



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT

# INVESTMENTS & IMPACTS

2015 – 2019

**NEBRASKA**  
DEPT. OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# CDBG OVERVIEW

Established as part of the Housing and Community Development Act in 1974, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program allocates funding directly to the State of Nebraska and to the four entitlement communities (Bellevue, Grand Island, Lincoln and Omaha) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

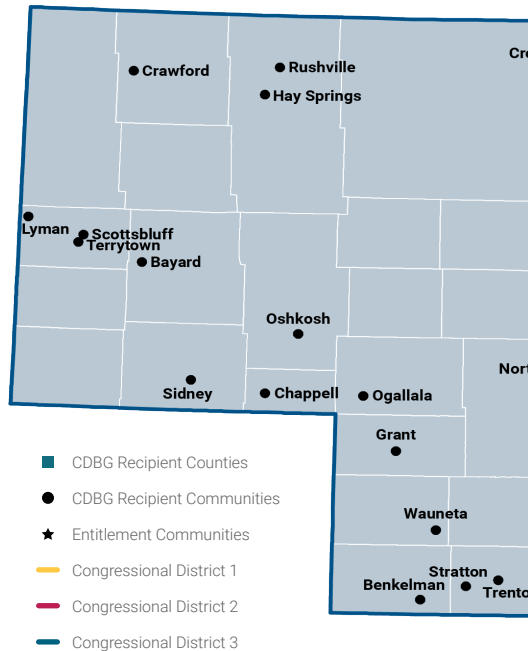
The Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) implements and oversees the State CDBG program to develop viable communities by providing Nebraskans with safe, affordable housing and infrastructure, as well as by creating quality jobs and investments through the financing of new and expanding businesses.

The allocation of CDBG program funds must support at least one of three national program objectives: to benefit low- and moderate-income persons; to prevent or eliminate slums or blight; or to meet urgent community development needs.

Over the past five years, 122 communities and counties have benefited from the State CDBG program, encompassing more than 111,000 low- and moderate-income individuals. The current overview highlights State CDBG program investments made in communities and counties across Nebraska. The State CDBG program provides

funding to communities and counties in the following categories:

- Comprehensive Development\*\*
- Comprehensive Revitalization\*
- Comprehensive Investment & Stabilization\*
- Downtown Revitalization
- Economic Development
- Emergent Threat
- Owner Occupied Rehabilitation
- Planning
- Public Works
- Tourism Development
- Water/Wastewater



\*Category is no longer active as of 2016.

\*\*Category is no longer active as of 2018.

# CDBG BY THE NUMBERS: JANUARY 1, 2015 - DECEMBER 31, 2019



**\$51,110,712**

State of Nebraska  
Non-Entitlement Investments



**233**

Projects



**111,000+**

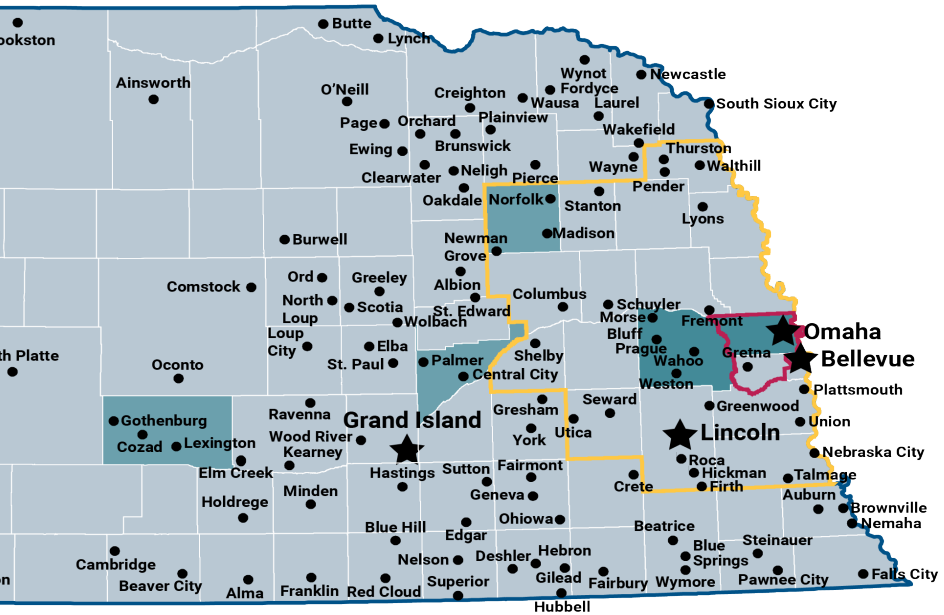
Low- and Moderate-Income  
Individuals Assisted



