

Celebrating Success: Allied Paper, Inc./Portage Creek/ Kalamazoo River Site in Plainwell, Michigan



Superfund
Redevelopment
Initiative



Renovated office space in the historic Plainwell Paper Mill. (Source: EPA)

“We wanted to make sure the community had a voice...we wanted to control our own destiny.”

Erik Wilson, Plainwell City Manager



The former dewatering facility, now a public safety office building. (Source: EPA)

“Everyone in the community can see the progress now. People are working in the mill again. We know there is more to do, but we also can see how far we’ve come.”

Richard Brooks, Mayor of Plainwell



Michigan Paper Company of Plainwell office, 1911. (Source: City of Plainwell)

A successful public-private partnership in central Michigan has resulted in historic preservation, adaptive reuse and mixed-use redevelopment. The project is restoring the historic Plainwell Paper Mill, which is part of a larger regional Superfund site, as a vital community resource.

In the early 1900s, this area along the Kalamazoo River had the largest concentration of paper mills in the world. Wastewater from the mills, and the later dismantling of dams on the Kalamazoo River, contaminated area soils and river sediments with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Cleanup has focused on removing these materials and monitoring the river’s health.

From the day the Plainwell Paper Mill closed in 2000, the City of Plainwell focused on the future. Local officials reached out to EPA Region 5 and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to learn more about the status of the 36-acre mill property. In 2004, a reuse planning process supported by EPA enabled the community to lay the groundwork for redevelopment. A 32-member, community-based Mill Committee created a comprehensive plan focused on mixed land uses, river access and the mill’s history.

The City worked with EPA and Weyerhaeuser, the property owner and responsible party, to conduct environmental assessments, qualify as a bona fide prospective purchaser (BFPP) and acquire the mill property. The City also prepared a Due Care Plan to manage the property moving forward. Meetings with EPA staff confirmed that the locality was taking all necessary steps to address liability concerns.

After acquiring the mill property, the City invited proposals from interested developers, and chose Conestoga-Rovers Associates (CRA) as its partner. To date, the City has leveraged over \$7.8 million in redevelopment resources. The project transformed a former dewatering facility into a new public safety building. CRA moved 50 employees into renovated office space in the mill. City offices are relocating to the mill in 2014. The mill itself is now part of a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. Looking forward, the City is developing plans for the rest of the property.

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