

Brownfields Success Story

Fonda Site

St. Albans, Vt.

The once blighted site of a paper product company in St. Albans, Vt., is now being shared by a national railway dispatching center and will be the future home of 100 new housing units.

Priming the Property for Redevelopment

Redeveloping the long-vacant brownfields site has been a high priority for the city. St. Albans is the largest city in predominantly rural Franklin County in the northwest corner of the state. Beginning in the 1940s, the site was home to the Fonda Container Company. The complex of three buildings housed a variety of chemicals, solvents, and other hazardous materials used to make paper products. The manufacturing plant stopped operations in 2005 when the company merged with the Solo Cup Company and closed its doors. Job loss, and concerns about negative economic decline in the surrounding area, prompted the City of St. Albans to buy the property in 2007 and start the process of redevelopment. However, contaminants from the former manufacturing at the site stood in the way.

In 2011, the city invested over \$1 million into the property, demolishing one building and putting up fencing around a 3-acre concrete slab that contained high levels of PCBs. In 2013, the State of Vermont chose the Fonda site as one of three sites in the state to be part of the pilot for the Brownfields Economic Revitalization Alliance (BERA). BERA is a joint effort with the VT Agency of Natural Resources, the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the VT Agency of Transportation to assist communities in bringing high priority brownfields sites back into economic productivity. The Fonda site received \$1.75 million in direct state funding to address contamination and finalize cleanup of the site from the BERA program.

In addition, in 2017 the city tapped into the EPA Brownfields grant program through the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) to fully assess the nature and extent of the contamination and prepare for cleanup and redevelopment.



Railway dispatching center (photo credit: Town of St. Albans)

Total EPA Funding: \$1,147,379

- Brownfields Assessment: \$345,052
- Brownfields Cleanup: \$802,327

Funders:

- Northwest Regional Planning Commission – EPA Assessment and Revolving Loan Fund grants
- City of St. Albans – EPA Cleanup grants
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development – EPA Revolving Loan Fund grant
- Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation – EPA Assessment grant

Leveraged Funding:

- State of Vermont: \$2.25 Million
- City of St. Albans \$1 Million
- Northern Border Regional Commission: \$443,956

Former Use:

Paper production facility



Fonda site after building demolition (photo credit: Town of St. Albans)



Rendering of proposed senior housing complex (photo credit: Town of St. Albans)

“The redevelopment of the Fonda site is the City’s biggest economic development priority. This has been a long time coming, but the risk of doing nothing with the site far outweighed the time and effort that has gone into tackling this challenge with our funding partners.”

Chip Sawyer,
Director of Planning and Development

Work to clean the site continued for several years, paid for by a variety of EPA Brownfields grants and state resources. Contaminants found at the site included asbestos, lead, PCBs, semi-volatile organic compounds, and chlorinated volatile organic compounds. These contaminants were found in building materials, groundwater, and soil. The clean-up involved removing hazardous building materials, demolishing buildings, excavating, capping areas with residual contamination at depth, and putting in controls to prevent any future exposure to contaminants. The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the City of St. Albans, and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation all partnered with the NRPC and contributed their EPA Brownfields funds towards the assessment and clean up. In 2020, St. Albans voters approved a \$1 million tax increment finance bond to help fund infrastructure improvements for the project.

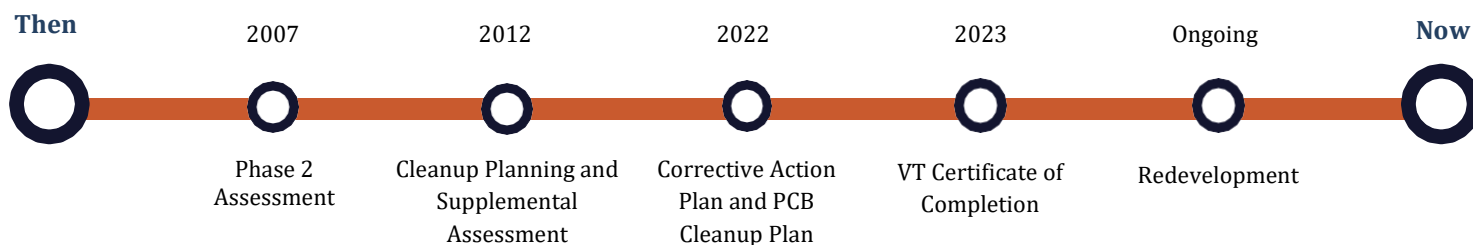
Additional financial assistance in the amount of \$443,956 for infrastructure improvements from the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) and \$500,000 from the VT Community Recovery and Revitalization Program helped prepare the site and start redevelopment.

Today

The American Rail Dispatching Center sits in a 10,000-square-foot office building on the site of the former manufacturing facility on Lower Newton Street. The building occupies a third of the 5.5-acre parcel just north of downtown St. Albans. The company, which expanded to this property in 2022 from another location in the city, employs 60 workers who manage trains and track equipment along rail lines in the U.S. and Canada.

Residential development is planned for the remainder of the site. Over 100 units of mixed-income housing are proposed and expected to be built. Thirty-three housing units will be reserved for seniors with limited income who are over 55. Construction of the senior housing units is due to start in the Spring of 2024. The rest will be “workforce housing,” priced between 80% and 120% of area median income.

The City of St. Albans will form public/private partnerships to carry out the residential part of the redevelopment project. Communities in Franklin County and across the state face a critical need for new housing construction, and the reuse of a large portion of the Fonda site for housing will help alleviate this need.



For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Christine Beling at 617-918-1792 or Beling.Christine@epa.gov