



EAST NEW YORK

The Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation used state planning funds to design an affordable residential building with a supermarket downstairs. It then purchased the land and had it rezoned. The project will open in 2017.

[View Case Study](#)

Community Planning With OER

This website assists community-based organizations (CBOs) plan and redevelop vacant or underutilized land in their neighborhoods.

It contains information on:

- OER's Community Grants for CBOs;
- Other OER grants;
- 16 strategies and 24 case studies that show how community developers overcame planning and redevelopment challenges in their neighborhoods; and
- Place-based community brownfield planning in NYC neighborhoods.

Quick Links

[SPEED Mapping Portal](#)

Search for environmental information on individual properties across New York City.



[EPIC Community](#)

EPIC



OER Community Impact



Affordable housing units built on land cleaned up under OER oversight



Number of sites cleaned up in the coastal zone



Number of sites cleaned up in low to moderate income communities



Community Brownfield Planning

**NYC Place-Based
Brownfield Planning
Program**

**NYS Brownfield
Opportunity Area
Program**

EPA Area-Wide Program

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Planning

OER believes that support for community brownfield planning and implementation is one of the best ways to eliminate vacant and blighted contaminated land and improve our communities.

OER now offers grants and other services to community based organizations (CBOs) for community brownfield planning in neighborhoods with vacant, contaminated land.

In addition, there are resources offered by state and federal government agencies to help assist CBOs in the process. Click the pages to the left to learn more.



NYC Place-Based Brownfield Planning Program

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NYC Place-Based Brownfield Planning Program

OER offers community-based organizations (CBOs) Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grants of \$10,000 and \$25,000. A CBO can use these pre-development funds to conduct brownfield planning at the neighborhood level and to undertake design work or other studies that advance a vacant site towards development. Place-based Community Brownfield Planning Grants are flexible and can pay for a wide range of services and activities at any stage of a development project prior to construction. CBOs can use the funds to identify strategic sites, assess their development potential and develop financing packages for each property. CBOs can also use the funds for building design work to improve prospects for project success. For example, one grantee has used an OER Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grant to design the community space within a residential building; another has hired an architect to evaluate a Passive House design for its affordable housing development. Almost any work that advances a project towards construction can be paid for with Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grants.

Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grant funds are made available to CBOs in two ways. One approach is for the CBO to utilize the services of community planning professionals under contract with OER. While services are tailored to the goals and needs of the CBO, costs for those services are paid by OER from the Community Brownfield Planning Grant, eliminating the need for the CBO to contract with its own vendor for the services.

The second method is for the CBO to establish a work plan using its own contractor, and OER disburses the Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grant to the CBO before the work is performed. Under this arrangement, the CBO must sign an agreement with the City and provide the work plan and a schedule for its completion.

Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grants require a CBO to designate a planning area around its development site, describe existing conditions in the area, and discuss how the proposed development would benefit the area. OER will recognize the CBO-designated area as a Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Area. Through these grants, OER seeks to expand the number of Place-Based Planning Areas in the City.

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Real Estate Advisory Services

OER also provides Real Estate Advisory Assistance. If a CBO cannot identify or arrange a meeting with the owner of a potential development site, an OER contractor experienced in community development can help identify the owner, contact him or her and arrange a meeting with the owner and the CBO.

Pro Bono Environmental Assistance Program

If a CBO has questions about the planning or redevelopment process, OER can refer the CBO to a planning professional from the Pro-Bono Environmental Assistance Program of the New York City Brownfield Partnership, a non-profit association of environmental industry professionals. Planners and environmental professionals including environmental attorneys from the Partnership can advise a CBO on how to plan for the cleanup and redevelopment of vacant property. From one to five hours of free consultation with an environmental professional is available.

To contact OER about Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grants, Real Estate Advisory Assistance or the Pro Bono Environmental Assistance Program, click [here](#).

NYS Brownfield Opportunity Area Program

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NYS Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program

The Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program is operated by the New York State Department of State and provides state planning funds to community-based organizations (CBOs) and municipalities to develop community plans for areas with multiple vacant properties or brownfields. Funds can be used to: study an area's existing conditions; develop an area plan; build community consensus for the plan; and identify strategic development sites. OER offers a local match grant of 10% of the BOA grant, up to a cap of \$25,000.

The BOA Program has funded planning work by CBOs and municipalities since 2005, but recently the Program has received limited annual appropriations, and the state is currently not accepting applications for new BOA areas.

BOA planning is typically conducted in three steps: pre-nomination, nomination and implementation. To learn more about eligible activities that can be funded under each step, see New York State's Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) Program.

BOA applications from city-based CBOs require the community organization either to form a partnership with a City agency or receive a letter of support from OER. Groups considering applying for a BOA grant should [contact OER](#).

Learn more about [20 NYC projects that have received BOA funding](#).

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EPA Area-Wide Planning Program

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Brownfields Area Wide Planning Grant Program provides municipalities and community-based organizations (CBOs) with federal funds to develop an area-wide plan for the assessment, cleanup and redevelopment of areas with multiple brownfield sites. Awards can be up to \$200,000.

EPA makes about 20 area-wide planning grants each year the agency makes awards under the program. Since the program's inception, EPA has made one area wide planning grant award to a CBO in New York City.

The Brownfields Area Wide Planning Grant Program is part of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a collaboration between EPA and the federal Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD). [Learn more about the Brownfields Area Wide Planning Grant Program](#).

Many community based organizations (CBOs) lack real estate development experience especially when building on vacant contaminated land. This section provides potential solutions to many real estate development challenges that community developers face. Written by and for CBOs, it contains 16 strategies and 24 case studies on how CBOs have built relationships with private landowners, become partners with real estate professionals, and built relationships with public agencies to advance their neighborhood plans and development projects.

These strategies and case studies are based on extensive research and interviews conducted by SoBRO and New Partners for Community Revitalization.

