



## Implementation Nomination #11185

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### Overview and Contact

Category: **Implementation**

#### Name of Nomination and Location

\*Name of the Entry: **Cincinnati, Ohio Central Riverfront Re-Birth Through Planning**

\*City: **Cincinnati**

\*State: **OH**

\*Zip: **45202**

Country: **USA**

### Criteria

#### \*Summary of the Entry

1 page *(100 to 200 words)*

The Cincinnati Central Riverfront redevelopment is an excellent example of plan brought to reality. It is succeeding to convert 195 acres between the Ohio River and Cincinnati's Central Business District from a vast wasteland of multiple single use auto related zones--mostly devoted to auto circulation and storage--to an economically successful, vital, mixed-use live/work/play development supported by multiple forms of transportation. The secret to its continuing success is a broad-based comprehensive plan rooted in an inclusive process that brought multiple governmental entities together and engaged citizens in the discussions and formulation, evolution, implementation and celebration of its birth.

The first wave of activity from 1998 to 2002 reconstructed the freeway separating the project area from the central business district, recapturing land and allowing two new sports stadia to replace the 1960s-era Riverfront Stadium and the construction of The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Although it took an additional six years to identify a developer, The Banks Project--Greater Cincinnati's largest single, mixed-use development to date--has successfully completed its first phase by staying true to that plan first proposed in 1997.

Response: 178 words

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### **\*1. Originality and innovation**

Document how your entry presents a visionary approach or innovative concept to address needs. Explain how the use of the planning process in this context broadened accepted planning principles within the context of the situation. **(150 to 300 words)**

Although the physical development plan for the riverfront from the mid-1990s carried many innovations now recognized as smart growth--mixed-use sustainable brownfield redevelopment, universal access or promotion of an active life style, multi-modal transportation--the true innovation in the implementation of the Cincinnati Central Riverfront Plan was rooted deeply in the planning process itself. The process presented a framework for cooperation and collaboration that has made the project a success. The first parts of the project saw the City and the County individually constructing the elements that they traditionally would undertake; the County constructing the stadia and garages and the City, the transportation and utility infrastructure. It took 10 years from the development of the first physical plan in 1997 for them to realize that to construct the hoped-for mixed-use development, they would have to join forces in a new and innovative manner, around a multi-part implementation plan.

Cincinnati and Hamilton County developed an innovative design for the project based on lifting the street grid and the buildings out of the 100-year floodplain to above the 500 year flood level and tying it to excellent transportation facilities and fronting it with an inviting riverfront park. All this could be done in a flood plain without measurable effect on the flow of the river. Drawn up with the leadership of The Banks Working Group (a citizens group appointed by the City and the County), the implementation plan recognized the partnerships, cooperation and collaboration required to mobilize resources and then keep the effort on track to deliver the multiple expectations of the project's key stakeholders. The resulting first phase is projected to return more than \$276 million in annual economic impact once completed, while the park is already being enjoyed by thousands.

Response: 288 words

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### **\*2. Effectiveness**

Indicate the level of consistency of this implementation effort since its start. State how your entry addressed the need or problem that prompted its initiation. Be explicit about how the results have made a difference in the lives of the people affected. Convey the level of effectiveness your entry can have over time. **(150 to 300 words)**

Because Cincinnati's front door, the Central Riverfront, is in the Ohio River Flood Plain, it has been the subject of multiple planning activities and attempts at development since the end of the 18th century. Until the mid-1990s, little progress had been made. At that point the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Government with Parsons Brinckerhoff as their lead consultant were engaged with the City of Cincinnati in redesigning Fort Washington Way, the urban freeway separating the riverfront from the Central Business District.

They joined forces in 1997 with Urban Design Associates, jointly employed by the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County and drafted the Urban Design Plan for the Central Riverfront and the Fort Washington Major Investment Study-- key documents that consistently guided the work in that area. The involved entities have used the guidance from those plans and the resulting legal agreements to bring the shared vision to reality.

First, the Public Parties settled any questions on resource management and contracting procedures with an Inter-Government Cooperation Agreement. Then the Master Development Agreement laid out the Public Parties' relationship with the developer, Carter-Dawson of Atlanta GA. The Infrastructure Development Management Agreement assigned responsibilities for project's utility and physical infrastructure. Lastly, the Joint Policy laid out social and economic

goals.

A 45-acre public park, apartments for 300 residents, and entertainment venues now actively contribute to the 24/7 neighborhood transforming the Central Riverfront while creating 900 jobs from construction and ongoing business operations, improving the quality of life for all.

