

“Green Streets” Pilot Project of West Union, Iowa

The [Main Street Iowa](#) program is distinguished as one of the most progressive of its kind in the country leading historic preservation and economic revitalization efforts in ways that strengthen community resiliency, long term sustainability and economic growth.

Guided by the tenets of the [Main Street Iowa](#) program, the small town of [West Union, Iowa](#) took a proactive approach in the renovation of its downtown area. Supported by the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), the process of envisioning a plan for redevelopment kicked off in 2008 with a series of workshops, led by the landscape architecture team, to explore ideas and identify resources. The firm worked with the community, government officials, local, state and federal agencies, as well as other groups and professionals to formulate a holistic approach to rebuild and reshape West Union for a better future; synthesizing land use planning, clean energy systems, road repairs, stormwater management and other improvements within the historic and cultural context of the community.

With limited resources available in a town of less than 2,500 people, the design team evaluated the types of improvements that both met the project goals and offered the best chances of attracting outside funding partners. Over the course of two years the team explored strategies, developed concepts and identified grant sources and other forms of support needed to move the project forward.

Completed in 2013, the pioneering project includes six blocks of permeable paving for both the streets and sidewalks that infiltrate, cleanse and cool storm water on site; more than 18,000 square feet of rain gardens; a district geothermal heating and cooling system connected to 60 downtown buildings; LED street lights; building energy audits and energy efficiency incentives; electric vehicle charging stations; improved walkability and accessibility; upper-story housing; public art installations; increased community awareness of sustainable practices; and a community gathering plaza.

As a result of the funding sources identified during the visioning workshops and the onset of federal and state stimulus programs in 2009, more than \$7.5 million of the \$10.2 million streetscape, civic plaza and district geothermal system was leveraged from 17 outside funding sources.

As a pilot project, the innovative and cost effective green technologies and practices demonstrated in West Union create a unique sense of place and provide the city with a positive advantage in retaining and recruiting businesses to downtown. The lessons learned here can be replicated in many other small communities across the Midwest and the country.