

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION



The Silo at Lewiston Landing



Dia:Beacon

All across New York State, communities are searching for ways to revitalize their economy, environment, and quality of life. A growing number have begun to look at abandoned buildings not as liabilities or useless relics, but as opportunities waiting to happen. These residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional ghosts are part of the community's heritage and are being dramatically brought back to life, reinvigorating the community.

The ability to find such opportunities is limited only by imagination.

Consider these creative transformations:

- A former coal silo is now an ice cream parlor with spectacular views of the lower Niagara River
- A railroad freight depot has been turned into a restaurant with outdoor seating overlooking Seneca Lake
- An abandoned paperboard manufacturing facility in Beacon is now a highly acclaimed museum for large-scale modern art

The process of redeveloping even the most ordinary of buildings begins with a vision. And most often this vision comes from within the community, with a local entrepreneur stepping in to take on what others may view as a risk.

For those communities that have successfully pursued such visions, returning abandoned buildings to useful service has strengthened community pride, preserved local heritage, established new destinations, created new jobs, and bolstered tax revenues for their community.

The goal of this guidebook is to help you and your community to achieve that success.

Who should use this guidebook

This guidebook is designed to assist all New Yorkers to redevelop abandoned buildings as part of the overall vision for their community. It is intended for three groups of readers:

- Government officials and staff seeking to transform eyesores into economic assets
- Community leaders, including residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations who have a shared interest in restoring and preserving their neighborhoods
- Developers and the development team who have recognized the opportunity presented by abandoned buildings

Often, all three groups will work closely together to redevelop buildings. This guidebook will help define the roles and responsibilities of each group as they come together in a partnership.

About this guidebook

This guidebook is the print component of a multi-media package which provides information on how to redevelop abandoned buildings and their sites. The other components are a video and a website(www.nyswaterfronts.com). This package provides guidance on the redevelopment process and shares lessons learned, specific techniques that have worked, sources of information and assistance, and the experiences of communities that have been successful in redeveloping abandoned buildings.

The multi-media package will be supplemented by similar packages of guidance that focus in more detail on other specific community issues.

The guidebook is an introduction to redeveloping abandoned buildings and sites and does not offer detailed legal, financial, architectural, contracting, historic preservation, and environmental advice. Readers are encouraged to use this information to seek further advice by following the links to the relevant agencies.

How is the guidebook organized

The sections of this guidebook take you step-by-step through the redevelopment process. These steps include:

- Defining your vision for success - highlighting the vital importance of having a clearly defined objective for the future of your building or site
- Building on your assets - helping you to understand your building or site, and its role in the community
- Establishing partnerships - showing how to strengthen the community's involvement in your project and ensure the key players are on board
- Finding a market niche for your building or site - outlining the steps needed to understand the market for your building or site, determine the economic viability of your project and the strategies that exist to fund your project

- Taking it one step at a time - providing detailed guidelines for implementing your project

This guidebook outlines a process that is about far more than just closing the deal. It is a process that involves the community and strives to bring all the resources, both public and private, to the table to enable the project to succeed. The sequence presented here may not fit every abandoned building project. You may want to create partnerships first, and then work together to understand your financing options before tackling the other steps. You may want to hold off on your vision until after you understand more about the condition of your building. Your visioning process may not be so formalized. You may want to understand your market niche and the feasibility of your project earlier in the process. You may want to do these steps at the same time. Taking a different approach is fine. The critical message is that all of these steps are important - it just may be that your project requires a different sequence or a different level of approach.

Seeing the potential in New York's abandoned buildings

Many of New York's communities are dotted with older and historic buildings that are often no longer in use. Abandoned buildings can have a destabilizing effect on neighborhoods, lowering property values and precipitating further disinvestment by property owners who fear that improvements to their home or business may not

pay off if the neighborhood continues to decline. But in a growing number of cases, people with a vision are transforming these buildings into cost-effective spaces for new uses, turning once derelict areas into new, vibrant destinations.

- In Greenport, a rusty, abandoned World War II Navy shipyard has been transformed into a thriving manufacturing site.
- In Oswego, the City has worked in partnership with the private sector to restore abandoned buildings, bringing activity back to the downtown.
- In Kingston, the reuse of abandoned buildings has created a thriving entertainment district that is acting as a catalyst for revitalizing other abandoned buildings.
- In Beacon, an abandoned factory on the Hudson River has been transformed into a world-class art museum by the Dia Art Foundation.
- In Syracuse's historic Franklin Square, abandoned factories and other buildings have been converted into an attractive mix of apartments, office space, and neighborhood shops and restaurants - the Square has become a model of successful urban revitalization.

- In Rochester, the City is building on its early successes in finding viable uses for abandoned buildings. The High Falls area on the Genesee River is becoming a thriving tourist destination as an entertainment and commercial district.
- In Greenpoint, a neighborhood of Brooklyn, the 400,000 square foot former Chelsea Fiber Mills complex has been redeveloped as a design and manufacturing center employing nearly 500 people.

By developing creative public/private/nonprofit partnerships and with persistence and careful planning, people are achieving their vision and realizing the benefits of redeveloping abandoned buildings and sites.

These projects are producing jobs, stimulating private and public investment, providing attractive spaces for new uses, and creating destinations that draw residents, visitors, and new business activity to downtowns and neighborhoods. Though long deteriorated and abandoned, these buildings occupy special places in the history of their communities, and are once again contributing to the community's distinctive character and sense of place - while also stabilizing and increasing property values and tax revenues.



Greenport



Oswego



Kingston



Beacon



Syracuse



Rochester

LOOKING AHEAD

Opportunities happen when...

You have the imagination to see abandoned buildings in a new light.

You know where you want to go.

You create a clearly defined, achievable vision.

The people who live and work in the community buy into your vision.

You build a foundation of public support and confidence.

You develop a detailed plan and strategy for implementation.

You know what you have to work with.

You respect your community's heritage.

You take advantage of all your resources and assets.

You establish partnerships and gain commitments from all stakeholders.

You know your market and find a niche for your building.

You have the patience and persistence to implement the many phases of redevelopment - one step at a time.



Rice Building, Troy