

# RECREATIONAL REUSE: CLEVELAND VELODROME

**O**pen spaces and recreational opportunities are essential components of healthy communities.

Physical inactivity is recognized as a major cause of a host of health impacts, including heart disease, diabetes, depression, hypertension, and obesity. The increasing interest in the creation of “active living” environments provides another option for reusing brownfields to benefit affected communities. Many brownfields are ideally located to improve public health by supporting greater physical activity.

Brownfields often are located within or nearby densely populated, low-income urban communities that have very limited options for recreation and physical activity. Even in less crowded suburban communities, sprawling development has resulted in widespread physical inactivity among children and adults as people have become more dependent on automobiles to get to essential destinations. Many brownfields can serve the physical activity needs of surrounding neighborhoods by being redeveloped into green spaces, such as ball parks, recreation fields, and trails.

Traditional brownfields redevelopment focuses on using market forces to encourage developers to create industrial, commercial, or residential reuses that provide economic benefits to a community. The benefits of these types of projects are numerous, including creating local jobs, increasing property values and tax bases, curbing urban sprawl, reducing adverse effects of contamination, and contributing to neighborhood revitalization. However, there is growing recognition among municipal planners and community groups of the enormous potential of brownfields for “greening” city environments and promoting more active lifestyles.

Recreational sites used to be seen as a poor reuse of brownfields by some because they didn’t increase property or sales tax dollars. That view is changing. Communities across the country are supporting a wide range of conservation and community enhancement activities

## NEW ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS

EPA’s land revitalization initiatives are producing significant environmental benefits and helping to transform communities into more sustainable and livable places. The strategy of encouraging market-driven redevelopment of brownfields and other contaminated sites for economic reuse is proving to be a successful approach at many sites. However, challenging real estate markets and economic realities can leave some formerly contaminated properties unused, possibly for a long time. New approaches are needed to revitalize these sites and protect human health and the environment.

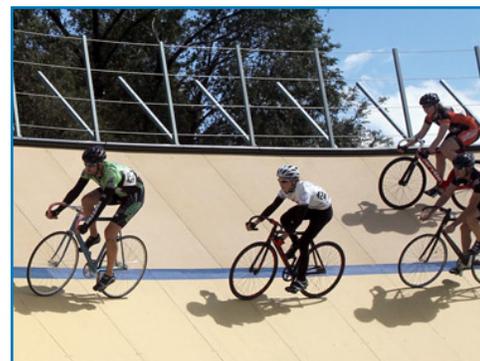
EPA’s Land Revitalization Team is working with communities, states, other federal agencies, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector to develop and test new approaches that recognize valuable reuse alternatives for formerly contaminated properties. Building green infrastructure to help manage stormwater runoff and floods, promoting safe soil management to support urban agriculture, and siting renewable energy on contaminated sites can bring environmental, ecological, and social benefits to communities. Unlocking the potential value of these underused properties often requires creativity and close collaboration with many public and private partners. These projects can help stabilize communities and spur economic development.

demonstrating that open-space preservation is a key community value and often is the community’s preferred reuse over economic-based reuses. Today, even some properties in prime locations that formerly would have been redeveloped as housing and offices are being turned into parks.

Recreational reuses of brownfields include playgrounds, pocket parks, hiking and biking trails, soccer and softball fields, basketball and tennis courts, and golf courses. More unusual recreational reuses of formerly contaminated land includes fields for flying model airplanes, fishing docks, equestrian centers, and velodromes for bicycling. These land uses have both public health benefits and economic benefits. The public health benefits of reusing brownfields for recreation include reducing the risk of adverse health effects from contamination and increasing opportunities for active living. In addition, there is plenty of data indicating that simply cleaning up brownfields increases surrounding property values and that creating a park or other recreational amenity increases property values even more.

Recreational reuse of brownfields presents a huge opportunity for active living communities, but there can be major challenges. It can be difficult to secure funding for the early stages of brownfield redevelopment such as planning, land acquisition, assessment, and cleanup. There also are long-term maintenance costs, and many recreational reuses do not provide an income stream to cover these ongoing costs.

