

Brownfields

Success Story

Polar Park

Worcester, MA

A parking lot that sat vacant for 20 years has been redeveloped into a world-class baseball park. Sitting in the city's rapidly growing Canal District, the 10,000-seat ballpark brought 18-acres of brownfields to life. The ballpark is now home to the Worcester Red Sox (WooSox), the Triple-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox who relocated from Pawtucket, RI. In addition to hosting Worcester Red Sox games, Polar Park will hold concerts, school graduations, fundraisers, and other community activities.

In 2016, the City of Worcester and the Worcester Redevelopment Authority established the Urban Revitalization Plan to revitalize downtown Worcester and parts of the Canal District. Polar Park was part of this larger development initiative that succeeded due to the collaborative efforts between many public and private partners. The overall vision of this area was realized because of the hard work and tremendous support from the city, community, and these public and private partnerships.

Priming the Property for Redevelopment

The new baseball park sits on land that was used for parking by a transportation company that manufactures metal components for the automobile and aerospace industry. The company operated in Worcester for many years but consolidated its operations and demolished some of the remaining structures in the city in the early 2000s. Once the company consolidated and demolition started, the 18-acre brownfield created an opportunity for redevelopment. Worcester, once a thriving industrial city, faced the challenge of hazardous building materials and soil contamination, specifically petroleum, lead, arsenic, and other substances after the manufacturer closed. The land was vacant and underutilized as a parking lot for 15 years. The site became the focus of many different ideas and discussions of redevelopment, but the city eventually settled on a plan to redevelop it into a ballpark in an environmental justice area.

The project, led by the Worcester Redevelopment Authority, in partnership with the City of Worcester, the Commonwealth of MA including the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Worcester Red Sox (then Pawtucket Red Sox), EPA, and the private development firm worked together on the overall vision of the area. Thorough study of site conditions revealed that contaminated soils were present throughout the property and would need significant work to manage and clean up. With the help of a \$2 million grant from Mass Development's Brownfields Redevelopment Fund, \$7,300 from an EPA Brownfields Assessment grant, and \$500,000 subgrant from an EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund, over 150,000 tons of soil were excavated, managed, and taken off site.



Aerial View of Polar Park. (photo credit City of Worcester)

EPA Grant Recipient:
City of Worcester

Grant Types:
Assessment, Revolving Loan Fund

Current Use:
Baseball Park

Former Uses:
Parking Lot, Manufacturing Facility



Aerial View of Polar Park. (photo credit City of Worcester)



Polar Park's seats are symbolic of Worcester's location at the heart of the Commonwealth. (photo credit City of Worcester)

“Polar Park has been a shining example of what the Brownfields Program seeks to accomplish. The public investment in the ballpark has leveraged substantial private investment and has significantly generated both environmental benefits as well as economic benefits. The project has also added a new opportunity for family fun entertainment, contributing to the city of Worcester’s quality of life as a destination to live, work and play.”

Peter Dunn
Chief Development Officer
Executive Office of Economic Development

Remaining costs for construction and development resulted in approximately \$160 million total to build Polar Park.

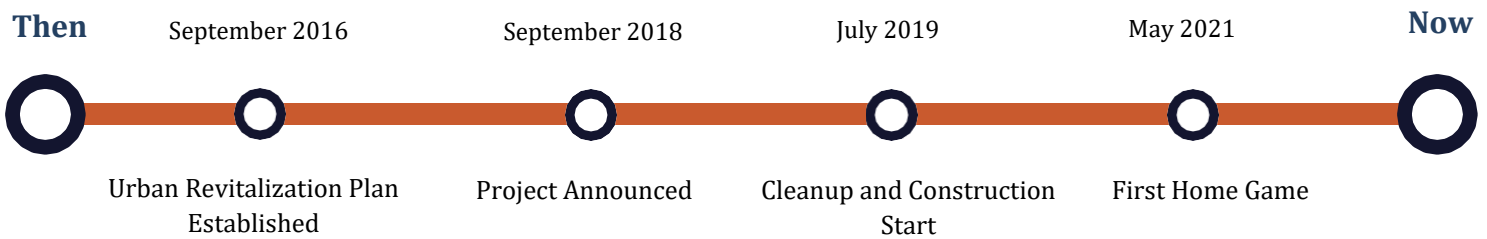
Today

The Canal District today is bustling with activity as residents, tourists, and college students enjoy its restaurants, cultural arts, entertainment, entrepreneurship, and retail activity. The addition of an innovative ballpark and relocation of the Worcester Red Sox has made this brownfield come alive in the city’s actively developing neighborhood. The renamed Worcester Red Sox has been welcomed into a growing district with support from both the city and community. The community even launched a postcard campaign where they mailed the team almost 10,000 postcards from the residents of the city voicing support for the relocation. Polar Park contributes significantly to the well-being of the city.

The ballpark is designed to look, feel, smell, and taste like Worcester. The name Polar Park is named after one of the most well-known companies in Worcester. The city also has a long history with the sport of baseball, notably the accomplishments of Hall of Famers Ted Williams and Lee Richmond. Stories of Ted Williams’ first professional league home run in an exhibition game at Holy Cross and Lee Richmond’s pitching of the first perfect game are highlighted throughout the ballpark, as well as elements and milestones of the Worcester Red Sox’s history. The team has embraced its new host city, taking on the yellow “smiley face” as its mascot, which was invented in Worcester. The ballpark’s light fixtures are in the shape of hearts, symbolic of Worcester’s location at the heart of the Commonwealth. A variety of venues and concession stands will feature food and beverage options from well-known local favorites. Local chefs and restaurants will operate on a rotating basis, each one having a chance to present their culinary products to the public. Worcester’s unique elements tie into the design and features of the ballpark, making every person feel like they are part of the community as soon as they walk in.

The ballpark officially opened for the first home game in May 2021. The city and developer have visions for the future development of the area around Polar Park. The future phases of redevelopment will focus on the southern portion of the site and may include a parking garage, hotel, residences, and other businesses. The developer started construction on the first 228-unit residential building in August 2021.

In June 2021, the Environmental Business Council of New England awarded the Polar Park project with the Nicholas Humber Award for Outstanding Collaboration in recognition of the partnership between public and private entities to complete a challenging urban renewal project in two years.



For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Dorrie Paar at 617-918-1432 or Paar.Dorrie@epa.gov.