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Former LTV Coke Works Property in Hazelwood Taking a Step Up

By Diana Nelson Jones

Pittsburgh's last brownfield may yet rise as new development from the ashes of its past, but first it will rise literally by 6 to 8 feet.

At the former LTV coke works in Hazelwood, truckloads of fill have been collecting over the past six years toward a goal of one million cubic yards to elevate new development above the flood plain. This layer also will allow for the burial of utility lines and other infrastructure without the cost of digging out old foundations.

A collaboration between Almono LLC -- a consortium of four foundations that bought the site in 2002 -- its site manager RIDC (Regional Industrial Development Corp.) and numerous large-scale developers has saved everyone huge costs, said Don Smith, president of RIDC.

"We have close to 800,000 cubic yards of fill from the chunnel and every major development project in the area," he said. "It might have been an \$8 million to \$12 million cost for us, but it was donated. It's a win-win for everybody, because the fill would otherwise have to have been disposed of at a cost" to developers.

With a master plan by the architecture firm of Rothschild Doyno Collaborative in place, Almono and RIDC are in the process of getting the site



Current conditions of river's edge on former LTV Coke Works Property

rezoned to accommodate residential, retail, office and clean manufacturing components, said Tim White, RIDC's assistant vice president for development.

Like all the other industrial brownfields before their development, this site is a vast riverside strip of rust-colored weeds, puddles, chunky mud, building foundations, rubble roads and ruins -- leaky corrugated structures, small brick offices with busted windows and abandoned artifacts.

A 1970s-era molded plastic chair sits askew outside an open door as if the last person in the

building brushed against it on his way out. A sign on the guard shack that reads "no sandals" is as brown as an old newspaper.

A coal dumper yawns toward the Monongahela River right where it functioned in this site's industrial heyday.

"We intend to keep that," said Mr. White. "Our goal is to maintain some industrial character," including the catwalks and other river apparatuses that were used to load barges.

In the spring, he said, RIDC will work with Friends of the Riverfront to build a temporary trail through the site, connecting to the Hot Metal Bridge. That recreational connection will

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echo the use J&L Steel's railroad made of the bridge, moving hot molds from Hazelwood to the steel mill where Southside Works is now.

Mountains of dirt have turned this rather flat landscape into a rolling terrain. About 225,000 cubic yards of fill came from the river bottom for construction of the "chunnel," the T spur from Gateway Center to the North Shore. Construction at Southside Works, the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University has contributed the bulk of the fill.

The 178 acres of land in Hazelwood will be divided into four parts. The zone closest to Downtown will be used for clean manufacturing. Office space and other commercial development will be built beside that. A green commons will separate the commercial area from the residential mid-rise and brownstone housing that will extend to Tecumseh Street at the far end.

Besides joining the neighborhood grid at Tecumseh, Mr. White said, the site will open to bring Hazelwood Avenue into



Bar Mill

the new development.

The final grading plan will be completed next year.

Dennis Hirsh, RIDC's site caretaker, worked for J&L for 15 years in security and as a foreman at the coke oven batteries.

"This was like a little city in the city back when there were 10,000 employees," he said. On a recent tour of the site, he drove his van into the mammoth bar mill, the faded blue building that's visible to traffic on Irvine

Street above. "Right next door, where that mountain of dirt is, was its sister building," he said.

As he inched the van through the building, it got darker and darker, but even on a cloudy day, pinpoints of light twinkled through holes in the roof, as if it had been punched through for decorative effect.

"This place is a diamond in the rough," Mr. Hirsh said. "Just waiting to happen."