In Gardena, Good Things are Growing on Cleaned-Up Soil

Gardena, California

Only a few years ago, the City of Gardena, California, in Los Angeles County, had a bleak economic outlook. The aerospace boom that had once brought jobs and manufacturing to the area was over, and nearly three-quarters of the city's residents were impoverished. Filled with vacant, idle properties that contributed nothing to the community, Gardena needed a way to create new development opportunities and improve its overall prospects. By cleaning up contaminated property and bringing new, mixed use development and private investment to the area, the city stimulated its stagnant economy, leveraged new jobs, and turned a $3.1 million debt into a $3 million reserve.

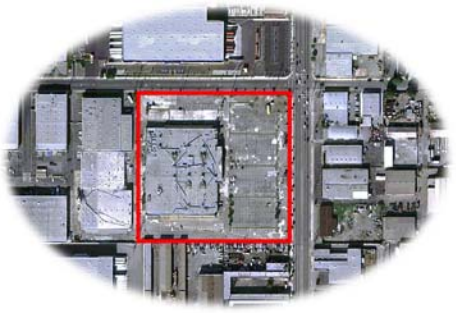
The City of Gardena first became aware of EPA's Brownfields Program in 1999, and recognized the opportunity to transform its idle properties. Despite a substantial budget deficit, the city council made the difficult decision to spend $10,000 to conduct a detailed inventory of the city's brownfields. The resulting study, which identified 47 properties with varied levels of redevelopment potential, was then used to apply for an EPA Brownfields Assessment grant.

EPA's $200,000 Assessment grant enabled Gardena to perform environmental assessments on selected brownfields, and remove the contamination uncertainties that had long stood in the way of their reuse. The city sought input from local business associations and Gardena's Economic Development Committee as to which properties should first be addressed by the EPA grant, based on criteria such as redevelopment potential and greatest community benefit. Those properties included a former airstrip more recently used for open-air swap meets, former gas and auto service stations, a long-dormant strip mall, and a dry-cleaning facility destroyed by fire.

The city's brownfields assessments drew immediate attention from private developers. "[The EPA grant] is a tool to show the business community that the city... will help where we can help," explained Mitch Lansdell, Gardena's City Manager. Economic Development Director Yvonne Mallory further elaborated, "The city brought attention to several sites and helped spur development... no one paid attention until we got the Brownfields site money."

And the results have been dramatic. Already, $2 million in cleanup funding have been leveraged to remove contaminants from the former airstrip property and from a brownfield once used as a refinery. Gardena's once-idle brownfields are now home to a Walgreens, a Sav-On Drugs, and a new shopping center—representing just a portion of the city's redevelopment successes.

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An aerial view of the former Discount Priceland site in Gardena, California.

JUST THE FACTS:

- A $200,000 EPA grant enabled Gardena to perform environmental assessments on selected brownfields, and remove the contamination uncertainties preventing their reuse.
- Brownfields targeted for restoration included a former airstrip more recently used for open-air swap meets, former gas and auto service stations, a long-dormant strip mall, and a dry-cleaning facility destroyed by fire.
- Following assessments, Gardena acquired the former airstrip/swap meet area as the site of a new, state-of-the-art, public transportation facility.
- Development of this new facility is being funded by $25 million from the Federal Transit Administration, and $4 million in state transportation funds.

The results of brownfields assessments conducted by the city drew immediate attention from developers. "The city brought attention to several sites and helped spur development... no one paid attention until we got the Brownfields site money."

—Yvonne Mallory
City of Gardena Economic Development Director

On the former airstrip/swap meet facility, for example, EPA grant-funded assessments led to Gardena's acquisition of the property as home for a new, state-of-the-art, public transportation facility. The Federal Transit Administration contributed $25 million for this project, with an additional $4 million provided by state transportation funds. Scheduled for completion in Spring 2007, the new transportation center will leverage 75 jobs when operational. In addition, the facility will use the latest "green" development practices to minimize the property's ecological footpri reduce any potentially negative environmental impacts.

Another of Gardena's brownfields, once the location of an aviation component manufacturing facility, is being cleaned up as part of an agreement between its former owner and the city. A new supermarket has already been built on a portion of the property, and once cleanup is complete, a 55-unit residential complex is planned. "Some sites sit there for years, because people think it will take a lot to clean up," explained the EPA Project Officer. "Once developers see the costs, lots of times it's lower tha the ballpark estimate. Then they don't have to take a big risk."

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Visit the EPA Brownfields Web site at:
http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/

From the beginning, Gardena emphasized community involvement and input as part of brownfields restoration. The city held community information meetings to present the initial brownfields assessment results. Gardena also formed a "Brownfields Community Relations Committee" comprised of loc business owners, community representatives, and municipal staff, to keep everyone informed of brownfields project decisions and status. In addition, the city published a brownfields newsletter, established a toll-free number for brownfields project information (available in both English and Spanish), and set up an environmental education display at Gardena's public library. The result has been a continual exchange of information among brownfields project managers, city officials, local businesses, and potential developers—ensuring that community, economic, and environmental interests are recognized as Gardena's brownfields are being transformed.



Demolition in progress on the former Discount Priceland site.

Only a few years after the city decided to spend $10,000 to inventory its brownfields, Gardena's outlook has been transformed like so many of its once-dormant properties. Already, the city's $3.1 million debt has been replaced by a $3 million reserve. Gardena's progress with its initial, $200,000 grant led to subsequent EPA grants of $150,000 and $400,000, all for continued brownfields assessments.

The city plans to add to its successes the restoration of a contaminated property that had been dormant for 15 years. This 5.6-acre property, at the prime location of Artesia and Normandy Avenues, is currently undergoing a cleanup funded by the property's former owners. The city expects that eventually, the property will become one of the busiest retail areas in the city and lead to the restoration of the entire surrounding area. "The Brownfields Program has been one of the most monumental programs available to our city," explained Yvonne Mallory. "Developers are now coming and seeing what they can bring to Gardena. We never had that before."

In April 2006, Gardena was chosen as one of 10 cities to receive EPA's prestigious Environmental Achievement Award.