

Technical Assistance to Urban Core Communities
Final Report
December 2008

Submitted by Sheri L. Smith
Principal Investigator
Landscape Architecture/Regional and Community Development Department

I am pleased to submit this final report for the *Providing Technical Assistance to Urban Core Communities* grant. This report will summarize projects and activities that have taken place over the past two years, emphasizing the activities since the previously submitted progress report. As a reminder: the grant was requested to support works with the Washington Wheatley Neighborhood Association as they endeavor to improve their social, economical and physical capital in order to participate in NeighborhoodsNow, an initiative that invests \$23 million towards rebuilding targeted urban-core neighborhoods. The Association had been active prior to KSU's involvement. However, their success had been sporadic and neighborhood involvement had been limited to a handful of individuals. The objective of this project was knowingly broad and did not address the specific actions necessary to achieve the neighborhood association's goal.

Since the time of the initial application, the context under which the Association operates has changed in three significant ways. First, Kansas City elected a new Mayor and all councilpersons responsible for the 3rd District. Second, the crime rate in Kansas City has reached a volume not experienced in years with a majority of violent crimes occurring in the 3rd District and the Washington Wheatley neighborhood. Finally, financial constraints have caused uncertainty whether LISC will be funding a next NeighborhoodsNow round. In response, the Association has modified their approach from community development (outside in) to community building (inside out). They've diversified their activities to address more entrepreneurial and sustainable issues, partnered with a variety of institutions/associations and focused on smaller projects in anticipation that these projects will act as a catalyst for larger developments.

Outcomes and Outputs

This section outlines the activities and projects undertaken by the Association and greater neighborhood. KSU was not directly involved with every activity. In some cases we provided technical assistance in completing and submitting grants, attended initial meetings with community residents or made initial contact with a given organization or, KSU's presence in the community was used as leverage in obtaining additional participation.

Social Capital

This is the area in which the Association has made its greatest strides. The Association continues to enhance the bonding capital among the residents as evidenced by a consistent increase in attendance at neighborhood meetings; numbers range from 31 to as many as 70, depending on the issue. Other activities include:

- A second and third newsletter was distributed to over 900 residents (See Appendix). This resulted in increased meeting attendance by both residents and businesses. The 1st newsletter was hand delivered, the 2nd and 3rd newsletters were mailed directly to households and businesses. Immediately after the mailing, numerous phone calls were received by the Association President to find out more regarding the Association and the type of services they provide. Stories for the newsletter have been progressively submitted by the city, community businesses and Association President. With each newsletter, the Association takes on a greater role in its distribution. The Association plans to continue with a semi-annual newsletter
- Aim-4- Peace is an initiative where residents respond to violent crime in the neighborhood by holding vigils and marches immediately following notification of a crime. The Association, with

assistance from KSU, applied for the city sponsored Aim-4-Peace grant and was one of 4 recipients. Success of the program requires the community to march with the victim's families and establish a presence in the neighborhood. To date, over 15 vigils and marches have been held.

- By-laws were revised to allow for Association officers to hold office for two years versus one. This allows for consistency in leadership. Association has also paid all fees necessary to retain their 501(c)3 status.
- Private businesses within the community now attend the monthly Association meetings and are developing a local business council.

In addition to the bonding capital, the Association has been working on its bridging capital by establishing partnerships with groups external to the community. The list of interested partners ebbs and flows as the Association attempts to improve the quality of life for its residents. Partners that have participated since the beginning of the grant, not including KSU, include:

- UMKC – provided student studio time to complete community survey and provided a summer intern. UMKC also helped to draft the neighborhood's Action Plan which won the Missouri APA 2008 Outstanding special project and collaboration award (copy on file at CECD office).
- City of Kansas City attends Association meetings and discusses illegal dumping and trash pick-up
- Swope Community Builders in partnership with Zimmer Development at one time were proposing to develop a small industrial park. They have stepped out as the developer however, the plans remain on the table.
- Benton Boulevard Beautification Leadership Team is responsible for the coordination of tree planting. Their long-term concern is focused on Benton Blvd. which runs through the targeted neighborhood.
- Pat Jordan, Private Contractor facilitates meetings between the Association and other developers.
- Audubon Society through a grant application submitted by the Association and UMKC, is committed to working with two neighborhood elementary schools to produce a community garden.
- ACORN partnership to co-host rallies as part of the AIM-4-Peace program. ACORN is no longer involved due to problems at the national level. However, adjacent neighborhoods have agreed to participate since crime is a concern for everyone in the 3rd District.
- Kansas City Police District regularly attends Association meetings and has created a committee of residents to address next steps to increase police presence in the community.
- At the request of the Association President, the Legal Aide of Missouri is providing information and hosting seminars for residents wanting to learn more about beneficiary deeds and other their home ownership issues.

Political Capital

The Association wanted to demonstrate to decision makers that Washington Wheatley residents cared about their community. The biggest concern expressed by politicians and other decision makers was that the community was not organized no consistent in its activities. Once the council members began receiving the newsletter and articles concerning Washington Wheatley appeared in the KC Star, growing attention is now being paid to the community.

- The Mayor and/or his representatives as well a City Council representatives periodically attend neighborhood association monthly meetings
- Two residents sit on adhoc committees with the police and city council. They then report to the Association planned activities and discuss strategies for getting Washington Wheatley ranked higher on the list of selected projects

Physical & Environmental Capital

The activities in this area represent the ultimate goal as seen by the community; a neighborhood that looks different than it has in the past. However, residents realize that much more has to be done before this can occur on a larger scale. Until that time, the neighborhood has or is pursuing the below list of activities.

Details of what is being proposed can be found in the Action Plan.

- Audubon society adopted two elementary schools for demonstration community gardens
- Lot clean up and planting of 50 trees
- Deeded 10 vacant lots from Move up, a now defunct non profit, the lots will be used as collateral in negotiation with developers. There is also possibility of creating a land trust.
- Plan for a 21st green corridor, see plan that would help reduce particulate matter in the community by creating a buffer along the west edge of I-70. The studies have been done and completed: next steps are the adoption of the plan by the city.
- Proposed new construction of ten housing by Pat Jordan

Human Capital

Efforts in this area were added after the grant began. Residents realized that given the high level of crime and challenges facing the Kansas City School district, that enticing economic capital into the community wouldn't happen until the community built up their labor force and reduced perceived risk. In being consistent with their revised community building strategies, the Association started with small and focused on groups that they perceived they could have an impact, elementary school students and the elderly.

- Adopt-a-grandparent started at one of the elementary schools to pair retired residents with students to focus on basic skills in the classroom.
- Audubon society adopted two elementary schools for community gardens that demonstrated how to grow and eat healthy food.
- Aim-4-Peace next step is to seek an avenue to provide job training as an alternative to crime. This is still in the planning stages but was recognized as the need after the successful 1st step of the Aim-4-Peace initiative.
- At the request of the Association President, the Legal Aide of Missouri is providing information and hosting seminars for residents wanting to learn more about beneficiary deeds and other their home ownership issues.

Self Assessment

Even though the probability of a next round of the Neighborhoods Now program is low, the initial matrix that was used as an index for possible participation in the program was completed for December 2008. Completing this matrix helps the Association see how much progress they have made in two years.