Leverage Existing Relationships

Meet with a Property Owner Early

Focus on Owners with a Medium Term Horizon

To influence the future use of land in a neighborhood, community-based organizations (CBOs) need a working relationship with private landowners of strategic development sites. For many community organizations that do not know, nor work with local business leaders, this is a major challenge. This section includes strategies and case studies on how CBOs can identify, meet with and build relationships with landowners.



[Identify the Owner of a Strategic Site](#)

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Identify the Owner of a Strategic Site

Identifying ownership of private property can be a time consuming and costly process. Many property owners go to great lengths to mask their identity to avoid a variety of issues, such as environmental concerns.

Real estate holding corporations, the official taxpayer of record for many properties in the City, is a commonly used vehicle for property ownership. Real estate holding corporations, which often have general and limited partners, have no searchable database in City records that will disclose individual owners. A search of New York State Department of State corporation records, however, can lead to a name but not necessarily any contact information, or a series of additional related holding corporations. If the ownership entity is a non-profit organization, a search of the Department of State's Corporation & Business Entity Database or the State Attorney General's Charities Bureau Registry will be helpful.

Uncovering a property owner's identity to enable direct contact with the owner and discuss your development plans may involve:

- Obtaining a title search of the property which will show all mortgages
- Contacting banks that hold mortgages on a property
- Interviewing adjoining property owners
- Discussing property ownership with local real estate brokers

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Leveraging Relationships

One of a community based organization's (CBO) strongest assets is its network and relationships within the local community. When reaching out to property owners of strategic properties, a CBO should use its existing relationships to obtain an introduction. One of the most effective outreach strategies is the door-to-door approach. A personal visit is the ideal way to make a connection, introduce the organization, explain interests and goals, show consideration of the property owner's interests, and build a relationship. Established CBOs oftentimes have long-standing relationships with local businesses or property owners who may be clients, participants in the organization's programming or serve as board members. A community organization's existing network can yield contacts who can introduce the organization to property owners of important development sites.

Related Case Study



Developing the Port Morris-Harlem Waterfront

Building Relationships with Flushing Land Owners

Identify the Owner of a Strategic Site

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- Leveraging Relationships +
- Building Networks Through a Local Business Association +
- Enlist many property owners in a targeted area -

A more subtle recommendation related to engaging property owners is to visit as many as possible, even though they are not all owners of strategic development sites. Property owners resist being “singled out,” and respond more positively when informed that they are part of a broader initiative that seeks to work with all property owners to maximize the potential of the area. A good strategy is to visit all owners in the target area and emphasize the goal of area-wide improvement; this connotes that individual properties are part of something larger. Make sure the owner understands that community development and planning goals are for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders in the area and that broad cooperation is necessary to achieve results. An owner should realize that improving his or her property value is, in large part, contingent upon improvements in vacant land usage within the surrounding area and that revitalization efforts can greatly increase his/her bottom line.

Related Case Studies



Injecting New Life in a Commercial Corridor



Survey of 400 Newtown Creek Businesses

Identify the Owner of a Strategic Site

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Meet with a Property Owner Early

A community organization should meet with owners of key development sites early in the planning process. The meeting should take place before a CBO finalizes plans for the reuse of an owner's site. At this meeting the CBO should seek the owner's view on how property should be redeveloped before it settles on a final plan for the property. Owners of key parcels should not feel a CBO's goal will impair its own plans to redevelop its property. Otherwise the CBO will have difficulty gaining the cooperation of the property owner in implementing its vision for the reuse of the vacant land.

A community organization should focus its first meeting with owners of strategic properties on means to increase value for the owner's land. The CBO should bring marketing materials such as information on recent sales or rentals in the neighborhood, a market analysis and economic trends in the area.

If the community organization has access to federal, state or city grant funds that can be used to develop marketing materials, it can offer to develop a highest and best use analysis for the owner's property at no charge to the owner. Consider use of NYC OER's Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grants for this purpose. This technique can gain the owner's trust while also highlighting the advantages of the community planning effort.

Some examples of economic data likely to gain the attention of property owners include:

- Economic development trends in the area or surrounding areas
- **Market demand data**
- Rental and sales comparables
- Potential return on investment and cash flow projections
- Type of uses and buildable square footage or unit numbers allowable by zoning
- Local rental rates for proposed uses
- Construction costs
- Environmental remediation costs
- Proposed funding mechanisms
- New land value after project completion

A community organization should develop a relationship with the property owner before raising any environmental issues about the property. Before conducting such a meeting, a CBO can meet with OER to discuss environmental issues at a property and various incentives, including city brownfield grants, an exemption from state hazardous waste fees, use of the Clean Soil Bank, state liability protection and OER working directly with the state Department of Environmental Conservation on closing petroleum spills, to address potential contamination at a property.

When environmental issues are broached with a landowner, the community representative should use neutral language, referring to the property as underutilized rather than describing it as a brownfield. Environmental concerns should be discussed in a non-threatening way. A community organization should consider bringing an expert such as an environmental or real estate professional to the meeting with the property owner who can discuss cleanup grants and liability protection for owners and developers if the property is cleaned up in a **government oversight program**, such as OER's Voluntary Cleanup program.

Related Case Study



What Land Owners Can Build in the South Bronx

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Meet with a Property Owner Early

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Focus on Owners with a Medium Term Horizon

Community organizations will encounter a wide range of property owners during place-based community planning and outreach: owner-operators, lessees, absentee owners, speculators, realty companies, and others. It is important to reach out to all types of owners and encourage their participation in the planning process; however, CBOs should identify and target those owners who are willing to actively consider development of their properties.

Whether a CBO seeks to develop an area-wide plan or participate directly in its development, a community organization should target business and property owners that are motivated to create value in their property in the medium term (2-5 years). This timeframe aligns with the period that the CBO requires to achieve its strategic community development goals. CBOs should also target property owners who are planning to retire.

