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Neighborhood Revitalization Model

The City of Fresno conducted a pilot demonstration of its revitalization and community-building practices in one of Fresno's most distressed Downtown neighborhoods, the Lowell neighborhood. The goal of the pilot demonstration was to, with extremely limited resources, build a sustainable and replicable model of revitalization for older, historically neglected neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty.

Background

Why revitalize? Neighborhood conditions can predict how healthy or sick its residents are, as well as who may live longer or shorter lives. Patterns in residential segregation have demonstrated health and wealth inequalities among different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. A recent study from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, *Place Matters for Health in the San Joaquin Valley: Ensuring Opportunities for Good Health for All*, states that the rate of premature deaths in the lowest-income zip codes of the San Joaquin Valley is nearly twice that of those in the highest-income zip codes. This overall pattern suggests that the clustering of social, economic, and environmental health risks constrains opportunities for people in these communities to live healthy lives.

Mayor Ashley Swearengin was sworn into office in January 2009 with a vision to revitalize Fresno's downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. The Mayor's leadership supported the drafting and passing of key planning legislation that seeks to guide future development practices in Fresno's core. In 2010, City Council approved the funds to draft three planning documents: the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan for Downtown Fresno, the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan, and a Downtown Development Code. The Mayor was involved in each step of the planning process, and ultimately all three plans were recommended for approval to City Council by the community and are expected to be adopted in 2015.

On December 18, 2014, the Fresno City Council adopted the 2035 General Plan Update, which calls for about half of the City's growth and investment over the next 20 years to occur in existing neighborhoods within the city limits. While balanced in its approach, the General Plan represents a departure from the City's historic growth pattern. To effectively implement the new General Plan, the City of Fresno has developed a successfully modeled "proactive" code enforcement, which is led by the City's Neighborhood Revitalization Team.

Vision

The City's Neighborhood Revitalization program is aimed to achieve its vision by:

- Actively engaging residents in the revitalization process in an effort to understand what the conditions are
- Maximizing resources through coordination of City departments and other stakeholders
- Ensuring sustainability of revitalization efforts
- Using a revitalization model that can be evaluated based upon neighborhood-specific conditions and replicated throughout the City of Fresno.

Focused Revitalization

During this process there is continuous integration with the Code Enforcement and Housing Divisions to ensure the neighborhood quality of life is both maintained and enhanced. The City of Fresno is looking for outcomes as a result of focused neighborhood revitalization such as:

- Increased homeownership opportunities
- Decreased vacancy rates
- Ensure all homes are in compliance with code laws
- Promotion of responsible landlords and tenants
- Decreased crime, gang related activity and drug activity
- Improvement in the environment for childhood learning to increase test scores and attendance
- Increased safe and comfortable transit options (bus, biking, walking)

Neighborhood Revitalization Team

Within the Development and Resource Management Departments Community Revitalization Division is the Neighborhood Revitalization Team (NRT). The NRT is assigned to targeted neighborhood revitalization activities.

The NRT currently consists of one manager, one community revitalization supervisor, three community revitalization specialists and three community outreach coordinators. One full-time Problem Oriented Policing (POP) officer also partners with the NRT per neighborhood. It is of particular necessity to have a team that not only understands the municipal code, but also who understands the need to create relationships of trust and to engage and collaborate with key stakeholders in all phases in the process of neighborhood revitalization.

The focus includes proactive, on-the-ground evaluation of blight and actions required to effectively address and remove these negative influences as well as providing hands-on outreach and engagement with neighborhood residents, property owners, business owners, community groups, connecting qualified home owners with rehabilitation programs, and creating partnerships with schools, nonprofit businesses, and other interested stakeholders who are actively participating in the revitalization of specific neighborhoods. Though it would stand to reason that the City of Fresno is vital to the success of neighborhood revitalization, without a model of collaboration with stakeholders, the efforts will not be sustainable without complete "buy-in" from engaged residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

Pilot Neighborhood and Best Practices

In 2010, the City chose to pilot its approach in one neighborhood, Lowell, to ensure City staff and neighborhood residents could begin to understand the issues facing Fresno's downtown neighborhoods, how to best approach those issues, and how to ensure the most collaborative and efficient approach possible before moving into other neighborhoods.

