

## PLAY BALL!

On any given night during spring and summer, one can visit the Bob Cene Sports Complex in Struthers, Ohio and catch a baseball game in progress. The sight of a lush green outfield and the smell of hot dogs and popcorn replace the red hot fire of the open hearth at the old steel plant that once stood near that site. As you watch the game and enjoy the sun set behind the old mills, you are reminded of what once was the single economic engine of the region: steel. Just beyond the left field fence is a new structure, a steel and concrete bridge that connects this old industrial area to the neighborhoods and the downtown. It is this sight that served to establish a vision for the Mahoning River Corridor of Opportunity (MRCO).

The Mahoning River Corridor of Opportunity (MRCO) Planning Committee consists of a consortium of public and private partners working on the redevelopment of the brownfield areas along the Mahoning River within the cities of Youngstown, Campbell, and Struthers Ohio.

The MRCO recognized that creating a multi-use development which includes industry, recreation and open space held the most appeal to the community and private investors. Already three full size baseball fields comprise the Bob Cene Baseball Complex, built on a former coke works site. The Tri-County dual indoor soccer facility was constructed on a former slag dump. These private ventures were built by individuals who have a love for sport and community. This vision was embraced by the MRCO committee, a group committed to the future of the Mahoning Valley.

The vision was then shared by the entire Mahoning Valley on Monday, September 19, 2005, when the ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on the new \$3,800,000.00 Walton Avenue Bridge Project. Dedicated "The Steelworkers Bridge," it honors the thousands of men and women who helped build the valley. It is a bridge that brings together the legacy of steel production with the future vision of a vibrant, mixed-use corridor.

The MRCO committee is made up of more than 30 individuals, most of whom had family who worked in those same steel mills. Each member was affected by Black Monday, which occurred exactly 28 years earlier on September 19, 1977 when Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. announced its closing and the loss of over 5000 jobs.



## INDUSTRIAL DEVASTATION

Throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mahoning Valley was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest steel producing center in the country, trailing only the Pittsburgh and Chicago areas. The 31 mile stretch of the Mahoning River was lined with 11 fully integrated mills employing more than 70,000 people. Four major manufacturers produced the bulk of the steel; (Republic Steel, U.S. Steel, Sharon Steel, and the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company).

Since Black Monday in 1977, the remaining steel plants began to fall like dominos, and today, only 1 mill remains, WCI Steel in Warren. To date, only 3,500 jobs remain in the steel industry within our Valley, or about 5% of what had existed at the height of the industry.

Youngstown, Campbell and Struthers were particularly devastated since their shared economic base depended on the steel industry along the Mahoning River. Each attempted to address their common challenge in their own way. They would compete with one another for limited resources and opportunities which resulted in limited success. The efforts to address the challenge of revitalizing thousands of acres of former industrial property were daunting. There needed to be a more manageable, regional approach to the common challenge if revitalizing the economic core that transcended three municipal jurisdictions was to ever be realized.



## COOPERATION REPLACES COMPETITION

The *Mahoning River Corridor of Opportunity* (MRCO) Planning Committee was formed to eliminate the competition among communities. The MRCO focused its revitalization efforts on the eastern 900 acres of the river corridor and worked on developing an effective partnership of local communities and state and federal officials to address the mission. Since then the MRCO target area has expanded to include a total of nearly 1700 acres.

The MRCO Planning Committee became a multi-jurisdictional, public/private partnership that pooled available resources and expertise to identify, prioritize, promote, assist and coordinate infrastructure improvements and economic redevelopment in the corridor. Teamwork, partnership and coordination replaced competition and fragmentation. The focus was revitalization.

Utilizing the expertise and talents already available the MRCO Planning Committee was organized into four subcommittees to address various aspects of brownfield redevelopment. They are:

- *Transportation and Development,*
- *Environmental Issues,*
- *Grants and Finance, and*
- *Marketing and Outreach.*

An Executive Committee comprised of a chairman, subcommittee chairs, the mayors of the cities of Struthers, Campbell and Youngstown, Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners and Governor's Regional Representative coordinate planning committee activities. The full Planning Committee meets quarterly to assess progress, problem-solve and identify next steps for the Executive Committee and subcommittees to implement.

The model was successful from its inception. In 1999, the MRCO was recognized by the Center for Sustainable Communities, sponsored by the U.S. Mayor's Conference and national Association of Counties, as one of fifteen initiatives nationwide for the process used in its efforts and approach to sustainable redevelopment. This recognition gave the committee the confidence and motivation needed to face the challenges ahead.

### MRCO COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION

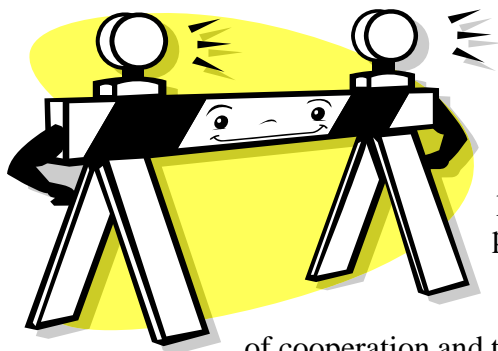
City of Campbell	Eastgate Regional Council of Governments
City of Struthers	Ohio Department of Development
City of Youngstown	OHIO EPA
Mahoning County	Castlo CIC
First Energy Corp.	Youngstown State University
Dominion East Ohio Gas	Mahoning Valley Economic Development Corp.
Aqua Ohio Water	Youngstown-Warren Chamber of Commerce

## FROM VISION TO REALITY

The barriers encountered in the process of redevelopment took the MRCO Planning Committee members by surprise. There were obvious challenges. Then, there were unexpected obstacles posed by previous and existing industrial activities. The site needed environmental assessment and remediation. Infrastructure and vehicular access was inadequate. Utility services needed improvement. In the case of brownfields, liability issues preclude most private investment. The preliminary cost and burden of redevelopment rested with local government. The stakes are high: for these cities there is no industrial land left that is not brownfield. No new jobs can be created until the brownfields are revitalized.

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## BARRIERS



### Site Control

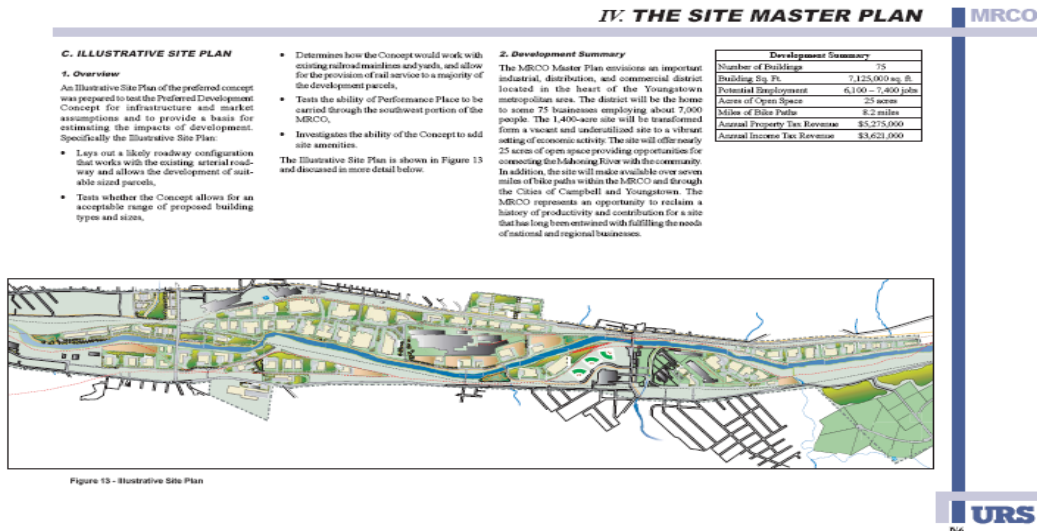
Most of the site was in the control of private owners or bankruptcy courts. The private property owners did not embrace our redevelopment ideas for fear of liability. Additional public funding meant disclosure of financial statements, employment, and environmental conditions. Property owners were reluctant to participate. Some of the property owners were happy to keep those parcels in their current condition. Government intervention might mean liability and expensive clean-up costs.

The MRCO Planning Committee had to build a relationship of cooperation and trust before public-private partnerships could be established. It also became necessary to secure as much land as possible through property transfer, easements or outright purchase. In some cases easements had to be secured for unknown heirs from a deed last recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In other cases, legal documents and partnership agreements had to be finessed.

When the MRCO began its work in 1996, US EPA offered the only funding program for assessment and remediation of brownfield sites, the *Brownfield Assessment Demonstration Pilot Grant*. Those grants were competitive and limited. A funding cap of \$200,000 barely covers assessments for a 50 acre site, let alone 900 acres. We needed a strategy to make the most of our funding.

The MRCO commissioned URS International to complete a master plan for site development. This helped prioritize which sites were more marketable and more worth the investment of time and resources.

### *Master Plan Conceptual Drawing*



First, areas where the proposed access bridge was to be constructed needed environmental review. US EPA funds paid for assessments of the bridge touchdown points and the areas where an interior roadway would be constructed. A second US EPA grant was used to assess areas within the CASTLO Industrial Park where there was already a stable base of industry and ample infrastructure to recruit more.

The brownfield assessment grants from US EPA also opened up a range of contacts for our project. Planning Committee members forged relations with US EPA and Ohio EPA staff who provided invaluable consultation and advice.

The State issued a bond program called *Clean Ohio* in 2002. It provided funds for brownfield remediation, acquisition of conservation lands and farmland easements. This enabled the MRCO to double the pace of assessment and remediation of strategic parcels within the 900 acre area. Within the first three years MRCO was awarded three grants. Each clean-up project attracted new investment and job creation, affirming that *if you clean it, they will come*.

## Limited Access

The MRCO, like a lot of former steel sites, had all the advantages of river and rail access neatly protected by ravines and rolling topography. Trying to construct roadway access to these areas posed a real challenge. Our brownfield area sat 30' below both main roadways that outlined the valley. The bridges that serviced the mills from these roads had long been torn down. A roadway study was conducted as part of the Master Plan to determine the best and most economic access point to the site. The Walton Avenue site was selected by the consensus of the property owners. It provided the shortest river crossing, minimal environmental cleanup, and easiest access to the interstate.



*Former Steel Mill access bridge.*



*New "Steelworkers Bridge" at same site.*

## Bridge Construction

Five obstacles unique to industrial redevelopment posed a challenge in bridge construction. First, because of environmental concerns, no portion of the bridge structure could be built in the river. One pier was placed along the river bank outside the farthest set of railroad tracks.

The second obstacle was trying to fit the second pier in between railroad tracks while maintaining the horizontal track clearances. Six sets of tracks run alongside the Mahoning River posing a real design challenge.

The third obstacle was the underground utilities, including major fiber optic lines that lease space from the railroads. We needed to relocate a line a few feet in order to drill our shafts for a bridge pier.

The fourth was unavoidable; our new bridge would block the site distance for a set of railroad track signals. This signal needed to be relocated on the other side of our bridge structure which added nearly \$300,000 to the project costs. All of the coordination for this work was time consuming when trying to execute contracts and conduct plan reviews with two different railroads.



Also, during construction, a railroad flagger was required. With trains passing through the site, work would be suspended anywhere from 4 to 8 times a day.

The last major barrier was all of the unknown structures we encountered beneath ground. Only a handful of maps of the former steel mill properties existed, none were complete. All these encounters added force account dollars to the project. Extracting concrete footers from every excavation pit also added time extensions to the contract. The slight residual benefit of encountering these structures was the savings in the anticipated contaminated soil bid item. In the end, a good contractor and cooperation from all others enabled the Planning Committee to keep the additional costs to only 3% above the original \$2,677,000 bid price.

## Funding

For just the bridge project the MRCO Planning Committee was challenged to acquire all of the needed funding. The US Economic Development Administration stepped up by approving a \$1.8 million grant. At the same time the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners established an economic development fund apportioned from sales tax revenues, of which \$700,000 went toward this project. The Ohio Department of Development met the remaining gap by providing \$650,000. With steel prices rising, additional funds were still needed. MRCO Planning Committee members knocked on doors to secure last minute gap financing. The Mahoning County Engineer, the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners, the Mahoning County Solid Waste District, and the City of Youngstown stepped up to the plate and saved the day. Congressman Tim Ryan appropriated additional funds for provide for bridge lighting.

## MOVING FORWARD



Planning for the bridge project began in 1999. Construction began in 2004 and was completed a year later. On September 19, 2005, the ribbon cutting took place on the day that is locally referred to as Black Monday. The day the bridge opened marked the first time the community saw the significance of the project. Local nay sayers who called the project *the bridge to nowhere* suddenly realized there is a new frontier to be found along those river banks.

Congressman Tim Ryan's office recently appropriated an additional \$1.6 million to complete secondary bridge and interstate access improvements. Matching funds anticipated from State and local

sources will complete the internal network of roadways along with improved utility services. Already several private property owners have begun reinvesting in the site. The MRCO Planning Committee anticipates complete revitalization and creation of 500 new jobs within the next five to ten years. Additionally, the Mahoning River Corridor will be flanked with bike trails open space for habitat protection and recreational amenities. A separate group, the Mahoning River Consortium is working with the Army Corps of Engineers on a river cleanup project. An area that was once dominated by heavy industry will become a land where residents can work, families can play and wildlife may return.

