

Reaching Community Consensus for Adaptive Reuse of Contaminated Sites

A case study / panel discussion of the Bo-Rit Superfund Site located in Ambler, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Panel

Peter M. Simone is a landscape architect and planner with Simone Collins Landscape Architecture (SC). SC led a multi-disciplinary team to develop the West Ambler Revitalization and Action Plan.

David Froehlich is the president of the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve Inc. and former co-chair of the Community Advisory Group (CAG) for the Bo-Rit Site.

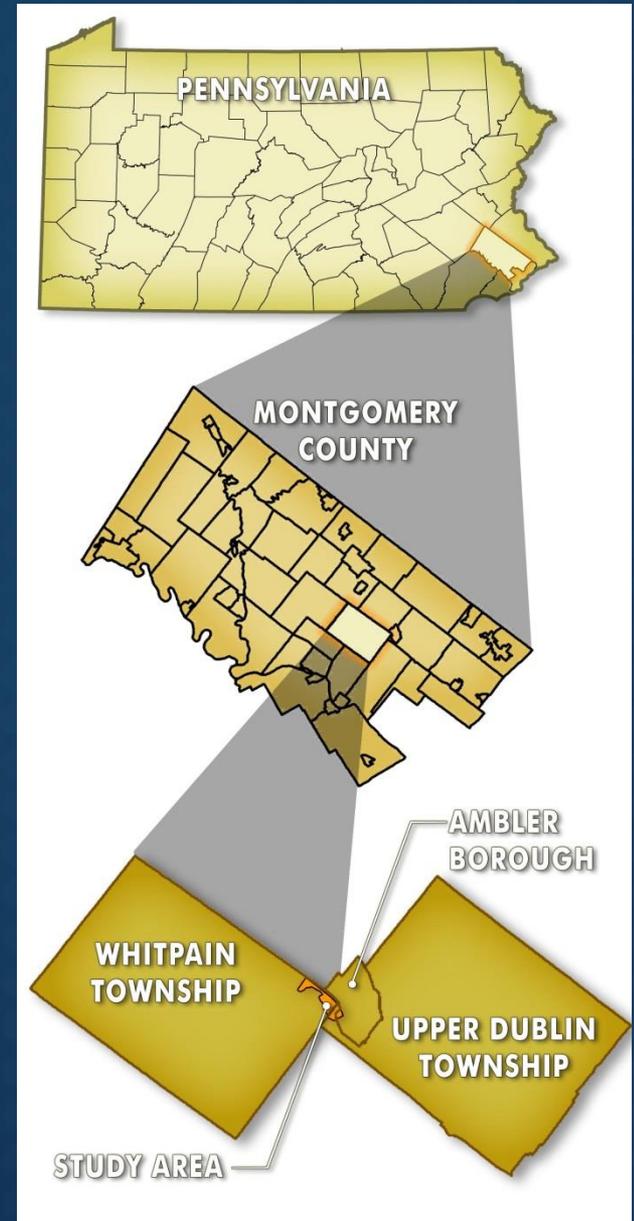
Otis L. Hightower is a resident of West Ambler, Whitpain Township, key member of the West Ambler Revitalization Committee and the Bo-Rit Asbestos Site's Community Advisory Group (CAG), and member of the Planning Commission.

