

University of Michigan Technical Assistance Brief Neighborhood Revitalization

Purpose:

The purpose of this brief is to highlight innovative approaches in home restoration or rebuilding efforts in Detroit communities that are part of the Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods initiative. The overall goal is to provide residents with resources with which they can participate in revitalizing the physical assets of their neighborhoods while maintaining residential stability for children and families.

Background:

Statistics are not available that document the prevalence of abandoned homes, homes in disrepair, or overgrown lots in communities associated with the Good Neighborhoods initiative. However, housing development and rehabilitation services and neighborhood revitalization were high on the list of needs identified in assessments of residents of at least two of these communities. Desire for housing development and rehabilitation services and neighborhood revitalization services was mentioned 18 times in a needs assessment of residents in the Brightmoor community and 17 times by residents in the Osborn community. At the same time, a need for community building was identified 60 times by Brightmoor residents and 54 times by Osborn residents. The same residents mentioned a desire for block club development 17 and 11 times respectively and a need for neighborhood beautification 34 and 22 times respectively. This suggests that residents of Brightmoor and Osborn neighborhoods want a community in which:

- houses are occupied and attractive,
- land is effectively utilized, and
- residents feel connected and have a sense of joint pride in the community.

Below we describe community practice approaches for consideration:

Community Practice Approaches:

I. Existing Models

- A. The Urban Institute used community revitalization strategies aimed at simultaneously revitalizing communities while avoiding displacement of current residents and their offspring. Strategies included *housing retention* – defined as retaining existing affordable housing stock, and *housing production*, involving the production of affordable housing units. [A third strategy, asset building, will be discussed in a separate brief.] The strategies were applied in six communities:
 - i. Bartlett Park of St. Petersburg, Florida,
 - ii. Oak Park of Sacramento, California;
 - iii. Reynoldstown of Atlanta, Georgia,
 - iv. Figueroa Corridor of Los Angeles, California,
 - v. Central Area of Seattle Washington, and
 - vi. Chicago, Illinois' Uptown.
- B. Interested residents will find it helpful to read the complete document on implementation of the selected strategies in the six communities - published by the Urban Institute: Levy, Comey, & Padilla (2006). "In the Face of Gentrification: Case Studies of Local Efforts to Mitigate Displacement."

II. If seeking to move forward with revitalizing the physical holdings of a community while avoiding displacement of its residents, the following approaches are suggested:

A. Housing retention - ***Explore the possibility of collaborating with university faculty and students in designing a building renovation plan – possibly one that preserves the architectural quality of existing homes in the community.***

1. The University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning is one such resource. Professor Anatole Senkevich and one of his architecture classes collaborated with the Old Anacostia (Washington, DC) community in such a project – aimed at the historic preservation of the houses and businesses in that community. Under Professor Senkevich’s supervision, the class:

- analyzed the community and architectural history and structure of the area, and
- involved members of the community through in-depth interviews with key informants.

The report covered findings and recommendations including:

- a design guide that could be followed in preservation efforts,
- potential sources of funding and assistance, and
- attention to the advantages of a preservation effort as well as potential problems and remedies.

B. Housing production – ***Consider Habitat for Humanities as a resource for***

- ***Building affordable housing on existing vacant residential lots, and***
- ***Purchasing non-repairable building for demolition and replacement with affordable new housing.***

1. A widely-known as a source of home-ownership for low-income families, contributed to, in great part, by the work of volunteers (including potential homeowners), Habitat for Humanity

- builds low- to moderate-cost houses on vacant lots in targeted neighborhoods
- buys vacant lots in targeted neighborhoods for building homes for eligible families, including paying back taxes in some cases (Metropolitan King County Council, n.d.)
- buys non-repairable houses, particularly from family members that inherit property, for subsequent demolition and replacement (Habitat for Humanity, Dallas, Texas).
- Accepts donated houses and land for rebuilding (“Can’t Sell It? Donate It! Habitat for Humanity,” n.d.)

Since 1986, Habit has facilitated the building of over 180 new homes for low-income family ownership in four initial communities in the city of Detroit. The most recent Detroit initiative is Vision 2020 where Habitat partnered with other stakeholders to help revitalize an eastside community. The program plans a minimum of 100 new homes as well as partnering with other groups to facilitate repairs to existing homes, infrastructure improvements, creating playgrounds and parks, and addressing other social and educational needs (“Habitat for Humanity-Detroit,” Retrieved September 18, 2007).

- III. ***Explore and tap funding resources.*** Ensuring adequate funding is essential to increase the potential for success in the housing retention and production strategies described above. Federal funding for rehabilitation through the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has been cut 60% since the early 1990s (“Michigan in Brief,” 2002). Below we describe resources that may be accessed.
- A. Federal funds to assist housing improvement. Examples are Community Development Block Grants and Home funds for such purposes as
 - i. repair assistance for elderly and disabled residents,
 - ii. minor housing rehabilitation grants and loans of up to \$15,000 (up to \$25,000 if removal of lead-based paint is required),
 - iii. other lead-removal programs, and
 - iv. down payment assistance in home purchases (city of Detroit Planning and Development Department, 2007).
 - B. State services, such as the Michigan State Housing Development Authority that provides loans and technical assistance to
 - i. create and preserve safe and decent affordable housing
 - ii. engage in community economic development activities
 - iii. develop vibrant cities, towns, and villages
 - iv. address homeless issues (city of Detroit Planning and Development Department, 2007)

Resources:

- Can't Sell It? Donate It! Habitat for Humanity. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from <http://miami.craigslis.org/mat/414473134.html>
- County to Sell Parcels to Habit for Humanity. (2002, March 19). Retrieved September 19, 2007 from http://www.metrokc.gov/MKCC/news/2002/0302/habitat_for_humanity.htm
- Gagnon, Geoffrey (2005). City of Blight: Detroit's New Weapon in its War on Eyesores. Retrieved September 26, 2007 from http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/July-August-2005/scene_gagnon_julaug05.msp
- Habitat for Humanity Detroit. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from <http://www.habitatdetroit.org>
- Habitat for Humanity Fact Sheet. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from <http://www.habitat.org/how/factsheet.aspx>
- History of Habitat. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from <http://www.habitat.org/how/historytext.aspx>
- Levy, D. K., Comey, J., & Padilla, S. (2006). In the face of gentrification: Case studies of local efforts to mitigate displacement. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Welcome to Habitat for Humanity International's recruitment page. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from <http://www.habitat.org/hr/>