Creating a Vision

Redevelopment of brownfields occurs as part of broader efforts to revitalize cities. For that revitalization to succeed, a community needs to be drawn by a vision developed by the affected parties. Among the factors to consider when creating that vision are:

♦ **What will provide the greatest benefit for the community?**
  All parties must work together to create a redevelopment concept that will work within the needs and wants of the community. However, the initial thrust and vision must come from the community. Without community support, the long-term success of any redevelopment project is unlikely.

  Difficulty may arise as disenfranchised segments of the community attempt to convey their desires to other parties. In many instances, they may not have a powerful enough voice. Additionally, history is rife with attempts by developers, government, and business who have steamrolled development plans into a community, often with disastrous consequences. Therefore, it is critical that a community has a well-defined plan for brownfield redevelopment, and to form partnerships early in the process of redevelopment.

♦ **Working with neighborhood development plans.**
  Infrastructure Assessments
  It is critical that existing infrastructure be evaluated to determine if future land use and development plans can accommodate the expected increased demand on utilities, roads, and sewers. A cost analysis should be conducted that examines the increased cost of upgrading existing infrastructure or constructing new systems. This component of redevelopment can often make or break a redevelopment budget, yet may also provide the opportunity to develop new construction techniques or materials, or to upgrade older systems to more energy and cost efficient systems.

♦ **What sort of redevelopment is compatible with the conditions of the site?**
  The type and extent of contamination found on and eventually cleaned up at a site may often dictate future land use. It may be very unlikely that a property can be effectively remediated to background or pristine conditions without spending an exorbitant amount of money. Therefore, it is important that all parties understand the processes, goals and limitations of remediation efforts. Some property contaminated by heavy industry may only be suitable for redevelopment projects that include a similar land-use, and rarely, if ever, will redevelopment of these types of sites include residential construction. These scenarios raise the age-old question of “how clean is clean,” and the inclusion of deed restrictions on future development efforts.
Building Teams

Although each of the players listed below brings a different perspective and capability to the redevelopment table, the team approach helps to ensure the success of any project. While each is important in its own right, the failure of one partner to support the effort can undermine the entire project.

♦ Community
A community, usually through a community redevelopment corporation (CDC) will hopefully, reap the rewards of a successful redevelopment effort, but unfortunately bears the majority of the burden of a failed redevelopment effort. An established and well-connected CDC may be able to initiate efforts aimed at brownfield revitalization, and may have access to funding, high levels of government, and other entities that can assist in their efforts. For CDCs with little or no experience in land-use planning, establishing the right contacts through networking opportunities such as Chamber of Commerce meetings, business development roundtables, and the effective use of government representatives, as well as determination, may be the most effective tools to use to establish the CDC as a player in the redevelopment game.

♦ Local, State, and Federal Government
Regulators on all levels play a crucial role in determining the ultimate outcome of redevelopment efforts because they control the selection of remediation processes and the level of cleanliness to be attained. Therefore, it is important to communicate the future land-use plans for a site in order to begin the process of working within the regulations to accomplish redevelopment goals.

♦ Developers
Ultimately, developers drive the process. They are usually more experienced than the other players at obtaining financing and the approval necessary to complete a deal.

♦ Financiers
The entities risking their money to assist in redevelopment efforts will need to be convinced that funding will be wisely spent, thereby resulting in a successful project and more money coming back to them.

♦ Universities
Many local universities have outreach and economic development programs that can be used by communities during redevelopment efforts. While some universities have not traditionally been involved in assisting underserved communities with business development and economic growth plans, universities can be an excellent resource for technical assistance and education on the brownfield redevelopment process.

♦ Media
Local media can be a powerful ally in redevelopment efforts by showcasing opportunities and even tribulations encountered in development. Although very few, if any, community development corporations have media expertise, it is beneficial to
contact local media sources and establish a network of contacts that can be called upon to highlight a success story, or perhaps more newsworthy, detail some of the problems and barriers to redevelopment communities may encounter.

**Financing**

It is often said, “Money makes the world go ‘round.” Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the redevelopment of brownfields and communities. If money is not available, or a project looks too risky for a financial backer, the deal won’t get done. However, the strong economy the nation has been experiencing over the past several years has led to the increased availability of resources, and one of the beneficiaries of this period has been the brownfield/community redevelopment industry.

However, the roads to funding sources are not paved in gold. Moneylenders and other entities are not throwing money at every redevelopment project that comes their way. Competition is still tough for the available funds, and a project team must have a definitive plan in place describing the benefits of the project to all parties.

♦ **Public Finance Sources**

Many federal programs exist that can aid a community in financing its redevelopment efforts. Unfortunately, competition for funding under these programs may be fierce, and application of funding may be restricted under terms of the program. For example, perhaps the best known of the brownfield redevelopment programs is EPA’s Brownfield Pilot Program. Although EPA distributes millions of dollars to Pilots around the country, use of funds is restricted to identifying and assessing the environmental conditions of a property, and cannot be used to actually begin cleanup or construction activities.

♦ **Private Finance Sources**

Private finance sources may be just as difficult to obtain as private funding, yet the range of application for these funds carries across the gamut of the uses. Corporations, banks, and private foundations are all involved in community redevelopment efforts, and each serves as a source of brownfield redevelopment funding.