

# brownfields

Success Story

## CREATING A NICHE NEIGHBORHOOD ENVIRONMENT

Philadelphia, PA

**Brownfields funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) helped finalize assessments for the Hunter School Homes project in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, completing the first step toward the development of 48 new housing units.**

### HIGHLIGHTS

The EPA Assessment grant was used to leverage financing for the environmental investigation, completing a critical first step for the project.

EPA Brownfields funding awarded to the state enabled the remediation necessary for investors to “sign off” on the project.

38 units of the housing project included subsidies to help make them affordable to first-time home buyers.

Norris Square Civic Association leveraged more than \$12.5 million for redevelopment.



The renovated Norris Square community.

Hunter Elementary School students and their parents see a changed landscape as they walk to school in the Norris Square community. The days of walking past abandoned and dilapidated lots are behind them; the neighborhood surrounding the Hunter Elementary School has been revitalized, with 48 new housing units in place of long-idle brownfields.

An area plagued by dilapidated and demolished housing is starting to see a resurgence in growth as new housing and community amenities are developed within the Norris Square neighborhood. This low-income, predominately Puerto Rican and Latino community was in significant need of development to provide new residential opportunities, and to enhance neighborhood amenities such as parks and recreational areas. The newly located and opened Hunter

Elementary School along Howard Street is a project of which the community is proud. However, it was clear that the surrounding blocks needed to be revitalized in order to make sure families felt safe accessing the new school. The vacant, condemned lots on these blocks had become targets for illegal dumping and vandalism, and many parents felt compelled to escort their children to school. In response, the Norris Square Civic Association and the City of Philadelphia partnered to assess these blighted parcels and develop a plan for revitalizing the neighborhood.

In spring 2007, the Norris Square Civic Association reached out to the City of Philadelphia's Department of Commerce to discuss 144 properties that the city's Redevelopment Authority assembled through condemnation in the vicinity of the new school. Former uses on this assembled site varied, including demolished, former housing, but specific concern was expressed about several parcels that were used as metal fabricating and plating manufacturing facilities from 1917 to 1976.

An EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant awarded in 2003 to the city funded an environmental study and a site characterization study. The EPA funding, along with a \$23,000 Industrial Sites Grant from the state, served as the required 25 percent match for federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding that had been provided to support the new housing development project. With some earlier environmental assessment data available, the Site Characterization study was completed in August 2007 and used to delineate how much contamination was on site— including heavy metals that needed to be removed before initiating redevelopment. The City's Department of Commerce requested assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for remediation. DEP identified and helped secure EPA Subtitle C funds for the project, and awarded \$75,000 to the Norris Square Civic Association to remove and dispose of impacted soils.

Led by the Norris Square Civic Association, this redevelopment project leveraged more than \$12.5 million from eight different sources for the development of 48 units of housing. Investment partners included the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB); the Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD) of the City of Philadelphia; Philadelphia's Redevelopment Authority (RDA); Pennsylvania's Housing Financing Authority (PHFA); Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED); and a private developer. These new residential units met an important need for the community after seeing much of the area's housing demolished over the years. Development of the new housing units was completed in September 2009. The Hunter School Home Ownership Program, run by the Norris Square Civic Association, was established to assist those new to home ownership. Much of this new housing was also provided at a subsidized rate for new residents.

In addition to subsidized housing options, the units were built with some efficient amenities to help curb both energy use and cost. Each unit has a metal roof with a 50 year warranty. Additionally, the units have a water management system which drains water from the roof into a specially design basin at each unit. This backyard irrigation filtration helps manage the costs of sewer usage. Double insulated windows and energy efficient lighting also help manage utility costs.

Other neighborhood businesses and investment projects are also prospering from the new housing development, as residents make use of the established commercial and retail businesses located a block away along Front Street. The Norris Square Civic Association is now working on revitalizing the long-idle, local community center, which will include an employment and training center for neighborhood residents. Other planned improvements to the community center include a commercial kitchen, new meeting space, a basketball court, a computer lab, and a theatre stage.

The Hunter School Homes project has already proven itself as a keystone development that has leveraged additional economic development and area-wide revitalization, including eventual reuse of the local community center and the rehabilitation of an area playground.

*Brownfields Success Story  
Hunter Elementary School  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

*Solid Waste  
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