

Brownfield Redevelopment can be an Economic Development Tool for Your Community

Michigan is home to approximately 43,000 brownfield sites; these sites are present throughout the state and greatly affect each and every municipality. At first thought, many people associate brownfield sites with environmentally contaminated property. While that is one definition, in Michigan the term “brownfield” also encompasses properties that are “blighted,” “functionally obsolete,” or a “historic resource.” It is essential to understand this distinction since many properties that a municipal official may get inquiries about may not be contaminated but qualify as a brownfield site.

In your community, some examples of brownfield sites could include:

- Publically owned/government buildings and land
- Gas stations and dry cleaners
- Commercial facilities and industrial sites
- Vacant schools and health care facilities
- Abandoned “main street” buildings
- Landfills, dump sites, and railroad yards

The challenges to redeveloping these sites can be overwhelming and include obvious disinvestment, known or perceived environmental contamination, underground storage tanks, lack of infrastructure, and parcels filled with debris. But the benefits of redevelopment could be immense. It may take time, but in the end, the community will enjoy an increase in jobs, recovery of the property tax base, improved value, and a safe site.

Qualifying as a brownfield site does not automatically trigger funding, but it may provide a means to incentivize a project or attract interest from state agencies with resources that could potentially help support your project. Several relevant state agencies include the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Michigan State Land Bank, and Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). Potential resources these agencies may be able to offer 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 funding through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Superfund Program and conducts limited free brownfield assessments for local government and public developers to evaluate properties for redevelopment. EGLE also has funds available for Brownfield Redevelopment Grants and Loans.

Additionally, suppose a site is a qualified brownfield and your county or a municipality within your county has a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. In that case, 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 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. These grants typically are announced in late summer and due to the U.S. EPA in November.

Our team has worked with all of these funding tools and has 30+ years of experience partnering with communities on brownfield redevelopment projects throughout Michigan. If we can support your efforts to transform brownfields into assets, please connect with me through email at hawkins@envirologic.com or by phone at (269) 615-3619.

