

ST PETER AND
PAUL'S ROMAN
CATHOLIC CHURCH
(SSPP)

NEW HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT

Melissa Marquez
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A. Definition of the Problem

SS. Peter and Paul's Roman Catholic Church (SSPP) is situated in the heart of an urban neighborhood on the west side of the City of Rochester, New York. The parish is located within the northern portion of an area identified as the Bronson-Wilder Conservation Area. Approximately 70% of the residents qualify as low or moderate income (less than 80% of the SMSA median income).¹ This area is generally divided into three separate yet very small neighborhoods: Lower Dutchtown, Susan B. Anthony and Mayor's Heights. The focus of this project has been primarily in the Lower Dutchtown and Susan B. Anthony neighborhoods. (See Appendix B for map.)

The problems addressed by my project have been: the decline of the housing stock; the prevalence of drugs in our neighborhood; and the lack of an organized group actively pursuing the need to address such problems. Rather than treating them separately we see these as interrelated problems. Without an organized group to monitor problems in the area, housing and drug problems develop and nothing happens. As the housing stock declines some residents move out due to declining property values and houses convert to absentee-owned rental property. Some of these properties are rented to drug dealers who supply addicted residents. Generally, individual residents who know about drug houses are very afraid to take on this problem. They realize that this kind of problem is not just one individual's problem and that people need to have an organized voice

¹ Grantee Performance Report, City of Rochester, New York, Department of Community Development, 1989-90.

to bring about change.

However, these problems have been treated as separate issues. For example, there has been a Staffed Housing Program run by the Urban League for this area since 1985. This program is designed "to promote the City's rehabilitation programs through outreach to homeowners and to initiate an aggressive effort to stabilize the area and attract owner/occupants to the neighborhood."² Their office is known as the HARP (Housing And Rehabilitation Program)/BRACE (Building Rehabilitation And Conservation Effort) office. Their focus is only on housing and primarily on administering city program funds available for the area. There is no ownership or control on the part of residents over this program. Decision-making is controlled by the Urban League's Economic Development arm and the City. Even the staff at the HARP/BRACE office feel as if they have no impact in making this program more effective for the neighborhood.

There also have been efforts to focus on the drug problems in this area. A group from Rochesterians' Against Illegal Narcotics (RAIN) patrols Jefferson Avenue on Friday and Saturday nights. Our own parish organized an anti-drug picnic and march in July 1989 and assisted the police in closing down one drug house on Brown St. that same summer. There has been a citywide initiative called "Greater Rochester Fights Back" which has held "town meetings" in the four quadrants (NW, SW, NE, SE) of the city. While these efforts have

² Neighborhood Development Program, City of Rochester, New York, Department of Community Development, 1989/90.

focused on the need to bring people together, none of them have connected their efforts to the issues of housing nor have they been able to sustain an organized group of residents working together.

There are also two neighborhood groups that exist in this area. The Susan B. Anthony Neighborhood Association has been around for at least ten years. They have no staff nor an office but they do have a few meetings per year. However, their membership is almost exclusively concentrated in the Susan B. Anthony Historic Preservation District and is predominantly white, although the area as a whole is 75% African-American. They are concerned about the decline of the housing stock in the surrounding areas and the problems with drugs. However, the organization has been fairly limited and weak in its response to problems and has not been an active force in the neighborhood for many years.

The other group that exists is the Mayor's Heights Neighborhood Association which has been around for about five years. Like Susan B. Anthony, Mayor's Heights does not have any staff or an office. It does not even have a 501(c)3 tax-exemption. The group meets only a few times a year to prepare a letter to the City regarding the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation for this Conservation Area. There are about five older African-American women who are the core of this group. They have lived in the area for 25 years or more and own their homes. Neither group really addresses the problems of tenants and landlords.

The Lower Doughtown area has not been organized in many years. Historically, this part of the city was more identified with the

northwest section of the city rather than the southwest section. The Dutchtown area was predominantly German and Italian. However, in the 1970's, an expressway (490) was built in the midst of this neighborhood which divided it in two. The Lower Dutchtown area (south of the expressway) has become associated with the southwest as the expressway has replaced West Main Street as the north-south boundary lines. An additional factor affecting the Lower Dutchtown neighborhood is that Brown Street (which divides the Susan B. neighborhood from Lower Dutchtown) is also the dividing line for both the City Council and County Legislature Districts. One of the worst streets in the City (Brown Street) is represented by two different county legislators as well as city council members, depending on which side of the street you are on.