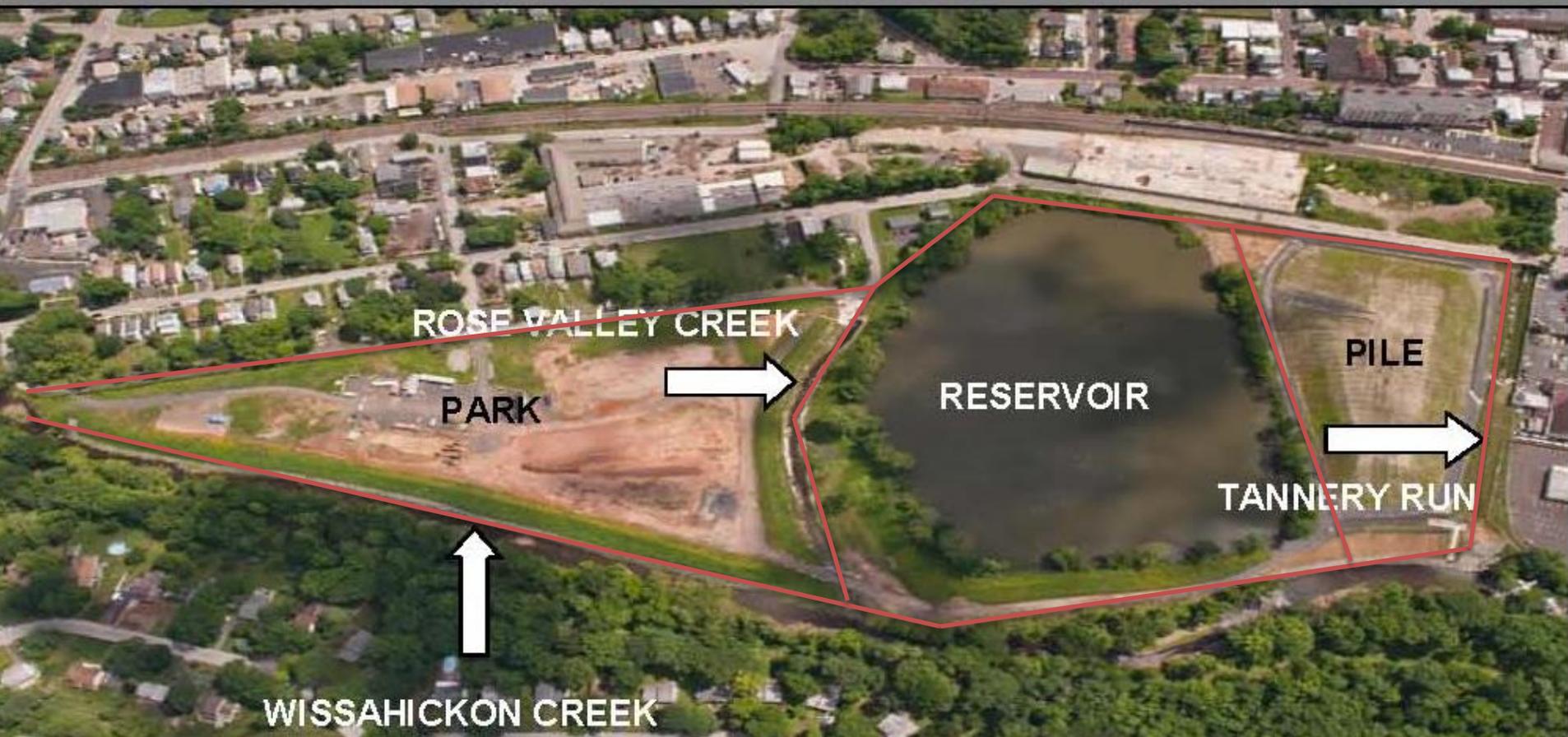
Britt Dahlberg is a PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation focuses on the Ambler Bo-Rit site and how residents, officials and developers think about risk on contaminated sites.

Fred Conner has been a supervisor in Whitpain Township since 2009. He helped organize and was the first co-chair of the CAG. Revitalization of West Ambler has been one of his priorities

The Bo-Rit Superfund site is located at the junction of three municipalities:

- Whitpain Township
- Ambler Borough
- Upper Dublin Township





Three parcels make up the BO-ROT Superfund Site

- Wissahickon Park – Whitpain Township
- The Reservoir – Wissahickon Wildlife Association
- The “Pile” – presently not owned (Sheriff’s Sale)



1945 Aerial



PA Brownfields Conference

Positioning for the Future



2 Paradigms

**About
The Risk**

**Bo-Rit Superfund Clean Up
US EPA**

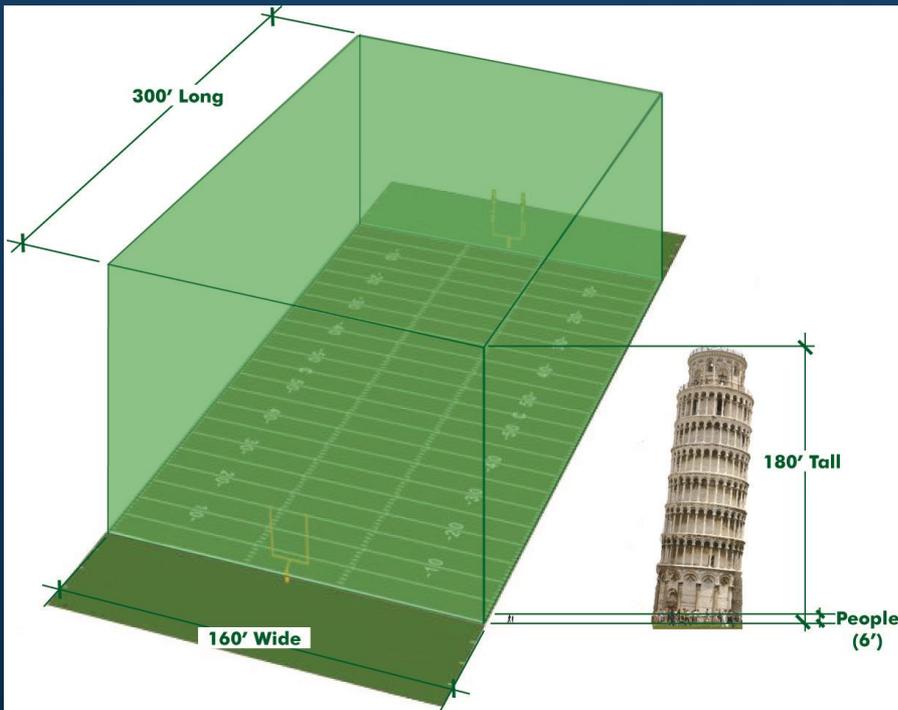
Whitpain Township – Upper Dublin Township – Ambler Borough

Community Advisory Committee (CAG)

**About
The Future**

**West Amber (Whitpain) Revitalization and
Action Plan Committee**

Residents, business & property owners,
Whitpain Township Staff & Officials, WWA,
Interested Area Residents, Consultant Team



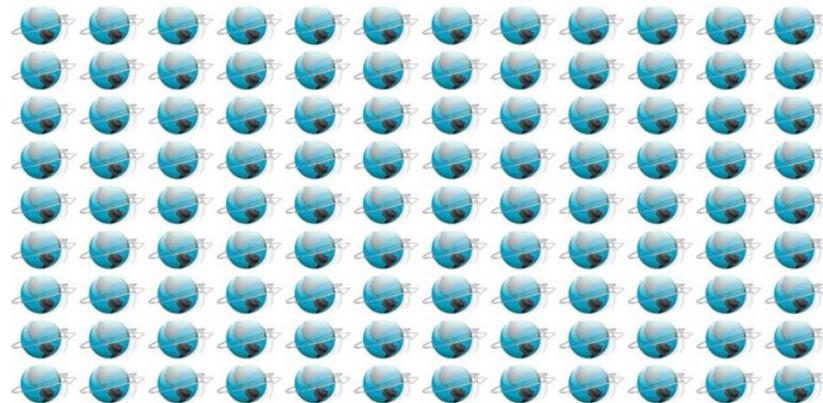
ESTIMATED VOLUME AT WISSAHICKON PARK	195,000 CUBIC YARDS
ESTIMATED VOLUME AT "PILE"	125,000 CUBIC YARDS
TOTAL	320,000* CUBIC YARDS

