

An Equitable Water Future *for the* **Blue River Greenway**

*Heartland Conservation Alliance
Wichita State University Environmental Finance Center*

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Acknowledgments

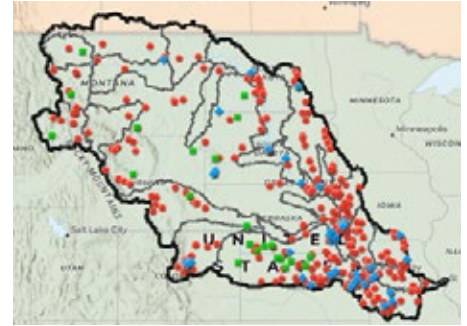
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Introduction

The Missouri River Watershed is a vast area that includes some or all of 11 states and parts of 2 Canadian Provinces. The watershed experiences many different environmental and natural occurrences, such as droughts, high heat, floods, freezing temperatures, etc. These various events have implications throughout the Great Plains, parts of the West and Midwest areas.



Credit: US Army Corps of Engineers

Credit: The Nature Conservancy

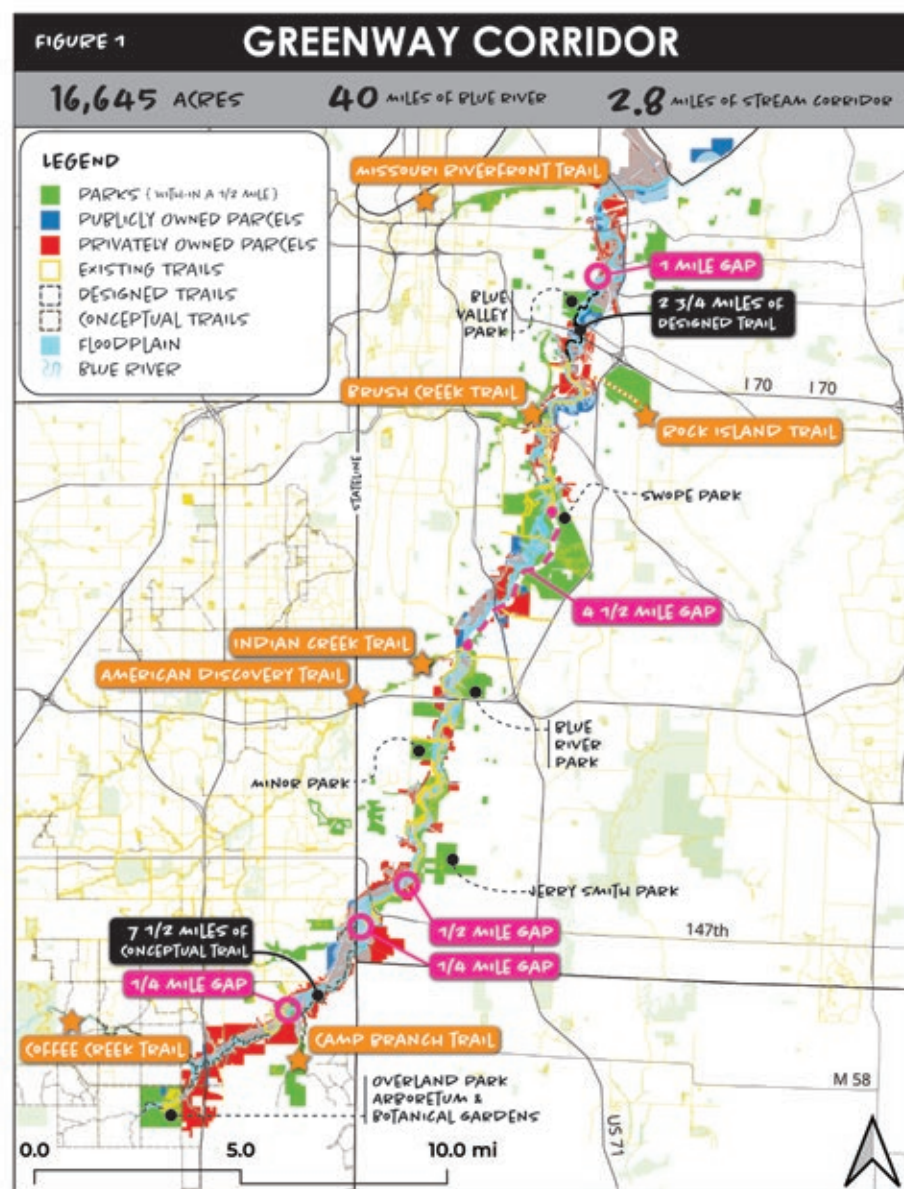


The Blue River Watershed is an environmentally, economically, and socially diverse place within the Missouri River Watershed, which encapsulates various types of communities, both urban and rural, and many natural habitats and ecosystems. The water that the Blue River provides to people, foliage, and animals is intrinsic to the greater watershed that stretches throughout the Great Plains and into the Western United States.

The Blue River flows 41 miles across Kansas and Missouri, through 5 counties and 20 municipalities. Two-thirds of the rain that falls in southern Kansas City area drains into the River, which then feeds many tributaries throughout Kansas City and surrounding areas to eventually flow into the Missouri River. The Missouri River is the source of drinking water for the Kansas City area.

The Blue River is a unique urban waterway. The headwaters in Johnson County, Kansas and Cass County, Missouri are a mix of natural wetlands, forests, grasslands, pasture, and cropland. The river alternately flows through affluent, upper-middle-income and middle-income suburban neighborhoods and middle- to lower-income and racially and ethnically diverse urban residential neighborhoods and heavily industrialized areas that are protected by a levee system to keep the flood events from damaging industry and protects the river from pollution. Several regional and local parks are located at various points along the river's pathway. This diversity is both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity for the river corridor to protect and restore physical, environmental, ecological, ethnic, socioeconomic, and political connections and serve as a model and catalyst for our region.

Water equity and equitable access to nature are cornerstones of a reemerging vision for the river. The Blue River Greenway will be the backbone of a healthy, prosperous, connected, and resilient region. Numerous municipal and not-for-profit partners (Partners) are collaborating to complete the Greenway from the Overland Park Arboretum in suburban Johnson County, Kansas to Corrington Park in urban Kansas City, Missouri, near the confluence of the Blue and Missouri Rivers (Figure 1). The project builds on our considerable public lands and trails, identifying gaps and opportunities to complete land assembly, protecting and enhancing habitat, and fully connecting trails.



Background

Kansas City and the Missouri River has a long history of utilizing its centrality for development. Trading posts, trail stops, and eventually the railroad would pave the way for Kansas City's development. Kansas City's expansion greatly increased when the intercontinental railroad first spanned the Missouri River. Warehouses, industry, and ports spawned along the river and the Missouri still serves a bustling industrial and manufacturing sector.

The Blue River Valley grew in parallel with the city as a whole. The river has a rich history. Indigenous communities lived along its banks for hundreds of years before settlers arrived. During the Civil War, the Blue River was the site of the Battle of Byram's Ford, which was part of a larger battle that resulted in a key Union victory.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was a social and cultural meeting place for some Kansas Citians. Cottages and watercraft rental outfitters lined the riverbanks in the summers. Houseboats were used as art studios, weekend picnic retreats, summer cottages and for many, year-round homes. The deep, clear water made for good swimming and fishing.



Credit: Kansas City Public Library

As the City grew, so did the water distribution systems and water quality and protection systems.

1860	Kansas City built the Main Street Public Sewer
1873	The National Water Works Company of New York City was granted a franchise to operate a water system in Kansas City
1875	4 million gallons of water per day were pumped through 12 miles of pipes
1885	Sewer extended to Missouri River
1895	The City purchased the water system from the National Water Works Company by issuing bonds.
1910	Sewer system plan developed
1926	Blue River Trunk Sewer constructed
1928	City constructed a larger water works station on the north side of the Blue River
1961	Water & Pollution Control Department established
1962	Blue River Treatment Plant constructed



Photos courtesy of KC Water

By 1908, there were 65 launches, four boathouses, and fleets of rental craft operating on the Blue. But as river recreation was booming, there were elements, both natural and man-made, threatening the future of the river as a popular outdoor destination (Kansas City Public Library, 2021). Kansas City was embroiled in the social and economic waves the United States experienced through the decades. The Roaring '20s and arts movements of the 1930s brought jazz, movies, and baseball to the region. Segregation and racial upheaval were as present in Kansas City as many cities in the nation. The practice of “redlining” in selling real estate and issuing both private and federally subsidized home loans increasingly concentrated minority communities to the eastern side of Kansas City that includes the Blue River Valley. Meanwhile, suburban areas of Kansas City, Missouri and the Kansas suburbs upstream boomed after World War II, but were essentially off limits to all but white homeowners (Johnson County Parks & Recreation District, 2022).

Credit: Heartland Conservation Alliance



With increased development came increased habitat destruction and pollution. As the Blue River was channelized and natural areas were paved over, the ability of the landscape to absorb water from storms diminished, causing increased flooding and stormwater runoff. These changes also resulted in less shading and cooling, increasing the urban heat island effect. Today, loss of habitat threatens native species and a lack of physical access to the river prevents Kansas Citians from using it. Some do not even know it exists.

Data

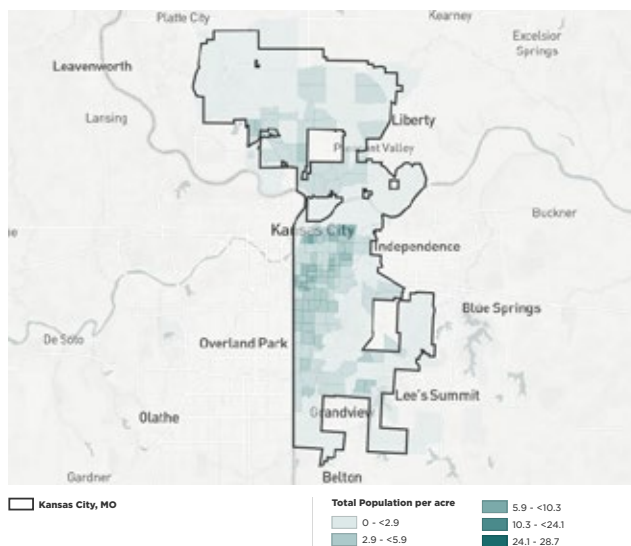
Geography and Population

Kansas City is a sprawling metropolitan area within 6 counties on the border of Kansas and Missouri. The City experienced rapid growth after the intercontinental railroad was built over the Missouri River. Additionally, KC experienced sprawl post World War II as homeowners began transitioning to the suburban areas.

Growth by Annexation



Total Population Per Acre



Since 1880, Kansas City's population has increased quickly. Migration from the southern states, the intercontinental railroad, and the advancement of cross-country travel provided Kansas City with exponential growth. The recession and divestment in industry during the 1970s impacted Kansas City's population; however, over the course of the past few decades, Kansas City's population is increasing again.

Kansas City's racial makeup is more than 50% white; however, minority groups are increasing in number, which inspires creativity, drives innovation, and enhances social inclusion.

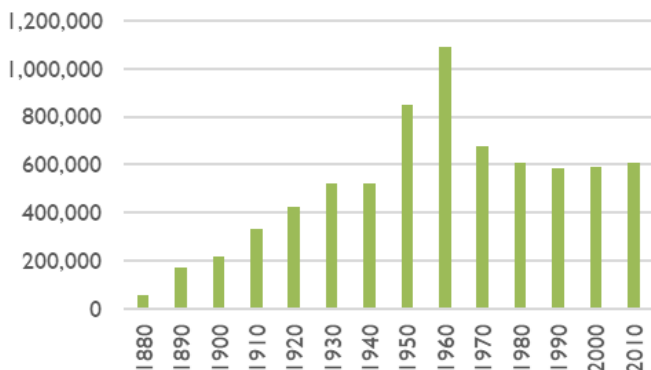


Figure 2: Data from US Census Bureau

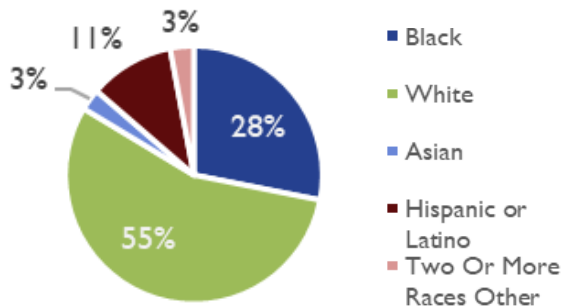


Figure 3: Data from US Census Bureau

Median Household Income

Median Household Income (MHI) is often a baseline used for the economic stability of a community. The relationships between MHI and poverty levels can be seen in housing, economic development, and community investments. Like many communities, Kansas City is experiencing a rise in MHI; however, that prosperity is not experienced equally.

Regardless of ethnicity, higher-than-average income earners primarily live in the farthest southern edges of the City, or in the suburbs to the north. Racially concentrated areas of poverty are observed in the urban core of Kansas City, which is consistent with many cities across the country. The core of the city, once the prosperous center, deteriorated over time as urban sprawl led affluent households to the suburban areas. Cities are experiencing gentrification at varying rates, and Kansas City is no exception; however, residents of the urban core still experience blight and poverty at higher rates than outlying areas.

