

**2015 BAD BUILDINGS PROGRAM APPLICATION  
COVER SHEET (Form A)  
*CHARLES TOWN, WV WEST END REVITALIZATION***

**Section I: APPLICATION/PROJECT INFORMATION and SUMMARY**

**A. General Information:**

Applicant: City of Charles Town, WV  
Lead Contact Person: Seth Rivard Title: Planning Director  
Second Contact Person: Todd Wilt Title: Director of Code Enforcement  
Address: 101 E. Washington Street, Charles Town, WV 25414  
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Email Address: [SRivard@CharlesTownWV.us](mailto:SRivard@CharlesTownWV.us)  
Project Name: *West End Revitalization*

**B. Community Information:**

Name of Community: Charles Town, WV  
County: Jefferson County

# ***DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARLES TOWN COMMUNITY***

## **Description of Target Community**

The City of Charles Town, WV is the county seat of Jefferson County, located in the state's eastern panhandle. Founded by the brother of America's first President, Charles Washington, and characterized by a rich heritage of colonial, Civil War, civil rights, and other historical sites, Charles Town has some wonderful and vibrant areas. Yet Charles Town is also plagued by significant blight, vacant and dilapidated buildings, and numerous brownfields left from the legacy of former manufacturing. This "BAD Buildings" are a major challenge in Charles Town's West End, an area with the highest concentration of poverty, blight, and deteriorated infrastructure in Jefferson County, and also an area with a significant minority population.

Charles Town was founded in 1780 by Colonel Charles Washington, and the West End was one of the first neighborhoods established, with a mix of manor homes and fine structures together with smaller, denser housing packed along a pattern of grid streets arrayed around the Evitts Run Creek, a tributary to the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers and a part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. For many decades, this area was an agrarian economy that included slavery. As the nation entered the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the industrial revolution, prominent Charles Town leaders founded the Charles Town Mining, Manufacturing & Improvement Company, which created a number of manufacturing entities clustered around the Evitts Run Creek, the Chesapeake & Ohio (CSX) railroad line through downtown, and in the neighboring area immediately to the north, an area which later became the City of Ranson in 1906.

At the West End, neighborhoods were formed around Augustine Avenue, Summit Point Road, and another road now known as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, along with smaller streets. Over the 1970s to 2000s, like in many other places, the manufacturing died or moved away, leaving a corridor of vacant brownfield sites along the Creek and railroad corridors. Job loss and resulting poverty led to the deterioration of housing stock, particularly on the West End, a problem compounded by the rise and prominence of one particular slumlord who bought dozens of structures, converted them to rentals, and allowed them to deteriorate. This individual still owns 70+ properties in Charles Town, many of them uninhabitable, deteriorated, and badly blighted.

Today, the City of Charles Town has 5,350 people, with around 2,675 in the "Old City" areas including the West End, and the others in newer housing subdivisions that were annexed into the city from farmland on the fringe and built in the past 20 years or so. Nearly half of employed persons in Charles Town commute out of the state for work, driving or taking the train down to the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Others work locally in the tourism sector, such as the Hollywood Casino & Racetrack, or in local service sector jobs. With newer developments and greenfields comprising more than 70% of Charles Town's land mass, older neighborhoods in the middle have deteriorated, and many brownfields area are left vacant despite a decade of effort on brownfields revitalization. Downtown and West End Charles Town continue to struggle with persistent blight, vacant and uninhabitable structures, brownfields and underutilized properties, and struggling urban neighborhoods. This includes more than 100 vacant and 30+ uninhabitable residential structures in the center city, more than 30 acres of brownfields, and dozens of structures in need of code improvements and basic upgrades including a struggling, old strip mall in an

economically distressed neighborhood. In these target areas, there is 8.8% unemployment, 20.1% of people have disabilities, 13.4% live in poverty, and 27% of people are minorities – all significantly higher than the surrounding area.

