



# Brownfields Redevelopment Re-energizes East Palo Alto

## East Palo Alto, CA

**E**ast Palo Alto has an ethnically diverse population of approximately 30,000, mostly minority. In comparison with its Silicon Valley neighbors, East Palo Alto has historically had a small industrial and commercial tax base. The city government has had difficulty meeting the significant social service needs of its population. East Palo Alto is the home of the region's largest tract of industrial land, the Ravenswood Industrial Area (RIA), which has sat underutilized to this day. This 130-acre, mixed-use industrial property is located 30 miles south of San Francisco Bay in the heart of Silicon Valley.

Although redevelopment had been stalled by staggering cleanup cost estimates for this property—which was home to auto wrecking, steel fabrication, chemical processing, light manufacturing, trucking, and bus companies—the city decided to seize the opportunities presented by the booming regional economy. The city's goals were to redevelop the RIA, create new job opportunities, and increase the city's tax base to improve community services. The city moved forward with an ambitious community-wide revitalization effort, and today, two redevelopment projects are complete and several more are in the works. Currently, the city's redevelopment agency is meeting with property owners and developers to map out an implementation plan. Expected to generate nearly 4,000 jobs, with a significant percentage filled by local residents, these projects will also result in an aesthetic and economic transformation of the area. A significant part of the effort on the 130-acre Ravenswood Industrial Area site was driven by the presence of EPA.

In cooperation with the city and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, an EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot grant funded a comprehensive soil and groundwater sampling effort of the 60 privately owned parcels making up the Ravenswood Industrial Area. Cleanup estimates for the RIA ranged from \$2 million to \$5 million, a far cry from the \$30 million estimated years earlier. Private property owners were still reluctant, however, due to fears that their interests would be excluded in any comprehensive redevelopment plan.

In 1997, grant money from the same Brownfields Pilot award was used to secure a facilitator, and the Ravenswood Industrial Area Brownfields Stakeholders Group was born. This group was composed of residents, business and property owners, and regional experts, among others. They worked over a nine-month period to tour neighboring cities' redevelopment projects, and conducted research about the regional

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## JUST THE FACTS:

- In cooperation with the city and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, an EPA brownfields grant funded a comprehensive soil and groundwater sampling effort of the Ravenswood Industrial Area (RIA).
- Cleanup estimates for the RIA ranged from \$2 million to \$5 million, significantly lower than the \$30 million estimated years earlier.
- East Palo Alto took the next step toward restoring the RIA by adopting a comprehensive, city-wide strategic redevelopment plan.

***East Palo Alto is the home of the region's largest tract of industrial land—the RIA. The city's goals were to redevelop the RIA, create new job opportunities, and increase the city's tax base to improve community services. To accomplish this, the city moved forward with an ambitious community-wide revitalization effort.***

economy, the job market, and the environmental status of the area. The group's efforts led to strengthened communications with the property owners and community residents and culminated in a report that provided elected officials with a series of recommendations for redevelopment of the RIA. In recognition of East Palo Alto's brownfields restoration efforts, EPA designated the city as a Brownfields Showcase Community in March 1998.

Showcase Communities are selected by the Brownfields National Partnership to demonstrate that through cooperation, federal, state, local, and private efforts can be concentrated around brownfields to restore these sites, stimulate economic development, and revitalize communities. Showcase Communities serve as models for broad-based cooperative efforts to support locally based initiatives. Showcases receive up to \$400,000 from EPA for both environmental assessments and to support the loan of a federal employee to the Showcase for up to three years. Showcase Communities receive additional financial and technical support from the Partnership's more than 20 federal partners, depending on the community need and program eligibility.

East Palo Alto took the next step toward restoring the RIA by adopting a comprehensive, city-wide strategic redevelopment plan. Through a series of community workshops funded in part by EPA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), community input was gathered and served as the basis for an urban design study that covered unplanned portions of the entire city, including the Ravenswood area. By leveraging additional funds from EPA, NOAA, property owners, and other private sources, the city was able to turn the study into a thorough Revitalization Plan. Under the plan, the RIA will be reborn as the Ravenswood Business District, featuring office, high-tech, and residential space. Property owners within the planned business district have enthusiastically embraced this plan and have formed an association, the Ravenswood Shores Business District LLC. This association has agreed to form an assessment district—a special taxing mechanism—to pay for needed infrastructure improvements.

The Showcase Community formed several local partnerships to aid in integrating brownfields redevelopment with other community development and social service programs. For example, the Pilot has formed a partnership with Opportunities Industrialization Center West to enhance brownfields job training and with the Community Alliance Neighborhood Development Organization (CAN DO) to integrate brownfields and community development needs. The city also partnered with an array of federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Justice. These partnerships have leveraged millions towards East Palo Alto's efforts to redevelop the RIA. The city received authorization for a \$5 million HUD Section 108 Loan for road improvements and \$3 million in grants and other cash contributions, including \$1.8 million from EPA, \$1.2 million from HUD Economic Development Initiative grants, \$700,000 from the Department of Transportation, and \$500,000 from the property owners' association.

## **CONTACTS:**

For more information on EPA's Showcase Communities, contact Tony Raia of OSWER's Office of Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment at (202) 566-2758

Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>