

# brownfields

Success Story

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DRIVES PROGRESS IN THE SPICKET RIVER REVITALIZATION PROJECT

In Lawrence, MA EPA brownfields grants have helped the community create a network of greenspaces along the Spicket River.

### HIGHLIGHTS

The Greenway initiative is reversing decades of environmental injustices impacting poor neighborhoods along the Spicket River by: helping to end decades of illegal dumping and polluting; removing 100 tons of debris and over 2,000 abandoned tires from its banks; transforming vacant lots and brownfields along the river into safe and healthy open spaces and parks; reducing chronic flooding; and creating recreational opportunities on a healthier river.

The initiative serves as a catalyst for revitalizing the historic mill district, as well as economic and community development throughout Lawrence.

Engaging Lawrence's youth helps to ensure long-term stewardship of the Spicket.

A \$2.6 million Commonwealth's Gateway City Parks grant has provided the means to finalize the design and construction of the 2.5-mile Spicket River Greenway.



SPICKET RIVER GREENWAY, 2012

**“This project will open the doors to community recreation and neighborhood revitalization. The river way is a true asset and, with this partnership, all will soon realize Lawrence’s gem.”**

**—Mayor William Lantigua**  
*City of Lawrence*

EPA's Brownfields and Land Revitalization program and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program have had a successful 12 year partnership with Groundwork USA. Groundwork USA is a network of independent non-profit organizations called Groundwork Trusts focused on stabilizing and revitalizing their communities through projects and programs that improve their environment, economy and quality of life.

*Lawrence, MA has a land area of just seven square miles and an urban community of 72,000 residents. Lawrence's population has a large Latino population hailing primarily from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Nearly half of its population is under the age of 24. This demography has intensified the demand for open space and recreational amenities, especially among children and teenagers. However, a survey by the Trust for Public Land found that Lawrence has the least amount of open space per resident in Massachusetts.*

Similar to the community led efforts of the brownfields program, the Urban Waters initiative is an effort to restore and protect urban water bodies and adjacent lands. U.S. EPA's goal is to integrate and leverage existing programs to foster increased understanding and a sense of ownership of waters and surrounding land in communities across the country. This is especially important as urban waters impact large populations and can influence far-reaching land-use decisions.

### **Project Motivation**

Groundwork Lawrence is assisting the city and residents of Lawrence, Massachusetts—a former iconic mill community—achieve riverfront restoration and neighborhood revitalization through rediscovery of a precious resource: the Spicket River. A vibrant river once filled with wildlife, the Spicket became a mechanism by the textile mills along its banks for flushing trash and pollutants downstream for much of the twentieth century. With the sharp decline of the textile industry in the 1950s and subsequent mill closures in the 1970s, vacant lots and abandoned mills littered the banks of the Spicket, and neighborhoods surrounding the river became home to Lawrence's poorest residents. Both the Spicket and its surrounding neighborhoods became targets for illegal dumping.

The entire city has experienced a long period of decline and disinvestment since the collapse of the textile mills. This once booming industrial center now has one of the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the state.

In an effort to restore health and vitality to the river and the community, the Spicket River Revitalization Project began. The keystone of the overall project is the Spicket River Greenway (Greenway): a network of open spaces and walking paths linking neighborhoods, schools and parks along the 2.5-mile long Spicket River. The river flows through the Arlington and North

Common neighborhoods, the city's most underserved and densely built neighborhoods and then into the Merrimack River downtown. By design, the Greenway will leverage residents' efforts to achieve environmental justice in the neighborhoods adjoining the Spicket River by providing access to a healthier river, to recreational opportunities that did not exist before, and to safe and healthy open spaces and parks. The Greenway also serves as a pathway to community-wide revitalization and economic development.

Groundwork Lawrence was launched in 1999 as an incubator project of the Merrimack River Watershed Council. Based on a model started in the United Kingdom nearly 30 years ago, Groundwork Lawrence was one of three Groundwork USA pilot communities, including Bridgeport, Connecticut and Providence, Rhode Island. In 2001, Groundwork Lawrence incorporated as an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and oversees the Spicket River Revitalization Project from its office in a refurbished mill building downtown, located adjacent to the neighborhoods where most of the work is focused. The Groundwork USA network is composed of over 20 independent Groundwork Trusts across the country, including Lawrence and two other Trusts in Massachusetts. Groundwork USA receives support from EPA's Brownfields Program and the National Park Service's (NPS) Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

### **The Past**

A former textile mill manufacturing city first incorporated in 1856, Lawrence, Massachusetts is a Gulf of Maine Watershed community located just north of Boston where the Merrimack, Shawsheen and Spicket Rivers converge. The Spicket originates in Salem, New



Aerial photo showing the 2.5 mile Spicket River flowing through Lawrence, MA

**“Restoring the Spicket River corridor and converting it into a community asset was one of our organization’s founding objectives.” The Greenway will improve long underserved residents’ access to the river and to quality open spaces.”**

**—Heather McMann**  
*Executive Director of Groundwork Lawrence*

Hampshire and enters Lawrence through Stevens Pond. From Stevens Pond, the river’s natural course was straightened to accelerate flushing of trash and pollutants downstream from textile mills and to facilitate the filling and development of its marshy floodplain for residences in 1906.

Lawrence’s location along these three rivers attracted the interest of manufacturers such as the Essex Company eager to harness the rivers to support textile operations. By the early 1900s, Lawrence was home to the world’s leading manufacturer of woolen textiles. Demand for labor in the city’s vast mills attracted immigrants from across the world. With the advent of synthetic fibers in the 1940s, and the migration of textile mills to the southern United States and later overseas, many the mills in Lawrence closed in the 1970s, resulting in a dramatic decline in jobs and population. The closed mills became vacant lots and brownfield sites that lined the banks of the Spicket, while the Arlington and North Common neighborhoods—the poorest in Lawrence—became dumping grounds. To make a bad situation even worse, the alterations to the river reduced the width and area of the river’s natural flood plain. This area, encompassing most of the North Arlington Neighborhood, has been subject to regular and severe flooding.

### **The Present**

Discussed by Lawrence residents and leaders for over 30 years, the Greenway was first formalized as a community goal in 1998. Through a series of Urban RiverVisions design meetings, often held in the homes of Lawrence residents, the community mapped out the Greenway project in 2001. Elevating community awareness of the river’s impaired state was the pivotal next step; this was accomplished by creating a recognizable logo and bilingual signage system for the river greenway that gave the river a presence and identity within the neighborhood. Creating stewards of the Spicket was accomplished in part by establishing

the Groundwork Lawrence Green Team, a program that involves local “at risk” youth in community organizing and environmental service and education projects. In September 2002, the youth-led Green Team kicked off the Spicket River: Keep it Clean Campaign with the first Spicket River Cleanup. In 2003, Tufts University graduate students completed an inventory of parcels and land uses adjacent to the Spicket River, and a Spicket River Paddle-A-Thon was held to raise funds for the Greenway and awareness about the river and its recreational potential. The Green Team partnered with the Urban Ecology Institute in 2004 to conduct ecological assessments and determine the degree of variation of life forms (plant and wildlife) along the Spicket.

In concert with the riverfront awareness and restoration efforts, several vacant lots and brownfields along the river have been transformed into open space, community parks and community gardens. The Dr. Nina Scarito Park (Scarito Park), named in honor of a local obstetrician, was the first brownfield-to-open space project completed in 2006. This neighborhood park



The Nina Scarito Park,  
former Brook Street site, a  
2.7-acre industrial brownfield

**“This is going to be a positive thing. It will bring more of the green areas needed, and create a lot of encouragement in the community. Once people see something positive in a vacant lot, it will encourage neighbors to keep the area clean as well.”**

**—Ana Luna**  
*Executive Director of Arlington Community Trabajando*



William Kennedy Community Park, former site of 14 residential homes in the North Common Neighborhood that were repeatedly damaged by floods—FEMA tore down the houses after a particularly damaging storm in 2001

