

Brownfields

Success Story

A Heyday in West Haymarket Lincoln, Nebraska

Along the western edge of downtown Lincoln, Nebraska lies the Haymarket District. First developed in the 1870s with the arrival of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, the district's industrial and warehousing uses served the adjacent railroad facilities.

In the 1980s, the city partnered with community leaders to remedy blighted conditions in the area. Since then, the West Haymarket redevelopment project has transformed dozens of acres of underutilized property into a civic arena, hotels, community space, retail and office space and residential units. Step by step, Lincoln has built upon redevelopment successes and has a lot to show for it today.

Challenges

Redevelopment in West Haymarket has been hampered by the area's historical uses. Beginning in the late 1800s, the railroads fueled trains and conducted other rail yard maintenance there. In addition, the site of a former manufactured gas plant was later used as a lumber yard and scrap metal recycling facility, and was contaminated with volatile organic compounds, heavy metals and polychlorinated biphenyls.

Until recently, redevelopment had taken place up to about 7th Street, where the city hit a roadblock. The environmental issues—especially those associated with the railroad—were too difficult to get around. Redevelopment would require moving rail lines, and determining how much cleanup was necessary depended on establishing an end-use for the area. Plus, the scrap metal recycler located between two rail lines initially had been reluctant to allow environmental assessment of its property.

The Cleanup

Redevelopment finally took off when local leaders identified West Haymarket as a great location for an arena, boosting developer interest. Voters approved a \$10 million bond measure to revitalize the area for a combination of public and commercial use.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded the city several Targeted Brownfields Assessment grants to examine West Haymarket properties. EPA later awarded the city two Brownfields Cleanup grants totaling \$400,000 to address the scrap metal recycling facility and former manufactured gas plant and lumber yard.

One hundred forty thousand cubic yards of unsuitable soil was removed, recycled or capped for use as a parking lot. The sites have now been remediated, and planning for their redevelopment is currently under way.



EPA Grant Recipient:
City of Lincoln, Nebraska

Grant Types:
EPA Targeted Brownfields
Assessment Grants, EPA
Brownfields Cleanup Grants

Former Uses:
Rail Lines and Yards, Coal and
Lumber Storage, Scrap Metal
Recycling Facility, Manufactured
Gas Plant

Current Use:
Mixed-use Commercial,
Office and Residential



Downtown Lincoln's early railroad, industrial and warehousing uses led to blighted conditions that made redevelopment challenging.



West Haymarket today has a new network of recreational spaces, including this seasonal skating rink outside the Pinnacle Bank Arena.

“Just 5 years ago, this area was largely unpaved and industrial. Its total transformation since then fits right into the brownfields cleanup vision.”

*Ernesto Castillo
Planner II
Urban Development Department
City of Lincoln*

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Jennifer Morris at R7_Brownfields@epa.gov.

Jennifer Morris, a project manager for EPA Region 7, says that redevelopment in the area has been powered by a series of events—all with a sustainability focus. “The two sites that received cleanup funding are parts of a larger effort,” she says. “Lincoln received technical assistance through EPA’s Greening America’s Capitals Program to revitalize the South Capital area through improvements to streets and alleys. They used Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality State 128a funds to assess properties. Ultimately that led to the start of redevelopment of the West Haymarket area, including the passage of the bond and, later, construction of the arena.”

Current Uses

West Haymarket today has a new network of streets, pedestrian ways, parking structures and mixed-use development, including residential, recreational, cultural and entertainment spaces. The 470,400-square-foot Pinnacle Bank Arena offers year-round entertainment, including concerts, family shows, touring acts and sporting events.

In addition, a local sports video software firm is building its headquarters in West Haymarket. The projected payroll and investment associated with this project will create an estimated \$140 million of annual economic activity.

Nearby, a national engineering firm headquartered in Lincoln built a new office, and new student housing was constructed in the area less than a mile from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. Two new roundabouts outside the football stadium help manage traffic, as does a new roadway that moves traffic north outside of downtown.

The city also built the state’s first protected bike lane, which runs between the two brownfield cleanup sites and extends about 17 blocks from 7th and N streets, where it hooks up with the Jamaica Trail, to 23rd and N streets, where it connects with the Billy Wolff Trail.

Community Impact

Redevelopment has employed 2,282 construction workers to date, including 1,347 from Lincoln/Lancaster County and 744 from other Nebraska counties. Ninety-two percent of the workers are from Nebraska. Seventy-five percent of all contracts, totaling \$160 million, have gone to Nebraska firms. The Pinnacle Bank Arena has spurred more than \$70 million in private investment throughout West Haymarket.

Adapting existing buildings instead of demolishing them has made West Haymarket one of Lincoln’s greenest neighborhoods. Increasing housing density, a mix of uses and proximity to the University of Nebraska and downtown combine to create a live-work-play environment that lets residents meet basic needs without needing automobiles.

The city is planning additional redevelopment in South Haymarket, a 38-block subarea adjacent to Historic Haymarket and West Haymarket. The redevelopment strategy includes an urban neighborhood with an additional 1,000 to 2,000 residential units, well-defined streetscapes that connect to trails, an urban plaza, open spaces, expanded commercial and office space, adequate parking for the new uses and other amenities within greater downtown.

Transformation

West Haymarket is a prime example of how a community can use EPA assistance to leverage multiple sources of additional funding, technical assistance and community support to drive and expand growth.

Ernesto Castillo works for the city on development projects. “Before the first EPA assessment grants, everything west of 7th Street was roundhouse, rail yard, scrap yard, industrial land and rail lines,” he says. “Now there are paved streets, restaurants, hotels, residences, new construction and more coming. The planning, brownfields assistance and needed investments all just fell into place.”