

FRAMINGHAM

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Targeting tainted ground

The Boston Globe

Plans to revamp, reuse polluted sites

By Tanya Pérez-Brennan

Globe Correspondent / July 13, 2008

Framingham is kicking off a public information campaign at a community forum later this month to promote a program for the redevelopment of potentially contaminated industrial sites with a \$200,000 federal grant it received.

The town obtained the three-year Brownfields Assessment Grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency in April. It will be used to identify about a half-dozen underused sites in downtown and southeast Framingham that could be redeveloped, according to town officials. The grant also has money to inform residents and property owners, and cover the cost of translation services to reach immigrant communities.

Town officials and an EPA representative will speak about the project at the 7 p.m. forum on July 21 in the Memorial Building.

"This is all based on the idea that some of these sites are underutilized because there is a suspicion of contamination," said Erika Oliver Jerram, a Framingham planning official.

According to the EPA website, brownfields are defined as sites where expansion, redevelopment, or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.

The EPA has identified as many as 438 contaminated sites in Framingham, but that doesn't mean all of the locations are brownfields, said Dorrie Paar, an environmental scientist and brownfields project officer for Region 1, the federal agency's New England office.

Paar said that if the brownfields sites are found to be polluted, the levels of contamination are usually very low, and could include a number of substances, including organics, metals, or petroleum-based products.

The town has been considering redevelopment for a number of years, but this is the first brownfields grant it has received, Jerram said. The town applied for the grant twice before.

According to Paar, the grant is competitive. This year, Region 1 received 120 applications, and funded 52, she said.

Framingham officials said they hope to redevelop these sites as part of a larger attempt at promoting the area's revitalization.

Jason Smith, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, said he sees the project as a "stepping stone," and as something that could lead to more funding.

"I think there's key areas in Framingham where redevelopment is going to be the way of the future," he said. "We hope it will bring in new revenues and lessen the tax burden."

The EPA encourages communities that have already won grants to reapply as a means of creating an ongoing redevelopment effort, said Gene Kennedy, project manager for the grant.

The first task will be to hire a state-licensed site professional, who will research and identify sites, he said. Then, that person will have to gain access to the site and work with property owners.

The town is hoping to set up a brownfields steering committee by next month or September, Kennedy said, since the grant runs on the federal fiscal year, starting Oct. 1.

The town has partnered with seven community organizations so far on the project, according to Kennedy.

Ted Welte, president and chief financial officer of the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber is one of the project's community partners. Local businesses and property owners are interested in the project, he said.

"There may be some properties that could be put back into productive use," he said.

But the town also wants to make sure that it includes everyone in the process, especially since a lot of the older industrial sites are near housing where some minority and immigrant communities can be found, Jerram said.■

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