MHI Over Time

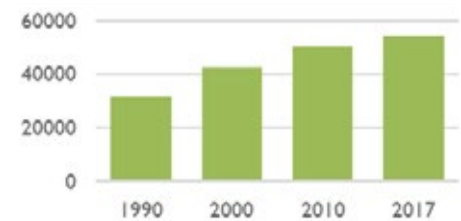
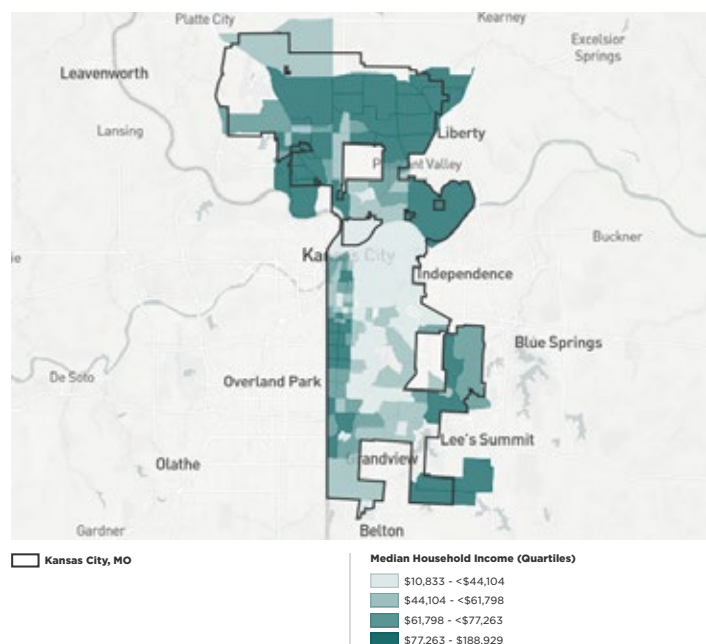
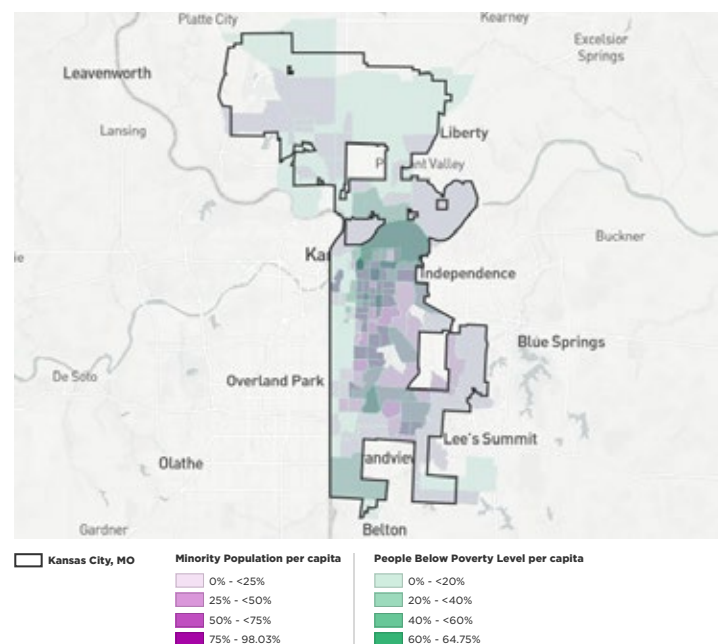


Figure 4: Data from US Census Bureau

Median Household Income in Kansas City by Census Tract



Racially or Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty



Poverty

Although poverty is on a downward trend, almost 25% of Kansas City residents are experiencing poverty, based on different thresholds.

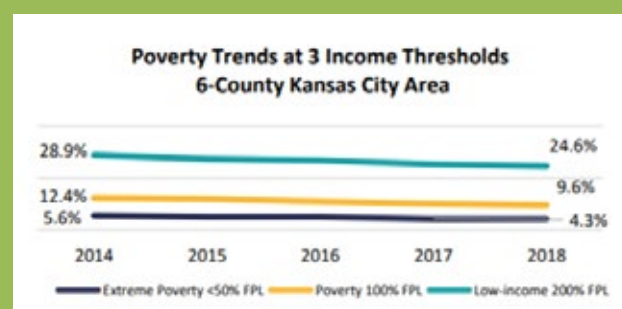
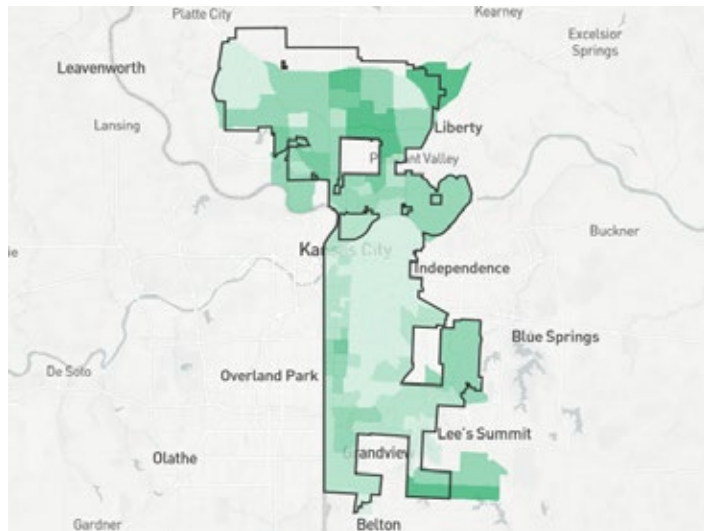


Table 1: Greater KC Community Profile

Housing

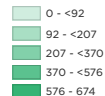
Housing is often a marker of disadvantaged communities within a city. Mortgage applications for the Kansas City area show that the urban core has fewer applications for mortgages and of the applications submitted, more were denied within the city center when compared with the outer regions of the city.

2017 Mortgage Applications

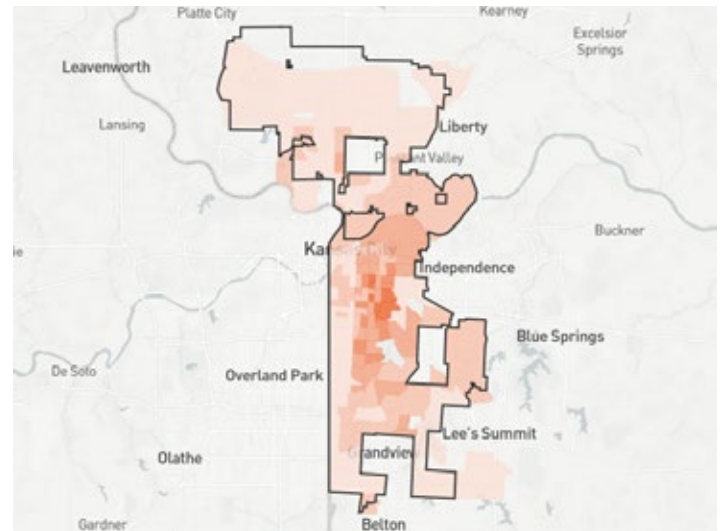


Kansas City, MO

Mortgage Applications

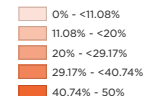


Mortgage Applications Denied in 2017



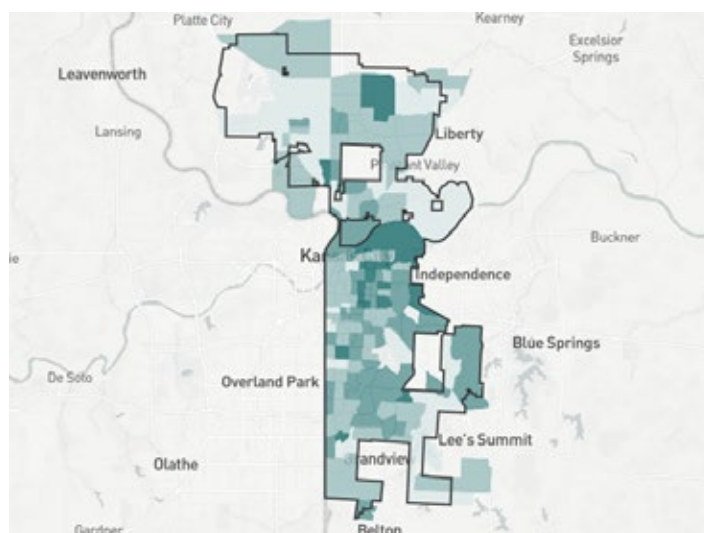
Kansas City, MO

Mortgage Applications Denied



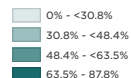
Additionally, renters living in the central areas of the city experience excessive rents despite median rents in the same area being lower than other areas of the city. It is observed that despite the lower rates, rents are still taking up more than 30% of income in these areas.

