

Narrative Information Sheet – Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County, Tennessee

1. **Applicant Identification:** The Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County (“the Board”), as an approved regional agency, with an address of 244 Love Street, Erwin, Unicoi County, Tennessee 37650, requests consideration of the following EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant proposal.
2. **Funding Requested:**
 - a. **Assessment Grant Type:** Community-wide
 - b. **Federal Funds Requested:** \$500,000
3. **Location:** Unicoi County, Tennessee
4. **Target Area and Priority Site/Property Information:**
 - a. **Target Area(s):**
 - i. Downtown Erwin (Census Tract 47171080400)
 - ii. Carolina Avenue (Census Tract 47171080400)
 - b. **Priority Site(s) Address(es):**
 - i. CSX Division Office: 229 Nolichucky Avenue, Erwin, TN 37650
 - ii. The Erwin Hotel: 229 S Main Street, Erwin, TN 37650
 - iii. Red Kap Mill: 601 Carolina Avenue, Erwin, TN 37650
5. **Contacts**
 - a. **Project Director:** Mr. Austin Finch, the Board’s Affiliated Partner and Erwin Utilities’ Economic Development Director, will serve as the Project Director for this proposal. Mr. Finch’s contact information is as follows: Phone: (423) 735-4542, Email: afinch@e-u.cc, Mailing Address: P.O. Box 628, Erwin, TN 37650
 - b. **Highest Ranking Executive Official:** Mr. Lee Brown, the Board’s Executive Chairman is the highest-ranking executive official. Mr. Brown’s contact information is as follows: Phone: (423) 743-1820, Email: lhbrown@e-u.cc, Mailing Address: P.O. Box 628, Erwin, TN 37650
6. **Population:**
 - a. Unicoi County Population: 17,891 (2020 Decennial Census)
 - b. Priority Site(s) Population:
 - i. CSX Division Office (The Town of Erwin) Population: 6,052 (2021 U.S. Census: American Community Survey)
 - ii. The Erwin Hotel (The Town of Erwin) Population: 6,052 (2021 U.S. Census: American Community Survey)
 - iii. Red Kap Mill (The Town of Erwin) Population: 6,052 (2021 U.S. Census: American Community Survey)



7. Other Factors:

Other Factors	Page #
Community population is 10,000 or less.	1
The applicant is, or will assist, a federally recognized Indian tribe or United States territory.	NA
The priority site(s) is impacted by mine-scarred land.	NA
The priority site(s) is adjacent to a body of water (i.e., the border of the priority site(s) is contiguous or partially contiguous to the body of water, or would be contiguous or partially contiguous with a body of water but for a street, road, or other public thoroughfare separating them).	NA
The priority site(s) is in a federally designated flood plain.	NA
The reuse of the priority site(s) will facilitate renewable energy from wind, solar, or geothermal energy.	NA
The reuse of the priority site(s) will incorporate energy efficiency measures.	3, 4
The reuse strategy or project reuse of the priority site(s) considers climate adaptation and/or mitigation measures.	3,4
At least 30% of the overall project budget will be spent on eligible reuse/areawide planning activities, as described in Section I.B., for priority site(s) within the target area(s).	9
The target area(s) is located within a community in which a coal-fired power plant has recently closed (2012 or later) or is closing.	NA

8. Letter from the State or Tribal Environmental Authority:

See attachment.

9. Releasing Copies of Applications:

Not applicable; No portions of the application are confidential.



TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION
DIVISION OF REMEDIATION
WILLIAM R. SNODGRASS TENNESSEE TOWER
312 ROSA L. PARKS AVENUE, 14TH FLOOR
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243

October 12, 2023

Mr. Austin Finch, Economic Development Director
Joint Economic Development Board of Unicoi County
244 Love Street
Erwin, TN 37560

Re: State Letter of Acknowledgement for the Community Wide Assessment Grant
Application

Dear Mr. Finch,

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) is pleased to acknowledge your efforts to apply for a \$500,000 US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Community Wide Assessment Grant.

Since many brownfields are abandoned, underutilized, and/or contaminated, TDEC is expressly interested in seeing initiatives to return these sites to productive uses. This effort is consistent with our mission to enhance the quality of life for citizens of Tennessee and to be stewards of our natural environment. In cooperation with Region 4 EPA, the TDEC brownfields staff will provide technical support and oversight for your grant.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to address brownfields in Unicoi County, TN.

Sincerely,

Paula Middlebrooks
State of Tennessee Brownfields Redevelopment Program

1. PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION AND PLANS FOR REVITALIZATION

a. Target Area and Brownfields

i. Overview of Brownfield Challenges and Description of Target Area

Unicoi County, Tennessee is situated at the far northeastern boundary of the state along the Tennessee–North Carolina border. Encompassed by the Cherokee National Forest of the Appalachian Mountain Range, the elevation hovers at about 1,900 feet above sea level. Although it is located only 40 minutes north of the bustling City of Asheville, North Carolina, Unicoi County experiences a much slower pace of life, as the area is largely isolated from neighboring communities by vast mountain peaks and valleys. The Town of Erwin serves as the County Seat and project area for this application. Incorporated in 1903, Erwin rests in the center of the oblong County and is bordered by the CSX Railyard and Nolichucky River to the west and south, and the famous and well-traveled Appalachian Trail to the east. Numerous natural areas surrounding Erwin attract tourists from across the Nation, including Rocky Fork State Park, the Cherokee National Forest and the previously mentioned Nolichucky River and Appalachian Trail. More than 3 million people visit the expansive Appalachian Trail alone, with nearly 3,000 of those hikers attempting a full thru-hike. Because of its close proximity to the Trail, many hikers break to rest and re-supply essentials in Erwin.

With a population of just over 6,000 residents, the Town historically served as a resting stop between Western Virginia and the remaining portions of Tennessee (American Community Survey, 2021 (ACS)). The CSX Railroad carried raw coal through the mountain passes to Erwin, where it was stored and organized at the Railyard before being transported further southwest to be purchased by coal-burning power plants and private entities who utilized coal as a fuel source. Additional industries supported the Town’s early and sustained development, such as garment production and uranium processing.

Despite previously hosting hearty industries, economic shifts have caused Erwin to struggle to support the population. For example, historically coal provided the Nation with approximately 55% of electricity generation (Energy Information Administration (EIA)), but coal consumption has fallen 59% since 2014 and 79% since 2000 (https://www.eia.gov/totalenergy/data/monthly/pdf/sec1_7.pdf). In 2022, only 9.8% of the United States’ electricity production is coal-powered (EIA). Coal has fallen out of favor due to environmental impact, associated regulations, and cheaper and cleaner alternatives, such as natural gas and renewables. This economic shift forced CSX to close their Erwin Railyard in 2015 as the route was no longer profitable. The closure left behind an expansive 175-acre railyard and put approximately 300 people out of work. Prior to the disinvestment of coal, government policies and international trade developments encouraged the relocation of industry such as clothing factories overseas, causing major economic backlash for large swaths of the South, Erwin and Unicoi County included. The 1980s closure of Red Kap Industries in Erwin left approximately 250 employees out of work. The combination of failing industries has forced the need to reimagine the economic climate and how prosperity might look for the rural area. To further evaluate and support economic diversity, the Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County (“the Board”) was established in 1986.

