

Finding New Life for Former Paper Mills

Analyzing emerging economic opportunities in Lee, Massachusetts



Project Summary

Community: Lee, Massachusetts

Technical Assistance: Economic Analysis

Former Use: Paper Mills

Future Use: Mixed Use Creative/Knowledge Economy Hub

The Town of Lee, MA has approximately 700 acres of historic industrial area consisting of four nearby former paper mills located within 1.5 miles of one another. The Town has been pursuing economic recovery opportunities since the last paper mill closed in 2008.

In 2013, the U.S. EPA provided a Brownfields Area-Wide Planning grant to the Town of Lee. The Town worked with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to develop an Area-Wide Plan that identified existing environmental conditions, community priorities, local infrastructure needs, and potential future uses for the mill sites. The regional development strategy encompassed two main themes: growth from within and leveraging existing amenities to create a mixed use, creative/knowledge economy that attracts compatible businesses.



Inside the current Columbia Mill Building

Community's Land Revitalization Challenge

The Town needed to fully understand whether the current local market conditions would support the site reuse alternatives identified in the Area-Wide Plan. The Town is pursuing a resilient economy that balances community

priorities, economic development, and adaptive site reuses that support modern business models.

EPA's Land Revitalization Technical Assistance

In 2016, EPA's Land Revitalization Program provided contractor technical assistance to develop the Northern Mills Market Analysis. The market analysis included research on local demographics, industry-specific commercial sales with consumer expenditures, and industry-specific retail opportunities. The contractor team aligned current market data with the proposed site reuses and described how the most viable uses at each mill site could take advantage of the rich cultural environment, lifestyle recreational activities, and anticipated growth in local entrepreneurial activity.

Potential Redevelopment Opportunities for Former Mills

Micro-brewery, café, food production
Small-scale industrial production/distribution
Performance/exhibition space, museum, art/culture
Boutique hotel/restaurant
Mixed-use commercial office/retail/residential
Knowledge, technology, start-ups, co-work, medical
Kayak/canoe landing, bike path/river walk
Organized sports venue/fitness center
Technical training
Warehousing and distribution

This technical assistance helps the Town of Lee incorporate emerging economic opportunities into their planning and consider more specific designs for redeveloping the former mills in conjunction with the community's goals.

For more information, contact Dorrie Paar, EPA Region 1 Brownfields Program, at paar.dorrie@epa.gov.