



## Building Municipal Capacity for Brownfields Redevelopment in Wellston, Missouri and Emeryville, California: A Case Study

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### Executive Summary

Although brownfields redevelopment is occurring in a wide variety of communities, most work is being done and attention is being given to the revitalization of central cities. The following two case studies are unique examples of small, inner-ring municipalities where a great deal of brownfields redevelopment is underway. The City of Emeryville, California, which is in the booming San Francisco Bay area, has struggled with the legacy of a heavy industrial past. The City of Wellston, Missouri, was devastated by post-World War II population loss. Their redevelopment has been stymied by environmental contamination and continuing urban sprawl. Despite the noteworthy differences in their locations, lessons can be learned by comparing and contrasting the redevelopment of Wellston and Emeryville.

Over the past 25 years, Emeryville has transformed itself from the “armpit” of the Bay Area into an important hi-tech and retail area. This has been achieved primarily through the efforts of the municipal government. Staff learned about brownfields redevelopment as they went through the process. They have become quite savvy about how to facilitate private development in their community. In some cases, the City of Emeryville has also served as the developer, taking on a significant amount of risk. Gone are the paint, pesticide, and steel manufacturers, yet Emeryville remains a business-oriented town, as it has always been.

The City of Wellston is not as far along with its redevelopment as the City of Emeryville. Although much planning and remediation has been completed, the construction of industrial parks and other major development has yet to begin. Compared to Emeryville, Wellston today is the furthest thing from trendy, however, historically, Wellston was the place to be. It began as a country escape for the wealthy and later became a shopping hub for the middle-class. By the 1980s, Wellston was devastated by an outflow of employers and residents. The burden of extensive contamination was left on an impoverished community. By partnering with St. Louis County, which has taken the lead role, the City of Wellston has seen significant progress toward redevelopment and renewed investment in the community's future.

## Emeryville Case Study

Emeryville is a small town located between Oakland and Berkeley, California. Looking west from the Emeryville Marina, one can see the skyscrapers of San Francisco just beyond the bay. Today, the population of the 1.22 square miles of Emeryville is 6,882 (U.S. Census, 2000). The retail sector in Emeryville is booming. Viewed from the congested highway that once bypassed Emeryville without a single exit ramp, an enormous red and white “EMERYVILLE” mural on the side of the new movie theater lets passersby know that the city has a new image. While city leaders still pride themselves on running a “business-oriented town,” Emeryville is no longer the industrial “armpit” of the Bay Area. Emeryville began as a low-tax, unregulated haven for polluting, malodorous industries. Most of the city’s brownfields have been cleaned up and only one card club remains, the others having been put out of business by a casino in a neighboring town. Pixar Animation Studios and Chiron Corporation, a homegrown biotech company, have developed campuses in Emeryville, which has added a hi-tech dimension to the city’s new reputation.

### The Location Factor

Emeryville is in a prime location for attracting businesses. Their brownfield sites are attractive for redevelopment because they have access to various modes of transportation. The city is at the crossroads of Interstates 80, 580, and 880 and at the foot of the Bay Bridge, which leads to San Francisco. It is also convenient to two major airports. With the many well-educated, technologically savvy people living in the Bay Area, employers also consider Emeryville to have access to an excellent workforce. The nearby University of California-Berkeley, a major research institution, is another locational asset.

The prime location of Emeryville combined with the high demand for developable land in the Bay Area make vacant land in Emeryville exceptionally attractive for redevelopment. The cost of land and housing in the Bay Area is high compared to most other areas in the U.S. A nonprofit housing developer, Resources for Community Development, describes the affordable housing situation in the Bay Area as a crisis. Both non-profit and for-profit developers have begun looking at brownfields in the Bay Area as opportunities. Not only have Emeryville’s abandoned brownfield sites provided opportunities for residential development, the multi-acre sites have attracted big box retail stores and campus-style business developments to the community. Retailers viewed the Bay Area as underserved - an untapped retail market. The corporations that were looking to build campuses saw the benefits for their employees of locating near San Francisco rather than on the edge of the region. Emeryville was ripe for redevelopment.

### History of Emeryville

The City of Emeryville was named for its founder, Joseph Stickney Emery, who was a businessman (Odoms, 2003). In 1859 Emery bought a large tract of land in unincorporated Alameda County. Emeryville was created as a place to do business and escape taxation and regulation. By the 1890s, Emery’s property was home to a horse racing track, two neighborhoods with 1,200 total residents, and a district with slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants (Greenwich, 2003).” A movement began to incorporate Emeryville, which “worried businessmen, who did not want to be part of a municipality they could not control.” With Emeryville’s incorporation in 1896, residents elected a slate of pro-business trustees and the manager of the Judson Iron Works as mayor. So began Emeryville’s pro-business orientation.

The Emery railroad station serviced the Judson Iron Works, which was Alameda County’s first large industry, according to the city’s “Revitalization Plan for Emeryville’s Historic Center”. Emery Station was originally a transfer point for two train lines. The connections to the railroad were key in attracting many more industries to Emeryville. Canneries, food processing plants, oil refineries, and manufacturers of paint, rubber, linoleum, and pesticides came to Emeryville. By the mid-1930s, over 100 manufacturing plants were located in Emeryville. Nancy Smith with the Emeryville Historical Society said, “It’s important to understand that Emeryville exists because of the railroad tracks. Industry located in and grew up around Emeryville’s transportation corridors.” Rail spurs were once said to be as common as streets.

In 1911, the State of California shut down all horse racing, including the racetrack in Emeryville. In its place, off-track betting and slot machines became popular. With Prohibition in the 1920s, Emeryville's residents turned to bootlegging. Earl Warren, District Attorney of Alameda County in the 1920s and 30s, found many activities in Emeryville to be illegal or, at the very least, undesirable. Warren dubbed Emeryville the "rottenest city on the Pacific Coast" (Greenwich, 2003). Emeryville is one of few towns in California that has always allowed cardrooms for gambling. Even though many card rooms closed after the closing of the racetrack, which was the town's main attraction, card rooms flourished in Emeryville through their heyday in the 1940s and beyond.

