

## ***One Region Forward***

### **Housing and Neighborhoods**

Working Team Notes

Meeting 2, May 7, 2013

#### **Working Team Members in attendance**

Michael Clarke, Buffalo LISC (Chair)

Michael Riegel, Belmont Housing Resources for WNY, Inc. (Chair)

Jill Shuey, ReNU Niagara

Rick Greenberg, Home Buyers Marketing II

Ellary Mori, Erie County Department of Environment and Planning

Christopher Ollinick, Jaeckle Fleischmann & Mugel, LLP

Stephanie Simeon, Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Inc.

Shannon Koehn, Housing Opportunities Made Equal

Catherine Braniecki, Community Development Manager - KeyBank

Cyndie Huynh, Mobile Safety-Net Team

Tod Kniazuk, Arts Services Initiative of Western New York

Grace Andriette, Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.

Jenifer Kaminsky, PUSH Buffalo

Cara Matteliano, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

Roseann Scibilia, University District Community Development Association

Carla Kosmerl, Town of Cheektowaga - Office of Community Development

Tom Dearing, Erie County Department of Environment and Planning (sitting in as a 1RF Steering Committee member)

**Facilitator:** Bart Roberts, UB Regional Institute

**Note Taker:** Teresa Bosch de Celis, UB Regional Institute

#### **Introduction**

Chairs (Michael Clarke & Michael Riegel) welcome everyone and start introduction of members in attendance

#### **Presentation**

Agenda

Reminder on why are we doing this? Our Facilitator provided a brief explanation about the impetus behind this initiative and why Housing and Neighborhoods are a focus area of One Region Forward.

- Part of a broader policy shift at the Federal level where local regions are being charged with planning to coordinate investments made by the Federal government. It is becoming commonplace for HUD, DOT and EPA grant applications to ask if regions have regional plans for sustainable development, if they have adopted performance measures, and if proposals meet the HUD-DOT-EPA Livability Principles. Additional Federal agencies are buying in as well – including EDA and USDA.

- But, we are not just doing it because we are being encouraged to do so by the Federal government. As a region, we need to collectively find strategies for action that deal with our unsustainable approach to housing.
- Some municipalities and neighborhoods have plans but there are no regional strategies that focus on sustainability.
- The Chairs provided additional comments on the purpose of this initiative and a review of our April meeting:
  - We have a good opportunity now to implement a plan in our region. Opportunity for all to get in the same page and give good input. (Michael Riegel)
  - Key Themes review from meeting #1: Think of houses and neighborhoods as more than just bricks and mortar. Access and choice are important. Household characteristics and preferences differ and need to be respected. We need to develop multigenerational communities. New ideas are emerging for designs and diversity of places and houses. There is potential for reconstituting school-centered communities. We need to continue to understand the trends and their impact on the future. Agricultural preservation and rural communities is important. We need to look beyond just urban centers. (Michael Clarke)

### **Working Group Process and Timeline**

We started in April with goals and today we will focus on strategies for action. We are moving to take the discussions here to get where we want to and get the working teams involved. (Bart Roberts)

Discussion points, framing issues and data points from the April meeting were reviewed.

Is there anything that seems to not be captured from last meeting or new thoughts? Anything specific we should be looking at? (Bart Roberts)

- Many years ago, the City of Buffalo worked on a survey of properties rating housing conditions from 1 to 5. This data no longer exists but it would be interesting to have that kind of data. The US Census is not as accurate because some places never got the survey. We don't have any way of knowing what kind of housing people want and how to improve housing. We are building big houses people cannot afford. Would like to see where we are, how many available units we have and how many need to be demolished, because we are demolishing homes that do not need to be. (Rick Greenberg)
- We need stronger data analytics about housing and neighborhoods not just in the city, but everywhere in our region. (Carla Kosmerl)
- We need richer data resources to promote the process. We need data on lots to build, lots to buy, houses to buy. And it's not just an inventory but an explanation of the procedures to go through. (Tod Kniazuk)
- There was a recommendation of Blueprint Buffalo to develop a real property information system that can address vacancy and abandonment issues. This is something we can do but it needs to look

beyond the city boundaries. It should include physical inventory as well as property information. And it should be housed at a third party agency like UBRI. (Michael Clarke)

- Let's not start from scratch. Do we have a way of taking existing data sources and aggregate them – things like Zillow? (Grace Andriette)
- We need to integrate data from different municipalities and make it work together without losing fidelity or accuracy. (Stephanie Simeon)
- It is harder to make one generic system since everyone works separately. These days we could think it is easier with our technology, but every municipality, city, etc. has their own system. They don't always speak to each other. (Carla Kosmerl)

### **Finalizing the Draft Goals**

The working team was presented a set of draft goals, derived through previous planning processes, during the group's first meeting. Revisions were made to these goals according to comments received during the first meeting. These revised goals were presented to the working team. Their comments are below:

Goal 1: **Preserve and revitalize** our existing **housing stock** to preserve history, embedded energy, and neighborhood integrity.

- It's not just about "housing stock." Extend to think about more than just that – include housing to be developed in the future and neighborhood fixtures. (Christopher Ollinick)

Goal 2: **Promote rehabilitation and development** of lifespan housing to accommodate all life cycles.

- Not sure about the word "PROMOTE". The goal is to make sure we set the conditions to make lifespan housing and neighborhoods. (Stephanie Simeon)
- Promote sounds like an action and not a goal. (Tod Kniazuk)
- Maybe would be good to add some examples to explain what lifecycle housing refers to. (Christopher Ollinick)
- We should add universal design (Stephanie Simeon)
- I like the word development on it because it includes more than just design. (Jenifer Kaminsky)
- Include "housing and neighborhoods," not just "housing." Eliminate Promote so it doesn't sound as an action. (Tod Kniazuk)

Goal 3: **Provide equal access** to affordable, green, safe, and healthy homes throughout the region.

- We could work to combine goals 3, 4 and 6 together as they all deal with access. Together, they could better define the multi-faceted elements of access. (Ellary Mori)
- We should consider changing "access" to the term "opportunity." It's also not just about being able to get housing but for developers to build what people need. (Jenifer Kaminsky)

Goal 4: Promote housing rehab and development to **promote easier access to employment** (e.g. location-efficient housing).

- Eliminate the reference to “rehab and development.” It’s not necessary here.
- Who’s responsibility is it to meet this goal? Can housing control where employment centers are? If we concentrate on housing and neighborhoods it is easier to accomplish it, but this goal is too broad and we should focus it or define who is responsible for this. (Tod Kniazuk)
- Maybe as we talk here we should talk more about neighborhoods than housing. (Michael Clarke)
- When we think about goals, we should consider who will ultimately own and take responsibility for implementing them – that is each local municipality. There is a need to integrate consideration of local planning so that this plan can have be used by those most likely to be able to implement more sustainable approaches to housing (Tom Dearing)
- We haven’t discussed housing types. Some towns have moratoria on multi-family housing. Those policies have implications for equity and access.
- Maybe the steering committee should decide what the best components are to drive housing development. For example transportation, business, education, etc. (Tod Kniazuk)
- We need to be sure policies create healthy neighborhoods. We used to build housing next to the factory with major environmental and health issues. Do we want to do that again? Do we want to build housing around office parks? Let’s anticipate the impacts. (Catherine Braniecki)
- We should start focusing on the NFTA stations to build around them as UB is doing in Allen St. Station. (Rick Greenberg)
- We are talking about orientation. Putting employment around housing or housing around employment, we cannot do it one way but both. (Christopher Ollinick)

Members agreed goals 4 and 6 (**Create mixed-use** neighborhoods where daily needs are accessible on foot, bicycle, or transit) could be combined into just 1 goal.

- Neighborhoods should be built in places that allow housing but should be convenient for all (transportation, business, employment, etc). (Michael Clarke)
- The term respect for local municipalities should be integrated into goal number six. The community decides what their daily needs are. (Ellary Mori)

Goal 5: **Design** neighborhoods to be **safe, accessible and walkable**.

- I struggle with “walkable.” We need to think of what people prefer, not just what we think it is better. There are lots of populations that like living in low density areas which force them to rely on the automobile. Farmer communities for example, we don’t want to get rid of them. We need all municipalities to agree and be involved on this. (Tod Kniazuk)
- Each neighborhood needs specific transportation and housing types. (Rick Greenberg)
- We cannot focus just on urban areas because there are so many rural areas in the region that need to be defined and need to be included. (Tod Kniazuk)

Goal 7: Foster **neighborhoods** that are **culturally diverse and distinctive**.

- How do we define “neighborhood?” A better definition that can be understood by all place types might allow us to identify sustainable strategies that municipalities with different values and preferences can adopt. (Tom Dearing)
- How are we regulating this goals? (Stephanie Simeon)

- We need to respect that some people like the idea of living far from activity, and driving far distances to go places. But you need to remember they are also communities. This generation doesn't want to be a farmer anymore, and you cannot impose a way of living when some people don't want it. (Catherine Braniecki)
- We need to make sure we preserve both urban and rural communities. (Michael Clarke)
- We can change the first goal to include all city, suburbs and countryside. (Carla Kosmerl).

Other thoughts on our goals:

- How do we include the issue of vacancy? What if we cannot do all these we are talking about because of all the vacant houses? It is the major issue everywhere. Should it be included somewhere?? Not just for housing but also commercial properties. There is a high number of vacant houses and we keep building. (Carla Kosmerl)

### **Strategizing for Alternative Futures**

How will our region look like in 40 years?

To acknowledge the long-term nature of this plan and that many unknowns will affect how our region looks forty years into the future, the working team engaged in an exercise to envision how different "alternative futures" would affect housing and neighborhoods.

