

CHESTNUT AVENUE TAP

Newport News, VA



About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission: shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region, with members in 80 countries.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

About ULI Virginia

ULI Virginia serves Hampton Roads, Richmond, and Charlottesville and has over 400 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Virginia facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

ULI District Council Leadership

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District Council Chair, ULI Virginia
Director of Community Engagement, WPA Architects

Sal Musarra, PLA (NC, VA) LEED AP
TAP Committee Chair, ULI Virginia
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Technical Assistance Program:
(TAP)

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed its members' technical expertise to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Tampa Bay area. Drawing from our seasoned professional membership base, ULI Tampa Bay offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and presenting it to the panel. TAP members typically spend two days developing an understanding of the problem, coming up with recommendations, and contributing those findings and recommendations to the sponsoring organization.

The focus of this TAP program for Woodberry aligns with the Urban Land Institute's Net Zero Imperative, a multiyear program providing research and technical assistance to public and private-sector leaders to accelerate decarbonization in the built environment through a combination of technical panels and long-term engagement. The goal of the effort is to help owners, cities, and other relevant constituents reduce or eliminate carbon emissions by providing concrete ideas and strategies to the beneficiaries of the panels and the general public.



Acknowledgments

ULI Virginia is grateful to the members of Ingenuity Capital Holdings LLC for inviting ULI to explore strategies for Chestnut Avenue corridor study area. Special thanks to leadership for planning and assistance to the TAP team before and during the exercise, especially the following individuals:

- o **Anita Dixon** – Ingenuity Capital Holdings LLC
- o **Raymond Dixon** – Ingenuity Capital Holdings LLC
- o **Tarvaris McCoy** – The Real McCoy Companies, LLC
- o **Larry Brunson** – Brooks Crossing Innovation Center

ULI VA Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Team

The TAP panel was selected from Urban Land Institute (ULI) membership based upon their unique qualifications, subject matter expertise, and project experience relative to the problem statement. The following subject matter expertise was the basis for panel selection:

- Architecture
- Economic Development
- Community Planning
- Land Planning and Site Design
- Landscape Architecture
- Community Engagement

Chestnut Ave Technical Assistance Panel Members

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE FOR THE STUDY

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Chestnut Avenue corridor is a historically vibrant, once thriving corridor of commerce and residence, but has experienced significant disinvestment over the last 20 to 30 years resulting in a lack of quality housing, services, and neighborhood commercial options. There is a need for injection of capital for infrastructure improvements and new development projects to create more quality housing, services, and commercial options for those living and working in the community. The Pearl Bailey homeplace project at 2814 Chestnut Avenue represents a potentially important investment into the community. There is a need to develop a vision for the corridor, including the Pearl Bailey project, as a potential catalyst for new development. The TAP sponsor believes that the TAP program, and implementation of the Pearl Bailey project, will help stimulate a new discussion about the history and future of Chestnut Avenue and development of a framework for revitalization.



SPONSOR EXPECTATIONS AND PANEL QUESTIONS

The Technical Assistance Panel was asked to analyze the needs and assets of the neighborhood and to synthesize a vision for the neighborhood, particularly the 2800 block which contains the Pearl Bailey project. Expected outcomes of the TAP program include helping to frame a process for defining a vision and priority action items for the area.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

Planning and Design Issues

- a. What are the proposed land uses and design elements for the neighborhood?
- b. How can the neighborhood experience better connectivity to surrounding community

assets?

c. What are some Implementation strategies?

d. How can the proposed “Pearl Bailey” project serve as a catalyst for the community?

Market Potential

e. What are the market needs that can be met by the development of this neighborhood?

B. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Chestnut Avenue is a primary collector street within a large, predominantly residential community stretching from W. Mercury Boulevard to 16th street near the waterfront. The neighborhood is generally referred to as part of the Southeast Community in Newport News, but functionally has unique characteristics, in addition to real and perceived barriers that lead many to consider this area to have a distinctly different identity.

The structures at 2814 Chestnut Avenue are strategically located in the heart of the corridor. A historic marker on the street signifies ties to entertainer and activist Pearl Bailey, who was reportedly born in this block. The structures are in poor condition, but the owners have developed plans to renovate toward the creation of a new neighborhood destination with some residential units and neighborhood commercial uses. Some of the characteristics and key issues associated with the corridor include the following:

- Blighted properties – there are many residential and commercial structures in poor condition along the corridor, contributing to an overall sense of long-term disinvestment.
- New build and renovation activity - In contrast to blighted properties, there is evidence of new construction and renovation work to residential structures that suggests investment activity in the area.
- Lack of goods and services – many of the neighborhood goods and services that once thrived along Chestnut have disappeared from the neighborhood fabric, leaving behind issues related to lack of access to these vital assets.
- Lack of defined nodes or social spaces – vibrant neighborhoods are marked by places of social activity and commercial nodes that inherently have a social aspect to them as places to see and meet your neighbors on a regular basis.
- Perceived public safety issues – The lack of active nodes and social spaces also removes activity and “eyes on the street” which is important to improve public safety in the public realm.
- Poor public realm – the physical and aesthetic condition of streets and sidewalks is critical to our perception of place and attracting investment. Chestnut Avenue has wide street sections, which encourages higher driving speeds, narrow sidewalks, overhead utility lines, and limited urban tree canopy.
- Future Land Use Plan - the 2040 Future Land Use Plan establishes planning objectives for the area, including dominant urban residential land use patterns with some mixed-use uses fronting Chestnut Avenue.
- Zoning - existing zoning regulations (for c1 and c2) allow uses that are out of scale and inconsistent with the character of the Chestnut Avenue corridor and adjacent neighborhood

areas. for example, warehousing and wholesale distribution are allowed with a conditional use permit. other uses, in particular residential uses, are not presently allowed by right, yet single family homes would be in keeping with the character of the existing neighborhood.

