

GREEN ISLAND/VERNON HILL COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, INC.

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

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A DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The Green Island area is located on the South side of the City of Worcester. It is bound by the Providence and Maine Railroad, and Quinsigamond Ave. to Providence Street and at Ballard Street on the South to Washington Square on the North.

Green Island/Vernon Hill Community Development Corporation, Inc. was founded in July 1986 out of the local Residents Task Force. It was founded to revitalize our neighborhood in the areas of housing and small business development.

The Green Island area is an old neighborhood that has suffered from many drastic changes. It has been a welcoming spot for many immigrants of different nationalities over the years. At present we have Polish, Spanish, Vietnamese and Irish as the dominate ones. There were many factories that provided jobs throughout the area. Now they are closed and the only large employer in the neighborhood is Wyman Gordon.

Housing in the area is mainly three story tenaments built in the 1880's. Many now need rehabilitation. The Green Island Task Force is anxious to help the neighborhood people realize that they need to visualize things differently to see themselves with new eyes and to plan for their own area.

The city in the past came in and took over 100 homes for a sewer project and the same happen when the highway Route 290 went in; without consulting the residents about the plans. Now the city is looking at renovating Union Station and including part of the Green Island area into the down town section of the zoning changes. The residential and business section of Green Island need to be developed and now is the time for the people to become an active part of it.

Father Micheal Foley, Pastor of St. John's Church, Bob Largess, a local merchant, and William Shea, Director of the local branch bank were the founders of developing the Green Island/Vernon Hill C.D.C. They saw what the Acres in Lowell was able to do and wanted to see that happen in our area.

The root problems are the same as any poor section of a city. The landlords will not or can not afford to fix up the buildings. The property

goes down and they rent to undesireables who destroy it more and create a bad name for the neighborhood. Then there becomes rapid turn over of clients. Business property is allowed to sit empty because of speculation. They become destroyed by vandales and then require too much money to rehabilitate. So we have a street of empty stores that destroy the looks of the area.

PROJECT GOALS

In my project this year I set out to establish the Green Island/Vernon Hill Community Development Corporation as an incorporated agency that would be able to work on housing and small business development. I wanted the experience of organizing the people and encouraging them to become members of the C.D.C. to be able to use their creative powers in bettering their neighborhood.

The C.D.C. goals are: 1) developing affordable housing (2) encouraging small business in the area (3) develop safer neighborhoods and (4) to develop programs for the young people.

These goals relate to the needs of the area as stated by the people. The neighborhood has been destroyed by the highway and sewerage project coming through it. The neighborhood needs a way to plan for its self and to be prepared when the city purposes things for the area, to know whether it^{is} something they want or not. The C.D.C. can be a way for this to happen as well as helping to do something for the rapidly deteriorating sections of our area.

The main goals of the C.D.C. for this past year were to get legally incorporated and to organize on a good solid foundation. Then our second goal, which we are working on now, is to begin a project to develop affordable housing in the area. Our project is the Upsala Street School which needs a great deal of rehabilitation. We are doing a survey to see if we have the support of the neighbors for this project.

Worcester Corporation Council, Inc. is helping us with technical assistance and they will help us to decide if this is too big a project for us to do at this time.

METHODS

We used the method of holding Gab Fest to involve the people in planning and being active members of our C.D.C. This has been a very effective method for us.

Gab Fest I was held August 13, 1986 - 100 people gathered for a pot luck then divided up into small discussion groups to share ideas and needs of the area. They surfaced the four major goals that we have worked on all year.

Gab Fest II was held November 1, 1986 - 35 people gathered to look at these four goals in depth and to ask people to volunteer to serve on committees and the board.

Gab Fest III was held June 30, 1987 - 70 people were present for a presentation by Sharon Hunt, "On what a community development corporation is and what it can do," and an explain of our By-Laws by Mark Scheafer. The residents then voted on the approval of the By-Laws and the Interim Board of Directors.

Gab Fest IV was held October 12, 1987 to celebrate our official incorporation and kick off our membership drive. An update report of our activities was given to the folks.

We followed a chart of work from June to September and this was very helpful to keep us on target with getting things done. We need to do another one now because too much of the work is falling on me. We all need to be involved in the long and short range planning so that the work can be delegated and accomplish what is most important.

We need to look at fundraising and grants seriously as we have a loan we have to begin to pay back as of January, 1988. None of the grants that we applied for have materialized. We have had a part-time staff person with the use of the neighborhood center's secretary which we also need to think about in planning our funding. It would be good for our project if we could find funding to have a full time staff person.

