



For Some of Maine's Former Brownfields, Impressive Reuse Plans

State of Maine

The mountain of snow on a picturesque, 14-acre site on Waterville, Maine's waterfront is ringed with "No Trespassing" signs to ward off kids who might be tempted to climb it. For years, the site has served as the dumping ground for snow collected by Waterville's road-clearing crews during typically harsh Maine winters. During warmer months, the site serves as the location for an occasional waterfront festival, its surface of patchy scrub grass and dirt trodden for a few hours by hundreds of local residents before again being left empty.

Nearly forty years ago, the property was home to thriving businesses and industry stretching back more than a century. Former uses included a wood mill and foundry, as well as tenements and housing complexes. More recently, the site had been home to gas stations before being abandoned in the 1960s.

Though the City of Waterville had been interested in redeveloping the site for years, it was not until an EPA Brownfields grant was awarded to Maine's State Planning Office (SPO) that detailed assessments of the waterfront property became possible. The city had already developed a master redevelopment plan over the course of several years. Presented to the community for approval in at least three public meetings, the plan called for a balance of commercial and retail development along with recreational greenspace such as walking trails and a promenade.

For Ron Singel, Waterville City Manager, transforming this waterfront property was a familiar challenge. Singel had already played a role in transforming a waterfront site in Old Town, Maine (where he also served as city manager) from a contaminated, former industrial site to commercial and recreational greenspace (a detailed article can be found at http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/pdf/ss_oldtn.pdf).

"In Old Town, we were proactive in regard to redevelopment instead of reactive, and we tried to do the same thing in Waterville," explains Singel. "[The Waterville site] was lucky to be one of three sites selected to make use of the Brownfields grant. Though the site had sat vacant for nearly 20 years, [redevelopment] interest was always there. The city was ready to move forward."

Assessments funded by the EPA grant revealed coal ash, lead, and petroleum byproducts. Prior to reuse, the entire site will be capped at an estimated cost of \$400,000. The city has applied for public sector funding to cover cleanup, and expects to move forward as soon as summer 2003.

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JUST THE FACTS:

- Though the City of Waterville had been interested in redeveloping a 14-acre, waterfront brownfield for years, it was not until an EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant was awarded to Maine's State Planning Office that detailed assessments of the property became possible.
- With assessments complete and a cleanup plan in place, the Waterville brownfield has been attracting a lot of attention from potential developers. A redevelopment plan calls for a new amphitheater, a cultural center, and recreational greenspace.
- One of the two additional sites selected to receive EPA Brownfields grant funding includes a four-story, 66,000-square-foot building with industrial activity dating back to the early 1900s. This property's redevelopment into a job training center and additional business space is nearly complete.

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***Ron Singel, Waterville
City Manager***

With assessments complete and a cleanup plan in place, the site has been attracting a lot of attention from potential developers. An updated redevelopment plan calls for a new amphitheater, a four-story office, a restaurant, and a proposed Franco-American cultural center (Waterville was the first major settlement in Maine for French Canadians, who made up half the city's population in the early 1900s). The remainder of the site will serve as recreational greenspace, with a promenade and walking trails along the waterfront. Total redevelopment costs are estimated at nearly \$6 million, with an expected time frame of up to three years. The redeveloped site will be home to as many as 180 jobs.

One of the two additional sites selected by the State SPO and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to receive EPA Brownfields grant funding lies approximately 45 miles west of Waterville in the Town of Rumford. The four-story, 66,000-square-foot building on the property was once part of the Mead Paper complex, with industrial activity dating back to the early 1900s.

In 1998, after announcing that it was leaving the specialty paper business, Mead shut down several of its manufacturing facilities, eliminating nearly 175 local jobs. The company considered its options for the three-acre site, where the building was at the time serving as an equipment storage facility.

It was around that time that one of Maine's largest economic summits revealed that thousands of the state's available jobs were going unfilled because of a lack of skilled workers. Working in partnership with the River Valley Growth Council (River Valley encompasses 10 towns in Maine, including Rumford), Mead realized that the site could be reused as a facility to help develop work skills and create new jobs.

The company donated the property and building to the River Valley Growth Council as the eventual site of a new technical job training school. Approximately \$30,000 of the state's EPA Brownfields grant was used to perform assessments on the property, revealing minor asbestos and lead contamination that is being removed during the building's renovation. Currently underway, this \$2 million site restoration project is being funded by a \$1.3 million construction grant from the federal Economic Development Agency, with the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development covering the remainder.

When renovations are finished, the building will be turned over to the River Valley Technical Center (RVTC) for use as its dedicated training facility. The RVTC is a corporation comprising more than 20 representatives of public and private entities, including Central Maine Technical College, the University of Southern Maine, local industry, a career center, government officials, the Financial Authority of Maine, and the River Valley Growth Council. The RVTC received \$800,000 from the U.S. Department of Labor in October 2001 to establish job training and education classes; those classes started in January 2002 in two state locations, including the Central Maine Technical College.

On the former Mead Paper site, the RVTC's new training facility will open its doors in November 2003, providing job skills in both industrial and manufacturing trades. The training facility will only take up a portion of the renovated building, and the RVTC is already taking applications from other businesses interested in starting up or relocating there.

CONTACTS:

For more information contact
U.S. EPA-Region 1 (617) 918-1424

Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>



The new business facility/job training center in Rumford.