Organizing Your Planning Effort: The First Steps in Installation Redevelopment

By: Yvonne Dawson
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COVER PHOTO

The cover photo is of Lowry Town Center, an urban retail and office development built in 2002 on the site of the former Lowry Air Force Base in Denver and Aurora, Colorado. More information on the Lowry Redevelopment Authority is available at www.lowry.org.
WHAT IS NAID?

NAID, An Association of Defense Communities (NAID/ADC) is the nation’s leading organization supporting communities with active, closed and closing defense installations. NAID/ADC unites the diverse interests of communities, the private sector and the military on issues of mission enhancement/realignment, community-base partnerships, privatization, and closure/redevelopment.

Support

For close to 30 years, NAID/ADC has been the voice of communities dealing with the challenges and opportunities of active and closed military installations. It’s an organization built on support found through one-on-one interaction at conferences, timely updates in our weekly newsletter, and the unique online resources.

Knowledge

For defense communities, understanding the complex and important issues they must face is not an easy task. At NAID/ADC we know the importance of learning and the opportunity that creates. Our comprehensive approach to increasing the knowledge of our members includes two major conferences – both packed full of hundreds of sessions – a highly regarded library of original publications, and a just-a-call away clearinghouse of information ready for your access.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For months, defense communities have nervously waited for the Department of Defense’s list of military facilities slated for closure and realignment. The list, presented to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission in May, calls for a number of installation closures and realignments. Over the summer, the BRAC Commission will be conducting hearings in Washington, D.C. and around the country, as well as visiting all installations on the list. In the fall, the Commission will present its recommendations to the president.

If previous BRAC rounds serve as a guide, despite community efforts to save installations, about 85% of those on the Department of Defense’s list will be closed or realigned. The departure of military and civilian jobs at an installation can significantly disrupt a local economy, and affected communities are understandably doing all they can to remove their installation from the list. This summer, these communities will be working feverishly to change the minds of Commission members. Facing possible closure, the experiences of defense communities impacted in previous BRAC rounds indicate that it is best to begin development of contingency plans now. Communities can have two teams working simultaneously: one (Plan A) challenging the installation’s closure and one (Plan B) developing a vision for site redevelopment. If the installation does indeed close or is realigned, time will not be lost and the community will be prepared for the next step in redevelopment. This is particularly important as the Department of Defense (DoD) is planning to expedite the closure and subsequent transfer of BRAC properties in this round.1

The BRAC process presents defense communities with the opportunity to convert closed or realigned installations into valuable local assets. This publication is intended as a guide to the first steps in the base redevelopment process for defense communities with installations slated for closure and/or realignment during the 2005 BRAC round. This publication draws from the extensive experience of NAID, An Association of Defense Communities (NAID/ADC) members to provide best practices in installation redevelopment.2 Over the past 15 years, many communities have successfully resuscitated fallow installations.3 These examples illustrate five key factors for effective installation redevelopment planning:

- Preparing contingency plans for the installation’s redevelopment in advance of the BRAC Commission issuing its final recommendations
- Speaking with one voice regarding the future of the installation
- Matching planning efforts with the community’s unique characteristics and the circumstances of the closure or realignment
- Involving the public in the deliberations over the planned redevelopment of the base
- Developing a reuse plan that is: responsive to community concerns and needs; financially feasible; guided by environmental conditions and focused on the accelerated transfer of military property
II. THE “PLAN B” TEAM

As the Plan A team gets to work, the Plan B group should develop contingency plans for the installation’s redevelopment in advance of the BRAC Commission issuing its final recommendations in the fall. If the installation does close, the community will have a head start understanding redevelopment issues and replacing jobs that may be lost following closure or realignment.

Defense communities often have reservations about conducting redevelopment planning in the decision-making stage of the BRAC process. Political leaders may be worried about leaving the impression with constituents that they’re “throwing in the towel.” Paul Tauer, the mayor of Aurora, CO, in both 1991 when Lowry Air Force Base was recommended for closure and 1995 when Fitzsimons Army Medical Center made DoD’s BRAC list, recommends that local officials follow a two-track strategy and should not be worried that broaching the possibility the installation will close will be interpreted as giving up. “I think they need to start getting people to begin to consider what happens next. I don’t think it’s dangerous. I think it’s exercising foresight and good judgment,” Tauer said. Despite such assurances, though, communities may still decide that the public focus should be on “Save the Base” efforts, while the Plan B group works quietly, maintaining a low profile over the summer.

