Community Perceptions of the Environmental Impact of the Closure of Fort McPherson

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Abstract

On May 13, 2005, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced that Fort McPherson will close by September 15, 2011. Community perceptions can often lead to problematic issues to overcome in the redevelopment of a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) installation. The Fort McPherson area is composed of high minority and poverty populations where issues such as public health, economic development, and community impact become key barriers to workforce development. A major portion of the plan for the redevelopment of the base includes the development of a Bio-Science Park that will serve as an anchor for the economic development of the 487-acre facility. The intent of the Bio-Science Park is to serve as the hub of research and development with direct ties to public and private research universities and scientific talent. A survey instrument was constructed by the Atlanta Zoning Department to ascertain the views of selected affected communities which would be impacted by the closure of Fort McPherson. This study analyzes this survey with respect to the expected inconsistent demand for the jobs that this base closure will create.

I. Introduction

On May 13, 2005, the Department of Defense announced that Fort McPherson will close by September 15, 2011. This announcement came on the heels of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) committee's recommendations. BRAC is the process that the Department of Defense employs to reorganize its installation infrastructure to more efficiently and effectively support its forces, increase operational readiness and facilitates new ways of doing business. On September 9, 2009 Governor Sonny Perdue signed an executive order establishing the McPherson Implementing Local Redevelopment Authority (MILRA). The MILRA has completed a reuse plan and has also partnered with the City of Atlanta's Department of Planning and Community Development-Office of planning to develop a zoning and land use blueprint. The zoning and land use blueprint is being developed based on the MILRA's Reuse Plan. A major portion of the plan for the redevelopment of the base includes the development of a Bio-Science Park that will serve as an anchor for the economic development of the 487-acre facility. The intent of the Bio-Science Park is to serve as the hub of research and development with direct ties to public and private research universities and scientific talent that is inherent in these institutions. . In order to be successful, the Park will require multi-million dollar commitments for researchers, technology, training and facilities over the next ten years. Tax Allocation District funding is essential to finance infrastructure.

II. Background

On November 9, 2005, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's recommendations for the closure and/or realignment of U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) facilities throughout the United States became law. Known as Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), these recommendations are intended to reduce duplication in military operations, improve efficiency and operational capabilities, and therefore yield cost savings to the federal government. The 2005 BRAC recommendations represent the most aggressive BRAC round ever proposed and will affect more than 800 installations. Of the 800 installations affected, the Commission recommended 22 major installation closures. As a result of this law, DOD had until September 15, 2007 to begin closing and realigning the installations. The BRAC process must be completed by September 15, 2011.

Since 1988, more than 387 installations nationwide have been closed or realigned, with an estimated $6 billion being spent on the cleanup of these sites. Some of these properties have been redeveloped into viable industrial, commercial or residential developments. Still many remain undeveloped. The primary impediment to transferring the remaining property involves environmental cleanup (GAO 2005). Many parties are affected when a BRAC installation is closed. There are the military and civilian personnel who face the loss or relocation of jobs. The communities in which BRAC installations are located face equal and in some cases more serious challenges. The loss of military personnel and supportive local industries can lead to a drain on the local economy.

In addition, the negotiation of land transfer, cleanup, and redevelopment of these properties can be a foreign process to communities who once thrived due to the installations' existence. Brownfield sites also pose challenges to communities. Brownfields are defined as abandoned or underutilized industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or reuse is complicated by suspected or known environmental contamination. Typical Brownfield sites include former industrial properties, old gasoline and service stations, vacant warehouses, dry cleaning facilities, landfills, scrap yards, and other properties that may have been impacted by hazardous substances, hazardous wastes, or petroleum products. Brownfield sites may have negative impacts on a community by reducing local property values, decreasing tax revenue and impeding economic development. The presence of a Brownfield site can erode a community's image. In turn, this stigma can discourage developers, businesses, and homeowners from investing in the community.

