

The Role of Citizens and Nonprofit Organizations in Clean Ohio's Brownfield Redevelopment Program



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Introduction

Brownfield redevelopment and citizen participation are becoming increasingly important in the United States. Brownfield redevelopment became a national priority over a decade ago as cities sought to revitalize their infrastructure and curb urban sprawl by encouraging infill. In the meantime, many communities have sought opportunities for greater citizen involvement in solving public problems, and governments at all levels have encouraged this. Our study seeks to combine these two topics, to examine the role of citizen participation in brownfield redevelopment.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) defines a brownfield as real property, the expansion, redevelopment or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of contamination (US EPA 2006). Brownfields can be located in urban, suburban, or rural areas. Many of the existing brownfields can be found in economically depressed and blighted neighborhoods. The amount of contamination at a brownfield can vary from no contamination to high amounts of contamination. If contamination is present, the type and extent of contamination can vary from site to site. This means that a brownfield can “range from a dilapidated but harmless property to highly toxic Superfund site” (Solomon 2003, p. 185). The cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield sites can bring many benefits, including opportunities to protect health, control urban sprawl, renew obsolete civil infrastructure, and revitalize inner-city neighborhoods. Key economic benefits include the creation of long-term jobs and increases to local real estate and income tax bases (Lange and McNeil 2004). The national importance of brownfield redevelopment was evident in federal initiatives such as the Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative (1993) and the Brownfields Action Program (1995) (Amekudzi and Fomunung 2004). In addition, a number of states, including Ohio, have initiated brownfield redevelopment programs within the last decade.

The latter part of the 20th century saw a shift towards greater citizen involvement as the importance of direct citizen participation in public and governmental processes has become more apparent (Roberts 2004; Koontz et al. 2004). Many have argued that citizens should be included in scientific and environmental decisions, since citizens have a right to participate in processes that affect them (Rudolph 2005; Bingham et al. 2005). While citizen participation can be seen as the cornerstone of democracy, there is an ambivalent connotation in direct citizen participation (Roberts 2004; Cortner and Moots 1999). Questions remain about the varying levels and types of participation, the barriers and disadvantages to participation, the advantages of participation, and the motivations for participating, which have been the target of research. While past studies have investigated brownfield redevelopment and citizen participation as separate issues, little has been done to examine the role and nature of citizen participation in the brownfield redevelopment process. This is an unfortunate gap, as recent developments have influenced state brownfields programs and citizen participation in the brownfield redevelopment process. In particular, the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Revitalization Act of 2002 provided additional incentives to spur brownfield redevelopment, and both the U.S.



Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) encourage the formation of citizen advisory boards at cleanup sites (Lowry 1998). Further, the USEPA has begun requiring states to provide information about the sites being addressed and opportunity for meaningful involvement to the public in their voluntary action programs (US EPA 2002). One key study of grassroots advocacy and public participation in siting and cleanup decisions for Superfund sites and US Department of Energy Facilities revealed that local grassroots organizations typically provide the most opportunity for citizen involvement (Lowry 1998). According to that study, effective public participation in hazardous waste siting and cleanup decisions can occur only at the local level because of the unique technical issues associated with each site, and local organizations play an important role. It has also been shown that communities have more capacity to respond to the problems brownfields present when there are community institutions, such as civic groups and other organizations, because they provide an institutional basis for coordinating a response (Rich et al. 1995).

Prior research on community involvement in redevelopment has focused on one type of nonprofit organization, the community development corporation (CDC). The CDC began in the 1960s as advocacy groups sought to provide opportunities for citizen's voices to be heard on community issues. Over the years, many CDCs have grown to emphasize policy implementation and economic development (Silverman 2003). Successful CDC strategies include partnering closely with city officials on property acquisition and use of other city services, fostering community and city support by linking redevelopment with other visible improvements, communicating frequently with city officials and community groups, and following a comprehensive development plan (Brachman 2003).

