Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Program

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

Introduction

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created the Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) Program to assist communities in responding to local brownfields challenges, particularly where multiple brownfield[1] sites are in close proximity, connected by infrastructure, and overall limit the economic, environmental and social prosperity of their surroundings. Through the BF AWP Program, EPA provides assistance to advance community brownfield revitalization efforts. The BF AWP program is part of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities collaboration among EPA and the Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (www.sustainablecommunities.gov)

Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Program Goals

EPA developed the BF AWP Program to enhance EPA's core brownfields assistance programs[2] by helping communities perform the research needed to develop an area-wide plan for brownfields assessment, cleanup, and reuse. The resulting area-wide plans provide direction for future brownfields cleanup, reuse and related improvements that are:

- Protective of public health and the environment;
- Economically viable; and
- Reflective of the community's vision for the area.

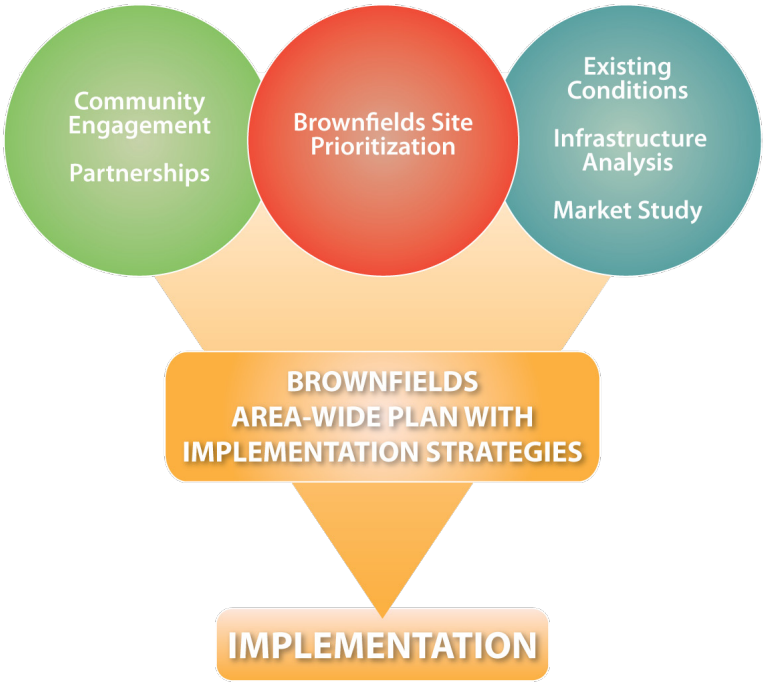
EPA's Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Program

Initiated in 2010, the BF AWP Program provides grant funding and technical assistance to brownfields communities selected via a national grant competition. These communities are using EPA resources to research area-wide planning approaches that will help them achieve brownfields cleanup and reuse in the future. The BF AWP grant recipients represent a cross section of community leaders on brownfield issues, include public and non-profit organizations, and are distributed across the country. Find more information at www.epa.gov/brownfields/areawide_grants.htm. EPA expects to award additional BF AWP grants as funding is available.

Core Elements of Brownfields Area-Wide Planning

Core elements of the BF AWP Program include:

- Collecting information and identifying community priorities related to brownfields cleanup and near- and long-term revitalization;
- Evaluating existing environmental conditions, local market potential, and needed infrastructure improvements;
- Developing strategies for brownfields site cleanup and reuse; and
- Identifying resources or leveraging opportunities to help implement the plans, including specific strategies for public and private sector investments and improvements necessary to help with cleanup and area revitalization.



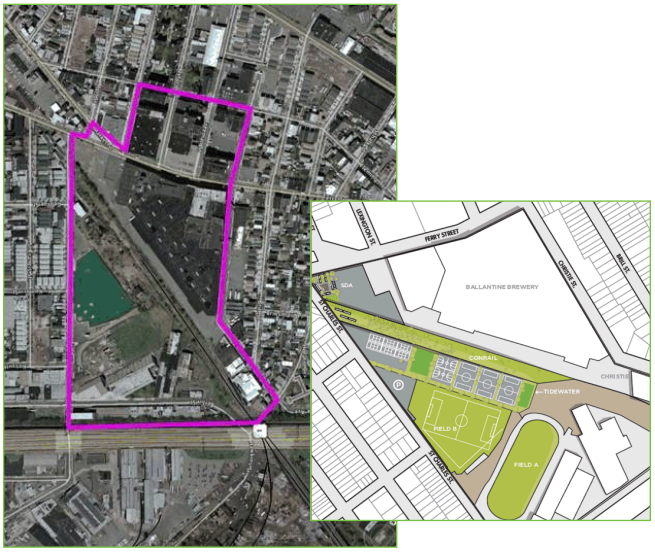
1 A brownfield is a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. See www.epa.gov/brownfields/basic_info.htm

