

ASSET AND BARRIER ASSESSMENT:

Introduction. Every community has a mix of assets and advantages that can be leveraged to stimulate business retention, expansion, creation or attraction. The process is the same for building a local green economy, although some unique conditions are needed to support sustainable business and particular growth sectors.

Target Sectors for Sterling's Riverfront Brownfields. Heavy industry once dominated Sterling's riverfront. Today, four major vacant brownfield properties remain at the southern gateway to the City. One of the City's major goals in establishing a Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Area is to promote the reuse of land and buildings adjoining the main road and bridge at the gateway to the City for cleaner, more sustainable uses. Delta Redevelopment Institute staff are seeking local input on Sterling's assets linked to sectors of the green economy with the best potential fit for its riverfront brownfields:

1. Green Tourism
2. Green Building
3. Alternative Energy, and
4. Local Food & Biofuels.

Preliminary Assessment of Assets. On August 4, the Downtown Riverfront Revitalization Task Force was asked to provide feedback on existing assets or local competitive advantages that the City could potentially leverage to promote economic growth in each of the Target Sectors. Half a dozen or so different types of assets were suggested, ranging from location advantages (proximity to key markets), natural resources, existing business base, workforce training programs, business support networks and available properties. Initial feedback on assets and barriers for each is summarized below.

1. **Green Tourism.** Green Tourism is a label for a broad range of hospitality, conference and event venues, parks and recreation and other leisure or entertainment businesses. Although Task Force members acknowledge that the Greater Sterling area has fewer tourism assets to draw upon than other tourism destinations within the same driving distance of Chicago such as Galena or Starved Rock, it does have existing assets that could be leveraged to serve a more targeted regional market.

a. Existing Assets.

- i. **Regional sporting event venue (Westwood Sports Complex).** Saulk Valley's largest sports facility with a 200-meter indoor track attracts indoor track, volleyball, and soccer clubs and tournaments from as far as in Rockford and Peoria.
- ii. **Historic and heritage sites.** In addition to a few historic homes (Ronald Reagan birth home in Tampico and new Lincoln home), Sterling has a strong manufacturing heritage and has a collection of 19 murals depicting historic figures located throughout the Downtown.
- iii. **Support networks.**
 1. Blackhawk Waterways Convention & Visitors Bureau serving the 4-county region (Whiteside, Lee, Ogle and Carroll counties). www.bwcvb.com
 2. Lincoln Highway Association

b. Potential Opportunities.

- i. **Hotel development.** Possible riverfront boutique hotel, or larger waterpark hotel?
- ii. **Heritage museum.** Possible new history museum

c. Barriers.

- i. **Funding.** There is currently no hotel/motel tax revenue to support new tourism-related development.
- ii. **Location.** Conventional chain hotels are located closer to Interstate 88 in Rock Falls. Could a specialty hotel (boutique or waterpark) overcome this challenge?

2. Green Building. This is another broad label for a range of construction or professional service firms that either are or have potential to promote more energy efficient or greener buildings, such as architects, engineers, landscape or product design firms. This sector might also include offices, showrooms or retail stores for green product manufacturers.

a. Existing Assets.

- i. Green buildings.** Several new schools with geothermal heating and cooling systems are a draw for groups or individuals requesting tours. Several homes also have geothermal systems.
- ii. Experience with grants and financing incentives for public buildings.** Some Task Force members have experience securing grants from the Illinois Clean Energy & Community Foundation and tax-exempt bond financing for green building investment.
- iii. Professional training programs** – Sauk Valley Community College is considering (or already has?) a LEED AP certificate program.

b. Potential Opportunities.

- i. Green rehab of existing riverfront buildings.** Green rehab specifications for city-owned riverfront buildings could create jobs for local construction or professional service firms.

c. Barriers.

- i. Contractor education/capacity.** Local contractors have limited knowledge and experience with new green building systems and standards. [Is there a Quad Cities US Green Building Council Chapter that could provide support here?]
- ii. Free energy audits not available for vacant buildings?** Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding is becoming available this year through state (DCEO) or regional government agencies. Most EECBG programs offer free energy audits for commercial and industrial buildings, but vacant buildings may not be eligible.

3. Alternative Energy. This sector includes utility-scale energy development firms as well as firms that focus on smaller-scale on-site distributed generation. While Sterling's riverfront brownfields are no longer suitable for modern manufacturing, existing buildings could potentially be reused by firms that install, assemble or distribute alternative energy systems or components (geothermal, wind turbine or solar panel parts, etc.), or contractors that specialize in installation or maintenance of wind turbines or other alternative energy equipment. There is overlap here with Green Building related businesses.

a. Existing Assets.

- i. Existing school buildings – early geothermal adopters – leading the way...
- ii. Existing businesses with potential to expand into energy components or services:
 - 1. Frantz Manufacturing – already considering wind components?
 - 2. Contractors (geothermal contractor out of Morrison; well drilling co's?)
- iii. Workforce/training programs – Sauk Valley CC – Wind Energy Certificate program?

b. Potential Opportunities.

- i. **Green rehab of existing riverfront buildings** (overlap with Green Building)
- ii. **Create new municipal or district utility?** Explore creation of new (geothermal?) utility (or district heating/cooling plant?)

c. Barriers.

- i. **Ample electric supply** already exists (although not very affordable). Existing electric utility (ComEd) not motivated to invest in additional generation capacity.
- ii. **High capital cost.** New utility or district plant will have high upfront capital cost.

4. Local Food & Biofuel. This sector is rooted in the region's still-important agricultural base and includes businesses that are related to organic farming, local food processing or distribution, wholesale or retail sales businesses, as well as professional service firms that specialize in bio-fuel production or other bio-based products.

a. Existing Assets.

- i. **Year-round farmers market close to Downtown brownfields.**
- ii. **Existing sustainable ag businesses.** There are several existing sustainable agriculture operations in the Greater Sterling area.
- iii. **Support Networks.**
 1. **Guardian Angels** – (? Quad Cities group)
 2. **Illinois Extension** – 4H and agriculture education ?
 3. **Food banks (?)** – potential partners or markets for locally-grown food?

b. Potential Opportunities.

- i. **Rehab of existing riverfront buildings for organic food or bio-product related businesses** (organic restaurants, shared kitchens, organic food processing or distribution, professional offices)

c. Barriers.

[NOTE: The Task Force did not have time to fully discuss this sector, but members were asked to fill in additional assets and opportunity ideas after the meeting.]