

# URBAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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The Indiana Cooperative Extension Service has extension experience in urban as well as rural areas. About 600,000 persons live in the northwestern Indiana urbanized area, which is essentially part of the greater Chicago metropolis. One industry, steel, dominates the private economy, but no one political jurisdiction predominates in the public sector. There are seventeen municipal corporations in Lake County alone. Three of these—Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago—are second-class cities. Several suburban communities are rapidly acquiring major stature as people move out from the larger cities, a phenomenon typical of many urban areas. Just over one-fifth of Lake County's population is black. Most are in Gary, which is more than one-half black. One-fourth of East Chicago is black and one-fourth of Latin ancestry. A significant part of the area's white population is of East European ancestry.

## THE LAKE COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

In 1965, Professor J. Carroll Bottum of Purdue, and A. D. Luers, then the Lake County Cooperative Extension Administrator, interviewed more than eighty persons throughout the county and asked: (1) What are the most important problems in Lake County? (2) Would a committee of citizens to study these problems and their solutions be effective? (3) Which five persons should be on such a committee if one were formed? Many problems were mentioned. The responses indicated that a committee could be useful but that overnight success should not be expected. Many persons were nominated to the committee. As a result of the interviews, twenty-five persons met to initiate the Lake County Community Development Committee (LCCDC). The membership now numbers about forty. In addition, heads of local governments and local state legislators are being invited to become associate members.

The committee decided immediately that it was a study and catalytic group, not an action organization, and that its focus would be on multicomunity problems and not on problems peculiar to any single community.

To assist the committee toward its objective, two advisors are

provided by each of the three institutions of higher education located in the county—Purdue University's Calumet Campus, Indiana University Northwest, and St. Joseph's Calumet College. The Lake County Cooperative Extension Administrator acts as coordinator. The state Cooperative Extension Service provides a research person, located in the area, and consultants.

The committee initially formed standing subcommittees based on major problem areas identified in the interviews. Over time, the standing subcommittees have been allowed to dissolve and ad hoc subcommittees formed as needed. Persons outside the committee, with interests and knowledge on the specific problem under study, also participate in these subcommittees.

The chairmanship of the full committee is changed annually, in a deliberate effort to move it around the county. This provides a more varied perspective and avoids having the committee identified too closely with any single community. Chairmen normally name an informal executive committee of six to ten persons.

While subcommittees meet on call, the full committee meets regularly for lunch and discussion on the second Friday of each month. Full committee meetings usually last an hour and a half. Some topics are covered at one meeting, but many are discussed over several meetings. Normally, a resource person makes a brief presentation to initiate the discussion. Knowledgeable and interested guests are invited to participate. Over time there has been a trend toward involving representatives of follow-up groups in the discussion. This enables them to benefit from the discussion and helps insure greater subsequent cooperation. Where an appropriate follow-up group does not exist, the committee helps to initiate one. Individual committee members may participate in these groups.

Subsequent to the original problem survey, committee members have been regularly polled to help identify problems of concern for the LCCDC. Other individuals or groups are also polled, orally or through written questionnaires.

Detailed minutes of each full committee meeting are distributed to the members and to several other persons. The mailing list is expanding. Background study reports and survey results are distributed to committee members and several additional persons. Brief reports are sometimes distributed more widely.

The flow of information to and from the committee is enhanced through contacts between individual committee members and their friends and associates. Members of the press regularly attend the

monthly meetings. Their knowledge of the communities can be useful. Their articles also help disseminate information. The committee frequently sponsors or cosponsors conferences attended by relatively large audiences. These conferences serve to disseminate information and to obtain inputs on specific subjects from a larger number of people.

#### SOME RESULTS

Some results of this kind of endeavor are not easily traceable. However, others can be more directly linked to the LCCDC.

Existing United Funds and alternative structures were examined by an ad hoc study committee of citizens and officials, formed and stimulated by the LCCDC. This committee's recommendation of a combined fund was approved and supported by the LCCDC. In turn, a steering committee guided the development of the Northwest Indiana United Fund, Inc., which combined ten of the eleven funds in the county. Funds raised increased substantially. A component organization developed to help evaluate and guide fund expenditures. Since then, the eleventh fund has joined the combination.

The committee invited the board members and directors of the seven library districts in the county to one of its regular monthly meetings to discuss issues relevant to library services. The discussion led to the conclusion that the establishment of a reciprocal book-use agreement would be desirable. A steering committee of library officials developed an agreement among five of the districts. Under this agreement patrons of any one of the districts may borrow books from any other district without purchasing an additional card. This effort, resulting in savings to the individual and more efficient use of library funds, is leading to further cooperation. Discussions with the other two districts continue.

An LCCDC subcommittee invited the board members and directors of the nineteen park districts in the county to meetings to discuss their mutual problems. After three meetings the group decided to establish its own informal organization. This organization meets regularly each month with the objective of eliminating unnecessary duplications and developing complementary and improved park and recreation services.

Representatives of forty multicomunity public or quasi-public organizations attended a meeting convened by a subcommittee of the LCCDC. One hundred fifty were invited. They concluded that closer coordination is important, not only to avoid duplication of effort but also to provide services which one agency alone might

not provide. Several agencies jointly prepared a Human Services Directory, which lists and describes the services of several hundred community organizations in a three-county area.

An LCCDC subcommittee held several meetings of public agencies whose effective planning and operation depend on the use of significant amounts of reliable data. This group subsequently formed its own committee, sponsored conferences and study meetings, and is developing a regional information system.

The LCCDC has been focusing on mass transportation problems. The Regional Planning Commission has drafted a legislative bill which will permit the creation of a regional mass transit authority. The bill is undergoing hearings and revisions and will be ready for the State General Assembly when it convenes this winter. Such an authority could help coordinate mass transit services in the congested urban area and help rescue failing local private companies.

The LCCDC is also directing attention to solid waste disposal. This problem had been examined earlier, but the matter was not followed through as expected.

Earlier, the committee recommended to school boards and superintendents the development of magnet schools. This brought either a negative response or no response. Perhaps either the timing was not right, or the decision makers on that issue were not involved, or both.

### CONCLUSIONS

For professionals concerned with community change and improvement, urban areas offer a worthwhile challenge.

While there is probably no one ideal method of urban community development, a useful one has been selected and adapted to northwestern Indiana. Based on our experience to date, it seems important to distinguish between community leaders and community decision makers. While leaders are usually among the decision makers, decision makers—who specialize—are not necessarily leaders. Community leaders constitute only a part of the larger decision-making force. This phenomenon seems to apply to larger, urban areas. It might also have significance for “regional communities,” urban or rural.

Functions which community leaders can help perform include: (1) identifying and placing priorities on community problems, (2) determining the members of decision-making groups and reconstituting them as required, and (3) monitoring the decisions to see

that they are made and are appropriate to the community's interests.

While extension and the universities can perform various roles in the community, their comparative advantage might well be in working with the leadership, to perform the above functions more effectively. This requires well-developed executive and administrative capacities, skills in human relations, and political judgment. Training to improve these capacities can be useful. The professional must have the characteristics and inclinations to comfortably accept, and be accepted by, community leaders. He must know what is occurring in the community, and who pays and who benefits, as the community grows or changes. He must also be aware of alternatives to the community's existing course.