Charles Town has worked in partnership with its adjacent City of Ranson to promote community revitalization, redevelopment brownfields, and efforts to address deteriorated buildings. In 2001, Ranson and Charles Town applied jointly for and secured its first EPA Brownfields Assessment grant, which was used to create the vision for a “Commerce Corridor” of economic redevelopment, neighborhood improvements, and parks and recreational along the railroad and creek corridors. Since then, the cities have used a FOCUS grant from the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center, three additional EPA Assessment Grants, a Brownfields Cleanup RLF Grant, an EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant, and other resources to move the Commerce Corridor initiative forward, to secure the 2013 Phoenix Award, and accomplish other progress. The most important current redevelopment initiative underway in Charles Town now is the “West End Revitalization” project to identify strategies for addressing brownfields, improving housing, advancing economic development in targeted areas, and restoring the Evitts Run Creek ecosystem. However, we still have many BAD Buildings, we still need additional guidance and assistance, and Charles Town is ready to move forward

### **Stakeholders Impacted by BAD Buildings**

The BAD Buildings in Charles Town are primarily located in the West End neighborhoods, although we will continue to work in other core areas of the central city. The target areas, particularly in the West End, have 100+ vacant properties, and 30+ uninhabitable and badly deteriorated houses. In addition, there are brownfields yet un-fixed in Charles Town including a former dump, leaking underground storage tanks, a former vending machine manufacturing complex, a former car wash, a railroad yard, and other sites where contamination contributes to the blight and deterioration. These sites impact the approximately 750+ residents whose homes and neighborhoods are clustered around the railroad tracks and Evitts Run Creek areas where the majority of bad buildings are located.

### **Community Involvement & Support for Revitalization**

These BAD Buildings in Charles Town impact stakeholders who are generally represented by community organizations who are actively involved in trying to address these BAD building and blight issues, including the Jefferson County NAACP, the African American Community Association of Jefferson County, the Jefferson County Commission for Community Empowerment, Jefferson County Community Ministries (and the area churches who support those Ministries), the Boys & Girls Club of Jefferson County, and other organizations. Charles Town has worked with these and other community, economic development, historic preservation, and environmental groups to conduct an intensive community engagement process that has included four major charrettes, more than a dozen community meetings and workshops, more than a dozen City Council public discussions, web site outreach, and other engagement. If we can move forward with the WV Brownfields Assistance Center on a BAD Building process on the West End of Charles Town, it will be the culmination of 15 years of robust, community-driven, and community-supported planning about the revitalization of the community.

# ***CHARLES TOWN NEEDS BAD BUILDING ASSISTANCE***

## **Impacts of BAD Buildings on Charles Town**

BAD Buildings are both a cause and effect of blight, economic disadvantage, crime, social distress and other challenges in Charles Town, particularly the West End. The areas with the highest concentration of BAD Buildings, in the West End, are also the areas with some of the highest levels of poverty, the highest concentration of minorities, the highest rates of crime, the highest degree of infrastructure deterioration (for example, cracked or missing sidewalks), and the highest concentration of abandoned and polluted brownfield properties in the entire county. The unemployment of 8.8% in these parts of Charles Town is one third higher than the jobless rate in Jefferson County, and the poverty rate of 13.4% is worse than the rest of the County.



Along the Evitts Run Creek Corridor in the struggling West End, major portions of the Creek are surrounded by brownfields including a former manufactured gas plant, a closed vending machine manufacturing complex, a former dump, a public works yard with underground storage tanks, and other brownfields. Nearly all the Creek's shoreline is inaccessible to the public. Along the Augustine Avenue, Summit Point Road, and MLK Jr. Boulevard main corridors in this West End, the sidewalks are missing, broken, and badly deficient. There are boarded up commercial

buildings, a large number of vacant and uninhabitable buildings, and other neighborhood challenges. These areas are also marked by the challenges of crime, particularly drug activities which are on the rise (included the dreaded scourge of heroin, and the return of crack). The general deterioration of the West End has left many residents wondering why this part of town has been neglected for so long, and has made reuse and restoration a major community priority now.

