

CROSS COMMUNITY COALITION SITE

DENVER, COLORADO

History of the Site

The Cross Community Coalition site is a half-acre brownfields property that was located within the Vasquez Boulevard/Interstate 70 Superfund site (VB/I-70). VB/I-70 is situated along a corridor of I-70 that is dominated by industrial operations. The area has been a major smelting center for years. Dating back to the 1870s, three smelters have operated at various times, refining a variety of metals, including gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, arsenic, and cadmium. One smelter, which refines high-purity metals, is still in operation. Facilities located within the VB/I-70 site, such as a power plant, oil refineries, and trucking firms, are in close proximity to residential neighborhoods. In total, VB/I-70 encompasses approximately 4,000 homes throughout several different northeast Denver neighborhoods with many Latino, African-American, low-income, and elderly residents. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated these neighborhoods as environmental justice sites because of the disproportionate concentration of environmental pollution.

Contamination Issues

Because of concerns of heavy-metal contamination resulting from former smelter activity, EPA has been investigating soil in residential yards throughout the VB/I-70 area since 1998. Sampling results showed in some yards elevated lead and arsenic concentrations, which could pose a health threat. Residents may become exposed to metals through ingestion of contaminated soil particles or by inhalation of contaminated airborne particles. Exposure to lead can stunt mental and physical growth in children and contribute to premature births among pregnant women. Arsenic poisoning can cause nausea, vomiting, swelling, fatigue, and sore throats, and long-term exposure to arsenic is known to cause cancer.

Contamination of VB/I-70 is likely to have come from several sources. As mentioned above, years of smelter emissions are one possible source of contamination. EPA also found some of the arsenic contamination probably derived from lawn-care products that were used before such products were banned (because of the threat they pose to public health) in the 1970s. In addition, EPA discovered that lead from nonsoil sources (such as paint) is another likely contaminant at many properties.

To address immediate health threats, EPA removed soil contaminated with very high levels of arsenic from residential properties. Because EPA believes that the lead and arsenic contamination remaining in some yards may pose a risk to children and other sensitive individuals, it has issued a proposed plan for additional cleanup through the Superfund program.