Overall, CDC studies have explained the type of roles these particular nonprofit organizations can have in the brownfield redevelopment process. However, important gaps remain in our understanding of the roles other nonprofit/neighborhood organizations can play in the process as well as how nonprofit organizations can impact citizen participation in the brownfield redevelopment process.

Research Questions

Given the growing importance of both brownfield redevelopment and citizen participation, in light of recent regulatory trends, our study examines citizen participation in one state brownfield redevelopment program, Clean Ohio, and the role of nonprofit, community-based organizations. The study is guided by two main research questions:

- 1) How does citizen participation affect the processes and outcomes of Clean Ohio brownfield redevelopment projects?
- 2) Do nonprofit organizations impact citizen participation? If so, how?



The Clean Ohio Program

Clean Ohio is a \$400 million bond program, approved by state referendum in 2000, which aims to preserve natural areas and farmland as well as revitalize contaminated urban areas. \$200 million in grants is to be devoted to preserving green spaces and farmland. The remaining \$200 million established the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund, which is awarded to applicants for the remediation and redevelopment of brownfields (Ohio Department of Development 2006). Counties, townships, municipalities, parks, and port authorities are eligible to apply for Clean Ohio Revitalization funds. Sometimes local governments and port authorities partner with private, for-profit entities, such as developers, or non-profit organizations (Ohio Department of Development 2006). The Clean Ohio Council uses a scoring process to determine which applicants should be awarded project funds. The projects that score the most points are given top priority. There are 30 measures considered in the scoring process, including economic benefit, environmental improvement, benefit to low-income residents and communities, and how the funds will be matched (Ohio Department of Development 2006). Sixty-five projects around the state have received funding since 2001, with the fourth and most recent round of grants awarded earlier this year.

Methods

Four cases within the Clean Ohio program were examined for this study. First, application materials submitted for Clean Ohio funds were reviewed for all projects in order to determine trends in the projects and in citizen participation as well as to aid in case selection. Next, two cases were selected from dense urban areas and two cases were selected from smaller more suburban/rural areas. These cases were in matched pairs, with similarities in level of urbanization, demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods near the projects, substantial citizen turnout at the public hearing, and presence of a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization that played a role in the redevelopment project. The urban cases included the Jeffrey Place redevelopment Project in the Italian Village neighborhood in Columbus, OH and the former AC Humko plant site in the Harrison West neighborhood in Columbus, OH. The suburban/rural cases included the Fort Piqua Hotel project in Piqua, OH and the Woodward Opera House project in Mt. Vernon, OH.

We employed a semi-structured interview protocol to gain background information about the sites and nonprofit organizations involved, trace project processes, and learn about outcomes. In addition, we asked questions to measure the degree to which each project attained Beierle and Cayford's (2002) five social goals of public participation: (1) incorporating public values into decisions, (2) improving the substantive quality of decisions, (3) resolving conflict among competing interests, (4) building trust in institutions, and (5) educating and informing the public. Finally, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 (not important) to 4 (very important), the importance they place on a variety of reasons for communicating with citizens (see Koontz 2007).



We conducted interviews with project leaders first, followed by additional participants using a snowball sampling method, until a point of saturation was reached. Project stakeholders interviewed included project leaders, developers, environmental consultants, nonprofit organization representatives, city officials, district commissioners, and citizens. In total, interviews were conducted with 18 people across the four cases, each lasting between 30 and 90 minutes.

Results and Discussion

Case Backgrounds

Harrison West, Columbus, OH

The property at 1st Ave. and Perry St. used to be the site of the former AC Humko plant, which manufactured margarine. The plant was decommissioned in 1999, and the site was abandoned. The contamination on the site included soil contamination from leaky tanks, soil gases, and groundwater contamination.

An out-of-state developer was the first to express interest in redeveloping the site. The developer had a high density gated apartment complex planned. However, the developer did not involve the neighborhood residents until the end of the process. The citizens of Harrison West and the neighborhood organization, Harrison West Society, opposed the plan so much that the developer backed out.