In my original contract I identified the following as the major causes of the decline of the housing stock in our neighborhood:

- 1) The housing stock is quite old and is in need of reinvestment. (The majority of the housing stock is more than sixty years old.)³
- 2) A significant amount of money paid for rent leaks out of our community and is not reinvested into the neighborhoods. (80% of the housing units are rental units.)⁴
- 3) Residents are not organized or feel powerless to be able to do anything about their housing situation.
- 4) Organizations do a lot of talking about this problem but we're

³ ibid.

⁴ Neighborhood Statistics Program, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983.

too busy doing the immediate and urgent things rather than taking the time to focus on important, long-term strategies for doing something about this problem.

A year later, I would eliminate the third factor in that original assessment. I no longer consider #3 a root cause of the decline of the housing stock. I do consider it to be a problem which this project has tried to address. Rather, my assessment is that the way the City has chosen to address neighborhood development problems does not place a value on residents being organized. No city monies can be expended to help residents organize themselves to address their neighborhood problems. Instead, where residents have not been able to pull enough resources together to organize themselves, the city has awarded contracts for "Staffed Housing" programs. Besides lack of control over decision-making, this method used by the city does not support the linking together of various problems in a low-income neighborhood.

B. Project Goals

The original goal of this project was to establish strong partnerships between St. Peter and Paul's Parish and neighborhood residents and organizations to:

- * prevent continued deterioration of the housing stock;
- * support efforts to create affordable home ownership;
- * ensure safe, secure and affordable rental units;
- * and prevent gentrification and speculation of real estate.

This goal was to be accomplished thru four minimum objectives. (See Appendix D for further details.)

However, the goal and the objectives changed because of two primary factors. At SSPP we had hoped to have an additional part-time worker to help us focus on addressing the problems of drugs in our neighborhood. I would have worked closely with this person to coordinate our organizing efforts. The person who would have done this work for us was employed by the Catholic Family Center. He left his position on March 1st and shortly thereafter the entire position was placed on hold. Therefore, I needed to pick up these pieces and incorporate them into my workplan.

The second factor was that the primary interest at the time on the part of groups and churches in the area, including our own parish Social Ministry Committee, was really on the drug issue and the potential closing of the local post office. Although my personal interest was not in the area of drugs, I could not ignore the interests and concerns of those with whom I working. Therefore, the focus of my project changed in its emphasis on only housing to include addressing the issue of drugs in the area.

The thrust of the goal also changed in another way. My efforts to try to build partnerships with area churches and to some extent with other organizations in the area did not meet with much success. Rather, the focus of my work became that of developing relationships directly with residents in the neighborhood and internally within our parish structure. This change will be further examined in other sections of this report.

The project goal evolved to the following: The goal of this project is to establish an on-going working relationship between SS.

Peter and Paul's Parish and neighborhood residents and organizations to:

- * enable residents to address their concerns about the drug traffic and other serious problems like the decline of the housing stock;
- * enable SS. Peter and Paul to develop our future plans for outreach ministry with residents in the neighborhood; and
- * support efforts to create affordable home ownership.

This is a much more accurate description of the project and what could be realistically accomplished during the project year. The original goal was far more visionary, yet unsuited for the actual circumstances. I believe that the groundwork that has now been laid as a result of the project work I've done brings us to a point where together we can be far more visionary in our goal-setting.

C. ___Methods

With the change in the goal, the objectives for the project also changed and therefore the methods used to accomplish the objectives changed. I will take each original objective and describe changes and the steps taken to accomplish that objective.

Objective #1 was originally to conduct a community housing assessment with at least 50 residents in the neighborhood. This would have entailed separate interviews which would have lasted anywhere from an hour to two hours a piece. Because of the changes in the goal, this objective was changed as follows: To conduct a neighborhood door-to-door survey with at least 200 residents to assess the needs and interests of the residents on how to address neighborhood concerns.

