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Brunswick ME: De-militarizing the BNAS¹



A case from the library of “smart growth” leadership case studies prepared by the New England Environmental Finance Center, available at http://efc.muskie.usm.maine.edu/pages/case_study_library.html

ABSTRACT. Closure of the Brunswick Naval Air Station in 2011 will have profound economic impacts on the entire mid-coast Maine region of Maine, with an estimated loss of 6,500 jobs and \$330 million annual income. Throughout the Base Realignment and Closure process, Brunswick, the region, and the State of Maine followed federal rules and developed the federally-funded Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority (BLRA) to plan for reuse of the 3300 acre base. In its planning process, the BLRA adhered to a number of well thought-out Guiding Principles, including the use of extensive public participation and the consideration of “smart growth” principles and strategies. This case study looks at the composition of the BLRA board, the planning process it pursued, and the likelihood of a “smart growth” plan and zoning being adopted by the Town.

¹ Prepared by Anne Holland, with assistance from Brett Richardson, for the New England Environmental Finance Center’s “Next Communities Initiative,” Richard Barringer, ed., Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, Portland ME, May 2008. Aerial photo of the Brunswick Naval Air Station courtesy of the Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority. Copyright © 2008 by the Muskie School of Public Service.

Brunswick. Brunswick is a mid-coast Maine community with a 2000 population of 21,172. First settled in 1628 and incorporated as a town in 1738, it flourished as a prosperous seaport along the Androscoggin River. Historically, the river played a significant role in the development of Brunswick, providing power for mills producing lumber and textiles throughout the 1800s. Brunswick is also home to Maine's oldest college, Bowdoin College, founded in 1794.

The Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS), located two miles east of downtown, was commissioned in 1943, deactivated in 1947, and recommissioned in 1951. According to information from the Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority (BLRA), there are approximately 2700 military, 862 reservists and 700 civilians working on the base today.² In August 2005 the federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission voted to close the BNAS and move its operations to Jacksonville, Florida. President Bush approved the closure on September 15, 2005. By law, the base must close before September 15, 2011. Relocation of the first air squadron to Jacksonville is scheduled for 2008.

The BNAS occupies 3300 acres within the Town, along with two smaller sites nearby. Infrastructure on the base includes two 8000 foot runways, two aviation control towers, numerous office buildings and recreation facilities, and approximately two million square feet of commercial and industrial space, including warehouses, hangars, and office and maintenance facilities, much of which is less than ten years old. In addition, there are approximately 1115 housing units located on and off the base, many of which were constructed within the last five years, including a 250 room hotel.³

Impacts of Base Closure. A study by the Maine Department of Labor in June 2005 states that the "removal of 2317 military personnel along with their spouses and children, would result in a population loss of perhaps 4500 to 5000," dramatically affecting local demand for goods and services.⁴ The Maine State Planning Office indicates that the closure could result in a combined direct and indirect loss of 6500 jobs and \$330 million in annual

² BLRA handout, "Then What?"

³ Ibid.

⁴ Maine Department of Labor. "The Impact Realignment of the of the Naval Air Station in Brunswick Combined with the Slowing Rate of Navel Ship Building at Bath Iron Works Would Have on the Local Labor Market." Augusta, ME, June 17, 2005. p. 1

income in the region by 2015.⁵ Area employers will lose approximately 500 military spouses as employees, and local public schools will lose 10% of their population and nearly \$1.3 million in federal school aid.⁶ Clearly, the effects of closure are expected to have a profound impact on the economy and demographics of the entire greater Brunswick area.

The Base Realignment and Closure Process. The federal government has very specific requirements and processes for base closure and reuse. First, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) selects the property and facilities it wishes to maintain on the base; then, other federal agencies may claim property; finally, the remaining land is deemed “surplus” and a state and local screening process begins. For the surplus land, the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) follows a procedure whereby land may be “conveyed to eligible entities for specific redevelopment or reuse purposes”.⁷

The federal government also has very specific deadlines and rules for conveyances, some of which are for “public benefit” and transferred at little or no cost.⁸ While the federal government ultimately decides how the land is to be conveyed, it works closely with the LRA to receive recommendations and determine which conveyances are appropriate.

The federal process dictates, as well, that the plan developed by the LRA make adequate provision for homeless persons in the vicinity of the base. This congressionally-mandated requirement allows the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to determine whether an LRA has adequately accommodated the needs of the local homeless population, making HUD the only non-DOD federal agency with a say in the substance of the reuse plan.

Local Planning Authority. The LRA is authorized by the federal government as part of the BRAC process, and is essentially a federally-funded planning board designated to

⁵ Renski, Henry, and Catherine Reilly, Understanding the Impact: Closing Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine State Planning Office, Augusta, 2007

⁶ BLRA handout, “Then What?”

⁷ BLRA BNAS Reuse Master Plan Executive Summary, p. 2

⁸ It is now expected that, due to federal budget stringency, there will be fewer low or no-cost conveyances in the case of the BNAS than in past base closures.

develop land use recommendations for reuse of the base. Steve Levesque, Director of the BLRA, points out that in some base closures the town itself has served as the designated LRA. In the case of the BNAS, it was decided by local and state officials that the LRA would be separate from the Town of Brunswick. Levesque notes, “They believed that an LRA that sat outside the town government structure, and had a more regional approach, would be most appropriate.”

It has been suggested that there was tension between the Town and the State during discussions about the composition of the LRA. Part of this may have occurred because the main base is entirely within Brunswick, making up 11.5% of the town’s land mass. Indeed, a large portion of the land that was to become the Brunswick Naval Air Station had been gifted in 1719 to the people of Brunswick by the founding Pejepscot Proprietors as a town commons.⁹ Nearly 1000 acres of that gift was taken by eminent domain in the 1940s to become part of the base.¹⁰

Levesque notes, however, that once the decision was made to have regional representation on the LRA, all parties worked well together in forming the organization and developing the reuse master plan. According to Martin Wilk, Chair of the BLRA board, its composition was determined by the Brunswick Town Council, the state legislative delegation from the area, and the Governor’s office. The board was weighted toward Brunswick, but, as noted, had regional and state representation.¹¹

Wilk suggests this makeup was good in that it provided great diversity of opinion, knowledge base, and expertise. Board members represented a variety of affiliations and organizations, including those with community development interests, the real estate industry, affordable housing advocates, Bowdoin College, and the Maine National Guard.

In brief, the LRA determines land uses and develops the reuse plan once the federal government has made its land selections; and, as noted, the LRA must take into account the needs of the homeless in the plan, or HUD may veto it.

⁹ History of the Town Commons, Brunswick ME at www.brunswickme.org

¹⁰ History of the U.S. Naval Air Station, Brunswick ME at www.nasb.navy.mil/nasb_history.htm

¹¹ The Legislature accommodated local concerns in this regard by providing that the separate regional authority created to *implement* the reuse plan would *not* have zoning powers of its own, and the Town would need to approve the reuse plan through its normal comprehensive plan and zoning process. See below.

Land Use Planning. Developing a reuse plan for a military base may be compared to developing a comprehensive plan for a community – but with a large infusion of federal dollars and a staff dedicated solely to its planning. BLRA board member and former Brunswick Town Councilor Forrest Lowe stresses three main reasons for the success of the planning process:

- **Excellent staff:** Because of the scope and excitement generated by the project, an exceptional staff was attracted to work for the BLRA.
- **Adequate finances:** Because adequate resources were available, the BLRA was able to use an array of public participation tools, have enough staff to manage the demands of this extensive process, and hire first-rate consultants.
- **Size of project:** Ultimately, there was enough space on the base (3300 acres) to allow all interests to be accommodated, notably those concerned with economic development, air transportation, housing, and open space. The BLRA was able to achieve a balance of uses based on the sheer size and geographical features of the base.

Guiding Principles. One of the documents developed early-on by the BLRA and frequently cited as contributing to the success of the plan is its “Guiding Principles.” These were developed by the staff and board at the outset of the planning process, to set boundaries and define how work should proceed. Levesque notes that at every step along the way, the BLRA asked “Where are we with the Guiding Principles?” As opposed to principles or a plan that is created and then forgotten, the board and staff made sure that each of the Guiding Principles was adequately addressed at each step. An evaluation matrix was produced and is displayed on the BLRA website.

Among the ten Guiding Principles developed and followed by the BLRA board are “Extensive Public Participation” and “Smart Growth.”

Guiding Principle 2. Extensive Public Participation dictates an “extensive, open and inclusive public participation program.” It includes the use of community visioning sessions and other opportunities to provide meaningful input. Indeed, public feedback was requested regarding the principles, themselves, and modifications were made in response.

Guiding Principle 5. Smart Growth states, “The reuse plan will consider ‘smart growth’ strategies that promote sustainable development and balance economic development, environmental protection, and the preservation or enhancement of the quality of life for Brunswick residents.”

Support and enthusiasm for “smart growth” was enhanced by EPA Region I-sponsored design workshops that solicited public input on applying smart growth principles and strategies. The well-known Miami design firm of Dover-Kohl, Inc, was enlisted to facilitate these workshops and their renderings, based on feedback from the workshops, captured how a smart growth redevelopment might look and feel as an extension of the historic community.

Dover-Kohl, Inc. Smart Growth Rendering of BNAS Reuse



The Planning Process. In developing the reuse plan, the BLRA thought it important to understand and respond to a “variety of existing market and economic trends, local community issues and policies, physical conditions and characteristics, and environmental conditions of the property”.¹²

¹² BLRA BNAS Reuse Master Plan Executive Summary, p. 3

Professional studies were authorized, including a market and economic analysis to define potential market opportunities; real estate analysis highlighting issues of demand and affordability; how land outside the base is zoned and utilized; area transportation issues; on-base physical conditions and characteristics, including natural resources, utilities and infrastructure, physical constraints, and buildings and facilities; environmental conditions and potential suitability for development; and an aviation feasibility study.¹³

The planning process involved gathering information and learning about the resource, presenting that information to the public, gaining feedback from the public, and making a decision. Information gathering and public input often took place simultaneously, and Wilk notes that the BLRA was receiving information on various conditions and getting the public up to speed at the same time. Essentially, the public learned as the board learned, with targeted analyses like the aviation feasibility study feeding into the broader effort.

Public Trust and Process. BLRA Deputy Director Jeffrey Jordan notes that the Brunswick citizenry are quite sophisticated when it comes to land use planning: they have a strong environmental ethic and a history of concern for land use planning; and are very deliberate in coming to consensus. This might have become problematic, as the amount of time between commencement of the BLRA’s work and the final plan presentation was to be just 18 months.

Wilk suggests that the tight timeline made the use of a variety of public participation approaches necessary, to maximize public involvement and build consensus. In addition to the public events listed in the table below, outreach efforts included community and business group presentations, articles and editorials in newspapers, televised committee meetings, an “open door” policy at the BLRA office (including late office hours one night a week), a statistically valid telephone survey of over 400 area residents, and the opportunity to post comments and questions on the BLRA website; each comment or question received a response from the BLRA.

¹³ BLRA BNAS Reuse Master Plan Executive Summary

Date Event Description¹⁴

(Note: Approximately 1200-1500 persons attended these events.)

June 2006	“BRAC to the Drawing Board”	Public meeting to introduce consulting team and process, and get initial public thoughts and reactions
July and August 2006	“Base to Bus Tours”	Tour of the base facilities to give people a greater understanding of the physical characteristics of the base (over 300 attendees)
September and October 2006	“BRAC to Basics” Visioning Meetings	Visioning meetings targeting different groups—military and civilian workers at BNAS, high school students, and public at large. Public asked to think about whether aviation uses were appropriate; divided the base into nine planning areas
Spring 2007	Topical Seminars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Transportation • Environmental Issues • Energy Opportunities
August 2007	“BRAC to the Future”	Four conceptual plans were presented to the public for consideration and feedback, including two with aviation and two without
September 2007	“BRAC to the Future (II)”	The two aviation concepts were further developed and refined
October 2007	“Smart Growth” Design Workshops sponsored by the EPA	Workshop to solicit public comment on applying “smart growth” principles and strategies.

The BLRA’s openness and responsiveness to public input, as well as the transparency of the process, are credited by Wilk and Levesque for the constructive, peaceful, and engaged public participation they enjoyed. Wilk suggests that the professionalism demonstrated by the public was, in part, a reflection of how the board conducted itself; the good faith effort and outreach of the board was reciprocated. Wilk also points out that there was little or no distrust of the process or the tools employed; therefore, the public was generally trusting of the board’s decisions. “Trust and credibility go a long way in creating comfort with the decisions being made.”

¹⁴ BLRA BNAS Reuse Master Plan Executive Summary

The public was invited to learn about the base, weigh in on possible land uses, and consider alternate plans based on public input and studies that included economic, market, and environmental analysis.

Aviation Feasibility. Crucial to the success of the reuse plan was ensuring that it combined market realities and public support. The aviation component of the plan is a good example of this and, according to Wilk, involved the public from the outset.

The BLRA designed a scope of work for the aviation feasibility study and, before it was put out to bid, invited the public to weigh in on it by asking, “Are you uncomfortable with any part of it?” and “Is there anything else you’d like to see in it?” Only after it had been subject to this scrutiny was the scope of work finalized. When the study was completed, the public was offered the opportunity to weigh in on draft conclusions. Wilk suggests that this involvement and opportunity resulted in high confidence in the conclusions of the study.



BNAS Runways

Wilk and Lowe had expected a deeper division within the community regarding aviation, and were surprised at the overwhelming support for continued aviation uses. The majority of people wanted the aviation complex, and analysis indicated that it would make economic sense. To further confirm support, the BLRA hired consultants to do a random telephone survey of 417 area residents, 84 percent of whom supported an aviation component to the redevelopment plan. As a result, the BLRA board voted unanimously to include this in the overall master reuse plan.

The Result. All those interviewed for this case study are pleased with the results of the planning process and, in particular, the public involvement. An op-ed piece in the *Bath-Brunswick Times Record* of December 12, 2007, by Wilk and Levesque express the general sentiment: “With your help we’ve developed an outstanding reuse plan for the base that will establish a vibrant ‘live, work, play, and learn’ environment for the region.” BLRA board member Forrest Lowe states “I don’t think you could have had a better outcome with the public feeling good about it and endorsing it.”

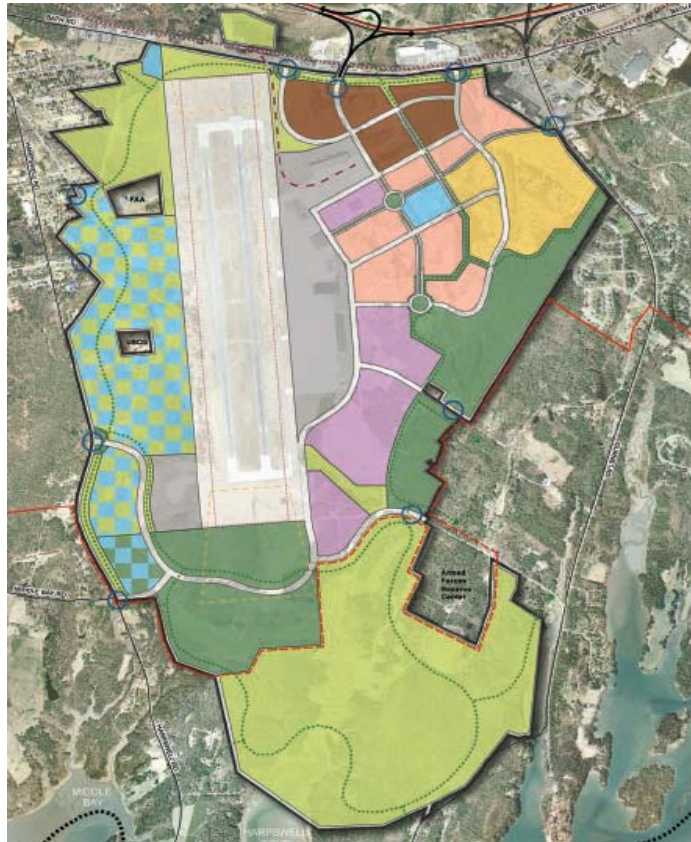
Frank O’Hara of Planning Decisions, Inc, designed the public participation effort using a standard technique, going from the general to the specific in three basic steps: brainstorming, visioning, and review of specific drafts. “Once we got into project,” O’Hara reports,

“there developed a nice synergy among Matrix, Inc., (the general contractor), ourselves, Levesque and the staff, and the board. We kept elaborating on the fly, adding bus tours, more visioning sessions, Dover-Kohl, the telephone survey to test the final plan, and so on. Wilk's inclusive, low-key public style reinforced the message of *listening*. Levesque was fully committed to doing this well and, at his own initiative, put added resources into the effort at several points and spent a lot of time in the community at Elks clubs and the like, drumming up interest. Matrix was brilliant in designing attractive and instructive materials, maps, and exercises for the various sessions.... It was the best public participation effort I've been involved with, so everyone deserves praise!”