Excessive Rent (Over 30% of Income)

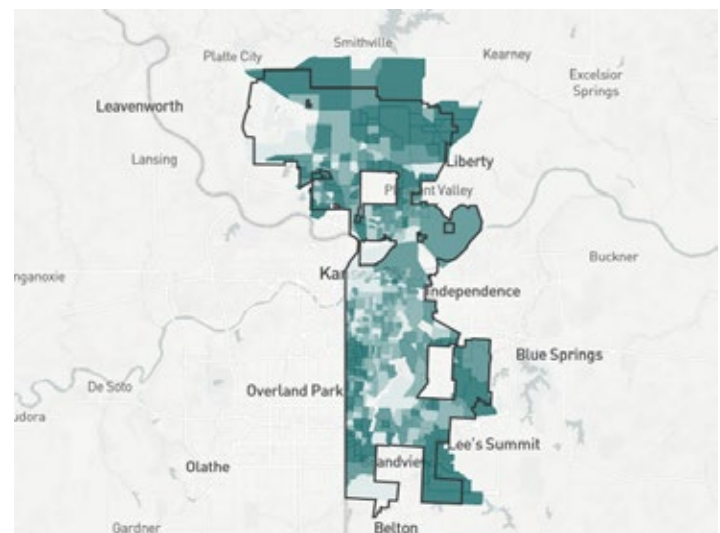


Kansas City, MO

Cost Burdened Renters

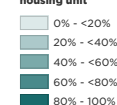


Owner Occupancy

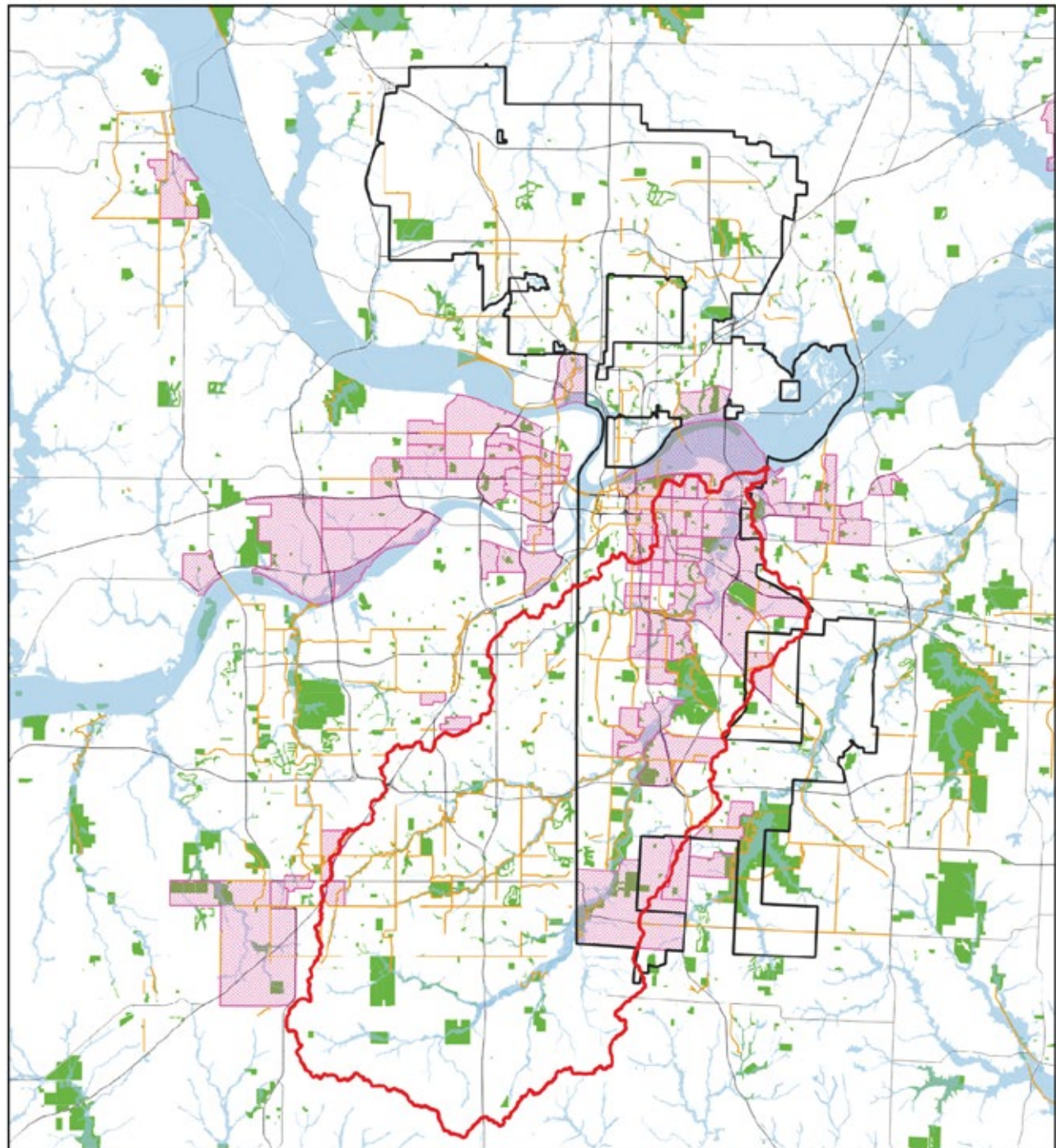


Kansas City, MO

Total Owner Occupied Housing Units per occupied housing unit



Social Vulnerability Index



Parks

500 year floodplain

Existing Trails

Highways

Blue River Watershed Boundary

KCMO City Boundary

Tracts with High Social Vulnerability



Key Terms

Socioeconomic Indicators:

Percent People of Color: The percent of individuals in a block group who list their racial status as a race other than white alone and/or list their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. That is, all people other than non-Hispanic white-alone individuals. The word “alone” in this case indicates that the person is of a single race, not multiracial.

Unemployment: All those who did not have a job at all during the reporting period, made at least one specific active effort to find a job during the prior 4 weeks, and were available for work (unless temporarily ill).

Low Income: Percent of individuals whose ratio of household income to poverty level in the past 12 months was less than 2 (as a fraction of individuals for whom ratio was determined).

Demographic Index: The demographic index in EJScreen is a combination of percent low-income and percent minority, the two socioeconomic factors that were explicitly named in Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice. For each Census block group, these two numbers are simply averaged together. The formula is as follows: demographic index = (% people of color + % low-income) / 2.

