

Why are Brownfields Important? The Benefits of Brownfields Revitalization

The cleanup and reuse of brownfields provides many environmental, economic, and community benefits. The growing number of success stories from around the country demonstrate that more and more communities are beginning to discover that investment in brownfields programs and projects pays off in many ways. Some of these benefits include:

- Protection of Public Health and the Environment:** By encouraging and supporting the reuse of brownfields, communities can facilitate the clean-up of contaminated properties that otherwise would continue to threaten public health and safety.

Example: The Magic Marker site Trenton, New Jersey was used for 40 years by a series of owners who were engaged in the manufacture and storage of lead acid batteries. Contamination left behind was of special concern because the property is surrounded by a densely populated low-income residential community and stands directly opposite an elementary school. The City of Trenton acquired the site, conducted several investigations, and conducted an innovative "phytoremediation" pilot study in 1998 using mustard plants to extract lead and heavy metals from the soil. The EPA used its authority to remove 200 drums of hazardous material and a large underground storage tank. On February 10, 2004, a "concrete-breaking" ceremony launched the final phase of cleanup, preparing the site for 38 new residences expected to be built in 2005.

- Location benefits:** Brownfields revitalization can put prime real estate back into productive use, because brownfields are often located in strategic places near waterfronts, railroad and transportation routes, and center city areas.

Example: In Des Moines, Iowa the locality and the private sector are working to revitalize the "Riverpoint West" area, located adjacent to the central business district along the Des Moines River and connected to key roads.

- Infrastructure advantages:** Brownfields are places that have already been developed. They typically are served with existing infrastructure, which can be more efficient to upgrade when compared to extending new infrastructure into greenfield areas.

Example: Stamford, Connecticut's brownfields are focused on the south waterfront area along the Long Island Sound, in close proximity to Interstate Route 95, the Amtrak Metro North corridor, a major multi-modal transit station, and major electric, telecommunications, water, and sewer utilities.

- Economic/tax base development:** Brownfields cleanup and redevelopment can serve as a catalyst for economic development and expand the jobs and tax base of local governments.

Example: The small and long neglected City of East Palo Alto, California has expanded its overall tax base by ten-fold in the last decade and reduced its dependency on federal grants from 50 percent of its operating budget in 1995 to less than 1 percent today, primarily through the "Gateway 101" redevelopment of a brownfield area into retail, housing, and commercial businesses. East Palo Alto predicts that the redevelopment of the Ravenswood Industrial Area, the community's next target, will create 4,000 new jobs and more than \$1 million per year in new local tax revenues.

- Leveraged investments:** Dollars invested in brownfields typically leverage major resources. The International Economic Development Council conducted a 1999 study of brownfields projects, and concluded that for every public dollar invested in brownfields projects, 2.5 dollars in private sector investment are leveraged. Since the launch of the EPA Brownfields program in 1995, the Agency reports that the federal investment of \$700 million in brownfields has leveraged \$6.5 billion in additional cleanup and redevelopment resources.

Example: The American Airlines Center, home to the NBA's Dallas Mavericks and the NHL's Dallas Stars, now stands at the site of a century-old industrial wasteland in the Dallas central business district. After a \$12 million cleanup, the mile-long site now includes 8 million square feet of apartments, office space, stores and entertainment venues. The American Airlines Center has sparked additional mixed-use development nearby and the City estimates that the project has

already created 1,350 jobs. Additional projects are in the works on adjacent properties to build 1,000 units of multi-family housing, 600,000 square feet of retail space, a 400-room hotel, and 900,000 square feet of office space.

- ▶ **Job creation:** Brownfields redevelopment can be an excellent tool for job creation and training. Since 1995, more than 29,000 jobs have been leveraged as a result of the EPA investment in brownfields revitalization. Many more jobs have been catalyzed by State brownfields programs. In addition, many local communities have used EPA Brownfields Job Training and Redevelopment grants to train citizens in the waste assessment and remediation fields, creating 1,740 brownfields employment opportunities.

Example: The Jobs for Youth Training Center in Boston, Massachusetts is using EPA funding to provide a 460-hour training course to 60 young workers in topics including Hazardous Materials Handling, Environmental Chemistry, and Applied Mathematics and Computer Skills. These new workers are helping revitalize brownfields in the Boston region.

- ▶ **Sprawl deterrent:** Disinvestments in central cities and brownfields can push growth to the edge of the established communities, and can result in sprawling development on the fringe. Concerns over liability, contamination, and clean-up costs at urban brownfields can make them less attractive to build on than greenfields (open space), which in turn contributes to sprawl and the associated transportation and environmental issues. Clearly, reinvestment in brownfields is a linchpin of "smart growth." In 2001, an EPA-sponsored study by the George Washington University, titled "Public Policies and Private Decisions Affecting the Redevelopment of Brownfields: An Analysis of Critical Factors, Relative Weights and Area Differentials," found that 4.5 acres of greenfields are saved for every one acre of brownfields that is redeveloped.

Example: The St. Louis Development Corporation is working with the regional council of governments to create a network of local officials who will better connect open space preservation and brownfields redevelopment. This network is seeking to identify brownfields and open space needs of individual communities and the overall metropolitan region, and evaluating the establishment of a "true cost" development impact fee system and regional transfer of development rights program.

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- ▶ **Environmental Justice:** Brownfields are often located in poor, predominantly minority communities. The cleanup of these blighted sites can bring new hope, investment, and vitality to these neighborhoods.

Example: In Chattanooga, Tennessee, 5,300 people live in the Alton Park area, which has a poverty rate of 61 percent, and a median household income of \$12,300. The area's population is 98 percent African American. Chattanooga has launched a brownfields cleanup and revitalization initiative in the 2.7 mile area which has approximately 34 state-designated contaminated sites. The City and its partners have held a land-use planning charrette, targeted brownfields cleanups through the use of a GIS-based system, and established a Master Redevelopment Plan. In 2003-2004, the community began to remove more than 600 abandoned public housing units at the McCallie Homes area that were badly contaminated with lead and foundry sand, to clear the way for new housing and community facilities.

- ▶ **Community amenity promotion:** Brownfields revitalization can help localities build on their assets and emphasize the character of the community.