Housing and Neighborhoods
Working Team Meeting No. 5
September 24, 2013

Strategy Theme D Group

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Strategy Theme C Group

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Working Team Facilitator: Anthony Armstrong, UB Regional Institute

Introduction by Anthony Armstrong

- Agenda is to review strategies and actions for Theme C – Target Neighborhoods Based on Their Strategic Assets (one size does not fit all), and Theme D - Improve the Housing Support and Delivery System (enhance capacity and program effectiveness). (Armstrong)

- As a reminder, the Community Congresses are to be held in November. A 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. (Armstrong)

Update on the scenario planning exercise of the Community Congresses. (See PPT).

- The scenario planning exercise is the core agenda item of the Congresses. (Hovey)

- Scenario planning will be a small group, interactive exercise. Each group will get a map of the two counties that they can mark up to show how they want our region to develop on the map. People
will get chips to put on the map. We will give them chips based on the following 7 recognizable place types that the Regional Institute has developed (Hovey)

- Urban centers
- Village centers
- Traditional neighborhoods
- Office and industrial areas
- Suburban strips
- Single family residential
- Exurban residential

- The goal of the exercise is to get people to understand the development choices that we have and what is entailed in each of those choices. It is also a way to get feedback from the community on our work. (Hovey)

- We will develop a process to consolidate these maps into types. After the maps are consolidated we will analyze how they affect key metrics, our land use concept, and our “Vision and Values” document. (Hovey)

- The exercise will build on the Framework for Regional Growth in two ways (Hovey):
  - The base scenario and starting chips are based on the Framework.
  - Groups can trade chips based on what the group agrees upon. Specific tradeoffs for each chip.

- We’re learning from other areas that have done this type of exercise. (Hovey)

- We’re using the GBNRTC (Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council)’s most optimistic population projection (by 2050 there will be 1.45 million people in our region). We’re going to acknowledge that this is a projection—we don’t know if it will happen but it’s our best guess. Also, if there is not any growth, it harder to do the exercise with the chips. Additionally, regardless of the population projection, the exercise will still enable the community to express its values. (Hovey)

- We’re going to do trial runs of the exercise with lay people as well as the decision makers of One Region Forward. (Hovey)

- One suggestion from Bob Shibley is to give people a set of patterns or principles, to give people a better understanding of what their development choices entail. For example, we would like to provide people with the statement “Walkable neighborhoods reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled” so that they have a better idea of the effect of increasing or decreasing the walkability of neighborhoods. We’ve created 10 such principles based on the Vision and Values document, input from the Working Teams, and feedback from the Regional Institute. People don’t have to follow these principles but if they don’t we’re going to ask that they explain why they didn’t. (Hovey)

- Aren’t we leading people to mark the map in certain ways by displaying these principles, and asking them to justify themselves if they don’t follow the principles? (Kniazuk)

- I also think that principles are leading. If I were a participant in the exercise, I would feel like I was being guided to do mark the map in a certain way. (Huynh)
This is a legitimate concern that the Regional Institute has previously discussed. But we feel like we have already been guided by principles since the beginning of One Region Forward, so there’s no reason to stop using these principles. For example, HUD (the Department of Housing and Urban Development) outlines six livability principles to consider for sustainable communities. We’ve also identified principles that the community shares through making the Vision and Values document. So shouldn’t these principles inform the scenario planning exercise? (Hovey)

We can present these principles, but we should be explicit that they are based off of HUD’s principles as well as the Vision and Values document. Also, if people have to justify why they don’t follow the principles, they should also have to explain why they agree with the principles. (Kniazuk)

We also have to make sure that we’re not being preachy when we present these principles. (Roberts)

On the other hand, people are going to debate the principles within their groups, so won’t that lead to unbiased exercise results? (Borowiak)

There are going to 7-8 people in each group, so debate is bound to happen. (Hovey)

Whether to use the principles depends on how you frame the exercise. If we use the principles we shouldn’t frame the exercise as an open-ended question. Also, if we use the principles we might want to say “Here are the principles that the community has agreed upon, show us how you think they should be implemented on this map.” (Kaminsky)

Whether to use the principles also depends on where the Community Congress is and the demographics of the meeting. If we only ask people to justify why they disagree with the principles, we may not have as many disagreeing people simply because the participants do not speak English that well and don’t feel comfortable explaining themselves. (Huynh)

To ensure a diverse mix of participants, we’re having 5 meetings in the following locations:
- Amherst Central High School on Tuesday, November 12th
- Either Kleinhan’s or City Honors High School on Wednesday, November 13th
- Either Orchard Park Middle School or Orchard Park High School on Thursday, November 14th
- Starpoint Central High School on Friday, November 15th
- The Niagara Power Project Visitors Center, on Saturday, November 16th

We’re also working hard to get the word out about the meetings to as many different types of people as possible, but we need everyone’s help with this. If you can get the word out, please do. (Roberts)

The Power Vista is not easily accessible via public transit. (Kniazuk)

Actually a major bus route runs by it. (Greenberg)
Anthony Armstrong provided updates on HUD’s Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA). (See PPT)

- There’s going to be an Advisory Committee meeting for the FHEA this Friday from 9 am to 11 am at the Regional Institute if anyone is interested. In total we want to have the Advisory Committee meet four times. Besides the one this Friday we will also have a meeting in October then we’ll gather public input at the Congress in Early November and reconvene in January and February. We are going to regularly update the Steering Committee about the FHEA throughout this time. If anybody wants to get involved in these meetings please see me. (Armstrong)

- Through the FHEA HUD is only requiring a comprehensive assessment of racial and ethnic inequality but most other regions going through this process are including other protected classes and demographic groups at least to some extent in the FHEA. (Armstrong)

- Though the two may seem similar to those who are familiar with it, there are some important differences with HUD’s Analysis of Impediments. (Armstrong)

- Thank you to everyone who has helped with the FHEA so far. (Armstrong)

Anthony Armstrong introduced the main objective of the meeting, which is to discuss Strategies C and D. (See PPT)

- We’re going to break into groups based on which strategy you would like to discuss. (Armstrong)

- Regardless of the group you are in, we’d like to give everyone a chance to weigh in on the issues. Use the handout on the table in front of you to jot down notes and ideas about the session you were in as well as the topics for the session that you were not in. At the end of the meeting, please hand these in and we’ll consolidate them and make sure they are considered in the next steps. We will also make the handout available online for people to contribute that way as well. (Armstrong)

- Through these discussions we’d like to figure out who should be involved in implementing these strategies currently and in the future. (Armstrong)

- One thing to discuss before we break out is a suggested rewording of one of the strategies in Theme D (see PPT). Through researching white papers and best practices it occurred to me that Theme D should include language about encouraging a greater understanding of housing assistance programs and their benefits to the community, in order to decrease their stigma and increase support for them. Any thoughts? (Armstrong)

- In my experience, the stigma of affordable housing is not that much of a problem. The main issues I face are that programs do not exist to serve everyone in need and people that do qualify for programs do not realize that they do. (Kosmerl)

- I agree with the last point. It seems like there are two groups of people that seek assistance- one group that are used to getting services, who know who to reach out to and how to get them, and another group that is not as savvy and does not know what it is eligible for. (Simeon)
On changing the wording of a strategy in Theme D:

- I like the second statement better. I think improving the understanding of housing programs is more important than increasing the number of programs. The closer I work to the city center, the less stigma I see, but it’s still important to address (Reigel)

- Maybe we should just change the word “affordable” to something that’s broader and doesn’t scare people. (Ollinick)

- A word change could be effective. For a lot of people, “affordable housing” means housing for low-income people. Generates opposition. For example, it often doesn’t occur to people that affordable housing also means housing for seniors. (Clarke)

