



A PUBLICATION OF  
ICMA'S BROWNFIELDS  
PROGRAM

# Local Government and Community Engagement in Brownfields Redevelopment







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# About ICMA

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is the professional and educational association of more than 8,000 appointed executive administrators serving local governments. Members manage cities, counties, towns, townships, boroughs, regional councils, and other local governments in the United States and throughout the world with populations ranging from a few thousand to several million people.

Founded in 1914, ICMA pursues the mission of enhancing the quality of local government through professional management. Its members turn to ICMA for information, research, and technical assistance on many issues of special interest. ICMA's management assistance includes a wide range of publications, training programs, research, information, and training services. ICMA's Research and Development Department seeks to enhance the quality of local government management through information sharing, technical assistance, research, and partnership building among concerned stakeholders.

ICMA's Research and Development Department has been studying the role that local government can play in a variety of brownfield issues through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Cooperative Agreement No. CR-R-82870801.

Other ICMA publications made possible by this and prior cooperative agreements with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency include:

*All Aboard for Revitalization: How Local Governments Can Restore America's Historic Train Stations*

*Beyond City Limits: Best Practices from ICMA's 1998 Brownfield Peer Exchanges*

*Beyond Fences: Brownfields and the Challenges of Land Use Controls*

*Brownfields and Utility Sites: A Primer for Local Governments*

*Brownfields Blueprints: A Study of the Showcase Communities Initiative*

*Brownfields Redevelopment: A Guidebook for Local Governments and Communities — Second Edition*

*Building New Markets: Best Practices from ICMA's 1999 Brownfield Peer Exchanges*

*Getting the Job Done: Strategies and Lessons Learned in Facilitating Brownfields  
Job Training*

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*ICMA Base Reuse Handbook: A Navigational Guide for Local Governments*

*Measuring Success in Brownfields Redevelopment Programs*

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*Partners in Planning: Strategies from the 2001 Brownfields Peer Exchange*

*Putting the Pieces Together: Local Government Coordination of Brownfield Redevelopment*

*Righting the Wrong: A Model Plan for Environmental Justice in  
Brownfields Redevelopment*

*Small Spaces, Special Places: Coordination of Rural Brownfields Redevelopment*

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## **Acknowledgments**

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# Introduction

Brownfields are real properties, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.<sup>1</sup> Brownfields redevelopment has become an important means of revitalizing communities and a topic increasingly discussed by local governments. Yet through its ongoing brownfields research, ICMA has learned that community residents and other stakeholders are not always aware of these discussions.

Realizing the need for better communications on brownfields redevelopment, ICMA, through a grant from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), launched the Local Government and Community Engagement in Brownfields Redevelopment Project in two selected communities—Jersey City, New Jersey and Bridgeport, Connecticut.

## Scope of the Project

The project studied local government policies and practices in conducting community outreach and education about brownfields and their redevelopment. The goal was to learn about communication strategies that were already in place— what worked and what posed challenges. Based on input from local officials, community residents, and other stakeholders, the study determined strategies that would improve communication and public participation in brownfields redevelopment planning. These strategies were presented at information sharing forums held in Jersey City and Bridgeport. The information sharing forums provided an opportunity for local officials and community residents to engage in dialogue to address their brownfields issues and concerns.

## Scope of the Report

This report discusses the findings of the study concerning the brownfields activities of both local government and community groups and what can be done to enhance current communication methods. The report also presents community residents' perceptions of decision making by the local government as well as the local government's perceptions of community participation.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by Public Law 107-118 (H.R. 2869), the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act, signed into law January 11, 2002.

### Locales of Applicants for the Local Government and Community Engagement Project

Allegan, Michigan  
 Chicago, Illinois  
 Coralville, Iowa  
 Denver, Colorado  
 Gary, Indiana  
 Hudson County, New Jersey  
 Hyattsville, Maryland  
 Jersey City, New Jersey  
 Little Rock/North Little Rock/Pulaski County,  
 Arkansas\*  
 Maysville, Kentucky  
 Bridgeport, Connecticut\*  
 Tacoma, Washington  
 Waterloo, Iowa  
 Wilmington, Delaware

\* = Nonprofit applicants.

To determine the communications dynamics in the field, ICMA conducted case studies in Jersey City, New Jersey, and Bridgeport, Connecticut. The research methodology details how these communities were selected.

### Research Methodology

This one-year study was conducted by ICMA and the Center for Public and Environmental Oversight (CPEO). The research involved site visits to selected communities and background research on other communities.

In November of 2001, a press release announcing the Local Government and Community Engagement Project and soliciting participants was prepared and distributed on ICMA's Website and numerous listservs. Applications were received from fourteen locales (see box above). Twelve applicants were local governments, and two were nonprofit agencies.

ICMA and CPEO staff evaluated the applications using the following criteria: the quality of the application, the commitment to brownfields redevelopment of the local government, the overall engagement of the community in land use planning, and the presence of a formal brownfields program. Applications submitted by local governments had to show evidence of a working relationship with community groups, and applications submitted by nonprofits had to include a letter of support from the local government. Of the fourteen applicants, Jersey City, New Jersey and Bridgeport, Connecticut, were selected to participate in this study. Both are older northeastern industrial cities that are similar in historic land use, form of government, population demographics, and per capita income.

Selection letters were sent to Jersey City and Bridgeport to reconfirm their willingness and availability to participate in the project. Initial site visits were arranged to meet with local government officials and staff working on brownfields redevelopment issues and to tour the community. A subsequent visit was made to each location to meet with community residents to discuss brownfields redevelopment and to follow up with local government officials. Additionally, numerous interviews were made with community residents, nonprofit organizations, and local officials, and a questionnaire was distributed to community residents.

An information sharing session with local government officials and community residents discussing the findings and recommendations of the project and possible next steps for expanding effective communication strategies in brownfields redevelopment was held in Jersey City in March 2003 and in Bridgeport in October 2002.

# Importance of Community Engagement in Brownfields Redevelopment

One way for a local government to counteract environmental inequities and the malaise of economic, environmental, and social decay in urban areas is to improve public participation in land use decision making. Local government officials are continuously looking for innovative and effective approaches to increase community involvement and facilitate good working relationships among all stakeholders.

Meaningful community engagement is achieved by raising awareness and educating citizens about issues of concern to them. As a result, they are empowered to participate in the planning and implementation of programs and policies. The greatest barrier to community engagement is an unspoken one of fear or distrust. Public officials may fear a negative reaction to their policies by citizens and the media; citizens may fear that they will be embarrassed if they take action or that they will be unable to influence the plans of government officials. Often officials are unsure of the public's ability to deal with difficult issues, such as contaminated sources, and the public doubts that officials will pay attention to their input.

## **Rationale for Community Engagement**

Local decisions that are made with citizens' input and active involvement are more likely to be acceptable to community residents. Citizen participation in community affairs serves as a check and balance to politicians' pursuit of their own interests. Participation allows fuller access to the benefits of a democratic society. Active participation in the decision-making process by a cross-section of citizens reduces the likelihood that government leaders will act based on factors other than the well-being of the citizens at large.

There are three rationales for citizen participation. First, merely knowing that one can participate in local affairs promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual. Second, engagement in civic activities taps the energies and resources of individual citizens within the community and affects the decision-making process. Finally, citizen participation provides a unique source of insight, information, knowledge, and experience that contributes to the soundness of community solutions. The result is an emphasis on problem solving to eliminate deficiencies in the community.

Additionally, citizen participation can legitimize a program— its plans, actions, and leadership— by bringing together the stakeholders to discuss the issues. Such legitimacy can often mean the difference between success or failure of community efforts. Support from citizens can lead to a stronger, more solid program, whereas unsupported leaders often become discouraged and drop activities that could be beneficial to community residents.

Local government officials are, with few exceptions, committed to serving constituents' interests and providing high-quality, and efficient government services. Yet there is much evidence that citizens do not feel that they are being heard or that government is addressing their priorities. It is increasingly difficult in growing and

diverse communities for local government officials to stay in touch with their constituents. A rapidly changing world means that traditional approaches for gathering feedback may be less effective today than in the past. Formal public hearings have their place, but they can be intimidating. Such hearings may not be the best way to encourage comments from a wide cross-section of community residents, and busy schedules often limit attendance.

Local governments are trying new approaches to make it easier for citizens to express their opinions and for local officials to understand their needs. The most effective community involvement programs use a combination of approaches to reach residents of different races and backgrounds. Advanced technology offers new opportunities for quick and cost-effective ways to get out information. Pressed for time, busy community members will appreciate convenient and quick ways to stay informed about, and contribute to, government services and community issues.

Opportunities for face-to-face exchanges between citizens and local government officials will facilitate understanding and balance officials' diverse interests. By scheduling convenient times for meetings and providing comfortable settings, officials will encourage participation. Finally, community members must feel that their concerns have been acknowledged and will be considered, rather than feel that they have not been heard or have been manipulated.

Local governments that encourage citizens to become directly involved in community improvements can reap further rewards. Programs that encourage shared responsibility for community problem solving and improvement not only take advantage of the energy and ideas of citizen groups to address community needs, they also provide citizens with a sense of ownership in the community. Neighborhood programs and volunteer opportunities can directly involve citizens in community improvement. The voluntary participation of citizens can also reduce the cost for personnel needed to carry out many of the duties associated with community action.

## Benefits of Community Engagement

Community engagement means that residents are informed about civic affairs and actively involved in making decisions that ultimately affect their community. Meaningful community engagement is beneficial in several ways. For example, it:

- **Promotes environmental justice.** Environmental Justice is the fair treatment of all people—regardless of race, culture, and income—when it comes to the development of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. It is considered to be an injustice when disadvantaged communities do not have a voice in policy making.
- **Fosters collaboration.** Parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible. Collaboration is mutually beneficial, enabling two or more parties to work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for results.
- **Minimizes conflicts.** When there is ongoing dialogue between the government and the community, and all parties are clear about what is going on, potential conflict decrease.
- **Improves information flow.** It is much easier to provide information and solicit input from citizens who are engaged in local decision making than from citizens who are unaware of what is happening in the community around them. This is because relationships exist between the public and local officials, and channels of communication are in place.
- **Improves community understanding of local government.** One of the greatest barriers to community involvement is citizen's lack of understanding of the civic process. To the layperson, the civic process may appear technical and complex. Therefore, many citizens choose not to get involved.
- **Improves the quality of life for citizens.** A citizen's quality of life is determined by his or her social, cultural, and economic values. If local decision makers take these values into account when setting laws and policies, they help citizens achieve the quality of life that they seek. To take into account personal values, a local government must listen carefully to citizens and ask them to participate.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kirk Sorenson. *Citizen Engagement for a Better Community* (Martin County, Florida: Martin County, 2000).

# Observations from the Field

## Community Profile

### Location

Hudson County

### Form of Government

Mayor/City Council

### Size

Total area: 21.06 square miles

Land area: 14.87 square miles

### Population and Demographics

Total: 240,055

Hispanic: 28.3%

Black: 26.8%

White: 23.6%

Asian: 16.1%

### Per Capita Income

City of Jersey City: \$19,410

Hudson County: \$21,154

New Jersey: \$27,006

## Communicating About Brownfields in Jersey City, New Jersey

Jersey City has a long history as an industrial community. Beginning in the 1830s, Jersey City served a railroad terminus. As the city grew, the shoreline became filled with garbage, ash, and slag from industrial by-products. By the 1960s, Jersey City was suffering from the same problems that industrial downturns and suburban development brought to other cities in the northeastern United States. The demise of the railroad in the 1960s coincided with the departure of local industrial giants as well as major chemical companies from Jersey City.

Of the more than 200,000 acres that form the landmass of Jersey City, approximately one-fifth of the acreage has been identified as suitable for brownfields redevelopment. Sites range in size from 15' by 100' lots to 240 acres. Most of Jersey City has been affected by contamination of the land. Many brownfields properties include former rail yards, vacant buildings, and underutilized deteriorating facilities. The abundance of contaminated properties and the pattern of ownership complicate the marketability of the sites for redevelopment.<sup>3</sup>

## Redevelopment Program and Process

In Jersey City, the cleanup and reuse of brownfields are part and parcel of its redevelopment efforts and are not treated as a discrete function or program. At least four local departments are involved in brownfields redevelopment in Jersey City: the Jersey City Redevelopment Agency (JCRA); the Department of Housing, Economic Development and Commerce (HEDC); the Environmental Commission; and the mayor's office. Their coordination in terms of promoting citizen involvement in brownfields issues is uncertain.

In April 1997, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) selected Jersey City as an EPA National Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot. The selected

<sup>3</sup> Brownfields Assessment Pilot Fact Sheet, Jersey City. See <http://www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf/html-doc/jerseyct.htm>.



Redeveloping abandoned brownfields sites can improve and revitalize neighborhoods in Jersey City.

area for Jersey City's Brownfields Pilot Program consisted of former industrialized and rail sites surrounded by residential communities. Specifically, the city chose a portion of the Lafayette neighborhood for initial redevelopment based on its mix of industrial and residential land uses, its large concentration of industrial properties (abandoned properties or properties with substantial municipal tax liens allowing foreclosure by the city), and its high level of unemployment.

The Brownfields Pilot Program in Jersey City funded by EPA was designed to achieve the following objectives:

### Morris Canal Redevelopment Area

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot Program Grant awarded in 1997 to Jersey City prompted the city to engage in a community-based planning process. A Stakeholders Advisory Committee (SAC) was formed to ensure community inclusion in developing the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan (Plan). The SAC assisted in selecting the sites for assessment and in planning charrettes that were coordinated by city staff to gain community input. After the Plan was developed, the planning board recommended approval by the City Council. The Plan was adopted by the City Council in March 1999.

The Plan reflected community concerns. It called for a separation of industrial uses from residential areas. The Plan also proposed the creation of a major park and encouraged the construction of subsidized housing for senior citizens. Perhaps most significant, the Plan, rather than encourage wholesale redevelopment and gentrification, reinforced the existing residential neighborhood, a multiracial area where some families had resided for generations.

The Plan included a community empowerment clause that provided for open lines of communication between the city government and the Morris Canal community. The clause mandated creation of the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Coalition (MCRADC), made up of representatives from the Morris Canal community including business and property owners. The Coalition's primary role is to review all redevelopment proposals to ensure compliance with the Plan.

Community residents felt that the city reduced its communications with the neighborhood once the plan was adopted. Fewer large community meetings were held than in the past. City staff expressed their view that public involvement was less needed in the "deal-making" phase of assembling properties and financing projects. Community members worried that construction would add or modify details in ways that did not serve the neighborhood's interests.

Because of cultural factors, including language, the Latino community did not fully participate in the planning phase, according to community members. However, city staff reported that Latino youngsters who attended community meetings to translate for their elders had the opportunity to influence the plans for park play areas, and advocated new soccer fields.

The city's Planning Division and Environmental Commission assigned a staff member to serve as liaison to the MCRADC. It is the responsibility of the liaison to ensure that the coalition is kept apprised of events as they occur throughout the investigation, remediation, and redevelopment process.

The Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Corporation (Corporation), a not-for-profit Community Development Corporation (CDC), was awarded \$100,000 for a project at 406-420 Communipaw Avenue and \$150,000 for acquisition of a vacant building at 319 Pacific Avenue to convert into its headquarters. The Corporation, which does not have any paid staff, will use a consulting firm for project management.

## Morris Canal Redevelopment Milestones

**1998**

The Stakeholders Advisory Committee was established.

City-sponsored planning charrettes were conducted.

**1999**

The City Council of Jersey City adopted the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan and the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Coalition (MCRADC) was established.

Jersey City and the MCRADC named Morris Canal Industrial Park Area and Conrail property as sites for Preliminary Assessment and Site Investigation (PA/SI).

HUD awarded Jersey City a \$1.75 million Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI) grant and \$8 million in Section 108 loan funds for development of the Morris Canal Industrial Park.

**2000**

Preliminary Assessment is completed at Morris Canal Industrial Park and site investigation initiated on several properties pursuant to Preliminary Assessment Report recommendations.

**2001**

Jersey City organized a site selection working group with representatives from the MCRADC, Jersey City Redevelopment Authority (JCRA), Jersey City Housing Authority (JCHA), U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). The selection of the first two sites— the Morris Canal Industrial Park and Conrail properties were reconfirmed at the working group meeting of April 5, 2001.

New administration begins with the inauguration of a new mayor of Jersey City.

Mayor Glenn D. Cunningham toured Morris Canal Redevelopment Area with city staff and members of MCRADC.

HUD awarded the Jersey City Housing Authority a \$34 million HOPE VI grant to fund development of mixed-income housing in the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area and the Lafayette neighborhood.

Developers gave presentations to MCRADC on three projects: 900 Garfield Avenue, Ercel Webb affordable housing development for veterans and adaptive reuse at 300 Communipaw Avenue.

**2002**

Jersey City Redevelopment Authority (JCRA) selected Hampshire Companies as developer of 900 Garfield Avenue, a chromium contaminated site complicated by the presence of a former coal gasification plant. The responsible parties for site contamination are cooperating with the JCRA, the city, and the developer and working toward site remediation.

JCRA selected Woodmont Industries as developer of the Morris Canal Industrial Park.

JCRA issued Request for Proposals for development of market-rate housing on approximately 42 acres in the Morris Canal Redevelopment Areas.

Mayor designated HEDC staff person as city liaison to MCRADC to ensure that the coalition is informed on public sector development activities in the redevelopment area.

JCRA designated Urban League Affordable Housing and Community Development Corporation as developer of Ercel Webb Veterans Housing.

JCRA heard proposals from three prospective developers for a 42-acre market-rate housing development.

Reinstatement of the Stakeholders Advisory Committee.

- Complete inventory of brownfields sites through a Comprehensive Data and Graphic Information Retrieval System.
- Complete assessment of eligible brownfields sites in the target area and select, assemble and reconfigure them into marketable sites for industrial development.
- Fund a community-based environmental education and participation program focusing on target area and sites selected for assessment.
- Increase the municipal tax base by adding to the tax rolls properties in tax lien or public ownership and by increasing the use and value of underutilized properties.

- Create new industrial jobs for Jersey City residents through the existing “First Source” job placement and job training programs maintained by the city (not funded by pilot grant).
- Reduce the potential for exposure to contaminants for the residents of adjacent neighborhoods.

The EPA pilot grant provided seed money that helped facilitate community involvement in redevelopment planning and improved communications between Jersey City’s government and its residents. The creation of the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area prompted additional direct grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and private investment in problem properties that had been dormant for years.

Visible signs of the city’s community outreach efforts include planned community charrettes, distribution of informational flyers, youth involvement in local decision making and the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan with its mandate for community involvement. Like most local governments, Jersey City’s government is faced with numerous and complex challenges. In Jersey City, these challenges include local government policies and procedures that do not require as much involvement from citizens as community members would like; a highly charged political atmosphere; unclear roles of stakeholders; project initiation and site selection led by developers; inadequate notification strategies; insufficient staffing for community outreach; lack of understanding about brownfields; and other issues.

The challenges facing residents in their dealings with local officials include lack of understanding of the civic process, confusion about the meaning of “brownfields”, and work and family obligations that hinder their ability to attend public meetings hosted by their local government, to name a few.

Matters are further complicated by stakeholders’ perceptions of each other and about processes and procedures. Activities of one party that are not transparent may be misconstrued by the other. Distrust as a result of past misunderstandings also appeared to hinder a collaborative



Redevelopment of brownfields sites will have economic, environmental and social benefits.

partnership in the present between a local government and residents.

Despite these challenges, local officials as well as community residents can take specific steps to improve communications. Subsequent sections of this report outline recommendations to Jersey City officials and community residents for developing effective communication and community involvement strategies.

## **Communication Methods Employed by the City Government**

This section describes both the required ways in which Jersey City has tried to involve the community in brownfields redevelopment as well as some of the extra steps the local government has taken to reach out to residents, both property owners and tenants.

### **Planning Charrettes**

The city government held three planning charrettes in the Morris Canal community to develop the vision for land use and building design for the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan. During the charrettes, residents were divided into eight subgroups, and input from each subgroup was later consolidated into a redevelopment vision plan. Some funds from EPA were used to purchase supplies for the meetings, and staff time was city funded. The charrettes were held in schools to make them accessible to the community. During the planning charrettes, translations were provided for Spanish speakers.



### **Notification Strategies**

To comply with state law and to ensure that its correspondence reached intended parties, Jersey City sent mail by certified delivery to property owners in areas in need of redevelopment to alert them about public meetings. For the benefit of renters who did not receive notification by mail, notices of meetings were published in the local paper with maps of the proposed redevelopment areas. These maps gave citizens a pictorial view of the current status and future plans for the areas as well as a better understanding of the issues that would be discussed at the meetings.

In addition to the city's notices, the Lafayette Neighborhood Association went door-to-door distributing 1,200 bilingual flyers produced by the Division of City Planning. City staff also used churches as a venue for outreach activities. By using multiple modes of dissemination of information, the city was able to reach broader audiences within the community.

### **Community Empowerment Clause**

The community empowerment clause in the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan requires public involvement in redevelopment activities and the creation of the Morris Canal Redevelopment Authority Development Coalition to provide comments to the city on development proposals. The clause states, "To establish and maintain community empowerment in the redevelopment area, it is recommended that the redevelopment area community establish a single community-based development coalition, for the purpose of community inclusion in the decision making process of the redevelopment plan...."<sup>4</sup>

### **Community Meetings**

The city proposed monthly meetings with the MCRADC to keep it abreast of redevelopment activities in the city. At these meetings, attendance has historically been low, perhaps because community members have conflicting obligations or doubt they have power to affect change.

### **Factors Influencing Communication between City Officials and Residents**

Following is an explanation of the factors that influence interactions between the local government in Jersey City and community members. These factors were noted as a result of detailed interviews with neighborhood residents and local officials. Taken together these procedural and personal issues can impede a collaborative partnership between the local government and the community.

#### **Policies and Procedures for Community Engagement**

The types of policies and procedures in place in local government can influence the degree to which a community is involved in redevelopment. Before Jersey City received its EPA pilot grant, no local government staff had been assigned responsibilities for community outreach. Planning staff followed state procedures for public notification (of pending redevelopment efforts) but did not take additional steps to engage the public. Public notification is just one way to reach out to citizens. True public engagement requires a two-way dialogue between government and residents, and input from residents in decision making.

#### **Highly Charged Political Atmosphere**

The past practices of previous leaders of Jersey City appear to have created distrust of local government among residents. The previous administration focused on waterfront redevelopment along the Hudson River and did not seek out or accept public input. This practice was seen by some in the community as compromising public interest while catering to developers' interests. Proactive in seeking community participation in the redevelopment process, the current mayor has personally visited neighborhoods to talk with residents about their concerns.

#### **Unclear Roles among Stakeholders**

The Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Coalition, established to review redevelopment proposals for projects within the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area, has not met

<sup>4</sup> City of Jersey City. Morris Canal Redevelopment Plan (Jersey City, New Jersey: City of Jersey, 1999).

the city's expectations that it would continue the work of organizing stakeholders' meetings on redevelopment in the community. From the perspective of local government officials, the coalition's current agenda extends beyond the original scope of its mission. They perceive the MCRADC as acting in the capacity of a developer rather than as a reviewer of developers' proposals, and they believe this is setting the stage for conflict. Jersey City and the MCRADC have failed to address the lack of transparency in motives and actions, and unless this issue is addressed, the relationship between the government and the coalition may become antagonistic.

### **Developer-Led Project Initiation and Site Selection**

On projects initiated by developers, community input is limited because the city works on predevelopment agreements to ensure the projects' feasibility. In Jersey City, this has always been an area of contention between local government and the public because the community feels disenfranchised by the process. However, the new administration, which came to office in 2001, is making public participation a priority for sites located in residential areas of the city.

### **Inadequate Public Notification Strategies**

Notification of redevelopment efforts and solicitation of input are often restricted to property owners, who may not be community residents if they lease their property. Indeed, the actual residents of the community may be excluded from the notification process if they are tenants. This strategy disadvantages low-income residents, since they are less likely to own their homes.

### **Insufficient Staffing for Community Outreach**

The scarcity of staff members dedicated to brownfields activities hinders community outreach. The Department of Housing, Economic Development and Commerce currently has only one community liaison, whose job is to coordinate community meetings to explain the redevelopment process to the public. The city realizes that having only one staff member with these responsibilities is insufficient, and it is in the

process of recruiting a community development planner who possesses both the technical knowledge of planning and the necessary training in community outreach.

Additionally, the local government staff's lack of racial diversity may make it challenging for them to interact with a diverse community. The Jersey City Division of Planning is entirely Caucasian, although half are bilingual (English and Spanish). It serves a brownfields redevelopment area with African American, Latino, and Asian residents. In an effort to address diversity issues throughout the city, Jersey City has been recruiting people of color in significant roles.

### **Lack of Awareness and Understanding about Brownfields**

"Brownfields" is a relatively new and confusing concept for most Jersey City residents. For this reason, it is hard for the local government to rally participation in discussions about brownfields and the process of redevelopment. The city needs to understand the community's pressing needs for jobs, health care, and public safety, and tie those needs into the discussion about brownfields. For example, brownfields redevelopment can bring in new business and create jobs locally.

Additionally, it appears that there is some confusion regarding the scope of Jersey City's brownfields program. Jersey City is an old industrial city, and virtually all nonresidential development construction involves potentially contaminated property or brownfields redevelopment. EPA's Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot Program Grant is linked to the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area, however, much of the city's activity—such as redevelopment planning, has been funded from other sources.

### **Conflicting Work Schedules Precluding Community Involvement**

Because a majority of residents have day jobs, scheduling community meetings during the day is not practical, and residents with evening jobs or family obligations have found it difficult to commit to evening meetings. Jersey City schedules community meetings during the evening, yet faces challenges attracting significant numbers of residents to these meetings.

### **Compartmentalization of City Government**

To some degree, the city's difficulties with implementing all of the activities listed in the brownfields grant application to EPA may be a consequence of the compartmentalization of its government. As noted earlier, at least four Jersey City departments—the Jersey City Redevelopment Agency (JCRA), the Department of Housing, Economic Development and Commerce (HEDC), the Environmental Commission, and the mayor's office— participate in brownfields redevelopment. Community members expressed different levels of satisfaction with each as well as different levels of concern with past and present administrations.

### **Allocation of Resources**

Leaders of MCRADC expressed concern that the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area was not seeing the benefits of the funds Jersey City received from EPA's Brownfields Pilot Program, even though the funding was based on the condition of this community. Jersey City insists that 100 percent of the EPA funds are being directed to these neighborhoods, but to date not all of the funds have been expended. **Authors' note:** It has been determined that grant funds have been expended on non-pilot activities, but the money will be replenished such that all grant funds will be spent on grant activities.

### **City Officials' Perceptions**

Government officials in Jersey City's acknowledge disparities between the city's brownfields redevelopment efforts and the agenda of some of the community representatives on the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Coalition. The local government wants to develop a working partnership with Jersey City residents. Brownfields proposals have been opposed by some in the community, and this has created friction with the municipal government. It is the local government's perception that development projects are delayed because some members of the community expect to gain financial benefits from private projects on the one hand and because of private developers do not understand the importance of communicating with the community on the other hand.

From the local government's perception, the MCRADC does not appear to have a clear vision of what it wants to accomplish. The MCRADC wants to manage development projects and serve in the capacity of a developer—a possible conflict of interest since any application for development must go through the coalition.

### **Community Residents' Perceptions**

When first interviewed, residents of the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area of Jersey City indicated deep mistrust for their local government. However, on a more thorough exploration of their views, the same residents expressed mixed feelings about their relationship with the city. They expressed satisfaction with the planning phase of the city's brownfields program in the Morris Canal area. The city, with the help of the Lafayette Neighborhood Association, notified community members about the process, and meetings were held in the community at convenient times.

While today both the city government and the community residents are focused on the implementation of a successful neighborhood revitalization program, community members warn that success could bring failures as well. Slightly north of the Morris Canal area is a large high-rise development designed, built, and operated by Newport Associates Development. A mixed commercial and residential complex built over former rail yards along the Jersey City waterfront, it benefits high-income residents who commute to jobs, just across the Hudson River, in New York City.

Like many other brownfields developers, Newport Associates, with regulatory approval, relied upon containment of contamination and institutional controls to reduce risks to human health. A company representative reports that this strategy led to a minor and easily correctable problem; residents want more recreational open space. The company intends to oblige, but it will be more difficult, at least more costly, since the site was paved over as part of the environmental response.

The success of Newport Associates' high-rise development illustrates that the Hudson River shoreline, including the Morris Canal area, is a very desirable place for highly paid professionals working in New York City to live. If the efforts to



Efforts are underway in Jersey City to redevelop areas like this brownfields site.

redevelop the area succeed—that is, if contaminated properties are cleaned and redeveloped, then widespread rapid gentrification may result. Active members of the area made it clear that they want not only to clean up and improve their neighborhood, but also to retain its essential fabric and affordability for current residents.

This, perhaps, is the strongest argument for direct community participation in area redevelopment projects. Such participation, on a significant scale, was not feasible at the Newport property because there was no pre-existing residential community. But in the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area, projects could be designed to improve communities and prevent unwanted gentrification.

Health issues related to redevelopment in Jersey City prompted little concern among local residents. They showed a general lack of interest in current contamination levels, health impacts, and plans for cleanup of brownfields sites. However, the community residents expressed concerns about negative health impacts from mobile sources of pollution such as heavy trucks. The community seemed unaware of the relationship between future uses for contaminated sites and cleanup strategies. At least one large site within the redevelopment area, the PPG Industries site, has extensive, hazardous chromium pollution.

### **Recommendations for Effective Communication**

Based on lessons learned during the research study, the following recommendations were for-

mulated to assist the local government with its communication strategy and to help the community recognize what it can do to become more involved in the civic process.

### **Recommendations for Local Government Action**

#### **Educate Community Residents**

While certain sectors of Jersey City are somewhat knowledgeable about brownfields, planning and other redevelopment issues, it would be beneficial to the city as a whole to educate all of its communities about brownfields redevelopment. Citizens of Jersey City realize that the whole city is literally one big brownfields site because of past industrial uses, but they would benefit from a better understanding of the associated health risks. By providing technical assistance to community residents, the local government can facilitate understanding of complex scientific and engineering information. Better understanding of associated health risks and the redevelopment process empowers the community to collaborate with city officials in addressing concerns and reaching mutually acceptable decisions.

#### **Develop Citizen Academies and Resource Education Series (CARES) Programs**

Citizen Academies and Resource Education Series (CARES) programs teach citizens about how their local government operates. Classes provide an overview of each governmental department and the services it provides. Learning occurs in an informal setting that may include field trips or site visits, as well as in a classroom. Citizens who complete a CARES program are presented with certificates to recognize the knowledge they have gained and the time they have invested in learning about their government. They become ambassadors for the local government because they have developed an understanding and an appreciation of what the local government is doing for them.

#### **Utilize Community's Experience**

Residents have the best knowledge of what is going on within their community. They are eyewitnesses to past activities and know firsthand

about contamination and other issues of concern. Local officials in Jersey City can build on this valuable source of information in two ways: (1) by establishing neighborhood peer exchanges, wherein residents educate each other based on their personal experiences and (2) by interviewing citizens as part of environmental site assessments.

### **Develop a Communication Strategic Plan**

A communication strategic plan is a unified policy that specifies in detail how the local government will communicate with community residents. Its goal is to improve citizens understanding of government functions and services, as well as their access to them. The plan can also empower staff to be more effective in communicating with citizens, other departments, and agencies. This can alleviate the confusion caused by multiple agencies working on similar issues and help create a more consistent approach to problems.

### **Reinstate Stakeholders Advisory Committee**

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee was formed to ensure community inclusion in developing the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan. The committee assisted in selecting the sites for assessment and in planning a charrette to gain community input. Reinstating the SAC and linking it with the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Coalition may provide a mechanism for increasing public participation in the brownfields redevelopment process. **Author's note:** On October 30, 2002, Jersey City reinstated the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC).

### **Define Appropriate Roles and Responsibilities**

Although Jersey City and the MCRADC have specific roles to play in the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Plan, those roles and responsibilities are not clear. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined to avoid the potential for confusion and a breach in trust.

### **Utilize the Media**

Early involvement of the media can provide positive results for Jersey City and spread the word about its brownfields redevelopment programs and initiatives. City staff could author op-ed

pieces as updates to what is occurring with the city's redevelopment efforts or provide the media with information on contamination and other brownfields-related issues for articles in the local newspapers. Public service announcements (PSAs) on local radio and television stations are another potential strategy.

### **Assist the MCRADC**

The redevelopment plan for Morris Canal requires the submission of development proposals to the Morris Canal Redevelopment Area Development Coalition for review. Development proposals are complicated and cumbersome documents and, without clarification by a trained professional, may be difficult to understand. Jersey City staff could prepare short and easy-to-read staff reports on development proposals for review by the coalition. The staff report could briefly summarize the proposal, its consistency with the redevelopment plan, and the staff's professional opinion on its merits. With this information, the MCRADC can more effectively participate in the dialogue between developers and local government officials.

### **Coordinate Government Departments**

By coordinating the efforts of its different departments, the Jersey City government can leverage resources to address brownfields issues in the community. For example, the city's Health Department can partner with the Planning Department to develop a strategy for educating the public about health risks at contaminated sites slated for redevelopment. By becoming knowledgeable about the process and the risk involved in redevelopment of brownfields, the public will be in a better position to evaluate scenarios and participate in decision making.

### **Form Partnerships**

Through nontraditional partnerships with universities and nonprofit organizations, Jersey City can gain valuable insight and expertise or benefit in its efforts to communicate about brownfields with citizens. In addition, state and federal agencies can provide human and financial resources, as well as technical assistance, for the local gov-

ernment. Together, these partners can implement communication strategies that consider the cultural, social, economic, and environmental aspects of the community.

### **Rebuild Trust**

The trust built through effective public involvement in the planning process was hindered when Jersey City reduced its communications with the community. Restarting the information flow—public outreach, newsletters, community meetings—will go a long way in restoring the positive relationship between Jersey City and its residents.

### **Leverage Federal Resources**

In Jersey City, as in cities across the country, community groups want to lead, rather than simply oversee, some of the projects in their neighborhoods. However, community groups in most instances lack the expertise and resources to play that role. Federal agencies, such as the EPA and HUD, and private foundations can support community-led brownfields redevelopment by piloting models that include training, assistance attracting investment, and legal frameworks for sharing project leadership with experienced public sector or private sector developers.

### **Clarify the Scope of Brownfields Redevelopment Strategies**

Local governments' brownfields redevelopment strategies are not limited to activities funded by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. They can include redevelopment planning and implementation, housing construction, and park development. Community involvement should be designed to support the entire strategy, not just EPA's piece of the puzzle. The EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot Program Grant awarded to Jersey City funded community-based planning—one element of a much larger picture.

## **Recommendations for Community Action**

### **Form Partnerships**

One of the main challenges facing community groups in Jersey City is how to become knowledgeable and credible when discussing brownfields redevelopment issues. In order to learn more about redevelopment issues and processes, community groups can partner with Community Development Corporations (CDCs). When multiple stakeholders are engaged, they have a stronger voice and more resources than a single advocate of brownfields redevelopment does. Communities and nonprofit organizations should learn to coordinate their efforts for the purpose of achieving common goals.

### **Train Community Leaders**

Jersey City has a Community Partnership Centers (COPC) Program that trains community leaders. Jersey City's community groups should look into this training for their members, if they have not already done so.

### **Gather Resources**

Numerous grant-making organizations including foundations, universities, and federal and state agencies can provide assistance to grass-roots community efforts to redevelop brownfields. Jersey City's community groups can research funding opportunities to help sustain the activities of their members and help build capacity.

## Community Profile

### Location

Fairfield County

### Form of Government

Mayor/City Council

### Size

Total area: 19.4 square miles

Land area: 16.0 square miles

### Population and Demographics

Total: 139,529

Hispanic: 31.9%

White: 30.9%

Black: 24.4%

Asian: 3.2%

### Per Capita Income

City of Bridgeport: \$16,306

Fairfield County: \$38,350

Connecticut: \$28,766

## Communicating About Brownfields in Bridgeport, Connecticut

Bridgeport, Connecticut is located on Long Island Sound at the mouth of the Pequonnock River. First settled in 1665, incorporated in 1821, and chartered in 1836, Bridgeport is the largest city in Connecticut and one of the most economically distressed.

Bridgeport is the perfect setting for urban rebirth. It has a highly skilled workforce, one of Connecticut's three deep-water ports, and excellent access to New York City and Boston. Despite those advantages, the city of Bridgeport has found it difficult to compete with surrounding areas. Industrial employment dropped steadily in each of the past three decades, and unemployment in the industrial corridor remains significantly higher than the citywide rate. Many businesses have left the city in search of clean sites and modern buildings, which has resulted in several hundred acres of abandoned land that may be contaminated.<sup>5</sup>

## Redevelopment Program and Process

To date, the city of Bridgeport has received three Brownfields Pilot Project grants from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency: an Assessment Demonstration Pilot (ADP) grant, a Job Training Pilot

Grant, and a Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) grant. Monies from these grants have been used to establish an inventory of contaminated properties, collect environmental and economic data for the sites, and create redevelopment strategies for the selected pilot sites. To accomplish this task, Bridgeport hired a team of planning, environmental, real estate, and marketing consultants to screen properties with the highest potential for redevelopment. The Community Linkage for Environmental Action Now (CLEAN) Task Force was established by the City of Bridgeport to serve as a sounding board and informational resource for the consulting team. The task force was composed of representatives of affected neighborhoods, government officials, potential investors, educators, and business leaders in the community.

The goal of the program in Bridgeport, as one of the nation's first three brownfields pilot communities, was to promote safe and appropriate redevelopment by pulling together diverse individuals and groups, and assembling a database of crucial environmental and economic information. Through a cooperative effort, Bridgeport hoped to demonstrate that it was possible to return contaminated urban industrial properties to productive uses that benefit and involve the community. The city recognizes that to succeed, each redevelopment project must be firmly anchored to the local neighborhood. Locally-driven strategies tailored to community needs are essential for successful implementation of brownfields programs.

