

## Project Overview

In May 2015, the City of Hickory was awarded a Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its Southside project area along the HWY 70 corridor in Southwest Hickory (see attached **Figure 1** for study area map). EPA's Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) Program enables a local community to develop a plan for assessing, cleaning up and reusing high priority brownfield sites. The area-wide plan addresses local environmental and public health challenges related to brownfields and benefits underserved or economically disadvantaged communities.

The Southside Hickory study area is a portion of the Urban Revitalization Area (URA) as approved by the Hickory City Council and outlined in the *Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan*. The URA incorporates the city's rail corridor, surrounds several disinvested roadway corridors, and incorporates several older and predominately minority neighborhoods. The URA contains the vast majority of Hickory's underutilized, abandoned, and/or idle buildings. The city's goals for the area include:

1. providing access to community services, education and health care options;
2. improving efficiency in resource consumption and service provision;
3. distributing services and costs equitably;
4. encouraging infill development and prioritization of infrastructure improvements within the central city, and
5. improving water quality through education and best management practices for surface water runoff.

## Community Engagement

Community-based involvement is an important element of the planning process. Public awareness and input will help identify community priorities for near and long-term cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites. As such, outreach techniques that are employed will target broad participation by local stakeholders.

This Community Engagement Plan serves as a guide for community outreach efforts in the project study area. The following public participation tools and techniques (beginning on page 4) will be used during the study process; however, it is important that this plan remain flexible for adjustments that may be needed to ensure the public is sufficiently informed and engaged.

### Brownfields Advisory Group (BAG)

The re-convening of the existing Brownfields Advisory Group (BAG) is an important step toward informing and guiding the planning process. Hickory’s previous Brownfields Assessment Grant (awarded in 2012) was governed by a Brownfields Advisory Group that contains many of the project partners for the Area-Wide Planning Grant. The BAG advised city staff regarding prioritization of brownfield funding during the assessment grant process, provided recommendations to the Hickory City Council on future funding for brownfield activities, and acts as leaders within the community to raise awareness about the issues brownfields pose in the community.



The committee is being re-configured to include representatives from local community associations, business and property owners, youth groups, the Chamber of Commerce, the Hickory Housing Authority, and other community partners in the project area. The reconvened BAG includes representatives from the following organizations:

- |   |   |                                 |
|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) | City of Refuge Community Development Center | Concerned Citizens of Ridgeview |
| Hickory Housing Authority                       | Chamber of Commerce                         | Friendship Baptist Church       |
| Paramount of Hickory                            | Exodus Homes                                | Local realtor/appraiser         |
| Moss Marlow Construction                        | Green Park Neighborhood                     | Centro Latino                   |
| Hickory Board of Education                      |   |                                 |

The role of the BAG committee is to:

- obtain advice on the most effective and appropriate outreach methods,
- to identify stakeholders and groups for participation,
- gain feedback on the process, and
- serve as project liaisons to the community.

The BAG committee will meet up to five times at key milestones during the study process. All meetings will be documented and posted to a project web page on the city web site.

## Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews and focus groups will be used as one-on-one and small group discussions, respectively, with an individual or organization recognized as a community leader, elected or appointed official, agency staff member, or neighborhood activist to provide input on the issues and process of the study effort. The stakeholders and number of stakeholder interviews and focus groups to be conducted will be identified in concert with city staff and BAG, and will represent a variety of perspectives.

The main purpose of the focus groups and interviews is to provide an early exchange of information on project goals, objectives, and the study process. Recommended agencies and organizations to interview include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Southside Heights  
Neighborhood Association
- West Hickory  
Neighborhood Association
- Green Park Neighborhood
- Concerned Citizens  
of Ridgeview
- Ward 4 Faith Leaders Group
- Hickory Branch NAACP
- Hickory School Board
- Youth groups
- Hmong community
- Habitat for Humanity
- Hickory and Catawba Home Builders Association
- Board of Realtors
- Major commercial realtors
- Owners of large properties in the study area



## Public Workshops

The project will include a multi-day charrette/design workshop, held within or near the project area. Several community engagement activities will occur throughout the workshop, including a kick-off community event, open focus group meetings during the day, evening pin-up sessions, and community presentations. This multi-day time period allows for the most efficient opportunity to meet with a large number of interest groups and citizens, gather their vision, and produce a detailed series of high quality recommendations, plans and renderings



that accurately reflect the vision of the community. Also, by setting up the workshop in the vicinity of the project area, it provides easier access to the businesses and the residents and allows the team direct access to the catalyst brownfield sites during the design stage of the project. Another benefit of this method is that it captures and maintains the public's attention in a collapsed timeframe which generates quality input and feedback.

A final public meeting introducing the design concept(s) will be conducted to confirm the support of the BAG and affected public. The final concept(s) will be placed on display at the local library and on the project web page.

Advertising for all workshops and meetings will include a variety of techniques such as media, flyer distribution by hand to public locations, e-mail, direct mailings, door-to-door and social media where appropriate. All advertising will occur at least two weeks in advance. Members of the BAG will also assist with bringing awareness to scheduled events.

## Community Events

Maximizing opportunities to receive input and feedback will occur throughout the process will include the team's participation in locally held events and activities. Early in the process, the team will seek out events sponsored and conducted by the community to share and distribute project information. These events may include festivals, school events, places of worship activities, and others. Specific examples include:

- Seasonal Farmer's Market
- Faith Based Services
- Meetings of Neighborhood Associations

- Hickory Young Professionals (part of the Chamber of Commerce)
- City of Hickory's Youth Council

## Newsletters

Project newsletters will be prepared at key milestones in the process to share information about the project status. Newsletters will provide articles on the overall project process, information about the catalyst sites, project schedules, and other relevant information. These newsletters will be posted in community centers, libraries, businesses, places of worship and other civic buildings in or near the project area. Newsletters will also be posted on the official city website and placed at City Hall. Up to three newsletters will be produced for distribution during the process.

## Website and Social Media

The project will take full advantage of the broad reach offered by the Internet and social media to ensure the public is informed and has meaningful opportunities to be involved, particularly with the youth in the study area. Public notices, maps, reports, and other relevant documents for public review will be posted on the City of Hickory website, and project announcements will be shared on the city's social media platforms. A project email address will be established to encourage on-going feedback with the community.

## Contact Database

As the process progresses, a database of contacts will be developed and maintained to assist with communications. This database will contain a mailing list and email distribution list including local and regional officials, local businesses and organizations, advocacy groups and the general public. The list will be updated during the course of the process with contact information provided by sign-in sheets from public meetings, phone calls, emails, and other correspondence.

## Documentation

Documenting all aspects of the community engagement process will help to maintain continuity in project decision-making. Outreach tasks will be documented to ensure the integrity of the project memory, and documents will be posted to the project web page on the city's website. The following deliverables will be included:

- Community Engagement Plan
- Brownfields Advisory Group Meeting Summaries
- Charrette and Workshop Summaries
- Presentations and Newsletters
- Website Content

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