Housing and Neighborhoods
Working Team Meeting No. 4
August 6, 2013

Working Team Members in Attendance:
Michael Clarke, LISC Buffalo
Michael Riegel, Belmont Housing Resources
Grace Andriette, Neighborhood Legal Services
Lori Borowiak, NYSERDA
Rick Greenberg, Home Buyers Marketing II
Jennifer Kaminsky, PUSH Buffalo
Tod Kniazuk, Arts Services Initiative, WNYS
Robyn Krueger, Community Missions of the Niagara Frontier
Ellary Mori, Erie County Environment and Planning
Dale Zuchlewski, Homeless Alliance of Western New York

Working Team Facilitator: Anthony Armstrong, UB Regional Institute

- Introductions, welcome to Dale Zuchlewski, joining the working team (Clarke).

- Agenda is to review strategies and actions for theme A – Provide Resources for Informed Decision Making and Action – and theme B – Anticipate, Accommodate, and Embrace Demographic Shifts.

- Working team schedule has been adjusted. Next meeting will be near the end of September. Community Congresses to be held in November. Sixth meeting will be in January. All organizations are asked to use their membership lists and list serves to reach out for the Community Congresses. (Bosch)

Anthony Armstrong presented a framework for discussion and some precedents and best practices for consideration by the group. (See PPT).

- Co-op is shared housing. Coop is for poultry. But this is a serious point. “Mingles” is also a difficult term for people not schooled in housing. We need to use accessible language (Kniazuk).

- We should keep in mind: “What does implementation look like?” We need to determine who, what, how, all this will get done. But we’ll consider this in detail later (Armstrong).

- What haven’t we discussed? What else should we be thinking about? (Armstrong)

- The US Department of Justice is filing law suits against providers of supportive housing for disabled individuals on the grounds that it is inherently discriminatory. A remedy might mean that the requirements to provide supportive housing might be more broadly applied. (Zuchlewski)

- The Olmsted law is aimed at larger housing producers to provide supportive housing. DOJ is working against segregation of mental health populations, etc. and now just starting to enforce. (Krueger)

- Let’s talk about when that strategy comes up… (Armstrong)
Assess and address supply against demand by housing type and neighborhood.

[See PPT on Neighborhood Typologies]

- What are the attributes they consider in creating the typologies? (Borowiak)
- Land vacancy, owner occupancy, housing value, and other indicators of physical condition. (Armstrong)
- This can be useful depending how we use it. It does evoke some knee-jerk reactions because of its similarity to FHA redlining maps. (Kaminsky)
- Is this housing or neighborhood focused? This approach makes sense if you’re focusing on housing stock. But if it’s about neighborhood, you should consider food, transportation, amenities. Assessing housing is different from assessing neighborhood condition. Also, you need all different types of neighborhoods to provide choices for people of varying circumstance. (Kniazuk)
- If we assess the housing stock, we need to evaluate homes. I’m an energy person. How energy efficient are they? How does that fit into the TRF approach? If we’re going to recommend energy efficiency work… that would be good. (Borowiak)
- We did this decades ago – a parcel by parcel evaluation, areas graded one to five. We added crime stats, poverty numbers. The goal was to use it to distribute block grant funds. Neighborhoods are not just housing. They are people, businesses, etc. (Greenberg)
- How does this differ from the traditional red-lining analysis? Does the neighborhood get more resources because it is more challenged? Or does it get written off? (Andriette)
- It is a process of triage. You have to decide whether the investment in a neighborhood will do any good. That’s how we created Georgia Prospect – identifying disinvested areas where new investment would make a difference. Units built then are now selling for $125K to $150K. They held their value well. We turned a “1” into a “5.” (Greenberg)
- So, how should we do it here? Who should do it? (Armstrong)
- Determine scope. Decide on data sets. (Kniazuk)
- I think it would need to be some sort of City entity involved in housing development. (Krueger)
- The Regional Institute would be best-equipped to do this. (Clarke)
- Does UBRI want to go beyond the two county area? (Greenberg)
- The boundaries of One Region Forward are established by our HUD contract and limited to Erie and Niagara. REDC work has encompassed a five-county area. (Armstrong)
We are ignoring places like Albion and Warsaw. By focusing on Buffalo, NF, Cheektowaga, we are also skipping smaller hamlets beyond. (Greenberg)

