PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

BROWNFIELD ASSESSMENT AND CLEANUP

Methods to encourage successful community involvement:

- *Be clear on the desired outcome for the meeting*

- *Know your community*

- *Ensure outreach methods match the needs of the people*

- *Provide opportunities for input at different phases of the project*

- *Listen and address concerns honestly*

Community members discuss the possibilities for land revitalization during a visioning session held by the City of Frankfort, KY.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND INVOLVEMENT

Community outreach and involvement is a vital part of brownfield redevelopment. If done correctly, it helps produce a redevelopment plan that will be beneficial to you and your community. It can also help those involved understand risk and to help them feel included in a process that will directly impact their lives. Excluding people from projects can lead to delays, upset community members, and sometimes the derailment of a project. As such, undertaking community involvement should start in the first phases of a project and be inclusive of all those impacted by sites and their redevelopment/reuse.

Establishing Goals and Targeting an Audience

What are you planning to get from your outreach? Are you trying to identify properties, get input for redevelopment or explain risks? Understanding your goals and stakeholder community will help you develop an effective community outreach plan, including an identified target audience, applicable methods of information exchange, and information that needs to be available and shared. It is important to look at your potential project in a critical manner to determine who will be included in outreach.

Is a site close to a neighborhood or school? Are there businesses around? Do local developers have a role? Think about who is impacted by this site on a daily basis, either economically, socially, or health wise. Avoid defining your audience too narrowly and promote an open door policy that encourages participation. Everyone should feel welcome to contribute.

Event Types and Scheduling

Events, whatever form they take, should be easily accessible and convenient. Looking at your population, what would be the best way to engage them? Are the people in this target group retired or actively working, do they have small children, are there different languages spoken, are there places where a majority of your target group already gather? You may need to do a combination of events to hit all audiences.

Events, Cont.

Events can take the form of public meetings, workshops, visioning sessions, tours of brownfield impacted areas, booths at community events and fairs, and others. Schedule events, like workshops and visioning sessions, at times and places where people can attend. A 10 AM meeting on a Wednesday may not draw those in the community that work. If public meetings have not worked well in the past, consider going to fairs, markets and other community events where people already gather. If in previous meetings, certain people tend to repeatedly dominate the discussion, consider doing some door to door outreach. Some people feel intimidated or won't share opinions if they think they will offend their neighbor.

The type of your event will also depend on your goal. Visioning sessions are great for reuse planning, whereas public meetings may be needed to explain a cleanup or communicate risk.

Attracting People to an Event

Like the outreach that you are planning, advertising for events should be appropriate for the audience that you have identified. Social media is not a good fit if your population is mostly elderly, and exclusively English advertising materials wouldn't serve their purpose in a predominantly Spanish or otherwise non-English speaking neighborhood. Fortunately, there are many ways to make people aware of your event, including:

- Newspapers
- Radio ads
- Newsletters
- Bulletin boards
- Social media sites
- Direct mailings
- Door to door surveys or invitations
- Invitation through local access television.

A community member shares his thoughts and ideas for brownfield redevelopment during a visioning session.

Starting a Dialogue

In order to start a dialogue so that everyone at your event can be on the same page, you will need to introduce concepts that are foreign to many laypeople. Does your neighbor know the definition of a brownfield? You will also need to explain the purpose of the event, what decisions have already been made, how their input will be used, and what kind of timeline you envision for the project. You may want to accompany verbal or visual presentations in order to accommodate different learning styles and levels of education. Community members can help identify areas for further explanation, what needs further study, and what may need a broader discussion.

Many use community meeting to determine potential end uses for properties. Community members can provide great insight into what is needed and wanted in a neighborhood. Those that fail to do outreach for end use often find their projects at a standstill, totally changed, or scrapped altogether.

If your meeting is to discuss a cleanup, you will want to work with your consultants and state programs to help properly communicate information about the site, contamination, health impacts, and how the property will be remediated or managed. Be honest with people. If there is a potential for the discussion to be heated for any reason, consider having a skilled facilitator on hand that can help let everyone be heard and to keep discussion moving.

Always actively listen, acknowledge feelings and ideas and answer questions honestly and to the best of your ability. Don't be afraid to offer follow-up at a later time if you are unable to answer a question. It is also important to remember to "close the loop" with community members as project decisions are made and finalized, and to emphasize that these decisions were made in part based on the community input. This ensures that it's clear to participants that their time wasn't wasted and their input was valued, and will in turn help encourage participation in future projects.