From the Board’s established County-wide inventory, the City of Erwin’s **Downtown District** and adjoining **Carolina Avenue** corridor were selected as Target Areas because of their centralized location and industrial history. The Erwin **Downtown District** was established in 2012 through a public planning process that resulted in the Downtown Master Plan. The **Downtown District** is bounded by the CSX railyard and Nolichucky Avenue to the west, 2nd Street to the north, Elm Avenue to the east, and Iona Street to the south. The 2 by 3 block Target Area is characterized by two-story, red brick, commercial buildings to the west and sparsely situated municipal buildings to the east. Renovated streetscapes and freshly poured sidewalks appear only in the more densely occupied western portion of Downtown. Despite targeted redevelopment, approximately 16 brownfields exist within Downtown. Approximately 45 people live within the Target Area and within a mile, that number increases to 5,446 (EPA Environmental Justice Screen (EJ SCREEN)).

Located approximately half a mile southwest of the Downtown District is the **Carolina Avenue** Target Area. The two-lane Carolina Avenue begins just east of the Downtown District and continues to the southwest, carrying traffic away from town. The Target Area is bounded by woods to the north and west, single family residential homes to the east, and commercial and light industrial buildings to the south. Carolina Avenue is lined by commercial and residential buildings, narrowly separated from the road by inadequately maintained sidewalks. Numerous stores along the 0.4 mile Avenue have been vacated and at least 9 identified brownfield sites are present. Approximately 4,194 people reside within a mile radius of the Carolina Avenue Target Area (EJ SCREEN).

Both Target Areas are located within disadvantaged Census Tract 47171080400, which is in the 70th percentile nationally for low-income households (Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)). Here, the elderly population (ages 64+) is 24.8%, 38.5% greater than the national average, and the median household income (\$41,189) is 51.4% less than the national average (ACS). Additionally, although minorities only make up 11.2% of the population, 42.4% of minorities live in poverty (ACS). Poverty rates are even more drastic for Black and Brown populations, as 100% of the African American population within the Census Tract lives in poverty (ACS). As retired, elderly populations intensify Erwin’s low household incomes and tax base, the Town struggles to provide supportive resources to care for these sensitive populations. Furthermore, current brownfield conditions hinder Erwin from fully marketing the Town as an ecotourism destination, causing a cyclical loop of disinvestment. To prioritize sustainable development and assess brownfield sites, the Board is applying for an EPA Community-Wide Brownfield Assessment grant. The Board is determined to utilize placemaking tactics to redevelop brownfields in a way that will enable the community to reshape their local economy through supportive ecotourism industries. The Board is committed to working with communities to implement policies and redevelopment strategies to support employment opportunities, social well-being, environment, and health. Federal brownfield funding will catalyze redevelopment in the Target

Areas and surrounding areas, assisting in crafting a concise plan to cater the local economy to take advantage of ecotourist spending. Due to the small population relative to the numerous brownfield sites, the Board is requesting a \$500,000 community-wide assessment grant to carry out the project described within this application, as well as assess sites identified outside of the Target Areas, within a secondary inventory.

ii. Description of Priority Brownfield Sites

Within the Target Areas, a total of 25 brownfields have been inventoried which consist of former commercial buildings, manufacturers, gas stations, and auto repair garages. From this inventory, three brownfields were identified as priority sites, carefully selected based on community input, redevelopment potential, and environmental, economic, and human impacts. The first priority site within the Downtown District Target Area is the **CSX Division Office**. As the westernmost priority site, the CSX Office marks the edge of Downtown, with a 175-acre former railyard located directly behind the building. Built in the 1930s, the three-story red brick building is accented with arching white windows and decorative keystones. Spanning 30,000 SF, the building was utilized as office space, conference rooms, drawing/mapping areas, and storage. Within close proximity to the rails (a mere 100 feet separates the two), likely pollutants from the railroad create redevelopment challenges. Coal spilt on the railroad tracks and Office property likely introduced Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) and heavy metals such as arsenic. As for the railyard itself, the railroad ties and past herbicide use are suspect for contamination. Railroad ties were typically soaked in creosote, a known carcinogen, prior to installation to preserve the wood (Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ASTDR)). Herbicides were applied on the tracks to prevent unwanted vegetation. Due to the timeframe in which the rail operated, the possibility stands for the use of nontraditional herbicides such as diesel fuel, leaded gasoline, or waste oil. These pollutants could have easily drifted onto the priority site, causing subsurface contamination. Dermal contact with residual diesel fuel could cause adverse health effects as it is a possible carcinogen (World Health Organization). Leaded gasoline has been labeled as a “probable human carcinogen” by the EPA and can cause central nervous system damage and neurology impairment in exposed children (ASTDR). Arsenical herbicides, a group of older herbicides that have been used since the 1950s, may have also been applied (University of FL). Toxicity of the herbicide depends on form, nevertheless, arsenic as a whole is recognized by the EPA as a confirmed human carcinogen (ASTDR). The CSX Office was retired in conjunction with the railyard in 2015 due to low freight traffic. News of the closure was broken abruptly, with little previous warning for the community. With a history of over 100 years of operation, CSX “cited significant declines in the coal industry as the reason for closure” (Johnson City Press). 300 CSX employees were left without work, with additional auxiliary businesses such as yard taxi drivers and diesel fuel suppliers affected as well. The CSX Office is a priority site based on community feedback, its proximity to North Indian Creek (directly adjoining the railyard) and the Nolichucky River, and because redevelopment of the historic building would support a cohesive western edge to the Erwin Downtown District.

The Erwin Hotel, the second priority site, is centrally located within the Downtown District, along South Main Avenue. Constructed in 1920, the red brick Colonial Style building once greeted guests with a tall porch, supported by towering two-story pillars. The former Hotel is perched on a half-acre parcel, spanning 19,000 square feet. The first story was remodeled to serve as a now vacant Bank of Tennessee location, the three upper stories retain the Hotel’s original layout. Most recently, the Hotel functioned as the Morrill Motors Inc. Headquarters. The company’s internal consolidation has rendered the space no longer necessary, and the building has been underutilized for storage since the 1970s. Due to the construction date, toxic Containing Materials (ACMs) and Lead Based Paint (LBP) are likely incorporated throughout the building, which will require remediation prior to renovations. Additional contamination may stem from historical neighboring operations. According to 1948 and 1954 Sanborn insurance maps, an auto body repair and painting shop was located directly to the northeast, and a filling station was located to the south, across Main Avenue. An odor has been reported within the basement of the building, of which a source has been not identifiable. As operations occurred prior to environmental regulations, used auto oil and petroleum spills and/or poor maintenance may have caused a release, contaminating the neighboring Hotel’s subsurface and presenting a potential vapor intrusion concern for building occupants.

The third priority site, **Red Kap Factory**, is located within the **Carolina Avenue Target Area**. As previously mentioned, the Carolina Target Area is characterized by single family homes intermixed with commercial and municipal properties. Red Kap is a priority site due to the property’s close proximity to residential properties and vulnerable populations, and the age of the building. According to Sanborn maps, the textile factory was constructed prior to 1925 and has frequently changed hands. Operating under a variety of manufacturers, the factory was most recently operated by Red Kap until the 1980s. The building is situated on 5.53 acres and once spanned approximately 72,800 square feet. Today, the central portion of the building has been demolished, leaving an overgrown field of rubble and weeds between two halves of the factory. The two-story, red brick building was primarily used for cutting and sewing of men’s garments. Pollutants from textile factories primarily consist of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) from degreasers used on machinery. Sanborn maps confirm the former use of coal to heat the property, which likely introduced PAHs and heavy metals. Ash and coal may be buried on site, causing surficial soil contamination and a direct exposure risk to nearby residents. ACMs and LBP are also likely present within the buildings.

iii. Identifying Additional Sites

The Board will develop a site nomination form and evaluation process to appropriately rank and select candidate brownfield sites to ensure the prioritization of underserved communities within our disadvantaged census tracts. The site nomination form will be used as a first step to gather information about a project. At a minimum, the form will request the following information: A) site location and degree to which underserved communities are being served, B) proposed uses and ability to address specific community needs (i.e. affordable housing, grocery stores, health care, etc.), C) site history; perceived or actual degree of contamination, D) level of future/obtained investment, and E) future economic impact; potential to catalyze additional

redevelopment projects and estimated job creation and tax base increase. A scoring system will be utilized to provide more weight to the projects that will support underserved communities. Nomination forms will be readily available online, in City and County offices, and at all public input meetings as described within section 2b. Each public meeting will begin with an opportunity to identify sites and discuss with the public. Community partners will also maintain the form for distribution to the residents they represent.

b. Revitalization of the Target Area

i. Reuse Strategy and Alignment with Revitalization Plans

The Target Areas and priority sites were chosen based on both regional and local planning efforts. Erwin’s Design Guidelines, adopted in 2012, outline regulations which will help maintain smart growth development for the future of Erwin, that also complements the existing quality of life and character of the Town. Goals from the Design Guidelines include 1) incorporating art within public spaces by using branding and thematic elements, and 2) establishing a pedestrian-friendly environment by providing wide sidewalks, designing outdoor café-style seating, and promoting connectivity between adjacent neighborhoods and the Downtown District. The Town of Erwin is served by the First Tennessee Development District. The District’s 2017 Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) outlines goals to provide a mechanism for guiding, coordinating, and analyzing economic development efforts. Notable goals include A) encouraging tourism development, and B) creating additional planning documents to guide sustainable Downtown development.

An interested developer has conveyed visions of redeveloping the **CSX Division Office** as a mixed-use building, providing commercial space on the lower level and short-term vacation rentals above. Targeted commercial space includes an outdoor and recreational goods retailer. This redevelopment supports Erwin’s Design Guidelines 2 by utilizing a building on the edge of the Downtown District, thus promoting a cohesive and connective Downtown. CEDS Goal A will also be met as the commercial store(s) (exclusive to Erwin) and vacation rentals will attract and retain overnight tourists. A health clinic is also proposed as one of the commercial uses to better serve the large elderly and sensitive populations, along with any hikers in need of medical care.

Following remediation, **The Erwin Hotel** will be marketed as a hostel, providing short-term accommodations and sporting a naturalist’s retreat theme. Modern, clean lines, neutral colors, and energy-efficient appliances and building retrofitting, in combination with professional branding will assist in conveying this style. The first floor will feature a lobby, coffee shop, guest laundry room, mail room, and small convenience store. These amenities will support Appalachian Trail thru-hikers as they resupply in town before heading back onto the Trail. Renovations will include communal kitchens and bathrooms, and numerous room offers, including solo and group accommodations. Proposed units will span an average of 400-1,000 SF, providing approximately 20 rooms. The refurbished hostel will support Erwin’s Design Guidelines 1 through branding and thematic elements, and CEDS Goal A as the hostel will support tourism activity of thru-hikers.

Consisting of two buildings separated by a grassy field, a conceptual redevelopment of **Red Kap Textile Factory** includes a brewery, restaurant, and event space. The larger building to the west (~20,000 SF) will house the brewery operation and event space. The eastern building (~12,800 SF) will be occupied by a kitchen and dining room serving casual, southern fare. The proposed Garden, in between the buildings (~40,000 SF) will provide recreation and additional seating. Outdoor amenities will include extensive picnic benches, string lights spanning between the structures, a full-service bar, catering to those dining outside, fire pits, and bar games such as giant Jenga and darts. The outdoor Garden will be pet-friendly, catering to thru-hikers traveling with a four-legged companion. Local artists will be commissioned to paint murals along exterior walls. Festivals and live music events will be featured frequently both in the indoor event space and outside Garden. Sidewalks approaching the facility will be replaced and installed on both sides of the street. A crosswalk will also be installed for improved connectivity. As a brewery and restaurant, the property will support Erwin’s Design Guidelines 1 and 2 by incorporating art within a public space and “establishing a pedestrian-friendly environment by providing wide sidewalks [and] designing outdoor café-style seating”. Additionally, CEDS Goal A will be met as the facility will encourage tourism development. Further planning needs will be addressed for the two Downtown District priority sites (CSX Division Office and the Erwin Hotel) as well as other non-priority sites by creating a Community-Wide Revitalization Plan, thus fulfilling CEDS Goal B. Infrastructure improvements will also be considered during the planning process.

ii. Outcomes and Benefits of Reuse Strategy

These redevelopments aim to improve infrastructure and quality of living for Erwin residents. Outcomes and benefits include those that are outlined within the table below, in addition to catalyzing investment throughout the Target Areas and increasing tax base revenue. Each priority sites’ redevelopment will increase property values and associated property taxes while eliminating the properties’ health and safety risks. Finally, the expansive greenspace at Red Kap Factory will help protect the environment, human life, community assets, and property by reducing runoff and alleviating flooding events related to climate change (CT 804 is in the 91st percentile nationwide for projected flood risk over the next 30 years; Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)).

Building Reuse	Outcomes and Benefits	Align with Redevelopment Strategy
CSX Division Office		
YES; existing ~30,000 SF building reused	~12 jobs*, 7,500 SF health clinic; ~2 jobs*, 2,500 SF retail store; improved access to healthcare for sensitive populations; support of	Design Guideline 2; CEDS Goal A

	ecotourism economy; 20,000 SF/~10 short-term rentals; provide overnight lodging for tourists; energy efficient upgrades; spin off spending at local businesses due to increased tourism	
The Erwin Hotel		
YES; existing 19,000 SF building reused	~8 jobs*; energy efficient hostel; ~20 hostel rooms; meets need for additional lodging space for tourists; creates community meeting space within ground-floor communal areas; spin off spending at local businesses due to increased tourism	Design Guideline 1; CEDS Goal A
Red Kap Factory		
YES; existing ~72,800 SF property reused	~65 jobs*; 0.9 acres of greenspace; improve walkability and connectivity and thus reduce CO ₂ emissions; create meeting hub for both residents and tourists; spin off spending at local businesses due to increased tourism	Design Guidelines 1 and 2; CEDS Goal A

* U.S. Energy Information Administration – Full Time Equivalent

c. Strategy for Leveraging Resources

i. Resources Needed for Site Reuse

A readily available inventory of incentives and grants listed below will allow the Board to maximize the leveraging of resources within the Target Areas. The Board will be eligible to apply on behalf of or in partnership with another municipal entity and/or developer for all leveraging resources. The funding sources noted in the table below do not rely upon the award of this EPA assessment grant unless otherwise noted.

