

Application 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. **Website URL:** <https://realwildunicoicounty.com/>
3. **Funding Requested:**
 - a. **Assessment Grant Type:** Community-Wide
 - b. **Federal Funds Requested:** \$500,000
4. **Location:** Unicoi County, Tennessee
5. **Target Area and Priority Site Information:**
 - a. **Target Area(s):**
 - i. Downtown District (Census Tract 47171080400)
 - ii. Carolina Avenue (Census Tract 47171080400)
 - b. **Priority Site(s) Address(es):**
 - i. CSX Division Office: 229 Nolichucky Avenue, Erwin, Unicoi County, TN 37650 (Downtown District Target Area)
 - ii. Red Kap Factory: 601 Carolina Avenue, Erwin, Unicoi County, TN 37650 (Carolina Avenue Target Area)
 - iii. Erwin Public Works Building: 715 Watauga Avenue, Erwin, Unicoi County, TN 37650 (Carolina Avenue Target Area)
 - c. Maps of the proposed Target Areas and corresponding priority sites are attached.
6. **Contacts:**
 - a. **Project Director:** Mr. Austin Finch, 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
7. **Population:**
 - a. Unicoi County’s Population: 17,779 (2023: American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates)



8. Other Factors Checklist:

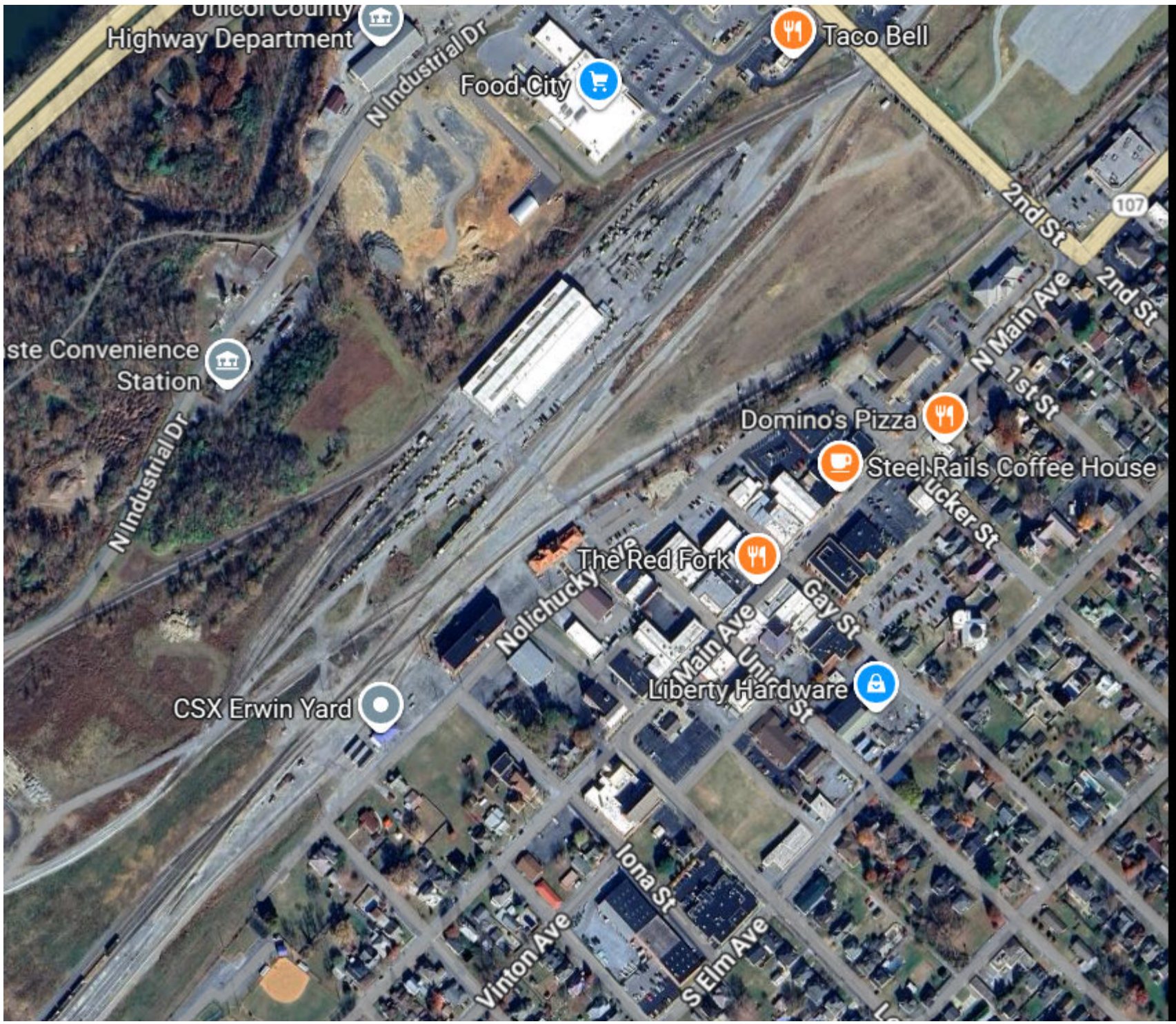
Other Factors	Page #
Community population is 15,000 or less.	1
The applicant is, or will assist, a federally recognized Indian tribe or United States territory.	NA
The priority site(s) is impacted by mine-scarred land.	NA
The priority site(s) is adjacent to a body of water (i.e., the border of the priority 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 proposed project will improve local climate adaptation/mitigation capacity and resilience to protect residents and community investments.	4
At least 30% of the overall project budget will be spent on eligible reuse/areawide planning activities, as described in Section 3.A.(2), for priority site(s) within the target area(s).	9
The target area(s) is impacted by a coal-fired power plant has recently closed (2015 or later) or is closing.	NA