Health Disparities:

Low Life Expectancy: Average life expectancy data developed as a collaboration between NCHS, the National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This data is available at the tract level.

Heart Disease: Prevalence among adults aged 18 years or older. The term “heart disease” refers to several types of heart conditions. This data is available at the tract level.

Asthma: Prevalence among adults aged 18 or older. This data is available at the tract level.

Critical Service Gaps:

Food Deserts: Low income and low access tract measured at 1 mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas. This data is available at the tract level.

Medically Underserved: Areas/Populations are areas or populations designated by US Health Resources & Services Administration as having too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty or a high elderly population.

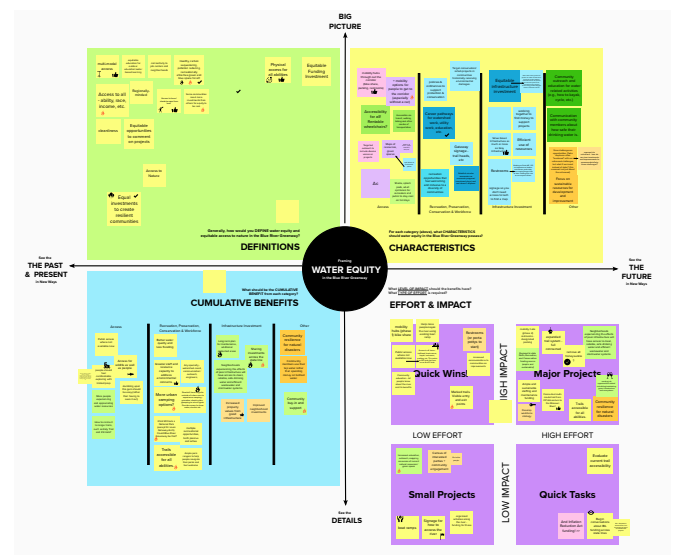
Water Equity

The US Water Alliance states that water equity “occurs when all communities have access to safe, clean, affordable drinking water and wastewater services, share in the economic, social, and environmental benefits of water systems; and are resilient in the face of floods, drought, and other climate risks.” Our community strives to enhance equitable structures so that all our communities and the people within them thrive. Without the essential life force that water provides, our people suffer, and when our people suffer, our city suffers.

This Roadmap is a living document to guide the City’s elected and appointed leaders, community groups, nonprofit organizations, and community members toward equitable access to clean drinking water and natural resources.

Blue River Greenway Vision

The many Partners have worked together to identify a vision for the Blue River Greenway by synthesizing the visions, goals, and objectives of several previously developed watershed management, conservation, and recreation plans, and soliciting additional community guidance and input.



Based on the Partners’ review of previous, related plans and studies, multiple conversations with stakeholders and residents, and review of the greenway characteristics and available data, the completed Blue River Greenway will:

- Become a regional destination to live, work, and play
- Complete the lynchpin of our regional greenways
- Strengthen natural, transportation, social, economic, and political connections
- Reduce flooding & improve water quality
- Draw down CO2 and help achieve carbon neutrality
- Improve air quality
- Cool the urban heat island
- Provide equitable access to nature and healthy outdoor recreation
- Promote regenerative economic development and provide green collar jobs
- Connect residents and workers to local jobs

Community Engagement Meetings

In developing the vision, the Partners engaged the community to help ensure that the Blue River Greenway will help fulfill the needs and desires of all residents and stakeholders now and in the future. Of the three virtual workshops conducted in summer and autumn of 2022, two were dedicated to engaging stakeholders, neighborhood associations, and residents on their desires for water equity and equitable access to nature: an August 29, 2022, stakeholder workshop and November 9, 2022, community workshop. The Partners actively invited a diverse range of community groups, neighborhood associations, and citizens, some of whom were already participating in related planning and visioning and some of whom were new to the topic. Experienced facilitators with backgrounds in equity, environmental justice, community engagement, urban planning and policy, and local environmental and social issues helped shepherd the conversations and solicit input, feedback, and guidance.

The following sections describe the emerging water equity road map, incorporating community engagement results into the vision into key themes that emerged from the meetings: Equitable Access to Nature, Environmental and Climate Justice, and Flooding and Water Quality, Economic and Workforce Development, “BlueGreenways” and Recreation, and Neighborhood Engagement. Specific examples or brief case studies illustrate the themes where possible.

[illegible][illegible]

Equitable Access to Nature

What We Heard

The Blue River Greenway should provide regular, welcoming, safe, and easy access to nature in urban and rural areas, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, age, ability, location, or transportation.

All communities should have knowledge of – and direct, consistent, and reliable access to – clean water, outdoor recreation, and natural resources.

Key Elements

- Create connections and pathways between natural spaces and the river, and from and into the neighborhoods
- Provide access to nature for people of all abilities, and multimodal transportation for those without cars
 - Via transit, walking, biking, and other modes of transportation
 - Access to safe trails for walking and riding, including for older individuals
- Provide mobility between communities in all senses
- Increase diverse socioeconomic and cultural interactions
- Base access on an understanding of the difference between “equal” and “equitable”
 - Ensure that the number of access points and the quality and connectedness of trails is equitable with more affluent communities
- Provide access to nature for mental and physical health benefits
- Recognize differing priorities for water access
- Understand that water quality might mean different things to different people
- Ensure that one type of access or use cannot impede or hinder other types of access or use
- Address public safety and perceptions of safety while ensuring that users are not stereotyped or profiled