Grant Source	Purpose /Role (Assessment/Remediation/Reuse)
Town of Erwin: Downtown Erwin Façade & Architectural Improvement Grant Program	Reuse: Properties located within the Erwin Downtown District can receive reimbursement of 50% of expenses, up to \$5,000 per property for eligible façade improvements. For multiple-faced buildings, an additional 25% (not to exceed \$2,500) may be awarded. Larger grants may be awarded for projects that show substantial economic impact including job creation and sales tax generation. Buildings must be a conforming use in the zoning District. The CSX Division Office and Erwin Hotel are eligible properties.
The Northeast Tennessee Economic Development Corporation (NTEDC): Downtown Erwin Loan Program	Reuse: The Downtown Erwin Loan Program provides an additional \$25,000+ micro loan for small business owners, property owners, or investors to purchase or renovate a downtown property or to purchase fixed equipment for the purpose of business creation, expansion, or renovation. The low-interest loan is to be applied toward the downpayment and/or closing costs. The business must be located within the Downtown Erwin Redevelopment District and the borrower must keep a business account at one of the 3 participating banks. The CSX Division Office and Erwin Hotel are eligible properties.
Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	Reuse: Unicoi County is eligible to apply for a Block Grant under “community livability” to facilitate necessary sidewalk, road, and lighting, etc. improvements along public right of ways that will support future development at Red Kap Factory and a pedestrian crosswalk at the CSX Division Office. Funding is limited to \$400,000 for such projects and applications are due annually, typically in February.
Tennessee Department of Environmental Conservation (TDEC): Brownfield Voluntary Oversight and Assistance Program (VOAP)	Assessment and Remediation: Tennessee’s Voluntary Oversight and Assistance Program was established in 1994 with the goal of encouraging prospective purchasers to redevelop brownfield properties by limiting the liability for new owners and providing oversight in the investigation and cleanup process. The program allocates up to \$11,250 per site for the state to assist in assessment and remediation oversight (up to 150 hours \valued at an average of \$75 per hour), minus applicable fees. The Board and private investors are eligible to apply. All priority sites are eligible for this funding.
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Transportation Grants Program	Reuse: The Board will apply for a RAISE grant to redevelop the Downtown District and Carolina Avenue Target Areas. The RAISE application will incorporate improvements presented in the Community-Wide Revitalization Plan, to be developed with funding from this brownfield assessment grant. Example improvements include burying utilities underground and creating a pedestrian-friendly Town by improving sidewalks, street lighting, and crosswalks. Funding is dependent on leveraging this EPA assessment grant.

ii. Use of Existing Infrastructure

The Board will utilize current municipal and building infrastructure wherever possible to prioritize funding and sustainability. All priority brownfield sites have direct access to municipal utilities that are readily available. These utilities include municipal water, sanitary sewer, natural gas, electrical, and high-speed telecommunications. However, sites will require updated connections which can be funded through the RAISE grant and/or CDBG funds. Existing onsite parking is available for all priority sites. Red Kap Factory and the CSX Division Office will benefit from utilizing CDBG funds to improve sidewalks and pedestrian cross walks.

2. COMMUNITY NEED AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

a. Community Need

i. The Community's Need for Funding

Census Tract 804 encompasses both Target Areas. Here, the median annual household income is only \$41,189 (\$28,528 less than the national median of \$69,717) and 31% of the population is considered low-income (70th percentile nationwide CEJST), including 19.2% who live below the federal poverty level (compared to 12.6% nationally; ACS). Additionally, 24.8% of the population of CT 804 is elderly (24.0% in Erwin as a whole) and the majority of this group is retired (ACS). Considering the national average of elderly persons is only 16.8%, the elevated number of retired persons means that Erwin misses out on a relatively large percentage of income taxes, causing the operational budget to be further limited (ACS). The combination of a declining population, recently lost industry, low incomes, and large sensitive populations has stunted economic prosperity within Unicoi County (and the Town of Erwin to a higher degree). These chronic pitfalls have manifested in the form of lost commercial businesses, decaying historic buildings and community infrastructure, and residual environmental contamination. Erwin's budget is self-described as "no-thrills" and covers only necessary services. Currently, with a small, declining population of approximately 6,000 residents and a disproportionately high low-income population, the Town lacks the tax base to fund various municipal building repairs, and additional funding has been requested to hire new employees to ease current workloads. As for Unicoi County's budget, between 2021 and 2022, the County's local taxes have decreased by over \$400,000. Due to these factors, the local government is forced to focus on providing only essential governmental services (i.e., police, fire, public utilities, etc.) and does not have the additional budget to assess brownfield sites. Redevelopment of priority sites through this grant will provide new, equitable job opportunities for local residents, improve incomes, stimulate local economic growth through eco-tourism, increase sales tax revenue from additional sales at the Hotel, Red Kap Factory Brewery, and other auxiliary industries, and increase property tax revenues.

ii. Threats to Sensitive Populations

(1) Health or Welfare of Sensitive Populations

Elderly, low-income, and minority individuals have been identified as sensitive populations living within close proximity to priority sites. Specifically, Block Group 1 of Census Tract 804 (which includes most of the Carolina Avenue Target Area and extends northwest into the Downtown District) has an elderly population (38%) more than twice the national average, placing it in the 96th percentile statewide and 95th percentile nationwide for elderly residents (EJ SCREEN). Within Unicoi County, 15.4% of the population is living in poverty and 31.6% falls under the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) definition (unitedforalice.org). These are "households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living" (unitedforalice.org). Many of these households continue to struggle, especially as wages fail to keep pace with inflation for essentials such as housing, childcare, food, transportation, and health care. Although only 11.2% of CT 47171080400's population is made up of minorities, 42.4% of all minority residents, including 100% of all African Americans, live below the poverty line. Increased welfare stressors have forced Unicoi County residents into a place of poor health; the County is ranked among the least healthy counties in Tennessee (within the bottom 19%) (County Health Rankings (CHR)). In Unicoi County, 12,500 years of life were lost to deaths of people under age 75, per 100,000 people. Compare this rate to the U.S. average of 7,300 years lost (CHR). The data shows a dramatic difference of 52.5%, implying that sensitive populations, particularly those living within our Target Areas, are more likely to die prematurely due to poor diet, lack of exercise, exposure to environmental contaminants, and inadequate medical care (CHR). In fact, primary care physicians are few and far in between, as each Unicoi County physician is estimated to serve 2,960 patients. Simultaneously, the national average ratio is 1:1,310, a difference of 77.1% fewer physicians. Redevelopment following successful assessments will reduce environmental threats, provide venues and workplaces for locals and tourists alike, and stimulate the economy. The proposed health clinic will help alleviate concerns related to healthcare access. Additional spending will translate into locally-circulated funds which will be used by the County to implement community-wide improvements. Such improvements will include streetscape projects to restore and install sidewalks, thus improving walkability and connectivity throughout Erwin.