**122**

Communities and  
Counties Impacted

*For the non-entitlement area, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development makes CDBG funds available to Nebraska counties and communities with a population of less than 50,000. All information contained in this publication pertains to the non-entitlement area.*



# INVESTMENT SUMMARY: 2015-2019

## CDBG & OTHER INVESTMENTS FOR ALL PROGRAM CATEGORIES

**\$51.1 million** in CDBG funds leveraged over **\$39.9 million** in matching funds to enable **233** projects.

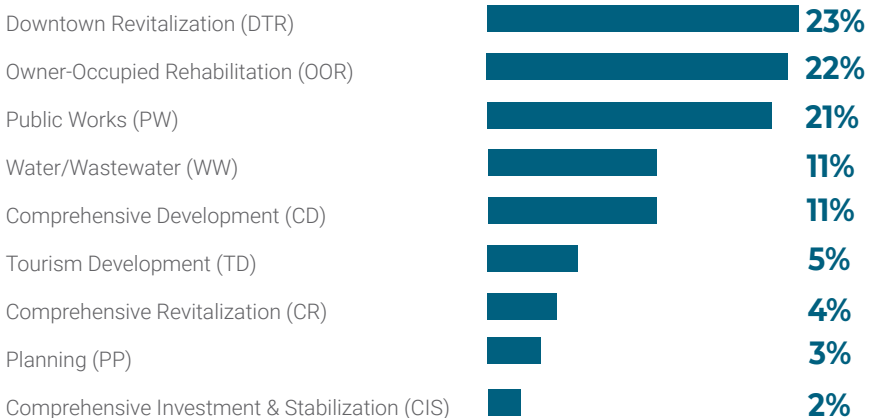


**56.1%**  
CDBG Investments

**43.9%**  
Matching Funds Leveraged

## CDBG ALLOCATIONS BY CATEGORY

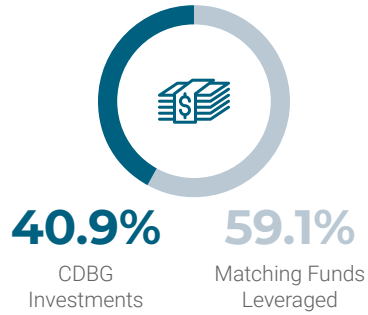
The CDBG program allocates funding to address one or more of the following goals: provide decent housing, provide a suitable living environment and expand economic opportunity. The State also ensures that within each category one of the following outcomes is met with each funded activity: improved availability/accessibility, improved affordability and improved sustainability.



# INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC FACILITY IMPROVEMENT INVESTMENTS

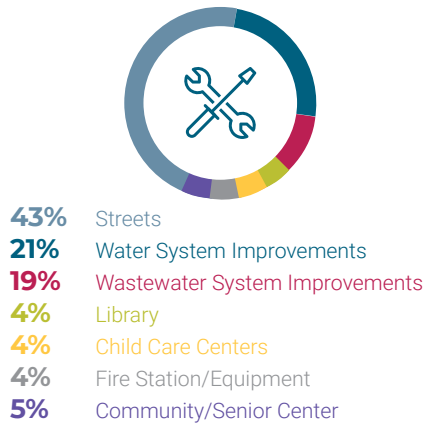
Over **\$16 million** in CDBG Infrastructure and Facility Improvement investments leveraged more than **\$23.1 million** in public and private investment.

\$1 CDBG = \$1.44 leveraged for Public Works and Water/Wastewater projects.



# INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC FACILITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

A total of **56 projects** focused on infrastructure and public facilities within the CDBG categories of Public Works and Water/Wastewater.



# HOUSING REHABILITATION

Over **\$11 million** in CDBG funding has been invested to address housing needs since 2015. Today, **53** homes have been rehabilitated, benefiting low- and moderate-income households. In all, the funding will support the rehabilitation of **360** homes.



**360**

Homes to be Rehabilitated



*Central City officials receive the Showcase Community Award, April 2019.*

## **CENTRAL CITY BRINGS HOME GOVERNOR'S SHOWCASE COMMUNITY AWARD IN 2019**

Now a two-time Showcase Community Award Winner, Central City (population 2,903) exemplifies what can happen when local leaders and residents work together to build a better community.

Ask Miles McGinnis what makes his community special, and you won't have to wait long for an answer.

