

Brownfields Success Story

After the Flood, Redevelopment Blooms Minot, North Dakota

Minot is a small city located on the banks of the Souris River in northern North Dakota. In 2011, record-breaking snowfall followed by a late spring thaw and heavy rain led to disastrous flooding. Twenty-five percent of the city's housing stock and a total of 4,000 structures and 12,000 people were affected by the flood.

The city's planning department struggled to address the needs of both displaced residents and developers trying to keep their construction jobs going, despite flood-related setbacks.

"Those jobs and those housing needs were critical to keep our community from falling into a sinkhole," says Donna Bye, who was the Minot city planner at the time. "Several federal agencies were providing assistance for major issues like sewers, water and roads, but in the neighborhoods residents were feeling left out of the process. People were feeling lost."

The Opportunity

A consultant suggested that the city look to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Program for additional support. Even before the flood, some areas had been blighted by various industrial and commercial causes. Now, the city had no choice but to take a closer look at the need for affordable housing, resiliency and sustainability.

"We wanted to take the opportunity to plan carefully," Bye says, "and to encourage certain businesses and industry to relocate outside the downtown area where there was more space and where neighbors wouldn't complain. We needed funds, but we also needed help planning."

The city embarked on two years of research and community involvement, using a Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant to fund, plan and develop implementation strategies for extensive flood mitigation, cleanup and revitalization of multiple catalyst sites along the Souris River downtown.

"We formed neighborhood groups and met regularly with residents, explaining what we were working toward," Bye says. "It felt like a therapy session for people, like someone was finally listening."

The Minot City Council approved a Brownfields Redevelopment Area-Wide Plan, whose framework also helped the city earn a \$74 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help reduce flood risk, build resilient neighborhoods and spur economic development.



EPA Grant Recipient:
City of Minot, North Dakota

EPA Grant Types:
Brownfields Area-Wide Planning,
Brownfields Assessment

Former Uses:
Car Repair, Dry Cleaning,
Entertainment, Grocery, Other Retail,
Restaurants

Current Uses:
Day Care, Entertainment, Restaurant



The Oak Park Theater was originally built in the 1960s and was restored following a devastating flood in 2011. Above, the theater is under water and, below, under reconstruction.





Today, the Oak Park Theater is back in active use by the community.

“Everyone knew that if we were able to use EPA Brownfields funds to clear the property of environmental concerns, it would be a big help toward redevelopment. That’s why these grants are so important for our communities.”

*Lance Meyer,
City Engineer,
City of Minot*

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Ted Lanzano at 303-312-6596 or Lanzano.Ted@epa.gov.

The Assessments

Minot used a \$400,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant to assess more than 15 sites along the Souris River, including the former Oak Park Shopping Center. The shopping center had stood vacant since the flood, when it was inundated by at least eight feet of water.

The Oak Park Shopping Center, originally built in the 1960s, had been used for numerous businesses over the years, including bars and restaurants; a bingo hall; a movie theater; shops providing shoe repair, car repair, dry cleaning and video rental services; and a grocery store.

Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments at the shopping center indicated some elevated levels of volatile organic compounds, likely associated with former dry cleaning and vehicle maintenance operations, but the concentrations did not exceed EPA recommendations for commercial use. The North Dakota Department of Health cleared the site of any additional monitoring or action. The assessments, clearance and All Appropriate Inquiries performed at the site protected the new owners from liability and made the property more attractive to developers.

Lance Meyer is Minot's city engineer and administers contracts on revitalization projects like the one at the Oak Park Shopping Center. "With all the different uses at that property over time," he says, "we knew that, if we were going to revitalize the site, we'd have to clear it of environmental concerns. Getting that property redeveloped and back on the tax rolls would be good for everyone."

The Revitalization

The \$4.9 million redevelopment of the Oak Park Shopping Center took about 12 months to complete, and included the new parking lot, which has landscaping to break up the pavement and improve aesthetics.

Today, there's a movie theater, a trampoline center, a pizza shop and a day care facility. The Oak Park Theater is a great example of how the community has persevered through an extraordinarily difficult time. Opened originally in the 1960s, the Oak Park Theater is one of the longest running theaters in the area—having shut down only from 2011 to 2016 due to flood damage. It's a truly unique and meaningful asset for the community.

Much of the surrounding area is residential, with single-family homes. The shopping center is located across the street from Oak Park, the largest park in Minot. The shopping center complements the park well: school-age kids go to the trampoline center for birthday parties, and families can have lunch or dinner at the pizza shop and then go see a movie together.

The Benefits

Redeveloping the shopping center created numerous permanent and temporary jobs and has generated tax income for the city. Many local companies provided cleanup, construction, paving and landscaping services for the redevelopment. Local contractors also helped upgrade the sewer, water and electrical systems in the buildings.

Local residents are employed both full- and part-time at the shopping center's businesses, and the day care facility provides much-needed child care services to local families.

Bye emphasizes that the revitalization was truly a community effort. "All of the people and organizations who supported us through the area-wide planning and assessment," Bye says, "they were people who, like us, had no experience with these programs. And, amid the chaos in our community at the time of the flood, they said, 'I want to learn about this and help get this through.' All these people came together and gave up their time when they didn't have to, and when we know they didn't have the time to. But they did, which is pretty special."