9. Letter from the State or Tribal Environmental Authority:

See attachment.

10. Releasing Copies of Applications:

Not applicable; no portions of the application are confidential.



Unicoi County
Highway Department



N Industrial Dr

Food City



Taco Bell

Ste Convenience
Station



N Industrial Dr

2nd St

107

2nd St

N Main Ave

1st St

Domino's Pizza



Steel Rails Coffee House

The Red Fork



Nolichucky

Liberty Hardware



Gay St

Natcher St

CSX Erwin Yard



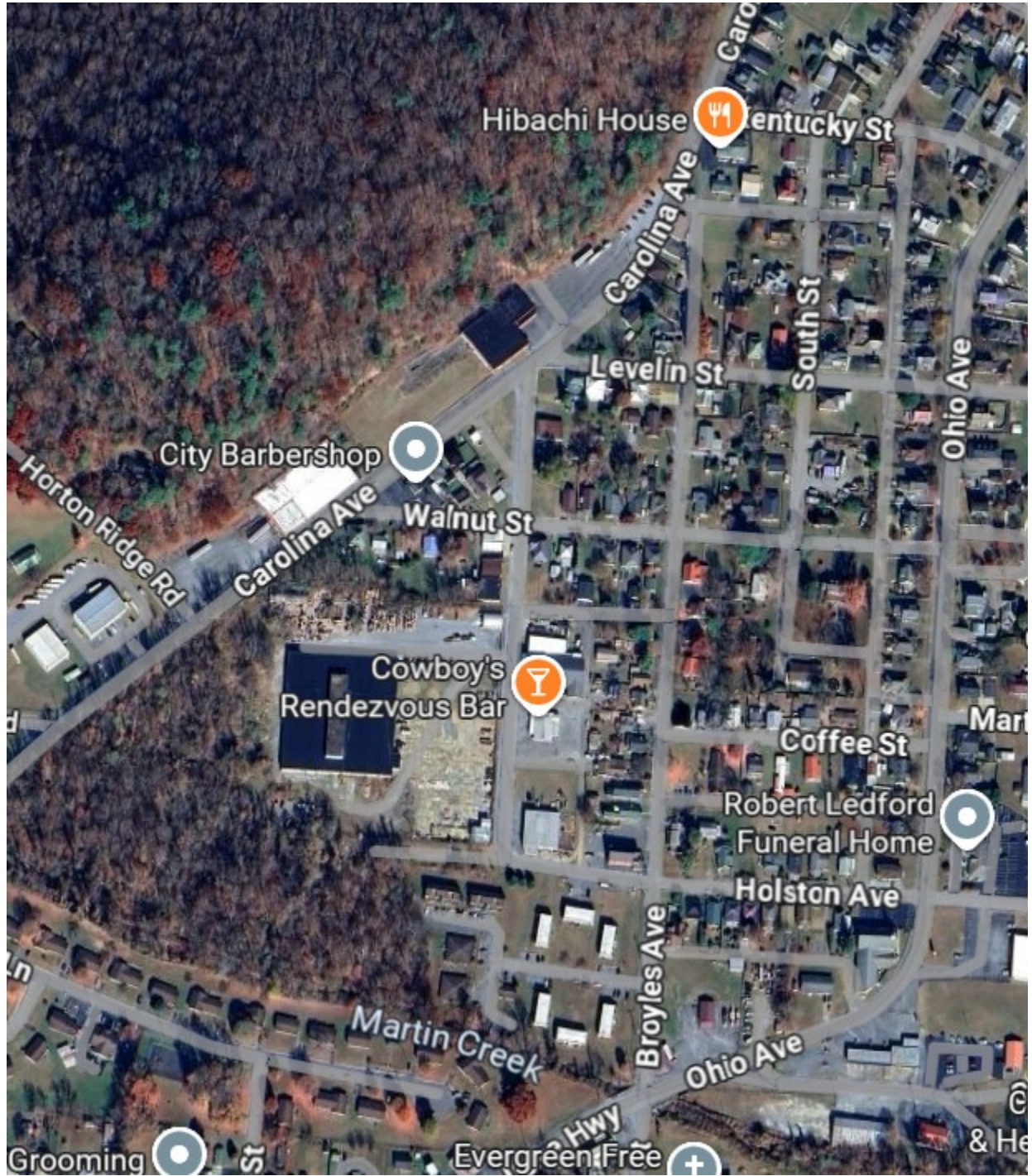
Main Ave

Union St

Vinton Ave

Iona St

S Elm Ave



Hibachi House



Kentucky St

Carolina Ave

Levelin St

South St

Ohio Ave

City Barbershop



Horton Ridge Rd

Carolina Ave

Walnut St

Cowboy's
Rendezvous Bar



Coffee St

Mar

Robert Ledford
Funeral Home



Holston Ave

Martin Creek

Broyles Ave

Ohio Ave

Grooming



Evergreen Free



& He



TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT & CONSERVATION
DIVISION OF REMEDIATION
DAVY CROCKETT TOWER, 7TH FLOOR
500 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243

January 5, 2026

Austin Finch
Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County
211 N Main
Erwin, TN 37650

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

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 the Unicoi County, Tennessee.

Sincerely,

Paula Middlebrooks

Paula Middlebrooks
State of Tennessee Brownfields Redevelopment Program

1. PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION AND PLANS FOR REVITALIZATION

Target Area and Brownfields

a. 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. 40 minutes north of Asheville, NC, Unicoi County is largely isolated. With a population of just over 6,000 residents, 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. Numerous natural areas surrounding Erwin attract tourists from across the Nation. Year round, AT thru-hikers frequently visit Erwin as a re-supply pit stop to their 2,197 mile hike. During the warmer months, commercial outfitters guide tourists down the Nolichucky River, providing both relaxing tubing and whitewater experiences. Historically, Erwin served as a resting stop for coal being carried to power plants as coal was sorted at Erwin’s 175-acre CSX railyard (American Community Survey (ACS)).

