

Brownfields Success Story

Branch Street

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

The Branch Street site on the banks of the historic Blackstone River in Pawtucket has evolved from an area overrun with invasive scrub and illegal dumping to the home for 29 units of affordable housing. Pawtucket, which launched the American Industrial Revolution in 1793 at Slater Mill, saw industrial development for the next century and became an important manufacturing center. For nearly 100 years, Branch Street was a flourishing urban community and the perfect place for working families --close to jobs, the river, major roadways, and Pawtucket's downtown.

The thriving textile industry eventually died down, leaving Pawtucket littered with brownfields. Branch Street, like the rest of the city, began to decline in the 1960s and '70s as industries closed and families moved out. Buildings were abandoned or torn down, leaving vacant lots of contamination and hazardous material. Before the cleanup and redevelopment, Branch Street's vacant lots were covered in poison ivy, which grew around illegally dumped mattresses, bags of garbage, and construction debris. With support from EPA's Brownfields program, Pawtucket Central Falls Development Corporation was able to take five of those vacant lots and transform them into a thriving neighborhood.

Priming the Property for Redevelopment

Pawtucket Central Falls Development saw Branch Street as a perfect location for much-needed affordable housing. In 2010, the RI Department of Environmental Management invested \$77,000 to assess the property for hazardous materials. This led to the discovery of contaminants, including lead, arsenic, and manganese, as well as urban fill and chemicals from old heating systems. Both the contamination and steep grade of the site added challenges to the cleanup. However, Pawtucket Central Falls Development created a unique cleanup plan that would leave the site ready for the construction of affordable housing units. The organization received \$600,000 in EPA funding, and work began in 2015 to remove and cover contaminated soils. An area of the site was also dedicated exclusively to preserving riverfront wetland.



Affordable housing units completed in 2017 with support from EPA Brownfields grants
(Photo Credit: Pawtucket Central Falls Development)

EPA Grant Recipient:
Pawtucket Central Falls Development

Grant Types:
Community-wide Assessment Grant
Cleanup Grant

Current Use:
Affordable housing

Former Uses:
Residential and Industrial



The conditions of the site before cleanup included illegal dumping and hazardous contamination
(Photo Credit: Pawtucket Central Falls Development)



The contractor removed the hazardous materials and capped portions of the site with building foundations and a parking lot, which ultimately reduced the cost of building affordable housing. Soon after the \$1.05 million cleanup was finished in 2017, construction began on the affordable housing units. The housing was funded by private and non-profit sources outside of the EPA brownfields grant.

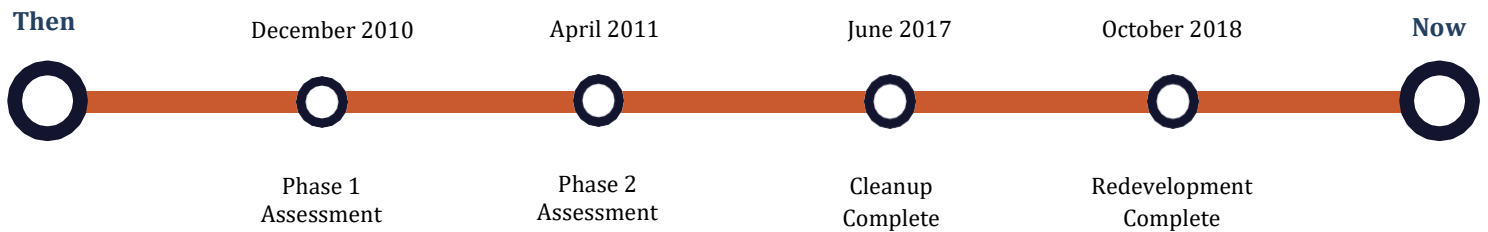
Today

From an abandoned brownfields site, an entirely new neighborhood has been built. Four three-story buildings now line Branch Street with all 29 units developed as affordable housing. The new development includes play spaces and green space, which for the first time allows public access to the river from Branch Street. The community now can access nature preserves as well as the river overlook park.

The affordable housing units are a mix of one- to four-bedroom apartments ranging from 600 square feet to 1,200 square feet. The apartments were built with durable material to ensure the buildings thrive for years to come. Energy efficient upgrades, such as high-efficiency heating systems and Energy Star appliances, reduce utility prices for tenants, as well as their carbon footprints. When the units became available, they were filled almost immediately, showing just how needed this project was in Pawtucket. In October 2018, the city saw the completion of a decade-long journey to revitalize this once hazardous site into clean, safe and affordable homes for more than two dozen Rhode Island families.

"The EPA Brownfield Cleanup award was the catalyst for the Branch Blackstone Development. PCF Development was able to leverage these grants and secure over \$11 million of affordable housing funding which directly led to the creation of these much-needed homes and complete revitalization of this formerly derelict property".

*Linda Weisinger
Executive Director - PCF Development*



For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Jim Byrne at 617-918-1389 or Byrne.James@epa.gov