WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
BROWNFIELDSCENTER

SUMMERSET AT FRICK PARK (NINE MILE RUN)

LOCATION: Pittsburgh, PA

SIZE: 238 acres

FEATURES: Location, Significant Acreage

OWNER: Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh (URA), the City of Pittsburgh, & the Summerset Land Development Associates

CURRENT USE: Housing

PAST USE: Steel By-product Storage

CONTAMINANTS: Chromium

TOTAL ACTUAL COST: $22 million

TIMELINE

1922	Site is used as slag dump by Duquesne Slag Co.
1982	Department of Planning publishes first development proposals for site.
1995	URA purchases site for $3.8 million.
1996	Master plan is released for residential development
1999	Groundbreaking for Summerset.
1999	Regrading of slag begins.
2007	Phase I is completed.

HISTORY

Nine Mile Run was originally a wooded stream valley, nestled between the areas of Squirrel Hill and Swisshelm Park. In 1910, Frederick Law Olmstead recommended it as the best opportunity for a large park within the city, writing, "Its long meadows of varying width would make ideal playfields; the stream...will be an attractive and interesting element in the landscape; the wooded slopes on either side give ample opportunity for enjoyment of the forest for shaded walks and cool resting places."

However, the site's close proximity to the riverfront made it prime industrial real estate. In 1922 it was purchased by Duquesne Slag Company, and for 50 years it was used to dump slag, the by-product from smelting metals.

TOPOGRAPHY

By 1972, there were approximately 17 million cubic yards of slag in the valley piled as high as 120 feet with very steep sides. Slag does not retain water and is extremely alkaline so no vegetation was able to grow.

Summerset at Frick Park is bordered by the Nine Mile Run valley and stream, which is undergoing a multi-million dollar restoration. Surrounding are the communities of

Picture courtesy of Google Maps

Squirrel Hill, Swissvale, Wilkinsburg and Edgewood, and there is excellent access to the Waterfront and Rt. 376.

Summerset is approximately five miles east of Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle.

MARKET CONDITIONS

Initially, the city proposed four development options. First, 71 acres would be residential and the rest would be non-residential, primarily offices and light industry. Second, the site would be entirely residential. Third, the site would be entirely non-residential, which was an unlikely option because the surrounding areas are residential. And finally, it would be mixed residential and non-residential, similar to the first option, but with a heavier emphasis on non-residential.

Later, the city was considering constructing an additional limited-access highway to the area that would help to relieve traffic to downtown. There would have been a large interchange with Rt. 376 next to the site, and private developers showed great interest in the site - among them was J. Gumberg Company - to create a mega-mall and office center on the site. However, the adjacent communities protested the additional highway, and the complex was deemed impossible without increased access.

In 1994, the city revealed plans to develop the site into a strictly residential neighborhood. The success of the nearby Rosemont development showed a strong market for new urban residences, and the mayor believed that the key to the revitalization of Pittsburgh was to lure suburbanites back into the city limits.

SITE ASSEMBLY

In October 1995, the URA paid $38 million for the 238 acre site. 116 acres of which was deemed developable. In June 1996, a nine member master development team was chosen by the city, headed by the Rubinoff Company.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

The Phase II Environmental Site Assessment determined two areas of concern. First, there was a high level of chromium found at the site, but since plans required the slag to be covered in topsoil (to retain water and re-grade slopes to allow vegetation to grow), this was deemed harmless. Second, there was sewage overflows in Nine Mile Run.

The heavily polluted Nine Mile Run stream underwent a $7.7 million restoration. A natural watershed of approximately 7 square miles, Nine Mile Run is the largest stream on the east end of the city and raw sewage was overflowing into the stream, along with many non-point source contaminants common to urban watersheds.

SOCIAL/COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Summerset is located between four neighborhoods in Pittsburgh: Squirrel Hill, Edgewood, Swissvale, and Wilkinsburg, and all of the areas adjacent to the site are residential.

There were at least forty community meetings about this development. Local community resistance to the

development centered on the increased traffic due to the new residents, environmental improvements to and maintenance of the stream flowing though the property, and the possibility of contaminants in the slag becoming airborne during contruction activities. The developer had installed air monitors to appease this concern.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The developers built a main road throughout the housing development, complete with sidewalks. Also, the area is host to public transportation in the form of PAT buses.

Because there was no existing infrastructure, everything had to be constructed. Its total public financing was just under $39 million.

COSTS & ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The development received various grants and bonds for building and infrastructure construction. In terms of public financing, more than $11.5 million was given from city bonds, $12.5 million from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP), and $8.2 million from the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority.

CURRENT STATUS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Summerset at Frick Park is currently in Phase II of development. Phase I included 221 homes on 27 acres of land. Phases II will include 270 additional homes on 42 acres, and Phase III will include 213 homes on 40 acres. Phase I sales were a success.

Its neighborhood is a new urbanist community; however, it remains somewhat geographically and socio-economically isolated.

ECONOMIC / COMMUNITY IMPACT

The development is thriving, shown by its ability to raise the property taxes for the area. The project is expected to generate over $2.9 million in annual revenue.

Public Financing

$ 11,687,766	City Bond
$ 3,101,828	Land Proceeds
$ 330,000	EPA Grant
$ 750,000	Foundations
$ 12,500,000	State - RACP
$ 742,080	State - Growing Greener
$ 1,500,000	County - LCTF
$ 8,235,000	PWSA
$ 38,846,674	TOTAL

Case Study Completed Summer 2007

SOURCES