

TESTIMONY
OF
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CITY OF RIALTO
CALIFORNIA
BEFORE THE
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
HEARING

BUILDING A 21ST CENTURY INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AMERICA:
REVITALIZING AMERICAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE
BROWNFIELDS PROGRAM

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Chairman Garret Graves, Ranking Member Grace Napolitano and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on revitalizing American communities through the Brownfields Program. It is a privilege and honor for me to participate in this important hearing. I am here today as the Mayor of Rialto, California to share my strong support, my community's support, for the US Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Program.

For those of you who may not be familiar with my City, Rialto is a vibrant, ethnically diverse, working class community of 100,000 people located in San Bernardino County, part of the Inland Empire in Southern California. Rialto is an environmental justice community. Like many older communities, which grew up along the railroad, Rialto has a long and colorful history that evolved from an agricultural base to a more urban, transportation/industrial economy.

Rialto is home to a host of major regional distribution centers: Staples Inc., which serves stores across the entire West Coast of the United States; Toys "R" Us, Under Armour, Niagara, Medine, Amazon, and Target in the northern region of the City. One of the country's largest fireworks companies, Pyro Spectaculars, is also headquartered in Rialto. The City also hosts Union Pacific's East Colton classification yard, the Kinder Morgan regional petroleum and fuel storage tank farm and fuel distribution facilities, major trucking operations such as Old Dominion, Yellow Freight, UPS and Fed Ex, as well as numerous metal fabricators including various surface mining and other heavy industrial manufacturing companies. We also are the home of Martinez and Turek, a large defense contractor and Biscomerica, a large confectioner manufacturer. Rialto, a transportation hub, is ideally situated at the confluence of three major freeways, the I-10, the 210 and the I-15, which help convey the goods movement from the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles to the rest of the nation.

There are over 95 companies in Rialto that handle hazardous waste. The State of California Water Resources Control Board environmental mapping program "GeoTracker" indicated that a significant number of our underground storage tanks are leaking. EPA, moreover, manages and operates a superfund site in the northern section of the City. So, while my home town of Rialto is a wonderful place to live, work and play, it also confronts many economic and environmental challenges that can best be addressed through the assistance and partnership of local, state and federal stakeholders.

As an elected official and public servant with more than 30-years experience, the Brownfields Program, in my view, plays a critical role in assisting cities such as Rialto clean-up, restore and reuse environmentally compromised properties so that they may once again contribute to the health and economy of our communities. This partnership is absolutely critical to economic revitalization and job growth, not just in Rialto but in cities across the country.

Brownfield Remediation – The WDIJ Site

In 2009/2010, the USEPA awarded a Brownfield grant to the City of Rialto for \$600,000 -- \$400,000 to conduct communitywide Brownfield Assessments and \$200,000 to remediate characterized Brownfields. Rialto used the grant funds to investigate and remediate several sites.

The City of Rialto's Redevelopment Agency (the Agency) acquired a 4.8-acre parcel in 2008 at 1485 South Willow Avenue. The Agency acquired the site to assemble a larger site for the purposes of commercial development. The City did not deem the heavy industrial use as the highest and best use of land. The Agency relocated the occupant in 2012 and demolished the vertical structures on the site.

During acquisition, the Agency conducted Phase I/II Environmental investigations that established contamination with waste oils, lead, and arsenic from the years of heavy industrial use, including steel and metal fabrication and painting operations. The office building also contained asbestos.

The City/Agency used the Brownfield Remediation grant to engage Converse Consultants to prepare a Remedial Action Plan and solicit bids for the removal of the contaminated soils. The City contracted with Partner's Engineering and Science to excavate, transport, and dispose of impacted soil from the site. The total cost of remediation was \$136,194.

The City now intends to use approximately 3 acres of the site for a public fire station. The City plans to incorporate the balance of the 4.8-acre parcel into the adjoining 15-acre parcel for redevelopment to commercial uses. The Brownfield grant helped eliminate a health hazard for Rialto residents and redevelop an underutilized site into a \$9 million fire station and community center, and eventually a \$15 million to \$20 million retail center, creating 1,500 jobs.

Communities Assessments – The Rails to Trails and Metrolink Projects

The City targeted two primary areas for community wide environmental assessments; the Central Business District and Foothill Boulevard. The Central Business District encompassed the historic center of the City, with a variety of civic, service, and retail uses. The Foothill Boulevard area consisted of former Route 66, a strip commercial highway with a mix of newer and older commercial and residential land uses.

The City performed environmental assessments on 15 parcels. The two primary projects that proceeded forward were the Pacific Electric Inland Empire Trail (Rails to Trails) and the Metrolink Expansion Project.

Rails to Trails Project

The Rails to Trails project transformed a 1-1/2 mile long abandoned railroad right of way into a hiking and biking trail as part of the national rails to trails program. The Rialto portion occupies the eastern end of the trail and joins up with completed portions in the neighboring city of Fontana. When fully complete, the Pacific Electric Inland Empire Trail will run 21 miles east-west between Rialto and Claremont, in Los Angeles County. Rialto completed the improvements in 2015 at a cost of \$4.4 million. This project turned a previously abandoned rail corridor into a park improving the quality of life for community residents. The Communitywide Assessment Grant allowed the City to secure Phase I/II environmental clearances and complete minor remediation to proceed with the project.

Metrolink Project

The Metrolink Project expanded the existing Metrolink station to accommodate additional ridership. Metrolink is a commuter rail line linking the city of Rialto and the Inland Empire to the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. The expanding parking lot facilitates access to the station by local residents, further encouraging the use of interurban mass transportation. The site originally consisted of an abandoned City Warehouse and several properties that were used for auto repair and storage, and the Phase I/II assessments allowed the City to receive environmental clearances prior to commencement of construction. The \$2.2 million project created construction jobs and approximately 350 new parking spaces for commuters.

Other Brownfield Opportunities in Rialto

Although EPA grants could not fund this particular project because Rialto owned the property and may have contributed to its contamination, the City followed the same basic procedures for the Brownfield Program before awarding a \$1.1 million demolition and remediation contract to prepare the 436 acre Airport for redevelopment. The City prepared Phase I/II environmental assessments and developed a Remedial Work Plan that was approved by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. In 2016, the city completed the remediation work, although it retained elements of the contaminated asphalt and concrete on-site pending reuse as roadway base. The City is currently applying the contaminated roadway base as part of its infrastructure improvements to support economic development. The remediation of this Brownfield site will produce \$2 billion in new assess valuations, 10,000 new jobs, and \$10 million per year in City revenues.

At the north end of Rialto, the City sued the owner of a 62 acre underutilized industrial site that contributed to groundwater contamination from perchlorate intrusion. This fallowed site represents a future Brownfield opportunity for the City. The County of San Bernardino currently assesses the site at approximately \$3.8 million, while its underlying land value is upward of \$30 million. When developed, the site could add another \$70 million in assessed valuation and generate 750 jobs or more. The uncertain burdens of remediation, the ongoing litigation, and other factors create a grossly underutilized property that could be an economic catalyst for the City.

The City of Rialto has a Brownfield Assessment grant application pending with the EPA. The grant is designed to investigate properties deemed likely to be brownfields and determine the best course of action to clean these sites. Our region (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) has over 25 known brownfield sites. The City of Rialto has established a Brownfields Assessment Coalition, under the National Resource Development Council for Local Governments (NRDC-LG) that will plan, and research economic and environmental needs of the targeted communities, and determine sites for assessment. The project goals are to assess existing brownfields, educate the public on brownfields, determine their capacity for reuse, and begin the planning for redevelopment, in line with broader land reuse documents.

In closing, EPA's Brownfield Program assists communities such as mine to clean up and restore contaminated and underutilized land, producing environmental and economic benefits that generate immediate and long-term dividends. The Brownfield Program, moreover, is an effective tool at leveraging federal taxpayer dollars to enhance and spur local economic development. We should not be so quick to give this up. We should not be afraid to invest in our future. We should be investing more, not less, in our infrastructure. Rather than target this effective program for elimination, as the Trump Administration proposes in its FY 2018 budget, I respectfully urge Members of Congress, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and President Donald Trump to weigh this program on its merits and fully fund it in the FY 2017 and FY 2018 budgets.

Thank you.