While coal historically upheld Erwin’s economy, the rapid decline of its consumption over the last few decades (down 59% since 2014 and 79% since 2000) forced CSX to close their Erwin railyard in 2015 as the route was no longer profitable, leaving approximately 300 people out of work. Prior to the disinvestment of coal, government policies and international trade developments resulted in relocation of Erwin’s textile industry as “Swift Denim” ceased operations in 2000, leaving approximately 800 individuals without employment (WRALNews). Born out of these problems, Erwin community leadership felt the need to reimagine the local economic climate and how prosperity might look for the rural area. To further evaluate and support local economic diversity, the Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County (“the Board”) was established in 1986.

Fast forward to September of 2024, Erwin became famous, as images of patients stranded atop local Unicoi County Hospital surrounded by floodwater were broadcast nationally. In Erwin, 9 individuals drowned and many more were injured and/or deemed temporarily missing (NOAA). Approximately 100 homes were impacted, 25 of which were devastated beyond repair (TimesNews). Erwin’s wastewater treatment plant, several bridges and interstates/roads (several of which are still impacted today), utilities, and industrial sites were also destroyed. Estimates in September 2025 assessed damage costs for roads and bridges had already exceeded \$303 million, a number which will continue to rise following additional damage assessments (TN Dept. of Transportation, TimesNews). Resulting infrastructure costs are “substantial, with \$75 million for roads and bridges, \$90 million for wastewater systems and \$17 million in electric, fiber, water and natural gas” (TimesNews). 11 businesses were destroyed completely, 14 had major damage and 6 minor, totaling 31 businesses impacted in addition to 6 manufacturers affected alongside the Hospital (TimesNews). 252 jobs were lost through destruction of the Riverview Industrial Park. Secondary economic disaster ensued as many local businesses were unable to reopen without functioning power/sewage. The AT and Nolichucky River were indefinitely closed due to flooding damages, in fact, the Nolichucky River remains closed to this day. Rebuilding rural Southern Appalachian communities, Erwin included, will continue for the foreseeable future as funding sources are considerably lacking. As a result, Erwin not only faces historical challenges of economic diversification post-coal, but faces the challenge to rebuild critical infrastructure and recover vital industry post-Helene.

Despite Erwin’s tireless efforts to restore what the floodwaters have taken, brownfield conditions, exacerbated by Helene flooding, 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 will utilize placemaking tactics to redevelop brownfields in a way that will enable the community to reshape the local economy through supportive ecotourism industries. The Board is committed to working within its communities to implement policies and redevelopment strategies to support employment opportunities, social well-being, environment, and health. Federal brownfield funding will catalyze redevelopment within and beyond selected Target 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 Target Areas, within a secondary inventory.

b. Description of Priority Brownfield Sites

From the Board’s established County-wide inventory, Erwin’s **Downtown District** and the adjoining **Carolina Avenue** corridor were selected as Target Areas because of their centralized location and industrial history. Established in 2012, 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. Despite targeted redevelopment, an estimated 16 brownfields exist within the Downtown District. Approximately 194 people live within this Target Area, 2,434 within a .5 mile radius and 4,858 within a mile radius (ACS). Located approximately half a mile southeast 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 southeast, carrying traffic away from town. This Target Area is bounded by woods to the north and west, Broyles Avenue to the east, and Martin Creek to the south and is characterized by single

family homes intermixed with commercial and municipal properties. An estimated 9 brownfield sites have been identified within this Target Area. Approximately 138 people reside within this Target Area, 3,093 within a .5 radius, and 4,740 within a mile radius (ACS).

Both Target Areas are located within disadvantaged Census Tract 47171080400, which is in the 68th percentile nationally for low-income households (ACS). Here, the elderly population (ages 64+) is 22.6% (25.6% greater than the national average) and the median household income (\$47,281) is 64.3% less than the national average (ACS). While only 7.8% of the population are minorities; 100% of the African Americans in this census tract live 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. Within the Target Areas, a total of 25 brownfields have been inventoried which consist of former retail buildings, manufacturers, gas stations, and auto repair garages. From this inventory, three brownfields were carefully selected as priority sites based on community input, redevelopment potential, and environmental, economic, and human impacts.

The first priority site, **CSX Division Office**, is located in the **Downtown District Target Area** and marks the western edge of Downtown. The site includes the 30,000 SF historic CSX office building and the 175-acre former railyard surrounding it. The CSX Office is a priority site based on community feedback, its proximity to North Indian Creek (directly adjoining the railyard) and Nolichucky River, and crucial location which would support a cohesive western edge to the Downtown District. Built in the 1930s, the Office is accented with arching white windows and decorative keystones. The building was utilized as office space, conference rooms, drawing/mapping areas, and storage. The Office and railyard were closed in 2015 due to the coal industry's decline. As a result, approximately 300 CSX employees were let go. Pollutants stemming from the railyard pose redevelopment challenges. Potential site pollutants include Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) and heavy metals (such as arsenic) resulting from coal spilled on the tracks; herbicides from vegetation control along tracks; and creosote, a known carcinogen, that is used to soak railroad ties for preservation (Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ASTDR)). Additionally, due to the building's construction date, Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) and Lead Based Paint (LBP) were likely incorporated throughout building materials.

The second priority site, **Red Kap Factory**, is located within the **Carolina Avenue Target Area** and was selected as such due to 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 ownership. 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. 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.

The third priority site, **Erwin Public Works**, is also located within the **Carolina Avenue Target Area**. Consisting of approximately 10 acres, the industrially developed property is developed with six structures, including a main warehouse (~40,000 SF), two implement sheds, two utility buildings, and a wood workshop. The property was previously occupied from 1916 to 1958 by porcelain china producing company, Southern Pottery. Likely site contaminants include lead, radionuclides, cadmium, uranium, antimony, and tin oxide - all resulting from the painting/glazing process. Pottery waste is likely to be buried on site, causing subsurface soil contamination and creating risk to nearby residents. Additionally, coal-fired kilns were likely used until transition to gas, which likely introduced PAH's and heavy metals. From 1958 to 1976, the National Casket Company used the property for casket manufacturing, where glues, sealants and metal plating/finishing and the embalming process likely introduced with formaldehyde, heavy metals (lead, zinc), VOCs, and ACMs. The property was later utilized by several metal fabricators, which conducted metal stamping, coating, and painting. These industries likely introduced pollutants such as heavy metals (lead, zinc, cadmium, chromium, nickel, copper) used in paints, pigments and plating baths, as well as VOCs. Additionally, solvents, lubricants sludge, and dust from metalworking fluids, extreme pressure additives, cleaning solvents, and dried paint chips likely contributed to the site's pollution. A Land Use Restriction was placed on the site by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) in June 2008, restricting the use of the property for commercial and industrial purposes only, adult worker populations only, and the mandatory plugging and abandonment of all wells. Manufacturing at the property ceased in 1990, prior to the Town purchasing the property in 2009. This priority site was selected due to proximity to residential properties and vulnerable populations as well as the degree of likely contamination.

c. 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 Erwin and other community and County offices, and at all public input meetings as described within section 2(g). 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.

