

Community Relations Plan

Former Racing Oil Property – Parcel #61-37
181 Center Street
Chicopee, MA 01013



October 20, 2015

Overview

The purpose of this Community Relations Plan (CRP) is to describe the City of Chicopee's strategy to address the needs and concerns of residents who will potentially be affected by the proposed cleanup and future redevelopment of the former Racing Oil Service Station located at 181 Center Street located in Chicopee, Massachusetts. Studied as part of the West End Brownfields Area-wide Plan (AWP), the Racing Oil property is one of fifteen Brownfields in the West End neighborhood targeted for redevelopment as part of the AWP's West End Vision. This CRP outlines how the City of Chicopee has involved, and will continue to involve, affected residents, City officials and local organizations in the decision-making process regarding the assessment, cleanup and eventual redevelopment of the subject properties.

The cleanup project is being funded in part by an U.S. EPA Brownfields cleanup grant awarded in June 2015 to the City of Chicopee. This grant specifically provides funds for the cleanup of the Racing Oil property (Parcel 61-37). This CRP is designed to meet the overall community involvement requirements for the cleanup of subject properties under the grant awards as well as other U.S. EPA Brownfields funding the City may acquire in the future for additional West End properties.

Active residents, local organizations and civic leaders involved in neighborhood issues are important resources for the success of this Plan as they have an understanding of the subject properties, existing challenges and opportunities. Additionally, these individuals hold key positions of responsibility within the community. The City recognizes these citizens as points of contact and communication. The long-term success of the proposed cleanup project and redevelopment will be enhanced by on-going citizen involvement – involvement that was initiated when the City began planning the future of West End properties in 2011. This on-going conversation with vested stakeholders will ensure the proposed cleanup projects are successfully executed and move the subject properties closer to the community-derived redevelopment goals as defined by the West End Area-wide Plan.

Spokesperson & Information Repository

Chicopee's Department of Planning & Development will oversee implementation of cleanup activities at the subject property with assistance from the City's Office of Community Development. Office and contact information are as follows:

Lee Pouliot ASLA, LEED Green Associate
Director
Department of Planning & Development
274 Front Street – City Hall Annex, 4th floor
Chicopee, MA 01013
(413) 594-1516
(413) 302-1513 (cell)
Email: lpouliot@chicopeema.gov

An Information Repository the project has been developed and is available for review in the Planning Department at any time during normal business hours (Monday – Friday, 9:00a.m. –

5:00p.m.). A second copy of the Information Repository has been established at the Chicopee Public Library and is available for review during the Library's normal business hours.

Additionally, all documents included in the Information Repository will be available digitally from the Planning Department's webpage (<https://www.chicopeema.gov/page.php?id=62>). Department Staff intend to launch a website for the City's Brownfields Program by fall 2015. Entitled H.E.A.L Chicopee, the website is intended to become the Program's primary outreach resource. A web address for the new website will be provided to the community on launch day and will be included on all public notices / project signs for each proposed cleanup project.

Site Description & History

Site History

The former Racing Oil Service Station, in Chicopee Center, consists of a former gasoline fueling station located on approximately 0.28 acres of property. The property has remained undeveloped since December 2004 when the removal of an on-site kiosk, pump islands and three underground storage tanks (USTs) was completed. The Site is currently covered with pavement and the remnants of a concrete pad where the gasoline pumps were located. The Site was assessed most recently in 2012 through a Targeted Brownfield Assessment (TBA) from Region 1 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA).

The City completed tax foreclosure proceedings in late 2011 and applied for Targeted Brownfield Assessment (TBA) funds from U.S. EPA Region 1 in 2012. The 2012 TBA determined that historical releases of petroleum hydrocarbons occurring because of former Site operations have resulted in soil and groundwater contamination at levels that could pose a risk to human health and the environment. Soil sampling data and field screening information collected during the TBA identified a zone of contaminated soil within the former UST area that appears to be residual contamination from historical releases from the tanks.

Petroleum constituents released to the environment in the UST area migrated downward to the water table and dissolved into Site groundwater. Dissolved contaminants subsequently migrated horizontally with the flow of groundwater to create a contaminant plume extending to the northwest across Center Street. A portion of the VPH plume extends beneath a commercial building located at 178 Center Street.

