



**Plan**  
**Old West End**

DETROIT / CENTRAL INTERSECTION STUDY

TOLEDO OHIO

Kathleen Kovacs

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Project in CED

Advisors:

Dr. Chris Clamp

Dr. Tosun Aricanli

School of Community Economic Development  
Southern New Hampshire University

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Toledo Ohio intersection of Detroit Avenue and Central Avenue and the surrounding area are peppered with vacant lots and blighted buildings. This once vital entranceway into the residential community has become an eyesore that only promotes increasing disinvestment and criminal activity.

Neighborhood residents wanted to change the perception of the area by hosting a design charrette that would develop landscape, land use and economic development project opportunities. The plan would be used as a tool to direct future investment activities.

A three-day charrette inviting the people in the surrounding area was developed with the assistance of community residents and the Urban Affairs Center of the University of Toledo to bring together homeowners, renters, landlords, business owners and city officials.

The first evening of the charrette was used to hear more about the issues in the community, learn what residents would like to see happen in the community and their dreams of future possibilities.

On the second day, residents began work with planners, architects, and students in three vision teams to translate the information from the previous evening in drawings and detail.

The culmination of the event, Sunday evening, the three vision teams presented their ideas back to the community and a sense of consensus was

developed. Determining the next steps and establishing a sense of continuity will be important follow-up activities to establish with the community so they understand this is an ongoing endeavor.

### **COMMUNITY PROFILE:**

Understanding the socio-economic profile of the target neighborhood area is important background information in designing the neighborhood charrette. It will help to gauge what percentages of age ranges should be approached to participate in the process, the breakdown of owners and renters to fairly represent their differing viewpoints, and racial composition. Understanding the economic standing of the community will have implications on participation and the end product. Knowing the audience in advance will assist in forming the Organizational Committee and give hints on where to advertise for the event as well as structuring the event itself. Accessing where possible, the available 2000 U.S. Census materials provided the following information:

#### **Target Group:**

- Population: 12,000 people in 5,200 housing units. There are a high number of female head of household families and senior citizens.
- Location: The area comprises one full Census Tract #21 and parts of 7 additional Census Tracts #16, 23, 15, 8, 32, 31, and 34. They are all on the outskirts of downtown Toledo and are adjacent. A

large area in Census Tract #21 is the National Register of Historic Places. The area is well situated to expressways and bus routes.

- **Income:** With the exception of Census Tract #16 the area is evenly divided between homeowners and renters. (#16 is primarily homeowners.) All Census Tracts in the NIP area are classified as low-income, however gentrification is underway in Census Tracts #21 and #16. It is doubtful, however that #21 will ever change that classification due to the high number of housing authority, nursing and group homes in the area.
- **Ethnicity:** The area is 70% African-American and 30% white as of the 1990 census.
- **Other characteristics:** There are a high number of female head of household families and senior citizens. The area is well situated to expressways and bus routes. The historic district has a large number of very large mansions, many of which have been converted into apartments. The ring around the historic district consists primarily of smaller (1,400 to 2,000 sq. ft.) homes. There has been serious disinvestment in these parts of the community. Many homes have been demolished leaving vacant lots in the surrounding ring.

General History and context of the project:

Neighborhoods In Partnership began in October 1991 and a coalition of

three adjacent neighborhoods, Collingwood Springs, the Old West End, and Corridor. In 1996 the UpTown neighborhood became a member. Since its inception the organization has developed 72 rental units, three single-family new construction homes, and rehabilitated 3 transitional housing units and 20 single family homes. Over \$141,000 in grants has been passed through as down payment or rehabilitation grants to seventeen families in the last year. Construction and lease-up was completed for 35 new tax credit single-family rental homes in October 2001. New Cheney Flats, a 65 unit \$7.5 million Housing Tax Credit project is currently under construction.

The organization has also developed a class 10, 100, 1000 clean room for computer chip manufacture and leased space to a community school. NIP owns four commercial buildings. One has been completely rehabilitated and houses a bank branch, insurance office and architectural firm. A second building has been partially renovated and houses a deli, dry cleaner and candy store and has two units vacant. The third building will be repaired when funding has been identified.

While a variety of projects have been completed throughout the service area grumbling persists that the organization may not be effective in its revitalization activities. While we see visual change it would be helpful to assess the actual financial value (other than just direct investment) and effectiveness on the lives of the residents.

