

Former Microfab Site Project - Questions and Answers

City of Amesbury - Office of Community and Economic Development - cleanmicrofabsite@amesburyma.gov



Introduction

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Since taking office in January of 2014, Mayor Gray's administration has been targeting issues that have plagued the community for decades. The former Microfab site has been an issue for nearly three decades and clearly requires a definitive solution. This document is a starting point to provide baseline information to the public. If you have additional questions or require clarification on the questions below please send a request to the above email address or attend any of the meetings that will be publicly announced.

What happened at the property? – The property was first occupied from 1950-1967 by a metal machining company named Sigtrans. In 1967, a company known as Microfab took over the facility. Microfab made printed circuit boards until 1987. The company, through poor management of the hazardous waste they generated, caused this waste to be released into the environment.

Who is responsible? – Responsibility lies with the owner/operator of the former Microfab facility. Beginning in 1984 EPA issued a Notice of Responsibility to the owner for their environmental impact instructing them to investigate and perform a cleanup of the site. The state regulators were also involved through MA DEP declaring the facility a Waste Disposal Site in 1987. In the face of the cost to clean up the site Microfab filed for bankruptcy in 1987. MA DEP stepped in when the responsible party abandoned the site.

Did the City foreclose on the property, or has it ever owned it? - The City has not foreclosed on the property. The City is not a responsible party or owner of the site.

Could you describe the property contamination issues? . The chemicals used by and released by Microfab are classified as hazardous substances under both state and federal laws. They include: organic compounds such as Trichloroethylene (TCE), a common degreaser used in the printed circuit board industry, and metals such as chromium, often used to plate onto other metals. Because Microfab operated in a negligent manner, waste from their facility entered the environment surrounding the building and property. Chemical contamination is present in the groundwater, soil, surface water and wetlands.

What environmental investigations have been completed to date? – Investigations have been conducted by EPA, MA DEP, and abutting property owners. These include Phase Investigations under MGL 21E to determine if contamination exists and the nature and extent of that contamination. Ecological studies have also been conducted to assess impacts to the wetlands and streams downgradient of the property. Remediation and Feasibility studies have also been conducted to determine approaches and costs to clean up the site.

Has any cleanup occurred? – In response to the investigation results indicating issues with contamination in groundwater MA DEP installed and operated a groundwater pump & treat system. This system stopped groundwater from migrating offsite and pumped it through a treatment system to remove the contamination. This system went into service in 1991 and was taken off line in 2012 after removing thousands of pounds of contaminants.

Why is EPA getting involved? – MA DEP has asked EPA for assistance with the cleanup of the site. The EPA has authority and resources beyond those of our state for dealing with sites needing complex cleanups, such as Microfab.

Who will pay for all this work? – This is another reason for EPA to get involved at this time. Since its owners abandoned the property there is no responsible party for the state, federal government, or the City of Amesbury to pur-



sue for the damages this site has caused to the environment. To date MA DEP has spent in excess of one million dollars to work on this site. At the same time the City has not received any tax money for the property and does not have the legal authority to act. Therefore there are no funds to continue work at the site at the local level. EPA has the regulatory, technical, and financial resources to tackle the next phases of work needed to clean up this site.

How does the cost to cleanup and liens on the property affect its current and future use? – The last appraisals of the property occurred in 1999. At the time the value, if the property were “clean”, or free of contamination, was estimated to be between \$800,000-\$1,250,000. At the same time estimates from environmental investigations that prescribed cleanup approaches dealing with soil, sediments, and groundwater indicate that those costs will be \$1,500,000-\$3,500,000. These estimates are using 2003 dollars. In addition, both MA DEP and the City of Amesbury have liens on the property in excess of \$2,000,000 for environmental work, and back taxes, respectively. Clearly the property is upside down with respect to real estate valuation. Without intervention from EPA, this property will likely never be redeveloped and will remain a blight and burden on the community.

What is going to happen to this property? – The first step is to enlist the aid of the EPA. The MA DEP is working with the City of Amesbury to assist EPA with its efforts to list the property on the Federal National Priority List (NPL) more commonly known as Superfund.

