

Green Municipal Fund



Leadership in Brownfield Renewal Program: Best Practices Framework

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Introduction

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Leadership in Brownfield Renewal (LiBRe) program is a national peer learning program that connects municipal practitioners and helps them develop knowledge and skills to better facilitate brownfield redevelopment. Offered through FCM's Green Municipal Fund™, it brings together a network of municipal governments from across Canada that are committed to bringing their brownfield sites back into productive use.

The LiBRe program is structured around a best practices framework for becoming a municipal leader in brownfield renewal. By providing tailored learning materials and peer learning activities, LiBRe supports participants' progress through seven key steps to becoming a brownfield champion municipality. This guide provides an overview of the LiBRe framework, including high-level recommendations for achieving each step. FCM will produce additional guidance documents related to each of the LiBRe steps over the coming years.

The LiBRe Best Practices Framework

The LiBRe framework is based on best practices observed in Canadian municipalities that have succeeded in catalyzing brownfield redevelopment. It consists of a series of seven key steps that municipalities should follow, and adapt for their local context, to become effective facilitators of brownfield redevelopment. Complete the steps in an order best suited for your community, whether you follow them one-by-one, undertake several simultaneously, or build on work already accomplished.



Commit to action



Understand the landscape



Build partnerships



Devise a strategy



Promote programs and opportunities



Manage programs and projects



Evaluate, improve and celebrate



Commit to action

Brownfield redevelopment requires a commitment on the part of the municipality to devote the necessary human and financial resources to achieve success.

➤ Increase your understanding

While you do not need to know all the intricate details of brownfield redevelopment, you should strive to gain a high-level understanding of remediation and redevelopment, and the role municipalities can play. Become familiar with best practices in brownfield remediation and redevelopment by consulting resources produced by FCM's [Green Municipal Fund](#) and the US [Environmental Protection Agency](#), for example. Attend workshops, webinars and conferences, like FCM's Sustainable Communities Conference, to connect with peers and learn from experts.

➤ Build internal awareness and commitment

Given the duration and complexity of many brownfield redevelopment initiatives, ongoing education and engagement is crucial to obtaining buy-in and maintaining commitment from staff and council. Buy-in from decision-makers is essential for securing the financial and human resources required to succeed with brownfield initiatives. Raise awareness about the benefits and challenges of redevelopment among municipal staff and council, foster a common understanding of brownfields' effects on your community, and describe what your municipality can do to help.

➤ Make brownfield redevelopment a municipal priority

Once you have obtained buy-in from elected officials, senior administration and colleagues from key departments, your municipality is ready to formalize its commitment to brownfield redevelopment by establishing it as a priority in an official plan or strategy. This commitment will signal to municipal staff, local developers and landowners that brownfields are a municipal priority and the municipality is ready to take leadership in driving redevelopment.

➤ Form an interdepartmental team

With an official commitment in place, your municipality is ready to develop policies, programs and processes to support brownfield redevelopment. Create an interdepartmental team, with a wide array of skill sets, to spearhead this work. It should be comprised of key elected officials and staff from departments such as planning, finance, legal, risk management, public works, economic development, and communications. At least one member of the team should have a basic understanding of different remediation approaches and when they are typically used.



Understand the landscape

Having a good understanding of your local brownfield sites, policy context, regulatory obligations and development options is essential to developing effective brownfield policies and programs.

➤ **Determine your regulatory obligations and policy options**

Regulatory obligations and policy options related to brownfields vary from province to province. Determine which of them apply to your municipality. Here are a few questions to consider: What types of brownfield incentives are available to municipalities in your province? Does your provincial government need to sign off on municipal brownfield policies? What provincial approvals are required to enable the redevelopment of a brownfield site in your province? What are the steps to obtaining these approvals? What role, if any, does your municipality play in this approval process?

➤ **Identify your local brownfield stakeholders**

Identify the individuals and organizations in your community that play a role in brownfield redevelopment (e.g. landowners, developers, contractors, heritage conservation groups, citizen volunteers, etc.). These stakeholders can help your municipality better understand the local brownfield context and can contribute to the development of effective brownfield policies and programs.

