other diverse groups from throughout the Rockford region.



Existing views of Fairgrounds Valley.

- » Many current Fairgrounds Valley residents have indicated a desire to pursue housing choices in areas of greater opportunity. The location of the required replacement units outside of the neighborhood and the use of Section 8 vouchers will allow this to occur.
- » RHA's recently completed Poverty De-Concentration Plan documents the need to reduce the number of public housing units at Fairgrounds Valley and locate the required replacement units in non-R/ECAP neighborhoods. The replacement housing plan substantially reduces the number of units for low income residents that will be rebuilt on the Fairgrounds Valley site. The total number of on-site units will be reduced from 210 to 160, with two-thirds being affordable at incomes of 60% of AMI or higher.
- » RHA will work to ensure that buildings and housing units incorporate principles of universal design and visitability. The conceptual site plan that will inform the detailed architectural plans and specifications was designed in accordance with LEED-ND requirements, which are consistent with these principles.
- » RHA's Poverty De-Concentration Plan builds on the regional Analysis of Impediments commissioned by RMAP as a component of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development, being funded through a HUD Sustainable Communities Grant.

### C. GREEN BUILDING AND ENERGY EFFICIENT DESIGN

Sustainability is an overarching theme of the Choice Neighborhoods program. RHA and its designated Housing Lead (Gorman and Company, Inc.) intend to comply with the requirements of the Enterprise Green Communities program in the construction of all new units included in the replacement housing plan.

Preliminary studies to determine the extent of green technologies and energy efficiency measures possible on the site were undertaken through a HUD Green energy technical assistance grant award. Technologies considered include solar, district heating and cooling with an on-site electrical generation station potentially fueled by biomass or alternate geo-thermal heating/cooling source. Final energy and technology solutions will be determined as the final development plans and pro formas are prepared and energy engineers provide final guidance.

“Walkability” is another measure of sustainability that focuses on the ability of residents to meet daily needs without access to a car. The “walkability score” for the portion of the project site west of Kent Creek is 54 according to walkscore.com, while to the east of the creek the score increases to 68. Both scores falls in the “Somewhat Walkable” range, with the eastern section

of the project site just two points shy of a “Walker’s Paradise” score. The conceptual site plan for the Fairgrounds Valley project site has been designed to create a healthy, vital, sustainable, walkable community that supports the needs of all its residents, and provides a high quality of life.

### LEED-ND ANALYSIS

The replacement housing plan has been developed to meet the requirements for certification under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) program.

LEED-ND requires that project sites meet a number of minimum criteria in order to qualify for certification. In addition to meeting the minimum qualifications, projects must achieve at least a minimum score of 40 points in order to become LEED certified. An assessment of the site and its components, relative to the prerequisites of LEED for Neighborhood Development, can be found in the following section.



## 1. LEED-ND Category 1 – Smart Location and Linkage

### Prerequisite 1 – Smart Location

Smart Location focuses on the encouragement of development within and near existing communities and public transit infrastructure. Projects are required to locate on a site served by existing water and wastewater infrastructure, and are required to locate on an “infill site.”

The Fairgrounds Valley project site is currently served by existing water and wastewater infrastructure, and is expected to satisfy the requirements of an “infill site.” Preliminary estimates indicate that the site is bounded by parcels that individually are at least 50% previously developed, and that in aggregate are at least 75% previously developed. Alternatively, given the site’s urban location, it is expected at least 75% of the land area, exclusive of rights-of-way, within a ½ mile distance from the project boundary is previously developed, satisfying this requirement.



### Prerequisite 2 – Imperiled Species and Ecological Communities Conservation

This prerequisite requires that project sites verify the presence or absence of imperiled species or ecological communities within their respective boundaries, and if present, develop an approved conservation plan or equivalent.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ Ecological Compliance Assessment Tool was used to determine the presence or likely presence of endangered species on the project site. Initial results indicate the likely presence of two at risk species within the project boundary, specifically Kent Creek. Species are identified as Black Sandshell (*Ligumia recta*) and Gravel Chub (*Erimystax s-punctatus*). Importantly, the project site was submitted for information only, and not as a formal consultation to ascertain the definitive presence or absence of said species. If the presence of endangered species is confirmed, however, an appropriate conservation plan will be developed, and it is expected that the project site will satisfy this prerequisite.

### Existing views of Fairgrounds Valley.

### Prerequisite 3 – Wetland and Water Body Conservation

This prerequisite is intended to preserve water quality, natural hydrology, habitat, and biodiversity through conservation of wetlands and water bodies. Projects are required to locate on sites that include no wetlands or water bodies, or are required to locate the projects such that land within a buffer area of wetlands or water bodies remains undisturbed. Additionally, all projects are required to comply with all local, state, and federal regulations pertaining to wetland and water body conservation.

The Fairgrounds Valley project is expected to satisfy the requirements of this prerequisite. While the site does contain a water body, Kent Creek, it is expected that any new development would occur on previously developed land, and not encroach further upon the creek, thereby not increasing the level of disturbance, and satisfying the requirement.

Conceptual single family home designs.

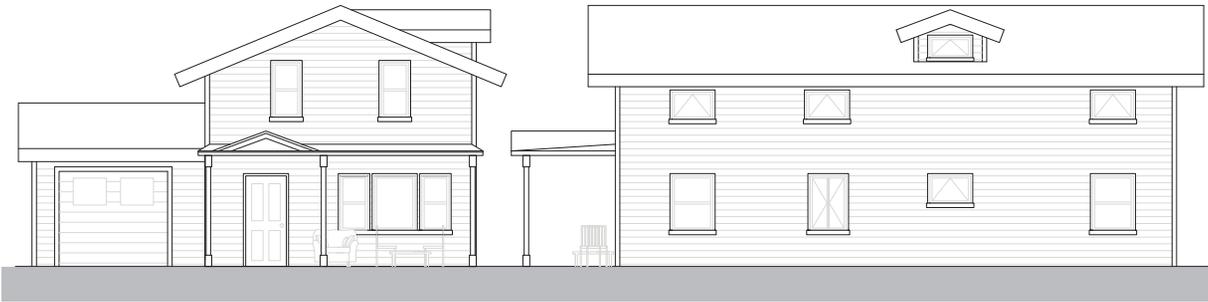


Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

#### Prerequisite 4 – Agricultural Land Conservation

The intent of the Agricultural Land Conservation prerequisite is to preserve valuable agricultural resources by protecting prime farmland and unique soils on undeveloped farm or forestland from development. Sites are required to locate outside of state or locally designated agricultural preservation districts, and are required to locate on infill sites, or sites without affected soils.

The Fairgrounds Valley project is expected to meet the requirements of this prerequisite, as it does not fall within a designated preservation district, and is located on an urban infill site.

#### Prerequisite 5 – Floodplain Avoidance

This prerequisite is intended to promote open space and habitat conservation, enhance water quality and natural hydrological systems, and to protect life and property in developed areas. It stipulates that project areas locate on sites without floodplain area, or otherwise on infill or previously developed sites where compliance with National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) requirements must be met for any portions of the site that lie within a 100 year high or moderate risk floodplain.

It is anticipated that the Fairgrounds Valley project will meet the requirements of Prerequisite 5, as it is located on an infill site, will not further encroach upon Kent Creek, and will be designed to comply with all NFIP requirements.

## 2. LEED-ND Category 2 – Neighborhood Pattern and Design

#### Prerequisite 1 – Walkable Streets

The intent of the Walkable Streets prerequisite is to promote walking by providing “safe, appealing, and comfortable street environments,” thereby encouraging pedestrian activity and promoting public health and safety. Requirements for this prerequisite include achieving minimum ratios for building height to street width, continuous sidewalk networks on both sides of the street for 90% of the frontage within the project area, limiting the amount of garage or service entrances fronting the street to 20% of the total frontage, and encouraging buildings to place a principal functional entry on the front façades of buildings facing either a street or other public space.

It is expected that the project site will meet, or adapt in order to meet these criteria. Currently, buildings front on public spaces, and contain primary functional entrances

that front the street. Building height to street width ratios will be carefully calculated, and adjusted if necessary to satisfy the 1:3 ratio specified in the prerequisite. Further, continuous sidewalk networks are provided throughout the project site, and though current sections of the site plan contain driveways leading to garage entrances, a solution will be reached to meet the maximum 20% of frontage being faced directly by garage and service bay openings. This may require interpretation of the precise requirements, an adjustment of the garage structures, or an emphasis on incorporating alley access to units. However the plan may need to be adjusted, the project team intends to meet the requirements of this prerequisite.

#### Prerequisite 2 – Compact Development

Prerequisite 2 is designed to promote livability, walkability and transportation efficiency by requiring increased density within project areas, especially if they are located within or near existing or planned transit service areas. All projects, regardless of location, are required to meet minimum density requirements for both residential and non-residential uses.

The project site will meet the criteria of prerequisite by building residential components of the project site at a density of seven dwelling units per acre of buildable land.



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Conceptual modular large family homes for Ellis Heights.



The site plan will be carefully analyzed and adjusted as necessary to ensure maximum density is achieved, in line with LEED-ND standards and the goal of creating compact, walkable development. Further, in line with the requirements of the prerequisite, non-residential components of the project site (if found to be lacking the density required) will be developed to meet the minimum 0.50 FAR requirement.

### Prerequisite 3 – Connected and Open Community

This prerequisite is intended to promote projects that have high levels of internal connectivity, and that are well connected to the larger community. It is also intended to encourage development to occur within existing, well-connected communities.

The project site has been designed to meet the requirements of this prerequisite. As designed, the internal connectivity of the site will likely exceed the minimum 140 intersection/square mile requirement of the prerequisite. Further, the project boundary, where possible and not prohibited by the presence of existing railroad and utility rights-of-way or natural features, will be highly permeable and likely meet the minimum requirement of one through-street or non-motorized right-of-way intersecting or terminating at the boundary every 800 feet.

## 3. LEED-ND Category 3 – Green Infrastructure and Buildings

### Prerequisite 1 – Certified Green Building

Certified Green Building is intended to encourage green building practices, and promote the design, construction and retrofit of buildings that meet LEED standards. It requires that at least one whole building within the project area be designed, constructed, or retrofitted to attain certification under LEED for New Construction, LEED for Schools, LEED for Retail: New Construction, or LEED for Core and Shell, or through a green building rating system requiring review by independent, impartial, third-party certifying bodies.

The project will satisfy the requirements of Prerequisite 1 by ensuring that a minimum of one building within the project area is designed, constructed, or retrofitted to meet the certification requirements specified. The entire project area is being designed to promote the core values embodied by LEED, and the construction of LEED or equivalent certified buildings is a critical component of the overall vision.

### Prerequisite 2 – Minimum Building Energy Efficiency

This prerequisite is intended to encourage the design and construction or retrofit of energy-efficient buildings that reduce pollution and the adverse environmental effects of energy production and consumption. It specifies minimum energy efficiency standards that must be met by newly constructed or majorly renovated residential and non-residential development within the project site, including ENERGY STAR or equivalent criteria for residential development.

It is anticipated that any new construction or major renovations would be undertaken with the goal of meeting or exceeding minimum energy efficiency requirements under the appropriate LEED program criteria.

### Prerequisite 3 – Minimum Building Water Efficiency

The intent of the Minimum Building Water Efficiency prerequisite is to minimize the impact of development on natural water resources, and reduce the burden on community water supply and wastewater systems. It specifies minimum water efficiency thresholds that must be met by new buildings, or buildings undergoing major renovations as part of the project, both residential and non-residential in use.

Conceptual single family home designs.

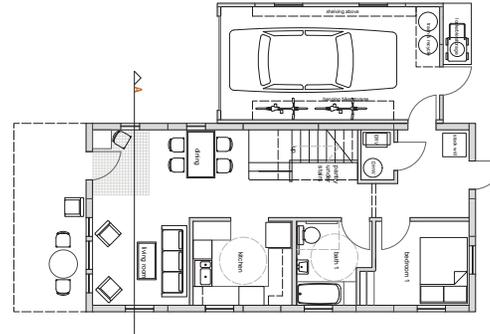
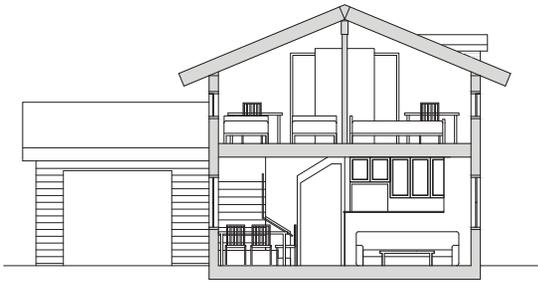


Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Any new construction or major renovation taking place within the project boundary is anticipated to meet or exceed the minimum thresholds established under the criteria of this prerequisite.

#### Prerequisite 4 – Construction Activity Pollution Prevention

This prerequisite is intended to reduce pollution from construction-related activities by minimizing soil erosion, generation of airborne dust and contaminants, and waterway sedimentation. It requires all new construction within the project boundary to implement an erosion and sedimentation control plan, which must list the best management practices being employed, must meet minimum performance standards, and detail how the project team will achieve a list of requirements, such as preservation of existing vegetation and protection of steep slopes, among others.

It is expected that any new construction that occurs within the project boundary will implement an erosion and sedimentation control plan, which will meet the minimum requirements of this prerequisite.

#### 4. LEED-ND Credits Likely to be Obtained

In addition to the prerequisites outlined above, a LEED-ND certified project must also achieve a minimum of 40 points under the credit system outlined in LEED 2009 for Neighborhood Development.

The table following indicates the credits that the project is likely to achieve, totaling 45 points currently, with a number of additional points possible; putting it well within the LEED certified range. Necessarily, there are component parts of the project that will need to respond to unforeseen circumstances and events during the development process, but the project has been designed to attain a minimum certification under the requirements of LEED for Neighborhood Development.



