

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Economic Development: Businesses and the local consumers are driving engines that generate capital for growth and development. We want to be a location of choice for new business and industry.

Brownfield redevelopment revitalizes contaminated properties

By Lexie Kasper
ODC Network

Building materials and methods have improved over the decades, often becoming more energy efficient, less wasteful, and utilizing more sustainable mediums. Well-known examples of past problems are lead paint and asbestos. When negative health impacts were discovered, those materials were no longer used.

A structure that was built long ago, during a time with different standards, can contaminate the area where it still stands today. With aid from the [Ottawa County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority](#) (OCBRA), communities can safely address these sites as structures reach the end of their life span.

“Brownfields are idle, underutilized, or vacant industrial or commercial properties where redevelopment is hindered by real or perceived environmental contamination, blight, or functional obsolescence,” the Ottawa County Department of Strategic Impact explains.

These sites can cause community concern, as well as be very expensive to clean up. Local municipalities have many considerations when determining land use, and all these barriers mean that brownfield sites often sit unused for decades.

The OCBRA has determined a plan to address these sites and determine how the authority may offer aid. Evaluation criteria include economic factors such as jobs created from redevelopment, location within the preferred development area, and how thoroughly health and environmental hazards are addressed.

The authority also looks at how these site plans mesh with “smart growth” principles. These principles consider neighborhood walkability, preserving farmland and/or natural beauty, community collaboration, sustainable building techniques, and meeting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria. A more exhaustive list of criteria can be found in the [Countywide Brownfield Redevelopment Plan](#) under the Planning Department on the Ottawa County website.

After being evaluated by the authority, communities can be aided by two different sources. The OCBRA has received two grants from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These funds are used to assess contamination sites and prepare cleanup plans. The second grant period ended in the fall of 2023, after a grant period of three years. Preliminary numbers show that the authority supported 56 environmental assessments and plans for 30 properties in 11 local units across the county.

Going forward, the OCBRA has applied for a third round of grant funding from the EPA and is waiting to hear if it received another grant award.

This funding pool is competitive and in an effort to stabilize the funds available, the Brownfield Incentive Program was established in 2018. This program utilizes local funding to offset the assessment burden for eligible properties. Already, the Incentive Program has assisted 10 projects in six communities.

To see a map of all approved Brownfield Redevelopment Sites, approved Brownfield Incentive Program sites, and potential sites identified by the OCBRA, [click here](#). Visit the [Ottawa County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority](#) webpage and contact the [Ottawa County Department of Strategic Impact](#) for more information.

- *Lexie Kasper is the land and water outreach coordinator for the ODC Network.*