- Residential land use - the corridor and supporting areas exhibit a wide variety of mostly single-family units in varying conditions and architectural styles. many homes are in good condition, many are blighted or vacant, and still others recently, or currently, under renovation. many individual lots have been cleared for new home construction.
- Commercial land use – many of the legacy neighborhood commercial uses have vanished along the corridor, resulting a lack of convenient access to everyday goods and services and a loss of important social places. Many of the few storefronts that remain are in poor condition. quality commercial uses do exist a short distance away from the corridor, but are not easily accessible to those without personal cars, money for transit, or with mobility challenges.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- History – potential to leverage the unique history of the corridor can underpin revitalization efforts and support development of a neighborhood identity.
- Transit – improved routes and headways to connect residents to goods and services beyond walking distance.
- New investment – the evidence of new construction and infill housing activity suggests an appreciation in the marketplace for assets such as affordability and location.
- Dochiki Social Club – while perhaps not as vital a local institution as it once was, this community space can have an important role in neighborhood revitalization
- Sentara – the presence of a community asset in the form of Sentara’s new community health facility must be leveraged as an important anchor and partner in revitalization efforts
- Connectivity To Community Assets - nearby community assets can become neighborhood amenities with better connectivity via transit, bike and pedestrian facilities. Examples include Brooks Crossing Innovation Center, proposed Seafood Market, existing parks, full-service grocery store, libraries, and healthcare facilities.
- Undeveloped and underutilized land - at key intersections up and down the corridor exists a significant amount of underutilized (i.e surface parking), undeveloped, or vacant lots located strategically at intersections along Chestnut Avenue. Developing a strategy to gain control, or work with current owners, to create public green space or new commercial nodes could be a catalyst for revitalization.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: BARRIERS TO CHANGE

- Zoning: Current zoning may be a barrier to change. Consider modifications to the current ordinance, including a ptential overlay district, to promote quality urban design and an appropriate mix of uses.
- Public Perception: Perception of Chestnut Avenue as an aging, high-crime, blighted area can be a barrier to attracting new investment. Aging building inventory and blighted properties

along the corridor contribute to this perception.

- **Market Forces:** City planning initiatives and resources have recently been focused on other areas of the Southeast Community, particularly along Jefferson Avenue. This energy understandably captivates investment resources for investors and homebuyers seeking to be in the city.
- **Lack of community advocates** – There are passionate people with ties to Chestnut Avenue but a lack of organized community advocacy or organizations to focus energy on developing a coordinated vision and implementation plan.
- **Limited Community Engagement** – Limited city engagement with community issues due to constraints (real or perceived) on funding, staff capacity, and vision for the community due to competing interests of other economic development opportunities outside the study area.
- **Lack of Functional, Easily Accessible, Public Green Space.**
- **High Volume Traffic** - Chestnut Ave. has a wide street section, a barrier to a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment.
- **Accessibility** – A lack of convenient and cost-effective access to goods and services such as healthcare, employment centers, healthy and affordable food options, art and culture related activities, and youth development programs.

C. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY COMMENTS AND BIG TAKEAWAYS:

The panel felt strongly that there are some critical table-setting activities and decisions to be made prior to embarking upon a visioning process or development of a physical plan for the study area. There are many well-intentioned organizations and individuals with interest in revitalization of this neighborhood, but a lack of structure, collaboration and commitment to creation and implementation of a plan. It is important to establish an organizational framework for stakeholders to come together around a broad vision and realistic goals for the community, and to bring some structure to this effort, leveraging trusted leadership from within the community.

CRITICAL PATH ACTION ITEMS AND HIGH PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Cultivate a Culture of Community Advocacy – identify community champions and create structured neighborhood organization(s) to guide a vision for neighborhood revitalization in collaboration with the city and key community partners (private sector and non-profits)

2. Remove Barriers to Development:

a. Zoning - address zoning issues that may present barriers to change including time and cost barriers to development. Evaluate modifications to the zoning ordinance to support the overall vision for the area. The number of modifications that would need to be addressed suggests a new district specifically designed for the Chestnut Avenue corridor may be more appropriate than an overlay zone. In addition, the city may need to consider design guidelines that address continuity of the street edge, pedestrian access, connectivity, hidden

parking or other issues and goals as part of the new/improved zoning language.

b. Education and Resources - Develop systems for educating residents and the local development community about funding and implementation support programs for new development projects, small and local business endeavors. For example, a landing page on the city website for all city programs that are available for development for private developers [small, medium, large] with city official names who can help guide all constituents.

3. Identify incremental changes and create an implementation plan to plant seeds of change.

4. Support Ingenuity LLC efforts to implement a plan for a catalyst project at Chestnut and 29th. Refine the development plan to leverage existing land uses in the entire block as a potential model for a sustainable development pattern and quality for new development.

II. THE CHALLENGE: FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY AND THE TAP PROCESS

A. SPONSOR VISION AND TAP OBJECTIVES

Ingenuity Capital Holdings LLC initiated the conversation around Chestnut Avenue using the structures at 2814 Chestnut Avenue as a potential anchor development and catalyst for future revitalization efforts. This block is strategically located in the heart of the corridor and includes the historic Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center, as well as single family homes in various conditions, including several new renovations and new construction. A historic marker on 29th street signifies ties to the entertainer and activist Pearl Bailey, who was reportedly born in the building at 2814 Chestnut. The structure is in poor condition, but the owners have put together plans to renovate toward a vision for a new neighborhood destination with residential units and neighborhood commercial uses.