The second developer to express interest was a local developer who solicited input from citizens in the neighborhood organization from the beginning. This developer, who is the current owner of the site, purchased the property in December 2001 and worked with the neighborhood organization to develop a plan. The developer remained in constant contact with members of the Harrison West Society and held frequent informal meetings with interested members. The total acreage for the site is 19 acres. As part of the plan, the developer donated four acres for a riverside park and established a park committee of 12 members, all citizens from the neighborhood organization. On the remaining 15 acres, single family housing and condominiums are planned. To date, the remediation of the site is complete, the Ohio EPA has issued a Covenant Not to Sue, and redevelopment is underway.

Jeffery Place, Columbus, OH

This site located in the Italian Village area of Columbus was the former location of the headquarters for Jeffrey Mining & Manufacturing, which manufactured mining equipment. The site has been vacant since the mid 1990s. Most of the contamination of the site was from railroad ties and foundry sand.

The developer for the project purchased the site through a series of transactions between 2000 and 2002, totaling 41.5 acres. The developer utilized a charrette process for developing the



design plan for the site. This process consisted of a series of public meetings held throughout a five-day period. Interested citizens could attend and contribute their thoughts and ideas about how the redevelopment should look. Issues discussed during this process included the end uses, street grid, and building types. The plan incorporated 1,200 residential units and approximately 45,000 sq. ft. of retail, office, and parking space. The developer made several presentations to the Italian Village Area Commission seeking approval of specific plans for the exterior of buildings planned for the site. Citizens from the Italian Village Society, which actively supports the Italian Village Area Commission, also attended presentations and had numerous opportunities to contribute to the process. Completion of the remediation is pending approval from the Ohio EPA, and redevelopment is underway at this time.

Fort Piqua Hotel, Piqua, OH

The Fort Piqua hotel, the defining feature of downtown Piqua, was built in 1891 and operated as a hotel until the late 1960s. Since that time, the building has been mostly vacant. In 1996, the Piqua Improvement Corporation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving and enhancing economic development in Piqua, purchased the building. A series of public meetings was held in 1999 to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for Piqua. As part of this plan, citizens identified renovating the hotel as top priority. The major end user of the building will be the Piqua Public Library, and there will be commercial and retail space in the building as well. The biggest challenge was acquiring the funds needed to complete the task.

This project would not have been possible if it were not for the Hotel/Library Legacy Alliance group, which consisted of a number of interested citizens formed for the sole purpose of making sure the plan had the funds it needed to become a reality. Another nonprofit organization that has played a critical role is Mainstreet Piqua, which is an organization dedicated to the revitalization of downtown Piqua. This organization has contributed to the project by supporting the Hotel/Library Legacy Alliance, engaging their stakeholders, and keeping citizens informed as the project moves forward.

This project has become a high profile endeavor that has received substantial media attention. City commission meetings are televised on the local public station to keep citizens informed of progress, and numerous newspaper articles and letters to the editor about the project have been published. The main environmental issue in this project is the removal of asbestos and lead paint.

Woodward Opera House, Mt. Vernon, OH

The Woodward Opera House is one of America's oldest authentic 19th century theaters. The Opera House, which originally opened in 1851, closed in the mid 1920s. Ideas of renovation first began in the 1970s, but nothing materialized until the Woodward Development Corporation purchased the building in 1998 and the annex next door in 2000. The Woodward Development Corporation is a nonprofit organization created by citizens for the sole purpose of seeing this project through. The key environmental issues include asbestos and lead-based paint. The major end user will be the Knox County Arts Coalition.