### Social Factors:

Toledo residents are noted naysayers about their community. There is also a “prophet in your own land” issue, since the Board and staff predominately live in the community; their assessment of the achievements may not be valued. There is a 50% of the community housing is rental with a significant number of absentee landlords which has increased disinvestment by owner occupants.

### Family and social structures:

There are a number of female head of household units in the community and a high number of senior citizens, particularly increased by the number of large senior projects and nursing homes. In the historic district there is a significant non-traditional family population. The gentrifying historic area is mainly comprised of young people and empty nesters. Although the number of people with families is increasing, they generally utilize private or home schooling. In the ring surrounding the district the predominantly African-American family’s children attend public schools.

### Local ways of addressing problems:

The CDC looks at the service area as a whole entity. Within the CDC area there are a variety of sub-groups and associations that usually concentrate on specific interests or areas. They have primarily been responsible for

community organizing around specific issues, frequently with input from the CDC.

#### Civic life in the Old West End:

While there are neighborhood meetings they tend to be fractionalized and only achieving large numbers of residents if there is a major problem or issue to be addressed. Some of the residents in the historic district do not even recognize that there are families outside their area and so do not take their needs into consideration. This causes friction between various segments of the community. Although the area is racially mixed, it has been so for quite a while and many believe this is a community strength. Issues do occur but they are relatively rare. Interestingly the factions in the community tend to be more divided by street demarcations than by racial context. Neighborhood artist, Rhonda Cowell, puts it this way, "the people in the mansions need to stay out of our business. They don't think we are part of the neighborhood, so they shouldn't intrude when we say we don't want a playground next to the school. " (Regarding community effort to add playground next to Glenwood School for the use of all community children, which was led by residents at the gentrifying area of the neighborhood.)

Everyone in this neighborhood thinks believes they are in charge. There are twelve community groups in the service area that meet with some regularity, including BlockWatches, neighborhood associations, and a garden club. The CDC has a relatively low profile compared to other neighborhood

associations. There are two major neighborhood groups in the Old West End that have only recently begun to collaborate on some projects. The other neighborhoods also have associations but they are less active. The Renaissance area of the community has two strong women that claim leadership of the same community but neither has a formal group or regular meetings. NIP has a Board of Directors comprised of representatives of its member groups and at-large members that are from the general community.

NIP has a quarterly newsletter throughout the service area. The Old West End has a volunteer driven monthly newspaper and UpTown, largely a business association, transmits information via email. There is also an email list of a variety of people in the Old West End. This neighborhood also has a grapevine that passes on information at the speed of light.

The community has a variety of resources available. Resident and stakeholders represent a number of professions and skills. A large artisan community, a number of educators, architects, public service and health care workers live in the neighborhoods.

The community is fortunate in that it has human capacities that can be tapped into for neighborhood efforts. Each of the member neighborhoods has pledged volunteers to assist Neighborhoods In Partnership on project development. A variety of professionals ranging from educators, real estate professionals, construction and health care live in this mixed-income area.

Working side-by-side residents have addressed issues that are of common concern.

Physical resources are also available. NIP has acquired new computer systems, and an office building. It also has access to land, housing programs and commercial centers.

NIP's service is conveniently located near expressways, bus lines, and adjacent to the downtown area. The esteemed Toledo Museum of Art is located in the neighborhood. A new full service grocery opened November 2001 nearby and there are a variety of convenience stores. The University of Toledo is also close to the area. The NIP service area includes one high school, a junior high that has been converted to a target grade school academy, and one public grade school. There are also three private and parochial schools.

"Holy Toledo" partially derives its name from Collingwood Blvd. Our main thoroughfare, also known as the "Street of Churches". (The other derivation of the name is due to Toledo's position half-way between New York and Chicago, and a "safe haven" for gangsters in the 1930's.) The historic district within NIP's service area is fairly stable with increasing property values due to gentrification. The historic district continues to attract a socio-economic and racially diverse community.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Neighborhoods In Partnership has built revitalization momentum in the

Detroit / Central area through the construction of 35 new houses, which were completed in October 2001. Residents in the community were excited about the investment and organized a neighborhood spring clean-up activity. An obvious next step especially at capturing resident involvement in the future of their community, seemed to indicate bringing the residents together to visualize what they would like their community to look like in the future.

