People ask why "blighted properties" are so expensive, and the answer could be that sellers ask for, and developers pay much higher prices because they count on government incentive monies. Brownfield funding was originally designed to clean up urban contamination and prevent sprawl into "greenfields" - to most people a fine use of public funds. Unfortunately with the additional "pork" conditions that were grafted on in 2000, this program has become, with little governmental oversight, a goodie bag for developers and the property owners who sell to them. For example, one development in our area received $4.5 million in Brownfield tax credits for a site that the developers knew had no measurable contamination. When informed of this fact the MEDC noted cavalierly that, "Everybody makes mistakes!" and refused to rescind or even review the grant. This kind of attitude at a time when there are cutbacks in government spending at all levels, is not only stupefying but is a slap in the face to all taxpayers. Answers should be demanded from members of the Michigan Economic Growth Authority as to why the credits were granted even though the DEQ knew (and the MEDC should have known) that contamination claims were wrong, and why board members didn't immediately review the issue. In other words, who knew what and when did they know it? Who polices the process, and why does it appear that no one will ever be held accountable?

Brownfield incentives are needed in Grand Traverse County as much as anywhere, but the questions that must be asked and answered apply to the whole state. Does the tax money that's diverted to subsidize business do so at the expense of services to an entire community, including schools? How subjective or arbitrary are the evaluations, and why are they seldom evaluated from a community perspective? Up to now they have focused almost entirely on the number of new jobs thought to be created in the TIF district, and by how much property values rose. These evaluations overlook what happens to community residents and to areas surrounding the TIF district. Were these jobs genuinely new, did they already exist at another location within the TIF district, or were they shifted into the TIF district from surrounding areas? Did the "new" job pay as well as the one that was displaced? How much could property values have been expected to increase without TIF? How much of the increase was due simply to the "Brownfield" designation? How much did property values drop in directly affected areas?

Please address these questions before continuing the Brownfield program so that taxpayers can once again view state Brownfield funding through

unjaundiced eyes as the good, quantifiable, and progressive program it was originally meant to be.