**LEED 2009 for Neighborhood Development  
Project Scorecard**

Project Name:  
Date:

Rockford Fairgrounds Public Housing Site

Yes ? No

**10 8 2 Smart Location and Linkage 27 Points Possible**

Y	?	No	Points	Description	Requirement
Y				Prereq 1 Smart Location	Required
Y				Prereq 2 Imperiled Species and Ecological Communities	Required
Y				Prereq 3 Wetland and Water Body Conservation	Required
Y				Prereq 4 Agricultural Land Conservation	Required
Y				Prereq 5 Floodplain Avoidance	Required
6	4		10	Credit 1 Preferred Locations	10
		2	2	Credit 2 Brownfield Redevelopment	2
1	1		7	Credit 3 Locations with Reduced Automobile Dependence	7
1			1	Credit 4 Bicycle Network and Storage	1
0			3	Credit 5 Housing and Jobs Proximity	3
1			1	Credit 6 Steep Slope Protection	1
1	1		1	Credit 7 Site Design for Habitat or Wetland and Water Body Conservation	1
	1		1	Credit 8 Restoration of Habitat or Wetlands and Water Bodies	1
	1		1	Credit 9 Long-Term Conservation Management of Habitat or Wetlands and Water	1

Yes ? No

**27 15 1 Neighborhood Pattern and Design 44 Points Possible**

Y	?	No	Points	Description	Requirement
Y				Prereq 1 Walkable Streets	Required
Y				Prereq 2 Compact Development	Required
Y				Prereq 3 Connected and Open Community	Required
8	4		12	Credit 1 Walkable Streets	12
2	4		6	Credit 2 Compact Development	6
3	1		4	Credit 3 Mixed-Use Neighborhood Centers	4
3	4		7	Credit 4 Mixed-Income Diverse Communities	7
1			1	Credit 5 Reduced Parking Footprint	1
2			2	Credit 6 Street Network	2
1	0		1	Credit 7 Transit Facilities	1
	2		2	Credit 8 Transportation Demand Management	2
1			1	Credit 9 Access to Civic and Public Spaces	1
1			1	Credit 10 Access to Recreation Facilities	1
1			1	Credit 11 Visitability and Universal Design	1
2			2	Credit 12 Community Outreach and Involvement	2
1			1	Credit 13 Local Food Production	1
1			2	Credit 14 Tree-Lined and Shaded Streets	2
		1	1	Credit 15 Neighborhood Schools	1

Yes ? No

**8 21 0 Green Infrastructure and Buildings 29 Points Possible**

Y	?	No	Points	Description	Requirement
Y				Prereq 1 Certified Green Building	Required
Y				Prereq 2 Minimum Building Energy Efficiency	Required
Y				Prereq 3 Minimum Building Water Efficiency	Required
Y				Prereq 4 Construction Activity Pollution Prevention	Required

8 21

**Green Infrastructure and Buildings, Continued**

Yes ? No

Y	?	No	Points	Description	Requirement
1	4		5	Credit 1 Certified Green Buildings	5
	2		2	Credit 2 Building Energy Efficiency	2
1			1	Credit 3 Building Water Efficiency	1
	1		1	Credit 4 Water-Efficient Landscaping	1
	1		1	Credit 5 Existing Building Use	1
	1		1	Credit 6 Historic Resource Preservation and Adaptive Reuse	1
1			1	Credit 7 Minimized Site Disturbance in Design and Construction	1
	4		4	Credit 8 Stormwater Management	4
1			1	Credit 9 Heat Island Reduction	1
	1		1	Credit 10 Solar Orientation	1
	3		3	Credit 11 On-Site Renewable Energy Sources	3
2			2	Credit 12 District Heating and Cooling	2
1			1	Credit 13 Infrastructure Energy Efficiency	1
	2		2	Credit 14 Wastewater Management	2
	1		1	Credit 15 Recycled Content in Infrastructure	1
	1		1	Credit 16 Solid Waste Management Infrastructure	1
1			1	Credit 17 Light Pollution Reduction	1

0 0 0

**Innovation and Design Process 6 Points**

Y	?	No	Points	Description	Requirement
			1	Credit 1. Innovation and Exemplary Performance: Provide Specific Title	1
			1	Credit 1. Innovation and Exemplary Performance: Provide Specific Title	1
			1	Credit 1. Innovation and Exemplary Performance: Provide Specific Title	1
			1	Credit 1. Innovation and Exemplary Performance: Provide Specific Title	1
			1	Credit 1. Innovation and Exemplary Performance: Provide Specific Title	1
			1	Credit 2 LEED® Accredited Professional	1

Yes ? No

0 0 0

**Regional Priority Credit 4 Points**

Y	?	No	Points	Description	Requirement
			1	Credit 1. Regional Priority Credit: Region Defined	1
			1	Credit 1. Regional Priority Credit: Region Defined	1
			1	Credit 1. Regional Priority Credit: Region Defined	1
			1	Credit 1. Regional Priority Credit: Region Defined	1

Yes ? No

**45 44 3 Project Totals (Certification estimates) 110 Points**

Certified: 40-49 points, Silver: 50-59 points, Gold: 60-79 points, Platinum: 80+ points

# HOUSING

Develop new mixed income housing, while protecting and upgrading the existing housing stock.

Desired Outcomes	Performance Metrics to Track Progress	Strategies to Achieve Desired Outcomes	Projects to Support Strategic Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public housing concentration is reduced on the Fairgrounds Valley site.</li> <li>▪ Mixed-income housing is integrated on the Fairgrounds Valley site and elsewhere in the larger neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ Homes are occupied and well-maintained throughout the neighborhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Total households</li> <li>▪ Concentration of households in poverty</li> <li>▪ Range of home prices</li> <li>▪ Range of market rate rents</li> <li>▪ Percentage of housing stock in poor-fair condition and vacant</li> <li>▪ Owner/renter occupancy status</li> <li>▪ Fairgrounds Valley on-site housing units</li> <li>▪ Fairgrounds Valley housing mix</li> </ul>	<p>“New Housing for a New Neighborhood” which advocates housing mix and new development in Ellis Heights to recast the image of Ellis Heights as an isolated community to a cohesive desirable neighborhood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IL Attorney General Foreclosure Mitigation Project – The grant funding received under the National Foreclosure Settlement for Housing Counseling and Community Revitalization will be used to keep owners in their homes through a comprehensive foreclosure prevention and mitigation program target to the Ellis Heights neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ “Super CHDO” - Organize and build community capacity by connecting Community Development Corporations under one certified CHDO umbrella. This effort would build greater capacity in community agencies (housing focus) so that each entity is able to be more productive and achieve greater impact.</li> <li>▪ Rental Maintenance Program/Housing Rehabilitation Partnership – This project is modeled on one operating in Springfield, IL and is designed to facilitate proper maintenance and improvements to Section 8 housing in Ellis Heights. Landlords would be responsible for purchasing materials for repairs, the RHA would undertake the required inspections and an organization such as YouthBuild would undertake the needed maintenance work.</li> <li>▪ Targeted Ellis Heights Mortgage Financing/Ownership Program – This effort would involve providing mortgage/financing assistance to encourage artists, teachers, police and fire personnel and entrepreneurs to move into the Ellis Heights neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ Enterprise Green Charrette Grant – Grant funds would be used to undertake a series of design charrettes. Charrettes take into consideration the existing community context by using a holistic and total-systems approach to the development process to promote health and livability throughout the life cycle of the development. Holding a charrette at the schematic design phase helps developers establish green goals as early as possible so that the most cost-effective green strategies can be incorporated in the building and site Plans through a Green Development Plan.</li> <li>▪ Home Maintenance Program/Renter Boot Camp – This project could involve a single program or sequence of classes open to any interested resident to teach basic home maintenance skills or more advanced home improvement training (Lowe’s, Menards or other local retailers may be able to assist with classes on home repair and yard maintenance. A component of this program would be a tenant education program that would focus on the responsibilities and property maintenance obligations of renters and landlords.</li> <li>▪ Infill Housing New Construction – Development of new housing on vacant sites throughout the neighborhood. The intent would be to cluster new housing in order to foster significant localized neighborhood improvement.</li> <li>▪ Infill Housing Rehabilitation – Focused effort to rehabilitate up to 85 currently vacant and blighted homes in the neighborhood. Includes for sale and for rent options.</li> <li>▪ Fairgrounds Valley Mixed Income Housing – Replacement public housing and construction of new mixed income housing that meets the community vision of multiple styles and income levels.</li> </ul>





# 08.

# EDUCATION INITIATIVE.

Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand, which reduces impediments to learning, increases school attendance, promotes the use of community learning facilities – all of which increase academic achievement and upward mobility through the “ladders of career opportunity” model.

Education is critical to 21st Century success. When Rockford enjoyed its heyday as a manufacturing center through the middle of the last century, lack of a high school education wasn't an impediment to a middle class lifestyle. Strong backs and a willingness to work were sufficient; strong reading and math skills were just an added bonus. That is no longer the case.

Nearly 20% of Rockford's adult population lacks a high school diploma or GED. The statistics for the Ellis Heights neighborhood are even more grim, and those for the census tract that includes the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments are worse still. While Rock Valley College has an active GED program, their staff has indicated that only about 35% of neighborhood residents have the reading skills required to participate in their GED program. They must first complete pre-GED classes to bring their reading skills up to the required 9th grade level. For parents who didn't enjoy academic success,

the connection between school and future employment success is often missing. This disconnect impacts not only their lives, but those of their children. With a large population of low-income renters, who move frequently getting kids to school isn't always a parental priority.

The impediments to academic achievement are many. Adults with undiagnosed learning disabilities find it difficult to pursue educational/employment advancement. Previous parental educational experiences may cloud their children's opportunities and outcomes. The application process for participation in various educational programs is often difficult for residents to manage. Required application information (school records, birth certificates, shot records, etc.) may not be available or organized. Parents enrolled in GED classes also often lack reliable child care. Residents don't feel connected to or trust potential service providers.

Rockford's Head Start Program provides door-to-door transportation and full and part-day programs. One of the assets of the Ellis Heights neighborhood is a Head Start center that is immediately adjacent to the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments. However, during the Choice Neighborhoods Planning process it became clear that very few Fairgrounds parents were taking advantage of this resource.

There are two elementary schools located in the target neighborhood. Lewis Lemon School serves grades K through 5 and is the designated neighborhood school for the Ellis Heights neighborhood. It is a 21st Century School, with afterschool programming operated by the YMCA. Lewis Lemon is one of several public schools with preschool classrooms. Ellis Arts Academy is also located in the Ellis Heights neighborhood and serves K through 8th grades. West Middle School is located outside of the Ellis Heights neighborhood and serves grades 6 through 8. Neighborhood high school students are assigned to Auburn High School. These schools all have substantial low-income populations, chronic truancy issues and high mobility rates.

In recent years, Rockford Public School District 205 has made great strides in improving its public schools, with an emphasis on schools with significant numbers of low-income students, supported by Alignment Rockford, the District's non-profit educational partner. The District recently completed development of a new Facilities Master Plan, which is intended to be used as a tool for potential expenditures related to maintenance of, and improvements to, existing facilities over the next ten years, as well as construction of several new facilities. Project priorities were established based on issues associated with building condition, educational adequacy, accessibility and energy efficiency, among other factors.



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Concept Design for a Family  
Resource Center within the Ellis  
Heights Neighborhood.

Among the more notable educational changes is the recent adoption of the career academy model that is being implemented over a three-year period, beginning with Jefferson High School. Auburn High School, which serves the Ellis Heights neighborhood, will adopt the academy structure during the 2013-14 school year. Academy clusters include: 1) engineering, manufacturing, industrial and trades technology, 2) health sciences, 3) business, arts, marketing and information technology, and 4) human and public services. Students in the career academy program will take a rigorous core curriculum as well as a three-year sequence of courses in which each student will earn a professional certification of college credit while in high school. Required 8th and 9th grade career seminar courses began being taught during the 2012-2013 school year to prepare all middle school students for academies and help generate interest and career academy participation, including Ellis Arts Academy and West Middle School, which serve the Ellis Heights neighborhood. A community education survey is being conducted to establish baseline information concerning parental commitment to education, length of time a student has attended the school and quality of the educational experience. This data will be used by the School District to continue its school improvement efforts.

Rockford Public School District 205 (RPS) is an integral member of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Planning Task Force and has made significant progress in improving educational programs for all of the students in the district. A partnership agreement has been signed by the executive officers of the RHA and RPS District 205 to help improve educational outcomes for RHA residents and work to achieve the goals of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.

In 2012, RPS initiated the Readiness Rocks campaign. The development and execution of this campaign came after significant administrative alignment and reorganization. The district has been readying itself to emerge as a high quality education provider and the community's education provider of choice. Under the direction of a new and progressive school board, the administrative team has been reassembled so that institutional capacity exists to carry the district's mission forward. In 2012, a new superintendent was announced along with key cabinet members to support the district's mission and vision. These strategies were consistent with the goals of the Visualize 2015 Strategic Plan. Other key components included - The Readiness Rocks focus on college and career readiness, the seven periods to success, 21st century learning environments, and preschool and college for all.

To strengthen college and career readiness, the district will create benchmarks for success that track the academic progress of students at each grade level. Support systems will be in place to help struggling students. Outreach opportunities, such as career shadowing and dual-credit college programs, will allow students to prepare for life after high school. Beginning fall 2013, secondary students will have seven-period school days that expose them to the arts, foreign language classes and advanced courses, giving students a more well-rounded experience. The longer school day will also provide additional time for educators to reach struggling learners.

The district and community have made a commitment to create a 21st century learning environment for students and staff. Board members approved the transfer of \$10 million to start the district's capital fund. In the fall of 2012, voters approved a \$139 million bond sale that will allow the district to improve schools. In the future, all children will have access to the district's early childhood program, a move that would allow students to begin developing essential learning skills at an earlier age. The Dennis Early Childhood Center will re-open in 2014, creating additional slots for students to participate in a preschool program that has been identified as one of the best in the state. Finally, the College for All Fund will become a resource that students can use, regardless of



### WALKING SCHOOL BUS

Pilot project at Lewis Lemon School. A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. Pilot shows reduction in truancy for 5 families. Expanding Fall of 2013 funded under the We Choose Health Grant.

*Status: Began in April 2013*

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

their economic situation, to pursue higher education. This effort received a significant boost when Judson University made a \$1 million commitment to the fund, Rockford College agreed to contribute \$2 million, and the district successfully led state legislation to make Rockford a Lincoln Promise Zone. From this legislation, an endowment for college tuition will be created and grown locally.

Of course this cannot be done alone. The successful passage of the Bond Referendum clearly shows the voters believe RPS has transitioned towards implementing its transformational plan. A key constituent in this effort is Alignment Rockford. Alignment Rockford is a non-profit public school support organization that employs a unique collaborative process to design and pilot tactical solutions in areas of greatest strategic need for Rockford Public Schools. Its mission is to coordinate community resources in order to raise student achievement, improve the health and happiness of our children, and advance the economic and social well-being of our community. Alignment Rockford has successfully bridged the gap between the public school system and the community it serves.