An example of a similar undertaking, Walk Westgate, was recently conducted utilizing students and staff from the nearby universities working alongside residents to gather their ideas and translate them into visible plans. This endeavor received a great deal of positive media exposure of which the Detroit / Central residents are aware. Past attempts by NIP to work in this community have met with doubts about the CDC's sincerity to make a positive community investment. With the construction of the new single-family homes visible proof existed and opened the opportunity to reestablish ties with neighborhood residents and further revitalization opportunities.

**PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

Visioning a different appearance and economic vitality developed by community stakeholders was the thrust of this project. How to engage neighborhood people in the process and get their input was the direct reason

for the development of the Renaissance Old West End Plan neighborhood design charrette.

The residents and businesses around the Detroit / Central intersection have suffered from declining property values and loss of income due to the blighted area. No community developed plan that to advance land use and design for the area existed.

The Renaissance Area is included in the Old West End neighborhood in the Neighborhoods In Partnership service area. The area has deteriorated over the last twenty years as the Chevrolet Transmission plant closed and other manufacturers such as Libbey Owens Ford and Jeep decreased their employment base. Homeownership declined and houses and commercial structures were abandoned. Heavy demolition of blighted structures has left the area devoid of an income base that can support local economic development activities.

About fifteen years ago Detroit Avenue, which is a federal highway, was widened and as a result the tree lawns were removed and the houses left perilously close to this truck route. Open spaces left between structures appear as a gap-toothed smile in the neighborhood. Missing the vitality of an energetic economy grocery stores and other neighborhood services moved away. Heavy demolition of blighted housing structures have left the area devoid of an income base that can support local economic development

activities, but at least eliminated illegal activities that took place within their confines.

Included in the area is a five-acre site that formerly was the Chevrolet Transmission Plant. The main structure was demolished several years ago after heated and protracted complaints to the city. Unfortunately due to the high cost factor the building was not demolished below grade and sub-basements were left unfilled. There is also a belief that chemical pollution exists the basements and surrounding soil.

Neighborhood residents wishing to revitalize their community asked for the revitalization of the Detroit Avenue and Central Avenue intersection and the immediately surrounding area and to be involved in the planning process. It was particularly important to build upon the momentum underway with the construction of the recently completed new housing project by Neighborhoods In Partnership just off these heavily traveled thoroughfares.

**GOAL STATEMENT:**

The goal of the project was to facilitate neighborhood meetings that would develop a comprehensive vision for the area surrounding the Detroit and Central Avenue intersections that included elements of streetscape, potential land usage and identify possible business and institutional opportunities.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- Develop a method of reaching neighborhood residents and stakeholders
- Hold a series of neighborhood meetings
- Attendance of at least 100 people at the meetings
- Utilize design professionals and students to work with participants to determine possible landscape design, business opportunities, institutional needs (community center, etc.), and land use
- Determine potential uses for the former Chevrolet Transmission site (5 acres)
- Residents and stakeholders come to consensus with a vision for the neighborhood
- Residents celebrate successes

## **PROJECT PURPOSE STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this project was to bring the community together with design professionals to develop an overall improvement plan for the revitalization of the Detroit / Central Avenue intersection area.

## **OUTPUTS:**

### Major Outputs:

- Community meetings that develop an accepted strategy.
- Land Use recommendations
- Intersection landscape plan
- Potential economic development project suggestions

- Final community meeting for acceptance
- Inclusion into the City of Toledo 20/20 Master Plan

Major Outputs that have been achieved:

- Held eleven organizational committee meetings
- Neighborhood Design Charrette held February 22-24, 2002
- Survey of community ideas
- Overall vision of neighborhood desires achieved for commercial, streetscape, community center, and retail office space to be developed
- Nearly 200 people participated in the three-day charrette process.

Partially achieved objectives:

- Steering committee established to look at next steps
- Volunteers determined to deliver flyers to the community
- Raise the Roof Day scheduled April 27, 2002 for one block in neighborhood (intensive fix-up, paint-up, clean-up, landscape day – nearly 200 volunteers will be sought)
- Increased exposure in the media for the neighborhood and their interest in making change
- Funding search underway for Strategic Plan

Outputs that have not been initiated:

- Inclusion in City of Toledo Master Plan. This will not be initiated until a final Strategic Plan has been developed.

