



**Third
Quarter
2001**

Improving the Practice

The Future of Fernald Process:

Creating a Community Vision and Legacy

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Background

Approximately 17 miles northwest of downtown Cincinnati, Ohio, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is working to clean up a former atomic weapons facility known as Fernald. The facility was established in 1951 and for 38 years produced uranium metals for use in nuclear weapons. Production and disposal activities, wind, and runoff during its operation resulted in widespread contamination from uranium and other hazardous and radioactive chemicals both on and off the 1,050 acre site. Of significant concern is uranium contamination of soils on site and above background levels up to five miles from the facility. The entire site is situated above a sole source drinking water aquifer and off-site drinking water wells in the area were contaminated. The area is rural and surrounding properties consist primarily of agricultural and residential development.

During the 1980's, Fernald established a large national reputation, including being featured on the cover of Time magazine, and little of it was good news. In the early 1980s, it was discovered that the Fernald facility had been contaminating local drinking water for many years. The Department of Energy was sued by local residents and paid out significant damages for this contamination. As trust of the Department and its con-

tractors continued to decline, strong grassroots citizen activity was formed and began to demand more of a role in the cleanup process. In the early 1990s, a revised Consent Agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identified that a number of important and far-reaching decisions about the cleanup of the facility were to be made over a several year period. DOE managers at Fernald recognized that many of these decisions would have a profound impact on the long-term interests of local stakeholders and that stakeholder involvement was therefore essential to developing sound decisions.

It was against this backdrop that Fernald established a citizens advisory board to assist in the most pressing issues facing the cleanup of the facility. DOE hired an independent convener in the spring of 1993 and a board was formally established in August 1993 as the Fernald Citizens Task Force. That fall, the Task Force realized that it needed independent technical and facilitation support and hired The Perspectives Group (then Phoenix Environmental) to provide this support. Armed with a detailed workplan and this support, the group delivered comprehensive recommendations to DOE 18 months later. The Task Force developed and released its recommendations over a seven month period from November, 1994 through May, 1995. A final report presenting the overall approach and

results from the process was released in July, 1995. The recommendations were developed to provide maximum impact on the process and each one was supported by a detailed discussion of issues and rationale. All of its recommendations were eventually accepted by the DOE and its regulators and today a great deal of progress has been made in cleaning up the Fernald site to the standards identified by the citizens in 1995. The work of this group also went a long way toward healing the wounds of the community and turning a tense and angry environment into one of increasing trust and open communication.

Shortly after making its recommendations, the Fernald Citizens Task Force changed its name to the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board (FCAB) to coincide with other advisory boards that had been established throughout the Department of Energy. The FCAB has continued to meet on a monthly basis, advising DOE on a wide variety of issues relating to the implementation of its cleanup recommendations.

The Challenge of Future Use

The future uses of the Fernald site following remediation were a major consideration of the FCAB's early recommendations. These recommendations prevented agricultural or residential uses at Fernald and strongly discouraged heavy industrial uses. While the FCAB envisioned some type of natural environment and green space for the community, it believed that those choices were best left to future generations, as the remediation was not scheduled to be completed until some decades hence.

However, a number of events coincided to bring those specific future use decisions to a more immediate focus. In 1996, the FCAB evaluated the efficacy of greatly accelerating the cleanup timetable at Fernald. By doing so, it was estimated that the total project costs could be decreased by over \$2 billion. The FCAB recommended taking an accelerated cleanup approach and lobbied extensively that Fernald be given the resources to make it happen. DOE listened and it was determined that cleanup could be completed by 2006. Also in this timeframe, DOE and the State of Ohio were working to resolve natural resource damage claims. The resolution of these damages was coordinated closely with area stakeholders and leaned heavily toward the designation of much of the Fernald site as an ecological park. One final influential event

was the reinterment of a number of Native American remains on the Fernald site. These remains were unearthed during the implementation of a new water supply to area residents. Their reinterment in a protected area on the site was so popular with Native American groups and area stakeholders that it was widely agreed that the reinterment of additional remains from the surrounding region would be a positive use of part of the Fernald site.

In 1998, the FCAB began to look closely at issues facing Fernald upon the completion of remediation, including specific future uses and the long-term stewardship of the site.

