

One Region Forward
Housing and Neighborhoods
Working Team Notes
June 4, 2013

Working Team Members in Attendance:
Mike Clarke, Buffalo Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Mike Riegel, Belmont Housing Resources
Rich Greenberg, Home Buyers Marketing II
Stephanie Simeon, Heart of the City Neighborhoods
Jen Kaminksy PUSH Buffalo
Cathy Braniecki, Key Bank
Cindy Huyhn, Oishei Mobile Safety Net
Christie Nelson, City of Buffalo Department of Real Estate
Ellary Mori, Erie County Dept. of Environment and Planning
Tom Lowe, ReNU Niagara
Roseanne Scibilia, University District Community Development Association
Carla Kosmerl, Town of Cheektowaga
Lori Borowiak, NYSERDA
Chris Ollinick, Jaeckle, Fleishmann & Mugel LLP

Facilitator: Anthony Armstrong (UB Regional Institute)

Online Working Team Contributors:
Joy McDuffie

Comments made by Working Team Contributors online after the in-person meetings are reported using purple font. Click here to learn more about the Working Team Contributor process.

Agenda review

Cross cut presentation:

- Did neighborhood schools come up? Clarke (No).
- Can we get in touch with the other working groups? Greenberg

- The themes make sense. My interest is housing and neighborhoods. I noted no one commented on the importance of creating a hub in our distressed neighborhoods. I believe that hub should be a neighborhood school. Distressed neighborhoods that contain Joint School Construction Project schools need to connect to the institution and develop housing around the school. Enterprise Partners call the model School-Centered Community Revitalization (SCCR). This would allow plans to include education as a community theme. It is essential that educational obtainment levels are addressed if we sincerely want to transform distressed neighborhoods. Next housing and density-if
premier learning centers, schools, were offered to residents in distressed Eastside neighborhoods and highlighted to market housing initiatives densities would increase (Joy McDuffie).

Review of goals

- None of these address homelessness or supportive housing. How do you address needs of developmentally disabled, people recovering from substance abuse, mentally ill, and others? We’re also missing someone to represent these issues. Maybe Dale Zuchlewski from Homeless Alliance of WNY. Erie Niagara continuum of care is coming together. Braniecki.

- Homelessness is important but is it more of a social services issue. Simeon.

- Goal 1 on “equal opportunity” addresses some of this but... Kaminsky

- You could use the “universal design” goal if you add language about these special needs populations. Braniecki

- Issues of homelessness are also addressed in the strategy language. Clarke

- Is there an inverse to “location efficient housing” that applies to the IDAs and economic development agencies? That is, develop centers of employment where they are accessible from existing neighborhoods. Example: ECC STEM building on North Campus is not convenient to the people who will be students there.

- Should we work harder to comment on cross-cutting issues? Ollinick. (Multiple references demonstrate how robust an issue may be. But it’s not necessary to go beyond what the group sees as its core mission).

- We don’t have a goal that focuses on dealing with the problem of vacant structures. Kosmerl.

- Vacancy is an urban and rural issue. Greenberg

- We touch on it in the “preserve” goal, too. Ollinick.

- I would suggest one adjustment. There must be some attempt to transform people. I know this is easier said than done. However the only way we can truly improve the core of the City and low-income rural areas is to empower the occupants (Joy McDuffie).

Strategy development – thematic organization

Target neighborhoods based on their strategic assets – one size doesn’t fit all...

  - Does the “manage vacant housing” issue belong here? Simeon
Vacancy tells me that the market has failed. This is true in Niagara and Erie, city and country. It also means government has failed. Proactive code enforcement without programmatic support leads to deterioration of housing stock. Greenberg.

- Focus on quality of life and decentralize neighborhood planning:
  - The LISC strategy is to focus on neighborhoods that still have some assets, institutions to partner with, commercial strips, housing suitable for rehab and reuse, minimum vacant land, maybe a good school, NFP partners to bring resources to the game. The idea is that denser population brings additional income to support more vital commercial infrastructure. That’s the strategy. Clarke.
  - It’s bringing the community into the planning process and responding to what they want. Pretty straightforward. Kosmerl.
  - Is there any gap not addressed by the four criteria? You boiled down the noise you heard the last time. Great job. But what did we miss? What makes a neighborhood? Ollinick.
  - What do we call it? Rural area may not call it a neighborhood. Simeon.
  - Do we consider as assets things that aren’t structurally part of a neighborhood? For example, in Lake Erie Beach in Evans the asset was the water. They planned how to use the water to promote development of the whole area. Could these include waterfront, parks, people, environment? Mori.
  - It should also include people, the human capital of the neighborhood. Ollinick
  - How do we divide up the pie to make everybody happy? Where do we say certain things are to be handled regionally and others are to be handled in the local community? Vacancy is a regional problem. Local neighborhoods won’t look at the overall problem. Need a regional scale to decisions and solutions. Greenberg.

- Design better not bigger strategies for non-market areas
  - Downtown – good office but not retail – how do we address those needs? Ollinick.
  - Let’s call them high need/low demand. These are the areas that don’t have schools and retail and housing. Let’s not call them “non-market” because the meaning is too harsh. Simeon.
  - There’s current research, both locally and more broadly, that recommends we stop treating vacant land as a liability because it’s an asset – not right away necessarily but eventually. Clarke.

