

**Ohio House Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 33 (Edwards)**

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Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority, thank you for the opportunity to share Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 33 (HB33), regarding the state's Main Operating Budget for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025.

My name is Todd Castellini, and I serve as Senior Vice President for The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority. The Port is a public, quasi-governmental agency focused on fixing broken real estate to promote job creation and homeownership, and equitable development throughout Hamilton County. Our work is guided by the belief that real estate should work for everyone.

I lead The Port's Public Finance practice and Industrial Revitalization team. We focus on bringing underutilized industrial properties back to their highest and best use and creating development-ready sites for job creation. Since its founding, The Port has cleaned up over 250 acres and has impacted nearly 50 properties in Hamilton County through environmental cleanup and assessment. Our site readiness strategy is borne out of a regional need for development-ready sites for business retention and expansion. The Greater-Cincinnati region has a strong manufacturing heritage, and our manufacturing ecosystem remains strong today, but our historic manufacturing corridors that once employed thousands now lie vacant and underutilized. The Port's strategy is comprehensive, encompassing everything from acquisition, remediation, demolition, and site prep to marketing the sites to qualified end-users.

One of the greatest challenges to recruitment and retention of manufacturing in Hamilton County is the lack of shovel-ready sites for expansion and new development. Historically, The Port has improved a number of former industrial sites or brownfields. In partnership with private sector land owners, from 2001 through 2010, we cleaned up over a dozen sites, at a total cost of \$35 million, \$17 million of which came from the public sector. In 2015, The Port transitioned its legacy brownfield remediation and compliance expertise into a comprehensive program to redevelop 500 acres of underperforming industrial sites along key transportation corridors to attract manufacturing investment and create higher-wage, sustainable jobs.

On behalf of The Port, I'd like to thank the Legislature for establishing the Brownfield Remediation Fund (BRF) in the FY22-23 main operating budget, and the Ohio Department of Development in its successful administration of the \$350 million program. The BRF provided grants to 313 projects in 83 of Ohio's 88 counties. This funding provided Ohio's communities with the first significant investment in brownfield grant dollars since the sunset of the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund (CORF) nearly a decade ago. Hamilton County was awarded \$25,032,757, with nearly \$16 million awarded to ten projects within the City of Cincinnati. The Lunkenheimer Foundry Site, a vacant and abandoned former valve manufacturing facility, received \$1.7 million for cleanup and remediation.



Constructed in 1908, this 150,000-square-foot building was subject to a USEPA time critical removal action that was initiated in 2018 and completed a year later. Four underground storage tanks and substantial amounts of lead paint, asbestos, and sub-soil contamination are present on the site. The scope of work for this brownfield remediation and clean-up project is a true testament of the significant investment needed to prepare brownfield sites for redevelopment; investment companies and private developers would not otherwise be able to commit. When companies look for a place to locate their business or developers look to purchase and develop a site, contamination and environmental issues can be a deal breaker. BRF grants help mitigate this issue and allow entities like The Port to remove blighted properties and prepare sites for redevelopment to revitalize neighborhoods and attract new economic development.

Another important project receiving funding through the Brownfield Remediation Fund is the former Reliable Castings plant at 3401 Colerain Avenue. The property was constructed in 1914 with additions in 1940, most recently serving as a manufacturing and office space for the former iron foundry. The building's rehabilitation is a key part of the resurgence of the Camp Washington neighborhood in Cincinnati. At the time of our application, proposed remediation efforts included asbestos abatement and capping of soil on the site prior to demolition; however, the property fell victim to a seven-alarm fire two weeks ago (Figures 1-2). This incident prompted the largest response to a fire in Cincinnati in nearly two decades, requiring 36 of Cincinnati's 41 fire companies, five fire companies from Hamilton County, roughly 170 firefighters, 15 master stream hose lines (the largest used by firefighters,) and seven elevated master streams dousing the fire in response.¹ The building burned down while vacant and derelict, releasing toxic chemicals and gases into the environment. This unfortunate situation further reinforces the need for a recurring brownfield remediation fund to prevent the same fate from happening to other sites awaiting assessment and cleanup opportunities.

Given the size and number of brownfield property that exist in our region and state, the need for brownfield grant dollars remains. With the final round of ODOD applications opening and closing in less than three business days, and the remaining number of projects in our pipeline, it is safe to say the BRF was oversubscribed. Again, we thank the Legislature for establishing the Brownfield Remediation Fund in the FY22-23 main operating budget and encourage members of the House Finance Committee to support the proposed amendment and add an additional investment of \$350 million to this program.

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 33. On behalf of The Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority, thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

¹ <https://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2023/03/06/camp-washington-fire-had-biggest-response-in-nearly-20-years-chief-says/69977232007/>



Figure 1:



Figure 2:

