

March 17, 2005

Non-Profit Situational Success and Lessons Learned

Moderated by: Mark Walker, CO

This session focused on the roles non-profits can play in the redevelopment of Brownfields, and how the non-profit sector can assist State agencies in redevelopment.

MAIN TOPICS:

1. At low costs, non-profit agencies can assist in coordinating stakeholders for successful Brownfields redevelopment.
2. Non-profits can function as an intermediary, and can sometimes take title of properties as well as apply for grant funds on behalf of affected communities.
3. Technical assistance, including training and low interest loan funds, are available through non-profits. Support of State programs, including economic development agencies, are keys to success in Brownfields redevelopment.

An Extension Service Model for Brownfields

Charlie Cunniff from the Environmental Coalition of Southern Seattle (ECOSS), discussed the mission of ECOSS, i.e., to help businesses and the Seattle community with environmental, social, and economic development issues. Mr. Cunniff discussed how ECOSS has been able to bring business, government and residents together in a positive and productive manner.

Mr. Cunniff provided specific examples of where ECOSS has been able to facilitate and coordinate projects for the benefit of all involved stakeholders. The success stories he presented included the Ranier Court project, the Kwik Cleaners project and the Colman Building project. Mr. Cunniff explained the various roles ECOSS can play, from assisting in the preparation of a grant application, to helping procure a professional consultant. Mr. Cunniff stressed that it is critical that businesses work with government if success is to be realized, but that “partnerships make it happen”. He noted that non-profit agencies such as ECOSS can serve a valuable role bringing parties together. Mr. Cunniff further advised that non-governmental organizations should be utilized and new ones encouraged, due to their low costs, flexibility and community connections.

Taking Title for Economic Development

Jesse Silverstein of the Colorado Brownfields Foundation (CBF) presented the CBF’s business model. Their mission is to remove obstacles to redevelopment. CBF’s board is made up of representatives from city, county and State government, as well as the private sector. Mr. Silverstein presented how CBF serves as a “community partner”. He explained that CBF’s “niche” was redevelopment projects viewed as “too difficult”. CBF projects include creation of, preservation of, or addition to a park, greenway, or recreational property, where the affected community lacks staff, technical, and/or financial resources, and where there is a potential to make the project marketable by resolving environmental conditions.

Mr. Silverstein discussed some typical project hurdles including cleanup costs, lingering liability concerns, and low economic activities. He presented several success stories where CBF has served as a project partner, including the Idalia Court project. Mr. Silverstein stressed the ability of non-profits to function as an intermediary. This can be a critical role in certain projects where the owner or prospective owner is reluctant to contact State regulators. He noted that the role of non-profits can include taking title to the property and potentially securing government funds (e.g., Targeted Brownfields Funding).

In summary, Mr. Silverstein highlighted the key roles that agencies like CBF can play in Brownfields redevelopment. These include performing public outreach, identifying ready projects for State Brownfields programs, prioritizing cleanup projects in order to move forward, taking title as ownership intermediary, and functioning as a crossover between agencies.

Creating Public/Private Non-Profit Partnerships

Stephanie Shakofsky from the California Center for Land Recycling (CCLR) presented CCLR's mission, i.e., to repair fractured communities by promoting development on already used land, thereby discouraging urban sprawl. Ms. Shakofsky cited the connection between economic development and environmental cleanup. She pointed to the fact that "environmentally challenged" properties are particularly problematic to small and/or struggling communities.

CCLR serves several program areas, including small grants, loans and technical assistance to community developers; training and consulting for redevelopment specialists; and policy and legislative research. Ms. Shakofsky presented a typical project, i.e., a Habitat for Humanity project, and demonstrated how CCLR was able to assist. She also presented the Forgivable Loan Program, which CCLR administers, whereby Brownfields redevelopment can be incentivized through a low interest loan (or the loan forgiven), based on the extent and cost of cleanup required.

In conclusion, Ms. Shakofsky noted that one of the components which lead to successful collaboration is clear/loud support by State leaders for the Brownfields redevelopment project. She also suggested that by broadening State regulatory programs to include State planning agencies, these programs can ensure the protection of public health while shifting emphasis to the broader community value.