Historically, Bridgeport had not involved until recently citizens in the brownfields redevelopment process. Its large brownfields redevelopment projects were city-sponsored, using a top down approach that informed neighborhoods only after a project

<sup>5</sup> Brownfields Assessment Pilot Fact Sheet, Bridgeport. See <http://www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf/html-doc/bridgepo.htm>



Bridgeport seeks community involvement in revitalizing sites like this vacant property.

had begun. Within the last four years, Bridgeport has begun pursuing redevelopment at the neighborhood level and incorporating the views of the community into the process. Additionally, the city has introduced a community involvement element in its redevelopment plans and an environmental education project is being created.

To help make the community aware of the opportunities that will result from the brownfields redevelopment projects, the city hosted an environmental job training and education forum for neighborhood leaders, state officials, educators, and business leaders. The city also has a neighborhood coordinator on staff who works closely with the planning office to keep residents informed. The Went Field Park restoration project exemplifies the close collaboration that is possible between citizens and their local government in brownfields redevelopment (see box on page 17).

### **Communication Methods Employed by the City Government**

As the recipient of EPA pilot grants that mandate community participation, Bridgeport is realizing the positive outcome of meaningful community involvement and taking new strides to engage its citizens in redevelopment planning. In addition to its strategies to support civic participation in the Went Field Park project, Bridgeport has employed the following means to communicate with residents about brownfields redevelopment and involve them in the decision-making process.

#### **Community Liaison**

Bridgeport's Office of Planning and Economic Development Department (OPED) has a neighborhood coordinator who is responsible for conducting outreach to residents on redevelopment activities. The coordinator attends community meetings and holds public forums to inform residents of the city's redevelopment efforts. The neighborhood coordinator has been with the city for over a decade and has established a good working relationship with the community.

#### **Quarterly Community Conferences**

Public safety concerns in Bridgeport prompted the Office of Planning and Economic Development and the police department to convene community conferences every three months. After the initial public safety concerns had been addressed, the residents continued to sponsor the quarterly community conferences themselves. At these informal gatherings, residents meet with local government officials. The locations for the conferences rotate among neighborhood associations. Agendas are preset by community residents, and city officials attend to answer questions.

#### **Interpreters**

To lower the language barrier and reach more of its population, Bridgeport translated information in newsletters, and flyers about brownfields redevelopment into Spanish. Interpreters also have been present at community meetings. These efforts have been appreciated by residents. A participant of one bilingual meeting noted that even though translations were simultaneous, not everything being said could be translated. However, she believed that "knowing some, if not all" was important.

#### **Multistakeholder Collaboration**

To devise and implement a plan to restore Went Field Park, the City of Bridgeport brought together local residents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. The Went Field Park effort also promoted interdepartmental cooperation among various local government entities, including the Parks and Recreation Department, the Police Department, and the Board of Education. Neighborhood resi-



## Went Field Park Restoration and Expansion Project

Went Field Park, adjacent to an Interstate 95 ramp, is a gateway to the 200-acre West End Industrial Area currently under redevelopment. The park served as winter quarters of the P.T. Barnum Circus for more than fifty years. Horses, tigers, and other domestic and exotic animals were housed on the property, and performers and trainers resided in the surrounding homes.

Revitalizing resources like the park are essential to improving the overall image of Bridgeport. The nearby Elias Howe Elementary School is land-locked with no outdoor play areas. Bassick High School, located a few blocks away, is one of the few high schools in the state without adjoining athletic facilities. Both the schools and the residents of the neighborhood will be able to use the expanded and improved recreation facilities at the Went Field Park.

Bridgeport was one of the first cities in the nation to use stakeholder's participation together with the redevelopment process to revitalize whole neighborhoods rather than parcels of land. Stakeholders included residents and businesses in the West End neighborhood, city departments, state and federal agencies, neighborhood schools and other groups such as the Went Field Park Association, the Barnum Museum, the Bridgeport Regional Business Council, Groundworks Bridgeport, Bridgeport Neighborhood Trust, and the Latino Softball League.

Issues related to crime, funding, and the environment were all resolved by the meaningful involvement of these stakeholders in decisions about the restoration and expansion of Went Field Park. Stakeholders participated in design workshops, public safety meetings, and other public gatherings.

The expansion of Went Field Park required the city to assess, acquire, and clean up two adjacent commercial sites: the Exmet site and the Swan Engraving site. Exmet, a former metal extrusion company, had left its site vacant since 1989. Bridgeport used part of its \$200,000 EPA Assessment Demonstration Pilot (ADP) grant to fund environmental assessments of the Exmet

site from 1997 to 2000. In 2000, EPA also conducted a \$75,000 Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) on the site of Swan Engraving, a former printing company. Subsequent work at the site funded was by the city's ADP grant.

The assessments identified the presence of low-level solvents in the groundwater. The contamination is being addressed in accordance with the standards set by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. As part of the applied study component of the Job Training Pilot, local students of the environmental training program will be trained in groundwater monitoring and data management using the existing monitoring program at the site.

On May 1, 2002, the Park City Brownfields Redevelopment Partnership was awarded an EPA New England Environmental Merit Award for its work to restore and expand Went Field Park.



A picnic gazebo at Bridgeport's revitalized Went Field Park.

By integrating funds from the EPA Assessment Demonstration Pilot Grant program, the EPA Job Training Pilot program, and an EPA-conducted Targeted Brownfields Assessment, the partnership leveraged an additional \$4.4 million to achieve its twin goals: (1) providing open space, educational opportunities, and better recreational facilities for the residents of the West End neighborhood, and (2) improving the overall image of Bridgeport.

The Park City Brownfields Redevelopment Partnership is an umbrella group for a number nonprofit agencies, community groups, and government entities working to restore and expand Went Field Park.

The Went Field Park restoration is the largest community-based project in the city and one of the largest in the country. The project expanded the park from six to ten acres by revitalizing the Exmet and Swan Engraving sites. Municipal, corporate, state, and federal sources were pooled, and West End businesses and residents joined forces to achieve success.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Success Stories. See <http://www.epa.gov/region1/brownfields/success/bridgeport.htm>.

dents used the project to open up communications with the police, and they established activities such as a Neighborhood Watch Program, to benefit the entire neighborhood.

### **Interdepartmental Coordination**

Even without a formal communication policy in place, Bridgeport's city departments work together to keep residents informed about brownfields redevelopment programs. The Board of Education has worked with the Department of Health to sponsor educational sessions at community meetings, and the Office of Planning and Economic Development and the Zoning Department work to coordinate the city's redevelopment efforts.

### **Risk Communication**

During the cleanup and development of Went Field Park, city officials met with residents to communicate the risks involved in its restoration. At the session, residents were presented with the history of the site and preliminary findings about its safety. The city sought residents' input and feedback, but residents did not believe they could initiate a dialogue with the city for two reasons. First, they believed the city's presentation was excessively technical and they were not able to understand it. Second, the information presented to them brought about feelings of anxiety. Many felt it was too early in the process to predict the outcome of the cleanup. They told the city they preferred to hear the actual findings rather than the preliminary findings, and asked for a reworked presentation that was easier to understand.

### **Factors Influencing Communication Between City Officials and Residents**

The effectiveness of communications between the City of Bridgeport and the residents about brownfields issues is determined by numerous factors. These include residents' priorities, funding and resources available, the character of the neighborhoods, and residents' feelings about local government.

