



Somerville's Abandoned Mattress Site Springs Back

SOMERVILLE, MA

With a population of nearly 80 thousand within its 4.2-square-mile area, Somerville, Massachusetts is the most densely populated municipality in New England. Since space is such a valuable commodity, wasted, idle land is something the city can ill afford. The redevelopment of an abandoned mattress factory and outlet into additional living space—combined with new jobs, and millions in leveraged funding—is cause for celebration for Somerville.

Until the 1970s, the Hostess Bakery Company occupied the 51,500-square-foot industrial building at 259 Lowell Street. The structure was subsequently renovated and occupied by a series of mattress manufacturers/outlet stores, only to be abandoned in 1995. After its abandonment, the building fell into disrepair and became a safety concern and an eyesore for residents of the surrounding area. Partially due to fears of site contamination, however, there was limited developer interest in the factory. This changed in 1996, when Somerville was selected as an EPA Brownfields Pilot, and received a \$100,000 grant to jump-start the city's idle properties.

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JUST THE FACTS:

- Following its abandonment, the 51,500-square-foot industrial building at 259 Lowell Street fell into disrepair and became a safety concern and an eyesore for local residents.
- The Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) approached the city with an interest in purchasing and redeveloping the mattress factory site, depending on the Brownfields Pilot's assessment results.
- The resulting \$14 million redevelopment project brought more than 45 permanent jobs to the city.

To encourage the VNA to move forward with plans to redevelop the property into a 100-unit, assisted living facility and neighborhood health center, Somerville provided \$100,000 in cleanup cost-override coverage. This coverage was developed as a component of the Brownfields Pilot.

EPA's Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a site, or portion thereof, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. EPA is funding: assessment demonstration pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to assess brownfields sites and to test cleanup and redevelopment models; job training pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to provide training for residents of communities affected by brownfields to facilitate cleanup of brownfields sites and prepare trainees for future employment in the environmental field; and, cleanup revolving loan fund programs (each funded up to \$500,000 over five years) to capitalize loan funds to make loans for the environmental cleanup of brownfields. These pilot programs are intended to provide EPA, states, tribes, municipalities, and communities with useful information and strategies as they continue to seek new methods to promote a unified approach to site assessment, environmental cleanup, and redevelopment.

After learning of Somerville's Brownfields Pilot award, the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) approached the city with an interest in purchasing and redeveloping the mattress factory site, depending on the Pilot's assessment results. Soil and groundwater assessments revealed lead, petroleum, and barium contamination, with an estimated cleanup cost of \$225,000. To encourage the VNA to move forward with plans to redevelop the property into a 100-unit, assisted living facility and neighborhood health center, Somerville provided \$100,000 in cleanup cost-overrun coverage. The coverage, which was developed as a component of the Pilot, will protect the VNA should actual site cleanup costs exceed the Pilot's estimate. Community Development Block Grant money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is being used to finance the program.

In response to the site's new and promising future, resources for the project rapidly mushroomed. The Federal Home Loan Bank agreed to a \$1.25 million loan and a \$250,000 grant; the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) awarded \$5.9 million in low-income housing tax credits; \$750,000 in low-interest loans have been granted by the DHCD and the City of Somerville; the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust fund has earmarked a \$150,000 loan for the project; and the Massachusetts Housing Partnership will provide a \$5.4 million Affordable Housing loan.

The VNA's new, 97-unit, assisted-living facility opened in June 2000, and every unit was occupied by the end of the summer. This \$14 million redevelopment project brought more than 45 new jobs to the city. For more information on Somerville's Brownfields Pilot, contact Lynne Jennings at (617) 918-1210.

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Visit the EPA Brownfields Web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>