Designing a Future Use Planning Process

While the FCAB often provided input to DOE on specific technical issues concerning cleanup, they recognized the importance of a much broader community effort for decisions which would so clearly impact the future of the entire community. They had identified a similar need years before when evaluating whether waste materials could be safely disposed on the Fernald site for the long-term. For that issue, the FCAB convened numerous large public workshops to evaluate options and explore the safety issues regarding an on site disposal facility. The success of that effort convinced FCAB members that a similar approach was needed for the future use of Fernald.

To that end, the FCAB sought to develop a process that achieved a number of far-reaching criteria that it had found essential in its previous efforts:

1. A high level of community participation
2. High levels of recognition for the process
3. A focussed decision-making process that allows for broad-based participation and consensus-driven decisions
4. A strong education component to allow for broad-based understanding of the issues and alternatives
5. An outcome that establishes a community legacy

Again working with The Perspectives Group of Alexandria, Virginia, the FCAB designed and implemented a process that not only worked but has provided ideas and momentum toward achieving a real and promising future for the Fernald site far beyond what was originally imagined.

How the process met each of the design characteristics is discussed below.

Criteria 1. A high level of community participation

In order to achieve a positive future for the Fernald site, the FCAB recognized that the entire community needed to work together to develop a shared vision of local stakeholders and the government agencies who are currently managing the restoration process of the site. Only with such a shared vision in place did the FCAB feel that real progress on identifying and planning for specific uses was possible. As such, the FCAB invited three other local citizens groups who were working to bring about the safe remediation of Fernald and a positive future for area residents to be part of the Future of Fernald process. These groups included Fernald Residents for Environmental Safety and Health, Fernald Living History, Inc., and the Fernald Community Reuse Organization. In addition, the FCAB made a great deal of effort to involve stakeholders who have not participated heavily in past activities. In particular, area teachers, historical societies, and similar groups were approached to get involved to ensure that educational and historical potentials of the site would be well considered.

Then, rather than coordinate the effort through the FCAB, a stewardship committee was established to include all of these groups and be open to all interested stakeholders. With open membership and full voting privileges of all attendees, the stewardship committee served as the managing organization of the process. Stewardship committee meetings are held monthly and average 20 to 25 attendees, of which only a few are FCAB members. In addition, Future of Fernald workshops are held in area schools and community centers that are not associated with traditional public meetings of the FCAB or DOE.

Criteria 2. High levels of recognition for the process

It was important to the FCAB that the process had an identity of its own and was well recognized in the community. The simple title "Future of Fernald" was used from the very beginning of the project to identify its activities and distinguish it from the FCAB. A specific logo was also created which showed the current industrial and future environmental skylines of the site along

with the tag line "The End is Just the Beginning." These elements are used in all mailings, materials and meetings of the Future of Fernald process and have achieved a high level of recognition throughout the community.

Criteria 3. A focussed decision-making process that allows for broad-based participation and consensus-driven decisions

The process designed for the Future of Fernald included monthly planning meetings of the Stewardship Committee punctuated by a series of large public workshops to provide the public with needed information, establish dialog, and incrementally develop recommendations to DOE. To date three workshops have been held and a fourth is being planned.

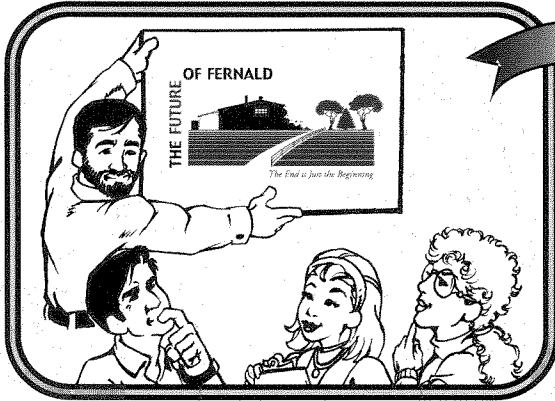
- **Workshop 1** – an introduction to the future use concepts under consideration and an opportunity to identify community issues and concerns about future use
- **Workshop 2** – following additional efforts to introduce future use issues to the public, the second workshop provided a forum for the public to identify its desires for the future use of Fernald
- **Workshop 3** – the Stewardship committee presented the public a draft stakeholder vision statement for the Future of Fernald based on the results of the second workshop, participants revised and agreed to the statement and then spent time conceptualizing how the vision statement might be implemented at the site
- **Workshop 4** – a community design charrette is being planned to involve a broad spectrum of community members in the development of visual design elements of the selected future for the site