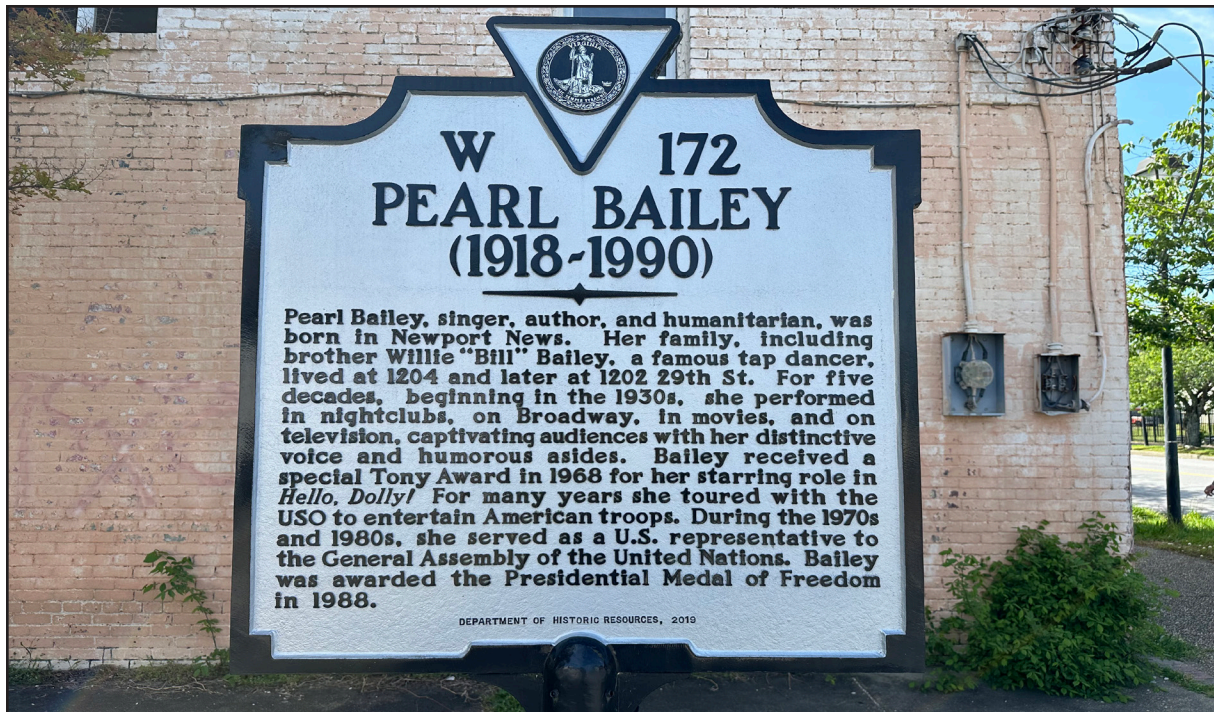
Acknowledging the Pearl Bailey site opportunity, the ULI VA TAP panel suggested expanding the scope of this effort to assess the broader community context and the impacts of disinvestment in a once historically vibrant, thriving corridor of commerce and residential living. **The Pearl Bailey** homeplace project represents a potentially important catalyst investment into the community. The corridor has many blighted properties and a lack of neighborhood commercial options. There is a need for injection of capital for infrastructure improvements and new development projects to create more quality housing, services, and commercial options for those living and working in the community.

There are obvious barriers regarding planning and visioning for a revitalized Chestnut Avenue corridor. The city recognizes the area as an important corridor within the southeast community but has not yet developed specific planning documents to attract or guide revitalization. The city lacks an active framework for tangible community input to provide a current, fresh reference point from which to make planning decisions around the future of this community. The TAP sponsor believes that the TAP program, and implementation of the Pearl Bailey project, will help catalyze a new discussion about the history and future of Chestnut Avenue and development of a planning and economic development framework for revitalization.



Figure 3: Study Area Map

Ingenuity Capital Holdings LLC, as the TAP program sponsor, requested the ULI Virginia Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to consider some potential uses for redevelopment of the buildings at 2814 Chestnut as a catalyst for revitalization of the corridor. The TAP panel was also charged to consider what other improvements, and appropriate land uses could benefit the corridor, how community engagement could inform a long-term vision for the area, and to identify strategic partnerships that may play a role in the future of Chestnut Avenue.



Future plans for the corridor should define, and leverage the cultural identity and unique assets of the neighborhood to guide redevelopment strategies, and to encourage redevelopment that exhibits the following characteristics:

- A mixed-use pattern of development that is safe and pedestrian friendly.
- Quality, and affordable housing with access to grocery stores, public open spaces and arts and entertainment venues.
- Streetscape improvements that provide for safe bike and pedestrian connectivity and unified design standards for the public realm.
- Small neighborhood gathering spaces and social venues.
- Small, locally owned businesses.

B.TAP METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE

The ULI TAP program is designed to provide a valuable resource for communities to inform future planning efforts related to important land use issues. The process included a review of background materials provided by the sponsor prior to the team's arrival, followed by a two-day program working locally near the study area



ULI VA CHESTNUT AVENUE TAP PROGRAM AGENDA

Tuesday April 23, 2024	
10:30 am – 10:45 am	Team arrival and sponsor introductions
10:45 am– 12:00 pm	Site Tour
12:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Stakeholder Interviews:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anita Dixon – Ingenuity Capital Holdings Llc • Floyd Keller – Property Owner • Raymond Dixon - Ingenuity Capital Holdings Llc • Larry Brunson – Brooks Crossing Innovation + Opportunity Center • Owen Miller – Acting Assistant Manager, City Of Newport News • Tina Vick – Vice Mayor, City Of Newport News • Florence Kingston – Department Of Development, City Of Newport News • Derek Perry - Department Of Development, City Of Newport News • Flora Chioros – Assistant Planning Director, City Of Newport News • Terri Francis – Neighborhood Coordinator, City Of Newport News • Elizabeth Mccoury – Redevelopment Program Manager, City Of Newport News • Jamal Whitehead – Property Owner • Mike Hawkins – Retired VHDA • Katie Stodghill – PMA Architecture • Wendall T. Green and Olin Walden , WTG Architects
Wednesday April 24, 2024	
8:30 am – 4:00 pm	Panel working session
4:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Presentation of recommendations to sponsor and guests
5:00 pm	Close Program

The panel findings and recommendations were presented to representatives from the sponsor, invited staff from the City of Newport News, and members of the general public, to conclude the two-day TAP program. This report documents the overall process, observations and the final recommendations of the panel.

