



Brookhaven officials look at potential uses for brownfields site

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Brookhaven officials are studying potential uses of the Lawrence Aviation site in Port Jefferson Station, though it is expected to take up to two decades to rid the parcel of toxic contamination.

Town planners next year are expected to complete a land-use plan for the 126-acre federal Superfund site on Sheep Pasture Road, where the aircraft-parts manufacturer is believed to have dumped tons of sludge and chemical waste before it closed in the 1990s.

In addition to environmental concerns caused by the shuttered factory, its owner owes more

than \$10 million in unpaid taxes, officials said.

"This is a scar on the land, and this scar is a deep one," Town Supervisor Edward P. Romaine said in an interview Tuesday. "This is a brownfields I want to see cleaned up and reused in the best possible way."

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The property is undergoing a massive cleanup by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which thus far has spent \$27.3 million, EPA spokesman John Martin said. Restoration is expected to take up to 20 years.

Environmental hazards -- including a mile-long toxic plume emanating from the site -- leave few viable options for future development, town and civic leaders said. Housing developments, for example, are practically out of the question.

Romaine said the property may only be suitable for a park, nature preserve or open space.

Town Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld, whose North Shore district includes the site, said it could accommodate an office building, adding, "We don't necessarily want something that's going to . . . [grow] food for people to eat, or a senior housing complex."

Lawrence Aviation and its owner, Gerald Cohen, 79, of St. James, pleaded guilty in 2008 in U.S. District Court in Central Islip to federal charges that they illegally stored corrosive wastes in two tanks at the site.

Cohen completed a federal prison term last year, but he has not paid \$105,816 in court-ordered restitution, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office said Tuesday.

Cohen also owes about \$10.5 million in back taxes, including penalties and interest, and has not paid taxes on the property since 1993, Suffolk County chief deputy treasurer Doug Sutherland said. The county reimburses the town and other agencies for lost tax income, he said.

Cohen, in a phone interview on Tuesday, declined to comment on the unpaid taxes and restitution.

Houses above the plume have been connected to public water systems, and a \$2 million water treatment plant was built to filter contaminated groundwater. But residents are wary.

Michael Eiermann, of Port Jefferson Station, one of five people appointed last month by the town board to the Lawrence Aviation Land Use Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, said he was unsure what could be built there. "I can't imagine, from what I've read in the newspaper and heard in the news, that it can be cleaned up to that extent," he said.

[< back to article](#)