

COORDINATING APPROACHES TO ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND MEETING STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

No one type of housing is typical of a brownfields redevelopment project. The type of housing that is developed on a brownfields is primarily based on site conditions and the interest of the developer. While traditional apartment buildings and single-family houses have been built on former brownfields sites, creative and innovative projects are being developed as a way to meet some unique or challenging conditions of a brownfields site. There are also as many different entities acting as developers of these sites as there are different types of brownfields-to-housing projects. Examples can be found all over the country of private sector firms, community groups, and local governments that have led projects, or been key partners in supporting one.

In almost all brownfields-to-housing projects, the local government has played an essential role in facilitating the redevelopment. Local governments must be educated on the issues and concerns of stakeholders so that they may be an active facilitator or leader in a brownfields-to-housing project, meet the expectations of stakeholders, and be prepared to justify their decisions should they face criticism over public policies. Furthermore, local government should be engaged in brownfields projects as it is their responsibility to protect the health of the community and its environment. Not only do residents have expectations of their local government, but it is the local government's responsibility to protect their constituents from the effects of contamination. By being engaged in the brownfields redevelopment process, local governments will be better able to serve their citizenry in this protective and steward capacity.

Who are the primary stakeholders and what are their expectations of local government?

Issues related to brownfields-to-housing redevelopment projects can be more sensitive to stakeholders than other types of brownfields redevelopments. Reasons for this heightened sensitivity include the public policy issue of putting residential use on a formerly contaminated site or on a site that has residual contamination, and the fact that a housing development essentially creates a neighborhood, which is likely to influence—and perhaps significantly alter—the character of a community. However, concerns and critical issues in housing projects will differ according to the stakeholder group. Primary stakeholders in the brownfields-to-housing redevelopment process include for-profit developers, nonprofit developers, citizens, and various departments of local government. State and federal governments are often stakeholders in a brownfields-to-housing project. Understanding the concerns and issues most relevant to different stakeholder groups up front can aid a local government to facilitate, partner, or coordinate a brownfields redevelopment project; foster better coordination among stakeholders throughout the term of the project; and help the project leaders prepare to address issues that stakeholders are likely to raise.

Local government can take two different approaches to brownfields redevelopment: it can be the entity redeveloping the brownfields or it can facilitate brownfields redevelopment projects led by a developer. When the local government is the developer or lead on a brownfields-to-housing project, citizens are more likely to expect the local government to meet the needs of the jurisdiction or advance local initiatives (such as providing affordable housing or housing compatible with the surrounding neighborhood), or act in the best interest of the community (such as protecting human health and the environment). Deviation from this purpose could result in criticism from the community. As such, outreach to the community to collect their feedback and input in the planning stages of a brownfields-to-housing project is crucial. An outreach effort will also enable a local government to identify and address community concerns that could otherwise delay or compromise a project, such as vocal community opposition, which might occur in absence of an outreach effort.

As a partner, it is likely that the local government will be expected to provide incentives, which might include:

- Lending financial resources and tools, such as tax-increment financing and funding for an environmental assessment;
- Streamlining or expediting administrative processes, such as permitting;
- Public investment of new or upgraded infrastructure;
- Changing zoning; and
- Accepting non-traditional site plans that account for site conditions, such as the option to cluster housing on those sections of parcels where there is no contamination while covering contaminated areas with parking and other impervious covers (Greenberg 524).

In addition, as a partner in a redevelopment process, developers may be expecting local government to connect them with the community. If a developer is unfamiliar with the community in which they are working, they may seek guidance from the local government in connecting with local community groups, neighborhood associations, community development corporations, and other local entities that should be engaged or consulted in the redevelopment process. Developers may also want the local government to take the additional step of facilitating community engagement opportunities.

The incentives offered by a local government to facilitate a redevelopment project can be used to encourage or require a developer to integrate interests of the local government or community into the project. For example, in some communities, brownfields incentives are only available to those developers who agree to officially enter their site into the city's brownfields program. This stipulation enables the city to be engaged in the redevelopment process. While some landowners or developers may claim that enrolling their site in a brownfields program puts a stigma on the property that could affect its

marketability, the benefits to developers are often overriding factors. In addition to the incentives for which a developer becomes eligible, the city is able to troubleshoot (as appropriate) on behalf of the developer throughout the redevelopment process. Having a troubleshooter within local government is particularly valuable for time sensitive projects and can expedite processes that might otherwise cost a developer time and money due to delays.