III. FINDINGS: SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

The summary of existing conditions was developed based upon various inputs to the ULI TAP team prior to, and during the program including the following sources of information:

- review of background materials provided by the sponsor
- observations made while touring the study area
- stakeholder interviews

Background materials provided for review by the panel prior to the program included historical context, applicable regulatory and planning guidelines, and physical site conditions of the subject properties. Resources included links to the city Comprehensive Plan documents, physical maps, transportation plans, zoning, economic development reports, history, and housing market studies. Touring the site and surrounding areas gave the ULI panel context for existing land uses and important land use relationships beyond the study area. Stakeholder interviews provided additional context around visions for the area, major concerns, and potential resources to implement change.

DEFINING THE STUDY AREA

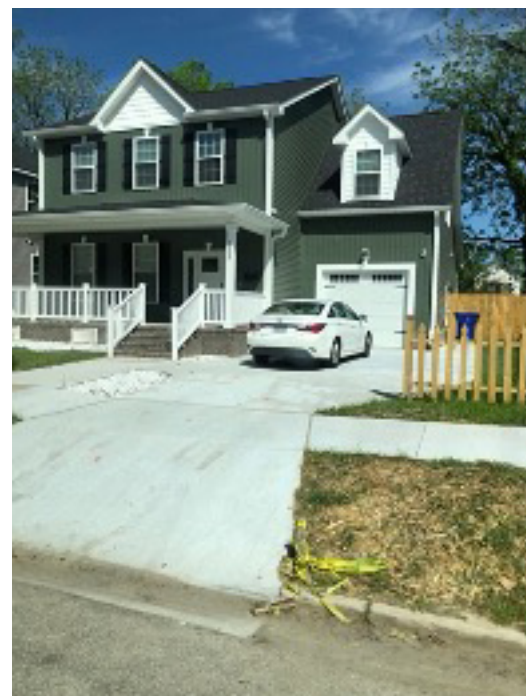
Defining the limits of study area for the Chestnut Avenue TAP was the first challenge to emerge from the stakeholder interviews and the study area tour. The corridor is roughly 1.2 miles long as measured from 39th Street to 16th Street, and one of many streets in a broad network of parallel streets running through the southeast community characterized by predominantly single-family residential uses. The distance along Chestnut from 25th street to 39th street is less than one mile and may more accurately reflect the core of the neighborhood, as well as presenting a more manageable scale to focus revitalization efforts and branding. The community and the city need to consider the functional neighborhood boundaries that would ultimately inform branding, neighborhood identity, and designation of an area for future resource allocation.



CHESTNUT AVENUE

OBSERVED ASSETS, and OPPORTUNITIES

- **History** – potential to leverage the unique history of the corridor can underpin revitalization efforts and support development of a neighborhood identity.
- **Transit** – improve routes and headways to connect residents to goods and services beyond walking distance
- **New investment** – the evidence of new construction and infill housing activity suggests an appreciation in the marketplace for assets such as affordability and location.
- **Dochiki Civic and Social Club** – while perhaps not as vital a local institution as it once was, this community space is still active and can have an important role in neighborhood rejuvenation.
- **Sentara** – the presence of a community asset in the form of Sentara’s new community health services must be leveraged as an important anchor and partner in revitalization efforts.
- **Community Amenities** - safe and convenient access to nearby community assets via improved transit, bike and pedestrian facilities can effectively provide valuable neighborhood amenities. Examples of existing or planned amenities include the Brooks Crossing Innovation Center, the proposed community Seafood Market and Commercial Kitchen, existing parks, full service grocery stores, libraries, and healthcare facilities. Booker T Washington and the Discovery STEM Academy are well regarded schools located along the corridor, but serve a large number of families from outside the immediate area.
- **Undeveloped and Underutilized Land** - a significant amount of underutilized (i.e surface parking), undeveloped, or vacant lots was observed at key intersections up and down the corridor. Developing a strategy to gain control, or work with current owners, to create public green space or new commercial nodes could be a catalyst for revitalization.



F



OBSERVED CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Land Use

- **Blight** - There are some significant structures of historic or cultural significance to the community fronting, or within a block or two, of Chestnut Avenue. Many structures are in poor condition, but some have been renovated to varying degrees and several new infill homes are occupied or under construction. An aging building inventory and blighted properties are a visual and economic deterrent to new investment.
- **Lack of defined nodes or social spaces** – vibrant neighborhoods are marked by places of social activity and commercial nodes that inherently have a social aspect to them as places to see and meet your neighbors on a regular basis. Stakeholders often notes the loss of important neighborhood intuitions and social hubs that bound neighbors together including Smith’s Pharmacy and Madam Daniels’s Beauty Academy.
- **Lack of significant public open space** – while lacking quality open space today, there does exist a few opportunities to create small pocket parks or public gathering spaces within the study area on vacant properties. In addition, there are playgrounds, parks, and public open spaces within walking distance or a short drive from the neighborhood.
- **Lack of Goods and Services** – many of the neighborhood goods and services that once thrived along Chestnut have disappeared from the neighborhood fabric, leaving behind issues related to lack of access to these vital assets.

MADAM DANIELS



SMITH'S PHARMACY



Zoning - Comprehensive Plan 2018 encourages a mixed-use future land use pattern but existing C1 and R4 zoning would require a change in zoning or an overlay district. Zoning change would likely be necessary to attract private development to the area with higher density residential products or new commercial by permitting higher densities and more height flexibility.

