

# How to Make Brown The New Green

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At a time when our highways are jammed with commuters forced to move farther and farther away from downtown because housing is so expensive, wouldn't it be great if extra land magically appeared close in to city centers? Land that could be developed into housing, retail, parks and other community amenities that entice people back into cities at affordable prices? Sadly, as we all know, open space is simply not available in many city centers, or even in close-in suburbs.

But it is, if you know where to look for it — and what to do with it. Brownfields are industrial or commercial sites that are abandoned or underused because of environmental contamination. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that there are between 400,000 and 1 million brownfield sites throughout the United States. Connecticut alone has thousands. In fact, the Yale Sculpture building was built on a brownfield. All told, brownfield sites account for more than 5 million acres of real estate — roughly equivalent to the land area of 60 of the largest U.S. cities.

Considering how valuable parcels of land are in the highly populated cities where the majority of these sites are located, you might expect there to be some serious urgency to clean up and revitalize these areas. Yet, it's likely that the vast majority of Americans have never even heard the term "brownfield."

Strong legislation is needed to provide for the economic feasibility of brownfield redevelopment. Earlier this year, the American Institute of Architects testified in support of the Brownfields Reauthorization Act of 2008, which is before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Incentives such as a tax credit of 50 percent of the costs for abatement, control, demolition and reconstruction of brownfields are essential to spurring the redevelopment and invigoration of the communities that house these hazardous sites.

But to make real change, money is necessary to augment legislative policy. At current funding levels, there is no way that the EPA can respond to the overwhelming number of requests from local and state governments for assessment, cleanup and grants to begin the revitalization process.

Brownfield remediation offers tremendous opportunity to also turn blighted, dilapidated sites into vibrant mixed-use communities with parks, shopping areas, business centers and affordable housing options. Brownfield reclamation will increase the local tax base, create jobs, revitalize neighborhoods and extend environmental protection for the public. Many brownfield sites are near important transportation hubs such as highways and rivers, and therefore can become valuable community assets.

**Comment [F1]:** Use current situation or news story as an opening to offer a timely and relevant topic.

**Comment [F2]:** Be sure to define something that might not be well known.

**Comment [F3]:** Use statistic to quantify situation.

**Comment [F4]:** Use local example whenever possible.

**Comment [F5]:** Only after you have set the stage should you mention the position / action / goal or whatever is relevant for the particular topic.

**Comment [F6]:** Follow with the "call-to-action."

**Comment [F7]:** Show how "action" will have positive results for the local community.

Pittsburgh is a leader in brownfield redevelopment, with numerous successful case-study examples. A former dumping ground for steel mills was turned into the \$243 million Summerset at Frick Park residential development. A rail stop for livestock and meatpacking that was known for its unbearable stench became a waterfront center for commerce, manufacturing, recreation and housing.

**Comment [F8]:** Support when possible with case study examples. (These were found on Wikipedia)

Technologies such as bioremediation and strategies including soil vapor extraction can help expedite the cleanup process. But a legislative and financial commitment from the federal government is vital to address such widespread contamination that, left in its current state, will continue to stymie neighborhood redevelopment, harm existing communities, limit economic development and growth, and perpetuate urban sprawl.

**Comment [F9]:** Pose "what if no action is taken" scenario.

With Earth Day's arrival Tuesday, we will undoubtedly hear the reminders to switch to fluorescent light bulbs and energy-saving appliances, and to insulate our homes. All of which are excellent ideas. But there should also be thought given to big-picture environmental concerns.

There needs to be a nationwide and community-level priority to make brownfields green.

**Comment [F10]:** Strong conclusion / final takeaway.

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