According to a University of Cincinnati study, Economic Impact of The Banks Project in the Redevelopment of the Cincinnati Central Riverfront, the ongoing impact of The Banks, once Phase 1A achieves full-occupancy, is projected to reach \$91.6 million annually, a good return on investment in planning.

Response: 299 words

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### \*3. Overcoming challenges

Address what steps have been taken to build momentum and public support for your entry. Detail any changes, derailments, or improvements throughout the implementation phase. Identify funding challenges or support for this effort. Report any political changes that might affect, for better or worse, the effort's long-term funding. **(150 to 300 words)**

The Banks Project broke ground on an 18-acre site on Cincinnati's central riverfront in 2007 and completed its first development phase in 2011, a clear indication of its challenges. Overcoming them required City and the County to collectively plan, design, and finance \$128 million for coordinated infrastructure work and to engage the successful private developer.

Challenges to this effort were many:

- The area lies in the Ohio River Flood Plain;
- Planners and citizens called for risky mixed-use development, difficult to finance for the developer in an economic downturn and with eligibility problems for federal transportation dollars;
- It required a Public-Private partnership, not yet supported in Ohio Law, but clearly because of public involvement requiring economic inclusion, a balanced budget, and prevailing wage rates, and
- Strong public and political expectations for success.

To lift the development above the flood plain, designers devised a foundation comprised of an intermodal transit center with floodable garages capped with a flood-proof development podium, new street grid, replacement of all underground utilities, and a new 45-acre riverfront park. First phase of the private sector share on top of those public garages delivered a 24/7 neighborhood: 300 fully-occupied luxury apartments and over 90,000 square feet of commercial space now 92% leased. An economic study commissioned by the developer revealed a projected \$91 million annual economic impact from residential and retail first phase, a gratifying return.

The City and the County each fielded a team of professionals and hired a Project Executive to work with the developer to implement the plan and keep all parties informed through press releases, a website, and publishing monthly progress reports documenting performance against budget, schedule, inclusion, and safety targets, all met including over 416,000 hours worked without a lost-time accident.

Response: 292 words

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#### **\*4. Participation**

Explain how various public interests were involved and the extent of that involvement. Describe how your entry obtained public and private support. Clarify the role, significance, and participation of planners. **(150 to 300 words)**

The Central Riverfront from day one was planned by--and for--the public interest and benefit. Starting with the Fort Washington Way Major Investment Study and the concurrent Central Riverfront Plan, the process has been engaging, interactive and innovative. The general public and key stakeholders alike helped shape the development, funding, implementation and oversight of the plans. General agreement existed that the disjointed and under-developed sea of surface parking, home only to an obsolete stadium, needed to be reinvented into a cohesive, attractive and productive magnet for people to live, work and play along the banks of the Ohio River in downtown Cincinnati. It took multiple public workshops, presentations to every imaginable group, networking at events, roving displays, websites, to some extent social media, and even a voter referendum on the location of the ballpark.

The critical difference in citizen participation that made the biggest impact was a citizens' advisory group jointly appointed by the City and the County: the Joint Banks Steering Committee (JBSC). The JBSC devised the implementation plan that ultimately got the job done. Within that blend of physical design and implementation planning, elected and appointed officials weighed in on the best return for their investment. Business leaders helped shape policy and held the City and County and their contractors accountable for results. State and federal funding and operating agencies described the outcomes they would support. City and County project team members kept efforts on schedule and within budget, and supported ongoing dialogue with the general public through monthly progress reports and presentations, dedicated website, events, news media and social media outreach.

All members of the team collaborated to coordinate the involvement in Master Development Plan iterations and implementation, an integral role that ensured timely delivery of critical construction milestones within budget and meeting inclusion goals.

Response: 297 words

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#### **\*5. Achievement**

Describe how the longevity of this effort has increased the community's appetite for planning and the pursuit of similar initiatives. Clarify the extent that this effort's sustained success has been achieved beyond its general audience. **(150 to 300 words)**

Proving that the Central Riverfront Plan only increased the region's desire to plan a sustainable future, both the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County each undertook comprehensive planning efforts: Hamilton County's Community COMPASS and the City's Plan Cincinnati. Both efforts have enjoyed success and spawned follow-on efforts to deliver specificity and develop implementation plans similar to those focused on the riverfront. These initiatives have deep roots, both in planning history and in public process, reflecting a collective shared vision.

Community COMPASS resulted from a process by the Planning Partnership, an alliance of governments and planning commissions in Hamilton County, as well as civic and private sector organizations engaged in planning for the future of the county. It continues today, building off its Hamilton County 2030 Plan and Implementation Framework to further develop implementation plans reflecting the diversity of the 49 communities within Hamilton County.

Similarly, in 2009 the City of Cincinnati began developing Plan Cincinnati. Concurrent with the launch of that effort, Cincinnati received a 2010 Community Challenge Planning Grant through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities to consolidate existing zoning, subdivision

regulation, building, and environmental codes. With tools such as Form-based Code, Complete Streets, Transit Oriented Development, Inclusionary Zoning, Transfer of Development Rights, Incentive Zoning, and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, Cincinnati's new unified Land Development Code will promote the six Livability Principles and position the City's innovative approach on a national level.

Regionally, the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) has undertaken a series of planning efforts coordinated through its Regional Planning Forum. Ohio-based Agenda360, and Vision2015, based in Northern Kentucky, pick up themes of economic development and job growth and align them to both general policy and specific implementation for the region.

Planning is alive and well, driven by the success of the Central Riverfront and other projects.

Response: 300 words

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### **Letters of Support**

- from **Todd, Kinskey, AICP, Executive Director, Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission; Director, Grea**  
Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission

To the APA 2012 Awards Jury:

It is my honor to submit a letter of support on behalf of "The Cincinnati Central Riverfront, Rebirth Through Planning" Nomination in the Implementation Category of the 2013 2012 National APA Awards.

As a long-time resident of the City of Cincinnati and a professional planner, the redevelopment of the riverfront makes me so proud of my City as well as the planning profession. In planning terms, a project that goes from a concept to implementation in less than twenty years is impressive to say the least. It is that much more impressive because, in this case, the implementation involved, what at the time seemed insurmountable physical, economic, and political barriers.

Prior to redevelopment, the riverfront in downtown Cincinnati was a large brownfield, blocked off from the rest of the city by interstate highways, railroad tracts, and warehouses. Cincinnati was largely ignoring its riverfront preventing any use or enjoyment of the riverfront by its residents. The Cincinnati Central Riverfront redevelopment, which we, Cincinnatians, tend to refer to as "The Banks," was prominently identified as a strategy in the Hamilton County COMPASS (Community Master Plan and Strategies). The Banks addresses the goals of the development of the CBD as a key component in reinventing Hamilton County as the core of the region. In such capacity it anchors investments and redevelopment efforts not only for the City of Cincinnati, but for Hamilton County and the other 13 counties that makeup the OKI region. All the plans that have come after COMPASS continue to build around the vision and goals condensed there. The Banks was listed as a prominent strategy to achieve multiple goals.

The Cincinnati Central Riverfront aka The Banks redevelopment implementation has resulted in:

- Public access to the riverfront
- Public and private collaboration, and the private donations that have aided its construction illustrate the community's commitment
- Implementation brought not just transportation improvement, but over 900 new jobs by the end of 2012 in the businesses located there, 300 apartments, and cultural and recreational improvements

- National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the project's first structure after the sports stadia, has brought value as a focus for historical, cultural and inter-racial understanding. Based on a comprehensive transportation approach, the project has addressed both immediate as well as future needs including an Intermodal Transportation Center for future use with accommodations to enable development of both rubber tired and rail transit along with event bus staging
- The Cincinnati Bike Center provides locker rooms and bike storage for commuters, and bike rental and repair for the enthusiast or casual biker
- Public investments have fostered missed use – smart growth with minimal disturbance to the Ohio River floodplain
- Resulted in 300 LEED certified apartments in its first two buildings
- It is a walkable, bikeable, work, play 24/7 neighborhood where accessibility was one of the first considerations
- A spectacular new riverfront park includes amenities suitable for regional and local users, features with a solid business plan for its maintenance and growth ensuring the sustainability of the facility
- It is a great example for planning students, professionals, elected officials that long-term planning is not a book on a shelf but a clear path to investments and community development.

As an engaged professional planner who has watched this impressive project unfold, from an idea to a vision to bricks and mortar, transforming the riverfront of Cincinnati, I cannot imagine another project that embodies plan implementation better. I strongly recommend "The Cincinnati Central Riverfront, Rebirth Through Planning" Nomination for the Implementation Category Award by National APA for 2013. Please feel free to contact me at 513.946.4454 or [todd.kinskey@hamilton-co.org](mailto:todd.kinskey@hamilton-co.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Todd Kinskey, AICP  
 Executive Director, Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission  
 Director, Greater Cincinnati Section of APA-Ohio  
 Secretary, APA-Ohio Board of Trustees

Attached document: [TheBanks.KinskeyAPA\\_Riverfront\\_letter.pdf \(0.05 MB\)](#)

- from **Christian Sigman, Hamilton County OH Administrator**  
 Hamilton Co Ohio

To the 2012 APA Awards Jury:

I am happy to endorse this nomination for the American Planning Association National Award for Implementation. The citizens of Hamilton County are justifiably proud of the progress on the Cincinnati Central Riverfront.