In other communities, when a developer is seeking certain variances or latitude in the redevelopment process, the local government can use the opportunity as leverage to ensure local interests are not compromised in the redevelopment process. For example, some local governments will encourage developers to engage the community in the redevelopment process or hold informational forums, and consider community interests such as affordable housing, site access via public transportation, and the convenience of mixed-use development. In this way, developers might integrate elements that will make a project better fit the needs and interests of the community. Developers may be particularly interested in these issues as community approval and acceptance of a project, as well as professional reputation, is important to many firms. Local support for a project may also increase the success of a project. Community input integrated in a redevelopment project could reflect qualities and characteristics amenable to potential homeowners of the new development, thereby increasing the marketability of a project.



Community meetings offer an opportunity for stakeholder input in the redevelopment process.

Sidebar: Local Government and Community Outreach

While local governments typically have experience in community outreach, it is usually valuable to consult with neighborhood groups, community development organizations, or even experts who specialize in community engagement and facilitation. These stakeholders will help ensure that a well-rounded community outreach effort is initiated, and could encourage participation from citizens who may be intimidated or discouraged by a local government-initiated effort. Furthermore, local governments are, themselves, stakeholders in the brownfields redevelopment process. In some instances, it may be appropriate for a local government to participate in a developer's outreach efforts. It may be in the best interest of local government to lend a perspective during outreach activities where developers are visioning or collecting input for consideration in their project. Local government will be unable to act as an unbiased facilitator if they are going to engage in outreach activities.

When the local government is the lead in a redevelopment project, it is particularly important that they engage partners in the outreach process, both to make the project more manageable and to ensure that a range of local perspectives are integrated. As the lead on a project, a local government may be too intimately involved to adequately address all the necessary components of a brownfields-to-housing redevelopment process. Furthermore, local governments may want to lend their perspectives to the redevelopment process. By having a facilitator or another stakeholder group responsible for community outreach, local governments may be able to advance their agenda or goals.

Identifying, considering, and addressing community concerns is particularly important in brownfields-to-housing projects as such projects tend to be more sensitive to stakeholders than other types of brownfields redevelopments. Reasons for this heightened sensitivity include the public policy issue of putting residential use on a formerly contaminated site or on a site that has residual contamination, and the fact that a housing development essentially creates a neighborhood, which is likely to influence the traditional character of a community.

It is also important to identify the community's expectations of the local government. When the local government is acting as the developer or lead in a brownfields-to-housing project, the community is likely to expect that through the use of public funds, a local need will be addressed through the brownfields-to-housing project. For example, the community may be in need of affordable housing, multifamily housing, senior citizen housing, or a renovation of a particular type of housing stock. When the local government is working with a developer or acting as a partner in a brownfields-to-housing project, the community is likely to expect the local government to act as an advocate for community needs, encourage developers to engage the community in the planning and redevelopment process, and ensure that a developer's plans are concerned with the safety and best interest of the surrounding community. By identifying these and other expectations, the local government can enhance its capacity to act on behalf of its citizens and maintain the support of its community.

Community outreach will also help local governments and developers to test a community's reception to a brownfields-to-housing project: Are members of the community willing to live on brownfields? What do they want to see redeveloped on the brownfields sites? Local governments and developers will need to assure potential residents of the brownfields-to-housing projects that the sites are clean and safe. If health risk and stigma are concerns, developers and governments may need to determine creative and effective ways of assuring customers that their health, as well as the value of their investments, will be protected.¹

¹ Greenberg, Michael et al. "Brownfield Redevelopment and Affordable Housing: A Case Study of New Jersey." *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol 12, Issue 3 (2001):534.

Furthermore, as developers—both private and nonprofit—are likely to expect local governments to provide tools and resources that will facilitate brownfields redevelopment, local governments should learn the strategies employed by other local governments in aiding developers to plan and execute successful redevelopment projects. Case study examples, informational resources on brownfields, and opportunities to interact with colleagues (such as forming informal networks among local governments within a particular region, peer exchanges, or forums and conferences) can be helpful to local governments in better managing expectations of stakeholders and expending their resources and authorities.

What are some concerns or public policy criticisms of brownfields-to-housing projects that local government might face?

Although redevelopment brownfields-to-housing offers a range of benefits to a community, the practice is not without its critics. While the role of local governments in facilitating brownfields redevelopment is often a key to success, their involvement in certain projects can provoke criticism. It is important for local governments to be aware of public policy criticisms so that they consider the issues in their decision-making and, if necessary, are prepared to justify their decisions. Three controversies in the public policy of allowing residential use of a brownfields site have been over residual contamination, the use of public funds on private sector projects, and the placement of low-income housing.

Residual contamination

Brownfields redeveloped for housing may have residual contamination, which can be controversial even though residual contamination must always be within legal limits and would require the use of institutional controls to protect public health. State voluntary cleanup programs prescribe a remediation standard which, in conjunction with a land use control (LUC), can be achieved even with some level of contamination remaining on site. LUCs as well as engineering controls are put in place to ensure that residual contamination does not threaten the health and safety of residents or environmental resources (for more on LUCs, see Chapter 2).

