Rebuilding North Lawndale: Steps to Revitalizing a Community

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Executive Summary

The North Lawndale neighborhood is located less than five miles west of downtown Chicago. With its close proximity to the downtown area, North Lawndale has tremendous potential to grow into one of Chicago’s most vibrant neighborhoods. Even though North Lawndale is currently not enjoying the prosperity and vibrancy it once did, there are substantial signs that indicate the community is in the midst of growth in both social and economic elements. Prior to 1970, North Lawndale had many local businesses, strong educational institutions, valuable property and scenic parks for community enjoyment. It is the goal of the North Lawndale residents to revitalize the community to once again enjoy this prosperity. The North Lawndale community, which is predominantly African American, hopes to capitalize on the community’s close proximity to downtown Chicago and create employment and social opportunities for the neighborhood’s residents. It is critical that the North Lawndale residents actively participate in all areas of development to prevent the neighborhood from being gentrified and losing the neighborhood’s character.

North Lawndale’s greatest assets are its close proximity to downtown, a heritage of unique grey stone housing, wide boulevards and it’s strategic location on Ogden Avenue- a high traffic area and a pathway to the Little Village neighborhood. According to 2000 census data, the residents of this neighborhood are predominantly African American (93%), with small populations of Latino, Asian and White residents. During the years of decline, much of the population emigrated from the area. The population who remained have been staying in the area through continual years of hardship. This long standing population forms the backbone of several community based organizations. Youth agencies, religious organizations, entrepreneurial organizations and training centers have been sprouting up in recent years, and it is this type of community mobilization that is further required for North Lawndale revitalization.

The neighborhood faces numerous challenges and revitalization will not be a quickly paved road. Low investment, few businesses, declining property value, crime and unemployment all pose complex problems to tackle. The neighborhood currently records approximately 42,000 residents according to 2000 census data. The lack of economic growth has not been able to keep up with labor demands, and the high unemployment rate (25%) has led to subsequent social problems.

Social stress and unemployment are critical problems in this community. The downturn in employment opportunities has inevitably led to crime, poor savings rates and lower rates of higher education. These factors keep North Lawndale community members in a downward spiral of existence.
North Lawndale is racially segregated from the surrounding areas as the neighborhood is generally made up of African Americans. The neighborhood was once a predominantly white area, however emigration to the suburbs increased vacancy rates, decreased property values, and left the community very much segregated.

Limited growth has hurt the local schools. With the out-migration of businesses, came declining housing values that directly correlate with property taxes for funding of the local schools. This correlating relationship will continue to have a cyclical effect unless property values are increased.

Nonetheless, the neighborhood is experiencing an up swell in growth both economically and socially. Furthermore, a significant amount of attention is being paid to developing North Lawndale by the local government, cooperative agencies (religious for example) and community-based groups. The proposal outlined in this report aims to be a part of this growth process and focuses in key areas for improvement. This report highlights four strategies aimed at improving the economic and social problems of the community. These strategies will utilize the neighborhoods assets and find innovative ways to overcome the obstacles and impediments to revitalizing the North Lawndale neighborhood.

**Strategy 1**: Physical Development- Beautification of Ogden Avenue, development around CTA, community art, trees, etc. This process will heavily involve resident volunteers and community-based development organizations to create a desirable location for businesses and create an attractive ambiance for the community.

**Strategy 2**: Economic Development: Commercial development to bring sustainable businesses to the area, focusing on Ogden Ave. Businesses that will create desirable employment opportunities for the community are required. Furthermore, businesses that will provide essential goods and services are critical to meeting the needs of this community. Examples of such businesses include a bank, grocery store, and pharmacy.

**Strategy 3**: Social/Human Development (in regards to employment)- Increase employment options for North Lawndale residents. Aim to improve job skills and earning power of residents through skills training, employment networking, and entrepreneurship training. Creation of a community center to offer these resources. The community center is a central part of the revitalizing project as it will serve as a resource base for residents and act as a pillar of community economic spirit and wellbeing.

