Brownfields
Success Story

Empowered by Innovation
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Historically, the shores of Philadelphia's Schuylkill River near University City and West Center City thrived with manufacturing jobs and businesses during the Industrial Revolution. The 3,700 acre industrial district was one of the older and more intensively used areas of Philadelphia and helped make the city a workshop of the world.

Over time, the heavy industrial exploitation of the Lower Schuylkill River contaminated the soil and groundwater of the area. Contaminants included polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and metals such as arsenic, lead, and chromium.

The steady decline of manufacturing and industrial enterprises as well as the outmigration of residents to the suburbs created a void in one of Philadelphia's most vibrant industrial locations. Despite the high levels of pollutants, vacant buildings, and blight from decades of decline, the Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development (PAID) and the City of Philadelphia recognized the incredible opportunity for redevelopment along the Lower Schuylkill River and decided to invest in the revitalization of the community.

Priming the Property for Redevelopment

In 2013, EPA Brownfield grant recipient PAID and the City of Philadelphia formed and initiated a 20-year, $400 million master plan to remediate and redevelop the Lower Schuylkill River area.

A key site in this effort was a former DuPont research and development site that sat atop 23 acres of contaminated land within the Lower Schuylkill River area. In 2015, PAID loaned and subgranted $600,000 of EPA Revolving Loan Funds to the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn), which leveraged an additional $37.5 million investment from the University, to clean up the contaminated soil of the property through institutional and engineering controls. The property was restricted to nonresidential site use and was capped with additional coverage of pavements and buildings.

The University of Pennsylvania originally took interest in the DuPont property due to its connectivity of the main campus to other areas of the city as well as providing beneficial opportunities to students. UPenn had the vision to acquire the property in October 2010. With EPA and City support, UPenn remediated the 23 acres brownfield site to help set the stage for the University's "Pennovation Center".

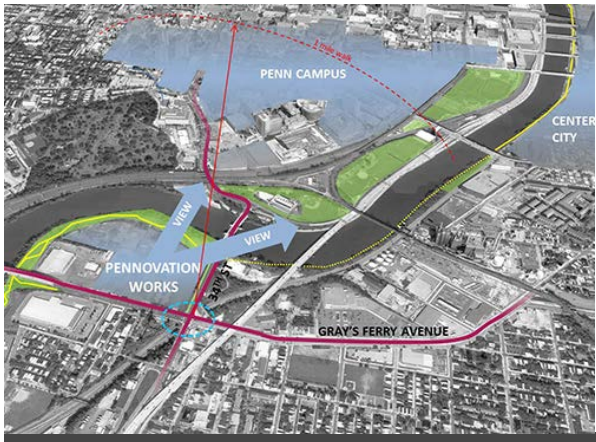
University of Pennsylvania's "Pennovation Center" is the cornerstone of Philadelphia's emerging Innovation District.

EPA Grant Recipient:
Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development

Grant Type:
Revolving Loan Fund

Former Use:
Industrial Research and Development

Current Uses:
Mixed-use Commercial and Research Incubator



Above: Pennovation Works is established within the Lower Schuylkill River area of Philadelphia near Center City and the main Penn campus. Below: The former DuPont facility, which was used primarily for producing resin and dispersing it in quantities up to 300 gallons.

EPA
United States Environmental Protection Agency

Open, social spaces and an emphasis on daylighting create an interactive hub for innovators from all disciplines to exchange ideas and collaborate on projects.

"The transformation of the 3,700-acre Lower Schuylkill River area into a 21st century commercial hub will provide greater connection for the surrounding neighborhoods, allow ideas and innovation to flow, and create a workplace for the future of Philadelphia."

John Grady,
President,
Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development

Kate McNamara (third from the right) receiving the 2017 Phoenix Award for the Pennovation Center.

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Stephanie Branche at 215-814-5556 or branche.stephanie@epa.gov.

EPA 560-F-17-197
August 2018

Effective partnerships and collaborations were able to propel PAID's master plan and vision forward in the early stages of cleanup and redevelopment. Federal, state, and city dollars were invested into the Lower Schuylkill River area to transform it into the Innovation District that is developing today.

"In planning the Lower Schuylkill, we saw tremendous opportunity for transformation, investment, and growth of an area that had been largely vacant and underutilized," said PIDC President, John Grady. "Realizing the vision of the master plan takes dedicated partners like the City of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, and the EPA."

Pennovation Center Today

By utilizing EPA Brownfield funding and removing the barriers to redevelopment, the Pennovation Center has been able to bring students and the private sector together to foster interaction and the exchange of ideas. The Pennovation Center is a LEED Gold certified establishment of cutting edge labs, creative common spaces, and inventor garages. Businesses range from a working dog center to a vaccine innovation lab to a drone and robotics lab. These facilities are designed to be an incubator for researchers, innovators, and entrepreneurs to advance science and commercialize research discoveries.

Green initiatives, stormwater management techniques, and sustainable development enhance the environmental stewardship of the 58,000 sq. ft. building. Additionally, the Pennovation center hosts a variety of programs, trainings, and events making it the driver of greater things to come in the Innovation District. The Pennovation Center earned PAID the prestigious 2017 Phoenix Award for excellence in brownfield redevelopment establishing it as one of the top brownfield projects in the country.

Down the Road

The Pennovation Center has opened the gateway for community revitalization in the Innovation District. Since opening, 64 companies and 266 entrepreneurs have used the space within the center. As these companies and entrepreneurs grow, they can expand to adjacent businesses or even form a business of their own.

PAID's master plan to improve the Innovation District articulated a phased approach with initial activity focused on the Pennovation Center. If development continues according to that plan, the Innovation District will surface as a key engine of Philadelphia's economy.

"We have continually seen results as we work together with our partners on the redevelopment of this area," said PIDC President, John Grady. "The Pennovation Center is just the beginning of a next generation of development that will continue to drive growth in this area."