The success of the neighborhood revitalization model is predicated on many factors being in place. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A.** Each neighborhood is unique; this can also be true from street to street in the same neighborhood. It's crucial the NRT is poised to "adjust" at any given time, if current thinking and practices don't result in positive change.
- B.** Two City of Fresno departments are critical to positively impact neighborhood revitalization. These are the Police Department and Code Enforcement. This is not to say other departments such as Housing, Public works, etc. aren't essential. A strong foundation should be laid with enforcement of existing codes and a heavy presence of the NRT building a relationship of trust with stakeholders in order that criminal activities are reported and code enforcement violations are addressed.
- C.** A majority of City departments can enhance revitalization efforts by coordinating and allocating a percentage of their resources to impact the necessary work improvements in the focus neighborhood. For example, Public Works funding for sidewalk repairs, street light repairs, etc.
- D.** All City of Fresno housing programs should be aligned to fit the specific needs of the focus neighborhood. For example, Targeted Rehab programs should be designed to fit the needs of the affected community.
- E.** Community revitalization specialists are able to open their own code enforcement cases and work with the residents directly until the cases are resolved. For more complex cases, the NRT would continue to hand-off cases to Code Enforcement.
- F.** Adequate technology needs to be in place to maximize the amount of time NRT members spend in the community. An office in the neighborhood or mobile unit housing the NRT is desirable and might prove to be hugely impactful to the efforts of the team.
- G.** The NRT continues to partner with the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program, focused on improving resident capacity, the development of resident-driven revitalization planning efforts and sustainable neighborhood associations.
- H.** The NRT should be aware of and engaged in leveraging other programs such as the Fresno Economic Opportunity Commission's weatherization program. Such partnerships leverage the limited resources of each agency, but when combined can have positive results.

Initial Targeted Neighborhoods

- El Dorado Park
- Jefferson
- Kirk
- Lowell
- Yokomi

Neighborhood Revitalization Implementation

PHASE 1

Data Mining

This phase generally takes approximately **four to six weeks**.

- Identify which neighborhood will be evaluated.
- Develop map of the neighborhood.
- Identify which four person team consisting of one senior, two Community Revitalization Specialists and one Community Coordinator will be assigned.
NOTE: two teams can work different targeted neighborhoods at the same time.
- Data Mine: Conduct interviews with stakeholders, code enforcement, and other agencies as needed. Review maps, census, demographics, income, employment, education level, and other related information.
- Identify sub areas in the neighborhood and assign individual team members.
Set up by residential blocks, total numbers of residences, etc.

PHASE 2

Saturation Initial Evaluation

This phase generally takes approximately **four to six weeks**.

- Team assigned to neighborhood (boots on the ground)
- Photo existing conditions
- Assign initial rating system (1–5 with 1 being the worst)
- Introduce staff to residents
- Implement spread sheet database (Note: consider using Naviline for tracking)
- Look for signs of criminal element and activity.
- Look for general conditions in the neighborhoods that will require other City Division assistance, such as lighting, street conditions, alley blight
- Consider immediate assistance from Code Enforcement if there are critical health and safety issues.
- Consider immediate Housing Assistance if it is readily apparent during first inspection that the home qualifies.

PHASE 3

Maximum Coverage

This phase generally takes approximately **six to eight weeks**.

- Introduction to stakeholders including proximity to schools, businesses, medical facilities and residents.
- Prepare introductory and provide introductory letters to the residents outlining the components of the program.
- During one-on-one contact, provide handout pamphlets.
- If there has been no personal contact, leave door hangers with key contact information listed.
- Initiate case for Code Violations.
- Conduct inspections on worst health and safety issues.

PHASE 4

Rally Point Command Central

This phase generally takes approximately **six to eight weeks**

- Begin and end each day at same point.
- Evaluate progress, share evaluations, and provide support, scheduling the next day's activities.
- Evaluate new code cases and disposition.
- Consider integrating Code and Housing into this process.

PHASE 5

Coordination/Integration—City Components

This phase generally takes approximately **six to eight weeks**.

- Conduct bi-weekly meetings with Code and Housing. Invite other divisions as needed.
- Consider having Code and Housing Staff respond to residents via their particular expertise.
- Evaluate what programs are available for the residents.

PHASE 6

Key Partners Outside of City Hall

This phase is **ongoing**.

- Establish monthly meetings and secure input from EOC, Reading and Beyond, Housing Authority, Property Owners Association, and others as needed
- Solicit their expertise and program availability to individual residences
- Report Card: success measurement
- Identify how many homes per target area
- How many residents were contacted
- How many residents qualified for housing programs
- How many code cases were opened and closed
- From PD, identify crime trends (hopefully reductions) in focus area
- How long did it take to fully complete the neighborhood evaluation
- Identify any additional data that needs to be considered for future target areas
- Identify any substandard results
- Identify what follow up measures need to be taken

Quality Assurance/Maintenance Mode—Initial Analysis

Based on the current data available, a target area with approximately 921 residences takes a minimum of 34 weeks to complete the Phase Program. Once the Neighborhood Revitalization Teams complete the Phase Program they move on to the next target area. It appears from the first initiative that approximately 45 residences or 5% of the total neighborhood are going to require support in the form of Code Enforcement. These can be open and closed code cases but because of the magnitude of their individual case it is apparent they will need further effort. The list of these particular cases will be transferred from NRT to Code Enforcement for continued effort. Once the Code Enforcement Department assumes the case they too can make a recommendation that the case be continued, closed or referred back to NRT for monitoring. Updating a report card is consistent with ensuring that the standard is met.

