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Ground breakings bring new housing, entertainment venue and increased public access to waterfront - by Roberto DaSilva

December 16, 2022 - Rhode Island



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The city of East Providence, together with Churchill & Banks and its subsidiary Noble Development as well as the East Providence Waterfront Commission, broke ground on a new ambitious \$120 million waterfront development. The site, known as the former home to Washburn Wire and the Ocean State Steel Co., was a former brownfield site. The property was left in environmental ruins. The property was placed into a court-ordered receivership and was mired in a legal dispute since 2009. The city brought everyone to the table to overcome a number of challenges with the property.

The site has been remediated and reclaimed and will now be developed into 392 single and multi-family units in addition to apartments adding to the housing stock in East Providence. The development includes 39 age-restricted affordable housing units.

The former industrial area will feature six acres of public access to the waterfront, provide an accessible kayak launch and public access along Omega Pond and the Seekonk River as part of the Urban Coastal Greenway.

The city had the foresight to create the Waterfront Commission, which includes high-density zoning for the working waterfront areas of the Providence and Seekonk Rivers in order to someday transform the abandoned industry complexes into mixed-use or residential neighborhoods. East Point Development is another example of the Waterfront Commission's success.

South of the East Point Development, the city of East Providence, together with RI Waterfront Enterprises and the East Providence Waterfront Commission, broke ground on a new \$30 million concert venue location. The site, known as the Union Oil Co. of California (UNOCAL), has been inactive since 1984. The property, which is listed as a brownfield site by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, was left in environmental ruins.

To establish an understanding of the site, the owners looked at the region, history and site itself. They identified community goals, reviewed plan documents and analyzed existing conditions. They needed to overcome overarching challenges, such as remediation, flood risk, and storm water run-off. Lastly, the owners outlined an implementation strategy, including funding, phasing and operations.

"It's a win for the economy, a win for the local music scene and a win for our labor markets and workforce and what a win this is for Rhode Island's environment," RIDEM director Terrance Gray said. "This is another sequence of projects along the city of East Providence waterfront that takes a site that is underused with a few environmental challenges and makes it into something amazing. It's a success story."

The success of these two projects remediating and revitalizing underutilized brownfield sites for reuse is the result of the collaboration between the city of East Providence, the private sector, and state agencies.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence, R.I.

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