Brownfield Redevelopment in a Historic Neighborhood

Covington, Kentucky

This former junkyard is located in a heavily industrial region of Covington, Kentucky, directly across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, Ohio. From 1886 to 1949 the site was used as a residential structure, then converted into an auto garage and unregulated junkyard. Environmental concerns associated with the lot perpetuated its use as a dumping ground and discouraged potential developers. With funding from EPA’s Brownfields program, two local groups investigated the site, cleaned it up, and redeveloped the area. The lot was transformed into a parking area for the adjacent circa-1880s “shotgun” style housing, an Orchard Street neighborhood that would come to be known as Shotgun Row.

From Junkyard to Community Asset

After 50 years of use as an auto garage and junkyard, the city of Covington conducted environmental assessments at the site in 2005 and 2006. These efforts indicated that historical junkyard operations contaminated site soil with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and lead, and the property continued to sit vacant, contributing to an area challenged by high crime rates. As the Center for Great Neighborhoods of Covington (CGN) began to look for ways to bring new life to the area as the site’s new owner, they focused on the Orchard Street neighborhood and the junkyard property for revitalization efforts. The CGN worked in collaboration with the Northern Kentucky Area Development District (NKADD), who focused on the site’s cleanup. In 2012, NKADD utilized approximately $17,000 in EPA Brownfields assessment grant funding to conduct environmental assessments for the property. These studies further confirmed soil contamination and laid the foundation for a cleanup that would support reuse. The area was ready for change and the lot’s cleanup would provide a spark to jumpstart redevelopment.

“This was the most disinvested block in the area. The project overall was very catalytic to growth in the community, and the parking lot was a critical piece.”

Adam Rockel, CGN Program Director
Through a joint effort, CGN and NKADD refurbished the homes and constructed the parking lot. In 2013, an EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) subgrant supported the lot’s $46,000 cleanup, which included removing contaminated soil, backfilling the area with clean soil, and paving the lot with asphalt. In accordance with city requirements, CGN planted trees and drought-tolerant plants around the lot to control runoff and provide landscape bedding. CGN also provided the lot’s finishing touches, such as striping and signage, before each Shotgun Row resident was assigned a designated parking spot.

Catalyst for Positive Change in the Community

CGN renovated and refurbished the interiors of the Shotgun Row houses primarily with funding from the city of Covington and the Kresge Foundation; the renovation effort included asbestos removal and bringing the structures up to code. In addition, Orchard Park, a community garden and chicken coop, was created across the street. The park has become a unifying and beautifying force in the community.

The site’s cleanup and redevelopment have spurred area-wide revitalization with a focus on serving the community and keeping homes affordable. This Orchard Street neighborhood previously had low home ownership rates, high numbers of vacant properties and high crime rates. The National Trust for Historic Preservation stated that saving these historic homes ultimately led to the rehabilitation of the whole neighborhood. Since completion of the work on Orchard Street, the area has experienced a significant increase in real estate investment. The convenience of guaranteed parking has been important to the residents; plans are in place to provide a few commercial spaces to a local restaurant as well. “Having parking nearby in an older city is definitely an added value,” explained Sarah Allan, a program director with CGN.

With support from EPA, the cleanup, investments and neighborhood connections that NKADD and CGN helped foster over the years have generated a renewed sense of pride within this community.

For More Information:

EPA Brownfields Program
www.epa.gov/brownfields

EPA Region 4 Brownfields Program
(404) 562-8729

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Newly refurbished houses, along with a community garden across the street, contribute to the revitalization of the area.

December 2020