**Strategy 4**: Social/Human Development (in regards to education, recreation, families, health care, etc.). These resources and services will make up a large part of the community center’s purpose. The activities conducted will aim to support student achievement and opportunity, build strong families and individual health and wellbeing. Supplemental programs to improve academic performance and college attainment and a mentoring program are also proposed. The community center will also help the community expand access to health care and will also provide actual opportunities for mental health and substance abuse counseling. Fitness and nutrition classes/recreational opportunities (youth sports, open gym time...) will also be offered. This community center will also work with local agencies to revitalize the Douglass Library and keep it technologically up-to-date. The community center will also offer childcare services and form partnerships with local schools with co-op programs. The aim of all these activities is to meet the social needs of this community.

The residents have been experiencing serious social stress and are in need of support systems to enable their growth. Revitalization will be an ongoing process. It is critical that community mobilization is combined with external help in order to develop the neighborhood in the best interests of the community members. It is critical that the community members do not become demoralized in the process and lose the character of North Lawndale to gentrification. This report will provide a blueprint for economic and social development by offering specific strategic recommendations. The report strongly advocates that the local governments utilize these strategies and form collaborations with state and federal agencies in order to deliver the maximum resources to the revitalization. This report also stresses the responsibility of community organizations and cooperatives as part of this development process in order for it to be sustainable.
Introduction

The census data from 2000 indicates that North Lawndale is experiencing several immediate problems and ranks extremely low on all development indicators compared to other more prosperous areas in the Chicago area. There is an urgent need to revitalize the community and recreate a sustainable environment for the community members. This is particularly important in order to protect the neighborhood from gentrification given its attractive and strategic location close to downtown Chicago.

There are approximately 42,000 residents in North Lawndale. Approximately 24,000 of these residents are between the age of 18 and 64. The unemployment rate is particularly problematic at almost 26%. The median household income is approximately $19,000 with over 45% of the population living below the poverty line, of which over 9000 are children. There are significant levels of single-parent head households including almost 6000 working mothers. Most of the population is dependant on rental properties to meet their needs with few residents having the capabilities to be homeowners. Almost 50% of the population aged 25 or over has only a high school degree with little to no college experience. Less that 5% of this group has a college degree and only 3% has an associate’s degree.

These statistics collected in the 2000 census indicate the stressful economic and social conditions that the community is facing. These conditions give rise to several problems that must be addressed in order for revitalization. The strategies put forth in this report aim to address these problems and give the North Lawndale community a new dynamic.

Successful communities provide residents with places to live, socialize, learn, work, and play...

Strategy #1 - Shape Ogden Avenue into North Lawndale’s main Commercial street, developing mixed use space from Central Park Avenue to Pulaski Road.

Vacant lots and abandoned building overrun the current commercial district of North Lawndale. As the first impression of the neighborhood, the Ogden Avenue strip has little appeal to aspiring business owners and entrepreneurs. Still part of the historic Route 66, Ogden Avenue has the potential to become a sustainable center of commerce and allure. Restoring the commercial avenue is a priority in strengthening economic and social development.
1.1 Beautify and reconfigure target area in order to support both retail and pedestrian activities.

- **Configure diagonal street parking, add more stop signs, and create bicycle lanes.**
  Specifically these three initiatives are designed to decrease the speed of automobile traffic. We expect more drivers and passengers will have more opportunity to survey the community as an attractive atmosphere. Safer living conditions should prevail and businesses will more likely shift to region.
  
  The Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) would be vital partner in this effort. Ogden Avenue currently consists of four to six lanes of traffic. CDOT would be responsible for traffic services, permits, and street reconstruction to reduce these lanes. The entire phase will take place within two to five years.

- **Wider sidewalks, street light repair, add more garbage cans, plant more trees.**
  
  In addition to altering the physical street of Ogden Avenue, we also are seeking to improve sidewalk and median features. The stated initiatives are key to beautifying and supporting the pedestrian activities of the community. The Ogden Avenue strip includes a substantial median with potential of becoming a striking green space. Along with increasing the number of garbage cans, we can develop a more healthy and environmental friendly main street.
  
  Street light repair would serve duel purposes as well. Brighter streets will provide more ideal conditions for business attractions, and again creating a more visible and safer setting for residents.
  
  CDOT would be in charge of planter and median improvements and maintenance. In conjunction with street development, this phase would also require one to two years to complete.

- **Incorporate community art into main street appeal.**
  
  We believe that community input and interaction is essential to our strategies of revitalization. One direct way to utilize this element in our effort is to include the community’s culture into the main street attraction. To do so, the community will be given three or four distinct building facades to create imaginative and innovative murals. This undertaking will be similar to mural project created in 2006, entitle *Beacon Of Light*, found on Central Avenue & Ogden. (See adjacent photographs.)
  
