

ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE CENTER

BROWNFIELDS
REDEVELOPMENT
CHARRETTE REPORT

CITY OF POCA TELLO
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INTRODUCTION

With the growing interest in revitalizing our cities has come the realization that post-industrial, or other blighted pieces of land often hold the key to creating new, more livable, communities in which people live, work, and shop. The cleanup of these lands also contains the potential to improve the environmental qualities in our cities. At the same time, the growth in American suburbia has had a diminishing effect on green lands that buffer urban areas. Cities are extending into the quickly disappearing countryside, creating environmental problems ranging from surface water runoff to automobile exhaust created smog, a side effect of commuting from urban cores to the more aesthetic suburbs. The impact of this situation is worsening, thus agencies and organizations such as the Environmental Protection Agency are calling attention to the problems of urban sprawl, practices that encourage it, and programs that could potentially decrease it.

In Western communities, while there are not as many obviously contaminated or blighted sights as in areas such as the Midwest, public officials are being faced with the need to redevelop these areas. Cities once reliant on the railroad have long recognized that other economic foundations are necessary to survive. Once primarily reliant on extractive industry and the railroads that supplemented and made it possible, western communities must now come to terms with the growing dependence on more technological industries and the people, culture, and expectations that come with it. The dichotomous culture of espresso drinking cowboys and Internet savvy woodsmen has taken our culture to another unique, while still western, level. Our view towards urban centers has changed as well. Westerners, like Americans elsewhere, have come to see urban centers as a valuable asset that, if fully developed and capitalized upon, can bring further economic stability and improvement to our communities.

The city of Pocatello Idaho, is an example of a community that has recognized the importance of changing so as to benefit from the new economic and opportunities in the west. As a typical western city its past dependence upon Union Pacific and other extractive or “dirty” industries are evident. The city has several blighted areas in need of remedies to real or perceived contamination. Pocatello has successfully implemented several stages of an urban renewal project, and is finding that new businesses are interested in becoming a part of their community. The city’s officials and citizens have exhibited a desire and motivation to clean up their city, making it more attractive to those living in the nearby communities. The city hopes to pull people into the original urban core and decrease future sprawling growth that would promote the environmental, economic, and social problems often attributed to urban out-migration.

In meeting their economic development goals, Pocatello will attempt to take advantage of several programs offered by the federal and state governments in order to improve their urban corridor through redeveloping Brownfields. The Environmental Protection Agency, noting the value of deterring sprawling growth, has created a pilot program through which communities are able to apply for funds to cover assessments and research. This is part of a growing effort on behalf of the agency to improve environmental conditions through urban renewal. The EPA’s Environmental Finance Advisory Board has created a Brownfields working group to research various financing and redevelopment strategies that may be used as part of redeveloping cities’ abandoned urban landscapes. The EFAB stresses the importance of

sound planning and investing, and has cited methods in which investors can be encouraged to become a part of the effort.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City of Pocatello, in order to enhance its redevelopment project through community participation and sound planning, asked the Environmental Finance Center at Boise State University to aid in the initial phases of its planning process. The Environmental Finance Center at Boise State University is one of eight centers across the country established by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Its mission is to provide communities with resources to fund environmental projects by working with the communities and tribes of the Northwest to understand the “how to’s” of environmental finance. While the community had already found several plots of land on which redevelopment would further its urban renewal goals, they had not yet begun to include the community in the decision making process, or conducted phase I assessments on the land. The EFC at Boise State agreed to help Pocatello gather information and community support for its grant application process by conducting a charrette. This event brought community stakeholders and various interests together to discuss the needs of the community and to determine a parcel of land that would be most financially and socially viable to redevelop using the EPA grant.