- (1) Continued population decline or, "sprawl without growth",
- (2) Significant population growth, our region grows at the same rate as the rest of the U.S., and
- (3) Stabilization or modest growth, our region stays about the same as it is today.

### ***Brainstorming on what might drive these future outcomes***

- Projections on the future are uncertain. In a period in which US population is projected to rise from 322 million to 438 million, Erie and Niagara Counties are projected to lose 100,000 people. The number of school aged children is projected to drop by 30,000 in the next period. On the other hand, some suggest that being on the Great Lakes will push our population upward. (Michael Clarke)
- I think our pop has been stable for decades. (Rick Greenberg)
- We have been losing pop since 1970. (Bart Roberts)
- I think we should plan for immigrant population. It may be a small number but some are coming to the area. There are also opportunities to attract artists from NYC and Toronto that are priced out of those regions. We should create places that attract population. (Tod Kniazuk)
- We have the possibility of bringing people from outside the US. We should welcome them and create places where they can live and work; it is all driven by employment. (Rick Greenberg)
- We may see immigrants as a way to reuse old housing, but are we putting them in toxic structures? Also, do we have the housing types to suit them? They want five bedroom houses, not two or three-bedroom units. (Stephanie Simeon)

### ***Brainstorming on strategies to pursue***

- There are lots of people that don't want single family house and it seems like almost the only option here. Need more diversity of housing. Be creative thinking on housing types – coops, condos, co-housing. (Jenifer Kaminsky)
- Ceate a tool box that aligns with the goals and gives people who come here – not just immigrants – information on resources, funding, options, etc. Outreach is part of the program. (Ellary Mori)
- How do we make it a service? How do you get tools into the right hands? (Shannon Koehn)
- Consider Brent Ryan's concept of "palliative urbanism." Work with what we have and work with who is here. Don't assume growth. Just work to make things better, denser. (Jenifer Kaminsky)
- What are some example strategies in Niagara Falls? (Michael Clarke)
- While not speaking for all of the diverse interests and perspectives in the Falls, here are some of the issues: Niagara Falls doesn't appear to have as much immigrant population. The city's industrial legacy has shaped the city quite a bit. There is a great deal of vacancy, and while there are demolition strategies, more work needs to be done on what to do with the land after it has been cleared. There is a good school system. The city is pretty walkable and has some good corridors like Pine Ave. The Falls is not as neighborhood-based as Buffalo; it's more about blocks. We are trying strategies to bring young population from around the country with the LiveNF initiative that is geographically focused. Working with Eddie Friel on tourism focus/identity and districts. (Jill Shuey)
- Lets' not just think about building. Let's invest in the people who love this place. Creating an engaged citizenship is important. Create a strategy for participatory budgeting and involving the community. (Christopher Ollinick)
- HUD expects that community engagement will be robust. (Cara Matteliano)
- Working "bottom-up" is sustainable – the approach that groups like PUSH and LISC take (Catherine Braniecki).
- Homes on the North Buffalo railway right of way got \$100K subsidy, cost \$200K to build, but are selling for less than that now. (Rick Greenberg)
- Let's think about infrastructure as more than just streets, sewer, and water. Let's think about it as business corridors, parks, religious communities, community centers, arts districts etc. These are the reasons that people live in a place. They can be the focus for housing investments. (Tod Kniazuk)
- Do we have housing and neighborhoods that meet the needs of folks who are already here? There's a mismatch between what people will buy and housing that is existing. (Stephanie Simeon)
- Think of enforcement to ensure housing quality. (Grace Andriette)
- Inspections and enforcement are often unfunded. Let's just start by enforcing our own rules. The first step in regeneration is stabilization and the first step in stabilization is enforcement. (Tod Kniazuk)

- “Where is the money going to come from?” Seniors don’t have cash to fix things. They vow to live in their house til they die. Then the home is vacant for a long time. “Let’s focus on what we can do.” We need to address that senior population. Does the reverse mortgage work? (Carla Kosmerl)
- One of the challenges with seniors is many don’t want to take on loans and debts to fix problems like a decrepit roof, they may be apprehensive to ask for help. It can be hard to address but it is a significant challenge. (Stephanie Simeon)
- We need open source municipal data to let people think about things and solve their own problems. (Christopher Ollinick).
- There are lots of programs for different neighborhoods but maybe would be interesting to have something for everyone in the region. Regional programs the same for all. (Jenifer Kaminsky)
- We should identify resources. (Carla Kosmerl)
- We need to know where resources exist region wide. (Stephanie Simeon)

### **Next Steps and Reminders**

Review of Team Work web portal (Bart Roberts)

- Invite others to participate as a contributor
- Give feedback on the vision and values
- Share stories and best practices online
- Visit our Working Team Site to review materials and what other working teams are doing.