"I can think of two things," said McGinnis, who serves as Central City's Economic Development Director. "Number one, we have an attitude, or mantra if you will, to say 'Yes we can.' Second, we make it a priority to involve our citizens. When people take ownership for bettering their community, the result is almost always a more successful project."

These qualities helped Central City earn its second Governor's Showcase Community Award last April. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development



*Central City welcome sign.*

(DED) bestows the award on communities that display outstanding achievements in local and economic development, as well as the innovative use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to create a better quality of life.

## Planning and Progress

Read up on Central City's large portfolio of successful projects in recent years, and a common theme will emerge: looking ahead. Local leaders seem to be constantly thinking about the future, spearheading projects that embrace opportunities and address challenges for the long term. This is exemplified by the City's Vision 2020 Plan, which laid out a 10-year comprehensive strategy for community and economic development.

Central City leadership regularly takes the pulse of the public through surveys and public forums, resulting in projects that are tailored to address local needs and priorities. A recent downtown revitalization effort, for example, brought a unifying aesthetic to a commercial district that had long felt divided by a highway running through town. This is just one of many examples where public input has played a key role in local economic development decision-making.

## Setting the Stage for Growth

Housing, employment opportunities, childcare and local amenities are some of the prerequisites for thriving communities. They're also areas where Central City continues to focus its efforts. Innovative housing approaches such as the Free Lot Program have eased a housing shortage by creating dozens of homes, lots, and even two new subdivisions. Through a partnership between the school system and local Child Development Center, 20 new slots for during- and after-school daycare



*Neighborhood in Central City.*

have addressed a growing need for more childcare options. These and similar projects are helping to set the stage for the city's continued economic and population expansion.

## **Embracing Innovation**

In its pursuit of progress, Central City has shown it's not afraid to adopt innovative approaches. That pioneering spirit is embodied in its nationally acclaimed Community Solar Garden. In partnership with Mesner Development, the project allowed local businesses to purchase panels at a multi-acre site on the city's outskirts; the power generated could be applied to offset consumer utility bills. An additional 500 W adjacent solar array has allowed the City to maintain stable, economical power rates for local customers. A first for Nebraska at its inception, this model has since been replicated in communities across the state and even the nation.

Meanwhile, a collaboration between the City and Merrick County Economic Development helped locally-operated Preferred Popcorn — an international popcorn distributor — become Nebraska's first-ever beneficiary under the Nebraska Department of Transportation's Economic Opportunity Program. Funding through the program helped provide paved transportation access to the company's multi-million-dollar expanded facility, which was funded in part by the CDBG program, and created multiple new jobs.

## **Pursuing Community Involvement**

Central City not only takes public input into account prior to each project, but actively seeks citizen participation. Just ask local middle and high school students, who led the design of the new 9.5 acre Central Park. What was once a noisy



rail- road corridor will soon be a local quality of life amenity, with pickleball and basketball courts, skate ramps, water features and more. It all connects to the Dark Island Trail, a stretch of former rail line that takes bicyclists and joggers on a winding scenic tour to the Platte River.

Meanwhile, across from the high school, the Central City Veteran’s Memorial was designed and built in partnership between local Scouts and United States Veterans, with concrete and materials donated by local businesses and land by the City. The monument is not only picturesque, but an educational remembrance and expression of thanks to all of the nation’s military men and women.



*Central City Veteran's Memorial.*



***CDBG funds can be invested into the development of facilities such as libraries, fire stations, child care and community centers.***



## **BURWELL TACKLES PERSISTENT STORM WATER ISSUE**

**Much-needed drainage improvements, funded in part by the CDBG program, ease water woes in city of Burwell (population 1,282).**

When you're a business owner in a rural community, you hope to see plenty of customers at your doorstep. What you don't want to see is standing water. But until recently that was a common occurrence in downtown and residential portions of Burwell, where an out-of-date storm sewer system was causing headaches for residents and economic developers.

Built in the 1960s, the storm sewers in northwest Burwell were never intended to accommodate rain and snow melt from a sizable urban area; after all, there was little to speak of in that part of town back then. But throw in more than five decades of economic growth, and Burwell began to outgrow its infrastructure.

**“ Our flooding and standing water issues in that part of town have been eliminated, and now we’re able to proceed with our projects in the northwest,” Sawyer said, citing planned residential developments and a new nursing home as two examples. “The CDBG program really helped make that possible. It can be difficult for a small town to raise funding to complete these massive projects. For Burwell, CDBG has been the difference-maker.”**

DAVID SAWYER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
BURWELL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As the city expanded to the northwest, the burden on the storm sewers grew. More streets and gutters meant more water rushing into the original 24-inch storm sewer pipes after a thunderstorm or spring snow melt. Before long, even an inch of heavy rain was enough to water log the system and create flooding issues.

