

New York Construction

Spotlight on **Brownfields**



www.newyork.construction.com/features/archive/0501_cover.asp

Developers are paying more attention but are still wary of brownfields development programs that New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut have launched in recent years, hoping to recapture former industrial sites, landfills, and other contaminated properties. Look for an overview of the region and project profiles on the pages that follow.

Redevelopment Economics:
Area Developers Scout Brownfields
for Opportunities **Page 30**

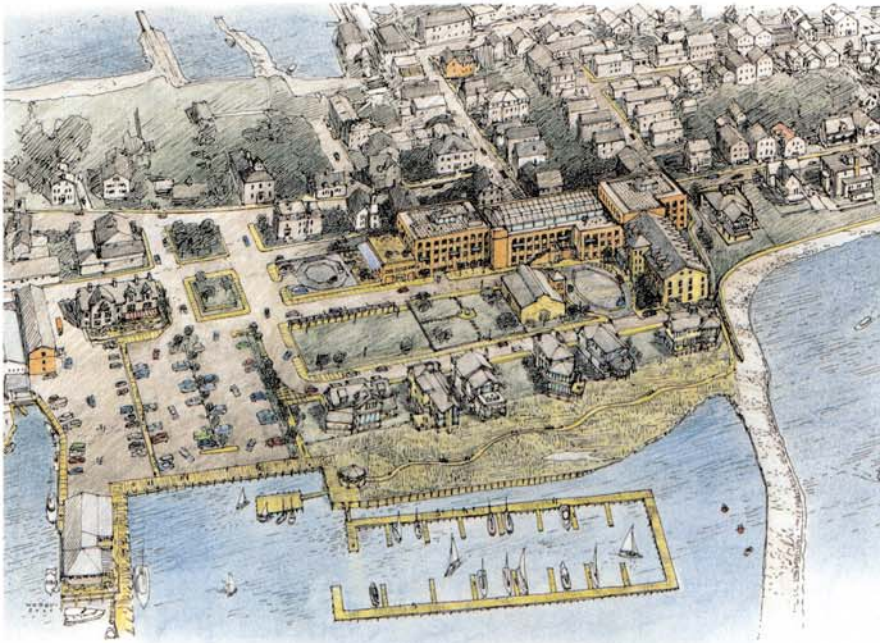
Landfill Redevelopment:
Major Warehouse to Recapture
'Lost' N.J. Site **Page 32**

Mill Redevelopment:
Industrial Site Yields Prime Real
Estate in Conn. **Page 35**

Mill Redevelopment

Industrial Site Yields Prime Real Estate in Conn.

By Katherine S. Robertson



On a site described as a "museum of contamination," the developer is cleaning up and building the \$35 million Stonington Commons luxury condominiums.

Brownfields carry the specter of uncertainty, harboring contamination that causes developers to waver. But in the case of the \$35 million Stonington Commons in eastern Connecticut, the environmental contamination wasn't a deal breaker, because the developer had a unique advantage – knowledge of what was there.

Earlier prospective developers had conducted extensive testing. That gave Seth Weinstein and his partners in Stonington Water Street Associates a clear picture of

what was on the 5-acre parcel, which had an industrial history going back nearly two centuries. But it was still a long road to build luxury condominiums.

"It was almost a museum of contamination," Weinstein said. "Remarkably, there wasn't anything we couldn't deal with by removal or capping."

Weinstein, principal of Hannah Real Estate Investors of Stamford, Conn., has always had an orientation toward restoring fouled sites. In his 25 years in the real estate business, he said that up to three-quarters of his work in recent years has involved tainted land.

"Brownfields sites have never frightened me," Weinstein said. "It's no more complicated than any other construction

project if handled with care. I do a rigorous risk-reward calculation before I enter into a project. People sometimes look at what I do as risk-taking – I look at it as being conservative."