CBOs should not target the following property owners. Owners interested in pursuing development in the short term (less than 1 year) have settled on a development plan and are focused on its implementation. Buyers interested in earning a quick profit on the purchase and sale of land are poor prospects because they are typically unwilling to assume any risk associated with development. And owners with a long term (8 or more years) development horizon are also a poor prospect for a partnership with a CBO because they are content to carry low-income generating properties for an indefinite period.

Owners with a medium term horizon are likely to be open to partnering with a CBO, and that willingness is a critical factor in whether plans for a strategic development site reach implementation.

Related Case Study



Evergreen Targets Landowners Likely to Sell

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Engage a Real Estate Broker

Engage an Attorney

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Partner with a Private Developer

Engaging the Private Sector

Most community based organizations (CBO) have little or no experience developing real estate. The strategies and case studies that follow show how a CBO can acquire the development experience it lacks by becoming partners with a local development corporation, real estate professionals or a private developer.



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Establish an Advisory Committee

At the outset of a neighborhood planning process, the lead community organization should consider inviting experts from the community development and the real estate industry to join the planning effort. Their expertise can produce a stronger community plan and enable even a community organization without development experience to pursue and achieve real estate opportunities.

Community leaders, other non-profit organizations, residents and government officials can bring a deeper understanding of the community’s needs to the planning effort. The plan that emerges will attract broader support by addressing important community goals such as an improved food supply or better health care and prepare the community, through assistance to small business or workforce development, to take advantage of the economic development that a successful plan will ultimately deliver.

If the lead planning entity has little or no development experience, it should consider asking a developer, realtor, land owner or other real estate professionals to join the community planning effort. Real estate experts can advise the lead community organization on how to approach the owner of a potential development site and position a property for development. Such members can also guide the planning organization on how to acquire land or finance and design a development project.

There are several ways to utilize this new talent. The community organization can create an advisory committee and invite those seeking to plan the development of vacant land and real estate professionals to join it. This can produce lively engagement in the advisory committee between community leaders and real estate interests, which can ultimately produce a balanced community plan with broad support. Alternatively, the lead planning organization can create a real estate subcommittee to the advisory committee that can pursue redevelopment of vacant property.

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Consider a Local Development Corporation

A community organization without substantial experience in planning or real estate development should consider engaging a Local Development Corporation (LDC) or similar non-profit as a consultant to its planning efforts.

An LDC is a private, non-profit corporation often created for the benefit of local government to promote economic development at the neighborhood level. A Community Development Corporation (CDC) is a non-profit, community based organization focused on revitalizing the area in which it is located. Both LDCs and CDCs possess valuable local development experience and a staff that is knowledgeable about real estate finance. Both types of local development organizations have a network of relationships with local landowners, business owners and economic development officials. Because of their background, LDCs and CDCs are well suited to contribute to the development tasks that a neighborhood plan contains. For example, an LDC or CDC can identify and assess potential local development sites. And, on the planning side, these development organizations' intimate familiarity with a community can contribute to an existing conditions study.

Ideally, an LDC or CDC may work in an area that a community organization seeks to plan and redevelop. If a community organization has a planning budget, it can procure a LDC or CDC through a competitive Request for Proposals. If, however, the lead planning organization cannot afford to pay for consulting services, an LDC or CDC can be invited to participate on an advisory committee, a gathering of stakeholders interested in the neighborhood's redevelopment, where it can be assigned the task of advising on the selection of consultants and commenting on drafts of planning and other reports.

Related Case Study



A Local Development Corporation Helps a CBO

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Hire a Development Consultant

Community organizations without prior real estate experience cannot manage a real estate development from start to finish on their own. Therefore, once a clear project concept has been established, a community based organization should consider engaging a development consultant to find a site and attract financing, thus sculpting the concept into a real development project.

Initially, a development consultant may explore design alternatives and refine the project's financial projections. The consultant can identify sources of development financing, and persuade property owners, agencies and other key players to commit to the project. As the development project gains momentum, the consultant may assemble a project team, including a development partner(s), architect, attorney, contractor, and lenders and coordinate site acquisition, financing, and permitting to move the project to ground-breaking and construction.

The cost of development consultants may be funded with planning grants if available to the community organization or may be added to a project's development budget and paid from construction financing. Hiring a development consultant relieves a community organization of managing the development of a real estate project which can span several years.

Related Case Study



UPROSE Wins a State Grant

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Engage a Real Estate Broker

For a non-profit organization with a clear development plan, a professional real estate broker can be of great assistance in finding an appropriate development site and discussing the potential sale of a property to a community organization with the landowner. Ideally, a community organization will approach a broker with a project concept, acquisition funds, and a project team (e.g. an architect, an attorney, a joint venture partner, and a potential lender).

With a plan and development resources, the broker will see that the CBO is serious about a real estate deal and is more likely to commit the time and effort to find a development site.

A broker can be helpful in cases where a CBO lacks strong ties to the property-owning community or has little deal-making experience.

During the outreach process, a broker can engage an owner's interest and maintain a transaction-oriented focus. A community organization might otherwise emphasize its own mission or vision for the area, which may be of little interest to a property owner. In other cases, a property owner may perceive a community organization as opposing its interests and not trust it to strike a deal.

If a property is contaminated, an owner may be concerned that the prospect of a sale of the property will raise environmental liability issues and, in the process, depress a property's sale price. A broker can allay such concerns and advance productive conversations with property owners.

A broker can be especially helpful in price negotiations. An expert with knowledge of the local real estate market, a broker knows the value of comparable property and can protect against the seller inflating the price of the parcel.

A broker can also help protect against the seller inflating the price due to the non-profit's reliance on [subsidized acquisition financing](#) or its need to postpone a closing because of the time required to assemble multiple sources of [public financing](#).

