

CITY OF CORDOVA

Cordova, AL
Assessment Grant

Environmental Assessments Serve as Tools of Progression in Creating Sustainable Redevelopment

ADDRESS:	74 Main St.; Cordova, AL 3550
PROPERTY SIZE:	6 tracts of land totaling 1.6 acres
FORMER USE:	Gasoline service stations, automobile repair stations, dry cleaners, junk yard
CURRENT USE:	The six contiguous vacant sites are currently waiting funding to clean up the brownfields sites
EPA GRANT RECIPIENT:	PROJECT PARTNERS:
In September 2007, the City of Cordova received a \$200,000 Brownfields Hazardous Substances Assessment grant	Cordova Improvement and Preservation Association (CIPA), City of Cordova Planning Commission, Regional Planning Commission at Greater Birmingham, Center for Urban Affairs at University of Alabama Birmingham, Walker County Development Authority, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, Alabama Power Company – Department of Economic and Community Development, Walker County Commission, and Auburn University Urban Studio, Birmingham



Cordova walkability plan map, showing proposed greenspace and redeveloped downtown area.

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

Indian Head Cotton Mill was the focal point for economic success in the rural city of Cordova, a coal mining and cotton mill town until 1962 when the mill closed. Despite the beautiful natural setting, adjacent to the Appalachian Mountains and the Black Warrior River, the city underwent an economic and population decline. Many of the city's youth left to pursue higher education but never returned to help restore and reinvigorate their aging hometown. Subsequently, the closing of the mill and the population decline promoted poverty and abandoned businesses; this occurred mainly in the retail stores and gasoline stations in the city's downtown district where the six brownfields reside. The brownfields are an eyesore to the community and the cause of petroleum contamination to soil and ground water. Cordova began developing a master plan in 2004 to restore historical value to the community, develop mixed-use facilities, promote a walkable community with trails and greenspace, accentuate the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape, and endorse eco-tourism with the completion of the I-22 highway, a major southern east-west route. EPA Brownfields Assessment grants funded seven Phase I environmental site assessments (ESA) and six Phase II ESAs.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Owners of six contiguous properties permitted the city to conduct environmental assessments to determine the environmental status of the brownfields. Also, the city used assessment funding to determine the health of an intermittent stream that flows through the brownfields and connects to the Black Warrior River, the water supply for the capital city of Birmingham.
- The encouragement of the citizens and the results of the brownfields assessments have, and will continue to, open lines of communication to Congressional delegates for financial assistance. Communication has been established with a successful businessman native to Cordova, whose charitable and philanthropical foundation is considering donating funds for cleanup and sustainable redevelopment.
- The EPA grants have been able to leverage funding from other sources—such as a grant from the Alabama Board of Education for a new high school with a sports complex. Other grants from Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) have helped in small ways to begin restoration, such as \$280,000 for purchasing and converting an abandoned armory to a civil center town meeting place and \$400,000 to remove structurally hazardous buildings. The Alabama Power Company Tree Grant for \$2,000 allowed the city to purchase and plant cherry trees as a visual buffer along railroad lines.

OUTCOME:

The parcels of land have undergone their respective assessments and now require cleanup of petroleum contamination. The city hopes to acquire the polluted properties from the owners to apply for federal cleanup grants and move closer to its goal of redevelopment and to use this particular tract of land as the new municipal building and city hall. The next phase in Cordova's strategic plan calls for the restoration of the intermittent stream and the purchase of the Indian Head Cotton Mill. This 14 acres will be cleaned up and preserved as open space, and Cordova will soon be connected to the rest of the world with two exits off of Interstate 22. The highway will serve as a major artery between Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama. The city hopes that commuters will stop in Cordova to relax and enjoy the beautiful landscape and quaint town feel. The EPA funded assessments have promoted forward progress in cleanup and the city hopes the assessments have leveraged enough future funding to economically and aesthetically revitalize an impoverished, rural community with affordable housing and a plethora of jobs.