Site Location

The Racing Oil property is located at 181 Center Street in the West End/Chicopee Center neighborhood. The Site is bound by Center Street (west), residential parcels (east), business parcels (north) and business parcels (south). **Please see Attachment I: Racing Oil Property.**

Redevelopment Vision

Racing Oil was identified and studied for redevelopment as part of the City's West End Brownfields Area-wide Plan (AWP) pilot project funded as part of the federal EPA-HUD-DOE Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The former Racing Oil Service Station is most closely associated with the Gateway Area - located just a few parcels away from the boundary of the Gateway. The property is defined in the AWP plan as an 'infill' site with potential reuse for small office, retail space, an electric

car charging station/related transportation use or greenspace in support of the Gateway's reuse strategies, as the neighborhood's market demands shift with redevelopment of the larger priority areas. As these priority areas are addressed, the AWP suggests short term improvements to these infill sites including assessment, completion of any required cleanup activities and improving the aesthetics and marketability of these sites to showcase the City's commitment to redevelopment. This land banking strategy will provide a visible City commitment to the property until the market provides an appropriate redevelopment demand to move forward with the recommended reuse strategy.

Nature of Threat to Public Health & Environment

Health Concerns

The 2012 Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) determined that historical releases of petroleum hydrocarbons occurring because of former Site operations have resulted in soil and groundwater contamination at levels that could pose a risk to human health and the environment. Petroleum constituents released to the environment in the UST area migrated downward to the water table and dissolved into Site groundwater. Dissolved contaminants subsequently migrated horizontally with the flow of groundwater to create a contaminant plume extending to the northwest across Center Street. A portion of the VPH plume extends beneath a commercial building located at 178 Center Street.

While representing a historic loss of neighborhood jobs, the Racing Oil Site, because of known contamination, has diminished redevelopment potential – commercial or recreational - both desperately needed to address Health/Welfare Concerns in the neighborhood.

The proposed cleanup plan includes soil excavation and off-site disposal with *in situ* groundwater remediation. This would include the excavation and off-site disposal of contaminated soil from the former UST area with active treatment of the groundwater plume. The project will likely include the following activities:

- Excavation and off-site disposal of 1,200 cubic yards of contaminated soil;
- Dewatering of the excavation area and on-site treatment of contaminated groundwater;
- Collection of post-excavation soil samples for laboratory analysis;
- Backfilling of the excavation area with clean soil;
- Advancement of soil borings within the contaminant plume area (along the northern Site boundary and across Center Street) for the purpose of injecting treatment reagents;
- Injection of treatment reagents into the subsurface to promote *in situ* chemical oxidation (ISCO) or *in situ* bioremediation (ISB); and
- Post-injection monitoring of groundwater to evaluate progress toward cleanup.

Excavation and off-site disposal of contaminated soil will be an effective and permanent measure to eliminate potential future exposure to contamination. With respect to groundwater, additional data collection would be required to evaluate which type of *in situ* treatment technology will be most effective given the subsurface conditions at the Site. However, it is likely that at least one of these technologies would be effective to reduce contaminant levels in groundwater to achieve a Permanent Solution. Further, *in situ* treatment would enable a Permanent Solution to be achieved in

a shorter timeframe than natural attenuation and could be used as a contingency in the event that monitored natural attenuation does not meet the objectives of the cleanup.

Environmental Concerns

The West End contains a concentration of known and suspected Brownfields and suffers disproportionately from them. The district is home to 3.5% of the City's population, but it contains about 5.4% of all sites in Chicopee reported under the Commonwealth's cleanup program, including six releases regulated under MassDEP Tier 1A (i.e. most hazardous) permits. There are only three other Tier 1A permits in the City. On a per capita basis, the area has 49% more reported waste sites (of all categories) than the Massachusetts rate. Moreover, parcels containing known Brownfields cover at least 35.3% (67.08 acres) of the neighborhood's land area, presenting a tremendous challenge to (and opportunity for) revitalization.

The entire West End neighborhood is no more than 100 yards from the nearest reported contaminated site.