During April and May, the Social Ministry Committee of SSPP collectively developed a neighborhood survey tool. We recruited surveyors and planned and held an orientation and training session on June 2nd. Before going out, we tested out the tool on five residents. We conducted the surveying from June 3rd until shortly after Labor Day. We always went out in pairs, wore nametags and introduced ourselves to everyone we met. We planned six specific two hour dates to go out as a large group, although originally we had only planned two. We also developed a calendar of available times people could go out and I matched up pairs. I kept track of all streets and assignments were always available so that surveyors could go out on the spur of the moment by picking up materials at the parish office.

We varied the dates and times we went out in order to see what worked best. Late afternoons and early evenings worked well. We also made posters that were put up in the church which kept track of our neighborhood survey status. We listed our goal of 200 surveys and filled in the poster as we progressed towards that goal. Results were tabulated and used to help SSPP to develop our future outreach ministry plans. This objective helped us to get at root cause #4, always being focused on the immediate needs and not taking the time to plan for long-term strategies.

Objective #2 was to explore interest in networking on housing issues with neighboring church leadership of four congregations. This objective was never accomplished. We did invite three congregations to participate with us in conducting the neighborhood

survey but none had the time or energy to do so. Yet that was never the intent of this objective. I had hope to spend significant time talking individually with neighboring church leadership. This did not happen due to my own lack of time; our participation with area churches on plans for a major health fair; the difficulty of establishing relationships between African-American and/or evangelical churches and a predominantly white, Roman Catholic church especially when the contact is not clergy-to-clergy. I will come back to this objective in Section E.

In place of this objective, rather than focusing on our external relationships with other churches, we focused on developing the internal processes for members, staff and leaders within our parish to develop a sense of ownership over this project and its resulting plan. We worked to understand how this initiative could be integrated with our other outreach ministries which include: a soup kitchen which feeds 300 people six days a week; a day care center for 30 neighborhood children; and 12 units of low-income housing. This process included extensive consultation at various levels including within our Social Ministry Committee, with the Parish Council, with the Advisory Boards and staff of the Kitchen and Day Care Center, with volunteers who work at the Kitchen, with the broader parish membership and our other pastoral team members.

Objective #3 was accomplished to the extent possible and is one of the objectives which is still continuing. We contacted five housing and/or neighborhood organizations and have continued an on-going dialogue with them. With the housing organizations,

discussion occurred between myself and staff of three organizations, although I also met with the Housing Committee of one of them. With the three neighborhood groups, we have met with the general membership and/or boards and have continued informal updates by phone or in writing.

It has been through working on this objective that we have most clearly focused on the decline of the housing stock and our hope to develop affordable home ownership opportunities. We have received assistance from the Housing Initiatives Program (See Appendix R.) As part of our surveying effort, we tracked vacant lots and boarded up houses. In the Fall, we returned to each site and conducted an exterior inspection and took photographs. The trainer from HIP obtained documentation on each of the sites from the Neighborhood Development databank. Our next steps will be to try to secure financing for the aquisition and rehab of three of the vacant houses. Since we already have a working relationship with Housing Opportunities, the non-profit developer for our 12 units of mutual housing, we are negotiating with them on this project.

Objective #4 was to develop a community-based plan which provides long-term strategies for addressing the problem of housing. This objective changed as well because it was linked to the other three objectives. Since the direction of this project took on the additional component of focusing on drugs in the community, the plan that was developed also reflects this. Because of our own internal focus, the plan that was developed is a plan for our future outreach work with the neighborhood residents. This objective's

timeframe also changed as it took longer for the wider consultation and decision-making of the Parish and Parish Council. The Parish Council approved the final plan on November 13. We had planned to hold some community meetings following this but have opted to postpone this part until February 1991. We have sponsored two other community meetings. We have needed to focus these meetings on preparing our request to the City on how we would like CDBG monies to be used for the Bronson-Wilder Conservation Area. This request includes use of monies for the aquisition and rehab of vacant houses in the area.

There was a fifth objective, which was to secure any needed funding for the implementation of the plan. As we have structured this, we are in the midst of seeking funding from three sources to have a staff person in place by July 1991. However, these efforts have occurred since the first of the new year rather than during the CED project year.

