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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Using Energy Programs to Turn Undesirable Properties into Economic Opportunities

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Local governments may find opportunities for economic development through energy programs and energy installations. Some communities have even used energy installations to turn otherwise undesirable properties into economic opportunities.

The town of Hull, Massachusetts is located on a peninsula in Boston Harbor and has about 10,000 residents. Since 1894, the town has operated a municipal energy utility, the Hull Municipal Light Plant. Because of its geographic location, Hull is a windy community, and Pemberton Point, which juts out into Boston Harbor, has been also known as “Windmill Point” since as early as the 1820s. In the 1980s the town erected a small wind turbine on the site to help power its municipal operations, and in 2001 that turbine was replaced with a much larger turbine on the same site that provides about 3 percent of the town’s electrical needs.

Based on the success of this first commercial turbine and on support from the community (95 percent of residents that responded to a questionnaire were in favor), Hull began investigating the possibility of installing a second, larger turbine that would generate about 9 percent of the town’s electrical needs. The question became where to site that turbine.

The answer was on top of the town’s closed landfill. This location was popular with residents and took an otherwise undesirable property within the town and turned it into something profitable. It is believed that this was one of the first wind turbines to be sited on a closed landfill in the entire United States, and now other communities are looking to site clean energy on closed landfills in Massachusetts and in New York.

In addition to closed landfills, other potential sites for energy installations are brownfields, mining sites, and other contaminated lands. The US Environmental Protection Agency has a set of resources available for communities interested in using contaminated lands for energy siting through its RE-Powering America’s Land program.

EPA estimates that there are approximately 490,000 sites and almost 15 million acres of potentially contaminated properties across the United States. These sites often have critical infrastructure in place such as electric transmission lines, water service, and roads. Using these sites takes stress off of other undeveloped land, and siting energy can provide an economically viable reuse for sites with significant cleanup costs or low real estate development demand.

Some successful projects include

- The installation of eight commercial wind turbines on the site of the former Bethlehem Steel slag pile in Lackawanna, New York. These turbines produce enough electricity to power 7,000 homes.
- A 2.3 MW combined PV solar system that powers the reclamation of contaminated wastewater at a closed uranium mine in Rifle, Colorado.
- With economic incentives from the town and state, the closed Maytag plant in Newton, Iowa, a RCRA site, was cleaned up and redeveloped into a factory producing wind turbine support towers.

EPA’s project website has fact sheets, maps, tools, and resources to help interested communities move forward with energy projects on contaminated sites.

