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THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

Elizabeth Mayor J. Christian Bollwage's response to Questions for the Record from the Subcommittee on Environment Hearing - March 11, 2025

Question from The Honorable Nick Langworthy

It's my understanding that one of the most promising ways to repurpose these brownfield sites is by converting them into data centers. Data centers, which support the backbone of our digital economy, require large spaces and stable infrastructure, making these sites ideal candidates for redevelopment. In NY-23, these data center projects could be located in areas like the Southern Tier that have long struggled to attract new industries.

1. Mayor Bollwage, could you elaborate on the potential for job creation from redeveloping brownfield sites and how these projects can generate lasting employment opportunities in regions that have lost industrial jobs?

Answer from Elizabeth Mayor J. Christian Bollwage, USCM Trustee and Chair, USCM Brownfields Task Force:

Brownfields redevelopment creates jobs in a wide variety of ways. Initially, there are the temporary, but usually highly paid, jobs of assessing, remediating, and eventual construction on these sites. There are also the permanent jobs created if an economic development plan is placed on the site such as a factory or industrial site, an office building, a new store, etc. But even if the brownfield is turned into additional housing, there are the third types of jobs - the ones that support the redeveloped site such as new restaurants, coffee shops, stores, and even day care facilities that naturally spring up because the opportunity for further economic development is supported.

For example, in my own community, The Mills at Jersey Gardens was built on a former landfill in 1999. It is now a thriving shopping experience - with more than 200 stores and an AMC Loews movie theater located next door. Although the name has been changed, the Mall continues to flourish and attract visitors from all around the world. Because of its popularity, an eight-story Embassy Suites Hotel with 82 rooms and an 87,200 sq. ft. restaurant was built as well as the Country Inn and Suites by Carlson, Elizabeth Courtyard by Marriott and Residence Inn by Marriott Newark/Elizabeth Liberty International Airport. Restaurants such as Ruby Tuesday and IHOP are also available on the property.

So by redeveloping this former landfill, we were able to create thousands of jobs during construction and thousands of current employees throughout the mall, hotel, restaurants and other supporting business.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, since the inception, the Brownfields program has created over 130,000 new jobs and leveraged anywhere from \$16-\$19 for every \$1 spent by the federal government.

And you mentioned data centers as a possible reuse for brownfield sites and that is probably a good idea for many communities especially those that have former industrial sites that have been difficult to redevelop. While I don't have any experience in my own city of locating data centers on brownfield sites, it is my understanding that if you have access to both energy and water, data centers can employ anywhere from 30-200 employees in such jobs as facility managers, computer programmers, IT specialists, security, and administrative to name a few. I think one issue you may have to deal with for some of these communities is possibly providing job training to help the people who live in these communities get a job at the facility. I would assume that is also a factor when deciding on where to locate a data center.

At the brownfield site that I just described, we worked in collaboration with Union County College, the Retail Skills Center, which has evolved into the Workforce Innovation Center, which provides job placement, soft skills training, and ESL education to residents - and is located right within The Mills at Jersey Gardens. This has helped people who live in my community get the skills they need to work there and for The Mills to have a trained workforce. It is a win-win all around.

My final note is that currently data centers would be eligible to locate on brownfield sites so it may prove useful to talk to a few of these companies and find out what would make these sites more lucrative? In most cases the infrastructure is already there, so do they need a cheap and reliable energy supply (that doesn't spike the costs for area residents), adequate water supply, a trained workforce, or something else that might be holding them back from utilizing these sites currently? Since more data centers are needed and will be needed for the foreseeable future, it would be a worthwhile conversation to have.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond.