

Planning for Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment

REDEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR ABANDONED GAS STATIONS

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, EPA REGION 7



St. Louis, Missouri, is plagued with abandoned property throughout the city. Like many cities across the country, St. Louis has dozens of abandoned gas stations across its neighborhoods. These sites often are vandalized, have illegal dumping and loitering, and are not maintained to protect human health and the environment. Abandoned gas stations can be unattractive to developers or future site owners because of the unknown contamination and smaller return on investment. Additionally, gas stations tucked into neighborhoods can be hard to find, market and reuse. Addressing these sites helps preserve the integrity of older neighborhoods and can be a model repeated at thousands of sites across the country.

From February – December 2013, EPA's Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization and Office of Underground Storage Tanks, in partnership with EPA Region 7, provided technical assistance to the St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC) to support redevelopment planning for three abandoned gas stations located in the same general geographic location—south and southwest of downtown St. Louis.

The EPA technical assistance team analyzed the former gas station sites, located in Fox Park, Tower Grove South and Benton Park neighborhoods. The Land Reutilization Authority (LRA) owns all three sites and, therefore, the SLDC can influence their use. The sites require environmental site assessments (ESAs) and remediation, which will be facilitated by SLDC, Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and EPA. Because the sites were located on separate parcels, EPA's technical assistance team developed separate site reports that provided:

- A policy and infrastructure evaluation of the conceptual redevelopment plan to ensure it was consistent with land use and zoning requirements and that infrastructure and utilities were available and capable of supporting redevelopment.
- A market assessment to evaluate the neighborhood's demographics and an assessment of how the data might influence the conceptual redevelopment plan.
- A review of the organizational capacity of SLDC and partners to facilitate interim uses and redevelopment.

In April 2013, EPA Region 7 and the project team met with key stakeholders and property owners to discuss neighborhood needs and opportunities for redevelopment, such as access to small, local retail shops, restaurants or other amenities that would be within walking distance to the community. Based on input from community members, environmental conditions analysis, market data and infrastructure evaluations, the project team developed conceptual site designs for each site to be used as educational and marketing tools to promote site redevelopment.

The existing neighborhoods and uses surrounding each site influenced the orientation and size of the building in the conceptual designs. For the Fox Park site, the conceptual design recommended a mixed use (residential/commercial). The Tower Grove South site conceptual design suggested residential reuse, and provided several design options for a future developer to consider based on site costs and demand. Finally, the Benton Park site was the only site with an existing building that could be reused, but it also had the worst environmental conditions of the three sites. Market data and



Figure 2: Abandoned gas station site and conceptual design for its reuse in the Benton Park neighborhood.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Engaging area residents in discussions early in the redevelopment process helps refine developer requests for proposals (RFPs).
- Data and expert analysis help the local stakeholders understand the site options and opportunities.
- While the three sites share several common elements—former gas stations, small site size, located within mostly residential neighborhoods—the reuse opportunities varies based on site location, site layout, reuse of the current building and community and market inputs.
- SLDC can leverage limited technical assistance for additional project work. SLDC received additional EPA funding to assess the Benton Park site and pull underground storage tanks, making the site more attractive for reuse.

community input led to a recommendation to consider reusing the building for commercial use, but did not limit the opportunity to building a new corner structure that could feature commercial and limited residential spaces.

For more information, please contact David Doyle, EPA Region 7, doyle.david@epa.gov.

PLANNED POST-TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

- In March 2014, EPA supported SLDC in a tank pull at the Benton Park site. EPA removed eight underground storage tanks from the site and helped address environmental concerns.
- “Without EPA’s help, I’m certain this site would have been guaranteed to sit inactive for another five years.” – SLDC Project Manager
- SLDC continues to promote site redevelopment opportunities for the three sites and pursue economic development.