City of Wilkes-Barre: Comprehensive Planning for Open Space Redevelopment

In 2015, the National Resource Network partnered with the City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to assess challenges facing the economic growth and vibrancy of the city’s downtown area, including crime. Following a recent rash of violence, the Network connected City leaders with resources at the U.S. Department of Justice to explore crime reduction strategies. The Network’s initial assessment also identified Public Square, a three-acre park at the heart and geographic center of downtown, as a major opportunity for downtown revitalization.

The Network’s assessment was followed closely by a more targeted engagement that focused on Public Square. In this phase, the Network developed a capital and operation and maintenance funding strategy for the redevelopment of the open space. Over a six month period, the Network identified potential sources of funding for redevelopment of the park, and worked closely with the Mayor’s office and local stakeholders – including the Diamond City Partnership, Wilkes University, King’s College, and the Downtown Business Association – to develop a vision for the future of the open space in partnership with local architecture studio Bohlin Cywinski Jackson. Thanks in part to the Network’s efforts, the City received a $200,000 grant from the State of Pennsylvania to initiate the Square’s redevelopment in July 2016.

By the end of 2018, local news was applauding the continued efforts of the City and community to improve the downtown area, highlighting the Diamond City Partnership’s Downtown Action Plan, which strives to make downtown: a safe, clean, and attractive place to live, work, shop, and visit and the region’s walk-to-everything urban neighborhood of choice, innovation district, and college neighborhood. Central to these efforts is the implementation of the vision for Public Square’s redevelopment, which began in October 2018.