

# Brownfields

## Success Story

### Meeting Street

*Providence, R.I.*

Former commercial and industrial properties in South Providence have been redeveloped into a campus for a nationally recognized non-profit for children with special needs and developmental delays. Meeting Street, a state-of-the-art educational center, has transformed an abandoned industrial area into a safer, greener space with athletic fields, parking, and 100,000-square-feet of buildings. Its early childhood programs and schools now serve over 7,000 economically disadvantaged children and their families each year.

Working with EPA and other private and public partners, Meeting Street turned a brownfields site into the organization's 9-acre campus in 2006. Since then, enrollment has drastically increased and demand for services is quickly outpacing the organization's ability to meet it. Meeting Street recently expanded its campus by three acres and plans to further expand in one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in Rhode Island.

### Priming the Property for Redevelopment

The Lower South Providence neighborhood that is home to Meeting Street includes a mix of homes, industry, and commercial uses. The neighborhood also once hosted metals manufacturing businesses and auto repair shops. Changes in urban manufacturing in the 1970s led to a mass movement of middle-class families out of the neighborhood. This left behind empty properties, vandalized buildings, and concerns about contamination from lead, arsenic, volatile organic compounds, and petroleum products. Today, Lower South Providence is considered an environmental justice area by EPA due to its proximity to sensitive populations and brownfields sites.

A \$200,000 EPA cleanup grant in 2004 funded the cleanup that led to Meeting Street opening the new campus in 2006. To continue with ambitious efforts to expand, Meeting Street applied for and received three additional cleanup grants totaling \$600,000 in 2018. They were also successful in competing for funds at the state level, winning a total of \$1.2 million in funding through Rhode Island's Brownfield Bond Fund and the Brownfields Remediation and Economic Development Fund. These funds paid to clean up three blighted industrial lots associated with a former metal plating business and automotive junkyard and repair shop. Meeting Street then expanded its parking and athletic facilities onto these properties, adding a new outdoor track and a multi-sport artificial turf field that completed the second step in its four-part master expansion plan.



**EPA Grant Recipient:**  
Meeting Street

**Grant Types:**  
Cleanup, Targeted Brownfields Assessment

**Current Use:**  
Nonprofit Educational Organization

**Former Uses:**  
Residential, Furniture Warehouse, Automobile Service Facility, Metal Plating Business





**“The EPA Region 1 team has been an invaluable partner in Meeting Street’s 15-year journey to productively reuse brownfields across Lower South Providence. Our work to be a community resource for families, supporting the healthy development and education of all children, has been made possible by the EPA Brownfields program, and their collaboration with the RI Department of Environmental Management.”**

John Kelly, President/CEO

Meeting Street

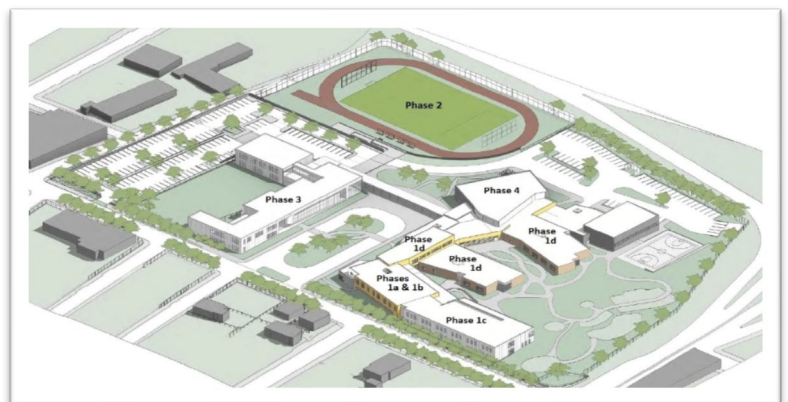
The partnership between EPA, the RI Department of Environmental Management, the RI Health and Educational Building Corporation, and other private and public funders has led to the successful cleanup of these four properties and the creation of a world-class \$55 million campus.

## Today

Meeting Street has transformed the community of South Providence, once an economically distressed area with high rates of poverty, little economic investment, few quality schools, and a lack of green space. The neighborhood now boasts this center of academic achievement that serves families and children of all abilities at its early childhood programs and schools that deliver customized therapy. Meeting Street has classrooms, a library, a computer literacy center, a science laboratory, a gymnasium, playgrounds, and occupational and speech-language therapy rooms. The new parking lots offer a safer traffic flow and more parking for visitors and student families. The new athletic facilities are home to cross country and spring track teams. About 68 percent of the student body is minority and over 83 percent of the students enrolled come from families living at or below the federal poverty threshold, highlighting the enormous contribution this project brings to minority and disadvantaged communities. With the influx of students and new programs, Meeting Street has even bigger plans for future redevelopment.

Meeting Street has plans to expand its 9-acre campus by three more acres and more than 100,000 square feet of program space as part of its five-to-seven year Campus Expansion plan. The goals are to create a center for preschool and early childhood development, fostering higher educational achievement in the community. EPA’s Targeted Brownfields Assessment Program is helping Meeting Street assess another brownfield for the next expansion. The final project is expected to create 50 new, permanent full-time and part-time jobs in South Providence.

Meeting Street took what was left behind by New England’s industrial past and revamped it to improve safety and academic achievement, empowering residents and giving children a better chance to succeed.



***Providence Campus Master Plan:*** Meeting Street’s campus expansion plan is divided into 4 phases. Upon completion of the project, Meeting Street is expected to have a new auditorium and Early Learning Center to accommodate growth of Meeting Street’s pre-K programs. The project is estimated to be completed by Spring 2022.

### For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at [www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields) or contact

Jim Byrne at 617 918 1389 or [Byrne.James@epa.gov](mailto:Byrne.James@epa.gov).