

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

By Terri Smith, Environmental Liability Management, Inc.

# Brownfields with abandoned building: It can be a matter of reuse

All across the country communities are evaluating and assessing the potential reuse of brownfield properties. As is often discussed in brownfield related articles such as this, communities are looking at brownfield properties as a means to revitalize their town and, in turn improve their quality of life. This is especially true in New Jersey and Pennsylvania where the region was once the "hot bed" of industrial activities since the 19th century. Many times brownfield properties contain abandoned buildings in varying degrees of disrepair. These abandon and



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dilapidated buildings can attract criminal activities or be-

come illegal dumping grounds for waste or refuse. Developing a planning and reuse strategy to cleanup and reuse these buildings can assist in the overall cleanup and redevelopment of a brownfield property. The building reuse effort also acts to preserve green space and reduce urban sprawl.

An abandoned building should be evaluated to determine if the potential exists for its reuse within the overall development strategy for the property. To that end, an abandoned building should be evaluated to determine if it is structurally sound for potential reuse considerations. In

addition, any environmental concerns related to the building should be assessed. This assessment should consider such environmental concerns as the presence of asbestos, lead paint, mold and indoor quality issues such as vapor intrusion.

Another aspect of evaluating a building for reuse should also include an investigation involving the potential historical aspects of the building. Through this evaluation it may be determined that the building may have some historical significance. Older buildings can illustrate the historical heritage of the area or region

in which they are located. Adaptive reuse of these old buildings can be like finding a "diamond in the rough". Older buildings can possess character and charm as well as unique architectural designs that can be incorporated into the overall redevelopment of a brownfield property.

Abandoned buildings can take many forms and may include former gas stations, bank buildings, supermarkets, and former industrial manufacturing facilities. For example, it is estimated that there are over 200,000 abandoned gas stations across the country. It is relatively safe to say that many communities have, at least one abandon gas station. The question of how to rehabilitate or reuse these buildings is being undertaken in many communities in their revitalization efforts. These once derelict, abandoned buildings can be transformed into productive renewed spaces that can once again generate taxes and contribute to improving the quality of life in the community.

There are many examples of brownfield reuse projects that have taken advantage of the reuse of a former gas station that was in various stages of abandonment and disrepair. Most often the environmental issues surrounding these properties are associated with underground storage tanks located on the property. One such example is a former gas station that was considered by the town as a historic treasure due to its 1930's architectural design. The developer working with the community cleaned up the property and transformed the building into a coffee shop. It now provides a place for people to gather from the community. Another example involves a former gas station building that was built in the 1920's and again possesses a vintage architectural design from that era. The property was abandoned for many years and was overgrown with weeds and contained leaking underground tanks. The property was cleaned up and remediated by the developer and with input from the community and local stakeholders the building is now a showplace and home to a visitor's center.

In addition to gas stations there are other examples that  
**continued on page 16A**

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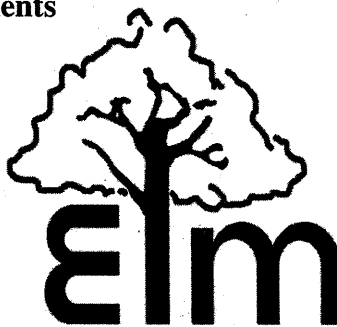
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**C**ontinued from page 14A demonstrate the creativity, planning and community involvement that can be undertaken when evaluating a buildings reuse. An example includes a brownfield redevelopment effort that is being completed in the city of Chester, Pennsylvania. The Chester Generating Station has been a landmark on the Chester waterfront since the early 1900's. The reuse of this building was important to the local community. This brownfield redevelopment project included the cleanup and rehabilitation of this former power generating station into office space. The cleanup and reuse

cleanup and redevelopment effort underway on the Chester waterfront.

In the City of Trenton, New Jersey the cleanup and reuse of a former industrial building that dated back to the 1800's was cleaned and reused as a restaurant on the waterfront and is part of a large redevelopment project that was completed at a former steel manufacturing facility.

It should be noted that there are also federal incentive programs that may be applicable to the building reuse effort. To facilitate the reuse of historic structures a developer may want to consider the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax

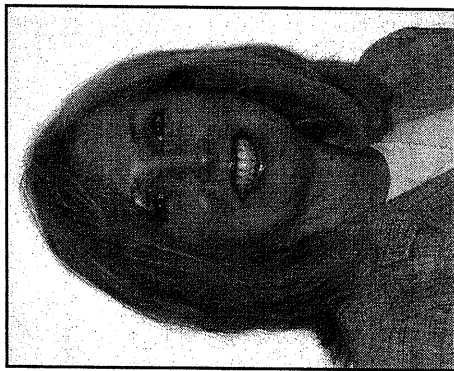
Credit Program. This program was designed to assist in the reuse of existing buildings. Additional information on the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program can be found at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tpts/tax/>.

Another program that may be worth considering is the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. The United States Green Building Council has developed a LEED rating system that can be used for existing buildings. The LEED-EB rating system is for the sustainable operation and upgrades of existing buildings. The intent of LEED-EB is to certify the

operation of the building, both its physical systems such as equipment, design, and land use and also the way the building is occupied and operated such as waste management, temperature monitoring and commuting programs.

As you can see there are reuse options and incentives for the reuse of abandoned former industrial and commercial buildings. This article contains a few examples but there are many more success stories out there.

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is complete and the renovated building is now occupied and part of a larger brownfield