

Menomonee Valley- Stormwater Park

PUB-RR-827

January, 2009

Menomonee Valley - Stormwater Park

3301 W. Canal Street
Milwaukee, WI
Milwaukee County

2.8 Acres

Location: Menomonee River Valley

The largest brownfield redevelopment in Wisconsin's history includes 70 acres for storm water management and green space, putting the "park" in business park.

History

The redevelopment of the former Milwaukee Road rail yard in the west end of the Menomonee Valley is a grand undertaking, many years in the making.

The Valley had been a hotbed of manufacturing and industrial activity since before the turn of the 20th Century. As the importance of railroads declined, so did the jobs that the rail yard and associated businesses provided. In 1985, the Milwaukee Road went bankrupt and the former Road Shops site was left empty. Site pollution, following years of industrial use, made the property a long shot for redevelopment.

It would not be until 1998 when the city of Milwaukee and interested developers finally were able to begin "renewing the valley."

Stormwater management and green space were key elements of early plans for redevelopment. The area is within the 100-year flood plain for the region, and the site's proximity to the Menomonee River posed a risk for contaminated run-off to flow into the water and towards Lake Michigan. Early concepts for the redevelopment focused heavily on balancing the needs of the industrial center with the space required for green areas.



Crews perform landscape work in the new Stormwater Park (photo courtesy Menomonee Valley Partners).

Investigation & Cleanup

Once cleanup began, crews discovered the one-time rail yard had a surprisingly manageable amount of contamination— consisting mostly of petroleum, lead and other hazardous materials. In extremely polluted hotspots, soil was removed from the ground.

An important component of the cleanup was preparing the site in accordance with an overall stormwater management plan. Plots designated for



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Remediation and Redevelopment Program

PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707
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development were filled in to be raised up above the flood plain. Planners also graded the entire industrial park to accommodate effective stormwater flow.

Redevelopment

The addition of Stormwater Park to the Road Shops redevelopment added beauty, in addition to functionality. While the physical park space may take up only a section of the landscape, the entire development – including the industrial center – is one singular storm water management system.

Builders are encouraged to develop properties with as much permeable surface as possible, so that water can return to the ground. In places where that is not possible, potentially contaminated rain and snow runoff is routed through a system of subsurface pipes. Water settles in shallow wetland meadows and is filtered through a layer of crushed concrete. Finally, gravity takes the runoff even further down the line to the Swamp Forest section of the park, where natural vegetation absorbs many remaining contaminants. The entire process removes more than 80% of total suspended solids, as well as phosphorous, nitrogen, and heavy metals. The system is designed to handle days of extreme rainfall, without dumping overflow into the river.

Besides functioning as storm water management, the park has livelier side as well. Athletic fields, picnic areas and river access make it a pleasant spot for employees to relax and families to play. The centerpiece is Chimney Park – marked by the twin chimney stacks, which recall the Valley's industrial past. The main lawn of the park is flanked on the north by soccer fields and basketball courts, and to the south by the Hank Aaron Trail and a canoe launch. Public art is incorporated throughout.

While the city of Milwaukee currently has responsibility for the park, management will be turned over to Milwaukee County and the DNR.

The successful planning and execution of Stormwater Park earned the project the honor of

being named one of the Sierra Club's *Best New Development Projects* for 2006.



Stalks of grass grow in Stormwater Park, ready to soak up the rain (photo courtesy Menomonee Valley Partners).

Financial, Liability, Technical Assistance

The entire Milwaukee Road Shops redevelopment was made possible through approximately \$28 million in financial assistance at the federal, state and local level.

Stormwater Park also received a \$200,000 Green Space Grant through the DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment Program (RR), and RR staff have helped guide the project through all phases of redevelopment.

Contacts

Margaret Brunette – WI DNR
Project Manager
(414)263-8557 Margaret.Brunette@wisconsin.gov

Corey Zetts
Program Director
Menomonee Valley Partners, Inc.
(414)274-4655
corey@renewthevalley.org
www.renewthevalley.org

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