In 2009 a diverse group of Rockford's civic, business, religious and educational leaders evaluated how other communities have used best principles and practices to

improve educational outcomes. As a result a collaborative framework known as Alignment Rockford was formed. Alignment Rockford's goal is to engage a diverse group of public and private organizations in a cooperative and focused effort to support the academic and social needs of Rockford's youth. The program is modeled on the Alignment Nashville approach, which seeks to improve public education using the best principles and practices.

Four working committees have been established to work with children from birth through high school to improve educational outcomes. In addition to being strong advocates for the career academies, Alignment Rockford's efforts have included the Healthy Starts Talk2Me Initiative which involves conducting trainer workshops with all youth serving organizations to model pro-attachment behaviors and train parents around the importance of secure attachments and interactions with their children, so that children are healthy, feel safe and are ready to learn when they start kindergarten. Alignment Rockford Parent Engagement pilot project at Lewis Lemon school is designed to bring resources to parents during school activities to improve social and emotional learning connections.

Rock Valley College (RVC) holds GED classes at Crusader Clinic, which is located within the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Community referrals and marketing

are used to attract potential GED participants to a required orientation session, prior to GED intake testing. The emphasis is on making sure that potential GED participants understand the commitment required to obtain a GED certificate (being on time, coming to class, etc.). The objective is to make sure that drop outs understand that getting a GED requires hard work so that they don't become disillusioned when they find out that a GED isn't a "quick fix" to the lack of a high school diploma. RVC also offers remedial courses designed to bring reading and math skills to the level required to undertake college coursework.

Deconcentrating poverty within Ellis Heights can't happen unless middle and upper income families choose to move to the neighborhood. There are hundreds of vacant lots where new market rate housing could be built, but other Rockford neighborhoods also have significant pools of affordable, market rate housing. Top-notch neighborhood schools are essential if Ellis Heights is to successfully compete for middle income families. But no matter how new the facilities or dedicated and qualified the teachers, the schools will be judged by student test scores.

Projects included under the Education Strategic Initiative of our Plan are organized under two strategies.



Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand through the “Education as the key to prosperity”

## A. STRATEGY ONE

Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand through the “Education as the key to prosperity” strategy which:

- » Identifies and reduces impediments to learning
- » Builds neighborhood links to community job training and work readiness programs
- » Improves transit connections to learning centers beyond neighborhood
- » Develops and promotes the use of designated neighborhood-based community learning space/facilities.
- » Teaches life skills to adults to reduce adverse childhood educational experiences and improve parenting skills

The projects included in the Plan are designed to build upon the educational improvement momentum that has already been established. There is a broad array of educational resources available including a Head Start center in the neighborhood as well as preschool classrooms at Lewis Lemon School. There is a focus on engaging middle and high school students to prepare for well-paying careers. Rock Valley College offers GED classes in the neighborhood at Crusader Clinic and at its

nearby downtown facility. The challenge is to connect the children, adults and families who need them the most to these resources. Projects under this strategy include:

### 1. Walking School Bus

This project involves getting parent volunteers to be responsible for gathering and walking neighborhood children to school in a safe and timely manner.

### 2. Early Childhood and Youth Tutoring Project

This project will focus on the youngest children to position them to succeed in school.

### 3. Rockford Educators Consortium

Create an umbrella organization for all educational service providers (RPS, RVC, Alignment Rockford committee, Literacy Council, Workforce Investment Board, private schools, etc.) focused on identifying opportunities to coordinate/align efforts, develop common documentation requirements for program entry, a unified educational message to promote the value of education to all Rockford residents.

### 4. Life Skills Training

Classes would focus on skills like basic sewing/mending, cooking and other routine household activities.

## B. STRATEGY TWO

“Schools are for parents too” will emphasize programs designed to bring parents into the educational process.

The Plan recognizes that children need a supportive and nurturing home to assure an interest, commitment and successful participation in educational programs. Therefore, we believe that “schools are for parents too,” and propose two key projects to better connect families to the schools.

### 1. Family Literacy Initiative

This project focuses on educational activities (life skills, health, education, fitness) that require family members to work together. There would be an adult learning component and a learning component for children as well as intergenerational activities.

### 2. Lighted School House Initiative

Make use of space in Lewis Lemon and the Ellis Arts Academy for educational programming after school hours and in the evenings for educational programming.

# EDUCATION

Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand, which reduces impediments to learning, increases school attendance, promotes the use of community learning facilities – all of which increase academic achievement and upward mobility through the “ladders of career opportunity” model.

Desired Outcomes	Performance Metrics to Track Progress	Strategies to Achieve Desired Outcomes	Projects to Support Strategic Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students arrive at school on time and ready to learn.</li> <li>▪ All residents have basic reading and math skills.</li> <li>▪ All residents possess 21st Century skills.</li> <li>▪ High school students graduate from high school with career pathway choices.</li> <li>▪ College and post-secondary educational opportunities are accessible (cost and transportation) to adults and graduating high school students.</li> <li>▪ Residents access available workforce training programs.</li> <li>▪ Residents choose to live in Ellis Heights because of the quality of the neighborhood schools.</li> <li>▪ The neighborhood culture values educational achievement.</li> <li>▪ The educational system is easy for Ellis Heights residents to access.</li> <li>▪ Parents are actively engaged in their children’s education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Percent of children entering school with preschool experience</li> <li>▪ Percent of Fairgrounds families with preschool children that are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs</li> <li>▪ School attendance rates</li> <li>▪ Percent of Fairgrounds families with children attending high quality schools and/or schools undergoing significant improvements</li> <li>▪ Chronic truancy rate (% of students absent without valid reasons for 5% or more of school days)</li> <li>▪ Percentage of children who enter Kindergarten ready to learn</li> <li>▪ Percent of K-8 students meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math</li> <li>▪ Percent of K-8 students meeting or exceeding state standards in science</li> <li>▪ Percent of Auburn High School students who meet or exceed state standards on the Prairie State Achievement Examination</li> <li>▪ Percent of youth who graduate from high school within five years</li> <li>▪ Percentage of students meeting or exceeding college readiness benchmarks on the ACT</li> <li>▪ Educational attainment – percent of population over 25 years who are high school graduates or higher</li> </ul>	<p>Establish a positive and identifiable Ellis Heights educational brand through the “Education as the key to prosperity” strategy which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifies and reduces impediments to learning</li> <li>▪ Builds neighborhood links to community job training and work readiness programs</li> <li>▪ Improves transit connections to learning centers beyond neighborhood</li> <li>▪ Develops and promotes the use of designated neighborhood-based community learning space/facilities.</li> <li>▪ Teaches life skills to adults to reduce adverse childhood educational experiences and improve parenting skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Walking School Bus – This project involves getting parent volunteers to be responsible for gathering and walking neighborhood children to school in a safe and timely manner.</li> <li>▪ Early childhood and youth tutoring project – This project will focus on the youngest children to position them to succeed in school.</li> <li>▪ Rockford Educators Consortium – Create an umbrella organization for all educational service providers (RPS, RVC, Alignment Rockford committee, Literacy Council, Workforce Investment Board, private schools, etc.) focused on identifying opportunities to coordinate/align efforts, develop common documentation requirements for program entry, a unified educational message to promote the value of education to all Rockford residents.</li> <li>▪ Life Skills Training – Classes would focus on skills like basic sewing/ mending, cooking and other routine household activities.</li> </ul>
		<p>“Schools are for parents too” will emphasize programs designed to bring parents into the educational process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family Literacy Initiative – This project focuses on educational activities (life skills, health, education, fitness) that require family members to work together. There would be an adult learning component and a learning component for children as well as intergenerational activities</li> <li>▪ Lighted School House Initiative – Make use of space in Lewis Lemon and the Ellis Arts Academy for educational programming after school hours and in the evenings for educational programming.</li> </ul>



# 09.

# INCOME AND JOBS INITIATIVE.

Increase resident employability, employment opportunities and neighborhood business opportunities. Foster an environment of arts and culture to cultivate the creative talents of local residents in order to help shape and move Ellis Heights forward.

Rockford's unemployment rate has remained one of the highest in Illinois over the last decade. The percentage of Ellis Heights residents in the labor force is even lower. Fewer than half of Ellis Heights residents over the age of 16 are in the labor force according to 2006-2010 American Community Survey estimates. Median income for these workers is also significantly below that of the Rockford's median earnings. Median household income for Ellis Heights residents is only about 55% of Rockford's median income. A substantially higher percentage of Ellis Heights residents receive food stamp/SNAP benefits than is the case for Rockford as a whole. More than half of Ellis Heights residents have income below the poverty line compared with less than a quarter of all Rockford residents.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood lacks retail uses including grocery stores, banks and drug stores. However, based on typical retailer location requirements household income and residential

density are too low to support significant commercial activity. The West State Street corridor improvement project removed a few marginal business uses along the corridor. The improvement project will result in the development of a linear park system on both sides of West State Street, with retail uses focused around the West State Street and Central Avenue intersection. In addition to these areas, retail and commercial uses are identified as appropriate development types for the eastern edges of the neighborhood, including areas adjacent to the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments.

Income, jobs and access to retail services were repeatedly identified as critical needs by Ellis Heights residents. Education and access to job training are keys to preparing residents to succeed in the jobs that are available in the Rockford region. Rock Valley College has training dollars for certificate programs in three main employment areas: 1) transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL), 2) health care, and 3) manufacturing. Major employers are involved in helping to ensure that the curricula produce program graduates that can get jobs. However, entry into these programs requires strong reading and math skills. Contextual learning is emphasized, setting students up to be able to gain the necessary skills to secure employment and move up the career opportunity ladder. The intent is to work to make the certificates/degrees more "stackable." Also critical to helping residents secure and

maintain jobs are support services like reliable daycare and transportation. Projects included in our Choice Neighborhoods Plan address these issues as well.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood counts among its resident a significant number of parolees and ex-offenders. Finding jobs and training for these individuals poses a special challenge. One of the potential neighborhood employment projects that has emerged through discussions with our planning and implementation partners is the creation of a furniture building co-operative that would train ex-offenders and give them not only a marketable skill, but an ownership interest. To reduce costs (and save the City money) lumber would come from the ash trees being cut down due to the emerald ash borer.

While the immediate Ellis Heights neighborhood currently has few jobs, the downtown and surrounding areas have significant concentrations of jobs and businesses. Rockford's Economic Development, Education and Entrepreneurship Network (EDEEN) is focused on the improvement of Rockford's commercial corridors, including the West State Street corridor. It has divided Rockford into eight geographic/economic development zones and tracks the number of businesses, total employment, number of households, median household income, number of residents, and total sales tax revenue for each zone. While the zone that includes Ellis Heights



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

Mixed-use live/work buildings can provide space for entrepreneurs in Ellis Heights.

is in the middle of the pack, the zone immediately to the north is one of the strongest in the City. Strengthening connections to the retail and employment base of this zone would help to improve employment prospects for neighborhood residents.

Formerly a manufacturing hub, many of Rockford's keystone employers have left the city, ushering in a wave of high unemployment, that is especially evident in Ellis Heights. One of the benefits of having a strong manufacturing history, however, is that many residents have skills as technicians, artisans or craftsmen in trades that were once the backbone of the local economy. The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Plan supports the City-wide goal of giving residents the tools that they need to turn these skills into economic opportunity. Our Plan encourages and fosters the growth of the Ellis Heights neighborhood as an arts community, attracting new residents and enhancing the image of Ellis Heights as a place to locate one's home and business. The focus of the neighborhood as a center of cultural arts will help put Ellis heights on the City's map of key destinations. A cultural arts focus will help stimulate the neighborhood economy, bringing new jobs, entrepreneurship and commercial ventures tied to improved community service and creative arts economy. This focus will help to provide new uses for presently underutilized or derelict properties. This stimulus will provide learning, business

and employment opportunities for current neighborhood residents and attract a cadre of new investors and workers who will help to change the current Ellis Heights identity as a distressed neighborhood.

In August 2012, Rockford Mayor Larry Morrissey tweeted at Etsy's CEO, Chad Dickerson:

**"Since we need an 'Etsy Economy' has Etsy begun any partnerships with high schools or job training? We'd love to explore."**

The captain of the Rockford Etsy Team joined in the dialogue:

**"I'd love to see where this leads! Rockford Etsy Team is willing to help."**

This dialogue led to a unique partnership that will help Rockford build upon the creative talents of its residents. The Etsy Platform initiative is intended to help advance low-income residents into entrepreneurship by sponsoring classes on how to become self-employed as a crafter, providing mentoring and other support for these budding arts enterprises.

The Artisan Entrepreneurship project in our Plan is designed to foster a creative and community-based

economic development program that will 1) raise the visibility of arts and culture as a realistic and "do-able" approach to economic development, 2) identify and inventory creative workers, artists and cultural entrepreneurs who will shape and move the program forward, 3) reveal and utilize hidden talents and cultural assets held by the community, and 4) highlight spaces and places where arts based and creative economic development programming can take place. The project will work to further integrate community strategies to create new opportunities for arts engagement, appreciation, growth, pride and economic benefit.

These ideas are encapsulated in the following strategies and associated projects.





Larry Morrissey  
@MayorMorrissey



@chaddickerson Since we need an "Etsy Economy" has Etsy begun any partnerships with high schools or job training? We'd love to explore.

Reply Retweet Favorite More

1 RETWEET 4 FAVORITES

11:14 PM - Aug 30, 2012

### ETSY CRAFT ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM

A City/RHA Plan managed under the New Mix brand to co-create a Craft Entrepreneurship Curriculum, with Etsy's platform and marketplace as the learning lab. The aim of the project is to teach people that if they have a craft skill, entrepreneurship and economic opportunity are within reach.

Status: Begun in September 2013

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

## A. STRATEGY ONE

Develop neighborhood-based employment and training opportunities with special emphasis on an arts economy.

### 1. Ellis Heights Community Creative Assets Treasure Hunt & Development Project

The Rockford Arts Council in concert with Rockford Housing Authority will leverage existing relationships and multiple partner memorandums of understanding to elevate the potential of this initial effort. The results will be used to create a database of creative people who are interested in using these skills to increase income, teach, and/or mentor.

### 2. Artisan Entrepreneurship

Find, organize and promote and build capacity for the creation of handmade goods. Eventually merge the opportunity with the Business Mentoring Program.

### 3. Business Mentoring Program

Help new and existing businesses grow and thrive by providing training, coaching and other programs, covering topics like marketing, bookkeeping, customer service, etc. A special focus will be exploring creative business opportunities.

