

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The Ambridge Area Brownfields Partnership
“Brownfields in Our Neighborhoods” Workshops

In May of 2001, the Manager of Ambridge Borough approached The Western Pennsylvania Brownfields Center at Carnegie Mellon; an initiative that was consistent a then-recent Board commitment to engage local resources, including the regional academic community. The idea of a series of extended workshops, facilitated by The Western Pennsylvania Brownfields Center was introduced as a mechanism to engage stakeholders in a dialogue regarding the role of brownfields in the future of Ambridge Borough. As a neutral platform, The Brownfields Center could create an environment that would raise awareness and encourage open discussion.

The workshop is a venue that brings together local stakeholders and outside (non-local) experts. Through a number of venues, the outside experts become familiar with the area of interest and the surrounding communities. Armed with this first-hand knowledge, the experts then brainstorm amongst themselves and develop a plan that can provide guidance to the community for ongoing brownfield development initiatives.

The “Brownfields in Our Neighborhoods” Workshop series began in 2001, when seven experts¹ convened on the town to study its brownfields and cultivate a plan to remediate and redevelop these areas. A 43-parcel corridor was selected for the expert’s study at the workshop. The corridor contained 23 separate property owners and many of the properties were formerly used by the steel industry, in steelmaking, fabricating, transportation (rail lines), and disposal (slag).

Subsequent workshops were held in August 2006² and December 2006³, with some returning and some new experts. The results of each workshop are summarized in the following sections of this summary.

Section 1: Brownfields in Our Neighborhood, November 2001

Section 2: Stronger than Steel, August 2006

Section 3: Brownfields Reflections: Proud Past Bright Future, December 2006

Section 1: Brownfields in Our Neighborhood, November 2001

In the 2001 Ambridge workshop the attending experts provided independent validation of the assets of the Ambridge/Harmony Area. Specifically, they noted the housing stock; human capital, including community pride, cultural diversity, the school system, and churches; location; Ohio River; proximity to the Pittsburgh International Airport; proximity to Interstate highways; existing central business district; fiber optics; and historic depth as positive attributes.

¹ Charles Bartsch, ICF Consultants (then with the Northeast Midwest Institute), Evonne Kovach, Department of Economic Development; Ron Littlefield, City of Chattanooga; Sue McNeil, University of Delaware (then with the Urban Transportation Center at the University of Illinois); William Muzychko, McRoberts, Roberts & Rainer (then with PNC Bank); Joseph Schilling, Virginia Tech (then with the International City County Management Association); Jesse Silverstein, Development Research Partners

² Experts included Ron Littlefield, Bill Muzychko, and Jesse Silverstein as well as local experts Dewitt Peart of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and Maureen Ford with Pennsylvania Commercial Real Estate, Inc.

³ Experts included Joseph Schilling and Terry Smith with Environmental Liability Management

While these observations may not have been ‘new,’ they were important to note as independent observations made by persons with no inherent bias nor agenda. It was difficult to have the experts focus on only the brownfields and not the entire community. With respect to the corridor, the experts emphasized the importance of maintaining current businesses and poisoning the community for future development. The Ambridge Regional Center offered a good working example and the metal fabricators were an appropriate and viable use of the corridor. The expert observations/mendations, specific to the subject industrial corridor, were as follows:

- Evaluate transportation access – maybe limiting development
- Improve the external image of the buildings
- Inventory the buildings to assess potential for future usage
- Consider light office and flex-space
- Avoid businesses that might compete with the central business district

Experts’ thoughts about immediate next steps included:

- Develop business clusters, as well as a brownfield cluster, with the objectives of focusing efforts and siting business with synergistic needs
- Establish environmental court that will publically review local environmental violations on a regular interval.
- Apply for State (Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PaDEP), Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (PaDCED)) and Federal funds (US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA))
- Apply for an Federal interagency personal agreement (IPA)
- Develop closer ties with Beaver County
- Introduce Ambridge/Harmony to the philanthropic community
- Pursue business development center/incubator
- Develop business retention/expansion strategy
- Explore additional municipal powers that can convert into development incentives
- Adopt a beautification campaign for the industrial corridor

In conclusion, the experts could not suggest absolute uses of the property in the industrial corridor, but rather suggested that the process of determination requires patience, cooperation and sustained commitment.

In addition to the expert observations and inputs, the workshop brought other benefits to the community:

- Seven ‘new ambassadors’ -- the experts that have a new-found interest in Ambridge and Harmony
- Raised regional visibility of Ambridge and Harmony based on media coverage of the event
- Raised internal awareness of the value of the industrial corridor to Ambridge and Harmony
- Collaboration between the Borough Manager and the experts
- Proof that Ambridge and Harmony can collaborate
- Demonstration that local stakeholders can engage in constructive discussion

Section 2: Stronger than Steel, August 2006

The returning experts (from the November 2001 workshop) were impressed by the visible developments in the community over the five year period. They were struck by the enduring sense of community and the engagement of community and business leaders. Areas the experts identified as having room for improvement included misinformation surrounding the Moltoni⁴ development, the apparent lack of plan or vision for integrated development, a disproportionately high number of renter-occupied units, and an municipal structure that does not take advantage of regional efficiencies. More specifically, the experts from the August workshop identified six categories that would benefit from significant attention. The experts made suggestions for the areas (as discussed below) agreed that a single point of contact must be established to move the process forward.

The action items were suggested to promote brownfield development:

- **Guiding Change**
Identify a champion to set the tone for the community and stay the course. This individual should embody a comprehensive understanding of public investment, private investment, and community vision.
- **Land Use Synergies**
Develop land-use synergies by taking advantage of existing assets including Old Economy, Trinity School, as well as the new Ambridge High School. Direct investment towards population—include services and housing intended for aging population. Integrate marketing and economic development plans.
- **Regional Efficiencies**
Begin to consolidate public services, including, code enforcement, police, fire safety, maintenance. Establish regional work-group to look at coordination opportunities.
- **Educate and Communicate**
Stakeholders are unaware of respective actions and motives, as lack of information creates distrust. Obtain documents that form basis for state funding and may be useful for future planning efforts. Start a monthly brown-bag to be organized by an existing council. Create a quarterly development newsletter that discusses the community as a system, development hurdles, and market drivers. Reestablish the AARDC as coordinator of communication.
- **Jobs and Workforce**
There exists a mismatch of skill sets between available jobs and available labor. Develop high school vocational programs and a business incubator. Identify the skill sets demanded by emerging industry and build trade partnerships. Use the Main Street program funds to identify niche retail opportunities to inform entrepreneurship programs. Create conduits to existing opportunities.
- **Transit and Transportation:**
There exists a lack of strategic investment in transit. Commission strategic transportation plan.

⁴ Rob Moltoni, an Australia-based developer is locally represented by Pittsburgh Minerals and Environmental Technology and is considering a multi-use development in the industrial corridor that spans Ambridge Borough and Harmony Township.

Section 3: Brownfields Reflections: Proud Past Bright Future, December 2006

The intent of this, the final brownfields workshop to be hosted by Carnegie Mellon's Western Pennsylvania Brownfields Center in Ambridge, was to provide The Ambridge Area Revitalization Development Corporation (AARDC) and Ambridge Borough with specific tasks to initiate the redevelopment effort and to speak to the topics identified in the August workshop. The experts were impressed by the progress in Ambridge's brownfield development efforts and the numerous organizations whose members have demonstrated enthusiasm for these projects. One of the objectives for the AARDC is to pull these organizations and efforts together for 2007 and, using the experts' observations, prepare a revitalization action plan.

The most pressing suggestion of the experts was for Ambridge to develop a communication strategy to counter rumors and the information void surrounding current development efforts and to educate the community about the many revitalization developments occurring. This communication strategy might include a quarterly newsletter, signage on storefronts and land announcing events or development intentions, a 'Good News Ambridge' website, a development speaker series, cultivation of a relationship with the local media, and church bulletins. The full list of suggested communication channels is detailed below under the *Getting the Word Out* subheading.

Given AARDC's mission and composition, the AARDC is an appropriate body to implement the ideas discussed at this and previous Brownfield Center events. County Commissioners Charles Camp and Joseph Spanik, who each attended the workshop, pledged their support of the Ambridge redevelopment initiatives and AARDC's upcoming efforts, which include initiating a community visioning program and creating a communications strategy to effectively convey development intentions to the Ambridge community. Commissioner Camp also pledged the County's intent to work with the Corporation for Economic Development and the Planning Commission in approaching USEPA Region 3 for an IPA (Intergovernmental Personnel Act) agreement that could bring a dedicated staffer to the region for an extended period of time.

To realize these goals, the AARDC needs to be strengthened with increased membership on its Industrial, Residential, Historic, and Commercial committees. A single champion, ideally within the AARDC, will need to champion brownfield redevelopment.

The experts offered the below observations:

Organizing for Regional Efficiencies

- Use the plans already in place, including the SHALE group plan, the Multi-Municipal Plan, and the SHALE group plan
- Share resources with neighboring towns, i.e. code enforcement
- Look at new techniques for code enforcement including vacant property registration ordinance
- Take advantage of Rivertown association
- Look at the business case for efficiencies
- Look in to other incentives (KOZ, Tax abatements, etc)

- Engage IPA's/interns/college-based 'studio'
- Revisit multi-municipal plan - Kristen to convene administrators
- AARDC to meet with Governor's office –programs for funding

Understanding the Needs of the Workforce:

- Municipality will assume a matchmaking role
- Educate new businesses about job programs
- Take advantage of existing resources—establish a speaker's series
- Institute library based training sessions
- Provide job links on Ambridge Website
- Start talking about an environmental program with the vocational school
- Educate students about 'gold-collar' job opportunities
- Use SBA resources/programs
- Develop Co-op programs
- Use chamber of commerce as information center

Initiating the Community Visioning Process:

- AARDC in conjunction with Council initiate a visioning process that
 - a. Thinks about the future
 - b. Engages all of the community
 - c. Expands the circle of revitalization beyond brownfields—holistic approach
- Build consensus through process
- Identify a facilitation team to guide community through process
- Investigate EPA grants through process resolution program - for design and facilitation
- Visit other communities (Carnegie, Youngstown)
- Build on existing initiatives -- SHALE report, SR 60 report, Rivertown reports, Multi-Municipal compact - review, synthesize, ultimately set plan
- Incorporate other established entities in the community

Getting the Word Out: Education & Communication

- Dispel rumors/myths
- Celebrate successes (such as demolition of HH Robertson building)
- Prepare annual report of successes
- Lots of partners - network to spread the word, economy of scale
- Expand circle - bring in new blood - consider future community leaders
- Obtain a preliminary written 2007 game plan from the Moltoni Group
- Use CCBC as a resource - will contact Duke
- Develop a communication strategy; this might include
 - Quarterly Newsletter
 - Signage (at H.H. Robertson, for example)
 - Website—'Good News Ambridge' and 'Champions' web page also
 - Library as repository of information
 - Word of mouth
 - Speaker Series
 - Coffeehouse information events
 - Press Releases—tag onto Elm Street Grant press release
 - Work with high school students
 - Need liaison to media—need to meet with editors
 - Study circles

- Church bulletins

Closing

The observations presented in this Executive Summary are the result of a series of focused workshops facilitated by The Western Pennsylvania Brownfields Center at Carnegie Mellon in Ambridge Borough and Harmony Township, Pennsylvania over a period that spans from 2001 to 2006. These observations reflect the inputs of visiting experts and local stakeholders. This report has been transmitted to the members of the Ambridge Area Brownfields Partnership including:

- Kristen Denne, Ambridge Borough Manager
- Brian Hayden, Beaver County Commissioners' Office
- Debi Leopardi, Ambridge Value Properties
- Gene Pash, Ambridge Value Properties
- Bea Patterson, Ambridge Area Chamber of Commerce
- Fritz Retsch, Ambridge Area School Board
- Laura Rubino, Beaver County Corporation for Economic Development

The Western Pennsylvania Brownfields Center at Carnegie Mellon is pleased to have been able to provide input into the brownfield development initiative of Ambridge Borough and Harmony Township. The observations presented herein are non-binding and are only presented to provide insight to those stakeholders that will remain engaged and interested in the local brownfield development process.

The workshops summarized herein were supported in part by (former) US Congresswoman Melissa Hart, the Heinz Foundation, the Small Business Administration and local businesses in Ambridge Borough and Harmony Township.

Respectfully submitted,

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