Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record

Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Hearing on
"Back from the Brink: Restoring Brownfield Sites to Economic Engines"
February 15, 2022

Ms. Lee Ilan, Chief of Planning, Mayor's Office of Environmental Remediation, The City of New York, NY, *On behalf of* National Brownfields Coalition

The Honorable Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY)

1. Although I understand that today you are here on behalf of the National Brownfields Coalition and not the City of New York, I want to thank you directly for your decades of service to the people of our City.

   So far, I've been very pleased to hear about all the benefits of this important program, and I'm eager to hear more about how our recent investments are going to help clean up the legacy environmental contamination that has plagued underserved communities for decades.

   Why is it so important, from the lens of environmental justice, that we prioritize cleaning up contaminated sites in and around low-income communities and communities of color?

   RESPONSE:

Industrial pollution, illegal dumping, and filling land with contaminated material have often taken place in areas where poor, working class, and people of color have resided due to lower land values and historic discriminatory practices such as redlining. These residents have experienced poor health outcomes, disinvestment, and neglect of their communities. As we invest in cleanup, we can begin to redress this history by removing contaminants, and meeting community needs for affordable housing, open space, community services, and good-paying jobs. Prioritizing cleanup in these areas is the basis for equitable development.

2. All too often in districts like mine in Brooklyn, we see projects happen in the name of economic development only to end up altering the very fabric of the local community with no real benefit to the families who have been living there the majority of their lives.

   Can you speak from your experience about how Brownfield locations can be revitalized in a way that uplifts the surrounding community, rather than displacing it, and why this is so important when we talk about economic development in underserved areas?

RESPONSE:

While brownfield development, like all development, is largely driven by the local real estate market, the City of New York (NYC) directs our brownfield grant funding to projects that meet community needs, like affordable housing, schools and health centers. These uses allow longtime residents and their families to stay in their neighborhoods, live with dignity, and support their communities.

Further, we support and offer grants to community-based organizations to study, plan, recommend, and implement strategies to develop brownfields in a way that fulfills the community's vision for the area. When community members have a voice, they can better influence how their neighborhoods change to meet their needs and respect their local priorities, so development does not have to lead to displacement.

3. It's been noted how the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act specifically included $30 million dollars for the purpose of Brownfields Job Training Grants.

   Why is it so important—again, as we're thinking about uplifting disadvantaged communities—that we provide funding to help train folks in this remediation work who actually live in and around the communities where Brownfields are located? And how does this training translate to long-term careers in green industries?

   RESPONSE:

A just transition to a green economy provides for the people who have disproportionately experienced the negative impacts of brownfields to benefit when they are remediated and redeveloped. The residents of neighborhoods with brownfields have a vested interest in making sure the remediation work is done well. Brownfield job training teaches valuable skills and provides the basis to earn good wages and build careers.

This training may facilitate long-term careers in green industries because egraduates receive green industry certifications that make them marketable and give them more job options as communities pursue inclusive, equitable, and environmentally responsible growth.

The Honorable Debbie Dingell (D-MI)

1. I am interested in the connection between Brownfields projects and accelerating the deployment of electric vehicles. In your testimony you mention a number of innovative Brownfields projects aimed at helping combat the impacts of climate change—including the build out of EV charging infrastructure. Could you expand on how Brownfields could help us deploy more EV charging stations nationwide?

RESPONSE:

In light of the dire need to achieve carbon neutrality, U.S. cities and states have adopted strategies and target dates to promote electric vehicle usage. While about 600 Direct Current fast-charging ports are installed each quarter according to the U.S. Department of Energy, significantly more are needed to reach climate goals. In NYC alone, at least 400,000 vehicle owners will need to switch to electric vehicles by 2030 to meet our carbon neutrality goals. As a result, NYC is aiming to support the creation of 46,000 public chargers by 2030.

To meet these challenges, installers are definitely looking for real estate for charging stations. Drivers of cars and light trucks want convenient infrastructure, and fleets and heavy-duty trucks need large sites with room to turn. Since brownfields are often located on former gas stations or along transportation corridors, and their prior uses may have warranted good power connections, brownfields could be excellent potential locations for EV charging activities or battery energy storage systems. Any reuse that requires parking could be a good place for EV charging and mixed-use amenities. However, EV installers are inexperienced with remediation, so we should make it easier for them to deal with contamination and liability issues. As I previously explained in my written testimony, Congress should renew the federal brownfield tax deduction because it encouraged the private sector to invest in cleanup by allowing entities that cleaned up a brownfield site to deduct the cleanup costs in the year they are incurred rather than spread over ten years.

2. Cleaning up contaminated brownfield sites is only half the battle. Finding a productive use for these sites after they are cleaned up is the other half. These sites could be ideal locations for clean energy development, including solar farms. This would not only restore the former brownfield property to beneficial environmental and economic use, but it would also leave greenfield property available for farming and other best uses.

    a. Would you agree that solar farms would be a good use for brownfield properties?

RESPONSE:

Property reuse is always site-specific and responsive to local needs. While real estate in dense areas such as NYC is not likely to be used for large ground-mounted solar arrays, solar panels are more often a component of redeveloped sites. In fact, NYC requires new buildings to install rooftop solar or vegetation. Brownfield redevelopment therefore can result in more renewable energy even in a dense environment like NYC. In less-dense areas that have brownfields larger than 5 acres and access to power lines and substations, solar farms may make sense, as the arrays are above ground and installation does not require much soil disturbance. Although solar farms may not bring as many jobs as other reuses, communities can benefit from electricity cost savings, land lease revenue, and increased tax payments for the land and/or renewable energy system.

b. What policies would be necessary to encourage this practice, particularly if there are additional costs involved compared to locating on a greenfield property?

RESPONSE:

Similar to EV providers, solar installers are inexperienced with brownfields. Providing tax incentives, liability protections and focusing remedial requirements on due care to protect new site users may encourage these green infrastructure reuses. Power purchase agreements and guaranteed contracts with utilities for the energy output and bonuses for building on a brownfield can make the investment work. Supporting programs such as NY State's Clean Transportation Prizes will encourage replicable innovations in green energy and electrification that can benefit brownfield sites. A best practice guide for localities and a national marketing directory where local governments or property owners could voluntarily list brownfield sites suitable for solar or EV uses could also be helpful. Finally, fully funding EPA's brownfield programs allows communities to assist green infrastructure developers in paying remediation costs.