

TURNING BROWNFIELDS GREEN

Green Building Projects in Michigan and Minnesota Spur Adaptive Reuse

The new energy economy is making some headway in the manufacturing community. Organizations are coming up with creative strategies to convert old industrial plants into green manufacturing hubs or simply cost-effective renovation projects. It's another sign that the country is taking sustainability and environmental awareness seriously.

The idea of adaptive reuse itself is a fundamentally green act, according to Anthony Flint, an author on urban trends at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in Cambridge, MA.

"Developers are expending energy to renovate, but not wasting the embodied energy in the building and not building from scratch, thus requiring new materials. There is also much less demolition waste. A huge portion of energy consumption, waste and emissions can be traced to buildings and development," Flint says.

After closing the doors at Detroit Electro Coatings, a plant that originally supplied parts to automakers in Detroit, Christos Moisides and Michael Sinanis reopened the facility as 23rd Street Studios (www.23rdstreetstudios.com). The facility will offer filmmakers studio space, equipment rental and production offices. Sinanis hopes to convert the site into a full film studio sometime in 2009. In a state full of empty factories and warehouses, it's commendable to see business owners looking outside the auto industry to create new jobs in Michigan.

"It's a no-brainer to provide film production services in a facility like this," says Sinanis. "We've got 18 acres, the perfect size and layout for film production. We have cranes, heavy flooring and rail capabilities as well."

In addition, Sinanis is emphasizing green manufacturing on all the new construction as well as the warehouse conversion aspects of

the project. "We want to be as eco-friendly as possible, everything from the waste to the oil as well as the material we're buying," Sinanis says. "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) practices will help us reach our sustainability and energy efficient goals."

In Minnesota, a coalition between student organizations at McAllister University and Local UAW 879 has recently proposed plans to convert the Ford Twin Cities Assembly Plant in St. Paul, MN into a green manufacturing hub once the plant shuts down in 2011. The Arise Project, one of several initiatives currently being considered for the Ford site, is a development strategy that would bring retail businesses to the lower levels of the plant with residential units above. Rooftop restaurants and bars would be connected to gardens with beautiful views along the Mississippi River.

"The city of St. Paul is open and receptive to what many of these organizations want to do," says Merritt Clapp-Smith, department of planning and economic development for the city of St. Paul. "We're in the process of hiring a consultant to look over many of these green manufacturing opportunities to see what might be the best fit."

Green manufacturing concepts in Los Angeles, New York, Boston and Chicago are paving the way for more green renovation projects in the future. Community colleges and environmental task

forces are working daily to find new areas to promote such growth.

Flint at the Lincoln Institute sees many advantages to redevelopment projects with green manufacturing in mind.

"I suppose a manufacturing facility that made machine parts that was converted into a wind turbine facility with energy efficient windows, lighting, heating, cooling, a green roof and was also near a transit station—now that would be the ultimate in green."

For more information on adaptive reuse projects visit www.lincolninst.edu or www.adaptivereuse.org.



The former Detroit Electro Coatings plant is being converted into a film studio in an effort to create more jobs in Michigan (Courtesy 23rd Street Studios).



Construction on 23rd Street Studios will include LEED practices that focus on green manufacturing initiatives (Courtesy 23rd Street Studios).