



MVEDD

Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, Inc.

Community Involvement Plan Former Newport School



November 5, 2024

(Revised November 19, 2024 and April 15, 2025)



Prepared by BRS, Inc. for MVEDGE as part of EPA Cooperative Agreement BF96238700
and for MVEDD as part of EPA Cooperative Agreement 4B 96219500

Though this project has been funded wholly or in part, by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the EPA.

Overview

This Community Involvement Plan (CIP) aims to outline strategies and actions for involving community feedback in the demolition and comingled disposal of Asbestos-containing materials (ACM) and residual petroleum contaminated soils at the former Newport School site located at 7456 East Street in Newport, Herkimer County, New York. The priority for the project is to remove the existing hazard and its blighting effect on Village residents while the redevelopment of the Site is determined with community input. Work for this project is being funded in part by two different US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Sub-grants: one from the Mohawk Valley Economic Development Growth Enterprises Corporation (MVEDGE) and one from the Mohawk Valley Economic Development District, Inc. (MVEDD). This single CIP fulfills the requirements for both the MVEDGE's and the MVEDD's respective cooperative agreements. The Subgrantee for the project is the Village of Newport. The Village of Newport's environmental consultant for the project is Thomas Seguljic, PE, PG of HRP Associates, Inc.

Site Description

The Former Newport School is located at 7456 East Street in Newport, Herkimer County, NY. The Site is 1.1 acres and consists of one parcel of land identified by the Herkimer County tax assessor as SBL 094.47-2-8.2. One three-story building totaling 24,584 square feet was constructed in 1928 and utilized as a public school until being vacated in 1990. The Site has remained vacant and unused. The building interior is in dilapidated condition to the extent that a structural evaluation deemed the building unsafe to enter (Delta Engineers, Architects & Surveyors, March 2023). Delta recommended that access to the building be prevented and the structure demolished. Site assessments and a pre-demolition survey determined the following:

- The building contains ACM that needs to be remediated. Given the lack of structural integrity for the building, the ACM abatement will not be able to be conducted as a standalone removal, but rather be managed as part of the building demolition.
- A 550-gallon #2 fuel oil tank located along the perimeter of the Site building near the chimney was removed prior to 2022, and petroleum contaminated soil was discovered in the tank grave. Contaminated soil was removed to the extent possible in the vicinity of the building foundation; however, the spill was closed not meeting cleanup standards likely due to its proximity to the building, thus residual petroleum contamination remains on-site. The presence of petroleum products in the subsurface requires remediation that cannot be conducted until after the building is demolished.

Given the report from the structural engineer, the demolition would need to be conducted to facilitate the removal of the ACM and residual petroleum contaminated soil due to structural integrity issues associated with the building. As such, the proposed use of funding would be eligible under the EPA Brownfields RLF program.

Community Profile

Herkimer County is a rural area spanning over 1,400 square miles with a population of 60,139 residents. Since the 1970s, the community has been grappling with significant job and population loss, leading to a decline in the local tax base. Despite these economic challenges, Herkimer County boasts several community assets, including the Empire State Trail, various local businesses, and educational institutions.

Residents are at the heart of the Village of Newport (population 543) and Herkimer County, contributing to its social fabric and culture. Environmental advocacy groups work diligently to preserve the area's natural resources and promote sustainable practices. Local government officials are tasked with making decisions that impact the county's future, while business owners strive to invigorate the local economy and provide employment opportunities. Together, these groups form the backbone of Herkimer County, working collaboratively to address the challenges and leverage the county's strengths.

Community Needs and Concerns

While such data sets are not available at the level of the Village, the EJScreen Community Report for Herkimer County reveals significant disparities in environmental and socioeconomic factors that affect the community. Residents face heightened exposure to air pollution, including particulate matter (PM2.5) and ozone, above state and national averages. These pollutants pose serious health risks, particularly to respiratory health. The community is also situated near a higher concentration of hazardous waste sites, raising concerns about soil and water contamination and increasing the risk of exposure to toxic substances.

Socioeconomic challenges compound the community's environmental issues. The median household income is lower than surrounding areas, leading to economic instability, poor housing conditions and restricted resource access. Additionally, the unemployment rate is higher in Herkimer County, which exacerbates economic difficulties and contributes to increased stress and mental health concerns.

Overall, the disparities highlighted in the report suggest an urgent need for targeted interventions to improve environmental conditions, enhance economic opportunities, expand access to education and healthcare, and elevate the overall quality of life for Herkimer County residents. Such disparities likely exist at the level of the Village of Newport given its small, rural nature.

Action Plan

The EPA funded work will remove a blighted property in a highly visible location among residential properties.

The top priority of the community involvement plan is to maintain ongoing communication and active engagement with community members about the project. This involves creating opportunities for dialogue and ensuring that the community is informed and involved every step of the way. To achieve this, Herkimer NEXT will conduct public meetings and information sessions. Herkimer NEXT will hold these meetings to provide updates on project developments, answer questions, and gather input from community members. Recognizing the diverse preferences of the community, Herkimer NEXT will prepare and distribute to the local community flyers to disseminate information and notifications for meetings.

Addressing environmental concerns is a critical component of our plan. We are committed to remediating site contamination and mitigating health risks to create a safer and healthier environment for residents. Our strategy includes implementing a comprehensive site cleanup plan to address the Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM). This plan effectively remediates contamination, protects public health, and restores the Site for safe future use. Transparency is essential to building trust so that we will provide updates on remediation progress and results.

The draft Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA) and the overall remediation approach for the ACM abatement will be presented and discussed at the at a standalone community meeting anticipated to be held on November 14, 2024. The draft ABCA, site investigation reports, the cleanup plan, cleanup standards used, responses to public comments, and verification of the cleanup completion, and other relevant site specific documents can be found in the MVEDGE document repository at <https://mvedge.org/former-newport-school/> and in the MVEDD document repository at <https://mvedd.org/brownfield-cleanup>. Written responses to significant and appropriate comments and documentation of any changes to the cleanup plans will be included and / or incorporated into the final ABCA.

By engaging the community, addressing environmental concerns, and promoting active involvement, we aim to create a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative process that leads to the successful revitalization of Herkimer County. Our commitment to these principles will foster trust, build strong partnerships, and ensure that the project meets the needs and aspirations of the community it serves.

Timeline of Activities:

Timing	Tasks	Lead or Forum
November 14, 2024	Initial community meeting	HERKIMER NEXT
November 2024	Public release of remediation plan	MVEDGE, MVEDD
November 2024	Feedback collection and analysis	MVEDGE, MVEDD
Spring 2025	Implementation of cleanup activities	Village of Newport

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