## **INPUTS:**

### Inputs Needed:

- Residents and businesses in the community
- Old West End Historic District
- Cherry Bancroft Summit Corridor Coalition
- State and Federal highway officials
- University of Toledo and Bowling Green State University
- Toledo / Lucas County Plan Commission
- Neighborhoods In Partnership Board of Directors
- Local Government officials

### Expected Inputs:

In order to achieve a well-attended neighborhood event it was necessary to do intensive planning. A group of residents were asked to participate on an Organizing Committee based on their community standing. Other volunteers were sought to round out the group.

The Urban Affairs Center of the University of Toledo was asked to assist in the planning phase of the charrette. The UAC had facilitated an earlier charrette called Walk Westgate that centered on a very busy shopping area in Toledo. The UAC was also able to assist in developing maps of the area for land use, zoning and census information.

Special Project Funds were raised through Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur to help with the expenses of the project. A \$10,000 grant was made

available for the efforts. Central United Methodist Church located in the target area offered their facilities for the Organizational Committee meetings and the three-day charrette.

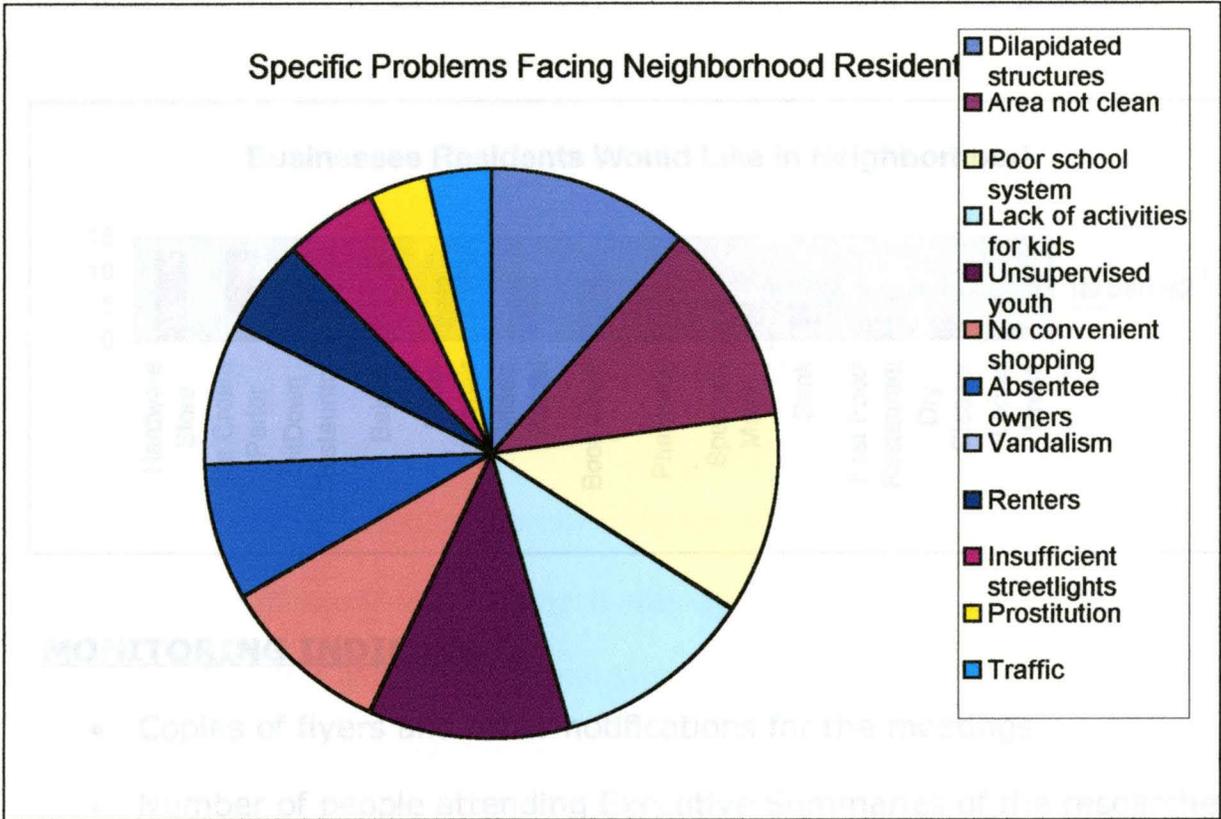
Neighborhoods In Partnership provided staff time for organizing, design and mailing of newsletters, developing survey, photographs of the area and other professional experience.

