


Framingham: Town wins \$300K from EPA to assess 'Brownfields'



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Framingham used EPA Brownfields money to test this parcel at 48 Pratt St. for contaminants before opening it as a community garden in 2011. [Daily News Staff Photo/Jonathan Dame]

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Posted Jun 13, 2017 at 10:53 PM

Updated Jun 13, 2017 at 10:53 PM



FRAMINGHAM – A \$300,000 federal grant will fund site assessments for potentially contaminated properties in need of redevelopment, town officials said.

Framingham was one of just 172 communities nationwide to receive funds this year as part of the Brownfields program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The three-year grant will further the town's economic development vision in the downtown and southeast Framingham, historically industrial sections of town with many low-income and immigrant residents.

"If we can clean up a property, if we can increase investment in a property, it's going to make the quality of life for the properties around it and the neighborhoods around it better," said Erika Oliver Jerram, the town's deputy director of community and economic development.

"It's going to improve the tax base in Framingham," she said. "It's kind of simplistic, but ... the bottom line is making [Framingham] a better place."

This is the fourth time since 2008 that Framingham has received a Brownfields grant, bringing the total to \$1.1 million. The town missed out on the award last year, leaving the program without funding until this coming October.



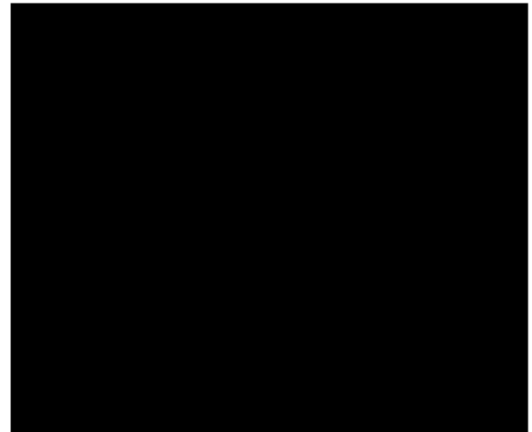
The town is strategizing ways to more proactively reach out to property owners in specific areas of town: the downtown and southeast Framingham. In 2016, a consultant submitted a 79-page [“Southeast Framingham Brownfield Plan.”](#)

Multiple census tracts on the south side of town meet the state’s criteria for “environmental justice” areas based on the disproportionate share of residents that are low-income, minority, or non-English speakers.

“Brownfields” are properties with known or suspected contamination that are underutilized, such as abandoned former commercial facilities. While the EPA does pay for some cleanups, the grant awarded to Framingham is only for site assessments.

“We’re trying to help the small property owners in particular because we know that they are resource-challenged,” said Oliver Jerram, Framingham’s Brownfields program director.

The grant money can’t go to the parties known to have caused the contamination and is only meant for properties in the process of being sold or redeveloped. The town has enough money to assess more than a dozen sites by 2020.



Slightly more than a dozen Massachusetts communities received Brownfields grants in 2017, including Worcester, Lawrence, and New Bedford.

Ashland, Bellingham, Holliston, Hopedale, Marlborough, Northborough, and Franklin have received money through the program in the past.

Framingham previously used Brownfield money to investigate the environmental condition of the Cochituate Rail Trail corridor, the site of the McAuliffe Branch Library, and the Danforth Green.

Framingham has also assessed many private properties over the past decade, including a parcel at 68 South St. where the Planning Board permitted a three-story, 16-unit apartment building last month.

Town officials stressed that property owners should feel comfortable inquiring about the program without fear of punitive regulatory action from the state or federal government.

The grant money can fund Phase I site assessments, essentially just a review of historical records to determine the likelihood that a property is contaminated. It also pays for more costly investigations that include testing soil samples for hazardous compounds.

There is no state reporting requirement for a Phase I assessment, Oliver Jerram said. The program is “intended to incentivize change,” she said.

“We encourage folks to call us if they think their property might be eligible,” Oliver Jerram said.

The Framingham Brownfields program can be reached at 508-532-5455 or brownfields@framinghamma.gov.

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