

Report on the Colorado Community Brownfields Workshop

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About 30 people gathered in west Denver on Saturday, September 22, 2007 for the Colorado Community Brownfields Workshop. Convened at the offices of Making Connections-Denver (MCD), the day-long workshop was co-sponsored by the Voluntary Cleanup Advisory Board (VCAB), MCD, the Front Range Economic Strategy Center (FRESC), and CPEO. Participants heard strong presentations from speakers from the U.S. EPA Region 8, the State of Colorado, and the regional Technical Assistance to Brownfields Communities program. But I was most impressed by the local talent: speakers from the local community.

Steve Harley of the VCAB provided maps and photos describing properties participating in Colorado's Voluntary Clean-Up Program. He is typical of a growing number of computer-savvy local activists who are adapting the full range of mapping resources and tools to understand environmental conditions in their communities. Steve established the workshop website, <http://www.cocobrownfields.org>, which will soon post the day's presentations as well as other emerging information about Colorado brownfields.



Steve Harley

John Yelenick, a community activist *and* real estate professional, provided an innovative description of real estate covenants, from the perspective of residential real estate sellers, buyers, agents, and appraisers. If a property has underlying contamination from an off-site source, the property is legally encumbered. That is, there is a

responsibility to notify. Usually one hears about real estate covenants from the perspective of polluters, developers, or regulators.

The next two community speakers described two strategies for ensuring that neighborhoods benefit from brownfields projects: ownership and leverage.

Local businessman Rogelio Rodriguez described the Osage Mercado, a cultural marketplace planned for three acres, with low levels of arsenic in the soil, adjacent to the 10th and Osage Light Rail Station. The city of Denver has received a \$200,000 brownfields grant to address the property. The Osage Mercado coalition is a non-profit organization that hopes to obtain the site from the city and partner with a private developer. Rodriguez was only able to participate briefly in the workshop, because he was running the two-day open-air Osage Mercado festival on the site.



Rogelio Rodriguez

Robin Kniech of FRESC described how a community coalition, the Campaign for Responsible Development, negotiated a community benefits package with local government and one of the developers, Cherokee Denver, of the former Gates Rubber factory, located at another light rail station. Kniech described how the coalition conducted research, organized, lobbied, and negotiated for better jobs, more affordable housing, a more attractive, accessible development, and a more complete cleanup. She said the key to the community's success was its ability to approach local government and the developer with a single voice, not as distinct interest groups with conflicting priorities.

Finally, the VCAB's Tim Lopez—the driving force behind the workshop—explained how the VCAB leveraged access to environmental information, technical assistance, and persistent oversight to ensure a sound cleanup of not only the Gates

property itself, but of impacted adjacent neighborhoods. He called upon the state of Colorado to institutionalize the community involvement process that has worked so well at the Gates-Cherokee voluntary cleanup site.

The workshop packed a lot of information into one workshop, but I believe that we laid the groundwork for additional community influence in both the development and cleanup of Denver-area brownfields.