

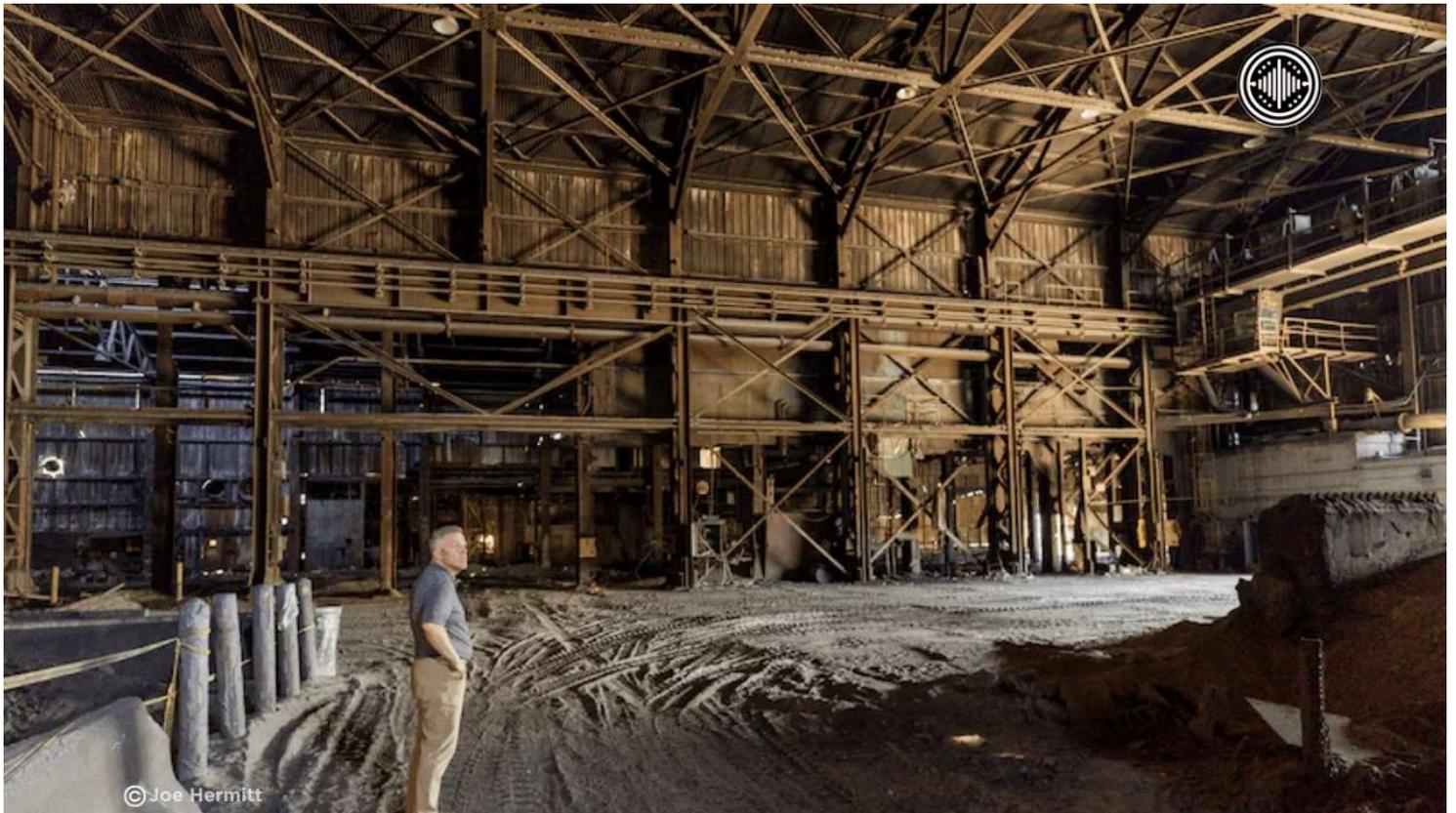
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Plans Underway to Redevelop Long-Empty Industrial Site in Carlisle

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Cumberland County officials have begun preparations to revitalize a historic industrial site in Carlisle that has stood vacant for years. The 27-acre property, once home to the Frog, Switch & Manufacturing Company, is now being readied for a future that could bring new life and purpose to the area.

The Frog, Switch & Manufacturing Co. site has a rich history stretching back more than 125 years before the Civil War. Named after the railroad components called “frogs” and “switches” it once produced, the company shifted focus over time. By the 1960s, it had

stopped manufacturing railroad parts and started producing manganese, a metal widely used in industrial applications. At its peak in the early 1990s, the company employed more than 500 workers, but the workforce steadily declined to about 30 by 2023. In June of that year, the company announced it could no longer sustain operations due to intense international competition and the rising costs of essential upgrades.

Andrew Notarfrancesco, chair of the Real Estate Collaborative (REC), a branch of the Cumberland Area Economic Development Corporation (CAEDC), explained the significance of the closure. “When it closed, it was the last Manganese manufacturer in the United States,” he said.

Site Prep

Two years later, the REC has purchased the site at 600 E. High Street with the goal of preparing it for redevelopment. The complex includes 18 industrial buildings and a five-acre landfill, many with deteriorating structures and legacy industrial equipment like 15-foot-deep pits and large steel machines that require careful handling. “The quicker we can get buildings like this down or redeveloped and get life back into them, the better,” Notarfrancesco said.

This is the largest project for the REC since its founding nine years ago. Their role is not as developers themselves but as facilitators. “We are kind of the middle folks that get it ready,” Notarfrancesco explained. The plan is to issue a request for proposals (RFP) to attract master developers who can envision how best to utilize the site, balancing economic opportunity with community needs.

The state government is backing the project, awarding over \$10 million in grants and loans through Pennsylvania’s Strategic Investments to Enhance Sites Program. This funding is earmarked to stabilize the property, demolish outdated buildings, and support environmental cleanup efforts.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is conducting a thorough study of the site, which is expected to conclude by the end of the year. The EPA’s assessment will guide decisions on contamination, remediation, and demolition priorities. Notarfrancesco emphasized the complexity involved: “We need to know what we’re really contending with and how we manage through it.”

The property is in an urban Mixed-Use District, which allows for a wide range of development possibilities, including residential and commercial projects. Notarfrancesco highlighted the community-focused vision: “Our goal here is residential. There’s a lot of area here that we don’t think has contamination that could be set up for it.”

Some parts of the site, like the five-acre capped landfill, are off-limits for construction but could be turned into public green spaces. An imaginative suggestion includes transforming old casting molds from the foundry into park art installations, blending the area’s industrial heritage with community recreation.

One building expected to be preserved is the distinctive 7,000-square-foot main office, known for its Spanish Mission architectural style. It may one day serve a new purpose, such as a restaurant, retaining a physical connection to the site’s past.

Notarfrancesco reflected on the importance of redeveloping former industrial properties: “What happens with many of these old sites is they sit and decay. They become nuisance sites... and they become a blight on the community.”

The redevelopment process is expected to take years, requiring patience and cooperation among officials, developers, and the public. A dedicated website is in the works to keep the community informed with updates, historical insights, and opportunities for developer proposals.

This initiative marks a significant step toward revitalizing Carlisle’s industrial past and shaping its future, blending heritage with modern growth potential.