



Greenspace Uses for Brownfields Properties: It Is Easy Being Green



The former Hope Rubber Plant in Fitchburg, Massachusetts has been converted to the new Riverfront Park.

Greenspace

Creating greenspace from brownfield properties is a growing component of EPA's Brownfields Program. Along with the commercial, residential, and industrial redevelopment of brownfields, restoring these properties to greenspace has become an increasingly viable option. Reusing brownfields as greenspace can benefit a surrounding community in ways that traditional redevelopment projects can not: offering aesthetic appeal, restored natural habitat, and outdoor recreational options.

Oftentimes, municipalities and nonprofit groups work to transform brownfields into greenspace that is accessible to all members of the community. For many nonprofit groups, EPA's Brownfields Program provides much-needed gap funding to make these projects a reality, and the resulting community benefits cannot be measured by economic indicators. But whether it is a nonprofit, a city, a redevelopment agency, or some other entity steering the process, everyone benefits from added greenspace in a community.

Greenspace is the Place to Start in Fitchburg

In the Boston suburb of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the transformation of the old Hope Rubber Company factory into a recreational park has jump-started a series of redevelopment projects throughout the city. In 2001, the City of Fitchburg used a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment grant to assess the site of the former rubber factory that closed in the 1990s after a long history of industrial use. The site contained a 35,000 square-foot building that had burned down, leaving a pile of rubble and unknown contamination. Following assessments, more than 150 cubic yards of contaminated material were removed, and the affected area was covered with 18 inches of clean soil. The new park opened in 2003.

The design and construction of Fitchburg's Riverfront Park was a collaborative effort that included a citizen's committee, the city and its redevelopment authority, local business leaders, and federal agencies. The 1.6-acre park runs along the Nashua River and contains a promenade, benches, and open lawn that provides

JUST THE FACTS:

- Greenspace can include parks (for people and pets), open space, trails, nature sanctuaries, and recreational sports areas.
- With the proper cleanup activities, even brownfields properties contaminated with petroleum can be safely reused as greenspace.
- Greenspace can serve as neighborhood gathering spaces for youth and adults to build a sense of community.

"We are fans of greenspace. Our focus is on getting people to think about Fitchburg as a place to live."

– Steve Bonavita,
Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority

a touch of green to downtown Fitchburg. Future plans include the installation of a band shell for music and other performances, an overlook to the river, and additional seating.

Riverfront Park's success has spurred additional redevelopment efforts in the city, such as renovating North Street, a major thoroughfare in the city; working to improve downtown traffic patterns and parking; developing a river walk; and assessing additional brownfields within the city to engage developers. The Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority received EPA Brownfields grants in 2003 and 2005 to assess other properties that the city and the Authority are targeting for potential redevelopment. As said by Steve Bonavita of the Redevelopment Authority, "We are fans of greenspace. Our focus is on getting people to think about Fitchburg as a place to live."

Recreational Greenspace Benefits Youth in Atlanta

The Atlanta Youth Soccer Association (AYSA) in Atlanta, Georgia, began its brownfields cleanup and redevelopment project with the end goal in mind. A few years ago, the chosen site was an abandoned truck depot; now this recreational greenspace comprises 7.5 acres of full-scale soccer fields, smaller fields for warm up, a concession stand, and a maintenance building.

AYSA is a grassroots, nonprofit organization that acquired the property to build a soccer complex for its league. The organization raised nearly \$2 million from Georgia philanthropic foundations, the local community, and its members; however, due to the location of the property and county zoning, it was not eligible for any local or state funding to assist in assessment and or cleanup. EPA's Brownfields Program filled this funding gap with a \$200,000 Cleanup grant in 2004. AYSA President Janet Gross said of the EPA funding, "EPA was a great legitimizer for our project. The EPA funding gave us some status because it showed that we passed a level of scrutiny in a national competition."

Using the Cleanup grant, AYSA addressed the 10-acre property, which had underground storage tanks, asphalt paving, a loading dock, and four large outbuildings comprising the former truck terminal. A portion of the grant was used to demolish most of the paving (paving was not removed where the new parking lot sits), the dock structure, and outbuildings. The grant was also used to address five known, and one hidden, underground storage tanks. Once cleanup began, contractors found additional buried debris, asbestos, and a granite slab; however, no soil or water contamination was discovered. All of the property's debris was either ground up and safely covered, or removed from the property entirely. Additional funding for the cleanup effort came from AYSA's own fundraising efforts. AYSA worked diligently with EPA to complete the project more than a year before the targeted completion date.

AYSA's soccer fields are currently open for league play. This recreational greenspace project is an innovative reuse for an abandoned brownfield that had been of no value to anyone. Additionally, the AYSA Arizona Avenue Youth Soccer Complex provides a safe and healthy haven to the more than 1,000 children that participate in Atlanta youth soccer.

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Greenspace as Nature Sanctuary in St. Paul

In St. Paul, Minnesota, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary provides serene greenspace for urban residents. Since 1997 several local units of government in the Twin Cities metropolitan area have received EPA Brownfields Program grants, and in 2003 the City of St. Paul received two Cleanup grants totaling \$400,000 to clean up hazardous substances and petroleum on property along the Mississippi River. The targeted property, a 27-acre parcel of land close to downtown St. Paul, had become covered with trash, abandoned appliances, and contaminated soil. The property was once a railyard and was known to be contaminated with heavy metals and petroleum.



Bruce Vento Park in St. Paul, Minnesota.

A community group, the Lower Phalen Creek Project, recognized the potential of this site and worked to secure funding, perform cleanup, and reuse the property as open space. The Lower Phalen Creek Project is a public/private partnership composed of more than 20 organizations whose goal to turn this blighted property into the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and link it to an existing trail system was realized in 2005. The project leveraged funding from the National Park Service, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Trust for Public Land to acquire and convey the land to the City of St. Paul. The city used its EPA Cleanup grant to clean up hazardous substances on a portion of the property designated for recreation, and to clean up petroleum from a portion designated for conservation. This cleanup included the removal of 7,500 tons of petroleum-contaminated soil, the redistribution of 20,000 tons of soil, and the replacement of another 25,000 tons of soil to cover the property.

After cleanup, much of the property was restored as natural habitat, with 10 acres set aside for recreational purposes. The property now provides a continuous natural area along the river from Indian Mounds Regional Park to Swede Hollow Park. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is maintained by the city and is currently open to the public; wetlands projects, plantings, and other restoration activities will continue for several years to come. This project is a classic tale of greenspace redevelopment—restoring a contaminated natural property in a prime location to its proper use.

The Future is Green

One of the four pillars of EPA's Brownfields Program is Sustainable Reuse, which translates to enhancing a community's long-term quality of life. As long as communities continue to regard the redevelopment of former brownfields into greenspace as important, the amount of greenspace will increase. And the more greenspace a community has, the healthier it is. With technical support from EPA and other federal, state, and local agencies, greenspace projects will continue to be a viable reuse option for brownfields.

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www.epa.gov/brownfields/