What are the future plans after cleanup? Our primary goal is cleanup of the site and removal of the abandoned buildings. The results of the cleanup will guide redevelopment, and therefore it is too soon to make commitments on the potential for redevelopment. The City has seen recent success with the use of tax incentives to address difficult site development. We will begin the planning process for redevelopment soon after the EPA achieves an approval for the cleanup. That would mean we can establish a plan and incentive program simultaneously with the cleanup process.



What can I do to move this forward? - This project requires support from the community to facilitate continued progress with the EPA. Please offer support through the email address indicated at the top of the first page. Tell us how a cleanup of the former Microfab site will benefit you and our community.

New Questions and Responses February 19

The below questions are new inquiries (since February 12) gathered from various venues from the time of the original document release until the above date.

Regarding the EPA cleanup of the Microfab site, can someone explain the city's statement? "This project requires support from the community to facilitate continued progress with the EPA." : In this case **"support"** equates to showing the State and Federal agencies that the **City is in favor of the clean up project**. To move the project forward the EPA has requested that the City demonstrate that the community is in favor of listing the former Microfab site on the NPL (see EPA Brochure). Therefore we have notified properties near the site, established a workshop meeting with the City Council, and finally we will request a Resolution from the City Council in favor of the project. In the case of the Microfab project the EPA and DEP have expressed their gratitude for our more extensive outreach. To grow and sustain a partnership with any agency the City needs to build a relationship between the agency and the community. This public outreach and request for "support" is also part of that relationship building process. *(see last question this page for more on the need for support)*

If the city does not own the property and the EPA funds the cleanup, what exactly is needed from the community? Are there indirect costs and/or risks not yet disclosed?:

Correct, the City does not have an obligation because the City does not own the property. (see other questions in this document) The property has not been taken for back taxes. There is no request for financial support. The EPA is funding the cleanup and taking the first step by listing the property on the NPL. The support mentioned in the above question is not financial. The indirect costs could be considered as State and Federal costs for work to date and in the future. The City is not a financial participant in the remediation of the contamination.

Why is the meeting needed? Is there information that has not been disclosed?

The EPA proposal to move through the administrative process to clean up the site is the new development or "disclosure". At the meeting, the EPA will present their project approach. Given the duration and complexity of this project, a meeting should be held to provide a public venue for dialogue. Further, before we move forward and request a Resolution of Support from the City Council, we wanted to make sure the Council had an opportunity to publicly review the project with residents, businesses, the DEP, and EPA.

Finally this project has been an issue in the community for decades. Over that time, new housing developments have been occupied, and new residents have moved into the area in existing homes. These new residents may want to know more about the site and the project.

What is the EPA planning to accomplish?

The following text is excerpted from the EPA brochure which can be found online in the City Website under News and Notes Microfab Site.

The (City) Town of Amesbury and MassDEP have exhausted resources to further investigate and clean up the Site. In the fall of 2014, MassDEP requested the assistance of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to evaluate this Site for possible inclusion on the National Priorities List (NPL). At the request of MassDEP, EPA is preparing necessary documentation to propose the Microfab Site to the NPL in order to complete a detailed Site investigation and clean up. EPA's initial evaluation of the Site confirmed that it is eligible to be listed and cleaned up under the Superfund program.

Why does the EPA need our support, can't they just move ahead?

The following text is excerpted from the EPA brochure which can be found online in the City Website under News and Notes Microfab Site

The EPA and MassDEP have met with the (City) Town of Amesbury and plan to attend the City Council Meeting on February 23rd to provide information about the NPL and the possible inclusion of the Microfab Site on the NPL. EPA requires a letter of support from the Governor prior to adding a Site to the NPL. EPA and Mass DEP are working with the City of Amesbury to inform the local community and determine the community's support for listing. After a Site is proposed to the NPL, a formal public comment period is held. Following the comment period, Sites are then finalized on the NPL.

Please feel free to send us questions, comments and "support" and watch for updates to the questions:

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