

Managing Brownfield Sites in Your Community

Michigan is home to thousands of brownfield sites, which affects each and every municipality. As government officials and community leaders, you understand the importance of making these sites a priority, but also understand the difficulty in finding funding or the resources to assess them, clean them up and ultimately find someone interested in redeveloping the site. In many small or rural communities, managing the operations are difficult enough without having to address brownfield sites considering the limited resources that are available.

At first thought, most people associate “brownfield” sites with environmentally contaminated property. Federally (and in Michigan), that is one definition; however, in Michigan, properties that are “blighted,” “functionally obsolete” or a “historic resource” are also considered to be included in the definition of a “brownfield.” It is important to understand this distinction since many properties that a municipal official may get complaints about may not be contaminated, but are likely just downright ugly and falling down but may qualify as a brownfield site.

Granted, qualifying as a “brownfield” site does not automatically trigger wheelbarrows of money to come rolling into town, but it may provide a means to incentivize a project or attract interest for support from state agencies that may have resources to offer. These may include the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the Michigan State Land Bank and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). These resources may include Blight Elimination Grants, Rehabilitation Grants, Brownfield Redevelopment Grants and Loans, and Brownfield Redevelopment Assessments.

For instance, some communities have been able to take advantage of Brownfield Redevelopment Assessments through EGLE. The department typically receives annual EPA funding through the Superfund Program and conducts limited free brownfield assessments for local units of government and public developers to evaluate properties for redevelopment. EGLE also has funds available for Brownfield Redevelopment Grants and Loans.

What is a Brownfield?

Facility – contaminated above residential cleanup criteria, or;

Blighted – determined by the local governing body to be:

- Public nuisance in accordance with local code or ordinance;
- Attractive nuisance to children – physical condition, use or occupancy;
- Fire hazard or dangerous;
- Had utilities disconnected, destroyed, removed or rendered ineffective;
- Tax reverted property owned by a qualified local governmental unit, county or state;
- Property owned or under control of a Land Bank;
- Has substantial subsurface demolition debris buried on site, or:

Functionally Obsolete – property is unable to be used adequately for its intended use due to loss in value from overcapacities, changes in technology, etc., or;

Historic Resource – publicly or privately-owned historic building or structure located within a historic district designated by the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register of Historic Places, or a local historic district (Section 90A of the Michigan Strategic Fund Act, 1984 PA 270).

Additionally, if a site is a “brownfield” and your county or a municipality within your county has a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, a Brownfield Plan can be developed to allow for tax increment financing to reimburse a municipality or developer for eligible brownfield activities.

These are just a few local resources to consider when trying to redevelop brownfield sites in your community. Other brownfield grant funding opportunities also exist federally, including Brownfield Assessment, Cleanup, and Multipurpose Grants.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me directly at jhawkins@envirologic.com or (800) 272-7802.

Brownfields ARE a community redevelopment opportunity!

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