➤ **Conduct a brownfield inventory**

A brownfield inventory allows a municipality to take stock of the number, type, location and extent of brownfield sites present in the community. Conducting an inventory is an essential step in developing a structured and strategic approach to encouraging redevelopment. Brownfield inventories are also useful in day-to-day operations, for processes such as reviewing and approving development and building permits, and planning and carrying out capital projects and property transactions. A list of available brownfield sites is also useful for identifying potential areas for future investment.

Brownfield inventories often include the following information: site location and characteristics; land ownership; land use; redevelopment potential; relevant municipal policies, plans or strategies; and the municipal contact person. Brownfield inventories can be restricted for internal uses only, or they can be made publicly available. However, publicly available inventories should not contain information on sites not owned by the municipality unless the municipality has obtained prior consent from the property owner.



Build partnerships

Local brownfield stakeholders can help you develop and implement effective brownfield policies and programs that respond to the realities of your local context.

➤ **Form an external brownfield advisory group**

Consider the range of brownfield stakeholders in your community and assemble an external brownfield advisory group that can help you identify and maintain a dialogue on local brownfield redevelopment challenges. These individuals can also help to ensure that your brownfield policies and programs meet stakeholder needs and effectively catalyze brownfield redevelopment. Such groups are often composed of developers, landowners, citizen volunteers and representatives from the business community.

➤ **Build relationships with financial institutions, relevant ministries and FCM's Green Municipal Fund**

Financial institutions and upper levels of government (e.g. provincial ministry of the environment, federal department of fisheries and oceans) play essential roles in brownfield redevelopment by providing financing and regulatory approvals, respectively. Brownfield redevelopment projects will be more efficient, coordinated and effective with a strong understanding of how these organizations can work together. Contact FCM's Green Municipal Fund to learn about offers funding and knowledge resources that could support your brownfield projects.



Devise a strategy

Devising a brownfield strategy will enable your municipality to structure its approach to incentivizing redevelopment and focus its efforts and investments on priority areas.

➤ **Identify priority brownfield sites and define broad redevelopment visions**

Using your brownfield inventory, as well as other municipal policy documents (e.g. economic development plan), identify priority brownfield sites for redevelopment in your municipality. These might include: municipally-owned sites, sites in tax arrears, sites located in high visibility areas (e.g. waterfront, downtown) and sites whose redevelopment would result in significant environmental, social and/or economic benefits for the community. Threshold sites (i.e. sites that would not be developed under normal market conditions, but that could become economically viable through appropriate incentives) should also be considered to be priority sites.

Setting clear and realistic redevelopment goals that are well-aligned with community needs will help to build local buy-in for redevelopment projects and reduce the perception of risk in the development community.

➤ Engage stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is essential to aligning your brownfield strategy with the aspirations of local residents and the needs of developers. Broad community consultations involving residents and businesses can provide valuable insights on what the local community envisions for your community's brownfield sites and can be an important means of generating buy-in for brownfield redevelopment early on in the process. Consultations with stakeholders such as developers, land owners and real estate professionals will help you ensure that your brownfield strategy and programs reflect the realities of the local development market and effectively address redevelopment barriers.

➤ Develop a strategy and appropriate incentive programs to encourage brownfield redevelopment

A brownfield strategy identifies a municipality's priority brownfield sites, outlines what financial and non-financial incentives will be employed to stimulate their redevelopment and describes how the municipality will administer its brownfield programs. The strategy should also specify performance measurement indicators and recommend a proposed frequency for reviewing and updating the strategy.

Brownfield incentives can include financial assistance (e.g. tax assistance/relief, tax increment financing, site assessment grants), priority processing, charge rebates or waivers, building height flexibility, and reductions in parking requirements. The incentives you select should be flexible enough to allow developers to respond to changing market conditions throughout the lifecycle of a project. Impacts on the municipality, in terms of the cost and complexity of implementation, should also be considered.

Your strategy and incentives should be developed in consultation with your internal brownfield team, the brownfield community advisory committee, as well as with the broader community when appropriate.