In August 1998, the City of Pocatello contacted the Environmental Finance Center. Kara Palm, and intern for the EPA, had been helping the city to conduct a review of properties that could potentially be involved in the EPA Brownfields redevelopment grant program. Kara was referred to the EFC after a conversation that she had with Dean Nygard at the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Kara was working with the City of Pocatello office of Community Development to determine ways in which the city could find funds for the redevelopment of lands within its central urban core and tax increment finance district. As an “Enterprise Community,” Pocatello has been working on revitalizing its downtown in order to further community and economic development. After speaking with Bill Jarocki, the Director of the Environmental Finance Center, Pocatello and the EFC believed that there was potential for a partnership.

Bill Jarocki and Lauren McLean traveled to Pocatello in August 1998. Steve Ernst of the Pocatello office of Community Development, Kara Palm, and Mark Masarik of the Idaho operations office of the EPA met to discuss the steps that should be taken to further Pocatello’s application process. At this time, all parties involved decided that the city had progressed to the point where a charrette would be helpful to finalize which tracts of lands would best work. The EFC agreed to help organize and conduct the charrette for the City of Pocatello.

Pocatello had originally chosen four main sites within a defined area (railroad corridor) to be the foundation of their Brownfields pilot project, spanning across the six central neighborhoods of the city and encompassing the original core of Pocatello. This defined area was selected based on the following criteria:

- The proximity to the downtown and the existing urban renewal area

- The potential to further economic development along the rail corridor
- The amount vacant, idle, or underutilized land due to the stigma of real or perceived contamination of these lands
- The new incentives for investment and development
- The ability to address environmental justice issues

The goal of the city's Brownfield pilot project is to cease urban sprawl and to restore economic vitality to the pilot area while fostering community development through the creation of a Brownfields model that will retain the area's historical nature and provide commercial and recreational opportunities within the urban core. This will be accomplished by focusing on commercial redevelopment, neighborhood redevelopment, and economic development. More specifically, the project goals are: to promote commercial redevelopment through cooperative proactive efforts of local government and non-profit and private organizations; to revitalize neighborhoods through concerted efforts to increase market values and monetary investment in residential properties; and to further the economic development of Pocatello by increasing the opportunities for business, investment, and expansion in the area.

An EPA cooperative agreement would allow the city to accomplish these goals by funding a Phase II assessment. Upon its completion, the city would work collaboratively with members of the community and other stakeholders to develop methods for future enhancement of community outreach activities, to determine the costs of innovative technological approaches to remediation, and to develop a plan to market the available properties.

Presently the City of Pocatello is working with its financial officers, the Bannock Development Corporation, and the Environmental Finance Center at Boise State University to develop creative solutions to the financial obstacles posed by the cleanup. Pocatello also formed a Brownfields Steering Committee composed of local government officials, development corporations, DEQ, community organizations, and environmental organizations to research Brownfields issues within the community.

The City of Pocatello envisions a strong partnership with the EPA and other appropriate authorities throughout the project. The EPA's technical expertise will be of great use in designing an appropriate method for cleanup of the sites. The EPA's legal counsel will be vital in addressing issues of liability. The city will cooperate with the Idaho Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to enter into the Idaho Voluntary Land Remediation Act Program and to prepare a work plan to which each party will be bound. The City of Pocatello will apply for a 1999 Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative Grant from HUD to alleviate a portion of the costs associated with cleanup. Also, Idaho State University has offered technical support. The university is investigating ways to enhance its curriculum by training students to conduct site assessments and develop cleanup technologies for different types and levels of contamination.

THE CHARRETTE

To enhance community involvement and awareness of the project, the City of Pocatello invited the Environmental Finance Center at Boise State University to conduct a mini-conference to introduce community members to the concepts of Brownfields redevelopment. A charrette – a collaborative session to aid with the city’s grant application – was held the following day, granting community stakeholders the opportunity to be involved with the process of choosing the most viable property for this redevelopment grant.

Presenting opportunities for community involvement has been an essential component of Pocatello's redevelopment and revitalization efforts. The city will continue to solicit community participation as a part of its Brownfields redevelopment program, thereby providing a forum in which property owners, impacted community members, financial and educational institutions, and government authorities work together to develop creative solutions.