During the summer, as the BRAC Commission is reviewing DoD’s 2005 BRAC recommendations, the Plan B effort will probably be led by a relatively small group made up of elected officials, city or state administrators, business leaders, and economic development professionals. If in the fall the installation is on the final list for closure or realignment, the effort must become much broader, involving the public more extensively. For the time being, the Plan B group will work to get a handle on the situation – learning more about the installation’s assets and liabilities; financial and planning resources needed; the potential impact of closure or realignment on the community; and the redevelopment process. The group will put a plan of action in place – including a timeline for public involvement and eventual redevelopment – in anticipation of the final BRAC decision in the fall. When the
final list is approved, community leaders will then be able to speak with one voice on the installation’s future.

Activities of the Plan B group:

Learning about the redevelopment process

Shortly after the list is released, the Department of Defense’s Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) will contact impacted communities to inform them of the resources it provides. OEA (www.oea.gov) is DoD’s primary office with responsibility for providing adjustment assistance to communities, regions and states adversely impacted by significant Defense program changes. OEA provides funding and technical support to help communities better manage the impact of closure or realignment and provides guidance on how to begin the installation redevelopment process.

To support planning efforts at this stage, impacted communities on the list will be able to apply for funds through OEA’s Community Planning Assistance Program. The program makes available dual tracking assistance during the summer of 2005, followed by initial “seed” planning assistance grants during the early Fall until the BRAC 2005 list become final. States and local governments are able to apply, and a 10 percent match is required. More information on OEA funding for organizational development and reuse planning is provided on page 13.

Gathering information

A key question for the Plan B group is how significant the closure’s impact will be on the local economy. To determine this, communities typically commission studies to estimate total job losses on and off the base, impacts on the buying power of remaining residents as well as the effect on local industries. The results are useful for the Plan A team as well as for the Plan B team as they determine how to fashion an appropriate planning strategy.

The Plan B group can also begin gathering information about the installation property, including the condition, location and current use of buildings, infrastructure, utilities and roads. An analysis of the installation’s assets as well as liabilities — such as environmental issues, development constraints, etc. — will help the community outline preliminary concept plans for site reuse.

Getting organized

While the “Save the Base” effort continues, an affected community may not want to pursue a highly public effort to plan for the installation’s redevelopment. Instead, the Plan B group can develop a conceptual framework for a planning process. Specifically, the group can identify potential stakeholders and the structure for a Planning LRA. (See Section IV for more information on getting organized.)

Developing a communications plan

The Plan B group should also develop a plan for communicating with the public following the final BRAC recommendations. This will be a difficult time for impacted communities, and decisive action by the Plan B group can help reassure the community that all is
not lost. The group will want to stay ahead of the issue, rolling out the timeline for developing a reuse plan, reporting on its findings thus far and providing opportunities for the community to give their input on the installation’s redevelopment. With a communications plan in place, community leaders will be better prepared to speak with one voice as to the installation’s future redevelopment.

**Visiting installations redeveloped in previous rounds**

To understand how other communities have approached installation redevelopment, the Plan B group may want to visit communities that suffered a closure in previous rounds. NAID/ADC can serve as a valuable resource, connecting communities on the list with those impacted in previous rounds in order to promote sharing of ideas and lessons learned. For example, when Chanute Air Force Base was designated for closure in 1988, community representatives — along with leaders from other Air Force communities slated for closure — visited five former Air Force bases.\(^5\) During the visits, the officials observed the diversity of development at the various bases and visited with officials from the communities that worked on redevelopment. Katy Podagrosi, the mayor of Rantoul, Ill., when Chanute Air Force Base was designated for closure in 1988, indicated that the visits provided a valuable illustration of the opportunities and challenges in redevelopment.\(^6\)

### III. THE PLANNING LOCAL REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (PLANNING LRA)

After the BRAC Commission issues its final recommendations this fall, affected communities will need to quickly determine what group will lead the redevelopment planning effort and serve as the Planning LRA. For those communities that follow a dual-track process over the summer, the Plan B team may have already outlined the structure of the Planning LRA and identified stakeholders to participate on the Planning LRA.

