



NORTH TONAWANDA: Brownfields possibilities could spur development on Tonawanda Island

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— North Tonawanda city officials have long discussed the possibilities for development on Tonawanda Island, but just how the island will be developed has been up for debate.

A Brownfields grant may help the city answer that question.

The city applied for a \$300,000 Brownfields grant to do a study on Tonawanda Island years ago and is still waiting to hear if the grant has been approved. The study would evaluate environmental concerns on the island and create a plan for development, Lumber City Development Corp. Executive Director Jim Sullivan said.

“All of the brownfields grants are in limbo right now,” Sullivan said. “Everybody wants to know, nobody’s been approved. But we’ve been told it was an excellent application.”

A community meeting on the Niagara Strategic Brownfields Waterfront Plan was held in late August at North Tonawanda City Hall. Niagara County is focusing on specific cities in that plan, including North Tonawanda. The county’s waterfront plan was just finalized, according to Amy Fisk, environmental planner for the Niagara County Department of Economic Development.

Fisk pointed out the county has given grant money to North Tonawanda in the past, providing studies for North Tonawanda’s downtown area. The county receives grant money from the Environmental Protection Agency, Fisk said.

The choice of Tonawanda Island within Niagara County’s waterfront plan didn’t come by accident, Fisk said. “The city asked us to look at Tonawanda Island for this detailed conceptual plan,” she said.

Included within the plan is a waterfront neighborhood on the island. The plan calls for significant waterfront access and mixed use for professional and commercial space, condominiums and townhouses.

Of course, actual development is still far off in the future. An environmental evaluation of the island would go a long way in determining if any money is available to develop a contaminated site.

The general consensus about the island is that it’s “not hot,” Sullivan said. The contamination is likely minor compared to the size of the potential development.

However, actual contamination isn’t the only way the city can become a bonafide brownfield site, Fisk said. A brownfield site is defined federally as vacant, underutilized property that has actual or perceptual contamination, Fisk said.

In the case of Tonawanda Island, perceptual contamination is a definite possibility. The island was home to a paper mill in the past, North Tonawanda City Engineer Dale Marshall said. The overall contamination of the island is largely unknown.

Even if Tonawanda Island doesn’t benefit from any kind of environmental remediation money, future projects will still be eyed for the island due to developer interest, Sullivan said.

“It’s going to be investigated,” he said. “There’s definitely interest there.”

North Tonawanda Mayor Larry Soos has previously said he has talked with developers about the property. Marshall agrees the island is full of possibilities.

“It’s really like a jewel of Niagara County,” Marshall said. “It’s got this great potential.”

What remains to be seen is just what lies beneath the surface.

Contact reporter Phil Dzikiy at 693-1000, ext. 114.

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Photos



James Neiss/staff photographer Town, NY - The City of North Tonawanda is exploring brownfields as possible development sites on Tonawanda Island, like this former industrial site at Archer and Bridge Streets.