However, some advocates assert that remediation standards for residential reuse should be such that an LUC is not necessary. Advocates for this remediation standard assert that the potential for human exposure increases with residential reuses because people spend a significant amount of time at home and certain residential activities—such as landscaping, home remodeling, and soil excavation for a pool—could violate engineering controls. Furthermore, LUCs require monitoring and enforcement to be effective. Land uses and landowners are likely to change over time, and a careless landowner or developer may unknowingly violate a LUC and destroy an engineering mechanism. In addition, there is no model in place for the recording, management, oversight, and monitoring of LUCs; often local governments are called on to monitor and enforce certain LUCs, but lack the necessary funds or resources to effectively do so (Schilling et al 2).

Public funds and private development

When brownfields-to-housing projects are the result of a public-private partnership or benefit from a local financial incentive, critics scrutinize the use of public funds to subsidize the cost of creating a high-profit generator for a private sector entity. Local governments typically receive grant money or other financial resources from federal agencies, state agencies, or foundations to help fund redevelopment projects. Often local government will, in turn, make these funds available as incentives for developers to redevelop brownfields. However, as private sector developers typically plan projects for the purpose of making a profit, critics argue that public resources are merely subsidizing the cost of a project so that the private sector can make a larger profit. Those who support this argument suggest that public funds should be used for a more expressly public purpose that offers a greater benefit to the community.

However, some counter this argument by demonstrating how the use of public funds to support a private endeavor does produce a public benefit. A remediated, redeveloped site is better than the blight of a brownfields. It improves neighborhood conditions and can be an impetus for additional development in the area. Furthermore, redevelopment puts a site back on the tax rolls, which will benefit the public in the long run.

And perhaps most critical is that few local governments have all the resources to address all the brownfields within their jurisdiction. But providing some seed money as incentive for private sector development will at least help to clean up contamination that would otherwise continue to plague the community.

Low-income housing on brownfields

Low-income housing is a common residential use in brownfields-to-housing redevelopment. However, critics scrutinize the public policy of putting low-income housing on brownfields, and building affordable housing on former brownfields sites has social justice implications. Low-income earners have fewer alternatives to choose from in deciding where to live, and therefore live on former brownfields solely due to their economic status.

However, brownfields are not necessarily targeted as the location for low-income housing; rather they can present a strategic opportunity for stakeholders seeking to develop low-income housing, when it may not otherwise be possible. As low-income housing is not typically a big profit generator for private sector stakeholders, the public or nonprofit sector must often step in to meet the housing need. Since local government or a community group may take the lead on a brownfields project, they are more inclined to address the needs of the locality in their development efforts. Nevertheless, the resources of public and nonprofit stakeholders can be more limited than those of private sector developers. As such, brownfields-to-housing projects present an opportunity to leverage resources for public and nonprofit developers to potentially obtain property at reasonable cost. Brownfields redevelopment projects are also eligible for a variety of grants and financing programs that can make a project financially viable. By using brownfields as a site for low-income housing, the public and nonprofit sector could seek funding sources for which they would not be eligible were the housing to be developed on a non-brownfields site.

In addition, low-income housing is not the sole type of housing being developed on brownfields and for any kind of residential development, mechanisms must be put in place

to protect public health. Upscale residential units are sometimes built on formerly contaminated sites or sites with residual contamination and these units are selling at or above market rates. Therefore, the argument which points out the inequity of putting low-income housing on brownfields is somewhat discredited by the fact that even those with the financial means to seek alternatives in houses choose to live in developments on former brownfields. Furthermore, legal mechanisms such as voluntary cleanup programs ensure that properties are adequately remediated for residential use and the use of institutional controls can protect the health and safety of residents living on a former brownfields.

Conclusion

Coordinating activities among stakeholders is a crucial—and challenging—aspect of successful redevelopment. There are many issues to consider in undertaking coordination, namely identifying the appropriate stakeholder groups and their expectations of local government, facilitating community outreach, and addressing criticisms of local government public policy and decision-making. Furthermore, local governments can find themselves in difficult and conflicting positions when working with stakeholders. Local governments can often be perceived or expected to be a neutral party when they, themselves, are a stakeholder with a unique perspective they may want to lend to the redevelopment process. Meanwhile, developers are looking to local government for incentives and assistance to ensure a successful project, and citizens expect the local government to act in the community's best interest. For these reasons, local governments may want to draw on the expertise of facilitators or other stakeholder groups in community outreach activities.

It is impossible for local government to plan for all the variables in coordinating approaches to engaging stakeholders and meeting stakeholder expectations. However, local governments must be educated on the issues so that they may prepare for criticisms and consider them up front in the decision making process, put in place appropriate measures to effectively work with and engage stakeholders, and participate in the redevelopment process. □