  Not only will this initiative be a visual and emotional element of North Lawndale’s cultural presence, but the wall paintings will make efficient use out the existing infrastructure. We hope to hold a community planning meeting to discuss creative ideas of design for the murals. Schools and local interest group could be delegated the production tasks. Phase completion in one to two years, with option to modify community art over time.

1.2 Develop a mix of sustainable commercial entities, in order to create job opportunities and retain community spending.
• Concentrate new development near CTA train stations.

The recent $480 million renovation of the CTA Blue Line Douglas branch is clearly a valuable resource which we want to capitalize on. The Line provides North Lawndale with great potential for foot traffic with its location being linked between the western suburbs and downtown Chicago. Ideally, the space around the two train stops located at Pulaski and Central Park Ave. will become vibrant areas of interest for the community. We wish to concentrate commercial develop strictly between the two stops, keeping in mind the need for residential development adjacent to the zone. Higher density residential living near by will allow access to the transit system as well as support the retail operations. Furthermore, developing commercially on Ogden Avenue will create a business corridor with surrounding neighborhoods.

• Generate ideal mix of businesses for maximum, societal benefit.

As with every strategy proposed, our goal is to support North Lawndale in becoming a self-sustaining community. We believe this involves initially deciding on an optimal mix of businesses and organizations located on Ogden’s main street. Suggested mix of commercial zone use includes a grocery store, drug store and/or medical pharmacy, new/used bookshop, family-oriented restaurant, auto-repair shop, and a community bank. Currently, the majority of these types of entities exist in neighboring communities, but this lack of business in Lawndale creates deficiency in the local economy.

In the past, Ogden Avenue contained a supportive commerce district. Sears Roebuck Co., International Harvester, and the Zenith and Sunbeam Co. provided a vast amount of manufacturing jobs throughout Chicago, while employing a significant portion of North Lawndale residents. But the nationwide decline of the manufacturing industry crippled North Lawndale. When corporations moved operations out of the neighborhood, the community lost 80% of their jobs (Steans Family Foundation).

In order to revitalize the economic and social state of the community, we find it necessary to create a diverse commercial mix in our central business district. We want to direct the community to focus on prudent saving and spending, keeping the majority of money being spent within the community itself. This phase is expected to take between five and ten years to fully become profitable.

• Utilize federal, state, and city programs and initiatives to attract and retain favorable entrepreneurship.

As portrayed earlier, one of the tribulations North Lawndale has undergone has been severe commercial disinvestment and abandonment. In order to combat the recent trend in business ownership, it is imperative that the community takes advantage of federal, state, and city programs that foster economic development. Instead of relying solely on Tax Increment Financing (TIFs), we believe that we can expose other means of attracting business ventures, while benefiting the community as well. By providing incentives such as wage credits, tax deductions, sales tax exemptions, and even property tax reductions, businesses would have a good reason to situate themselves within North Lawndale. There are a number of vacant buildings on Ogden Avenue that could be restored, refurbished, and used by incoming businesses.

For example, two programs currently in position for neighborhood area 29 (North Lawndale) are enterprise zones and empowerment zones. (Neither of which are utilized to their intended purpose.) This program promote incentives such as real estate tax exemptions, utility tax exemptions, and wage credits to name a few. The City of Chicago’s Department of Planning and Development (DPD) Finance Division also offers Bank Participation Loan Programs, where the city works with local banks in lending to commercial businesses at reduced rates. The Micro Loan Program and CDBG Float Loans are similarly utilized for commercial development as well.

Cook County also fosters programs designed specifically for marketing technical assistance for encouraging entrepreneurship is the Chicago’s neighborhoods. Particularly Chicago’s DPD Strategic Planning Division collects and provides demographic and economic data about Chicago to businesses and organizations in need. They also work in union with the Department of Building to update and publish the status of vacant City-owned land for public use. By providing incentives such as wage credits, tax deductions, sales tax exemptions, and even property tax reductions, businesses would have a good reason to situate themselves within North Lawndale. There are a number of vacant buildings on Ogden Avenue that could be restored, refurbished, and used by incoming businesses.
We want take these programs and educate North Lawndale’s residents about the future benefits a sustainable commercial zone. A robust economy within even a small community has a multiplying effect on the society at large. We aim to capitalize on the local resources available. This leads into our second strategy, which identifies what programs and initiatives should be utilized for North Lawndale.

