

Colorado Brownfield Site Redevelopment Success Stories #1

Property Reuse & Revitalization Program

Cortez, Colorado

It can be difficult to imagine reuse possibilities when looking at a vacant or underutilized property (often called "eyesores") with unknown contamination. Environmental assessments can help demystify unknown site issues that prevent redevelopment, allowing community revitalization plans to move forward.

In 2022, Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE) was awarded a \$2,000,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This funding will be used to perform environmental assessments and cleanup of eligible sites to transform blighted properties into vibrant businesses and community spaces.

The following success stories are examples of how reusing "brownfield" sites can restore the environment, create jobs, increase property values, reduce health risks, and support neighborhood revitalization.

Help us create a success story in your neighborhood!

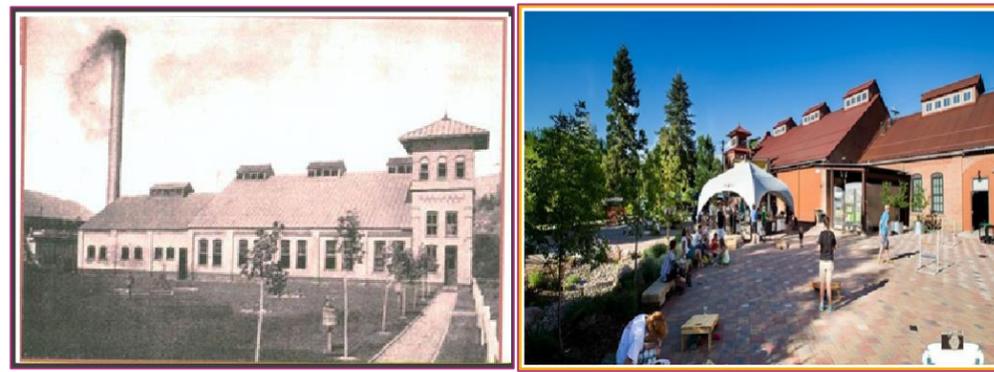
Do you know of a vacant or underutilized site in need of redevelopment? Get involved with the Cortez Property Reuse and Revitalization Program! A pool of great ideas and visions and observations of opportunities help property owners and potential developers realize community desires, needs, and possibilities. To learn more, please visit our website or contact:

Helen West, Community and Economic Development Specialist

Cortez

phone: 970-331-0213

email: hwest@cortezco.gov



Powerhouse Museum, Durango, CO

Located in Colorado's southwestern corner, the City of Durango became home to the world's first steam-powered, alternating current (AC) power plant in 1893. A critical part of Durango's early development, the plant was eventually incorporated into Western Colorado's power grid as the region's energy use expanded. The plant operated until [the mid-1970s](#), when it ceased operations and was boarded up with much of its original equipment still in place. The 8,000-square-foot plant, which covers three acres on the banks of the Animas River, sat idle and dilapidated for more than 20 years. The City of Durango took ownership of the property, but reuse options were hindered by unknown levels of asbestos and other contaminants, including decades of pigeon waste buildup. While still in limbo, the Durango Power House was added to both state and federal Historic Place registries. Finally, in 2002, the Children's Museum of Durango contacted the city with an interest in restoring and relocating onto the historic site. An agreement was made in which the Museum would handle fundraising for necessary cleanup and redevelopment, while the city would provide administrative and technical assistance and transfer site ownership to the Museum upon the project's completion. To aid with assessments, the city requested the assistance of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Brownfields Program.

Key Accomplishments

- Used approximately \$45,000 in 128(a) funds to perform assessments on the historic facility; findings from these and earlier assessments included asbestos, pigeon waste, mercury, and uranium mining waste (which had migrated from an adjacent site).
- Used nearly \$90,000 in state funding to remove asbestos, and more than 1,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil. An additional \$8,000 in Section 128(a) funding also contributed toward soil removal.
- Completed primary cleanup of the facility in September 2005.
- Project donations, which have reached \$2 million (of an estimated \$10 million needed) have come from private foundations and local and national businesses. BP America donated \$50,000 in solar equipment that will one day provide power to the restored facility.



Project Environmental, Social, and/or Economic Benefits

This project created an interactive science museum that highlights the facility's historic role in energy innovation. Visitors can experiment with the 19-century sciences that gave rise to electrical power, learn about locally mined energy products, operate a hydrogen-powered race car, and explore energy-efficient building techniques. The restored facility, which retains and displays some of its original equipment, is used for science camps and after-school club meetings; and rented out for tours and private events. The restored power house has received LEED certification, which recognizes how its reconstruction and operation meet high standards for energy efficiency and environmental stewardship. This project is part of a larger, riverfront restoration initiative that will produce new recreational space for both tourists and local residents—including a riverfront park, outdoor shops and exhibits, and walkways connecting the site to downtown Durango.



Cloud City Farm, Leadville, CO

This 2.5-acre triangular-shaped parcel is owned by the Lake County School District (LCSD). The western edge of the property that appears to be the former bed for the Colorado Midland Railroad which operated from 1883-1918. A second concern was its location in close proximity to the Western Zinc Smelter site which operated from 1914-1926 on a site directly west. The project returns a large contaminated property that has been vacant for nearly 100 years to productive use. The project is intended to help address a shortage of healthy affordable food in both Leadville and Lake County which are served by only one grocer and where the estimated weekly cost of groceries is 18% higher than the national average. The project builds on work completed as part of a previous U.S. EPA environmental education grant awarded to C4 in 2015. The earlier grant project focused on building Lake County's capacity for environmental stewardship by providing Lake County K-12 students with opportunities to increase their environmental understanding through daily composting and hands on education. Compost generated from this earlier project is being used at the Cloud City Farm. The Cloud City Farm will serve as an outdoor classroom. C4 is working with LCSD to develop lessons in science, health, and social studies that can utilize the Farm and be incorporated into school curriculum. In addition, farmer "internships" will be offered to two high school seniors each year. The project also supports goals identified in the Lake County Energy and Sustainability Plan, in particular:

- Increase Lake County's ability to grow and access fresh, healthy food.
- Increase meaningful and hands-on environmental education opportunities surrounding clean energy, food systems, recycling, compost, and waste diversion for our youth and community members.

**Visit our website to learn about Cortez's
Property Reuse & Revitalization Program**

<https://www.cortezco.gov/863/brownfields>