



Historic Trolley Barn Site Will House the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage

Louisville, Kentucky

The Russell neighborhood was once the vibrant heart of the African American community in the City of Louisville, Kentucky, and this neighborhood will soon be home to a museum and cultural center highlighting and honoring the contributions of African Americans to the city's and the state's history. The Kentucky Center for African American Heritage will be established in the city's historic trolley barns and three other buildings that make up the complex, with the main trolley barn building serving as the primary exhibit hall. The trolley barn was used for transportation-related purposes beginning in 1879, when it housed mule-drawn trolleys. Later, mechanized trolleys were serviced there. Because of its history, the trolley barn site was once thought to be unusable because of prohibitive cleanup costs associated with the site's perceived contamination. However, an EPA Assessment Pilot grant has given this property new life—an environmental assessment conducted on the site using Pilot funds revealed minimal contamination that required only minor cleanup, and the museum project is now underway. The groundbreaking for the heritage center took place in February 2003, and it will open to the public early in 2005.

The trolley barn site lies within one of Louisville's old industrial corridors, part of which is littered with abandoned and underutilized properties that cost the city \$8.7 million annually in lost property tax revenues. The two-acre trolley barn property is a prime example of a site where the stigma of major environmental contamination discouraged any redevelopment interests—an earlier environmental assessment indicated that it would cost \$30 million for cleanup. To help address the barriers to redevelopment in this 5,401-acre area, which is designated an Empowerment Zone, EPA awarded the city a \$200,000 Brownfields Pilot Assessment grant in September 1995.

Thanks to this EPA funding, Louisville was able to target the trolley barn site for a new environmental assessment, the results of which contradicted the previous \$30 million cleanup estimate (which would have required soil removal and possible groundwater cleanup). The initial high estimate was based on the site's history, which most recently included a janitorial cleaning supply house where various pesticides and herbicides were blended. Based on the new assessment, the city was able to move forward with soil cleanup at a cost of only \$80,000, while remaining fully protective of the health and safety of local residents. Additional costs were incurred for lead abatement and building stabilization.



The old trolley barn property, prior to restoration

JUST THE FACTS:

- The trolley barn site lies within one of Louisville's old industrial corridors, part of which is littered with abandoned and underutilized properties that cost the city \$8.7 million annually in lost property tax revenues.
- EPA's Brownfields Pilot targeted the trolley barn site for an environmental assessment, the results of which contradicted a previous, \$30 million cleanup estimate.
- Based on the updated assessment, the city was able to move forward with soil cleanup at a cost of only \$80,000, while remaining fully protective of the health and safety of local residents.

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The trolley barn property is now on its way to becoming home to the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage. The complex's 40,000-square-foot main barn features an elegant clerestory and will house the primary exhibit hall. The idea for this museum/cultural center was submitted to the City Housing and Urban Development Department by the Louisville and Jefferson County African American Heritage Committee. According to Lora Bradshaw, chairperson for the committee, the museum will "be something that's significant to the entire community. It won't just be African Americans-everybody will be proud of what the museum can be." Exhibits in the museum will tell the stories of African Americans in Kentucky from the pioneer days through the civil rights movement, including such well-known figures as York, a slave who made a significant contribution to the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The African American Heritage Foundation partners in the heritage center, including federal, state, and city governments, financed a \$2.5 million project to stabilize the four buildings of the trolley barn complex. The buildings are owned by the Louisville-Jefferson County Metro Government and are to be leased to the foundation for \$1 a year. The \$7.8 million needed to renovate the main trolley barn building and ready it for exhibits will be paid for with additional state, city, and private funding. An additional \$2.5 million will need to be raised to finance the creation of the exhibits. The Heritage Foundation will seek private donations and will likely receive some funding from the metro government.

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