➤ Establish clear roles and responsibilities

Brownfield redevelopment projects often involve a broad spectrum of municipal departments such as economic development, planning, finance, legal, risk management, real estate, engineering and public works. To maximize efficiencies and streamline approval processes, ensure that you clearly define the roles and responsibilities for implementing your brownfield strategy and administering your programs.



Promote programs and opportunities

Actively promoting your brownfield programs and brownfield redevelopment opportunities is essential to generating developer interest in your local brownfield sites.

➤ **Develop a communications strategy and materials to promote municipal brownfield programs and redevelopment opportunities**

A communications strategy helps to formalize your outreach efforts by identifying target audiences, key messages, appropriate tools and vehicles, timing and desired outcomes. It should include personalized marketing designed for key brownfield stakeholders. Communications materials (e.g. brochures, websites, e-newsletters, etc.) should clearly outline your municipal brownfield programs and offer guidance for navigating the application, approval and disbursement processes.

➤ **Organize and participate in events to promote brownfield programs and redevelopment opportunities**

Deliver presentations to key community organizations and at workshops, webinars and conferences. Use these engagements to develop awareness and generate interest in your municipal brownfield programs and opportunities. Meet with brownfield stakeholders to describe your programs and discuss options for available brownfield sites. Organize community events (e.g. breakfast presentations, brownfield bus tours, and design charrettes) to provide updates, showcase redevelopment opportunities, and foster networking.



Manage programs and projects

The successful administration of your brownfield programs and redevelopment projects will require a flexible client-centred approach, as well as internal collaboration and coordination.

➤ **Adopt a client-centred approach**

The success of your brownfield programs and projects hinges not only on offering appropriate incentives but also on ensuring that developers have a positive experience working with your municipality. Adopt a flexible, client-centred and solution-oriented approach to processing applications, administering requests for proposals and undertaking negotiations. Ensure there is enough staff capacity to effectively manage each project while continuing to promote your municipal brownfield programs.

➤ **Designate and empower a brownfield “point person”**

Designating a brownfield “point person” helps to simplify and streamline communications between brownfield stakeholders and the municipality. This point person will be best positioned to respond to inquiries about your brownfield programs, facilitate internal collaboration and shepherd redevelopment proposals through the municipal

approval processes. The brownfield point person should have good customer service skills and be familiar with brownfield redevelopment and remediation approaches.

➤ **Develop a strong understanding of your brownfield sites**

A strong understanding of the development potential and remediation challenges of your brownfield sites will help you determine which incentives or sale conditions are best suited to catalyze redevelopment. Draw upon your internal and external brownfield stakeholders and the research conducted as part of your brownfield inventory and strategy to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with your brownfield sites.

Make yourself available to meet with developers and discuss potential redevelopment projects. Learning about their goals and needs will set the stage for a positive and transparent working relationship, and will better prepare you to act as a project ambassador throughout an approval process.

➤ **Set clear and realistic expectations**

When discussing potential brownfield redevelopment projects with developers, use the pre-application stage to set clear expectations on application requirements, processes and timelines. Clearly communicate the maximum financial assistance available through your incentive programs, the program eligibility criteria and eligible costs, the application process and requirements, and the key timelines. Ensure that all web and print materials regarding your brownfield programs are accurate and up-to-date. This will reduce uncertainty for developers and help ensure that all submitted applications are complete.

As some developers may be unfamiliar with the brownfield redevelopment process, take the time to explain what provincial and municipal approvals will be required and outline the estimated approval timelines. Refer developers to the appropriate provincial ministry for detailed information regarding provincial requirements.

When issuing a call for tenders or expressions of interest for a brownfield site, provide as much information as you can regarding the site in question (e.g. environmental site assessment results, development potential, zoning) and allow sufficient time for developers to respond.

➤ **Contact FCM's Green Municipal Fund**

FCM's Green Municipal Fund (GMF) offers funding and knowledge resources to help municipalities and their private sector partners undertake brownfield redevelopment projects. Consult the GMF web site to obtain useful resources such as case studies, guidebooks and sustainable remediation best practices, and contact a GMF advisor to find out whether your brownfield projects might be eligible for funding.

