

A CLOSER LOOK

A Closer Look takes topics from previous and current issues of *Bridges* and examines them from a local perspective.



...AT THE ST. LOUIS REGION

The Brownfields Marketplace

Where St. Louis Area Developers, Property Owners Make Connections

Property owners, developers and local government agencies attempting to address brownfield problems in the St. Louis region have a new tool to help them: the St. Louis Regional Brownfields Marketplace. The premise? Bring property owners and developers together, provide them with information and access to resources, and brownfield transactions will happen.

The marketplace grew out of the 2004 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Conference in St. Louis, where a concept called the Brownfield Transaction Forum was introduced.

The idea was simple. Before the conference, brownfield property owners and developers were invited to register for a session of exclusive, but free-wheeling, networking. Those with property had to submit details about the property and then attend the session to network with developers.

Developers who registered for the event were nationally renowned for their work with brownfields and were ready to make deals. Networking with them appeared to work quite well for property owners and communities with a

Creating a New Model

After the EPA conference, the local host committee replicated the transaction forum with one difference: It wanted to improve the connection between developers and low-capacity brownfield

All agreed that a variation of the EPA transaction forum might be the answer to the low-capacity question. The committee recognized that larger communities like the city of St. Louis could deal with brownfield projects easier than smaller cities could. With a lack of staff, many small communities do not have the opportunity to acquire the expertise needed to redevelop a brownfield project.

Committee members agreed that the effort needed to extend beyond the core inner-city communities. First-tier aging suburbs in the St. Louis metropolitan area, while they may have resources, often must deal with the increasing cost of providing city services. The issues with these first-tier cities involved convincing them that brownfield redevelopment efforts needed a regional focus and that they would benefit from coming together to meet other property owners and developers.

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“Although not every developer had interest in our specific site, each had a lot to contribute about our downtown. That interaction with developers is invaluable.”

—attendee, St. Louis Brownfields Marketplace

high capacity for brownfield redevelopment. However, for those property owners and communities lacking brownfield redevelopment capacity, the event seemed out of reach. There appeared to be a disconnect in the brownfield redevelopment process for them.

communities. The committee included members from private, public and nonprofit agencies across the St. Louis region. All had worked either directly on brownfield issues or in some form of development or government partnership program.

Brownfields are real property, the expansion, redevelopment or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant.

Source: www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf

The St. Louis Regional Brownfields Marketplace provided an opportunity for property owners, local government and developers to:

- meet one-on-one through an innovative “speed networking” event;
- hear the latest news on the region’s successful brownfield cleanup and redevelopment projects;
- talk about the availability of economic incentives; and
- pick up a portfolio of featured properties and municipality information.

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This challenge had been recognized previously, and there had been several attempts to train inner-core municipalities on inter-municipal cooperation, but those attempts never moved beyond the concept of training. The brownfield marketplace, as it was now being called, could be that missing link, where property owners and developers could meet and where communities could gain access to valuable brownfield resources. The challenge for the group planning the event rested in how to create the connections.

The answer was to make the St. Louis Regional Brownfields Marketplace more than just a transaction forum. To improve on the EPA event, the local planning committee added structure to the networking session, creating “speed networking” sessions.

In these sessions, property owners and community representatives who might not be well-versed in brownfield redevelopment met local brownfield developers who would work with them. The property owners had five minutes to present potential projects to the developers, during which time contact information would be exchanged. At the end of the time, the property owners moved to the next developer. This continued until all property owners had visited all developers. For those who wanted to follow up with a certain developer, an informal networking period was scheduled after the sessions.

The marketplace also offered an informational overview with keynote speakers from state and regional environmental agencies. A resource center provided communities and developers

with information and contacts for potential brownfield transactions.

To date, the region has held two marketplace events. Indications based on participant evaluations suggest that the concept is working, so the committee is looking to make the brownfield marketplace an annual event.

Lessons Learned

After the initial marketplace in 2005, there were a couple of reports that connections were made between developers and property owners, although no actual transactions occurred. The primary benefit that developers reported was greater knowledge about brownfield opportunities across the region. Property owners said they developed a deeper understanding for the types of information developers need to know about a brownfield property. Further, property owners said they learned how to market their communities to developers. And the local planning committee learned more about the capacity issues in communities and how future marketplace events might be improved.

The event was held again in early 2007, heeding the lessons from 2005. Evaluations from the second event suggest that several connections were made and that attendees were more satisfied with the networking session. All acknowledged benefits from the resource center.

Challenges associated with developing this brownfield

capacity-building model were typical: finding resources, committed partners and willing participants and then conveying the idea. The local planning team included several members from the local host team that was assembled for the 2004 EPA Brownfields Conference in St. Louis. Thus, there was continuity from the initial event.

Additionally, there was a wider advisory circle: the St. Louis Metropolitan Brownfields Coalition provided fund-raising guidance and support. Through the coalition, several important partnerships formed, including a sponsorship from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis for the 2007 forum. The local planning team was able to draw on this larger advisory circle for resources and partnerships, keeping costs low.

The more difficult challenges involved finding willing speed-networking participants and conveying the idea. The collective expertise of the local planning team provided a key resource in overcoming that challenge. Team members were able to seamlessly connect across the region, selling the concept and gathering participants to make the event a success.



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