

Trostel Tannery

PUB-RR-855

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Trostel Tannery

1776 N. Commerce Street
Milwaukee, WI
Milwaukee County

5 acres

Location: A heavy industrial and commercial section of downtown Milwaukee, between the former Beer Line “B” rail line and the Milwaukee River.

One of the world’s largest tanneries goes from brownfield to beautiful, multi-colored condominiums along the Milwaukee River.

History

The process of tanning animal hides for leather had long been a staple of American industry, and one of the most environmentally disturbing. When the city of Milwaukee looked to redevelop a strip of industrial property along the Milwaukee River, the former Trostel Tannery site was a major obstacle blocking the way.

As early as 1858, the Albert Trostel & Sons Company was operating in Milwaukee, with their largest tannery opening on Commerce Street around 1885. It was a massive facility, one of the world’s largest and stood in a

growing industrial area of the city, where the Beer Line “B” railroad track sliced through.

Trostel stayed open for nearly a century, before the tannery was decommissioned in the late 1970s.



The Trostel Tannery was a major Milwaukee employer for nearly 100 years (photo courtesy UW-Milwaukee Archives).

Investigation and Cleanup

Remediation of the Trostel Tannery was made easier by the fact that the building was imploded in the 1980s. Testing of the soil revealed impacts of high levels of chromium and sulfate. Groundwater was also impacted, but at lower levels.

One cleanup strategy employed involved pushing impacted soils into a raised mound in the center of what would become new apartments. These soils were then capped with clean fill and then turned into a central park and courtyard for the apartment complex.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Remediation and Redevelopment Program

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Redevelopment

For years, there was debate about what to do with the site. The state of Wisconsin purchased the site in the 1980s with the intention of building a prison, but those plans fell through. However, a plan by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee (RACM) to clean up the Beer Line “B” corridor proved to be the start of a new life for the former tannery.

The city looked to redevelop the Beer Line B corridor by improving public services to encourage private development. Years of extensive planning paid off as one by one, former industrial properties were turned into housing complexes, retail spaces and other diverse uses — such as a rowing club.

The site of the former Trostel Tannery was sold to a developer and the result is Trostel Square: a riverfront complex consisting of two apartment buildings, two townhouse buildings and one with both apartments and town homes. More than just housing, the unique design and color scheme of the complex adds to the attractiveness of what was once a run-down industrial area.

Financial, Liability, Technical Assistance

Completion of this project came together with help from many sources. The city of Milwaukee set up a TIF district to cover some remediation and development costs. The project also qualified for a Wisconsin Department of Commerce Blight Elimination and Brownfield Redevelopment Grant, and remediation tax credits helped recover some of the costs associated with cleanup.

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The new Trostel Square is one of many successful redevelopment projects that make up the Beerline B region of Milwaukee (photo courtesy Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee).



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