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Revitalizing America's Neighborhoods

A Practitioner's Perspective

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Photo by David, via Flickr.

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Abstract*

This essay describes neighborhood revitalization efforts in the United States from an historic perspective, and current efforts. Taking a market viewpoint, I use the lens of my long experience with neighborhood improvement to explain the political and economic context for these efforts, identify problematic approaches, and suggest 13 neighborhood revitalization principles.

Background

This essay aims to inform neighborhood change agents of today and tomorrow on the lessons I've learned through my work to revitalize neighborhoods in America's cities, over the past 50 years. My perspective is that of a practitioner, as my work has been a harmonious mix of on-the-ground efforts in neighborhoods, even recently still in church basements, coupled with generalizing from that work and offering insights in books, articles, conference lectures, and classrooms. I've bridged the gap between practitioner and academic, but I would have been useless in the classroom and on the written page without in-the-neighborhoods practice, as this paper reflects.[1]

Fifty years is a long time, and the nation's perspective on cities and neighborhoods has changed dramatically during this period. When I was fresh out of the University of Pennsylvania's planning school in the early 1970s, the nation's urban thought leaders were mostly worried about central city survival due to masses of people fleeing to the suburbs because of civil disturbances in central cities, fear of crime, school desegregation, and neighborhood racial change. The urban experts' concerns applied to both downtowns and neighborhoods. There was a considerable amount of writing and emerging experience regarding stabilizing or revitalizing neighborhoods in central cities in that era.

In today's environment it may be difficult to understand the pervasiveness of the belief about the decline of cities in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1971, for example, as Seattle battled for its future, (yes, Seattle!) a couple of wise-guy real estate developers bought a billboard that said, "Will the last person leaving Seattle please turn off the lights?"[2] New York City effectively went bankrupt.[3] Cities were rapidly losing residents. New York City, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, and Minneapolis each lost over 10 percent of their populations.[4] Articles from well-regarded researchers like Anthony Downs (a 1970s urban celebrity, as Richard Florida is today), restated earlier work that posited stages of neighborhood decline. Not revitalization—decline.

Jim Rouse, the developer of the new town of Columbia, Maryland and of festival markets like Faneuil Hall in Boston, Harbor Place in Baltimore, and Navy Pier in Chicago, was featured on *Time* magazine's cover in 1981 with the headline "Cities are Fun!" because his belief in central cities was so peculiar.

Unlike today, the federal government was a major player in trying to improve neighborhoods, taking bold, large-scale action and appropriating significant amounts of federal funds. Authorized in late 1966, President Johnson's

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1 George Galster has recently produced a wonderful overview of the academic work on neighborhoods. In addition to Galster's wisdom, the book contains the best bibliography I've seen on neighborhood research. George C. Galster, *Making Our Neighborhoods, Making Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); George Galster, "On the Nature of Neighborhood," *Urban Studies* 38, no. 12 (November 2001): 2111-2124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/43198189.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5152%2Ftest&refreqid=search%3Aaf41199c1d8df3ab26bb76e55b5562bf.

2 Greg Lange, "Billboard Reading 'Will the Last Person Leaving SEATTLE Please Turn out the Lights' Appears Near Sea-Tac International Airport on April 16, 1971," *HistoryLinkOrg Essay 1287,* accessed August 1, 2020, https://www.historylink.org/File/1287.

3 Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York Metropolitan Books, 2017).

4 Jordan Rappaport, "U.S. Urban Decline and Growth, 1950 to 2000,^ *Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Economic Review* (Third Quarter 2003): 15-42, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.502.496&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

Model Cities Program allocated about $600 million per year[5] ($4 billion in 2020 dollars) to improving distressed neighborhoods through comprehensive strategies, with significant citizen participation. Later in the decade, the Carter Administration created an Office of Neighborhoods in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), headed by Msgr. Geno Baroni that offered technical assistance and funding to neighborhood-based groups. There was a lot going on at the federal level to improve neighborhoods and, unfortunately, plenty to harm them, including urban renewal, highway construction, and mortgage insurance practices that preferred suburbs. But, at all levels of government and in corporate America, there were efforts to improve neighborhoods in central cities.

In 1970, I was working at ACTION-Housing in Pittsburgh, a well-established housing development and neighborhood-improvement nonprofit. ACTION stands for Allegheny Conference to Improve Our Neighborhoods; the organization was created by the corporate power structure in 1957 as a result of an Eisenhower administration commission on housing and urban problems.[6] Its mission, as the name suggests, was to improve Pittsburgh's low-income neighborhoods through organizing self-help efforts and by producing large amounts of affordable housing. In keeping with the nation's focus on neighborhoods, a colleague, Roger Ahlbrandt, and I published *Neighborhood Revitalization, Theory and Practice*,[7] based on the successful work of the first Neighborhood Housing Services Program (NHS) in Pittsburgh. The book asserts that "America's older neighborhoods need to be saved," and, like a good bit of the discourse about neighborhoods in that era, we took a market-oriented approach to our analysis, an approach quite different from the urban renewal work that was prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s.[8] This work, especially in the context of a city losing population, was an important base for my later work in understanding the dynamics of neighborhood change.

Pittsburgh was one of those older industrial cities that were desperate to figure out its future, as it was rapidly losing population and jobs. The city's population dropped from a high of 677,000 in 1950 to 424, 000 in 1980, a reduction of about one-third.

In 1977, I joined the administration of Mayor Richard S. Caliguiri, as the City's first housing director and later as head of the long-established Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). A key challenge was to find the right strategies to stabilize the city's neighborhoods, using scarce resources as effectively as possible.

Pittsburgh had a long and well-respected history of the public and private sectors working together. After WW II, the city's corporations teamed up with city government to clean up the air, revitalize downtown, and reduce seasonal river flooding.[9] Within the culture of this successful public-private partnership, my task was to deal the neighborhood leadership into that partnership. Jane Jacobs had taught a new generation of planners that neighborhoods were precious, sometimes unique, and had great potential power for good in their people, if that power could be released and directed.[10] The Mayor encouraged the creation of public-private-neighborhood partnerships as a way of doing business in his initiative to revitalize Pittsburgh's economy and neighborhoods, which he called Renaissance II.

Dick Caliguiri was a great mayor, who had very good instincts about neighborhoods.[11] He knew that strong neighborhoods and neighborhood leadership were crucial to the city's present and future well-being. He tasked me with making the neighborhoods stronger by working in partnership with neighborhood groups. I teamed up with neighborhood leaders; we brought the young Ford-Foundation-financed Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) into the city to strengthen neighborhood groups' capacity to become developers in their

5 "Making Sense of Model Cities," *Urban Omnibus*, November 2016, https://urbanomnibus.net/2016/11/making-sense-of-model-cities/.
6 The President's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs, *A Report to the President of the United States* (December 1953): Appendix 2, 121-122, http://www.michaelcarliner.com/files/Eisenhower53_Pres_Advis_Commitee.pdf.
7 Roger S. Ahlbrandt, Jr. and Paul C. Brophy, *Neighborhood Revitalization: Theory and Practice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1975).
8 John T. Metzger puts this literature in a concise history in John T. Metzger, "Planned Abandonment: The Neighborhood Life Cycle Theory and National Urban Policy," *Housing Policy Debate* 11 (2000): 7-40.
9 For a look into the generation just prior to mine, see Elisabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in a Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), and Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1975).
10 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York City: Penguin Random House, 2011).
11 James O'Toole, "A Mayor Remembered," *PG News*, May 6, 1998, 2020, http://old.post-gazette.com/regionstate/19980506bmayor1.asp.

neighborhoods. The Development Training Institute, led by my long-term colleague Joe McNeely, trained some of our neighborhoods' Community Development Corporations (CDC) directors to be more sophisticated and capable leaders. We aligned city government funds and priorities with those of the neighborhood leadership and local foundations. These partnerships were making neighborhoods and their leadership stronger.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS NOT THE SAME AS NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT.

One of the unfortunate confusions in the field of "housing and community development" is that affordable housing is the same thing as community development or neighborhood improvement. Affordable housing and neighborhood improvement, while related, meet quite different needs. Affordable housing—a term that evolved from "subsidized" housing—describes the need for governmental funds and programs to meet the housing needs of low- and moderate-income people who cannot afford to rent or buy housing in the marketplace where they live. They need financial help either in the form of lower rents because the housing they can afford has been given a supply-side subsidy (lower interest rates, a project-based rent subsidy, free land, etc.) or the tenant or buyer gets a subsidy so that some of the rent or purchase price is covered by the government. Affordable housing is needed almost everywhere, but it's needed especially in the hot-market locations where vast numbers of people are priced out of the standard market.

Community development/neighborhood improvement is different. As this paper indicates, this term and strategy is about improving places and, to follow the approaches highlighted on pages 13 to 15, housing in weak-market neighborhoods should be built to serve the market it can serve. Sometimes the prices that can be gotten in the market are low enough that the housing meets the definition of affordable; in other cases they are not. It is also true that sometimes the location of affordable housing (Low Income Housing Tax Credit, Habitat for Humanity homes) can be part of a neighborhood improvement strategy.