We should work with the governmental associations: Niagara County Supervisors Association, Erie County Association of Government, the interagency group that formed around Framework for Regional Growth, if they are still active. (Kniazuk)

Execute the analysis on a local level. Develop a common methodology. Subsidize the resources to help smaller municipalities participate. (Kniazuk)

Smaller municipalities already depend on the Erie County Consortium for data, analysis, planning assistance. (Mori)

Niagara Falls Department of Community Development is a candidate. They have a good idea of what’s going on with housing stock. Also NF Housing Authority has a handle on the data. Lockport has a housing authority, too, although North Tonawanda doesn’t. (Krueger)

We need to go back to The Reinvestment Fund to understand the cost of their process versus what it may cost to construct this locally. (Armstrong)

Who are the end users and why do they think this data is useful? If a regional entity is determining best use of resources it’s different than if private capital is using it to decide to invest or not invest. The categories are a little loaded. (Kaminsky)

Build in a “freshening” mechanism to the data and analysis. It’s driving multi-year plans. Needs to be updated regularly. (Kniazuk)

Develop a Regional Property Information System including open source data on neighborhoods & municipalities.

(See PPT)

Is there a query language in the system for outsiders to ask for data? (Greenberg)

It’s public data and user friendly, but the queries within the best practice examples vary by system design and data integration... currently Erie County, Buffalo, Amherst have systems that have various levels of information and differing user interfaces. (Armstrong)

They don’t answer the “good questions”: how many vacancies, how many people in this block group. (Greenberg)

Would we design something different to increase buy-in or would we focus on education to get people to buy-in to a good proposal. (Kniazuk)

People guard their data closely. If they are going to give it up, they don’t want to do any work or spend any money. (Greenberg)
The City pushed back on creating a shared open data system because they didn’t want an unbiased third party telling people what is really going on. (Clarke)

Potential actors?

NYSERDA has data bases of homes we’ve treated – low income and market based. I don’t know how we’d create a funnel of information. Some homes have been invested and have a good score, others don’t and have a need. (Borowiak)

Do you have samples to show people how this would work and how it could be used? (Zuchlewski)

NEOCANDO used data to break up a mortgage fraud ring in a particular neighborhood. (Brendan)

The key is trust between contractor and the participant. And consider what the benefit is back to the participant. And it is about making it as easy as possible. (Kniazuk)

The first question people ask is “what it’s going to cost me?” (Zuchlewski)

In time and money and data. (Kniazuk)

The economies of scale can’t be questioned. Putting data in a common form will help municipalities save money. (Greenberg)

So, maybe that’s what they’re getting – an upgrade in their system. (Kniazuk)

Logic doesn’t always cut it. I think the data, the elements, etc. will provide the buy-in. (Krueger)

You already had a pilot phase. Some people are ready to do it. They’ll be the best one to promote this. (Kniazuk)

Would the city buy-in? (Greenberg)

The buy-in would come in from above the planning director. (Clarke)

The largest user isn’t always the best for a pilot. The idiosyncrasies of their need tend to become the new standard. (Kniazuk)

Lots of sources of data are proprietary. National Grid and National Fuel have lots of data. (Clarke)

Erie County Department of Social Services doesn’t know how much benefit they are buying because HEAP provides service directly. It’s not part of their accounting. The data needs to be better integrated at this level too. (Greenberg)

Develop a tool box for municipalities, developers, non-profits, and residents to effectively design, produce and preserve sustainable housing types and neighborhoods.
Toolboxes don’t work across jurisdictions. Information tends to be very local. Each city does things differently. Getting approvals, for example, is a local process. (Kaminsky)

There is a plan to update the Framework for Regional Growth. We are using this to go further into the tool box area. And using the players in the Framework to work on it. (Mori)

On the low end of investment, this could be just an on-line resource guide. On the high end it could be a service organization that provides advice and TA. The second case study is scary. Offering a prefab process for problem solving could lead people in the wrong direction. Arts Services Initiative provides technical assistance and best practices models. (Kniazuk)

