

United States Senate
Subcommittee on Environment on Superfund,
Toxins and Environmental Health
Oversight Hearing on Brownfields Program - Cleaning Up and Rebuilding
Communities

Testimony

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Hudson County, New Jersey is located on the Hudson River directly across from New York City. The county is the fourth most densely populated area in the United States. As of the 2010 Census there are 634,266 people living within Hudson County's 46.6 square miles. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP) Known Contaminated Sites list has over 1,000 contaminated sites in Hudson County; giving us approximately 21 challenged sites per square mile. Clearly, our main concern is for the health and well-being of the residences of our county.

The Brownfields that plague Hudson County are the remains of our industrial past. Companies with names like Western Electric, Maxwell House, Colgate-Palmolive, Owens Illinois, Guyon General Piping, and Diamond Shamrock were leading firms in the municipalities of Hudson County. These companies employed thousands of workers and provided tax revenues to the towns along with good paying jobs.

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All that changed in the 60's and 70's when manufacturing companies left the region and closed their facilities. Jobs became scarce, creating high unemployment throughout Hudson County and high numbers of people living in poverty.

The unemployment in Hudson County rose to double digits. To this day our unemployment rate is higher than the state and national average. The unemployment rate for Hudson County is currently 10%.

The loss of these companies had another adverse effect, that is the large number of abandoned, derelict properties, and buildings that are functionally obsolete by today's standards. Many of these sites had their buildings demolished to lower the property taxes. These sites were fenced in and left to decay along with the communities. Land lie fallow and millions of potential, valuable square footage went unused for decades.

The revitalization of these properties was the only option for Hudson County. In the spring of 1998 Hudson County applied for and was awarded a grant from US EPA. We called the application the Brownfields Revitalization in an Urban Complex, A Demonstration Project in Hudson County.

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The US EPA grant provided the resources, support and technical expertise for site identification, inventory, assess and reuse plans for these sites.

The Hudson County Economic Development Corporation is the lead agency and our first act was to form the Brownfield Stakeholders Group to guide and direct the process of Brownfields revitalization. The group consist of a banker, educators, insurance professional, developers, interested citizens, town representatives, the Hudson County Regional Health Commission, the Hudson County Office of Strategic Revitalization, (which is now the Hudson County Office of Planning), and the Hudson County Division of Community Development. In addition, the US EDA, US HUD, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Brownfields Manager, and the US EPA Region 2 Project Manager served on the group. Many of these individuals are still working members of the committee.

The first meeting held on December 1, 1998 and meetings continue to this day. We did however move from monthly to quarterly meetings three years ago. These dedicated individuals have been the core of our efforts and have contributed their time and energy for the good of the Hudson County. We owe our success to their guidance, diligence and selfless support.

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Projects and Success

The first project was in the Town of Harrison, New Jersey. Harrison Mayor Raymond McDonough decided it was time to address the abandoned sites that were located near the entrance to the Town. The largest of the sites was a site formerly known as the Callahan Concrete Company. The company had closed and left behind land that was fenced in and cluttered with debris. The site is located on the banks of the Passaic River, directly across from Newark, NJ. The Town selected the site because of the impact to the area and it represented a great location for redevelopment.

The work began on the site and the preliminary investigation concluded that the main contamination was historic landfill. Many towns utilized historic fill around the turn of the century to fill in marshy areas. These areas were the breeding ground for mosquitoes that spread the plague.

The land was cleared; followed by the challenge of finding a suitable developer who could bring the highest and best use to the property and the Town of Harrison.

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Mayor McDonough's office received many calls of interest, but none of the interest materialized into a project. Finally a developer who specialty is building hotels expressed interest in the site. A Hampton Inn & Suites was the proposed project. The developers were from Long Island and had completed other hotels throughout the Tri-State region. A team from the town visited a hotel in the Long Island that the developers had completed to see firsthand the type of project the group would be building in Harrison. The visit was a success. The Hampton Hotel & Suites is the first hotel to open in Harrison since stagecoach days. The project has an indoor pool, a health club and a beautiful walkway on the Passaic River. They offer shuttle service to Penn Station in Newark, NJ and to the Harrison PATH station that serves New York City, Jersey City and Hoboken. Its location is ideal for the business traveler, and in recent years with the opening of the Red Bull Stadium in Harrison, it is a favorite of soccer fans. The hotel is a thriving business and was the impetus for other development projects within Harrison, NJ.

This successful project could not have happened without the US EPA Grant dollars that started the process. The Hampton Inn & Suites proved there were options for Brownfields reuse and gave confidence to developers to consider challenged sites for development instead of building on green space. Job creation for this project is 45 full time and 15 part time jobs.

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The second project is Affordable Senior Housing in Kearny, NJ. The site located at 681 – 697 Schuyler Avenue had been a former manufacturing company. The land was fallow for over twenty years. This site sits on the hilly side of town and has amazing views of the Manhattan skyline. It had been fenced in and was an eyesore in the community.

The Mayor of Kearny, Mayor Alberto Santos and the Town Council realized that many elderly people with limited resources had to leave the Kearny to find affordable housing. Seniors who had lived all their lives in town now had to move away to find housing that was they could afford.

The Hudson County Brownfields Stakeholders embraced this project and moved forward with a site investigation using the US EPA Grant. The project had many partners leveraging their funds to help create this great project. Among the partners were NJ EDA using Hazard Discharge Site Remediation Funds (HDSRF) , US HUD HOME Funds and the developers.

Town of Kearny has a 49-unit Affordable Senior Housing complex. It has added life to a section of town that was underutilized and an eyesore. On mild evenings seniors can be seen sitting on the front stoop enjoying the camaraderie of friends and the joy of living in a beautiful building. There are 2 full time jobs at this location.

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In conclusion: These are examples of two smaller projects but every journey starts with that first step. **These early successes helped spur development that “But for the US EPA Grant” would not have been considered.** These projects signaled a change in the dynamic of adaptive reuse and sustainability within our urban environment. We have had success because we work well with the communities, we encourage community participation and we respect the people and their dually elected officials as the client in our process. Our collaboration with the United States EPA has been a wonderful example of working together for a common goal. They have offered assistance and guidance throughout the process. We rely on the Grant to assist with the projects but, we have also relied on the guidance that the EPA has provided to us.

Working with the US EPA and the Grant process has made us understand that reclaiming Brownfields is a perfect starting point to reclaiming our future. Living in a community that has mass transit options and that are walk-able and livable will lead to a healthier and brighter future for all communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you to discuss our program.

Harrison Passaic Avenue - Before



Harrison Passaic Avenue - After



Affordable Senior Housing

After

