

*May 2005*



## **Understanding Base Realignment: What Communities Should Know First**

*By: Todd Herberghs*



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the many individuals who made this NAID/ADC *Infobrief* possible. First, NAID/ADC Executive Director Tim Ford and NAID/ADC associate Yvonne Dawson, who both offered guidance and support throughout the drafting of the paper. I would also like to thank Dan Cohen, Managing Editor of NAID/ADC publications, who provided editing and technical assistance. Moreover, I would like to thank the NAID/ADC publications committee: Jim Hicks, Irene Kornelly and William Harvey, who provided editorial support and feedback, which guided me through the research and development portions of the writing process.

Most importantly, I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals, all currently working in defense communities that have previously undergone base realignment, for sharing their own community's experiences:

- Mr. Chuck Finley, Executive Director, Pueblo Depot Activity Development Authority, Pueblo, Colorado
- Mr. Richard Hall, Executive Director, Red River Redevelopment Authority, New Boston, Texas
- Mr. Phillip Whittenberg, Former Executive Director, Base Reuse Commission, Millington, Tennessee
- Mr. John Van Horn, Executive Director, Letterkenny Industrial Development Authority, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. I would like to especially thank Mr. Van Horn for his additional editing and review services.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Todd Herberghs, Esq. is a research fellow with NAID, An Association of Defense Communities. Prior to joining NAID/ADC, Todd worked at the National Governors Association, in Washington, DC, where he focused on state-level BRAC policy matters and land use issues. Prior to that, he was a commercial defense attorney at Swartz, Campbell, LLC, in Fort Myers, Florida. He received his Juris Doctor, with honors, from the University of Florida and a B.A., with honors, in Political Science from the University of Florida.

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## **COVER PHOTO**

The cover photos are of two office buildings at the Grissom Aeroplex, part of the realigned Grissom Air Force Base in Indiana. The top photo is of the Miami County Business Center, Building Two. The bottom photo is the SigNet Professional Arts Building. More information about the Grissom Aeroplex is available at [www.grissom-aeroplex.com](http://www.grissom-aeroplex.com).

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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.

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734 15th Street, NW, Suite 900  
Washington, DC 20005  
202/822-5256 (phone)  
202/822-8819 (fax)

## I. INTRODUCTION

### BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE (BRAC):

*“BRAC” is an acronym which stands for base realignment and closure. It is the process DoD has previously used to reorganize its installation infrastructure to more efficiently and effectively support its forces, increase operational readiness and facilitate new ways of doing business (Department of Defense).*

While closures received much of the attention in previous **Base Realignment and Closure** (BRAC) rounds, BRAC 2005 has placed a greater emphasis on realignment as a tool to reshape the nation’s military infrastructure to support military forces’ transformation. BRAC 2005 has called for the realignment of 29 major installations, with some installations losing more than 1,000 employees. Defense communities facing realignment of their military installations share many of the same issues involved in dealing with installation closure. However, realignments also present a distinctive set of challenges for communities — principally, determining what property is available for redevelopment and gaining access to it, obtaining utilities and other services, and property and facility redevelopment adjacent to an active military base.

In a base realignment situation, the military installation remains open, yet significant functions and their associated employment are relocated to another base. In most — but not all — cases, this relocation may lead to parts of the installation being closed and the creation of surplus land. Historically, this excess property has supported economic development efforts in impacted communities.

Although realignment is viewed as not-as-drastic an action as closure, realignments, depending on their size, have had major impacts on communities in previous BRAC rounds. A total of 55 major military bases were realigned in the previous four BRAC rounds. Realignment impacts varied from community to community depending on the magnitude of the relocated functions. In some cases, realignments have been followed by closure in a future BRAC round. Regardless of the end result, base realignment has a significant economic impact for defense communities — the most obvious being the loss of civilian and military personnel and their family members.

This *Infobrief* is designed to be a preliminary tool for communities facing the prospect that their installation will be realigned. The paper:

- Defines base realignment and explains its unique nature;
- Explains to communities what they can do this summer, while the BRAC Commission reviews the DoD closure and realignment recommendations, and prior to the issuance of the BRAC Commission’s recommendations;
- Informs communities about issues they should be aware of before they begin the process of developing redevelopment/reuse plans for property that is part of a realigned base, and highlights several general challenges that are found with all base realignments; and
- Offers two case studies of successfully redeveloped installations after their realignment designation in prior BRAC rounds.