**Strategy #2**: Commercially develop Ogden Ave by implementing a variety of initiatives. Resulting businesses will provide desirable employment opportunities for community residents and will provide essential goods and services.

Ogden Avenue. This commonly used road cuts directly through North Lawndale, and it is in dire need of a revival. On the main strip, commercial development is essential. As a result of this commercial development, there would be a significant increase in occupational opportunities for residents throughout the community area. In order to entice businesses to locate on this Ogden Avenue strip, there are numerous programs and strategies that should be used. The following section (2.1) will highlight some of these programs and strategies.

2.1 Take advantage of federal initiatives and programs to spur commercial investment.

- **The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development offers an Urban Empowerment Zone Initiative that can assist North Lawndale.**
  The first program that could be of great use to the community is the Urban Empowerment Zone Initiative. Empowerment Zones (EZs) receive regulatory relief and tax breaks to help local businesses provide more jobs and promote community revitalization (HUD, 01/15/2002). The program offers **wage credits**, which encourages businesses to hire residents living in the designated zone. Therefore, businesses throughout the North Lawndale EZ would receive up to a $3000 credit for every newly hired or existing employee who lives in the EZ (HUD). The program also offers **work opportunity credits**, which encourages businesses to hire employees from groups that have high unemployment rates (young adults).

- **The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development offers a Renewal Community Program that can assist North Lawndale.**
Similarly to the aforementioned Empowerment Zone, this program offers numerous incentives for businesses within the designated zone. With this program, there are *RC Employment Credits* that allow businesses to take “up to annual tax credit of $1500 per employee within the RC designated zone” (HUD, 12/29/2006). There are also *Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTCs)* that encourage businesses within the RC to hire employees from groups that tend to have high rates of unemployment. This provides a tax incentive to the businesses to mobilize specific groups within North Lawndale. One such group is youth males and females from 18-24 years old. There are also a variety of deductions that limit construction costs for various businesses throughout the designated Renewal Community. For North Lawndale, this would make it easier to construct new commercial buildings or rehabilitated vacant ones. Since there are numerous vacant buildings and lots throughout North Lawndale, the *Commercial Revitalization Deduction* could be very useful and effective for commercial development projects. Aside from hiring and construction benefits, the Renewal Communities Initiative also offers other tax deductions (*Increased 179 Deduction*) and investment incentives (*Zero % Tax on Capital Gains*, and *Qualified Zone Academy Bonds*).

Both the Urban Empowerment Zone and the Renewal Community Zone should be further utilized within North Lawndale. Currently, part of North Lawndale is under Empowerment Zone designation, but businesses do not use all of the available options and benefits.

Aside from relying solely on federal initiatives within our commercial development strategy, we also stress the importance of a community bank. In the following section, we will further spotlight the effects that a community bank can have on a neighborhood that has experienced a significant amount of disinvestment and deterioration. North Lawndale falls under this category, and therefore could benefit greatly from the formation of a community bank that serves its residents.

2.2 The Formation of a Community Bank.

- Community banks or financial institutions are often underused and undervalued. Their worth to a struggling neighborhood can be unparalleled. For North Lawndale, this is no different. For this element of our revitalization plan, we would like pay specific attention to Shore Bank. ShoreBank began operating in August 1973, when its founders purchased the South Shore National Bank on Chicago’s South Side” (ShoreBank Corporation, 2005). It was largely successful in getting a disinvested and struggling south-side Chicago neighborhood on its feet, and we would like to mimic that success. The ShoreBank applies socially responsible investing that turns away from profit-based goals and focuses on assisting the surrounding community. It makes loans that support small business owners, help rehabbers buy and renovate vacant buildings, allow families to purchase their first homes, enable churches to build community centers and senior housing, and contribute to the creation of vital, healthy communities (ShoreBank Corporation, 2005). One option for forming a community bank in North Lawndale revolves around encouraging ShoreBank to branch out like it has to other regions of the city. It has branched out to North Side Latino neighborhoods, and it has branched out to a western part of the city. Next stop: North Lawndale. If this branching out process fails, than it is possible to form a new bank or financial institution. Recently, a Washington Mutual bank has formed near the intersection of Pulaski and Ogden Avenue. In the photograph above, it is clear that they have adopted a similar mission as ShoreBank has. The bank promises “to be a good neighbor, to earn your loyalty, trust and respect, by making your banking experience simple, efficient, and friendly. Be our guest, look around,
we’re here to help” (Di Lorenzo, 2007). There are some obstacles to overcome though. Unfortunately, the bank has not been used to its fullest potential; this may take some time. Practically next door, there is a “checks cashed” facility; on our last visit to North Lawndale, the line was out the door here, while the Washington Mutual bank was practically empty. Hopefully in the near future, North Lawndale residents will take advantage of what Washington Mutual has to offer. Since there is already a community bank on the corner of Pulaski and Ogden, we propose a new bank to be located close in proximity to our new, proposed community center. This information can be found in the following strategy, as we introduce our community center along with other key elements to our revitalization strategy.