- Also, when people think of affordable housing they usually think of a whole development rather than a program. Minor home repair or weatherization is broader than affordable housing and not the same as creating a unit of housing. (Kaminsky)

- I like the term affordable housing. I think it makes sense to use it for housing that serves multiples types of people (low-income, seniors, etc.). The programs we are talking about are affordable... Large suburban housing isn’t affordable. (Greenberg)

- Interestingly, the phrase “housing that people can afford” is more accepted than the term “affordable housing”. Maybe we want to start using that phrase to decrease stigma. (Clarke)

- Energy programs are not just for householders who are income-qualified. (Borowiak)

- Let’s not miss affordable rental housing. That’s the real need in our community. (Zuchlewski)

- I think that we should change the phrase “understanding of housing programs” to “acceptance of housing programs” since the latter is our goal. (Kniazuk)

- But isn’t the goal of “greater understanding” more realistic to strive towards than the goal of “greater acceptance”? (Kaminsky)

- Part of the understanding is that there’s a community wide benefit. Hopefully this translates into acceptance... for example the recent Hudson Street development. I will try to capture both of those ideas in the revised version of Strategy D. (Armstrong)
Notes on discussion about Strategy Theme C:
Target Neighborhoods Based on Their Strategic Assets
(one size does not fit all)

Strategy 1: Emphasize community based planning with residents and stakeholders to maximize participation, leverage diffuse resources, and focus on quality of life improvements

- Some of the examples we included in the policy brief were Rochester’s Neighbors Building Neighborhoods program, the New Communities/ Building Sustainable Communities work in Chicago. These are two different approaches to community-based planning, one initiated at the neighborhoods level, one initiated by the City. How do we get this to scale, especially considering shrinking HUD & CDBG resources. Should our approach be top down or bottom up? (Armstrong)

- We need buy-in from the neighborhoods we are targeting. (Huynh)

- In the Larkin District are the neighborhoods engaged in the work that’s being done there? We need to figure out how to prevent the Fruit Belt community from moving. (Huynh)

- So maybe one way to bring this concept to scale is getting communities substantially engaged in development initiatives that are ongoing and have investment coming, but may be happening without a real community process or plan? (Armstrong)

- In Niagara Falls we engage communities by avoiding the word “planning” which is associated with plans that don’t get implemented. We also used a combination, top down and bottom up approach. We got a group of high-level elected officials to meet with residents to encourage them to get more involved in planning initiatives. Seth of at the community development department then got residents to fill out surveys about their experience. The impression is that people like to have a voice in planning. (Shuey)

- Syracuse did a combination approach for its Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today program. (Branecki)

- We should try to change the culture associated with affordable housing. We can do that by telling people about how affordable housing affects them. It affects everyone in different ways, so it’s key to identify how affordable housing affects the individual you’re talking to, and discuss this with him or her. We also need to get people to understand that they’re feedback is critical. (Kniazuk)

- Our explanations of planning participation need to be simpler and exclude planning jargon. We need to identify community leaders and work with cross-sector partners. It’s also better if we can tell people about early wins that will result from the program. It will better demonstrate to people that they are being heard and their participation in planning meetings matters. It is about empowerment and being resident driven. (Matteliano)

Strategy 2: Connect public policy and investment priorities to community goals to create “complete communities” with a range of accessible services and amenities.

- We also need to emphasize that this is a regional plan. We don’t expect every municipality to have the resources to implement our recommendations. (Kniazuk)
Rather than focus on the counties though, we should focus on municipalities. This is because when municipalities make budgets, they usually have some money left over that can be used for community engagement programs. (Huynh)

There are differences in processes and level of input in different local governments’ capital and operating budgets. (Armstrong)

We need to show that these pots of money exist and that it’s important to allocate these pots properly. (Kniazuk)

We need to convince regional economic development councils that participatory budgeting is a priority. (Kniazuk)