While giving the Mayor a progress report on our neighborhood work, I cautioned: "Mayor, I cannot control these groups and they might, at times, be oppositional to your agenda." "Don't you worry about that for a minute, Paul," he said. "You keep doing what you are doing. I can handle the politics of it. Pittsburgh is better off with strong neighborhood groups. " Over the years, I've retold this anecdote to half a dozen mayors and have gotten blank stares and even grimaces. Their reactions have reminded me that without mayoral support, those working to improve neighborhoods are hamstrung; these reactions have me wishing that more mayors understood the profound benefits of strong neighborhood groups and of working in partnership with them to achieve mutually shared goals.

Another illustration of the neighborhood-city hall connection: a young organizer, Mike Eichler, was working in the Perry-Hilltop neighborhood to fight nasty blockbusting[12] underway in the area when his charitable funds expired. We brought him into the housing department and gave him the room to keep up his work, which helped strengthen his neighborhood. He even invented a form of organizing, Consensus Organizing, that he exported to other cities with help from LISC.[13]

The Pittsburgh work taught me the power of partnerships with neighborhood groups, but also the very big challenges of strengthening the desirability of neighborhoods in their market context. My Pittsburgh years were valuable in another way: I was working to improve the place where I lived and had come to love. For many in the planning and community development field, this "place-based" experience is very inspiriting.

However, the thinking, research, and advocacy about neighborhoods at the national level—of which I was a part in Pittsburgh—faded with the coming of the Reagan administration, which cut federal funding for neighborhoods and also shifted the federal focus to the growing national challenges of homelessness and affordable housing. I consider it a tragedy that the energy and lessons from the 1970s and early 1980s-era neighborhood revitalization efforts have largely been lost to national policymakers and, to some extent, to local practitioners, even those

12 "Blockbusting," Wikipedia, accessed August 3, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockbusting.
13 "Development of the Consensus Organizing Model," San Diego State University, Consensus Organizing Center, accessed August 3, 2020, https://consensus.sdsu.edu/history/.

based in neighborhood organizations.[14] The earlier emphasis on strengthening neighborhood groups, seeing neighborhoods in a market context and intervening differently based on those market conditions faded into a more generalized, more anemic federal commitment to neighborhood improvement. Those committed to neighborhood revitalization at the local level were losing their critical federal partner.

I left Pittsburgh in 1988 and began working nationally, first with what is now Enterprise Community Partners, founded by Jim and Patty Rouse, and then as an independent consultant, focusing on neighborhood revitalization and economic development mostly in cities like Pittsburgh.

The Essentials of Neighborhood Revitalization

To bring this history up to date, I begin with four essentials to set the framework for thinking about neighborhood revitalization in the 2020s.

Essential 1. *The United States is a capitalist economic system, and governments at all levels connect with that system primarily through incentives and regulations*. The interface between the capitalist system and the federal government exacerbates the challenge of intervening where the economic system is failing places.[15] Without federal intervention, cities and their metro areas are on their own to compete with each other to attract and hold businesses, capital, and people. In today's market, Seattle is an economic winner (the billboard was way off); Youngstown is an economic loser. And the competition within that regional competition is neighborhoods vying with each other in their metropolitan areas for people and investment. This system also produces winners and losers.

Improving neighborhoods is also challenging because there is so much in our system that affects them: institutional racism and segregation; predatory lending, the shrinkage of the middle class, and persistent poverty. There are patterns of disinvestment, sometimes caused and/or condoned by governments. The nation is reawakening to the pattern of institutional racism that has produced neighborhoods occupied by people of color that do not receive the services and capital they need to succeed as places to live.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RACE

Racial policies and practices have affected and are affecting many of America's neighborhoods, and underlie many of the challenges of improving neighborhoods. Until the Civil Rights Act of 1968, racial segregation and discrimination in housing was legal. Even since the passage of that law, race continues to drive homebuyers' locational decisions, bank lending, and institutional investments. Neighborhood racial patterns and housing prices are directly responsible, in part, for the racial wealth gap in the nation. The Brookings Institution reports that housing in neighborhoods that are predominately African American, housing prices are half of what they are in predominately white neighborhoods, resulting in a loss to Black homeowners of $156 billion.[i] Disparate policing and imprisonment practices also affect neighborhood trajectories.[ii] On average, Black incarceration rates are five times higher than whites. This incarceration rate reduces the number of employed neighborhood residents in predominantly Black neighborhoods, affecting poverty and homeownership rates.

i. Andre Perry, Jonathan Rothwell, and David Harshbarger, *The Devaluation of Assets in Black Neighborhoods: The Case of Residential Properties* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2018), https://www.brookings.edu/research/devaluation-of-assets-in-black-neighborhoods/.

ii. Ashley Nellis, *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons* (Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, June 2016), https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/#II.%20Overall%20Findings.

14 The COVID-19 pandemic has reawakened the issue of the future of cities. See The New York Times Editorial Board, "The Cities We Need," *New York Times*, May 11, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/11/opinion/coronavirus-us-cities-inequality.html?referringSource=articleShare.

15 Some very intelligent Brookings researchers have argued for a federal policy that would deliberately stimulate innovation centers in older cities, the first voices I've heard arguing for a spatial federal growth policy since I helped coin the phrase "legacy cities" in the early 2000s. See Robert D. Atkinson, Mark Muro, and Jacob Whiten, *The Case for Growth Centers: How to Spread Tech Innovation Across America* (The Brookings Institution, December 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/research/growth-centers-how-to-spread-tech-innovation-across-america/.

THE AMERICAN ASSEMBLY: CONVENER FOR URBAN POLICY

In 1993, as Henry Cisneros was moving into his role as HUD Secretary, I was invited to a meeting of The American Assembly, a convening organization created by Dwight D. Eisenhower when he was president of Columbia University. The American Assembly had a remarkable model: bring together 60 or so of the most informed people on a matter of concern to America's future, lock them up for a very long weekend, and produce a report that might affect the trajectory of that American issue. The very rigorous tempo of the meetings hooked me and I realized that this organization could be the meeting place to advance thinking about cities and neighborhoods.

The Cisneros meeting produced *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation*, which Cisneros edited.[i] Then I had the honor of directing meetings that produced a number of breakthrough thoughts: Community Capitalism,[ii] Legacy Cities,[iii] and Middle Neighborhoods, all of which have provided thought leadership to the field.

i. Henry Cisneros, ed. *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

ii. American Assembly, *Community Capitalism: Rediscovering the Markets of America's Neighborhoods* (New York: The American Assembly, 1997), https://www.google.com/books/edition/Community_Capitalism_Rediscovering_the_M/yFlFCWEtrG8C?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=community+capitalism&printsec=frontcover.

iii. Richard M. McGahey and Jennifer Vey, *Retooling for Growth: Building a 21st Century Economy in America's Older Industrial Cities* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press and The American Assembly, 2008); American Assembly, *Reinventing America's Legacy Cities: Strategies for Cities Losing Population* (New York: The American Assembly, 2011), accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reinventing_America_s_Legacy_Cities/gwG49ZVUJfUC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=legacy+cities&pg=PA5&printsec=frontcover.

Essential 2. *Neighborhood change—decline and improvement—is a function of citywide and metro-wide market conditions.* The first step in thinking about neighborhood change is to understand the city/regional context. Overly simplified, there are three kinds of cities: those that are strong markets (San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, DC), weak markets (Gary, Youngstown, Buffalo),[16] and those someplace in between these poles (Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, Baltimore). In the strong-market places, neighborhoods are generally experiencing gentrification, with the negative effect of low- and moderate-income households struggling to find affordable places to live. And, despite the fact that they may contain some hot neighborhoods, in the weak-market cities and those in between, the broader worry is neighborhood decline, which leads to modest-income homeowners losing home equity due to declining prices, housing abandonment, and an increase in crime.[17]

As neighborhoods were losing people during my time in Pittsburgh, the able staff at the Department of Housing tried all kinds of new approaches to contend with our weak market conditions.

- We created the Neighborhoods for Living Center to recruit people to neighborhoods (Live Baltimore is today's equivalent).[18]
- We targeted our Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds through programs like Operation Paintbrush, a seasonal effort to literally get the exterior of houses in target areas looking better to change the investment psychology in these neighborhoods.
- We sold a couple of dozen vacant houses via a Great House Sale, our version of urban homesteading.
- We won what was called an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) to provide second mortgages to people who bought homes in the well located but struggling Central North Side, the funds available to anyone, regardless of income.

However, attracting affluent buyers to a declining area was totally counterintuitive to other officials in HUD because Washington, DC was encountering its first wave of conversions of rental units to condominiums, and that housing market was hot. These HUD officials assumed that Pittsburgh must be in the same market condition,

16 Many small towns in rural America may be the most challenged, as there is often no market for housing or commercial space in these places, as the job base has disappeared.

17 See Alan Mallach, *Building a Better Urban Future: New Directions for Housing Policy in Weak Market Cities* (Community Development Partnerships' Network, The Enterprise Foundation Local Initiatives Support Corporation, National Housing Institute, June 2005), https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/BuildingABetterUrbanFuture.Pdf; Kim Burnett, "Strengthening Weak Market Cities," *Shelterforce*, September 2003, https://shelterforce.org/2003/09/01/strengthening-weak-market-cities/.