The Future of Fernald process officially kicked off on April 20, 1999 with a community workshop attended by approximately 75 local residents. An information booklet was developed and displays were used to describe key elements of remediation and how they would lead to possible future uses of the site. A number of conceptual models of the future site were presented to show how green space and hiking trails could be incorporated. Participants worked in small groups to discuss specific issues of importance and provide feedback to the process.

Results of the first workshop were important to overall planning of the Future of Fernald process. One of the key aspects of the workshop was to present conceptual models of how the site might look following remedia-

FUTURE OF FERNALD TIMELINE

FCAB Recognizes Need for Broad
Community Input to Future Use Planning



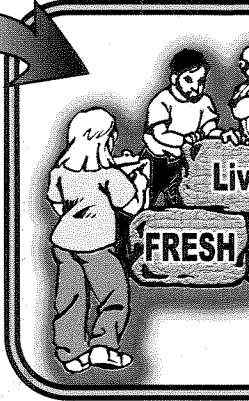
Full Board Activity

Need for More Education and Awareness
Becomes Apparent



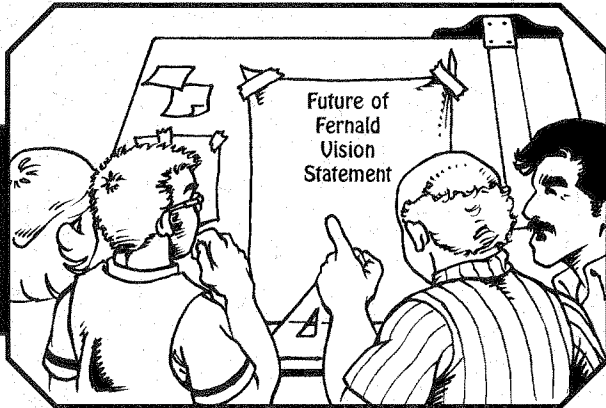
First Workshop

FCAB Builds on
to be Led by St



Full Board

Draft Stakeholder Vision Statement Prepared



Stewardship Committee Activity

Stakeholder Consensus on



Third V

Formal Criteria for Trails and Education Center Developed
Coalition Expanded to Include Universities and Sources of Financial Support



