

town of tonawanda

Brownfield remediation program advances in Town of Tonawanda

Work will precede cleanup, development

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The Town of Tonawanda has advanced to step two in a three-step program designed by the state to clean up and revitalize vacant, abandoned, underutilized and environmentally contaminated properties in the town's industrial core.

A \$275,400 state grant will be used to further analyze and prioritize sites according to their potential, town officials said this week.

"This grant, in particular, will help us with remediation," said Town Supervisor Anthony F. Caruana. "It'll give us the much needed resources to go into greater detail on required environmental scope of prioritizing parcels and examining specific environmental challenges."

Market and land use analyses, as well as a master plan, were developed during the first step using a \$60,000 grant the town received in 2004 from the state Department of State's Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program.

"Step one is starting to look at these parcels – like dipping your toe into the water – to see what's there," said Town Engineer James B. Jones. "Step two, you can actually step onto the parcel, start to shake the bushes and review the parcels a little more in depth."

Cleanup and redevelopment of parcels would follow in phase three.

"Once the redevelopment is done, hopefully they can become community assets and attract business, jobs and ultimately expand the local tax base," Caruana said.

The Tonawanda Brownfield Opportunity Area extends to 4000 River Road and encompasses 202 parcels totaling 1,743 acres that were once pristine farm land.

Twenty nine properties, or approximately 14 percent of all the properties and 47 percent of the land area, are classified as brownfield, underutilized or vacant parcels, according to an initial environmental condition review released in Nov. 2012.

Jones said the town also follows Environmental Protection Agency initiatives in parallel with the state, which is "slow to respond sometimes."

"It could take a year or so to get the contract," Jones said. "Getting the Department of State to be a little more responsive in their contract administration would be helpful to us. But we don't necessarily wait for them."

The town has been working with partners including Erie County in recent years to clean up and stabilize several River Road properties. They include a long-closed chemical plant where resins, plastics and rubber products were manufactured and a former petroleum tank farm, which is now Riverview Solar Technology Park.

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