### **Residents' Priorities**

During the best of times, most Bridgeport residents have little understanding of the phrase "brownfields redevelopment" or its relevance to economic development and the creation of new jobs. Under current economic conditions in Bridgeport, it is also difficult for local government to pitch brownfields redevelopment to the public as a priority. Local officials will find it hard to rally citizens for discussions about brownfields unless there is widespread awareness of the issue and an understanding that redevelopment can promote economic development, create jobs, and protect community health.

### **Inadequate Financial and Staff Resources**

Insufficient financial and staff resources in the city government make it difficult to communicate effectively with local residents, keep them informed of the city's progress, and hear their concerns regarding brownfields redevelopment. Bridgeport currently has only one neighborhood coordinator who is responsible for conducting outreach to communities on redevelopment activities. Fortunately, residents and business owners have formed community organizations that play a role in disseminating information on brownfields redevelopment and other issues. While these community groups serve a vital role, increased coordination with the city's staff will help to ensure that timely and accurate information reach area residents.

### **Fragmented Neighborhoods**

Neighborhoods in Bridgeport are somewhat fragmented. The population is often transient, and the residents have not organized themselves to present a unified voice on issues. The formation of neighborhood groups in Bridgeport is a relatively new occurrence. The Unity Council does not represent the majority of neighborhoods in Bridgeport. Many neighborhoods are left "out of the loop" in terms of the brownfields redevelopment process.

## Remington Woods

Remington Woods is a 430-acre parcel of land that straddles the border between Bridgeport and Stratford to the East. Formerly a munitions test site, the parcel is the largest undeveloped piece of land in the area. It is currently owned by DuPont, which plans to develop the property as an office park.

The city's Office of Planning and Economic Development supports DuPont's plans for commercial and office development. Because Bridgeport needs jobs and nonresidential tax revenue, a majority of the community activists who were interviewed also seem to favor development. However, there is an active local group, Friends of Remington Woods, that wants the site to remain as relatively undisturbed habitat. The Friends of Remington Woods would like to see

the property become an eco-tourist destination, but they have no concrete plans for acquiring the property. The group supports redevelopment of other Bridgeport brownfields as an alternative to developing Bridgeport's last, relatively natural acreage of greenspace.

Neither the opponents nor proponents of development of Remington Woods have focused on the health and public safety aspects of reusing a site contaminated with ordnance, as well as other contaminants. Contamination and related health and public safety issues seem to be secondary concerns in Bridgeport. The focus is on reuse and redevelopment, and environmental concerns seem to be related to future use, not exposure to contamination caused by past uses.

### Distrust of Officials

In many cities, there is an inherent distrust of local governments, charged with making decisions and spending tax dollars, and this is also true in Bridgeport. This skepticism impairs the way residents interact with their local officials and serves as a barrier to effective communication.

### City Officials' Perceptions

As mentioned earlier, Bridgeport has used numerous techniques to involve residents in the brownfields redevelopment process. The city feels confident about the progress it has made in improving communications on redevelopment activities, but officials acknowledge there is further work to be done to educate more members of the community about brownfields and the redevelopment process.

### Community Residents Perception

Bridgeport's Went Field Park project is a model exercise in public involvement for brownfields redevelopment. Bridgeport residents outside of the West End neighborhood, however, remain uninformed of the city's strategy for revitalizing brownfields elsewhere in the community. Virtually all nonresidential development in



Redeveloping abandoned and deteriorating structures is a priority for the city of Bridgeport.

Bridgeport is brownfields redevelopment, yet residents are unfamiliar with the city's brownfields program because of confusion about terminology.

Like many other cities that have received EPA pilot grants, Bridgeport is marshaling resources from a number of programs to support its efforts to redevelop brownfields. Bridgeport's brownfields funding from EPA represents a small portion of the city's formal brownfields funds. The EPA-funded program is referred to as the brownfields program, yet brownfields throughout the city are being redeveloped with non-EPA funds. Most residents are not aware that Bridgeport's brownfields also includes these projects.

## **Recommendations for Effective Communication**

From the research study of Bridgeport, the following recommendations were formulated in an attempt to help the local government communicate more effectively with citizens and help the community become more involved in decisions about brownfields redevelopment.

### **Recommendations for Local Government Action**

#### **Clarify Confusion Surrounding Brownfields Redevelopment and EPA Grants**

Bridgeport's community groups are confused by the city's brownfields redevelopment plans. Like Jersey City residents, Bridgeport residents do not understand that the city's brownfields strategies go far beyond EPA-funded activities. The city can do a better job of informing residents and disseminating information about the scope of its brownfields program.

It should explain to residents how EPA's brownfields grants allowed Bridgeport not only to target specific properties, but also to leverage additional funds from federal and state agencies. These funds, obtained as part of the brownfields program, helped to support a broad redevelopment initiative that encompassed numerous community development and economic development goals including site characterization, land assemblage, and property remediation activity.

#### **Manage Community's Expectations**

Community members expect a speedy turnaround with redevelopment projects and seem to be unaware of the long planning process that must precede restoration of brownfields sites. This timing is extended if properties are contaminated and have to go through the remediation process before they are developed. The city can help manage the community's expectations by making clear all the steps and possible setbacks that are involved in redevelopment activities, so residents will not believe that the city is failing to take action.

## **Communicate Health Risks**

Bridgeport's residents seem unaware of or unconcerned by the potential hazards of brownfields contamination. The city and its environmental and health agencies should better communicate information about health risks. Such information is essential in planning the future use of contaminated properties, particularly Remington Woods.

### **Utilize the Press**

As a proactive step to inform the community, the local government of Bridgeport can keep the media apprised of what is happening with the city's brownfields redevelopment efforts. Uninformed about the numerous steps that must be completed in the development process, residents often complain about the "lag time" between project development and project completion. By writing articles or providing information to the media, city staff can update Bridgeport residents on progress. As a result, they will receive needed feedback from the community.

### **Utilize Nontraditional Methods of Disseminating Information**

The mass media are not the only way for local governments to spread the word. They can use credible leaders in the community to educate the public on brownfields redevelopment issues. Residents who have attended a program about local government can serve as ambassadors to their community. And communities themselves can act as leaders in educating other communities about contamination issues. Through neighborhood peer exchanges organized by the city government, residents who have experience with redevelopment issues and processes can educate other residents with less experience. As an example, residents involved in the design and implementation of the plan to restore Went Field Park can assist residents in the city's next designated brownfields redevelopment project, a proposed housing and mixed-use development in Black Rock, a residential area within the City of Bridgeport.

### **Expand Community Outreach**

Land use planning is a difficult and complicated process that may baffle citizens unless a trained professional explains the technicalities. By having appropriate staff available to answer residents' specific questions about brownfields redevelopment, a local government can go a long way in making sense of the process. In Bridgeport, the Office of Planning and Economic Development employs a neighborhood coordinator who serves in this capacity for the entire city. Bridgeport should consider expanding the city's outreach program or diversifying the current staff positions to include a greater emphasis on outreach. One-on-one contact with community members is essential for successful local government. Additionally, Bridgeport should consider hiring a facilitator to ensure that complicated technical information is conveyed to residents clearly.

### **Publicize Funding Opportunities**

Local governments should publicize funding opportunities for brownfield projects to make the community aware of the various programs available to assist with redevelopment. In Bridgeport, this is happening. Through the Grow Bridgeport Fund, financing is available for local businesses looking to start up or expand. The fund is a partnership of public, private, and not-for-profit entities, and it has two financing options to support those who would like to redevelop properties, purchase equipment, or expand their current business. The Brownfield Remediation Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is provided through a cooperative agreement with the EPA and is intended to give developers of environmentally impacted properties a low-cost and flexible financing mechanism. The Grow Bridgeport Fund assists small businesses and community-based organizations obtain capital to expand their operations or develop commercial real estate.

### **Pursue Additional Federal Assistance**

Bridgeport should seek sources of funding, in addition to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, to support community involvement on brownfields redevelopment. The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD), the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and the National Park Service (NPS) are among the other federal departments that could be pursued by the city to address the full range of brownfields issues in Bridgeport.