**Strategy 3-** A social and human development approach to North Lawndale. Aims to improve job skills and earning power of residents through skills training, employment networking, and entrepreneurship training. Plans for the creation of a community center to offer these resources.

North Lawndale has experienced significant rates of unemployment for several years. Up until 1970, North Lawndale was a vibrant community comprised of relatively good income levels, affordable housing and a center of various employment opportunities. However, between 1970 and 2000, the population decreased by 45% as a result to declining job opportunities and flight of populations who could afford better homes in the suburbs. These factors led to a cyclical process that correlated the low populations with low employment opportunities and decrease in business development. Subsequent problems have included crime, building abandonment, inadequate housing, low funded schools and an overall decline in vibrancy of the neighborhood. Hence, an urgent need exists to create sustainable employment opportunities for the population. This strategy will involve job search help, job training and collaborating with businesses to improve the unemployment situation of North Lawndale. This strategy will involve the following aspects:

- Improve job skills, earning power of residents through employment networking, workshops and other resources
- Former prisoner employment assistance
- Chicago community Venture, provides growth capital and business services to inner-city entrepreneurship
- Illinois Institute for Entrepreneurship Education (IIEE)
- Local municipalities –i.e. Chicago Police Department employment, etc. (creates sense of pride, serving neighborhood)

Community members need an infrastructure and resource base in order to improve their employability. Proposed is a strong infrastructure that will provide community members with an opportunity to make them employable and additionally to enable their search for sustainable employment. An integral part of the North Lawndale revitalization project will revolve around a proposed community center. This place of gathering, resources and community vitality will be located where there is currently a vacant block on the corner of 21st street and Harding street, just steps away from the Blue-line train stop. This community center will serve as a permanent resource for community members for a variety of activities—employment resources is one of them. The reason a community center will be built is that North Lawndale residents are significantly lacking in opportunity and this structure will create a long-term pillar that residents can approach when they desire. Secondly, the community center will address other community problems with numerous other resources, and hence, community residents will have a location that can approach for a variety of resources.

3.1 Employment Workshops

- It is proposed that the community center will hold monthly workshops addressing the various obstacles to finding a job. Some of these workshops will include: Resume writing, interviewing skills, job search training, self-motivating skills, self-help job opportunities, etc. The purpose of these workshops is to give community members some motivation and support in their job search. Generally those who have had trouble finding employment may be experiencing some sense of discouragement and helplessness. It is integral that the revitalization process involves a element of participatory action from the community members in gaining employment. As time goes on, this program will also take suggestions from the community members on what they would like in future workshops. It must be recognized that motivation
and participatory action is critical to improving the vitality of community members and ensuring they find employment that is enjoyable, suitable and conducive with their goals and desires on both short and long term basis.

3.2 Job Training

- While the community center will not run long-term job training, it is proposed that bi-monthly sessions will be held in various fields to expose community members to the opportunities for skill development and careers. It is the aim of these sessions to expose community residents to thinking about a career, rather than a job. For example, a session in carpentry could be held that would bring in a professional from the workforce to talk to community members about the field. Subsequently, the job training program will identify pathways that North Lawndale residents can prepare themselves to gain this sort of employment through vocational schools, internships etc. The main aspects of the job-training program will be to link community members with existing pathways and opportunities for education and training. For example, helping a single-mother seek grants, scholarships for taking a nursing course at a Chicago-area community college.