The Brownfields Mini-Conference on October 20, 1998 granted all interested and concerned parties the opportunity to express their visions and concerns for the Pocatello Brownfields project. The momentum of the conference will leverage additional input and to begin to shape an overall plan for the Brownfields project.

On October 21, 1998, the Environmental Finance Center at Boise State University conducted a Charrette to help Pocatello further its Brownfields redevelopment goals. A charrette is a meeting to resolve a problem or issue within a specified time limit. It includes the definition of the problem or issue to be resolved, an analysis of the problem, and the assignment of small groups to clarify issues. The group works to develop alternative solutions, then final proposals are presented and analyzed, and a final resolution is approved on the approach to be taken. A charrette is useful because it is problem oriented, it enlarges the degree of public involvement, and it produces visible results

A charrette can occur at any time in a planning process, but preparation is crucial. Advance work can take a month or more, depending on the issues discussed. Because it focuses on a specific problem to be resolved or issue to be addressed, a charrette is usually a one-time event. The charrette sharpened Pocatello’s understanding of the perspectives of interest groups. Early in project formulation, a charrette offers a glimpse of potentially competing demands and can be a barometer of the potential for agreement on an issue. The objective of the process was to determine a property within the community of Pocatello that would be the subject of an EPA Brownfields Redevelopment grant.

Charrette Attendees:

- Genie Alexander of the Bannock County Assessor’s Office,
- Charlie Burrup with First Security Bank,
- Ray Burstedt, the Executive Director of Bannock Development Corporation,
- Rick Canaroli, the Chief Civil Deputy Attorney for the City of Pocatello,
- Steve Ernst of Pocatello’s Office of Community Development and Research,

- Mary Howell, the Director of Old Town Pocatello
- Bill Jarocki, the Director of the Environmental Finance Center,
- Mark Masarik of the Idaho Operations Office of the EPA,
- Lauren McLean of the Environmental Finance Center,
- Jim Morphy, a realtor with Gate City Real Estate,
- Dean Nygard with Idaho DEQ,
- Boyd Roberts, also with the Idaho DEQ,
- Mary Lee Shannon with the Bannock County Assessor's Office,
- George Spinner, a representative from the Environmental Resource Board.
- Ron Timpson, Pocatello's Budget Director,
- Kirstin Toth, a Brownfields redevelopment expert from the Great Lakes Environmental Finance Center at Cleveland State University; and
- Cac Turner, a Project Engineer with the City of Pocatello

The goal of this charrette was to help Pocatello with its EPA Brownfields Grant application. The group wanted to know how a redevelopment program could fit all objectives of different groups in the area, as well as how much redevelopment activity should be attempted simultaneously. The group established that they would determine which properties would be likely candidates while keeping in mind the community's goals in terms of fostering or encouraging redevelopment of Brownfields. They would then plan further action to finish the grant and create an implementation calendar.

The group assessed the individual sites with the following criteria in mind:

- Economic viability
- Location
- Marketability
- Amenities
- Owner willingness to cooperate
- Zoning
- Size

- Extent of contamination
- Community goals for redevelopment

When choosing areas based on economic viability, the Pocatello Development Authority identified parcels as part of a Central Corridor Urban Renewal Area. Each property was looked at with regard to existing market potential. This would include an urban renewal and tax increment area. The City Council is currently considering this proposal.