D. Results

For this section I feel that the results from this project can be categorized into three areas: 1) results related to the surveying; 2) outcomes as a result of the planning process; and 3) outcomes from external networking.

Overall, the surveying took a great deal of time and energy and yet it generated a lot of energy as well. After developing the survey collectively, the Social Ministry Committee was very excited about having a concrete tool to work with and used it as a way to recruit potential surveyors from our parish community. Fifteen members participated in the surveying from June 3rd until September

10th. We had originally hoped to have 20 members from our parish and 20 from neighboring churches. All the surveyors found the experience to be very refreshing and exciting.

Residents of the neighborhoods received us very warmly. Many people invited us into their homes, made us something to drink and deeply appreciated our concern for the neighborhood. Although we did not reach our goal of surveying 200 residents we came very close. We conducted 187 surveys. It was very tempting to try to finish the last 13 but we had agreed to end the survey in order to have time to compile the results. Just as important as the 187 surveys, we compiled a list of 49 residents who indicated some level of interest or willingness to be involved in working on neighborhood concerns.

Another important outcome has been that we now know who residents are in this area. We know who lives in various houses. We have names and phone numbers and we know what kind of work people have done or are doing. We were able to survey an average of 52% of all homes we approached. On some streets we talked with 75% of the residents, while the lowest percentage was 33% on two street.

The soup kitchen which we have operated for the last eight years has been our primary experience of residents of the neighborhood. The surveying gave us the opportunity to meet residents who have never used the soup kitchen (70% of those surveyed had never used the services of the kitchen). That gave us a broader understanding of the residents living in this area.

After completing the surveying, we really moved into the final

stage of an on-going planning process as a committee. The Social Ministry Committee held two planning sessions. The major meeting was conducted by an outside facilitator and lasted five hours, including a wonderful meal and prayer together. The outcome of the two sessions was a draft plan to establish a membership-based community center over the next three years. The goal of the plan is to enable residents of the neighborhood to address their social, cultural, economic and spiritual well-being. The community center is a means to that end. (Please see Appendix AL for more details.)

The committee presented the draft to the SSPP Parish Council in October. We held two meetings in the Kitchen in order to get input from Kitchen guests regarding the proposed plan. There was lively discussion and a great deal of support for the plan. We also organized a Parish Forum for the parishioners of SSPP to have an opportunity for discussion. The quality of the small group discussions was very heartening. With this additional input a final proposal was developed and submitted to the Parish Council.

The Parish Council gave its general approval to the proposal to establish a membership-based community center. However, what was even more significant was the quality of the discussion among the Parish Council members. This was a special accomplishment because in my previous two years experience of serving on the Council, we had never generated such a good level of questions and discussion. It was very evident that members were very interested and understood that this was not something to be undertaken lightly. The Social Ministry Committee was asked to continue to update the Parish

Council and to address questions about staffing and the relationship of the parish to the community center after the three years.

The final area of outcomes relate to the networking that we have tried to do as part of this project. Probably the most exciting outcome is the very real possibility that we will be a primary sponsor for acquiring and rehabbing three boarded up houses for affordable single-family home ownership. This is possible because of our work on two of the objectives.

As a result of our surveying effort, the City Neighborhood Development Bureau agreed to receive a letter from us regarding the use of the CDBG allocation for this Conservation Area. Normally, only established neighborhood organizations can submit letters. However, a substantial portion of our work has been in the Lower Dutchtown neighborhood which has not been represented in previous planning because there is no neighborhood group. As a result of our efforts, we were invited to submit a letter on behalf of Lower Dutchtown residents.

Two meetings were held by the City at St. Peter's Kitchen in order to develop a list of priorities to submit to the City. The first meeting included 34 residents from Lower Dutchtown, Mayor's Heights and the Susan B. Anthony neighborhoods. Rather than submitting three separate letters we agreed to submit one letter together. Included on this list of priorities is a request to use some of the allocation to acquire and rehab vacant properties. It is the third priority of eight, however, it is the first one that actually has to do with the actual allocation of money. The first

two priorities have to do with the need for the neighborhood groups to continue meeting and the need for better communication about programs. This too was very exciting because it was further evidence of how important the element of being organized is to residents in this economically-stressed area.