**“In this city, the park transformation is an important thing. There was so much joy in the neighborhood when the park opened—finally the children have a safe place to play!”**

**—Angelita Iraola  
Brook Street Resident**

now resides on the former Brook Street site, a 2.7-acre industrial brownfield. The site was first developed as a small mill complex in the late 1800s, and later as a commercial laundry in 1949. By the late 1980s, the laundry buildings had been demolished, leaving the site vacant along the banks of the Spicket for over 20 years. Through bank mergers, the Bank of America (BOA) became the owner of the Brook Street site. BOA worked with the city to pay back taxes on the site, then donated the land and \$200,000 towards park construction. Redevelopment of the park was further funded by a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) awarded to the city and through a Massachusetts Urban Self Help grant. Through its Brownfields Program, EPA funded the assessment and cleanup of the site.

Forward planning coupled with the success of Scarito Park allowed three additional revitalization projects along the Spicket to move forward rapidly. Built on a vacant lot acquired by the city using a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant and CDBG funds, the construction of the William Kennedy Community Park was completed in 2007. The park provides much-needed open space for local residents while helping to absorb storm water and minimizing the impact of chronic flooding on the surrounding neighborhood.

*The former Covanta incinerator facility, located within a 19th Century mill complex on Stevens Pond and the Spicket River burnt municipal trash for nearly 20 years. At its peak of operation, the facility emitted 800 pounds of mercury and 400 pounds of lead each year. The highest rate of childhood lead exposure and the second highest rate of childhood asthma in the Commonwealth are found in Lawrence.*

Through a campaign led by a Lawrence youth group, the SK8 Kids, and with city matching CDBG funds and Massachusetts Urban RiverVisions and Urban Self Help grants, Misserville Park was rehabilitated into a skate park in 2007. The park also comprises a basketball court and an outdoor schoolyard gardening classroom opportunity for the adjacent Leonard School. Jarrod Curtis, one of the original SK8 Kids and now a college student, cut the ribbon at the dedication ceremony for Misserville Park and had this to say about the effort, “It’s simply amazing to stand here today, I learned perseverance and it’s very gratifying knowing that I’ve contributed something.”

The fourth Greenway project completed involves the cleanup and redevelopment of the former Covanta incinerator facility, a five-acre brownfield site contaminated with mercury, lead and other pollutants. Partially funded by EPA, cleanup was completed in 2008 and Manchester Park opened in September 2009. It is home to playgrounds, picnic tables and benches, greenspace and community gardens. With 32 innovative projects from across the country nominated for the award, Manchester Park received the esteemed 2010 Brownfield Renewal Award for Social Impact from the trade publication Brownfield Renewal. The awards are presented to projects that represent the “gold standard” of brownfields redevelopment across the country and serve as models for other communities. Heather McMann, Executive Director of Groundwork Lawrence, commented on the award, “Nearly a decade of work—community activism, fundraising, planning, cleanup and building—went into the realization of Manchester Street Park. The reward for that work is a neighborhood reborn—the vision of a community now sustained by and sustaining this beautiful, healthy, thriving place.” In 2011, the project earned a second national award: the Gabe Zimmerman Public Service Award from the National Community Development Association

(previously the Audrey Nelson Award). These awards are given to local communities in recognition of their exemplary actions to better the lives of low-income people and neighborhoods.