3.3 Former prisoner employment assistance

- The Center for Impact Research identified that there is a sizable number of formerly incarcerated people living in the North Lawndale neighborhood. At the time of the 2000 census, the research indicates that up to 13,000 people belonging to the North Lawndale community were incarcerated and the majority of these people return to living in North Lawndale after their sentence. Given the sizable number of this group in the North Lawndale neighborhood, it is clear that targeted programs must be devised and implemented to ensure this group becomes productive members of society and stay away from illegal activities and drug abuse.

There is already in existence programs that strive to enable ex-prisoners reenter the community by addressing employment, housing and other related transition services. This strategy aims to strengthen support of these programs and integrate some of these services into the community center.

In conjunction with the community center, the Chamber of commerce and local religious groups, support for existing programs will be maintained and made a priority on the budget. Furthermore, this strategy hopes to also expand the programs in areas that lack funding or are underperforming due to lack of resources. Several of the programs are organized by local religious agencies and can be further expanded and supported with increased funding and other resources. These programs additionally address psychological issues of ex-offenders as a service that compliments job rehabilitation and housing. The Safer Foundation’s Ready4Work is one of these organizations that provides job training. There have also been relationships established with local businesses such as Lou Malnati’s Pizzeria, which is critically important given the stigma associated with
incarceration and the difficulties ex-prisoners endure when seeking employment. Working with business leaders in the community is integral to rehabilitating this population and overall development for North Lawndale.

The Lawndale Community Church’s Hope House that helps formerly incarcerated males who have substance abuse problems is another example. The program helps the men, providing training and counseling to prepare them to seek a job. Subsequently, the program offers the well-progressing participants to qualify for the Church’s transitional housing which is low-cost rent of approximately $100.

Given that numerous such organizations exist within the North Lawndale community, it is essential that people who need these services have the know-how on how to access them. The community center will strive to form databases and networks in order to ensure community members are able to capitalize on resources and programs that are in existence.

3.4 Chicago Police Department Employment

- Emphasis must be placed on creating a strong relationship between the community members and the local police departments. By encouraging the local police department to employ local residents this relationship can start to grow. Not only will this create sense of pride from the part of the community members who will see these jobs as part of serving neighborhood, but it can also instill trust into the police department and the role it has in the community.

Additionally, it is proposed that the police department form a relationship with the local schools in order to offer students exposure to police careers. This can be implemented with shadow programs between police officers and students, presentations and after-school mentoring programs.

Given the low high school graduation rate, high unemployment and crime, it is necessary for the police department to bridge the hostile relationship and create a sense of trust amongst the community members, particularly the youth. Additionally, it is beneficial for community members to actually be employed within the police department in order for them to take on the responsibility of governance in their own community.

3.5 Illinois Institute for Entrepreneurship, Education (IIEE)

- Created in 1988, the goal of this institution is to “promote entrepreneurship as a viable career option, and to educate and aid the public in economic development” (IIEE, 2006). Its formal mission is “to foster growth and development of entrepreneurship education and to educate the citizens of Illinois to the role and contributions of entrepreneurs in economic development and job creation” (IIEE, 2006). With this being said, the IIEE can be a very effective and useful contribution to North Lawndale and its residents. By creating a link between the IIEE and North Lawndale high schools, students could learn about the benefits of entrepreneurship and the job options that may result from it. Often, the majority
of high school students have interest in entrepreneurship, but they are not offered the opportunities to learn about it. With the assistance of IIEE, this gap can be bridged.

**Strategy 4- Social/Human Development** (in regards to education, recreation, families, health care, etc.). Aims to support student achievement and opportunity, build strong families and individual health and wellbeing. Develop community center that will help improve academic performance and college attainment as well as expand access to health care, provide substance abuse counseling, etc. The aim of all these activities is to meet the social needs of this community.