What to expect when a community organization engages a real estate broker? There are no set rules. If a community developer has a prior relationship with a broker, the broker may be willing to work for free and earn a commission on the land transaction of 1% to 5%. When a community based organization does not know a broker, it can expect to pay an upfront fee (\$2,500 to \$5,000) with an understanding that at closing the broker will earn a fee of 3% or more.

Related Case Study



Cypress Hills Builds Affordable Housing

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Engage an Attorney

A community organization should engage competent legal counsel when considering the purchase of real estate or becoming a partner with a developer who will undertake a real estate project.

Why engage an attorney?

Lawyers can perform due diligence on a property prior to its acquisition.

They can advise on how to learn about the extent of contamination at a property, the party liable for existing contamination, and the best way for a development team, including a community organization, to shield itself from liability when a site is redeveloped.

Attorneys are also essential in drafting partnership and joint venture agreements and other documents required if a non-profit partners with a developer on a real estate project.

How to engage an attorney: A community organization has several ways to engage an attorney.

Lawyers, as well as environmental consultants, tax attorneys and other professionals, can work for community organizations for free through the Pro Bono Program of the New York City Brownfield Partnership, a non-profit association of environmental professionals. Under the Partnership's **Pro Bono Program**, an attorney or other professional offers a CBO an initial consultation from one to five hours in length free of charge. Afterwards, the parties can negotiate terms of any future work.

Community organizations can also request that a law firm discount its fees because the client is a non-profit. Another approach where a community organization is pursuing a development project, is for the lawyer to advise a non-profit for an initial, reduced fee, and if the development occurs, to promise the attorney the legal work arising from the subsequent real estate transaction.

To use the NYC Brownfield Partnership's Pro Bono Program, community organizations should **contact OER**.

Related Case Studies



Due Diligence on a Contaminated Site



SoBRO Pursues Contaminated Land

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Contact OER If Contamination Blocks a Land Purchase

Sometimes parties to a real estate transaction cannot agree on terms for the sale of a property, particularly price, because of a disagreement between buyer and seller on the extent of contamination.

In such circumstances, the prospective buyer or seller can meet with OER, discuss the site, and develop a work plan for the site’s investigation. OER will approve the work plan, which the party, assisted by an environmental consultant, can then conduct. When soil, groundwater and soil vapor samples are collected, analyzed and a laboratory generates results, OER will review the information with the requesting party and determine what remedy would be necessary for the property’s development. If the party determines that an OER-approved remedy would be advantageous, the party’s consultant would prepare a remedial plan, and submit it to OER. The Office would approve the remedy when the site enrolls in the city Voluntary Cleanup Program.

At that point, the cost of remediating the site would be known and the party that obtained the approved remedy can share it with the other party to the land transaction. With the uncertainty about site contamination resolved, the parties can resume negotiations and agree on terms to a sale.

During this time, while the site is enrolled in the city program, it would be in Standstill Mode and not be required to implement the approved remedy. When a new owner was ready to develop the property, cleanup of the site would resume.

A party that conducts a site investigation of a property within the city is eligible for a \$10,000 city brownfield incentive grant to defray the cost of the investigation.

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Partner with a Private Developer

In the 1980s and 1990s, it was common practice for non-profits seeking to develop housing in New York City to acquire City-owned land at little cost. As surplus public land has dwindled and public funding has become more competitive, CBOs now partner with private developers, investors or other non-profits to fund pre-development of new residential and commercial projects. In order to attract such a partner, the non-profit organization must contribute something of value to the partnership and project. An organization can leverage:

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Land

Attracting a **development partner** works especially well if the CBO owns property and will commit the site to the project. By delivering the site, a community organization is in a strong position to determine the property's end use.



WHGA Teams Up to Build Affordable Housing



ECDO Finds the Financing to Rehab 254 Apartments

Funding

Non-profits have access to sources of pre-development funds not available to a private developer. Contributing such funds to a project can finance a project's early development and reduce the amount of equity otherwise needed to fund a project's early stages. A non-profit is given more flexible lending terms not available to a private developer, including lower equity requirements, a lower payment guarantee rate, which requires the non-profit to repay a percentage of the loan should the non-profit fail to make full repayment, and a greater loan to value rate. These advantages are a basis for attracting a private developer to a community project.

Another source of pre-development funds available to CBOs is OER's Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning Grants. These pre-development grants of \$10,000 and \$25,000 are intended to assist a CBO advance a project on a specific parcel of vacant land in its community. They also pay for planning in the area around the project, including an existing conditions study and an analysis of how the development would change the neighborhood. These pre-development grants can pay for a wide array of studies such as a zoning analysis, pro-forma financial analysis or Phase I assessment as well as important pre-development items including the design of community facility space in a city-funded affordable housing development.

Many developers find it advantageous to work with a well-regarded local non-profit in the neighborhood where its next project is located. A CBO brings a network of relationships with the community board, other community stakeholders and local elected officials. In a neighborhood where a developer lacks a local presence, a non-profit can make introductions to local stakeholders with the promise of building strong community support for a proposed development, which is essential to a project's success.

By leveraging land, funding sources, and community relationships, a CBO can position itself as a development partner, **joint project owner**, **project sponsor**, or **community partner** with a private developer, providing input or oversight throughout the site planning and design process.

While Community Development Corporations have long-standing relationships with private developers, networking is generally a necessary first step in building such partnerships. Many private builders look to “give back” by supporting or collaborating with a mission-driven non-profit. Non-profits can meet developers through an introduction from a city agency contact or through networking events that bring the planning community together with the private development community. A CBO may invite a developer(s) to participate on the planning advisory committee or even reach out about a specific project idea.



