LOCATION: Ambridge, PA
SIZE: 394 acres
FEATURES: Flat Land, Location - Proximity to Airport and Interstates, Significant Acreage
OWNER: The 43 parcels of land are held by more than 23 property owners. Anchor landholders include Moltoni and Value Ambridge Properties.
CURRENT USE: Light Industry, Underutilized (Vacant)
PAST USE: Steel Manufacturing
CONTAMINANTS: Oil, Asbestos, Debris, PCBs
TOTAL ACTUAL COST: $60 million for proposed Moltoni 10-acre mixed-use development

TIMELINE
1900 The American Bridge Company is formed.
1905 Ambridge is incorporated.
1983 The American Bridge Company ceases operation.
2005 Moltoni purchases the H.H. Robertson Property and New Economy Business Park.
2006 H.H. Robertson plant is demolished.
2008 Construction for the Moltoni development begins.

HISTORY
The Borough of Ambridge may not have existed without the formation of the American Bridge Company in 1900. The American Bridge Company was the result of a merger between twenty-eight small bridge and structural steel companies. It was stationed in a town that the company built for its workers, later named Ambridge.

The oil embargo of the 1970s and the importation of foreign steel gradually eroded the profitability of the Ambridge plant. In 1983, the economic relationship between Ambridge and American Bridge ended when the company ceased operation.

Ambridge and adjoining Harmony Township have 394 acres of brownfields in their industrial corridor. The corridor is made up of 43 parcels and owned by 23 separate property owners. Many of the properties were formerly used by the steel industry in steelmaking, fabrication, transportation (rail lines), and disposal (slag) processes associated with the American Bridge Company.

TOPOGRAPHY
The brownfields that make up the Ambridge/Harmony Industrial Corridor span from 11th Street to 24th Street between Route 65 and Duss Avenue. Its 43 parcels are flat and extend through the center of town. Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard and rail lines separate the site on the western side from the Ohio River.

Photo courtesy of http://www.ambridgeboro.org
MARKET CONDITIONS

The Ambridge/Harmony area has many positive assets, including housing stock, human capital–community pride and cultural diversity, the school system, churches, proximity to the Pittsburgh International Airport and interstate highways, an existing central business district, and history present in Old Economy Village. The Borough of Ambridge does have one of the highest vacancy rates in Beaver County.

An Australian developer Rob Moltoni has initiated a project in 2005 to take advantage of Ambridge’s pedestrian scale and the local historic Old Economy Village. This development may include retail space and housing options on 10 acres of the site.

SITE ASSEMBLY AND CONTROL

The Pittsburgh Steel Construction Company, later named Central Tube Company in 1909 was bought by H.H. Robertson in 1940. The area was later purchased by Moltoni in 2005.

Some of the most significant blocks of the land in the corridor and their respective property owners are as listed:
- **Toth Property, former H.H. Robertson block** – Rob Moltoni
- **Ambridge Industrial Center, former H.K. Porter Company, Inc. and National Electric Division property** – Rob Moltoni
- **New Economy Business Park, former Central Tube company and H.H. Robertson property** – Rob Moltoni
- **Wycoff Steel** – Waste Management Industries
- **Babcock and Wilcox** – Koppel Steel
- **Armco Steel Plant** – Value Ambridge Properties
- **A.M. Byers** – Brunner Inc., Brunner Enterprises, and Rosenberger Land Co.
- **Legionville area** – Pekich, Gerald, Unis, Mitchell, Jerart Slag, Friend, and Barlmas
- **National Electric block** – Allen, Thomas, Ambridge Industrial Center, Economy Industrial Properties, and Straight Steel Building Corporation

There are limited controls present at any of these properties to prevent unauthorized personal from entering the properties.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Fifteen of the corridor’s parcels met the criteria for Phase I environmental assessments through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's Industrial Sites Reuse Program (ISRP).

The Toth Property and the Ambridge Industrial Center hosted tar pits, painting facilities, oil drums, underground and aboveground storage tanks, electrical and mechanical equipment, and other potentially polluting chemical agents in the past. Phase I noted the presence of two 430,000 gallon oil tanks to the east of the area, miscellaneous debris, PCBs, possible asbestos-containing materials, an oil container, miscellaneous fill materials across the site, former rail sidings, and railroad ties. Site soils contained only limited areas of potential contamination. Most of the preliminary groundwater data are within acceptable levels.

SOCIAL/COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2001, the manager of Ambridge Borough approached the Brownfields Center of Western Pennsylvania at Carnegie Mellon University (WPBC) to facilitate a series of workshops focused on 60-acres of the brownfields existent in the community. The WPBC was able to spotlight the area by bringing in national redevelopment experts. They spent several days surveying the land and providing their unbiased opinions and comments regarding the community and possible development. A few years after the first workshop, the area garnered international fame.
when an Australian developer, Rob Moltoni, became interested in the site. In 2006, the WPBC reviewed the progress of the community and the Moltoni development in a second workshop with many of the same experts. To aid the WPBC in orchestrating the workshops, a community-based team, the Ambridge Area Brownfield Partnership, formed. Its main goal was to continue interest in the development of the corridor.

