

Public-Private Partnership Fuels Redevelopment in Paterson



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Since the inception of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Brownfield Development Area (BDA) initiative in 2002, local municipalities and private property owners have redeveloped nearly 2,000 acres of former industrial land.

Under the BDA approach, the state works with the community affected by multiple brownfields to simultaneously design and implement remediation and reuse plans. This approach enables remediation and reuse to occur in a coordinated fashion, and also allows various stakeholders—including owners of contaminated properties, developers, community groups, technical experts and residents—to participate in cleanup and revitalization efforts.

Several municipalities have recognized the need for this type of approach in urban areas, particularly for properties that due to location, contamination levels, or size have not yet attracted adequate private funding for remediation or private development. In Paterson, a local desire to rehabilitate eight properties that were being redeveloped and the desire to create a state park on another property provided the push to get the brownfield applications together.

Paterson's Experience Paterson holds a special place in New Jersey and American history. It is the state's third-

largest city, and the nation's first planned industrial city. It was during the American Revolutionary War that the Great Falls, the second largest waterfall east of the Mississippi River, was identified as the future site of the nation's first modern industrial city. But the industry that spurred development here is fading or gone, though the environmental scars of its industrial past remain.

For nearly 150 years, Paterson was recognized as a center for the production of major manufacturing products, including the Colt revolver, Thomas Rogers' steam locomotive, John Philip Holland's submarine, Charles Lindbergh's engine and the silk industry. Historic mills, mostly established in the Allied Textile and Printing (ATP) site and along the three-tiered water raceway system, were constructed and operated during the late 18th century and continued to thrive well into the 20th century.

But where there once stood successful and productive factories, there are now abandoned warehouses, crumbling buildings and a vacant garage. Years of commercial and industrial work have left their mark in terms of potential soil and groundwater contamination.

But with the state's approval of 108 acres as a BDA site, the Great Falls Historic District is once again poised to be on the

upswing. The former ATP site will be the centerpiece of the state park redevelopment effort and will eventually connect to Haines Riverwalk. The city has applied for and received \$1 million in funding to complete that work. The BDA designation also makes Paterson eligible to receive \$5 million a year to clean up further contamination.

But it could have been very easy to get lost in the paperwork and bureaucracy on this project. With such a large area of land and so many previous owners and interested parties, red tape could have stopped the transformation of former manufacturing buildings into new commercial and residential initiatives, including townhouses, apartments, hotels and a parking deck, well before the project was started.

One Point Person There's no doubt the state program proved incredibly useful for hammering out the details of this rather large project. Instead of having to work with a number of people at a variety of state departments, Paterson officials were given one point-person to deal with. We were also fortunate enough to have our own team in place well before the application was approved.

The formal process for cleaning up the brownfield site began in 2004 with the formation of the Paterson Environmental Revitalization Committee (PERC). It is comprised not only of government officials, attorneys, realtors, developers and community representatives, but engineering professionals, mortgage lenders and other experts who will do the clean up and rebuilding work.

Teamwork PERC is a unique commission; not many municipalities have a group like it in place. But it has been instrumental in bringing all of the key players to the table before plans and decisions were made. Too often projects of this size lack consistency and cooperation, and interested parties are driven away by a lack of coherence and uniformity. With the advent of PERC, everyone from concerned citizens to city officials and state workers were brought in on the front end of the project, avoiding last minute catastrophes and back-end problems.

Having a variety of professionals, like the engineers of The Whitman Companies Inc., committed to the project from day one helped ease the transition of the project from speculation to action. Developers and real-

tors were eager to see the site rehabilitated, but having a full understanding of the rehabilitation work that needed to be completed proved to be invaluable in this instance.

Environmental laws, land use plans and the rules regarding clean up are constantly changing. By working with our own experts and the state and government officials, city officials ensured that we wouldn't be caught unaware of new regulations or changes to state law. By using the framework put in place by PERC and the state program, we were able to foster a team spirit, and demonstrate how actions taking place now can affect future land use and development. When it comes to government action, working in an incubator often only leads to frustration.

The end result of this teamwork and foresight will be the transformation of a once thriving and now crumbling industrial center into green space and a public park with plans for new housing and commercial initiatives. Parking problems that have plagued the city's first ward are being addressed. The city has found a way to move into the future, while retaining the historic and cultural significance of one of the country's most important neighborhoods.

The Environment, Recreation and Economic Development The work being done in the Great Falls Historic District will offer many great public benefits including improved public health, environmental rehabilitation and the pro-

motion of more outdoor activities. But the economic health of Paterson will also improve. The brownfield designation provides future developers and stakeholders with additional funding sources and opportunities to create new development in the city.

The state's BDA initiative is a great example of how a local desire to redevelop a neighborhood can be helped by the state's numerous resources. The BDA process and the DEP's commitment to supporting and facilitating this ground-up approach have been key factors in the success of redeveloping Paterson. By putting this project on the fast track, eliminating layers of red tape and securing the support of the local community, the only outcome in Great Falls will be success in these redevelopment goals. ▲

Jose "Joey" Torres has served as the mayor of Paterson since 2002. He is also a former Paterson city councilman, serving in that capacity for 12 years. He has remained committed to providing new economic opportunities to the city, including implementing Urban Enterprise Zones such as the one in Paterson's first ward.

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