The last part of our redevelopment plan for the revitalization of North Lawndale consists of a transitional focus towards social and human development in regards to education, recreation, social services, families, and health care. We have touched on economic development, physical development, and social development in regards to employment, but another extremely critical component of our redevelopment plan is a focus on North Lawndale’s social capital in regards to the community and its people. As Euchner and McGovern mentioned in their book, *Urban Policy Reconsidered*, “community institutions in today’s poor urban neighborhoods have experienced massive strain.” The authors have come to the conclusion that throughout history and events that have occurred, “social networks and support systems have collapsed.” (Euchner & McGovern)

North Lawndale was once an extremely vibrant and rich community that encompassed all of these aspects and more; we believe that it continues to hold the potential of sustaining these components if revitalized. The problem is not the implication that North Lawndale’s social capital has completely disappeared, but that it is not being developed and maintained. Hence the fourth strategy, one focused on community development, will offer a revitalization of North Lawndale’s education: improving academic performance, health care: providing fitness classes and recreational activities, child care, job training, and much more. Also, along with these specific developments another important and significant component of our final strategy is a community center, which will house some of these programs such as child care, tutoring, job training, etc.

Before we begin to focus our attention with improving the academic performance, health care education, and other issues being faced by North Lawndale’s community, we must discuss where these activities and initiatives will take place. As previously mentioned we will construct a Community Center, which will essentially house most of the anticipated educational, job training, health care, recreational, and community development programs. This community center will be located on the corner of Roosevelt and Pulaski or in the proximity of where those two streets meet. With the location of the community center being around this area we feel the community center will not be too far away from the commercial district and close enough to the residential areas for easy accessibility to the entire community.

The community center will consist of many programs and resources available to the community of North Lawndale. It will house child care services, parenting classes, after school programs, motivational/incentive programs, sport and recreational activities, healthcare and fitness classes, job training to mention a few, which will each be further explained later on in this last strategy of our plan. The goal of the community center is not only to serve as a facility where all of these
programs and social services can take place, but to, furthermore, bring together a rich community with a vibrant potential to sustain the revitalization of their own neighborhood.

The youth of a neighborhood helps shape the future of that community, therefore improving education and mentoring the youth of North Lawndale is vital. Providing programs such as mentoring and supplemental programs for young adults and children will help them concentrate on their future, their community’s future, and other positive aspects of life as opposed to focusing on negative activities such as gang related activities or dropping out of high school. Not only is this essential to North Lawndale as a neighborhood, but also to provide the youth of this community with substantial groundwork to improve in their academic performance, college attainment, and invest in the future of North Lawndale motivating the youth of this particular community. This will eventually inspire the youth of North Lawndale to continue investing in their community and stay in the community while also contributing to its social, but also economic and physical growth.

According to the North Lawndale Charter High School Interactive Illinois Report Card, the North Lawndale Charter High School has been on probation for 3 consecutive years. The high school was also put on a school improvement track and has been on it for the same 3 consecutive years. Along with the probation status of this specific high school, its status was also categorized as being on an Academic Warning Status (AWS), which means it failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two additional years after having been placed on Academic Early Warning. Not only does this mean improvement track-like repercussions for the high school, but also possible state sanctions, such as funding cuts, restrictions, or even closing the school down, etc. Charter schools do not have the same expectations as regular public schools, which is why stressing high academic performance is a fundamental issue for North Lawndale’s educational system. (Interactive Illinois Report Card)

Proposing an improvement in the educational system existing in North Lawndale is not an easy three-step task managed by a small group of people or businessmen, but instead, what we are proposing is involvement within the community to create an ongoing developmental change and sustainability among the community in terms of human and social development. There needs to be a focus on why North Lawndale Charter High School has been on probation for three consecutive years and work with the school to help the students and teachers strive for a higher percentage than simply 15% of its students meeting or exceeding the state standards in state tests in math, science, and reading. By enforcing and providing tutoring services and after school programs specifically tailored to focus their lesson plans and curriculum in math, science, and reading, they will theoretically improve academic performance and test results.

These after school programs and tutoring programs could either take place in the schools or could take place in the community center or even both, for that matter, but the idea is for them to be available to all students in need of educational assistance. Not only will these tutoring services be tailored to those scoring low on state tests, but also for those who simply need a mentor or guidance with school, also eventually allowing them to feel a sense of belonging in a community that is theirs.

Along with tutoring and mentoring services, youth and teen programs will also be offered within the community center. The youth and teen programs will consist of gang-related support groups and meetings, fundraising events such as open mics, poetry nights, etc., sports teams, recreational groups, art classes/workshops, writing workshops, resume workshops, college workshops, cultural workshops, and much more to strengthen their community involvement. Having these types of programs and activities will bring the youth of North Lawndale closer together and will give them a sense of inspiration to stay and invest in their community. It can open up new doors for the youth of North Lawndale not only in terms of state test results, for example, but in terms of the future and achieving a higher education than simply a high school education.