List of Inputs:

- \$10,000 in funding raised
- Neighborhood Survey
- Flyers about the event
- Maps
  - Racial Composition
  - Zoning
  - Target Area
  - Land Use
- Photographs
- Media Releases
- Census information
- Certificates of Appreciation
- T-Shirts
- Food
- Door prizes

**Survey Results (based on returned surveys):**

Findings from the surveys will be used to gauge issues and desires of the community to determine the priorities of action.



**The likelihood of residents living in this neighborhood 5 years from now:**

Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	No thought	Somewhat Unlikely	Somewhat Likely
12				

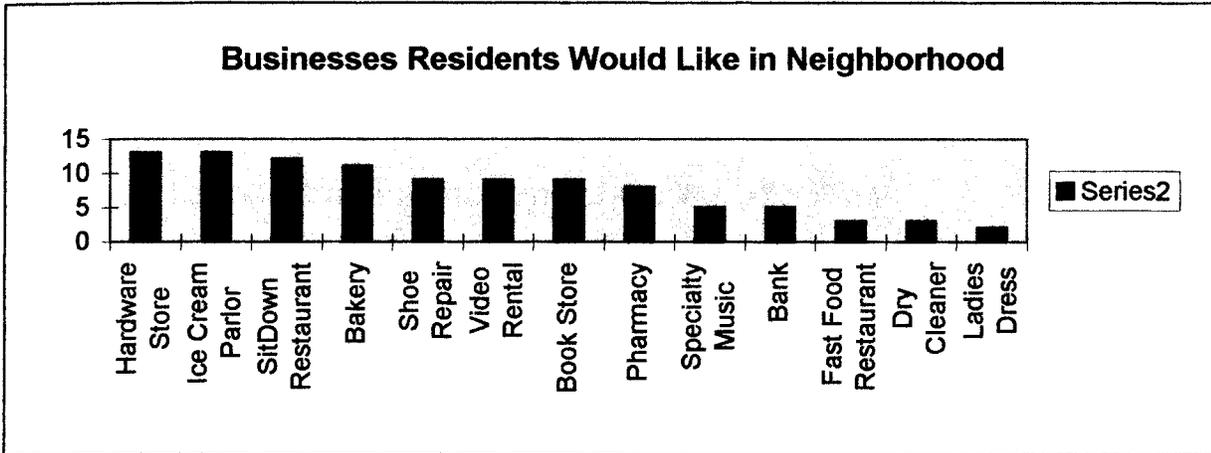
**Various opinions on the neighborhood:**

1. Residents have a lot of pride in their neighborhood:

Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6	4		1	1

2. It will be easy to attract new merchants/businesses to the neighborhood:

Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	5		1	3



**MONITORING INDICATORS**

- Copies of flyers and other notifications for the meetings
- Number of people attending Executive Summaries of the researched materials
- Draft Plan
- Final Plan

**EVALUATION:**

Methodology: The method to determine if the goals of the project had been reached was based on two elements: attendance at the charrette and the ability to come to a consensus on a vision for the target area.

## EVALUATION:

Developing the process required research. While a number of books and guides were read, the one that resonated best to the type of neighborhood issues and results that were hoped for from the event was "The Neighborhood Charrette Handbook: visioning & visualizing your neighborhoods future," by Dr. James Segedy and Bruce Johnson. The reference was easy to follow and gave suggestions on materials and research to collect in advance and choosing a facilitator.

Another important research activity involved understanding neighborhood economics and community processes. Early in the organizing process a revitalization idea around transit villages came from the committee and significant research was done on this topic. Urban design and planning was also given significant attention in doing research, as the physical improvement of the community was the paramount purpose of the charrette.

During the organizing period community membership interested waned. Meeting attendance dropped off until much closer to the scheduled event. As mailings went out the community members slowly gained enthusiasm and became more animated in the meetings. Although pessimistic about the outcome the residents volunteered to bring food and friends to the meetings.