## II. WHAT IS BASE REALIGNMENT?

### BASE REALIGNMENT:

*any action that “both reduces and relocates functions and civilian personnel positions, but does not include a reduction in force resulting from workload adjustments, reduced personnel or funding levels, skill imbalances, or other similar cause. A realignment may terminate the DoD requirement for the land and facilities on part of an installation. That part of the installation shall be treated as ‘closed’ for purposes of this part...” (Department of Defense)*

### Realignment Defined

According to the legislation authorizing BRAC, a **base realignment** is any action that “both reduces and relocates functions and civilian personnel positions, but does not include a reduction in force resulting from workload adjustments, reduced personnel or funding levels, skill imbalances, or other similar cause. A realignment may terminate the DoD requirement for the land and facilities on part of an installation. That part of the installation shall be treated as ‘closed’ for purposes of this part...”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, a realignment occurs when one or more functions of an installation are relocated elsewhere. The installation, though, still retains significant functions and remains, in part, an active military post.<sup>2</sup> The reduction in the number of functions will often mean that less land or facilities are needed, and that excess land may be made available for redevelopment by the local community. When a realignment creates surplus property, the community can access various federal assistance programs from the Office of Economic Adjustment. Communities can use the surplus property and facilities to support and guide economic development opportunities.

In some circumstances realignments do not create surplus property. A relocated function may not reduce the overall need for land or facilities on the installation, and there may only be a minor loss of personnel. If this occurs, then there may not be any surplus property or facilities created.

### Realignment Presents Distinct Challenges

Communities dealing with realigned bases face distinctive challenges that communities facing closure do not encounter. Base realignments are often seen as more challenging because:

- Every realignment is unique

Some realignments are large in scope and move numerous functions; whereas other realignments only move a few, smaller functions. Because of the variation of manpower and jobs impacted, it is difficult to generalize about the extent to which a realignment affects an installation’s assets and a community’s economy. Although every community dealing with realignment faces different issues, there is one common challenge that is present in every community — the loss of both civilian and military personnel.

- Opportunities for redevelopment are not always as apparent as they are with closures

When an installation is closed, the community has the opportunity to redevelop much — if not all — of the closed base’s land and facilities. However, when realignment occurs, there may be no excess property or facilities generated. Development options may not be as evident in a realignment as in a closure.

- Realignments occur adjacent to an active military installation

Due to the proximity of an active military installation, there are a myriad of challenges — such as training encroachment, installation buffer property, etc... — associated with integrating former military lands into the community. These issues are not present when a community deals with a base closure.

### **III. BEFORE THE BRAC RECOMMENDATIONS BECOME FINAL DECISIONS – WHAT TO DO DURING THE SUMMER – THE “PLAN B” TEAM**

Facing possible realignment, the experiences of defense communities impacted in previous BRAC rounds indicate that it is best to begin the development of contingency plans now. Communities can have two teams working simultaneously. The first — known as the “Save the Base” team — can challenge the installation’s realignment. The second — known as the “Plan B” team — is more private and begins preparing contingency plans for the installation’s redevelopment.

As the “Save the Base” team gets to work, the “Plan B” group should take the first steps toward developing a contingency plan so that the community will have a head start on economic recovery if the final BRAC decision is to realign the installation.

Defense communities may be concerned that contingency planning sends a signal to the BRAC Commission that officials are resigned to losing some or all of the military’s presence. In most cases, though, leaders from bases recommended for closure or realignment in past rounds have employed a dual strategy of striving to keep the local installation off the final list while simultaneously trying to get a jump on redevelopment planning. Despite assurances that contingency planning does not signal recommendation agreement, 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, contingency planning efforts 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 realignment, the planning effort must become broader, involving the public in a much more extensive way.

Because the scope and size of individual realignments are different, the Plan B group should begin by forecasting and assessing the potential overall impact of a realignment on the community. This analysis should serve as the basis for creating a contingency plan.

#### **Plan B Group Gets Started**

Officials should start evaluating the impact of the realignment by considering what military functions may move and whether land and facilities will become available to support redevelopment. There are several key issues to consider:

- What functions are recommended for realignment?
- Will the realignment create surplus property or facilities? If so, what is the general location and scope of excess property?

- What are the workforce implications (for both uniform and civilian personnel) of the realignment? What are the professional background/skill levels of the impacted personnel?
- Where will the realigned functions be relocated? How likely is it that civilian employees will move to remain with their current activity?

The overall impact of realignment can be generally grouped into two categories:

- **Realignments with Surplus Property:** If a community determines that realignment will create surplus land and facilities for development, contingency plans should consider redevelopment strategies that forecast or project where the “new” installation boundary will/should be. At this stage, redevelopment planning for realigned property generally will follow the process employed at closed bases. The planning team also should contact DoD’s Office of Economic Adjustment to seek economic assistance in planning for redevelopment. For more information, see NAID/ADC’s May 2005 publication *Organizing Your Planning Effort: The First Steps in Installation Redevelopment*.
- **Realignments without Surplus Property:** If a community determines that surplus land or facilities likely will not be available or very small, contingency strategies should focus on workforce strategies for unemployed workers that choose not to relocate with the realigned function(s).

#### **IV. ONCE THE FINAL BRAC LIST IS APPROVED**

After the BRAC Commission submits its final recommendations to the President in September, communities dealing with realignments must begin the process of transition

##### **RESERVE ENCLAVES AT REALIGNED BASES**

In the four previous BRAC rounds, the BRAC Commission recommended 27 actions in which a reserve enclave was to be established at a closed or realigned base. In several instances involving an Army post, though, the service created a reserve enclave that was nearly as large as the pre-BRAC installation on which it was located, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported. At five installations — Fort Hunter Liggett, CA, Fort Chaffee, AR, Fort Pickett, VA, Fort Dix, NJ, and Fort Indiantown Gap, PA — the Army retained at least 90 percent of each installation’s pre-BRAC acreage. Generally, this will prohibit most community redevelopment efforts as the military still occupies the majority of the installation. As a general rule, reserve bases do not generate a significant number of jobs on the base.

In the 1995 round, the BRAC Commission’s “recommendation language generally provided that the Army bases be closed or realigned, except that minimum essential ranges, facilities, and training areas be retained for reserve component use,” GAO said. To limit instances in which the BRAC Commission language does not explicitly identify what facilities a service can retain, GAO recommended that DoD should clearly state what infrastructure is needed for any proposed enclave and what the estimated operating costs are. In contrast, the three major reserve enclaves created at Air Force bases (AFB) — March AFB, CA, Grissom AFB, IN, and Homestead AFB, FL — retained no more than 51 percent of each installation’s pre-BRAC acreage.

Source: See Government Accountability Office, *Military Base Closures: Observations on Prior and Current BRAC rounds*, [GAO-05-614](#). (2005)



planning that entails creating a new installation from the previous one's assets. There are a number of critical tasks realigned communities should undertake at this point:

### **Garner Community Support & Organize**

The community must realize that realignment is not a death sentence — while some employment has been lost, the installation does not close. While it is normal to experience shock and disappointment at losing part of an installation, the community must look ahead and define a vision for any surplus lands or facilities resulting from realignment.<sup>3</sup> If local officials have not already done so, they must create a community-based organization that will coordinate development efforts and act as a single voice for residents.

### **Engage the Base Commander**

Because the base commander plays a vital role in determining what property the community can use following a realignment, maintaining a close relationship is one of the keys to successful redevelopment. Base commanders change posts regularly, however, so communities should try to finish planning efforts quickly to avoid having to negotiate with multiple commanders.<sup>4</sup> More details about establishing a boundary with the active installation can be found later in this *Infobrief*.

