

## Planning for Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment

### GREEN AND VERTICALLY INTEGRATED BUSINESS ANALYSIS

#### CHICO, CALIFORNIA, EPA REGION 9

Chico, a vibrant college town in Northern California with about 86,000 residents, is recognized as a regional center for recreation, education, shopping, employment and health services. Rich in outdoor recreation opportunities and natural resources, the town is also home to several local, entrepreneurial enterprises. "The Wedge," located in the southeast part of the Southwest Chico Neighborhood Improvement Plan Area, offers up to 40 acres of underutilized industrial land and is considered critical to the revitalization of the area.

EPA provided technical assistance to Chico to increase economic development in the The Wedge by analyzing local, green and vertically-integrated business (VIB) opportunities. VIBs conduct at least two processes that are typically separated—such as manufacturing, distribution or retailing—in a single location. Several VIBs exist in or near The Wedge already.

The technical assistance team met with city staff to understand the community's goals for The Wedge and to attain a better understanding of the characteristics of The Wedge. The team also met with numerous property and business owners, developers and economic development professionals to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with revitalizing the area. EPA funded an analysis of key market indicators and existing

institutional infrastructure to assist community officials understand economic drivers in Chico. EPA also identified local entrepreneurial businesses that could be interested in locating to The Wedge as a VIB. The final report presents recommendations and next steps to the city to foster a supportive environment for attracting local, green VIBs to The Wedge. Key recommendations from the project include:

- Establish a public/private partnership and assemble properties.
- Update and implement the Southwest Chico Neighborhood Improvement Plan.
- Nurture home grown, green VIBs.
- Leverage additional public and private investment opportunities.

On April 8, 2014, EPA met with more than 25 stakeholders, including business owners from The Wedge, neighbors, realtors, economic development professionals and city staff, to present the technical assistance findings and discuss opportunities for revitalizing The Wedge as part of the Brownfields Community Wide Assessment grant awarded to the city in 2012. As a result of the EPA-funded VIB analysis and EPA Brownfields grant activities, momentum is building towards redeveloping The Wedge. A developer is coordinating with the city to meet with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control to discuss a strategy for moving forward on a key property within The Wedge, and the city is prioritizing sites for environmental assessment.

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Figure 3: The Southwest Chico Neighborhood Plan Area highlights several VIBs and The Wedge.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

- Communities may be more successful by assessing opportunities to foster existing businesses as a strategy for job creation and growth rather than focusing on attracting a business from another community.
- A culture of sustainability is important for green VIBs because it provides a basis for cross collaboration and encourages innovation and creativity.
- When planning for sustainable brownfield redevelopment in communities with city budget constraints, a public /private partnership can allow the city to guide the process while sharing redevelopment responsibilities and costs.

#### PLANNED POST-TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

- Continue to focus on redevelopment of the catalyst property at the "top" of The Wedge.
- Continue site prioritization for environmental assessments for other Wedge properties.
- Pursue developer interests and respond to inquiries.
- Continue to provide information on site opportunities.