Effects of Citizen Participation and Nonprofit Organizations on the Projects

Results suggest that, across the four cases, collaboration with citizens and nonprofit organizations can impact brownfield redevelopment projects in a variety of ways. In the Harrison West project, citizens had a tremendous amount of influence on what the final product would look like. The developer sought input from and continually compromised with citizens in the Harrison West Society, to ensure that it was aesthetically consistent with the rest of the neighborhood. According to the developer, a goal was to make the process as open as possible, to reduce skepticism created by an attempt made by the previous developer to redevelop the site. A handful of citizens in the Harrison West Society strived to become more educated throughout the process, so they could provide more valuable input. One local resident, who is also an architect, helped to design the plan and explain details to other group members. The Harrison West Society also played a critical role in keeping citizens in the neighborhood informed about the project. The Society publishes and distributes a newsletter that gives updates on the progress of the project.

In the Jeffrey Place project, the nonprofit group that had the most impact was the Italian Village Area Commission, which was comprised of local citizens. The commission enables citizens to better react to changes in their neighborhood. The commission must approve plans for new buildings to ensure aesthetic consistency throughout the neighborhood. The developer made several presentations to the commission and made plan revisions based on their recommendations. A second nonprofit organization, the Italian Village Society, played an instrumental role in keeping citizens informed by giving updates at their meetings and on their website. Society members were invited to take part in a project design charrette at the beginning of the process. Citizen comments made during this period were incorporated to a certain extent. Citizens were able to provide valuable information about traffic patterns and community needs that helped shape the general plan developed for the project during the charrette process. While citizens felt their opinions were listened to during this process, which helped to increase their trust in the project, some citizens began to lose faith long after the charrette process concluded because of how slow the project was moving. Some also began to feel that the project was straying from the original plan they had helped to shape.

In the Fort Piqua Hotel project, city officials sought input from citizens when developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the downtown area of Piqua. Citizens saw renovating the hotel as a top priority. However, according to one interviewee, the city's previous economic development director was not very forthcoming in the process, which created distrust. Another interviewee noted that an open and honest approach is needed to establish trust with citizens. The current project leader saw that as important as well, and he has worked to build trust with city officials. Additional analysis was done throughout the process to address citizen concerns, which helped to improve the quality of the overall plan. Several nonprofit organizations each played a vital yet different role in making this project happen and getting citizens involved. One nonprofit organization, the Piqua Improvement Corporation, contributed to the project by purchasing the building. In addition, Hotel/Library Legacy Alliance provided critical assistance



by soliciting funds for the project. This group also hired a professional woodworker, to assure the community that the building's structural integrity was intact (some citizens previously thought the building should be torn down because it was too degraded.) Mainstreet Piqua, another nonprofit organization involved and one of the project's biggest supporters, contributed by educating and informing nearby citizens and business owners of progress.

In the Woodward Opera House project, a few key players had a large impact on brownfield redevelopment. The Woodward Development Corporation (WDC), consisting of a 12-member board made up of citizens, was formed by a core group of interested citizens. Members of the WDC and other stakeholders had a substantial impact on the design of the project during a community planning process, which was open to the public. Architects made adjustments to the plans based on comments received during this process. The WDC, which is also the current owner of the opera house, also negotiated and made compromises to accommodate more end users. According to interviewees, city officials, Woodward Development Corporation members, and project leaders were open and honest throughout the process, which helped to increase understanding and foster trust. Information was provided to citizens in an "availability session," which is an open format that allows interested citizens to ask questions.

Evaluation of Social Goals

The way each project satisfied the five social goals and the degree to which each project satisfied these goals varies. Table 1 shows similarities and differences in how the nonprofit organizations involved in the four cases helped to achieve the five social goals. For the social goal of incorporating public values into decisions, 11 interviewees indicated that citizens have an influence on what the site will look like and what will be done. For example, the developer used citizens in the Harrison West Society as a focus group, and sought input on what kind of housing he would be able to market. This allowed citizens to be able to ensure that the new development would be aesthetically consistent with the rest of the neighborhood.