Industry boomed in Emeryville through the 1940s. Up to 25,000 people were employed there in the 1950s (Dayrit, 2002). The jobs drew new residents to town. The residential population had grown to around 3,000 in 1960. By building on top of landfill in San Francisco Bay, the city increased in size by 250 acres (Dayrit, 2002).

Beginning in the 1970s, many U.S. manufacturing companies began to relocate to other areas of the country and to foreign countries where it was cheaper to operate. Emeryville's industrial decline began in 1978 and hit the city hard throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Of 385 acres zoned industrial/commercial, 20 percent were left vacant and 41 percent became underutilized. There was known contamination on 55 percent of these parcels (O'Keeffe slides). Along with the loss of industry came a devastating loss of municipal tax revenue.

During the economic downturn in Emeryville, initial attempts at planning for the city's future failed, said Howard Greenwich, Director of Research for the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE). The city then hired a planning firm to write an updated general plan, which the city adopted in 1987. Although this plan reflected a strong community vision, the city did not implement it, explained Greenwich, who is a primary author of a research paper entitled "Behind the Boomtown: Growth and Urban Redevelopment in Emeryville." City officials instead decided to reinvent Emeryville. The city identified niches that it could fill - retail and hi-tech - and the Redevelopment Agency began working to carry out that vision. "It was redevelop or die. It wasn't a choice," said attorney Robert Doty of Cox, Castle, and Nicholson, who has assisted the City of Emeryville.

### Characteristics of Emeryville Today

With 6,882 residents as of the 2000 Census, today Emeryville is a small town within populous Alameda County. Many of the new people who have moved into Emeryville are single or couples without children. The resulting average household size is only 1.7 people. University of California-Berkeley students comprise 10 percent of the population (Weinstein, 1997). An issue of concern for local residents is the quality of the public schools. "The schools in Emeryville have been terrible for a long time," Smith said. "When people decide to have children, if they can afford it, they typically move elsewhere." The median household income of \$45,359 is higher than the national average, but well below that of Alameda County. Emeryville reflects the racial composition of the county. Forty five percent of the population is white. There are many African American, Asian, and Hispanic residents, although there are 10 percent less Hispanic residents than the Alameda County average. Most of Emeryville's low-income residents live on the east side of the railroad tracks, away from the spectacular bay views and near brownfields and what remains of Emeryville's operating heavy industry (Dayrit, 2002).

The City of Emeryville has a lot going for it. During rush hour, the line of cars that are waiting to exit at Emeryville backs onto the freeway. Traffic congestion is a visible sign that people are moving to Emeryville, which has become very trendy with its gourmet grocery store and the booming construction of "lifestyle lofts." The visible reminders of the city's history have for the most part been deconstructed, transformed, or blended into

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the city's new image. Emeryville has succeeded in capitalizing on its location and making it a desirable place (for those who can afford it) to live, work, and shop. With all the new retail in town, however, the city has had to significantly increase its public safety budget in order to deal with crime that typically is associated with retail. Last year there was a bombing at Chiron's headquarters for which an animal rights group claimed responsibility. Despite such public safety challenges and the dramatic physical alteration of the community, some residents say there remains a strong sense of community. "I like the fact that Emeryville is a small town," said resident artist Sharon Wilchar. "I mean that not only in the physical sense, but also in its feel as a small town and the sense of community it engenders" (Emeryville, 2004). While the community of Emeryville has many assets, some issues of concern for Emeryville residents include air quality, traffic congestion, gentrification, and lack of affordable housing.

## Local Government Structure

Emeryville has a city council-city manager form of government. The Emeryville city council has five members who are elected by residents every four years. Every year the council selects a mayor and vice-mayor from among the council members. The city council appoints a city manager, who is the administrative head of the municipal government and also serves as the Executive Director of the Redevelopment Agency. The Emeryville Redevelopment Agency (RA) is the governmental body responsible for directing and overseeing the goals and objectives of the city's redevelopment plans, which were adopted in 1976 and 1987. The RA's jurisdiction covers 95 percent of the city. The city council acts as the Redevelopment Agency Board.

The City of Emeryville has 25 committees that residents and stakeholders can get involved with, including the Housing and Traffic Committees. The city also sets up task forces for special projects, such as the Brownfields Pilot Program Task Force (City of Emeryville).

There is little relationship between Emeryville and Alameda County. The Redevelopment Manager of Alameda County, Eileen Dalton, said that the only county involvement in Emeryville is through the regional Water Quality Control Board and the Environmental Health Department. The brownfields redevelopment process is driven by the city. It is the city that has taken the lead on land assembly, remediation, and working with developers. According to Emeryville's Director of Economic Development & Housing, Patrick O'Keeffe, the county pays little attention to Emeryville, which is a small percent of the county's total area. Emeryville tends to be overshadowed by neighboring Oakland (O'Keeffe, 2004).

## Facilitating Brownfields Redevelopment

The Emeryville Redevelopment Authority, which gets its authority from the California Community Redevelopment Law, has several powers that it has utilized in order to facilitate brownfields redevelopment. The RA is responsible for planning. They have set out land use goals in plans such as their initial 1976 "Emeryville Redevelopment Plan." The RA then can assemble land using their power to acquire property. The RA has used the power of condemnation, but only rarely. The property where the bustling Bay Street shopping mall now exists was formerly a pigment factory. The owners didn't want to improve their property, nor sell, so the city used eminent domain. For that site, there was too much financial and regulatory risk for a private developer to be interested, so the RA served as the developer. The city has also assembled land in order to then sell it to a private developer. On property that the RA has acquired, they can perform environmental assessments and remediation as needed.

The RA plays several other roles in order to assist the redevelopment process. Almost all redevelopment projects in Emeryville have had environmental issues. The RA has developed relationships with regulators at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), California EPA, and county health department. In the original wave of redevelopment, the city worked with these agencies to get sites through the remediation process. The RA has received grants and loans, some of which they have in turn given to small property owners who might not otherwise be able to finance the remediation.

“Hand holding” is another important role that the RA has played. A city staff member is assigned as project manager to assist developers through investigation and remediation, to help them see that there will be a successful end to the remediation process and, ultimately, to help make the projects work. Staff member Ignacio Dayrit developed a tool that is very useful for potential developers - OSIRIS, an online geographic information systems (GIS) database that displays parcel information, including environmental assessments and reports. Consultants helped with developing this tool as well. This is an advanced application of GIS that most municipalities cannot afford. Emeryville’s GIS capabilities are highly advanced, particularly for a municipality of its size.