“We would have standing water to the point of impassable roads and localized flooding in the northwest,” said David Sawyer, Executive Director of Burwell Economic Development. “We knew that if we were going to proceed with our plans for economic development in that area, it was an issue we were going to have to tackle.”



*Piping for Burwell’s new storm sewers.*

What's more, the problem impacted other parts of town. Overflow from the northwest emptied directly into the adjacent downtown district, flooding streets and even creeping up to the doorsteps of local businesses.

"Now we had not only an economic development issue but a risk to public safety and property," Sawyer said.

By the mid-2010s it was clear Burwell could no longer avoid what was sure to be a costly repair and replacement process. Fortunately, the City was able to find relief in the form of a \$250,000 CDBG award under the category of Public Works. With this funding, plus local match, the major storm sewer infrastructure project was able to proceed.

Digging deep underground, engineers replaced long portions of the original system with 36-inch pipe, nearly tripling its capacity from nine to 26 cubic feet of water per second. The result? An immediate and dramatic improvement in Burwell's quality of life.



*Replacement of the original system with new piping.*



**\$5.4 million in CDBG funding invested in Water/Wastewater projects.**



# CDBG GRANT IMPROVES PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN WAYNE

Residents are traveling more freely and safely after the installation of accessible curb ramps at intersections and sidewalks throughout the city of Wayne (population 5,557)

Sometimes the things that seem commonplace, the ones we tend to take for granted, are a lot more important than we give them credit for. Just ask residents of Wayne, where a CDBG-funded initiative to add accessible curb ramps throughout the city has made a big impact on public safety and welfare.

Like many rural communities, it's not uncommon for Wayne residents to rely on pedestrian modes of transportation, from walking, to bicycling to mobility devices. But until recently, getting from A to B without a vehicle wasn't always a walk in the park.

**“It’s hard to overstate the impact that this project, and the CDBG program, has had throughout our community. We were able to address a major quality of life issue and have a tangible impact on people’s lives.”**

IRENE FLETCHER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,  
WAYNE AREA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

“We have two highways running through the center of town,” said former Wayne Public Library Director Lauran Lofgren. “But there were no curb ramps. So getting around safely was often a struggle for people with limited mobility.”

Dr. Mark Lenihan, Superintendent of Wayne Community Schools, noted that the missing safety feature was a concern among parents and teachers.

“We have a school wellness policy that encourages students and staff to walk or bike, and we’ve seen a dramatic increase in the number of students using our bike racks in recent years,” he said. “The installation of curb ramps was badly needed so children weren’t attempting to ride in the street.”

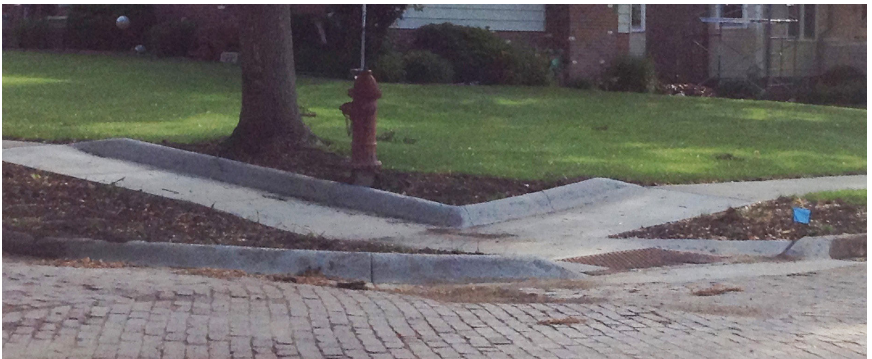
Brandon Anderson, who works for a developmental disabilities service provider, says he saw how the problem affected his agency’s clientele.

“Mobility is a very common concern for the people we serve,” he said. “One of our organization’s goals is inclusion, which means helping individuals be active within the community. The ability to frequent local businesses is a big part of that. But that’s challenging for our clients when it involves navigating pedestrian infrastructure that can’t accommodate people with wheelchairs or other mobility devices.”

As concern continued to grow, Wayne decided it was time to take action. With support from Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District, the City applied for CDBG funding to install curb ramps at locations throughout the community. After being awarded \$325,000 under CDBG’s Comprehensive Development category, which the City matched with local funding, the project got off the ground in the spring of 2019.