Yet it has been because of our work with the Housing Initiatives Program that we were able to supply residents with the very real option of rehabbing some vacant properties. We had data on the vacant structures and we knew that another neighborhood organization is in the midst of completing five units under the title of "The Homesteading Program." We could present a very concrete proposal for a very evident problem which we knew was a concern to residents because we had heard so many speak about it while we were out surveying.

This third segment of results is tied very much to our plans to establish a community center. We firmly believe that the value of the community center will be known by its ability to get things done. Therefore, we cannot just invite people to become members without being able to articulate some of the things we are inviting them to be a part of, like the affordable housing development and/or summer activities for children and families.

A final result which I did not include above is my own growth and learning through my work on this project. I have learned a great deal and I have grown in my understanding of myself and of the neighborhood of SS. Peter and Paul's. I have come to appreciate the members of my parish far more deeply because of their strong sense

of mission in this neighborhood.

E. Analysis / Conclusions / Recommendations

I know that this project has produced good fruit and has been very beneficial for the members of our Social Ministry Committee and others who have volunteered their time to assist us. Our own excitement and efforts have had an energizing effect on members of our parish, especially new members. Our pastor has characterized the Social Ministry Committee as the driving energy for the parish. The committee has set a model for working with the Parish Council that has not been in place in recent years. Our commitment to short and long-range planning and goal-setting has helped to inspire our other committees and Parish Council to do the same.

The fact that we were able to do so much good work has amazed a lot of people because we are such a small urban parish (200 members) that struggles to meet our operating costs. We have amazed our Kitchen volunteers who come from larger suburban parishes, both Roman Catholic and other denominations. We have amazed various City officials (elected and bureaucrats) and County legislators who have called to request information on our efforts. We have amazed diocesan officials who see our work as a model that other parishes could replicate. We were invited to share our work with chairpersons of other Social Ministry Committees at the Annual Leadership Day in September. Two nearby Roman Catholic churches have asked us to meet with their Social Ministry Committee members to help them focus their energies and share our efforts with them.

Yet the other side of all of this is that the project required an

enormous amount of energy. I served to coordinate the work and provide key leadership to the project. Yet it would not have worked without the willingness and commitment of the Social Ministry Committee members to meet at least twice a month for many months. Members were also some of the most available surveyors. In addition to meetings, each member spent at least 15 hours surveying during the summer.

Perhaps we would have been overwhelmed had we realized what it would actually take to accomplish the surveying goal we had set for ourselves. Originally, we projected that we could complete ten surveys for each two hour period we went out. To do 200 surveys meant 20 two hour groups going out. We thought that with 10 groups of two people each, we would only need each person to go out twice. We thought we were being pretty realistic in our approach.

In reality, there was a wide variation in how many surveys we could complete in the two hour period. This ranged from completing only one survey to eight surveys. We actually averaged a little over four surveys per outing. We could have been more diligent and efficient in our surveying but we also valued spending time getting to know people in the neighborhood. This became even more important to us after we experienced what it was like to be meeting our neighbors. Therefore we often spent anywhere from twenty to forty-five minutes at one home.

I had the opportunity to go out at least once with most of the surveyors. This was a good chance to better understand the various ways people are comfortable interacting in such a setting. For

everyone, surveying became easier to do overtime. Each experience helped us prepare for future experiences. Our orientation and training was a four-hour session facilitated by two diocesan Social Ministry staff. I worked with them to prepare the agenda and process for the training. We had the opportunity for role-plays and feedback about how people had done as well as how they felt about their roles. People felt the training was very important in preparing comfort levels and having ideas of how to respond to various situations.

What I found challenging was needing to hold myself back so that the other surveyor did not defer to me for the interaction with residents. Because of my leadership on this project, most everyone tended to defer to my "experience" and would let me do most of the surveying. However, I knew that it was important that we both contributed rather than having someone just accompany me. I also wanted to encourage the growth in communication skills of the surveyors so that they can provide leadership on this in the future. In general, everyone improved over the summer. People were more comfortable with the survey tool (especially once we changed it when we were about halfway done) and got better at assessing and identifying the potential leadership capacity of residents we surveyed.