As noted above, the sheer size of the project made it possible to satisfy almost all interests. Geography dictates much of the land use: roughly 1/3 is undevelopable for ecological reasons; 1/3 of the land is marginal for development; and 1/3 of the land is already developed. The land use breakdown is indicated at the right and on the maps below:¹⁵

LAND USE DISTRICTS		SURPLUS ACRES	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Land Development	Airport Operations	500	16%
	Aviation-Related Business	230	7%
	Professional Office	120	4%
	Community Mixed Use	175	5%
	Business and Technology Industries	190	6%
	Education	200	6%
	Residential	215	7%
	SUBTOTAL	1,630	51%
Open Space	Recreation / Open Space	510	16%
	Natural Areas	1,060	33%
	SUBTOTAL	1,570	49%
GRAND TOTAL		3,200	100%

¹⁵ BLRA BNAS Reuse Master Plan Executive Summary



Legend

- B N A S Surplus Property
- Town of Brunswick
- State Highway
- Major Road
- Railroad
- Runway Protection Zone
- Runway Object Free Area
- Existing Town Growth Boundary
- Potential Town Growth Boundary
- Potential Pedestrian / Bike Trail
- Potential New Interchange
- Potential Railroad Spur
- Access Points



0 500 1,000 2,000 3,000 Feet



1. Checkered blue-light green area totals 320 acres, of which an undefined 175 acres have been assigned in the table above to Education and 145 acres to Natural Areas.



2. Checkered blue-dark green area totals 30 acres, all of which has been assigned in the table above to Recreation / Open Space; however, Education would be an allowed use, if needed.



3. Checkered light green-dark green (East Brunswick Transmitter Site) area totals 70 acres, of which an undefined 35 acres have been assigned in the table above to Recreation / Open Space and 35 acres to Natural Areas.



4. The Runway Object Free Area provides a 500-foot buffer to the east and west of the two runways. The Airport Operations land use district extends an additional 500 feet beyond the Runway Object Free Area, resulting in a 1,000-foot buffer parallel to the runways.

Implementation. Overseeing implementation of the BLRA’s reuse plan is the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRRA), a governmental agency established by the Maine Legislature. Like the BLRA, it is designed to have a regional perspective, with board members from throughout the region as well as from the State.

It now remains for the Town of Brunswick to adopt the reuse plan as part of its comprehensive plan and the “smart growth” zoning consistent with it. The zoning is currently being worked on by the MRRRA and the Town of Brunswick. Levesque does not foresee problems with the Town’s adopting both the reuse plan as part of its comprehensive plan and the enabling zoning. It has been suggested that due to the time and effort that went into the reuse planning and the strong public support behind it, it would be difficult for the Town *not* to accept both. As Forest Lowe states “I believe the Town Council will accept it and implement the zoning because the process was so good. There was a lot of town involvement and good interaction.”

Dover-Kohl, Inc. Smart Growth Rendering of BNAS Reuse



Teaching Notes

Important ideas illustrated in the BNAS case include:

1. Adequate Funding is Necessary: Don't underestimate the amount of time and funds required to have a successful and trusted public participation process.
2. Avoid Pre-Conceived Conclusions: The BLRA Board was advised by the DOD to go into the process with an open mind and to learn from, and make decisions based on studies and public input.
3. Make Participation Easy and Acknowledge Views: Make sure to have ways for the public to make their views heard and acknowledged, even if they cannot attend public meetings.
4. Do Sound Analysis of All Important Considerations: The readiness and ability to have reliable, trusted information available to address major concerns established a basis for credible decisions.
5. Share Information: Include the public in the information gathering process and share the results. This helps ensure public confidence in the studies, and ultimately the decisions made.
6. Evaluate Decisions Based on Accepted Principles: The BLRA continually referred back to their "Guiding Principles" to see that they were effectively addressed. This helped keep them on course and also demonstrated to the public that throughout the process they adhered to the initial, foundational values.

Useful Questions:

Constituent Interests: How did the fact that Brunswick is both a college town and a military town affect the planning process and outcome?

Trust: How did the BLRA build trust with the citizens of the town and throughout the region of BNAS' impact?