Today, curb ramps have been installed at over 140 sidewalks and intersections throughout the city.

"Quality of life issues are extremely important when recruiting new businesses or residents to the community," said Irene Fletcher, Assistant Director at Wayne Area Economic Development. "This project, which would not have been possible with support from the CDBG program, ensures that Wayne is a place that meets the needs of anyone who chooses to live here. For some, it's also literally life-changing."



*Newly installed ramps in Wayne.*



**\$10.5 million invested into Public Works infrastructure projects across the state.**



*Cleveland's Cafe after revitalization efforts.*

# CITY OF ALBION INVESTS IN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

**CDBG support helps Albion (population 1,561) create a more vibrant commercial district.**

Just about everywhere you look in downtown Albion, there's something new to catch your eye — from refreshed business façades and sidewalks to ornamental planters decked out with bright green foliage.

Almost five years ago, the Albion Downtown Revitalization Committee, organized by Economic Development Director Michelle Olson and City Administrator Andrew Devine, embarked on a major refresh of the city's commercial district, which was starting to show signs of age. From deteriorating brick façades to boarded-up shop windows, there was plenty of work to be done to restore the downtown to its former glory.

"Downtown is the heart of the community, and should embody the community's spirit and vitality," Devine said. "The Albion DTR Committee saw an opportunity to make aesthetic improvements that would reflect the pride and excitement for the future that we, as residents, feel about our city."



**“ Our city has been extremely fortunate to have the support of the CDBG program, as well as elected leaders who are willing to devote the time and resources to developing a long-term plan for revitalizing the downtown business district. There is real excitement about what lies ahead.”**

ANDREW DEVINE, CITY ADMINISTRATOR

Aided by Jan Merrill of the Northeast Nebraska Development District, the City received a CDBG Planning grant from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) in 2016 to spearhead a comprehensive study of the district. Working side-by-side with the public, they identified needs and priorities for a sweeping revitalization effort. After pinpointing dozens of potential projects, the City made the decision to prioritize building façades, sidewalks, public spaces and signage during the initial stages.

“We knew we were embarking on a long-term effort that would require multiple phases. So we wanted to kick off with projects that would make an immediate visual impact that residents could really see and experience, while also bolstering our local grassroots business community,” Devine said.



*Cleveland's Cafe before revitalization efforts.*

Equipped with a plan, the City applied for a second CDBG award through DED, receiving \$350,000 under the category of Downtown Revitalization (DTR). Albion Economic Development Corporation contributed project matching funds, aware that improvements to the district would promote foot traffic to local businesses and spur economic growth. With this funding support, the City was able to match the expenses of local business owners who agreed to participate in façade improvements.

After only a few short years of project implementation guided by Merrill — a certified CDBG grant administrator — the success of Albion’s revitalization effort is hard to miss. Since the beginning of the initiative, 42 businesses have had projects approved by the City’s DTR Advisory committee. Of these, 30 have already completed their improvements, with 12 slated for the coming months. The plan is to leverage the current progress toward other planned public aesthetic improvements, from new pedestrian lighting and bump-out crosswalks to new trees lining the sidewalks.

“This project has really brought a new spark to the entire commercial district,” Devine said. “The CDBG program has given Albion the tools to achieve its goals and create a more vibrant community with a brighter economic future.”



***\$19.8 million in CDBG funding invested throughout the state helped to revitalize neighborhoods and downtown areas in 36 communities.***



*Farm Bureau before and after signs.*



*Clip n Curl before and after signs.*



*Fringe & Skin before and after signs.*



# NEW ENTERTAINMENT VENUE DRAWS TOURISTS TO DOWNTOWN OGALLALA

CDBG funding helps local business owners attract new visitors to Ogallala (population 4,573).

Nebraskans flock to Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area to enjoy boating, fishing, camping, hunting and water sports. Only a stone's throw away, the city of Ogallala is the perfect spot to unwind after a day at the beach. Now, thanks to a group of local business owners – and support from the CDBG program – visitors to “The Mac” have a new reason to abandon their sunscreen and head into town.

The 99-year-old True Value Hardware building in downtown Ogallala had been vacant since 2015. But one day, local business owners Jeremy Smith and TJ McMillan had a fateful discussion with Keith County Area Development (KCAD) Director Mary Wilson.

