

# Tonawanda News

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## Learning what brown can do for them

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TOWN OF TONAWANDA — Turns out, a little contamination may be a good thing after all. At least when it comes to incentives for redeveloping former industrial sites in the Town and City of Tonawanda.

Efforts are under way to take the initial steps in cleaning up some of those contaminated parcels. The goal is to spur redevelopment in the hopes of spawning another success story, such as the recently remediated Spaulding Business Park in the city.

“The advantage of redeveloping these sites is that they’re on the river. They’re going to be real attractive, and we’re providing land for economic development and jobs,” said Ed Flynn, a senior planner with LaBella Associates.

Representatives from the firm briefed about a dozen people Thursday in the Sheridan Parkside Community Center on the Tonawanda Brownfield Opportunity Area, a program that ultimately will identify specific brownfield sites in the town and part of the city, and develop a master plan for redeveloping those brownfields. The program will lure developers to certain sites by offering tax credits and other incentives for reuse.

Those incentives could include a tax credit of anywhere from 22 to 50 percent, according to Robert Murray, an attorney with Harris Beach, a law firm working with the town on the Brownfield Opportunity Area project. Harris Beach has been involved in more than two-dozen brownfield projects, Murray said, and each one has been profitable because of the incentives offered.

The town received a \$60,000 state grant to perform what’s called a “pre-nomination study,” which is basically an investigation of potential brownfield sites in what’s called the BOA, or Brownfield Opportunity Area. “We want to get a handle on where we are and eventually where we want to go with this,” said Town Engineer Jim Jones.

Currently, officials involved with the project have identified approximately 26 brownfield sites, most of which are in the town, including the Riverview Solar Park on River Road, the North Youngmann Commerce Center, and a few park areas; a few parcels are located in the city.

“There’s a lot of different types of uses because it is such a big area,” Flynn said, noting that the Tonawanda BOA covers approximately 116 parcels on more than 1,000 acres of land bounded by the river and the I-190 and I-290.

After the pre-nomination study, the town can apply for additional funding to complete a more detailed analysis of the contamination on the brownfield sites, and the potential costs associated with cleaning up those areas.

Essentially, a brownfield site is one that's difficult to redevelop because of the presence, or potential presence, of contamination, Flynn explained to audience members. Brownfields can be a dilapidated, vacant industrial building — similar to the former Spaulding Fibre site on Wheeler Street — or even a vacant parcel that's in a good location, such as along the river, but one that still hasn't been developed.

The state-administered Brownfield Opportunity Area program will help bring those sites to the forefront of potential developers, Flynn said. "The benefit of the program is that it advances projects to the marketplace," he said.

That's largely because brownfield sites can become eligible for tax credits and other incentives that make them lucrative to developers who might not otherwise consider investing in such a site. "One of the objectives is to recapture the Niagara River for the Town of Tonawanda," Flynn said.

"These sites should be very attractive to developers, especially because they're in the Brownfield Opportunity Area and will qualify for brownfield tax credits," said Greg Senecal, LaBella's Environmental Division director.

Some of the potential brownfield sites can be cleaned up for redevelopment. Others, though, such as parcels affected by the federal FUSRAP program, which pertains to sites that were part of the country's early atomic energy and weapons efforts, may need to be cleaned up, capped and monitored well into the future to ensure that any contamination in those sites, including the Tonawanda Landfill, doesn't leak out.

Despite New York's nearly \$10 billion deficit, officials said Thursday that while there's no guarantee that the Brownfield Opportunity Area program will continue to be funded, state leaders, including Gov. Andrew Cuomo, have indicated that it is a critical tool in redeveloping sites in economically challenged areas.