



The Excitement for Brownfields Is Building



TWIN CITIES, MN

The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Brownfields Pilot, awarded by EPA, has partnered with the Minnesota Environmental Initiative (MEI) and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to perform environmental assessments on 10 brownfields in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. This partnership is opening the door to reuse of the sites for affordable housing. On February 13, 2002, EPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Habitat for Humanity International to work in partnership to build energy-efficient homes on former brownfields throughout the country. Like many other cities in the United States, the Twin Cities area suffers from a shortage of affordable housing. Approximately 185,000 households in the metropolitan area with incomes below \$30,000 spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing; such high housing costs have a disproportionate impact on lower-income workers who play critical roles in the community, such as child-care providers, bank tellers, home health aides, and preschool teachers.

Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit affiliate of the international Habitat for Humanity, produces affordable housing for families in need and has a mandate to dramatically increase the number of homes it builds each year. To achieve its goal, Twin Cities Habitat must identify large, affordable properties on which to build multiple homes. Such properties sometimes have presented environmental issues that Habitat had no capability to address, and in the past the organization had to pass on properties that had a hint of possible contamination. MEI's role in the partnership has proven to be essential, as the nonprofit organization has considerable experience in conducting brownfields redevelopment projects. MEI has taken the organizational lead in this project, and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council's EPA Brownfields Pilot grant has allowed potential properties to be assessed to ensure their suitability for residential use.

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JUST THE FACTS:

- The Twin Cities metropolitan area contains 3,000 acres of identified brownfields.
- While not all of the area's brownfields are suitable for residential reuse, the Brownfields Pilot verified through environmental assessments that several were free from contamination, allowing homebuilding plans to proceed.
- The Brownfields Pilot has leveraged more than \$415,000 for homebuilding projects thus far, as well as additional, in-kind environmental assessment work from a local consulting firm.

"...it is essential that we have the capacity to consider every location that has the possibility of providing housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income people. Thanks to this collaboration [with the Brownfields Pilot and the Minnesota Environmental Initiative], generously supported by the Environmental Protection Agency, we are able to do just that."

The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council oversees redevelopment for the seven-county metropolitan area, which has a population of 2.2 million, and has identified 3,000 acres of brownfields within that area. While not all of these sites are suitable for residential reuse, the Pilot has verified through environmental assessments that several properties are free of contaminants, which has allowed Twin Cities Habitat to proceed with homebuilding plans. In addition to funding these site assessments, the Brownfields Pilot has leveraged \$415,361 for the project thus far, including in-kind contributions of environmental assessment work from a local consulting firm, Braun Intertec.

To date, three single-family homes have been built on one property at Nebraska and Arkwright Streets in St. Paul by Habitat's WomenBuild project, which uses all-female volunteer crews. This site is part of a Habitat development project comprised of eight single-family homes. One of these homes was purchased by an immigrant woman whose teenage daughter encouraged her to apply for a Habitat home. The mother works full-time and was concerned that she would not be able to meet the "sweat equity" requirement of contributing 300 hours of labor on the home, so her 16-year-old daughter committed to do the sweat equity labor herself. The young woman provided the family's 300 hours by helping with the construction after school. The family will soon be moving into their new home, and the mother, Yeshi Lemu, recently expressed, "We are excited to move into our new home on Nebraska Avenue because we will have so much more room. Also, rent is very high right now in our city and when we are in our new home, it will be much more affordable."

A fourth home on Stevens Avenue in Minneapolis was also completed in fall 2001. The Stevens Avenue house is in the densely developed Whittier neighborhood of South Minneapolis, which has a population of 15,247 residents, 46 percent of whom are minorities. The median income of Whittier is lower than that of other Minneapolis neighborhoods. However, there are many social services available in the neighborhood and there are nearby grocery stores and restaurants. Also within blocks of the Stevens Avenue home is the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Children's Theatre Company, and less than one block away is the recently developed Midtown Greenway, a bike path that runs through a rail corridor-turned-greenspace.



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Visit the EPA Brownfields web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>

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All of the Habitat homes are being built with energy-efficient r25 insulation in the walls and mechanical ventilation to maintain indoor air quality. Furthermore, the State of Minnesota recently raised its building code for single-family residences, so these homes are being built to the strictest standards in the nation.



The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Brownfields Pilot and its partners hope to create an easily replicable model that will allow other affordable housing builders to similarly expand their capabilities. Stephen Seidel, executive director of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, has said, "As we at Twin Cities Habitat strive to meet the ever-increasing need for affordable housing in our community, it is essential that we have the capacity to consider every location that has the possibility of providing housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income people. Thanks to this collaboration [with the Brownfields Pilot and the Minnesota Environmental Initiative], generously supported by the Environmental Protection Agency, we are able to do just that."

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