### 4. Preston Street Employment Center

Engage property owners along Preston Street to identify a location for a business training center hub and opportunities for future business development. This effort could include working with the Rockford Housing Authority and other eligible partners to implement a comprehensive HUD Section 3 policy and promote strategic employment initiatives. Preston Street, at the southern edge of the Ellis Heights neighborhood, is currently an industrial corridor with a variety of warehousing and manufacturing uses along with several vacant buildings and sites. In order to provide additional jobs within walking distance for local residents. The Preston Employment Center is envisioned as a location for recruitment of new light industrial, service or office

users as well as for the establishment of business incubator spaces. These incubator spaces could provide studios, work areas and computer access to neighborhood residents as they create new businesses. The Preston Employment Center could also provide space for local artists and craftspeople along with tools and other resources needed to foster creativity.

### 5. Micro-Lending Program

Build on similar programs that have operated around the country and in Rockford previously.

### COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

An effort to conduct a one-day session led by the Economic Development, Education and Entrepreneurship Network (EDEEN) of Rockford

Status: May 2013

EARLY ACTION PROJECT



The first graduation class for the Rockford Etsy – Craft Entrepreneurship Program (CEP). The four week program, launched on September 18, 2013 is designed to teach self-sufficiency and the entrepreneurial skills needed to successfully sell crafts and arts.

## B. STRATEGY TWO

Improve employment infrastructure and connect residents to the support services needed to secure and keep employment.

### 1. Business Apprenticeship Project/ Building Trades Skills Development

Partner with the Rockford Housing Authority, Rockford Public School District 205, Rockford Park District, City of Rockford, independent contractors, law enforcement agencies, labor unions and YouthBuild to establish a viable apprenticeship program for youth and young adults with a minority focus.

### 2. Housekeeping and Maintenance Worker Training

Develop an employment pipeline for positions in Rockford area hotels (modeled after CARA program in Chicago) through Rock Valley College & private training classes.

### 3. Center for Working Families

This program is designed to increase financial stability among low-income residents by helping people change their financial behavior by encouraging a long-term commitment to increasing income, decreasing expenses, building credit and acquiring assets.

### 4. Ellis Heights Daycare Center

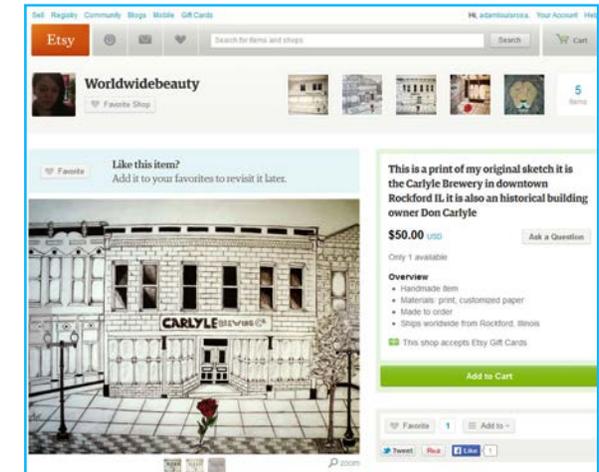
Establish a daycare center that meets the needs of working parents in terms of hours of operation, proximity to jobs, transit, etc.

### 5. Work to Home Transit Links

This project involves working with the Rockford Transit Agency to develop more effective ways to connect residents without cars to work site and shopping.

### 6. Ex-Offender Employment Initiative

This project would include assistance in working to expunge minor criminal records to remove employment impediments and providing a positive re-entry program for parolees and others with prior criminal records returning to the community and seeking employment.



Rockford Housing Authority Etsy Program graduate and Ellis Heights resident Jamie Kaspar's Etsy shop featuring original artwork.





# 10. SAFE, HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE.

Improve connections between neighbors to create shared respect, understanding and communication, which help to connect residents to health and wellness services, build mutual respect and confidence in neighborhood ownership and confront issues leading to neighborhood violence.

When Ellis Heights residents were asked to identify issues and challenges that needed to be addressed, stopping the violence and an affordable, quality full-service grocery store in the neighborhood were at the top of the list. Drug treatment centers and other amenities for successful living rounded out the list. The strategies and projects included under this initiative are organized around three major, inter-related themes: 1) creating a safer, less violent neighborhood, 2) access to healthy food, and 3) connecting residents to health and wellness services.

## A. CREATING A SAFER NEIGHBORHOOD

Ellis Heights has long been known as one of Rockford's most violent and crime ridden neighborhoods. It is home to large numbers of probationers, parolees and youth in or likely to join gangs. Vacant and boarded up houses contribute to an image of disinvestment and invite criminal activity. Shots fired offenses are frequent occurrences. Youth in this area are being taught to pick up the empty shells from the gun so the shooter can flee quickly before the police show up. West State Street and Central Avenue form turf barriers for youth that negatively impact participation in programs provided in other parts of the neighborhood. Improving public safety is essential, if Ellis Heights is to succeed in rebranding itself as a family-friendly and secure community.

The Ellis Heights neighborhood shares the same footprint as Rockford's West Side Weed & Seed area. For five years local police targeted crime and conducted a Drug Market Intervention program. This grant initiative ended just as Choice Neighborhoods planning process was beginning. However, the need for public safety improvements continued, particularly those focused on neighborhood youth. The Fun Safe Summer Partnership is a collaborative effort to curb violence that includes many partners who have been central to the Ellis Heights Choice

## SECURITY CAMERAS AT RHA PROPERTIES

RHA is installing 17 cameras at Fairgrounds, Orton Keys and Blackhawk. These cameras can record a 360 degree view of the area and pick up on fine details. The cameras are intended to add to a sense of neighborhood security

Status: July 2013

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

Neighborhoods planning process. These partners include: Rockford Housing Authority, Rockford Police Department, Rockford Fire Department, New Zion Baptist Church, Emmanuel Episcopal Church, St. Paul Lutheran Church, NAACP, Neighborhood Network, Northern Illinois Food Bank, Rock River Valley Blood Bank, Fifth Third Bank, Boys & Girls Club, Girl Scouts, City of Rockford, Cease Fire, Divine Divas and Dons, and Jeremiah Development.

The Rockford Area Violence Elimination Network (RAVEN) project is using a "carrot & stick" approach to ex-offenders returning to the community. Comprehensive support services (substance abuse counseling, education, job training & placement, etc.) are provided to smooth the re-entry process. Individuals who re-offend will be priorities for resolution in the criminal justice system.

The City of Rockford applied for a Byrne Criminal Justice Initiative Grant for an area that overlaps the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhood footprint. This grant would provide



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

funding for a comprehensive, proactive and coordinated crime-fighting strategy that includes prevention, suppression, intervention and enforcement to support neighborhood revitalization initiatives.

The public safety projects included in our Choice Neighborhoods Plan are designed to further multiple objectives. For example, our housing demolition will remove abandoned buildings that are often used as a base for assaults, drug deals and other criminal activity. It will also further our neighborhood improvement objectives and has been structured to provide employment opportunities by recycling materials and reducing the amount of material going into landfills. This approach will also help stretch available demolition dollars. Similarly, initiatives like RAVEN are helping formerly incarcerated individuals rebuild their lives and build employment histories to that they can contribute to the improvement of the Ellis Heights neighborhood that many call home.

## B. ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Efforts are underway to attract an affordable, full-service grocery store to serve the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Ellis Heights meets the criteria for designation as a “food desert” although there are several grocery stores just a few miles away. The relatively low population density and household income levels make it difficult to recruit a grocery store to locate in the neighborhood. However, this may change as West State Street improvements are completed, and new infill housing is built.

Because we recognize that attracting a grocery store to Ellis Heights may take time, we are also pursuing other ways to improve access to healthy food and improve nutritional outcomes. The Rockford Housing Authority is initiating an urban farming effort on available land that it owns. Community gardens are prevalent in many Rockford neighborhoods including Ellis Heights. A community garden has been located adjacent to the Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center for several years. Current rules require donation of surplus food to local food pantries. There has been considerable discussion about whether these rules should be revised so that residents, particularly youth, can earn income from their urban farming efforts.

Community markets could provide opportunities for local residents to buy and sell goods.

Development of an Ellis Heights Farmers Market can benefit the neighborhood in several ways. It could provide income for community gardeners. It can serve as a neighborhood gathering place, connecting residents with each other. And most importantly, it can connect residents to fresh fruits and vegetables. It can also serve as one of the venues for demonstrations and classes to teach people how to cook good-tasting, healthy meals.

### Material reuse examples



Materials from demolished vacant homes can be repurposed for creative new uses.



## C. CONNECTING TO WELLNESS

Health issues that confront Ellis Heights residents are not unlike those in other parts of Rockford. Diabetes, asthma and hypertension are significant health issues. Housing conditions and poverty impact health care. People seem to have come to accept chronic disease as just a part of life. There is no realization that people can make lifestyle changes to improve health.

Lead paint is a big issue in all older neighborhoods, including Ellis Heights. Residential units are typically identified when kids suffering from lead exposure are found through lead screenings (Head Start, Health Department screenings, well-child visits, etc.). The Winnebago County Health Department handles referrals, but few resources have been available in recent years to address lead paint issues.

Crusader Community Health is a community-based, non-profit community health center founded in 1972 that provides healthcare for all, regardless of ability to pay. Crusader Community Health serves the Rock River Valley area with quality primary health care for all people in need from four facilities, including the Woodward Campus for Community Health Care located in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. There is a perception that Crusader is

only for the poor, which is not the case. While Crusader is easily accessible from all parts of the Ellis Heights neighborhood and offers a full range of primary care services, people who can afford a private doctor often go elsewhere. Crusader's strengths include pediatrics, women's health and primary care. There is sufficient capacity to meet demand, with the exception of dental care. Dental care is provided for kids, but only done for adults on an emergency basis. Mental health referrals are made to connect people in need with appropriate mental health services.

The Rockford Health Council undertook a Community Health Survey that was completed in 2010 and covered Boone and Winnebago Counties. Surveys were distributed on-line, through business group and organization lists, 8,000 random addresses throughout the two counties and through schools with high low-income student populations, including Ellis Arts Academy and Lewis-Lemon School. The survey results have been used to help focus initiatives to improve resident health. Examples include the Rockford Health Council Changing Hearts project, which is being piloted in area churches including Banner of Truth in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Changing Hearts provides fitness and blood pressure screenings of parishioners. This effort should be expanded to other neighborhood organizations.

### URBAN FARM INITIATIVE

RHA expanded its urban farm initiative in 2013 and is looking to hire a farm manager to support additional agricultural initiatives on available land owned by the Rockford Housing Authority.

*Status: July 2013*

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT

Rockford is home to a campus of the University of Illinois Medical School. As the neighborhood began its visioning process, the RHA was approached by a group of medical students with a proposal to hold a health fair for Fairgrounds Valley residents. This project is continuing with follow-up health assessments to help RHA residents improve health.

One of the best ways to ensure good health is for people to be physically active. The linear park system being built as part of the West State Street project, will include an extensive pathway system, designed to encourage residents to walk and bike. The desire for a family fitness center designed to accommodate a broad-range of athletic programs and fitness classes was clearly identified during the Choice Neighborhoods visioning process and is one of the projects identified in our Plan.

Two strategies and related projects are proposed to be implemented in addition to the programs discussed above.



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

A conceptual Recreation and Athletic Center at State and Central could provide athletic activities for both local residents and visitors.

## D. STRATEGY ONE

Reduce physical impediments to safety and engage residents in promoting public safety and reducing violence.

### 1. Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds Police Outpost

This project is designed to help promote and advance geopolicing by locating a full police station in the neighborhood.

### 2. Housing Demolition Project

Demolish deteriorated and vacant housing using a new collaborative model designed to recycle materials from demolished houses to reduce the amount of materials going into landfills and make the dollars available for demolition activities accomplish more.

## E. STRATEGY TWO

Healthy Neighborhood Strategy to connect residents to appropriate health and wellness services to reinforce and improve resident life skills and reduce the presence of lead paint and other environmental contaminants.

### 1. Neighborhood Health Screening Project

Train neighborhood residents to assist with simple glucose reading tests, taking blood pressure, etc.

### 2. Lead Paint Remediation

Undertake lead assessment and remediation projects for rental properties within Ellis Heights.

### 3. Smoking Cessation Education Project

12-month classes as a precursor to RHA public housing going smoke free. Classes teach and support smoking cessation.

## 4. Urban Farming Project

Hire a farm manager to support agricultural initiatives on available land owned by the Rockford Housing Authority.

## 5. Healthy Eating Initiative

Work with schools and faith-based organizations to teach how to prepare good tasting, healthy food, provide health food shopping tips, and advocate/lead by example (ensuring that pot-lucks and other gatherings have good-tasting, nutritious foods). Cooking classes could be held at churches, community resource centers and RHA sites.

### HCIA GRANT APPLICATION

Award would allow RHA and its health care partners to implement a community-based holistic and collaborative wellness system that addresses poverty issues in the lives of public housing residents to improve health.  
Grant Amount Requested: \$5,400,000

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT



Image courtesy of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture

New open spaces should be designed to promote healthy activity and play.

## 6. Ellis Heights Farmers Market

Identify a location for a regularly scheduled farmers market at a neighborhood location. Produce could come from neighborhood youth and other community gardens, urban farms or other area farmers and would include taking the steps needed to allow the use of SNAP to pay for produce.

## 7. Residency and Associate Dance Project

Building on its very successful youth dance programs, the Rockford Dance Company will implement adult interpreted dance programs, including instruction in all forms of dance to adults of all ages. These adults will serve as “communal instructors” and connectors of the community to the dance company as a means to build interaction between both.

## 8. Family Fitness Center

Build a community center designed to accommodate a broad range of athletic programs and exercise facilities for adults and children, with spectator seating, locker rooms, and concession/café facilities that provide healthy food.

### NON-SMOKING PREPAREDNESS

Agreement with the Winnebago County Health Department for non-smoking preparedness for across the board “smoke free” implementation and other health related items. We Choose Health Grant - Kick off activities to move HA to 100% smoke free.

*Status: Begun on May 31st 2013 (World No Tobacco Day)*

EARLY ACTION PROJECT

### COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION - SMALL CITIES

Preventing and reducing obesity and increasing physical activity and improving nutrition, increasing control of high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, asthma and other chronic diseases, all shown to link to diet, and increasing child and adolescent health and wellness.

*Grant Amount Requested: \$500,000*

EARLY ACTION PROJECT



# SAFE, HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD

Improve connections between neighbors to create shared respect, understanding and communication, which help to connect residents to health and wellness services, build mutual respect and confidence in neighborhood ownership, and confront issues leading to neighborhood violence.

