

Brownfields

Success Story

639 Main Street

East Hartford, Conn.

The intersection of Main and Pitkin streets in East Hartford, Connecticut, has seen a variety of businesses come and go over the years, including a gas station, diner, laundromat, and floor tile store. Most recently and notoriously, a former nightclub was shuttered there after several instances of illegal activity.

The site is uniquely situated as a gateway to both the town's Downtown District and an office complex called Founder's Plaza, making it a perfect candidate for redevelopment, according to Eileen Buckheit, East Hartford's Development Director.

"East Hartford is designated as a 'distressed municipality,' which can make widespread economic development a challenge," says Buckheit. "We knew that if we could transform this site into something long-lasting and valuable to our community, there would be cascading positive effects."

The Opportunity

The town's Development Department worked with the property owner to find an appropriate use for the site and ultimately settled on a local franchise of a coffee and doughnut chain widely beloved by New Englanders.

However, the sale of the property stalled when the buyer's commercial lender required an environmental assessment before moving forward. Both the buyer and the town were concerned about the costs for site testing, but Buckheit and her team worked with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Program to secure funding for an assessment.

"There was a sense of gridlock," says Buckheit, "Without the Brownfields Program's resources and expertise, the project would have been in real danger of never reaching its full potential."

The Assessment

The town used approximately one-quarter of a \$200,000 Brownfields Community-wide Assessment Grant for Phase I and Phase II environmental site assessments, which a local environmental firm conducted. The assessments revealed no environmental contamination, but the firm did uncover and remove several storage tanks that were a holdover from the site's former life as a gas station.



EPA Grant Recipient:
East Hartford, Connecticut

Grant Type:
Assessment

Current Use:
Coffee Shop

Former Uses:
Gas station, diner, laundromat, floor tile store, nightclub



The new coffee shop is one of a select few franchises built using innovative design practices. (photo credit Town of East Hartford)



The town used other funding to repave and spruce up the pathway from the coffee shop to Hockanum River Linear Park. (photo credit Town of East Hartford)

“This project is the linchpin of our town’s redevelopment efforts in the area. EPA support was absolutely crucial in seeing it through.”

*Eileen Buckheit,
Development Director,
East Hartford, Connecticut*

The Redevelopment

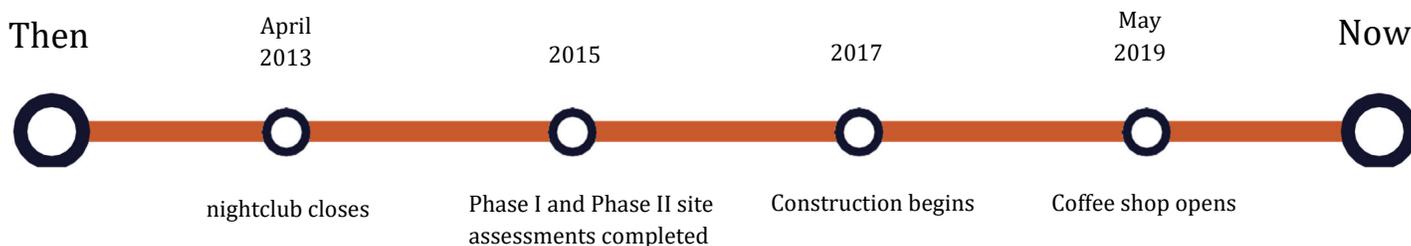
When construction began, Buckheit, still eager to achieve those “cascading positive effects,” began exploring how the town could make a deeper connection between the site and other parts of the community. The Hockanum River Linear Park, a 3.5-mile waterfront trail that leads to the Downtown District, has an entrance near the site, but the pathway to the trailhead was in disrepair. The town used a \$100,000 Community Development Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to revamp the sidewalk and beautify the entrance to the trail, which was completed in May 2019 alongside the new coffee shop.

“It just made sense,” says Buckheit. “Whether you’re starting or ending your trip along the trail at Main and Pitkin, you can grab a pick-me-up from the coffee shop on your way.”

The Benefits

When the coffee shop opened, it was one of only 50 of the company’s more than 12,800 restaurants to have a “next-gen” design. The design features innovative water runoff technologies, an open layout, and warm colors to create an approachable and comfortable atmosphere for customers. The store employs 25 people full-time and generates approximately \$29,000 in annual tax revenue.

Buckheit emphasizes that getting the project done required a team effort. “I don’t think I’ve been part of a project before where all the stakeholders, from federal to state to municipal, public and private, were all on the same page,” says Buckheit. “The town of East Hartford was a first-time recipient of Brownfields funding, so there was a bit of a learning curve for us. But that sense of collaboration and desire to complete a common goal was greatly, greatly appreciated.”



For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Amy Jean McKeown at 617 918 1248 or Mckeown.Amyjean@epa.gov