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America Center

AN ENVIRONMENTALLY ADVANCED OFFICE CAMPUS



The America Center site is part of the U.S. EPA's South Bay Asbestos Area Superfund site. The EPA has determined that the site's soil covers were in compliance with the landfill cover requirements and is working toward delisting the South Bay Asbestos Area in 2011.

By Steve Dunn and Derrick How

There is continued focus on the impact businesses have on the environment and the communities that surround them, starting with the locations developed for their operations. For Legacy Partners, this has inspired a greater commitment to finding ways to align investment goals with an approach to development that adopts sustainability and eco-conscious design as a guiding influence.

The Devil's in the Details

The story of America Center begins with the conversion of a former landfill site to a viable, safe and productive asset that offers both social and economic benefits to the community. Site restoration involved regrading then placing a protective seven-foot clean soil cover beneath the site to isolate landfill materials from the public and environment. (The soil thickness exceeds the state landfill closure cap minimum of four feet.)

The majority of landfill debris at America Center is benign construction material. Out of 61 soil and waste samples collected in exploratory borings at the site, asbestos was only detected at concentrations of one-to-two percent in three samples, and less than one percent in six samples. Although it is highly unlikely that any landfill gases will migrate from the soil into the buildings, a vapor barrier membrane was installed beneath each building to mitigate intrusion. Each building has passive and active venting systems which extract vapors from beneath the building. In addition,

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gas blowers will be activated if the sensors detect gases above trigger levels.

The location for America Center was identified in 1998. Legacy Partners was developing a neighboring site, Tech Park at 237, which featured a two-story office campus style product. While reviewing site aerials, the development team recognized that directly adjacent to this site was a parcel of land featur-

ing a significant swath of hilltop open space. This was a compelling discovery in the supply-constrained realities of the maturing Silicon Valley submarket. Upon further investigation, it was found to be a site of more than 60-acres, not zoned or entitled for development. The Legacy Partners development team discovered that this land, owned by Cargill Salt at the time, was uniquely suited for an office property development. The site was directly adjacent to an existing base of commercial office properties, with access to major regional freeways and public transit options. It held a prominent position on the area's only hilltop, with 360-degree views of its surroundings -- views that offered an amazing juxtaposition between the site's urban neighbors and an extensive natural environment. Cargill had attempted

Besides the use of low-emitting materials and certified wood products, the building management system provides Web-based optimization of control systems.



to entitle the land for office use, but had been unsuccessful due to the complexity of the site's former use as a construction debris landfill and the challenges of a restoration program to close and restore the natural environment for new development.

The Dedicated Pursuit of Possibility

Legacy Partners approached Cargill with a plan to acquire the land, but with a risk-appropriate mindset. Legacy Partners entered into a strategic process involving its de-

velopment professionals, environmental consultants, architects and engineering consultants to develop a restoration and development plan, and applied to the City of San Jose for entitlements.

Based on the comprehensive plans laid out for the restoration of the site by Legacy, the City of San Jose and the local community were very supportive of Legacy's vision to transform the site for new office development. Legacy Partners completed its land acquisition and closed on the site to begin development of America Center in June of 2000 with entitlements in place. Over the next two years, Legacy

Partners worked closely with federal, state and local authorities to close and cap the landfill to meet or surpass all safety requirements. Landfill closure was completed and approved by all pertinent authorities in 2002. Legacy Partners established a sophisticated monitoring and maintenance program, and has been working with the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the City of San Jose Local Enforcement Agency to continue to monitor the site and conduct routine inspection and reporting.

The Masterplan: Architecture Meets Environment

In 2007, HKS Architects was commissioned to create a design vision for America Center that featured four six-story office buildings in a campus format, with additional parcels planned for tenant amenities including a hotel and fitness club. The plan reflected the investment decision to develop the office campus in two phases, two buildings in each phase, with the addition of a four-level parking garage as part of the second phase of construction. Since the property would have to appeal to the unique taste and interest of the region's many high-tech companies and related operations, the design of America Center needed to reflect an advanced and modern mindset. Further, envisioned as a potential single tenant campus as much as a multi-tenant office environment, America Center needed to fulfill as many of the common space demands of a modern office tenant as possible. This included flexible floor plates and tenant amenities.

Legacy Partners worked with HKS to ensure that the final design would be sensitive to views -- in

terms of both the tenant's experience within the buildings and on the campus -- as well as the aesthetics from its surrounding area. America Center's architecture was designed to channel the creative thinking and spirit of Silicon Valley companies. HKS incorporated a sleek, curved curtain-wall facade to front the buildings, combined with

a modern side profile. All exterior walls incorporated significant glass to articulate the characteristics of a contemporary style and provide a high-tech impression. Other architectural elements include the eyebrow feature over the curved curtain wall facade, accentuating the prominent building facade from the freeway view.

The development team also wanted to ensure that the structures built at America Center would meet the highest LEED standards possible. It was not enough in this point-rated system for the team to rely on the points immediately granted for the brownfield remediation. Sustainable features of the project include:

- Extensive building glass utilizing an energy-efficient glazing system to ensure light transmittance while offering better insulation.
- Highly reflective white roofing with a high SRI index.
- HVAC systems operating 14.5 percent above typical systems achieving Energy Star compliance.
- Low-VOC shell and core adhesives, paints, sealants and carpets.
- Drought-tolerant landscaping that consumes water at one-half the rate typical for similarly sized office parks. Water efficiency standards for the building further exceed building code standards by approximately 30 percent,



America Center is capped with a seven-foot clean soil cover beneath the site to isolate landfill materials.

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including the use of low-flow shower heads and solar-activated lavatories that incorporate automated dual flush fixtures.

- Recycled and renewable products including wood for framing, doors and form work, as well as significant quantities of recycled concrete.
- Use of locally-sourced building materials (within a 500-mile radius).
- Green cleaning program.
- Onsite parking for low emission and fuel efficient vehicles.
- Bicycle storage and changing facilities on the ground floor.
- Web-based optimization of building control systems, including lighting, to reduce energy consumption.

America Center was shell complete in July 2009 and soon after received the honor of being San Jose's first LEED Gold-certified speculative office development built on a fully restored brownfield. The first phase of completed buildings, featuring two Class A office buildings each containing approximately 213,800 square feet (427,600 square feet total) features an Energy Star designation in addition to its LEED Gold certification. The fully-integrated, green workplace provides tenants with move-in ready facilities, modern architecture, high-efficiency building systems, access to public transportation and visibility for signage and building identity. While there are currently no tenants in the building, Legacy Partners is actively marketing and touring the property with potential tenants.



Sustainable features of the project include energy reductions that collectively exceed California Title 24 by more than 14 percent.

The Lesson Learned: A New Era of Office Development

For Legacy Partners, America Center provided an opportunity to recognize that as a real estate owner, manager and developer, it is paramount to focus on the communities and corporate customers that are served by the properties delivered. The ultimate test for America Center and the workplaces created by the industry is how



the realities of reduced resource consumption are adopted through innovative and sustainable architecture and planning. ■

By **Steve Dunn** and **Derrick How**,
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