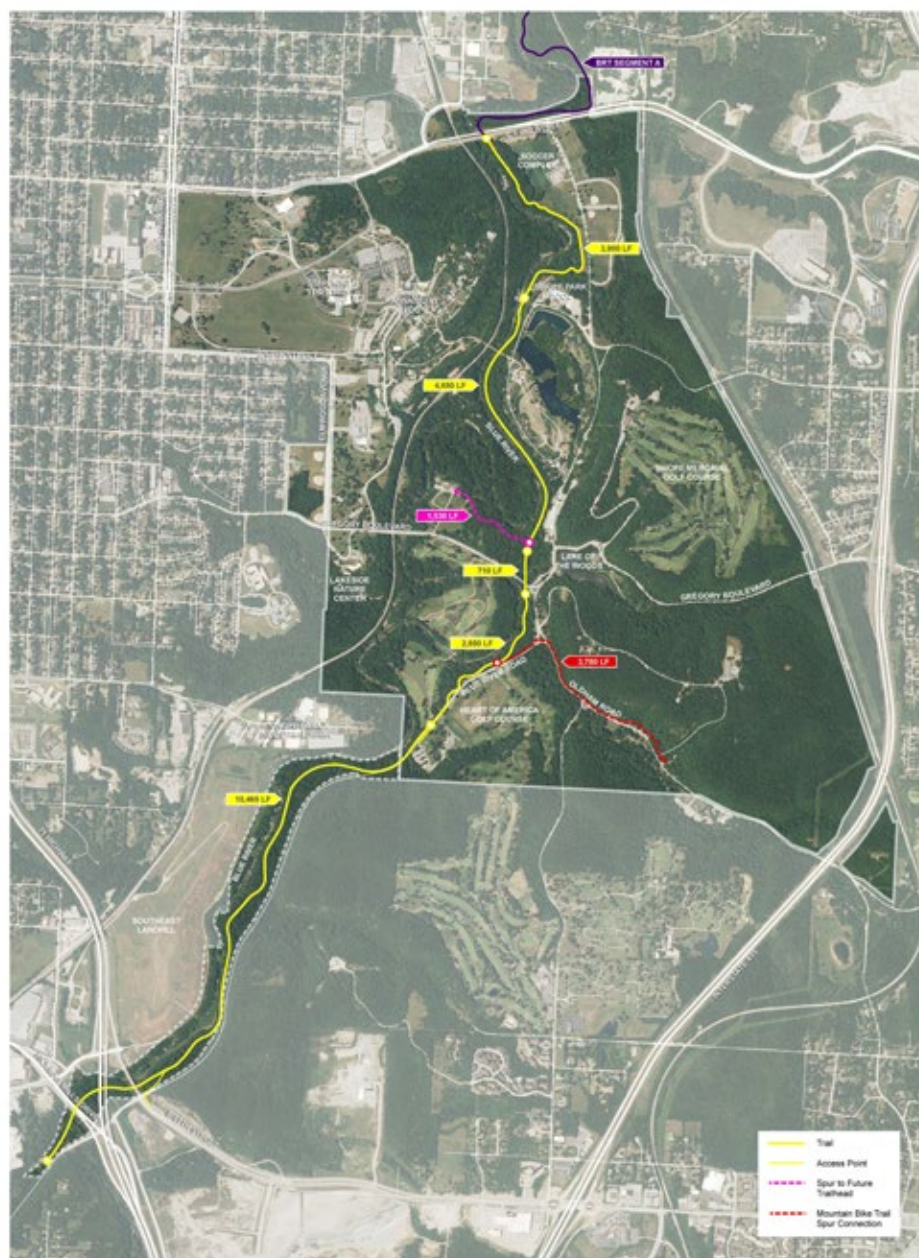


PROJECT THEMES

Blue River Trail

The Blue River Trail corridor is an important part of Kansas City's regional trail system, eventually planned to connect areas of southeast Kansas City to the Missouri River and points north.

The central section (Segments A, B, and C) of the corridor from Swope Park to Truman Road has the potential to connect urban core neighborhoods to the rest of the region and to commercial and industrial centers in the Blue River area. Within this central section, Segment B of the Blue River Trail is an approximately 2.5-mile multi-use trail generally following the Blue River from the Colorado Avenue Bridge at Brush Creek north to Stadium Drive. From Segment B, trail users are also able to connect to the Brush Creek Trail just to the west of the Colorado Avenue Bridge.



vireo

BLUE RIVER TRAIL - SWOPE PARK STUDY
PREFERRED TRAIL ALIGNMENT APRIL 2014



Environmental & Climate Justice

What We Heard

Provide healthy, carbon-sequestering, pollution-reducing, recreationally attractive green and blue space for all.

Address historical Environmental Justice issues.

Create resilience to natural hazards like extreme heat, drought, and flooding.

Key Elements

- Provide a model for better urban development that retains and infiltrates water, protects water quality, and preserves biodiversity
- Promote climate change mitigation and adaptation
 - River corridors are extremely important for climate change adaptation
 - Provide access to the cool air flowing down the river on hot days
 - Including creating cooling stations on the river
- Enact policies and ordinances to support protection and conservation
- Improve flood resilience
- Reduce air and water pollution
- Target conservation and restoration projects in communities historically experiencing environmental damages
 - Including pollinator habitat
- Remediate brownfields
- Identify polluters and those directly and indirectly harmed by pollution
 - Determine whether fish can be safely consumed
 - Identify communities that lose resources when fish cannot be consumed
- Prepare risk management plans
- Provide access to proper trash disposal to reduce litter and pollution
- Provide environmental safety information on chemicals used for honeysuckle removal
- Restrict pesticide use in areas where food foraging is common

PROJECT THEMES

Municipal Farm

Located on the bank of the Blue River east of the Brush Creek confluence, the 444-acre Municipal Farm has been in City ownership since 1911 and benefits from its proximity to important regional amenities and natural resources (the Truman Sports Complex, Brush Creek and Blue River greenway trails, and the Rock Island Corridor). Over the last century, the farm has been home to the city's tuberculosis hospital, women's reformatory, "potter's fields" (indigent cemetery), municipal correctional institution and an inmate-run farm, municipal landfills and hazardous materials storage. The adjacent Blue River has been altered by the US Army Corps of Engineers to reduce flooding, and the area is surrounded by industry and residential neighborhoods struggling with crime, poverty, and environmental challenges. The Municipal Farm has been overgrown with invasive species, resulting in a monoculture of understory species displacing native wildlife.



After the jail was demolished in 2009, a Municipal Farm Sustainable Reuse Plan was created and adopted in 2012 (Resolution No. 120959). As many partners work to implement the plan, the Municipal Farm helps to revitalize urban agriculture, restore habitat, and provide healthy outdoor recreational opportunities to its underserved community. Expanding community gardens, restored farmland, and a future food hub to train and support urban farmers are providing healthy food and economic opportunities. Over 30 acres of wetland and bottomland hardwood habitat restoration have been completed with plans to double the conservation area, helping to offset historic groundwater contamination in the industrial area downstream. Future plans include mountain biking, kayaking and canoeing, fishing, nature viewing, rock climbing and even skateboarding, creating an unparalleled urban nature park that has the potential to become a regional ecotourism destination.

Photo Credit: Heartland Conservation Alliance



Economic & Workforce Development

What We Heard

Neighborhoods surrounding the river should have as much if not more access to the resources and share in the benefits generated by revitalization of the river

Growing food in the greenway is important for many communities along the river

Leverage water and natural resources as assets that generate real community income

Economic benefits must be distributed equitably by race, income, location, transportation access, and ability