In Niagara Falls our CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) meetings have changed their focus from “here’s how your program can get funding” to “what do residents want?” This encourages organizations to listen to and engage with residents and their concerns. (Shuey)

This approach encourages nonprofits to work with residents. Also, a participatory budget exercise is easier to understand than scenario planning. The end result of participatory budget exercises is easier to grasp. (Matteliano)

Won’t officials claim that they already have participatory budgeting, because residents elect them to decide budget? (Kniazuk)

The counties/region are too big to target. Need to start at the municipality level. Although maybe counties can provide incentives for municipalities to engage. It seems a pilot process at a smaller scope is more achievable, but there needs to be technical assistance and facilitation for that process. (Matteliano)

**Strategy 3: Focus public investments in neighborhoods with existing infrastructure, community anchors, viable fabric, and active capacity to spur private investment**

We need to understand the neighborhood’s assets and centers. (Parke)

We also need to communicate that infrastructure can mean many things. We need a flexible, inclusive definition of infrastructure. (Kniazuk)

Focusing isn’t just about urban areas. There are so many vacant properties in the suburbs. We need a different way of gaining investment in these properties. There are more creative ways to address this than past methods, but determining these methods requires focus. (Matteliano)

Look at Apple Tree Mall. This is a successful, repurposed building that was the product of imaginative planning. (Branecki)

Repurposed buildings also reduce sprawl, which is helpful for various reasons. But we haven’t focused on that as a strategy. (Matteliano)
I think that bringing people back into the city is a gradual thing. Also, some people are just not into city living. (Branecki)

Through a program called “Live NF” Niagara Falls targeted young people to live in its historic Park Place neighborhood by offering to help them repay their loans. This strategy is working. Also, the young people are improving the area. In the beginning, existing residents were reluctant about this program, until we convinced them that the young people would spur development around the neighborhood. Part of this is understanding the area population. (Shuey)

This also speaks to neighborhood expectations vs. what is realistic and achievable within the market. (Armstrong)

**Strategy 4: Design ameliorative interim “better, not bigger” strategies for neighborhoods where strategic assets are missing and normal property markets have ceased to function.**

This program follows our “better not bigger” strategy. We’re seeing population loss in a lot of different areas. One of the primary ways this is being dealt with elsewhere is through greening and other non-traditional developments for reusing the land, so it’s not just new build v. actively managing land. (Armstrong)

We need community based planning. No official wants to make the hard decisions without residents. (Matteliano)

We need to make explicit what is going to happen after a project is finished. We need to answer how projects will appeal to the marginalized. If we can’t do this, then we shouldn’t do the project, because the marginalized will still be there to answer to no matter what and we also don’t have the right to say that we’re cutting off their resources. (Kniazuk)

We also need to empower people to maintain their property and be a part of the planning conversation. We also need to empower people to leave if they want to. Some people don’t leave neighborhoods because they don’t have another option. Also, there is the condition of the house and the condition of the neighborhood to consider. We can’t just relocate people to better housing and expect the housing problem to be solved. Some people will not maintain their houses wherever they are because they can’t. They don’t have the money, they are elderly, disabled, etc. (Matteliano)

We need to deal with speculators and absentee landlords, which are causing a stigma against renters in neighborhoods. Homeowners have little patience for renters when landlords don’t maintain their property. Niagara Falls is trying to get a housing court to address this. (Shuey)

If it is decided that a neighborhood must undergo municipal disinvestments, there needs to be a last best chance in place. Starting disinvestment should also be a long process. It shouldn’t be done in haste. Especially because some choices that we’ve made in the past are why neighborhoods are the way they are. (Kniazuk)

Code enforcement and regulation are hugely important to this. (Matteliano)
Notes on discussion about Strategy Theme D
Reconsider Scale and Scope of Support Services
(enhance capacity and program effectiveness)

Strategy 1: Reconsider the scope and scale of the housing support and delivery system, to increase region wide capacity while remaining responsive to community context