*BASED ON EPA ESTIMATES

**THE NEAREST ASBESTOS LANDFILL IS 38 MILES AWAY
OR 76 MILES ROUNDRIP
35,556 DUMP TRUCKS x 76 MILES = 2,702,256 MILES**

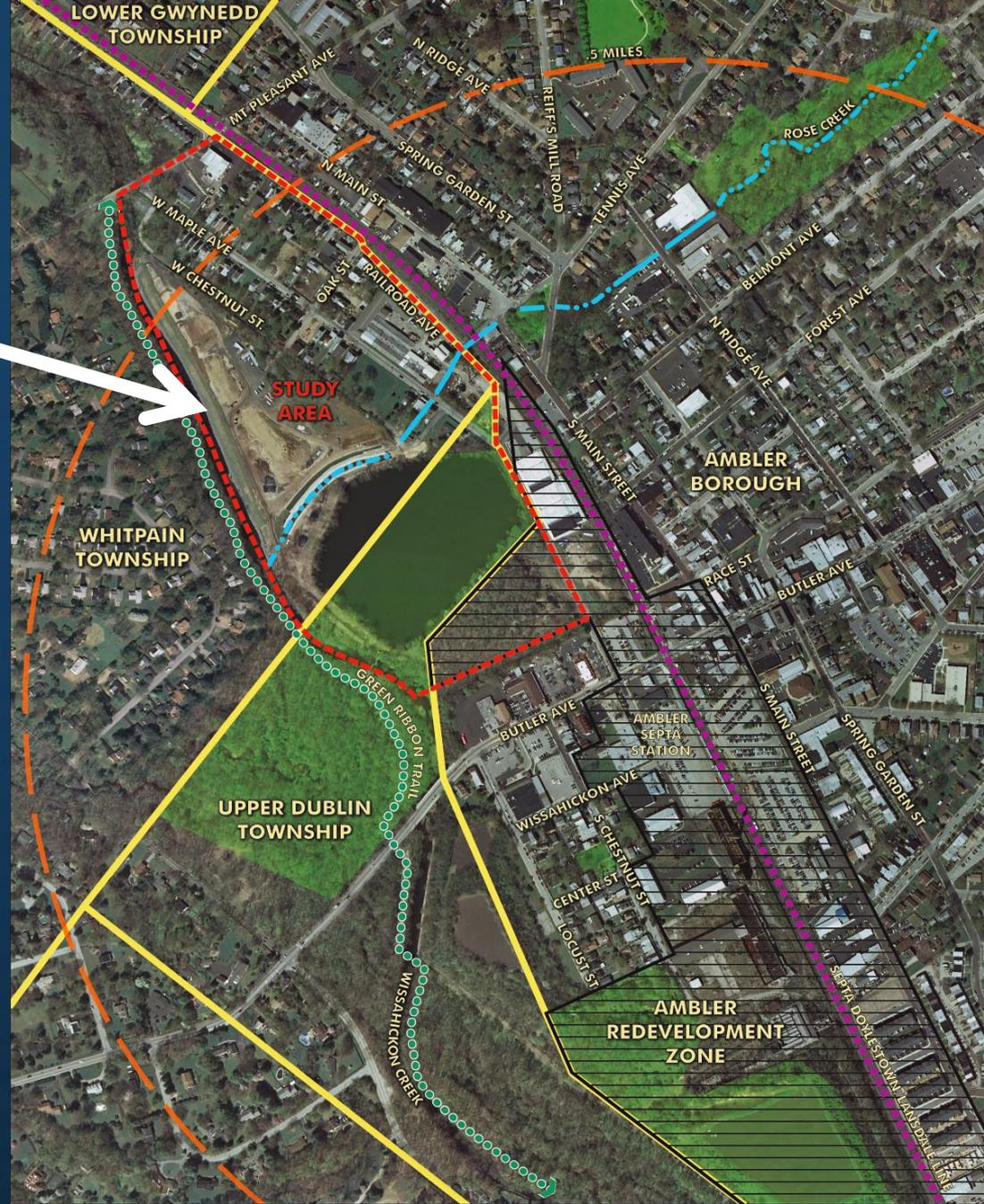


2,702,256 MILES = 108 TRIPS AROUND THE EARTH.



During the CAG process, some CAG participants wanted to remove 340,000 CY of asbestos contaminated soil from area. Cost - \$200M+

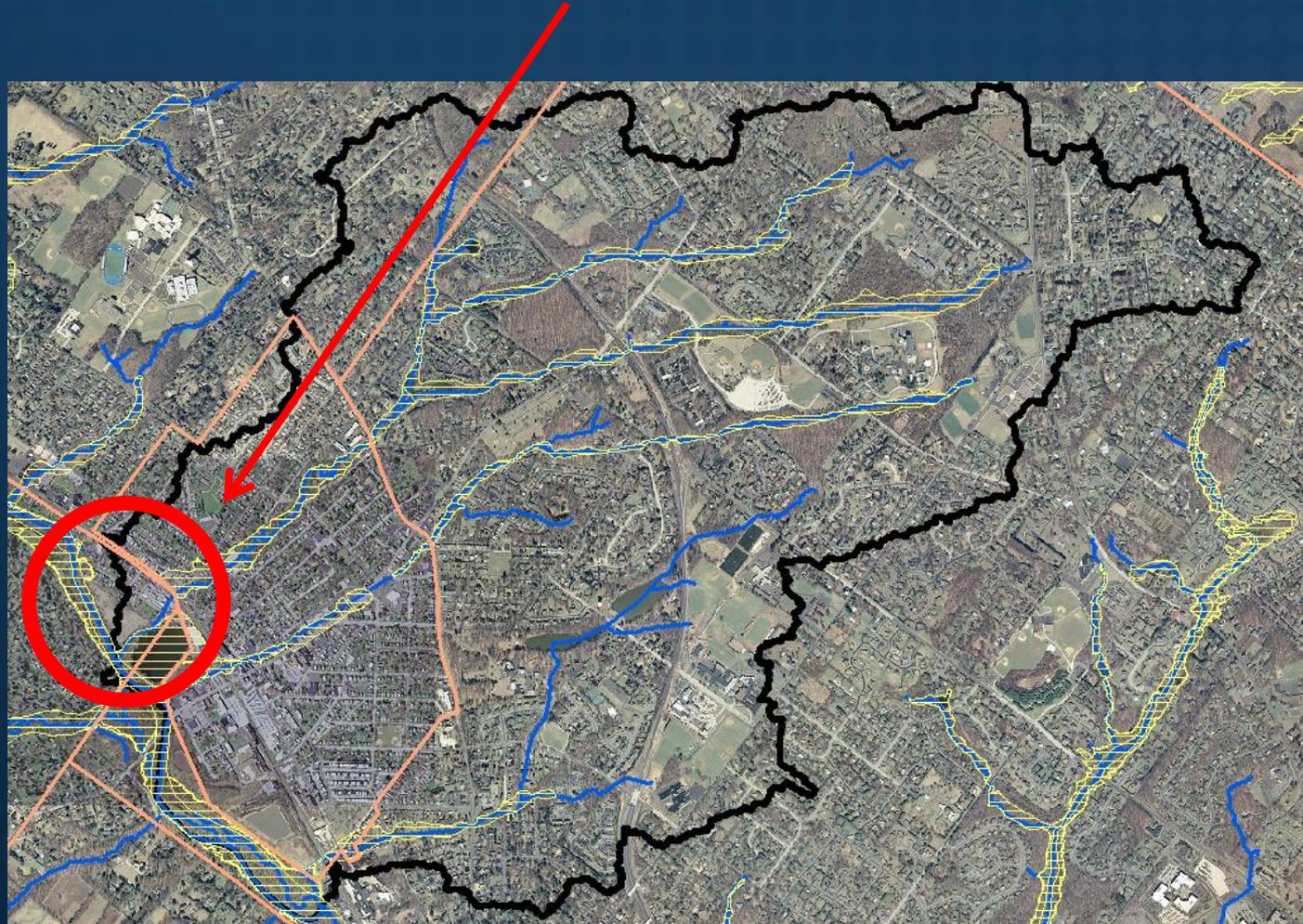
Study area included the Bo-Rit Superfund Site plus the West Ambler residential / industrial neighborhood.



ROSE VALLEY CREEK FLOOD HAZARD MAPPING AND MITIGATION STUDY

Temple University Center for Sustainable Communities

Flooding and flood mitigation issues subject to on-going study. Study will suggest ways to mitigate flooding and will become a part of the West Ambler Revitalization Plan



PA Brownfields Conference

Positioning for the Future



Revitalization Plan

- Proposed park / reservoir and pile improvements
- Streetscape / infrastructure improvements
- Flood mitigation improvements
- Private sector neighborhood redevelopment

David Froehlich - Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve Inc. / Former CAG Co-Chair

- Why did Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve, Inc. (Wissahickon Watershed Association, Inc.) step up and purchase the reservoir portion of the Superfund Site?
- Dave's dual roles as former CAG CO-Chair and President of Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve, Inc. – Perspectives of both roles.
- How Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve Inc. viewed their risk in the purchase of the reservoir site to create a waterfowl refuge?



Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve

Transforming a liability into an asset

WWP-keystone to a bigger area

- 15 acres, 10 acre reservoir, Wissahickon Creek.
- WWP attracts wide variety of waterfowl and is Audubon Society *Important Bird Area*
- Within three municipalities
- Center of BoRit area but also central to bigger Ambler conservation area

WWP is part of a larger area



Long process to acquire

- Ten years or so under consideration
- Pressure from bird watchers and nature enthusiasts
- Due diligence: engineering studies, legal advice, set up separate corp., purchase negotiations

Waterfowl Preserve separately owned

- Purchased in 2006 by Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve, separate, nonprofit, 501(c) (3) corporation, subsidiary of WVWA
- Not owned directly by Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association

Reasons For Caution

- Asbestos materials on site
- 2008 became part of BoRit Superfund site
- Cleanup liability flows with chain of title
- Extensive due diligence done prior to acquisition
- To date, WWP is not viewed as a responsible party.

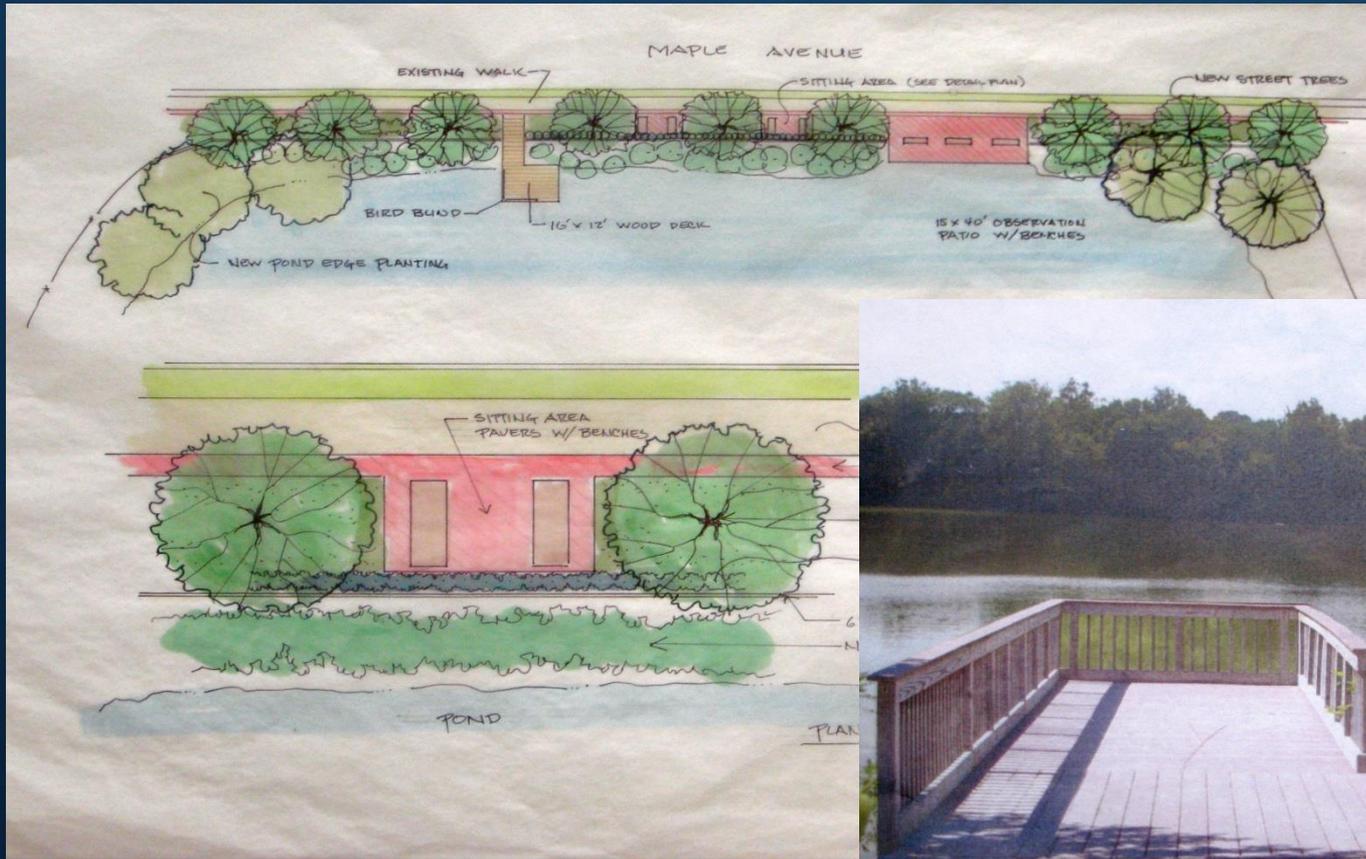
Plans for the future

- Clean up and beautify area along Maple Ave.
- Create bird watching deck and mini-park along street
- Maintain reservoir as nature preserve
- Make it part of bigger Ambler Conservation Area and reopen Whitpain Park.
- Cooperate with BoRit cleanup

What will it look like?



What will it be like



What will it accomplish?

- Protect unique natural asset in Ambler and West Ambler area
- Beautify area
- Be part of larger, recreational/natural area just outside of Ambler.
- Attract visitors
- Provide park destination for people in surrounding communities

Struggle to keep vision alive

- Ongoing tension between: 1. public safety, public use and preserving natural habitat, 2. liability and public use
- Safety first but need creativity to keep reservoir.
- Vision part of CAG future use and Whitpain West Ambler Plan.

The site today



PA Brownfields Conference

Positioning for the Future

Different perspectives

- CAG very safety oriented. Often emotional, probably reflecting history of asbestos health issues in community
- West Ambler community often not comfortable at CAG
- BoRit only part of what they are concerned about in neighborhood

Otis L. Hightower - Resident, Revitalization Committee, CAG, Planning Commission

- What were the community's initial impressions about the CAG process and the Revitalization Process? How did those impressions change over time?
- How was the community either embraced or alienated by either or both processes?
- In addition to safety, what were the community's main concerns about the clean-up?
- How will the West Ambler community measure success?



