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Pittsfield leaders still optimistic about cleanup

[By Sharon Kiley Mack](#)

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PITTSFIELD, Maine — Town officials, department heads, consultants and representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Protection met Monday morning to determine the scope and timeline of a federal brownfields cleanup project.

The contaminated property is a former business building on Mount Road. It was built in the 1950s and since has been used as a furniture store, a tanning bed distributor and a printing company.

When the town acquired the property in the mid-1990s for \$23,000 in back taxes, homeless people were living in the building and it was beginning to collapse.

At one point, the town thought it could burn the building but an assessment of the property found it to be contaminated with asbestos. There is a small fuel oil spill in the soil near a fill pipe.

Last year, EPA awarded the town a \$40,000 grant to abate the contamination. The town also will conduct an assessment of an existing septic system and, once the site is cleaned, groundwater testing will be done.

“We originally thought we could clean up the property and then someone would buy the building,” Town Manager Kathryn Ruth said Monday. “I don’t know that this is an option any longer in today’s economy.” In addition, the building has continued to deteriorate since the grant process was begun.

EPA and DEP both were optimistic Monday that once the federal stimulus package is released, additional money could be allocated to the project that would allow for removal of the building.

Ruth said the project would run about \$75,000. The town’s goals, she said, were to return the property to pristine condition, thereby enhancing the neighborhood, protecting the environment and creating a marketable property to leverage private investment and employment opportunities.

“We’ve been trying to abate this since the mid-1990s,” Ruth said. “This is going to be wonderful.”

Solid waste coordinator Don Chute came up with an inexpensive removal solution for the building.

Chute said there was money available in his budget to allow the company that grinds the town’s woodpile to also chip the building, once contaminants and metals were removed. The cost to the town for the chipping service and chip disposal, about \$30 a ton, could be part of the town’s funding match for any money above the original \$40,000.

“That would be excellent,” Ruth said. “Inexpensive and efficient.”

EPA’s Christine Lombard participated in the meeting by telephone and said that EPA could come up with an additional \$40,000 to \$50,000 and possibly the state could come up with the rest to fund the removal of the building as part of the project.

Lombard said the town could use all in-kind costs, such as town personnel labor, the use of town equipment, barriers or skills, even the costs of advertising for public hearings, to be part of the town's \$15,000 match.

"We are very, very open," Lombard said, offering to go to Washington, D.C., to personally lobby for additional money for the cleanup.

The town's consultant on the project, Rip Patten of Credere Associates LLC of Portland, said that once DEP and EPA approve the cleanup scope and plan, contamination removal will begin "when the snow melts in April."

He said the project could be completed by the end of the summer, not including removal of the building. By accepting the EPA money, the town has a full two years to complete the project.

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