

Question Submitted for the Record by Representative Capps

Question: I commend EPA, as well as HUD and DOT, on their continuing commitment to the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which helps our local communities plan more efficiently, improving safety, energy efficiency, and livability. The Partnership exemplifies smart community planning that benefits both people and the environment. Mr. Perciasepe, what are some of the main accomplishments of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and how will EPA continue to prioritize it in its FY 2014 budget?

Answer: Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this question about our innovative partnership with HUD and DOT. This work will continue to be a significant focus going forward as we find new ways to use collaboration with partners at all levels of government to protect human health and the environment in fiscally challenging times. For example, EPA Administrator McCarthy recently released her seven priority themes for “Meeting the Challenge Ahead” and the Partnership for Sustainable Communities directly supports two of those themes:

- Making a Visible Difference in Communities across the Country
- Launching a New Era of State, Tribal and Local Partnerships

Therefore, our work with HUD and DOT on the Partnership will continue to be an important way in which we work toward achieving our goals. I would point to a few accomplishments of the Partnership as outstanding examples of how our work with HUD and DOT supports these key agency priorities by overcoming traditional barriers to progress, fostering innovation and supporting greater efficiency in the way we plan communities.

Over the past four years, the Partnership agencies have provided grants and technical assistance to over 730 communities. This assistance has ranged from targeted technical assistance workshops to multi-million dollar / multi-year grants. However, the consistent theme across all this work has been close coordination among the agencies in support of a clearly defined set of Livability Principles to guide the work. From the outset, the agreement by all three agency heads to direct resources in support of a common set of principles has been a foundation of the initiative’s success. This common vision, combined with the commitment of key staff meet every week for the past four years is a major feature that distinguishes this effort from traditional interagency efforts. As a result, we have improved the effectiveness of our work at all scales by ensuring that Federal resources are coordinated and each project takes a more holistic approach that bridges traditional agency silos.

For example, EPA HUD and DOT's efforts in the cities of Ranson and Charlestown, West Virginia are a good example of how the Partnership has allowed us to capitalize on each agency's strengths, avoid duplication of effort, and enable communities to fully leverage a variety of Federal support. In 2010, Ranson and Charlestown received a three year HUD Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant, an EPA Brownfields Area-wide Planning Grant and a DOT TIGER II Planning Grant to create a comprehensive plan for the Ranson-Charles Town Green Corridor Revitalization Initiative. As the cities were kicking off these larger planning efforts, EPA also selected Ranson for its Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities technical assistance program. This more targeted assistance program helped the city strengthen the Green Corridor Initiative by working with stakeholders to develop a community wide vision, identify priority areas for growth, and evaluate existing community tools for managing growth.

The plan that was produced envisions a transformation of Fairfax Boulevard, the main thoroughfare between the two cities. The redesigned boulevard, will also be surrounded by walkable, bikeable connections between the two cities to provide access to regional job centers and community facilities. In April 2012, Ranson's city council unanimously approved proposals to enact a new zoning code and comprehensive plan, moving the community one step closer to realizing its vision for growth. Following these changes in city policy, Ranson was also awarded a \$5 million TIGER grant to support implementation of the corridor plan. Over a two year period the Partnership's coordinated assistance helped Ranson and Charlestown move from planning to implementation of an initiative that will help revitalize the heart of these two communities.

Little Rock, Arkansas also exemplifies what we can achieve by working closely with HUD and DOT using sustainable communities as a core organizing principle. In 2010, EPA, along with HUD and DOT, worked with Little Rock during the first year of the Greening America's Capitals program. The focus was developing a design plan for Main Street that would help: revitalize the economically distressed area, better manage stormwater, and improve the walkability of the streets. As result of the design that emerged, the city was able leverage:

- \$900,000 from the Arkansas Department of Natural Resources, (EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 non-point source grant funds) to design and to implement green infrastructure elements along a five-block section of Main Street.
- A \$900,000 grant from Pulaski County Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Grant to cleanup and redevelop several buildings on a key block of Main Street.
- \$150,000 "Our Town" grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to fund a "Creative Corridor" project
- These investments, in turn, have leveraged millions in private investment and helped to revitalize a distressed corridor that previously had many vacant buildings.

Finally, Metroplan, the region's metropolitan planning organization, received a \$1,400,000 HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant to support the development of *Metro 2040: Blueprint for a Sustainable Region*. This effort will help spread the innovative strategies used in Little Rock to other communities in the Central Arkansas region.

For FY 2014, our Office of Sustainable Communities will continue to coordinate with HUD and DOT on the selection and delivery of its technical assistance programs: *Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities*, *Smart Growth Implementation Assistance* and *Greening America's Capitals*. HUD and DOT will also continue their Interagency Agreements with EPA that support the *Governor's Institute on Community Design*. The Governor's Institute brings national experts into states at the request of their governors to provide technical assistance to cabinet officials. Additionally, the EPA Brownfields Program will continue to include language in the Areawide Planning Grants application instructions that prompts applicants to describe, where appropriate, connections between their proposed workplan and existing Partnership for Sustainable Community grants from HUD and DOT. Finally, EPA headquarters and regional staff will also continue to participate in the review of upcoming HUD and DOT grants related to the Partnership.

