Brownfields Assessments

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Brownfield?

A Brownfield is an abandoned or underutilized property where expansion, redevelopment, or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.

How much does it cost to participate?

Nothing! The assessment program is completely free to eligible landowners.

Where does the money for this program come from?

In 2025, Big Sky Economic Development (BSED) was awarded a $500,000 Brownfield grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to complete environmental assessment activities.

What is the goal of this program?

The goal of Brownfield site assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment is to allow for the revitalization of blighted properties in support of community growth and development.

Are certain sites given a higher priority than others?

Some sites may be deemed higher priority due to several factors including the site's location, timing of redevelopment, availability of other redevelopment resources, alignment with community needs and strategic plans, economic development impact of the project, local interest, health and safety factors, and/or the type and extent of contamination.

When is funding available?

Funding through this program is limited and only a certain number of projects can be completed. Contact Darian Armer at Big Sky Economic Development to discuss your property's eligibility.

In which area is funding available?

BSED's target area for use of these grant funds is downtown Billings and the East Billings Urban Renewal District, but properties throughout Billings and Yellowstone County may be considered.

What activities can be completed on my property?

Assessment funds can be used for Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments as well as cleanup and reuse planning.

Who completes the assessments?

Big Sky Economic Development hires a Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) with the applicable experience and certifications to complete on-site assessments.

Does the community get a say in the redevelopment?

Ultimately, the redevelopment of a property is up to the landowner and/or developer. However, community input is important to BSED's Brownfield Program. We regularly seek input from the community through various public meetings and feedback.

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What is the difference between a Phase I and Phase II ESA?

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) is a non-invasive, historical investigation of a property and its surrounding area to determine whether there are any Recognized Environmental Conditions (RECs). This includes researching database records, analyzing historical documents such as aerial photographs and maps, speaking with individuals familiar with the property, and conducting a visual site reconnaissance.

The goal of a Phase I ESA is to identify whether there is any possible contamination on a property. A Phase II ESA is an invasive investigation where samples are collected. The samples are analyzed at an accredited laboratory and will provide data as to whether there is contamination at a property.

What kind of properties make good Brownfield sites?

Common types of sites include former dry cleaners, automotive repair shops, former gas stations, industrial manufacturing facilities, illegal dump sites, railroad facilities, warehouses, landfills, properties with meth use, and structure built prior to 1980 (asbestos & lead-based paint).

What makes a landowner eligible to participate?

A landowner is eligible to participate in the program if they meet the following criteria: They own the property; The property is underutilized, abandoned, or is going through redevelopment or revitalization; There are real or perceived concerns for environmental contamination at the property; There is a potential reuse or redevelopment plan for the property; The owner did not cause or contribute to the contamination at the property (unless it is asbestos and/or lead-based paint contamination).

What types of contamination can be addressed?

There are numerous types of contaminants that are eligible for assessment and cleanup through the Brownfield Program. Common contaminants at Brownfield sites include, but are not limited to, petroleum products, Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), asbestos, lead-based paint, methamphetamine, mercury, and industrial chemicals and solvents.

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What is required of the landowner through the process?

The landowner can be as involved or hands-off as they would like. At a minimum, the landowner must have an initial meeting with BSED to discuss the history of the property and see if the site is eligible for funding. If deemed eligible by EPA, the landowner must sign an access agreement permitting BSED and their QEP access to the property for the purpose of performing the environmental site assessment (s). Ideally, the landowner will also meet with BSED and the QEP after each phase of assessment to discuss the findings and next steps for the property. It is BSED's goal to keep the landowner informed throughout the entire assessment process and make sure they feel included in the activities happening on their property.

What are the benefits of the program?

Participation in the program is 100% voluntary and assessments are completed by a contractor hired by BSED at no cost to the landowner. The information generated can be used to: determine whether environmental contamination exists; meet regulatory agency requirements; satisfy purchaser or lender concerns; create cleanup or reuse plans; satisfy requirements to utilize additional state or federal Brownfield funds for further assessment or cleanup activities.

Is this a mandatory cleanup program?

No. Brownfield assessment is 100% voluntary. It is intended to support the owner and/or future purchaser in activities that promote reuse of the property.

How do I determine if this program is a good fit for me?

The Big Sky Economic Development Community Development team is available to discuss your project goals and/or property concerns and help you determine if this program is the right fit for you. Brownfield site assessment should be viewed as an effective tool to achieve community and property redevelopment.

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