



Hartford Creates Community Greenspace in a Blighted Neighborhood



Community gardens at the Chestnut/Edwards street site.

Hartford, CT

Residents from one of the poorest neighborhoods in Hartford, Connecticut, are enjoying an aesthetic revival of the area. The impetus of this revival is the transformation of a hazardous brownfield adjacent to a local school into greenspace benefitting the entire community. The city's efforts, along with those of EPA and other federal and state agencies, have brought new opportunity to Hartford's distressed areas by focusing on brownfields reuse.

Thirty percent of the land in Hartford has been abandoned since 1986 due to migration of the city's heavy manufacturing industry. Statistics show the economic consequences: in 1995, 62 percent of the city's population of 125,100 was identified as living below federally defined low- to moderate-income levels. The situation was perhaps the worst in the near-100 percent minority Clay/Arsenal neighborhood, where unemployment rates climbed as high as 24 percent. For 11 years, students attending a school located in this neighborhood, Quirk Middle School, were forced to pass an unsafe and unsightly dump full of tires, mattresses, oil cans, and other debris. Known as the Chestnut/Edwards Street property, this site had once been home to a paint store before being abandoned.

Now, thanks in part to assistance from EPA and other federal agencies, the Chestnut/Edwards Street site has been transformed into a 1.74-acre greenspace that includes open playing space, a nature path, and a community garden that is the pride of community groups and local students who contributed to its planting. The city received an initial \$200,000 grant from EPA's Brownfields Initiative in September 1997, and has since received \$150,000 in supplemental funding and \$200,000 as a Brownfields Showcase Community finalist. The city used \$60,000 of this Pilot funding to perform preliminary environmental assessments on the site in December 1998, followed by a more detailed assessment in April 1999. The discovery of high levels of lead contamination from the former paint store made cleanup of the site a major priority. The City of Hartford committed

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JUST THE FACTS:

- The city used \$60,000 in EPA Assessment Pilot funding to perform environmental assessments on the Chestnut/Edwards street site. The discovery of high levels of lead contamination made cleanup a major priority.
- In addition to other funding sources, the Kellogg Foundation at Trinity College provided \$38,000 to fund cleanup of the site through phytoremediation. Students from the college employed this innovative cleanup method, which uses plants to extract lead from soil.
- The community also played a major role in planning the site's transition, specifically through community organizations such as the South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation and the Organized North Easterners/Clay Hill and Northeast community group.

Thanks in part to assistance from EPA and other federal agencies, a brownfield in one of Hartford's poorest neighborhoods has been transformed into a 1.74-acre greenspace that includes open playing space, a nature path, and a community garden that is the pride of community groups and local students who contributed to its planting.

\$108,000, a Community Development Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provided \$100,000, and the Knox Parks Foundation used \$30,000 in funding from a 1997 EPA Urban Environmental Initiative Grant to design and develop the site into recreational greenspace and a garden ready for

planting. The Kellogg Foundation at Trinity College provided \$38,000 to fund cleanup of the site through phyto-remediation techniques. Students from the college employed this innovative cleanup method, which uses Indian mustard plants to extract lead from the soil as they grow.



The Chestnut/Edwards street site with phytoremediation in progress.

CONTACTS:

For more information contact
U.S. EPA-Region 1 (617) 918-1424
Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>

The community also played a major role in planning the site's transition, specifically through community organizations such as the South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation (SAND) and the Organized North Easterners/Clay Hill and Northeast community group (ONE/CHANE). Students from Quirk Middle School were also involved in garden planting. Teacher Wendi di Corcia stated, "I was always taught to leave a place better than when you came in. This gardening project gives our students ownership in this neighborhood. This is where their neighborhood is. This is their garden. It gives them a sense of pride." The garden also has a positive impact on the adjacent House of Bread soup kitchen as it receives fresh produce from the site. Area residents are finally able to enjoy open greenspace, and the local economy is now growing as development spreads to properties adjacent to this former brownfield.

This thriving, urban greenspace is an example of the innovative brownfields restoration projects currently underway by the City of Hartford.



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