



## **WCCOG Brownfields Program Frequently Asked Questions**

Washington County  
Council of Governments



### **What are Brownfields?**

The federal government defines brownfields as "abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination." Brownfields may make you think of dirty, blighted, abandoned industrial property, but that image is too narrow. Though some brownfields are old industrial sites, others are commercial buildings with little or no environmental contamination. Brownfields could be former service stations, warehouses, abandoned railroads or boat yards.

### **How does a community benefit from Brownfields redevelopment?**

Brownfields redevelopment can help a community in many ways. Some brownfields sites are in unattractive, economically depressed parts of a neighborhood. Cleanup and redevelopment of the sites can encourage higher property values and create jobs, as well as positively impact the local economy by creating a safer, healthier urban space to house businesses and residences. Many brownfields are in very good locations for redevelopment. They are the relics of our commercial and industrial past – they are often on waterfronts, in downtowns and at the junctions of well-travelled routes.

### **What are the benefits of Brownfields redevelopment to property owners?**

In addition to providing benefits to surrounding landowners, property owners that clean up and reuse their brownfields properties may benefit directly by:

- Avoiding potential environmental enforcement actions by federal, state and local regulatory agencies that could impose penalties and costly cleanups;
- Receiving tax benefits for cleaning up and reusing the property;
- Reducing the likelihood that contamination from the property will migrate off site or into the groundwater under the site, thereby limiting liability for, and long term costs of, cleaning up the property;
- Creating goodwill within the community
- Realizing an enhanced return from the property by making it more valuable and marketable.

### **What Resources are available from WCCOG?**

In May, 2014 WCCOG was awarded a \$400,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The assessment grant includes \$200,000 for assessment of sites impacted by petroleum and \$200,000 for sites impacted by hazardous materials. The grant period extends through the fall of 2017 and covers the



entirety of Washington County. This is the third \$400,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant awarded to WCCOG. The prior two grants, beginning in 2009, were used to prepare 21 Phase I & 14 Phase II assessments, and to assist with redevelopment of several sites. Visit [wccogbrownfields.com](http://wccogbrownfields.com) to learn about the sites already completed in the WCCOG program.

Services provided at no cost to the applicant include, among others:

- Phase I Environmental Site Assessments (ESA)
- Phase II ESAs
- Lead, asbestos and other hazardous material surveys
- Site remediation and reuse planning
- Permitting for building demolition and related activities

### **What properties are eligible?**

Properties owned by municipalities, non-profit organizations, developers or private land owners are eligible. The program excludes properties owned by the federal government, sites where pollution was caused by owner activities, and sites under regulatory enforcement action.

### **How do I apply?**

Brownfields site nomination forms are available at [wccogbrownfields.com](http://wccogbrownfields.com), or by contacting Judy East, WCCOG Executive Director, at (207) 454-0465. Sites are selected for assistance following review and ranking by the Regional Brownfields Advisory Committee.

### **Are there tax incentives for brownfields redevelopment?**

In addition to direct financial assistance, federal, state and local tax incentives are available to property owners and developers to help reduce the costs of brownfields projects. The federal tax incentives include the Taxpayers Relief Act, which allows eligible taxpayers to deduct qualified cleanup expenses at eligible brownfields in the year they are incurred, and a 20% credit for the *certified rehabilitation of certified historic structures*. A State of Maine tax credit of 25% is available for the rehabilitation of qualifying historic structures.

### **How clean is clean - must a brownfield site be cleaned up to pristine conditions?**

The extent of cleanup will vary considerably depending on the type, amount and area of contamination, and the cleanup standards used by the specific regulatory program that governs the cleanup. In addition, a key factor in determining the level of cleanup is whether the use of the property is taken into account in setting cleanup standards. For example, if a property is slated for industrial use, the cleanup standards may be less stringent than if the property were to be used for residential purposes, because the level of exposure to the contaminants will be less. Therefore some properties may only require isolation of contaminants, with paving for instance, or adoption of covenants that ensure future property owners or users will not be exposed to contamination.



### **How much will the cleanup cost?**

The cost of the cleanup will vary considerably depending on many factors. The level, type, and extent of contamination are key determinants. For example, if groundwater is contaminated, the cost of cleanup may be higher than if just the soil is contaminated. The cost will also depend on the standards that apply to the cleanup. For example, if a brownfields property is cleaned up to commercial use standards, rather than residential use standards, the cleanup will typically be less expensive. The cost to the property owner of the cleanup will also be affected by whether there are other parties, such as previous owners of the property that are also responsible for the contamination and can contribute to the costs.

### **How long will the cleanup take?**

The length of the cleanup will vary according to the level, type, amount and extent of the contamination, as well as the cleanup standards that apply to the site. A site with extensive soil and groundwater contamination that is cleaned up to residential standards is likely to take longer to clean up than a site that has only minimal contamination and will be used for industrial purposes. Factors such as the time of year, or unusually bad weather can affect the duration of the cleanup.

### **How do I pay for Cleanup?**

WCCOG will work with property owners to identify and apply for potential cleanup funding when needed. Examples of possible funding mechanisms include EPA site-specific cleanup grants, Maine Department of Environmental Protection Brownfields funding and groundwater insurance funds, Maine Department of Economic and community Development (DECD) Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) subgrants and low-interest loans, and other economic development funding mechanisms.

### **Where do I find more Information?**

To apply for environmental site assessment funding or to learn more about the WCCOG Brownfields program, please contact:

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Please visit our Brownfields website at [wccogbrownfields.com](http://wccogbrownfields.com)