While the list of milestones is a source of local pride, the legacy of nearly two centuries of industrial dominance is taking its toll on the community. A decline in manufacturing, which is a national phenomenon, has left the City with concentrated areas of vacant industrial complexes that provide no economic benefits. The City's financial needs for the assessment, cleanup and redevelopment of the West End Brownfields are challenging. Massachusetts municipalities depend on local property taxes to fund local government operations and the West End's Brownfields are contributing little in taxes to the City to support the needed public investment in these sites.

A lack of interest and demand for rehabilitating these properties along with the high costs associated with the remediation of contaminants have hindered assessment, cleanup and redevelopment efforts and are the major impediments to reuse of these blighted parcels.

Community Background

Target Community Profile

The City of Chicopee's West End neighborhood is one of the oldest industrial communities in the United States. Ideally situated near the confluence of the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers, the area's earliest factories were built before 1820. Around 1830, the Dwight Canal was completed, providing water power and barge access for rapidly expanding textile, munitions and shoe manufacturers. As the industrial base increased, a densely-built residential neighborhood grew towards the nearby Center Street corridor to serve the mill worker population. This blue-collar neighborhood of mostly Irish, French-Canadian and Polish immigrants thrived for over a century. However, during the past several decades, the demise of manufacturing, aging facilities and suburban competition have caused industrial establishments to abandon the mills – leaving behind large, vacant industrial structures and a community searching for environmental and economic solutions.

Encompassing Census Tract 8109.01, Block Group 1, the West End is home to an estimated 1,948 people, which is roughly 3.5% of Chicopee's population (Census 2010). As **Table I** details, a significant number of the neighborhood's residents are either under the age of 18 (24.5%) or above

the age of 50 (26.8%). American Community Survey (ACS) five year estimates ('08-'12) dictate that up to 12.8% of the neighborhood's population reported Veteran Status while up to 38.8% of the neighborhood's population reported some disability.

Housing affordability is a challenge for the West End. Over 71.2% of the neighborhood's 997 housing units are renter-occupied with 77.9% of the neighborhood's total population living in rental units. The resulting low owner-occupied percentage (18%) has contributed to further disinvestment and instability. The city-wide owner-occupied rate is approximately 59%. More than half of renters are considered rent burdened – paying more than 30% of their income towards rent. Nearly 11% of all housing units are vacant, which is nearly double the city-wide rate of 5.6%. Additionally, according to the West End Brownfields Area-Wide Plan, nearly one-third of all households in the neighborhood consist of single mothers and their children.

Table I: Target Community – Census Tract 8109.01 Select Population & Housing Data

Population – Under 18 years	24.5% (477 people)
Population – Over 50 years	26.8% (522 people)
Veteran Status	5.6% - 12.8% (61-189 people)
Population Reporting Disabilities	7.2% - 38.8% (181-924 people)
Owner Occupied Housing Units	18% (179 units)
Population in owner-occupied	22.1% (430 people)
Renter-occupied Units	71.2% (710 units)
Population in renter-occupied	77.9% (1,518 people)
Vacant housing units	10.8% (108 units)

*Data from the 2010 U.S. Census

Table II: Demographic Information Comparison

	Target Community				
	<i>Census Tract 8109.01</i>	<i>City of Chicopee</i>	<i>Hampden County</i>	<i>Massachusetts</i>	<i>United States</i>
Population	1,948*	55,298*	463,490*	6,547,629*	308,745,538*
Unemployment Rate	8.6% ± 5.5 [^]	8.7% [†]	8.5% [†]	7.1% [†]	6.7% [†]
Poverty Rate	33.5-55.9% [‡]	11.3-15.5% [§]	17.8-20.6% [°]	11.6-12.2% [°]	15.8-16.0% [°]
% Minority	27.3%*	13.2%*	23.5%*	19.6%*	26.7%*
Per Capita Income	\$12,254 ± \$2,328 [‡]	\$24,056 ± \$1,143 [§]	\$25,626 ± \$742 [°]	\$34,907 ± \$338 [°]	\$27,319 ± \$46 [°]
Median Household Income	\$21,349 ± \$5,600 [‡]	\$46,396 ± \$2,119 [§]	\$48,865 ± \$2,517 [°]	\$65,339 ± \$645 [°]	\$51,371 ± \$53 [°]

*Data from the 2010 Census data

[^] Median Percentages based on Margins of Error in 5-year ('08-'12) American Community Survey Unemployment Estimates