Perhaps the most crucial steps that the city has taken to facilitate city-wide revitalization have been transportation-related improvements. Historically, Emeryville only had one major street running east-west and one going north-south. The city has improved traffic circulation within Emeryville by constructing new arterials and adding a second bridge and a pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks. They have also improved access to nearby interstates. In 1993, an Amtrak station opened in Emeryville. The station serves as the point of arrival for San Francisco and is one of the busiest stations in the nation. The city was the co-developer on that project. The city also subsidizes a free bus service called Emery-Go-Round that circulates within the city and brings people to and from the nearest Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station. O’Keeffe believes that “a small percent of the redevelopment could have occurred without the city’s leadership, but the infrastructure improvements were necessary before most of the redevelopment could happen.” Also, he explained that the general brownfields climate has changed as experience has been gained and legal limitations have been placed on liability. “Now you would be seeing more happening (inevitably),” he said. Transportation improvements have helped to connect Emeryville’s business, retail, and residential areas and have made Emeryville more accessible and attractive to visitors.

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## Accomplishments

The city’s final report for the Brownfields Pilot Project, entitled “Brownfields Redevelopment Demystified,” highlights all of the brownfields redevelopment projects that have involved city assistance as of 2002. “Behind the Boomtown” was published a year later and includes a description of five key redevelopment projects. They include:

- East Baybridge shopping center
  - o Now: Big box shopping center
  - o Then: Rail terminal land
- Chiron Corporation
  - o Now: Laboratory and corporate campus
  - o Then: Transformer maintenance and petroleum research
- Pixar Animation Studios
  - o Now: Corporate campus
  - o Then: Del Monte foods warehouse and Pepsi Cola bottling plant site
- Bay-Shellmound project
  - o Now: Transportation circulation improvements that enabled development in the south bayfront, including hotels and IKEA furniture store
  - o Then: Judson Steel Factory and other heavy industry.

- Bay Street shopping center
  - o Now: Upscale retail center and restaurants
  - o Then: Significant industrial activity, including a lime and sulfur plant, an insecticide and spray plant; steel storage

Emeryville has accomplished a great deal through their redevelopment efforts. The table below quantifies Emeryville's accomplishments from 1995-2002.

Housing Units	534 completed 311 under construction
Low and moderate income units	214 completed 62 under construction
Sq. ft. of office (new or redeveloped)	3.6 million
Sq. ft. of retail	830,000
Hotel rooms	488
Estimated additional jobs	8,400
Total value of development	\$513 million
Estimated tax increment	\$5.4 million

*Source: Brownfields Redevelopment Demystified, City of Emeryville, 2002*

The city has been well rewarded for its efforts. Approximately \$5.4 million in tax increment is generated per year, which is more revenue per person than any other RA in the Bay Area has generated (Greenwich, 2003). Emeryville's sales tax revenues grew by 51 percent from 1990-2002 (Greenwich, 2003). The city's General Fund grew by 63 percent, adjusted for inflation, between 1990 and 2001 (Greenwich, 2003).

Emeryville is also a three-time Phoenix Award winner, most recently in 2003 for the Bay Street Project. The Phoenix Award is a prestigious national brownfields award.

### Capacity

The City of Emeryville today has an incredible amount of capacity in terms of staff time and expertise to facilitate brownfields redevelopment. The city has 135 employees, 14 of whom spend most of their time working on redevelopment. The city also uses consultants to supplement their staff. The Director of Economic Development & Housing, Patrick O'Keeffe, is an experienced professional who worked in redevelopment with the City of Concord, California before coming to work with the City of Emeryville in 1995. For some major redevelopment projects that required a lot of staff time, Emeryville has been able to get developers to pay for the staff time that the city dedicates to their project. In this way, the city is able to dedicate staff time toward moving these redevelopment projects forward in a timely (and therefore cost efficient) manner for the developer. From 1990-2001, Emeryville spent nearly \$4,000 per resident on redevelopment efforts (Greenwich, 2003).

**Funding:** A major source of funding for Emeryville's brownfields revitalization has been tax increment financing (TIF). In California, it is very common for redevelopment authorities to utilize TIF. Early successes generated TIF money that was then invested in additional development.

In addition, city staff have pursued every grant they could find, according to Robert Doty. Federal and state EPA grants have been used for environmental cleanup. Funds for housing related improvements have also been obtained from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the State Housing Finance Agency. Other sources of revenue that the RA has taken advantage of are the sale of bonds, loans from the city, and interest earned on investments of RA funds. The money that the City of Emeryville is able to put toward brownfield redevelopment has greatly increased the city's capacity for brownfields redevelopment.

**Building capacity:** The City of Emeryville has built capacity to do brownfields redevelopment through the experience that they have gained. "Knowledge has been developed through experience with the brownfields program," O'Keefe said. He also said that the number of staff that works on redevelopment has not increased over the years. While the city apparently has not gained capacity through increasing the number of city employees, their existing employees have built capacity within the organization. They have learned who are key resource people at various government agencies and have played an important role in coordinating them. Another way in which the city has developed expertise through experience is with GIS, as discussed above. They could have opted to have a private company create and maintain their GIS system. Through their involvement with developing this tool, the city understands the system and can build upon it in the future according to their needs. An outside observer, Doty, agrees that the city has built capacity from within. "They have used lawyers and consultants, but they have developed savvy over time," he said. It is that savvy that will enable the City of Emeryville to continue its successful redevelopment well into the future.

The association with University of California-Berkeley has proven to be an asset in building the city's capacity as well, as O'Keefe indicated:

The staff are talented and interested in working here in a place where a lot is going on. The city has a strong connection with the university. Staff speak to university classes. We have hired interns as staff members. They bring energy and ideas.

