

Brownfields Success Story

The Edge of Something Special (Greater Williamsburg area, Virginia)

On the eastern side of the City of Williamsburg, Virginia, is an area, locally referred to as the Edge, where James City County and York County adjoin the City limits near the intersection of Route 143/Merrimac Trail and US Route 60/Pocahontas Trail, a once thriving shopping area that has seen recent decline. Strip malls, shopping centers and hotels with inefficient access and large parking lots of a bygone era have left the area unattractive and in need of a boost. Adjacent residential neighborhoods are also in decline near this otherwise well positioned commercial junction.

As a part of ongoing revitalization efforts of its commercial areas, the Greater Williamsburg Coalition (consisting of the City of Williamsburg, James City County, York County, the Greater Williamsburg Partnership, and the Greater Williamsburg Business Council) plans to revitalize commercial buildings and public spaces in this vicinity, attract new businesses, and increase the customer base for these businesses. Envisioning an “eatertainment” zone in this corridor to attract new investment, the Coalition hopes to increase tax revenue and expand access to family attractions. Existing restaurant/retail venues in the area will benefit from an infusion of investment in The Edge.

Colonial doesn't need to mean “old”

The area is bursting with potential. Travelers and local residents alike, are looking for new gathering places that reflect the colonial history of the area, but with a fresh ambiance. Plans for refurbishing the aging street fronts with a clean, vibrant appearance designed to encourage open-air activities and pedestrian friendly thruways, including casual to fine dining, entertainment, lodging options, craft beverages, and boutique shopping are underway. Reinvigorating this gateway into the area with the development of the with pedestrian and bicycle-friendly travel as well as integrating comfortable outdoor dining into the planned renovation of the area furthers this goal.

An EPA Brownfields grant was awarded in 2019, and the Coalition hired a full service environmental and engineering firm for the project. A local woman-owned business was brought on board to provide branding and marketing services in early 2020, joined by another local small business to launch a website presenting the Brownfields program to the public and establishing an online presence. The project was off to a robust start, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact the US. Meetings quickly transferred to virtual formats, but the valuable face-to-face interactions became limited. Many of the potential businesses temporarily closed down during the spring, due to statewide restrictions. Nonetheless, the project has continued to move forward, just more cautiously.



EPA Grant Recipient:
City of Williamsburg, Inc.

Grant Types:
EPA Community-Wide Brownfields
Coalition Assessment Grant (2019)

Virginia Tourism Corporation Grant
(2020)

Preparing an application for the Virginia
Brownfields Restoration & Economic
Redevelopment Assistance Fund (2021)

Former Uses:
Restaurants, Hotels, Retail
Residential

Planned Use:
Culinary and Hospitality District, Retail



The Coalition envisions an “eatertainment” zone in this corridor, making it a destination area.



“... people talked about how they wanted to be innovative and push the envelope while still being respectful of traditions in the area.”



For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Patricia M. Corbett at 215-814-3173 or corbett.patricia@epa.gov

Since its inception, the Coalition has been quite busy. They quickly developed a relationship with the Greater Williamsburg Partnership (GWP) to share resources. They developed a website that presents information about the Brownfields program with a downloadable brochure, an inventory of candidate sites, introduces the Brownfields Redevelopment Advisory Group (BRAG), and offers a link to press releases and virtual webinars they have hosted. <https://www.businesswilliamsburg.com/gwp/brownfields>. They've also developed an online presence on social media (LinkedIn and Facebook).

Representing the Coalition, Voncile (Von) Gilbreath (GWP Executive Director), attended the USEPA National Brownfields Training Conference in Los Angeles. Further efforts by the Coalition have included conducting a familiarization tour, and later, a community engagement kick-off with The Edge businesses. Ten Coalition Engagement Meetings have been hosted. Press briefings have been released to local news media, and the GWP has established it's own Newsletter, outlining local economic development highlights.

Steps toward improvement

Draper Aden Associates has developed an inventory database of candidate sites that may be suitable for renovation, demolition, and/or redevelopment. A Generic Quality Assurance Project Plan was prepared, and Property Approval Questionnaires were prepared and submitted to EPA for approval. Subsequent to agreements with the owners, multiple Environmental Site Assessments, Asbestos/Lead-Based Paint Surveys, and Hazardous Materials Abatement Specifications have been prepared for properties in the program.

Draper Aden Associates is also providing video production services to include collecting still photography and video using handheld equipment as well as small Unmanned Aerial Systems of featured industrial and commercial sites to advance an EPA Brownfields redevelopment strategy for the Coalition.

Introducing a fresh face to the world

Consociate Media produced a branding logo, and launched a website for The Edge district (<https://edgedistrictva.com/>), expressing the unique character and appeal of the area. Existing businesses, including twelve eateries, four craft beverage producers and three retail businesses have opted in on the ground floor of The Edge district, and are currently highlighted on the website and social media campaigns for the district increasing awareness of development and investment opportunities.

Poised for the future

With the end of COVID-19 restrictions in sight, the area is primed for a return to business. Work is set to get underway redeveloping sites and bringing new businesses into the community. An online presence has been established, and materials are available to provide interested parties with information. The future is looking bright, and the Coalition is ready to embrace it.