2 Please visit www.epa.gov/brownfields/grant_info/index.htm

Types of Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Research Activities

- **Project Area Definition** – BF AWP areas are typically established within a local commercial corridor, neighborhood, city block, downtown district, or other geographically-defined area that has a single large or multiple brownfield sites.
- **Community Engagement** – Meaningful and continuous community engagement is fundamental to BF AWP. Stakeholders include residents, businesses, government, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and any potential future partners. Engagement can be facilitated through advisory committees, public meetings, design charrettes, round table sessions, and other means to gather community priorities for area cleanup and reuse.
- **Partnerships** – BF AWP should reflect diverse perspectives on community priorities and shared responsibility for implementation across multiple entities. Partnerships typically include government agencies, institutional or community-based organizations, local or regional funding providers and the private sector. Long-term collaboration amongst partners helps ensure the interests voiced in the community engagement process are applied throughout the life of the project and facilitates implementation of the area-wide plan.
- **Brownfields Site Prioritization** – Prioritization allows for strategic use of limited resources. It can be customized to meet the unique needs and goals of the community identified through the community engagement process. Criteria may include proximity to sensitive populations, property size, human or environmental health threats, likelihood of reuse, availability of other resources, or potential to catalyze additional improvements within the project area.
- **Existing Conditions** – Establishing the local physical, social, economic, and environmental context on which to base the plan allows stakeholders to: identify priorities, partnerships, and general needs for the area; informs a detailed opportunities and constraints analysis;

The vision for cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields is driven by local community priorities, market demand, and area-wide investments in New Bern, North Carolina



Ironbound Community Corporation, New Jersey brownfields planning area and site reuse concepts

Meaningful community engagement like this meeting in Huntington Park, California, allows the plan to reflect community priorities

and begins the process of identifying resources for implementation. For example, proposed projects requiring private market investment and development may benefit from economic research or market studies to identify what the local real estate market can support. Similarly, identifying the extent to which a project will require public subsidies is critical to determine project feasibility. Brownfields cleanup and reuse strategies need to be directly tied to the infrastructure that supports the sites, including roads, water, sewer, power, and telecommunications, if revitalization plans are to be realized. Examining the adequacy of infrastructure is important when developing strategies for leveraging the use of existing infrastructure— or identifying if upgrades are needed given the planned reuse.

- **Brownfields Reuse Planning for Catalyst Sites** – Through the process of identifying the community's priorities and existing conditions of the project area, the BF AWP process helps uncover specific opportunities where communities can assess, clean up and reuse high-priority, or catalyst, brownfield sites. These sites may have the strongest potential for reuse due to community interest, environmental, health or economic concerns, and/or ability to spur additional revitalization within the project area. The brownfields area-wide plan should summarize the cleanup and reuse implementation strategies for these catalyst sites using information obtained through research into community engagement, prioritization, existing conditions, partnerships, and potential resources.

- **Implementation Strategy** – Identifying and evaluating potential technical or financial resources at the local, regional, state, tribal, and federal levels are critical steps for the realization of BF AWP goals. EPA encourages strong coordination with other federal, state, tribal, regional and local agencies to share relevant information and help leverage technical assistance and resource opportunities. Implementation strategies must also consider partnerships, market-based feasibility of redevelopment plans, and short- and long-term actions to achieve full-scale implementation.

Brownfields like this in Ranson, West Virginia, are part of the city's BF AWP project area and targeted for cleanup and revitalization

Mobile community engagement in San Francisco tours the planning area for close inspection

Public and private partners in Kansas City, Missouri, look at a key brownfields site and work together to develop a strategy to implement the BF AWP vision

Developing Action-Oriented Brownfields Area-Wide Planning with Short- and Long-Term Implementation Considerations

The BF AWP process is meant to help communities organize the short-and long-term actions that they need to take to achieve the cleanup and reuse goals for the project area. Often times, economic limitations (such as financial resources and market conditions) and local policy challenges can prevent a brownfields area-wide plan from being implemented immediately. However, the process should help a community recognize that taking initial or interim steps can keep momentum behind the project. For example, a community can work to integrate the plan across local government departments, into partnership priorities or into regional planning efforts. Additionally, pursuing interim cleanup and reuse at brownfields sites can also help demonstrate to the community that their priorities are being addressed, even before the full brownfields remedy and reuse are achieved.

Relationship of Brownfields Area-Wide Planning to Existing Community Planning Efforts

BF AWP does not replicate or replace traditional planning efforts such as city-wide comprehensive, regional land use, or neighborhood planning. Rather, the research and strategies developed through BF AWP can be used to inform these more traditional planning process so they are complementary and account for the unique nature of brownfield cleanup, reuse, and the social, environmental, and economic implications that differentiate them from unencumbered property. For example, some community planning efforts assume relative uniformity across properties within a particular area – that all properties are equally reusable, relatively unconstrained, and any development limitations are influenced only by local policy (such as zoning). These planning efforts do not always account for the impact that real or potential contamination associated with brownfields has on these assumptions.

Conclusion

EPA's BF AWP program outlines an approach which enables communities to research and evaluate brownfields cleanup and reuse opportunities in light of priorities and existing plans; local market, infrastructure, and other conditions; and resource availability. This information enables communities to make more informed decisions about where to direct scarce resources and helps advance the implementation of locally-driven initiatives, such as housing, parks, environmental improvement, economic development, and ensuring environmental justice.

Ohio River Corridor Brownfields Area-Wide Planning study area in Monaca, Pennsylvania

The BF AWP process is especially helpful to communities that have already been working within a specific area to develop partnerships, engage the community on priorities and build agreement around a shared revitalization vision.

As available, EPA provides assistance to brownfields communities for BF AWP in order to help identify specific cleanup and reuse opportunities for key brownfield sites that can serve as catalysts for revitalization of the surrounding area.