Public Perception: perceptions of Chestnut Avenue as an aging, high-crime, blighted area can be a barrier to attracting new investment. The lack of active nodes and social spaces also removes activity and “eyes on the street” which is important to improve public safety in the public realm.

Market Forces: City planning initiatives and resources have recently been focused on other areas of the Southeast Community, particularly along Jefferson Avenue. This energy understandably captivates investment resources for investors, institutional money, business entrepreneurs, and homebuyers seeking to be in the city.

Lack of Community Advocates – while there are passionate people with ties to Chestnut Avenue, there appears to be a lack of organized community advocates, champions, or organizations to focus energy on developing a coordinated vision and implementation plan.

Resource Limitations - limited city engagement with community issues due to constraints (real or perceived) on funding, staff capacity, and a defined vision for the neighborhood due to competing interests of other economic development opportunities outside the study area.

Connectivity and Mobility

- Transit Service is focused on the main north-south routes, with limited east-west service from the study area.
- The public realm, from street curb to building façade, is lacking some of the amenities that make for safe and inviting pedestrian zones such as consistent design vocabulary of paving materials, site furnishings, landscaping, canopy trees, lighting, and wayfinding. The width of Chestnut Ave and heavy traffic volume contribute to a less than ideal pedestrian experience. The physical and aesthetic condition of streets and sidewalks is critical to our perception of place and attracting investment. Chestnut Avenue has wide street sections, which encourages higher driving speeds, narrow sidewalks, overhead utility lines, and limited urban tree canopy.



2814 CHESTNUT AVE



IV. FINDINGS: ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

1. A NEED FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

There are individuals and groups of individuals with interest and motivation to help revitalize the Chestnut Avenue corridor, but those efforts are muted by a lack of organizational structure, leadership, and strategic partners to effect change. In essence, there is a lack of ownership to advance a coordinated effort for improvement across the many stakeholder groups with vested interest in the corridor. This includes residents, religious-based organizations, non-profits, the city, private developers, and local businesses. There is a real need to establish a formal structure to develop and guide a vision and change for the area and, in the absence of that structure, there is no mechanism for addressing the critical issues effectively.

2. A NEED FOR A VISION AND COORDINATED PLAN

With the proper neighborhood organizations in place, development of an Overlay District, Small Area Plan, or other supportive land use planning tools is key for guiding future redevelopment efforts. The lack of such guidance can be a barrier to redevelopment. Having a good plan gives the city a tool for encouraging good development and a basis for formal review of development plans. Plans provide the development community and investors with a vision, and some assurances that proposals consistent with these guiding documents should be met with some level of community support, thus reducing some risk in the development process. Finally, these plans give the neighborhood some assurance that change will be guided toward a long-term vision that aligns with their values.

The planning process must be rooted in community engagement and be a collaboration between the community, the city, and key stakeholders. When properly executed, the result is a plan that reflects the community needs and vision, with support from community leadership.

3. A NEED FOR IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

Good public realm, safe pedestrian crossings, right-sized street sections, and connectivity to key destinations beyond the neighborhood are key issues relative to encouraging redevelopment of the study area. Following are some of the existing issues associated with infrastructure and connectivity:

STREET SECTION: Chestnut Avenue exhibits the characteristics of streets in many older communities that give preference to the automobile, resulting in a less appealing, and less safe, pedestrian environment. It appears to have more than enough overall width to accommodate two travel lanes and some on-street parking. Identification of on-street, parallel parking is sporadic along the corridor and that condition, plus the width of the street, encourages higher vehicle speeds.

PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS: The way that we experience of the urban environment and a key component to quality of life in our neighborhoods is greatly influenced by the design and conditions of our public realm. The public realm along Chestnut Avenue is characterized by excessive pavement, inconsistent sidewalk widths, minimal tree canopy, sporadic on-street parking, and significant volume of utility poles and overhead utility lines. (There are actually blocks with well-

spaced trees, but the presence of overhead utility lines has resulted in those tree canopies being severely cut back to the point of having little impact on shading the pedestrian areas). Intersection configurations result in very long pedestrian crosswalk distances, which is less safe and a challenge to those in wheelchairs or mobility challenged. That said, they do offer opportunity for design modifications and improvements. There are some blocks with vintage themed pedestrian lighting, but a more detailed analysis would be needed to determine if overall lighting levels are sufficient to provide a safe pedestrian environment.



PUBLIC REALM



BRANDING AND NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY: On the north end of the corridor is a sign demarcating the “Chestnut Avenue Business Corridor”. There are also various state historic markers along the corridor but no coordinated design package for wayfinding and neighborhood branding. It is difficult to clearly define when you enter or leave the neighborhood.

TRANSIT AND MOBILITY

Vibrant, thriving neighborhoods often do not possess all the key ingredients that make for fully functional neighborhoods (goods and services, amenities, etc) within their boundaries. In those cases, they are supported by good connectivity to those missing ingredients through the presence of good public transit, bike infrastructure, and pedestrian paths. Some of the key assets lacking today along Chestnut Avenue can be found nearby, beyond walking distance for some residents, but within easy access if connective infrastructure were in place. A robust network of bus routes running not only along Chestnut but west to community assets along Jefferson Boulevard and to the waterfront would improve the quality of life for residents within the study area, particularly those dependent upon public transit, walking, bikes, or the kindness of others to get around. For those able to bike or walk long distances, safe and continuous sidewalks and bike lanes are critical to access key destinations beyond the neighborhood.

4. VACANT AND CITY-OWNED PROPERTIES

Scattered throughout the area, among existing homes and at intersections, are vacant residential lots, many owned by the city. These represent opportunities for infill housing, public pocket parks, or commercial node development at key intersections. A coordinated strategy focused on converting these properties to productive uses should be part of a community plan.

5. KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the key issues above, the panel developed the following list of key challenges and opportunities resulting from our site tour and stakeholder interviews. The list is not in order of importance, and further prioritization of issues is more specifically addressed with recommendations in Section V of this report.

CHALLENGES

- Food insecurity – access to healthy, affordable groceries
- Housing insecurity – access to affordable, quality, and safe living conditions
- Lack of trust among residents and property owners resulting from a pattern of disinvestment and lack of attention to systemic problems
- Blighted properties
- Difficulty engaging the community in an organized manner. Lack of community champions
- Lack of opportunities for local youth participation and youth advocacy
- Limited access to libraries, employment centers, healthy and affordable groceries, goods and services beyond the neighborhood
- Perceived public safety and security issues

- Lack of visual continuity, branding and wayfinding to delineate neighborhood boundaries
- **OPPORTUNITIES:**
 - Vacant residential lots and underutilized commercial space at key intersections
 - Location within the City Enterprise Zone designation
 - Develop design standards for streetscape to apply throughout the study area
 - Adequate width of streets and pedestrian zones to improve the public realm (shade trees, lighting, street furnishings, wayfinding, improved bus stops, etc)
 - Densification through infill and mixed-use development
 - Improved transportation and connectivity to the community amenities

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Opportunities for change are an expression of the potential for change based upon specific conditions of assets that might present a path to change with the willingness or partnership among landowners, developers, the city, and other stakeholders. This typically includes conditions such as the following:

- Vacant or blighted properties
- City or development authority owned properties
- Undeveloped land
- Under-utilized properties (i.e. surface parking)
- Properties held by absentee owners
- Property for sale, or with a willing seller

It is important to note that an opportunity for change does not necessarily indicate a willing property owner or suggest any active plans regarding change of use or ownership. Within the study area, the panel identified some interesting opportunities for change:

OPPORTUNITY SITES

- **CITY-OWNED PARCELS**
- **24TH & CHESTNUT OPEN SPACE**
- **2415 OPEN SPACE**
- **2800 BLOCK (PEARL BAILEY SITE)**
- **30TH & CHESTNUT**
- **31ST & CHESTNUT OPEN SPACE**
- **32ND & CHESTNUT (SMITH'S PHARMACY)**
- **34TH & CHESTNUT**
- **35TH & CHESTNUT**



Opportunity Sites



2814 Chestnut Avenue - The 2800 block of Chestnut avenue includes the Pearl Bailey birthplace, adjacent structures, and vacant lots. The panel encourages the property owners and city to consider how a coordinated development plan might transform the entire block that already includes good residential structures and the historic Newsome House.

Pearl Bailey Renderings



Pearl Bailey Renderings

courtesy of WTG Design Architects, LLC



Pearl Bailey Site: A Catalyst For Change



The pilot project could use replicable strategies from the panel's recommendations:

- Multiple partners
- Flexible zoning approach
- Improvements to private and public realm
- Establish a primary node
- Design character and community character

City-owned property – The city of Newport News does not own large parcels to inject change into the area but does control several small residential lots scattered throughout the area. These collectively may represent an opportunity for an intentional strategy to make these lots available for new construction or creative uses such as community open space or gardens.

Undeveloped Land at Key Intersections – the panel observed many undeveloped or underutilized lots, or portions of developed lots, with frontage located at the intersection of Chestnut Avenue and several key side streets. These may represent opportunities to create new neighborhood commercial nodes along the corridor.

Street and Intersection Geometry – Chestnut Avenue presents a wide street section and adequate pedestrian zones to accommodate modifications for an improved public realm. Reducing the travel lane widths, enhancing crosswalks, adding parallel parking, increasing sidewalk widths, and added landscape areas could greatly transform the character of the neighborhood, and encourage slower rates of speed for safer crossings.

V. A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIES

This section provides a framework for an action plan, including key recommendations and priority action items. The recommendations are focused on actionable items related to the creation and implementation of a long-term vision for the neighborhood, as well as small, incremental, and short-term actions. All recommendations are viewed as important, and connected, but some are deemed a higher priority as they are time-sensitive or represent enabling projects, decisions, or actions necessary to set the table for other actions.

The development of recommendations is framed around the following Guiding Principles:

- All recommendations should respond to and support a neighborhood vision and a plan for creating a fully functional neighborhood supporting community objectives that respond to the history and culture of place.
- Identify land uses that are appropriate for the study area with respect to scale, community character, market viability, and relative to adjacent development patterns.
- Focus on land uses that are market-driven to ensure long-term viability and sustainability.
- Focus on small, incremental change.
- Build a commercial strategy around small and local goods and services.
- Consider improvements that create or enhance opportunities for improved connectivity from within the study area, to nearby community services with infrastructure for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists, including enhanced public transportation service and facilities.

SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Understanding that there are active plans for the 2800 block of Chestnut, it is important to get ahead of market forces to engage and organize the community and create a process for the development of a neighborhood plan. The lack of formal neighborhood associations or advocacy within the community, as well as a lack of structure within city government for a more robust community engagement within the study area is a key barrier to success. It is very important to establish an organizational framework for stakeholders to come together around a broad vision and realistic goals for the community, and to bring some structure to this effort, including identification of leadership from within the community. Action items related to creating a formal structure with accountable leadership and community representation are among the highest-level recommendations of the TAP panel. The panel firmly believes that formulation of a lead neighborhood organization with leadership from within the community is the first critical step to guide visioning for the community prior to development of a physical plan.