Stewardship Committee Activity



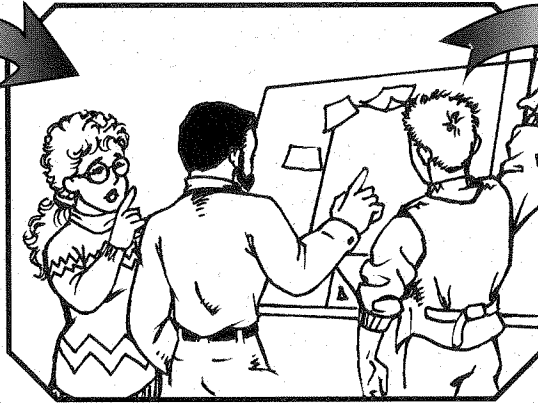
1999 - 2001

Community Coalition
Stewardship Committee



Activity

Community Education and Awareness
Through Broad Public Outreach



Stewardship Committee Activity

Detailed Community Concerns
and Desires Identified



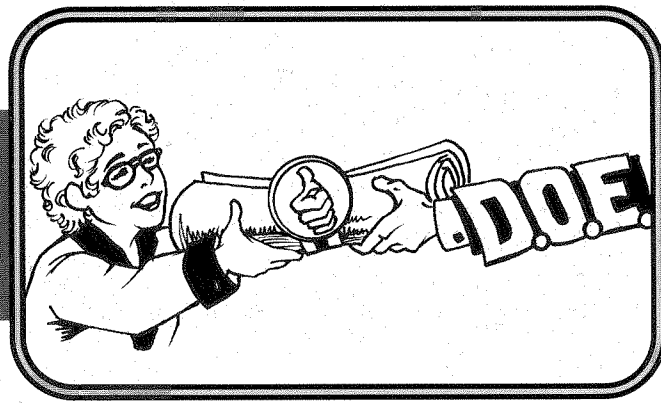
Second Workshop

Decision Statement Achieved



Workshop

FCAB Approves Vision as Written and Forwards to
DOE as a Formal Recommendation



Full Board Activity

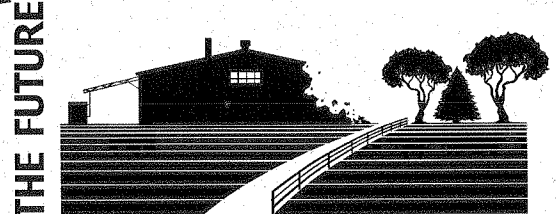
Design Charette to Develop Conceptual Site Design



Fourth Workshop (planned)

REALIZATION OF THE VISION

OF FERNALD



The End is just the Beginning

to be continued...

tion, including the possible presence of various hiking trails throughout the site. A number of residents were alarmed at the thought of this future public access to the site, particularly close to the on-site disposal facility. Although billions of dollars were being spent to make sure that such access perfectly safe, the FCAB realized that the community was not yet ready to envision the site as a safe, accessible property and that the FCAB would need to do more education and dialogue before such activities could be discussed. The FCAB also realized that specific ideas for use of the site needed to be generated by the community. Conceptual models developed by DOE created too strong of a suggestion regarding DOE's actual plans for use and were not helpful to facilitating community dialogue.

Following this first workshop, the FCAB began to work directly on issues of future use and long-term stewardship of the Fernald site and were asked formally by DOE to manage a process to provide direct community input to future use decision-making. The FCAB agreed to take on this role and coordinate the efforts through its stewardship committee. Through activities of the committee and working with other area stakeholder groups, the FCAB encouraged a much higher level of dialog throughout the community about the approaching end of remediation activities and the future use opportunities that would be possible.

On May 24, 2000 the second Future of Fernald Workshop was held and jointly sponsored by the four community groups supporting the Stewardship Committee. Over 100 area stakeholders attended and the event was also broadcast live on the internet and by speakerphone to allow remote participation.

Breakout groups were convened in which participants were asked to address several questions:

- What are the things you would most like to see as possible community assets at the site?
- What are the things you would definitely not want to see at the site?
- How would you like to see these assets managed within the community?
- Where should long-term support come from and who should be involved?

The results of each breakout were reported back in plenary addressing three main points: What did we learn? What do we still need to do? What should the next

steps in the Future of Fernald process be? As a result of the second workshop, citizens agreed that there was enough information available to begin drafting a community vision for the future of Fernald. The Stewardship Committee was tasked with the job of taking the results of the workshop and creating a draft statement for evaluation at a third community workshop.

During the course of the summer of 2000, the FCAB Stewardship Committee worked to develop a draft stakeholder vision statement for the Future of Fernald along with specific recommendations for achieving the vision. The draft statement was then distributed among all participants in the Future of Fernald process. On September 26, 2000, the Third Future of Fernald Workshop was held to discuss the statement and seek community consensus. Approximately 80 stakeholders attended the workshop. Small group sessions were held to identify any issues with the vision statement, as well as any areas requiring substantive change. The small groups were required to reach consensus before returning to the larger group and each of them did. In the larger group, each breakout presented its proposed changes to the full group for discussion of whether to accept or reject the changes. In this manner, a final vision statement was adopted with unanimous consent from those present.

Following adoption of the stakeholder vision statement, participants returned to their breakout groups to develop draft ideas with regard to how the vision might be implemented at the site. Each group was provided a map of the site showing the likely physical characteristics that will be in place following remediation. Each group then created one or more conceptual plans for use of the site, including trails, education centers, nature preserves, overlooks, and Native American reburial plots.

Following the third workshop, the FCAB formally adopted the stakeholder vision statement and made a formal recommendation to the DOE that it be used as a model for designing the future use of the site.

