

## NEFCO's Brownfields Assessment Program

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Tom Murphy, a former Pittsburgh mayor and an Urban Land Institute fellow, quotes a General Motors study: 24 year-olds are six times less likely than their parents to own a car. With much of America's landscape shaped by the automobile, what does this mean for economic development? Quite possibly, Millennials may be on to something.

Millennials have shown increasing interest in living downtown within an easy walk to work and cultural attractions. Local governments often bear lower costs by developing areas already served by urban infrastructure. Decreasing public resources for new infrastructure are giving developers reasons to reconsider urban centers. Many Ohio cities share a legacy of abandoned /vacant properties, evidence of manufacturing's decline. These "brownfields," many with suspected contamination, can be a wise investment for developers once environmental issues are properly addressed. And they can play a role in positioning communities to provide amenities and employment to young adults who will shape the future.



The Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization (NEFCO) has been a leader in supporting the reuse of brownfields through its program to assist Summit County communities, property owners, and developers. Funded by two U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grants, NEFCO jumpstarts redevelopment by contracting with a qualified environmental firm to investigate properties with suspected environmental contamination. Many of these sites have been reused and have created and retained jobs. Communities served by these federal brownfield



*A Save a Lot grocery store in Akron opened in a machine shop that was a former brownfield. It provides fresh produce to an inner city neighborhood that lacked a place for residents to purchase healthy food.*

assessment grants provide a valuable service to property owners and developers.

NEFCO worked with its procured firm, Partners Environmental, to investigate two properties with successful outcomes. In both cases, past uses resulted in a stigma, preventing redevelopment. The presence of a "perceived" condition is a defining characteristic of a brownfield and can be as detrimental to its redevelopment as actual contamination. A developer interested in



*Triad/Next Level Interactive and city representatives discuss the redevelopment project with Congressman Tim Ryan, Ohio. A sweeping view of the Cuyahoga River Gorge was restored (photo courtesy of Triad/Next Level Interactive)*

remodeling a vacant building in Akron was concerned about a possible underground storage tank and potential environmental issues as a result of an adjacent former gasoline station. The investigation did not find an underground tank, and environmental concerns were minimal and easily addressed. This service enabled the developer to open a grocery store in a distressed neighborhood also considered a food desert. Today, eleven new jobs have been created and fresh produce is available to residents.

NEFCO's brownfields program also assisted with the redevelopment of a 1928 former machine shop in the City of Cuyahoga Falls. An environmental assessment revealed contaminants that could potentially be a source of hazardous vapors entering the building. With the investigation in hand, it was possible for the City and use to determine the remediation costs and to adjust the design to avoid areas where impacts would have resulted in higher clean-up costs. The historic building has received an Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit and is currently being restored by an advertising agency.



Communities are quickly realizing the locational benefits that brownfields redevelopment provides and advantages that made these sites ideal for development in the first place. Using brownfields as an economic development tool creates places where Millennials and older adults will want to live, work and play.



*A new sign identifies the building's past history and construction in 1928. The former foundry will soon open as the headquarters of Triad/Next Level Interactive in Cuyahoga Falls (photo courtesy of Triad/Next Level Interactive)*

*For more information about the Summit Brownfields Revitalization Program, contact Sylvia Chinn-Levy, Program Manager for Economic Development Planning, [schinnlevy@nefcoplanning.org](mailto:schinnlevy@nefcoplanning.org), or visit [www.nefcoplanning.org](http://www.nefcoplanning.org). Visit <http://www.ohioeda.com/page-1863457> for the original article.*