Setting the Stage for Complex Risk Communication With an EJ Community

October 6, 2022
Northwest Environmental Business Council
Remediation Conference
Tacoma, Washington

How This Started

- Soil sample collected in neighborhood right-of-way indicated yards might be contaminated

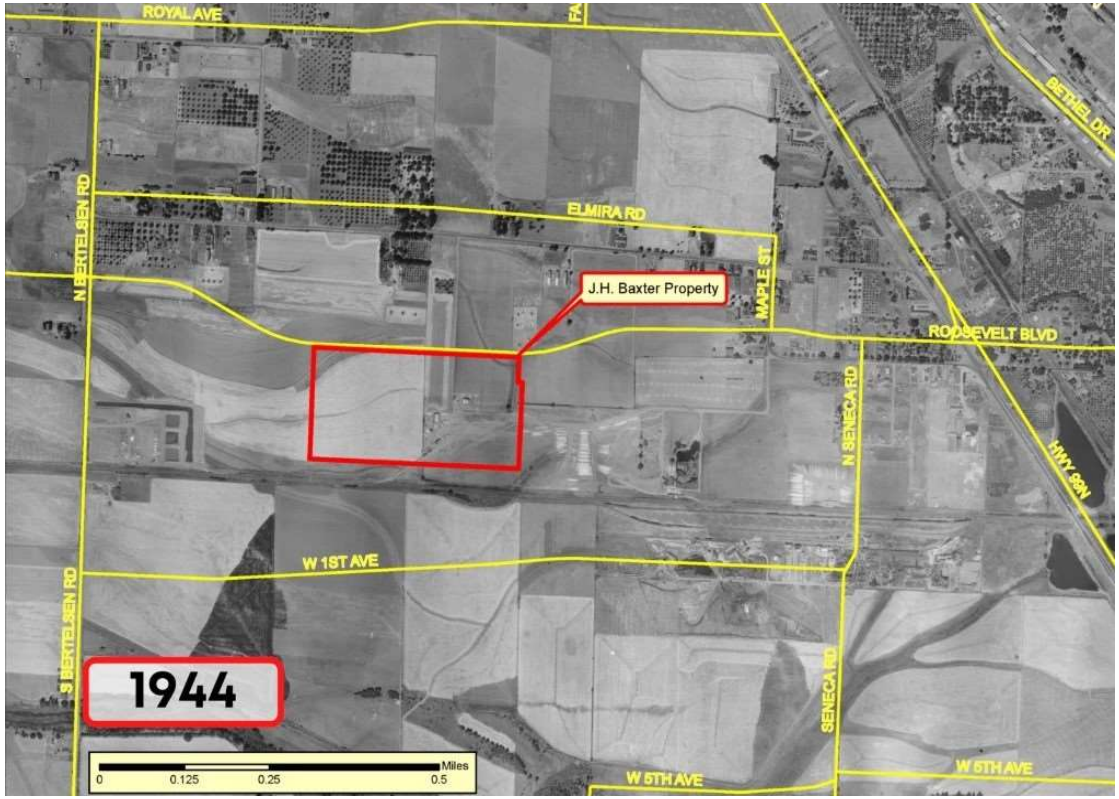
Needed a Different Approach

- Sampling and Cleaning up Residential Yards: not usual scope of DEQ Cleanup Work

- Typical approach: solicit comments through public comment period for each individual DEQ and other agencies' programs

  - This project and neighborhood needed a more inclusive approach

Background on Community Development



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We Needed a DIFFERENT Approach!

Engaged Multiple Agencies and DEQ Programs

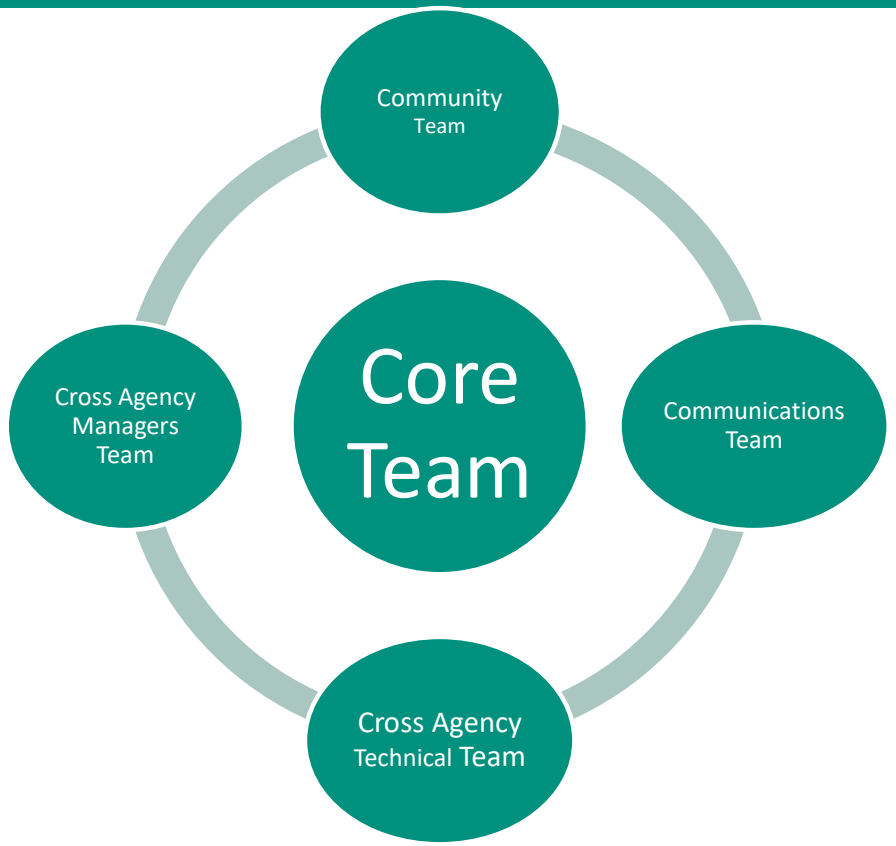
PUBLIC HEALTH
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Brought In Third Party Facilitator/Mediator