- The “*Volkswagen Graveyard*” comprises about 2-3 acres neat the Sterling Building. Its current zoning is industrial. This property could potentially increase the value for land in Old Town since the development of properties on the edge of Old Town's borders would increase the aesthetics of property within its borders. It is all within the TIF zone, and PDA has been looking for small sites.
- The *Harrison West Site* is comprised of classical industrial housing areas, including a mix of warehouses, businesses, and industrial sites. This area of the city was under consideration due to its evident blight. The group decided that this would not be a good one to consider due to the complexity. It would require its own economic development plan to tackle the housing, social justice, and business issues that exist in this area.
- The *First Street East area* is comprised of large brick warehouses. Most are occupied, although vacant parcels and those perceived to be contaminated are found further south along the street. Cleanup would be necessary here before redevelopment could occur. Designated as a historic warehouse district, this area is part of the Tax Increment Finance district, making it more appealing to businesses, restaurants, and perhaps even apartment housing.
- *Kraft Road* came under consideration at the suggestion of a participant. H&H Dive is located in this area, as well as the old Kraft cheese factory. The group discussed the possibilities of green space and a connection of the Greenway to the part that Simplot has recently donated. In addition, the existence of two clean-up projects nearby would make this a good site for a proposal. Mark Masarik reminded the group that having successfully implemented critical mass clean-ups nearby is good for an application.

The group discussed issues that would make this site a good candidate for the program, while keeping in mind community and economic goals. The river corridor has great amenities for redevelopment if it were to be cleaned up. A proposal to clean the river, protecting it for all time, combined with land reuse and urban renewal has great potential.

The charrette participants suspended their discussion to tour the Kraft Road sight in order to assess its potential in relation to the established criteria. After viewing the site and discussing its potential in comparison with other potential sites, the group decided that the River Corridor site would be the best to move ahead with for the EPA Brownfields grant application due December 12. A work plan was established to identify important players, stakeholders, tasks, and job order so that the application will be completed by December.

CONCLUSIONS

The Kraft Road site was selected to be part of the grant application proposal because of its redevelopment potential and proximity to successful critical mass clean-ups. This location offers a great deal of amenities due to its location along the river. When cleaned up, this location could be attractive to potential businesses, and could connect the Greenway path from town to the portions recently donated by the Simplot Company. Thus this property could offer the community several possibilities in keeping with its redevelopment goals, while offering businesses an attractive location. The office of Community and Economic Development will ask the City Council to amend its Tax Increment Finance district to include this property, and the owner, it is believed, would be willing to participate.

This property is in proximity to two other critical-mass cleanups; Mark Masarik believed this fact would be attractive in the application process. By cleaning up this piece of property, the community would be further improving this section of the river corridor. The charrette participants believed that the environmental implications of cleaning up a section of river corridor, as well as the connection to other recently and successfully undertaken clean-ups would prove favorable to their cause.

There are several steps that the city must take in order to complete successfully its goal of Brownfields redevelopment. Key players must be contacted and kept apprised of the situation. Their acceptance and support of the city's project is integral to its overall success. The key players that have been identified include: the City of Pocatello, Portneuf Greenway Foundation, Pocatello Development Authority, Bannock County, the Industrial Development Corporation, all property owners, various bankers and lenders, commercial and residential developers, Union Pacific, Idaho DEQ, and the EPA. Those individuals or groups that have a stake in the outcome of the project must also be included. Stakeholders include the Mayor, the Mayor's council, the Pocatello Street department, Pocatello Community Development, Pocatello Parks & Recreation, and the water and sewer departments.

In order to complete the pre-development stages of this project, several tasks must be completed. Pocatello Community Development and Research will identify three or four properties from the site, while the Pocatello Development Authority will attempt to amend the TIF district to include this area. Idaho DEQ and the EPA will identify sights for a mapping process, to be followed by the City of Pocatello's Phase I site assessment. The city must work to ensure the inclusion of property owners in the decision making process, as well as to include letters of support from community members, leaders, and agencies with the application.

The City of Pocatello has an opportunity to combine its goals of community and economic development with sound environmental policy through the Brownfields redevelopment process. By attempting to receive grant funds as a part of a pilot program with the EPA, the community has recognized the importance of reusing our urban landscapes. By working to redevelop these lands, Pocatello has accepted the challenge to recycle underutilized urban properties, thereby aiding in today's nationwide attempts to provide stronger, more stable cities and communities, cleaner air, and communities that are, overall, more livable than they have been in the past.

