

OVERVIEW

Brownfield redevelopment is a general term for developing brownfield sites or properties that have been abandoned or underused due to environmental contamination.¹ These sites include former factories, hospitals, mills, and gas stations. Sites can be redeveloped for any use and have been successfully converted into parks, greenways, and commercial or residential developments. While such development is often more costly due to cleanup and the increased liability of hazardous materials, a series of tools to support the conversion of this land to a public and sustainable purpose can support the broader community goals of inclusion and equitable development.

Brownfield redevelopment offers a prime opportunity for equitable development, both with regard to choosing which sites to develop and deciding how specifically to develop them. Developments with negative environmental impacts — such as landfills or factories — are often disproportionately located adjacent to communities of color² and thus these sites when redeveloped can deliver specific benefits to these communities. Additional funding and financial incentives can provide opportunities for communities to work with government and developers to require community input into the development process and align the projects with the priority needs of community members.

HOW IT WORKS

Because any development involves zoning, planning, and environmental regulations, brownfield redevelopment requires collaboration with government entities at the local, state and/or federal level. Nonprofit collaborations also exist, typically in conjunction with government entities.

At its simplest, this collaboration involves a state government limiting liability for developers of brownfield sites to encourage development.³ Municipalities can offer incentives such as tax credits to spur development on target sites, and they can use the same incentives to encourage applicants to develop the sites for a specific use. Communities can advocate for both the new use of the spaces and the cleaning of these sites, which could remove

¹ <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/bf/background>

² <http://www.uncinclusionproject.org>

³ <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/bf/background>

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Identify potential brownfield sites locally, and speak with your elected officials about developing them into community assets like parks, greenways or other public spaces.

Ask the officials:

- **Are you aware of available EPA grants to aid in development of these sites?**
- **What incentives are in place to encourage applicants to develop these sites?**
- **Are you aware of programs such as Groundwork USA or RE-Powering America's Land?**

Organize a group of local stakeholders to gauge interest in forming a Groundwork Trust, a community-led and community-run organization with access to the Groundwork USA network and equipped to plan and implement brownfield redevelopment projects.

If interest exists, form a resident steering committee and draft a letter of interest to Groundwork USA.

Once selected, the steering committee should work with Groundwork USA and the National Parks Service to submit a full proposal.

If the proposal successfully passes through a feasibility study, Groundwork USA will provide seed money for launching a new Groundwork Trust.

HOW IT WORKS (CONTINUED)

toxic substances that include asbestos, petroleum, lead, and industrial chemicals from the area. Successful brownfield redevelopment projects across the country have increased the area's tax base, generated renewable energy, and reclaimed previously unusable space.⁴

Communities can find funding and support at the federal, state, and local level. At the federal level, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Program offers grants for virtually every aspect of brownfield redevelopment: assessment, cleanup, planning, research, technical assistance, environmental workforce development, and special considerations for indigenous lands.⁵ Another federal program called RE-Powering America's Land offers technical assistance in converting contaminated sites to renewable energy plants.⁶

Local stakeholders can partner with a nonprofit called Groundwork USA, which creates a local "Groundwork Trust" that is linked to a national network backed by resources from the National Parks Service and the EPA. These trusts specialize in equity, youth development, and technical assistance for brownfield rehabilitation, clean water systems, and healthy communities in general.⁷

Ultimately, what a community does about its local brownfields will be up to its members. A process to identify community needs and viable projects can ensure that the redevelopment effort is successful and achieves the desired community outcomes.

IMPACTS IN N.C. TO DATE

North Carolina's Brownfields Program is administered by the Division of Waste Management. The program essentially amounts to a covenant not to sue property developers in the case that contaminants are eventually found on their site.⁸

Four municipalities have successfully received EPA grants over the last 15 years: Durham and Winston-Salem for

4 https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/brownfields/brnflld_qna.html
 5 <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/types-brownfields-grant-funding>
 6 <https://www.epa.gov/re-powering/re-powering-your-community#projects>
 7 <https://groundworkusa.org/groundwork-network/>
 8 <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/bf/background>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Identify brownfield sites using the Division of Waste Management's site locator tool:

<https://ncdenr.maps.arcgis.com/>

Learn more about starting a Groundwork Trust:

<https://groundworkusa.org/ground-work-network/start-a-new-groundwork-trust/>

Learn more about various EPA grants to discuss with elected officials: <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/types-brownfields-grant-funding>

Learn more about RE-Powering America's Land:

<https://www.epa.gov/re-powering>

environmental job training, Hickory for assessing redevelopment of a historic textile mill, and Fletcher for cleaning up old sites in an effort to revitalize downtown.⁹ For more intensive interventions, there are two RE-Powering sites in Haywood and Wake counties. Both sites are former landfills that have been outfitted with solar arrays.¹⁰

There are currently no Groundwork Trusts in North Carolina. The closest trusts are in Atlanta, Ga., and Richmond, Va., both of which were founded within the past five years.¹¹ Groups seeking to redevelop brownfield sites can look to the collaborative, community-oriented models of such projects. For example, Groundwork Atlanta leverages its partnerships with the EPA, the City of Atlanta, a public land trust, and community organizations to advocate for community-driven redevelopment of several brownfields in historically underserved parts of the city. They have worked with youth and other residents to clean a former brick company campus, railroad tracks, and a local park.

— *Written by Blake Rosser with Rachel Salzberg*

9 <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/brownfields-grantee-success-stories>
 10 <https://www.epa.gov/re-powering/re-powering-your-community#projects>
 11 <https://groundworkusa.org/groundwork-network/>