Community members play a key role in determining the future of the installation. A wide array of ideas will be put forth for the installation’s redevelopment, some workable and some not so workable. It is up to the Planning LRA to serve as the forum and clearinghouse for community input. The Planning LRA will capture the vision offered by the community and use it as a basis for developing the reuse plan. Ultimately, the plan must represent community desires, but at the same time be realistic regarding economic, market and environmental conditions.

DoD and OEA will want one point of contact for redevelopment efforts. Communities with competing organizations that have different visions of the installation’s redevelopment will face significant delays in the process and will not have access to the planning resources provided by OEA and DoD. For funding purposes, OEA requires that the Planning LRA be an instrument of local, regional or state government.\(^7\) The next section explores issues for the Plan B team to consider when organizing the Planning LRA.

### IV. GETTING ORGANIZED

Each installation closure and realignment is different, and planning efforts much be designed to match the unique circumstances of each community. The size of the installation, the number of jobs projected to be lost, the size and number of jurisdictions affected,
and numerous other factors impact the scope of the redevelopment effort. How should the Planning LRA be organized to best support redevelopment?

Previous BRAC rounds have seen a wide variety of Planning LRA structures, and examining how these LRAs were organized can provide valuable lessons for communities. Based on information presented in an OEA bulletin and the experiences of NAID/ADC members, the following are some of the critical questions that should be considered before organizing your Planning LRA.8

Questions to Consider

Who should be on the governing board of the Planning LRA?

Communities will need to think carefully about who should be involved, ensuring it is “a local participatory group that is representative of the stakeholders most intimately affected by the closure,” according to J. Lynn Boese, former Executive Director of the Fort Benjamin Harrison Reuse Authority in Lawrence, Ind. The LRA should strive to be as inclusive as possible, representing the demographics of the area and involving public and private sector members from all jurisdictions affected.9 In some cases, it may be important to reach out to special populations such as Native Americans or the homeless.10 For example, when Williams Air Force Base in Mesa, Ariz. closed as a result of the 1991 BRAC round, the Gila River Indian Community played an important role in the redevelopment process due to the presence of archaeological sites on the base.

Can the Planning LRA role be taken on by an existing organization or should a temporary organization be established?

Depending on the circumstances of the installation’s closure or realignment and the characteristics of the installation and local community, an already established entity – such as a local jurisdiction, regional council or state – may be the obvious choice for leading the planning effort. In some cases, it is less clear what organization should lead, either because the community lacks a strong planning capacity or due to disputes over process control.

When Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, N.H. was closed in 1991 as a result of the 1988 BRAC round, there was a great deal of controversy over how the redevelopment process should go forward.11 Debate centered on whether the effort should be led by the state, as the impacts of closure would be felt throughout New Hampshire, or whether the small counties and municipalities surrounding Pease AFB should spearhead the effort. To address the needs of both, the state enacted legislation to establish a special purpose authority, the Pease Redevelopment Commission. The Commission’s membership was made up of an equal number of state and locally appointed representatives. Its primary responsibility was to plan for the redevelopment of the base, and once the planning function was complete, the organization ceased operations. The Commission presented the reuse plan to another entity, the Pease Development Authority, that the state gave responsibility for implementing the plan.
How should the Planning LRA be structured if the closed installation is within more than one jurisdiction?

The Planning LRA should represent the interests of all jurisdictions impacted by a BRAC action. Localities where multiple jurisdictions are impacted require a great deal of regional cooperation to avoid protracted disputes that can delay redevelopment by months and even years. Competition among neighboring communities over ideas for redevelopment can prevent the region from presenting a united front to government agencies and limit access to OEA and other planning and funding resources. Establishing a regionally oriented Planning LRA can be the solution.

When Fort McClellan in Anniston, Ala. was announced for closure in the 1995 BRAC round, the Fort McClellan Redevelopment Authority (now the McClellan Joint Powers Authority) was established with representation from throughout the affected region. In addition to representatives from Anniston, the county, state and the local Council of Mayors have a seat on the board. The council is composed of rotating mayors from smaller jurisdictions that abut McClellan.

How long should the Planning LRA last? When does the Implementation LRA begin its work?

According to OEA, the major function of the Planning LRA is to be “the focal point of community adjustment activities and for Federal Government interaction with the community.” The role of the Implementation LRA is somewhat different. It has the responsibility of transforming the planning vision into reality on the ground – and this requires skill in land development, finance, engineering, etc. Implementation LRAs may also require authority to purchase and convey property.

At Lowry Air Force Base, the cities of Denver and Aurora formed the Lowry Economic Recovery Project (LERP) to lead the planning process. The agency included public input through subcommittees and numerous citizen meetings held to develop a reuse plan. A different organization – the Lowry Redevelopment Authority – was established to implement the plan created by LERP. The LRA serves as master planner and developer of the 1,866-acre site with responsibility for zoning, infrastructure improvements and real estate sales. According to Jane Blackstone of the Portland Development Commission who served as a Project Manager with LERP, “it was a wise decision to have two groups. Through the activities of LERP, the citizens of Aurora and Denver were able to come to consensus on a vision for the base.” Citizen volunteers and leaders who become involved in the reuse planning effort often want to continue on with the implementation phase, but different skills or representation may be needed for implementation, she notes. In order to avoid alienating participants, it is important to be clear in the beginning as to the responsibilities of the Planning LRA and whether or not it will evolve into an Implementation LRA.

V. THE PRIMARY ACTIVITIES OF A PLANNING LRA

Public Involvement and Communication

If the installation makes the final BRAC list, everyone will be asking the big question: what’s next? If planning efforts begin over the summer, the redevelopment team should
have a strategy in place for how to communicate next steps with the general public, stakeholders and the media. As quickly as possible, community leaders should outline how the Planning LRA will be gathering input from the public in an important discussion over the future of the base.

Planning LRAs typically develop subcommittees to tackle detailed issues related to redevelopment. Local volunteers study and make recommendations in areas such as worker adjustment, infrastructure, environmental issues, aviation, utilities, economic development and transportation.

In addition to the work of subcommittees, the Planning LRA leads an outreach effort to ensure the broader community is involved in the process. The LRA will help the community develop a vision and goals “that will guide the planning process...these goals serve as the foundation of the overall recovery strategy.”14 To determine this vision, public involvement activities may include:

- Community interviews
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings
- Public information (website, newsletters, media)

Best practices in public involvement can be learned from the comprehensive planning efforts of communities throughout the country. The American Planning Association (www.planning.org) provides extensive resources on how to guide citizens in creating a community vision for a site. Unlike previous BRAC rounds, communities impacted in the 2005 BRAC process will be able to take advantage of new Internet-based public involvement tools. Community members can respond to surveys, review publications and provide comments to plans and more, all online.

Defense communities have strong connections with their installation, and closure can bring about a tremendous sense of loss. An installation “enjoys center stage in a community’s economic and social structure. The prospect of closure suddenly spells the end to a lengthy, symbiotic relationship.”15 Communication and public involvement efforts will be needed to help community members acknowledge what’s happened and begin to consider the future. The Plan B team can help reassure the community that closure also presents opportunities through redevelopment. Many communities affected in previous rounds have realized that the planning process can serve as a great opportunity to come together to develop a picture for how the area will be redeveloped.

**Developing a Reuse Plan**

Incorporating the community’s vision from the public involvement phase, the Planning LRA’s primary mission is to develop an initial base reuse plan. The reuse plan identifies the LRA’s overall redevelopment strategy for the base, “incorporating environmental considerations such as clean-up activities, air emission credits, natural resource concerns such as endangered or threatened species and habitat, and cultural and historical requirements.”16
In order to develop the reuse plan, the following steps need to be taken:

- Inventory the site and physical resources (facilities/land use, utilities, surrounding area, transportation, environmental constraints)
- Assess market forces and economic conditions (regional and local demographic and economic data, demand for various land uses and a competitiveness analysis)
- Develop a community vision for the site that focuses on community needs
- Develop reuse alternatives (land use, users, circulation, open space, education)
- Match redevelopment alternatives with property disposal methods
- Select and refine an alternative
- Develop a plan of action

A number of resources are available to communities as they begin to develop their reuse plans. Publications available from OEA, DoD and NAID/ADC — including OEA’s Community Guide to Base Reuse and the Base Reuse Implementation Manual and NAID’s The Community Base Reuse Planning Process: A Layman’s Guide — take communities step-by-step through this process.