18 Live Baltimore, accessed August 3, 2020, https://livebaltimore.com/.

despite ample evidence to the contrary. A simple market-rating index of cities might have helped, but, come to think of it, we still don't have that index available today. The field was not informed on this essential: cities and neighborhoods vary in their market strength and customized policies and strategies should be based on these market differences. Federal funds need to be allocated and used for different purposes based on these different local market conditions.

Essential 3: *Within the city/regional market context, neighborhoods compete with each other for investment—residential and commercial*. In all places but the strong-market cities, this competition produces neighborhood winners and losers. As I describe later, neighborhoods can be grouped into three major types: distressed, healthy, and in those the middle. There are now a number of tools to help local officials and community leaders assess where on this continuum neighborhoods fall, and policies and programs to intervene in each of these categories of neighborhoods.[19]

In my teaching, I often use an exercise to help students understand neighborhood markets. First, I divide the class into small groups and ask them to report on five measures of neighborhood change, that is, measures of how to determine if a neighborhood is getting stronger or weaker. These professional-minded answers have included: poverty rates, number of vacant houses, number of low-birth-weight babies born, population changes, and sometimes—but only sometimes—changes in housing prices.

READING NEIGHBORHOOD MARKETS

The categorization into distressed, middle, and strong is a vast oversimplification. Very good work on the nuances among neighborhoods has been done. Bob Weissbourd at RW Ventures in Chicago worked with Living Cities a decade ago to classify neighborhoods in a very sophisticated way. The Dynamic Neighborhoods taxonomy[i] is a result of extensive analysis of neighborhoods in multiple cities. Bob and his colleagues identified nine neighborhood types, based on market conditions and overall demographics and other conditions.

With Ira Goldstein and the late Jeremy Nowak as thought leaders, Philadelphia's Reinvestment Fund invented the Market Value Analysis,[ii] a neighborhood market classification system that ranks neighborhoods in cities and other parts of metropolitan areas via analysis of conditions such as selling price, percent homeownership, and vacancies. Dozens of cities have used this tool, some multiple times, to gauge neighborhood market conditions so that interventions can be deployed based on local market knowledge.

CZB Inc.,[iii] led by Charles Buki, also takes a market approach to neighborhood planning and helps local governments use their scarce funds wisely to intervene in neighborhoods. This firm has recently partnered with Des Moines to develop a middle neighborhoods strategy in that city.

i. Robert Weissbourd, Ricardo Bodini, Michael He, *Dynamic Neighborhoods: New Tools for Community and Economic Development* (New York: Living Cities, September 2009, http://rw-ventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/DNT-Final-Report.pdf.
ii. Ira Goldstein and C. Sean Closkey, "Market Value Analysis: Understanding Where and How to Invest Limited Resources," St. Louis: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Summer 2006, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/bridges/summer-2006/market-value-analysis-understanding-where-and-how-to-invest-limited-resources.
iii. "How CZB Works," CZB, accessed August 4, 2020, https://czb.org/how/.

I process the results with them and then ask a different question, one more personal: "Tell us why you choose to live where you now live." And the answers are very different: "I want a yard for my dog," "I want to be close to bars and restaurants," "I want to be away from bars and restaurants; I want quiet," "I want to be near my family," "I want to be able to walk to work." These answers, they realize, are coming from them as consumers, not as urban professionals. This helps them understand that neighborhoods are competing with one another. Extending beyond the group in the classroom, they realize that there are many, many different categories of people who have different preferences. A leading housing market analyst firm in the country today uses 68 market segments in her analysis.[20] These preferences change depending on one's stage of life, and the choices are constrained by purchasing power—what the economists call demand.

19 For examples of tools see Ira Goldstein, "Market Value Analysis: A Data-Based Approach to Understanding Urban Housing Markets," in The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Putting Data to Work: Data-Driven Approaches to Strengthening Neighborhoods* (Washington, DC, December 2011): 49-60, https://www.reinvestment.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MVA-Data-Driven_Approaches_to_Strengthening_Neighborhoods-Article_2011.pdf.
20 Phone conversation with Laurie Volk, July 2020. For more information see ZVA, https://www.zva.cc/.

Some professionals are doing excellent work translating this market knowledge into marketing plans to reach market segments that can be attracted to particular neighborhoods.[21] This data is essential in applying programs to treat neighborhoods with different market conditions. For example, systematic code enforcement makes sense where the market is strong enough that owners can make necessary repairs and recoup the cost of the improvements through the sale of the property or increased rents. If this tool is used where the market is too weak, it can lead to housing abandonment.

Essential 4*: In the weak-market places and some of those cities in the middle, the decline of neighborhoods is often a bigger worry than gentrification.*[22] You wouldn't think that this is an essential based on the literature and the dialogue in the community development field today. So, please stay with me here as we to sail into the shoals of race, class, the definition of gentrification, the definition of displacement, and the importance of race in setting neighborhood strategies.

First, and so I am perfectly clear, gentrification is a serious problem in hot-market cities. Take a look at *San Francisco 2.0*,[23] a dramatic description of the major negative effects escalating prices have had on San Francisco's residents and collective personality. Housing price increases in the hot-market cities have caused displacement from these cities. Those displaced are both modest-income renters and homeowners who cannot afford escalating property taxes. These residents must find less expensive places to live, if they can, creating a serious public policy issue in these places. Some approaches can be effective, such as rent control and rent subsidization and property tax escalation ceilings.[24] It is appropriate that this phenomenon continue to spur significant thinking and amelioration where it is occurring.

However, the specter of gentrification haunts our discourse on neighborhood improvement impedes thoughtful analysis and strategy development on how to intervene to make neighborhoods stronger where they are not competing successfully in their market setting. It's the same problem I had in the 1980s trying to get support from staff from HUD and foundations that were living and working in hot-market places. In many neighborhoods in weak-market cities, the appropriate intervention goal is to help housing prices rise so that homeowners can anticipate some level of appreciation and build some equity in their homes. Isn't this what we collectively approve of in suburbs? Isn't this the American Dream? Don't city residents deserve the same opportunity? This is particularly true in African American neighborhoods. In Baltimore, for example, some middle-class African American neighborhoods have seen housing prices decline by 30 percent due to weak demand for these neighborhoods.[25] This means that hardworking people of color are losing equity in their homes, making it far more difficult for them to pass wealth onto their children.

Scene: A bus tour through Detroit's Brightmoor neighborhood about 2012. The neighborhood has been devastated by the foreclosure crisis. The housing stock is basic—small single-family detached homes with siding and a carport or single-car garage, with about a third of the homes in the neighborhood vacant. No buyers. People are still leaving, turning keys over to their lenders or suffering through foreclosure. Yet the tour guide launches into a description of how the revitalization strategy for the neighborhood intends to avoid gentrification. Seriously? No one wants to live in the neighborhood. The housing market is not functioning. Banks are foreclosing. And, yet, our tour guide, a staffer from a community development corporation has been programmed to focus on gentrification. The population of Detroit continues to decline. The critical issue is getting more people to live in Detroit and, in this environment,

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21 See, for example, the work of Marcia Nedland at Fall Creek Consultants, http://www.fallcreekconsultants.com/, and Tracy Gosson at Sagesse, https://www.sagesseinc.com/.

22 For an excellent overview of demographic changes in cities see John Landis, "Tracking and Explaining Neighborhood Socio-Economic Change in US Metropolitan Areas, 1990-2010," Penn IUR Brief (Penn Institute for Urban Research, 2015), https://penniur.upenn.edu/uploads/media/John_D._Landis_-_Tracking_and_Explaining_Neighborhood_Socio-Economic_Change.pdf.

23 Alexandra Pelosi, *San Francisco 2.0*, https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/san-francisco-2-0.

24 For a good overview of tools that can mitigate the effects of gentrification, see Lance Freeman and Jenny Shuetz, "Producing Affordable Housing in Rising Markets: What Works," working paper prepared for Reinventing Our Communities: Transforming Our Economies (Penn Institute for Urban Research and Federal Reserve bank of Philadelphia, 2016), https://penniur.upenn.edu/uploads/media/Freeman-Schuetz_PennIUR-Philly_Fed_working_paper_091616v2.pdf.

25 Alan Mallach, *Drilling Down in Baltimore's Neighborhoods: Changes in Racial/Ethnic Composition and Income from 2000 to 2017* (Baltimore: The Abell Foundation, April 2020), https://www.abell.org/sites/default/files/files/Abell_Neighborhood%20Changes%20Report%20FULL%201_13Final%20(dr).pdf.

Brightmoor is not competing well. The housing stock is not attractive to today's market. The only work that should be going on in that neighborhood is figuring out how to shrink the residential sections of the neighborhood and hold onto the strongest areas, if they can be found.

Scene: A discussion with an African American graduate student at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, circa 2014, shortly after the traumatic disturbances in Ferguson. The student mentions that her parents have been gentrified out of their neighborhood in St. Louis city and are now living not far from Ferguson. "What do you mean, 'gentrified out'," I asked. "I was of the impression that there was no inner-city St. Louis neighborhood where prices were rising so fast that people were being forced out." "Well, no, it wasn't the prices that drove them out. They were gentrified out of the neighborhood by the rising crime rate. They no longer felt safe there," she responded. I realized that we were using the term gentrification to mean exactly opposite phenomena. What happened to her parents in my lingo was they were displaced from their neighborhood because it had declined beyond the point of livability for them—they fled from blight, which, in many cities, continues to be a bigger displacement factor than gentrification.

There is another aspect—cultural gentrification. This worry is that when a different group of people moves into a neighborhood, the long-term residents are culturally gentrified—that is, their way of life is infringed upon. This feeling is particularly raw as young white people move into long-standing African American neighborhoods. But, I encountered this attitude very strongly in a bar in the Locust Point neighborhood where I now live. Locust Point was once an entirely blue-collar white neighborhood full of longshoremen, hospital aides, truck drivers, etc. Some of those workers (many retired) are still in the neighborhood, but their replacements have been millennials, mostly white, but a mix of races. When I asked my bar companion how long he'd lived in the neighborhood, I was told "64 years, and it was better before all of these rich kids moved in. Goddamn it, this neighborhood used to be full of people like me, and now it's filled with these creeps." He was still in the neighborhood, and his house was, no doubt, worth far more than he ever dreamed, but in the language of many, he had suffered cultural gentrification.

For him, and many others, this is a painful experience. But newcomers arrive in cities and begin to cluster in places where lots of homes may be for sale because older residents are selling their homes and moving elsewhere. Little Italy in Manhattan is now more Asian than Italian. My old neighborhood in Philadelphia, once German, Irish, and Italian, has been African American and Puerto Rican for a generation. The many Germantowns in cities are no longer German. These natural changes are inevitable, though they may be hard on people like my neighbor in the bar.

These hot-market places are neither where I have worked nor the places I am writing about here. I believe that the politics of scarcity makes it even more difficult to stabilize neighborhoods in weak-market cities, compared to the hotter-market places. In the hot-market settings, there is more real estate value that produces taxes that give local governments the option of using this revenue to subsidize housing for low-income people. In places with flat or declining values, this revenue is absent.

So, my focus continues to be the weak-market cities, sometimes called older industrial cities, sometimes legacy cities. There are the well-known population losers like Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland, but there are surprises as well. Chicago, for example, while touting a robust image nationally, lost population in its SMA, Cook County and Chicago City. Dayton, Birmingham, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and other cities lost population in the past decade.[26]

My adopted home, Baltimore, remains the only major East Coast city continuing to lose population. In the period 1990-2018, Baltimore's population fell by 142,000 people, a loss of just under 20 percent. This translates into reduced housing demand; Baltimore continues to have about 17,000 abandoned houses, mostly located in the least competitive distressed neighborhoods.

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26 Tony Griffin et al., *Mapping America's Legacy Cities* (New York: J. Max Bond Center, The City College of New York, 2015), https://ssa.ccny.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MappingAmericanLegacyCities_15Dec2015.pdf.

What should be done in these cities to strengthen neighborhoods? Back to the three major categories of neighborhoods: distressed, middle, and strong.

Types of Neighborhoods

DISTRESSED NEIGHBORHOODS

This category of neighborhoods is characterized by very weak housing and commercial real estate markets, a decline in population, high poverty rates, high crime rates, lots of vacant housing and land, and low-performing schools. These are East and West Baltimore; parts of North Philadelphia; much of Detroit; the Chicago neighborhoods of Austin, Englewood, and South Chicago; Homewood-Brushton in Pittsburgh; and most areas in smaller cities like Gary, East St. Louis, Camden, and Chester, PA.

These neighborhoods are distressed because in the competition among neighborhoods for investment they are losing. They were disadvantaged in the competition beginning a century ago by institutional racism, housing discrimination, redlining by banks and the Federal Housing Administration, and a near absence of capital for commercial/retail space. Some of these neighborhoods are still coping with the legacies of urban renewal, highway construction, and civil disturbances in the 1960s and 1970s.[27] They are also struggling because governments at all levels tipped the scales in favor of suburban development.[28]

The living conditions in these neighborhoods also result from broad forces in our society: racism, persistent poverty, large levels of unconstrained disinvestment, and the failure of government and civic institutions to create a more equitable society.

Who cares, one might ask. Let there be losers. This is a capitalistic system, after all. I offer four reasons why taking action regarding distressed neighborhoods matters:

- There are people still living in these places and it is immoral to let these Americans languish.[29]
- These neighborhoods are especially terrible places for children.[30]
- It's a waste of land, scarce resources, and infrastructure to let these older neighborhoods decline while building new infrastructure and housing in outer suburbs.
- The upkeep of these neighborhoods is a direct cost to older cities and an indirect cost in the loss of tax revenues, making it harder for these governments to provide services to residents in these neighborhoods and elsewhere in these cities.

There is a lot at stake here, and there continue to be numerous efforts to improve distressed areas. What are the key strategies to improve these distressed neighborhoods? What approaches seem to hold the most promise?

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27 For an excellent description of how the federal government fostered segregation, see Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017). For the story of how race formed Baltimore, see Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010). For a contemporary take, see Molly Metzger and Henry S. Webber, eds. *Facing Segregation: Housing Policy Solutions for a Stronger Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

28 Kriston Capps, "How the Federal Government Built White Suburbia," *Citylab*, September 2015, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-02/how-the-federal-government-built-white-suburbia; Devon Marissa Zeugel, "Financing Suburbia: How Government Mortgage Policy Determined Where You Live," Strong Towns, August 15, 2017, https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/8/15/financing-suburbia-how-government-mortgage-policy-determined-where-youlive.

29 How well residents of distressed neighborhoods are doing is not only measured by housing values, crime rates, etc. Some bonding social capital may exist in these neighborhoods—neighbors helping neighbors. For a thoughtful discussion of bonding social capital see Larisa Larsen et al., "Bonding and Bridging: Understanding the Relationship between Social Capital and Civic Action," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 24 (2004): 64-77.

30 There is ample research that indicates that children of the same socio-economic class who live in better neighborhoods succeed in moving out of poverty more frequently. See Jonathan Rothwell, *Sociology's Revenge: Moving to Opportunity (MTO) Revisited* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, May 2015), https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2015/05/06/sociologys-revenge-moving-to-opportunity-mto-revisited/.

Rule 1: Make sure an intervention has enough heft to make a significant change, which means lots of money and talent. The medical analogy to this rule is dosage. When a physician treats a patient with medicine, she is careful to prescribe the correct dosage to cure the illness. Too little will not succeed. As I describe below, the proper dosage is necessary but not sufficient to improve a neighborhood.

Let me cite two distressed neighborhoods that I worked on directly to make this point.

- Park DuValle in Louisville[31] is a replacement neighborhood for the Cotter and Lang public housing projects, barracks-style 1950s housing which had become the most distressed in Louisville. The Louisville Housing Authority let units stay vacant as residents moved out, in order to vacate the property, and then tore it down. What could go in its place? Who could be attracted to live in what was understood to be a very bad part of town? Years of planning and development, with some of the nation's best urban designers (UDA of Pittsburgh) a committed, smart developer (The Community Builders), and a firm expert in finding housing market niches (Zimmerman-Volk) produced a new, mixed-income, mixed-tenure neighborhood, which is now an attractive place to live. People living in the rental component hope to buy townhouses there one day. The market was mostly African American households who had the resources to move almost anywhere in the Louisville region, but found the right combination of price and positives in the new neighborhood. Creating this new attractive neighborhood was costly. The overall transformation cost over $100 million in public funds. [32]
- East Baltimore, a neighborhood adjoining Johns Hopkins Hospital, had declined so badly in the 1990s that no employee from one of the world's best and largest medical facilities would live there, even with financial incentives. A nonprofit rehabbing housing in the neighborhood reported that it could not rehab fast enough. As it rehabbed housing for sale and rent, more houses were abandoned. With support from Mayor Martin O'Malley and other political leaders, I orchestrated a planning process; and after a neighborhood design charrette, many community meetings, involvement from Johns Hopkins Medicine, the City, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, an improvement strategy became one of relocate, demolish, and rebuild a residential part of the neighborhood and build a new school and bio-research jobs. It took a long time, was very controversial, and cost the public over $200 million.

The point of these two examples is that recovering distressed neighborhoods costs a great deal of money, which is generally not available today. We have virtually no funds coming from the federal government for large-scale interventions, and states and local governments typically have trouble balancing their annual budgets. These budgetary constraints are exacerbated further by COVID-19, which has led to greater expenditures locally and a loss of tax revenue due to COVID-19-induced business closings. Even with these constraints, local governments are often tempted to tackle the improvement of distressed neighborhoods, but trying to do so with insufficient funds will not work. With government resources at low ebb, it is usually impossible to garner the resources needed to transform distressed neighborhoods. Moreover, this level of transformation requires enormous levels of brainpower and the orchestration of many players. Louisville and Baltimore had substantial levels of mayoral involvement. Cities of this size need to focus a considerable amount of talent on these large-scale projects. I doubt whether, even if funds were suddenly available, mid-size cities could manage more than one of these large-scale efforts simultaneously.