Revitalization of the Target Area

d. Reuse Strategy and Alignment with Revitalization Plans

Target Areas and priority sites were chosen based on both regional and local planning efforts. Erwin's Design Guidelines were adopted in 2012 and serve as the newest local planning documents available; 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. Unicoi County is served by the First Tennessee Development District. The District's 2022 Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) outlines goals to provide a mechanism for guiding, coordinating, and analyzing economic development efforts. Notable sectors include A) encouraging tourism development, and B) creating additional planning documents to guide sustainable Downtown development. Additionally, the CSX Railyard is partially located in Opportunity Zone Census Tract 47171080200, with all other sites in close proximity, thus providing additional redevelopment incentives.

A local developer and architect has crafted conceptual plans transforming the **CSX Division Office** into The Clinchfield Hotel, preserving "the historic structure while opening it to the public in a way that blends hospitality, tourism and community use" (ErwinRecord). The plans incorporate energy efficient fixtures and materials. The first floor (~10,000 SF) will be utilized as a spa, the second as a community meeting space and restaurant (~10,000 SF), the third floor will host hotel suites (~10,000 SF), and the fourth floor will provide a rooftop venue space (~10,000 SF). A pool, as well as outdoor patio space, will be featured behind the hotel including lounge chairs, gazebos, and service station (~30,000 SF). County leadership state the building "has always been central to Erwin's identity and history and that "[f]or generations, the building housing the headquarters stood as a beacon of economic activity in the heart of town" (ErwinRecord). 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.

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. A 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 the 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.

Following additional assessment and potential remediation of **Erwin Public Works**, engineering and institutional controls will be re-evaluated and properly incorporated into site designs. Existing buildings will be demolished to make room for new construction, which will consist of a multi-story, mixed-use building. The energy-efficient development will feature apartment homes (~20,000 SF), retail stores (~10,000 SF), and a community health clinic (~10,000 SF). In order to promote community spheres, a large greenspace (~1 acre) is also being considered for the redevelopment (plans are dependent on further assessment and any associated property restrictions). An outdoor "art garden" is proposed within the greenspace, which will feature murals and sculptures crafted by local artisans. Specific redevelopment benefits include the health clinic, which will better serve the large elderly and sensitive populations, addressing existing health disparities and increasing access for Erwin residents. The clinic will also market themselves to serving hikers in need of urgent medical care. Altogether, the development will accomplish Erwin's Design Guideline 1 by incorporating art within a public space and CEDS Goal A by creating a retail destination to capture tourist spending.

Additionally, further planning needs, including infrastructure improvements, will be addressed for both the Erwin public Works property and other non-priority sites by creating a Community-Wide Revitalization Plan. This planning initiative will fulfil CEDS Goal B.

e. 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; relevant as Census Tract 47171080400 is in the 91st percentile nationwide for projected flood risk over the next 30 years (Climate Risk Data Access).

Building Reuse	Outcomes and Benefits	Align with Redevelopment Strategy
CSX Division Office/Clinchfield Hotel		
YES; existing ~30,000 SF building reused	~50 jobs*; energy efficient hotel; ~25 hotel 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 at spa, restaurant, and rooftop venue (~ 20 jobs created at hotel, ~ 5 jobs created at spa, ~ 5 jobs created at restaurant, ~ 5 jobs created at rooftop venue)	Design Guideline 2; CEDS Goal A
Red Kap Factory/Red Kap Factory Brewery		
YES; existing ~72,800 SF property reused	~65 jobs*, ~15 jobs*, 0.9 acres of greenspace; improved walkability and connectivity and thus reduce car 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
Erwin Public Works/Mixed-Use Development		
NO; existing building (and auxiliary buildings) to be demolished	Energy efficient development; ~25 apartment homes: ~20,000 SF, retail: ~10,000 SF, health clinic: ~10,000 SF; ~1 acre greenspace; additional housing stock; capture tourist dollars; improved access to healthcare for sensitive populations; increased spin-off spending; creation of ~24 jobs (apartments: ~1, retail: ~6, health clinic: ~17)	Design Guideline 1; CEDS Goal A and B

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

Strategy for Leveraging Resources

f. Resources Needed for Site Reuse

A readily available inventory of incentives and grants listed below will allow the Board to maximize resource leveraging within 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 \$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 down payment and/or closing costs. The business must be located within the Downtown District and the borrower must keep a business account at one of the 3 participating banks. The CSX Division Office is an eligible property.
Tennessee Department of Economic and Community	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