While the city has tapped into University resources, they have recognized the importance of their internal resources as well. O'Keefe noted that "Emeryville is located in the middle of an economic engine. The politicians have sophistication about redevelopment." The knowledge and experience that local politicians can bring to the table is helpful, but only if they can come to agreement on an idea and move forward with it. Emeryville has been fortunate in this way. O'Keefe said:

The council has been stable over the years. With five members, the small size of the council means that they can get things done quickly. Three members have been in office since the late 80s. The councilmembers are consistent in their vision. There has been sustained political commitment.

O'Keefe emphasized that this sustained political commitment has been the key to Emeryville's brownfields redevelopment success.

**Community Involvement:** While Emeryville politicians have shared a common vision for the future of the city, there has been some question as to whether this vision is shared by other Emeryville residents. The EBASE report concludes that the community's vision for Emeryville's future, as articulated in the 1987 General Plan, "was not fully realized." The report asserts that modifications to the plan helped to get redevelopment deals done, but potential negative impacts of the modified plan, such as traffic congestion and changing community character, were overlooked.

To the city's credit, they did hire a consulting company to prepare a public participation plan for the Emeryville Pilot Project. Some of the specific public participation activities that the city planned to undertake included distributing progress bulletins, appointing a community advisory task force, and conducting at least one public brownfields workshop. This plan was not particularly ambitious. Along the spectrum of public participation methods, Emeryville is closer to "less public involvement" than more (Bonner, 2003). Emeryville's process involved the exchange of information and also opportunities for the public to provide non-binding advice or recommendations. The city did plan for and dedicate some funds to community

involvement. When asked how the city determines what residents want, O’Keeffe said, “It is a small community. It’s easy for the community to call or e-mail the council.” Although some neighborhood meetings and hearings are held, it appears that the impetus is generally upon residents to contact the council about their views.

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**Wellston has been dubbed a poster child for brownfields redevelopment. The St. Louis County Economic Council has framed it as a model partnership that is building capacity.**

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When Emeryville residents were vocal about proposed redevelopment projects, their input resulted in the project being more beneficial to the local community. For most redevelopment projects, the city and developers signed a written “development agreement” that documented each party’s commitments. An example given in the EBASE report is the development of the Chiron world headquarters. The Chiron development agreement included an estimated \$27 million that Chiron would pay in fees, constructing a public park, and mitigating traffic impacts. Chiron made other concessions to address community concerns, such as reducing the height of their planned building. According to the report, “Long-time city Councilmember Nora Davis suggested that it was the involvement of the community in the development process that resulted in such extensive benefits.” This is but one example of what vocal residents can achieve when they are engaged in the development process.

Given residents’ power to shape and even to derail development projects, the City of Emeryville and other local governments would be wise to provide even more opportunities for meaningful public involvement. The City of Emeryville describes their development and implementation of brownfields strategies as “a model to be emulated in other cities.” Based on their minimal community involvement plan and concerns that community input was disregarded in favor of a new vision, Emeryville’s brownfields redevelopment is not a great model of community involvement. The City of Emeryville might benefit from the recommendations of Charles Bartsch of the Northeast Midwest Institute from his report “Community Involvement in Brownfields Redevelopment.” After examining more than 100 brownfields projects over the past ten years, he concludes that “a meaningful, inclusive process of stakeholder involvement has proven to be an important factor in the successful redevelopment and reuse of brownfield sites...As approaches to brownfield redevelopment evolve, the role of community participation is playing a larger and larger part.” By increasing community involvement, the City of Emeryville could further strengthen their capacity for brownfields redevelopment. The tension surrounding the modification of the 1987 General Plan could be lessened by improved communication between the city and stakeholders about this issue. As Bartsch writes, the more community members know, the more they can contribute to the successful redevelopment of brownfields in their community.

## Lessons Learned

Over the past 20 years, the City of Emeryville has built expertise through the process of brownfields redevelopment. Local government officials have directed the process and city staff have done much of the work. One key to this city’s success was that elected officials decided upon a vision for the city’s future and empowered the staff to work toward it, rather than changing course or endlessly fighting amongst themselves. The city has built their expertise while simultaneously obtaining funding. For these reasons, the city has been successful in turning brownfields into a higher and better use. The City of Emeryville is equipped to continue facilitating redevelopment in the future. In short, the city’s brownfields redevelopment efforts can be seen as sustainable. If new brownfield sites are created, the city will have the capacity to deal with them. Through creating a new plan for the city and becoming savvy about brownfields, the city has strengthened their planning, public works, and development abilities, which they will certainly continue to employ even after the major contamination has been dealt with.

Concerns about the City of Emeryville’s redevelopment process include their weak public involvement effort. By at times disregarding residents’ input, or at least being perceived as having done so, the city lost the confidence of some residents. Better communication is needed between the city and its residents in order to repair the relationship and bring residents more

fully into the process of shaping the future of their community. Hamish Reid, a resident of nearby Oakland who worked in Emeryville for many years, said, “The city ruthlessly and successfully became a hi-tech and retail area. Emeryville has staked its future economically on these two things.” The City of Emeryville has indeed staked its future on its ability to fill this niche. The dollar signs and other signs point to a healthy economic future for the City of Emeryville.

## **Wellston Case Study**

Over the past 40 years, the City of St. Louis and many of its inner-ring suburbs have declined, showing symptoms of abandonment, physical decay, and poverty. The City of Wellston, which is located in St. Louis County, Missouri, shares a border with the City of St. Louis. Wellston is a prime example of an inner-ring community that is burdened with complex urban problems but has little capacity to manage them. During the Reagan Administration, Wellston was reputed to be on the Administration’s list of the top five worst cities in America. Since that time, \$74 million has been poured into the revitalization of Wellston (Noonan, March 2004). In the St. Louis region, Wellston has been dubbed a poster child for brownfields redevelopment, which is taking place through what the lead partner, the St. Louis County Economic Council, has framed as a model partnership that is building capacity. To date, a significant amount of planning, pre-development, infill housing development, and economic development cornerstone projects have been completed. Although much progress has been made in terms of the economic development of the community, little, if any, success has been achieved in developing a model partnership that is building local capacity.

