



Minnesota
Pollution
Control
Agency

Minnesota Targeted Brownfield Assessment Program

Brownfields to Green Space and Urban Gardens

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Background

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has helped return many properties with pollution concerns to productive use through its Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup and Petroleum Brownfields Programs. Most voluntary cleanups occur on properties with economic development potential. Assistance is available through the Minnesota Targeted Brownfield Assessment Program (MNTBAP) to aid in transforming properties into gardens or green space to enhance community livability and the environment. Preserving green space fundamentally benefits the environment, and therefore, is part of the MPCA's mission of helping Minnesotans enhance and preserve the environment and improve their quality of life.



An urban flower garden

Brownfield to green space projects can include widely differing and multiple land uses. Brownfields can be converted to parks, trail systems, playgrounds, vegetable and flower gardens, landscaped areas, wetlands and open green spaces.



An urban vegetable garden

Green spaces can be places for the community to gather and appreciate a cleaner environment for many different types of activities. The use can be based on local community needs, future land use plans and can be as varied as a community's imagination.

Benefits

Restoring brownfield sites to urban gardens, recreational space, greenways, natural areas, rain gardens and other community amenities benefit the environment in many ways.

- Green spaces can stimulate cleanup of contaminated property and remove urban blight.
- Garden space provides residents the opportunity to grow vegetable or flower gardens which provide fresh produce and flowers to neighborhood residents.
- Gardening can be a learning tool for young children to teach them responsibility and to produce their own food. Green spaces can improve adjacent water quality by halting polluted runoff and erosion.

- Green plants stabilize soil, produce oxygen and consume carbon dioxide, a major contributor to global climate change.
- Unpaved green space allows rainfall, snowmelt and runoff to infiltrate, which helps recharge the groundwater and reduce the adverse impacts of urban stormwater runoff.
- Green space helps maintain biodiversity by providing wildlife habitat corridors for local wildlife and migrating species.



Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis

- Transforming brownfields to green space also enhances the quality of life in communities:
- Urban gardens can provide a relaxing gardening experience to community residents and provide fresh vegetables and flowers.
- Open space reserves provide restful breaks from urban noise, pavement, traffic and stimulation.
- Green spaces remove unattractive blight and safety hazards that detract from livability.
- Green spaces enhance residential property values by providing amenities that draw people to live and work in their communities.
- Green space adds vitality to communities by providing opportunities for gardening and recreation and a way for citizens to develop an appreciation of the natural environment. The creation of publicly accessible green space from underutilized and declining properties is often the critical stimulus for new common sense community (re)development and can help increase property values in surrounding areas.

The problem and how MNTBAP can help

Brownfield sites which incorporate community green space as a significant part of, or all of, the planned land use typically cannot compete for traditional brownfield cleanup grant funds which are designed to encourage redevelopment that yields increased property tax revenues and/or job opportunities. While traditional brownfield grant programs are very successful in boosting economic development and cleaning up pollution, there is a need for grants that recognize the important role green space plays in communities.

The MNTBAP fulfills part of this need by providing technical services to communities that are considering a Brownfield property for redevelopment into a green space. Under MNTBAP the MPCA works with local units of government to evaluate urban properties to determine if the properties are appropriate for local gardens and other proposed uses. MNTBAP can provide environmental testing and develop a work plan outlining measures that need to be taken to undertake gardening or other green space related uses.



Urban garden produce

For more information

For more information about MNTBAP brownfields to green space assistance please contact:

MNTBAP Coordinator

MPCA Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup Program, Remediation Division, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, 520 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul, MN 55155 651-296-6300 or 800-657-3864

An excellent fact sheet on Urban Garden issues has been developed by the University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service and can be found at: http://www.misadocuments.info/Urban_Soil_Contaminants.pdf