(2) Greater Than Normal Incidence of Disease and Adverse Health Conditions

Considering Unicoi County's small population size, state and county data provides the closest and most accurate data available. Because infant statistics provide an early snapshot of childhood health, it is important to note that in 2022 the State of Tennessee experienced an 11.3% pre-term birth rate, receiving a "D-" grade from the March of Dimes. Between 2012 and 2019, Unicoi County experienced an infant mortality rate of 7.6 per 1,000 births (compare to the national rate of 5.8) (Kids Count). Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality, accounting for 20% of all infant deaths (CDC). According to the March of Dimes', birth defects account for about 1 in 4 infant deaths in Tennessee. Although environmental causes of birth defects are generally poorly understood, a few exceptions exist. For example, the National Birth Defects Prevention Study (NBDPS) performed by CDC affiliates found that pregnant women who were exposed to PAHs were more likely to have babies with cleft lip with or without a cleft palate. The average prevalence of babies born with a cleft lip and/or palate in the State of Tennessee between the years 2014-2018 was 16.9 per 10,000 live births (TN Department of Health). The national average prevalence was only 8.0, less than half Tennessee's rate (CDC). As coal dust contains PAHs, the entire Town of Erwin (and especially the Target Areas) has likely been exposed to this contaminant for generations as coal was the primary cargo transported and stored at CSX's Erwin railyard. Furthermore, as cited by the CDC, exposure of pregnant women to high levels of heavy metals (such as mercury, lead, arsenic, and cadmium, which are found in coal) can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, and low birth weight. Such health consequences may be due to inhaling or ingesting toxins found in food or drinking water. In fact, the Nolichucky River, which runs through Erwin, has a mercury precaution for multiple fish species.

Additionally, according to kidney.org, heavy metals have been linked to chronic kidney disease. This correlation is significant as data between 2014 and 2018 show elevated kidney cancer incidence rates for Unicoi County (18.9% greater than the national average) (State Cancer Profiles). Additionally, census tract 804 is in the 91st percentile nationwide for adults who have heart disease, 83rd percentile for adults who have diabetes, and 77th percentile for low life expectancy (CEJST). The long-term and open-air transportation of coal along the CSX railway, subsequent inhalation of coal dust, and introduction of coal dust to local surface water sources may have contributed to these negative health outcomes. Coal dust may also be found at the Red Kap Factory (coal chimney) and along the CSX Division Office property (spilled coal on ground). It should also be noted that machinery degreasers, such as trichloroethylene (TCE; likely used in the Red Kap Factory and at the former mechanic shop located adjacent to the Erwin Hotel) are human carcinogens, pose vapor inhalation risks, and can cause damage to the kidneys (EPA). The successful identification of contaminants within the Target Areas will contribute to identifying and mitigating causes of elevated diseases, cancers, and premature death, leading to long-term public health improvements.

(3) Environmental Justice

(a) Identification of Environmental Justice Issues

The continued loss of industry (through both the closure of Red Kap Factory and later the CSX railyard), has created high unemployment and poverty impacting minority populations the hardest. All of Unicoi’s four census tracts, which also encompass the target area and priority sites, are considered disadvantaged as defined by CEJST due to health, climate, and low-income factors. The Appalachian Regional Commission has designated Unicoi County as economically ‘at risk,’ which measures three-year averages for unemployment rate, per capita market income, and poverty rate. Unicoi County suffers from an unemployment rate of 5.2%, with even higher unemployment in the Target Area (6%; ACS). Vulnerable populations, including elderly and minorities are also affected as poverty rates reach 17% and 42.4%, respectively within Erwin (ACS). Income disparities are compounded by proximity to nearby brownfields. Red Kap Factory, for example, is only 150 feet from residential housing. Within a half mile radius of the Red Cap property, the household income is only \$27,187, **88% less than the national average** and a quarter of the population is over age 64, which is in the 83rd percentile statewide and 81st percentile nationwide (EJSCREEN). The low-income sensitive populations near the priority sites are disproportionately affected by environmental contamination. For example, in addition to contamination likely originating from the priority sites (including potential vapor intrusion risks at adjoining homes), cumulative exposure threats are amplified by the presence of air pollution. **The community surrounding the priority sites is in the 95th percentile nationwide for toxic releases to air.** In Block Group 1 of Census Tract 47171080400 which includes portions of both Target Areas (pop. 803), the EJ Screen Socioeconomic Indicators (which includes, but is not limited to demographic index, supplemental demographic index, low income, less than a high school education, populations above the age of 65, and low life expectancy) are on average, in the 80th percentile nationwide. The priority sites also currently inhibit residents from fully appreciating and taking advantage of community space. Currently, both the Erwin Hotel and CSX Division Office limit the Downtown District’s functionality, employment, and spending opportunities.

(b) Advancing Environmental Justice


This grant will assist Unicoi County in taking the necessary steps to eliminate environmental hazards by assessing properties that are contaminated and negatively impacting the health of underserved populations in the Target Areas. Once threats are identified through this assessment grant, additional financial resources will be sought to eliminate contamination, limit exposure, and reduce environmental justice concerns. Following redevelopment, the former brownfields will directly address income and access disparities by providing the Town with economic and community-centric vitality through added employment opportunities, a new healthcare facility, and retail and restaurant spaces for Erwin citizens. Spinoff from increased tourism will help stimulate the local economy, further supporting and providing opportunities for our residents. Connectivity throughout the Downtown District will also be improved, and along with reuse of the historic buildings at the priority sites, will further establish the Town’s sense of place, a critical aspect when growing the local ecotourist industry. It should be noted no businesses nor residents are intended nor expected to be displaced because of these redevelopments. To minimize the potential for unintended displacement, the Board will work with our local governments and community-based organizations (e.g. those provided in 2.b.i below) to incorporate strategies through planning and visioning that preserve affordable housing and small business opportunities in the Target Area.

b. Community Engagement

i. and ii. Project Involvement and Project Roles

A table with names and contact information for partners providing their commitment to the brownfield program is provided below. The Board will continually build upon this list to ensure inclusion of all stakeholders.

Organization & Point of Contact	Role
Loyal Order of Moose Doug Mann, Administrator (423) 743-9955 lodge939@mooseunits.org	The Loyal Order of Moose, a non-profit private fraternal organization is located northwest of Red Kap Factory. The local Order is “dedicated to caring for young and old, bringing communities closer together, and celebrating life”. The Order is an active community partner which hosts numerous volunteer opportunities throughout the year. As such, the Order will assist with community engagement (via their well-trafficked Facebook page), public meetings, and providing input on upcoming decisions for site selection and future reuse as a representative of residents in the Target Area.