### **Understand Market Forces**

In preparing a vision for redevelopment of the realigned base, officials must be realistic and understand what kinds of uses the community needs and can support. And while it is prudent to look to other communities for guidance, there is a good chance the reuse models of other communities will not be applicable since every community facing realignment faces a different economic situation and market demands. In order to accurately assess the market, it may be necessary to hire experts that will create a realistic business plan to match local market conditions.<sup>5</sup>

In considering redevelopment opportunities, officials should try to leverage the remaining military missions and infrastructure. For example, if realignment results in a smaller installation with a technology-focused mission and workforce, the community may want to focus redevelopment of realigned property toward high-tech industries and businesses.

### **Bring in Outside Assistance**

Communities dealing with realignment should consider the need for legal counsel — possibly hiring experienced outside counsel — to assist with jurisdictional or property rights issues, such as easements, law enforcement jurisdiction or others. Also, the realigned property might reside in several different political jurisdictions, or in an unincorporated area.

Communities might also consider hiring a planning firm to assist in developing a reuse plan for the realigned lands. The planner can also work closely with the attorney so that any planned development will comply with jurisdictional rules.<sup>6</sup>

### **Partner with OEA**

The Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) is available to help communities facing realignment. Since realigned property is considered closed, OEA can offer planning grants to

help communities with the financial burdens of redevelopment planning. OEA grants can be used to organize and plan economic recovery efforts in a community. Thus, it is necessary to engage OEA early in the redevelopment process. For more information, visit [www.oea.gov](http://www.oea.gov).

#### WHAT TO DO ONCE THE FINAL BRAC LIST IS APPROVED

- Build Community Support
- Engage the Base Commander
- Understand Market Forces to Determine How to Properly Redevelop the Property
- Bring in Outside Assistance
- Partner with the Office of Economic Adjustment

## V. THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING REALIGNED PROPERTY

Some of the challenges in fashioning redevelopment plans for surplus property and facilities resulting from a realignment are comparable to those faced in planning new uses for a closed base. But there also are a number of key differences stemming from the distinct nature of realigned real estate — it is property that has been severed from a self-contained military installation that must continue to function. The realigned property and facilities become part of the local community, yet still retain many of the installation's characteristics. This novel situation creates a myriad of challenges for communities trying to develop realigned property.

### Realizing that Redevelopment is a Slow Process

Even if a community hires every expert available and creates a robust vision for the former military site, the development process may still take years. In many cases, timing is the one thing that is difficult to control. There are several things that may slow the progress of developing realigned property, including:

- Complicated, long-term environmental cleanup issues;
- Slow transfer by the military of the realigned functions and missions to their new location;
- Reluctance of civilian employees to leave the installation; and
- Difficult relations with the base commander<sup>7</sup>

Environmental cleanup can take several years to complete. For example, at the Memphis Naval Air Station, which underwent realignment in BRAC 1993, cleanup of the realigned property took six years to complete. The military first conducted a baseline study — a review of past uses of the site to determine whether it was likely contamination would be found there. After the baseline study was complete, an environmental assessment was

performed, and, finally, remediation began. Cleanup was not completed until the end of December 1999.<sup>8</sup>

Even after the government designates certain missions and functions at an installation to be moved to another base, the receiving installation may not be ready to accommodate the new missions for several months or even years. In the interim, the community may have to put its redevelopment plans on hold.<sup>9</sup>

### **Establishing the Boundary Line**

Reaching agreement with military officials over a new boundary dividing the active installation and the newly created surplus property is both a critical first step and one of the most difficult aspects in the redevelopment of realigned property. After an installation is designated for realignment, base officials will determine which facilities and property are no longer needed following the planned departure of the relocating missions.

The initial boundary line established by the military service may be very different from what the community desires, prompting a negotiation process between the two parties. Ideally, during the process each side will gain an understanding of the other's needs. The military's initial boundary line probably will not be straight and will not conform to the community's desired master plan or zoning. The boundary may weave and curve, for example, in order to include one building, but exclude another. It may obstruct roads and access routes. It is important that the community work closely with the base commander to create a boundary that is mutually agreeable to both parties and still allows accomplishment of the remaining military missions and community redevelopment.<sup>10</sup>

In general, the negotiations will not be a cut-and-dry process, and communities should be prepared for the boundary line to change numerous times before agreement is reached.<sup>11</sup>

### **Ensuring Property Access**

One important consideration for establishing the installation boundary line is property access. Communities must ensure that they have easy access and egress to the property they intend to redevelop. While the concept seems obvious, accomplishing it is not as easy as one may surmise. Surprisingly there are many examples of communities that have not been able to gain access to the property they intended to acquire following a realignment. Normally, this situation results from military requirements.