Table 1: Contributions of Nonprofit Organizations to Five Social Goals of Participation

	Harrison West	Jeffrey Place	Fort Piqua Hotel	Woodward Opera House
Goal 1: incorporate public values into decisions	Harrison West Society (HWS) served as focus group	Area Commission must approve all exterior plans; Society members made comments about approval	Hotel/Library Legacy Alliance hired consultant to gauge citizen support before proceeding	Architect made changes based on comments from Woodward Development Corporation (WDC) members
Goal 2: improve substantive decision quality	Helped ensure redevelopment plans were consistent with neighborhood	Society members provided information about traffic patterns during charrette process	Citizen concerns led to additional analyses	Architect adjusted plans based on comments during the public process
Goal 3: resolve conflicts	Project leaders and developer compromised with citizens to overcome conflicts	Area Commission members compromised with developer based on citizen concerns	Alliance made video about structural integrity that spurred a compromise	WDC made compromises to accommodate more users while preserving historic aesthetics
Goal 4: build trust	Developer made process very open to reduce skepticism of HWS members	No impact identified	Alliance efforts built greater citizen trust	Citizens trusted WDC board members because they have been in the community and understand community needs
Goal 5: educate and inform the public	HWS publishes newsletter to share status of the project	Society kept citizens informed via meetings and website	Mainstreet Piqua kept neighbors informed	No impact identified

For the social goal of improving the substantive quality of decisions, it appears that project leaders value input from citizens and try to accommodate their comments. In response to the questions about reasons to communicate with stakeholders, the project leaders rated the reasons “to obtain time- and place-specific information about a site” as a 3 or 4 and “to learn what the public wants” as a 3 or 4 on the scale from 0 to 4, suggesting that they find substantive input from citizens as well as citizen values to be highly important.

For resolving conflict among competing interests, 7 interviewees indicated that project leaders and developers compromised with citizens when there was opposition or disagreement. This was especially relevant in the cases of Harrison West and the Woodward Opera House.

A majority of interviewees noted that citizens trusted in the process, and in instances where there was opposition, mistrust was lessened in the end. According to one interviewee, “there



is a huge increase in the level of trust if you can voice your opinion and have an influence, or at least be heard.”

Finally, for the social goal of educating and informing the public, the most prevalent way in which citizens are educated through these processes is through open and honest discussion. Thirteen of the 18 interviewees indicated that citizens become educated through the process. According to the one interviewee, “the best way for citizens to become informed is through face-to-face dialogue and conversation.” For example, in the Mt. Vernon case, an availability session was held. This is an open format where interested citizens can come and ask questions.

Roles of Nonprofit Organizations

Each of the nonprofit organizations involved in the projects played a vital role in project success. The Piqua Improvement Corporation and the Woodward Development Corporation served to overcome redevelopment barriers. In both of these cases, the community lacked an interest from developing companies, so interested citizens in these organizations took it upon themselves to purchase the building and make the project happen. Nonprofit organizations can also help move projects along by raising funds and rallying support. In the Piqua case, one interviewee indicated that the project would not have moved forward if the Hotel/Library Legacy Alliance group had not raised crucial funds needed. The Mainstreet Piqua organization helped to rally support. These results may suggest a difference in rural and urban communities, as nonprofit organizations in the rural communities were critical in raising funds to spur redevelopment, whereas in the urban areas nonprofit this function was provided by private developers.

Another role of nonprofit organizations, across all the cases, is providing a network and keeping citizens within the community informed of progress. For example, in Harrison West, the Harrison West Society provides updates in the newsletter it publishes. Nonprofit organizations may also serve as focus groups or help to provide guidelines of what type of development will be aesthetically consistent with the neighborhood. In the case of Harrison West, the developer sought feedback from society members. The developer indicated that it helped serve as product market testing. In the case of Jeffery Place, the Italian Village Area Commission must approve all exterior plans. Another group in this neighborhood, the Italian Village Society, supports the Area Commission, recommends members for the Area Commission, and provides a network to keep the community informed. This indicates that the prior history of a district may explain why the roles of nonprofit organizations vary.