During the workshop, the Brownfields Center and the Ambridge Area Brownfield Partnership set up community meetings and distributed two surveys—one in 2001 and the other five years later—to the attendees. These surveys gauged the public awareness of the developer’s intent of construction and public awareness of the concept of brownfields. The survey process revealed that the community and the development might benefit from greater avenues of communication and increased education about brownfields and a brownfield’s inherent opportunities.

These series of workshops advised several “next steps” that Ambridge and Harmony Township should take in order to continue with the revitalization of the area:

- develop business clusters, as well as a brownfield cluster, with the objective of focusing efforts towards one purpose
- establish an environmental court that will publicly review local environmental violations on a regular interval
- apply for state (PA DEP, PA DCED) and federal funds (US EPA)
- apply for an interagency personal agreement
- develop closer ties with Beaver County
- introduce Ambridge/Harmony to the philanthropic community
- pursue business development center/incubator
- develop business retention/expansion strategy
- explore additional municipal powers that can convert into development incentives
- adopt a beautification campaign for the industrial corridor

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Two state roads run through Ambridge, Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard and State Route 989. Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard is a multi-lane road that traces the north shore of the Ohio River to the Pittsburgh city limits.

Route 65/Ohio River Boulevard provides three main access points into Ambridge; however, transportation access may be limiting the area’s development. Within the borough, the roads were designed for a time when short haul railroads were common, and the primary means of local transportation was muscle-powered. This means that the streets are fairly narrow with short blocks. There are a number of one-ways streets, too. While this is advantageous from pedestrian design perspectives, these qualities hinder easy truck access to the Toth site and other properties within the industrial district.

In 2006 Moltoni considered widening Merchant Street to give the trucks easier access. Also, Route 989/Duss Street is wide enough to accommodate turns by large trucks. Duss St. could be an important access route to the Toth property if the proposed $1.5 million extension of 19th Street to Route 65 is constructed; however, this initiative has little funding.

In terms of site utilities, new water connections and valves may be preferable to using the existing infrastructure in order to prevent leakage.

The development made great progress with the demolition of the H.H. Robertson plant in late 2006, and in 2007 the surrounding area underwent a $1.2 million main street initiative in order to update the façade of its buildings.

COSTS & ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

New Economy Business Park received a $30,000 grant for a Phase I Assessment on 19 properties. Moltoni received a $175,000 state planning grant through the County Redevelopment Authority for the preparation of the site. The project was awarded $3 million in Capital Budget funding in 2006. As of January 2007, Moltoni’s proposed $60 million project has received $3.5 million in state funds.
New construction is expected to begin in 2008.

Other local businesses received money for expansions in Ambridge. CENTRIA, a coal coating facility, received a $50,000 opportunity grant, $82,000 in tax credits, and up to $450 in customized job training per employee to create an additional 41 jobs over the next 3 years and retain 217 existing employees. The Moltoni development is credited for the CENTRIA expansion by generating local energy and encouraging business additions. Facility upgrades have reduced monthly gas consumption by 16.5% while increasing production by 33%. By installing a new state-of-the-art oven system, CENTRIA can capture the paint’s volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions to produce fuel.

Druzak Medical, an Ambridge medical supplier, received a $75,000 opportunity grant and a $200,000 Small Business First loan. Its $3.7 million expansion created/retained 41 jobs. It expanded twice before becoming landlocked. It relocated to Centre Township, Beaver County because it outgrew its location. Pocket Nurse Enterprises, Inc, a distributor of medical educational items, received up to $8,000 in tax credits from the state of Pennsylvania to retain 29 jobs at their facility, as well as add 8 new jobs. O’Neal Metals, a metals manufacturer, relocated from Alabama and was welcomed with a $50,000 opportunity grant, $88,000 in tax credits and up to $700 in employee in job-training assistance. It has generated 44 new jobs.

CURRENT STATUS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Ambridge engaged in smart growth practices by opening a Park and Ride in 2002, and the historic district opened a visitor’s center in 2003, increasing employment and promoting tourism.

The brownfield area made progress with the demolition of the H.H. Robertson plant in 2006. Moltoni expects to spend $600,000 in exterior painting and renovation of floors in the existing structures. The developer hopes to complete the installation of wiring and communication devices on the site by late 2008. As of 2007, Moltoni’s proposed development included retail, housing, a brewery, and a food processing company. Some community members objected to Moltoni’s mixed-use development, hoping that industry would come back into the area. Local officials were able to change the site’s zoning from manufacturing & industrial to commercial to make way for the Moltoni development.

Also, Merchant Street has undertaken the Main Street Program. The program, which renovates the facade of buildings, started in 2003.

ECONOMIC/COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Moltoni development’s success thus far has driven the expansion of CENTRIA and other businesses in the area. The market value of housing is expected to increase after the development is completed.

Case Study Completed Summer 2007

SOURCES


