

Brownfields Success Story

Repowering a Historic Landmark

Ambler, Pennsylvania Boiler House

The Borough of Ambler, Pennsylvania, was a bustling industrial community when the Keasbey & Mattison Company relocated its manufacturing business there from Philadelphia in 1881. Sixteen years later, the company constructed the 48,000-square-foot Boiler House as a generating station to power its asbestos manufacturing operations.

While the company collapsed after the Great Depression, the Boiler House remained and was sold several times to other asbestos producers until, in the 1980s, it sat vacant and neglected. The site was contaminated by asbestos, benzoate, arsenic, lead and other toxins—even a buried railcar filled with oil.

Though it had become an eyesore, the Boiler House stood as an icon of Ambler's industrial past. "Each time we would go to Ambler," says Jerry Nugent, executive director at the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Montgomery, "you could see the Boiler House was a prominent landmark." In the early 2000s, the Redevelopment Authority began working with Ambler Borough to revitalize a number of buildings in the area. It was time to do something about the former power station.

Working Through Steep Challenges

The biggest obstacle to redevelopment was environmental remediation. The Boiler House is adjacent to the former Ambler Asbestos Piles Superfund Site, and approximately \$4.6 million in environmental assessment and cleanup was required before renovations could begin. Every part of the building was washed, and each piece of rubble inside had to be cleaned before it could be transported to a landfill. Another challenge was financing the project. An \$847,000 EPA Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) loan helped trigger the rest of the project's \$14.2 million in financing from federal and state agencies. "One of the key pieces of the financing was the RLF," says developer John Zaharchuk, whose real estate development company purchased the Boiler House in the early 2000s. "You can't borrow money to redevelop a site that has this level of contamination. The RLF enabled us to put the other pieces of financing in place."



EPA Grant Recipient:

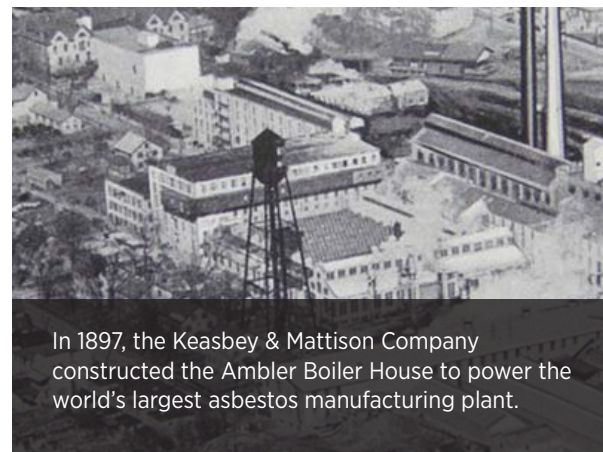
Redevelopment Authority of the County of Montgomery, Pennsylvania

EPA Grant Type:

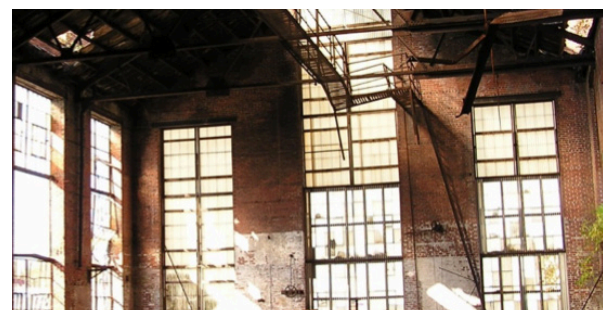
EPA Revolving Loan Fund

Former Use: Power Station for an Asbestos Manufacturing Plant

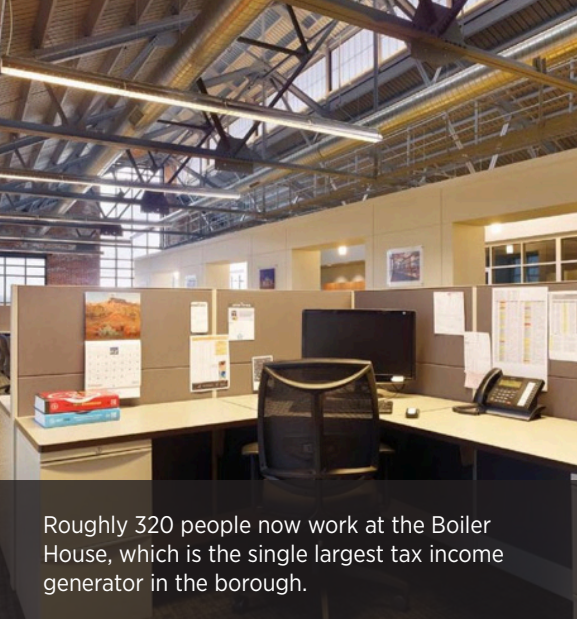
Current Use: Office Space



In 1897, the Keasbey & Mattison Company constructed the Ambler Boiler House to power the world's largest asbestos manufacturing plant.



After sitting vacant and contaminated for more than 20 years, each piece of the building's rubble had to be cleaned before it was taken to a landfill.



Roughly 320 people now work at the Boiler House, which is the single largest tax income generator in the borough.

“We get to see the impact every time we’re in Ambler. It’s pretty remarkable that something like this has had such a positive effect on the community.”

*Jerry Nugent,
Executive Director,
Redevelopment Authority of
the County of Montgomery,
Pennsylvania*

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Gianna Rosati at 215-814-3406 or Rosati.Gianna@epa.gov.

In 2009, an amendment to Act 2 under Pennsylvania’s Land Recycling Program limited environmental liability for economic development agencies like the Redevelopment Authority. After the new law was established, Zaharchuk’s company temporarily transferred the property title to the Redevelopment Authority during remediation. The Redevelopment Authority was then able to borrow money not available to private entities, which paved the way for the RLF-led cleanup and maximized financing opportunities. Once remediation was complete, the title was transferred back to the developer and construction began.

Reimagining the Boiler House

The process of remediation, redevelopment and reconstruction took about four years, concluding in 2012. The day construction ended, the building was already completely leased. Approximately 320 people currently work there, many of whom arrive each day by a 25-minute train ride from downtown Philadelphia. The building is LEED Platinum certified by the U.S. Green Building Council, due in great part to its geothermal heating and cooling system and extensive use of recycled materials during construction.

“We set out to create an environment that would enable our tenants to attract and retain employees,” Zaharchuk says. “For our tenants, the building is strategic. It’s not just a place for their business.”

Zaharchuk also has seen a difference in the community as a whole. Structures that were either uninhabited or underutilized are now under renovation. “I think everyone believes in this area,” he says. “Some of the older, adjacent commercial buildings are now trying to keep up with the Boiler House. Everyone is making sure their properties are in great condition.”

Constructing the Future

The Boiler House now contributes significantly to Ambler’s local economy while preserving a link to the borough’s history. Annual taxes on the property—barely garnering \$1,000 in the 1980s—are now at \$120,000, making the Ambler Boiler House the single largest tax income generator in the borough.

The parties that revived the Boiler House have partnered again to construct a ground-up development at an adjoining site. The Crossings at Ambler, a 115-unit apartment project, is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2018. An additional, \$250,000 loan from Montgomery County’s Brownfields RLF is helping fund remediation for the project.

“Ambler had a reputation as a declining former industrial community,” Nugent says. “Now it’s a hotspot. It’s a cool place to work and live.”