Development: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	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: TDEC’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.

g. 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

Community Need

a. The Community’s Need for Funding

Currently, with a small, declining population of approximately 6,000 residents and a disproportionately high low-income population, Erwin as a whole lacks the tax base to address brownfield redevelopment. Both Target Areas are located in Census Tract 47171080400, where the median annual household income is only \$47,281 with an 18% rate of poverty (ACS). 22.6% of the population is elderly and the majority of this group is retired (ACS). Erwin’s “no-thrills” budget covers only necessary services and has been greatly impacted by Helen flooding. Post-Helene Erwin has seen both decreased industry coupled with a burden of urgent infrastructure redevelopment needs that plague their county budget, demonstrated by a \$500k deficit passed in June 2025 (WJHL). 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. These chronic pitfalls have manifested in the form of lost commercial businesses, decaying historic buildings and community infrastructure, and residual environmental contamination. Redevelopment of priority sites through this grant will provide new, equitable job opportunities and stimulate local economic growth through eco-tourism,, and increase sales tax from revenue at Clinchfield Hotel including restaurant, spa and venue, Red Kap Factory Brewery, and retail store(s) at the Erwin Public Works, as well as increase property tax.

b. 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. 14.2% of Unicoi Counties population is living in poverty and 50% fall under the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) definition, or “households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living” (unitedforalice.org). Many households continue to struggle financially as wages fail to keep pace with inflation associated with daily living essentials. Although only 7.8% of Census Tract 47171080400's population is made up of minorities, 100% of all African Americans and live below the poverty line. Unicoi County is ranked among the least healthy counties in Tennessee (77 out of 95) (County Health Rankings (CHR)). 12,100 years of life per 100,000 people were lost to deaths under age 75, a trend which is steadily increasing compared to the average of 8,522 and 11,808 years lost in U.S. and TN (America’s Health Rankings).

The data shows a dramatic difference of 35%, implying that sensitive populations, particularly those living within Target Areas are more likely to die prematurely (CHR). The current patient to doctor ratio for Unicoi County physicians is estimated to be 1:2,950 patients (CHR). Simultaneously, the national average ratio is 1:1,310 (74.7% difference) and Tennessee 1:1,440 (CHR). These already slim numbers have been further reduced by the closure of Unicoi County Hospital post-Helene. Erwin residents have also experienced acute physical and mental trauma resulting from Hurricane

Helene. Studies supported by the National Institute for Environmental Health studied approximately two decades of flood exposure data finding an increased prevalence in PTSD as and death rates for cardiovascular diseases, infectious and parasitic diseases, injuries and respiratory diseases for those experiencing a flood event (NIEHS). The successful identification of contaminants within Target Areas will contribute to identifying and mitigating causes of elevated diseases, cancers, and premature death, leading to long-term public health improvements. Redevelopment following successful assessments will reduce environmental threats, stimulate the economy, and increase healthcare access. Additional tourist spending will translate into locally-circulated funds which will be used by the County to monitor health conditions and continue rebuilding community infrastructure.

c. 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 2025 the State of Tennessee experienced a 10.9% pre-term birth rate, receiving grade “D” (March of Dimes). Unicoi County experienced an infant mortality rate of 7.6 per 1,000 births, compared to a national rate of 5.8 (2012-2019) (Kids Count). Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality, accounting for 20% of all infant deaths in the U.S. and in Tennessee, birth defects account for about 1 in 5 infant deaths (CDC, March of Dimes). The National Birth Defects Prevention Study performed by CDC affiliates found that pregnant women exposed to PAHs during pregnancy 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 in 2018 was 11.3% compared to 6.3% for the U.S. (Tennessee Birth Defects Data Report, 2024). The entire Town of Erwin has likely been exposed to this contaminant (PAH’s) for generations through proximity to coal 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. 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).

d. Economically Impoverished/Disproportionally Impacted Populations

The continued loss of industry in Erwin has created high unemployment and poverty. Unicoi County qualifies as economically ‘at risk’ from The Appalachian Regional Commission, measured by three-year averages for unemployment rate, per capita market income, and poverty rate. Unicoi County suffers from a high unemployment rate of 5.2% (ACS). Additionally, although minorities only make up 7.8% of the population, 100% of African Americans within Census Tract 47171080400 live in poverty (ACS). Within this tract, 59% of the population is low income and 23% are elderly (64 years or older)(ACS). Low-income sensitive populations living near priority sites are disproportionately affected by environmental contamination, as well as cumulative exposure threats amplified by air pollution exposure. **The community surrounding the priority sites is in the 95th percentile nationwide for toxic releases to air** (EPA Toxic Release Inventory). This grant will assist the Board in taking the necessary steps to eliminate environmental hazards by assessing properties that are contaminated and negatively impacting the health of underserved populations in Target Areas. Once threats are identified through this assessment grant, additional financial resources will be sought to eliminate contamination, and limit exposure. 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 and community space. Spinoff from increased tourism will help stimulate the local economy, further supporting and providing opportunities for residents. Connectivity throughout the Downtown District will also be improved, and along with reuse of the historic buildings at priority sites, will further establish the Town’s sense of place, a critical aspect when growing the local ecotourist industry.