It is tempting to romanticize about our old and historic neighborhoods and lean too heavily into recreating something perceived to be lost. A more productive approach for many of our legacy neighborhoods is often to simply leverage existing assets and opportunities toward a forward-looking vision for a complete community. A beautiful, vibrant, sustainable Chestnut Avenue neighborhood may be one that leans into its assets and the most highly valued characteristics most desired by people, including the following:

- Safe and attractive streets and sidewalks
- Well maintained homes and businesses
- Multi-generational and diverse population
- Healthy – significant tree canopy; reduced paved areas; good drainage systems; removal of blighted properties; access to community healthcare
- Convenient accessibility to critical goods and services, within and beyond the neighborhood
- Good parks and open space
- Happy and Connected – a robust calendar of community events and access to meaningful social places

CRITICAL PATH ACTION ITEMS AND PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations represent the TAP panel’s highest priorities and critical path action items.

1. Develop a Framework and Culture for Robust Community Engagement

Formation of community advocacy organizations is a top priority. A good first step would be to convene a meeting, or series of meetings, with city and community leaders, and strategic planning partners (private and public sector) to advance several key objectives:

- To better define the perceived and functional boundaries of the neighborhood.
- To create a shared vision and commitment to the revitalization of the corridor.
- To develop and implement an equitable and inclusive community engagement plan rooted in building trust and relationships within the community and between the community and the city.
- To identify and connect strategic partners from the public, private, non-profit sectors with community leaders around key assets and opportunities. Potential partners may include:
 - Sentara
 - Liebherr
 - Huntington Ingalls, Newport News Shipyard
 - Local Universities (CNU, Hampton University)
 - Newport News Public Arts Foundation
 - Virginia Main Street – DHCD
 - Hampton Roads LISC

2. Create a Vision and Masterplan to Guide Development

Creation of a guiding plan will define a long-term vision, help build reinvestment interest in the area, give the community a stake in the vision, and give the city another tool for guiding and reviewing development proposals.

A word of caution about visioning: it would be wise to avoid the temptation of viewing the product of revitalization efforts in other parts of the community (such as Jefferson Boulevard or Hilton Village) as blueprints or expectation for Chestnut Avenue. The land use context and market forces are too dissimilar and change within the study area should reflect an authenticity unique to the area. The vision process will be most successful if it leans into the unique assets of the corridor and creates a vision that is market-driven, based on those assets.

3. Remove Barriers to Change

Address zoning issues, time, and cost barriers to development. Evaluate potential changes to the current zoning ordinance, including a possible overlay district to support the overall vision for the area.

4. Focus on Small, Incremental Changes

The physical arrangement of land uses and critical needs of the neighborhood do not suggest large scale, transformative projects for change. A strategy for small, incremental change, with community involvement can help to address long-term goals and objectives. Home renovations and infill housing are examples of incremental change. Streetscape improvements, wayfinding, and addressing blighted properties are also incremental steps toward success.

5. Implement A Catalyst Project

City and community support to implement a plan for a catalyst project at Chestnut and 29th (ideally, a vision for the whole block) could establish a model for a sustainable development pattern and quality for new development. Continue to refine the development plan for the 2814 building with a broader view of the block bounded by Chestnut Avenue, 29th, 28th, and Oak Avenue.

6. Educate residents and the development community about funding and implementation support programs.

Local property owners and outside investors, especially small ones, are not always familiar with, or may be intimidated by, the process of land development in the city. Programs for educating potential investors or business owners can help mitigate real or perceived risk and alleviate that barrier to investment in the neighborhood. Leverage the Brooks Innovation Center as a partner to facilitate these programs.

SUPPORTIVE ACTION ITEMS

Supportive Action Items do not imply a chronological order of action but may occur concurrently in support of the priority actions, assuming they do not distract focus or drain resources away from those priorities.

Policy

- Review maintenance practices of public property and ROW to address visual impact of unkept areas within public view.
- Enforce code provisions for addressing blighted and abandoned properties.

Economic Development

- Apply the Main Street program approach to revitalization including Promotion, Design, Economic Restructuring, and Organizations.
- Conduct an ecosystem mapping of assets at the community, and neighborhood-level to inform an economic development strategy.

- Develop systems for educating residents and the development community about funding and implementation support programs for new development projects, small and local business endeavors.
- Evaluate business clustering opportunities (i.e. food / art / music / maker-space) to encourage development that reflects the history and culture of the community.
- Inventory all city owned and vacant properties within the study area and develop a plan for timely disposition of those properties.
- Tap the creatives: market to maker-space tenants and incubators that are cost-sensitive to capital costs, permits, and taxes, but less sensitive to location for their business model.

Long Term Organization and Open Engagement

- Promote locally-owned, long-term ownership and investment around a shared vision for the neighborhood.
- Evaluate the use of community action grants as a funding tool.
- Reconvene neighborhood groups and stakeholders to celebrate incremental progress with the community and document your progress along the journey.
- Consider a Community Ambassador program (volunteer or paid positions) to put recognizable and highly visible docents on the street to monitor activity, provide assistance to people in need of help, share the history of the area to visitors, or report unwanted or illegal activities.

Physical Improvements

- Implement small, public-facing and achievable projects (small, early wins i.e. green space enhancements; wayfinding) that address safety and quality of life issues as signs of commitment to the community.

Develop a transportation, mobility, and pedestrian safety plan, including improvements at key intersections to calm traffic, reduce pavement and create safer pedestrian environments. Follow “Complete Streets” and “Context Sensitive Design” concepts that emphasize right-size streets (minimal pavement sections) and incorporate safe, multi-modal options for pedestrians and cyclists.

Facilitate A Re-Branding Process

A community-led process is critical to define an authentic neighborhood brand that reflects the history and culture of the corridor. The brand must be supported by a physical plan and an economic development strategy. Elements of community branding may include design standards for street furniture, signage, lighting, and landscaping.

Program Community Events

The history of annual parades along Chestnut Avenue still inspires strong memories among long-time residents. Creating programmed activities to bring people together around food, arts, music, history and culture on a regular basis is important to recapturing the vitality of the neighborhood. Start small and build an *events calendar* to create a space for residents to connect and share, and become better advocates for the neighborhood.