<p>RISE Erwin Jamie Rice, President (423) 330-1820 riseerwin@gmail.com</p>	<p>RISE Erwin is a community-focused group of individuals who seek to rejuvenate, invest in, support, and energize Erwin and Unicoi County by collaborating and advocating for a sustainable future-focused community. RISE has organized a multitude of ongoing community events, including a weekly evening farmers market, the Great Outdoors Festival, Apple Festival, and Nativity Parade. RISE will encourage community engagement throughout this grant by facilitating and attending public meetings, providing representation to the residents for site selection and reuse strategies.</p>
<p>Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association Alicia Phelps, Executive Director (423) 262-0238 tourism@northeasttennessee.org</p>	<p>Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association facilitates visitors planning a trip to the Region by providing recommendations for recreational activities, lodging, food, and events. The Association will aid in advertising the priority sites, once complete, by writing an article about the new developments on their website and by sharing public meeting invites on their Facebook page. Additionally, the Association will be included in all public meetings to provide input on upcoming decisions for site selection, schedule, and future reuse.</p>
<p>Unicoi County Community Advisory Board Christy Smith, (423) 737-6522 </p>	<p>With a vision to work in partnership with the community toward creating a safe and healthy environment for all citizens, the Unicoi County Community Advisory Board shares local events and community resources on their well-trafficked Facebook page. The Advisory Board will also share brownfield-related public meeting invites on their Facebook and will be included in all public meetings to provide input on site selection, upcoming decisions for cleanup activities, schedule, and future reuse.</p>
<p>First Baptist Church Koby R. Strawser, Senior Pastor (423) 743-9156 hello@erwinfirst.org</p>	<p>Located a block from the Erwin Hotel, the First Baptist Church is an active congregation, which most notably assists the community through their food bank. The Church will assist in dispersing information relating to the brownfield projects during service and by using fliers during food bank distribution, to ensure the residents that live within the target area have an added resource for input and communication.</p>

The EPA, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), and Unicoi County Health Department are also established partners and/or will be involved throughout the grant cycle, each contributing to their own capacity. Specifically, TDEC will be responsible for assisting in community engagement and education, the technical review and approval of documents, including the Generic Quality Assurance Project Plan (GQAPP), as well as assisting the Town, the Board, and grant partners with applicable cleanup incentives.

iii. Incorporating Community Input

Following this grant’s award, a project kick-off meeting will be held. This meeting will provide an opportunity to establish a Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC) consisting of representatives from local stakeholders. The BAC will review projects and make decisions to prioritize site assessments based upon the hierarchy described within section 1.a.iii. The kick-off meeting will also outline the goals of the grant, how to provide public input and what the funds would mean to the County, ensuring an educated public and allowing for additional community involvement. Ongoing communication throughout the life of the grant will be conducted in a variety of ways, including regularly held public meetings and charettes that are organized in partnership with community organizations such as those listed in 2.b.i. Meetings will be held in-person at the Erwin Town Hall, to ensure close proximity to the Target Areas’ residents. Meetings will be held at hours agreeable to most schedules to ensure a high level of attendance and involvement. Additionally, those that cannot be present during the live meeting, can access the recorded meeting online, at the Board’s website and/or can utilize a call in number for the meeting. Meetings will provide a platform for public comment to identify additional brownfield sites, reprioritize known brownfield sites based on established criteria, and voice potential concerns. Commentary will be collected through comment cards and via email to the project manager so that affected parties’ input can be captured and documented for use in decision making when selecting and prioritizing sites. These meetings will also be utilized to present potential redevelopment opportunities to interested developers by showcasing available brownfield sites and providing developers with technical assistance in obtaining additional financial incentives for planned redevelopment. Input will be considered during public meetings in an open manner that embraces the diversity of the community and focuses on a constructive, forward-looking vision for Erwin and Unicoi County. Additional communication regarding grant updates and opportunities will be conducted in a variety of ways including press releases with the local newspaper which will include The Erwin Record (online and in print). Brownfield related announcements will also be featured on the Board’s website, local news stations, and flier distribution via local businesses and community organizations. In addition to the stakeholder websites listed in 2.b.i, the following Facebook pages will be utilized: “Erwin, Tennessee” and “The Talk Of Erwin/Unicoi,” reaching over 8,300 followers.

3. TASK DESCRIPTIONS, COST ESTIMATES, AND MEASURING PROGRESS

a. Description of Tasks/Activities and Outputs

Task 1: Cooperative Agreement Oversight

- i. **Project Implementation:** General grant management; develop Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC); Qualified Environmental Consultant (QEC) selection based on a competitive bid process (per 40 CFR 30); meeting facilitation with the BAC, TDEC, and EPA; required reporting; budget reconciliation.
- ii. **Schedule:** Quarters 1-16: The BAC will be developed within 1 month of funding and meetings will be held on a quarterly basis throughout the project. A QEC will be selected within 1-2 months of funding. Quarterly reports will be submitted on a quarterly basis and MBE/WBE reports will be submitted annually. ACRES will be updated throughout the grant period.
- iii. **Task Lead:** The Board will oversee this task, with assistance from the BAC and selected QEC
- iv. **Outputs:** BAC development, 1 Work Plan, 1 Community Involvement Plan, 16 Quarterly Reports, 1 Close-Out Report, regular ACRES reporting, and 4 submissions (once annually) of EPA Form 5700-52A for Minority and Women Business Entity Utilization and Federal Financial Reports SF-425.

Task 2: Inventory and Community Outreach

- i. **Project Implementation:** Develop marketing materials, which will be available online and in hard copy; notify the community of site-specific public information meetings and assessment schedules; advertise for public meeting through online and in-person methods; hold public meetings to solicit input, inform, educate, and update the community regarding assessment and redevelopment activities; provide updates as necessary at local development council meetings. The Board will also attend various brownfield conferences.
- ii. **Schedule:** Quarters 1-16: Community outreach will be performed for the duration of the grant period; the 1st public meeting will be held within 3 months; the 2nd public meeting will be held after the first round of assessments have been completed; and the 3rd public meeting will be held when assessments are nearing completion and reuse planning begins. Additional meetings will be held on an as-needed basis.
- iii. **Task Lead:** The Board will oversee this task, with assistance from the BAC, TDEC, QEC, and community partners.
- iv. **Outputs:** Public meeting advertisements; press releases and project update reports; educational materials to support public meetings (PowerPoint presentations and handouts); kick-off meeting; 3-6 public meetings; one-on-one meetings with property owners as needed; updated brownfield inventory; attend various brownfield conferences, including two EPA Region 4 Conferences and the National Brownfield Conference.