Community Engagement

e. and f. 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.

<p>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 children, seniors and our community” and 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 Carolina Avenue Target Area.</p>
<p>RISE Erwin, Jamie Rice, President, (423) 330-1820, riseerwin@gmail.com RISE Erwin is “a community-focused group of individuals living and working in Unicoi County who seek to improve the community in which they live” which “looks to benefit the community at large by generating partnerships with other organizations and focusing on the business, economic, cultural, recreational, and social aspects of Unicoi County”. RISE has organized a multitude of ongoing community events, including a weekly evening farmers market,</p>

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.

Northeast Tennessee Tourism (NETT) Association, Alicia Phelps, Executive Director, (423) 262-0238, tourism@northeasttennessee.org

NETT Association's mission is to "serve as a catalyst to enhance regional economic and community growth through the promotion and development of tourism". The Association will aid in advertising the priority sites, once complete, by writing an article about 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.

Unicoi County Community Advisory Board, Christy Smith,

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.

First Baptist Church, Dr. Brian Scott, Senior Pastor, (423) 743-9156, hello@erwinfirst.org

Located a block from the Erwin Hotel, the First Baptist Church is an active congregation, which most notably assists the community through their "Main Street Pantry" 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.

The EPA, 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.

g. Incorporating Community Input

Following this grant's award, a project kick-off meeting will be held to provide an opportunity to establish a Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC) consisting of representatives from local stakeholders to review projects and make decisions regarding site assessments (based upon the hierarchy described within section 1.c). This meeting will educate the public and solicit involvement by outlining the goals of the grant, how to provide public input and what the funds would mean to the County. Communication throughout the grants cycle will be conducted through regularly held public meetings/charettes that are organized in partnership with community organizations such as those listed in 2.e.f. In-person meetings will be held in close proximity to priority site residents, at Erwin's Town Hall and at hours agreeable to most schedules, encouraging high levels of involvement. Meetings will provide a platform for public comment to identify additional brownfield sites, reprioritize known sites based on established criteria, and voice potential concerns. Remote access will be provided through a call in number, and a recording of the meeting posted for those not in attendance. 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 developers by showcasing available brownfield sites and providing technical assistance to obtain 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/Unicoi County. Additional communication regarding grant updates and opportunities will be conducted through: The Erwin Record (online and in print), 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.e.f., the following Facebook pages will be utilized: "The Erwin Watchdog" and "The Talk of Erwin/Unicoi," reaching over 9.5k followers.

3. TASK DESCRIPTIONS, COST ESTIMATES, AND MEASURING PROGRESS

Description of Tasks/Activities and Outputs

Task 1: Cooperative Agreement Oversight

a. 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. Non-EPA grant resources: None.

b. 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 Federal Financial Reports (FFR) SF-425 reports will be submitted annually. ACRES will be updated throughout the grant period.

c. Task Lead: The Board will oversee this task, with assistance from the BAC and selected QEC

d. 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 FFR SF-425.

Task 2: Inventory and Community Outreach

a. 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 Board meetings. The Board will also attend various brownfield conferences. Non-EPA grant resources: None.

b. 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. Additional meetings will be held on an as-needed basis.

c. Task Lead: The Board will oversee this task, with assistance from the BAC, TDEC, QEC, and community partners.

d. 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)

a. 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. Non-EPA grant resources: None.

b. 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.

c. Task Lead: The QEC will oversee this task, with assistance from the Board and the BAC.

d. Outputs: Priority Sites: 3 Phase I ESAs, 3 Phase II ESAs, 2 Haz Mat Surveys; Additional Sites: 8 Phase I ESAs, 5 Phase II ESAs, 5 Haz Mat Surveys

Task 4: Cleanup Planning and Planning Activities

a. 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. Non-EPA grant resources: None.

b. 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.

c. Task Lead: The QEC will oversee the completion of ABCAs. The Board will oversee public meetings/design charettes with assistance from the QEC and BAC.

d. Outputs: 3 ABCA reports; 1-3 public meeting(s)/design charette(s), 1 Community-Wide Revitalization Plan.