[‡] Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

‡ Based on Margins of Error in 5-year ('08-'12) American Community Survey Estimates

§ Based on Margins of Error in 3-year ('10-'12) American Community Survey Estimates

° Based on Margins of Error in 1-year ('12) American Community Survey Estimates

As seen in **Table II**, Income and Poverty issues further challenge the neighborhood's residents. The estimated percentage of West End residents obtaining a high school diploma or higher is approximately 12.1% less than the city-wide estimate (70.7% ±10.6%, 82.8% ±1.8%, respectively). The estimated percentage of West End residents who have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher is approximately 9.1% less than the city-wide estimate (8.7% ±4.5, 17.8% ±2.0%, respectively). While the neighborhood's unemployment rate seems to be within a comparable range to the City's, it should also be noted that 54.3% ± 8.8% of the neighborhood's population is not in the labor force. Further, the neighborhood's poverty rate is at least triple that of the city-wide rate while both the per capita income and median household income are at least 50% less than the City as a whole.

The Massachusetts Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) lists Census Tract 8109.01 as meeting two of four Environmental Justice population criteria. The criteria met include: households earning 65% or less of statewide household income and 25% or more of residents are minority. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) has classified Chicopee as an Economically Distressed Area (EDA), defined as areas within the Commonwealth that are eligible for targeted assistance under the Brownfields Act. Further, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI) lists Census Tract 8108 in Severely Distressed Status and Tract 8107 in Eligible Status for the New Market Tax Credit (NMTC) Program which the CDFI administers. Such classifications are based on demographic information, including income, poverty and empowerment zone status.

Chicopee is also a federally designated Empowerment Zone/Entitlement Community per the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), with all block groups in Tract 8109.01 defined as having 51% or greater total number of low to moderate income residents.

Key Community Partners

The following organizations are firmly committed to revitalization efforts for the West End's fifteen identified Brownfields and are providing oversight of the West End Brownfield AWP's implementation:

- **Chicopee Savings Bank** has chaired both the Gateway and Brownfields AWP Stakeholders Groups. Additionally, Chicopee Savings is an anchor downtown business tenant, that is highly supportive of revitalization efforts throughout the City;
- **Elms College** is Chicopee's best known institution of higher education, located directly adjacent to downtown Chicopee and the West End neighborhood. The College is keenly aware of the importance downtown revitalization efforts hold in attracting and keeping students in Chicopee. The College's administration has invested in both the Gateway and Brownfields AWP efforts, realizing the benefits to the institution while providing 'local' educational opportunities to students;
- **Valley Opportunity Council (VOC), Inc.**, is also a downtown business anchor, operating several residential, educational and commercial facilities in downtown Chicopee and the region. The VOC, '...is dedicated to eliminating poverty by providing

the opportunity for our low and moderate-income neighbors, families and friends in the greater Hampden County area, to achieve greater independence and a higher quality of life' and is a key stakeholder in both the Gateway and Brownfields AWP processes as the organization realizes how revitalization efforts help to support various service programs;

- ***Chicopee Neighborhood Development Corporation (CNDC)***; is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to, 'providing quality housing programs and projects to directly support Chicopee residents and to promote stable neighborhoods.' The CNDC owns property in the West End neighborhood and has played a committed role in the Brownfields AWP and other community planning efforts.

Chronology of Community Involvement

Community engagement regarding the West End neighborhood has been on-going for the past four years. In 2009, the City received funding from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to identify specific 'brick and mortar' improvements to help revitalize downtown Chicopee, of which the West End neighborhood is a portion. Known as the '*Chicopee Gateway Plus – Downtown Revitalization Plan*,' efforts were completed in August 2009 and presented to Chicopee officials and residents.

The plan's foundation is based on extensive community and stakeholder outreach and participation. The professional team led a community meeting, four stakeholder meetings and a community survey which garnered participation from roughly 250 residents. This outreach effort set the tone for planning by identifying specific problems to address, discussing previous planning efforts and defining specific revitalization priorities. The Stakeholders played a key role in guiding the development of an appropriate strategy and assisted in generating specific action items. Some of these action items, including sidewalk improvements, downtown lighting, downtown greening and pedestrian safety have been addressed in recent public infrastructure improvements.