WHGA Teams Up to Build Affordable Housing



ECDO Finds the Financing to Rehab 254 Apartments

At the initial meeting with the public agency, a CBO will learn how its view, and the agency's view, of the planning area differ. A community group should consider revising its planning goals to address any agency's objections. Wherever possible, the community organization should align its plan with that of the agency central to its achievement. Agreement between a community developer and an agency can lead to a long term partnership that over time achieves the non-profit's goals for community development. Without agency support, a community developer's plans may be delayed or perhaps never implemented.

Learn About a Public Agency Before the First Meeting

[Aligning with a Public Agency Takes Time](#)

How to Work Successfully with an Agency

How to Acquire Public Property

CBOs with Development Plans Should Meet with OER

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Aligning with a Public Agency Takes Time

Proposing an area plan and projects that achieve it, attracting investors and public financing, and constructing a development project can take five years or longer. The likelihood of successful outcomes increases when a non-profit partner builds a long-term partnership with a public agency. It starts with building relationships with key staff members of the agency that is instrumental to a community developer's plans.

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Role of an Advisory Committee

One of the most effective ways for a non-profit community developer to align with a public agency is by inviting the agency to appoint a staff member to serve on a planning Advisory Committee. All stakeholders with an interest in the planning and redevelopment of an area should be represented on the committee, including representatives of each agency critical to achieving the community developer's plan. By working with an agency staff member at Advisory Committee meetings, the Community Based Organization (CBO) can learn how to effectively engage the agency to resolve the challenges that their development project may face. In the process, the non-profit has the opportunity to build a long-term relationship with agency staff members. Because the time line for a development project can be five years or more, forging relationships with the mid-level staff who tend to remain at agencies for substantial periods of time can be crucial to building and maintaining agency support for an a community's redevelopment plan.

Another way for a community developer to align with a public agency is to collaborate around planning for an area. The community organization may have produced an area study, which can serve as a basis for future agency action. An existing conditions study of a neighborhood, for example, can support a future rezoning by the Department of City Planning. Or an area study might lead an agency to connect residential communities to the waterfront with bicycle paths, pedestrian walkways and bio-swales.

Alternatively, a public agency may be considering planning in an area that the CBO seeks to redevelop, and have funds for a study that the community developer can participate in. Working together on a neighborhood plan can bring an agency and a CBO into agreement about the future of an area and lead to public funding for development projects that achieve it.

Related Case Studies



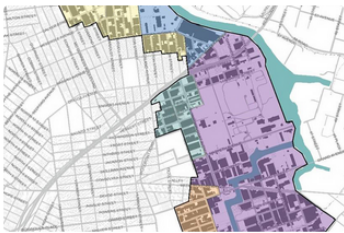
High Rise Development in Downtown Jamaica



A City Study Advances a Plan for Staten Island



A Non Profit Works With City Planning on Rezoning



Community Planning Leads to a City Industrial Plan

Community District

Another vehicle to build agency support for a CBO's planning goals and development projects is the local Community District. Under the **City charter**, city agencies must consult with Community Districts when preparing annual statements of an agency's objectives, priorities, programs, and projected activities. A Community District's professional staff evaluates the quality of an agency's services, recommends projects to city agencies as candidates for public funding, and holds public hearings on the Community District's program and budget needs. Periodic Community District meetings with a city agency can be an opportunity for the Community District's professional staff to declare its support for a community developer's vision and a development project that implements it.

Funding

A non-profit developer should meet often with a public agency, including in later stages when it seeks agency funding. When asking for funds, a CBO should not underestimate the value that its endorsement of an agency's proposed neighborhood project confers. A respected community partner knows local conditions, has relationships with a wide range of community leaders, and through outreach can deliver community consensus for an agency's project.

Each agency has a distinct set of priorities that determine which planning and development projects it will elect to support or fund. Therefore it is crucial for a community developer to meet with public development agencies early on to determine if funding for planning and development projects or other agency support is possible.

In addition to seeking funds from city agencies, not-for-profit organizations may apply to receive discretionary capital grants from the City Council and the Borough Presidents. Such grants, if approved, may be used to purchase, construct or reconstruct real property (land and buildings) or to purchase equipment and furniture. The application process generally opens in late December or early January, with deadline for submission starting in late February. See the link for below details. When available, **[view the application along with guidelines](#)** describing the process.

Another Approach to Funding: OER issues comfort letters to non-profit developers and their lenders that specify the city, state and federal grant and loan funds a development project can receive upon its enrollment in the city Voluntary Cleanup Program. These letters can be indispensable in reassuring a lender that a development project is working with a government agency to address environmental issues and that significant funding is available to offset site remediation costs. Comfort letters can assist projects secure both acquisition funds to purchase a vacant property as well as construction financing to cleanup and redevelop a site. Depending upon a project's end use and whether its developer is a non-profit entity, OER comfort letters describe funding sources available to community-support projects that can total over \$100,000.

Learn About a Public Agency Before the First Meeting

Aligning with a Public Agency Takes Time

[How to Work Successfully with an Agency](#)

How to Acquire Public Property

CBOs with Development Plans Should Meet with OER

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How to Work Successfully with an Agency

If a community developer's message is not getting through to an agency, it should consider seeking assistance from an agency that can play an **Ombudsman** role with other agencies or from agencies that can resolve development challenges. Key agencies that can assist CBOs as they navigate the planning and development process are described below. Community developers should take advantage of the in-house, no-cost expertise and guidance of these agencies as they implement their development plans.

Expand All

Collapse All

Click a topic, or press the enter key on a topic, to reveal its answer.

NYC Mayor's Office of Environmental Remediation (OER)

OER delivers a wide range of programming encouraging the revitalization of vacant, contaminated land in the City of New York. The office provides planning grants and technical support to non-profit community developers and supports the redevelopment of vacant, underutilized properties throughout the five boroughs. OER can serve as an effective liaison for community planners with New York City agencies.