➤ **Move applications through municipal approval processes**

A brownfield redevelopment project often involves two parallel municipal approval processes: the approval of the development application and the approval of the financial incentives application. As such, brownfield redevelopment projects typically require more support on the part of the municipality to help developers move through the approval processes. Additional municipal oversight is sometimes required to ensure that proposals meet any development requirements or restrictions imposed by the province.

Your brownfield point person should play an active role in shepherding redevelopment projects through each stage of the approval process: from the pre-application consultation, to the application submission, review and approval, to the administration of post-approval conditions.

Whenever possible, application packages should be standardized and approval processes should be streamlined to help expedite the redevelopment process.

➤ **Maintain regular communication with project proponents and stakeholders**

Successful brownfield redevelopment projects require working closely with developers, meeting with them regularly throughout the life cycle of a project to discuss and prepare for each phase of the redevelopment process. Regular communication with appropriate municipal departments from the onset of the project will ensure that they are aware of a project's context and needs, and that the redevelopment proposal will move smoothly through the municipal approval processes. Contentious brownfield redevelopment projects may require early and regular communication with the public to address community concerns and build project buy-in.

➤ **Monitor project progress and impacts**

Develop a system to track the progress of your brownfield projects through the various municipal approvals and to track the disbursements of any financial incentives. This system will be essential for staying up-to-date on the status of your projects and will enable you to easily identify those that may be stalled in the approval process and in need of extra support.

When a project has been approved, use the performance indicators identified in your brownfield strategy to set a baseline scenario (e.g. land use, parcel size, property assessment, property taxes, neighbourhood aesthetics and amenities, and commercial vacancy rates). Throughout the project life cycle (i.e. remediation, construction, post-development), track the indicators that will allow you to measure project impacts on the community and local economy (e.g. project value, project costs, job creation, volume of soil remediated, and number of housing units). Use this information to demonstrate the value of your municipal brownfield programs when they are being reviewed (see step below).



Evaluate, improve and celebrate

Evaluating the impact of your brownfield programs and celebrating your successes will help you increase the performance of, and interest in, your brownfield programs over time.

➤ Evaluate and report on the impact of your brownfield programs

In consultation with your internal brownfield team and external brownfield advisory group, conduct regular reviews and performance audits (e.g. every 5 years) of your brownfield policies and programs, including the offer, forms, process, marketing/promotion approaches, and service delivery. These reviews will permit you to evaluate the full costs and benefits of each program and whether your program targets and desired outcomes are being achieved. Monitoring service delivery will help you verify satisfaction levels and determine whether staff training or delivery method changes are required.

Report on the impacts of your brownfield programs using the performance indicators outlined in your brownfield strategy. Selecting appropriate and measurable performance indicators is critical to demonstrating the progress and impact of your brownfield programs. Performance indicators to consider include: area of land remediated, increase in tax revenue, increase in neighbouring property assessments, and the number of jobs created.

➤ Adjust your brownfield program offering and service delivery as needed

The evaluation process may reveal that some brownfield programs are having a greater impact than others. Revise, enhance or terminate brownfield programs as needed. Perform regular reviews of brownfield redevelopment best practices in other jurisdictions and integrate them into your brownfield programs when possible.

Each project presents an opportunity to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and uptake of your brownfield programs. As projects conclude, identify ways to simplify and streamline approval processes. If possible, reduce processing fees to maximize the efficiency and impact of your brownfield programs.

➤ Celebrate and showcase your brownfield success stories

Celebrating the successes of your brownfield redevelopment projects encourages more brownfield redevelopment and communicates the benefits to the community. Require that recipients of municipal financial assistance display a sign at their redevelopment sites acknowledging the municipality's contribution. Communicate your success stories through press releases, social media and public events, for example. When appropriate, apply for awards, such as a Canadian Urban Institute Brownie Award or an FCM Sustainable Communities Award, to showcase your achievements to the greater public. Also consider preparing case studies — with information on project vision, goals, process, challenges, incentives and approach — to share your brownfield redevelopment experience and successes.