One factor that may limit access is that many installations have limited entry and exit points. Without an explicit agreement with the base, community officials may not be able to get to the realigned property. As part of the redevelopment of the former Memphis Naval Air Station, private planes were allowed to use the naval runway. However, there were several instances in which the owners of private planes could not get onto the airfield because they could not get past the installation's guard gate.<sup>12</sup>

In short, communities must assure that realigned property tenants are able to access their businesses. The community should try to secure one or more access routes to the property.

Another issue that may confront local officials is the ability to travel freely throughout the surplus property if it is composed of several parcels and is not contiguous — a common situation. Traveling from the community’s development office on one portion of the former base to reach another realigned parcel may require traversing the active installation. To avoid this difficulty, the community should make it a priority to negotiate contiguous parcels when negotiating a boundary line. If that result is not possible, the community must ensure that easements are in place so that officials — and soon, tenants — can access all of the realigned property.<sup>13</sup>

## **Security**

The community should be aware of the military’s need to maintain operational security. With community development occurring adjacent to an active installation, local officials will need to work closely with the military on this issue. Often the military will request that buffer zones be created to maintain an adequate security posture.

## **Public Utilities**

Obtaining adequate utilities service — electricity, natural gas, phone, water and sewer — will be another significant issue for communities developing realigned property. Following realignment, the community cannot assume it will be able to rely on the military to provide utilities, and a number of scenarios are possible for obtaining service.

For installations that are located near a municipality, the local redevelopment authority (LRA) may be able to work with the local utility companies to establish service. Some communities may be fortunate enough to have interconnected gas lines in the area, so that the gas company may only need to “flip a switch” to establish realigned site service. The city/county may also be willing to extend service to the realigned property at its expense.

Gaining access to utilities tends to be more complicated in rural areas. The closest city/county jurisdiction may not have the resources to extend service to the realigned property, forcing the LRA to seek state or federal assistance to extend utilities. Another option is for the military to be the service provider; however, this is not the preferred circumstance since the military accounting and billing for utility services is not similar to a utility company. The redevelopment/LRA will have to pay for requested service upgrades and charged utility rates do not pay for recapitalization of utility lines and infrastructure.

It is worth noting that officials will need to obtain access to each utility on a case-by-case basis, prompting varied and creative solutions for obtaining service. At the Pueblo Chemical Depot, a rural installation in Colorado, local officials handled each of the utilities in a separate manner. Electricity is still provided by the Army, which bills the LRA. A natural gas company extended lines to the LRA’s property. However, the Army still supplies the LRA with phone and water service.<sup>14</sup>

## **Police & Fire Protection**

Communities also must assure the realigned property receives police and fire protection. As with utilities, there are multiple solutions. Some communities can contract with

the military for both police and fire protection. Other communities are able to integrate the realigned property into the local civilian jurisdiction, and receive police and fire service from the city or county.

In some cases, fire protection can be more complicated. For example, fire hydrants at the Pueblo Chemical Depot are configured differently than the hydrants in the outlying community, preventing city fire hoses from fitting on the Army's hydrants. Therefore, officials must either contract with the military for fire service or replace fire hydrants so that they are adaptable to city fire hoses.<sup>15</sup>

#### **MAJOR CHALLENGES WITH DEVELOPING REALIGNED LANDS**

- Realizing that Redevelopment is a Lengthy Process
- Establishing an Agreeable Boundary Line
- Ensuring Access to the Property
- Maintaining Security
- Supplying Public Utilities
- Obtaining Police & Fire Protection

## **V. CASE STUDIES**

Following are two brief case studies. The first case study demonstrates the challenges a community may face with a realignment; the second highlights the favorable outcomes realized by a community following realignment.