Desired Outcomes	Performance Metrics to Track Progress	Strategies to Achieve Desired Outcomes	Projects to Support Strategic Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ellis Heights is viewed as a safe neighborhood to live in and raise a family.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incidence of Part 1 Violent Crime per 1,000 residents</li> <li>▪ Percentage of Fairgrounds Valley residents reporting that shootings and violence are major problems</li> <li>▪ Percentage of Fairgrounds Valley residents feeling safe at night</li> </ul>	<p>Reduce physical impediments to safety and engage residents in promoting public safety and reducing violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds Police Outpost – This project is designed to help promote and advance geopolicing by locating a full police station in the neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ Housing Demolition Project – Demolish deteriorated and vacant housing using a new collaborative model designed to recycle materials from demolished houses to reduce the amount of materials going into landfills and make the dollars available for demolition activities accomplish more.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Residents enjoy good health.</li> <li>▪ Residents have good access to affordable, nutritious foods.</li> <li>▪ Residents are physically active.</li> <li>▪ Residents can easily access to services to support health lifestyles (drug rehabilitation, ex-offender support, domestic violence reduction programs, dental services, neighborhood-based health care)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Properties requiring lead paint/ environmental remediation</li> <li>▪ Travel times to grocery stores/ nutritious food via public transit</li> <li>▪ Percent of Fairgrounds Valley households with a medical home</li> <li>▪ Percent of Fairgrounds residents with health insurance</li> <li>▪ Percent of Fairgrounds residents reporting good physical health</li> <li>▪ Number of Fairgrounds residents involved in health support services and programs</li> </ul>	<p>Healthy Neighborhood Strategy to connect residents to appropriate health and wellness services to reinforce and improve resident life skills and reduce the presence of lead paint and other environmental contaminants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighborhood Health Screening Project –Train neighborhood residents to assist with simple glucose reading tests, taking blood pressure, etc.</li> <li>▪ Lead Paint Remediation – Undertake lead assessment and remediation projects for rental properties within Ellis Heights.</li> <li>▪ Smoking Cessation Education Project – 12-month classes as a precursor to RHA public housing going smoke free. Classes teach and support smoking cessation.</li> <li>▪ Urban Farming Project – Hire a farm manager to support agricultural initiatives on available land owned by the Rockford Housing Authority.</li> <li>▪ Healthy Eating Initiative – Work with schools and faith-based organizations to teach how to prepare good tasting, healthy food, provide health food shopping tips, and advocate/lead by example (ensuring that pot-lucks and other gatherings have good-tasting, nutritious foods). Cooking classes could be held at churches, community resource centers and RHA sites.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights Farmers Market – Identify a location for a regularly scheduled farmers market at a neighborhood location. Produce could come from neighborhood youth and other community gardens, urban farms or other area farmers and would include taking the steps needed to allow the use of SNAP to pay for produce.</li> <li>▪ Residency and Associate Dance Project – Building on its very successful youth dance programs, the Rockford Dance Company will implement adult interpreted dance programs, including instruction in all forms of dance to adults of all ages. These adults will serve as “communal instructors” and connectors of the community to the dance company as a means to build interaction between both.</li> <li>▪ Family Fitness Center – Build a community center designed to accommodate a broad range of athletic programs and exercise facilities for adults and children, with spectator seating, locker rooms, and concession/ café facilities that provide healthy food.</li> </ul>



# 11. FOCUS ON YOUTH INITIATIVE.

Establish avenues for youth development leading to lifestyle and learning opportunities that enhance economic opportunity and personal choice.

Creating a neighborhood where families want to live requires that there be lots of positive things for kids to do. These activities have been in short supply in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. There are few safe havens for youth and lots of opportunities to become involved in gangs. Lack of classrooms and other physical space within the Ellis Heights neighborhood means that there is not a reliable base of operations for youth service providers. The cost of youth programs also limits access. Youth service providers have limited resources, making expansion into the Ellis Heights neighborhood a challenge. There is a lack of consistency in the youth programs that are offered in the neighborhood from year to year.

Ellis Heights is full of children and young adults. According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey data 38% of residents are 18 years of age and younger. The youngest children (under five) are concentrated in the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments and in the blocks along School Street.

The importance of engaging youth in positive activities was recognized even before the Choice Neighborhoods effort began. The Fun Safe Summer Partnership began operating in the summer of 2011 to help curb violence in the Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds Valley and other high-crime Rockford neighborhoods. Events are focused around “old fashioned” ice cream socials held in the street, specifically in locations where drug sales or gang activity is or is deemed likely to occur. These events are designed to interrupt criminal activity with positive events. Events continued in the summer of 2012 and 2013 and the RHA is seeking grant funding to allow expansion of the program. This is a continuation of the multi-agency efforts to provide safe activities for children and families and deter violence during the summer.

Several other agencies have existing programs focused on youth. Rockford Park District’s Summer Program at Fairgrounds Park is an 8 week summer recreation program. The Summer School Lunch Program is an on-going project that involves participation in the summer school lunch program to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals when school is not in session. Parent Cafes currently operate at the Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center and include peer-led discussions for parents and activities for youth.

Moving forward, we intend to engage and guide youth in positive ways. One of the challenges that we hope to overcome through implementation of our neighborhood improvement Plan is the expansion of space for youth activities. While new playgrounds will be built as part of the West State Street corridor linear park system, other facilities are also needed to house a variety of programs and services to engage youth. In the meantime we are committed to creatively working with what is available to ensure that the youth that make up such a large part of our neighborhood make good choices and are excited by the opportunities open to them.

## COPS N’ BOBBERS PROGRAM

Cops n Bobbers is dedicated to the mission of bringing local kids, the Rockford Police, and the community together in outdoor events that are educational and fun.

*Status: July 2013*

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT



ArtsPlace is an innovative program that provides Rockford area youth ages 14-18 with job training in the arts.

## A. STRATEGY ONE

Provide a central gathering place/physical anchor within Ellis Heights that serves as a hub for youth programming and connections to similar hubs in other parts of Rockford.

### 1. Neighborhood Teen Center Programming

This project involves working with youth service providers and Auburn High School students in a collaborative process to design and program the new Ellis Heights Teen Center that will be housed in the old St. Patrick's school that has been purchased by RHA.

### 2. Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club

Establish a location for a Boys & Girls Club to serve Fairgrounds & Ellis Heights youth. Currently working with Youth Services Network to design the after-school program.

### 3. Neighborhood Youth Garden Project

Community garden rules would be changed to allow youth engaged in urban agriculture and earn money by selling their produce.

## B. STRATEGY TWO

Develop neighborhood leaders (adult and youth) who can work together to create a culture of respect.

### 1. Youth Mentorship Program

Develop coordinated mentorship initiatives that can be implemented by organizations serving neighborhood youth including Rockford Police Department youth academies, Rockford Area Arts Council – ArtsPlace, YMCA hoop school, Rockford Park District fall football and other youth sports.

### 2. ArtsPlace

ArtsPlace provides Rockford area youth with job training in the arts and has expanded in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. The “artist apprentices” work in teams under the guidance of professional teaching artists, selected with care by the Arts Council for their talent and ability to form positive working relationships with young people. ArtsPlace photo caption – Young artists engaged in the ArtsPlace program.



As part of the Inside Out project, RHA used photos of Rockford children to promote belief in Rockford, in the promise of tomorrow the promise of peace, and the promise of an end to violence. Posted on the exterior of the neighborhood teen center.

# FOCUS ON YOUTH

Establish avenues for youth development leading to lifestyle and learning opportunities that enhance economic opportunity and personal choice.

Desired Outcomes	Performance Metrics to Track Progress	Strategies to Achieve Desired Outcomes	Projects to Support Strategic Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local service providers collaborate to develop sustainable solutions to youth engagement.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights youth participate in activities with youth from other Rockford neighborhoods on a regular basis.</li> <li>▪ Youth have positive role models and mentors within the neighborhood.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood youth make good choices.</li> <li>▪ Youth are excited about opportunities for their future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School attendance rates</li> <li>▪ Chronic truancy rate (% of students absent without valid reasons for 5% or more of school days)</li> <li>▪ Youth involvement in the juvenile justice system</li> </ul>	<p>Provide a central gathering place/ physical anchor within Ellis Heights that serves as a hub for youth programming and connections to similar hubs in other parts of Rockford.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop neighborhood leaders (adult and youth) who can work together to create a culture of respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighborhood Teen Center Programming - This project involves working with youth service providers and Auburn High School students in a collaborative process to design and program the new Ellis Heights Teen Center that will be housed in the old St. Patrick's school that has been purchased by RHA.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Boys &amp; Girls Club – Establish a location for a Boys &amp; Girls Club to serve Fairgrounds &amp; Ellis Heights youth.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Youth Garden Project – Community garden rules would be changed to allow youth engaged in urban agriculture and earn money by selling their produce. Currently working with Youth Services Network to design the after school program.</li> <li>▪ Youth Mentorship Program – Develop coordinated mentorship initiatives that can be implemented by organizations serving neighborhood youth including Rockford Police Department youth academies, Rockford Area Arts Council – ArtsPlace, YMCA hoop school, Rockford Park District fall football and other youth sports.</li> </ul>



# 12. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE.

Create collaborative partnerships between city and neighborhood groups to encourage community maintenance, safety and investment.

At the start of the Choice Neighborhoods Planning process, there were few neighborhood groups in Ellis Heights. The Weed & Seed grant that had sponsored neighborhood meetings was ending. Fairgrounds residents did not have a residents council and few city-wide groups were targeting their programs to Ellis Heights, even though there was broad consensus that this was a broken neighborhood. Slowly, but steadily through the development of our Choice Neighborhoods Plan this dynamic is changing. Still, much more needs to be done.

The West Side Weed & Seed effort that preceded Choice Neighborhood Planning included a staff person charged with working with neighborhood residents. Even without staff support a few neighborhood residents continued to meet encouraged by the Neighborhood Network. This non-profit corporation serves Rockford and adjacent unincorporated areas. The organization provides a variety of assistance to neighborhood

groups in helping them get to the next step (securing grants, bringing in speaker, producing workshops, coordinating community gardens, gardener classes, working with police to coordinate neighborhood watch groups). The West Gateway Coalition organization is the current incarnation of the old Ellis Heights Weed & Seed neighborhood group. The organization has established a board, bylaws and a bank account.

Other organizations and neighborhood groups that were in their inception when the Choice Neighborhood Planning process began have evolved and grown. Examples include the Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center, which is housed in the basement of Banner of Truth International. Several organizations use space at the Joyner Center including the Northwest Community Center satellite computer lab, a variety of life skills classes and programs for youth, workforce connections, case management, Rockford Sexual Assault Council, and other organizations as space and scheduling permit.

The high percentage of renters in Ellis Heights makes it difficult to “know your neighbors” and establish neighborhood-based organizations. However, even this dynamic has begun to change. Project 10:13 – Saving Blaisdell Street is a neighborhood beautification project that involves home repair as well as street and alley

cleaning. This effort started with a few homeowners on Blaisdell Street. With the momentum of the Choice Neighborhoods planning process and support from the West Gateway Coalition, New Zion Church and Rock Church, this project has grown into a multi-block beautification project including both homeowners and renters.

The Fairgrounds Valley Resident Council is a newly formed group that grew out of the Choice Neighborhoods planning process. The Resident Council is in the process of identifying programs activities and projects for residents of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments. Early in the Planning process a resident survey was undertaken to identify issues and concerns and encourage resident involvement in crafting our Choice Neighborhoods Plan. As a result of the needs identified, a resident health fair sponsored by students at Rockford’s University of Illinois Medical School and “Week of Possibilities” fair at Fairgrounds Valley Head Start to promote information about education and employment opportunities were held to connect residents to available resources. A more comprehensive resident needs assessment was also completed that will help guide implementation of the housing strategy and ensure that the relocation strategy meets resident needs.



The strategies and projects included under this initiative are designed to support and expand the capacity of neighborhood residents to lead neighborhood improvement efforts. From the start of our planning effort, we have recognized the importance of having committed homeowners involved in the process. Because Ellis Heights is currently dominated by rental housing, one of the metrics of our Choice Neighborhood Plan is to increase the number of homeowners. As is being demonstrated by efforts such as Project 10:13 – Saving Blaisdell Street, homeowners are in a unique position to help engage and mentor renters ways that absentee landlords cannot.



Creating community connections will help to establish lasting relationships that will lead to neighborhood improvements.

## A. STRATEGY ONE

Engage residents in providing solutions to problems in the neighborhood.

### 1. Ellis Heights Block Club Creation/ Block Club Association

Establish block clubs in all parts of the neighborhood and form an umbrella group to coordinate activities. This organization could convene a quarterly community meeting program to review and coordinate the strategies and projects proposed through the Plan.

### 2. Neighborhood Leadership Training

Identify neighborhood residents interested in becoming more active in the community and providing periodic programs and training events to enable them to develop new communication, conflict resolution and other leadership skills.

### 3. Ellis Heights Community Service Project Coalition

Identify service projects that could be undertaken by student groups, churches or other organizations to improve the Ellis Heights neighborhood (clean-up, beautification, etc.).

## B. STRATEGY TWO

Develop collaborative partnerships to promote Ellis Heights and attract homebuyers.

### 1. Neighborhood Welcome Initiative

Recruit volunteers who would welcome new residents with an information packet that could include requirements for enrolling kids in school, Head Start and Park District programs, brochures on the services provided at Crusader Clinic, Joyner Resource Center, etc., and invitations to join the neighborhood block club and West Gateway Coalition, etc.

#### WEEK OF POSSIBILITIES FAIR

A Head Start program to promote information about education and employment.

*Status: Conducted in March 2013*

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT

#### ACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

A program at Fairgrounds Valley which aims to encourage healthy behaviors through education and interaction. Conducted by University of Illinois School of Medicine and supported by Rockford Health Council.

*Status: Ongoing*

EARLY ACTION  
PROJECT

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CAPACITY BUILDING

Create collaborative partnerships between city and neighborhood groups to encourage community maintenance, safety and investment.