Despite the challenges, scores of communities are successfully transforming contaminated properties into valuable parks and



*Cyclists exercising in the Cleveland velodrome. (from Fast Track Cycling, Inc.)*

recreational spaces. Converting brownfields to recreational reuses continues to rely largely on the support of federal, state, and local governments. Nonprofit organizations also can catalyze projects by

engaging the community and working to fill funding gaps. For example, EPA partnered with the U.S. Soccer Foundation and the Academy of Model Aeronautics. The presence of a community-based cham-

panion to generate community interest and collaboration is one of the most important factors in successful recreational projects.

## CLEVELAND VELODROME PROJECT

A velodrome, the cycling track most of us see only during the Olympics, was built on the site of a former brownfield in Slavic Village, a neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. Slavic Village, just south of downtown Cleveland, was originally settled in the mid-19th century by Czech and Polish immigrants who arrived to work in the city's steel factories and woolen mills. The neighborhood still maintains the customs, culture, and recipes brought by their ancestors. As with most older, inner-ring urban neighborhoods, brownfields are located in close proximity to residential areas. Traveling a long and creative path, one of this quaint neighborhood's brownfields has been turned into a unique recreational facility.

The velodrome is located on the site of the former St. Alexis Hospital, founded in 1884 to serve workers in the Cuyahoga Industrial Valley. Renamed St. Michael Hospital in 1994, the hospital closed its doors in 2003. The site owner gave the property to the city along with money intended to ready the property for reuse.



*View of St. Alexis Hospital circa 1957.  
(from Michael Schwartz Library,  
Cleveland State University)*

The city decided to place the property within the Cleveland Land Reutilization Program, a land bank run by the city's Department of Community Development, with the intent of redeveloping the property for housing.

Total costs for the assessment, demolition, and cleanup of the site were about \$2.5 million, which far exceeded the amount provided by the former site owner. The city assessed contamination at the site using an EPA brownfields assessment grant. Cuyahoga County added a \$200,000 subgrant from an EPA brownfields revolving loan fund grant and a \$628,400 loan from the county's bond fund. The city provided additional funding, demolished structures on the site, and cleaned up contamination, primarily asbestos. The city received a No Further Action determination by the state and published a request for proposals (RFP) from developers to generate ideas for housing redevelopment projects. Unfortunately, this occurred just as the nation's housing market downturn began, so the RFP was received with little interest.

The Slavic Village Development (SVD), a non-profit community development corporation, became involved in reusing the 8.9-acre site after it became clear that a housing project was not going to happen. SVD has been working to create new greenspace throughout the community, promote active living, and improve housing and transportation in the Greater Broadway community for 30 years. SVD, with the backing of the community and City Council members, actively searched for a greenspace reuse of the site. Their search resulted in a connection with Fast Track Cycling, Inc., (Fast Track), a nonprofit



*Artist rendering of completed  
velodrome project. (from Fast  
Track Cycling, Inc.)*

dedicated to establishing and operating a velodrome cycling track in Cleveland to promote the sport of cycling for its various health and wellness benefits. Fast Track was evaluating sites within five northern Ohio counties for a location for a velodrome.

In November 2009, Fast Track entered into a lease with option to purchase agreement with the city to use the site as a velodrome. Through the work of its 12-member volunteer board, Fast Track raised \$300,000 in donations to construct the first phase of the three-phase project. Phase I of the project was completed with the grand opening of a 166-meter outdoor track on August 30, 2012. Activities at the track include youth programs, velodrome etiquette training, open riding, and racing events. Fast Track is continuing to work toward completion of all three phases of its project, which will culminate in twin indoor tracks and a connecting building.

### MORE INFORMATION:

Visit EPA's Land Revitalization program website at <http://www.epa.gov/landrevitalization/>  
Fast Track Cycling, Inc., Cleveland Velodrome, at <http://clevelandvelodrome.org/>

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