**Some Issues to Consider in Reuse Planning**

Based on the experiences of NAID/ADC members, the following are important considerations for communities just beginning redevelopment planning.

**Consultants**

LRAs will need to examine their internal capacity and capability for planning to determine whether or not a consultant may be needed to develop the reuse plan, and if so, at what stage in the planning process to involve the consultant. At Fort Harrison, the LRA “elected to develop the reuse plan internally rather than hiring consultants,” according to J. Lynn Boese. “Consultants were brought on board later to help prepare the economic development conveyance application and the implementation strategy,” he notes. At Fort Harrison, sufficient capacity existed within the planning departments of impacted local governments to do this work.

If a consultant is involved in the plan’s development, it’s important to develop a request for proposals that clearly articulates the community’s vision. Duane Lavery, Executive Director of the Red River Redevelopment Authority in New Boston, Texas, notes that it is important for the community to remain the owner of the vision, “instead of letting the consultants guide the process.” As a resource to communities, NAID/ADC can provide a list of consultants with experience in reuse planning.

**Financial feasibility**

While the Planning LRA will certainly encourage the community to “think big” when developing its vision for the installation’s redevelopment, it is also important that the community develop a realistic picture of what new uses can occur and what unmet community
needs the plan might accomplish. This can be done by:

- Identifying practical redevelopment alternatives that are capable of attracting private investment and provide a reasonable rate of return.
- Illustrating how the conditions of the installation – including hazardous waste sites, historic facilities and/or archeological sites – may impact the eventual redevelopment of the installation.
- Ensuring that the reuse plan is responsive to the fiscal concerns of local governments. Development options in the plan should reflect economic reality while minimizing the financial exposure of communities involved in redevelopment efforts.¹⁹

Remaining flexible

Successful implementation of the reuse plan will likely take 10 to 20 years, or even longer. During that time period significant market, regulatory and financial changes will most likely occur.²⁰ As a result, the reuse plan should be flexible so implementation efforts can be altered to accommodate changing conditions.

Considering implementation during the planning phase

Communities will want to develop reuse plans that allow for a quick transfer of property into new uses. To do this, the Planning LRA will need to consider some implementation-related issues, such as environmental cleanup and property disposal. Community leaders should think about the property will be conveyed – via an economic development conveyance, negotiated sale to the community, public sale, public benefit conveyance or other approach. The disposal method will significantly affect redevelopment plans and the costs the community will be responsible for. The environmental condition of the property also is an important factor in contemplating new uses.

Funding to Support LRA Activities

Organizational Seed Grants

Beginning Sept. 8, 2005, the date the BRAC Commission presents its final recommendations to the President, OEA will make available organizational grants to communities on the BRAC list. These funds may be particularly useful for communities that chose not to conduct redevelopment planning over the summer. The grants provide operational support to inventory planning and economic development resources and develop the structure for the Planning LRA. Applicants must be state or local governments and a 10 percent grant match is required.

Complete Adjustment Assistance

When the final BRAC list is approved by the president, OEA will be able to provide its full BRAC assistance to impacted communities. To be eligible, there must be a “direct and significantly adverse impact on the affected community.”²¹ Again, applicants must be state or local governments and a 10 percent grant match is required. Grants are tailored to the needs of the community, but generally cover organization costs related to planning and
carrying out a community adjustment strategy, including the development of a reuse plan. The funds can also be used to hire consultants and/or staff. Grants are provided over a number of years — averaging from three to six years — and average $1.8 million.