Instead, in many situations (Detroit is a good example), a pragmatic approach to distressed neighborhoods is to demolish vacant structures as people move out, offer to buy out people to reduce the level of local government service expenses in the neighborhood, and maintain vacant lots until some future opportunity arises that makes

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31 The Villages at Park DuValle, accessed August 3, 2020, https://www.thevillagesatparkduvalle.com/.

32 For an overview of Park DuValle and similar projects, see Mindy Turbov and Valerie Piper, *Hope VI and Mixed-Finance Developments: A Catalyst for Neighborhood Renewal* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2005), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/20050913_hopevi.pdf.

it possible to develop new homes for new residents.[33] This approach is not well regarded by those who want to attack the terrible conditions faced by the remaining residents of these neighborhoods; but, until substantial public funds are allocated to these places, not much more can be done.[34]

Rule 2: Improved delivery of social services can improve people's lives, but it does not transform distressed neighborhoods as places.

One of my first student planning exercises at the University of Pennsylvania's School of City Planning was to develop a plan for an impoverished North Philadelphia neighborhood, part of the Model Cities Program. Our student team developed the thesis that the neighborhood would improve if social services to the people there could be better orchestrated. Efforts to coordinate social services to low-income people have been with the field from Jane Addams and her settlement houses to HUD's requirement to include social services as part of public housing transformations, via HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods programs.

Social services agencies generally target people with specific needs, not geographies. There is a structural misfit between people goals and place goals. A social service agency considers it a win if a client gets a higher-paying job and chooses to move out of a distressed neighborhood. To one concerned with the place, this is less of a win.

There have been numerous efforts to orchestrate social services to transform distressed neighborhoods. The evidence is that while some people personally benefit from the social services (a better job, improved health), which is desirable, the neighborhoods as places do not improve. A 2010 report by the Aspen Institute took a very close look at programs over a couple of decades to improve distressed neighborhoods via what the report calls Comprehensive Community Initiatives, and concluded that while these services' approaches can demonstrate increased community capacity and improved outcomes for some residents in their target neighborhoods, they cannot demonstrate changes among the broader neighborhood population in key indicators of well-being.[35] [36]

And yet, despite this evidence, some continue the quest to combine social services with housing and other components to improve neighborhoods as places. My student group was incorrect in its social service strategy in North Philadelphia; it's still a risky strategy now. Helping people in distressed neighborhoods get better jobs will create more opportunity for them. They may choose to remain in the neighborhood, but they may also choose to move to a better one. Some residents become more able to succeed, but the place does not necessarily get better.

There is a corner of the field, however, where the connection between provision of services and housing does show some promise: some transformative low-income housing development/redevelopment. There are more than a handful of developers and nonprofits working successfully on this connection. McCormack Baron Salazar and its nonprofit affiliate Urban Strategies, Integral Housing in Atlanta, Purpose Built Communities, The Community Builders, and Mercy Housing have all found ways to connect school improvement and service delivery in low-income and mixed-income stand-alone projects/communities. One key ingredient in making this model succeed is that the housing developers screen residents for initial occupancy and can evict residents for community rules infractions—quite a different approach than working at the neighborhood level. Even with this advantage, these

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33 Funded largely by The Kresge Foundation, the Detroit Future City's Strategic Framework is the best in class regarding approaches to desolate land and buildings in a large American city. Tony Griffin et al., *Detroit Future City: 2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan* (Detroit: Inland Press, 2013), https://detroitfuturecity.com/strategic-framework/.

34 I resigned from a local nonprofit project review committee when staff enthusiastically promoted the development of seven homes for clients in one of the worst neighborhoods in the city. In my view this small development would not change physical or social conditions in the neighborhood and would put the homeowner families at risk by being there. Maybe 700 homes would be enough to create a new place, something that could change the character of the neighborhood, or at least create a safe community within a larger problem area. But not seven.

35 Anne C. Kubisch, Patricia Auspos, Prudence Brown, and Tom Dewar, *Voices from the Field III* (Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2010), https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/images/rcc/VoicesfromtheFieldIII.pdf.

36 Jim Rouse, co-founder of what is now Enterprise Community Partners, led a neighborhood transformation program in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood in Baltimore. The successes of that effort can be found in Prudence Brown, Benjamin Butler, and Ralph Hamilton, *The Sandtown-Winchester Neighborhood Transformation Initiative: Lessons Learned about Community Building & Implementation* (Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Enterprise Foundation, 2001), https://folio.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/10244/77/sandtown-winchester.pdf?sequence=1. Sandtown-Winchester continues to be one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Baltimore.

developers are constantly begging for the funds needed to support the service side of their work since, despite numerous efforts, the costs of the services are not included in projects' operating costs.

Rule 3: Improving distressed neighborhoods requires the involvement of long-term residents, businesses, and institutions, like churches; a clear vision and commitment to making the neighborhood (place) safe and attractive for existing residents and potential newcomers; and, if housing market conditions warrant, a competent, mission-oriented real estate developer.

What does this approach look like? There are two contemporary examples in Baltimore worthy of close examination: the work underway by Rebuild Metro, led by Sean Closkey, in East Baltimore, and the Southwest Partnership, led by Michael Seipp, a federation of neighborhood groups and community anchors aimed at improving seven neighborhoods in Southwest Baltimore. Both are taking a market-oriented approach[37] to neighborhood improvement, with substantial direction from neighborhood leaders.

EAST BALTIMORE: OLIVER AND JOHNSTON SQUARE

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) is a broad-based, non-partisan, interfaith, multiracial community power organization rooted in Baltimore's neighborhoods and congregations, which has worked to improve Baltimore neighborhoods since 1977.[38] An affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, BUILD has teamed up with Rebuild Metro to improve neighborhoods in the East Baltimore neighborhoods.

ReBuild Metro is a nonprofit neighborhood-improvement company that understands that developing housing for a mix of income levels—not just housing for low-income people-- is essential to redeveloping a distressed neighborhood. As astounding as this assertion may be to some, it is even more remarkable that this premise is imbedded in an organization that is led by bishops, pastors, an Industrial Areas Foundation affiliate, CDFI leadership, and business people.

THE ROLE OF FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES IN NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

Faith-based people and organizations have been a big help in improving the lives of people in distressed neighborhoods. In some cities, faith-based groups have aligned to advocate for neighborhood improvement. Groups like BUILD in Baltimore, and COPS/Metro Alliance[i] in San Antonio push their elected leaders for more resources for impoverished neighborhoods. Habitat for Humanity, a Christian organization, has been successful in deploying vast numbers of volunteers to build and rehabilitate housing for low-income homeowners. And, in many cities, more affluent faith-based congregations have partnered with inner-city churches to help improve the lives of people living in poverty.[ii] Like the early work of the Enterprise Foundation, the emphasis is on affordable housing more than neighborhood improvement.

i. COPS/Metro was formerly Communities Organized for Public Service. For more information see https://www.copsmetro.com/, accessed August 19, 2020.
ii. Jill Suzanne Shook, *Making Housing Happen: Faith-Based Affordable Housing Models* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

ReBuild Metro began as a subsidiary of the Reinvestment Fund in Philadelphia, an organization with a long history in of improving impoverished neighborhoods by bringing capital for housing, schools, food markets, and other physical elements. Jeremy Nowak, a community development iconoclast, led the Reinvestment Fund for many years. He played a key role in raising $10 million in private funds to capitalize what is now ReBuild Metro. The nonprofit has the discipline of a private for-profit company, and is seeking to improve neighborhoods while sustaining itself financially through the improvement work.

The residents, churches, and businesses in the neighborhood are always ReBuild's starting point. The organization works with church leadership, congregations, and neighborhood leaders to crystallize a shared vision for the

37 Paul C. Brophy, "A Market Oriented Approach to Neighborhoods," in Susan M. Wachter and Kimberly A. Zeuli, eds., *Revitalizing America's Cities* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013): 149-167.
38 BUILD: Rooted in Community, Committed to Change, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.buildiaf.org.

future of the neighborhoods in which it is working. Income mixing, race, crime reduction, school quality, and the role of businesses are all openly discussed.

ReBuild Metro's first venture in Baltimore was in the Oliver neighborhood, a deeply distressed area near Hopkins Hospital, one of the largest employers in the city and region. Long before any work began to rehab and build houses, the organization connected with neighbors and church members to map the neighborhood, to understand fully where the drug traffic was located and who was involved, and to begin to imagine the livability of this area if the vacant housing and illegal drugs were gone.

The neighborhood was at its bottom. In 2001, the median sales price for a home was $18,540, an indication that there was no normal housing market. There were 458 vacant houses, and many more vacant lots where houses had once stood. By 2017, there were only 46 vacant houses. ReBuild Metro's efforts had rehabbed or built 184 single-family homes, and the median sales price in the neighborhood was $135,000, close to replacement cost, and low enough that someone with a modest income could be an owner.