Task 3: Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs)

- i. **Project Implementation:** ASTM-compliant Phase I ESAs; Phase II ESAs; TDEC and EPA reviewed Generic Quality Assurance Project Plan (GQAPP) and Site-Specific Quality Assurance Project Plans (SSQAPPs); Hazardous Material (Haz Mat) Surveys. Costs for these activities include contractual consulting and reporting expenses and printing.
- ii. **Schedule:** Quarters 1-14: A QAPP will be completed within 1 month of selection. Once approved by TDEC/EPA, site-specific assessment activities will begin within 1 month. Assessment and reporting will occur throughout the grant period, with the goal of completing assessment activities by Quarter 10.
- iii. **Task Lead:** The QEC will oversee this task, with assistance from the Board and the BAC.
- iv. **Outputs:** Priority Sites: 3 Phase I ESAs (3 Haz), 3 Phase II ESAs (3 Haz), 3 Haz Mat Surveys; Additional Sites: 8 Phase I ESAs (6 Haz and 2 Petro), 5 Phase II ESAs (4 Haz and 1 Petro), 4 Haz Mat Surveys

Task 4: Cleanup Planning and Planning Activities

- i. **Project Implementation:** Creation of cleanup plans and implementation strategies for developing and utilizing resources; development of Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives (ABCAs) for priority sites that require remediation based on Phase II ESA data. The ABCAs will include remedial actions for each identified regulated contaminant that exceeds applicable guidelines. Remedial actions will be compared based on metrics such as cost, feasibility, and effectiveness in protecting human health and the environment. ABCAs will be developed based on the likely reuse scenario(s) for each site, to be further vetted through a Community-Wide Revitalization Plan. A public meeting will be held during this reuse planning period to solicit input from the public and community partners; we envision this meeting to be conducted as a design charette to encourage public participation. The total estimated budget for this task includes cost associated with a planning firm to assist in managing the Community-Wide Revitalization Plan, and travel to attend meetings with stakeholders related to redevelopment plans. The Community-Wide Revitalization Plan will incorporate community input, market data, and feasibility analysis for various reuse scenarios. The Plan will provide financial projections/estimates, potential leveraging opportunities, incorporate input from project partners, stakeholders, and community members, and respond to the surrounding market and environmental conditions and challenges.
- ii. **Schedule:** Quarters 5-14: ABCAs will be completed within 3-6 months of finalizing the Phase II ESA reports. The public meeting/design charette will be held after the draft ABCAs are complete, but before they are finalized.
- iii. **Task Lead:** The QEC will oversee the completion of ABCAs. The Board will oversee the public meeting/design charettes with assistance from the QEC and BAC.
- iv. **Outputs:** 3 ABCA reports; 1-3 public meeting(s)/design charette(s), 1 Community-Wide Revitalization Plan.

b. Cost Estimates

The following list outlines how costs were derived for each task. Allocation of grant funds is included within the table below.

Task 1: Cooperative Agreement Oversight

- Personnel: 65 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,200 for programmatic costs such as financial and performance reporting. *Personnel costs have been developed based upon prior experience of similar scope.
- Supplies: Office supplies will include copies, maps, and handouts. Estimated cost: \$495
- Contractual: 100 hours at an average rate of \$100/hour = \$10,000 to assist in reporting needs throughout the grant’s lifecycle.

Task 2: Inventory and Community Outreach

- Personnel: 65 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,200 for outreach coordination and meeting attendance.
- Travel: Estimating one staff member traveling for two national conferences averaging three days each; \$400 registration, \$900/round trip flight, \$200/hotel room per night (assuming 3 nights each), and \$60/day per diem (totaling \$4,160). Additionally, one staff member traveling for two local conferences averaging three days each; \$400 registration, \$100 in gas for travel, \$200/hotel room per night (assuming 3 nights each), and \$60/day per diem (totaling \$2,560) = \$6,720
- Supplies: Office supplies will include copies, maps, and handouts. Estimated cost: \$495
- Contractual: 100 hours at an average rate of \$100/hour = \$10,000 to assist in both information gathering for growth of the inventory and community engagement presentations.

Task 3: Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs)

- Personnel: 65 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,200 for report reviews and securing site access.
- Supplies: Office supplies will include copies, maps, and handouts. Estimated cost: \$495
- Contractual: \$287,000 (57.4% of budget)
 - Priority Sites: \$108,000
 - 3 Phase I ESAs: estimated cost of \$3,000 per ESA = \$9,000
 - 3 Phase II ESAs: estimated cost of \$23,000 per ESA = \$69,000
 - 3 Hazardous Materials Surveys: estimated cost \$10,000 per survey = \$30,000
 - Secondary Sites: \$179,000
 - 8 Phase I ESAs: average estimated cost of \$3,000 per ESA = \$24,000
 - 5 Phase II ESAs: average estimated cost of \$23,000 per ESA = \$115,000
 - 4 Hazardous Materials Surveys: estimated cost \$10,000 per survey = \$40,000

Task 4: Site Specific Cleanup Planning and Planning Activities

- Personnel: 65 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,200 for programmatic expenses associated with cleanup planning, review of reports, and meetings.
- Supplies: Office supplies will include copies, maps, and handouts. Estimated cost: \$495
- Contractual: \$163,500
 - 3 ABCAs: average estimated cost of \$4,500/ABCA = \$13,500
 - Community-Wide Revitalization Plan: \$150,000 (30% of Budget); (EPA estimates a total cost of \$50,000-\$175,000)

Budget Categories		Project Tasks				
		Task 1: Cooperative Agreement Oversight	Task 2: Inventory and Community Outreach	Task 3: Environmental Site Assessments	Task 4: Cleanup Planning and Planning Activities	TOTAL
Direct Costs	Personnel	\$ 5,200	\$ 5,200	\$ 5,200	\$ 5,200	\$ 20,800
	Fringe Benefits					\$ -
	Travel		\$ 6,720			\$ 6,720
	Equipment					\$ -
	Supplies	\$ 495	\$ 495	\$ 495	\$ 495	\$ 1,980
	Contractual	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 287,000	\$ 163,500	\$ 470,500
	Construction					\$ -
Total Direct Costs		\$ 15,695	\$ 22,415	\$ 292,695	\$ 169,195	\$ 500,000
Indirect Costs						
Total Budget (Direct + Indirect)		\$ 15,695	\$ 22,415	\$ 292,695	\$ 169,195	\$ 500,000

c. Plan to Measure and Evaluate Environmental Progress and Results

Per the requirements of the EPA Assessment Grant, the Board will submit quarterly reports to the EPA Project Officer. These reports will cover work progress and current status, as well as any difficulties that were encountered, a record of financial expenditures, data results, and anticipated further action. Quarterly reports will also document information regarding a plan to resolve progress if the Board ever finds itself off track financially or schedule-wise. The Board will also complete reporting in the ACRES database for each assessment site, noting specific accomplishments, contaminants found, materials impacted, if

clean-up activities are required and the progress of said activities, and other resources that have been leveraged to complete the redevelopment of the site. The ACRES database will also be utilized to track job creation and acres of land assessed as part of this grant, as well as the total number of assessments completed and the type of assessment, the amount of funds expended by project, the total project cost, increased tax revenue; essentially acting as a tool for both the EPA and the Board to track and measure the grant’s progress in achieving the outputs and eventual outcomes. At the end of the four-year grant period, a final report similar to quarterly reports will be produced.