VI. SUMMARY

Defense communities with installations slated for closure or realignment in the 2005 BRAC process will be working this summer to remove their installation from the list. Based on experience from past rounds, communities affected by BRAC this year should begin planning early for potential redevelopment, creating a “Plan B” team to work quietly over the summer. This team should learn all it can about installation resources, conditions and redevelopment potential and develop a plan of action, including a communications strategy, to be in place if indeed the installation is on the final list for closure or realignment.

After determination of the final list, the contingency planning team should transition into a formal planning effort that helps the community create a vision for new installation uses. Guiding this process is the Planning Local Redevelopment Authority, which also has responsibility for developing the reuse plan for the installation. Each closure is different, so Planning LRAs are structured in a variety of ways in order to match the unique circumstances of the surrounding region and the installation. The Department of Defense’s Office of Economic Adjustment serves as a resource to communities throughout this process, providing technical support and funding to communities impacted by closure and realignment. OEA will provide support to communities as they form their Planning LRAs, as well as in the development of a reuse plan. The next phase is implementation – turning the reuse plan vision into reality – and will be covered extensively in an upcoming NAID/ADC Infobrief publication.

VII. RESOURCES

For detailed information on the reuse planning process, resources available through the Department of Defense, the Office of Economic Adjustment, the military services and NAID, An Association of Defense Communities are provided below.

Department of Defense BRAC Site
http://www.defenselink.mil/brac/

DoD Base Reuse Implementation Manual (a 2005 update is expected)

DoD Community Guide to Base Reuse (a 2005 update is expected)

Office of Economic Adjustment BRAC Library
http://www.oea.gov/oeaweb.nsf/BRAClib?OpenForm

Army Public Involvement Toolbox
Army BRAC Site

Air Force BRAC Site
http://www.afhra.hq.af.mil/brac.htm

NAID, An Association of Defense Communities Publications
http://www.defensecommunities.org

FOOTNOTES

1 NAID/ADC 2005 Winter Forum Conference Notes.
2 NAID’s 2004 publication The Community Base Reuse Planning Process: A Layman’s Guide draws from
the expertise of NAID members to provide an overview of the base reuse planning process.
3 See NAID’s 2002 publication Case Studies in Base Conversion for examples of communities that trans-
formed closed defense facilities into new civilian uses.
4 Elected officials from defense communities with installations impacted by closure in previous BRAC
rounds share their insights in NAID/ADC’s April 21, 2005 Defense Communities $60.
6 Ibid.
7 Notice of Funding Availability for Advance Planning Grants - Request for Grant Proposals. Federal Reg-
8 Economic Adjustment Technical Bulletin 2: Changes at Military Bases – Community Organization Chal-
9 Community Guide to Base Reuse. Section 3: Local Redevelopment Authorities. Office of Economic Ad-
10 The 1994 Base Closure Community Redevelopment and Homeless Assistance Act requires that the
Planning LRA incorporate the needs of the homeless in base reuse planning. The LRA is responsible
for developing a reuse plan that balances the needs of the homeless in neighboring jurisdictions with
the community’s economic development goals. For more information, see Chapter 10: Addressing
Homeless Needs by Owen W. Bludau in NAID’s 2002 publication The Community Base Reuse Planning
12 Economic Adjustment Technical Bulletin 2: Changes at Military Bases – Community Organization Chal-
info/faqs.htm.
16 Community Guide to Base Reuse. Section 2: Local Redevelopment Authorities. Office of Economic Ad-
17 Based on a presentation by Ellen Heath, AICP of EDW Inc. at NAID/ADC 2005 Winter Forum.
18 NAID. The Community Base Reuse Planning Process: A Layman’s Guide. Ch. 12 Case Study - Fort Ben-
jamin Harrison Reuse Plan in Retrospect. February 2004. The LRA retained consultants with expertise
in base reuse to serve as informal advisors while the community-led reuse plan was being compiled.
J. Lynn Boese notes that, “…it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to prepare the economic
development conveyance application and the implementation strategy without the expertise that con-
sultants brought to the task.”
19 NAID. The Community Base Reuse Planning Process: A Layman’s Guide. Ch. 11 – Implications of the
20 Ibid.
oea.gov.