Wellston is one of 91 municipalities in St. Louis County, which is located just west of St. Louis City. Wellston and several other inner ring communities, both in Missouri and Illinois, have typical urban problems with a suburban twist: less capacity. Today the population of Wellston is 2,460 (U.S. Census, 2000). The city’s population has declined significantly over the years, as have municipal revenues. According to Assistant to the Mayor Karl Reid, the city is financially strapped and struggling to survive day to day (Reid, 2004). Wellston was once known as the shopping hub of St. Louis and “one of the most progressive and active business centers” (McCune, 1951). Fifty years ago the Wellston Loop was one of the busiest transfer points in St. Louis for buses and streetcars. With the decline of manufacturing, the rapid post-World War II suburbanization of the St. Louis region, and white flight, Wellston spiraled into decline.

Although many decaying homes and vacant commercial buildings remain in the City of Wellston, there are many visible indicators of renewed investment. Infill housing development is occurring throughout Wellston. The new Audrey Estates homes, which are the first homes in Wellston to sell for more than \$100,000, have generated much excitement within the city (St. Louis County). Most of the industrial buildings that were eyesores for decades have been demolished or renovated. Although planning and a great deal of pre-development work have taken place in Wellston, the city’s redevelopment is not as far along as Emeryville. Brownfield sites in Wellston are in various stages of development. Tons of clean, brown dirt have been spread across several acres of a site that is awaiting construction. Other sites are in the planning, remediation, infrastructure improvement, and construction stages. According to Beth Noonan, Wellston Project Manager with the St. Louis County Economic Council, “We’re right on the precipice of doing a lot in Wellston.” The county anticipates that for several projects the pre-development work will soon be complete and development will begin.

### **Locational Advantages**

Wellston is part of the urban fabric of St. Louis much like Emeryville is to the East Bay. Although the city has no waterfront property and lacks the views of gorgeous hills, from an economic development standpoint, there are several advantages to Wellston’s location. The city is located near major highways and not far from St. Louis’ main airport, Lambert International. The region’s first light rail line has a station in the heart of Wellston near the major redevelopment sites, which would make future jobs accessible to employees. Although many Wellston residents are undereducated, potential employers could see the advantage of Wellston’s central location within the eight-county region and the potential for attracting a well-educated workforce from throughout the region. St. Louis does not have the high-tech reputation that the San Francisco Bay does, but St. Louis is marketing itself as the heart of the “Biobelt” of biotechnology research and development. Like the City of

Emeryville, Wellston is located near a premier research institution, Washington University. In fact, there are several universities and colleges in the St. Louis region. Considering the vast amount of knowledge and resources available through these institutions of higher learning, they have done little to engage with the struggling Wellston community.

Sharing a boundary with the City of St. Louis is an advantage, because the city also has a stake in seeing Wellston thrive again. Wellston also adjoins University City, another inner-ring community. In the past 15 years, the University City Loop has become one of the most popular areas in St. Louis for dining, boutique shopping, and entertainment. The success of the University City Loop has proven to be contagious, spreading across the border into the City of St. Louis. Wellston has the potential to benefit from this success as well.

The cost of land and housing in Wellston is generally lower than in Emeryville. The St. Louis and San Francisco regions both need more affordable housing, but the problem is less pronounced in St. Louis. There has been no concerted effort in the St. Louis region to discourage the sprawl into surrounding greenfield sites. While there has been renewed interest in city living in St. Louis, Wellston is one of many inner-ring suburbs that are far from having a hot real estate market. There are thousands of acres of vacant land scattered throughout the St. Louis urban core. It is the size of Wellston's brownfield sites that makes them outstanding opportunities for redevelopment. The two planned industrial parks are 15 and 24 acres respectively. Although St. Louis County currently has over 6.6 million square feet of industrial space available for lease, when the land assembly and remediation of Wellston's brownfields are completed, the large, development-ready site will likely be quite attractive (St. Louis County).

There are many financial incentives tied to the City of Wellston that may make the city an attractive location for development and investment. Some of these include:

- Federal Empowerment Zone
  - o The Greater St. Louis Regional Empowerment Zone was established in 1998. Employment tax credits are available to businesses located in the zone that have employees living in the zone. The zone includes Wellston St. Louis, and East St. Louis.
- Federal Enterprise Community
  - o In 1994, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded \$3 million to the St. Louis Enterprise Community area, which includes Wellston.
- State of Missouri Enterprise Zone
- St. Louis 2004 Sustainable Neighborhood
  - o As a designated Sustainable Neighborhood, a group of Wellston leaders and stakeholders formed the Leadership Team of the Wellston Sustainable Neighborhoods group. They received leadership training from the Coro Leadership Center-St. Louis and developed a plan for the future of the community. Wellston is now eligible for grants offered by Sustainable Neighborhoods.
- Federal Brownfield Demonstration Pilot Project
  - o Wellston got into the brownfields ballgame early when it received an EPA Brownfields Demonstration Pilot grant. Millions of dollars in EPA funding followed this initial grant.
- Southwestern Bell Digital Services Park
  - o Southwestern Bell has provided in-kind services to the Wellston area.

Wellston was profiled as an "environmental justice success story" in a 2002 EPA report. It is likely that Wellston will be nominated for a Phoenix Award in the near future.

## History of Wellston

Until the 1830s, the area that is now known as Wellston was considered to be wilderness. The Kienlen family settled the land in 1837 and eventually sold a portion of the land to Erastus Wells, a prosperous transportation magnate. When Wells

designed a narrow gauge railway from the intersection of Grand and Olive in St. Louis City to the City of Normandy, he built a station near his estate in order to be able to access the city from his country home. His son, Rolla Wells, later divided the property into the Wells Homestead Subdivision. The small community that developed there became known as Wellston, in honor of Erastus Wells. People moved to the new community of Wellston “to escape the noise and pollution of the city” (Trampe, 2003). During the summers, people would flock to Wellston to have picnics, enjoy the opera, and visit nearby country clubs.

By 1905, there were enough businesses, factories, and homes to support the opening of a First National Bank (McCune, 1951). In 1906, Herbert Appleton Wagner moved his growing manufacturing business from the City of St. Louis to a 13.5 acre site in Wellston. Company officials noted that Wellston had excellent railroad and streetcar access as well as an abundance of available land (Hurley, 1997). The Wagner Electric Manufacturing Company focused on producing motors, transformers, and automotive equipment. After World War II, Wagner experienced a boom and expanded the Wellston plant. The 1940s were considered to be Wellston’s heyday (Brown).