### **Grissom AFB, Indiana**

Grissom Air Force Base, in Miami County, IN, was realigned in the BRAC 1991 round. After 14 years, the community is still engaged in developing the realigned property. Three main challenges slowed development at what is now known as the Grissom Aeroplex. These challenges are: the transfer of real and personal property, environmental cleanup and the transfer of utility systems.

Property transfer has proven to be the most difficult aspect of the realignment. Initially, the Grissom Redevelopment Authority obtained short- and long-term leases for the property from the Air Force. Due to the severe economic impact of the realignment on the region's economy, Grissom was able to receive a rural, no-cost economic development conveyance from the military.

Environmental cleanup also has been slow, even though contamination on the base was limited to fuel spills and underground storage tanks. Cleanup delays slowed the transfer of property and the concluding of purchase agreements. Grissom developers urge communities to work closely with the parties that are performing the cleanup in order to understand the elaborate processes and the time involved.

Transferring utility infrastructure has been difficult as well. In order to begin property development, it is necessary to secure utility services. However, due to the unique nature

of realignments, it can take years to make provisions for utility services. Therefore, Grissom developers recommend that utility decisions be made early on in the process. LRAs attempting to lure tenants to their communities need to assure businesses that utility services will be available and reliable. If utility decisions are not made early on, then development efforts essentially stop.

Although the process of developing realigned property has been difficult, the Grissom project is thriving today with many new partnerships and businesses.<sup>16</sup> Nine years after the base was realigned, almost 70 percent of the realigned property has been transferred to the LRA. The LRA has also received help from state and local development agencies. The Grissom Aeroplex is thriving and looking forward to more development opportunities in the years to come.

### **March AFB, California**

March AFB was realigned in the BRAC 1993 round, and the March Joint Powers Authority (JPA) was formed in 1993 following the realignment decision. Since 1993, the JPA has moved towards its goal of acquiring and redeveloping 4,400 surplus acres of realigned property.

The March JPA has successfully developed the realigned property in two major areas. First, the JPA capitalized on the Air Force's runway by establishing the March Inland Port, which contains several aviation-related businesses. Second, the JPA created a business park of more than 1,200 acres on the western side of the base.

The March JPA has been successful for numerous reasons. One of the more notable reasons is that the property lies in the prosperous Inland Empire east of Los Angeles. The March JPA has experienced tremendous growth due in large part to the booming economy of the region. The March JPA was also able to leverage the Air Force's runway to recruit an international cargo carrier to the base.

The March JPA has been successful in transforming the realigned property into a vibrant economic engine for the Inland Empire.

### **FOOTNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> BASE REUSE IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL, U.S DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, X (1997); See also 10 U.S.C § 2687(e)(3) (2003).
- <sup>2</sup> An installation that receives functions or missions will not be addressed in this InfoBrief. For a guide for communities expecting to gain new functions, please see NAID/ADC's publication entitled "When an Installation Grows: The Impact of Expanding Missions on Communities."
- <sup>3</sup> See interview with John M. Van Horn, Executive Director, Letterkenny Industrial Development Authority (April 20, 2005).
- <sup>4</sup> See *id.*
- <sup>5</sup> See *id.*
- <sup>6</sup> See *id.*
- <sup>7</sup> See interview with Chuck Finley, Executive Director, Pueblo Depot Activity Development Authority (April 19, 2005); see also *supra* note 4.
- <sup>8</sup> See interview with Phillip Whittenberg, Former Executive Director, Base Reuse Commission (April 20, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> See *supra* note 4.

<sup>10</sup> See *id.*; see also interview with Chuck Finley, Executive Director, Pueblo Depot Activity Development Authority (April 19, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See interview with Richard Hall, Executive Director, Red River Development Authority (April 13, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> See *id.*

<sup>13</sup> See *supra* note 9.

<sup>14</sup> See interview with Chuck Finley, Executive Director, Pueblo Depot Activity Development Authority (April 19, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See *id.*

<sup>16</sup> See “Grissom Air Force Base”, by Dan Goddard, from NAID/ADC publication entitled “Case studies in Base Conversion”, 2002.



734 15th Street, NW, Suite 900

Washington, DC 20005

[www.defensecommunities.org](http://www.defensecommunities.org)