ReBuild Metro is now working in Johnston Square, also an area in a great location, half a mile from Baltimore's major Amtrak stop, three-quarters of a mile from Johns Hopkins Hospital, and a mile from Baltimore's downtown. Yet, the median sales price of a house in the neighborhood is $31,000, and 21 percent of residential units are vacant (many others have been demolished, leaving a large number of vacant lots), and building permits for improvements over $10,000 are 75 percent lower than the surrounding neighborhoods. These are market measures, not sociological or demographic measures. That's because the orientation of the neighborhood and ReBuild Metro is to strengthen the market in these distressed neighborhoods—an appropriate policy as there is little worry of gentrification in these Baltimore neighborhoods.

The vision developed by the neighborhood leadership is:

> Johnston Square will revitalize to become a safe, walkable neighborhood complete with diverse housing choices for all people and anchored by thriving businesses, supportive services and institutions.[39]

More specifically, the vision for housing and retail is:

> Sustaining and vibrant neighborhoods provide equitable residential development, housing choices and are supported by businesses to cater to their daily needs. A mixed income and diverse housing stock can support people of different economic backgrounds and lifestyles simultaneously as well as give people a chance to stay local even as their needs change over time by creating and preserving a range of affordability options and housing types. A diverse retail corridor creates business synergies, supports daily needs and creates opportunities for social experiences.

This approach is similar to and based on the previous partnership in the Oliver neighborhood, which has shown a remarkable rebound due to the Rebuild Metro model. Maybe a reminder is needed here: this is not a gentrification strategy. It's an effort to get these neighborhoods to a point where they have a chance to attract new homeowners, with the hope that housing prices will increase at or above the rate of inflation, so new buyers can see the prospect of building some equity.

Slowly but surely, these neighborhoods are getting stronger, climbing up from the bottom of neighborhoods in Baltimore, seeking to compete more successfully for businesses and residents. Sometimes getting the neighborhood to a new normal requires a decade or more, illustrating that improving distressed areas is a marathon not a sprint

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39 Hord/Caplan/Macht, *Johnston Square Vision Plan* (Baltimore, March 2020), https://rebuildmetro.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Johnston_Square_Vision_Plan_Final2.pdf.

It's very hard, risky work. Rebuild Metro is threading the needle between failing because the neighborhood brand is so weak that houses can't be sold, and lighting a market fire and causing prices to go too far up. In this kind of neighborhood, the first possibility is the far bigger worry. The emphasis is on marketing the homes and the neighborhoods to find the niche buyer or renter who sees the positives (or potential positives) of the neighborhood and the people in it. And, there's the challenging design and construction process of finding the right companies to produce a quality job, usually small operators requiring a close working relationship. There are a lot of moving parts.

It's working in Johnston Square because the long-term residents are in charge and all parties are building trust with each other, sharing a vision—becoming a normal neighborhood, a place with no vacant houses, a place where a buyer can get a mortgage from a national lender, a place that's part of the mainstream. To quote the vision statement, Johnston Square is becoming "a safe, walkable neighborhood complete with diverse housing choices for all people and anchored by thriving businesses, supportive services and institutions."

The City is a key partner, of course. Led by Michael Braverman, the former Commissioner of Housing and Community Development, the City has provided substantial financing assistance, public improvements, and decisions about what to demolish, what to rehab, and where new homes and businesses can locate. A cooperative police department is working to make the neighborhood safer. It's an illustration of the kind of public-private-neighborhood partnership that's necessary to make substantial change in a distressed neighborhood.

SOUTHWEST BALTIMORE

Directly west of downtown and the University of Maryland's Baltimore City campus lie seven neighborhoods that are mixed racially and economically: some are mostly Black, some a mix of races, with a range of housing prices. Some sections are as distressed as the East Baltimore neighborhood described earlier. Others are expensive stately homes. There are people with low incomes living near people with higher incomes. In today's parlance, the seven neighborhoods are a mixed-income, mixed-race part of Baltimore. Despite the short walk from this area to the University of Maryland and downtown, these neighborhoods might as well be miles away. The broad MLK Boulevard is a major divider between job centers on the east side of the parkway and the neighborhoods.

When a nonprofit set up yet another drug treatment center in one of the seven neighborhoods, the leadership of the seven neighborhoods decided to explore some form of confederation. With considerable help from two

THE IMPORTANCE OF ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS IN IMPROVING NEIGHBORHOODS

One of the bright spots in improving neighborhoods is in the work of colleges, universities, and hospitals—the anchor institutions adjoining neighborhoods that need help revitalizing. My alma mater, University of Pennsylvania, has done a remarkable job in making West Philadelphia a safe, mixed-income area.[i] My work with the University of Chicago, Washington University in St. Louis, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Maryland in Baltimore has demonstrated that well-led institutions can work in harmony with surrounding communities to fashion improvement agendas that are in the mutual interests of the neighborhood and the institutions. Two particularly important recent examples of this is the partnership of Washington University in St. Louis and Wexford Science and Technology, chaired by my long-term colleague Hank Webber, to develop the Cortex Innovation Community in the Central West End, which has become a major economic boost to St. Louis.[ii] The second is the Central Baltimore Partnership, conceived by Dr. Timothy Armbruster, the long-term executive at the Goldseker Foundation, which consists of Johns Hopkins, The University of Baltimore, Maryland Institute College of Arts, and neighborhood groups. This Partnership is improving 11 Baltimore neighborhoods.[iii]

i. See Judith Rodin, *The University and Urban Revival: Out of the Ivory Tower and into the Streets* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) and for a broader description see, Eugenie Birch, David Perry, and Henry Louis Taylor Jr, "Universities as Anchor Institutions," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 17 (2013), 7-16, https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/jheoe/article/view/1047/1046.

ii. Cortex Innovation Community, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.cortexstl.com/.

iii. The Central Baltimore Partnership, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.centralbaltimore.org/.

local neighborhood-improvement practitioners, the neighborhood groups and the institutions across the boundary and within the neighborhoods formed the Southwest Partnership (SWP). The Partnership consists of leadership from the seven neighborhood organizations and the University of Maryland Baltimore, the University of Maryland Medical Center, Bon Secours Hospital, the B&O Railroad Museum, the University of Maryland BioPark, and Wexford Science and Technology, the University's partner in developing a BioPark in a portion of the neighborhoods.

The Partnership rallied behind a very dramatic vision for the neighborhoods:

> We envision an awesome, healthy, architecturally beautiful, diverse, cohesive community of choice built on mutual respect and shared responsibility. We embrace all diversity: from race, gender, and sexual orientation to economic, educational, and housing choice. Our diversity is our strength.

This is the kind of vision that might have come from Jim Rouse, who believed correctly that a bold vision is a magnet for energy and resources. This has proven so in Southwest Baltimore.

Activities are carried out in commercial development, housing, education, historic preservation of the architecture and culture, workforce, public safety, and vibrant and walkable streets. The SWP decided to avoid the distraction of operating and developing programs and real estate but to let the experts do it as long as they agreed to abide by the SWP Vision Statement.

The Partnership is not a housing or commercial real estate developer. Rather, it acquires land and buildings and works closely with developers to build product consistent with the neighborhood plan. Developers are vetted by staff, approved by the local neighborhood association, and sign a contract that defines the work they are to accomplish. Unlike East Baltimore, this neighborhood's market is strong enough that if vacant land and buildings can be aggregated, private developers can succeed in rehabbing or building new residential units, some with gap financing from city governments to ensure affordability for households with lower incomes.

Other important neighborhood improvement efforts exist elsewhere. In Cincinnati, the work of the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) has transformed the Over the Rhine area into a thriving mixed-income neighborhood and shopping destination.[40] The University of Chicago succeeded in improving parts of low-income Woodlawn.[41] There is also the work by the Chicago Housing Authority, the John D. MacArthur Foundation, and numerous developers to transform Chicago's distressed public housing into safe mixed-income communities.[42]

These efforts—and others not cited here—take a market-oriented approach to the improvement of low-income neighborhoods, and make the implicit assumption that mixed-income communities work better than all poor communities.[43]

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40 Colin Woodward, "How Cincinnati Salvaged the Nation's Most Dangerous Neighborhood," *Politico Magazine*, June 16, 2016, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/06/what-works-cincinnati-ohio-over-the-rhine-crime-neighborhood-turnaround-city-urban-revitalization-213969; and, Jason Oseid, "Over-the Rhine: Cincinnati's Historic Neighborhood Hums Again," *Forbes,* June 10, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnoseid/2019/06/10/over-the-rhine-cincinnatis-historic-neighborhood-hums-again/#6804389f6b76.

41 Lee Harris, "UChicago Charter Schools Opens New Woodlawn Campus, First Development South of 61st Since '60s Agreement," *The Chicago Maroon*, January 31, 2018, https://www.chicagomaroon.com/article/2018/2/1/uchicago-charter-schools-opens-new-woodlawn-campus/.

42 Lawrence J. Vale and Erin Graves, *The Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation: What Does the Research Show So Far?* (Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, June 2010), https://dusp.mit.edu/sites/dusp.mit.edu/files/attachments/publications/vale_macarthur_2010.pdf.

