

Selma, Alabama

Using Brownfield Redevelopment to Sustain Small-Town Heritage

When one thinks about rural America's landscape, the word "frontier" comes to mind. Just as the definition of the word frontier suggests, rural America is the compilation of regions at or beyond the edge of settled areas. These regions are often considered to be largely undeveloped or depending on one's view, underdeveloped.

As the U.S. edges toward the projected population of nearly 400 million in 2050, these rural regions are bound to keep growing. Within these regions some small metropolises, not quite rural, are cropping up and more or less functioning in rural isolation.

Micropolitan Statistical Areas

In response to this phenomenon, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget developed a classification to quantify growth and allows these small cities to enable statistical consolidation with metropolitan areas, as needed. It's called the micropolitan statistical area, and generally encompasses a county that has at least one urban population cluster with a minimum of 10,000 and a maximum of 49,999.

Simply stated, a micropolitan area is a functioning small community isolated from other metropolitan areas. In addition, the definition identifies cities and includes well-distanced suburbs, where many city-employed people have their homes. These micropolitans are sometimes referred to as "commutersheds."

There are currently 674 counties with micropolitan areas, according to a USDA Economic Research Service 2003 report. These micropolitan areas tend to retain a common residential preference for small-town, healthy living that is neither large-urban nor completely rural and are at a distance from metro areas. The residential small-town preference makes managing growth and combating sprawl a top priority.

Often, these growing micropolitan areas rely on the expertise of local government planning divisions or regional planning organizations such as a council of governments (COG) to ensure that transportation and community development growth designs keep quality of living standards intact. Many of these local or regional planning divisions have found that redeveloping brownfields preserves the small-town lifestyle that attracted residents in the first place.

Selma, Alabama

The rural-urban continuum community of Selma, Alabama (population 20,512) is one of these micropolitan areas. The town has used brownfield redevelopment to sustain their small-town persona and heritage and to improve their environment.

Selma is tucked away some 45 miles west of Montgomery and 80 miles south of Birmingham. Overlooking the Alabama River, Selma is part of the Alabama-Tombigbee river economic development region and is the only micropolitan among the rural region's ten counties. Selma was founded in 1820. Since then, the small city has been the site of many historic events,

including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s launching of the 1965 voting rights marches. During the Civil War it was one of the South's main military manufacturing centers.

Selma houses the largest historic district in Alabama. Mayor James Perkin Jr., elected in 2000 as Selma's first black mayor and re-elected in 2004 commented, "A heritage as rich as ours ought to be preserved and redeveloping brownfields allows us the luxury to do just that. It also makes our communities healthier, brings the community together and gives us the economic stepping-stone we so badly need in our rural environs."

Selma's economic standing has been on a steady decline since 1978 when Craig Air Force Base closed and a domino effect of manufacturing shutdowns ensued. One of those idled sites was the 50-acre Honda All-Lock plant, which was gifted to the City.

When the City received an EPA brownfields grant in 2001, they prioritized the Honda plant and two other sites. They got to work and got the plant redeveloped. The plant is now occupied by Meadowcraft Inc., which produces outdoor furniture. Approximately 200 new jobs were created, and the two-year lease agreement will essentially cover the redevelopment costs.

Selma also received a 2002 Underground Storage Tank grant to reclaim three former gas stations. The overall brownfields revitalization objective in Selma is being met, which is to sustain the small-town feel and honor its heritage while managing growth.

Contact:

Kelly Novak

NADO Research Foundation

202-624-7809

knovak@nado.org

If you have any questions about Brownfields please contact ADEM or visit us on the web.

Phone

(334) 271-7700

Mail

Alabama Department of Environmental Management

P. O. Box 301463

Montgomery, AL 36130-1463

Web

adem.alabama.gov