

## Perkins Machine, Keene

### Overview

The former Perkins machine shop occupied a number of mill buildings at 92 and 110 Water Street in Keene. Broken windows, a collapsed roof, plants growing into the structures made the building an eyesore and source of blight for the community. The property was tax deeded in 1998, and after a large-scale cleanup effort, new construction is underway on the property.

### History

In 1919, Melvin S. Perkins established the Perkins Machine Co. principally to produce wood working equipment. The Keene plant occupied more than a half-dozen buildings in various areas of the city including the facility on Water Street. Over the years the company continued to grow, reaching a war-time high of 450 employees when it switched production to fuses and bomb parts. At this time, 94 percent of production was apportioned to war related work. In 1961, Perkins sold the firm to Roberts-Hart, Inc., which sold it to Lee P. Hart in 1964. Circa 1985 the property was again sold. From mid-1970 to approximately 1991, the property was used for a variety of purposes, including shoe manufacturing and warehousing of medical supplies, rugs and books. By 1991, manufacturing operations had been terminated; however, warehouse uses continued until at least 1997. Fleet Bank, the mortgage holder, investigated redevelopment of the property in 1991 when the owner missed mortgage payments. By October 1996, the owner was \$150,561.03 behind on property taxes, and on October 22, 1996 the city of Keene wrote to DES about environmental liabilities at the property. DES responded on November 22, 1996, and clarified the liability protections available to the city (qualifying holder and brownfields). Keene took the abandoned mill building for taxes in 1998.

### At A Glance:

**Site Location:** Downtown Keene

**Site Profile:** Former Perkins Machine Mill  
Redevelopment

**DES ODD Fund Reimbursements:** \$326,119

**EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant:** \$200,000

#### Outcomes:

- 2,696 tons of petroleum contaminated soil removed and properly disposed of off-site.
- 1,198 tons of chlorinated solvent and 69 tons of asbestos contaminated soil/debris and removed and properly disposed of off-site.
- Three USTs properly closed.
- Comprehensive site investigation completed.
- Closure of the petroleum portion of site.



View of the vaulted UST.

## Environmental Assessment and Cleanup

In an effort for Fleet Bank to redevelop the property and rescue its non performing mortgage asset, a subsurface investigation was conducted. The April 10, 1991 report documented the presence of chlorinated volatile organic compounds in groundwater and petroleum contaminated soil outside the boiler room. Although there was some interest in redeveloping property (December 11, 1991 letter from JR Raynes to Jack Dugan of the Keene Industrial Development Center and contacts by Perry Technology to NH Office of Industrial Development), nothing came to fruition.

In response to the April 10, 1991 report, DES visited the property on June 27, 1991; however, a formal response requesting the completion of a site investigation was not issued until January 18, 1995, because of the overwhelming work load at the time. On January 8, 1997 DES met Mike Lynch about the overdue site investigation. Mr. Lynch indicated the letter was never received and that letters were frequently lost when sent to his Water Street location. He also noted that he could not afford to complete the requested work and that in his opinion the contamination on his property originated from the adjacent property.

Keene took the property for taxes in 1998 and completed a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment to ensure that the city preserved CERCLA liability protections by meeting due diligence standards. The Phase I was submitted to DES on April 24, 1998, and on May 28, 1998, DES issued a response agreeing with the recommendations to complete a site investigation and assessment of the underground and aboveground storage tanks. The city made the first of three major attempts in April 2001 to market the property. Around this time, the city demolished three obsolete buildings on 110 Water Street and removed a large aboveground storage tank. In March 19, 2003, Keene applied for a brownfields cleanup grant from EPA. To support its grant application, the city completed a supplemental site investigation. On April 23, 2003, the city also issued a Request for Proposal for redevelopment of the property; however, no successful redevelopment proposal was generated from this solicitation.



View mill building prior to demolition, photo on the right taken by Lorianne DiSato

In 2004, the city applied for and was accepted into the State's Covenant not to Sue program, and EPA awarded a \$200,000 brownfields cleanup grant to Keene for the Perkins Machine Property. The grant was a significant piece in the cleanup funding puzzle but, by itself, would not be sufficient to address the removal of underground storage tanks, asbestos, and petroleum and chlorinated compound contaminated soil. Keene, DES and the environmental consulting firm for the city worked out a cleanup plan that meshed EPA and ODD fund money. The ODD fund would pay for the removal of fund eligible petroleum contaminated material and the EPA grant would be used for the remainder of the environmental issues. A remedial action plan was prepared and finalized on June 30, 2004. Bid specifications were submitted to DES on February 18, 2004 and the request for bids was issued on April 20, 2005. DES approved the work scope for the ODD fund eligible work on July 31, 2005. The cleanup took place during the summer of 2005 resulting in the excavation and off-site disposal of 2,696 tons of petroleum contaminated soil and 1,198 tons of chlorinated solvent contaminated soil. An additional 69 tons of asbestos contaminated soil/debris was removed and properly disposed of off-site. Following the excavation, monitoring wells were reinstalled, and a groundwater monitoring report was submitted on October 20, 2006. Although the soil remediation effort was comprehensive in nature, some PAHs and metals impacted soil remained; therefore, an activity and use restriction (AUR) was recorded on November 27, 2007 to address the remaining soil contamination. A Phase II investigation report was submitted September 30, 2009, and in 2010 two additional monitoring wells were installed to follow up on the findings of the report. Based on results from the additional wells, DES determined on January 4, 2011 that no further action was required for the petroleum contamination. One well slightly exceeds the groundwater quality standard for trichloroethylene. Therefore, the site is close to but has not yet achieved no further action status.



View of the main building demolition, photos taken by Lorianne DiSato.

### Redevelopment Project Status

The Perkins machine shop building was originally considered as a potential mill rehabilitation project by the city of Keene (April 2001 request for proposal). When prospective developers looked into the condition of the building, however, they found that the brick walls were bowing outward and the roof suffered a partial collapse in 2004. Two additional requests for proposal for redeveloping the property failed to generate interest, which led to the city taking a very active

role in the cleanup of the property. The combined effort by the city, the DES oil and brownfields programs, and EPA, via its brownfields grant, provided the necessary funding to clean-up the property. However, additional effort was required for the eventual success of the property.

Based on the extremely poor condition of the building and lack of interest by developers, Keene demolished the building in 2007. The property is located on Commerce Way near the very successful Railroad Square project. Railroad Square is also a brownfields project and used to be a six-acre, blighted B&M Railroad property. The redeveloped B&M property (Railroad Square) has a projected value of \$52.4 million and includes senior housing, condominiums, a Marriot Courtyard, Southwestern Community Services offices and other future projects. Based on the strength of the nearby Railroad Square brownfields project, the city was able to successfully interest a developer in this cleaned up property. On September 13, 2010, the property was purchased by Cityside Housing Associates Limited Parnership, LLC to construct a 24-unit building for permanently affordable workforce housing. The construction is underway and nearing completion as of August 2011.



View of the revitalized 92 and 110 Water Street property from Water Street and the parking area.