

Testimony from Bob Flint, Executive Director - Springfield Regional Development Corporation – on behalf of SRDC and the RDC's of Vermont – 2/9/21

(I will speak from these bullet points)

- Overview of Springfield's brownfields/legacy of machine tool industry – referencing Bryant Grinder/Jones & Lamson – between then, 21 acres/430K sf of unused space (in the case of J & L, since 1986!)
- Springfield has been a focal point of brownfield redevelopment, simply because of the scale, and the success stories we've had, working with DEC/ACCD/RPC – and how much need there is in our region. The Mt Ascutney RPC has the largest brownfield program in the state and they are our closest partner, not just with brownfields!
- Currently, RDC's and others access assessment funding from various RPC's, DEC and others, who receive grants from EPA (not annually). While there is sharing amongst partners, there never is consistent availability of assessment funding, much less enough to satisfy the need.
- The situation is even worse when it comes to cleanup. Again, EPA offers opportunities for direct cleanup grants, and there are pieces of cleanup funding available through RPC's, DEC, ACCD, VEDA, but it's rarely enough to satisfy the need of a major project. EPA grants are also capped, which leave massive gaps for site with significant needs.
- Brownfields are a unique challenge. The acronyms (EACA, CAP, QAPP etc) can easily drive one nuts, but the real issues are time and cost. Both of these are factors that make any brownfield redevelopment difficult, but for a significant property – an almost impossible barrier.
- Risk is certainly a major issue, but DEC has worked to eliminate that as a barrier through the BRELLA program. Risk and what reuse can be are still things to work around.
- It's time and money. Conventional development is challenging in Vermont – certainly in an area like ours, where it's tough to make a case for a return on investment (with sf rates at \$3.50/sf) –even when you're building on a perfect piece of property. Brownfield costs are non recoverable – they complicate already expensive projects (and, depending on the severity of the contamination, lead to use restrictions which further constrain any ROI) and they test the patience of a conventional developer, who can find easier sites to take their projects.

- I'll come back to the J & L project in a moment, but there are others around Vermont. In St Albans, the city has been working to redevelop the Fonda site, 4.5 acres. Despite significant investment, including establishing a TIF district, they still need at least \$2 million in additional funding they haven't identified.
- In Burlington, 531 Pine Street is an albatross, because of the cleanup costs, due to its proximity to the Barge Canal superfund site. Projects in St. Johnsbury, Brattleboro and more are all wrestling with similar constraints.
- So, back to where I started – between J & L and Bryants, there are 21 acres of flat land, on a 4-lane highway with full utilities (including fiber) a few miles from I-91. Imagine the economic impact that putting those properties back in play would have for Springfield and Vermont?
- I spoke about time – J & L Plant 1 has been empty since 1986 – assessment efforts started in 1994 and, to date, over \$2 million has been spent in assessment and small cleanup efforts on the site.
- A few years ago, this committee held a special session in the “Great Hall” at 100 River Street – the original Fellows Gear Shaper. That site is an example of what can be done – through partnership between us/RPC/DEC/ACCD/EPA – it was a high-wire act, and there still is cleanup work to be done on area of the property that haven't yet been developed – but it shows that a contaminated property doesn't have to be in purgatory forever and can contribute to a community once again.
- The Governor's proposal is seemingly a once in a lifetime moment to fund these major projects that have been stuck for years and move them forward. This would be a true game changer and would have a direct, and immediate impact on our economy as well as resolving long-standing health concerns in our area communities. I would ask for this committee's support and I thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony today.