

COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN

**Gray's Hospital
477 East Main Street
Batesville, Ark. (Independence County)
AFIN: 32-00704**



Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment
Division of Environmental Quality
Office of Land Resources, Brownfield Program

March 2026

1.0 Introduction and Background

This community relations plan for the Gray's Hospital site describes the strategy of the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Brownfield Program, to provide prior notice of brownfield cleanup activities and meaningful opportunities for public participation.

1.1 Site Location

The Gray's Hospital site is located at 477 East Main Street, Batesville, Ark. (Independence County). It sits at the northeastern end of the Batesville Historic Commercial District at the intersection of East Main Street and North 5th Street, and is located to the west of the Batesville Municipal Building.

1.2 Previous Site Uses

The 0.61-acre site was developed with residences in the late 1800s. Gray's Hospital was built in 1939 and operated until the 1980s. The site was then used as medical offices until 2021 and has been vacant since. The site was donated to the City of Batesville on Dec. 30, 2025.

1.3 Site Assessments

An asbestos inspection was completed by Snyder Environmental in April 2018. The inspection identified 24 asbestos-containing materials, which are defined as materials containing greater than 1% asbestos.

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment was completed by Tetra Tech, Inc. in October 2025. The Phase I Environmental Site Assessment identified three Recognized Environmental Conditions in connection with the site:

- The historical use of an incinerator at the site
- A nearby site that was historically used for dry cleaning
- A nearby site that was historically used for automotive services

Prior to site redevelopment, the identified Recognized Environmental Conditions may require additional investigation, including sampling soil and groundwater sampling, to determine whether contamination is actually present and to evaluate the risks to human health and the environment. The additional investigations will be accomplished after the building at the site has been demolished.

1.4 Project Goal

The City of Batesville intends to demolish the former hospital building and redevelop the site as a community green space. Prior to demolition, asbestos must be removed by an

Arkansas-licensed asbestos abatement contractor. The DEQ Brownfield Program will provide asbestos abatement funding from its State Response Program grant.

1.5 About Asbestos

Asbestos refers to a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals that are extremely strong and heat- and fire-resistant. Because of these properties, asbestos was commonly used in construction and manufacturing for many years despite its dangerous health impacts.

Exposure to asbestos can occur through inhalation of asbestos fibers or by direct contact with the skin. Asbestos can cause serious health issues including asbestosis, mesothelioma, and lung and stomach cancers. Symptoms of these diseases often develop years or decades after exposure.

Most asbestos-containing building materials and other consumer products were banned or phased out in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. However, many older buildings that were constructed prior to the 1970s still contain asbestos.

Asbestos regulations differentiate between friable and non-friable asbestos-containing building materials. Friable materials are those that, when dry, can be crumbled, pulverized, or reduced to powder by hand pressure, potentially releasing asbestos fibers into the air. Non-friable materials cannot be damaged by hand pressure.

Non-friable asbestos-containing building materials are not harmful to human health when left intact and in good condition. When these materials deteriorate or are disturbed, however, asbestos fibers are released into the air. For this reason, renovations and demolitions of commercial buildings are regulated to prevent exposure to asbestos.

2.0 Community Relations Information

2.1 Community History and Profile

Information for this section was obtained from the City of Batesville website, the Encyclopedia of Arkansas, and the US Census Bureau.

Batesville is the largest city in Independence County and is the county seat. Located in northeastern Arkansas, it lies in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains along the White River.

Batesville has historical significance as the oldest existing city in Arkansas. The area was originally inhabited by Osage Indians, who ceded the land to the United States in 1808. By 1812, a trading post was established at Poke Bayou at the uppermost navigable portion of the White River. The settlement quickly became an important river port and entry point into the interior of the Arkansas territory. The settlement officially became Batesville in 1821, named after Judge James Woodson Bates, the first territorial delegate to Congress.

In its early years, the settlement provided provisions to settlers in exchange for furs and hides. By the Civil War, the city was a prosperous cultural and mercantile center. Its strategic location made it an ideal military base and throughout the Civil War, and Batesville became the headquarters for three Confederate and two Union occupations.

