

NRTEE FIVE YEARS ON

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

by **Tammy Lomas-Jylha & Angus Ross**

It is now five years since the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) published its national strategy on brownfield redevelopment. The Canadian Brownfields Network (CBN), in collaboration with the NRTEE, recently engaged the Ontario Centre for Environmental Technology Advancement (OCETA) to undertake a market research study to identify impacts of the strategy.

There were a number of key findings.

The strategy was well received by both the public and private sector and has been used as an essential background document in guiding public policy on removing barriers to brownfield redevelopment. The NRTEE brownfield definition is now used as the industry standard, although it's often modified to meet specific regional or sectoral needs.

The barriers identified by the NRTEE strategy have changed in priority, and some new barriers have been identified. There have been successes in the development

of provincial and municipal brownfield strategies, largely as a result of very effective communication and cooperation between the public and private sectors. This importance of the role of the private sector has to be stressed at all levels of government.

All levels of government must strive to work together to coordinate approaches to the removal of barriers to redevelopment and improve the redevelopment process. There is frequently an inter-relationship between barriers and removing one can have a beneficial impact on other barriers.

Brownfield redevelopment has a direct link to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and acts as well as a catalyst in the revitalisation of communities. Brownfield redevelopment should be an important component of government climate change and sustainable community objectives.

Changing priorities

It's interesting to look at the change in priority of the original barriers as well as those newly identified. The original seven were:

- Lack of access to capital
- Regulatory liability risk
- Civil liability risk
- Limited access to insurance protection
- Regulatory delays
- Stigma and risk perception
- Lack of awareness among many key public and private sector groups

The general position of respondents to the survey was that although some progress has been made to reduce these barriers, more work is needed. The current most important barriers are regulatory delays and regulatory liability risk,



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closely followed by access to capital. Access to insurance and lack of awareness were not considered to be important barriers by the majority of respondents, although there are regional disparities in awareness. A number of respondents said that lack of access to capital, insurance protection and civil liability were no longer a major issue since these can often be dealt with by market forces once other barriers, such as regulatory liability, are removed.

The new barriers mentioned by respondents included the following.

Value creation on brownfield sites. This was identified by both public and private sectors since the cost of cleanup or remediation is often higher than land values. More creative approaches and exit strategies are needed to spur successful redevelopment.

Intergovernmental relations. The communication and relations between federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments was identified as a barrier to redevelopment. Successful approaches need to be identified and built on by integrating them into policies and programs, as well as better harmonization of policies such as qualified-profes-

sional programs. The newly-formed Inter-provincial Forum on Brownfields was identified as a welcome improvement to communication, but cooperation among all orders of government is needed.

Labour market shortage in the contaminated site remediation industry. A demand and supply labour market study undertaken by ECO Canada identified a significant shortage of workers with the necessary expertise to meet the demands of the remediation industry. The ECO Canada study gives a strategy and recommendations on how the public and private sectors can address this barrier.

Although there is an increased awareness of the benefits of brownfield redevelopment, more work is needed in all regions and to build capacity within the public and private sectors. Municipalities need training and tools and guidance on how to make decisions based on the acceptable level of risk. Private sector developers still find it easier to develop the less risky "greenfields" where regulatory delays are fewer.

The survey recognises the areas in which significant improvements have been made and it's clear from responses that the NRTEE strategy acted as a catalyst in bringing to the forefront the issues and commercial benefits of brownfield redevelopment. There is still work to be done, but the survey is an illuminating snapshot of progress and remaining challenges.

Note: *The full review is available on the CBN website at www.canadianbrownfieldsnetwork.ca*

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