

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

For

Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
Brownfield Assessment Coalition
March 26, 2024

Submitted by

Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
802 Chenoweth Loop Rd.
The Dalles, Oregon 97058

Lead Contact

Lindsay McClure
Project Manager
lindsay@mcedd.org
mcedd.org

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

The Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD, coalition lead) has formed a coalition with one community-based nonprofit organization (Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation [CCHC]) and three local government agencies (Wasco County, OR; Sherman County, OR; and Klickitat County, WA) to address brownfields within the Mid-Columbia Region, which includes MCEDD's five member counties: Sherman, Wasco, and Hood River counties in Oregon, and Skamania and Klickitat counties in Washington.

The five project counties are highly rural in nature, covering a land area of 7,257 square miles, and having a total population of 85,191 (population density of 12 people per square mile, with some counties as low as 2 people per square mile). With the exception of Hood River County, where a high concentration of unmanned aerial systems sector employees resides, the region's median income is 18% lower than the state averages. Mid-Columbia region brownfield challenges relate largely to a dramatic decline in the area's natural resource (wood products) economy, with its abundant family-wage jobs, that peaked in the 1970s. Today, most of the region's job options are in lower-wage sectors such as agricultural/food processing, trade/transportation, and leisure/hospitality. The decline in the timber industry resulted in mill and supporting business (truck/equipment maintenance and repair) closures, leaving behind brownfields. Low wages associated with the jobs that replaced lost timber industry jobs resulted in less disposable income and spending, causing shrinkage of the economy. Local governments have faced shrinking budgets and have no funds to allocate to brownfield cleanup in their jurisdictions.

An inadequate supply of development-ready employment land is a barrier to the region's growth. Furthermore, an inadequate supply of quality attainable housing burdens the region in several ways: 1) 27% of all households (53% of low-income households) are severely rent burdened (paying more than 50% of income on housing); 2) the housing stock in the region is older on average than in OR/WA/US, impacting health through poor indoor air quality and exposure to lead in paint; 3) housing prices are forcing residents to move further afield, increasing commute times for low-income residents; and 4) employers in the region have indicated that attracting and retaining employees is a challenge due to housing costs and availability. Infill housing projects on brownfields will alleviate the region's shortage of attainable housing and will also provide vibrant walkable neighborhoods in our urban areas—a feature highly desired by the emerging workforce.

The project will address the region's brownfield challenges by 1) turning former mill sites into reusable land, thus creating opportunity for family-wage traded sector employment; and 2) revitalizing smaller urban brownfields into mixed commercial/residential projects, focusing the benefit on underserved members of the community by creating jobs with short commutes and providing much needed affordable housing. Over the four-year project period, this will entail assessing the highest priority sites and resolving environmental barriers to create buildable large and small employment lands that will be used to create family-wage jobs as well as lands in urban areas that will promote the creation of additional units of affordable housing and ensure that underserved communities disproportionately impacted by brownfields benefit the most from redevelopment projects.

1.2 Organizational Structure and Responsibilities

MCEDD will lead the project coalition. Lindsay McClure will be the lead staff. Lindsay will lead the Coalition and direct its contractor. MCEDD responsibilities include the following: complying

with all grant requirements, local laws, and state laws; maintaining financial records and documentation for the project; and documenting all grant-related activities and expenditures.

Pursuant to the cooperative agreement, EPA will be substantially involved in the project. The EPA Brownfield Project Manager (BPM) is Sarah Frederick. Sarah is responsible for providing technical assistance and advice, monitoring and evaluating compliance and program progress, and reviewing and approving all plans submitted by the Coalition.

MCEDD has contracted with Stantec, an environmental engineering consultancy, to provide technical support and brownfield expertise. Leonard Farr will work closely with MCEDD to develop the technical strategy for the project.

Coalition partner leads will represent the interests of their jurisdictions, serve on both the Project Coalition Team and the Core Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC), and assist with community outreach and public involvement throughout the grant term. Coalition partner leads are listed below.

- Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation (CCHC) – Joel Madsen, CCHC Executive Director
- Sherman County – Joe Dabulskis, County & Juvenile Court Judge, Sherman County
- Wasco County – Carrie Pipinich, MCEDD Deputy Director of Economic Development, staff for the Wasco County Economic Development Commission (EDC)
- Klickitat County – Richard Foster, Director of Economic Development for Klickitat County

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) have agreed to provide review of technical documents on an as-requested/as-needed basis during the project. The DEQ brownfield lead for the project area is Katie Daugherty. The Ecology brownfield lead for the project is Ali Furmall.

2. Goals/Objectives of Public Involvement

The Coalition recognizes that addressing brownfields in the five-county MCEDD region is a long-term process that will require a diverse group of local collaborators and strong communication. Past community engagement events around similar brownfield revitalization efforts have been well attended and have demonstrated community support for brownfield redevelopment. Continuing to build an involved and informed public will serve to maintain engagement in addressing brownfields over time. Additionally, ensuring that property owners understand the process, benefits, and financial implications of remediating brownfields will create a motivated base of key stakeholders that can take direct action.

The priorities for public involvement include the following:

- Brownfield education that is accessible to a general audience;
- Tailored outreach to key stakeholders including property owners, key sectors in the development process such as realtors and bankers, and community groups to increase awareness of brownfields and the tools this program provides;

- A focus on public health and equity through specific outreach to communities that are nearest to the existing brownfields as well as local public health advocates; and
- Clear communication of progress through local media and direct outreach to community groups, ensuring that engagement provides necessary information and opportunities for the public to participate.

