

FRAMINGHAM

Grant may give boost to town

\$400,000 from EPA eyed for vacant property assessment

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FRAMINGHAM — Even the possibility of contaminated land can hold up building projects or purchases and sales.

"Sometimes suspicion is enough to hamper development," said Erika Jerram, senior planner with the town's Department of Community and Economic Development.

But a \$400,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant the town landed last week from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency may facilitate economic development downtown and on the Southside, the town says. It allows the town to hire a licensed site professional to assess up to 16 vacant or underutilized properties

that are either privately owned or eyed for municipal projects.

This is the third and largest grant Framingham has received to build up its brownfields program, which began in 2008.

"One of the biggest values that we've seen with our program is that it essentially provides federal money to help leverage town projects," Gene Kennedy, the assistant director of Community and Economic Development, said Friday.

Some of the new funding could pay for environmental investigation at the town-owned Nobscot chapel, the village shopping center or the Mt. Wayte plaza, Kennedy said.

Studies will also look at future land use in specific pockets of

the Southside, he said.

As part of the program, the town reaches out to private property owners who may need what's known as a 21E assessment to obtain a mortgage or loan, Jerram said.

Assessments involve documenting the site, checking its history and generating recommendations on any land contamination and next steps to take, she said.

"This will give the owner and the buyer information," Jerram said. "Oftentimes it will help facilitate a sale."

"The goal of the program," Kennedy said, "is to provide the money that a property owner can use to evaluate that to assist in revitalizing or selling that property."

He said department head Alison Steinfeld sees the brownfields program as a "key ingredient" to economic revitalization in Framingham.

Past grant funding has allowed the town to check out the state-owned Rugg-Gates property on Rte. 9, the proposed site of a new branch library on Water Street and the Pratt Street plot that's now a community garden.

For more information about program eligibility, visit the Community and Economic Development department's page on the town website, www.framinghamma.gov.

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