## **Potential Reuses for BAD Buildings**

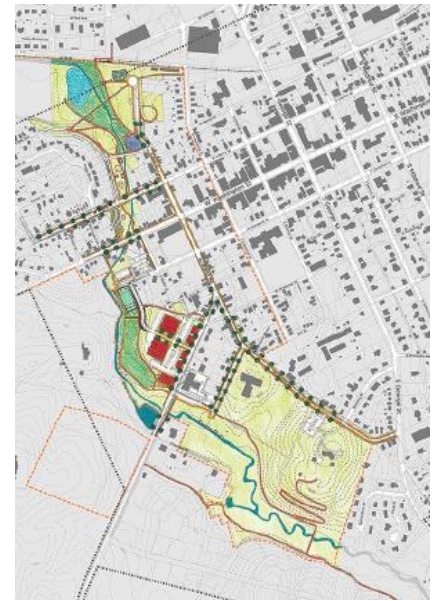
The revitalization of brownfields and deteriorated areas of Charles Town has been conducted for 10+ years under the banner of the "Commerce Corridor" revitalization, and much success has been achieved. Success has been concentrated along the railroad corridor in the core downtown area, where the American Public University campus revitalization and the demolition of several broken down commercial structures has sparked award-winning revitalization. To see more about the challenges of brownfields and blighted buildings along with general context for the community's revitalization vision, see the EPA Brownfields AreaWide Report created for this area at <http://ransonrenewed.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Ranson-Charles-Town-Area-Wide-Plan-Final.pdf> (on this page, look at the reports on the left side, under "Related Materials", under the Ranson Area Wide Plan link); see page 29, and the Chapters concerning Sites ## 4 & 5.

The blighted buildings and brownfields in the West End, arrayed around the Evitts Run Creek, has always been part of the Commerce Corridor vision, but has not received the same focus or enjoyed the same opportunities – much remains to be done. That is why the BAD Buildings effort proposed here will concentrate on this West End component of the Commerce Corridor revitalization.

For this West End Area, Charles Town envisions the potential reuses, represented by the sketch map at right here:

- Charles Town envisions a **park and recreational area** on the east side of the Evitts Run Creek (currently brownfields-impacted) that will include basketball courts, ice skating/hockey facilities, an expanded Boys & Girls Club, a new community lake that is also a stormwater management/green infrastructure feature, a new minor league baseball park, and a streamside walking/biking trail.

- Charles Town seeks **economic and streetscape revitalization** along the Augustine Avenue Corridor and the connected MLK Jr. Boulevard and Summit Point Road corridors – an area long-known as “Black Main Street”. These roads are surrounded by many of the BAD Buildings targeted here. This streetscape revitalization will also use improved road and sidewalk connections to make the overall West End more walkable and livable.



- Charles Town envisions demolishing and clearing many or most of the abandoned, vacant and/or uninhabitable housing structures in the most challenged parts of West End (the City has already removed two prominent eyesores), and using the new green spaces for **community pocket-parks, micro-housing projects for low-income residents, community gardens, and other vibrant reuses.**

### **Results and Impacts from Successful Reuse and Redevelopment**

The revitalization of the West End along the Evitts Run Creek and its key transportation corridors will have multiple benefits that are considered at the highest level of priority for the community, in the area that has the most distress. These community benefits will include economic, environmental, recreational and other benefits:

- ✓ **Improved Neighborhoods:** The removal of blighted and uninhabitable houses along with eyesore abandoned commercial structures will improve the West End neighborhood and improve local property values. This in turn could lead to additional neighborhood cleanup and investment, which can further help address crime and other neighborhood challenges.
- ✓ **Brownfields Revitalization:** Success in this West End neighborhood will culminate the brownfields “Commerce Corridor” revitalization launched more than a decade ago.
- ✓ **Community Park & Recreational Development:** Removal of brownfields and blight along the Evitts Run Creek, and the improvement of these properties for public access, will help create a grand park, recreational, nature preserve, and environmental education corridor.