Wellston was incorporated in 1949 as a third class city. Business at Wagner Electric continued to boom. By 1953, Wagner Electric had 8,000 employees (St. Louis, 1984). Manufacturers of lumber, metals, chemicals, and machinery also located in Wellston (Johnson, 1971). Black and white photos of Wellston show Easton Avenue thriving. Finance companies, offices, and retail shops spanned several blocks. A 1950s booklet about Wellston described the city in the following manner:

The Wellston district has become one of the most active of all of the St. Louis outlying trading centers. The price of real estate in this business “hot spot” has increased to many times its former value. Fine buildings have been erected, excellent stocks of goods installed and the best merchandising experts in the country, namely the chain store people, consider that Wellston is high on their list of desirable locations. It has excellent churches and schools and bids fair to continue its march of progress.

Contrary to optimistic predictions, Wellston’s so-called march of progress came to an abrupt halt.

Until 1940, Wellston was a blue-collar town populated almost exclusively by working-class white people. A 1940-1960 study of Wellston found that the population was changing “as the small number of non-white persons increases and the whites move out.” The report states that “The effects of the “newcomers” became apparent: the number of whites decreased by 17.9 percent, while the number of non-whites increased 21.6 percent.” Wellston’s demographics shifted even more dramatically during the 1960s, when the percentage of white residents fell from 91 to 31 percent. Between 1950-1970, Wellston’s population dropped from 9,396 to 7,071. Post-war prosperity enabled white flight, which was one of the leading causes of Wellston’s decline (Hurley, 1997). Those who had the means to do so left Wellston for suburbs that were further from the noise, pollution, and compactness of the city. Many desired to purchase new homes in communities that were homogenous in terms of race and class.

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**There are many financial incentives tied to Wellston that make the city an attractive location for development and investment.**

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Although African Americans found housing opportunities in Wellston, most had to look elsewhere for employment. As Andrew Hurley, author of an article about Wagner Electric, explains, “the historical timing of neighborhood succession proved detrimental to the ability of incoming African-Americans to sustain viable communities. Unfortunately, African-Americans gained access to housing in working-class suburbs just as the demand for unskilled industrial labor shriveled” (Hurley, 1997). Beginning in the mid-1960s, pieces of the Wagner Electric Company were acquired by other companies through corporate mergers and other product lines were phased out (St. Louis, 1984). The Wellston plant began cutting back its workforce. In the 1970s, very few Wellston residents were employed by the

industries that were located there. Wagner Electric, which was once the biggest taxpayer in Wellston, closed its doors in 1981.

In 1969 Wellston applied for federal urban renewal funds to help solve the city's problems, which included "a shrinking tax base, an exodus of middle-class property owners, and an influx of poor people drawn to the community by low-cost housing, much of it sub-standard" (Urban, 1967). Indeed, by the 1960s the houses in Wellston were relatively old, small, and of low value. Only 11 percent of the buildings in Wellston were built during or since the Great Depression (Elkin, 1963). The undesirable housing stock was another key factor in the city's decline. Less than 20 years after Wellston's boom as a real estate "hot spot", the city was declared to be blighted.

When the relatively wealthy people left Wellston, those who were left behind or who moved into the area faced a challenging situation. A 1971 survey of Easton Street recorded 20 vacant buildings that once were businesses. Fires, vermin, and rats were serious problems in derelict residential buildings. Other concerns included the quality of the schools, better police protection, drugs, littering, and lack of opportunities for youth (Johnson, 1971). By 1980, one in three Wellston residents were living below the poverty line. The population continued to shrink through the 2000 Census.

### Characteristics of Wellston Today

The 2000 Census profile of Wellston residents reflects the broad demographic shifts that took place there over the last 50 years. The city's 2,460 residents are scattered across the 0.92 square miles of a city that was once inhabited by nearly four times as many people. Ninety two percent of residents are African American. Wellston today is one of the poorest areas in St. Louis with 39.1 percent of individuals having poverty status. The educational attainment of Wellston residents is well below the national average. Only 60.9 percent are high school graduates or higher, and of these 5.4 percent of the people have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Of people 16 years and older, just one in two are in the labor force.

An important current issue in Wellston is the struggling school system. The Wellston School District lost their accreditation in spring 2003 due to poor academic performance on basic skills testing. The district was given two academic years to show improvement. If the district does not succeed in regaining accreditation, they face the possibility of a state takeover of the school system. The loss of accreditation had an immediate impact on school enrollment. Enrollment fell 29 percent to 524 students from 747. Although some parents chose to send their children to other schools, many residents are proud in having the only all-black school district in Missouri and hopes are high that the school may be reaccredited. Wellston is currently the only unaccredited district in Missouri.

An accurate picture of Wellston can not be drawn from Census data nor from newspaper articles. Both tend to overlook the positive aspects of the Wellston community. The strength of Wellston lies in its people. Wellston has a core group of older residents who have lived in the community for decades and have been working to make Wellston a healthy, enjoyable place to live. In many ways, Wellston is a small town. There is quite a bit of overlap between the membership of the School Board, the city government, the Sustainable Neighborhoods Leadership Team, and local organizations such as the Wellston Human Development Corporation. Information is largely shared by word-of-mouth and at city council meetings, according to Helen Jackson, who has lived in Wellston for 35 years. Jackson said that schools are improving, more parents are getting involved with their children's education, and many other positive things are happening. Volunteers have been cleaning up the community. Residents are looking forward to a new ballpark that is planned. "The city is beginning to network together," she said. "That's a positive move."

Wellston today is home to a handful of major employers, including Federal Mogul, Ameren UE, Inter-Global, Inc., and Vi-Jon. There are dozens of small businesses and stores in Wellston, including a Union Planters Bank that is located on the city's main street in a building that has no windows. The Amoco station recently expanded and opened a mini-mart. Although positive change appears to be underway in Wellston, the community still has a lot of challenges.

## Local Government Structure

The City of Wellston has a mayor-council form of government. The Wellston City Council has six members who are elected every four years. Unlike in Emeryville, the residents directly elect the mayor every four years. The city has 24 full-time employees, 16 of whom are with the Police Department.

