

# Brownfields Success Story



## Agriculture & Community Garden Development

Former Electrical Substation  
City of Dothan, Alabama

### Introduction

The City of Dothan (population 71,072) was selected to receive a brownfields \$300,000 assessment grant in 2017 to assess properties within and around the City center for possible redevelopment. Located in the southeastern corner of Alabama, less than 30 minutes from the Florida and Georgia State lines, Dothan was founded on an agricultural economy and retains much of that identity today, serving as a regional hub for rural and small-town populations in southeastern Alabama, north Florida, and southwestern Georgia. The City identified seven properties to be assessed with EPA funding. Brownfields assessments were conducted by the City to leverage the cleanup and redevelopment resources needed to reduce blight, improve opportunities for new investment, and enhance the community at large for its residents.

One of the brownfield sites assessed with the EPA funds was a barren lot within the proud, well-established, minority residential neighborhood known as the Baptist Bottom. This property, vacant since the late 1990s, was unable to sustain any surface vegetation, representing a long-term concern for neighborhood residents. Knowing these concerns, combined with the low potential for redevelopment (due to unknown and unquantified environmental concerns), the City utilized grant funds, between 2018 and 2020, to complete three phases of investigation (Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), Phase II ESA, and a supplemental soil evaluation) to evaluate the extent, degree, and potential risks related to soil contamination left behind by this decommissioned substation.

### Preparing for Cleanup & Redevelopment

The neighboring property owner, Aunt Katie's Community Garden, had long expressed interest in acquiring this property to expand its community garden operations; however, concern over possible contamination from the former substation presented too much risk and uncertainty to move forward. With the information obtained from the previous assessments, the City now had sufficient information to develop a cleanup strategy to facilitate the transfer of the property to Aunt Katie's Community Garden. With these plans in place, the City applied for cleanup grant funds from EPA in 2019, and, in 2020, received a \$297,900 cleanup grant award.



**EPA Grant Recipient:**  
City of Dothan, Alabama

**Grant Type:**  
EPA Assessment Grant  
EPA Cleanup Grant

**Former Uses:**  
Vacant, Former Electrical  
Substation

**Current Status:**  
Urban Farm/Community Center



This cleanup initiative transformed a liability into an asset for the Dothan community. A vacant property, contaminated and unused for decades, is now a thriving farm providing locally grown produce to City residents and restaurants.



Whiddon Power Station 9 and 10 operated on the Property from the early 1950s until 1997 when all components were removed, leaving behind a vacant lot with arsenic-contaminated soil in a low-income residential community.



It remained vacant for the next 23 years until EPA's Clean-up Grant award to the City of Dothan in 2020. The City moved quickly, completing all remedial tasks and achieving regulatory closure by September 2021.



**For More Information:**

**EPA Brownfields Program Website**  
[www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields)

**EPA Region 4 Brownfields**  
 (404) 562-8729

Following the cleanup grant award, the City, engaging regularly with Aunt Katie's Community Garden, area stakeholders, and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), developed a remedial plan and site reuse strategy to allow for future expansion of the Aunt Katie's Community Garden onto the property.

In December 2020, Aunt Katie's Community Garden enrolled the property into the Alabama Voluntary Cleanup Program and submitted a cleanup plan for approval. ADEM approved the cleanup plan in February 2021, allowing for the commencement of cleanup work in March 2021. The cleanup activities included excavating and removing contaminated soils, backfilling with clean fill material, and establishing building pads for future agricultural tunnel houses. The remediation and restoration activities were completed in early April 2021. After an Environmental Covenant was recorded, the property was transferred to Aunt Katie's Garden. Additionally, the property received a Letter of Concurrence in September 2021 that released the site from further liability for assessment or cleanup. Cleanup planning, community engagement, remedial work, and regulatory approval occurred in approximately ten months.

**Expanding the Garden**

The Garden wasted no time in moving forward with expansion. In December 2021, it held a ribbon cutting for two new tunnel houses constructed on the property, along with a wildflower and bee habitat. With this expansion, the Garden will triple production next year, creating sustainable growth on land which withered vacant for decades.

Even accounting for the increased production from the tunnel houses currently under construction, Mr. Michael Jackson, the Garden Director, said the demand will exceed what the Garden can supply. That revelation triggered the development of a new, expanded Garden Master Plan to further increase production, thus compounding the growth already realized by the addition of the site to the Garden complex. The results are generative, perpetuating future financial sustainability, more jobs, and a growing reputation of hope and opportunity in the Baptist Bottom.



"The Cleanup Project transformed a neighborhood eyesore into a valuable asset for a Dothan non-profit institution. The former abandoned and contaminated property provided a needed expansion for Aunt Katie's Community Garden: a state of the art urban farming operation. The former brownfield site now contains two massive high tunnel farming houses, growing fresh produce for the community on a year-round basis. That alone, is a successful end result for any brownfield project. But for the City of Dothan and Aunt Katie's Community Garden, that success is just the beginning," says Bob Wilkerson, City of Dothan Senior Planner. "The Garden is now empowered, through expansion of its operations, to move forward with its greater mission of self generated community enhancement, more jobs and educational opportunities for local residents, greater access to fresh food, and a sustainable platform for long-term, economic wellbeing."