We were very fortunate to have a lawyer volunteer to help us with our By-Laws. We also had technical assistance all along from Worcester Corporation Council, Inc. They guided us in our board selection and

meetings. We also had one session from EOCD for board training. This is an area that we still need more direction as new issues come up.

We had a Businessmen's Luncheon as a way of reaching the merchants in our area. This was a great success and we consider doing this again as a way of keeping them informed of our activities. They have also been a great support financially.

Our greatest difficulty all along has been with one individual in the community that tries to undermine the C.D.C. from getting off the ground. We have had to have closed meetings or committee meetings to do planning. We have had to be very united as a board to be able to move forward as we have and stand up to her antics.

The greatest changes we have made would be in the style of our board meetings. In the beginning it was very informal and no one kept notes. Now we are more regular in our meetings and in keeping minutes. This is an area we will continue to need board training as new members come on the board.

We have done three surveys trying to get documentation for grants and the project we are studying the feasibility of now. I feel the board members are very dedicated and that things are going well for the Green Island/Vernon Hill Community Development Corporation, Inc.

RESULTS

The results of the project are that we have an active interim Board of Directors totaling twelve. They met regularly to study and approve the By-Laws and Articles of Organization drawn up by the lawyer, who donated his time.

It was great to have the legal services donated but this delayed us a few months because of his busy schedule. Also he was not familiar with C.D.C.'s so he had to do research to look into this. I feel that in some ways our By-Laws are much too detailed as a result of this. The Board members took their responsibility very seriously and put in many long hours going over the By-Laws to understand each one before they would approve them to be presented to the membership for approval.

At the first two Gab Fests we presented the idea of a community development corporation to help revitalize the neighborhood and had the people share their ideas and goals. This was a good method to get the people out and sharing with each other what their goals for the area are. There was also refreshments offered at all of the Gab Fest.

Our four goals came from the people and are:

- 1) To develop decent affordable housing.
- 2) To maintain safe neighborhoods
- 3) To encourage small business development
- 4) To develop more services for our young people

The third Gab Fest was held for the people to read and hear about the By-Laws and to vote to accept them and the Intern Board of Directors. We had Sharon Hunt, as our guest speaker to explain what a Community Development Organization is about and what it can do. Mark Scheafer, from Worcester Corporation Council, Inc., explained the By-Laws to the folks and then a vote was taken 23 to 4 in favor of accepting them. Sharon was a great help with her enthusiasm and examples of what a C.D.C. program can do for an area because we have one person in the community who is very destructive towards the organizing of the C.D.C.

The fourth Gab Fest was held October 12th with a cook-out to celebrate Columbus Day and receiving our Articles of Organization back from the State House. We also updated the people on the activities of the C.D.C. and kicked off our membership drive. We now have 58 members.

Because of the diversity in the languages spoken in our area we felt strongly that it would be good to have the pamphlet we were developing be in English, Spanish and Polish.

This was time consuming to find people who could translate it into the spirit of the C.D.C. and not just words. We wanted to accomplish two things with this flyer; 1) to explain what a C.D.C. is and how the Green Island/Vernon Hill C.D.C. came into existence and 2) to use it for a membership sign up sheet. We have not really gone door to door or to speak to groups yet but had talked about doing this. The pamphlets do not of

themselves bring in membership it takes the personal contacts.

We felt strongly that we had to have a site plan to develop a project and it would help in applying for grants. We hired a M.I.T. city planning student for the summer for \$6,000. This project had many problems along the way. It was a bigger project than any of us realized. To get up dated housing data we had to do a survey of vacant land and housing conditions. Some board members along with several volunteers worked on this project. Although this was a good contact for us with the people it was time consuming. We could not get all of the area done. Also it would have been good if we had our newsletter ready or pamphlet to give out and get members at the same time but we were waiting for our incorporation to be completed before we could do the membership drive.

This student did do us a great service in explaining at several meetings about the zoning changes the new city master plan is proposing and how we as a group could be prepared when the public meetings come up. We need to be ready as a group to propose what we would like to see happen for our area. Zoning and survey material are in the appendics.

One of the difficulties we had was to keep close supervision on the student and to get him to come to the board meetings that we wanted him at. He had a language problem and sometimes we allowed for that as the reason. He also went off with all the maps and survey material which we wanted him to leave. Hopefully we will be a little more businesswise next time.

The Businessman's Luncheon was held to explain our purpose and goals to the local merchants. There was a good exchange and it was an excellent way to meet the owners. The information package we gave out is in the appendics. The businessmen said they would like to have an update periodically.