43 There is considerable research and practice underway on mixed-income housing largely in planned communities. It is now housed at the National Initiative for Mixed-Income Housing at Case Western Reserve.

MIDDLE NEIGHBORHOODS

I grew up in a middle neighborhood, though, of course, I didn't know it then. When I was a boy there were only two kinds of neighborhoods: the good and the bad. If you went to a Phillies game at Connie Mack Stadium at 21st and Lehigh in North Philadelphia you knew you were in a bad neighborhood because you had to pay a kid a buck to protect your parked car. That form of protection wasn't needed in my good neighborhood.

My parents bought their 1,000 square foot row home in Hunting Park in 1949 for $6,500 with a VA mortgage. All the homes were the same for blocks and blocks. The neighborhood was very safe, in part because had we kids done anything malicious, any one of 20 or so neighbors would be knocking on our doors to let parents know what they had seen.

With rare exceptions, everyone in the neighborhood was a blue-collar worker, employed by the nearby hosiery factories, breweries, and assembly plants. On the 4400 block of 7th Street, where I grew up, there were 62 dwelling units, and 55 were owner occupied. The average value, says the 1950 census, of those 55 homes was $7,353 or, in today's dollars, $78,751.

My motivation to become a city planner was my love for this neighborhood. While at LaSalle College I realized I wanted to spend my life trying to improve neighborhoods so that kids like me could live a safe life and grow up to have successful lives. Hunting Park had shared values and important institutions that helped kids like me get to college. The F. P. Kenkel Credit Union, open for business on Thursday nights in the basement of my grade school building, loaned me the tuition money I needed each semester to pay my way through college. I repaid each loan through my earnings from delivering pizzas at Lou's Pizza shop, and from summer jobs. In today's parlance, a small business in my neighborhood provided me a job, and my community development financial institution (CDFI) loaned me the funds to get a college education.

I am quite aware that my career in improving neighborhoods stems from the way my boyhood neighborhood nurtured me.

This is how many, many working class neighborhoods in Philadelphia worked in the 1950s and 1960s, and it's how some of them still work today. These are America's middle neighborhoods—not the distressed ones described above, nor the healthy and affluent ones, places like Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia or Roland Park in Baltimore.

Our field has paid barely any attention to these neighborhoods.

It once did. In our 1975 book, Ahlbrandt and I focused on the Central North Side in Pittsburgh, where the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) program was underway. An African American neighborhood activist, Dorothy Richardson, and Howard Tweedy, a lender from First Federal Savings and Loan started this program, aimed at strengthening a neighborhood that was too good for urban renewal, yet was showing signs of decline: some vacant houses, some clear signs of deterioration in occupied homes, people having trouble getting mortgages, the rise in absentee landlords.

The program had funds from the local lending industry, city government, and Pittsburgh foundations. A young, dynamic executive, Tom Jones, was succeeding in getting homes rehabbed. The program model was simple: the City used code enforcement to see to it that all homes were in good shape; a group of lenders agreed to make home improvement loans and provide mortgages; the nonprofit organized the neighborhood and provided higher-risk loans and grants to homeowners. The goal was to stabilize the neighborhood and to get property values to hold steady or appreciate. The program worked.

The Ford Foundation took notice and began funding the program. Anita Miller, a Ford program officer, became an advocate for the program, and a partnership between HUD and the Federal Home Loan Bank, the regulator of

savings and loan associations, began to replicate the model elsewhere. In 1975 this partnership, called the Federal Urban Reinvestment Task Force, engaged Ahlbrandt and me to assess progress in NHS's in cities around the US. The report led to the creation of the Congressionally chartered Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation in 1978, which is now NeighborWorks America.[44]

THE WANING ROLE OF BANKS IN NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

In 1980, the nation had over 4,000 savings and loan associations, specialty banks aimed at making home mortgages and home improvement loans. Most of these were small institutions, focused on specific parts of a city or, if large enough, a city and its suburbs. Remember George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*?[i] He ran the Bailey Building and Loan. Today, there are only about 700. This category of financial institution failed in the 1980s largely because of loosened regulations. This loss, plus the pattern of banks becoming bigger and bigger, means that banks are less prone to become partners in improving neighborhoods. For example, the Healthy Neighborhoods Program in Baltimore has a vibrant bank consortium to lend in the middle neighborhoods it is improving, but the largest banks are not participants.[ii] This bank consolidation pattern has been a big loss for neighborhoods, despite the Community Reinvestment Act.

i. Hoosiertown, "*It's a Wonderful Life* Bank Run," accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPkJH6BT7dM&t=48s.

ii. "Partners," Healthy Neighborhoods, accessed August 4, 2020, https://healthyneighborhoods.org/about-us/partners/.

This NHS and neighborhood reinvestment work was primarily about improving middle neighborhoods. The organization created local partnerships of lenders, city officials, and neighborhood residents to save middle neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, and later NeighborWorks America, provided technical assistance and funding for operations. They even created an entity to buy the high-risk loans being made by local NHSs to provide fresh capital so the local groups could make more loans. NeighborWorks America still honors a neighborhood group annually with the Dorothy Mae Richardson award.

Yet, NeighborWorks America's focus in no longer primarily on middle neighborhoods. As a federal entity concerned with neighborhoods, NeighborWorks America has appropriately responded to shifting national needs including growing homeownership, disaster relief, rural housing issues, affordable housing, and foreclosure relief.

So, approximately 50 years after Dorothy Richardson's efforts to prevent decline in the Central North side, we have no national organization primarily focused on her category of neighborhoods. Fortunately, there is a small coalition working effectively on this category of neighborhoods: the National Middle Neighborhoods Steering Committee, a program of National Community Stabilization Trust and NeighborWorks America. [45]

The Steering Committee is a derivative of the publication *On the Edge: America's Middle Neighborhoods*,[46] published by the American Assembly and the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. Today's strategies to improve middle neighborhoods are very similar to the approach used by the original NHS program: target neighborhoods that are in danger of decline and may be showing early signs of decay, but are not too far gone; provide affordable capital for home improvement and home purchase loans; get the neighbors organized and help them help themselves to improve their neighborhoods; and get needed public improvements in the neighborhoods.

Lots of the work to improving this category of neighborhoods is based on the skill, intuition, and common sense of David Boehlke a long-term practitioner in middle neighborhoods who has worked in over 300 neighborhoods. David is a wizard at reading neighborhood conditions; and he has taught the middle neighborhoods field to accept the counterintuitive: improvement strategies need to build from strength and work toward the weaker areas rather than the reverse.[47]

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44 ACTION-Housing Inc., *The Neighborhood Housing Services Model: A Progress Assessment of the Related Work of the Urban Reinvestment Task Force* (1975) https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x000559823&view=1up&seq=9.

45 "What are Middle Neighborhoods?" Middle Neighborhoods, accessed August 4, 2020, http://middleneighborhoods.org/.

46 Paul C. Brophy, ed., *On the Edge: America's Middle Neighborhoods* (New York: The American Assembly, 2016).

47 David Boehlke, *Great Neighborhoods, Great City* (Baltimore: The Goldseker Foundation, 2001), https://www.ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/Healthy%20Neighborhoods%20Initiative%20in%20Baltimore%202001.pdf and David Boehlke, *Great Neighborhoods, Great City, 2004 Update* (Baltimore: The Goldseker Foundation, 2004), http://www.donaldpoland.com/site_documents/Great_Neighborhoods_Great_Cities_2004.pdf

We'll see if this work takes hold. The foundations that serve the distressed neighborhoods show little interest in the middle neighborhoods, feeling that they just aren't bad off enough. And that's the point they are missing. It is so much less costly, and avoids so much heartache to keep these neighborhoods healthy, rather to wait for them to fall into decline—give them vitamins and food supplements rather than waiting for them to get sick. A stitch in time saves nine. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Need I go on?

And my old neighborhood? In the early 1970s, blockbusting real estate agents scared away the long-term white residents and African Americans and Hispanic residents moved in. In blockbusting, everyone loses except for real estate agents who make a fast buck on the transaction. And, then, very sadly, my old neighborhood did get very sick. For reasons unclear to me, the crack epidemic of the 1980s hit the neighborhood hard; many of the people who had moved in during the 1970s left the neighborhood, and abandonment set in. The institutions left also, including my old parish and the credit union. Lots of hard working people lost the equity in their homes. A nonprofit, Esperanza, provides a range of services to residents in the neighborhood today.[48] Housing values are low. Zillow reports that the current median listing price of homes on the market is $70,000, which in constant dollars is less than homes were selling for in 1950. My periodic visits to my old haunts renew my passion to improve neighborhoods, especially for the kids living in them.

STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS

This category of neighborhoods does not require much in the way of public sector intervention to improve them. These are places that are the winners in the neighborhood market place. Cities need to pick up the trash, plough the snow, enforce housing and zoning codes, keep the streets and sidewalks maintained, and keep the neighborhoods safe. These are places where, politics notwithstanding, affordable housing should be developed through inclusionary zoning approaches.[49, 50]

The Principles of Improving Neighborhoods

Whether it's distressed or middle, approaches to neighborhood improvement succeed most frequently when they follow some well-established principles. These are:

1. *Efforts are targeted to a place.* This may be an obvious point, but it's a reminder that neighborhoods are places, resources are limited, and targeting is necessary. The place selected needs to be large enough that improving it will affect market values in and around it, but not so large that impact is lost in a larger area of decline.

