



Russell Transformation Plan

Task Force Meeting Minutes - **HOUSING**

September 22, 2015 - Russell Apartments (1718 W Muhammad Ali Blvd) - 10am

Introduction – Johnetta Ferguson, Co-Lead

- Explanation of her connection to housing (Community Ventures), welcome to new comers, task forces still in information gather phase, no concrete solutions yet, once information gathered, will work towards formulating plan with task force help

Lisa Thompson, New Directions

- Welcome to Russell Apartments (owned by New Directions), 83 units of affordable housing

Introduction of other task force members and their affiliations

Laura Grabowski, Co-Lead

- **Welcome**
- **Review of photo voice activity held by People Task Force**
 - o Bus/walking tour of Russell to highlight neighborhood history
 - o ~40 resident and stakeholder participants were given cameras to chronicle what they liked or did not like about their neighborhood
 - o Reviewed positives and negatives found, lots of good conversations, but difficult to capture all of them due to being on a bus
 - o Positive feedback, people want to do it again
 - o Good opportunity for people to learn the neighborhood, boundaries, major corridors, landmarks, history, and encourage task force to learn these things as well if they were unable to participate in the tour, or to take advantage if opportunity presented again
 - Not here to erase history, good to know what assets and challenges exist and how they can be reimaged, maintained or revitalized
 - Good to see the housing architecture of Russell, quite varied from mansions to shot guns
 - o Pictures taken will be presented at the October 10th design workshop
 - o Roughly 30 residents involved, good way to engage them
 - o If Housing Task Force wants to do something similar, can try to think of creative ways to engage youth

Jeana Dunlap, Director of VAPS for Metro

- **Discussion regarding blight and vacant and abandoned properties in Russell**
 - o Recap of previous efforts
 - spent time looking at whole neighborhood and potential neighborhood approaches, zeroing in on “opportunity” sites

- Want to focus on blighted and vacant properties and existing homeowners
- Some sites have already been earmarked for treatment, still have other small land opportunities to focus on
- Determine Task Force recommendations for those properties and also understand what is already happening in Louisville and/or West Louisville that Task Force could piggyback on to avoid duplicating efforts
 - Even if not currently in West Louisville, could it be brought there?
 - What can get started now?
- Existing Homeowners
 - Any current programs that support existing homeowners who want to stay in neighborhood?
 - Existing homeownership in Russel at 18% or 19%, very low
 - Donnie Adkins is supervisor over the City's home rehab department – Metro has many programs either city-wide or in targeted areas, and City has budgeted a small amount of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars (\$200,000) for homeowners in Russell, have had trouble developing programs for Russell since homeowner rate is so low
 - Need to decide best way and location in neighborhood to focus money
 - Looking to fix up the exterior of the homes, \$15,000 per home maximum – roof, windows, doors, paint, etc.
 - Running into issues with so many of the homes occupied by renters, since the program is targeting homeowners, may only be 2 owners on a block of 10, where fixing up two houses on a block doesn't create that much effect for beautifying the block, so is that the best use of funds?
 - Need to figure out a roadmap for using funds, to prevent incorrect spending
 - Program can only target owner-occupied homes, not investors
 - Owners who occupy their house already invested in the neighborhood, so good to target them and help them protect their investment, supersedes other reinvestment, helps show that the Choice Initiative and the City care about them and appreciate their investment in Russell
 - Highlights why these two issues are together, because a homeowner may be right next to a blighted or abandoned property
 - Want to make sure owners stay in the neighborhood
 - Should focus on how to help City have a targeted plan for investment in Russell, and get that pool of money to grow
 - New Directions wrapping up NSA program in Portland that focused on about 80 homes
 - Since such a small amount of money, maybe focus on a straight roofing program instead of full façade, since most beneficial improvement to the structure of the house, then other programs like Repair Affair can look for different ways to improve

- Don't look simply at districts around FoodPort or Cedar Street project, look to data to tell you where the homeowners are, a cluster of homes elsewhere can become another cell of energy in neighborhood
- For things like Repair Affair, can also focus and try to recruit volunteers like CARR, to help within their own neighborhood, can do things that don't cost as much like painting
 - Repair Affair traditionally helps 150 homes a year, 1,600 volunteers through the whole county area, 3 or 4 homes in Russell – resource netting
- Would also be good to reach out to organizations that are interested in doing block by block rehab (HPI, CVC, NDHC), pick a site, focus on the area around it, renters vs. homeowners, then use various programs to help the whole target area to show concentrated change
- Has city done mapping of the neighborhood yet?
 - Current program evolved from previous ECAD program that looked at homes with code violations, assessed if they were owner-occupied, and helped owners fix violations
 - Had focused on only Shawnee and Schnitzelburg, now incorporating Russell, so at this point do not know who the home owners are in Russell, but information available
- 4,802 housing units in neighborhood, 864 owner-occupied
 - Not all of them in need of repair help
 - Seem to be opportunities for synergistic partnerships around targeted resources
 - All blighted and vacant/abandoned properties have been mapped, know about who owns some
 - Don't have as much info about smaller, scattered site units, outreach worker windshield survey will help gather information about those properties at street level
 - Should map out game plan with help of City funds, because could be a program to start right away
 - SDAT team suggested during their first visit that revitalization focus on a full, highly visible block, even perhaps just painting. Can help gain support and excitement, roofs are important, but don't give the same visual impact that paint and landscaping can
 - Both need to be addressed, two different targets, maybe two different resource lines - one wider and one more targeted
 - Also need to know what kind of homeowner there is, will create multiple different scenarios for programs and aid
 - Need to gather data on homeowners, maybe a focus group, to not only identify owners in dire straits, but ones who also have a choice of where they live, why are some leaving?