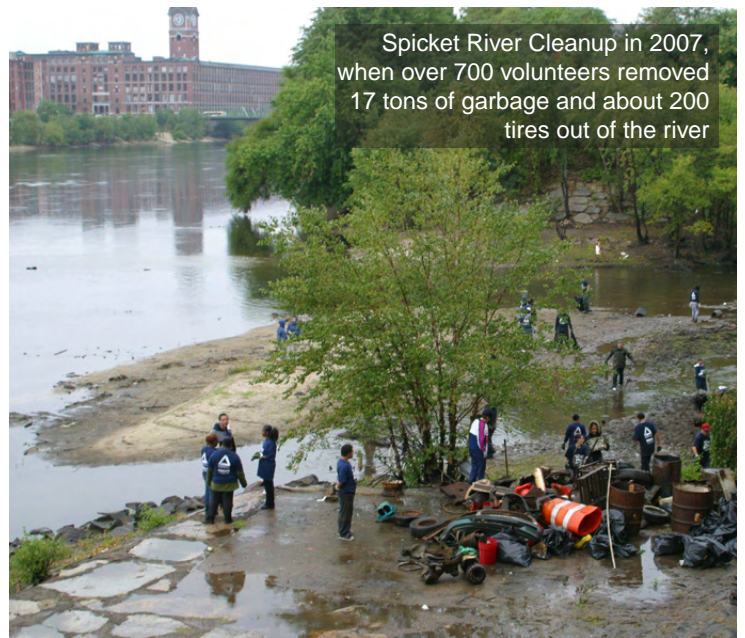
### The Path Forward

On the ground for over a decade now, Groundwork Lawrence, in partnership with the City of Lawrence and its residents, has made significant progress on the path to riverfront restoration and neighborhood revitalization through the Greenway Initiative. The Spicket River Cleanup, an annual event led by the Green Team, completed the ninth river cleanup in September 2010. Since 2002, over 4,500 local residents, students, business owners, and other volunteers have cleared 100 tons of debris and over 2,000 abandoned tires from the banks of the Spicket River.

The building of a vast network of nearly 100 public and private partnerships and the leveraging of over \$6 million in public and private funding led to the cleanup and transformation of this area. More than 10 acres of vacant lots and brownfields have gone from blight to open space creating neighborhood parks and improving long underserved residents' access to the river and to safe and healthy open spaces. These changes also allow for better management of storm water runoff and will reduce flooding in Arlington and other neighborhoods adjoining the Spicket River.

The Greenway initiative is also producing economic benefits. Property values of homes in the North Common Neighborhood surrounding the new open spaces and parks increased significantly—making this area one of the fastest appreciating zip codes in the country in 2006. Crime has decreased significantly in these areas according to local law enforcement. And when the nationwide foreclosure crisis hit, the combination of parks and homeownership investments helped stabilize the low-income neighborhoods.

The Greenway Initiative complements and supports efforts underway such as the Union Crossing project to revitalize the historic mill district where the Spicket meets the Merrimack River. This effort will transform a complex of 19th century textile mills surrounding the Merrimack River into a new Lawrence neighborhood and link the mill district to adjacent downtown and residential neighborhoods along the Spicket and elsewhere. The project will create renovated and newly-built space, including affordable family and workforce housing, commercial office, retail, and community facilities, as well as new greenspace and public access



Spicket River Cleanup in 2007, when over 700 volunteers removed 17 tons of garbage and about 200 tires out of the river

**“We have thousands of ardent stewards who have been working with us for over a decade to clean the river banks and streambed. These same residents and youths are the best assurance for the long-term care of the Greenway and will continue to care for the Spicket River Greenway for decades to come.”**

**—Heather McMann**  
*Executive Director of Groundwork Lawrence*

to the Merrimack. Groundwork Lawrence assisted with site design and facilitation of community meetings during the Master Planning phase; it will assist with designing the green infrastructure elements like the storm water management, Riverwalk Trail, and community gardens.

In July 2010, Lawrence was awarded a \$2.6 million grant from the Commonwealth's Gateway City Parks program. Gateway grants are awarded to support significant park projects for underserved populations across the Commonwealth. The grant allows Lawrence to finalize the design and construct the 2.5-mile Spicket River Greenway that will link the network of existing and new open spaces, parks and neighborhoods along the restored riverfront to each other and to the downtown and developing mill district. Total completion of the Greenway is slated for 2012. State Senator Barry Finegold said of the award, “This grant will continue to help with regional growth and prosperity in Lawrence, and improve the lives and futures of its residents.”