# ***CHARLES TOWN HAS THE CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT A BAD BUILDING PROJECT***

## **Charles Town Ability to Administer Technical Assistance Activities**

The City of Charles Town is highly motivated to conduct a BAD Buildings initiative, we are ready to pull significant staff resources into place, and we have conducted commenced the community engagement and partnership building to make this a success.

Charles Town has significant experience in similar community revitalization efforts, and in conducting technical assistance projects with organizations like the WV Brownfields Assistance Center. Indeed, Charles Town City Manager David Mills has worked with the Brownfields Center for more than a decade now, from his earlier days as the Ranson City Manager and leader of the Charles Town-Ranson brownfields initiative. City Manager Mills will work closely with the Charles Town Planning Director –the Team Leader for this BAD Buildings Project – together with the City’s Code Enforcement, Police Department, and Public Works teams to conduct this initiative. Together this team has already conducted successful brownfields and community revitalization efforts in partnership with the WV Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. EPA, the U.S. and WV Departments of Transportation, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and other key organizations. Our success on these efforts form a strong basis of capacity to be able to move forward on the BAD Buildings initiative.

Charles Town has also taken specific action to deal with abandoned and dilapidated properties, including forming a Vacant Properties Board of city officials meeting with police, fire and health officials to identify the most pressing problems of blight and bad buildings, and to create strategies for addressing these issues. We have obtained new Home Rule authorities to make our code enforcement and blight removal tools more effective, and we have revised local codes to implement these new tools. See [www.charlestownwv.us/vertical/sites/%7B497B4BB1-9A1F-47D0-AF93-611C825E6674%7D/uploads/Homerule\\_Application\\_Ranson-CT.pdf](http://www.charlestownwv.us/vertical/sites/%7B497B4BB1-9A1F-47D0-AF93-611C825E6674%7D/uploads/Homerule_Application_Ranson-CT.pdf). These actions have positioned us to use the BAD Buildings assistance effectively and proactively. Our Team Leader, Planner Seth Rivard, will build on these efforts to launch a call to action, expand the Vacant Properties Board into a more robust multi-stakeholder BAD Buildings Team, and act as a local point of contact for moving this initiative forward.

## **Charles Town Will Engage the Community and Key Stakeholders**

Charles Town has already engaged the community in a vibrant, ongoing process for the West End Revitalization, and we will continue this community engagement to ensure the success of the BAD Buildings component of this overall effort. Charles Town will:

- Expand its Vacant Properties Board effort and form a separate, full, multi-stakeholder BAD Buildings Team;
- Use website, social media, print media, and our well-developed stakeholder email lists to notify organizations and community stakeholders about the launch of a BAD Buildings initiative to address blighted buildings;

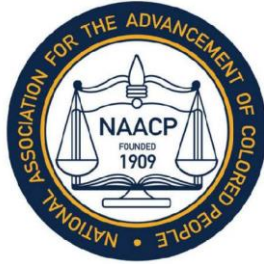
- Regularly convene the BAD Buildings team in the historic Fisherman’s Hall Community Center in the West End (itself a BAD building until recently) to ensure that our efforts are conducted in the midst of the community targeted for improvement;
- Keep the results of our efforts transparent with regular community reports by web, email, and public meetings; and
- Make sure to celebrate steps of progress, including the rehabilitation of BAD Buildings, the demolition of uninhabitable structures, the launch of brownfields revitalization projects, ribbon-cuttings on specific projects, and other aspects of progress.

**Expected Members of the Charles Town BAD Buildings Team**

Charles Town expects to include the following organizations and stakeholders on the BAD Buildings Team:

- Charles Town Mayor
- Charles Town City Manager
- Charles Town Planning Director
- Charles Town Director of Code Enforcement
- Charles Town Police Chief
- Charles Town Public Works Director
- Ranson City Manager (as the blight transcends our common border)
- Ranson Director of Code Enforcement
- Representatives from Citizens Fire Company and Independent Fire Company
- Jefferson County NAACP
- African American Community Association of Jefferson County
- Jefferson County Coalition for Community Empowerment
- Jefferson County Community Ministries
- Boys & Girls Club of Jefferson County
- Friends of Happy Retreat (non-profit restoring historic Charles Washington estate in West End)
- Evitts Run Conservancy
- Discover Downtown Charles Town
- Jefferson Arts Council
- American Public University System
- Business owners on West End including Thomasson Ford and Hilldale Shopping Center
- Volunteer citizens from the West End neighborhood

Charles Town is excited to continue its long partnership and collaboration with the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center, and how we can do a BAD job together now.