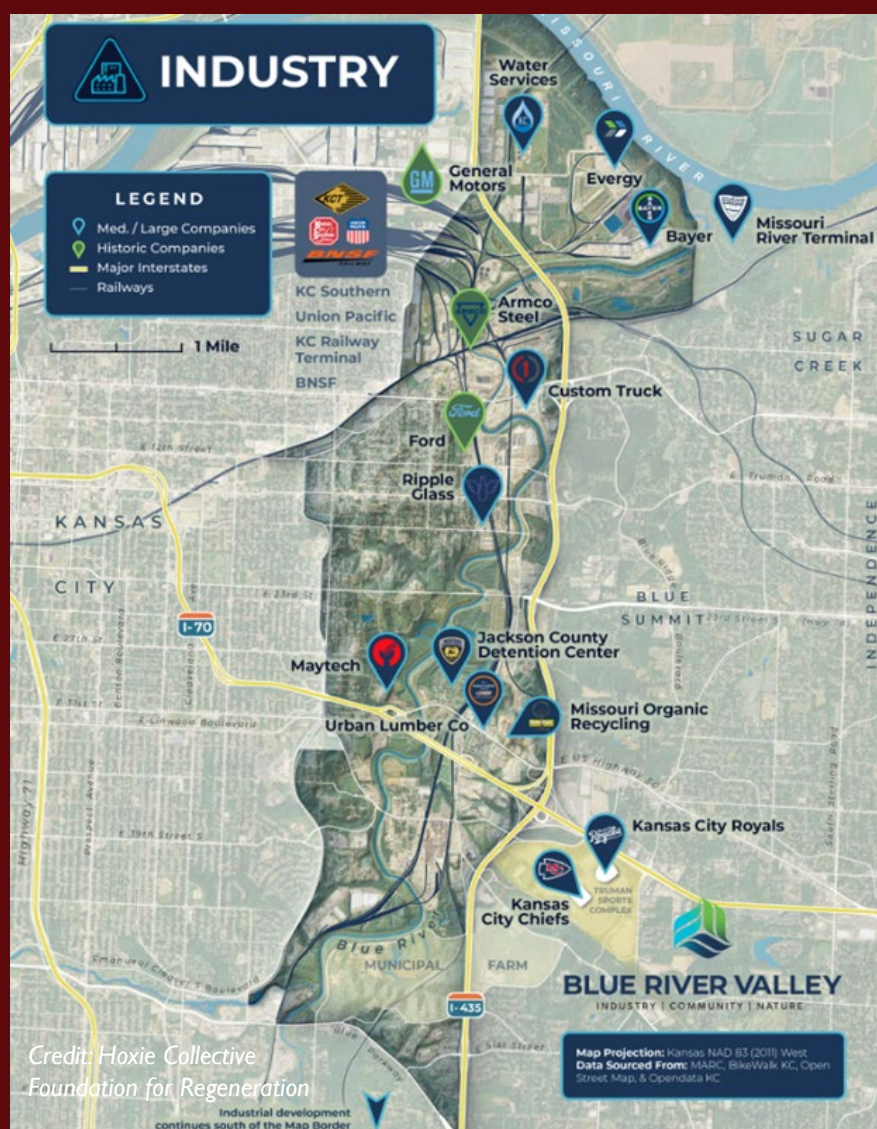
Key Elements

- Provide equal access to the jobs that build and maintain green infrastructure and physical connections to these places
 - Create jobs in green infrastructure, tourism and hospitality, education, and preservation
 - Promote entrepreneurial opportunities
 - Invest eco-tourism dollars in environmental justice programs
 - Direct resources toward capacity building
 - Expand eligibility for additional grant funding, including smaller grass roots organizations
- Provide equitable economic and infrastructure investment, including water, wastewater, power utilities, walkability, and transit in addition to roads
 - Investments equitably based on historic disinvestment and current need
 - Invest and use resources efficiently
 - Help make water utility bills more equitable and affordable
- Expand urban agriculture opportunities
 - Provide education and demonstrations about food and gardening
 - Leverage local expertise, wisdom, tradition, and family knowledge
 - Incorporate a mix of traditional crops and native species
 - Implement the 4-P Agroforestry plan (plum, paw paw, pecan, and persimmon)
- Establish circular economies so economic progress and investment stays local and doesn't displace existing residents or businesses
 - Nurture Eco-dustrial businesses of the future
- Address gentrification

PROJECT THEMES

The Blue River Valley Plan

Spanning more than 4,600 acres and stretching from I-435 and the Truman Sports Complex on the south to the confluence of the Blue and the Missouri Rivers in the north, the Blue River Valley that was once a nature lover destination and thriving industrial community is now in serious economic decline with an uncertain future. The Foundation for Regeneration, a nongovernmental organization, is working to demonstrate the potential and promise of Regeneration in the Blue River Valley by realizing the vision of the eco-industrial park concept:



In the future the look and feel of the Blue River Valley will be a restored habitat of riparian and wetland species. The connected trail systems and managed lands will be stewarded by the CCC providing new green jobs to KC residents. This greenway will connect up to the Missouri River will invite new exploration and enjoyment for local residents and visitors to Kansas City. We will see the assemblage of land and entities to make highest use of byproduct synergies. Companies throughout the corridor will supply local open-source products and regenerative strategies that stack together.

In the North, the Missouri River Terminal will catalyze a surrounding groundswell for Transportation & Logistics. Similarly in the South, Municipal Farm will catalyze 'Ecodustrial' friendly companies rather than simply "Mixed Industrial." Companies with synergies will co-locate and function as nodes of commerce and regeneration.

The foundation and its partners are securing funding and developing numerous catalyst projects to demonstrate and jumpstart the transformation, from identifying project sites and areas to helping develop processes, tools, standards, and markets for a thriving regional circular economy.



BlueGreenways & Recreation

What We Heard

Natural spaces should provide access to healthy outdoor recreation, including hiking, cycling, and mountain biking, kayaking and canoeing, rock climbing and skateboarding

Creating a regional and national destination for tourism, and a recreational asset that drives economic opportunities

Allowing more people experience and appreciate water resources

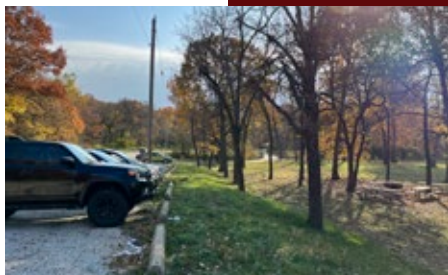


Key Elements

- Provide recreation opportunities that feel welcoming and inclusive to diverse communities
 - Include both passive and active recreation
 - Provide accessibility for all abilities
- Provide public access where unavailable – trailheads, boat access, kayak and canoe ramps, restrooms, parking, etc.
 - Help more people kayak the river using existing boat ramp
 - Bring Kansas facilities up to the same level as Missouri
- Create gateway signage and mapping, including for those without access to technology
- Employ ample park rangers to help people navigate their parks and feel welcome
- Engage the community with education on water-related activities (e.g., outdoor skills, how to kayak, cycle, fish, etc.)
- Remove impediments to fishing and boating
- Increase the visibility of Urban Trail Co. single-track trail network
- Provide shade, splash pads, adult sprinklers for recreators and public to stay cool on hot days
- Connect to regional and national trails such as the Rock Island, Katy, American Discovery, and Kansas Rails-to-Trails corridors

PROJECT THEMES

Blue River Parkway Master Plan



Jackson County Parks + Rec sought to create a master plan for the Blue River Parkway which stretches from south of Swope Park to Kenneth Road and consists of approximately 2,200 acres. Throughout the citizen-driven master planning process, input from stakeholders, existing partners, and the public was critical in informing and creating the three major goals and priorities:

- Land management and natural resources
- Enterprise, recreation, and programs
- Park development and improvement

The final deliverable included a master plan document that highlights the Parkway's historic importance, public engagement results, major goals, priorities, and objectives for the future of the Parkway, and a capital improvement plans for strategic areas along the Parkway, like the Alex George Wetland.



