

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)

Presents

Building on History

[Arleen O'Donnell, Acting Commissioner, MassDEP]: Massachusetts was the first state in the country to have a privatized cleanup program, so that makes us unique. Rather than trying to attempt to take on the 20,000+ hazardous waste sites with our own staff, we leveraged the support of the private sector and we license site professionals to actually do the site cleanup and then we do audits and oversee the cleanup. That has resulted in very quick cleanups of hazardous waste sites, what would otherwise take years and years...

Springfield

[Narrator]: Did you know basketball was invented here? – But not in Boston, at the other end of the state, in Springfield. Today, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame is a shrine to all things basketball. But it is a museum that almost wasn't.

[Andrew Crystal, Vice-President, O'Connell Development Group]: Our involvement began in 1995; through a mutual acquaintance we approached the then Executive Director of the Basketball Hall of Fame. They were in an existing building that's at the north end of this project site and their admissions were faltering and they were thinking about taking the museum and leaving the state of Massachusetts, going to a location that would enable them to boost their admissions. We came in and proposed to them that we would do a feasibility analysis on alternate sites within Massachusetts and the greater Springfield area, because that's where the game was born. We wanted to keep it here. Our legislative delegation was very much in support of that – they didn't want to see the Basketball Hall of Fame Museum move, either. The result of that analysis was that this was, in fact, the best site: it had great highway access, it had great visibility, and people were used to coming here to see the Basketball Hall of Fame. So we presented that to the Board of Trustees. They agreed that this was the best location and then we undertook designing a program for them to expand.

This project was absolutely a public/private partnership. The City of Springfield for many, many years had tried to develop the riverfront. Putting the basketball Hall of Fame here was a big step forward. I think the City's hope was that it would be a catalyst so that the development would happen around it.

[Richard Green, Site Management Section Chief, MassDEP]: Just prior to this building, there was a Salvation Army building and there were other commercial/industrial properties in the area. Prior to that, the property was used by the manufactured gas plant

(which was actually located north of here) for the storage of the gas. They had these large above-ground storage tanks right where the basketball Hall of Fame is located now.

[Andrew Crystal, Vice-President, O'Connell Development Group]: We knew there was a coal gasification plant on the site, in a prime area of the site, so we anticipated that there would be some environmental cleanup.

[Richard Green, Site Management Section Chief, MassDEP]: I think the first time I heard about it is when the City filed an Environmental Impact Report, and MassDEP reviews those. I work for the Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup, and we get involved with releases of oil or hazardous materials. The comment that we put forth to the City was that it is very likely, given the location of the project, that they would run into contamination associated with the former manufactured gas plant.

[Narrator]: And they did.

[Richard Green, Site Management Section Chief, MassDEP]: And they did.

[Narrator]: How bad was it?

[Richard Green, Site Management Section Chief, MassDEP]: When you're talking manufactured gas wastes, it is bad: it stinks, it is highly toxic, and it doesn't break down.

[Andrew Crystal, Vice-President, O'Connell Development Group]: A lot of what was in the ground that was hazardous, we identified early. There were some things, as we were digging, that we uncovered that weren't identified early on. We went through a process – we had a Licensed Site Professional here during the construction, so when we found a tank that we were unaware of we handled in the proper manner. The local DEP office was very cooperative. They understood the importance of our schedule moving forward at a quick pace and they cooperated. The City – every department within the City – was very cooperative. As we found contamination in the ground, trying to bring the building up from underground, all of that was dealt with in a very speedy manner.

Not only was it a contaminated site, as I said, it was an urban renewal site. There were a lot of run-down buildings, there were some abandoned buildings on the property, and the entire riverfront was not what the City had hoped it would be. From my client's standpoint, the basketball Hall of Fame, the neighborhood wasn't a conducive neighborhood for people to travel great distances to visit this museum. Part of their boosting their sales was to increase the size of the museum, put in new exhibits, make it more friendly for the visitors, but also to create a neighborhood around the museum that was appealing and would attract people to come and spend three, four or five hours on the location. Not only was it helpful and satisfying for us to clean up a contaminated site and recycle it – put it back into productive use – but it was more than just the environmental contamination, it was an urban renewal district, and we've totally redone it. I think that's one of the things the City is most proud of. We've created a riverfront that's now one of the key parts of how Springfield markets itself. The Hall of Fame saw

their attendance almost double the first year they opened. We've brought in some fine dining restaurants that are some of the best in the City of Springfield. Come by on a Friday or Saturday evening and you'll see this parking lot absolutely packed.

[Richard Green, Site Management Section Chief, MassDEP]: I think the City and the Basketball Hall of Fame had a clear plan in mind and they weren't going to let any contamination stand in its way. It was a win-win situation because the cleanup got done and the redevelopment was able to proceed on schedule.

[Arleen O'Donnell, Acting Commissioner, MassDEP]: We view Brownfields Redevelopment as sending two important messages to the public. One is that the environment is clean, and the other is that the economy is doing well. Those two messages, together, send a very powerful signal that those two things go hand-in-hand. I think, more importantly, for every Brownfields that's redeveloped, that's one less Greenfield, one less forest that's destroyed for new development.

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