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Strategy 2: Develop better opportunities/ supports/ protection for renters and home buyers - particularly from traditionally vulnerable groups

- We are low on resources, locally because of a small philanthropic community, nationally because of GOP budgets, and the state. We have a limited resource base in Buffalo. How do we deal with that when the challenges are beyond our resources? Clarke.
  - We have had a long running conversation about how to organize services cost effectively – do we change or stay the same – and the key issue has long been “turf.” Clarke.
  - When we look at precedents, the words collaborative go throughout the material. But we haven’t been able to do it. Why couldn’t we have a pool of money open to all effective housing organizations? There’s not enough money to build “new capacity.” Clarke.
  - We’ve always spread the money around. Many organizations were set up around 1980 based on conditions existing then. Their effectiveness is never evaluated. They stay in the program based on completed work plan not goals met. New organizations can’t get in because others are locked in. The politics make it hard. Organizations get what amount to entitlements. Clarke.

  - Good Neighbors Planning Alliance had only two of eleven plans adopted. All neighborhoods want housing. But we can’t do it all over the city. Philanthropy has steered clear of housing as too politicized. Although recently there has been some interest to deal with organizations that are strategic and concentrated. Clarke.

- The precedent paper didn’t deal with places other than Buffalo. Let’s get away from our current organizational model altogether. Part of the problem is that if people are one dollar over the income limit you can’t help them. Simeon.

- Let’s target areas by income rather than qualify individuals by income. Greenberg.

- HUD won’t allow you to do that… Braniecki.

- Is HUD willing to change from “low-income”? Streets where low-income households are mixed with nearly low income. Allow communities to do more regional strategies. One area to share its strengths to another. I don’t have a ton of agencies to turn for help. Just Belmont. Kosmerl.

- Some organizations are neighborhood based with an array of services. Others provide one service and don’t deal with any particular neighborhood. We should reorganize to focus on specialties.
Dissolve the neighborhood lines so most competent service providers can work anywhere. Funding is difficult. There’s no money for convening, just for development. Kaminsky.

- Some organizations take on a task because no one else will do it. Kosmerl.

- Ken-Bailey and University Community Development Association. Ken-Bailey was NHS (Neighborhood Housing Services) and NPC (Neighborhood Preservation Corp.). UCDA was block grant recipient. “We gotta merge.” KB had assets, property, money in the bank. UHCD had the block grant. They weren’t particularly effective. Gloria Parks did human services. NHS on Ken Bailey was doing housing. Now planning other reforms: One ED, one board. Both agencies were doing homeowner training. I don’t know why. Why not use Belmont? Turf is the downfall in this community. Scibilia.

- Encourage strategic mergers and foster partners – Ollinick and Clarke.

- Force local CBOs to use regional providers... Scibilia.

- CBOs do homeowner training because they get funded to do it. Clarke.

- I don’t know why there are so many agencies on the West Side... Scibilia.

- FLARE... another disaster. Greenberg.

- Encourage regional expertise for non-neighborhood specific needs. Kaminsky.

- Fund the regional provider... to sub out to the local providers. Ollinick.

- Need buy-in from agencies so they understand the benefits of these arrangements. E.g. small fry wouldn’t get tax credits. Larger entity would. Kosmerl.

- Housing programs used to be centralized. Then they blew it up. Now we’re at the other end of the spectrum. In the middle there’s a balance of centralized service with independence for the small organizations. Ollinick.

- Get over the idea that you have to serve everybody. There will always be a cutoff of who gets help. Decide what services you want to provide. Some people shouldn’t be homeowners. Some shouldn’t stay in their house. Deal with the instability of renters. A thousand school children in Buffalo in unstable housing. Impact on attendance, education. Zuchlewski.

Who needs to be at the table?

- DHCR (Division of Housing and Community Renewal) – they have the NPC and the RPC (Rural Preservation Corp.) programs. They’re creating some of these turf wars – and the pay to sustain them. They pay for redundancies. Simeon.

