



Brownfields and Economic Renewal

Gro-WA Work Component D



Introduction

Washington County's coastal cities and towns hosted a heavy concentration of shipyards, canneries, fuel transport and other business along the waterfront. Over a century of industrial emissions and discharges has resulted in residual impacts to the land, groundwater, and marine environment. When combined with over 250 spills of oil and hazardous substances reported by Maine DEP for Coastal Washington County since 1984, the cumulative environmental impacts from these "Brownfields" (<http://www.gro-wa.org/brownfields-defined>) are substantial.¹ These issues become exacerbated with climate change and associated sea level rise, where shorefront factories, like the Columbian cannery in Lubec, become inundated and contaminants are released to the marine environment.

In 2013, MaineHealth published a report that ranked Washington County 14th of 16 counties in Maine for a number of "Physical Environment" rankings. These rankings reflect cumulative environmental impact for many communities in the county.² For example, the county scored high for threats to drinking water, air pollution and limited access to healthy foods. These data raise concern over the high reliance on groundwater for drinking water, and risks posed by industrial waste and water pollution; as well as local and regional transport of industrial air pollutants.

The Washington County Brownfields Assessment Program (<http://www.gro-wa.org/washington-county-brownfields-program>) started with \$400,000 of site assessment funding from the USEPA in 2009. The Washington County Council of Governments (WCCOG) received another \$400,000 in 2012 and has completed 25 Phase I and 14 Phase II assessments that have led to 11 redevelopment projects in Washington County. There are numerous sites and site owners with an interest in site assessment and redevelopment. As a result, the program has fully committed funds from the second 3-year grant in less than two years. WCCOG submitted a request (Jan 21, 2014) for an additional \$400,000 in site assessment funds to maintain the momentum of this successful program.

Findings

Funds from the GROWashington – Aroostook regional planning initiative were put to use to expand the Regional Brownfields Advisory Committee, to identify and map

¹ Maine DEP "Spill Report Master List," www.maine.gov/dep/maps-data/documents/spills.pdf

² Mainehealth, "2013 Community Health Rankings – Summary for Washington County," 2013.



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redevelopment opportunities relative to disadvantaged populations, identify regulatory barriers to infill development, seek additional brownfields assessment funds, develop videos to provide technical assistance to local boards and to coordinate regional housing, transportation, economic development and infrastructure plans with redevelopment obstacles and opportunities.

The Washington County Brownfields Advisory Committee was expanded over the past 3 years with the addition of several individuals that bring essential insights to site selection and re-development planning (<http://www.gro-wa.org/assets/files/brownfields/WCCOG-BrfldAdvComm2014ForWeb.pdf>). The committee was expanded to include an architect from Steuben, the Tribal Brownfields Program Manager from the Passamaquoddy Reservation at Pleasant Point, the new City and Town Managers in Eastport and Baileyville respectively, and a member of the Calais Downtown Revitalization Committee. The Advisory Committee remains actively engaged in attendance at regular meetings, a celebration of site redevelopment with over 100 in attendance, and outreach events to describe and promote the assessment program.

There are only a handful of municipalities in Washington County with locally adopted zoning ordinances. Others have very basic land use ordinances or nothing at all besides the state-mandated subdivision and shoreland zoning regulations. None of these regulations contain regulatory barriers to infill development. Indeed most of them, and the Comprehensive Plans on which they are based, encourage it. Three of the largest municipal centers (Calais, Eastport and Machias) are part of the Maine Downtown Network and actively support brownfields redevelopment. Indeed, the Washington County Brownfields program was a featured presenter at the November 2013 Washington County Downtown Day (<http://www.mdf.org/events/Washington-County-Downtown-Day/690/>). This participation and outreach in fact led to the identification of a new potential brownfields site to our inventory.

As already noted above the Washington County Brownfields program successfully sought and obtained additional brownfields funding in 2012 and is seeking more in 2014. These funds are leveraged by the technical assistance provided by the WCCOG to businesses for applications to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program in numerous cases.

In collaboration with Northern Maine Development Commission, WCCOG has created 3 videos to provide municipal officials with an understanding of the need and benefits of site assessment, the information provided by Phase I and Phase II site assessments (and how they are created), and the benefit of redevelopment projects. All are prepared



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with examples of projects specific to each county with the GROWashington Aroostook region. The expanded advisory committee is linked above and videos are available at <http://www.gro-wa.org/brownfields-redevelopment> .