Following the war, reconstruction saw the founding of Arkansas College (now Lyon College) and brought new settlers to the city. River traffic remained a vital part of the local economy, and railroads were completed in the early 1900s.

According to US Census data, Batesville has a population of 11,445 residents. The population is primarily white (64%) with a notable Hispanic population (23%) and small populations of multi-race residents (7%), Black residents (3%), Asian residents (1%), and others (2%). The average per capita income is about \$28,411 and the median household income is about \$51,856.

Batesville's economy includes agriculture, food processing, manufacturing, timber, banking, and healthcare. It is home to Lyon College and the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville. Lyon College has hosted the annual Arkansas Scottish Festival, formerly called the Ozark Scottish Festival, since 1980.

Historic preservation has played a key role in maintaining Batesville's legacy. The city has three National Register Historic Districts, including the Commercial Historic District, the East Main Historic District, and the School Addition Historic District, as well as numerous other properties individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Gray's Hospital site sits on the northeast end of the Commercial Historic District.

In recent years, the City of Batesville has invested in revitalizing city infrastructure, community spaces, and recreational facilities with the goal of attracting new businesses, enhancing quality of life for residents, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Key initiatives include downtown revitalization, public infrastructure updates, and new recreational facilities. The redevelopment of the Gray's Hospital site aligns with the City's efforts to revitalize its historic downtown and create opportunities for public recreation.

2.2 Community Relations Objectives

DEQ's community relations objectives include providing prior notice of planned cleanup activities, informing the community of opportunities for public participation, providing access to the administrative record for the site, and addressing any questions or concerns that may arise.

2.3 Community Relations Activities

As stated in 8 Code of Arkansas Rules pt. 82, Brownfield Redevelopment, the public shall be provided notice of a proposed cleanup action at a brownfield site and given opportunity to comment and request a public hearing prior to DEQ making a final cleanup decision.

Prior Notice

DEQ will issue a public notice of the proposed cleanup activities in the local newspaper, the *Batesville Daily Guard*, and on the DEQ Brownfield Program website at www.adeg.state.ar.us/hazwaste/programs/brownfield/.

Public Participation

Members of the public wishing to comment on the proposed cleanup action may submit comments, along with their name and mailing address, to DEQ by mail or by email. The period for submitting comments will begin on the public notice publication date and will end at 5 p.m. on the 30th day after the publication date.

DEQ will respond to all comments and, upon request, will host a public hearing on the proposed cleanup action prior to making a final cleanup decision for the site.

Comments may be submitted by mail to:

Addie McClain, Brownfield Program Coordinator
Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, Division of Environmental Quality
5301 Northshore Drive, North Little Rock, AR 72118

Comments may be submitted by email to: ee.brownfields@arkansas.gov.

Administrative Record

During the public comment period, the administrative record for the site, including all environmental assessments and cleanup planning documents, will be held at the Independence County Library at 267 East Main Street, Batesville, Ark. 72501. The administrative record will also be posted on the DEQ website at the web address listed above.

The administrative record will consist of the following documents:

- Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
- Asbestos Inspection
- Community Relations Plan
- Draft Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives
- Final Quality Assurance Project Plan

2.4 Ongoing Contacts

Members of the public may contact the following spokespersons at DEQ, the City of Batesville, or the White River Planning and Development District with questions or concerns regarding the asbestos abatement at the Gray's Hospital site.

The DEQ spokesperson for this project is:

Addie McClain, Brownfield Program Coordinator
Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, Division of Environmental Quality
5301 Northshore Drive, North Little Rock, AR 72118
Email: addie.mcclain@arkansas.gov
Phone: 501-682-0616

The City of Batesville spokesperson is:

Jennifer Corter, Administrative Assistant to Mayor Rick Elumbaugh
City of Batesville
500 E. Main Street, Batesville, AR 72501
Email: mayorassistant@batesvillearkansas.gov
Phone: 870-698-2400 ext. 100

The White River Planning and Development District spokesperson is:

Mitzi Hargan, Community Development Director
White River Planning and Development District
P.O. Box 2396 Batesville, AR 72503
Email: mitzi@wrpdd.org
Phone: 870-793-5233