- Develop complete neighborhoods by coordinating zoning policy and public sector investment.
  - Why not just say link policy and investment? Mori.
Are we talking about today’s “complete neighborhoods” or ten or twenty years from now? What that means will be different in the future. Braniecki.

The term “Complete Neighborhoods” is contextualized by our goals. Ollinick.

Zoning policy and public sector investment are the ways to move forward. Kaminsky.

We need to adjust our zoning policy more often. Simeon.

Talking about zoning and public sector investment is all government in my mind. All the other strategies are bottom up. This doesn’t even reference private investment. This is a government focus. Braniecki.

It’s about including community groups and neighborhood groups in the process. Public sector shouldn’t necessarily mean government. It also includes not for profit organizations – it’s really about the social sector. Ollinick.

This wouldn’t apply to a green field development on farm land in Eden twenty years from now. Zoning wouldn’t apply. Government spending wouldn’t be involved. Braniecki.

Tools and concepts from the regional scale should be provided to be used at the local level. Let the local council man decide the zoning issues. Greenberg.

- Neighborhood planning should be transparent and allow input from the residents in the neighborhood. Need to delve a little deeper here (Joy McDuffie).

Anticipate, accommodate and embrace demographic shifts

- Assessing and addressing supply against demand by type and neighborhood.
  - This one belongs in Provide Resources for Informed Decision Making and Action. Clarke

- Diversification of housing stock – including rental and non-traditional ownership

- Targeting incentivizing community clusters in discrete neighborhoods (artist, college grads, etc.)

- Coordination intentional infrastructure, diversified housing options and accessible care to support full life cycle communities and aging in place
  - This is where supportive housing belongs. Braniecki
  - Isn’t this where the community has a say if they want this kind of housing? Some people are not going to say yes to half of the stuff we have up here. Simeon.
• People are aging out of family homes and there’s no place for them to go. Alternatives are being blocked by NIMBYism. Braniecki

• This sounds very urban. These are not the issues you’ll hear in the rural areas and suburbs. They don’t have artists, college grads, not a lot of ways to attract people. How do you address needs of rural areas? Kosmerl

• We are not investing in rural low-income housing in the way we were. That might be a community cluster. Providing opportunity and servicing people not just attracting and retaining. Ollinick.

• College grads, immigrants, etc. have in common that they are low-income. Identify neighborhoods they can afford. Simeon.

• Nationally immigrant groups are bypassing the city and going to the suburbs, so the opportunities for non-urban areas may be changing. What I’m hearing, though, is that in targeting demographics, we need to find a balance between the need for specificity to make this strategy implementable and pigeon-holing this strategy to only certain groups. Armstrong.

• Immigrants are an emerging market. But those housing-seekers can be easily scammed. How do we inform people about the housing choices and products and services and protect them at the same time? Braniecki.

Improve the housing support and delivery system

• Create universal programming/ suite of programs to remove stigma associated with assistance.
  
  • Create outreach function. There are programs that already exist people don’t know about. Thuyn.

• Broaden housing resources, programs beyond neighborhood based CDCs (ending small box delivery system, building system-wide capacity).
  
  • On one hand we’re talking about decentralizing which lends itself to groups working on smaller scale. For me the best approach is to create regional policies with local implementation. Broader program. Local implementation. Kaminsky.

  • People call and you can’t help because they’re in the wrong zip code. Everyone should offer the full range of programs. Simeon.

  • Small home repair is available to everyone – but “you’re implementing it in a way that makes sense on the Lower West Side.” Kaminsky.

  • Strategies are centralizing and decentralizing. We should break them down to determine which kind is most appropriate for which purposes. Mori.

  • Suburbs and rural areas have county-wide programs. This is a problem we don’t have out there. It’s a city problem. When I was involved in funding organizations at the city level, it
was a resource issue to pay for 12 different executive directors for 12 organizations. Kosmerl.

- Maybe we don’t remove the small box system but make sure there are no areas are left out and working to ensure quality and efficiency. Borowiak.

- Streamline the small box system to make sure we use resources wisely. Lowe.

- System needs repair.

- Does HOTC need to be around twenty years? No. When all the houses are rehabbed I should hang up my hat and move on. Simeon.

- Do we need to... evaluate the system? Sure. Think about it in the context of HUD sponsorship and saving federal dollars. Braniecki.

- There’s nothing wrong with the small box system. It’s the implementation of the product that we pass on to other agencies. I’m all for consolidation. I already did it in University Heights. We do our job well. We relate to neighbors. It’s HUD. It’s the government. We should continue to merge. And we should expire. But we’re doing our job. We need to strike the balance between ensuring capacity with maintaining relationships with clients. Scibilia.

- CDC’s need technical assistance and leadership training. We are not utilizing existing organization to their potential (Joy McDuffie).

Provide resources for informed decision-making and action

- Regional property information system.

- Open sourcing neighborhood municipal data.

  - Citizens should also have access to this information. Kosmerl.

- Develop tool box.

  - You need to be able to walk people through the process. Simeon.

  - Should be for municipalities, non-profits, private sector and individuals.

- Inventory all vacant property ASAP!! (Joy McDuffie).