The closure of a military base requires the implementation of distinct processes that involve many stakeholders, including federal, state, tribal, and local government regulators and officials, as well as the local community in which the base is located. Similarly, the cleanup and revitalization of a Brownfield site requires the implementation of processes that may involve subsets of the same stakeholders. While the processes may differ from one another, they share the same goal of cleaning up sites so that they are safe for human health and the environment and to return these properties to productive reuse. With regard to BRAC, Brownfield programs and processes, many site cleanup and revitalization issues are similar. Most notably, both types of properties may be contaminated with similar substances, whose cleanup requires similar solutions. In many cases federal and/or state oversight is required for cleanups to ensure the protection of human health and the environment. The revitalization of BRAC installations and Brownfield sites can help a community to experience an economic resurgence, providing a range of housing, commercial, industrial, and transportation options that can help to reduce or eliminate the ongoing trends of blight. On the other hand, there are numerous examples of BRAC and Brownfield case studies which can be used to demonstrate the revitalization successes due to partnerships, interparty communication efforts, and available financial incentives.

The surrounding Ft. McPherson community argued that cost was the overriding factor in the Department of Defense's decision to close this historic installation, and significant relocation costs were understated. The community maintained that the current co-location of three major Army headquarters (Forces Command, Reserve Command and Third Army) next to an international airport with unparallel access and point-to-point travel is an important synergy for training readiness and operational planning. Loss of a major military presence in the Atlanta metropolitan area would adversely affect the City of Atlanta, a terrorist target; hinder military recruitment of African Americans; reduce military support to the Department of homeland security; disadvantage a significant number of handicapped employees at Fort McPherson; and adversely affect surrounding communities already suffering high unemployment rates and low per-capita income. It was the community's judgment that Fort McPherson, Atlanta's seventh largest employer, is ideally located to take advantage of Atlanta's major transportation and information technology hubs which they believed will be necessary to meet future military and homeland security command and control challenges.

III. Methodology

Community perceptions can often be an issue to overcome in the redevelopment of a BRAC installation. For BRAC and Brownfield redevelopment projects located in the Fort McPherson area which is one of high minority and high poverty populations, issues such as public health, economic development, and community impact were raised. The Per Capita Income (PCI) with in a one-mile radius of the Fort McPherson closure is $13,599 and within a three-mile closure is $14, 429. The PCI as a percentage of the National Average is 5.4% within a one-mile radius and 5.8% within a three-mile radius. The average household incomes within the same areas are $35,323 and $38,026 respectively. These and other potential environmental justice issues were addressed proactively at the earliest stages of project planning and design. A survey instrument was constructed by the Atlanta Zoning Department to ascertain the views of selected affected communities which would be impacted by the closure of Fort McPherson. A total of 194 surveys were returned as a result of four community meetings March 10, 17, 24, and 31 of 2010.

The City of Atlanta is divided into twenty-five Neighborhood Planning Units or NPUs, which are citizen advisory councils that make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on zoning, land use, and other planning issues. The NPU system was established in 1974 to provide an opportunity for citizens to participate actively in the Comprehensive Development Plan, which is the city's vision for the next five, ten, and fifteen years. It is also used as a way for citizens to receive information concerning all functions of city government. The system enables citizens to express ideas and comment on city plans and proposals while assisting the city in developing plans that best meet the needs of their communities. In Atlanta the NPUs meet on a monthly basis to consider community concerns.

Membership is open to anyone 18 years or older whose primary residence is within the NPU, or any corporation, organization, institution or agency, which owns property or has a place of business or profession within the NPU area. Members from three Neighborhood Planning Units and the city of East Point were surveyed and used as data points. The surveyed units were NPU-S, NPU-R, NPU-X, and the city of East Point.

a. NPU-S consists of five Atlanta neighborhoods: Cascade Avenue/Rd., Bush Mountain, Fort McPherson, Oakland City, and Venetian Hills.

b. NPU-R consists of seven neighborhoods: Adams Park, Campbellton Road, Fort Valley, Greenbriar, Laurens Valley, Pamond Park and Southwest.

c. NPU-X consists of five Atlanta neighborhoods: Capitol View, Capitol View Manor, Hammond Park, Perkerson, and Sylvan Hills.

d. The city of East Point is southwest of the neighborhoods of Atlanta in Fulton County, Georgia, United States.