## URBAN WATERS

Urban environments, particularly in underserved communities, are typically characterized by paved or covered “impervious” surfaces, working waterfronts with industrial facilities, abandoned industrial sites, and other underutilized or contaminated lands. These characteristics, in combination with aging and inadequate storm water management infrastructure, generate excess and untreated runoff that transports sewage and hazardous wastes into local water bodies. Urban patterns of historical development often make waterways inaccessible to adjacent neighborhoods. Lack of access to waterways limits the ability of communities to connect and participate in restoring waterways as healthy living ecosystems and reap the benefits of living close to the water in the city. Addressing these issues to ensure healthy and accessible urban waters can help grow local businesses and enhance educational, recreational and social opportunities in nearby communities.

EPA is learning from community efforts already underway and supporting communities as active participants in the restoration and protection of urban waters. EPA works to increase access to waterways, which promotes a sense of public ownership of water resources and integrates environmental goals with other pressing priorities like economic development, education, job creation, and greenspace creation and preservation.

### URBAN WATERS RESOURCES

[www.epa.gov/urbanwaters](http://www.epa.gov/urbanwaters)

#### **Watershed Planning and Management**

- Managing Wet Weather with Green Infrastructure - [cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program\\_id=298](http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=298)
- Directory of EPA Watershed Publications - [water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/publications.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/publications.cfm)
- Key EPA Water Internet Tools Course - [www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/wacademy/epatools](http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/wacademy/epatools)
- Watershed Central and Wiki - [wiki.epa.gov/watershed2](http://wiki.epa.gov/watershed2)

#### **Water Quality and Pollution Prevention**

- EPA Enforcement and Compliance History Online - [www.epa-echo.gov/echo](http://www.epa-echo.gov/echo)
- Nonpoint Source Pollution - [www.epa.gov/owow\\_keep/NPS/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow_keep/NPS/index.html)
- Water Quality Assessment Tools and Models - [water.epa.gov/scitech/datait/models/index.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/scitech/datait/models/index.cfm)

#### **Community Information**

- Groundwork USA - [www.groundworkusa.org](http://www.groundworkusa.org)
- National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program - [www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/rtca](http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/rtca)
- Adopt Your Watershed - [www.epa.gov/owow\\_keep/adopt/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow_keep/adopt/index.html)
- Community Culture and the Environment A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place - [www.epa.gov/care/library/community\\_culture.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/care/library/community_culture.pdf)
- EPA Smart Growth - [www.epa.gov/smartgrowth](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth)
- Surf Your Watershed - [cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm](http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm)

#### **Outreach Development**

- Coastal Urban Waters Toolkit - [www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/debris](http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/debris)
- Getting In Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns - [www.epa.gov/owow/nps/toolbox/guide.htm](http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/toolbox/guide.htm)
- Non-Point Source Toolbox - [www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox](http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox)

#### **Funding**

- Brownfields Grants to Support Assessment/Cleanup of Contaminated Property, Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants, and Targeted Brownfields Assessments - [www.epa.gov/brownfields/grant\\_info/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/grant_info/index.htm)
- Catalog of Federal Funding Sources for Watershed Protection - [cfpub.epa.gov/fedfund](http://cfpub.epa.gov/fedfund)
- Sustainable Finance Website - [www.epa.gov/owow/funding/trainings.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow/funding/trainings.html)
- Watershed Funding Resource Directory - [water.epa.gov/aboutow/owow/funding.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/aboutow/owow/funding.cfm)

#### **Case Studies**

- Case Studies for Stormwater Management on Compacted, Contaminated Soils in Dense Urban Areas - [www.epa.gov/brownfields/tools/swcs0408.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/tools/swcs0408.pdf)
- Urban Agriculture on Brownfields Website - [www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag)
- Targeted Watershed Grant Case Studies - [water.epa.gov/grants\\_funding/twg/initiative\\_index.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/twg/initiative_index.cfm)

For more information on the Spicket River Greenway, and on other brownfield related Groundwork projects, contact Groundwork Lawrence at 978-974-0770, or visit the Groundwork Lawrence web site at: [www.groundworklawrence.org](http://www.groundworklawrence.org)