

Brownfields Success Story

Hilltop School Somersworth, N.H.

A 150-year-old three-story, brick building that for more than a century housed a school has been redeveloped into a building with office and gallery space as well as apartments. This historic building is completely occupied and provides residents and workers in the community a unique spot for living and working.

The Hilltop School building, built in 1871, rests on Prospect Hill overlooking the Salmon Falls River and the city of Somersworth, NH. The day school, which originally housed 350 students from elementary school through high school, was most recently known as the Hilltop Elementary School. After it closed in 2009, this historic building sat vacant for years. In 2015, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places, and the City of Somersworth began considering development options. Up until the 20th century, Somersworth provided employment for thousands with its six mill buildings powered by electricity generated by the 100-foot drop in river elevation over one mile. This quaint city of 10 square miles, a forty-five minute drive east from the state capitol of Concord, sits on the Salmon Falls River dividing New Hampshire from Maine. Ten minutes away is the Downeaster in Dover, NH, with rail service to Portland and Boston.

Priming the Property for Redevelopment

The Strafford Regional Planning Commission received an EPA Brownfields community-wide assessment grant in October 2015 and prioritized this site in Somersworth. Their team conducted an environmental site assessment which led to the discovery of minor issues - floor tiles, pipe insulation and other building materials containing asbestos, items with PCBs, and lead paint in the woodwork, all due to age of the building. To encourage the redevelopment, the city sold the property to a private developer and approved a tax incentive for housing and historic preservation. The developer, which specializes in redevelopment of historic properties, including former mills throughout New England, cleaned up the site by abating the asbestos containing materials and the hazardous materials. The redevelopment supported over a hundred construction-related jobs during 2019-2020. EPA's \$12,626 investment in grant funds helped spur an almost \$4,000,000 investment.



Front entrance for the Hilltop School (photo credit Chinburg Properties)

EPA Grant Recipient:
Strafford Regional Planning Commission

Grant Type:
Assessment

Current Use:
Residential Apartments and
Commercial Spaces

Former Uses:
Elementary and High School



Aerial photo of the Hilltop School (photo credit Chinburg Properties)



The Hilltop School (photo credit Chinburg Properties)

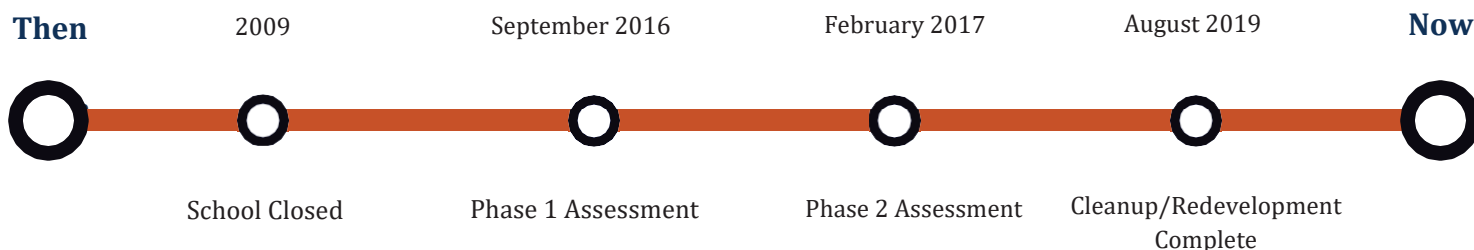
“ This a great example of a site where a relatively low-cost assessment was able to answer a few questions and make a much larger private investment possible. This project came at a perfect time for Somersworth and the greater seacoast. We have a housing shortage, and while we've seen more interest in redevelopment lately, this site was ahead of the curve.”

James Burdin
Strafford Regional Planning Commission

Today

Hilltop School is a now home to 22 residential apartments and six commercial spaces which are all occupied. The apartments are former classrooms showcasing huge windows and original materials. A common reception hallway exhibits the murals of previous student’s art going back over 100 years. Sitting within a mile of downtown, the Hilltop School allows residents to rent out commercial space where they can work and live. The school gymnasium was renovated for artists and provides both art galleries and retail space. This redevelopment sitting on top of Prospect Hill provides a unique lifestyle, with the beauty of its original structure enhancing the surrounding Victorian houses.

Project Budget	
2015 EPA Assessment Grant Funds.....	\$12,625
Cleanup Cost.....	\$30,000
Redevelopment Cost.....	\$3,850,000
Total.....	\$3,892,626



For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Amy Jean McKeown at 617-918-1248 or McKeown.AmyJean@epa.gov