Desired Outcomes	Performance Metrics to Track Progress	Strategies to Achieve Desired Outcomes	Projects to Support Strategic Initiative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ellis Heights has strong and active neighborhood leadership.</li> <li>▪ Support for successful living is readily available.</li> <li>▪ Residents are respectful of their neighbors.</li> <li>▪ Tenants have the skills and resources to take care of their homes/yards.</li> <li>▪ Parents are engaged in the education/growth of their children.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights has a substantial number of homeowners (with a goal of 3 to 4 owners on e every block).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Neighborhood organization membership</li> <li>▪ Overall visual quality and conditions in the neighborhood</li> <li>▪ Home ownership rate</li> </ul>	<p>Engage residents in providing solutions to problems in the neighborhood.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop collaborative partnerships to promote Ellis Heights and attract homebuyers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ellis Heights Block Club Creation/Block Club Association – Establish block clubs in all parts of the neighborhood and form an umbrella group to coordinate activities. This organization could convene a quarterly community meeting program to review and coordinate the strategies and projects proposed through the Plan.</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Leadership Training– Identify neighborhood residents interested in becoming more active in the community and providing periodic programs and training events to enable them to develop new communication, conflict resolution and other leadership skills.</li> <li>▪ Ellis Heights Community Service Project Coalition –Identify service projects that could be undertaken by student groups, churches or other organizations to improve the Ellis Heights neighborhood (clean-up, beautification, etc.).</li> <li>▪ Neighborhood Welcome Initiative – Recruit volunteers who would welcome new residents with an information packet that could include requirements for enrolling kids in school, Head Start and Park District programs, brochures on the services provided at Crusader Clinic, Joyner Resource Center, etc., and invitations to join the neighborhood block club and West Gateway Coalition, etc.</li> </ul>



# 13. IMPLEMENTATION.

The projects included in the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhood represent a comprehensive approach to neighborhood revitalization that addresses the core goals of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative: Housing, People and Neighborhood.

The projects included in the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhood Plan represent a comprehensive approach to neighborhood revitalization that addresses the core goals of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative: Housing, People and Neighborhood. The preceding chapters of our Plan described the projects included under each of our seven strategic initiatives, desired outcomes and the metrics that can be used to monitor progress. Implementation of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan is built on collaborative partnerships that address issues that have been identified both by neighborhood residents and the organizations that have been working to address these needs.

It has become increasingly clear that tackling challenges one at a time is not a recipe for success. The planning process allowed us to strengthen existing relationships and forge new ones that will lead to a new beginning for Fairgrounds Valley,

its residents and the Ellis Heights Neighborhood. Our partners are committed to establishing a long-term governance structure that is consistent with RMAP's Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. Toward this end RHA has created a new staff position with responsibilities related to implementation of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.

## A. PROJECT COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE

Governance and accountability for the Transformation Plan will be held under a newly formed Westside CDC, a community-based (L3C) business focused on physical, economic and educational development throughout the community resulting in expanded employment, economic prosperity and housing opportunities for all. The governance structure will be modeled after the International Finance Council's recommendation for good governance. "Good governance connotes acting with responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency. Transparency has a withering effect on misconduct and is absolutely critical in communicating to stakeholders any decisions of the board. In this context, transparency demands that the communications consist of substance over form and contain positive and negative aspects, if any." (IFC - World Bank Group, 2012)

In addition to monitoring, reporting and adapting to the data (and outcomes) monitored and implemented as part of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan, self assessment of the CDC will be developed based and then rated by the BaSICS measurements. The guide attempts to check the coherence of the structure with the board conduct and its continuous improvement processes. Questions are prepared to consider whether in each dimension a proper tone is set at the top; an effective information provision process is established; and a proper process is in place for appropriate guidance and adequate oversight. Furthermore, the developments on these issues both over time and in comparison to benchmarks are considered (IFC - World Bank Group, 2012). The CDC governing board will include initiative partners, data monitors and key service delivery agencies that respond to the core goals of Choice Neighborhoods. Nine directors, representing a cross-section of partner agencies will have voting powers.

One of the strengths of the Rockford region is the emphasis on creation of collaborative partnerships to tackle major community challenges. The Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan is built on a foundation that includes work being done by the City of Rockford, Rockford Public School District 205, Alignment Rockford, Rock Valley College, the Rockford Police Department and other law enforcement agencies,



The Task Force meetings helped to strengthen local connections while guiding and informing the Plan recommendations.

Rockford Health Council, Rockford Area Arts Council, Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) and a variety of other organizations. These efforts support and broaden the impact of the neighborhood, housing and people strategies that will support the transformation of Ellis Heights into a community of choice and opportunity. Several of these collaborative partnerships are described below and illustrate how organizational partners and neighborhood residents will be kept engaged and held accountable as the projects in our Plan are implemented in the coming years.

## 1. RMAP's Vital Signs Consortium

The Vital Signs Consortium includes RMAP, City of Rockford, RHA and the Rockford Region Economic Development District as core partners who provided the in-kind local match for the grant which has resulted in a "data commons" that will be used to track progress on a variety of community indicators at both the regional and neighborhood level. RMAP provides further connections to the region within Boone and Winnebago Counties. This connection is imperative in efforts to de-concentrate poverty and racial segregation and Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing efforts.

## 2. EDEEN (Economic Development Education and Entrepreneur Network)

EDEEN consists of 38 organizations, eight City departments and one City Council Committee. RMAP, Rockford Region Vital Signs, and RHA are among the partner organizations that are focused on strengthening existing businesses, creating new businesses, creating new jobs, redeveloping commercial properties and creating an inviting cultural environment for all by aligning and investing partner resources in Rockford's commercial corridors. The West State Street corridor, the spine of our neighborhood, is one of these key commercial corridors. Members are held accountable because meeting attendance is tracked.

## 3. RAVEN (Rockford Area Violence Elimination Network)

RAVEN is a collaborative effort led by the community working with partners including Rockford Police Department, Winnebago County Probation, Winnebago County State's Attorney, U.S. Attorney's Office, Illinois Department of Corrections, City Alderman (community leader), Rockford CeaseFire, Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center, RHA, RMAP and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Agency to help reduce recidivism and

improve prospects for the large concentration of parolees living in Ellis Heights. The initiative was recently awarded a \$400,000 technology grant to implement a holistic, collaborative case management software (MPOWR) to report on and/or track progress and performance measures of each parolee through his or her case management plan.

## 4. Northern Illinois Regional Partnership (NIRP)

NIRP is led by HomeStart a HUD-certified housing counseling agency with extensive experience with the Rockford region. NIRP is working with a National Foreclosure Settlement Award from the Illinois Attorney General to address the impacts of foreclosure in a holistic way. Core NIRP Team Members include the City of Rockford, RMAP, RHA and the 17th Judicial Circuit. Developer Team Members include Gorman and Company, Bridge Rockford Alliance, Winnebago Homes Association, Comprehensive Community Solutions, Jeremiah Development and Pilgrim's Promise CDC/ Hands that Help, the Swedish American Foundation, and the Winnebago County Health Department. Expert Team Members include NeighborWorks, RSI and Prairie State Legal Services. Ellis Heights is one of the primary target neighborhoods for this effort, including the delivery of housing counseling services.



Fairgrounds residents were engaged throughout the process to create the vision, initiatives and Plan.

## 5. Fun Safe Summer Partnership Program (FSSP)

FSSP has been in operation since winter 2010-2011. RHA, Rockford Police Department, Rockford Fire Department, Rockford Park District, New Zion Baptist Church, Emmanuel Episcopal Church, St. Paul Lutheran Church, YMCA, Northern Illinois Food Bank, Rock River Valley Blood Bank, Fifth Third Bank, NAACP, Girl Scouts, Neighborhood Network, Boys & Girls Club, Divine Divas and Dons and Jeremiah Development have worked collaboratively to provide regular positive events for youth and families at key locations designed to disrupt violence and provide healthy alternatives. To date more than 5,000 residents have participated in FSSP events.

## 6. Neighborhood Network

This umbrella organization provides resources to more than 100 neighborhood associations helping them build local leadership capacity and advancing their neighborhood improvement efforts. The Neighborhood Network has helped the West Gateway Coalition become a strong partner in improving Ellis Heights and the larger Westside neighborhood. The West Gateway Coalition recently completed its strategic planning sessions and has adopted several of the Choice Neighborhood project initiatives that needed a sponsor or project lead in order to improve “the neighborhood.”

## 7. Transform Rockford

Transform Rockford accepts the challenge to dramatically improve the social the economic conditions of our region and its residents through a structured and inclusive process where all ideas will be heard and given weight for the betterment of our community. By applying strategic planning processes used successfully in businesses, our community will develop our vision – together – for the future as well as strategies and detailed plans to achieve that vision. Every individual, through a public process, will be asked to provide insight, input and commitment to this transformational endeavor. Then, using the vision as a guide, an aggressive implementation plan will bring our collective vision to reality. The Process Team’s mission is to facilitate and train participants in an agreed upon process to enable the Transformation of the Rockford Region. This effort will:

- » [Bring a formal and proven process to the vision and strategy development efforts](#)
- » [Facilitate or assist other facilitators for a variety of vision, strategy and planning sessions](#)
- » [Select visioning and strategy Mapping Tool](#)
- » [Develop and train on a Plan, Do, Check & Act \(PDCA\) process](#)
- » [Establish process metrics](#)
- » [Provide “Train the trainer” services on facilitation](#)





The Task Force meetings helped to strengthen local connections while guiding and informing the Plan recommendations.

## B. PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative is organized around three pillars – Neighborhood, People and Housing. The Rockford Housing Authority was awarded a planning grant based on the adverse conditions present at the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments and in the surrounding Ellis Heights neighborhood.

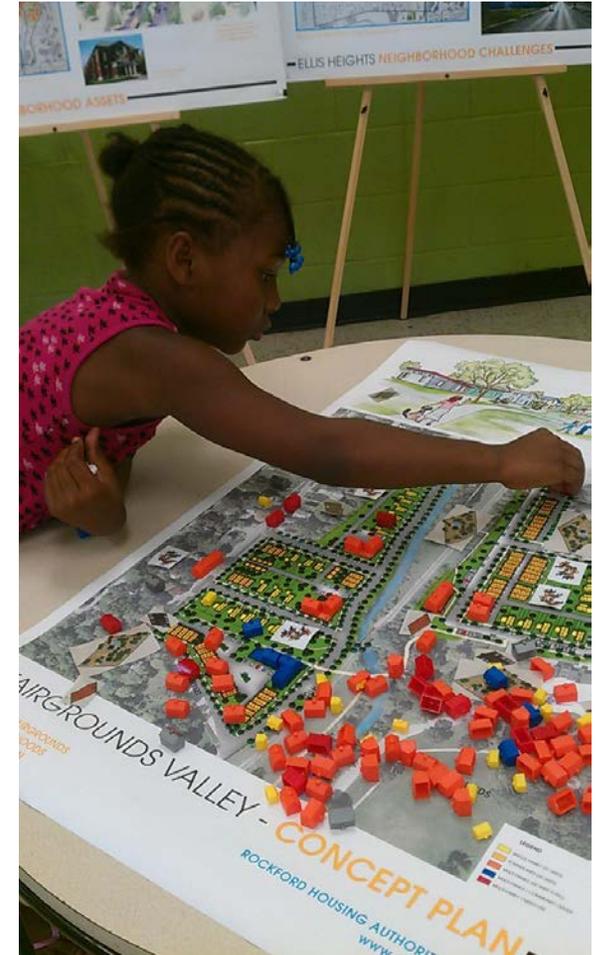
Performance measures and baseline conditions have been identified for each strategic initiative in our Plan. However, our ability to fully achieve our vision is dependent on our ability to secure funding and commitments to undertake the projects in our Plan. We have already made significant progress with limited resources, but we know that there is much more work to do. We will work with our implementation partners to build consensus around five-year target goals as implementation resources become available. RMAP and several of our other implementation partners have evaluation structures already in place to help RHA and the planned Westside CDC track change and evaluate programs.

RMAP has received “Preferred Sustainability Status” from HUD and has been a key partner in our Choice

Neighborhoods planning process. RMAP has done extensive work in creating performance measures in the areas of health and wellness, food access, housing, education, access to opportunity, poverty reduction, economic development, safety biodiversity, energy, natural resources and urban form that will be tracked at the regional and neighborhood levels. These metrics will help us track progress in meeting goals and outcomes of the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan.

RHA conducted comprehensive needs assessment survey of Fairgrounds Valley residents to establish baseline conditions related to the planned supportive service activities and other elements of the Fairgrounds Valley replacement housing plan. This information will be used to refine elements of the supportive service strategy and help target limited resources. Progress on achieving the target results will be tracked on an individual basis as a part of the case management activities and more generally through periodic surveys of residents related to neighborhood perceptions and service availability and access.

In addition to the “data commons” developed by RMAP for Rockford region as part of its Vital Signs effort, the City of Rockford, EDEEN and other groups routinely use the “dashboard” model to monitor a variety of community indicators. Beginning in 2014 EDEEN will report out to the community on the dashboard under its “Move the Needle” community campaign. Educational performance measures are also tracked and reported in School Report Cards that compare individual school performance to district and state averages. The housing market analysis undertaken to document the current neighborhood housing market and identify housing investment opportunities relied in part on home sales information provided by the Rockford Township Assessor based on a list of all property identification numbers in neighborhood planning area. This data can be updated on an annual basis to document the direction of home prices and the values for valid versus invalid or distressed sales (foreclosures and short sales) in Ellis Heights, providing a more reliable data source that the information available through the American Community Survey.



### C. PROJECTS TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

We have made significant progress in securing commitments from lead and partner agencies to implement the projects included in the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan and continue to work to identify sponsors and funding for the remaining projects. We have also developed a tentative timeline for project implementation. This information is summarized in the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhood Plan Project Implementation Matrix. Many projects address more than one strategic initiative and this has been indicated in the project matrix, with the primary strategic initiative highlighted in bold.

As has been described throughout this document, the Ellis Heights Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan is built on a foundation of work being done by engaged community partners including, but not limited to the City of Rockford, Rockford Public School District 205, Alignment Rockford, Rock Valley College, the Rockford Police Department and other law enforcement agencies, Rockford Health Council, Rockford Area Arts Council, Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) and a variety of other organizations. These efforts support and broaden the impact of the projects that have been identified to transform the Ellis Heights neighborhood into a community of choice and opportunity. They are summarized in the Partner Project Matrix which concludes our Plan.