Conclusion

Despite the presence of countless brownfield sites, and considerable resources devoted to encouraging their redevelopment, we currently know little about what role citizens can play in the process. The citizen participation process for Superfund has received a significant amount of attention from researchers. Since the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Revitalization Act was passed, the US EPA has begun requiring states to provide information about the sites being addressed and opportunity for meaningful involvement to the public in their Voluntary Action Programs (US EPA 2002). However, little is known about how these state voluntary programs incorporate citizen participation.

Previous research shows that grassroots advocacy and civic organizations can empower citizens and provide the most opportunity for citizen involvement (Lowry 1998; Rich et al. 1995). An exploration of how the involvement of non-profit organizations affects citizen participation in brownfield redevelopment projects in four Clean Ohio projects gives some insight. Nonprofit organizations can create more opportunities for citizens to get involved, provide a network for citizens to have more influence in the process, and play a vital role in keeping the general public informed of progress. Sometimes the involvement of a nonprofit is crucial to the success of a brownfield redevelopment project, such as in the Fort Piqua Hotel project in Piqua, OH.

Results point to a trend for when nonprofit organizations make other contributions to the brownfield redevelopment process beyond the achievement of the five social goals of public participation. Only nonprofit organizations involved in the two suburban/rural cases (the Fort Piqua Hotel in Piqua, OH and the Woodward Opera House in Mt. Vernon, OH) made contributions to overcome redevelopment barriers and to raise funds. This suggests that there may be differences in the roles nonprofit organizations play in urban and rural communities. Further research might provide additional insight into such differences.

Prior research has suggested that collaboration among different stakeholders may lead to better outcomes and less opposition to decisions made in the process. The results of this study are consistent with these findings. In the four cases examined for this study, when developers collaborated with citizens and nonprofit organizations, brownfield redevelopment projects were perceived to accommodate more end users, satisfy more stakeholders, and be more aesthetically consistent with the rest of the neighborhood. This study suggests that community-based nonprofit organizations can provide the necessary framework for citizens to become empowered and have an influence on brownfield redevelopment processes.

With increasing federal and state attention to brownfield redevelopment, and growing efforts to incorporate meaningful citizen input into community problem solving, it is important for policy makers to understand of how citizen participation might foster successful redevelopment projects. One potentially helpful way, as demonstrated in this study, is through engagement with nonprofit organizations. While such organizations provided important support in each of



our four cases, there may be other cases where nonprofit organizations are less critical. Further research to discover when nonprofit organizations are vital, and how policy makers might encourage them to become involved, is warranted.

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About the ECARP (Environmental Communication, Analysis, and Research for Policy) Working Group

Located within the School of Environment and Natural Resources, the ECARP (Environmental Communication, Analysis, and Research for Policy) Working Group is a vibrant and multi-disciplinary research, development, and consultation center staffed by a core group of affiliated faculty members and graduate research associates representing the social, management, and natural sciences. In addition to a core of faculty leaders, ECARP serves as a clearing-house, tailored to particular projects, by gathering research and support personnel from across the campus and nation as needed.

The ECARP has five fundamental objectives:

1. To apply technical knowledge and analytical methods to key environmental and natural resource questions identified by clients such as Federal, State, and local management agencies and private entities.
2. To advance the state of knowledge and disseminate findings for concepts and methods concerned with environmental and natural resource issues.
3. To conduct innovative and valuable research that helps frame thinking and debate about environmental and natural resource issues.
4. To recruit top-quality graduate students to the School of Environment and Natural Resources and provide students with opportunities to work with faculty on projects within the ECARP Working Group.
5. To serve as a focus for student and faculty research by applying for and securing research funding from Federal, State, University, non-governmental, and other sources.



Some examples of the types of research and client-based projects the ECARP might undertake include the research and development of:

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- comprehensive environmental risk communication approaches
- innovative environmental education and interpretive efforts
- courses to be offered in the School of Environment and Natural Resources for students as well as the community of environmental professionals

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