Planning for Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment DISPOSITION PLANNING FOR A FORMER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COTTONWOOD, IDAHO, EPA REGION 10

Cottonwood—similar to the surrounding Idaho County—is a rural community that wants to invigorate economic revitalization to sustain its current population and attract new residents. Over the past 10 years, its population of residents aged 5-19 dropped 14 percent (from 251 to 217). This drop in youth population resulted in the city having to make the difficult decision to vacate the 26,000+ square-foot Prairie Elementary School. The school property includes three buildings: the existing school, a cafeteria, and the gymnasium. While the existing school and cafeteria were closed when the school shut down, the community continues to use the gymnasium and its two associated classrooms. The property was on the real estate market for more than four years and received no viable purchase offers.

In early 2013, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's (IDEQ's) Brownfields Program assisted the community by conducting a site assessment at the property and confirmed the presence of asbestos containing materials (ACM) and lead based paint in the existing school and cafeteria. IDEQ estimated abatement costs of approximately \$91,000. Depending on the potential future sale and use of the building, post-abatement restoration activities are estimated to be \$94,000, making the total cost associated with cleanup and restoration of the property to be approximately \$185,000.

In November 2016, local stakeholders requested technical assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Land Revitalization Team to assess market opportunities and limitations, and evaluate viable reuse options for the school.

In March 2016, EPA's Land Revitalization Team facilitated a series of interviews with Cottonwood community leaders and other stakeholders to develop a community vision for the future use of the property. The Team brought a real estate technical expert to assist community stakeholders in identifying different approaches for reusing and repurposing the property and buildings. During the visioning process, the Team met with more than 50 community representatives, all of whom supported the future reuse of the school and property. Stakeholders identified their community needs as housing (senior, retirement, assisted, and workforce), a daycare facility, workforce development training, and a community wellness center. Additionally, all stakeholders indicated that retaining use of the school gym for community recreational activities is a priority.

"The Land Revitalization Team's planning assistance offered the school district an opportunity to better understand how the unused community asset might be used for public benefit and helped the district determine a strategy for jump-starting reuse."

-Executive Director, Clearwater Economic Development Association, Inc.

The Land Revitalization Team conducted a best value analysis to help the community balance the financial needs of the school district against the community-identified needs of adding value to the community and attracting additional workforce to the area. Technical assistance led to the development of three reuse scenarios that take into account the community's desire to maintain use of the gym, while also allowing for the addition of housing at the property and a career-technical education or a community center. The Team developed a presentation that can be shared with the Cottonwood School District to help evaluate the sale price of the property and future use options for the school. Additionally, the project team provided renderings for all three reuse scenarios that can be used during discussions with potential site developers. Finally, the Team developed a building assessment for the existing school that can be shared with interested parties to evaluate future potential reuse alternatives.

For more information, please contact Terri Griffith, EPA Region 10, griffith.terri@epa.gov.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Introducing a new project partner can provide the necessary momentum to engage existing partners at a higher level.
- The local stakeholders most affected by the brownfield property can make significant contributions toward identifying reuse options with the greatest potential for success.

PLANNED POST-TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

- IDEQ will provide assistance to address contamination through the state's brownfields program.
- The Regional Economic Development Association will work with project partners to support the three reuse scenarios and programming.
- Cottonwood School Board will reconsider the school's list price and request offers for sale of the property.
- The Regional Economic Development Association will provide additional grant funds for the project.