In 2010, the City in collaboration with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) was successful in securing grant funds from the U.S. EPA's pilot Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (AWP) Program, to specifically plan for the redevelopment of Brownfields within the West End neighborhood. The AWP grant was funded as part of the federal EPA-HUD-DOT Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The Gateway Plan's Stakeholders, showcasing their commitment to downtown Chicopee, agreed to again provide oversight of the planning process and have been involved in activities since August 2010.

The West End Brownfields AWP engagement efforts included a variety of outreach venues including two community workshops, a community design charrette, visual preference surveys, blogs, a Facebook page and YouTube videos of public meetings. These efforts have kept stakeholders and interested residents invested in the planning process while initiating the creation of an implementation plan.

Key Community Concerns

The community has been a key stakeholder and participant in the planning process for RiverMills. Through a variety of communications, meetings and other outreach venues, the community has been generally supportive and active in the development of redevelopment visions for the West End's Brownfields and the priority areas targeted for initial implementation. Key concerns expressed through the community process included the following:

- Concern and strong desire to see the West End's mills successfully converted to mixed-use, residential complexes;
- The attraction of technology-based and start-up business activity to the area;
- Investment to create new restaurants, boutique stores and other destination attractions in the neighborhood,
- The development of neighborhood amenities including walking and biking paths; and
- The redevelopment of vacant / underutilized properties.

The City will continue to communicate with and involve the community in the redevelopment process while addressing any concerns that are raised as these cleanup activities are planned and implemented to facilitate redevelopment.

Continued Community Involvement

In addition to any on-going involvement efforts, detailed in the above sections of this CRP, the following efforts will be utilized during the proposed cleanup projects to keep the community informed of and involved in the projects as they progress. A significant tool that will become active in fall 2015 is the City's Brownfields Program website: H.E.A.L Chicopee, specifically designed to serve as a clearinghouse of information regarding all projects administered through the City's Brownfields Program. The new website will include a feedback mechanism for visitors to ask questions or submit community ideas/concerns for each targeted property. A project sign will be erected at the project site to provide information to residents on where to find locate project information.

Should a language barrier be identified, the City will make every effort to procure appropriate interpreters. The City is also prepared to accommodate those with special needs such as the blind and the deaf.

In addition, the following efforts will be utilized during the proposed project to keep the community informed of project progress and outcomes:

- ***Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA) 30-Day Public Comment Period:*** The City will prepare and release the ABCA for the proposed project for the required 30-day public comment period. The ABCA will ensure the most appropriate cleanup alternative is selected and communicated to the community. At the close of the 30-day public comment period, the City will respond to significant comments received and then finalize the ABCA;
- ***Public notice:*** The City will post a public notice in the local newspaper, The Republican, announcing the start of the public comment period, the details about the public meeting, and the availability of the ABCA & information repository for public review;
- ***Public Meetings:*** The City estimates holding one public meeting during the ABCA Public Comment Period;

- **Mailings to Abutters and Media Outlets:** Informational mailings and public meeting notices will be sent to Site abutters, both residences and businesses (within a ¼ mile radius of the subject property) and all local media outlets (including The Republican, the Chicopee Herald, the Chicopee Register, News 22 (WWLP) and News 40 (WGGB)). The City anticipates these mailings to coincide with each of the planned public meetings;
- **Project Sign Posting:** A project sign will be posted and will remain posted at each project site which briefly describes the project and includes contact information;
- **Social Media:** As part of the City’s overall Brownfields Program, the Planning Department will begin utilizing social media outlets to distribute project information and solicit feedback from the community. Currently, the Department envisions utilizing Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Other venues will be considered as appropriate;
- **Information Repository:** An Information Repository for this project has been developed and is available for review in the Office of Community Development at any time during normal business hours (Monday – Friday, 9:00a.m. – 5:00p.m.); and
- **Planning Development Webpage:** All documents included in the Information Repository will be available digitally from the Planning Department’s webpage (<https://www.chicopeema.gov/page.php?id=62>). Additionally, the Planning Department will post all public notices and other meeting advertisements on the webpage and associate these events with the city-wide event calendar.

Attachments

- I. Racing Oil Property Parcel #61-37