

Summit Place

PUB-RR-850

February 2010

Summit Place

6737 W. Washington St.
West Allis, WI
Milwaukee County

7.8 acres

Location: The site of the former Allis-Chalmers manufacturing plant, in the heart of West Allis.

When the Allis-Chalmers company ran out of gas, the city of West Allis could have gone with it. But smart planning and savvy redevelopment have given the city a new economic engine.

History

The community of West Allis has always been strongly tied to the Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company, from which the city's name is derived. The company's origins in the Milwaukee-area date back to the 1840s. Over the years, they built products as simple as grindstones and as complex as uranium separators. However, it was for their tractors that the company would achieve status as a household name in the U.S.

During World War II, the company's sprawling West Allis plant was a city unto itself, employing an estimated 45,000 people. Yet, by 1987, the roar of the manufacturing plant went silent as Allis-Chalmers closed down.

The city was left without its foremost employer. Blocks worth of empty buildings likely contained environmental contamination remained and no other manufacturers were lining up to take over the property.



The end of operations at the Allis Chalmers facility in West Allis left large blocks of brownfields and a huge hole in the community (photo courtesy DNR).

Investigation and Cleanup

An investigation of the property revealed contaminated soil underneath the buildings and concerns of hazardous vapors leaking into the new office complex. Testing turned up the presence of various Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) underneath one of the buildings.

To eliminate any possibility of human contact with these contaminants, the building's floor slabs were kept in place.

In addition, all of the existing shop buildings were decontaminated to remove hazards such as lead and asbestos.



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Redevelopment

Part of the property was cleared for a strip mall in the early 1990s, but it wasn't until the city and a developer teamed up with a vision of the future "Summit Place" redevelopment, that things got rolling.



The new Summit Place office complex reused some existing structures, preserving the spirit of the area and reducing waste (photo courtesy DNR).

Many redevelopment projects start with a wrecking ball – demolishing former structures, in favor of constructing a cheaper, entirely new building. However, the team guiding Summit Place tried to keep many elements of the building's original look and feel.

Crews gutted three former manufacturing shops and restored their brick surfaces and skylights. New interiors were then built on the building's frame. As another nod to the site's past, the project architects designed a skybridge between two buildings, using two gigantic old cranes found on the property.

Following the lead of several major companies, Summit Place now holds more than 50 tenants. An estimated 3,000 people, work there. Demand for space led to expansion of the complex to its current 630,000 square-foot capacity, and the complex is scheduled to be connected to the near-by shopping center.



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City officials estimate property taxes at \$1.2 million per year, nearly \$770,000 higher than before construction.

Financial, Liability, Technical Assistance

Approximately \$30 million of public and private dollars have been invested in the new heart of West Allis. An important step in leveraging money for redevelopment was the establishment of a \$6 million Tax Incremental Financing District (TIF).

To clean up the environmental contamination, the Wisconsin Department of Commerce contributed a \$300,000 Brownfields Cleanup Grant and \$1 million dollars was made available through the Allis-Chalmers Trust.

The DNR's Remediation & Redevelopment Program provided technical assistance and awarded a \$99,900 Site Assessment Grant to investigate multiple properties in the area.

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