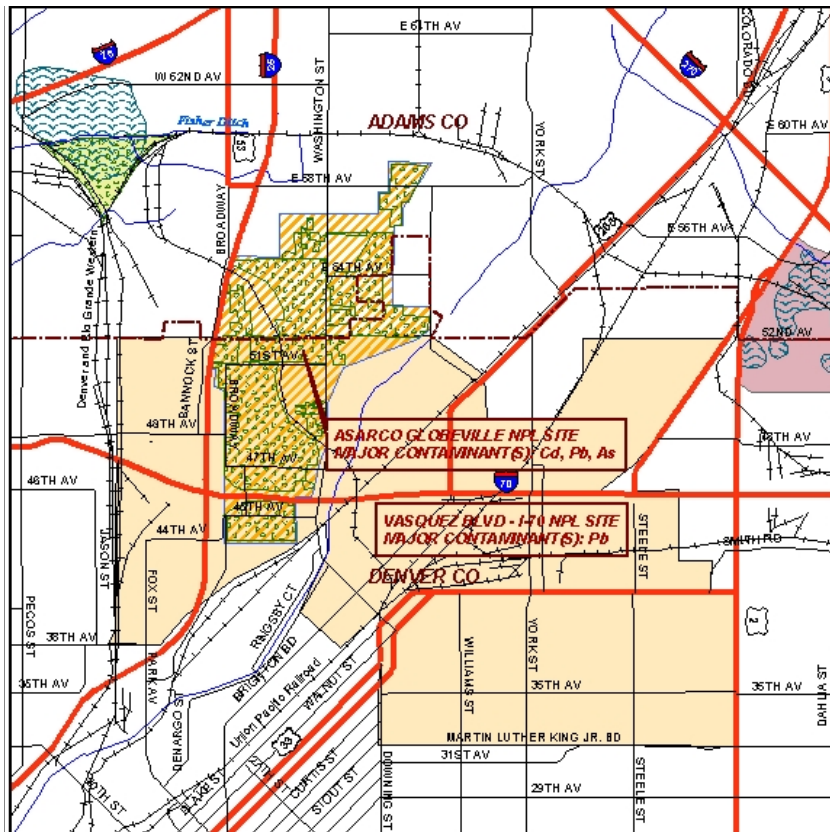
Setting Sights on Redevelopment

The Cross Community Coalition site, a half-acre, residentially zoned property, gets its unofficial name from its property owner, the Cross Community Coalition (CCC), which is a community-based nonprofit human-services organization. The CCC bought the site after a four-year fundraising campaign for a family resource center. The facility will offer a range of services, such as after-school programs, bilingual school readiness programs, tutoring services, food programs, and parenting classes.

The Cross Community Coalition site was included within the boundary of the VB/I-70 Superfund site because it was zoned residential and the level of contamination found on surrounding sites exceeded levels

acceptable for a residentially zoned property. However, the Cross Community Coalition site was not initially tested for contamination because as vacant property, it was not a priority.

Based on the results of tests conducted on co-located properties, the city suspected that the levels of contamination at the Cross Community Coalition site would not exceed the Superfund threshold for a commercially zoned property. Since the family center qualified as a commercial use, the city realized that if the site were rezoned, the site could be removed from the VB/I-70 Superfund site boundary and redeveloped as a brownfields, which would allow for quicker redevelopment than if under the scope of Superfund.



(At left) The VB/I-70 Superfund site map from the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, Hazardous Waste Division. This map is a representation of areas of interest to the furnishing agency. It should not be used as an interpretation of contaminated areas or areas that may be safe for use by the public and environment.

Applying a Co-location Approach

To determine whether the redevelopment strategy for the Cross Community Coalition site would be feasible, the site had to be tested. If the contamination levels found on the site did not exceed the standards for a commercial property, it could be rezoned by the local government, removed from the Superfund boundary by EPA, and addressed as a co-located brownfields by CCC. However, finding assessment money was a challenge. EPA had already completed its testing phase in the neighborhood, and the city of Denver could not use its EPA brownfields assessment funding because the site was considered part of Superfund.

The city of Denver worked with EPA Region 8's brownfields and Superfund programs, along with EPA's laboratory located in Golden, Colorado, to arrange for the Cross Community Coalition site to be tested for arsenic and lead, which are the Superfund program's contaminants of concern for the site. EPA employees collected the samples and sent them to its laboratory for

analysis. The lab results indicated that the contaminants of concern did not exceed Superfund threshold levels for a residential property. Within a few months of testing, EPA sent the CCC a comfort letter stating that the site does not require cleanup and that it was removed from Superfund.

With the Cross Community Coalition site outside the boundary of the VB/I-70 Superfund site, the city was able to use its brownfields grant money to test the site for other contaminants that may have migrated from the adjacent railroad and industry. Even though the site did not warrant action under Superfund, it still had to meet state environmental and public-health standards before development could take place. Test results, however, determined the property clean for redevelopment.

Conclusion

Taking a co-location approach was critical to the redevelopment strategy of the Cross Community Coalition site. Without



The vacant Cross Community Coalition site will be redeveloped as a family center to serve the nearby residential neighborhood. Industrial facilities are nearby, as seen in the background.

coordination between the city and the EPA, it is likely that the CCC would have had to put its plans for the family center on hold until the Superfund remedial actions were complete on the VB/I-70 site. Instead, the CCC plans to start development of the family center as soon as the site is rezoned. The CCC anticipates that it will be able to break ground in October 2003.

As the Cross Community Coalition site example suggests, some of the differences between Superfund and brownfields redevelopment are not easily overcome. Co-location will often require innovative approaches for successful and timely navigation of the different regulatory and redevelopment processes. However, the co-location approach to redevelopment yielded the benefit of expediting reuse of the Cross Community Coalition site. Furthermore, redevelopment of the Cross Community Coalition site could enhance the redevelopment potential and future marketability of the VB/I-70 site (once it is remediated) by demonstrating a local commitment to invest in and support development in the neighborhood.●

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