

PLAINFIELD PLAINTALKER

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Consultant Explains Brownfields Opportunity

Thursday's brownfield informational meeting drew about a dozen members of the public, mostly business owners interested in what the plan would do for them.

The point of the meeting was to explain to property owners the advantage of the Brownfield Development Area designation that the city is seeking. A successful grant application could bring as much as \$5 million annually to the city to convert contaminated land to sites ready for redevelopment.

The opportunity hinges on forming a broad-based committee to leverage brownfield remediation into community revitalization. Two such committees have already been organized, officials said. Five redevelopment locations have been targeted, with 14 brownfield properties identified, encompassing 19 acres.

The deadline for submission is March 31. **Michael J. Meriney** of Excel Environmental Resources gave Thursday's presentation on the city's proposal, stressing the need for support for community support. Competition for the grant funding is highly competitive, he said, with only three awards in the last round of 16 submissions.

But once a municipality wins an award, it is renewable annually, he said.

Jennifer Wenson Maier, director of Public Works and Urban Development, said of the program, "When I heard about it, I thought I struck gold."

The designation can mean a grant of up to 75 percent of cleanup costs for land designated for recreational or open space use, up to 50 percent for affordable housing use or up to 75 percent for any end use within a brownfields designated area. It can basically transform an unfavorable property into one worth redeveloping.

Meriney said once the application for brownfields designation is submitted, it could take 8 to 10 months before winners are known. But successful applicants will be assigned a case manager to coordinate all activities. Those designated can then apply for grants to clean sites for redevelopment. In Plainfield's case, the application covers five sites covered by redevelopment plans. They are the Marino's site, the North Avenue expanded redevelopment area, the East Third/Richmond site, the former Disco Aluminum property and the Arlington Heights redevelopment area.

Many of the questions from the public veered off onto redevelopment issues unrelated to brownfields concerns, and Meriney referred those complaints to city officials.

--Bernice Paglia

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