

A Case Study in Remediation

By Michael Sylvester, Director of Business Operations, The Whitman Companies

Like many municipalities across the country, the borough of Lodi in Bergen County, New Jersey, found itself with a downtown that was in need of revitalization. Most of the problems — a lack of economically productive businesses and numerous under-utilized buildings — were contained to 45 acres where years of neglect had left former industrial parcels blighted, unsafe and unproductive.

In 1993, Lodi took the first step in moving toward a more pedestrian-friendly and economically vital downtown, declaring the 45-acre area a redevelopment zone. But still more work needed to be done. An eight-acre brownfield site within the zone, located between Main Street and Saddle River, was heavily contaminated by years of industrial and warehousing use and needed to be cleaned up before the project could really get off the ground.

The town's plans for the area were to widen the street width of Main Street and reconfigure the current site to accommodate a variety of businesses, including banks and accounting firms, offices space, retail fronts and a Shop-Rite grocery store, which would be the first building completed under the redevelopment plan. With the help of developer Lodi Markets, LLC, that plan was fleshed out and the feasibility of the project was realized. The Whitman Companies was hired by Lodi Markets to not only facilitate the necessary on-site environmental work, which included remediating soil and groundwater contamination on the site where the grocery store would eventually go, but to also manage environmental aspects of the redevelopment project as a whole.

Some developers shy away from brownfield redevelopments because the work is subject to a number of state and local regulations. However, Whitman has been working on these projects for years, and we have been able to convert our expertise into cost savings and shorter project timelines for our clients. Our first task at Lodi was to refocus the project, and getting all parties, seller, redeveloper and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection on the same page. This was critical to ensuring that the overall schedule for site redevelopment could be maintained. By working directly with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection as well as other state and local agencies, Whitman was able to facilitate and directly implement portions of the required environmental work, including dewatering activities and designing a state-of-the-art vapor mitigation and collection system for the site. But perhaps even more importantly, Whitman was able to obtain the necessary agreements for the redeveloper to recoup roughly 75 percent of the cost of the environmental work over an eight-year period through the sales tax that would be generated at the site. The total redevelopment costs for the entire 45-acre site is estimated at \$18 million, including remediation expenses totaling \$7.7 million.

Whitman estimates that the site, once rehabilitated, will produce \$708,000 in taxes annually, not including the \$270,000 in sales tax generated by construction revenue and the \$150,000 annually generated in corporate business taxes. From the two years since the initial environmental testing to the current near-completion of Phase I of the project, Whitman has acted as a supporting member of the stakeholder team, bridging the gap between the former owner, the private developer and state and local agencies that can often occur in redevelopment projects. A Shop-Rite has opened at the site and additional retail space is being developed. The redeveloper is in the process of acquiring another parcel across Main Street from the brownfield site. Plans are in the works to place a bank, restaurant, accounting firm and additional office and retail space within the redevelopment zone. Whitman has been retained to do the assessment work on the next phase of the property.

What was once an eyesore is poised to become a vibrant downtown, with a variety of retail, residential, commercial and recreational uses. Whitman was able to facilitate environmental issues associated with the project and guide it through environmental regulations to create a productive development that meets the needs of employees and employers, as well as visitors and residents.

About The Whitman Companies

The Whitman Companies is an environmental, engineering and management firm, offering expertise in brownfield redevelopment, civil and geotechnical engineering, site assessment, remediation cost recovery, ground water contamination and recovery, indoor air quality solutions, industrial hygiene and innovative remediation technologies. In 2007, Whitman acquired Brownworth Engineering, a mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineering firm located in Piscataway, N.J. The acquisition has created one of the largest full-service firms in the state, providing expertise in all areas of environmental and engineering services.

For more information
www.whitmanco.com.