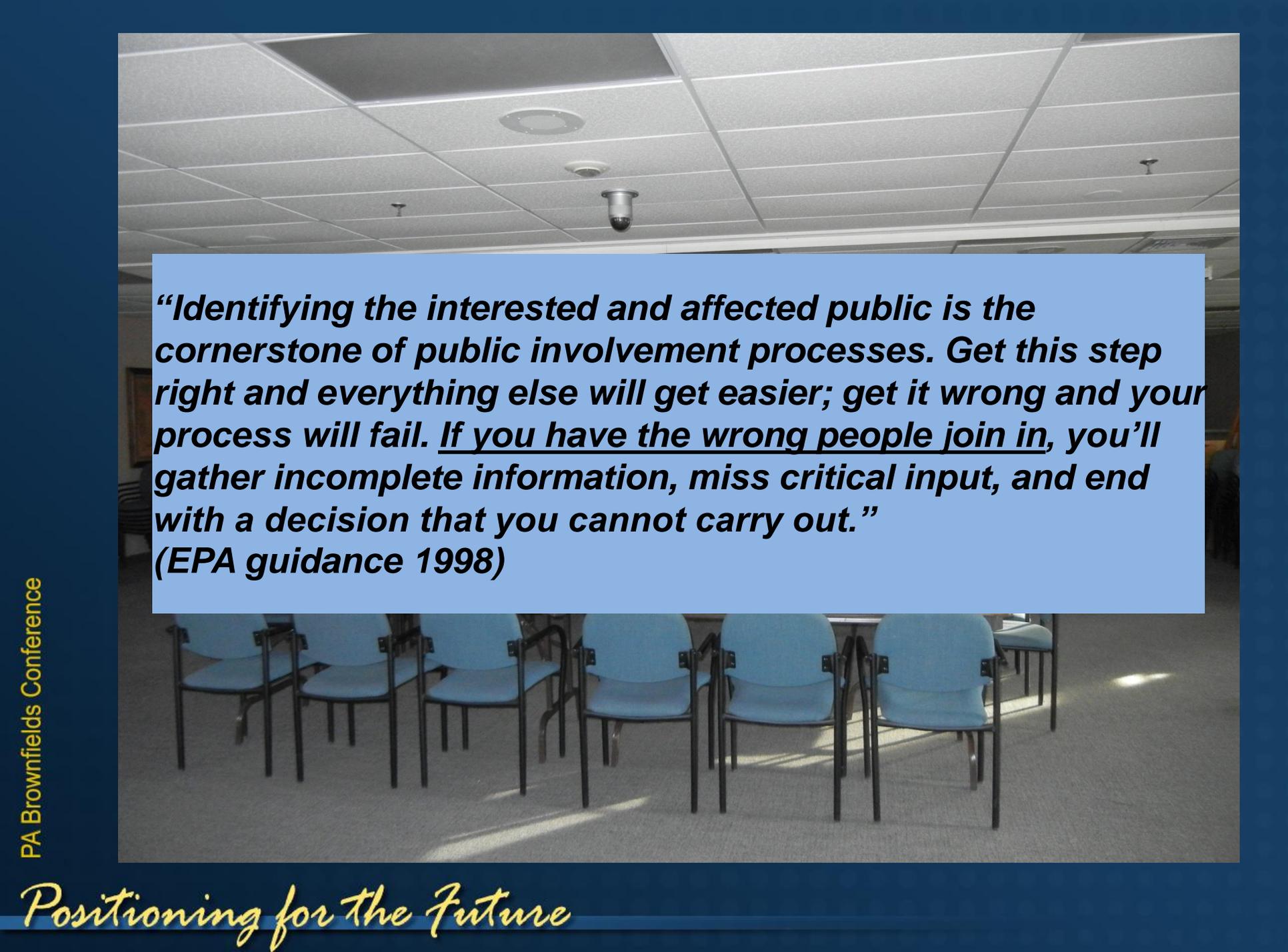
Britt Dahlberg – University of Pennsylvania Researcher about risk and futures

- Preliminary results:
 - Newer and long-term residents differed in their view risk and their hopes for reuse.
- Overview of research on Bo-Rit Superfund Site.
 - A central challenge was how to include diverse groups in community involvement to discuss risk and site reuse.
 - Views on risk and reuse were linked to other social concerns, but not all meetings made space to discuss these.
- Different approaches taken to community involvement in Revitalization Meetings and CAG meetings.



A large, empty conference room with a long, light-colored wooden table and several rows of blue chairs. The room has a drop ceiling with recessed lighting and a security camera. In the background, there is a wooden panel wall, a whiteboard, and a podium. The text "Who is the 'community'?" is overlaid in white on the table.

Who is the
“community”?