Criteria 4. A strong education component to allow for broad-based understanding of the issues and alternatives

Extensive stakeholder information and evaluation has long been a hallmark of FCAB efforts and the Future of

Fernald process is not an exception. Strong emphasis was placed on creating the materials and information needed by stakeholders to understand future use issues. It was also very important to the FCAB to create opportunities for dialog among stakeholders and with subject area experts to ensure that all of the issues important to stakeholders are addressed. Focus was placed on the use of visualization and hands-on techniques so that stakeholders could evaluate the impacts of possible choices and decisions.

This first workshop was designed around the issues that were identified by the Stewardship Committee as the most interesting to the Fernald community regarding potential future use of the site. These included:

- Native American History and Remains
- Public Use of the Land
- Environmental Education
- Local and Cold War History

Fact sheets were developed for each issue, and a variety of displays and videos were used to provide the background information needed to understand issues relating to the completion of the remediation project and the potential for future uses of the site. Breakout group discussions were conducted for each issue allowing stakeholders to identify issues and concerns and to talk directly with subject area experts.

The second workshop followed a similar format and was organized around five slightly different facilitated breakout groups to address the evolving interests of Fernald stakeholders:

1. Environmental Education
2. Cold War History
3. Fernald History
4. Native American History and Burials, and
5. Education, Recreation, and Community Development.

The breakout groups were arranged in a manner that allowed each individual to attend two different breakout sessions. In each of the breakouts, participants discussed the issues that were important to them, were able to ask questions of subject area experts, and identified the items that they would like to see present at Fernald following remediation. Following the workshops, all participants received a detailed report on the many ideas and issues that were raised.

The third workshop used flip-chart sized maps of the site to allow stakeholders to explore different possible futures for the site in keeping with the consensus vision statement. To-scale models of burial plots and education centers allowed stakeholders to visualize the potential impacts of different sized buildings and other site features. As a result, a wide variety of ideas were generated for consideration by the Stewardship Committee and to inform future planning efforts.

All of the results of the Future of Fernald workshops were provided to participant stakeholders and are displayed on the FCAB website.

Criteria 5. An outcome that establishes a community legacy

The "Stakeholder Vision for the Future of Fernald" has received wide recognition and acceptance throughout the Fernald community. DOE and its regulators have accepted the vision as a blueprint for the future of the site, and the FCAB and its Stewardship Committee are hard at work to determine ways in which the vision can be achieved. The vision reads:

Fernald Stakeholders envision a future for the Fernald property that creates a federally-owned regional destination for educating this and future generations about the rich and varied history of Fernald. We envision a community resource that serves the ongoing information needs of area residents, education needs of local academic institutions, and reinterment of Native American remains. We envision a safe, secure, and partially accessible site, integrated with the surrounding community that effectively protects human health and the environment from all residual contamination and fully maintains all aspects of the ecological restoration.

This vision has been subsequently bolstered by the FCAB with specific recommendations and criteria which help to provide specific direction to DOE. In addition, the FCAB recognizes that achieving this vision will require the coordination and cooperation of many groups beyond those involved in the cleanup of the site. They have begun to foster the types of relationships that will be necessary to bring this vision about. Key among these is integration with local schools and universities and seeking appropriate organizations to serve as the long-term stewards of the Fernald site.

In many ways, the Future of Fernald process has only just begun. The excitement generated by the Future of Fernald process and the FCAB's outreach activities have begun to bear fruit. The FCAB recently received a commitment from the President of the University of Cincinnati to partner in future efforts. The site contractor has also made a commitment to donate a certain portion of their possible fee to the long-term management of an on-site education center. The FCAB is working with area architects and universities to develop a design charrette which will allow area stakeholders to work with professional designers to begin developing design concepts for an education center on site. The FCAB is also working with DOE to identify what elements of remediation can be coordinated and integrated into supporting future use development.

The FCAB will continue to support the Future of Fernald process up to and including the construction of on-site facilities and the design of long-term stewardship programs to ensure that whatever is implemented at Fernald will be sustainable for generations to come.

Douglas Sarno is a senior trainer and facilitator at The Perspectives Group in Alexandria, Virginia. He has served as the facilitator and technical advisor to the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board continuously since 1993.