- More that we understand about what will help residents protect their investment the better
 - Property taxes
 - Tax moratorium program (administered by PVA)
 - If property is renovated, taxes can go up, can be detrimental to owner and discourage improvement
 - Not as strong as it used to be through loss of partners
 - Can it apply to a whole neighborhood? May be difficult
 - Delinquent taxes – at risk for a third party tax lien purchasers, presents other dangers and risks to an owner
 - Looking to set-aside tax bills in a target area, help with third party issues and foreclosure risks
 - Estate planning
 - Depends on age distribution of homeowners
 - Improper or deficient estate planning leads to a lot of abandonment because housing stock is so old
 - House may be in family for generations, but when there is no one to carry on after a death, leads to the abandoned large mansions, or get tied up in legal issues, etc.
 - One West was talking about making an investment in 3rd party taxes.
 - Compassionate third party tax program
 - Have a dialogue with existing HOs, a focus group.
 - Telling families to hold on – protect them from selling low. This kind of process is already trying to tip the market – speculators coming in and buying up properties.
- Small Business help
 - Louisville Metro Government 3% Façade loans from Metco for small businesses
 - No current list of all Louisville Metro resources, task force meetings helping pull together that list – Donnie’s HO list and Laura’s commercial list-
 - Sustainability department - green infrastructure improvements for business owners – match dollar for dollar up to \$
 - Still trying to get green roofs off the ground
 - Pull the data available from the existing records
 - Have the NOWs help with spreading the word, educating
 - Get data and info from City resources, NDHC’s Repair Affair, if there are any restrictions for home owners
 - Who can bring capacity to this efforts – have to be able to implement. Cue those agencies up so they can build capacity. Habitat.

- Sustainable Dept. tree efforts – several groups doing robust tree programs.
 - Blighted and underutilized properties
 - Of the 4,802, 20% are vacant or 913 (probably a third are deceased property owners, a large number are dormant LLC's or non-profits, in bad status with State and can't conduct business anymore, have to take them to court to erase entanglements.
 - Some properties are a liability. No one including City doesn't want to buy it.
 - Over 1,000 properties in Russell that are on the historic register. Jeana looks at every one of them. Does an evaluation of what it would cost to renovate.
 - Important to see where liability properties area. Get them on a map.
 - Jeana has shared data with EJP on outstanding fines on properties
 - Early stages of developing a better system of classifying the structure according to severity of deterioration - emergency, structural or administrative. Rate them 1, 2 or 3.
 - All circles back to shoring up the homeowners. Losing good neighbors.
 - How to find and focus on people who are on the edge of moving.
 - Need clear titles, and clean transferrable properties to incent investors.
 - Compassionate buying and banking of properties for the development process.
 - Landbank acquires, clear titles and banks for future use – HO, commercial.
 - In years past, administrations have frowned upon on acquiring properties that are liabilities. With the new goal to reduce vacant and abandoned structures, it's imperative to take properties. Take donations from individuals, investors. Going into a conversation today about liens.
 - Can set up Memorandums Of Agreement with non-profits to help expedite the process of getting properties to them. Could also set ups a special policy or process for certain areas, like Russell.
 - LMHA does have first right of refusal for properties for redevelopment purposes. COD (Contract, Option or Deed) list.
 - Can we put pressure on insurance companies to insure, or the City's self-insurance plan offer some respite to the uninsured - there is a state insurance option. How do we get that option to these households?
 - Focus of redlining issue today is around insurance. City is working on this.
 - Small strategies can help. Once people have paid off their mortgage – paying insurance on their own.
 - Legal Aid is very interested in helping with VAP issue.
 - Our recommendations - such as how to utilize these properties – will become part of the TF plan.
 - This Transformation Plan ultimately gets adopted and codified by Metro Government.
- **Action items on this topic:**
- Get the rest of the data re: homeowners and small businesses in Russell
 - Not a lot of clusters or big assemblages of land. Challenges of sites being scattered, small.

- What's the appetite for the Choice program?
 - Have some groundwork to get more information/involvement
- RKG looked at market factors, Jeana could get that to us– where the hardest hit areas, marginal areas, most marketable
 - Policy decision was to focus on the marginal areas
 - Don't currently have enough resources to go the hardest hit areas
 - Stage approach over time passed on status
 - Beecher site is the priority site or zone – by default it's a jumping off point, as well as FoodPort and Chef Space. Build upon places where investment is underway
 - Private sector has a role here – we are trying to set conditions to where they will come to the area and invest their dollars in a responsible way.
 - Working with existing tools and expanding on tools.
 - Preliminary market data in, but a lot of questions.
 - Discussion about the off-site replacement housing – how much in Russell versus other neighborhoods. Maybe discuss at the next meeting
- Reminder for the Community Design Workshop
- 574-5850: Office of Housing and Community
 - www.louisvilleky.gov has a pre-application available
- Follow up with Donnie to do an article for the November newsletter
- NOWs can help spread information.
- **Next meeting, October 27th, Tuesday, 10:00 at the Russell Apartments**