

Perseverance Leads to Success in Dickinson, North Dakota



For more than 20 years, the historic Dickinson Elk building stood empty and posed a health risk to its community. Once a vibrant part of downtown Dickinson, North Dakota, the building is now poised for redevelopment and will serve as a cornerstone for the city's revitalization.

Improving Local Economies Provides Redevelopment Opportunities

Like other communities in southwestern North Dakota, Dickinson has experienced an out-migration in the past decade due to under-employment and aging of its population. Falling farm prices and drought have also affected the local economy. At the same time, an economic boost provided by oil and gas recovery has led to increased commercial and residential redevelopment in Dickinson. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Dickinson is located at the lower tip of an area that could produce as much as 864 million barrels of oil, 278 billion cubic feet of natural gas, and 39 million barrels of natural gas liquids. Though most drilling takes place north of the city, Dickinson has still felt the economic benefits. In 2008 alone, oil and gas production taxes generated more than \$320,000 for the city. This is a significant benefit for a rural city of approximately 16,000 residents that lies within a USDA Rural Economic Area Partnership Zone.

A Community Symbol in Disrepair

The Dickinson Elk building has stood as a symbol of the community since its construction. Built in 1913 to provide space for the growing membership of the local Order of the Elk, the building also became home to the Dickinson Normal School—the predecessor of Dickinson State University—from 1918 to 1924. From the mid-1920s until the 1960s, the building featured local businesses and a ballroom used for social functions. The Elks last used the space as a meeting hall in 1982. Over the past three decades, ownership of this building changed several times, and for the last several years, has stood vacant. Allowed to fall into disrepair, the former Elk building became home to pests and vermin, making it difficult to convince developers to invest in the property. The city took ownership of the site in December 2001.



Redevelopment of the historic Dickinson Elk building is currently underway for use as commercial space and residential condominiums.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Completed an environmental assessment and cleanup of the Dickinson Elk Building
- Leveraged 11 cleanup jobs
- Recognized the Dickinson Elk Building as a National Historic Landmark
- Restoring and redeveloping a community symbol, as a major component of the city's overall revitalization plan

Assessment Leads to Redevelopment and Leveraged Resources

EPA Region 8's Brownfields Program provided contractual support through a Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) to provide lead and asbestos sampling, as well as removal and remediation cost estimates. Testing conducted from September 2002 through March 2003 resulted in conclusive evidence of

airborne particles containing lead and asbestos fibers, which are a health risk for workers and visitors to the building, as well as the surrounding community. The building's mold spore counts were elevated compared to an outside spore count. The assessment also found trace amounts of arsenic but concluded that concentrations were too low to pose a likely risk to workers involved in short-term renovations.

In 2004, the City of Dickinson received a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Cleanup grant to clean up and restore the Historic Dickinson Elk Building. The city used the EPA grant—as well as more than \$94,000 of its own funding—to safely clean up the property in 2005.

In 2006, the city transferred site ownership to Dickinson Elks, LLC. The city had set aside \$150,000 in a construction fund back in 2003 to assist with eventual redevelopment of the property. In addition, the Dickinson City Commission granted the developer a 100 percent tax exemption for a five-year period on the Dickinson Elk Building. The developer hired a historic consultant to research and assist in the building's placement on the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the National Park Service. Redevelopment is currently underway and includes restoration of the building for use as commercial space and residential condominiums.

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Redevelopment of this historic site has not proceeded without setbacks. In October 2007, a fire destroyed the roof of the building and created an enormous amount of debris, bringing progress to a temporary halt. The blaze occurred just days before the building was to be considered for historic preservation by the North Dakota Historical Preservation Review Board. This did not deter the developer; on April 11, 2008, the Dickinson Elk Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places and redevelopment is now scheduled for completion in the summer of 2010. The area has drawn significant interest in both the planned condos and commercial space, and the project is expected to attract new business and residents to downtown Dickinson.

This project will eventually restore a prominent historic property that was once the town's social center and eliminate the threat of environmental contaminants to city residents. It will likely stimulate additional development in the downtown area, create jobs, and generate local tax revenue. To date, this project has already leveraged 11 cleanup jobs, and as of October 2008 more than \$800,000 has been invested into the redevelopment (and unexpected fire cleanup).

LEVERAGED RESOURCES

- Contractual support from an EPA Region 8 Targeted Brownfields Assessment
- \$200,000 from an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant
- \$150,000 from the City of Dickinson
- More than \$800,000 in private funding

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