Over 200 people participated over the three-day neighborhood design charrette event period, nearly doubling expectations. This did not include the organizational meetings leading up to the event itself. The turnout and the level of community participation thrilled Neighborhoods In Partnership, the local community development corporation.

This was a very different citizenry than the Walk Westgate participants. While Walk Westgate was pushed by predominately white middle to higher income residents and business owners, the Renaissance area is comprised primarily of lower income minority residents that traditionally have not had a voice in determining the future of their community.

The Organizing Committee meetings were difficult, primarily because people did not know what to expect or how this type of event would work. This was a new experience for them and attendance was spotty and the UAC and NIP staff representatives pulled most of the discussion along. However, as the time for the event grew closer the committee appeared to become engaged in the planning.

There was a lot of concern about how the differences in community would work during the event. Since the neighborhoods on each of the four quadrants of the community were vastly different we were concerned that opinions of some of the factions might not be equally heard. Since one sector of the target area included the gentrified historic district, another the

exact antithesis: a devastated blighted area where demolition had run amok and left a huge expanse of vacant brownfields. Fortunately, residents of the four participating districts were able to put territory aside and look at the focus area with like interests as all would benefit from its improvement.

The event itself was more successful than hoped for and nearly 200 people participated over the three-day period. The neighborhood participants spanned socio-economic and racial bounds, landlords, tenants and homeowners voiced their ideas and opinions openly. City representation was minimal allowing the community to develop their own concepts with the architects and planners.

While one additional professional (either architect or planner) would have been helpful, the residents were forced to do most of the work. If there had been more professionals, community participants would have been more reluctant to speak up.

This was the first time to work directly with the Urban Affairs Center of the University of Toledo to develop a project. While very interested in participating the UAC has a very small staff and has historically taken on more than they can effectively complete. The key staff person was offered co-chairmanship on the newly elected mayor's transition team and left the charrette planning process to a junior staff member. Fortunately, she was calm, easy to work with and even encouraged her students to participate during the event. Interestingly, efforts to recruit students and professors

from the geography and planning departments were not only rebuffed but also strictly forbidden due to internal politics at the University.

The young students that did participate were from a University of Toledo Cultural Anthropology class. As the students worked with the residents during the charrette event we noted a real bonding between them taking place. One student even stepped forward the final night and stated that working with the residents to develop their vision of the community had helped him overcome his pre-conceived ideas about the community that were based on its appearance.

One observance of the event was that there was an obvious feeling that the residents cared about their community but felt that the city didn't love them. Lack of city services to trim trees, repair broken streetlights, clean alleys and repair potholes in the street were evidence of these disinvestments. Finding the community's voice and helping them to express their needs will be an important follow-up activity.

The media was very generous in giving the event television airtime for the event and in several cases the event was the lead story and up to 2 ½ minutes of airtime used to tell the story. Press has written a couple of follow-up stories and all have asked us to keep them informed of our progress so they can continue the story.

At the culmination of the event, participants were so buoyed up by the experience it was obvious they did not want to leave. Many wanted to begin right away to take next steps in taking the vision to reality.

The afterglow from the event has been a topic of conversation in many arenas around the city. Participants have spoken to others about their very positive feelings about the charrette and their hope for the future.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Try to have one or two people on the Organizational Committee that have participated in this type of event before. It would have been helpful to explain in more detail how the process would work.



Have a logo.

**Old West End**

This was a great tool to use in

identifying the event and was used throughout the activities. It creates "brand recognition" and as it is used on projects and events in the future residents will be able to identify this as an output of their efforts to revitalize the community.

Issue Certificates of Appreciation. The sponsors, committees, students and professionals that assist particularly appreciate these.

T-shirts and food are necessary! Everyone likes getting a T-shirt, especially

if it has the event logo on the front. It creates a sense of belonging. Food is required to attract participants, and sharing a meal creates an opportunity for camaraderie to grow and share individual ideas and opinions, as well as deepening relationships.

More planning. You can never plan everything that will happen but the devil is in the details.

Communication. Use different mailing lists: purchased, auditor's office, etc. They seem to reach different groups of people. Some hit the property owner rather than the occupant; others are occupant driven. Use sign up sheets or names and addresses gathered from events to target those that have already expressed interest. Have volunteers deliver flyers announcing the event, not only does it add to the publicity of the project but it also helps neighbor meet neighbor.