The first mayor of Wellston, Dr. Leo Hayes, served five consecutive four-year terms. Since 1970, there has been a high turnover rate among elected officials. Eight different men served as mayor between 1970 and 2004. The first black mayor, Johnnie Henderson, was elected in 1978. Three mayors were convicted of corruption while in office due to stealing, accepting bribes, and misusing funds. The lack of continuity of elected leaders makes it difficult for the municipal government to develop and implement a long-term vision for the community.

The chaos at Wellston City Hall has not been limited to the mayor's Office. Adding to the political turmoil, during at least one election there were concerns about voter fraud. Reports of punches being thrown during city council meetings have been printed in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* newspaper. The office of City Administrator has been a point of contention as well. "Wellston has had an ordinance authorizing a city administrator since 1986, but the position was never filled. Under prior federal programs, Wellston had an administrator for short periods in the 70s and 80s, but after the funding ended, the position remained unfilled due to budget constraints and political disputes" (Levy, 2002). The City of Wellston hired Michael Evans on May 6, 2002 as the full-time City Administrator. His tenure with the city was brief and controversial. He was dismissed by the city council in a closed session in September of 2003, but was returned to his position five days later. In December of 2003, while the mayor was in the hospital, the acting mayor suspended Evans for "insubordination" (Levy, January 2004). Evans was fired in February 2004 (Levy, April 2004).

If the amount of local newspaper coverage is any indication, the political situation at Wellston City Hall is cooling off and perhaps stabilizing. Long-time public official James A. Harvey was recently elected to his second full term as mayor. Not long after Evans was fired, Karl Reid, the former Assistant Director of Lambert Airport, was brought on board as Assistant to the mayor. Reid describes the city as financially strapped and struggling to survive day-to-day. "So far, no more layoffs and we're meeting payroll," he said after a recent council meeting. The council approved a bid for a professional audit of the city's records. The last audit was conducted in 2000 by the State of Missouri in response to a petition by residents.

In 1999, the City of Wellston established the Wellston Redevelopment Corporation (WRC), as authorized by Chapter 353 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri. The entire City of Wellston was declared to be blighted so that all 1,823 parcels could be included within the Redevelopment Area. The St. Louis Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA), which is a division of St. Louis County government, took the lead on developing a redevelopment plan for the WRC. The relationship between the county and the city was formalized when the city approved the plan. The WRC Board is comprised of two representatives of the County LCRA, two representatives of Wellston, and one representative from the Wellston Major Employers Council.

The relationship between St. Louis County and the City of Wellston is unusual in the amount of help the municipality has been willing to accept from the county. The county's role in the redevelopment has included planning, pre-development work, litigation, bringing in developers, and applying for funding. Staff of the LCRA do most of this work and also bring other county resources to bear. The County Planning Department has contributed GIS mapping and statistics to the redevelopment effort. They have also allocated U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds to support housing development in Wellston. The County Executive's office provides the necessary political support. Technical assistance from the County Highways Department has been utilized as well. "The county brings financial resources and people who have know-how to get these redevelopment projects done," said Reid. Noonan concurred that the county brings ideas and resources to the table.

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**The strength of Wellston lies in its people. Wellston has a core group of older residents who have lived in the community for decades and who work to make Wellston a healthy, enjoyable place to live. In many ways, Wellston is a small town.**

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The City of Wellston's role in the redevelopment is limited by their lack of capacity. They have embraced the opportunity to work with the county. According to Noonan, the city's role is "to provide [the county] with their endorsement and to make sure what we're doing is consistent with what they want to see." Development happens "with their participation as much as possible," she said. Developers come to the WRC with proposals, not to the city council. The city has delegated this power to the WRC. Reid said that the city's role in redevelopment is in issuing permits and business licenses. The relationship between the city and the county is generally viewed as being in the best interest of the City of Wellston. "Wellston has done a great partnership with the county," said Percy Harris of the Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance. "It is the best move they ever made and I applaud them for that," he said.

### Facilitating Brownfields Redevelopment

Through the LCRA, St. Louis County has done a great deal to facilitate brownfields redevelopment. Much like the Emeryville Redevelopment Authority, the LCRA is authorized by the state to utilize various redevelopment powers. The LCRA has acquired property and contracted with private companies to perform environmental assessment and remediation on their property. As a result of environmental investigations, the LCRA has had to modify some of their plans. When high levels of contamination were discovered on property that was the proposed location of a day care center, the LCRA found a more appropriate site for the day care center and decided to use the contaminated land in another way.

LCRA has eminent domain power, however, the majority of development in Wellston has been done on publicly owned property. Tax abatement is available in the redevelopment area for ten years. Tax increment financing is not being utilized in Wellston. The LCRA can establish three-party agreements with the WRC and developers. Other roles that the LCRA has played have included GIS mapping, transportation improvements, grant writing, and suing potentially responsible parties to cover the costs of remediation.

### Accomplishments

Below is a summary of the major brownfields redevelopment projects that are underway in Wellston.

- Wagner Electric

After Wagner Electric closed their Wellston plant, the site sat vacant for many years. The site was donated to St. Louis County in 1982. After the county took possession of the property, PCB contamination was discovered. The LCRA sued Wagner and two other parties for cleanup costs. A settlement was reached in U.S. District Court awarding LCRA with \$605,000 for response costs plus \$2 million. One of the parties then sued other companies to help pay the costs. The Wagner site has been broken into several pieces for redevelopment, as follows:

- o **MET Center** In 1997, one building was remediated and turned into the Cornerstone Partnership job training center, which was later named the Metropolitan Education & Training (MET) Center. The MET Center offers GED preparation, job training, transportation and employment services. Over \$13 million was spent on initial development. The total public investment into the MET Center is almost \$39 million.

- o **Police and Fire Training Center** The St. Louis County and Municipal Police Academy was built on part of the former Wagner property as well. The construction is complete and the academy is currently operating.
- o **St. Louis Enterprise Center-Wellston** The newest of St. Louis County's business incubators, this center will have 10,000 sq. ft. of office and warehouse space.
- o **Page Ave. Business Park** Fifteen acres of Wagner property will become the Page Avenue Business Park. Remediation is complete. Construction has not yet begun. Clark Properties is the developer. Also known as "Plymouth Industrial Park" and "Cornerstone Industrial Park."

