

Petroleum Brownfields

Success Story

L&M Gas and Service Station *Lunenburg, Massachusetts*

A gas station in Lunenburg that operated for most of the 20th century but has sat abandoned and contaminated since the 1990s is ready for final cleanup and redevelopment so it can enhance the community.

For the past two decades, the abandoned L&M Gas and Service station remained in the residential and commercial center of Lunenburg. Just 500 feet from homes and 100 feet uphill from a wetland, the station at 925 Massachusetts Ave. sat idle for over 20 years with its canopy and pumps still standing and its underground storage tanks and piping still in the ground.

Because it was in the middle of town and the abandoned tanks created a potential hazard, this site became a priority for the Town. With help from EPA's Targeted Brownfields Assessment program, this abandoned leaking underground storage tank site has seen significant progress.

Site History

The site had been used as an auto repair shop, starting in 1918, with fuel pumps there as early as 1936. It operated as a gas station until the late 1990s when it was abandoned. The property was put into tax title around 2005 for non-payment of taxes, but the Town delayed taking ownership of the property for many years due to a fear of liability for any potential contamination on the site. One of the main concerns for contamination stemmed from the presence of the underground storage tanks left in the ground, which are among the most common sources of groundwater pollution in the United States.

Furthermore, the station had a history of not complying with requirements for underground storage tanks, landing it on the radar of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection with notices of non-compliance issued to the owner in 1987, 1991, and 1993. The site was listed by the EPA as a small quantity generator for hazardous waste, and oil and petroleum hydrocarbons were found in the soil. In 2007, MassDEP officially listed the property as a contaminated site with the tanks as one of the sources of contamination.

Despite the tanks being a source of contamination, the town could not use LUST Trust Fund money to empty and remove the tanks because it had not officially taken ownership of the property. This also prevented the town from being eligible for Brownfields funding for the site.



Two 10,000-gallon gasoline tanks being removed from the site in May 2023.

Funding Type:

Targeted Brownfields Assessment

Current Use:

Developers are bidding on redevelopment plans

Former Uses:

Gas and Service Station



One 4,000-gallon gasoline tank removed from the site in May 2023.

“Our hope is to revitalize this property and bring a service/business to this site that will [fit] the character and needs of the town and add to the economic development of the downtown area.”

Heather Lemieux
Town Manager, Lunenburg MA

Site Assessment

In 2019, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment of the site was paid for with local funding. Following this, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission received a \$300,000 Brownfields assessment grant from EPA to support communities in the area with qualified Brownfields projects. The commission invested \$36,000 of this funding to conduct a second assessment at the site. Both assessments confirmed the presence of hazardous substances, including arsenic, lead, PCBs, naphthalene, and aromatics in the soil.

With the results of these assessments, as well as knowledge of the past ownership, MassDEP concluded that the Town would not be considered liable for cleanup costs. With this knowledge, and upon the advice of their environmental consultant, the Town finally felt comfortable taking ownership of the property, which they completed in 2022. This made the site eligible for the Brownfields program, including direct technical assistance through the Targeted Brownfields Assessment program.

EPA selected the site in 2022 for Brownfields support and, work, which began in May 2023, included removing four tanks from the property, including two 10,000-gallon gasoline tanks, one 4,000-gallon diesel tank, and one 500-gallon oil tank as well as the associated piping. After the completion of this work, EPA initiated the next step of the site assessment: sampling the soil underneath the tanks for contaminants.

Soil samples collected from underneath the former tanks showed the presence of volatile petroleum hydrocarbons such as ethylbenzene and naphthalene as well as metals, including arsenic, mercury, and lead. The Town has been in contact with MassDEP and submitted forms indicating the tanks had been removed. Additional investigation activities are planned with the ultimate goal of LUST site closure and eventual redevelopment.

Hopes for the Future

The Town of Lunenburg continues to receive positive feedback on the work they have done on this property. Residents have shown their appreciation through “likes” on the town’s social media posts. The town is currently conducting additional site investigation to support final site cleanup and received a Real Estate Technical Assistance Grant through Mass Development to produce conceptual plans for redevelopment and assistance with drafting a Request for Proposals for disposition of the property. While the Town has already been approached by several interested buyers, Lunenburg plans to ask for proposals from developers on what can be done with the site. Town Manager, Heather Lemieux said, “Our hope is to revitalize this property and bring a service/business to this site that will [fit] the character and needs of the town and add to the economic development of the downtown area.”

For more information Contact:

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