The participants surveyed were analyzed using an Analysis of Variance. **(ANOVA)** is a collection of statistical models, and their associated procedures, in which the observed variance is partitioned into components due to different sources of variation. In its simplest form ANOVA provides a statistical test of whether or not the means of several groups are all equal, and therefore generalizes Student's two-sample *t*-test to more than two groups. ANOVAs are helpful because they possess a certain advantage over a two-sample t-test. Doing multiple two-sample t-tests would result in a largely increased chance of committing a type I error. For this reason, ANOVAs are useful in comparing three or more means. A statistically significant effect in ANOVA will be followed up with one or more different follow-up tests. This can be done in order to assess which groups are different from which other groups or to test various other focused hypotheses. Follow up tests are often distinguished in terms of whether they are planned (a priori) or post hoc. Planned tests are determined before looking at the data and post hoc tests are performed after looking at the data. Post hoc tests such as Tukey's range test most commonly compare every group mean with every other group mean and typically incorporate some method of controlling for Type I errors.

Comparisons, which are most commonly planned, can be either simple or compound. Simple comparisons compare one group mean with one other group mean. Compound comparisons typically compare two sets of groups means where one set has at two or more groups (e.g., compare average group means of group A, B and C with group D). Comparisons can also look at tests of trend, such as linear and quadratic relationships, when the independent variable involves ordered levels. The following general hypotheses will be tested for significance:

1. Was there a statistical difference between the participation of the four groups who attended the community sessions?
2. Was there a statistical difference in the longevity of the participants who attended the community sessions?
3. Was there a statistical difference in the business owners/operators within the four groups who attended the community sessions?

IV. Analysis of Data

1. The racial makeup of East Point is 78.16% African American, 16.10% White, 0.20% Native American, 0.62% Asian, 0.09% Pacific Islander, 3.40% from other races, and 1.42% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 7.57% of the population. The median income for a household in the city is $31,874, and the median income for a family was $36,099. Males had a median income of $27,114 versus $25,839 for females. The per capita income for the city is $15,175. About 17.2% of families and 20.7% of the population are below the poverty line, including 30.0% of those under age 18 and 13.6% of those of the age of 65 or over. The three most common jobs for males in this area are in the construction industry, food services/accommodations and waste management. These 3 area account for approximately 28% of the jobs of the male population. 31% of the females in East Point work in health care, food service and educational services. Only 4% of women work in scientific or technical fields. The East Point workforce is inversely related to the reuse plan for the Fort McPherson area. East Point had the smallest variance in attendance for residing in the Fort McPherson Zoning area. This is a measure of the amount of variation within the values of that variable, taking account of all possible values and their probabilities or weightings (not just the extremes which give the range).

2. The majority of residents in attendance for the community meetings were long term dwellers. Over 60% of the community survey respondents lived in their homes over 10 years. The variance of the dwellers in attendance that lived in the communities between 6 to 10 years was the smallest. This group was the smallest for the four surveyed groups.

3. The ANOVA results revealed that there was no difference between the means of the length of time residents lived in their home for the four communities
information sessions.

V. Conclusion

The formerly known as Ft McPherson business landscape is changing and its future stability is under threat, which carries serious consequences for the current/local labor market, For jobseekers, investing in specialized medical training and skill upgrades will help to maximize longer term employment prospects as employers remain focused on appointing those individuals with the right skills, at the right time. The importance of this, teamed with gaining on-the-job experience in temporary, part-time or unpaid roles should not be underestimated. The proposed 170-acre research park is expected to be the engine of a redeveloped Fort McPherson, could generate up to 7,000 jobs and many large companies to southwest Atlanta. The research park is part of an ambitious mixed-used makeover of the more than century-old army base that could generate up to 15,000 jobs. Although an impressive amount of jobs will be added to the Atlanta area, these jobs require a level of specialization that the current/local residents do not possess.

The research park will focus on vaccine development, regenerative medicine, cardiovascular research, and neuroscience, and would be marketed as a research and development center. Moving the project from blueprint to bricks and mortar, however, will require significant public-private investment and collaboration between multiple stakeholders. The research park, alone, could cost up to $168 million to develop. Additionally, the research park will be spread across more than 3.4 million square feet and include R&D, office, retail and housing space. The development of this park will require the use of those in the construction area which will be a plus for the local residents and those with lower technical skills.

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