February 13, 2015

**Re: NAACP Seeks to Partner in BAD Buildings Revitalization Effort**

Dear Leaders of the WV Brownfields Assistance Center:

I write on behalf of the Jefferson County Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Jefferson NAACP). I am also involved in other local organizations seeking the improvement of the community for all people, including the African American Community Association of Jefferson County, and the Jefferson County Coalition for Community Empowerment.

We understand that the City of Charles Town is seeking assistance from the WV Brownfields Assistance Center to address “BAD Buildings” that are Brownfields, Abandoned, and Dilapidated buildings. There are many BAD Buildings in Charles Town, particularly in the struggling west end neighborhoods where we are actively seeking improvements. We meet in the historic Fisherman’s Hall building, a black community center that, until a decade ago, was so badly dilapidated that it was condemned and slated for demolition, before we joined with the City, the State and others to revitalize it for active use today. But there are many other houses and buildings in the neighborhood that need to be improved.

That is why the NAACP has been involved in Charles Town’s brownfields revitalization and blight improvement programs for many years, and that is why we are encouraged that Charles Town would like to do more to fix BAD Buildings in our impacted neighborhoods. We plan to continue to be engaged partners in these efforts, and we encourage you to be a part of it too. We appreciate your consideration of the City’s BAD Buildings application, and hope that you choose Charles Town for this initiative.

Sincerely,

George Rutherford  
President  
NAACP, Jefferson County Chapter



# City of Charles Town

101 East Washington Street, P.O. Box 14, Charles Town, WV 25414  
Phone: (304) 725-2311 ♦ Fax: (304) 725-1014 ♦ Web: [www.charlestownwv.us](http://www.charlestownwv.us)

February 13, 2015

**Re: Charles Town Seeks to Fix BAD Buildings for its West End Revitalization**

Dear Leaders of the WV Brownfields Assistance Center:

I write on behalf of the City of Charles Town to request the help of the WV Brownfields Assistance Center to address brownfields, blighted properties, and dilapidated buildings in our core city, particularly our distressed West End – “BAD Buildings”.

Charles Town has been underway with brownfields assessment, planning and cleanup, and other community revitalization projects for more than a decade. Yet BAD Buildings continue to challenge us, particularly in the economically distressed West End neighborhoods. This West End and other targeted neighborhoods are marked with dozens of vacant and 30+ uninhabitable residential structures in the center city, more than 30 acres of brownfields, and dozens of structures in need of code improvements and basic upgrades including a struggling, old strip mall in an economically distressed neighborhood. In these target areas, there is 8.8% unemployment, 20.1% of people have disabilities, 13.4% live in poverty, and 27% of people are minorities – all significantly higher than the surrounding area.

The revitalization of these struggling areas with BAD Buildings is a very top priority for the City of Charles Town. My administration and the professional staff in City Hall including the City Manager, the Code Enforcement Department, the Community Planner, our Public Works Department, the Police Department, and others have committed resources to the revitalization of the West End and the prevention and removal of blight and BAD Buildings. We are holding community workshops, establishing new processes, and coordinating with other organizations. We have hired a consulting firm to help identify resources to leverage into revitalization of the West End. We have obtained new WV Home Rule authorities and created new code to deal with vacant, dilapidated and blighted buildings.

But we need more help, as the number of BAD Buildings in Charles Town are many, and we need tools and best practices for identifying and remedying these challenging properties. A BAD Building assistance package from the WV Brownfields Assistance Center could go a long way to help us. I appreciate your highest consideration for our application, and thank you for your continued leadership on community revitalization.

Sincerely,

Mayor Peggy A. Smith  
City of Charles Town, WV