**“ We probably wouldn’t have even considered moving forward without the CDBG support we received. It just wouldn’t have been possible.”**

JEREMY SMITH, DRIFTWOOD CO-FOUNDER

“We were talking about potential uses for the building, and all of us kind of had an ‘aha’ moment,” Smith said. “We realized there was an opportunity to use the space to bring some of those thousands of lake tourists and Interstate 80 travelers into our downtown.”

It wasn’t long until plans for “The Driftwood” began to take shape. Part restaurant, taproom, concert venue and meeting space, the new business would be a one of a kind tourist attraction for the lakeside community. With administrative support from KCAD and the City of Ogallala, the project soon became a beneficiary of a \$346,000 CDBG award under the category of Tourism Development.

A third family, the Hiltibrands, joined the group, and by fall 2018, renovations to the old True Value were underway. Local contractors were used exclusively to complete the \$700,000-plus effort. In July of 2019, The Driftwood opened its doors for the first time, with a staff of 40 locals and a payroll that will add nearly \$500,000 per year to the community.

The new venue offers a little something for everyone.

“We’re a full-time contemporary restaurant with a professional chef. We’ve already hosted nine national and local music groups. We do corporate events in our meeting room. We are holding a youth talent show. Weddings. Just everything. And people have flocked so far.”

And as word travels, the proprietors anticipate a ripple effect throughout the downtown district.

“We’re bringing in a lot of new visitors, and we hope this will be launch-point for other tourism-related businesses to start opening downtown,” Smith said. “There’s a lot of excitement for the future.”



***\$2.7 million in CDBG funding invested into Tourism Development projects since 2015.***

# HOMES, COMMUNITIES TRANSFORMED THROUGH CDBG PROGRAM

## Walthill (population 691)

Low- and Moderate-Income Households Served: 7

Thanks to the CDBG program, seven households in the Village of Walthill are experiencing a greater quality of life following essential home repairs.

A \$298,125 CDBG award from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) enabled the partnership between the Village, Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District (NENEDD), and Northeast Community Action Partnership to develop an affordable owner-occupied rehabilitation program. Based on forgivable loan financing, the program has provided homeowners at or below 80% of the median area income a way to finally afford much-needed property fixes, from new roofs and siding to plumbing and electrical updates.

“Because of this program, I’ve been able to sleep better at night not worrying about how bad my gutters were, which was making my foundation weaker,” one property owner said.

By helping homeowners manage the costs of necessary maintenance, the CDBG program has not only benefited individuals and families throughout the

community, but has helped to improve and preserve its existing housing stock for years to come.



*Before.*



*After.*

## Columbus (population 22,834)

Low- and Moderate-Income Households Served: 10

CDBG funds have helped the City of Columbus revitalize homes, repair critical infrastructure and benefit

low- and moderate-income (LMI) households in the city's residential areas.

In 2015, the City was awarded \$407,480 in CDBG Comprehensive Revitalization funds for targeted neighborhood revitalization within LMI areas. Columbus focused this funding on two activities: street reconstruction and housing development through the purchase-rehab-resale (PRR) of 10 single-family housing units. This was part of a larger effort to increase quality housing opportunities throughout the community.

As a result of these projects, Columbus, in partnership with NeighborWorks Northeast Nebraska and NENEDD, has created a vibrant housing stock and new opportunities for families to achieve the dream of quality, affordable homeownership.

"From the early planning phases on, CDBG has been a critical resource that's helped us make projects in this target area a reality," said NENEDD Community Planner Mandy Gear. "That's resulted in a better quality of life for the residents of Columbus."

## Geneva (population 2,115)

**Low- and Moderate-Income  
Households Served: 26**

In Geneva, the CDBG program is helping create a brighter future by supporting an ongoing housing revitalization effort.

Leaders in Geneva are keenly aware of the link between housing and local


growth. Communities with quality, affordable housing options are better prepared to attract and retain residents, expand the workforce and create economic opportunities.

Now completing its third round of owner-occupied rehabilitation since 2011, the City of Geneva has harnessed the CDBG program to revitalize 26 homes.

"Geneva is a growing community and a shining example of what small towns in rural Nebraska can do to reverse the trend of population decline," said Mayor Eric Kamler. "We have seen a boom in new businesses and families because they see the opportunity that exists here. The owner-occupied rehabilitation program has been a major help in solving our housing shortage and helping homeowners make needed improvements to their homes that spur economic growth and vitality for our community."



*Completed owner-occupied rehabilitation.*



Front and back cover photos:  
The Driftwood venue, Ogallala, NE.

# NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Opportunity.

**Nebraska Department of Economic Development**  
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