From the Ground Up, Springfield Builds Momentum in Redeveloping its Brownfields

Springfield's new cancer treatment center offers a tranquil setting for patients and guests.

Springfield, Ohio

Like so many typical industrial, Midwestern cities, the City of Springfield, Ohio suffered an economic downturn in the 1970s and 80s, with the closure of some of its longest-running industrial facilities. Some of those facilities sat idle or underutilized for decades despite their enviable locations, with developers held at bay by fears of liability for any residual contamination. But today, through the efforts and determination of the city, its partnerships with the state and federal Environmental Protection Agencies (EPA), and its collaboration with the private sector, Springfield is undergoing a transformation. Within the last few years, the city has seen the redevelopment of some of its most significant brownfields in projects that have leveraged hundreds of millions of dollars and created a renewed economic outlook.

Among Springfield's most dramatic examples is the former Bayley industrial facility, a 1.17-acre site used for wrought iron manufacturing for more than a century. In spite of the property's prime location, on a ridge with beautiful views of Buck Creek and the Veteran's Memorial Park, it had only been used for warehousing and light industry since the Bayley facility's closure in 1984.

In 2002, Springfield's two competing hospitals formed a partnership to build a comprehensive cancer treatment center. At the time, area cancer patients had to travel to Columbus or Dayton for treatment. Originally, these partners planned to develop on an unused greenfield. When the city suggested the former Bayley site, the hospitals acknowledged it as a perfect location, but also expressed several reservations. They questioned whether the site's suspected contamination could be removed to commercial standards, let alone those for a health facility. There was also doubt as to whether the site could be prepared quickly enough to fit their tight redevelopment schedule, given the complications often associated with contaminated land. To ease these concerns, the city held a meeting with hospital representatives, the State of Ohio EPA (OH EPA), and other project stakeholders. The city and OH EPA explained how brownfields can be safely redeveloped to even hospital standards and the availability of liability protections at the state and federal levels.

With a go-ahead from all parties, the city performed a full environmental investigation of the property, using $30,000 of a $200,000 U.S. EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant awarded to Springfield in 1999. This investigation revealed contaminants including volatile organic

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JUST THE FACTS:

- Two partnering hospitals looking to build a new cancer-treatment center questioned whether a former industrial site could be cleaned to commercial standards, let alone those for a health facility.
- The city held a meeting with hospital representatives, OH EPA, and other project stakeholders to explain how brownfields can be cleaned to even hospital standards and the availability of federal and state liability protections.
- Cleanup took less than three months, and the site became the first enrolled in the state's Voluntary Action Program—under a Memorandum of Agreement with U.S. EPA—to receive a Covenant Not to Sue letter from OH EPA.
- Less than one year after the site's cleanup, Springfield's $10 million, state-of-the-art cancer treatment center opened its doors, offering patients local access to chemo and radiation therapies.

compounds (VOCs), total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPHs), polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), other heavy metals, asbestos, and two underground storage tanks (USTs) used for heating oil. Cleanup involved UST removal, soil excavation, and the use of clean soil to fill excavated areas. To help fund the more than $800,000 cleanup, the city used approximately $300,000 from a $1 million U.S. EPA Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund (BCRLF) grant awarded in 2002. The entire cleanup took less than three months, and the site became the first enrolled in the state's Voluntary Action Program (VAP)—under a Memorandum of Agreement with U.S. EPA—to receive a Covenant Not to Sue (CNS) letter from OH EPA. The CNS assures the developers that they will not be held liable in the unlikely event that any pre-existing contaminants are found after the state's safe cleanup determination.

"With brownfields communities you get a lot of pessimism; people get resigned that nothing will change. Now we have all this momentum, and you can see the change in people's perceptions. People are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the projects going on. We've gone from a time of no change to where former industrial properties are being seen with potential."

—Shannon Meadows,
Executive Assistant
to the City Manager

On August 2, 2004, less than one year after the site's cleanup, Springfield's new, state-of-the-art cancer treatment center opened its doors. This $10 million facility offers patients access to chemo and radiation therapies, and outpatient oncology; and houses a community resource library, a prayer/meditation room, and natural gardens that provide a peaceful environment for both patients and their visitors. The treatment rooms also incorporate natural lighting into their design, which provides a comfortable atmosphere and reduces energy consumption.

Like the Bayley site, Springfield's former SPECO-Kelsey Hayes property had an industrial legacy going back to the 1800s, when the site's facility was used to build hydraulic turbines for the Mast-Foos Manufacturing Company. In 1916, after the property's use for nearly a decade as a brewing facility, the Steel Products Engineering Company (SPECO) began operations on the seven-acre site. During World War II, the facility transitioned to military production, which continued during the Vietnam War, when the plant was used to assemble helicopter components for the U.S. Department of Defense. The facility shut down in the late 1970s, when the company consolidated and transitioned its operations to another part of the city. The idle property was purchased by a private owner who converted the plant into a cold-storage facility that operated until the late 1990s. The city wanted to perform environmental investigations on the property using its 1999 Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant, but the owner refused site access.

Eventually, the site's owner was willing to cooperate with a private developer that expressed interest in purchasing the property for cleanup and resale. Following negotiations with the owner and potential buyer, the city conducted initial environmental assessments. More detailed assessments were performed using approximately $30,000 of a $400,000 U.S. EPA Brownfields Assessment grant received by Springfield in 2004. These assessments revealed contaminants including petroleum, asbestos, PCBs, lead, and PAHs in the soil. The developer purchased the property once site investigations were complete.

The city entered into a Cooperative Redevelopment Agreement (CRA) with the site's new owner in which the city would fund and oversee most of the cleanup, and the owner would ensure the safe closure of the site's underground storage tanks. In this arrangement, the city provided a $35,000

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community improvement grant; and used $750,000 from the state's Clean Ohio Assistance Program, $156,000 from the Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund, and a $200,000 Brownfields Cleanup grant awarded by EPA in 2004 to demolish structures and remove contaminants. In October 2006, as they had for the former Bayley property, the OH EPA issued a Covenant Not to Sue on this former industrial site.

With cleanup complete and liability protections in place, the property was resold in January 2007 to a local, industrial gas supplier with plans to relocate their regional headquarters to the site.

As part of the CRA between the city and prior owner, profits from the property's sale were split evenly; the city's proceeds were used to return capital to the BCRLF and provide the city with resources to transform other local brownfields. Construction of the company's new headquarters was completed in Spring 2008.

Demolition of structures underway on the former SPECO Kelsey-Hayes site.

The successful cleanup and reuse of the former Bayley and SPECO-Kelsey Hayes brownfields, which represented some of the city's oldest industrial sites, have helped to catalyze other redevelopment projects in downtown Springfield—including a 40-acre site being transformed into a $350 million, regional medical facility. And on the site of a former wire and spring manufacturer, the city used an EPA Brownfields Assessment grant to fund environmental investigations and develop a cleanup plan. With cleanup complete, the site's owner plans to return the property to industrial use.

"We've done some amazing work in this community," explains Shannon Meadows, Executive Assistant to the City Manager. "This was a program that was struggling back in the late 1990s. With brownfields communities you get a lot of pessimism; people get resigned that nothing will change. Now we have all this momentum, and you can see the change in people's perceptions. People are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the projects going on. We've gone from a time of no change to where former industrial properties are being seen with potential."

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