Analysis and Basic Conclusions

The majority of our Brownfields sites are located in or near village centers and along the waterfront. As such, environmental hazards such as heavy metals, petroleum products, solvents and asbestos pose a risk to residents and the environment as buildings decay and contaminants are released to soil, groundwater and surface water.

There is an inventory of 55 Brownfields sites in our GIS database that are in varying status along the assessment-redevelopment continuum. The WCCOG Brownfields web site (www.wccogbrownfields.com) provides a link to GIS maps of these sites. The on-line maps completed as part of the GROWashington Aroostook project provide the means of selecting the brownfields sites inventory relative to the infrastructure that supports redevelopment. Mapping of Brownfields sites relative to vulnerable/disadvantaged populations is provided on the on-line Planners Maps for each municipality available here: <http://www.gro-wa.org/planners-maps>

After initial skepticism, common among rural residents who prefer as little government intervention/investigation as possible, several successful redevelopment projects have demonstrated the power of site assessment to release properties from the uncertainty of environmental contamination, legal liability, and financial unknowns.

Redevelopment and clean up of Brownfields sites are taking place as a result of our Brownfields Assessment program – resulting in a positive impact on our county’s health. Examples include tank removal and re-use of a former Route 1 gas station, re-use of a Maine DOT maintenance garage by the town of Pembroke; demolition of a former sardine factory with contamination by lead and organic compounds into a now thriving indoor lobster storage facility, and repurposing of an old Five and Dime store into offices, computer training lab, and community arts space. During the 2nd Brownfields Assessment grant the WCCOG leveraged its household hazardous waste collection efforts (funded by USDA Rural Development) to remove decaying containers of hazardous materials from the Schoppee’s Garage Brownfields site in Jonesboro.

Suggested Actions

Many of the Brownfields sites identified in Washington County are located in poorer neighborhoods, contributing to a sense of hopelessness and despair. The blight of crumbling buildings is compounded by health concerns surrounding unknown environmental contamination (e.g., lead paint, asbestos, petroleum and solvent releases) and risk of injury for trespassers. The combination of blight, poverty and



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health concerns have eroded the well-being of the community. A prime example is the Bridges Garage site in Calais. This former automotive service station now sits vacant and dilapidated in the heart of the downtown. Many businesses near the site have closed. Behind the garage, however, are several acres of land on the St. Croix River where Bald Eagles often soar overhead. Downtown and Waterfront plans call for recreation space on the waterfront land. The Calais Downtown Revitalization Committee, with a newly appointed member on the WCCOG Brownfields Advisory Committee, is working to redevelop this and other properties in the downtown with Brownfields funding support.

Similar energy is active among community organizations in Eastport and Machias seeking to reverse the trend of despair. In Eastport, the City and the Port have seen recent gains in downtown revitalization, tourism, and shipping that were recognized nationally. In November 2013, the National Public Radio Atlantic-American Futures Project featured Eastport as a Maine community that best exemplifies resilience and reinvention (<http://www.marketplace.org/topics/economy/american-futures/american-futures-welcome-eastport-maine>). The WCCOG Brownfields Program is a strong partner in Eastport's revitalization with support of the Lighthouse Lobster and Bait redevelopment project (former cannery), ongoing Wass factory redevelopment, reuse of the Boat School site for tidal power generator fabrication, and repurposing of the Guilford Textile Mill for boat building, among others.

Planned redevelopment of future Brownfields sites will grow the county's tax base, provide jobs, attract new business, support tourism and eliminate blight. The renovation of the 5 & 10 Store Brownfields site in Machias for example includes a computer lab that provided 580 students technology courses in 2013; new worker skills will likely seed future business growth. Looking ahead, we will support redevelopment planning for lobster processing, an alternative energy incubator and expansion of tidal energy innovation (in Eastport); affordable housing, community kitchen and downtown recreational facilities (in Machias); waterfront redevelopment and expanded retail opportunities (in Calais); and improvements to currently abandoned commercial sites (in Baileyville).

Proposed Brownfields support for the Machias Laundry and Cleaners site could increase visitation to the adjacent historic Burnham Tavern and will promote tourism and associated economic benefits for the Town. Planned cleanup of the solvent release will also greatly enhance property values of adjacent businesses and allow reuse of the laundry site for affordable housing or other compatible use. We believe the Brownfields projects already identified, combined with identification of new redevelopment



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opportunities, have the potential to create another 50 to 75 new jobs, an increased tax base of \$2,500,000 and a corresponding 5-10% increase in property values.

