One Region Forward
Housing and Neighborhoods
Working Team Notes
Meeting 1, April 2, 2013

Members of the working team:

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Bart Roberts, UB Regional Institute, Facilitator
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Meeting Introduction – Welcomes, Introductions and Ice Breaker

As an “ice breaker” participants were asked to describe in a sentence their definition of a sustainable regional approach to housing. Their answers are below:

- Equity in housing and quality of housing across the board.
- Sustainable housing and neighborhoods allow for us each to find our place in the world.
- Equal access to affordable, green, and healthy homes.
- Access to affordable housing for anyone who wishes to live in a community of his/her choice.
- Equal access, affordability, advocacy and empowerment.
- Opportunity to live where ones heart desires or means permit
- Sustainable housing and neighborhoods are not built on bricks and mortar alone.
- Empowerment, inclusion and appropriateness of housing – neighborhoods and housing have different characteristics for different places.
- Be careful what works in inner city may not work in rural/suburban
Sustainable neighborhoods include collaboration and understanding amongst diverse neighbors and stakeholders – neighborhood organizations, businesses, faith institutions.

Safe, decent and affordable, in racially, socially, and economically diverse communities.

Sustainable neighborhoods are those where people want to live not only today, but into the future.

Places with access to opportunities – quality education, economic opportunities, affordable health care, healthy food.

Where residents have and know how to use the tools to sustain their individual homes contributes to sustainable neighborhoods.

Communities that are multi-generational and accommodate opportunities from cradle to grave.

Neighborhoods that are compact, affordable interconnected by efficient mode of transportation.

Sustainable housing allows for places where all people can live; sustainable neighborhoods allow for places where all people want to live.

Approaches to sustainable housing and neighborhoods need to focus on the needs of people who live in neighborhood; people know what they need and they must have a seat at the table.

Our homes should be as energy efficient as possible, renewables are wherever possible regardless of income, resiliency weather storms, comeback efficiently.

We need to understand both positive and negative aspects of neighborhood, and build on the positives.

Sustainable neighborhoods are lifespan neighborhoods.

Review of key issues and data points
The facilitator presented a series of slides on key issues and data points that, in part, describe the current conditions for housing and neighborhoods in the region including housing construction and demolition, household formation, and housing affordability. Participants were asked whether the issues and data points presented accurately and fully “told the story” of housing and neighborhoods in our region and were invited to help correct, elaborate, or detail the picture presented. Those suggestions are below:

- Can we identify data about the trend of people moving back to city, especially in downtown areas? For example, the percent of building permits within urban areas.
- Data on what happens when we don’t have a plan for what happens after demolition.
- How we depict the isolation of people to jobs – i.e. people without cars in the city, working in jobs in the inner ring suburbs.
- For vacancy data, the USPS data reports addresses that are no longer deliverable. This data is more current and more predictive. For example, it shows that 65 percent of our vacancy is within 30 percent of our cities.
- Data that speaks to our shrinking region – precedent examples in Detroit and New Orleans.
- A conversation ensued on identifying neighborhoods that could work, and being very deliberative in how we invest public dollars.
- Educational opportunities for families are really important – shouldn’t we be looking at school performance data?
- People (families with children) move sometimes for better school districts. Often these are to areas without support for walkable paths to school.
- When we talk about the changing demographics, we should get more detailed to understand what the new and emerging households in our region look like – i.e. unmarried couples, multigenerational families, etc.
• Energy star data from NYSERDA is showing new homes being built in Buffalo and Rochester region are getting away from single family – building low rise multi-unit building – single or parent has kids on weekend – town homes, patio, homes much more aging in place, meeting people’s incomes.
• Agricultural preservation – conversion to development vs. preservation for agriculture. This is especially important for rural areas.
• Crime statistics. The first issue is “is it safe.” Other amenities do not matter if my did is not safe in our neighborhood.
• Data on home price trends is important from an affordability standpoint, but also a market standpoint.
• Data on age and quality of our housing stock and connections to quality of life data.
• How is our housing stock located in relation to the “safety net” and human services of our region?
• How do people have access to basic needs (e.g. day care). What else is there beside a safe, clean apartment? HOME’s Mobility Library gives a good snapshot of where people can get what they want out of a home and neighborhood based on the best bang for their buck.
• NIMBYism and data to refute its validity.
• We need to consider our responsibility for all people in a community, even those who carry a stigma, such as those with disabilities or even sex offenders.
• Voucher programs like Section 8 don’t often meet the basic rents, and landlords can use exclusionary practices of raising rent well beyond what people can afford based on their desire to keep people out of their properties.
• Look at demographic maps to see the artificial boundary lines we have established in our region
• Can we answer the question of whether or not we have the housing stock in neighborhoods to attract people to our region?
• Can we identify data that illustrates the cannibal nature of our housing – when people move into one community they are really draining people from other communities?
• When we talk about data of housing, we need to go beyond just high scale development.
• What about disincentives or incentives for not expanding infrastructure that allows for further sprawling out of our housing?
• We need to be able to speak to our outer ring suburban areas like East Amherst, Clarence, etc.
• Again, education to overcome perceptions about what is safe, affordable housing is really important.

Review of Draft Goals
The working team was presented a set of draft goals derived from a review of past planning in the region, the research of the 1RF staff, and a review of “vision and values” by the Private Sector Council, Local Government Council, and the two Community Congress events. Participants were asked to consider if the goals are appropriate? Complete? Require adjustment? Their comments are below:

• We need to look beyond just urban-centric concepts of sustainability and housing. Perhaps we need different goals for different places.
• We need to engage builder community better since they are a major implementer.
• Glad to see we are not starting from scratch. A lot of recent planning work has gone on – i.e. the Buffalo Green Code has a clear agenda for where and how housing should be developed in the City of Buffalo. We need to make sure that regional plans don’t impede local plans.
• Some concepts in the goals – like mixed use – don’t necessarily fit within all of the community types in our region.
• In some communities, walkability is not wanted. People may not want neighborhoods that resemble urban prototypes. Sustainable forms for all types of community, village center not one size fits all.
Do we have any indication that people in many of our neighborhoods are unhappy with how things are currently developing?

Sustainability can’t be forgotten and thinking about the long term future of our region and its housing stock need to be at the center of our discussion.

We all need the same thing—can we find the things we all agree upon we need from our homes and neighborhoods—regardless of what community we live in.

Concept of “Complete Neighborhoods” was discussed as a potential frame for this effort so that we are thinking about how to recommend options for all places.

Although the plan is regional in scale, we should listen to what neighborhoods want.

What legal method is there to follow this plan and how can we enable an implementation structure?

As we think about our approach and the goals, we need to promote linkages between neighborhood, amenities, services.