

Brownfield projects bring vitality to Dallas

City should make redevelopment a priority and continue to encourage public-private partnerships

The redevelopment in downtown Dallas in the last 10 years has brought jobs, urban living, shops, restaurants, the American Airlines Center and an expanded Arts District to previously rundown, industrial portions of downtown.

Much of this redevelopment was made possible by programs that provide funding, liability protection or other meaningful incentives to tackle environmental problems on properties impacted by historical contamination.



These historically contaminated industrial properties are known as brownfields — abandoned or underused

industrial and commercial facilities available for re-use, but whose expansion or redevelopment is complicated by environmental contamination.

It is not an overstatement to characterize the cleanup and revitalization of these brownfields, whether privately or publicly funded, as the greatest recycling project undertaken in the City of Dallas.

Much of the environmental work associated with addressing environmental issues on brownfields has been privately funded. Private developers have purchased numerous blighted properties and addressed environmental contamination as a component of redevelopment, spending millions of dollars on environmental



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Elizabeth E. Mack

work to make the properties safe for the intended use. Under the current regulatory scheme, the developer

obtains certain liability protections for taking on and completing environmental remediation.

In the current stagnant economy, privately funded development and the environmental cleanups as-

sociated with them have slowed dramatically. However, Dallas has monies set aside for certain environmental work associated with brownfields, in partnership with the private sector. In order to receive the maximum benefits of the brownfields' cleanup and redevelopment initiative, the City of Dallas combines private, state and federal resources. During the life of its program, it has identified 200-plus brownfields.

Experiencing the benefits

The City of Dallas has accomplished quite a bit under its brownfields program. Approximately 1,244 acres of brownfields have been cleaned up and redeveloped, \$109 million in private investments and \$1.9 million in federal funds have been raised, and more than 1,700 jobs have been created. The redevelopment program has led to initiatives such as:

- The construction of multifamily residential and mixed-use projects.
- The development of a 26.4-acre property by American Pallet Recyclers in an economically stressed area — maintaining 60 jobs and creating an additional 30 job opportunities.
- The development of an occupational training institute, whose purpose will be to offer residents assistance with developing job skills and obtaining employment.
- Securing more than \$1.6 million in Economic Development Administration and Community Development Block Grant funding. This will be applied to the 90-acre McCommas Bluff eco-business park and research center project.

The importance of brownfield redevelopment has

been recognized at the national level as well. Efforts to better coordinate the local cleanup and reuse issues kicked off in 1997, when then-Vice President Al Gore announced the Brownfields National Partnership, which brought together the resources of more than 15 federal agencies. This partnership has pledged support to 16 "Brownfields Showcase Communities," which are models that show how brownfields can thrive from collaborative efforts. The City of Dallas has been named by the partnership as a Brownfields Showcase Community. Although federal dollars are not directly available to a private developer, federal funds have been distributed to the City of Dallas for brownfield use.

Lisa Jackson, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, is a former commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. She also spent 16 years with the U.S. EPA. As commissioner of the New Jersey agency, Jackson supported major brownfield initiatives in blighted parts of New Jersey, and we hope that in her new post, she will also recognize the need for continued improvements in Dallas.

Stimulus act funds

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides \$100 million for brownfield remediation grants. Under this program, grants are available to capitalize an eligible entity or a nonprofit organization's revolving loan fund for use in directly cleaning up a site. Entities eligible for the funding are local governmental entities, quasigovernmental entities, state chartered or authorized redevelopment agencies and similar organizations. While private entities are not included under the definition of "eligible entities," private entities may be eligible under a revolving loan fund capitalized by a grant.

We know that \$100 million will not go far. Whether with stimulus monies or from its own general revenue, it is imperative that the City of Dallas continues to support brownfield redevelopment, which will, in turn, incentivize the private sector, create jobs, revitalize blighted areas and address historic environmental contamination.

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Dallas Business Journal SUBMISSIONS

12801 N. Central Expressway,
Suite 800,
Dallas, TX 75243
Established 1977

Lisa Bormaster Publisher
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