

Brownfields are a Key Component for Economic Growth & Development

Everybody has a unique story for getting into this field. Why did you get involved in economic development?

In the 1990's, economic development in Emeryville, where I was a redevelopment project manager, involved many real estate transactions and construction. Emeryville had suffered decades of disinvestment and poor environmental practices that left many sites vacant. It was also a time when environmental regulatory agencies were adjusting to recently enacted Federal and state law on environmental protection. Because of the industrial history of Emeryville resulted in suspicions that most of the city's groundwater was contaminated, developers, prospective purchasers and investors shunned Emeryville. At the same time, the city was rebuilding its infrastructure and public facilities, and affordable housing. As a matter of course, we became experts at due diligence and cleanup. After getting our first EPA Brownfields grant in 1997, and with the help of a lot of experts and partnerships, and excellent city leadership and management, Emeryville became a model for brownfields programs and project development, developing many firsts, such as the first web-based environmental database, an areawide approach to brownfields redevelopment, model for green infrastructure, local environmental oversight and use of state law to compel cleanup. I have brought those lessons is my capacity as nonprofit technical assistance serving California and many other states.

The national Brownfields 2019 conference, not to be missed, and in [Los Angeles on Dec 10-13](#), is an excellent opportunity to meet economic development professionals from all over the US and world, and it's quite affordable. If you miss that, look for the California Land Recycling Conference in 2020. Of course, there will also be brownfields experts at the CALED conference in Sacramento. (there's a photo of me at the bottom of this page -

<https://brownfields2019.org/about/conference-overview/>) Over the years, the national

Brownfields conference has provided excellent opportunities to learn the multi-disciplinary approach to the three E's – environment, economy and equity. This year, there are eight technical tracks covering 150 sessions of all formats as well as mobile workshops. It's always been a one-stop shop to learn everything, and is best visited with other associates because many



relevant sessions occur simultaneously. Key topics emerge every year, including are affordable housing, infrastructure, financial leveraging, environmental justice. Up to 3000 practitioners from all levels of government, nonprofit and for-profit developers and communities and consultants will be there. CCLR will host several panels on complicated sites, climate action plans, housing and sports/entertainment.

In your economic development work experience, can you think of a specific economic development project of program that you worked on that stood out as making an impact? Can you tell me a little bit about it and when it started?

Immediately after GIS databases were enabled on the internet – and this was before Google Maps, or the state Envirostor and Geotracker databases, Emeryville used its EPA grant to develop OSIRIS – One-Stop Interactive Resource Information System – that not only included environmental covenant information, it also had land use, zoning, ownership and real estate information. OSIRIS was the model for many economic development and environmental applications on the web, and received an environmental prize from the King of Sweden in 1999. OSIRIS helped address the main concern on brownfields sites – certainty. It provided certainty to the development community and developers on any residual environmental concerns on a site, which informed project timing and costs, and helped expedite many redevelopment transactions and projects.

A lot of projects/programs have ups and downs. Were there challenges you had to overcome to be successful and rewards working on this project/program?

In my capacity as technical assistance provider at CCLR since 2009, the key challenge is the misconception of what a brownfield really is. Even sophisticated professionals are unaware that brownfields tools and funding can be used on practically any site that has had previous economic use – whether it be a warehouse, factory, corn field, strip mall. They are also unaware, especially with the BUILD ACT of 2018, a wide array of planning, marketing and outreach activities are eligible expenses. With the loss of redevelopment agencies, the EPA brownfield grants are an excellent alternative. And a city need not own a contaminated site. For those communities that have heeded this advice, they have received hundreds of thousands to millions in grant funds, plus all the \$17 leveraging that each EPA\$ generates.

Can you share any impacts the project/program has had or will have on employment, expansion of local tax base & diversification of the area's economy?

In Emeryville alone, there has been nearly \$1B invested in new projects and new tax revenue and more than from the brownfield sites that have been redeveloped. Resident employment has increased five-fold from about 1,100 in the 1990's to almost 6,000 in 2018. In Siskiyou County, also a brownfield grantee, since 2011, the county leveraged \$40 Million in private investment. Brownfield development has had an annual economic impact of \$17 Million, and Siskiyou communities have seen \$99 investment into the local economy for every \$1 invested in Brownfield redevelopment.

What advice would you give to other economic development professionals when working on a similar project/program?

Brownfields are key components of any economic development program. Economic growth needs real estate transactions and ample land/building inventory for new jobs. Brownfields resources are easily accessible, and are good to leverage with other funds. Connect with us at CCLR, we have grants that allow us to provide free technical assistance.

By Ignacio Dayrit, Director of Programs, Center for Creative Land Recycling (CCLR or “see clear”)



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