Our publicity has been good while Worcester Corporation Council, Inc. was helping us to get organized. They also were doing a commercial study in the area. We did one newsletter and have a committee working on the second one. It is hard to depend on volunteers because you are dependent on their time frames. I keep reminding them of their task because they forget with the many other things they get involved in.

Our pamphlets are finished and a membership card to give the person when they sign up. All of the board members have some of the pamphlets in each language and are responsible to try to have new members for each board meeting. It has been slow but after the holidays we will put more effort into getting to speak to some of our local groups and churches.

We have applied for our tax-exempt and had to resubmit it for some small things we omitted. This has been a learning experience for me because until you actually do it you do not realize the details involved in all these forms.

We have applied for five different grants, three of which we have already received our refusal notices. Our biggest problems here is that we are always racing with the deadlines and do not have time to get some technical advise. Also another problem is we do not have a clearly defined project yet and are asking for seed money.

We are now studying a project for rehabilitation of a school into one and two bedroom apartments in the Upsala Street school. In order to find out our market we did a house to house survey to test out if there were enough elderly owning three deckers in the area that would sell and move into the remodeled condos in the school and we would manage the three deckers for low-income housing. We found out that our theory did not work out because the elderly turn their homes over to their children. This area had a lot of young families and a lot of relatives living in the apartments.

We proceeded after a committee meeting to do a telephone survey to see if we would have enough area support for rental or co-op housing to be in there as there is grant money available for this type of housing. The board members have been very co-operative to give time to these surveys. Results are being tabulated by Worcester Corporation Council, Inc. and they are giving us technical assistance with drawing up a financial package. Without grant money it will be impossible to make it over into affordable apartments. Our C.D.C. did go to the first public hearing about the school and were instrumental in getting the City to change from putting it up for auction to opening it up to proposals. The City has not released the floor plans yet so it is very hard to get actual figures worked up and a proposal ready. We feel the City may move fast when they are ready and we want to be prepared with a good plan. At this time it looks like a 2.5 million dollar project and we need to have the facts to know if we can work with it or if it is too big a project for us.

ANALYSIS / CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

In analysis of this project I feel we have taken it step by step to build on a solid foundation so that it will continue whether I am here or not. The intern board members have also taken their responsibilities seriously to lay a good foundation for those who will follow. They all share in the dream and goals of building up the Green Island/Vernon Hill area with affordable housing and more small businesses.

The key to success of the community development corporation is to involve the local people in the projects. This takes a lot of patience, education and belief that it can happen.

There is a real need to have a full time person to work on this project in order to reach the people, to do the grant writing and research necessary for the projects. It is also necessary to attend local and state meetings around housing issues to keep up with what is happening.

It is very important to know the political workings of the city, state and neighborhood. It has taken me this year to learn all of this so in away I am only just beginning to be known and to know them. One has to build up a reputation in the field and neighborhood to get any action done.

The board feels in some ways that the Upsala Street school is too large a project for us to undertake but that at least when it was in the paper we did take action to go to the hearing. We will learn from taking steps to look at this project and our decision will be a technically informed one which ever way we choose to take. We have to learn how to take a public stand on issues as an informed board and not to do it on hear say or feelings.

We may need to look into a simple visible first project to get the support of more local people as well as for funding.

From the grants we have written and the business planning classes I realize that we need to have our project spelled out better in order to get seed money. The grants we have written have not been definite enough in our approach about what we are going to do and how we are going to accomplish it.

Our next steps as a board is to do an other chart of organization for the next six months and one year. We need to look at goals for funding, membership, paying off our loan, and projects that need development. We need to develop a good strategy plan for the board and staff person.

In working with the Green Island/Vernon Hill community I have had to deal with one strong influential person in the community who is against the C.D.C.. This has made the board pull together more to be able to explain what a C.D.C. is about as well as stand together on issues that come up. I have had to be very diplomatic to try to win her over.

I was new to the community and had to learn about the agencies and politics. As a group we need to be more aggressive in learning how to use the political systems as well as what the other agencies offer.

I have been satisfied with the progress we have been making although it would be nice to have the money we need to follow our dream without the frustration of wondering how we can do a project.

We also need to do much more leadership and business development training with the board so we will be able to understand the projects and take a more active part in them in the future. If I did it over again I would probably take more of a direct leadership role in the beginning with the board to move things along faster.

In order to continue the C.D.C we need to do some serious planning and research about the direction of our projects. We need to give serious thought to preparing for the board election in the Spring.

This kind of work can not be done without some experience in the field. I recommend that the full-time staff person should be experienced or work under supervision for awhile.

For myself I would like to work under someone experienced in this field for a year before I would like to be on my own.