Community Partnership Award

Applicant: City of Phoenix

Program Nominated: ReinventPHX

**Problems Assessment**

In 2008, the largest light rail construction project in the nation’s history was completed in Phoenix. This major achievement was the result of a partnership between local and federal agencies, strong civic leadership, and visionary urban planning that began decades earlier. Valley Metro rail has outperformed all expectations, achieving 2020 ridership goals in its first four years of operation. The infrastructure, however, was designed to not just add high-quality transportation options, but to lay a foundation for reinventing the neighborhoods surrounding it and creating new urban living choices in a city planned almost entirely for automobiles.

ReinventPHX is a partnership between the city of Phoenix, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) highly selective Sustainable Communities program, and 17 local organizations dedicated to achieving the full transformative potential of light rail. The partnership aims to create a new urban development model in Phoenix: Walkable Communities. Walkable places are safe, convenient, and comfortable environments for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit riders, and those using baby strollers, wheelchairs, white canes, and other assistive devices.

Phoenix is known as a sprawling, car-centric desert city. Decades of planning have urged this sprawl forward. Zoning codes, street designs, and land use decisions have been ultimately influenced by the automobile. Phoenix was willing to take on the daunting challenge of planning at all levels for walkability along the light rail system and design the process in such a way so that the resulting plans were put into action and not left “on a shelf.”

**Program Implementation and Costs**

In 2011, the city was awarded a $2.9 million Community Challenge Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This money, combined with the in-kind match commitment of city staff time and resources, and that of project partners, allowed the city to engage in a collaborative effort to plan for transit-oriented development and infrastructure investment in our existing light rail corridor. This was a highly competitive process and Phoenix was the fourth-highest grantee in the nation.

The work program for the ReinventPHX project was specifically designed to bring national best practices to Phoenix with regards to transportation choices, equitable and affordable housing, enhanced economic competitiveness, supporting existing communities, coordinating policies and leveraging investment, and valuing communities and neighborhoods. Working toward purposeful urban planning elements was key for all walkable communities with health, sustainability, and access for all available. Five transit districts were identified and named: Gateway, Eastlake-Garfield, Midtown, Uptown and Solano. The downtown area was not included since a transit-oriented development plan had already been written and a form-based code adopted.

This has been an exciting project with a great emphasis on collaboration with our many partners, including St. Luke’s Health Initiatives, Arizona State University Global Institute of Sustainability (GIOS), Urban Land Institute (ULI), Arizona Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Arizona Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), Artlink Phoenix, Discovery Triangle, Gateway Community College, Local First Arizona, Valley Metro, and Sustainable Communities Collaborative.

The three and a half year project began with significant community outreach along the rail corridor and the establishment of steering committees for each district. Three community design workshops were held and attended by well over a thousand people. Community engagement occurred in English, Spanish and Bhutanese. We talked to area residents, many of whom are immigrants and refugees. We met with neighborhood organizations, anchor institutions, non-profits, zoning attorneys, developers, architects, and landscape architects. All of these people came together to form the 2040 vision for the districts, and identify infrastructure needs and priorities for investment. The district steering committees will continue their review and participation function as implementation measures move forward.

**Tangible Results**

ReinventPHX created action plans for districts within the Phoenix light rail corridor. The plans established a community-based vision for the future and identified investment strategies to improve the quality of life for all residents. This process established a new, transit-oriented model for urban planning and development for Phoenix. The projected focused on addressing six elements – health, housing, land use, mobility and green systems.

The Transit District Plans are perhaps the most prominent deliverables associated with the ReinventPHX project. The plans tell the unique story of the five transit districts and were all ultimately adopted by the City Council.

The district plans serve as powerful tools for each of the five transit districts. The following is a summary of the key objectives of the plans:

* Articulate the community’s long range vision.
* Create the policy basis for rezoning property along the light rail system.
* Reinforce the goals and policies of the General Plan’s Transit-Oriented Development Strategic Policy Framework.
* Identify business, infrastructure, and other investment opportunities to advance the vision in each district.
* Identify associated implementation strategies, tools, and partners.

In addition to the Transit District Plans, the project provided a series of deliverables associated with each of the six planning elements, including the Walkable Urban (WU) Code. The WU Code provides for a new urban and transit-oriented zoning code for properties within the transit districts. The WU Code was adopted by the Phoenix City Council on July 1, 2015 (Ordinance G-6047). Copies of the ReinventPHX Transit District Plans and other project deliverables can be viewed at the following web page: <https://www.phoenix.gov/pdd/topics/reinvent-phx>

**Lessons Learned**

ReinventPHX was one of the most ambitious urban planning projects the city of Phoenix has ever done. The project provided an opportunity to work collaboratively with the community like never before and provided a blueprint for community-based planning that will serve the city for years to come.

Perhaps the greatest lesson learned is that tremendous results can be achieved when collaborating with Phoenix residents. Residents of all the transit districts continually demonstrated throughout the project a deep and profound love for their neighborhoods and an uninhibited sense of possibility about what their neighborhoods could become. The residents’ knowledge, commitment and vision for their neighborhoods were the project’s greatest assets. It is because of the residents that the project was such a success and that each of the transit districts has an incredibly bright future.