ALEX GEORGE WETLAND

Wetland restoration efforts with the 20-acre park are a collaborative effort between Jackson County Parks + Rec, the Wetland Conservation Alliance, Missouri Department of Conservation, the Gas and others. The restoration project represents a transition from a deep sand that has been filling in with sediment from surrounding areas to a shallow water wetland in order for the wetland to reach its full potential. Focus should be placed on the following areas:

- Improve water quality and reduce algae – conduct ongoing water quality monitoring as part of the restoration project and implement. Data will be useful for evaluating future nutrient and sediment loading to the wetland and surface waters within the region.
- Improve shoreline conditions by planting native and managing diverse species. Establishment of native plants will reduce erosion, increase diversity, and improve filtration of pollutants entering the wetland. Management of invasive species like the shrub *Hemlock* is also critical to this effort.
- Promote gardens – vegetation management of these areas is necessary for successful establishment and long-term management of native plant species that will in turn benefit native pollinator species like bees, butterflies, and song birds.
- Park amenities – the trail system along with shelters, picnic tables, restrooms, and boardwalks represent amenities that are essential to encouraging people to recreate within the park. Placement and maintenance of these amenities will be instrumental to achieving the goal of providing educational opportunities at the park.

The park concept presented here was heavily influenced by a previous concept study from a Professional Science Masters student at the University of Kansas. The Alex George Wetland serves as a perfect place for educational opportunities to teach people about natural processes, native plants, pollinators, wetlands, and fauna who

may live in these types of habitats. This park concept will include several small shelters, a nature playground, pollinator gardens, a small boardwalk and observation deck, a composted trail, and an outdoor classroom. Educational interpretive signs placed around the area could enhance the experience and opportunities for enrichment for students and visitors alike. Expanding the parking lot, especially with the increased number of shelters and activities, would allow for greater use and visibility of the park.



Neighborhood Engagement

What We Heard

Develop stronger communities and relationships among neighbors through a mutual interest in protecting nature

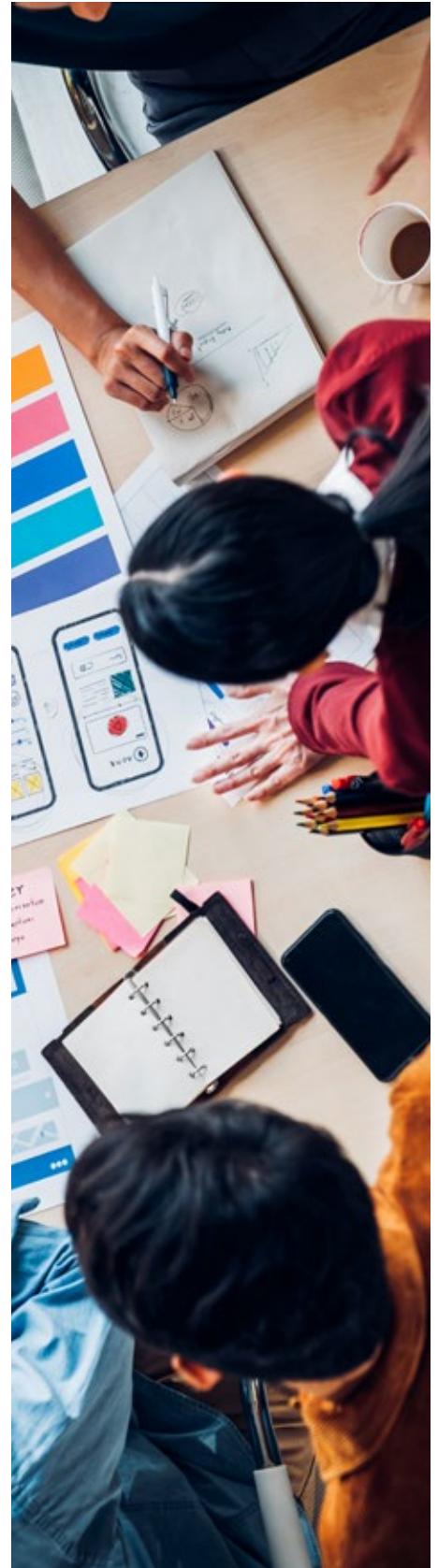
Build capacity and resources for continued stewardship to maintain quality across generations

Create green infrastructure as social infrastructure, places where community is created and grows

Let front yards be the gateway to nature

Key Elements

- Involve communities along the Blue River through education of project benefits, and by including in project planning
- Provide residents equal input on conservation projects in the Blue River Valley
- Create opportunities to learn how to interact with nature and develop outdoor skills
- Encourage re-vegetation of front yards to native plants, fruits and vegetables watered by rain barrels
- Provide stewardship opportunities to multifamily housing residents
- Nurture social connection through nature-based events
- Promote behavioral change with lasting and sustainable improvements to water quality and habitat



PROJECT THEMES

Palestine East Corridor Project



Heartland Conservation Alliance (HCA) coordinated with several partners to adopt a reuse plan for approximately 20 acres of vacant land nestled into existing neighborhoods. The site provides a forest refuge for many species of inner-city wildlife and natural spaces for neighbors to enjoy. The goal of the reuse plan was to reduce crime and illegal dumping, improve home values, and foster a sense of community and place for the surrounding neighbors.

Through a series of community surveys and workshops, HCA learned that nearby residents had significant connections with their backyard forest and a deep desire to protect it. A tree inventory was conducted in 2019 to prepare the way for concept development by the Community Advisory Board (CAB).

Nine individuals with varied backgrounds gathered to build trust and listen to one another's concerns for the site. They created concepts centered around Ecosystem Services and Economic Advance. Each focuses on accessible trails, neighborhood gathering spaces, community food production, and restoration of natural spaces by improving water quality and removing invasive species.

Engaging in community is tough but so worth it. Resident leaders spoke truth to power tonight and we are committed to stellar basic City services to earn their trust.

#GreenInfrastructure
#SmartSewer
#PeopleFirst



Next Steps & Further Considerations

Numerous Partners continue to craft the Blue River Greenway vision, develop specific and actionable goals and objectives, and identify real project opportunities and resources to realize the vision. The next step is a comprehensive case statement for prospective partners and funders. This Water Equity Road Map provides the foundation for the vision and case statement by establishing a baseline, integrating diverse community members in planning and decision making, documenting historic disinvestment, and identifying real needs and future community goals and desires. More importantly, it establishes equity and justice as core values for planning and implementation, and a lens through which to view issues, opportunities, and results.

The Blue River Greenway is also a lynchpin for regional efforts and will catalyze multi-benefit water resources projects, programs, and investments across the Kansas City metropolitan area. The Greenway (or BlueGreenway!) is a key component of several major regional initiatives that are guided by equity and justice frameworks, including the Climate Action KC Regional Climate Action Plan; Kansas City, Missouri's Climate Protection & Resiliency Plan; Johnson County, Kansas Stormwater Management Program's watershed master plans; Johnson County Parks & Recreation District's strategic plan update, Jackson County Parks + Rec's Blue River Parkway Master Plan, and Heartland Conservation Alliance's Blue River Action Plan, among others.



Credit:
Heartland Conservation Alliance

Implementation is ongoing as Partners complete ongoing projects and begin planned and funded projects, apply for and secure grant funding, develop new (and equity-focused) projects, and identify traditional and novel funding sources. Next steps include:

- Finalizing the Blue River Greenway Vision and Case Statement
- Creating a strategic finance plan for the Blue River Greenway
- Identifying and securing new Federal grants
- Approaching major regional and national philanthropic funders
- Developing a comprehensive, long-term funding and financing pool that distributes resources equitably and efficiently, guided by the community's vision, needs, goals and desires as documented in this Water Equity Road Map

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