4. PROGRAMMATIC CAPABILITY AND PAST PERFORMANCE

a. Programmatic Capability

i., ii., and iii. Organizational Capacity, Structure, and Description of Key Staff

Project intake forms will be utilized to allow each BAC member to review the assessment work proposed and project details such as potential reuse, investment, community input, and leveraging opportunities. As Economic Development Director, Austin Finch will be the project manager for this grant and will also oversee and coordinate community engagement activities and financial management. Mr. Finch has worked with numerous Fortune 250 Companies, managed over \$5.7 MM in investment portfolios, and currently acts as a liaison between industries and the local Erwin government. His previous experience has provided him with the financial literacy skills critical for this role as the grant’s financial manager. Mr. Finch will be assisted by Mitchell Barton, the assistant to the President of Erwin Utilities. With a background in law, Mr. Barton is knowledgeable in all things fine print. In his day-to-day work at Erwin Utilities, Mr. Barton interprets legal documents and contracts to ensure compliance. These skills will transfer over to the management of this grant as Mr. Barton guides Finch through the necessary components during grant implementation. Both individuals are committed to redeveloping Erwin’s brownfields as a means to attract ecotourists, thus improving the quality of life for local residents.

iv. Acquiring Additional Resources

The Board has extensive experience managing grant funds and thus will begin the contractor procurement process immediately following work plan and cooperative agreement approval with the EPA. The desired consultant will be experienced in Brownfield programs including the following services: assisting with Community Brownfield Inventories and Outreach, Phase I and Phase II ESAs, ABCAs, and working with state regulators regarding solid waste and brownfield assessment redevelopment planning and remediation. Additionally, the consultant will be expected to prepare the Generic Quality Assurance Project Plan (GQAPP) within the first 60 days of the grant so that proposed assessments and activities are not delayed. These services will be secured in accordance with the EPA’s selection protocol and the Board’s established purchasing policies. Standard procedure includes a Request for Qualifications be published for response by qualified firms. Firms will be allotted guidelines with a deadline for submissions, all submissions will be available as public record. Following receipt of proposals, each application will be reviewed by an internal committee composed of Board staff and the selected consultant will be recommended to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen for approval via resolution.

The Board has a division dedicated to equitable workforce development and outreach. The Board is focused on providing locals with equal opportunity to access training and job opportunities that arise from both this grant, and future revitalization that occurs because of the grant, as this has always been a vital part of our economic growth plan. Established relationships with local postsecondary educational and job placement organizations include East Tennessee State University, Milligan University, Tennessee College of Applied Technology-Elizabethton, Northeast State Community College, and the Regional Center of Advanced Manufacturing. There is a contact form available on our website for anyone interested in accessing these resources, which goes directly to the staff that will also be involved in the EPA Grant.

b. Past Performance and Accomplishments

ii. Has Not Received an EPA Brownfields Grant but Has Received Other Federal or Non-Federal Assistance Agreements

(1) Purpose and Accomplishments

The Board was awarded \$250,000 through the **Tennessee Valley Authority’s Invest Prep Grant** in 2016. The grant allowed for the preparation and cleanup of a former industrial property. The project took one year from start to finish. Later, in 2018, **Tennessee Economic Community Development** provided the Board with a \$500,000 grant which allowed for the construction of a 150,000 square foot site pad. The resulting pad is the only industrial site to date in the land-restricted Unicoi County. Following the one-year grant, completion documentation was submitted according to the agreement. T-Mobile awarded the **Board the Hometown Grant** in 2021. The grant provided \$50,000 to fund Phase I of the Unaka Bike Park construction. Located in Erwin, the Park boasts over 10 miles of trails of varying difficulty. The Park opened following 6 months of construction, drawing additional tourism.

(2) Compliance with Grant Requirements

As shown through the Board’s record of no audit findings, benchmark compliance goals on each grant have been met. The required reporting was conducted on time and serves as an integral part of maintaining the grants’ timely implementation. The state EDC grant required documentation of public bidding requirements, accounting of all costs spent, before/after photos of the project, assurance of spending within the 1-year timeframe of the grant, and a final close out report. The Hometown Grant required reconciliation of all funds expended within the grant period of 1 year. Six month, and 12 month progress reporting was required along with before and after photos, and final reporting of the resulting impact and success. Because of successful grant management, the Board is better positioned to continue to pursue leveraging opportunities that support the community. Overall, grant work plans, schedules and terms and conditions have been completed in accordance with awarding party requirements.

**Threshold Criteria – Joint Economic and Community Development Board of
Unicoi County, Tennessee**

1. Applicant Eligibility:

The Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County (“the Board”) operates as an approved regional authority for Unicoi County in the State of Tennessee. Please see the attached applicant eligibility documentation.

2. Community Involvement:

Following this grant’s award, a project kick-off meeting will be held. This meeting will provide an opportunity to establish a Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC) consisting of representatives from local stakeholders. The BAC will review projects and make decisions to prioritize site assessments based upon the hierarchy described within section 1.a.iii. The kick-off meeting will also outline the goals of the grant, how to provide public input and what the funds would mean to the County, ensuring an educated public and allowing for additional community involvement. Ongoing communication throughout the life of the grant will be conducted in a variety of ways, including regularly held public meetings and charettes that are organized in partnership with community organizations such as those listed in 2.b.i. Meetings will be held in-person at the Erwin Town Hall, to ensure close proximity to the Target Areas’ residents. Meetings will be held at hours agreeable to most schedules to ensure a high level of attendance and involvement. Additionally, those that cannot be present during the live meeting, can access the recorded meeting online, at the Board’s website and/or can utilize a call in number for the meeting. Meetings will provide a platform for public comment to identify additional brownfield sites, reprioritize known brownfield sites based on established criteria, and voice potential concerns. Commentary will be collected through comment cards and via email to the project manager so that affected parties’ input can be captured and documented for use in decision making when selecting and prioritizing sites. These meetings will also be utilized to present potential redevelopment opportunities to interested developers by showcasing available brownfield sites and providing developers with technical assistance in obtaining additional financial incentives for planned redevelopment. Input will be considered during public meetings in an open manner that embraces the diversity of the community and focuses on a constructive, forward-looking vision for Erwin and Unicoi County. Additional communication regarding grant updates and opportunities will be conducted in a variety of ways including press releases with the local newspaper which will include The Erwin Record (online and in print). Brownfield related announcements will also be featured on the Board’s website, local news stations, and flier distribution via local businesses and community organizations. In addition to the stakeholder websites listed in 2.b.i, the following Facebook pages will be utilized: “Erwin, Tennessee” and “The Talk Of Erwin/Unicoi,” reaching over 8,300 followers.

3. Expenditure of Existing Grant Funds:

The Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County does not have an existing EPA Brownfield Grant.

4. Contractors and Named Subrecipients:

Not applicable; the Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County has not selected a contractor.