



A PROGRAM REVIEW

The City of Ocala Brownfields Redevelopment Program was initiated in 1996 when the term 'Brownfields' first gained national attention. Brownfields sites were identified as abandoned, inactive, or under-used industrial or commercial properties where actual or perceived environmental issues complicated their expansion or redevelopment. The image was generally associated with previous industrial or commercial uses. In 1997, the City of Ocala developed a proposal for a Brownfields Pilot Project that it submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) in order to obtain newly available federal Brownfields funds. The project was called "Renew Ocala" and it identified numerous sites in the community that met the Brownfields definition, but it was 1999 before any federal funds were acquired for the project.

"Renew Ocala", became a viable Brownfields Program in August 1997 when a modest demonstration grant was awarded to the city through a cooperative agreement between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the USEPA. The grant allowed the City of Ocala to establish a Brownfields office in order to identify, categorize, and monitor sites of environmental concern. The office also provided a central location from which information could be disseminated to the community regarding Brownfields activities and sites with potential environmental problems.

In the same year, the Florida Brownfields Redevelopment Act was successfully enacted through state legislation. Shortly thereafter the Florida Governor's Office of Tourism Trade and Economic Development (OTTED), again with the cooperation of the USEPA, awarded the City of Ocala a larger grant to continue the local Brownfields effort. With the grant, "Renew Ocala" would be able to undertake Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) on abandoned commercial sites within the city's previously designated Community Redevelopment Area (CRA).

Upon acceptance of the grant award, "Renew Ocala" obtained approval from the Ocala City Council to establish a Brownfields Advisory Board of community volunteers to oversee all Brownfields activities. In the meantime, a Brownfields Area was designated through a Resolution by the City Council. The 'Area' encompassed the borders of the existing CRA.

Finally, a promotional campaign was initiated to select Brownfields Sites for environmental assessment. In September 1998 the owner of a former automobile service center came forward to volunteer his property to be the first Brownfields Site.