Related Case Studies



Cypress Hills Builds Affordable Housing



UPROSE Gets Help From Two Agencies



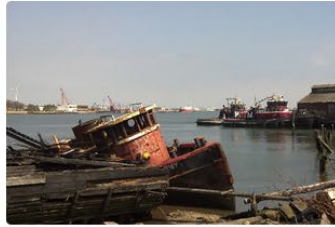
OER Helps an Affordable Development

DCP's borough offices have proven to be strategic, willing partners for community planners, and are an indispensable partner if a community group's planning calls for area-wide rezoning.

Related Case Studies



Cypress Hills Builds Affordable Housing



A City Study Advances a Plan for Staten Island



A Non Profit Works With City Planning on Rezoning



Greater Jamaica Repositions a Development Site

DEC regional staff can be key partners for community planning groups pursuing development and infrastructure projects on brownfields and in waterfront communities. If wetlands or bulkheads are involved, a community group should meet with DEC early in the process to discuss permitting issues that will arise when a development project reaches construction. If a community group seeks financing for remediation, DEC determines whether the project is eligible for enrollment in the state Brownfield Cleanup Program and can acquire state **brownfield tax credits**.

Related Case Study



Due Diligence on a Contaminated Site

Ocean Bay Selected to Develop a Supermarket

[Expand All](#)[Collapse All](#)

Click a topic, or press the enter key on a topic, to reveal its answer.

Persistence. Identify a point person and follow-up often. —

Outreach and follow-up is necessary to persuade an agency to dispose of city property. It may be advantageous to target more than one point person, including high- and mid-level staff, perhaps across several relevant agencies. Although commissioners have the highest decision-making power, these officials are not always easily accessible to a community developer. Mid-level staff members, however, are more accessible and have more detailed knowledge about specific properties and pending actions. Moreover, mid-level staff typically remain at agencies for extended time periods. Therefore, it is important to cultivate these relationships.

Ultimately, by communicating and advocating effectively with a land-holding agency, a CBO may successfully move an agency to issue an **RFP** to advance a strategic property. It is important to be diligent about following-up with key agency representatives and to utilize established relationships whenever possible.

Ultimately, whether the community developer wins the RFP and has the opportunity to develop the vacant lot in its neighborhood depends largely on how well its development proposal meets the requirements of the RFP and the capacity and experience of its development team.

Learn About a Public Agency Before the First Meeting

Aligning with a Public Agency Takes Time

How to Work Successfully with an Agency

How to Acquire Public Property

[CBOs with Development Plans Should Meet with OER](#)

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CBOs with Development Plans Should Meet with OER

A CBO with plans to build a community-supported project on vacant property that may have contamination should meet with OER at an early stage in the project's development to learn about resources and incentives to assist in moving the project forward.

Depending on the property and the proposed development, OER can offer a wide variety of services, including:

- An OER vendor to conduct environmental studies
- Pre-development funds -- \$10,000 or \$25,000—to pay for a wide range of necessary services and studies to keep a project moving towards construction and vendor services to perform this work.
- OER's assistance in outreach to other public agencies to remove obstacles impeding progress of a project. This could include OER coordination with the state Department of Environmental Conservation to develop a plan to close a petroleum spill on a property.
- An OER comfort letter identifying grants the project is eligible for that can satisfy a lender considering whether to extend a pre-development loan to a project.
- Free clean soil to raise the elevation of a project planned for a property in a coastal zone.

And it will include OER's advice on the most direct path forward towards a groundbreaking.

Related Case Study



[SoBRO Pursues Contaminated Land](#)

Resources

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Resources

The Resources section contains information on:

- How to obtain expert advice at no cost from an environmental industry professional;
- A web portal with environmental information on individual properties across NYC;
- 500 remedial action projects in the NYC Voluntary Cleanup Program;
- Green Property Certification of completed land cleanups;
- City predevelopment, investigation and cleanup grants;
- Remediation jobs available to workforce trainees; and
- Place-based community brownfield planning undertaken in two dozen NYC neighborhoods.



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Pro Bono Assistance

Community developers can receive free professional advice from an environmental industry professional on a wide range of subjects relating to the planning, financing, remediation and development of a real estate project on vacant contaminated land. The Pro Bono Assistance Program matches community-based organizations with environmental consultants, attorneys and planners from the New York City Brownfield Partnership. The environmental professional will provide a CBO with one to five hours of their time at no cost. To learn more about the Program, [contact OER](#).

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Mapping Portal

Search for environmental information on individual properties across New York City. This portal provides site contamination information drawn from government records, political and geographic information, property ownership, historic land use information and aerial photos on a NYCityMap platform. [View SPEED](#).

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Search for OER Projects

Search for information on more than 500 remedial actions in the NYC Voluntary Cleanup Program. [View EPIC Environment.](#)

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Green Property Certification

Parties that complete cleanups in the city Voluntary Cleanup Program earn a dazzling green building foundation plaque at no cost from the Mayor's Office symbolizing that the property is among the safest places to live, work and play in New York City.



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What OER grants are available for your project?

- To search for OER grants, [view OER Grants](#).

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Remediation Jobs

Graduates of workforce development programs can train at OER and learn how to become an environmental technician at a remediation site. Through the Brownfield Works! program, a workforce graduate trains for three months at OER. Accompanied by OER staff, the trainee will visit remediation sites enrolled in an OER cleanup program and learn how to perform community air monitoring and soil sampling, how to manage stockpiles of excavated soil, truck manifests that document contaminated soil shipped from a site, and other essential remediation skills. When the three-month training is completed, OER will help the trainee find a job in the remediation industry. For further information, [contact OER](#).

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Planning Organization Profiles

Learn about [community organizations conducting Place-Based Community Brownfield Planning](#) in over 20 neighborhoods across the city, the work they've performed and how to contact these organizations.

