

Sen. Cowles: Assembly Committee passes Cowles/Jacque Brownfields reform bill

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MADISON- Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) and Representative André Jacque (R-De Pere) released the following statements after 2017 Assembly Bill 179 was passed by the Assembly Committee on Environment and Forestry on a 10-1 vote:

Senator Cowles stated, “Brownfields are a huge impediment in economic development. These properties present economic, environmental, public health, and social challenges to hundreds of Wisconsin communities. Local governments have prioritized turning these properties from blight into usable and taxable properties, creating jobs and increasing property values. However, our current regulatory structure too often stymies redevelopment.

“AB 179 rethinks the way we deal with brownfields,” continued Senator Cowles. “Throughout Wisconsin, we have seen examples of successful brownfields redevelopment. While these success stories are exciting, they are limited in number, and there are still an estimated 10,000 brownfields sites scattered throughout the state. The new regulatory structure created by AB 179 removes some of the hurdles faced by local governments and developers, and will turn more blighted properties into productive developments that benefit the entire community. I would like to thank the Brownfields Study Group and my co-author, Representative André Jacque (R-De Pere), for their work on AB 179. I hope to see more action on this bill soon.”

Representative Jacque added, “Brownfields projects are often among the more difficult community or redevelopment projects you will find across Wisconsin, but they are well worth the investment and often stimulate additional economic development on adjoining properties and areawide. In my previous employment as the City of Green Bay’s grantwriter, I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to be closely involved in reinvigorating a number of brownfields sites in Green Bay, including waterfront redevelopment on both sides of the Fox River and the Arnie Wolff Sports Complex on the east side of town. I also served on the National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals’ (NALGEP) Brownfields Grants Management Task Force as a result of these projects, which has given me an even greater appreciation for the thorough evaluation by the Brownfields Study Group that has resulted in this legislation to improve tools for redevelopment.”

Brownfields are abandoned or underused commercial or industrial properties where redevelopment is hindered by contamination. Brownfields vary in size, location, age and past use. Some prior examples of brownfield redevelopment sites include the Leach Amphitheater in Oshkosh, Wausau on the Water restaurant and family entertainment center, and Tundra Lodge waterpark resort in Green Bay. Assembly Bill 179, which is a result of consensus recommendations from the Brownfields Study Group, makes regulatory changes to ensure that more brownfield sites are redeveloped. The bill’s provisions focus on site liability, property access for remediation, remediation tax increment financing reform, a pilot program on air permitting and additional tools our local governments need to promote brownfields redevelopment.