To build trust, they:

- Interviewed Community Members and Agencies
- Organized a Balanced “Core Team”
- Included leaders from local advocacy group and affected/organized community group (Beyond Toxics and Active Bethel Community)
- Act as sounding board and process guide for all core team members
- Helped us design a new process

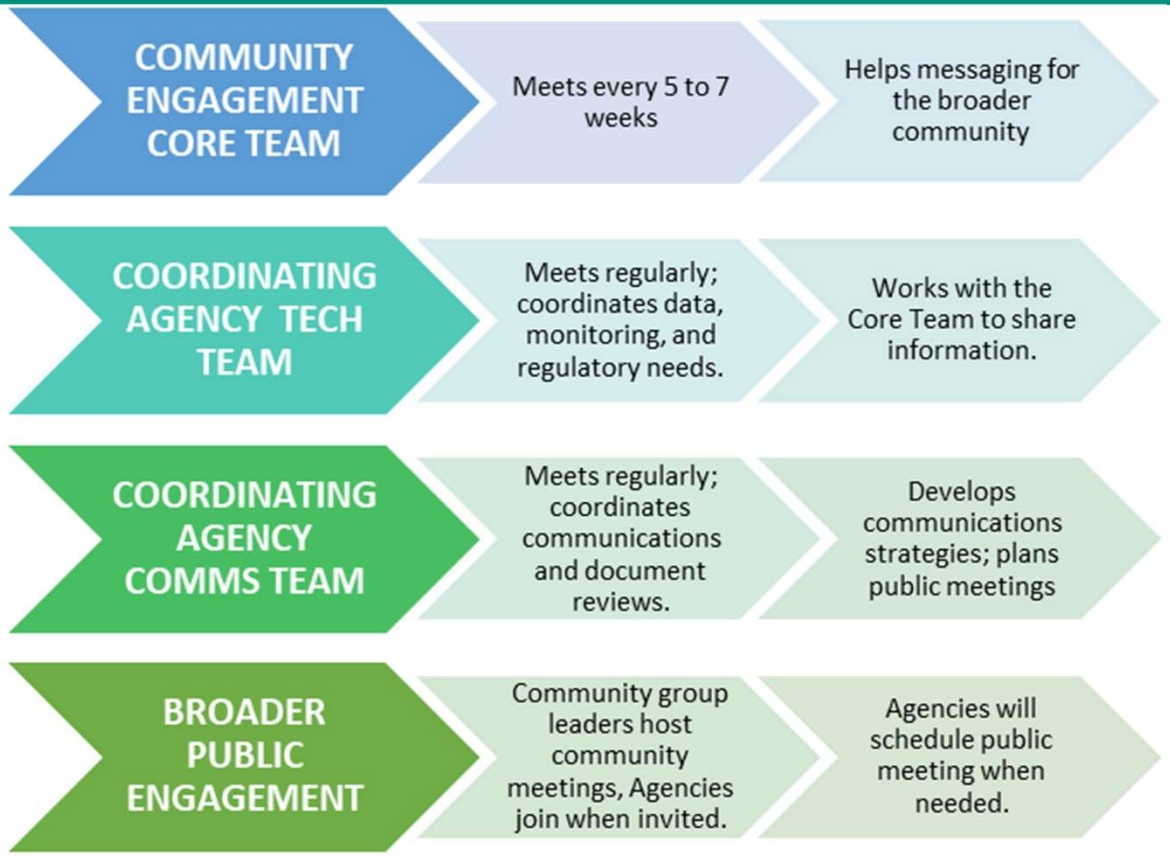
Different Approach – New Process



Agreed on Shared Goals

- Ensure protection of neighbors
- Ensure company meets environmental regulations
- Establish trust by being open and transparent
- Ensure regulators understand what's important to community
- Empower the community to have an equal voice at the table

Collaborative Efforts



Collaborative Governance

- By Agreement between DEQ/LRAPA/OHA
- Purpose: Discuss and make joint decisions that can't be made by a single agency
  - Established cross agency teams
  - Focused on Consensus seeking
  - Clarified Emergency Response Team of Three

Results of New Approach: Collaboration

- Community members knocked on doors to get access agreements signed
- Agencies use Community Group meetings as public meeting forum
- Core Team reviews sampling plans, fact sheets and press releases
- Worked together and developed a Story Map

https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/61e11e3a99a54ff784a68ffacaccffcc

Agencies Participated in Community Events

Gilbert Park Community Event: DEQ and LRAPA tables

Final Thoughts

The different approach we needed is working!

Final Thoughts

- Critical for Environmental Justice communities to be and feel included to help direct regulatory efforts
  - This process has been a great way to gain trust and partner with a community that was historically marginalized
- Community is playing a big part in urging elected officials to develop new health policies, such as a new ‘health overlay zone’
- We see a huge benefit for complex facilities with multiple permits and regulatory agency programs involved
  - Enhanced coordination, efficiencies, and resource consolidation

Our Hope

- This can serve as a model process for other complex sites with Environmental Justice issues.

- And, this case study can serve as an example for businesses to consider requesting in future, similar situations....

"Community engagement is really at the heart of Cleaner Air Oregon. There are systemic and structural barriers that have discouraged participation from communities over time. Cleaner Air Oregon values diversity and social equity, and ensures fair treatment and inclusivity of those who are near the facility."

Travis Knudsen, LRAPA, at June 15th meeting

Questions?

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