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Resiliency

Resiliency Report

Flood Zone Grants

Cleanup Standards

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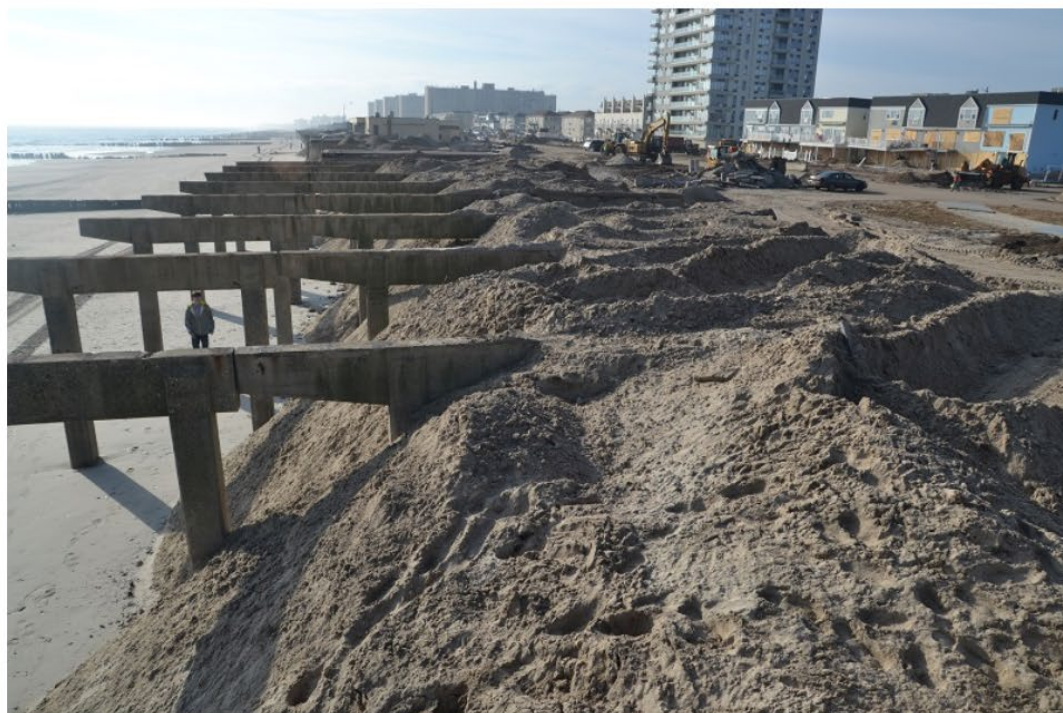
Resiliency

Erosion of contaminated land in low-lying waterfront areas during severe storms can cause pollutants to be dispersed into surrounding communities, including environmental justice areas already overburdened with pollution. These risks will increase as destructive storms become more frequent and severe due to climate change. Remediation of vacant contaminated land in the coastal flood plain is the most important way to minimize these risks.

This section contains OER initiatives to advance resiliency including:

- increased city grants for remediation of properties in the coastal flood zone,
- a best practices report on how to design and build more resilient buildings, and
- stricter soil cleanup standards for industrial properties in the coastal flood plain.

In addition, the NYC Clean Soil Bank, a soil exchange program overseen by OER, delivers clean, native soil for resiliency and remediation projects. By facilitating the transfer of clean soil directly from excavations to local developments, the program eliminates soil disposal and purchase costs for brownfield developers, City agencies, and community groups in need of soil. Clean Soil Bank material has been used around New York City to raise grade in flood zones, restore wetlands, implement flood protection measures and remediate contaminated land.



Resiliency Report

[Resiliency Report](#)

Flood Zone Grants

Cleanup Standards



Resiliency Report

Rising sea levels and coastal storm surges associated with climate change pose a growing threat to coastal cities such as New York City. Additionally, new building construction on brownfield properties present many opportunities for improved resilience and sustainability. To promote the integration of green remediation and sustainable and resilient development techniques on brownfield cleanups around the City, OER developed the Sustainability and Climate Change Resilience Survey. A variety of development types were surveyed—commercial, residential, and industrial—across all five boroughs.

A final report of best management practices for sustainable and resilient brownfield remediation and development, Resilience in Brownfield Reclamation, can be found [here](#).

Flood Zone Grants

Resiliency Report

Flood Zone Grants

Cleanup Standards

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Flood Zone Grants

The 100-year flood zone covers 19 per cent of the city's land surface. Projects built within this flood zone that enroll in the New York City Voluntary Cleanup Program are eligible for a \$10,000 bonus Flood Zone Cleanup Grant. Cleanup of coastal sites is part of a strategy to reduce the risk of erosion and dispersion of contaminants in the event of future severe storms that might affect the area.

The case study below illustrates an affordable housing project in Mott Haven that has earned a bonus Flood Zone Cleanup Grant.

