



Changing First Impressions: New Gateway Development



An artist's rendering of large-scale redevelopment in Coralville, Iowa.

Gateway Properties

Impressions of a town or community are usually formed when first arriving. The initial images of a place are often of “gateways”: areas surrounding major thoroughfares or transportation centers which can consist of bridges, stations, ports, or parks but can also be abandoned or underutilized properties. EPA’s Brownfields Program has enabled numerous communities to clean up and redevelop brownfields properties in gateway districts, and in turn improve community images, leverage jobs, and revitalize local economies.

Rail lines and rail yards have been a fixture of Salt Lake City’s historic Gateway District since the late 1800s. Located just three blocks west of Main Street, the 650-acre Gateway District was once home to a bustling immigrant community and thriving businesses. Although the presence of the railroad initially helped to develop the area, ultimately it became a hindrance as the district grew and rail lines in the street limited accessibility. In the 1960s, Interstate 15, a major highway running north and south through Salt Lake City, was built on the western edge of the Gateway District and four on/off-ramps were constructed to bypass the area. Cut off from major highway traffic, the area fell into neglect and disrepair.

In 2002, Salt Lake City hosted the Winter Olympic Games, and preparations for this major international event created a new wave of construction, development, and renovation projects. This included a major overhaul of Interstate 15. The new construction on the highway was a driving force behind fast-track cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields in the Gateway area. In 1996, the city received a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant to conduct environmental assessments on the District’s 650 acres. As expected, there was some contamination, but perception was worse than reality and conditions were such that redevelopment could proceed without significant cleanup. Additional progress was enabled through a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Supplemental Assistance Grant in March 2000

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JUST THE FACTS:

- The master plan for Salt Lake City’s gateway redevelopment includes 10,000 residential units, cultural facilities, commercial developments, and a transportation hub that will link bus, light rail, and commuter rail systems.
- Coralville, Iowa developed an Urban Renewal Plan that enabled the city to issue municipal bonds to fund a \$58 million convention center and 200-room hotel complex.
- Additional EPA Brownfields grant recipients working to restore their gateways include Glen Cove, New York; Astoria, Oregon; and Salem, Massachusetts.

Impressions of cities and towns are often formed when first arriving at their “gateways”: areas surrounding major thoroughfares or transportation centers that are too commonly plagued by abandoned or underutilized properties. EPA’s Brownfields Program has enabled many communities to clean up and redevelop their gateway districts, improving community images, leveraging jobs, and revitalizing local economies.

and another \$500,000 resulting from the city's designation as an EPA Brownfields Showcase Community. As part of the project, new on/off-ramps for I-15 were constructed to allow traffic to flow directly into the Gateway District. The master plan for the District's redevelopment includes 10,000 residential units, cultural facilities, commercial developments, and a transportation hub that will link bus, light rail, and commuter rail systems.

In November 2001, Gateway Associates, a private development group, purchased the largest rail yard in the District and began a \$375 million mixed-use, mixed-income development that incorporates the historic Union Pacific Rail depot. The first 30 acres have been redeveloped to create two million square feet of shops, restaurants, office space, and housing. During the Winter Olympic Games, 330 of these residential units were used for media housing, and most of the units are now occupied by long-term tenants. Salt Lake City also purchased land needed to reconstruct the main street and build a 100-foot-wide linear park immediately west of the Union Pacific Rail Depot and former rail yard. With an estimated cost of more than \$11.2 million, the project will consist of infrastructure improvements, land acquisition, environmental assessments, and the construction of landscaped "Park Blocks." Visitors coming in on I-15 are no longer treated to sites of abandoned rail yards and facilities. Through the combined efforts of the city and its redevelopment agency, the railroad, EPA, other federal agencies, and private investors, there is new hope of jobs for area residents, opportunity for private investment, a cleaner environment, and a revitalized gateway community.

Coralville, Iowa Picture driving down Interstate 80 and, approaching Coralville, Iowa, you see a beautiful river, with a giant coal pile, an abandoned truck stop, an old municipal dump, and a rail spur next to it— not a pretty picture. Until recently, this was the "gateway" view that greeted visitors arriving in Coralville. Now imagine arriving for a meeting at a new conference center with an exhibit hall and a hotel alongside the same river. As you stroll along a pathway on the river's edge, you rest at a gazebo and consider walking to Iowa City via the new pedestrian bridge. You may even picnic on the newly restored banks of the Iowa River.

This more appealing scenario is what the Coralville community had in mind when it participated in a brainstorming session for the revitalization of the 157-acre, declining industrial park that had for so long been the gateway to Coralville. To jumpstart revitalization, the City Council first brain-stormed different redevelopment scenarios and developed the First Avenue Revitalization Plan, which called for a new convention center/exhibit hall and hotel. With the help of EPA, which awarded a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant to the City of Coralville in 1998, along with supplemental awards of \$100,000 in 2000 and 2002, and \$1,500,000 in leveraged funding, this scenario is now becoming reality.

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

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In 1997, a First Avenue Corridor Study identified \$15.4 million in roadway improvements needed to provide necessary access to the park. These improvements are being funded by the Iowa Department of Transportation with matching funds from city bonds. The initial phase of these improvements was completed in 2001, including sidewalk repair and construction to improve pedestrian access—an important step as the park provides the only access to the Iowa River. In 1998, the city had used EPA funds to conduct environmental assessments of the park, which, along with three subsequent assessments, have acted as a catalyst for redevelopment.

In addition, the city has developed an Urban Renewal Plan, which enabled it to obtain a designation that allowed Coralville to issue municipal bonds to fund the \$58 million convention center and 200-room hotel complex in 2002. Since then, the conference center and hotel have opened the door to plans for a much larger redevelopment project adjacent to the conference center: the IOWA Child project. The city plans to acquire the land (they have acquired approximately 15 percent of the 30 acres needed) that will be used to house an ecologically-oriented learning environment that includes a 4.5-acre indoor rainforest with an aquarium, as well as outdoor exhibits of Iowa's indigenous ecosystem including prairies and wetlands. The project is envisioned as a learning laboratory for visitors, students, teachers, and researchers. The site's brownfields status, riverside location, and proximity to the conference center and hotel are well matched to the ecological project's aims. The brownfields properties along First Avenue corridor are being transformed into appealing and functioning areas for both residents and visitors alike.

In addition to Salt Lake City and Coralville, several other EPA Brownfields grantees are redeveloping their gateways. In Glen Cove, New York—with an initial EPA Assessment Grant in 1997 and a Showcase Community designation in 1998—underutilized properties are being redeveloped into a regional tourist destination with waterfront restaurants, new maritime attractions, a hotel conference center, and a pedestrian promenade along the water's edge. In Astoria, Oregon, the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department Brownfields Assessment grantee is rekindling abandoned mill sites along the road approaching town into new residential communities with views of the Columbia River. And in Salem, Massachusetts, the EPA grantee is planning to clean up and redevelop the 132-acre Boston Bridge Mason Corridor, an important gateway to downtown Salem.



Mixed-use redevelopment in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Through EPA investment, gateway properties are being revitalized and once abandoned buildings and factories are being transformed into parks and thriving business centers. In the future, with continued assistance, additional brownfields communities will be able to redevelop their gateway properties, changing the outlook for brownfields-affected communities. For more information on EPA's Brownfields Program, visit EPA Brownfields website at: <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/> or by contacting the EPA Office of Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment (OBCR) at (202) 566-2777.