Article

Carpe diem: why redevelop brownfields now?

What to know: With the final year of historically large EPA brownfields grants upon us, and applications due January 28, 2026, now is the time for local governments to think hard about how land reuse can improve their readiness to receive manufacturing investment.

After decades of decline, U.S. investment in manufacturing is on the upswing. Manufacturing investments of up to hundreds of billions of dollars are landing across the nation, often in small and midsized communities. For example, on December 10, 2025, Eli Lilly announced a $6 billion pharmaceutical manufacturing investment in Huntsville, Alabama. Companies ranging from Toyota and Hyundai to yogurt producer Chobani have made similar commitments to other communities.

But there's a hitch: The US lacks the development-ready land necessary to accommodate this investment. According to the 2025 State of Site Selection Report issued by the Site Selectors Guild, 49 percent of site selectors identified the availability of development-ready sites as a limiting factor. This lack of suitable land indicates that now is the time for local governments and private investors to coordinate planning to facilitate future investment.

> *"The manufacturing renaissance in the U.S. has only just begun. Yet this boom is constrained by the most basic requirement — physical space to build."*
>
> *– Didi Caldwell, Global Location Strategies President and CEO, 2025 State of Site Selection Report*

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But each major manufacturing investment needs land — not only for its own operations, but also for supporting infrastructure, suppliers with warehouses and logistical requirements, and workforce housing. In his book Corporate Site Selection and Economic Development, Mark Williams estimates that an investment anticipated to create 4,000 manufacturing jobs will generate 11,600 supplier jobs. Anticipating that each supplier job requires 1,200 square feet of space, that adds up to 1,065 acres (1.66 square miles) needed to accommodate the original manufacturing facility and the ecosystem that surrounds it.

Critically, those 1,065 acres don't need to come in the form of a megasite. In the 2025 State of Site Selection Report, site selectors emphasize the need for sites that vary in size from 5 to 150 acres, as well as the need for utilities and clear development timelines.

Whether urban or rural, few places in the United States have enough development-ready land. **But brownfield redevelopment could change that.** With the final year of historically large U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) brownfields grants upon us and applications due January 28, 2026, now is the time for local governments to think hard about how land reuse can improve their readiness to receive manufacturing investment.

Sarah Sieloff discussed the information in this article and more during a webinar hosted by the Redevelopment Institute. Watch the recording for more on brownfield redevelopment and the U.S. manufacturing sector.

Brownfield redevelopment fueled by EPA grants can support manufacturing investment

The EPA is currently accepting applications for $255.7 million in brownfields grants, which can support environmental assessment, cleanup, planning, and community engagement. Most public and nonprofit entities are eligible to apply, and although private sector entities can't directly receive this funding, they can still benefit from brownfields grants by partnering with public and nonprofit applicants.

2026 is the final year in which funding from the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) will make historically large brownfields grants possible. The BIL effectively tripled available EPA brownfields funding by investing $1.5 billion over five years (FY22-FY26). However, **all** BIL funds must be obligated by September 30, 2026, after which brownfields grants will reduce in number and size.

While we often talk about brownfields as an environmental program, brownfields grants are really about redevelopment. They support planning activities that reduce uncertainty and generate redevelopment momentum, from market feasibility studies to infrastructure assessments and fiscal and economic impact estimates. Done well, planning under a brownfields grant can start conversations about public-private partnerships and help articulate a pathway to redevelopment. Table 1 shows examples of planning activities that EPA brownfields grants can fund. For more information about specific brownfields-support planning activities, check out these fact Eligible Planning Activities | US EPAsheets from EPA.

Table 1. How can you plan under an EPA brownfields grant?

Gathering Information

– Market study

– Site reuse assessment

– Land use assessment

– Brownfields area-wide plan

– Community health assessment

Preparing the Plan

– Market study

– Site reuse assessment

– Land use assessment

– Brownfields area-wide plan

– Community health assessment

Identifying Resources and Implementing

– Redevelopment funding strategy

– Site disposition strategy

– Evaluation of market viability

– Economic impact analysis

– Fiscal impact analysis

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The EPA values planning so highly that it evaluates assessment grantees on whether they allocate at least 30% of their proposed grant budgets to planning activities. Planning facilitates redevelopment because it clarifies local preferences and expectations, and can mitigate project opposition, which can cause costly delays.

EPA brownfields grant applications are due January 28, 2026, but it's not too late to start. Please contact the author to learn how Haley & Aldrich can assist.