- MetroLink Station

The first light rail line to be built in the St. Louis region included a station in Wellston. The MetroLink enables people from throughout the St. Louis region to access the MET Center. The station also provides area businesses with access to a regional workforce.

- Wellston Industrial Park

The Wellston Industrial Park is planned for a 24 acre site north of the Page Avenue Business Park. The land is not yet assembled, but will include former Abex Foundry property, abandoned railroad property, and residential property. St. Louis County anticipates that Clark Properties will be the developer for this project as well.

In conjunction with the brownfields redevelopment in Wellston, several other public and private redevelopment projects have taken place or are planned. In total, \$25 million has been invested in new housing. A Family Dollar store recently located in Wellston. Also an existing Amoco station added new gas lane canopies, a convenience store, and an automatic carwash. Other planned developments include a child care center and a park that will include a baseball field. As of March 2004, the total public and private investment in Wellston's redevelopment is \$73,918,869 (Noonan, March 2004).

## Capacity

There is no single aspect of the county's involvement that stands out as the most important. If the county had not stepped into the lead role, these brownfields redevelopment projects would not have moved forward on their own. It is unlikely that the City of Wellston would have been able to do it without the county as a partner. Whether the partnership is a good model for other communities to follow is another matter.

**Municipal capacity** In terms of staff time and expertise, the City of Wellston has little capacity for facilitating brownfields redevelopment. The city has only eight full-time employees who are not members of the Police Department. Of these staff, only the Assistant to the Mayor is able to dedicate most of his time to redevelopment activities. The Mayor, Assistant to the Mayor, City Clerk, and Parks & Recreation Director spend some time on redevelopment, among their other duties. City staff lacks the time and expertise needed to manage major, long-term brownfields redevelopment projects.

**County capacity** With over one million people living in St. Louis County, it would not be surprising if a small municipality like Wellston were of little concern to the county (2000). On the contrary, a staff member of the County Economic Council is assigned as the full-time Wellston Project Manager. In addition, her boss dedicates a portion of her time to Wellston. Through these two staff members, the county brings to the Wellston redevelopment effort much needed capacity. The county controls several funding streams that it has directed to the Wellston redevelopment. They have successfully applied for many grants on behalf of Wellston. Due to their past experience in doing brownfields

redevelopment, county staff knows who to call and they have credibility with potential partners. As Reid said, “The county brings the financial resources and people who have know-how to get these redevelopment projects done.” The county too has described their role as “adding capacity.”

**Adding vs Building Capacity** In Wellston, the arrangement has been for the county to apply their capacity for the benefit of Wellston. The difference between adding capacity and building capacity within an organization or community, such as occurred in Emeryville, is that the added capacity can be taken away. When St. Louis County ceases to be the lead partner in Wellston, what ability will the community of Wellston have to do future development and redevelopment? According to Noonan, the county does not have a specific date nor an exit strategy for when their involvement with Wellston’s redevelopment will end. Whether in two years, ten, or twenty, the county will inevitably cease to play the role of lead partner. Hopefully the political and financial support for the county’s partnership with Wellston will not cease before the major redevelopment has been successfully completed.

There have been two recent efforts at building capacity in Wellston. Wellston is one of several communities in the St. Louis area that have participated in a process of leadership development and community-based planning known as the Sustainable Neighborhoods program. Representatives of social service agencies, the community development corporation, churches, and other groups have participated. These groups represent existing capacity that has been strengthened through the Sustainable Neighborhoods process. Wellston residents and stakeholders formed a Sustainable Neighborhoods Leadership Team. They developed a plan for the community that covers many topics, including beautification, social services, and economic development. The Leadership Team serves as a forum for presentations about proposals that would affect the Wellston community. The Leadership Team makes recommendations to city officials about whether or not to approve the proposals. Through Sustainable Neighborhoods, Wellston residents and stakeholders stay informed about projects in their community and are organized to be able to influence what happens in their community. Sustainable Neighborhoods is one way in which capacity has been built in Wellston.

The Coro Leadership Center-St. Louis has also helped build capacity in Wellston. Reggie Williams, a Coro trainer, got to know 11 Wellston residents during a leadership training program that Coro offered to Wellston Sustainable Neighborhoods participants. “There is a wealth of very, very grounded, excellent leaders in that community. There are citizens that are passionate, who take ownership. They are trying to work together. These leaders are the older residents of the community,” Williams said. He recommended getting youth involved to start training the next leaders of the community. Although the Coro training program and the Sustainable Neighborhoods program both helped with building capacity in Wellston, most of the capacity and power in the city-county partnership belong to the county.

#### Community Involvement: Lessons Learned

The Wellston partnership is unusual in the extent of the county’s involvement in a particular municipality. St. Louis County assists other struggling North County municipalities with redevelopment, but they have not made nearly the same level of commitment of staff time and funding. Perhaps Wellston was selected as the county’s focus for redevelopment in part because the community faced the direst situation and had the least capacity to turn the situation around. Together, the Wellston partners are beginning to clean up and rebuild the city. Through the redevelopment process, St. Louis County has not sought to strengthen the capacity of the Wellston community. If Wellston city officials and residents have little understanding of, much less influence on, the redevelopment process, will the results truly benefit them?

There is a lot of economic development work to be done in the City of Wellston. Perhaps capacity building is seen as not worth an investment of time and money. It may be viewed as outside the county’s scope of work or too slow of a process. The county’s idea of building capacity in Wellston is to make the community a more attractive place for wealthier, better-educated people, who will eventually become the new leadership of Wellston (Noonan, April 2004). If the lead partner in Wellston’s redevelopment that controls the funding will not support capacity building, who will?

Building trust and capacity is indeed likely to be a slow process in Wellston, but the capacity does not need to be entirely added by the county or brought in by new residents. That would discount the skills, knowledge, and caring of the people who live there. St. Louis County should provide more opportunities for residents to be involved, particularly the youth. Additional leadership training and community organizing would help Wellston residents to reach their leadership potential.

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**LIVABLE** Communities Don't Just **HAPPEN**....  
...They Are **CREATED** By The **PEOPLE** Who **LIVE** In Them..

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