That's why the team went ahead on the site in Stonington Borough, an affluent enclave in eastern Connecticut overlooking Long Island Sound. Though the 18-month remediation program cost more than \$1 million, that was more than offset by the value of the property, which sits on Stonington Harbor and offers spectacular views of the water and nearby historic village.

The biggest challenge Weinstein faced was winning over involved and opinionated residents of the area who had ideas for the site and who had already turned away a syndicate interested in developing a high-end residential project there. Over coffee and cookies, Weinstein's team and community residents tweaked the original concept to add commercial uses and to stress waterfront access and restoration of historic structures on site, such as the 1812 foundry, the 1849 Trumbull Building, and the 1906 Atwood Building. The brick Atwood building fronts historic Water Street and connects with the granite Trumbull building at a right angle, while the 1812 building sits apart in the shadow of the larger mill structures.

The resulting plan calls for a mix of historic renovation and new construction to create the condominiums and live-work units. It also entails building seven new single-family homes and construction of a yacht club, marina, and 800-ft.-long public waterfront walkway.

In September 2002, the developers hired Hodess Building Co. Inc. of North Attleboro, Mass., as construction manager, which led a team that gutted the buildings, removed asbestos, and removed >>

saturated wood interiors.

"I would say the types of contamination were typical for an older industrial site," said Carver Glezen, LEP, vice president of Triton Environmental Inc. of Guilford, Conn., the project's environmental consultant. "Oils and heavy metals were the predominant contaminants."

The remediation was a success, Glezen said, since monitoring of groundwater by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and site conditions during construction indicated no ongoing sources of trouble. "It looks like the remediation has effectively removed the [contaminated] sources," he said.

Shortly after the remediation work wrapped up, a fire on site caused major setbacks. Luckily, with remediation of asbestos and other building contaminants completed, the project avoided an environmental disaster. The cause of the fire is under litigation, but its wake is clear – it destroyed the Atwood Building and gutted the interior of the Trumbull building, damaging about a third of the 2-ft.-thick granite walls. The fire also destroyed the roof of the little foundry, but its walls survived.

The damage caused a six-month delay and sent the design and construction team back to square one to determine how to maintain the historical and physi-



View from the historic 1849 Trumbull Building looking out from the upper floor into Stonington Harbor. A fire required major rehabilitation of the granite structure.

cal integrity of the site.

"The project took on a whole new life," Weinstein said. "Now, we weren't going to have to rebuild these structures internally, we were going to have to rebuild them structurally."

The architects, New York-based Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners, opted to use as much of the existing materials as possible, salvaging granite from the Trumbull Building and setting up a makeshift stone-cutting operation in the solid granite foundry building.

Blake Hodess, president of Hodess Building, said crews cut the salvaged materials into 4-in. pieces, reusing them to replicate the original rubble construction of the Trumbull building. The team also tracked down granite from the original quarry and matched the brick from the Atwood Building.

By the end of 2003, the project was back

on track and scheduled for a spring 2005 opening. The condominium units have sold out at prices ranging from \$750,000 to \$1.8 million, while the houses, all on deposit, are selling on a range from \$1.5 million to \$3 million.

Weinstein, who is working on the Stonington job with his partner, Charles Mallory of Clearview Investment Management in Greenwich, has other brownfields in his portfolio. These include cleaning a blighted, defunct car dealership site in Stamford to build a 92-unit luxury condominium project and reclaiming another 17-acre former oil depot and utility site in Stamford.

"Seth has always taken an aggressive approach," said Glezen, who has worked on a number of Weinstein's projects. "He wants to fully understand the conditions of the property so he can make informed decisions on its reuse." <<

Key Players

Developers: Hannah Real Estate Investors LLC, Stamford, Conn., Clearview Investment Management, Greenwich, Conn.

Owner: Water Street Associates LLC, Stonington, Conn.

Architect: Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners, New York

Construction Manager: Hodess Building Company, North Attleboro, Mass.

Environmental Consultant: Triton Environmental, Guilford, Conn.