

# Valley Courier

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### Brownfields gives Valley property owners options

Posted: Friday, Apr 24th, 2009

Group meets with Valley officials

By REBECCA VAN DYKE

ALAMOSA — Often times, a blighted or potentially hazardous piece of property or real estate will make private lenders hesitant to give out loans based on the potential liability of the property. Thanks to non-profit organization The Colorado Brownfields Foundation, property owners and stakeholders have more options to clear the blighted property and turn it into something valuable to the community.

The Colorado Brownfields Foundation met with regional investors, real estate agents, environmentalists, and local governments to discuss what the foundation could do for the San Luis Valley. "There is a plethora of opportunity to take care of old buildings," said Kathy Rogers, Alamosa's mayor pro tem. "We're always appreciative of the Brownfield Association and we give you the key to Alamosa."

Primarily focused on rural communities for this particular workshop, the Brownfields Association presented possibilities that included but were not limited to environmental clean-up projects that will strengthen the potential for real estate development in the San Luis Valley, reuse planning to redevelop given purposes for an existing structure within the city's goals for the community, property and neighborhood assessment focusing on economic and environmental information which may be lacking, and create opportunities for possible success for the property as part of a series of monies provided by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

In 1911, the Mutual Power and Light Company built a coal powered power plant adjacent to the railroad as a result of more industry moving into Alamosa and the San Luis Valley. As the city grew, so did the need for more power, and in 1953 the plant expanded.

As the years wore on, the changing economy and new energy supplies pushed away the need for the old plant. In 1979, the facility was decommissioned. It shut its doors permanently in 1981.

Since closing, the plant had deteriorated and fell into a state that was deemed unrepairable. It was ignored and became a wreck, vandalized and used for housing for birds and bats.

The community began to question its environmental condition. The Colorado Brownfield Foundation allowed private investors to move towards putting the



*Photos by E.E. Mullens Although a former ConEdison power plant in Manhattan, N.Y. was rebuilt in 1977 and became the famous Power Station recording studio, there are no such plans for many outdated and abandoned structures such as the old power plant in Alamosa. Colorado's Brownfields Foundation is hoping to help communities overcome such blighted properties.*

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building back into productive use. After the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment paired up with the Office of Smart Growth, it was determined that

the plant was environmentally in decent shape. While the future of the building is uncertain as far as development is concerned, it has been cleared of animal waste, trash, and coal particles and is on its way to becoming a valuable piece of real estate in Alamosa. "The public-private partnership that emerged here in Alamosa was the key to moving the powerplant property redevelopment along," said Michael Wisdom of the San Luis Valley Development Resources Group.

The foundation is a non-profit corporation that provides technical assistance with financing, redeveloping, and reusing 'brownfield' sites. Brownfield sites are defined by the foundation as abandoned, idled, or under-used properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. The foundation puts brownfield properties into productive use. It is approved through the Colorado Enterprise Zone Contribution Project.

In order for Brownfields to assist with redevelopment, they require strong coordination among stakeholders in the community including local, state, and federal governments; private parties, and non-profit organizations. The property owners are interested in getting a fair value for their property and wish to manage liabilities from the start. Local governments, community groups, Environmental Protection Agency grant recipients, and non-profit organizations can seek redevelopment to the property from a community and economic standpoint. They are often looking for project success through rehabilitating the blighted property and creating economic and community growth. These public stakeholders often seek to enhance the community's image. The private sector often seeks the same outcomes as the public sector but with a return investment. Environmentalists can find assistance in ensuring the property is cleaned up properly and safe for reuse while taking away some of the potential environmental issues that would have otherwise shown up in the future.

Brownfields provide project management services, environmental due diligence grants, risk management and funding leads, take title to and remediate impaired properties and charitable deductions and state tax credits on donated and bargain sale property. They give the opportunity for site reuse and economic development studies, inventory redevelopment opportunities, policy and program research to further local revitalization efforts. Brownfields works on removing environmental obstacles and enhancing economic development potential.

The Brownfields Foundation gave the San Luis Valley attendees information on legalities, liabilities, grants, and the application process to begin working with them to make the Valley an environmentally safer and economically valuable region.

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