Case Study of Owensboro Riverfront

Keys to Success

- Project Description
- Economic Value
- Challenges & Advice
- Benefits
- Stewardship Meaning

Brought to you by:

Kentucky Division of Compliance Assistance

Situated on the banks of the Ohio River, the western Kentucky city of Owensboro was once the home of the former Executive Inn. Built in 1977, the hotel and conference center sat on 15 acres adjacent to the river in the downtown area, which had previously been operated as a manufactured gas facility. This prime location contained an inter-waterway canal where ship captains docked their boats in the late 1800s.

The Executive Inn featured celebrity entertainers, drawing crowds and was a popular destination. By 2008, a fire closed the hotel, and it was razed in 2009. City officials prepared a strategic redevelopment plan using the riverfront property as its focal point. One of the first steps taken by officials was the implementation of a 2010 brownfield assessment grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to evaluate the site. They were concerned about aging aboveground storage tanks at the former hotel's marina, unknown material used to backfill the canal and residual wastes from the old manufactured gas facility. These environmental issues had the potential to negatively impact the river.

> "Forward-thinking strategies were utilized that will benefit the Owensboro community for many years to come."

Linebach-Funkhouser, Inc., the city's environmental consultant, completed both Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments and found contaminants. The city's redevelopment team advised the EPA and the Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection (DEP) of the situation and devised a strategy using a Site Management Plan (SMP) and Environmental Restrictive Covenant (ERC), which utilized the proposed structures and parking features as capping mechanisms.

The riverfront redevelopment project includes a six-acre Smothers Park and Promenade, with a playground, veterans' memorial, three fountains with water shows four times an hour, a cascading waterfall and seating where the public can relax and watch the river traffic. A new convention center and high-

rise condominium project will be complete in 2014, and two hotels and businesses are also located on the riverfront.

Charles A. Leachman II, senior geologist for Linebach-Funkhouser, says the estimated cost for the environmental assessment and protection planning effort was about $170,000. Approximately $100 million has been invested in the new development, and the City of Owensboro has a $35 million addition to its tax revenues from the two hotels alone. More businesses are moving to the area, creating more economic value.

Leachman says sometimes they were asked to complete environmental field work within a tight time frame. Unusually wet conditions made this large project more difficult.

The city's convention center will draw business, boosting the economy.

During assessment work, they focused on not breeching a 1–3-foot thick confining layer of clay below the site, which required the use of telescoping wells to assess the lower regional aquifer for groundwater monitoring purposes.

He says it's crucial that you create a team environment between the client, regulator and consultant to build trust and allow streamlined work to proceed. Also try to anticipate the path regarding regulations that you plan to encounter, allowing you to address likely road blocks early and develop a plan to deal with these issues.

"This redevelopment process was predicated upon an upfront partnership between the City of Owensboro, DEP and Linebach-Funkhouser, Inc.," says Leachman. "By keeping these entities in the loop, forward-thinking strategies were utilized that will benefit the Owensboro community for many years to come."

In addition to tax revenue and several million dollars in the new development, results from the environmental success of the riverfront property include 100 new jobs and the

The Hampton Inn is shown during the construction phase on the riverfront.

lowest unemployment rate in the Saint Louis Federal Reserve Region for Kentucky. Owensboro is proud of its new riverfront and honored by the praise the project has received. It was one of only 10 towns in the nation named an All-American City for 2013.

"The City of Owensboro has utilized progressive economic policies with upfront environmental due diligence to lay the foundation to a vibrant and modern downtown area that will continue to produce significant long-term benefits," says Leachman.

Helpful Hint: **Cleaning up a brownfield can give an exciting new purpose to a property, creating community pride and economic benefits.**