I didn't always succeed in sharing the surveying experience equally. There were three surveyors who probably shouldn't have been out there. They clearly did not have the confidence in what they were doing, but they had big hearts and were willing to be out

there. I did not really give them a chance to be the primary surveyor and they always deferred to me to do almost all of the talking. I'm not certain whether I would do things differently with these three. I probably should have given them more encouragement to ask the survey questions. Even when I did suggest it, I easily accepted (almost expected) their negative response. With others I insisted that we share equally when we went out. I know people have different gifts and skills. Perhaps the gifts of these three people were their willingness to be companions on this venture. At least that is what I deeply appreciate about them from this experience. But no one ever talked about this, this was just the way it worked.

Another good learning experience was the process of putting the survey tool together. There were definitely benefits to the way we did it, but I can say with certainty that I would not do it that way again. The way we put together the survey tool was that we held a brainstorming session about what we would want to ask people in the neighborhood regarding their concerns. Everyone on the committee contributed their ideas which we then divided into two categories: questions regarding drugs and other non-drug questions.

At a follow-up meeting we shared what we thought were the three most important questions in each category. We then discussed ways to include those questions deemed most important. I developed a draft based on our meeting and people felt really good about how this was coming together. I asked three people I knew to critique our draft because they had sociology or research backgrounds. They all made various suggestions which I shared with the committee

members. I further revised the survey and presented it again. The final changes were minor. The committee members were very excited about our work since this was really our first product that we had collectively developed. People could see their different ideas in the tool. This alone was a value.

Yet we also discovered the survey tool's limits and therefore made changes in it after we had completed nearly a hundred surveys. This was only a problem because it felt so "unscientific" to make changes to our tool in midstream. Yet we felt the tool was secondary to our need to have something that made sense to the people we were surveying. There were two major changes: 1) we made a distinction between programs people thought the neighborhood needed and programs people would use; 2) we added community organizing to the list of programs and dropped health care.

We made the first change because our experience of surveying was that respondents were not making the distinction and were answering the question based on what they thought the neighborhood needed rather than on what they would use themselves. We really wanted to know what people would use. Residents were not comfortable responding negatively to services they thought this community needed but it was evident that they didn't necessarily think they needed it. The change helped us to explicitly ask them to respond to each. This change also happened because the original range of responses (Very Likely, Somewhat Likely, Not Very Likely, Not At All Likely, I Don't Know) was too cumbersome and people were generally not responding with such distinctions anyway.

We added community organizing (which ended up being the item with the highest percentage of positive responses) to our list because we had somewhat overlooked it the first time we drew up the list. We had a category entitled "Someone to Help You Find Help". Almost from the very start, people asked us what we meant. I began describing the work of an organizer and people responded very positively. Some residents engaged us in long conversations about the need for a community organizer. This happened repeatedly and we felt we needed to explicitly add it to the list. Dropping health care from the second survey was actually an oversight on my part.

I would do three things differently regarding the survey tool. First, I recommend anyone doing a survey to seek out samples of other surveys to have as examples. If I had done this I could have shared those samples with the committee members. I think this would have helped them and me to know what possible options we had for the format and content of the survey. Second, I should have utilized my focus group to get their suggestions/critique of the draft. With better time management I could have sent it out to them ahead of time or just asked for time on our agenda. I did not coordinate my time well enough to benefit from their suggestions. Finally, I believe we should have tested our survey tool on more than five people. When we did this, we critiqued our surveying skills rather than the survey tool. With a larger group, perhaps ten altogether. We might have made changes had we spent time talking about the survey tool.

Another aspect of this project that I would do differently has

been in the follow-up since we completed our surveying. For various reasons I have not done as good a job on follow-up as I would have liked. As the weather changed to rain and then snow, I have not been as inclined to be out on the streets knocking on the doors of resident we met in the summer. I haven't had as high an energy level and this is the kind of thing that can easily be postponed because there is no deadline to meet. I know that our Social Ministry Committee members would have willingly shared in making some of these contacts. However, again I have not done the follow-up coordinating work with the Committee to enable them to go out.

The only time I have successfully been out since the surveying was to remind people to come to the meeting with the City on the CDBG allocation. I leafletted some of the streets and dropped off notes or talked with some of the residents I felt would be most likely to come to the meeting. I know for certain that 7 of the people who came to the meeting were there because of my reminder. I feel this is a very critical issue because we don't want to be doing things for people, we want to enable people to become involved in neighborhood issues. However, that requires continued contact to nurture their leadership capacity, especially when things are still so new.