### **Develop a Communications Strategic Plan**

A communications strategic plan provides a coordinated policy for local government communication with residents. The plan's goal is to improve access to and understanding of government functions and services. The plan can empower local officials to be more effective in communicating with citizens, other city departments, and federal and state agencies. By developing a communications strategic plan, Bridgeport can increase the effectiveness of its Office of Planning and Economic Development, as well as other departments, by ensuring that underrepresented communities receive the same information as neighborhoods actively engaged in the city's brownfields redevelopment efforts. The plan also can help make sure that consistent communication approaches are used across departments.

### **Develop Citizen Academies and Resources Education Series (CARES) Programs**

Alone, Bridgeport cannot educate every citizen about local government services; it must rely on the trickle-down approach of educating community leaders and using them spread the message to other members of the community. Citizen Academies and Resource Education Series (CARES) programs are an ideal opportunity to educate the citizens of Bridgeport. CARES programs invite participants to learn more about their community and how the local government operates. Courses provide an overview of each department and the services it supplies. This knowledge can be shared through the community and will foster a greater understanding and appreciation of what local governments do for their citizens.

### **Use Visual Reminders of Redevelopment Efforts**

In addition to articles in the local press, visual reminders such as videos, photographs,

brochures, and posters can keep the community informed of Bridgeport's ongoing redevelopment efforts. For Went Field Park, a video and brochure were produced – communication tools that can be replicated for other redevelopment projects in the city.

### **Recommendations for Community Action**

#### **Enhance Existing Partnerships**

The Unity Council, a coalition of neighborhood groups and other community organizations, serves as an information resource for the residents of Bridgeport. The Unity Council can expand its coalition by seeking out newly formed community groups or disenfranchised residents in an effort to inform them of the city's redevelopment initiatives.

#### **Gather Resources**

Existing community groups can research funding opportunities to help sustain the activities of their organization and build capacity. Foundations, universities, federal and state agencies, and other organizations provide grants to assist grassroots community efforts.

#### **Organize and Coordinate Existing Resources**

Communities should learn to coordinate the multiple stakeholders in brownfields redevelopment in order to achieve common goals. Where multiple stakeholders are engaged, they will have a stronger voice and use resources more effectively.

## Conclusion

Effective communication in any setting involves an interactive flow of information. Interactive communication should occur both within government and outside government in its relations with citizens and other institutions. This type of interaction enhances the principle of community problem solving, calling on the best thoughts and ideas of everyone involved, rather than those of a few people at the top of the information pyramid.

All too often interactive communication becomes complicated because of misunderstandings by the parties involved. Insufficient knowledge of the nuances of the decision-making process can foster citizens' distrust of local government.

From the Local Government and Community Engagement Project in Jersey City, New Jersey and Bridgeport, Connecticut, ICMA identified the following obstacles to effective communication about brownfields redevelopment:

- Local officials' lack of understanding of citizens' interests and needs;
- Political pressure to favor or exclude the needs of some;
- The expense of reaching a broad public and maintaining a feedback loop; and
- The time required to reach a broad cross-section of the community and foster effective communications.

Communities are increasingly made up of diverse groups that have diverse interests and obtain information in different ways. The most effective community involvement programs use a combination of approaches to reach a cross-section of citizens. New technologies offer valuable opportunities for quick and cost effective ways to get out information. Busy schedules mean that citizens will appreciate convenient, comfortable, and quick ways to stay informed about government services and community issues.

Local governments' communications programs should focus on keeping citizens informed, consulting with citizens about important issues and needs, and involving them in making community decisions. By encouraging citizens to become directly involved in community improvements, these programs reap numerous rewards. They harness the energy and ideas of citizen groups to address community needs. They also provide citizens with a sense of ownership in the community. Neighborhood programs and volunteer opportunities can directly involve citizens in community improvement. Some jurisdictions are creating programs that encourage shared responsibility for community problem solving.

Local governments should not forget to get information out and to tell their own story about their accomplishments within the community. Allowing others to tell their story could result in assumptions and inaccurate interpretations.





## Resources

Opinion polls and a growing docket of initiatives signal that citizens do not feel that local officials listen to them. Many citizens doubt they can significantly influence community decisions. Government officials may need better tools for gauging the preferences and needs of constituents in increasingly diverse communities. Polls also indicate that the average citizen is acutely aware of government shortcomings, but far less conscious of the day-to-day benefits government provides. The message about government failures has been more vigorously promoted than the story of successes and the services offered by government. Cities and counties need to be more vocal about the value of government and the mutual responsibility of local officials and citizens to make it work.

The resources listed below can help local governments, (1) keep citizens informed about community issues and services, (2) obtain feedback about citizens' concerns, and (3) engage citizens in shaping the direction of their communities and the quality of governmental programs and services. The information and techniques are presented aid in better communicating what local government is all about. Of benefit to citizens as well as local government officials, these resources emphasize communication approaches that deliver a clear, focused, honest message in convenient and comfortable settings.<sup>7</sup>

### **1 Community Leadership Training**

#### **The Dudley Street Initiative**

**[www.dsni.org](http://www.dsni.org)**

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a nonprofit community-based planning and organizing entity based in the Roxbury/North Dorchester area of Boston. DSNI's approach to neighborhood revitalization is comprehensive (physical, environmental, economic, and personal). The initiative began in 1984 when residents of the Dudley Street area came together out of fear and anger to revive their neighborhood and protect it from outside speculators. At the time, arson, disinvestment, neglect, and redlining practices had nearly devastated the neighborhood. DSNI is the only community-based nonprofit in the country that has been granted eminent domain authority over abandoned land within its boundaries.

## **2 Citizen University**

Highland Park, Illinois

<http://www.cityhpil.com/citynews/citizen.html>

The program was implemented in 2000 as a means to educate residents on the many services, workings, and operations of their city government.

## **3 Communications Strategic Plan**

Martin County, Florida Communications Strategic Plan

[www.martin.fl.us/GOVT/depts/adm/communications/index.html](http://www.martin.fl.us/GOVT/depts/adm/communications/index.html)

The Communications Strategic Plan of Martin County sets forth the county's communications activities in order to improve citizens' access to and understanding of county government functions and services. Its goal is to empower county departments and staff to be more effective in communicating with citizens, county departments, and other governments and agencies, thus attaining fulfillment of the Martin County Vision Statement.

## **4 Public Participation Toolbox/Public Participation Spectrum**

International Association for Public Participation

<http://www.iap2.org/practitionertools/toolbox.pdf>  
<http://www.iap2.org/practitionertools/spectrum.html>

The association offers a Matrix of tools and techniques to keep community residents informed.

## **5 Municipal Research and Services Center**

The Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) of Washington is a nonprofit, independent organization. Its mission is to promote excellence in local government through professional consultation, research, and information services. The MRSC provides Internet links for the following information:

### **Strategies for Reconnecting Citizens and Government**

<http://www.mrsc.org/focuspub/strategiesmrscfocus.aspx>

### **Creating a Sense of Value: Building Citizen Commitment**

[http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Seattle\\_Community\\_Value.ppt](http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Seattle_Community_Value.ppt)

### **Effective Approaches for Getting the Word Out to Citizens**

<http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx>

### **Focus on Feedback (Is Anyone Listening?)**

<http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx#Focus>

### **Involving Citizens in Community Improvement**

<http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx#Involving>

### **Communicating about Government Spending (What We Get for Our Dollar)**

<http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx#Communicating>

### **Communicating about Government Services (What's in It for You?)**

<http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx#Communicating2>

### **Comprehensive Citizen Involvement/Public Relations Programs**

<http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Governance/Participation/Effective.aspx#Comprehensive>



