



# Washington County Site Redevelopment Program



**To:** Washington County Site Redevelopment Committee Members  
**From:** Scott Harrington, Vandewalle & Associates  
**CC:** Site Redevelopment Project Management Team Members  
**Date:** December 3, 2015  
**Re:** **Program Principles and Considerations**

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The following provides an overview of the presentation I made at last month's Committee meeting concerning the additional factors to be considered in selecting additional sites for proactive environmental investigation and redevelopment analysis using program funds. Elsewhere in your meeting packet are the results of the site scoring and ranking exercise, which we also will briefly present at the meeting on December 10<sup>th</sup>. Following that, we will ask the Committee to identify 2-3 sites for initial investigation work. While the results of the site scoring and ranking process should weigh heavily on the site selection decisions, there are time factors that the process cannot fully account for. Therefore, we recommend the Committee evaluate the higher scoring sites through the lens of the additional factors presented here in order to select the sites that are most likely to achieve the program's redevelopment goals.

As you will see below, community readiness is one of these additional considerations and, perhaps, one of the most important. As a result, the memo with the site scoring and ranking results provides a list of site rankings for each community. At the meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> we think it would be helpful if each community could make a brief statement concerning their higher-ranked sites in terms of whether they believe the sites are ready for program assistance based on the additional factors contained in this memo.

## **Program Principles and Considerations**

The purpose of the inventory and scoring process is to help select sites for further action as part of the Washington County Site Redevelopment Program where the Committee would take a *proactive* role in the assessment and redevelopment planning. Specifically where the USEPA grant is concerned, the next step would be to conduct Phase I Environmental Site Assessments (Phase 1 ESA's) on the selected sites, the results of which would then provide a baseline for additional environmental assessments (i.e., Phase II ESA's) and remedial and reuse planning. Each coalition partner has already identified a priority site for initial assessment and planning, but there is capacity within the program to take on 2-3 additional sites over the next couple of months. As staff has capacity, we will seek the Committee's guidance on selecting additional sites with the goal to spend all of the current grant funds by the end of the grant cycle in the fall of 2017. However, we also anticipate pursuing additional federal and state grants funds so site rankings will be used as a guide beyond the scope of the current grant and as a basis for obtaining and using future assessment grants.

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Understanding the long-term nature of Brownfield redevelopment, the site scoring and rankings are meant to provide a *static*, broad-based and objective measure of each site's redevelopment potential relative to all of the other sites in the inventory. Until and unless the scoring criteria change, the scores and rankings are designed to remain valid over a fairly long period of time. Typically, the inventory and scores are not revisited for at least five years, and even this will be more of an overview than a wholesale reassessment.

Time-based considerations, however, also play a critical role in selecting sites for further proactive assessment and planning. These include factors such as property ownership, local government capacity, and developer interest, among others. Accordingly, the final step in the site selection program is to apply these temporal considerations to the higher ranking sites.

As shown in the final scoring and rankings, the top 15 sites – which comprise approximately 30% of all sites – generally are separated by only a few points out of a possible total points of 107. Accordingly, the top-ranked sites should be viewed more so as a group rather than on their specific score or rank. To narrow the final list to begin site assessments, the following additional factors will need to be considered.

**1. Potential to Obtain Site Access**

Site assessments cannot be conducted without the written consent of the property owner. Owners who are satisfied with their current operations are often dis-interested. Even owners who may have some interest in redevelopment become fearful of what an assessment may uncover and the liability that may come with it. As a result, it can sometimes take an extensive and long term education process to obtain property owner consent.

**2. Potential to Obtain Site Eligibility**

The EPA must approve each site before grant funds can be spent. The eligibility for use of hazardous and petroleum assessments are different. In general, though, if the current owner has had the property for a long time and is likely to have caused or contributed to potential contamination, then the site may be deemed to be ineligible – at least for the use of USEPA funds. In such cases, state funds may be an option.

**3. Potential to Obtain Property Owner/Developer Interest and Cooperation**

Even if a property owner grants consent for a Phase 1 assessment, they need to have a significant interest in redevelopment and/or be willing to sell the property to someone else who does. This includes having a realistic expectation of the property's likely sales price. Even better is having a potential developer already identified and at the table ready to move forward.

**4. Potential Level of Local Government Interest and Capacity**



Redevelopment of any type, and Brownfields in particular, almost always requires a public-private approach in order to make projects feasible. Accordingly, a big determinant in project success will be the local government's and the SRC's capacity to engage with property owners and prospective developers and utilize a wide range of economic development tools to bring projects to fruition. This usually entails a significant time commitment by local government staff and officials and a need for sustained political and community support over what could be a several-year effort to fully redevelop a site.

#### **5. Presence of Groupings**

While the redevelopment scoring criteria look at the potential of each site to be catalytic in promoting redevelopment of neighboring sites, they still don't fully account for the redevelopment potential that a group of sites in relative close proximity could have. Where inventory sites are immediately adjacent to one another, we have already created and evaluated them as a "cluster." However, there are instances where sites are somewhat near one another where their general proximity also should be considered.

#### **6. Potential Complexity and Cost of Assessment**

Sites that are, or are suspected to be, highly contaminated are likely to be fairly expensive to assess and clean-up. Where the risks to human health and the environment are high, these are probably worthwhile investments. However, where such risks are low, then the program may be able to achieve a greater return on its investment (i.e., use of grant funds) by selecting sites with lower potential costs.

### **Putting it All Together**

The goal of the meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> is for the Committee to select 2-3 sites for initial proactive site assessment activities. In making the selection, the Committee will want to first look at the rankings and then apply the above factors to the top 10 or so sites. To assist with this, we recommend that each coalition partner provide an overview of their top-ranked sites as whether they believe the site is ready for program assistance based on the above considerations. At that time, each community may also propose sites that perhaps did not score as high but are sites the community believes are ready for immediate action. As a result, the sites that are ultimately selected might not match the order of the rankings. In such a case, this does not change the rankings, it just means that other sites were determined to be more ripe for action *at this time*. Further, it should be understood that one or more of the sites that are selected may not pan out. For example, we ultimately may not be able to obtain site access or site eligibility of a selected site. In such cases, the plan would be skip that site (at least for now) and move on to the next selected site.

Finally, it's important to remember that the sites selected through this process are those that the SRC and the corresponding local government are willing to take a *proactive approach* in order to bring about redevelopment. There will definitely be instances where a property owner /



prospective developer will seek funding assistance for projects *they* are leading. Depending on the proposed project, this may be a worthy expenditure regardless of the site's ranking, and we will provide additional information at a future SRC meeting on how to evaluate such requests.



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