Citizens Housing and Planning Association in MA is a good example – somewhere you could go and get advice. (Kaminsky)

We should work toward more of a service organization – with an on-line resource guide. Train code enforcement officers. Educate citizens and residents. (Mori)

It’s important to have real people to convey data and the learning, not just a web site. (Kaminsky)

What’s the relationship between building not for profit capacity and guiding private sector investment? (Armstrong)

Is there a division between different organizations for different roles? (Krueger)

Diversify housing types (townhouses, lofts, "mingles") and forms of tenure (condos/ coops/ cohousing, rentals) in mixed use neighborhoods – at a variety of price points.

Though this looks different depending on community type, can we say_fill in fill in, rehabs and conversions will provide active and accessible amenities to benefit new and existing residents? Is this the vision we have for this strategy? (Armstrong)

We have way more chicken coops than housing coops. (Kaminsky)

One of the places you see this happen is when an elected official makes it an agenda item (as well as when a private developer that takes it on). Termini took these new forms on and fought for changes to make it possible. New types need a champion. (Kniazuk)

The housing study done by Zimmerman Volk recommended a range of new types that are needed. Everyone responded with one type and left the others alone –developers want to be first to be second. (Armstrong)

Zimmerman Volk recommended low cost hard lofts – a lower cost option for younger renters – and none is yet to be produced. (Clarke)
You need to marry the residents with the developers. Nickel City Coop worked with a developer to create what they wanted. The same goes for cohousing. One started with a group of people working with a developer. This way, the need from the resident meets need of developer. The Urban Homesteading Assistance Board in NYC helped coops forming. Now they just do technical assistance. NASCO – North American Students of Cooperation – are much better at working with a group of people. In their model, everyone has a room in a big house vs. everyone has an apartment in a building. It’s a resident driven model instead of developer driven model. (Kaminsky)

A service organization can be a go-between and advocate – an intermediary. (Kniazuk)

If a developer does one, he might do the next one on spec. But “flipped” houses too often don’t seem suited to the market demand. (Kaminsky)

Isn’t this connected to item one – we’re talking about a market study. Need to determine better what people really want – not what the developer wants to build. (Zuchlewski)

Develop and deploy housing models to accommodate people with special needs by coordinating design, neighborhood context, supportive services, and other programming.

(See PPT)

This is a template – like a complete streets approach. Encourage municipalities to adopt these types just to keep their population and accommodate a key voting block. Use this demographic data to make the case. (Kniazuk)

This is not just an aging issue. There are other people with special needs who aren’t part of preferred demographic group (people other people want as neighbors). We need SRO housing. (Zuchlewski)

We have lots of regulations that make it almost impossible to build SRO housing. (Greenberg)

The Lafayette Hotel project displaced 300 units of SRO housing. It was a great project, but there was nobody to advocate for that population. They are difficult to advocate for. (Zuchlewski)

I’m about making government work better with the market. Maybe we could have a separate group to develop a report. (Greenberg)

Identify and recruit demographic groups that might provide impetus for focused neighborhood revitalization.

(See PPT)

Also look at the cultural district model, like Pittsburgh. (Or SALT District in Syracuse). There are a lot of examples. There’s also a Louisiana community – looking to do a whole neighborhood, not just a building. (Kniazuk)
Lower Town, Paducah, KY is another example. (Clarke)

Who drives it? (Armstrong)

We are organizing for it right now. (Kniazuk)

School centered development... or other institutions to be the catalyst and core. Maybe it’s not the schools given the demographics. Maybe it’s something else. (Mori)

You don’t want to do a cultural district where you don’t already have a lot of artists. Either the community is already there or (in the refugee case) resettlement going on. (Kaminsky)

Cultural district is a state designation. Now we’re looking to naturally occurring cultural districts. (Kniazuk)

Naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) are another type to consider. (Clarke)

Artists are often the first ones to move back to once-distressed neighborhoods. (Kaminsky)

Artists who are low income qualify in ArtSpace. (Kniazuk)