



Bring Back Blighted Sites

DEP expanding brownfield partnership with municipalities

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A healthy environment is a prerequisite for a healthy economy and healthy communities. The N.J. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is working with municipalities across the state to turn abandoned, underutilized and often contaminated land, also known as brownfields, into productive clean, safe and usable space to make those healthy ideals a reality.

Brownfields are the legacy of the Garden State's industrial past. These industrial or commercial properties range from small, abandoned corner gas stations to large, vacant former factories along industrial waterways. Though they are traditionally seen as a blight on neighborhoods, brownfields should be viewed as an opportunity for growth. Cleaned up and redeveloped, these sites are being transformed into valuable assets that can improve the quality of life in their communities.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates there are 450,000 brownfield sites in the nation. New Jersey has more than 14,000 active contaminated sites and many more brownfield sites. Their strategic locations along waterways and transportation corridors make these sites attractive for reuse, including as housing, open space, commercial, office and retail spaces, and as waterfront parks, paving the way for vibrant and resilient communities.

A sustainable enterprise

Redeveloping brownfields is a sustainable enterprise that benefits the state's land, water, air and natural resources. It's also smart growth, keeping greenfields, or undeveloped land, untouched. EPA estimates that 1 acre of brownfields reuse saves up to 4.6 acres of new greenfield development, with greater greenfield land savings anticipated in New Jersey.

Such efforts also substantially reduce stormwater runoff volume an average of 47% to 62%, according to EPA data from 2011, versus traditional greenfield



Harrison Avenue Landfill, Camden

BEFORE: An abandoned 86-acre city dump, operated in Camden from 1952 to 1971, was located next to a residential area and along two rivers. It remained neglected, without closure, for 35 years.

AFTER: The 62-acre Cramer Hill Waterfront Park is the largest park in Camden and has a fishing plaza, hiking and biking trails, a kayak launch, picnic area, playground, sensory garden, and shoreline observation areas along the Delaware and Cooper rivers. An additional 24 acres from the original dump have been turned into the Kroc Community Center, which serves area residents and offers enrichment programs, medical care, and a food pantry.



Blighted Sites

development, which adds impervious surface coverage and increases the severity of downstream flooding. Air quality is likely to improve because residential vehicle miles traveled are reduced 25% to 33%, EPA data from 2017 shows. Lastly, the planet benefits because redevelopment of brownfields also lowers per capita carbon footprints by an average of 32% to 57% versus conventional greenfield development, as per a 2011 EPA study.

All of these environmental benefits as a result of brownfield redevelopment also were accompanied by strong economic growth. EPA estimates from this year indicate that 197,693 jobs have been created on 10,098 brownfield sites remediated for productive reuse.

In New Jersey, the 29 Brownfield Development Area (BDA) municipalities have received \$187 million in Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Fund dollars that have helped to revitalize 31 neighborhoods with economic, environmental, community and quality-of-life assets.

Mixed-used projects

Through the BDA program, mixed-use, transit-oriented projects were completed on brownfields in Harrison, Orange, West Orange, Rahway, Somerville, and Haddon Township, revitalizing the communities and lowering the per-capita carbon footprint. Mixed-market housing units unfolded on brownfield sites in municipalities ranging from West Orange, Pennsauken and Haddon Township to Harrison, Trenton, Camden, and



Hamilton Stage, Rahway

BEFORE: Hamilton Laundry, an industrial laundromat, operated from 1929 to 2003, covering 2.1 acres of downtown property in Rahway.

AFTER: Hamilton Stage at Union County Performing Arts Center is a performing arts venue in the Rahway Central Business District.



Elizabeth, saving natural lands from development.

In Newark and Elizabeth, sites that housed former chemical facilities now are filled with employees in food service and recycling industries. And BDA sites in Bayonne and Lodi welcome shoppers in new retail centers built on old brownfield spaces.

Waterfront parcels in Carteret, Camden, Perth Amboy and Woodbridge, once home to former industrial facilities, have been transformed into parks that offer open recreational space and access to waterways for

local residents and visitors. Other waterfront industrial sites in Sayreville and Jersey City are undergoing multibillion-dollar private investments to create mixed use projects that will provide health and science jobs.

Climate adaptation and resiliency

Climate adaptation and resiliency elements have been placed in, or are planned for, brownfields in Jersey City, Bayonne, Camden, Perth Amboy, and Trenton. Resiliency is a key component in brownfield reuse planning in all BDA communities.

Additionally, the Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Fund (HDSRF) program, jointly administered by DEP and the N.J. Economic Development Authority (EDA), provided public entities with grants totaling \$208 million toward environmental remediation of 229 brownfield sites.

DEP is preparing an economic analysis that will show brownfield redevelopment results in dynamic economic growth. Preliminary data indicates that for every public dollar spent, \$8 in economic output was generated on formerly unproductive

History: BDA Program

The NJ Department of Environmental Protection established the Brownfields Development Area (BDA) program in 2002 to direct redevelopment opportunities. This program allows DEP, through its Office of Brownfield and Community Revitalization, to work with selected communities to carry out brownfield site investigation, remediation and redevelopment in a comprehensive manner.

As voluntary partners, DEP and an eligible public entity join forces to match a group of dedicated local stakeholders and a BDA manager, as well as licensed site remediation professionals, to design and complete remediation and reuse plans simultaneously. There are 29 municipalities currently partnering with DEP. The BDA program will be expanding to bring in additional partners and stakeholders to remediate and redevelop more sites.



Thomas Mundy Peterson Park, Perth Amboy

BEFORE: Three abandoned brownfield sites on 10 acres along the waterfront in Perth Amboy.

AFTER: Thomas Mundy Peterson Park includes ballfields for football, soccer, baseball, and softball, a waterfront walkway, and other amenities.




Blighted Sites

sites. Between 2006 and 2018, the 229 brownfield sites in this study that were remediated and redeveloped resulted in 9,765 jobs, 2,233 housing units, and 553 acres of new open space, most of which are in underserved communities.

Working together on redeveloping blighted brownfield sites is in the best interest of all New Jerseyans. New housing, jobs, open spaces and sustainable equitable growth benefit our people, our communities, and our planet.

DEP is ready to partner with more local municipalities and their stakeholders to address brownfields and will be opening applications for new BDA projects in additional communities in the coming months. Working with local leaders on this expanded brownfield program will help us to revitalize distressed areas and create stronger, fairer, and more resilient New Jersey communities.

The BDA program webpage (bit.ly/njbdaprogram) will be updated with more information. Subscribe (bit.ly/srp_updates) to receive site remediation program updates. 

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