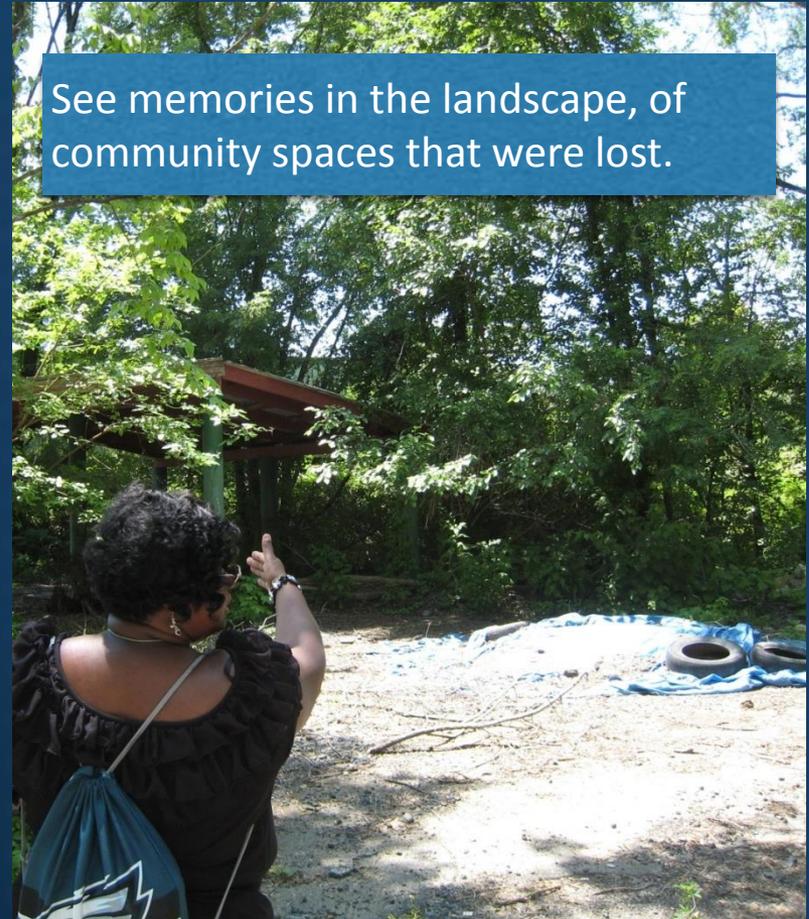


“Identifying the interested and affected public is the cornerstone of public involvement processes. Get this step right and everything else will get easier; get it wrong and your process will fail. If you have the wrong people join in, you’ll gather incomplete information, miss critical input, and end with a decision that you cannot carry out.”
(EPA guidance 1998)

View Landscape Differently



Notice signs of health risks.



See memories in the landscape, of community spaces that were lost.

Encouraging Dissent

- Results highlight the importance of encouraging broad discussion and dissent for building inclusion and relationships, rather than seeking consensus too early.
- Being open to concerns that appear to agencies to be unrelated, but are connected to the site *for residents*, facilitates engagement of diverse communities in designing reuse plans, and means plans can include local information.

CORE VALUES FOR THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

“We should be respected in this community to have our own issue... to have a place if there are safety issues we can gather...”

5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
6. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input was, or was not, utilized.
7. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

Source: *Interact: The Journal of Public Participation*, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1996. *Interact* is published by the International Association of Public Participation Practitioners, a non-profit corporation established in 1990 to serve practitioners throughout the world seeking practical experience designing and conducting public involvement programs.

Fred Conner - Township Supervisor, former CAG chair, catalyst for W. Amber Revitalization

- Why did Whitpain Township take the initiative and expense to create the revitalization process within the context of the larger Bo-Rit Clean-Up / CAG process?
- Why was the active participation of local government so important to the revitalization process?
- What was surprising about the revitalization process?
- What are the biggest challenges in implementing the revitalization plan?



Discussion / Questions & Answers

- Differences between CAG process and Revitalization Plan Process
- As a regulatory agency, EPA must be vary careful about public comments concerning future uses, adaptive reuse and owner-related future actions.
- How did “near-resident” concerns differ from “far-resident” concerns?
- What were the differences in expectations between the CAG and Revitalization Process?
- Were nearby residents - who may be perceived as being at the greatest potential risk - less concerned about risk than residents who did not live immediately adjacent to the site?

PA Brownfields Conference



Positioning for the Future

Lessons Learned / Take-Aways

- Separate adaptive reuse planning process from on-going clean up process / planning.
- If possible, bring in neutral agent to help plan for future adaptive reuse.
- Give regulatory agencies distance & cover during adaptive reuse planning. Don't put them on the spot in planning for the future or create a situation where they have to respond to every objection and concern that may be voiced at a public meeting.
- Encourage discussion about broader concerns during adaptive reuse planning. Encourage community discussion about issues that may not even concern contaminate site. Examine the BIG picture.



Resources / Contacts

West Ambler Revitalization & Action Plan

http://www.whitpaintownship.net/pdfs/westambler_actionplan.pdf

Bo-Rit Community Advisory Group

<http://www.boritcag.org/>

EPA information about Bo-Rit Superfund site

<http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/npl/PAD981034887.htm>

Speakers

Peter M. Simone	psimone@simonecollins.com
David Froehlich	davidfroehlich@verizon.net
Otis L. Hightower	otis.hightower@verizon.net
Britt Dahlberg	brittd@sas.upenn.edu
Fred Conner	fconner@whitpaintownship.org

**Thank you for your
interest & participation !**