

Brownfields

Success Story

Meeting Street

Providence, R.I.

Former commercial and industrial properties in South Providence have been redeveloped into a campus for a nationally recognized non-profit specializing in early childhood development and fully inclusive special education. Meeting Street has transformed an abandoned industrial area into a safer, greener space with athletic fields, parking, and 100,000 square feet of buildings. Its early childhood programs and schools now serve over 5,500 children and their families each year.

Working with EPA and other private and public partners, Meeting Street turned a brownfields site into the organization's 12-acre headquarters campus in 2006. Since then, enrollment has drastically increased and demand for services is quickly outpacing the organization's ability to meet it. Meeting Street plans to further expand in one of the most economically distressed communities in Rhode Island.

Priming the Property for Redevelopment

The Lower South Providence neighborhood, home to Meeting Street, includes a mix of housing, industry, and commercial uses. The neighborhood once hosted metals manufacturing businesses and auto repair shops. Changes in urban manufacturing in the 1970s drove middle-class families out of the neighborhood. This left behind empty properties, vandalized buildings, and concerns about contamination from lead, arsenic, volatile organic compounds, and petroleum products.

A \$200,000 EPA grant in 2004 funded the cleanup that led to Meeting Street opening the new campus in 2006. To continue with ambitious efforts to expand, Meeting Street applied for and received three additional cleanup grants totaling \$600,000 in 2018. They were also successful in competing for state funds, winning a total of \$1.2 million in funding through Rhode Island's Brownfield Bond Fund and Brownfields Remediation and Economic Development Fund. These funds helped clean up three industrial lots associated with a former metal plating business and automotive junkyard and repair shop. Meeting Street then expanded its parking and athletic facilities, adding a new outdoor track and a multi-sport artificial turf field that completed the second step in its four-part master expansion plan.

The partnership between EPA, the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, the R.I. Health and Educational Building Corporation, as well as other private and public funders, has led to successful cleanup of these four properties, creating a world-class \$55 million campus.



Meeting Street educational center buildings and athletic fields seen from above (photo credit: Meeting Street)

EPA Grant Recipient:
Meeting Street

Grant Types:
Cleanup, Targeted Brownfields
Assessment

Current Use:
Nonprofit Educational Organization

Former Uses:
Residential, Furniture Warehouse,
Automobile Service Facility, Metal Plating
Business



Meeting Street campus before cleanup and redevelopment (photo credit: Meeting Street)



Cleanup in progress, seen from above (photo credit: Meeting Street)

“The EPA Region 1 team has been an invaluable partner in Meeting Street’s 15-year journey to productively reuse brownfields across Lower South Providence. Our work to be a community resource for families, supporting the healthy development and education of all children, has been made possible by the EPA Brownfields program, and their collaboration with the RI Department of Environmental Management.”

John Kelly, President/CEO

Meeting Street

Today

Meeting Street has transformed the community of South Providence. Once an economically distressed area with high rates of poverty with little economic investment, few quality schools, and a lack of green space, the neighborhood now serves families and children of all abilities in early childhood programs and schools that deliver individualized education and on-site therapies. Meeting Street campus is now home to two buildings: Mondor Early Childhood Building and a school-age building. The former houses the agency’s fully inclusive Early Learning Center, a multi-modal Young Learners Library, sensory gymnasium, WIC offices, employee workspace and multiple community training rooms. The school building is home to four schools serving children between ages 4 and 22 and contains 45 classrooms, a multi-modal library, computer literacy center, science laboratory, gymnasium, therapeutic swimming pool, playgrounds, and occupational and speech-language therapy rooms. New parking lots offer safer traffic flow and more parking for visitors and families. The new athletic facilities are home to cross-country and spring track teams. Over 83 percent of students enrolled come from families living at or below the federal poverty threshold, highlighting the enormous contribution this project brings to economically distressed communities. With the influx of students and new programs, Meeting Street has even bigger plans for future redevelopment.

In 2022, EPA’s Targeted Brownfields Assessment Program helped Meeting Street assess another brownfield nearby for the next expansion. The final project is expected to create 50 permanent full-time and part-time jobs in South Providence. Meeting Street took what was left behind by New England’s industrial past and revamped it to improve safety and academic achievement, empowering residents and giving children a better chance to succeed.



Providence Campus Master Plan: Meeting Street’s campus expansion plan was divided into 4 phases. With the completion of the project, Meeting Street has a new building devoted exclusively to early childhood programming. (photo credit: Meeting Street)

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact

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