In September the Social Ministry Committee decided that we would separate the work related to the community center from the rest of our work as a Social Ministry Committee. We did this for two reasons. This is a major effort that could consume all our time, yet we have other responsibilities to the parish. By separating out

our work, another member of the Committee agreed to be the Chairperson of the Social Ministry Committee (replacing me in that role) and I agreed to coordinate the work of the subcommittee. More importantly, the separation can serve as a transition to the core planning group for the community center. Residents are being asked to serve on the subcommittee. I believe this was a critical step in order for us to continue with our plans with residents and yet not lose site of our identity and responsibilities as the Social Ministry Committee of SS. Peter and Paul Parish.

There are two other areas that come to mind that I would do differently. The first is that I definitely should have consulted more on the design of this project with the Social Ministry Committee. My primary consultation was with Fr. David Reid, our Pastor. I shared the overall picture with the committee but I didn't give them a draft beforehand. I really think this would have influenced how the objectives were originally stated. I think that members would have articulated our own internal need for consultation which was not part of my original contract.

The second area which I would do differently has to do with the way we have emphasized our interest in creating opportunities for home ownership. Since the neighborhood is 80% rental and because of my analysis of the resulting leakage of money from this area, increasing home ownership became an important goal. Yet three other aspects of this problem have not been addressed because of my original analysis. With our emphasis on home ownership, we have really missed the need to creatively address the housing problems

faced by tenants, of which there are plenty in this area. This emphasis also has not engaged us in discussion around creating permanently affordable housing such as limited-equity home ownership on land belonging to a community land trust. Closely related to this is the connection between our efforts to improve the neighborhood and the consequences of our actions on increasing property values, taxes and rental costs.

The home ownership opportunities that have been created in this city, including 40 Home Expo units in the Bronson-Wilder Area and the five units of the Homesteading Program have all been for moderate income families. We would like to see assistance given to low-income families as well. We do not want to participate in the gentrification of this neighborhood. I think we need to be much more mindful of the traditional and subtle processes at work in our city which value increasing home ownership opportunities and yet may not have in mind the centrality of keeping the neighborhood affordable for residents who already live here.

Incorporating my previous comments into the work of my project might not have been possible since I did not have the deep understanding of this until my last semester in school as I took the Housing Policy course. But I did have threads of it and I believe it might have come out had we spent more time on our own education and reflection as a Social Ministry Committee. Actually, we do a good job of theological reflection, but as I reflected on our planning process, I realized that I had not done a good job in helping my companions to get a better grasp of community economic

development. Had this happened as part of the project, I think our planning process would have been even more effective and fruitful. I think it would have helped people to think about and envision what we could really do in this neighborhood.

I do want to acknowledge that the process itself was very educational for everyone. Many times, members have said that without this process we embarked on, we most likely would have moved into providing additional human services for the neighborhood. In fact, the list of priorities on the survey even reflect that interest on the part of the committee members. But what we are proposing is really seen as something different. It is not something that will be provided for the community. We will be working with the community on efforts we can do together. Yet I will be mindful that education needs to be more deeply integrated into the meetings of the core planning committee (subcommittee) for the community center. People will not have the knowledge and rich experience I have been thru in the CED Program, therefore I need to create opportunities for people to educate themselves on the many aspects of community-based development.

There are a lot of next steps ahead for us. This project may be completed on one level but has opened a whole other level of work to which we want to give our energy. Our first year objectives need to be further developed and revised. We need to work very carefully on developing the core planning group's skills. We need to carefully develop the values upon which the community center will operate, which we believe will be the key to its success. We also need to be

mindful that those who are least represented in this community are part of this process in which we are engaging ourselves. We need to develop the conflict resolution skills of everyone who becomes involved. We need to make better connections between our Day Care parents, the families who moved into our 12 units of mutual housing, the kitchen guests and volunteers and those residents who become involved in the community center. I also believe that we will need to take a closer look at credit issues in this community if we are to truly get at some of the economic issues affecting residents.

