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Executive Summary- Re-Thinking the Future of Cleveland's Neighborhood Developers

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Executive Summary
Re-Thinking the Future of Cleveland's Neighborhood Developers:
Interim Report

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About the Study

Community developers must take a hard look at their current organizations, practices and strategies and adapt to emerging conditions. Doing so is not surrendering to pessimism, but recognizing a pathway forward. Realizing the opportunity requires that community developers re-think approaches to their work. Funders and investors have recognized that plans and strategies need to be re-worked. A strategy based on physical development made sense in a particular historical moment of cheap credit and rising property values. Those circumstances no longer exist and the challenge for the future is thinking through new roles for neighborhood developers. The fundamental job of community development is to improve the lives of community residents by improving the places in which they live.

The purpose of this study is to help practitioners, funders, policy makers, and applied researchers understand the opportunities for, and the challenges to "growing" or extending the community development system beyond housing and physical development. It is a two-phase study. Phase I identified strategies for the future based on a review of best practices, trends and ideas. We conducted 42 Interviews with funders, practitioners, city and county agencies, and intermediaries. We also looked at community development funding and the broader community development system. Phase II will focus on strategies for capacity building and implementation.

Defining Community Development

In the words of Urban Institute researcher, Margery Austin Turner, 2010:

> "What we should be thinking about is how to revitalize the places in which people live, how to enable people to take advantage of opportunities that are located in different places around the region, and how to make connections between where they live and regional opportunities." (Suzanne Morse, 2011. "Communities Revisited, The Best Ideas of the Last Hundred Years", National Civic Review, Spring 2011, p.8.)

Observations

The following are observations and impressions garnered from the interviews:

- CDCs have made important contributions to the city and its neighborhoods. Cleveland would be a far different, more challenged city if they had not existed.
- Some CDCs include remarkably talented community developers; these talents must not be lost.
- CDCs have been successful in innovative, place-making projects. They have not been as successful in empowering residents and connecting them to regional economic opportunities.
- CDCs are seeking out non-traditional partners such as settlement houses, schools, community health centers and other neighborhood serving organizations and institutions.
- Not every CDC needs to be a housing developer.
- Mergers and consolidations will result in fewer CDCs.
- Neighborhoods with assets, including the strongest "social capital" often have the strongest CDCs.
- All CDCs do not have to "look alike"; neighborhoods have different assets.

Four strategies for the future

As the industry contracts and service areas change, we expect that all CDCs will need an integrated, thoughtful, measured set of activities to address the neighborhood planning and development issues. CDCs are increasingly being called upon to address the broader challenges in their neighborhoods: housing, schools, healthy lifestyles, land reuse and commercial development.

1. Community Building, an enhanced approach to community organizing
2. Housing and Community Development
3. Schools and Community Development
4. Health and Community Development

1. Community Building; An Enhanced Approach to Community Organizing. We propose a more broadly conceived role for CDCs in community organizing that will require an enhanced set of skills and additional funding, beyond what is normally associated with existing positions. This role is more accurately described as a community builder or weaver, rebuilding or reweaving the fabric of communities. In an era of contraction, with an emphasis on partnerships and collaborations, there is a need for a much greater focus on building relationships. Within neighborhoods, there are opportunities for partnership with other neighborhood serving organizations. Across neighborhoods, there are opportunities for partnering with other CDCs and city and county agencies and funders. The expanded role of community builders would be to:

- Connect residents to education, health and economic opportunities both within and across neighborhoods and the region.
- Identify and leverage neighborhood assets for neighborhood benefit.
- Connect residents to planning and development projects of the CDC.

There is cautious interest among funders for expanded funding for this type of community building, provided there are agreed upon, measureable results and strong leadership from the CDC. It is viewed as part of a broader strategy to make Cleveland neighborhoods more sustainable, more vibrant, and more economically viable. Funding, if it is to be effective, must be multi-year.

This strategy is viewed as a cornerstone of CDC work going forward. The strategies that follow depend on this enhanced "organizing" capacity.

2. Housing and Community Development. Housing is a necessary strategy for improving the quality of life in neighborhoods, but it is not sufficient to revive markets in Cleveland's neighborhoods. Four important points about housing:

- Emphasis on affordable rental housing in target blocks and neighborhoods.
- Not every CDC needs to be a housing developer.
- Strategic demolition, planning and re-use of vacant land.
- Emphasis on partnerships.

Funding for housing and development will require even greater partnership and collaboration with traditional and non-traditional partners. There is a national movement by funders like Living Cities, the MacArthur Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to support broad community change initiatives in target neighborhoods.

3. Schools and Community Development. No community can develop successfully and hold its population in the long run if it does not provide children with a good education. The strategy around schools and CDCs includes:

- A good school in every neighborhood
- Schools as center of community; neighborhood orientation
- Relationships between school and community

- National foundation funding

The goal is to lessen the school/community divide and allow schools to become contributors to community development. We envision a narrowly defined role, providing a safe space for resident/school interaction and advocating on behalf of the schools.

National funders including the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation and Knowledge Works Foundation have all funded various school and community development studies and projects.

4. Health and Community Development. There are a number of initiatives underway in Cleveland's neighborhoods designed to reduce health disparities and encourage healthy lifestyles, including "Place Matters" and the Healthy Cleveland Initiative. As CDCs get more involved in health issues, their role is to:

- Connect residents with health assessments and health centers
- Encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce health disparities

In 2009, over $1 billion in grants was made available for community health facilities from the federal government. CDCs and Community Health Centers (CHCs) share a common focus on community empowerment and development. Working together, they can improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. CDCs can act as developers of CHCs and develop partnerships around health and community issues. Community builders have an important role to play.

Conclusion

- Collaboration and consolidation will be the way forward
- Build on strengths
- Adapt what works
- Strengthen existing and seek out new partnerships
- Invest in development and service projects that yield a return

Next Steps

In Phase II, we will focus on strategies for capacity building and implementation. We plan to delve further into the ideas that hold the most traction, based on feedback from the community and funders.

- How can CDCs make the transition from housing development as a driver to housing development as a component of a larger strategy focusing on building community and stabilizing neighborhoods?
- How can they best move to an approach of collective impact?
- What capacity needs to be added to take on these new roles?
- As needs shift to the suburbs, how can the system respond?
- What role can Cleveland State's Levin College play in educating the next generation of community developers?