e. 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: 62.5 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,000 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: \$695
- 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: 62.5 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,000 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: \$695
- 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: 62.5 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,000 for report reviews and securing site access.
- Supplies: Office supplies will include copies, maps, and handouts. Estimated cost: \$695
- Contractual: \$287,000 (57.4% of budget)
- Priority Sites: \$98,000
- 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
- 2 Hazardous Materials Surveys: estimated cost \$10,000 per survey = \$20,000
- Secondary Sites: \$189,000
- 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
- 5 Hazardous Materials Surveys: estimated cost \$10,000 per survey = \$50,000

Task 4: Site Specific Cleanup Planning and Planning Activities

- Personnel: 62.5 hours at an average rate of \$80/hour* = \$5,000 for programmatic expenses associated with cleanup planning, review of reports, and meetings.
- Supplies: Office supplies will include copies, maps, and handouts. Estimated cost: \$695
- Contractual: \$163,500
- 3 ABCAs: average estimated cost of \$4,500/ABCA = \$13,500
- 1 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	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 20,000
	Fringe Benefits					\$ -
	Travel		\$ 6,720			\$ 6,720
	Equipment					\$ -
	Supplies	\$ 695	\$ 695	\$ 695	\$ 695	\$ 2,780
	Contractual	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 287,000	\$ 163,500	\$ 470,500
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

f. 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 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

Programmatic Capability

a. b. and c. 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.

d. 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 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 Board's Executive Director for approval via resolution.

e. Past Performance and Accomplishments

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

(1) Purpose and Accomplishments

The Board has experience with both ongoing and completed grants. Due to the Board's vast funding history, only the most recent grants are included here. The Board was awarded a **\$300,000 Downtown Improvement Grant** from Tennessee Economic and Community Development (TECD) in December 2025. Funding will be allocated to eligible projects, which include improvements to building façades, downtown gateways, streetscapes, downtown courtyards, and the installation of wayfinding signage and electric vehicle charging stations. The Board also received several grants in 2025 and 2024 from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) under the **Area Development Program** for community infrastructure (**\$630,000**) to provide engineering support for infrastructure rebuilding due to damage from Helene. ARC also awarded an arts, culture, and tourism grant (**\$742,000**). The ARC's arts, culture, and tourism grants are managed in-house and provided funds and support for developing arts programs. The USDA awarded the Board a **Rural Business Development Grant for \$100,000** in late September 2025 to promote local business endeavors. Work for these grants are currently ongoing.

(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. Required reporting for the **TECD Downtown Improvement Grant** include Monthly, Annual, and Closeout Reports, requirements which are consistently met for the open grant. The Board regularly reports on **ARC grants** in Pathways, ARC's grant management system. Completed, required reporting for each ARC grant included Interim Performance Progress Reports and a Final Reporting Report (both of which require a narrative and financial report aspect), as well as submitting Standard Form 270-Request for Advance or Reimbursement. The **USDA Rural Business Development Grant** requires reporting through National Institute of Food and Agriculture Reporting System (NRS). Required reporting, which has been/will be met includes Financial Reports, Annual Research and Extension Results, Annual Report of Accomplishments, and Plan of Work. Because of their history 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:

- a. The Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County (“the Board”) is a non-profit with status as tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service. See attached documentation.
- b. No, the Joint Economic and Community Development Board of Unicoi County is not exempt from Federal taxation under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code.

2. Community Involvement:

Following this grant’s award, a project kick-off meeting will be held to provide an opportunity to establish a Brownfield Advisory Committee (BAC) consisting of representatives from local stakeholders to review projects and make decisions regarding site assessments (based upon the hierarchy described within section 1.c). This meeting will educate the public and solicit involvement by outlining the goals of the grant, how to provide public input and what the funds would mean to the County. Communication throughout the grants cycle will be conducted through regularly held public meetings/charettes that are organized in partnership with community organizations such as those listed in 2.e.f. In-person meetings will be held in close proximity to priority site residents, at Erwin’s Town Hall and at hours agreeable to most schedules, encouraging high levels of involvement. Meetings will provide a platform for public comment to identify additional brownfield sites, reprioritize known sites based on established criteria, and voice potential concerns. Remote access will be provided through a call in number, and a recording of the meeting posted for those not in attendance. 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 developers by showcasing available brownfield sites and providing technical assistance to obtain 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/Unicoi County. Additional communication regarding grant updates and opportunities will be conducted through: The Erwin Record (online and in print), 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.e.f., the following Facebook pages will be utilized: “The Erwin Watchdog” and “The Talk of Erwin/Unicoi,” reaching over 9.5k followers.

3. Expenditure of Existing Grant Funds:

Not applicable; 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 contractors nor subrecipients.