The final focus in this section will be on what I learned about the community's attitude and the local politics vis a vis the problems on which this project focused. I have divided my conclusions into four points. My first point has to do with residents we surveyed and residents who eat at our Kitchen. The second point has to do with the focus on spirituality and the third point has to do with my experiences with churches and the final point has to do with the politics of our City government.

As stated before, the project gave us a fuller picture of the residents living in this neighborhood. I think our view had been deeply influenced by the guests who come to eat at the Kitchen. There is so much unfocused anger in many of the guests at the Kitchen. There are also many alcohol and substance abuse problems. Guests do not want to make connections with other people, they just want to eat a good meal in peace. We really did not expect the degree of warmth and interest on the part of those we surveyed. People were very articulate and connected very much with the

importance of organizing. We were at first surprised that so many people saw this as an important need. Yet it really did make sense because I think it reflects the African-American experience of the civil rights movement that people need to join together to bring about change. I cannot convey how much our hope in what we can do together was emboldened because of the hope we heard expressed by so many of the residents we surveyed. This was really a boost.

Yet there were two other experiences with the residents that should be mentioned. First of all, drugs and the use of drugs, although definitely seen as a problem for the neighborhood did not seem to be prevalent among those we interviewed. Alcohol was not expressed as a problem among families either. This still does not seem to me to be the entire picture and my suspicion is that these subjects remain a very private family matter and therefore would not have been shared with us as we conducted our survey. The other item I learned more about was how deeply people already know what absentee ownership does to a neighborhood. This was another subject about which people were very articulate. If there is anything that I think can bring tenants and home owners together, it may be this issue, on which we need to do more work in the future.

The second point I want to raise has to do with what I learned in terms of the role or importance of spirituality in what we are doing. I think there has tended to be two approaches with regard to "religious" involvement in social concerns of a neighborhood. One approach is the evangelical approach which sees its central mission as evangelization and social ministry as one means to that end. The

other approach has been that we don't want to thrust our faith on people and instead we want people to freely receive the gifts we have to offer and see Jesus/God through our actions. This latter approach has been basically how we've operated at SSPP.

Yet as we spoke to people we surveyed, it became clearer for us that there really was a deep longing for people to express their spirituality. I'm certain that this came out because of the expression of spirituality in African-American culture. We do not see our invitation to people to address their spiritual well-being as automatically or solely a "religious" expression. We see it as an important recognition that we are spiritual beings and that people can become spiritually broken or isolated in the same way that they can become economically or socially broken or isolated.

We see it as an important part of expressing oneself and we want people to feel the freedom to do so or to try to come to understand that part of themselves better. We believe that one of the limits of traditional neighborhood organizations is that they would not be able to make or encourage such a connection. This analysis is a direct result of our experience of surveying and it has been very enriching and liberating.

The third point has to do with trying to work with churches which has its own set of problems. Both cultural and religious differences made this work difficult. I found it frustrating to be confronted with the male-centered clericalism of many of the African-American churches. Yet my analysis is that a more effective approach with churches may be in inviting them to consider

membership in the community center. I think it would have been a huge challenge to coordinate planning and decision-making among churches, especially without knowing what we were moving towards. I also believe that we will be far more successful encouraging residents involved in the community center to invite their churches to participate in this venture.

My final point has been raised somewhat in the first section of this report. As a result of the project and the CED program, I have come to understand more fully and clearly the role that our City officials play in determining what happens in a neighborhood. At many levels, there are some very systemic causes related to the lack of progress around housing and drug issues. Yet I think the bottom line is that we do not do a good job of holding our elected and bureacratic officials accountable for their decisions. We need to be more supportive of our elected officials who are trying to be far more innovative in solving problems. We are not given much to choose from in this city since it is so deeply run by the Democratic machinery. I would love to see a third party form.

In the meantime, I have realized that I should have been in contact earlier with the Neighborhood Development office. They have a great deal of information and control. Yet we cannot expect them to be accountable if we do not understand what they are doing, how they are doing it and who is doing what and where. Therefore my final recommendation is that this aspect should be included directly in a project objective. When things aren't working in a neighborhood, there are many reasons. These reasons need to be

understood, analyzed and challenged if necessary. Organizing residents is essential if we are really committed to community economic development. Yet we also need to know who has been doing it for us in order that we can change the balance of who has control.