The Central Riverfront has seen its share of ineffective planning efforts, but based on the lessons learned from those activities, the Central Riverfront Urban Design Master Plan from 2000 and The Master Development Plan for The Banks from 2007; based on that plan from 2000, have put forth the blueprint for that desired dynamic, 24/7 neighborhood on the banks of the Ohio River. Citizens worked collectively with their transportation and development agencies, elected officials, and a group of consultants jointly hire by Hamilton County and the city of Cincinnati (the Public Parties) to redefine that space with an inspired urban design plan. Residents who witnessed the riverfront in the mid-1990s can see the incredible transformation that has happened—funded mostly by their tax dollars through a voted sales tax increase and an innovative public-private partnership, augmented by funds from several state and federal agencies.

Today the fruits of these labors are becoming reality; however, little would have happened without the continuous planning and design process that has kept everyone focused on constructing the desired result: a new mixed-use, live/work/play neighborhood built out of the flood plain on County-owned garages, anchored by a dramatic new riverfront park and two professional sports stadia for the Cincinnati Reds and the Cincinnati Bengals. The fact that this

development happened during an economic downturn demonstrates the strength of the plan and the importance of the public commitment that brought it into being. Much of the infrastructure, starting with the freeway reconstruction and realignment and continued with many basic infrastructure improvements, occurred more than 10 years ago. When The Banks Working Group, the citizens' steering committee and the Public Parties finally identified a successful developer in Carter-Dawson, activity picked up where it left off because the joint plan provided the critical framework to keep the project focused.

Many projects promise job growth, but in its mixed-use development, The Banks will have created over 700 non-construction jobs by year's end. Where once there was what seemed to be an undevelopable flood plain, people now earn a living, make their home, and recreate.

My congratulations go out to the diligent and determined members of The Banks Public Partnership team and their ability to turn a great plan into a great project.

Christian Sigman

Attached document: [TheBanks.SigmanLetterSupportapa 2012 awards.pdf\(0.09 MB\)](#)

- from **Milton Dohoney, Jr., Cincinnati City Manager**  
City of Cincinnati

To the 2012 American Planning Association Awards Jury:

The Cincinnati Central Riverfront is a strong witness to the value of effective planning. Good planning requires teamwork and true teamwork is based on trust. In Cincinnati's case, trust has been established through collaboration, starting the formulation of the common plan for that riverfront. Very little that is worthwhile gets accomplished today without some form of collaboration, sharing of risk and resources for a common goal. Teamwork and communication continue to fuel the collaboration of The Banks Public Partnership, bringing the City of Cincinnati together with Hamilton County to realize a shared vision to revitalize the City's 'front door' along the Ohio River.

Based on learnings dating back to planning efforts in the 1930s, the Central Riverfront Urban Design Master Plan from 2000 and The Master Development Plan for The Banks from 2007, we have put forth the blueprint for a dynamic, 24/7 neighborhood on the banks of the Ohio River at Cincinnati – a place where people can live, work and play to take advantage of all that a compact, walkable urban environment such as our city has to offer. Itself a result of government, business and citizen involvement and input, the Master Development Plan and plans for construction in phases became reality only through the teamwork and persistence of subject matter experts on City and County staffs and their ability to work with a private developer in a unique public-private partnership.

The complexities of blending the talents and resources of two government entities, facing a softening economy, managing multiple funding sources and reporting requirements were all challenges we were able to meet through the coordinated, candid and consistent communication between City and County, between these Public Parties and the private developer, and with the citizens of our region. Again, this collaboration has been based in the trust and commitment built through joint planning and execution.

With the Plan for the rebirth of our riverfront as our guide, The Banks has succeeded in creating an entirely new neighborhood above the flood plain, transforming undeveloped and under-developed land into a one-of-a-kind driver of sustainable economic growth in our region. This could only have been possible, and productive, because we share a vision throughout our respective organizations of the value of a Plan and implementing that Plan to benefit both today's residents and generations to come.

I congratulate the diligent and determined members of the Banks Public Partnership team, and attest to the great value planning has, and will continue to have, on transforming Cincinnati's riverfront.

