



# Adaptive Reuse & Lead

## Private Sector Forum

HOSTED BY THE SMART SECTORS PROGRAM IN  
EPA'S OFFICE OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

MAY 2026

## Background

On May 20, 2026, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) convened a forum with leaders from the construction and real estate sector who do not often engage directly with the agency to explore opportunities to accelerate the conversion of vacant and underused buildings into new housing when lead (Pb) and other hazards are present. This type of building conversion is commonly referred to as adaptive reuse. The forum was intended to foster an exchange of information between EPA and the private sector about opportunities, barriers, and efforts underway on adaptive reuse, and to inform EPA's efforts to address affordability and housing challenges in a holistic way, grounded in practitioner experience and best practices.

## Forum Structure and Presentations

This hybrid convening included opening remarks by Senior EPA officials, presentations by leading industry practitioners and an EPA overview of tools and pathways, followed by action-oriented breakout discussions on finance and risk transfer, permitting and inspections, workforce and capacity, and standards and codes.

- **Travis Voyles**, Associate Deputy Administrator, opened the forum by emphasizing the shared interest in expanding housing supply while keeping EPA policy environmentally protective and predictable.
- **Mark Sanborn**, Regional Administrator, Region 1, framed redevelopment challenges (e.g., limited land availability, lead and other hazards at Superfund and brownfield sites) and led an open discussion.
- **Lori Ferriss (Built Buildings Lab)**, **Meghan Elliott (Jillpine)**, and **Mary Hashem (RE Solutions)** made the case for adaptive reuse across multiple environmental, health, housing, and economic factors through case studies of converting a historic rural school into workforce housing in Sandstone, Minnesota; an industrial building into mixed-use development in Kansas City, Missouri; and an office building into residential use in Boston, Massachusetts.
- **Paul Fericelli (Smart Sectors)** mapped EPA touchpoints across the development process and made the case for early and comprehensive environmental review to protect schedules, mitigate risk, and build lender confidence.
- **Jane Silverman (JP Morgan Commercial Real Estate)** and **Adam Galowitz (State Street Bank & Trust Co.)** described how investors evaluate adaptive reuse, brownfield, historic preservation, and rehabilitation projects with environmental liabilities, and the role of due diligence for managing risk.



### SMART SECTORS PROGRAM

EPA's Smart Sectors program works with industry sectors to develop collaborative approaches to improve environmental and human health outcomes. To learn more about the Smart Sectors program, [visit their website](#).



Photo credit: Dan Grandmaison



# Forum Takeaways Regarding Barriers and Opportunities to Scale Adaptive Reuse When Lead and Other Legacy Hazards Present

## BARRIERS

- **Upside-down economics.** Layered incentives are generally needed to close a complex capital stack since lead and other hazards further complicate project funding.
- **Pre-development funding.** This is the hardest capital to secure since banks and other market rate investors will not provide funding until there is a plan and cost estimate to address lead and other hazards.
- **Timing and approval risk.** The predictability of an approved schedule is critical to ensure that vertical and horizontal construction is completed on time and within budget. Late hazard discoveries, contractor windows, and state/local delays substantially raise costs.
- **Regulatory complexity.** Uncertainty is created by overlapping Federal, state, and local jurisdictional requirements, various compliance paths (such as using the Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule vs full abatement for lead), and evolving standards for emerging contaminants such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS.
- **Capacity gaps.** There is no shortage of EPA certified labor available to address lead, asbestos and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and states/local governments lack the ability to quickly entitle and permit projects.
- **Information gaps.** There is no single “front door” for EPA and other federal tools and resources, and limited awareness of available EPA programs by the private sector.
- **Small developer hurdles.** Specialized requirements, perceived risk, and limited technical support complicate adaptive reuse projects for small businesses.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- **Address the economics.** Expand EPA and other federal agencies direct upfront support for concept development, Phase I/II environmental assessments, hazmat surveys, and technical assistance, and increase access to EPA's Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund to de-risk predevelopment and protect closings.
- **Make compliance with EPA and other federal requirements for lead (and other hazards) predictable and navigable.** Publish renovation vs. abatement decision aids, standardize hazardous material lender-ready documentation, and stand up a single “front door” for federal resources.
- **Workforce training.** Scale and update EPA's training certification program and guidance on lead and other hazards, including asbestos, PCBs & PFAS; ensure, alignment with EPA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements and market needs; prioritize rural capacity.
- **Support efforts to strengthen local capacity.** Support local zoning and permitting reforms that reduce childhood lead and other hazard exposure through predictable reviews and aligned standards.
- **Support efforts to build strategic partnerships.** Engage healthcare systems and anchor institutions (e.g., hospitals, universities, major employers) to fill financing gaps and secure demand for new housing compliant with EPA Lead-Safe rules and regulations.

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*“Construction timelines aren’t always defined at the outset. Developers and contractors work to engage subcontractors early, but as time passes, cost and availability can shift. Aligning these moving pieces with project timelines requires thoughtful coordination among all parties.”*

— JANE SILVERMAN

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*“The U.S. has nearly 100 billion square feet of existing commercial floor area, representing a huge development opportunity when we consider what we’ve already invested to build it.”*

— LORI FERRISS

## Additional Resources and Contact Information

For additional information, presentation materials or further questions, contact Paul Angelone ([angelone.paul@epa.gov](mailto:angelone.paul@epa.gov)) or Paul Fericelli ([fericelli.paul@epa.gov](mailto:fericelli.paul@epa.gov)) from the EPA Smart Sectors program or visit the [Smart Sectors' web page](#).