Implementation already occurring

The WCCOG Brownfields program incorporates sustainability principles in our site ranking, assessment fieldwork, and reuse planning. Our practices and these opportunities include green building design, recycling of waste during demolition and cleanup, green remediation, energy efficiency, use of existing infrastructure, historic preservation and innovative storm water controls. Three examples include:

Wass Factory, Eastport: This historic cannery, proposed for re-use as a seafood processing plant, will take advantage of the existing dock, loading ramps and structure. Future commercial use will allow capping of modestly contaminated soils in place, saving time, money, and energy.

County Courthouse, Machias: The landmark courthouse building is overcrowded and inefficient with respect to use of space, energy and access. Instead of relocating to a new facility County officials will expand and renovate the building. Plans will preserve historic integrity, take advantage of existing infrastructure, and allow new energy conservation measures (e.g., windows, insulation).

Consea Cannery Site: Green remediation through reuse of building demolition debris for on-site fill and recycling of scrap metal generated positive cash flow for the owner and minimized solid waste. Blast rock from a nearby port improvement project was also imported for structural fill and shoreline stabilization.

This approach should continue with any successful new Brownfields Assessment funds.

WCCOG has implemented a comprehensive community outreach program over the course of two Brownfields Assessment grants (2009, 2012-present). We have engaged the support and enthusiasm of community members from diverse backgrounds, at state, regional and national conferences and in extensive press coverage. We seek to continue the success of this program whose elements include:

Brownfields Website: Our website (www.wccogbrownfields.com) hosts Brownfields educational materials, press, site nomination and ranking forms, notices of coming meetings, site updates, advisory committee meeting minutes and contact information. Links to the site are posted on many related sites and in all outreach materials.

News Articles: We release 5-7 press releases per year in local, regional and statewide publications and were featured in several articles in regional newspapers. Our focus is public awareness, benefits of site assessment, invitations to nominate sites, and updates on redevelopment activity.



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Educational Outreach: We provided a Brownfields workshop at a local high school to engage students and to discuss career opportunities and assisted in obtaining AICP Certification Maintenance credits for the Maine Brownfields Conference.

Public Meetings: We hold numerous public meetings in association with area Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, Downtown Organizations and community environmental groups. Meetings provide the same information as press releases but also seek input and feedback on the program.

One-on-One Meetings: Members of WCCOG, our advisory committee and contractor hold numerous meetings with selectmen, town managers, code enforcement officers and business leaders within our target communities to discuss the program, engage interest and to solicit new sites.

Conferences and Presentations: We actively promoted our Brownfields program with exhibits at the EPA Brownfields conferences in Philadelphia, PA and Atlanta Georgia in 2011 and 2013. In 2011 we presented highlights of our program as speakers at the Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association and the Maine DEP Brownfields Grantee Program.

Ribbon Cutting and Award Events: In June 2013, WCCOG hosted a ribbon cutting at the Lighthouse Lobster & Bait indoor storage pound, on the site of an historic cannery in Eastport. The event celebrated partnerships among the property owner, lenders, state regulators and our Brownfields team; and was attended by the Maine DEP Commissioner, Congressman Michael Michaud and over 100 attendees. WCCOG was recognized with the 2012 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for "Outstanding environmental leadership and innovation".

WCCOG is also planning an accredited *Brownfields Redevelopment Seminar* series in partnership with the Maine Real Estate Association. The series will provide developers, planners, lenders and community officials' strategic information about Brownfields assessment and redevelopment.

Additional resource needs

With new Brownfields Assessment funding, WCCOG could conduct an additional 10 Phase I assessments (6 petroleum, 4 hazardous materials) and an additional 7 Phase II assessments (4 petroleum, 3 hazardous materials); continue to update our social media outlets and hold additional public meetings at key project milestones in our target communities.

Our County has a relatively low minority population, but the significant role of migrant workers can necessitate the need for Spanish translation. Prior to public meetings or other events, we will coordinate with Mano en Mano, a regional service agency for Hispanic speaking residents, and the host community, to evaluate whether translators are needed for those challenged with speaking, hearing, or sight. We will also verify that meetings sites are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).