The idea of the community center will be to do just that: be a center for the community and not only focus exclusively on the youth, but also integrate the elderly and create relationships among them and the youth along with the rest of the residents of North Lawndale. Offering elderly care and services in the community center along with the youth programs will help bridge the gap of North Lawndale’s past, present, and future as a vibrant community. Ideally, these relationships among residents could begin and/or continue to build the social and human development North Lawndale needs to regain the rich, lively community it once had.

Not only will our final portion of the redevelopment plan focus on the community center and building new things, but also taking things from the community that already exist and improving those services. An example of the improvement of an existing service would be the Chicago Public Library Douglass Branch located in North Lawndale. We are proposing a new Technology Center, which will encompass new computers, computer literacy programs, and put emphasis on technology skills for the future. Also, among other suggests lie children’s book clubs, increased child activities, importance of family time, and keeping the library open for at least a few hours on Sundays. It was noted that this branch did not open on Sundays, but most families and children usually have time
on Sundays, but because it is closed for the community it offers nothing for them when they might possibly need it the most.

The previous strategy focused on social development in regards to employment and training, which will mainly take place in the community center as well. The bi-monthly training sessions will be held in a mixture of fields to expose community members to different options and opportunities for skill development and careers, rather than simply looking for a job to pay bills and live from paycheck to paycheck. It will give residents a sense of a goal-oriented mentality, which will then result in residents having a reason to invest in their community because they have the option of getting something back from their neighborhood rather than just going to work or even working outside of North Lawndale. According to the Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County (CEDA), as of 2004, the number of people living in poverty in Cook County was more than 763,000. (Wharton 2007) The median income in North Lawndale is $18,342, implying that a good number of the people in poverty living in Cook County are possibly residing in North Lawndale. Providing resources which will enable residents to develop the skills needed for the jobs located in their neighborhood will encourage them to stay and help enrich that neighborhood.

Employment seems to be a huge issue in a redevelopment plan of a community for its residents because as Brunn, Williams, and Zeigler points out “unemployment continues to be borne disproportionately by marginal labor force groups such as teenagers, older workers, women, racial minorities, and unskilled workers in general.” (Brunn, Williams, and Zeigler 2003) We seek to change this in North Lawndale to enrich its employment community for the entire neighborhood. This will be achieved through job training workshops, local business partnerships looking to employ, child care program for those employed, resume workshops, computer literacy, entrepreneurial skill building, and a tracking system which will encourage residents and community members to place a goal of employment and achieve it. In the past the city government was very much in favor of gentrification because it lured professionals into the city, which would in turn increase city tax revenue, but with our final strategy we wish to give the current residents the necessary skills to be able to stay in their neighborhood without a potential for displacement (Aardema & Knoy, 2004).

Using social capital theory, which Alejandro Portes describes as “the ability to derive benefits from membership of networks and related social structures”, we looked at the disparities and needs of North Lawndale, concentrating on indicators of social capital, to develop an understanding of the degree to which social capital is present in the neighborhood and how to revitalize those indicators (Turner, 2004). Furthermore, looking and focusing on those disparities will help the North Lawndale grow and improve its overall social capital all while also motivating the residents and giving them a reason to stay and invest in their community.

Conclusion:

The proposed strategy outlined in this report centers both on social and economic development. It is stressed that community participation and government support must work together in order for success. The North Lawndale community has undergone significant economic and social stress and extended periods of decline. The current situation reflects a surge of renewed incline to bring the community back to the levels it once enjoyed. The four strategies outlined in this report stress increased commercial activity, increased community vitality and an overall increase the employment levels to create productive and vibrant community members. It was a key concern of the group to create a strategy that took into
account the social well being of the people so that the community is not taken over by gentrification. North Lawndale has many assets that it can utilize to revitalize the neighborhood and it is critical that any strategy for development does not put the neighborhood on the path to gentrification. However, the obstacles that exist are numerous and complex including limited resources, high unemployment, a large ex-incarcerated population, low levels of education, and low economic activity. Community revitalization depends greatly on dedication and resources from all participants in the development process including the government, the community members, and facilitating organizations. It is our hope that North Lawndale develops into a vibrant and versatile neighborhood and its community members enjoy productive and satisfying lives.

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