
A brownfield is “a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.” According to the EPA, there are more than 450,000 brownfields in the United States. The program provides state and local grants to assess, safely clean up and sustainably reuse these contaminated lands.

The development of these properties is often more expensive and time-consuming than the development of a property without the stigma of environmental contamination. In addition, the presence of contamination and the potential uncertainty regarding liability often results in difficulties in securing financing for cleanup and redevelopment. As a result, these sites are often not cleaned up and become a blight on the local community that depresses real estate values and economic growth.

According to a 2017 study, remediation of brownfield properties led to residential property value increases of 5-11.5%. Another study analyzed data from 48 brownfield properties, and found remediating these sites led to an estimated increase in residential property tax revenue for a single tax year between $29 million and $97 million.

“This is a relevant piece of legislation for every single member of Congress,” said House Rules Committee Chairman Pete Sessions (R-Texas).

Congress has provided annual appropriations for the program at around $100 million. This bill authorizes $250 million annually over the 2018-2022 period. It also encourages more state and federal cooperation on the cleanup sites, including broadening the allowable uses for grants and eligibility requirements for land transfers. In addition, this legislation clarifies the liability protections that exist for state and local governments that take title to brownfields properties voluntarily.

The bill is expected to receive broad bipartisan support. CSG will monitor the reauthorization of the program closely as it moves forward.

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