

2012 Update on Contaminated Gas Stations Task Force Activities/Progress

The following is an update on activities and progress by the Contaminated Gas Stations Task Force.

Key among Task Force activities has been the continued engagement of brownfield owners, developers and other stakeholders. A specific inventory of former gas station brownfields is being monitored to understand the impact of the actions of the Task Force on the evolution of these sites. The strategy actions below are identified according to their numbering in the original approved document, "Contaminated Gas Stations Task Force Strategy, July 2010".

4.1.10

Establish a Brownfield Coordinator

A staff member has been identified from the original administrative team and has been assigned a role as single point of contact. Based on the nature of inquiries received from owners, developers or other stakeholders, the Brownfield Coordinator ensures appropriate internal resources are marshalled to provide comprehensive support. Email and telephone contact information is available on the City's website and in printed material. The Brownfield Coordinator's office receives inquiries ranging in complexity from standard environmental questions to the beginning of full brownfield redevelopment projects. Active promotion of the support services and tools, and the City's intentions continue.

Progress

As a result of promotion and accessibility of the Brownfield Coordinator's Office, dozens of inquiries have been received from all types of stakeholders. This single point of contact model has been an effective starting point for developers, property owners, concerned citizens, environmental organizations and community leagues. Other municipalities have also made contact looking for the City of Edmonton Strategy and research as material for their own brownfield support services.

The success of the Brownfield Coordinator role within the City of Edmonton has resulted in a similar function being considered by the Province of Alberta.

4.1.8, 4.2.4, 4.3.6

Restructure the City's Brownfield Redevelopment Grant Program

Since the Brownfield Grant was created in 2006, no applicants had successfully met the strict criteria of the original program. Based on feedback from unsuccessful applicants, the grant program was revised and broken down into typical stages of brownfield redevelopment and designed to reward progress in brownfield remediation. Those stages include:

- Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
- Phase II Environmental Site Assessment
- Remediation/Exposure Control
- And a new grant category that supports interim solutions such as community gardens or experimental remediation techniques.

The individual grant stages are designed to promote progress toward full remediation.

Progress

The first applicant was approved within one month of the re-launch and received a grant payment upon completion of a Phase II Environmental Assessment.

Applications in 2012 are projected to exceed the annual budget and will require staged reimbursement or an internal funding change.

Funded Projects:

- Affordable housing project supported through environmental testing and remediation phases.
- Downtown condominium development supported through environmental testing and remediation phases.

Pending Grant Application:

- Former gas station to proposed low-rise condominium development.

4.1.4, 4.2.2, 4.2.5, 4.3.2, 4.3.4, 4.3.5, 4.4.1

Contact Property Owners to Identify Interim Use Possibilities

The inventory of 50 former gas station brownfields has been the focus for these partnership opportunities. At present, three separate properties are under discussion for interim uses. These early projects will allow the City to standardize requirements to meet its own environmental and land use responsibilities. It will also provide transparency to enable property owners and other stakeholders to undertake these arrangements with or without municipal involvement.

Progress

Three long-term remediation sites are in discussion for interim solutions (community gardens, pocket park, neighbourhood entry signage).

4.1.2

Initiate an Application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Green Municipal Funds

In multiple speaking engagements as well as less formal contacts, FCM Green Municipal Funds (GMF) programs have been actively promoted. For inquiries where FCM GMF may be available, contact, introductions and support are provided to ensure this source of incentive is leveraged whenever possible.

Progress

- City of Edmonton received a grant in 2011 to assist with costs of researching the former gas station brownfield inventory.
- Brownfield Coordinator connected a developer with FCM-GMF Environmental testing grant and provided municipal partnership documentation – \$16,000 requested.
- Brownfield Coordinator supported a developer in qualifying for FCM-GMF remediation loan – \$4,000,000 requested.
- Other support requests in progress, pending remediation plans and cost estimates.

4.1.1

Complete the Identification, Inventory and Land Use Analysis of the Individual Brownfield Sites Which Were Previously Gas Stations

Ongoing monitoring of this inventory for remediation and redevelopment progress has been a responsibility of the Brownfield Office since March 2010. Part of the research of the sites' status and potential was completed through qualifying for an FCM community planning grant. Some programming changes in POSSE software allows for 'brownfield' flags to be assigned to these properties. This provides useful alerts regarding brownfield status to any City staff reviewing a property's record.

Progress

Of the original list of 50 former gas station brownfields identified in Edmonton, the status as of June 2012:

- 17 sold/for sale/or committed listing date within 12 months.
- 31 sites in long-term remediation:
 - 9 in active interim use (e.g. parking lot)
 - 4 in active dialogue for interim use
 - 18 targeted for interim use options
- 2 City-owned sites (held for LRT/used as Boulevard)

4.1.7, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.6, 4.3.1, 4.3.3

Develop a Request for Proposal Process

While a Request for Proposal was drafted and circulated to stakeholders, the unique nature of each brownfield property made this process difficult to use. A collection of support tools combined as necessary to advance the status of the brownfield has instead been the adopted approach.

4.1.9

Develop Municipal Property Taxation Support Packages

Draft policy is under review within Administration which, if adopted, will establish a grant program to offset the cost of remediation and be funded through the increased property taxes arising from a redeveloped brownfield site.

4.4.2

Assess Strategy Effectiveness and Identify Improvements

Testing of strategy elements with actual brownfields and stakeholders continues.

Review of the qualifications of the brownfield grant is done periodically and adjusted as necessary.

A City of Edmonton Brownfield Guidebook is being developed and will package relevant processes, tools and support options to enable brownfield redevelopment. The growing list of brownfield inquiries is contributing to a comprehensive reference guide of common questions, useful definitions and process detail.

1.1.1-6, 2.2.1-3, 3.3.1-2

Work With the Government of Alberta

Under the heading of “Advocacy Activities” the City of Edmonton has engaged a variety of other municipalities in workshops and less formal settings to share best practices and understand the issues of municipal brownfields.

Two of the five Task Force members met with the Ministers of Environment and Water and Municipal Affairs on two separate occasions (January 2011, February 2012) to share Edmonton-specific priorities and activities related to brownfield remediation and redevelopment.

From March 2011 to March 2012, a Provincial Working Group met monthly to explore, prioritize and establish consensus solutions to municipal brownfield issues. The City of Edmonton’s Contaminated Gas Stations Task Force was able to review and comment on the final draft of the Provincial Working Group report in March 2012. The recommendations put forward by the Brownfield Redevelopment Working Group have identified a number of tools which include legislative and regulatory changes, program and policy development and financial support. Since individual brownfield sites have a unique combination of challenges and barriers to redevelopment, the recommended tools will be designed to be applied individually or in combination. This approach provides flexible, stackable and integrated options to enable stakeholders to utilize the tool, or suite of tools, that will work best for brownfield redevelopment throughout Alberta. The final report is due mid 2012.

Progress

As of June 2012, the report has been presented to Ministers of both Municipal Affairs and Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Some clarification has been requested by one Minister and upon response, ministerial acknowledgement of the report will be provided to the working group. City Administration will remain in contact with the provincial administrative representatives to ascertain how the recommendations are being advanced.