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
Owner-occupancy rate	35%
Median home value	\$12,847
Number neighborhood-serving bus routes	2
Residential vacancy rate	21%
Neighborhood-based community service providers	3 (excluding churches)
Number of vacant lots	427
Number of vacant buildings	112

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - HOUSING

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
Total households	1,829
Concentration of households in poverty	51%
Range of home prices	\$15,000 - \$60,000
Range of market rate rents	\$700 - \$1,000
Percentage of housing stock in poor-fair condition and vacant	58%
Owner/renter occupancy status	35% owner, 65% renter
Fairgrounds Valley on-site housing units	210
Fairgrounds Valley housing mix	91% - 30% AMI 8% - 50% AMI 1% - 80% AMI

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - EDUCATION

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
Percent of children entering school with preschool experience	TBD*
Percent of Fairgrounds families with preschool children that are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs	TBD*

School attendance rates	88-91%
Percent of Fairgrounds families with children attending high quality schools and/or schools undergoing significant improvements	100%
Chronic truancy rate (% of students absent without valid reasons for 5% or more of school days)	8-46%
Percentage of children who enter Kindergarten ready to learn	TBD*
Percent of K-8 students meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math	15-28%
Percent of K-8 students meeting or exceeding state standards in science	33-52%
Percent of Auburn High School students who meet or exceed state standards on the Prairie State Achievement Examination	41%
Percent of youth who graduate from high school within five years	68%
Percentage of students meeting or exceeding college readiness benchmarks on the ACT	30%
Educational attainment – percent of population over 25 years who are high school graduates or higher	66%

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - INCOME AND JOBS

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
Number of Ellis Heights neighborhood-serving businesses and entrepreneurs	<10
Percentage of population in labor force	37%
Percent unemployed	25%
Percentage of Fairgrounds Valley working-age adults working at least 30 hours per week	<20%

\* Analysis underway at time of publication.

“Creating the Creative Business” class graduates	0
Median household income	\$20,605
Fairgrounds Valley average earned income for working families	\$6,706
Demonstrated resident involvement in programs directed to financial management and credit building	7 Fairgrounds Residents

### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - SAFE, HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
Incidence of Part 1 Violent Crime per 1,000 residents	28.41
Percentage of Fairgrounds Valley residents reporting that shootings and violence are major problems	76%
Percentage of Fairgrounds Valley residents feeling safe at night	30%
Properties requiring lead paint/ environmental remediation	31%
Travel times to grocery stores/nutritious food via public transit	TBD*
Percent of Fairgrounds Valley households with a medical home	93%
Percent of Fairgrounds residents with health insurance	81%
Percent of Fairgrounds residents reporting good physical health	78%
Number of Fairgrounds residents involved in health support services and programs	50

### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - FOCUS ON YOUTH

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
School attendance rates	88-91%
Chronic truancy rate (% of students absent without valid reasons for 5% or more of school days)	8-46%
Youth involvement in the juvenile justice system	TBD*

### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CAPACITY BUILDING

Performance Measures	Baseline Condition
Neighborhood organization membership	<5%
Overall visual quality and conditions in the neighborhood	Fair
Home ownership rate	35%

\* Analysis underway at time of publication.

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Timeline			
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building				Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
Kent Creek Greenway Path	X				X			City of Rockford	City of Rockford, RMAP, RHA	TIGER Grant and others under review	D			X
Neighborhood Gateway Connection	X			X	X	X	X	Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body	University of Illinois School of Architecture, profit and not for profit partners - TBD	Multiple under review now	D	X		
Streetscape Improvements	X							EDEEN - Economic Development Education and Entrepreneur Network	EDEEN, CDAG City of Rockford	Possible allocation of TIF and other capital monies from the City	D		X	X
Urban Farms Development	X				X			RHA, Winnebago County	Neighborhood Network, Joyner Center, RHA, Winnebago County	City grants with expansion into product sales covering operational costs	Yes	X		
West Side Grocery Store Development	X			X	X			Private Developer (TBA) Currently there is a confidentiality agreement but the developer and the grocer are working with the City CD department on site selection in the neighborhood footprint.	City, State	Private equity (build to suit/lease), tax rebates, NMTC.	Yes	X	X	
Neighborhood Commercial Development	X	X		X	X		X	Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body	University of Illinois School of Architecture, profit and not for profit partners - TBD	Multiple under review now	D	X		
Neighborhood Teen Center	X		X	X	X	X	X	Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body with eventual hand off to self sustaining arts center.	RHA, New Mix, Rockford Area Arts Council, University of Illinois School of Architecture, profit and not for profit partners	Multiple under review now	D	X		

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Implementation Timeline		
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building					Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
Community Learning Center	X		X		X	X	X	TBD - "Central project" died on the vine. Cultivate new partners - possibly Crusader Community Health.	TBD	TBD	D	X		
Community Land Trust	X	X						TBD	TBD	TBD	No			
West Side Reclaiming First (Possible Project)	X		X	X	X	X	X	Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body to speak with the Convention and Visitors Bureau and Park District to consider the addition of this future concept for the overall success of the City	University of Illinois School of Architecture, profit and not for profit partners - TBD	TBD	No	X		
IL Attorney General Foreclosure Mitigation	X	X	X	X			X	Northern Illinois Regional Partnership (NIRP) via HomeStart	Presently under NIRP agreement - NeighborWorks, City, RHA, Gorman, RSI, 17th Judicial Circuit, Prairie State Legal, Pilgrims Promise, Bridge Rockford, Winnebago Homes, Comprehensive Community Solutions, Jeremiah Development, Hands that Help, Swedish American Foundation, Winnebago Health Department	Grant - potential to provide expansion to projects 5, 37, 84 and 85 in this neighborhood. Many other connections to regional improvement across 3 counties.	X			

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Implementation Timeline		
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building					Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
“Super CHDO” - Organize and build community capacity by connecting Community Development Corporations under one certified CHDO umbrella.	X	X	X	X	X		X	Bridge Rockford Alliance	Bridge Rockford Alliance, Zion Development, Jeremiah Development, Hands that Help, Pilgrims Promise, YouthBuild/CCS, Community Builders	Organizational, HOME and CDBG funds, other resources	Yes	X		
Rental Maintenance Program/ Housing Rehabilitation Partnership	X	X			X		X	YouthBuild	RHA, RAVEN	YouthBuild operations, expansion requested under NIRP via II AG grant applied for, some materials donated by Home Depot - seeking others	Yes	X		
Targeted Ellis Heights Mortgage Financing/ Home Ownership Program		X			X		X	HomeStart (formerly Rockford Area Affordable Housing Coalition) via NIRP (See Attorney General Grant for expansion for this and other related programs.)	RHA - FSS/ROSS/ Homeownership participants; City of Rockford Employees	Participant escrows for down payments; HomeStart Operational funding	Yes	X		
Enterprise Green Charrette Grant	X	X			X			RHA	TBD	RHA Non-Fed and partnership leverage - 3 to 1 requirement. Deadline not yet established. Focus on next round of funding.	Yes			

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Timeline			
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building				Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
Infill Housing New Construction	X	X		X	X		X	Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body	University of Illinois School of Architecture, profit and not for profit partners - TBD	Multiple under review now - Current estimated short fall \$42 million (w/o subsidies)	D	X		
Infill Housing Rehabilitation	X	X		X	X		X	Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body	University of Illinois School of Architecture, profit and not for profit partners - TBD	Multiple under review now - Current estimated short fall \$22 million (w/o subsidies)	D	X		
Fairgrounds Valley Mixed Income Housing	X	X		X	X		X	RHA/Choice Neighborhoods Governing Body	University of Illinois School of Architecture, Bridge Rockford and HUD	Multiple under review now - Current estimated short fall \$47 million (w/o subsidies)	D	X		
Home Maintenance Program/ Renter Boot Camp	X	X			X		X	Rockford Area Apartment Association	RHA - specifically new and recertifying section and public housing residents. This program is underway and serves as the model for the Apartment Association who has expressed interest in expanding to all renters.	RHA operational	D	X		
Walking School Bus			X		X	X	X	Winnebago County	YMCA, RHA, YSN, RPS205	County grant funding	Yes	X		
Early Childhood & Youth Tutoring Project			X			X		TBD	TBD	TBD	No			
Rockford Educators Consortium			X					City of Rockford under the "City University" Initiative	All educational partners	TBD	D	X		
Life Skills Training			X		X			RHA	Various community partners	Various	D	X		

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Timeline			
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building				Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
Family Literacy Initiative			X		X	X		Possible - Rockford Literacy Council or GOODWILL	TBD	TBD	D	X		
Lighted School House Initiative			X					RPS District 205	Various community partners led by Alignment Rockford.	RPS operating and user fees	Yes	X	X	X
Ellis Heights Community Creative Assets Treasure Hunt & Development Project	X		X	X	X	X	X	Rockford Area Arts Council	RHA, Bridge Rockford, Rockford Public Schools, City of Rockford.	Grant provides ancillary growth potential for project 15.	App			
Artisan Entrepreneurship			X	X	X		X	Currently - Etsy, City of Rockford, RHA, RPS 205. Approach EDEEN about interest and advancement as the initiative evolves.	Etsy, City of Rockford, RHA, RPS 206	TBD	Yes	X		
Business Mentoring Program				X				EDEEN - Economic Development Education and Entrepreneur Network	RHA, ELEMENT, Rock River Development Partnership, ETSY, New Urban Futures	Section 3, Program Income, City, Other	Yes	X		
Preston Street Employment Center	X		X	X				Victory Bell - Pilgrims Promise	City, RHA, Preston Street Employment Center, SWIFT	Possibly DCEO and operational revenue	Yes	X		
Micro-Lending Program				X				Rockford Local Development Corporation	Local lending institutions	RLDC, DCEO, SBDC, Others	Yes	X		
Business Apprenticeship Project/ Building Trades Skills Development				X			X	Carpenter's Union - Brad Long	RHA, Rockford School District, Rockford Park District, City of Rockford, independent contractors, law enforcement agencies, labor unions and YouthBuild	Donations from community and membership dues	Yes	X	X	X

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Implementation Timeline			
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building				Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
Housekeeping & Maintenance Worker Training				X				RACVB/Hotel Motel Association	Others TBD	TBD	D	X		
Center for Working Families				X			X	TBD	TBD	TBD	No			
Ellis Heights Daycare Center	X		X	X				TBD - Possibly YWCA	TBD	TBD	D		X	
Work to Home Transit Links	X			X				RMTD - Rockford Mass Transit District	RMTD	User fees and city funds	D		X	X
Ex-Offender Employment Initiative			X	X	X			Rockford Police Department as RAVEN - Rockford Area Violence Elimination Network - ALSO SEE Prisoner Re-Entry Pilot Project	RHA, City of Rockford, DOC, States Attorney Offices, various Clergy, Ceasefire, Workforce Investment Board, "victim panel"	Operating funds. Applications made to Byrne and OJJDP.	Yes	X		
Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds Police Outpost	X				X		X	Rockford Police Department	City support of Geopolicing strategy and approval of budget	City funding	Yes	X		
Housing Demolition Project	X				X			City of Rockford	Carpenter's Union, RHA, YouthBuild, local CHDOs, others	CDBG, General fund, RHA/Bridge non-fed \$, other - application made for expansion under NIRP/IL Attorney General Neighborhood stabilization funds - applied for \$2.5 million	Yes	X	X	X
Neighborhood Health Screening Project	X				X			Rockford Health Coalition, University of Illinois Rockford College of Medicine	RHA - specifically Fairgrounds Valley Resident Council	University Grant for student lead initiative has been obtained.	Yes	X		
Lead Paint Remediation		X			X			Winnebago County	RHA, Private Landlords	Federal grant funding received \$3 million	Yes	X	X	X

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Implementation Timeline			
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building					Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5	
Smoking Cessation Education Project	5-5		X		X			Winnebago County Health Dept.	RHA - MOU executed. RHA working on aligning resources to go smoke free 2014.	Grant received. Program started; first round of classes started.	Yes	X			
Urban Farming Project				X	X	X	X	Angelic Organics	RHA, YouthBuild, Joyner	Various and revenue generated - working to make the program self-sustainable.	Yes	X			
Healthy Eating Initiative					X			Demonstration project currently part of University of Illinois College of Medicine project. Eventual Lead Agency to be found. Also tied into the Angelic Organics urban farm initiative.	TBD	University Grant for student lead initiative	Yes	X			
Ellis Heights Farmers Market	X			X	X	X		TBD	TBD	TBD	D	X			
Residency & Associate Dance Program			X		X		X	Rockford Dance Company		TBD	D	X			
Family Fitness Center	X				X	X	X	Possible - YMCA interest expressed.	TBD	TBD	D		X	X	
Neighborhood Teen Center Programming			X	X	X	X		RHA	Auburn High School Design Academy, University of Illinois School of Architecture, YMCA, United Way	Multiple - Under Review Now	YES	X	X		
Neighborhood Boys & Girls Club	X				X	X		Boys and Girls Club	TBD	TBD	No		X		
Neighborhood Youth Garden Project				X	X	X		Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center	Neighborhood Network, Fairgrounds Valley Resident Council	City grant application made and others	Yes	X			

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners	Potential Funding Sources	Underway Now - Yes, No, D - Discussing	Implementation Timeline		
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building					Year 1	Year 2 - 3	Year 4 - 5
Youth Mentorship Program			X		X	<b>X</b>	X	YMCA, RPD - Rockford Police Department, Rockford Area Arts Council, Rockford Park District	Same	Various grant and foundation investments and program fees	Yes	X	X	X
ArtsPlace			X		X	<b>X</b>	X	Rockford Area Arts Council		Various grant and foundation investments and program fees	Yes	X	X	X
Ellis Heights Block Club Creation/Block Club Association					X		<b>X</b>	Possibly Neighborhood Network	TBD	TBD	D	X		
Neighborhood Leadership Training					X		<b>X</b>	TBD	TBD	TBD	No			
Ellis Heights Community Service Project Coalition	X				X		<b>X</b>	Possible - Neighborhood Network or Committee under Choice Governance structure	TBD	TBD	No			
Neighborhood Welcome Initiative			X		X	X	<b>X</b>	TBD	Neighborhood Watch Groups, West Gateway Coalition	TBD	No	X		