Sincerely,

Milton Dohoney, Jr.  
City Manager

Attached document: [TheBanks.DohoneyAPA Nomination Letter of Support.pdf\(0.79 MB\)](#)

- from **Steve Mary, P.E., District 8 Deputy Director**  
Ohio Department of Transportation

To the 2013 APA Awards Jury,

I am pleased to provide a letter of support for an outstanding combination of projects tied together with an innovative comprehensive redevelopment plan, delivered with a strong sense of purpose and teamwork. The City of Cincinnati and Hamilton county (the Public Parties) came together with the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Council of Governments (OKI) and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to craft a plan that would not just solve transportation problems but also create a new southern gateway to the state that would be an entertainment center for the region and a new 24/7 neighborhood: quite an ambitious undertaking but it had results. I had a unique perspective, first from the Office of the Hamilton County Engineer, then from my current position at ODOT.

ODOT played a pivotal role in the launching of this transformation of Cincinnati's Central Riverfront by providing strategic transportation investments. ODOT provided federal and state funds worth over \$133 million, a State Infrastructure Bank loan, technical support for the Fort Washington Way Project, and entrusted the City and the County to accomplish what they were setting out to do. That relationship grew out of the planning effort resulting in the State allowing the City and the County to manage the implementation of the freeway and subsequent projects for ODOT. That critical early project—the Fort Washington Way Reconstruction—rebuilt the I-71 freeway that connected three interstates and a major US highway in much less space than the existing highway. This reconstruction brought positive impact to the area by lowering the freeway into a trench, extending the Central Business District street grid over it, and building an innovative below-street-grade transit center. Carefully drawn implementation plans and resulting construction contracts tied these investments together over a 15-year period and enabled the resulting development, reduced accidents on the freeway while greatly improving accessibility for all modes of transportation to the Central Business District and the project area.

The innovative floodable parking garage adjacent to the transit center provided the structural support for The Banks development, lifting it out of the 500 year flood, but with minimal effect on the flood plain. The only way that this incredibly complex set of interrelated projects could happen was through the joint continuous planning and implementation effort. ODOT is proud that its investments help trigger a transformation which has delivered \$91 million dollars of ongoing annual economic impact from its first phase, and over \$160,000,000 in construction spending over the past three years with \$55 million being private investment.

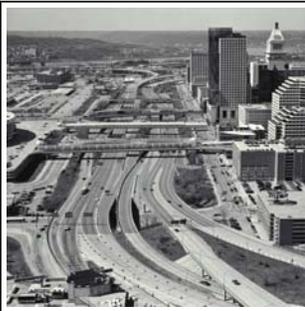
I am happy to recommend The Cincinnati Central Riverfront Plan for a National American Planning Association Implementation Award. If you have additional questions, please contact me at 513-933-6594.

Respectfully,

Steve Mary  
District 8 Deputy Directory

Attached document: [ODOT APA Support Letter.pdf\(0.04 MB\)](#)

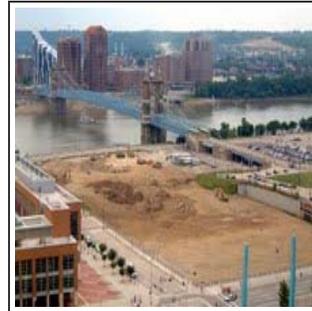
**Images**



**Fort Washington Way pre-reconstruction (1998)** (0.27 MB)



**Reconstructed Fort Washington Way (2005)** (0.32 MB)



**June 2008--The Banks is a project on paper, soon t...** (0.01 MB)



**July 2009--This phase of the project added 2021 ga...** (0.01 MB)



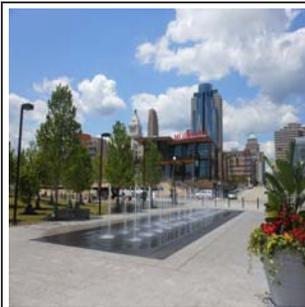
**June 2010--With the 'underbuild' completed (parkin...** (0.01 MB)



**March 2011--The private development (apartments, d...** (0.01 MB)



**The project from the southeast, highlighting the i...** (0.01 MB)



**Close-up of the Main Street Fountain with the Moer...** (0.34 MB)



**Nighttime close-up of the Walnut Street Fountain a...** (0.41 MB)



**Overall Cincinnati  
Central Riverfront  
development ... (0.01  
MB)**

### **Supplemental Materials**

**This page on The Banks Public Partnership website contains all pertinent planning documents forming the basis of The Banks project development and implementation.** ([www.thebankspublicpartnership.com/planning](http://www.thebankspublicpartnership.com/planning))

**This page on The Banks Public Partnership website contains The Banks Video, an upbeat visual review of the progress made since Fort Washington Way was reconfigured, the ground was broken for The Banks, and the construction of the mixed-use development tha** ([www.thebankspublicpartnership.com/videos](http://www.thebankspublicpartnership.com/videos))