

Lessons from the EcoDistricts Policy Toolkit

The district-scale approach to sustainable urban regeneration is now a critical city-making tool. It can aid in repairing stressed infrastructure, as well as in reducing gentrification, obesity, and poverty. It can also build greater resilience to the impacts of a changing climate.

Local governments grapple with the need to revitalize neighborhoods and rebuild basic infrastructure. Additionally, they are dealing with chronic systemic issues, such as increasing energy and water consumption, food deserts, poor health, and intense local weather patterns that stress infrastructure. Traditional models of urban redevelopment are falling short of dealing with these ever-changing conditions. Working at the district scale provides the opportunity to achieve meaningful advances in sustainable best practices without eating the elephant. District-scale approaches allow sustainability innovations to be piloted and then scaled, making it possible to test and then spread best practices to other locations.

USDN communities worked together through a USDN Innovation Fund grant to better understand district scale revitalization through the EcoDistricts model. The grant was awarded to Boulder and included participation from Austin, Boston, Burlington, Denver, Portland OR, San Francisco, and Vancouver. During that process, communities came to define EcoDistricts as a *“public-private partnerships that emphasize innovation and deployment of district-scale best practices to accelerate sustainable development at the neighborhood scale by integrating building and infrastructure projects with community and individual action.”* The participants agreed to start with the end in mind, and refined eight framing areas to assess successful EcoDistricts.

Now, many communities utilize these assessment areas to guide sustainable redevelopment processes and outcomes:

- Equitable development
- Access and mobility
- Habitat and ecosystem function
- Health and wellbeing
- Energy
- Materials management
- Community identity
- Water

The [EcoDistricts Policy Toolkit](#) features case studies from around the country. Here is an excerpt:

Location	Summary	Barriers	Lessons Learned
<u>Aspen, CO</u> Renewable Energy Mitigation Program	Requires large homes and businesses with energy intensive amenities to mitigate their negative effects, essentially as a carbon tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious amount of collaboration • Getting buy-in from constituencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit was integral to the success of the rebate
<u>Austin, TX</u> West Campus Parking Benefit District	Parking meter revenue is returned to the district to finance improvements that enhance the quality of life and promote multi-modal transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on residents changing from free to metered parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant initial expense for meters and enforcement
<u>Cleveland, OH</u> Evergreen Cooperative	Creates community wealth and economic sustainability through leveraging the purchasing power and stability of local business and institution anchors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of successful businesses that agree to invest can be difficult to balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a business first then create a cooperative where employees are not simply hired as workers