Cool door prizes. By having really nice door prizes that everyone was interested in winning we were able to get names addresses and telephone numbers of attendees that could be used for future mailings lists.

Have a next step ready. If the process has gone well the participants will be eager to undertake something to keep the momentum underway.

Prepare to be thrilled. Watching people take responsibility for their community and sharing their vision is an exciting life-altering occasion.

**RESEARCH:**

Before undertaking the project it was important to understand the dynamics of the community, possible scenarios that might occur, develop an overview of how the events could unfold and think about the types of projects and programs that the community might decide were important. This required reading literature on the topic, talking to stakeholders and potential sponsors, investigating the current land issues, population demographics and preparing budget information. It also required developing a method to reach neighborhood constituents about the event and its outcomes.

**BUDGET:**

Facilitator (one night)	\$ 300
T-shirts (200 full color)	1,300
Logo	150
Publications	3,000
Postage	700
Maps	300
Banners	150
Signs	300
Food	1,000
Door prizes	350
Supplies	350
Misc.	<u>100</u>
Total	\$8,000

## **Time Line / Implementation Plan:**

### **TIMELINES**

The timelines to move the project forward include:

- February 2001: Project clarified
- March 2001: Identify key stakeholders to invite to a preliminary meeting
- April 2001: Hold first meeting with key stakeholders and University of Toledo staff to discuss project potential, identify other key participants, how to best reach neighborhood residents, date for the next meeting set.
- May to July 2001: Determine funding resources for the project and make applications, hold second meeting of neighborhood stakeholders.
- June 2001 – August 2001: Have funding in place, do literary research to identify other successful planning efforts. Plan for fall meetings.
- September to November 2001: Meetings with neighborhood residents and stakeholders
- December 2001: Draft plan assembled
- January 2002: Meetings with neighborhood residents to review and make changes
- February 2002: Present completed Plan to neighborhood and

celebrate their input.

- March 2002: Plan presented to Plan Commission for adoption.
- April 2002: Class Presentation and copies of the attendance lists with addresses

### **COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY:**

Internet: Used to keep in contact with Urban Affairs Center  
Research materials

Census Information

Zoning maps

Land Use Maps

Mailing List (Auditor's office)

Property Owners (Auditor's office)

Publisher: Develop newsletters and mailings

PowerPoint: Charrette findings for public displays

Digital Camera: To photograph area and transfer to CD-ROM for project and  
public use

EXCEL: Mailing Lists

### **CONCLUSIONS:**

Developing and holding the neighborhood design charrette was stressful to develop both personally and professionally. The target area and its leaders have been difficult for Neighborhoods In Partnership to work with over the years; so undertaking this project was met with considerable

trepidation. If it succeeded it would boost the organization's recognition and status within the community. If it were unsuccessful the residents would point to it as another failure of the community development organization to deliver any services to the neighborhood.

The process of just bringing the Organizing Committee along took significant effort as attendance and buy-in to the process was sketchy. At one point it seemed hopeless for the event to come to fruition, let alone be successful. However after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, a new energy resurfaced and I sensed a new commitment to the project and the community. Working with the Urban Affairs Center representative, we decided we would drag the committee through this kicking and screaming, if that were what was needed. Ultimately, you could feel the engagement of the Organizing Committee begin to occur as the date for the event neared. At the last meeting they were volunteering to make chili and bake cookies for the event.

The fact that Neighborhoods In Partnership had recently made a commitment of several million dollars to the neighborhood through the building of 35 new single family homes, helped significantly in the success of the event. It was very visible proof that this was not a forgotten community and a belief that there is value in living there and it can again become a thriving neighborhood.

With the ensuing success of the project a new sense of hope was established in the community and the community development corporation will be forced to determine how to keep the enthusiasm flowing.

The process itself seemed grueling at times, as this was not the only project underway at the CDC and at times attention was strongly pulled in other directions.

At the conclusion of the project seeing the results of bringing the community together to develop solutions to their own problems was invigorating. New leadership is developing in the community and a desire to make lasting change and the empowerment to do it for themselves is a heady experience. This is the beginning of real community economic development at its best.

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