

Never Too Much of *Some* Good Things

By Lisa Alexander (Photography by Paul Locke)

On Thursday, November 29th, the Patrick-Murray Administration proclaimed November as “Brownfields Month.” For the savvy attendees at the State House event – municipal officials (including past and new award recipients) and various representatives from the 24 state and federal agencies involved in Brownfields redevelopment – Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray graciously simplified the official Proclamation’s many “whereas” points as “a wicked awesome” decision. The energy in the room was palpable, and why not? Those in the “21E” world “get” it.

MassDEP/Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup staff and Licensed Site Professionals are well aware of the benefits of remediating and redeveloping contaminated properties in urban areas. Indeed, the 21E program has always been about ensuring the cleanup of sites that were contaminated by oil and/or hazardous waste (OHM) so that they are safe to use and occupy again. The Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP) offers various post-cleanup scenarios with a range of allowable cleanup concentrations, based on limited access or exposure to said contamination, and recognizing that most sites could be safely reused even *with* some OHM remaining.

The “white knight” provisions (effective December 2007, and promulgated in the Valentine’s Day, 2008 MCP update), put forth additional protections for those willing to step up and repurpose these properties. Still, there were some sites that languished with no buyers, no viable owners, no one even attempting to fully assess them, much less clean them up, and no town able to take on the full extent of the project itself. Hence, the formation of the Brownfield Support Team (BST) initiative in 2008 to coordinate an alphabet soup of as many as 24 state and federal agencies that might need to be involved in any given Brownfield remediation and redevelopment project. The BST brought together agencies with legal expertise, technical guidance, business skills and even grant money.

MassDEP Commissioner Ken Kimmell kicked off the event, and spoke about the evolution of the Brownfields program over the years, the hundreds of acres of land put back into productive use, the millions of dollars in grants and investments made toward the redevelopment and the community-wide benefits that follow as a result. In October 2011, BWSC’s Boston Brownfields coordinator, Catherine Finneran, moved to the MassDEP Commissioner’s office to work on Clean Energy projects, and Brownfields moved into the Commissioner’s office where it is now under the oversight of the Associate Commissioner, Kerry Bowie in his role as Director of Brownfields and Environmental Justice. Also, in 2011, Benjamin Ericson, formerly at the Attorney General’s Office (where he worked



on Brownfields' Covenants-Not-to-Sue), was designated as the BWSC Assistant Commissioner. All are further evidence of the high level of interest in the forward progress of these complex projects in Massachusetts.

As a side note, in addition to the economic benefits associated with Brownfields redevelopment, Brownfields have significant “green” implications as well. They are often located within city limits, near people, utilities, transportation routes and roads. When Brownfields are effectively redeveloped, it can preserve undeveloped open space, wild lands and wetlands, and generally require less effort, carbon emissions, energy and resources than building on “new” locations. Further, if they are redeveloped or designed as energy efficient buildings, or add a renewable energy component, or they open up some green additional space around them, well, then they are not only redeveloped “sites,” they are something “even better.” So while “clean energy” is a factor in selection of awardees, all Brownfields have a potentially inherent green, energy efficient component. (For example, see the reports from the Northeast-Midwest Institute at <http://bit.ly/Vg0GLU> .)

Commissioner Kimmell introduced Lieutenant Governor Murray who praised the BST program and acknowledged several of the persons involved. When Lt. Gov. Murray nodded toward my area of the room to recognize “John Fitzgerald,” I had to look around and was surprised to find I was sitting next to him -- that is, the *other* John Fitzgerald, from the office of Housing and Community Development in the Urban Renewal office. He enthusiastically stated that working on these projects is “wonderful” and indicated that the BST model of cooperation is a great way to get projects done.



Curt Spalding, the EPA Region 1 Administrator, spoke briefly, and praised Massachusetts as a leader and role model in Brownfields redevelopment. Spalding said that “Massachusetts needs to take credit for their successes in this area.” He noted that other states are starting to follow our example, and further noted that the “word from Washington D.C.” is that they “want EPA to be a good partner” in the effort.

We in BWSC know that many in the LSP community have worked with various public and private “white knights” to come in and minimize risks that enable developers to turn these once toxic eyesores into low-impact, low-emission, re-designed buildings or open spaces for productive use. Some early successes (documented in the videos “Building on History”

<http://bit.ly/Vg1OiC>) include:

- Genzyme in Cambridge,
- North Common park in Lawrence,
- Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, and
- Massachusetts Museum of Modern Art in North Adams.

Apparently our success was noticed. The latest group to join the BST groups is the Department of Energy Resources (DOER). Each year, when the Lieutenant Governor selected sites for the bi-annual BST awards, there were certain criteria in mind:

Round 1 focused on smart growth, clean energy, open space and transit-oriented development; awards went to projects in Fall River, Grafton, Haverhill, Springfield, and Worcester.

Round 2 focused on redevelopment with significant transit benefits, municipal capacity-building, promotion of green business and commercial development that will increase tax revenue and jobs; awards went to projects in Attleboro, Chelmsford, Chicopee, Gardner, and Somerville. Brockton was also designated a special BST status where a group is working to assess potential sites.

The Round 3 choices announced on November 29th were made with a focus on environmental sustainability and clean energy projects which will actively incorporate solar, geothermal and other clean energy options into the redevelopment. The awards went to:

- Lower Millyard in Amesbury (40 acres);
- the former Lewis Chemical site in Hyde Park, Boston (0.7 acres);
- the Central Steam Plant in Fitchburg (4 acres);
- Ludlow Mills in Ludlow (170 acres); and
- the Payne Cutlery and former Elco Dress sites in New Bedford (about 5 acres, combined).

I spoke to Amesbury's Mayor, Thatcher Kezer III after the event. He seemed truly delighted to have the Amesbury project moving forward, and said he only learned two days before that Amesbury was going to receive one of the awards. He'll be working with Joanne Fagan and the MassDEP NERO staff on the project. Millie Garcia-Serrano, the SERO/BWSC Deputy Regional Director and Gerard Martin, SERO Brownfield's coordinator, both in attendance, will be helping move things forward in New Bedford. Ms Garcia-Serrano noted that SERO has been a proud participant in the BST program since its inception and the Southeast Region has long advocated for Brownfields development for the communities in the region. (A future article will highlight one of their projects in more detail.)

For the official MassDEP press release for the event and additional details on the awards and projects and priorities discussed at the BST event, go to:

<http://www.mass.gov/governor/pressoffice/pressreleases/2012/3rd-round-of-brownfields-support-team-announced.html>

For all (other) things Brownfields (projects, regulations, policies, legal issues, success stories, etc) go to: <http://www.mass.gov/dep/cleanup/brownfie.htm#intro>