2. *The intervention is based on a shared vision for the neighborhood with clear goals.* This point is illustrated by the Baltimore examples cited above.

3. *The planning and execution process is participatory and community-based.* There is a lot of experience in the city planning field regarding community participation in planning and implementing, and the experience of community development corporations is well documented.[51] Building from the early "maximum feasible participation" of the War on Poverty, today's processes involve residents, churches, anchor institutions, business leaders, and other stakeholders.

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48 "Esperanza: Strengthening Our Hispanic Community," Esparanza, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.esperanza.us/.

49 Jenny Schuetz, Vicki Bean, and Rachel Meltzer, "31 Flavors of Inclusionary Housing: Comparing Policies from San Francisco, Washington, DC and Suburban Boston," *Journal of the American Institute of Planning* 75 (2009): 441-456.

50 Josiah Madar and Mark Willis, *Creating Affordable Housing out of Midair: The Economics of Inclusionary Housing in New York City* (New York: NYU Furman Center, 2015), https://furmancenter.org/files/NYUFurmanCenter_CreatingAffHousing_March2015.pdf.

51 "Sample Quality of Life Plans," LISC Institute for Comprehensive Community Development, accessed August 4, 2020, http://archive.instituteccd.org/resources/category/522.

4. *The neighborhood improvement plan is multidimensional.* This principle aims to find the balance between monolithic plans that focus only on housing or some other element, and comprehensive plans that are at risk of failing because in trying to do everything, they succeed at nothing.

CONNECTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WITH NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Scene: East Liberty in Pittsburgh, circa 2003, a delegation from Baltimore listening to a director of the neighborhood CDC, East Liberty Development Inc. After preliminaries, the speaker says: "Let me start by describing how East Liberty fits into the overall regional economic strategy." Really! This was the only time in my 50 years that I heard a connection between economic development and neighborhood improvement expressed from a neighborhood leader. I was astonished and delighted.

More of that connection has happened since, in large part due to the work of Bob Weissbourd in Chicago (the author of that Neighborhood Taxonomy described on page 7). Bob and his colleagues have made the connection between inclusive economic growth and neighborhood revitalization. The plan for the group of Chicago neighborhoods called Greater Chatham includes a component on how these neighborhoods fit into the larger Chicago economy.[i] Similarly, the South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative's plan for a group of South Suburban municipalities combines inclusive economic growth and neighborhood improvement strategies,[ii] another big breakthrough. This connection makes sense when the neighborhood area is large enough to have its own place in the regional economy, and the analytics behind this work is ready for transfer elsewhere.

i. Greater Chatham Initiative Leadership Committee, *The Greater Chatham Initiative: Comprehensive Plan for Economic Growth and Neighborhood Vitality* (Chicago: June 2016), http://www.greaterchathaminitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/comprehensive-plan-for-economic-growth-and-neighborhood-vitality-pdf-2.pdf.

ii. South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative, "Transforming the Economy of the South Suburbs," Cook County, accessed August 4, 2020, https://www.cookcountyil.gov/sites/default/files/ssegi_overview.pdf.

5. *The Plan needs to be strategic and market savvy.* Neighborhood strategies need to be based on improving those elements of the neighborhood that are most likely to hold existing residents, businesses, and institutions and to attract newcomers. A sound understanding of the marketability of the neighborhood is key.

6. *The improvement plan should work from whatever strengths that can be found in and around the neighborhood.* This is the Boehlke principle and applies to every category of neighborhood.

7. *The plan needs to focus on investment psychology, which means it must produce visible results in timely fashion.* Lots of distressed and middle neighborhoods have been through multiple planning processes, without any clear results. Changes must be obvious, even if they are small, like clean vacant lots, boarded up vacant units, or new signage. Momentum is essential.

8. *Goals and resources need to be aligned.* Big plans with virtually no resources will disappoint everyone.

9. *The implementation of the plan needs to leverage resources.* A smart planning process creates a constituency for the plan, so that a mix of public, philanthropic and private funds can be triggered to improve the neighborhood. Capital from financial institutions is critical.

10. *The organizations working to improve the neighborhood need to be entrepreneurial in spirit and deed.* Neighborhood improvement is not for the faint of heart. Passion is needed. Risks must be taken. And key players need to think about the improvement strategy as though it is their company, so that they psychologically own it.

11. *The implementation of the plan must have a champion or champions.* Whether it's Dorothy Richardson in the Central North Side, or Rev. Luis Cortes in Hunting Park, or Jeff Versespej in Old Brooklyn in Cleveland, neighborhoods need people who are relentless in their efforts to strengthen

them. These improvement processes are very hard work. People argue. Different visions need to be reconciled. Disappointments occur. Champions help the players stay focused on and excited by the vision and big goals.

12. *Someone with legitimacy and trust needs to orchestrate all of the players.* There are many players: city government departments, real estate developers, neighborhood leaders, lenders, social service providers, pastors, business owners, school principals and teachers, and many others. The orchestrator needs to get these players working in harmony, both in content and timing.

13. *Uninterrupted momentum is crucial.* However small, actions need to be taken and victories won that build credibility about the process and hope for change. The vacant lot is now clean. 100 people came to a meeting. Three people volunteered to be block captains. The City demolished that awful building!

These principles are simple to state, but challenging to execute well. This essay would double in size if I included a more detailed "how to" section, that focused on the need to understand power dynamics, establish and enforce rules of engagement, press for transparency, give elected officials center stage, and implement many other practices that take concepts and make them reality.

Closing Thoughts

Back to the federal role. When Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, Bruce Katz from the Brookings Institution, working with the Transition Team, asked me to organize and coordinate a group to prepare a transition document on HUD, with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation. I teamed up with Rachel Godsil, who had worked with Bob Weissbourd and me on the Campaign's Urban Affairs Committee. The University of Pennsylvania's Institute for Urban Research (Penn IUR) agreed to provide the home for this effort, and over 100 very experienced professionals produced a 200-page plus report called *Retooling HUD for a Catalytic Federal Government: A Report to Secretary Shaun Donovan*.[52] One of the themes running through this detailed report is to put the "UD" back in HUD, that is, reinvigorate the urban development agenda. HUD is now primarily a housing and regulatory agency. The housing is public housing and housing mortgage insurance via the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and Fair Housing. The remaining neighborhood improvement effort is the CDBG program, created in the Nixon Administration. HUD essentially regulates use of the funds, most of which are intended for poor people and distressed neighborhoods, but there is little or no creative use of the funds.

The Obama Administration's place-based initiatives—Sustainable Communities, Strong Cities Strong Communities, and Promise Zones—provided technical assistance so that the programs could make effective use of the very limited funds available for narrower purposes from a range of federal agencies. While this approach valued local efforts, without grants to sustain local organizing efforts or jump-start catalytic projects there was little direct support for neighborhood improvement. Under the Trump administration, funds for neighborhood improvement are near nil. An important exception is the continuing work to transform public housing through HOPE VI, Choice Neighborhoods, and the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD).

Sadly, the federal government is not a partner in neighborhood improvement. With the right leadership, it could be again.

One last very important point in a very different dimension: Underneath all of these concepts, strategies, principles and lessons lies something more mysterious and essential to neighborhood strength. It is the soul of

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52 Paul C. Brophy and Rachel D. Godsil, Retooling HUD for a Catalytic Federal Government: A Report to Secretary Shaun Donovan (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Institute for Urban Research, February 2009), https://penniur.upenn.edu/uploads/media/retooling-hud-report.pdf.

the neighborhood, a term that Alice Shabecoff and I used in a 1996 *Shelterforce* article.[53] This is the caring, the friendliness, the pride of place, the small favors, the block parties, the laughter shared by neighbors. It's the smiles neighbors give each other, and the help, when needed.

While in Pittsburgh, I was befriended by Phil Pappas, an eccentric and lovable Greek-American organizer, poet, and artist, who knit together a modest-income South Oakland community, with only two essential ingredients: a community space to meet and share, and a belief that neighbors caring about each other is the essential ingredient to a stable neighborhood. If we can figure out how to accept, love, and heal one another that will be enough. There is enough strength in us, collectively, to make our lives better. Young Linda is falling behind in reading. Who can tutor her? Millie's son, David, was just arrested for drug possession. Is there a man in the neighborhood who can become an uncle to him for the next six months? The neighborhood is looking ratty. Let's organize a clean-up next month. Who's in?

What Phil was practicing was what Fred Rogers, another important Pittsburgher at the time, was preaching from WQED every day.

> "I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you,
> I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you . . .
> Won't you please, won't you please, please won't you be my neighbor."[54]

This is the profound truth underneath why any of this matters.

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53 Alice Shabecoff and Paul C. Brophy, "The Soul of the Neighborhood," *Shelterforce*, May 1996, https://shelterforce.org/1996/05/01/the-soul-of-the-neighborhood/.

54 PBS Kids, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQS3JGqx46U