3. Planning Public Involvement Activities

Project public involvement was initiated with an announcement at a public meeting on September 12, 2023, that was held for a brownfield coalition grant led by the City of The Dalles. The primary goal of this public meeting was to share an update about the brownfield assessment work that was completed as part of The Dalles' grant. Following this update, MCEDD made an announcement and took questions about the MCEDD brownfield coalition assessment grant.

The MCEDD Coalition will work with community partner organizations as part of a Regional Brownfield Committee (RBC) to ensure that public involvement represents stakeholders in the project area and provides a transparent public process with opportunities for community input throughout the project.

3.1 Brownfield Advisory Committee and Regional Brownfield Committee

A Core Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC) and a larger Regional Brownfield Committee (RBC) will be assembled. The Core BAC will include MCEDD, CCHC, Wasco County, Sherman County, Hood River County, Skamania County, and Klickitat County as well as a representative from Business Oregon and a representative from Oregon Regional Solutions. This core committee will allow the project's partners to coordinate planning efforts for the assessment grant. This group will meet as needed to keep the assessment project moving forward.

In addition to this smaller committee, a larger RBC comprised of members of the Core BAC and stakeholders from the community partner organizations listed below will be assembled. The RBC will provide input on project direction, advise on business owner outreach strategies, and contribute to conversations about area-wide planning activities. The RBC will meet over the course of the project at a minimum of once per year, including a kick-off meeting, site prioritization criteria review meeting(s), and two meetings to apprise the Core BAC of project efforts, successes, and support requests. The schedule in Section 3.7 has outlined five meetings. It is anticipated that at least some of these meetings will be virtual. The following organizations have been invited to participate in the RBC. Additional partners may be added as necessary to ensure the RBC is representative of the community.

- Skamania Economic Development Council
- Columbia Gorge Community College Small Business Development Center
- Washington Small Business Development Center
- Port of Klickitat
- Port of The Dalles
- Washington Department of Ecology
- Washington Department of Commerce

- Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
- Comunidades
- The Next Door, Inc.
- Washington Gorge Action Programs
- Mid-Columbia Community Action Council
- Klickitat County Public Health
- North Central Public Health District
- Hood River County Health Department
- Skamania County Public Health
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
- Oregon State Brownfields Program
- Business Oregon
- Oregon Regional Solutions

3.2 Brownfield Fact Sheets

The Coalition will develop fact sheets as an informational tool for stakeholders, partner organizations, and property owners in the community. The purpose of these fact sheets will be to define the term “brownfield,” communicate the environmental and public health implications of brownfields and convey the benefits of participation in the program. The fact sheets will be available on MCEDD’s brownfield webpage, will be distributed to property owners during business outreach, and will be available at public involvement events. They will also be promoted through Coalition partners’ communication channels.

3.3 Brownfield Coalition Webpage

MCEDD will host a webpage that will act as an information repository for the program. The program is committed to making all information accessible to the public throughout this project, and all hardcopy outreach materials will be available digitally on this webpage. The webpage will contain links to Coalition partners’ websites and, conversely, the Coalition partners will link to the MCEDD brownfield webpage on their own websites. This will contribute to the greatest possible exposure for the program.

3.4 Public Meetings

There will be five public meetings throughout the grant period. They will be held in the third quarter of FY 2024, the first quarter of FY 2025, and the fourth quarters of FY 2025, FY 2026, and FY 2027. The purpose of these meetings is to solicit feedback from affected partners at distinct stages of the project process to address community concerns, educate a broader audience about the benefits of brownfields redevelopment, and increase community participation rates in site assessments and clean-up efforts. We anticipate some of these meetings being virtual.

3.5 Public Outreach

Representatives of the Coalition will select one or two community meetings per year hosted by relevant community organizations such as the Mid-Columbia Association of Realtors, area Chambers of Commerce, Kiwanis, or Rotary to raise public awareness of the project. Feedback from these presentations will provide the Coalition critical insight and direction for further public

engagement and connect the Coalition with property owners who might be interested in participating in the program. These meetings will be in addition to semi-annual updates to the boards of community partner organizations. We anticipate some of these meetings being virtual.

3.6 Press Releases

At key junctures throughout the project timeline, the Coalition will issue press releases to local radio stations and news resources, including *Columbia Gorge News*, *Columbia Community Connection News*, *Times-Journal*, *Skamania County Pioneer*, and the *Goldendale Sentinel* to encourage project coverage that will reach residents without internet access.

3.7 Schedule

EPA Fiscal Quarter	Activity
FY 2024 Q1 (Oct – Dec)	Core BAC Project Team Kickoff Meeting
FY 2024 Q2 (Jan – March)	Core BAC Meeting Develop Brownfield Factsheets Brownfield Coalition Website published
FY 2024 Q3 (April – June)	Core BAC Meeting RBC Meeting/Public Meeting
FY 2024 Q4 (July – Sept)	Core BAC Meeting
FY 2025 Q1	RBC Meeting/Public Meeting
FY 2025 Q2	
FY 2025 Q3	Core BAC Meeting
FY 2025 Q4	RBC/Public Meeting
FY 2026 Q1	Core BAC Meeting
FY 2026 Q2	
FY 2026 Q3	Core BAC Meeting
FY 2026 Q4	RBC/Public Meeting
FY 2027 Q1	Core BAC Meeting
FY 2027 Q2	
FY 2027 Q3	Core BAC Meeting
FY 2027 Q4	RBC/Public Meeting