## PARTNER PROJECTS

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building		
West State Street Corridor Improvement Project Reconstruction of West State Street through the neighborhood and development of a linear park system	X			X	X		X	City of Rockford	IDOT, Community
Project 10:13 Neighborhood beautification project including home repair, as well as street and alley cleaning. This project started with a few homeowners on Blaisdell Street and with the momentum of the Choice Neighborhoods and support from the West Gateway Coalition, New Zion Church and Rock Church has grown into a multi-block beautification project including both homeowners and renters.	X	X			X		X	Blaisdell Street residents	West Gateway Coalition, Rock Church, Mt. Zion Church
Design Guidelines Create a set of design guidelines based on the input from the community. Guidelines should be applicable to all renovation, restoration, replacement and new construction - public and private.	X	X			X		X	Civic Design Advisory Group	RHA, City, TBD
Landlord Registration Ordinance This Rockford City Council action would provide contact information for rental landlords so that issues with property maintenance and problem tenants could be addressed in a timely manner.		X			X			City of Rockford	N/A
Healthy Starts Talk2Me Initiative This project involves conducting trainer workshops with all youth serving organizations to model pro-attachment behaviors and train parents around the importance of secure attachments and interactions with their children, so that children are healthy, feel safe and are ready to learn when they start kindergarten.			X		X	X		Alignment Rockford	RHA, RPS205, Many private sector partners
Rockford Head Start Head Start provides door-to-door transportation and full and part-day programs. The Ellis Heights neighborhood is served by the Fairgrounds Head Start site on Acorn Street.			X	X	X	X		Community Action Agency/Head Start	Multiple
Early Childhood/Head Start Coordination Lewis Lemon is one of several public schools with preschool classrooms. This project is intended to establish better coordination between the City's Head Start program and the Rockford Public School's early childhood classes.			X	X	X	X		Community Action Agency/Head Start and RPS 205	Multiple
Lewis Lemon 21st Century School Afterschool Programming The YMCA operates afterschool programs for students.			X	X	X	X		YMCA	RPS 205
Parent Engagement Pilot @ Lewis Lemon School This pilot project is designed to bring resources to parents during school activities to improve social and emotional learning connections.			X		X	X		Alignment Rockford	RPS 205

## PARTNER PROJECTS

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building		
<p>Career Academy High Schools</p> <p>The recently adopted career academy model is being implemented over a three-year period, beginning with Jefferson High School. Auburn High School, which serves the Ellis Heights neighborhood, will adopt the academy structure during the 2013-14 school year. Academy clusters include: 1) engineering, manufacturing, industrial and trades technology, 2) health sciences, 3) business, arts, marketing and information technology, and 4) human and public services. Students in the career academy program will take a rigorous core curriculum as well as a three-year sequence of courses in which each student will earn a professional certification of college credit while in high school. Required 8th and 9th grade career seminar courses began being taught during the 2012-2013 school year to prepare all middle school students for academies and help generate interest and career academy participation. This includes Ellis Arts Academy and West Middle School, which serve the Ellis Heights neighborhood.</p>			X	X		X	X	Rockford Public Schools	Business Community via Alignment Rockford
<p>Lydia Urban Academy</p> <p>Private alternative high school currently serving 20 students and operating out of available space at RHA's offices. Students come to Lydia through a variety of ways (guidance counselors, probation officers, word of mouth). There is a sliding fee scale, with a work requirement for students that covers a portion of the tuition. Lydia Urban Academy would like to expand its programming to include middle school students and operations with a facility in the Ellis Heights neighborhood that would serve approximately 50 students.</p>			X	X	X	X		Lydia Urban Academy	Many in the community under its internship fee/waiver program (Includes RHA)
<p>Rockford Literacy Council</p> <p>This organization teaches reading to adults through the 8th grade reading level with a combination of state and private funds.</p>			X					Rockford Literacy Council	Community
<p>GED Classes</p> <p>Rock Valley College holds GED classes at Crusader Community Health, which is located within the Ellis Heights neighborhood. Goodwill also provides access to GED classes.</p>			X	X				Rock Valley College and Goodwill	Crusader Clinic
<p>Rock Valley College GED Orientation &amp; Intake</p> <p>Community referrals and marketing are used to attract potential GED participants to a required orientation session, prior to GED intake testing. The emphasis is on making sure that potential GED participants understand the commitment required to obtain a GED certificate (being on time, coming to class, etc.). The objective is to make sure that drop outs understand that getting a GED requires hard work so that they don't become disillusioned when they find out that a GED isn't a "quick fix" to the lack of a high school diploma.</p>			X					Rock Valley College	
<p>Regional GED Initiative</p> <p>The Boone and Winnebago Counties Workforce Investment Board is leading a regional initiative designed to identify barriers to GED participation and implement a community awareness program with GED fairs and other activities.</p>			X	X				WIB	Many (Includes RHA)
<p>Rock Valley College Developmental Studies Program</p> <p>Remedial courses designed to bring reading and math skills to the level required to undertake college coursework.</p>			X	X	X			Rock Valley College	Many

## PARTNER PROJECTS

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building		
<p>Career Certificate Programs</p> <p>Rock Valley College has training dollars for certificate programs in three main employment areas: 1) transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL), 2) health care, and 3) manufacturing. Major employers are involved in helping to ensure that the curricula produce program graduates that can get jobs. Entry into these programs requires strong reading and math skills. Contextual learning is emphasized, setting students up to be able to gain the necessary skills to secure employment and move up the career opportunity ladder. The intent is to work to make the certificates/degrees more “stackable.”</p>			X	X				Rock Valley College	Multiple
<p>Rock Valley College Small Business Center</p> <p>Rock Valley College currently offers a fee-based class (free for low-income people) that helps students develop business plans and learn how to set up a business.</p>			X	X				Rock Valley College	N/A
<p>EDEEN - Economic Development, Education, and Entrepreneurship Network</p> <p>Network formed by Mayor Morrissey. West State Street corridor added as a focus area for commercial district and neighborhood “strategic doing” effort.</p>	X			X	X	X	X	EDEEN - Economic Development Education and Entrepreneur Network	34 Citywide agencies representing Business Districts, Entrepreneurship, Community & Economic Development, Arts & Entertainment and the City of Rockford
<p>Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center</p> <p>Several organizations use space at the Joyner Center including the Northwest Community Center satellite computer lab, a variety of life skills classes and programs for youth, workforce connections, case management, computer labs, Rockford Sexual Assault Council.</p>			X		X	X		Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center	Banner of Truth Church
<p>Parent Cafes</p> <p>This project currently operates at the Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center and includes peer-led discussions for parents and activities for youth.</p>			X		X	X		Alignment Rockford	Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center
<p>Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)</p> <p>Enhance the quality of home-visiting services in an effective comprehensive, early childhood system. These intense home visits will build strong parent-child relationships and healthy development outcomes for children five and under.</p>			X		X	X		Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD)	Winnebago County Health Department, RHA, Easter Seals, City of Rockford Head Start, Rockford School District, LaVos Latina
<p>Changing Hearts Project</p> <p>This project is currently being piloted in area churches including Banner of Truth in the Ellis Heights neighborhood and involves promoting fitness and blood pressure screenings of parishioners. This effort should be expanded to other neighborhood organizations.</p>					X			Rockford Health Council	Multiple
<p>Mental Health Referral at Crusader Clinic</p> <p>This is an ongoing effort to connect people in need with appropriate mental health services.</p>					X			Crusader Clinic	N/A

## PARTNER PROJECTS

Project Name	Strategic Initiative						Community Engagement, Capacity Building	Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth			
<p>Rockford Area Violence Elimination Network (RAVEN)</p> <p>A joint effort by the community to provide needed support to parolees and parolees who have committed to be responsible contributors to the community. Mandatory monthly call ins to discuss progress, needs and barriers in an effort to reduce recidivism. Initiative stemmed from the Violence Reduction Advisory Board. Primary focus on Ellis Heights with citywide implications and outcomes.</p>		X	X	X	X	X		Rockford Police Dept., States Attorney's Office, New Zion Church	Rockford Police Dept., Mayors Office, States Atty Office, Mayor, ATF, Human Services, Work Force Investment Board, RHA, New Zion Church, various moral voices from the community
<p>Prisoner Re-Entry Pilot Project</p> <p>This project is intended to use a "carrot &amp; stick" approach to ex-offenders returning to the community. Comprehensive support services (substance abuse counseling, education, job training &amp; placement, etc.) are provided to smooth the re-entry process. Individuals who re-offend will be priorities for resolution in the criminal justice system.</p>					X			RAVEN assumed this initiative SEE Ex-Offender Employment Initiative	City, RHA, CAA, DEA, Police Dept, ATF, 17th Judicial Court, DOC, Greater Rockford Prisoner Re-Entry Coalition
<p>Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program</p> <p>Rockford proposes to plan, develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive, proactive and coordinated crime-fighting strategy that includes prevention, suppression, intervention, enforcement, to achieve the mission of neighborhood revitalization. This will be a 36 month program and the City of Rockford will serve as the fiscal agent. Major goals of this project are to improve community safety and spur revitalization by reducing gun related offenses in the target area by 15 % and reduce overall violent crime by 10%.</p>			X		X	X		RAVEN - Police Department	RHA, City, Neighborhood Network, Joyner, University of Cincinnati (research analyst), Ceasefire, IRIS, CrimeStoppers, States Attorney
<p>Fun Safe Summer Program</p> <p>This is a continuation of the multi-agency efforts to provide safe activities for children and families and deter violence during the summer. Ice-cream socials and recreational activities are planned for and occur on sites where drug sales and violent activity have occurred or are anticipated to occur. <a href="http://funsafesummer.us/">http://funsafesummer.us/</a></p>					X	X		RHA - 2011 inception	Rockford Police and Fire Department, Park District, Churches, YMCA, Northern Illinois Food Bank, NAACP, Girl Scouts, Neighborhood Network, Boys & Girls Club
<p>Summer School Lunch Program</p> <p>This is an on-going project that involves participation in the summer school lunch program to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals when school is not in session.</p>					X	X		City of Rockford Community Action Agency	RHA, City, Rockford Park District (kids who participate are encouraged to attend or are attending Time 2 play programs in Fairgrounds Park)

## PARTNER PROJECTS

Project Name	Strategic Initiative							Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth	Community Engagement, Capacity Building		
<p>Community Garden Project</p> <p>A community garden is located adjacent to the Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center. Current rules require donation of surplus food to local food pantries.</p>					X	X	X	Neighborhood Network	Joyner Neighborhood Resource Center, RHA, Neighborhood Associations
<p>Rockford Park District Summer Program at Fairgrounds Park</p> <p>An annual 8 week summer recreation program. Time 2 Play offers your child many active choices to play with friends at a neighborhood park. Participants will enjoy breaking a sweat playing fun games such as spiderball, four-square, kickball, table hockey, wet and wild water play, weekly field trips, and more, all supervised by well trained staff.</p>					X	X		Rockford Park District	As needed the Park District reaches out to various community partners. At Fairgrounds and in Ellis Heights RHA is a partner.
<p>Rockford Park District Youth Sports – Coach Mentorship Program</p> <p>Skill level doesn't matter when it comes to NFL Flag Football. Participants receive an official NFL Flag Football jersey, a set of flags, trophy, NFL certificate, and field trip. NFL Flag consists of a 6-8-game season and playoffs. Practices, at least two per week, are held in various schools and parks. Coaches and parents work as a team and are trained under the Park District volunteer training program. Special training is provided to RHA coaches as requested to turn the volunteer opportunity into an apprenticeship program to train for future park district job opportunities</p>			X	X	X	X	X	Rockford Park District	RHA and Boys and Girls Club
<p>RAAC Camp</p> <p>RAAC Camp is a multi-disciplinary arts camp located at Ellis Arts Academy. RAAC camp is for children 5-13 years old and is open to any child who resides in the county, though the majority live in the Ellis Heights neighborhood. RAAC camp is a two week intensive arts experience with professional teaching artists. The campers sign up for three arts classes they were most interested in taking. Choices include: dramatic arts, video production, music, rap, dance (modern and hip hop), and visual arts. Tuition is waived for families that qualify for free or reduced lunch. Some of those youth have gone on to RAAC's ArtsPlace apprenticeship program or became artist assistants at RAAC Camp, and many have been accepted into the District's Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) program.</p>			X		X	X	X	Rockford Area Arts Council	Many
<p>ArtsPlace</p> <p>ArtsPlace, an innovative program that provides youth ages 14-18 with job training in the arts. The "artist apprentices" work in teams under the guidance of professional teaching artists, selected with care by the Arts Council for their talent and ability to form positive working relationships with young people. The teams work in a variety of media, including furniture painting, garden mosaics, murals, pastels, theater arts and dance. The artist apprentices learn valuable skills including attendance, punctuality, positive attitude and productivity which are applicable to future employment. They learn that to be successful at their jobs they must practice good teamwork skills, and they develop other skills vital to the workplace such as problem solving, teamwork, decision-making, and good communications. Of course they also produce quality artwork sold at the retail ArtsPlace Store, and sell tickets to their performances.</p>			X	X	X	X	X	Rockford Area Arts Council	Many

## PARTNER PROJECTS

Project Name	Strategic Initiative						Community Engagement, Capacity Building	Project Sponsor/Lead Agency	Partners
	Neighborhood Improvement	Housing	Education	Income & Jobs	Safe, Healthy Neighborhood	Focus on Youth			
<p>Neighborhood Network</p> <p>This non-profit corporation serves Rockford and adjacent unincorporated areas. The organization provides a variety of assistance to neighborhood groups in helping them get to the next step (securing grants, bringing in speaker, producing workshops, coordinating community gardens, gardener classes, working with police to coordinate neighborhood watch groups).</p>	X				X		X	Self led effort	107 neighborhood organizations county wide - West Gateway Coalition is one neighborhood association in Ellis Heights and under this umbrella.
<p>West Gateway Coalition</p> <p>This organization is the current incarnation of the old Ellis Heights Weed &amp; Seed neighborhood group. The organization has established a board, bylaws and a bank account.</p>	X				X		X	Self led effort	Neighbors in the western edge of Ellis Heights. Neighborhood Network.
<p>Fairgrounds Resident Council</p> <p>This newly formed RHA resident council is in the process of identifying programs, activities and projects for residents of the Fairgrounds Valley Apartments.</p>					X		X	Residents of Fairgrounds Valley	RHA, Anti-Violence committee



# 14.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

These additional references are an instrumental part of the Ellis Heights Transformation Plan and available upon request. Please contact Rockford Housing Authority for copies of the documents listed below.

### REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

- » Transform Rockford - Regional long-term planning effort to dramatically improve the social and economic conditions of the Rockford area. Transform Rockford is a comprehensive and disciplined approach which is driven by shared values and vision to transform the Rockford region.
- » Rockford Region Vital Signs – A regional plan for sustainable development with five key deliverables.

### NEIGHBORHOOD

- » Grocery Store Study.

### HOUSING

- » Rockford Housing Authority's De-concentration Plan.
- » Ellis Heights and Fairgrounds Valley Housing Market Analysis.
- » Rockford Housing Market Analysis.

### PEOPLE

- » Rockford Public Schools (RPS 205) Facilities Plan – A \$210M plan for facility improvements (\$138M bond referendum).