Painting Up The Town in Emeryville

Paint manufacturer Sherwin-Williams has a new canvas to work on after six years of DTSC-led cleanup work ended recently with a certification of completion, and the prospect of more jobs and homes coming to Emeryville, a vibrant artist's community on the edge of San Francisco Bay.

The paint company has retained development consultant Thompson Dorfman and commercial developer SRM Associates to sketch a plan for the reuse of eight acres in the Park Avenue District, which city officials have described as the "historic center" of the Alameda County community. Many of the older buildings in the neighborhood have been transformed into condominiums and artists' cooperatives.

Sherwin-Williams made paints and coatings there from 1919 to 2006, and pesticides from the 1920s to the 1940s. The facilities closed in 2006, and most of the buildings were removed by 2008. Only one structure remains, and it has been deemed historically significant in the Park Avenue District Plan.

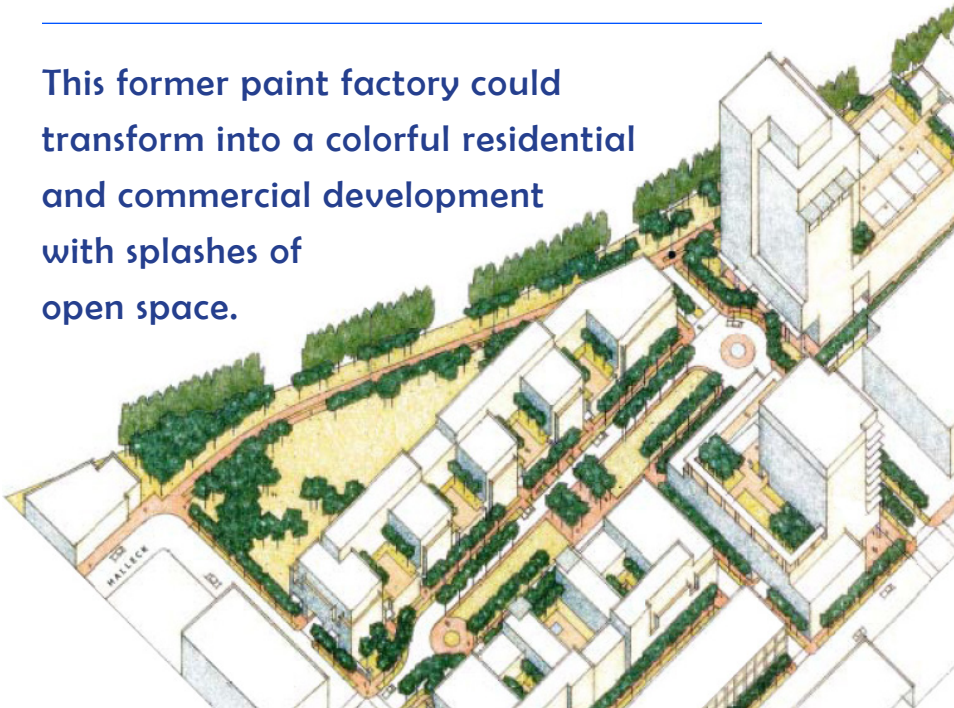
But the company couldn't proceed with redevelopment plans until arsenic was satisfactorily cleaned from the soil and groundwater - which is not used for drinking. The California Department of Toxic Substances Control oversaw that effort, which was followed closely by neighbors.

DTSC Unit Chief Karen Toth signed the notice of completion in January, which allows the iconic paint company to use property - although it must continue to monitor the groundwater.

A chunk of mostly vacant and developable property that size in the urbanized region presents a rare opportunity. "This is pretty unique," said city Planning Director Charles Bryant. "We only have a few potential development sites of this size, and the others already have occupied buildings on them - two shopping centers, one industrial site."

Bryant said the developers could have a plan in place this summer. On its web site, Thompson Dorfman says the design team is pursuing a mixture of commercial and housing, along with more than two acres of open space, on those eight acres.

This former paint factory could transform into a colorful residential and commercial development with splashes of open space.



Emeryville is a unique city, and this project required extra outreach by DTSC and Sherwin-Williams. Artists' lofts and condominiums comprise much of the neighborhood, and many residents didn't like the prospect of trucks coming and going, or the dust generated during the cleanup.

Excavation of the contaminated area.

Same are filled in with clean soil.

"This one had a very active community," said Janet Naito, a DTSC project manager who shepherded the project through the remediation design phase. "This project really brought the neighborhood together."

As a result, DTSC and Sherwin-Williams took additional measures, which included the unusual step of implementing a Community Safety Plan. The document detailed how the cleanup would work, and outlined ways the entities would soften the impacts of construction activity, and protect the community.

Weekly email updates went out to residents, and a sound wall between the homes and the site became a student art project – really fitting for an artists' colony. A 24-hour phone line was established for residents with concerns and, most significantly, a temporary rail spur was extended to the site. Rather than trucking out soil, Sherwin-Williams agreed to remove the majority of hazardous waste by rail, which was shipped to a landfill in Utah, although clean replacement dirt had to come in by truck.

About 150,000 tons of hazardous and non-hazardous material was removed. That equated to 2,976 truckloads and 682 rail cars of waste.

"Sherwin-Williams really stepped up to the plate," Naito said.

She says each cleanup project is unique, and this one was no different. "This was a case where hard work by DTSC staff and the project team, including the community's representatives, turned around a project where there was a lot of mistrust into one where people thanked us for our efforts," she said. "We went the extra step at the request of the community."