- Other social service agencies? Clarke.

- Broader delivery system. Clarke.
- We want People Inc. at the table and Department of Social Services. Simeon.
- What about code enforcement, people who know the streets, the issues? Mori.
- HUD.
- Universities. Kosmerl
- County Department of Health. Greenberg
- HUD community development. Kosmerl
- Look to the funders who can demand that people come together. Oishei. Key Bank. HHAC?
- Talk to city governments. Centralizing resources can be frowned upon. Ollinick.

**Strategy 3:** Create greater understanding of housing assistance programs and their community-wide benefits to remove the stigma of affordable housing initiatives while increasing individual participation and community support

- Just need a fancy marketing campaign. Rebrand poverty. Simeon.
- There is a campaign out there. “We need the people who need affordable housing.” Riegel.
- “Workforce housing” won’t work as a phrase. Our haters are smarter than we think. They figured that out. Simeon.
- We should state that it benefits me if my neighbors get assistance for improved housing. Kaminsky.
- Tie requirements to other funding. Ollinick.
- East Aurora and Orchard Park are part of the Erie Co. consortium – but if people there need a roof they’re not eligible. We need an agency that deals with that. How do you get them assistance? Mori.
- On-bill financing is ingenious in the energy sector. Maybe we could extend the concept to other programs and services. Other structures... that allow financing of improvements. Kaminski.
- The vulnerable markets are the people in the gaps. We had one person turned down because they were one dollar over the limit. Simeon.
- Some don’t take jobs because they need to stay within the guidelines. Ollinick.
- They should fine banks that don’t resolve a lien. Greenberg.
- On-bill financing or other mechanisms to self-fund might help. Ollinick.
- No effort in Buffalo to collect liens on previous loans from housing assistance agencies. Clarke.
- HUD person said “you have that crazy thing where you require people to pay you back...” Kosmerl.

**Strategy 4: Enhance the code enforcement system and connect it to existing education and support programs**

- There is a southern community where they have an environmental court and environmental judge... they get the specific assignment for specific term. This can provide consistency of enforcement. Clarke.
- Vacant property registration and property standards in Albany... should we talk about a broader process for enforcement? Clarke.
- Where does the money come from? Self-funding through rental tax or penalties... Not on low income but on higher rent. Ollinick.
- Foreclosure process – if bank starts process, put up a bond – if the owners walk away the bond goes to pay for... Zombie houses are a real problem. Kaminski.
- Environmental (housing) court – would put in charge someone who is interested in the issue and has some continuity. Kaminsky.
- Vacant property registry... Clarke.
- How are you going to enforce it? Greenberg.
- Involve public in identifying vacant properties. Clarke.
- People will 311 you to death. Simeon.
- Provide opportunities to text in or report on-line to identify vacant properties. Kaminsky.
- Technological revolution to support the system. Ollinick.
- HOCN using Google app to report issues... It’s free. Simeon.
- Post office and utilities could provide property data on vacancies. Clarke.
- Technology is helping. Something more regional is needed. We need access to data. Kosmerl.
Albany is using the Fire Department to identify vacancies because they don’t invoke the whole building code. It’s quicker just to deal with the basic issues not do a full inspection and write-up. Clarke.

Look at the unemployed as a resource, not just a problem. Use them... doing roofs whatever. Greenberg.

Community colleges to do retraining. Borowiak.

Use the people who have tried retraining programs... focusing on what jobs are available. Training for existing jobs. Kosmerl.

Anthony Armstrong concluded the meeting

- We don’t have time for each group to summarize what they’ve discussed, so we’ll create another opportunity for people to comment online. (Armstrong)

- If you’re interested in the FHEA, let me know. (Armstrong)

- Once again the Community Congresses are happening from November 12th to November 16th. Help us get the word out. (Roberts)

- Thank you to Teresa for all of her hard work in putting these meetings together! (Roberts)