

Brownfields

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative was created to empower states, federally recognized Indian tribes, local governments, communities, and other stakeholders involved in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, and safely cleanup brownfields in order to facilitate their sustainable reuse. As part of this Initiative, EPA awarded the City-Parish of Baton Rouge funding assistance to establish a Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot.



What is a Brownfield?

EPA defines brownfields as "abandoned, idled, or underused industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination." This leads to development outside of urban areas in pristine

"greenfields". The goal of the brownfields program is to encourage revitalization and reutilization of the nation's urban brownfields.

A Tool for Horizon Implementation

Designed as a program to operate within the framework of the 1992 Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan known as the Horizon Plan, the Brownfields Pilot is the foundational step for the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program (BRBP). Since the overall growth scenario established by the Horizon Plan is infill and redevelopment and since the Pilot targets properties predominantly found within the urban core, the BRBP is viewed as a powerful tool to be used towards implementation of the Horizon Plan.

The BRBP clearly meets the Horizon Plan goals and objectives to protect and enhance the value and character of existing urban areas; to promote development and redevelopment within the urbanized areas; to revitalize deteriorating neighborhoods; and to create and maintain accessible open space and greenbelt areas.

An Economic Development Program

While the BRBP might be thought of as an environmental program it should be considered an economic development tool.

The program functions by focusing on conserving resources for economic development. The inability to fully utilize urban land resources due to economic and legal uncertainties related to real or perceived contamination prevents growth. In this scenario, businesses prefer to invest in "greenfields" rather than deal with the problems associated with brownfields. They take taxes, jobs, and opportunities with them to undeveloped outlying areas.

What appears to be growth is actually an exchange of already developed urban properties for undisturbed, natural areas. In many cases, our community's resources such as open space, habitat, agricultural lands, and forested acres are lost to new development. Consequently, blight and untreated contamination are a potential occurrence on abandoned sites.

Incentives for Redevelopment

The brownfields program promotes recycling of urban properties by eliminating the uncertainties caused by pollution and quantifying the costs of remediation. The BRBP offers various incentives to assist in the redevelopment of qualified brownfields.





At the federal level, the **Brownfields Tax Incentive Program** allows the expense of cleanup of contamination on a site to be deducted from income tax of the owner in

the year it is incurred. To qualify, the site must be certified by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) as a brownfield. Certification is automatic for any property processed by the BRBP and identified as a Listed Brownfield (Level 3 Site).

Listed brownfields are also eligible for funding for site assessment and redevelopment planning through the BRBP. This includes grants for Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments, Remediation Action Plans, and workplans that may be used for the LDEQ Voluntary Remediation Program (VRP). The VRP is a new program authorized by legislation enacted in April 2001 that allows innocent third parties to receive a release of liability from contamination at a site. This release of liability automatically flows to future owners of the property as well.

The Planning Commission also waives select planning and zoning fees for listed brownfields and the project receives a brownfields designation in the file to expedite the planning and zoning review.

Also, through its ongoing partnership with Baton Rouge Green, the BRBP has secured special discounts for purchase of trees for landscaping for brownfields redevelopment projects.

The BRBP is investigating the availability of low-interest loans for brownfields acquisition and cleanup. The BRBP can also request no cost Targeted Site Assessments from EPA for special projects. The Planning Commission Staff continually researches additional brownfields incentives. Please contact the City-Parish Planning Commission for an updated list of funding sources.

In addition to direct funding opportunities, the BRBP offers assistance to process qualifying sites through the program. Technical guidance is available and communication can be facilitated with the Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), the VRP and other authorities as needed.

Specific site data gathered by the BRBP is confidential and is not made available to the public. However, to receive funding assistance, property owners or their appointed representatives must authorize listing of the property as a brownfield. Such authorization permits public access to information about the site.

Participating in the Brownfields Program

There are many ways you can participate in the brownfields program and receive assistance.

- **If you own a property that you think is impacted by environmental contamination**, submit your site to the Planning Commission. The BRBP will make a preliminary review to qualify the property for economic incentives.
- **If your neighborhood is affected by abandoned, blighted, or underutilized commercial properties**, call the Planning Commission to review. Qualifying sites will be considered for BRBP redevelopment assistance.
- **If you are a developer looking for commercial properties or redevelopment opportunities**, call the Planning Commission to discuss sites that meet your project needs. The BRBP can put you in communication with representatives of qualified brownfields.
- **If your community or organization is interested in brownfields redevelopment**, call the Planning Commission to set up a special presentation.



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