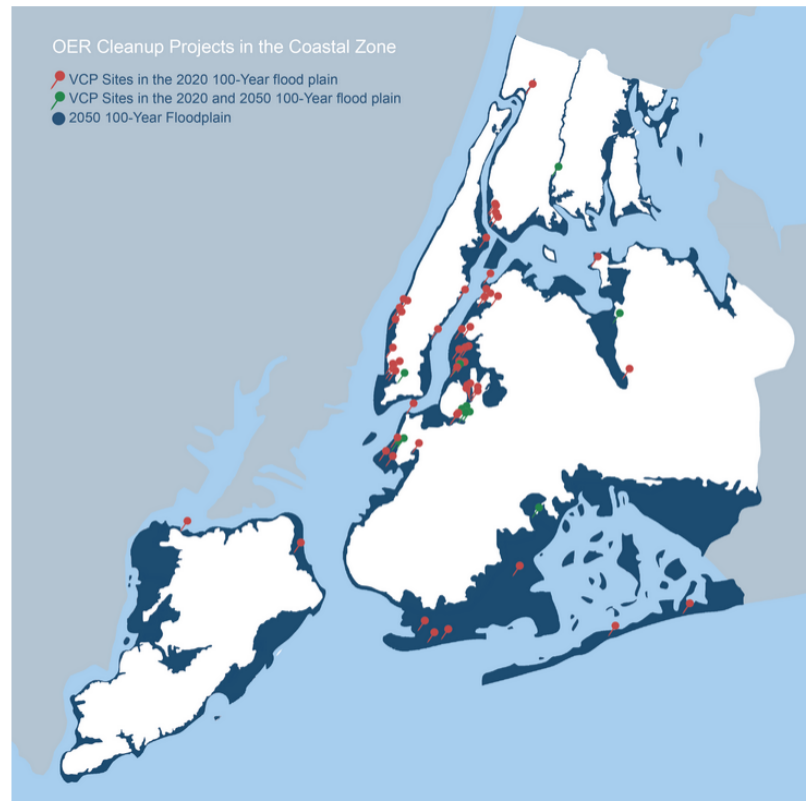
Morris Court consists of 201 apartments, each of them affordable to a family of four earning between \$51,780 and \$86,300 a year. Guido Subotovsky, President of Azimuth Development Group, a builder of market and affordable residential buildings in northern Manhattan, the Bronx and Queens, explains that Morris Court was conceived in 2008 at the height of the economic downturn. To make the project's finances work, Azimuth built parking beneath the entire 1.1-acre site and created 30,000-square feet of ground-floor retail space now leased to a merchandise retail store, a daycare facility, a drop-in medical office, a grocery and delicatessen. Parking income and revenue from commercial tenants allowed Azimuth to build an entirely affordable development. In addition, by committing to make 40 apartments permanently affordable, the project received a floor area bonus to build 26 additional apartments.



Morris Court sits near the crest of a hill that descends to the Harlem River eight blocks away. Although these handsome twin towers of brick and pre-cast stone sit above the Harlem River, Morris Court could be within reach of storm surge during the next 100-year storm. Because its developer cleaned up flood-prone land in the city Voluntary Cleanup Program, the project received a bonus Flood Zone Cleanup Grant of \$10,000 from OER.

Morris Court, the first major development under the Lower Grand Concourse rezoning, was built on former manufacturing land previously occupied by an auto repair and gasoline station. The cost to remediate the site was \$1.5 million, most of it for the removal of 23,000 tons of soil excavated to create the underground parking garage that extends beneath the two towers.

To assist with remediation for this important project, Morris Court received \$135,000 in city brownfield cleanup grant funds, consisting of a \$100,000 cleanup grant, the bonus Flood Zone Cleanup Grant, and a \$25,000 bonus cleanup grant for achieving the highest level of cleanup.



Cleanup Standards

Resiliency Report

Flood Zone Grants

Cleanup Standards



Stricter Soil Cleanup Standard on Waterfront

When industrial development is proposed for waterfront properties, the Office of Environmental Remediation (OER) requires developers to clean their sites to stricter, commercial soil standards. Cleaning waterfront property to stricter standards is part of the Office's strategy to reduce the dispersion of contaminants on the waterfront from coastal erosion during severe storms.

The case study below features a remedial action for a regional recycling facility to be built on the waterfront in the Sunset Park industrial district in Brooklyn.

Overview:

Tully Environmental Inc., which owns and operates six solid and liquid waste management facilities across the metropolitan area,

proposed to build a regional grease recycling facility on the waterfront in Sunset Park to serve the restaurant industry. The facility, to be known as ClearBrook Recycling, will heat fat, oil and grease from restaurants and refine it into a bio-fuel supplement. A grease recycling facility in New York City will encourage restaurants to properly dispose of grease waste rather than flush it down drains which can damage city sewers.



The ClearBrook Recycling facility will feature three buildings totaling 30,800 square feet of new industrial space. Besides spurring economic growth and providing 50 permanent jobs available to local residents, the ClearBrook recycling site will be remediated to ensure that this waterfront property and the surrounding community is protected from pollutant dispersion during coastal storms.

Background:

In 2007, the NYC Economic Development Corp developed a plan to revitalize the Sunset Park industrial district. Disinvestment in the area over the past several decades had drained this once thriving industrial area of its vitality. The ClearBrook recycling site is within this promising but currently underutilized area. Potential land contamination issues from the prior use of the site for manufacturing and warehouse storage surfaced when Tully Environmental prepared to redevelop the property.

To address contamination issues, the developer, working with the NYC Office of Environmental Remediation (OER), conducted a thorough investigation of the site's groundwater, soil, and soil vapor. Tully Environmental then opted to enroll the site in the city Voluntary Cleanup Program, a land cleanup program managed by OER, and clean it up to meet stringent residential standards.

The property and the development plan for the three buildings have also been examined as part of OER's Climate Change Resilience Survey program. The survey highlights opportunities to implement sustainable remediation techniques, resilience measures for extreme weather events such as floods, and other efficient design practices to promote environmental resiliency and sustainability in the industrial park.

Conclusion:

With the implementation of stricter waterfront soil cleanup standards and the Climate Change Resilience Survey program, the site's development reflects the best available approach to protect and strengthen this burgeoning waterfront area from severe storms.

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EPIC

EPIC Community is the New York City Mayor's Office of Environmental Remediation's online portal for information about community planning on vacant contaminated land in New York City.
[View EPIC Community.](#)



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Case Studies

The 24 case studies below tell the stories of non-profit community based organizations across New York City who have acquired land; partnered with developers to build affordable housing; worked with the department of city planning to rezone a neighborhood; and conducted due diligence on seriously contaminated land.

The case studies also illustrate the 16 strategies in the Development section of this site.

Borough

Phase of Development

Type of Project

SUBMIT

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Flushing Place-Based Planning and the Chinese Business Association



Port Morris -- Place Based Planning and SoBRO



Morrisania's Commercial Corridor and WHEDco