When David Horst of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region first learned about Partners for Places, he wasn’t sure his community of Appleton, Wisc., had a sustainability director, sustainability plan—or even a clear definition of “sustainability.” But after a little research and a cold call introduction, Horst quickly connected with Dean Gazza, who oversees sustainability work for the city government.

“We were excited to hear about this opportunity, because we knew this was a chance to team up and do something great for the community that would hit on all aspects of sustainability: promoting a healthy environment, a strong economy, and opportunity for all residents,” Gazza said.

The partnership successfully won $60,000 in 2012 from Partners for Places, matching $60,000 from the community foundation, to help fund the transformation of a 70-acre golf course into a vibrant urban farm, park, and job-training program.

In two years, Riverview Gardens has successfully engaged 2,800 volunteers and dozens of local businesses, schools, and universities to plant 4,000 fruit and nut trees and bushes, harvest 9,000 lbs. of produce for a local food pantry, provide job training to 164 people transitioning out of poverty, create 2.5 miles of trails, establish a beekeeping program, and host a bread-baking program, among many other accomplishments.

“The grant from Partners for Places provided a big boost, and we were very pleased to receive support from national foundations for our local community,” Horst said.

As a result of this grant and project, the foundation and city sustainability office have continued to seek each other’s input and opportunities to partner. Because of its experience with Partners for Places, the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region even shifted its environmental grantmaking to an “environmental sustainability fund,” and Gazza serves on the committee that decides those grants.

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Director of Parks, Recreation and Facilities Management, City of Appleton

“Many communities like ours have several groups working toward the same goal but without a lot of opportunity for collaboration,” Gazza said. “This program sparked the opportunity for us to get more fully connected.”

Partners for Places is a successful matching grant program that improves U.S. and Canadian communities by building partnerships between local government sustainability leaders and place-based foundations. National funders invest in local projects developed through these partnerships to promote a healthy environment, a strong economy, and well-being for all residents. Through these investments, Partners for Places fosters long-term relationships that make our urban areas more prosperous, livable, and vibrant. Our partners for this project include the City of Appleton’s Sustainability Program and the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. For more information, please visit fundersnetwork.org.