Develop Design Standards

Creating standards for the public realm helps to establish a neighborhood character that feels unified and connected. It can also provide a visual clue to where the neighborhood limits begin and end. Improvements could include wide sidewalks, pedestrian-level lighting, landscaping, street trees, street furnishings, and signage.

Focus on Youth

Vital. Sustainable communities typically exhibit a diverse demographic profile, including multi-generational characteristics. Keeping and attracting young people to the community is important, and that means providing amenities and services for that demographic.

- Develop or provide better access to a youth innovation center (ex: Six Points Innovation Center model in Highland Park, Richmond) to foster soft and hard skills around creativity and entrepreneurial mindsets.
- Consider community violence prevention programs (ex: Project Imagine, Danville VA)
- Engage youth leaders in the neighborhood organizations to participate in planning and visioning exercises

APPENDIX: REFERENCES AND CASE STUDIES

APPENDIX A. FUNDING RESOURCES

- VDACS AFID Grants - Planning, Infrastructure, Facility
- Enterprise Zone Grants - Real Property Investment Grant (RPIG)

APPENDIX B. RESOURCE GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

["Virginia Community Voice Blueprint"](http://viriniacommunityvoice.org) viriniacommunityvoice.org

APPENDIX C. POTENTIAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- African American Historic Society of Newport News [African American Historical Society of Newport News - Home \(wildapricot.org\)](http://wildapricot.org)
- Model Program: Commercial Area Revitalization Effort (CARE) Program [CARE Brochure.pdf \(rva.gov\)](http://rva.gov)
- Virginia Statewide Business District Resurgence Grant [va-statewide-resurgence-grant-one-page.pdf \(viriniamainstreet.com\)](http://viriniamainstreet.com)
- Resource Guide for Community Engagement: Virginia Community Voice Blueprint [Blueprint – Virginia Community Voice \(vacommunityvoice.org\)](http://vacommunityvoice.org)
- Congress for the New Urbanism: **"Building Local Strength – Emerging Strategies for Inclusive Development"**
- Incremental Development Alliance [IncDev Alliance \(incrementaldevelopment.org\)](http://incrementaldevelopment.org)
- Virginia Main Street – DHCD
- EmPower All [About Us | EmPower All \(empowerallva.org\)](http://empowerallva.org)
- Black BRAND [Black BRAND – | We are the solution](http://blackbrand.org)

APPENDIX D. WALKABLE CITY STRATEGIES

Walk [your city] is a quick and relatively inexpensive way to orient pedestrians and support connectivity. A QR code on signs opens a map with multiple nearby landmarks and provides directions for walking from a current location. Some signs are directed to cyclists as well. <https://walkyourcity.wordpress.com/>

<https://walkyourcity.wordpress.com/about/>

<https://www.facebook.com/WalkYourCity>

Tactical Urbanist's Guide to Getting it Done <https://tacticalurbanismguide.com/portfolio/walk-your-city-signs/>

APPENDIX E. MAKER SPACE AS A COMMUNITY BUILDING BLOCK: CASE STUDY

Cassco Historic Ice House Building - 217 South Liberty Street, Suite 103 - Harrisonburg, VA
This building was constructed in 1934 for ice manufacture and cold storage services. The 80,000 square foot building sat vacant for many years until redevelopment was completed 2014/2015. The building now houses university offices (~30,000 sq ft), residential units and retail spaces.

- Hugo Kohl Fine Jewelry (workshop and boutique) <https://hugokohl.com/>
- The Museum of American Jewelry Design & Manufacturing

Stakeholders:

- Andrew Forward and Barry Kelley, local developers
- City of Harrisonburg
- James Madison University Offices:
Outreach and Engagement
Small Business Development Center
Institute for Certified Professional Managers
Shenandoah Valley Technology Council
Technology Transfer
- Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
Community Development Industrial Revitalization Fund (\$500K grant)

Unique among the current businesses is Hugo Kohl. HK was named one of America’s Coolest Small Stores in 2020 by In-Store magazine. The award goes to businesses with 6 or fewer employees. (https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=595638091341326)

Hugo Kohl Fine Jewelry uses historical manufacturing methods for producing custom jewelry. The business started as the result of a tour of the Providence, RI, jewelry district, where Hugo intercepted a load of “scrap” that turned out to be hobs, or the artwork molds for stamping and rolling patterns into jewelry metals. HK holds a significant collection of hobs in its vault, and has added the larger equipment (e.g., drop hammers, screw presses) needed for mechanical reproduction of jewelry, as it would have been made a century or more ago. All of the equipment was originally run by hand; some has been retrofitted with motors to create efficiencies in the process. Siting in a former industrial building was essential to the long-term success of the business.

The business now includes jewelry manufacture, a retail space, and a museum on the history of jewelry manufacture. The public is allowed to enter the workshop to watch the manufacturing process any time the boutique/showroom is open. Guided tours of the workshop are available one afternoon a week.

SOURCE: From Ice House to business center

Samantha Ellis, contributing writer - The Breeze (JMU newspaper)

Feb 10, 2014 Updated Apr 3, 2017

https://www.breezejmu.org/news/from-ice-house-to-business-center/article_28e73d-dc-91ff-11e3-b388-001a4bcf6878.html

APPENDIX F INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT REPLICABLE STRATEGIES and CASE STUDIES

“Building Local Strength – Emerging Strategies for Inclusive Development” - The Congress for New Urbanism

Washington, DC - Anacostia Neighborhood

- Develop an Equitable Development Plan to ensure the needs of legacy residents are addressed.

- Build a coalition of organizations with overlap in mission and service area to maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts.
- Establish a Community Land Trust to maintain below-market-rate housing while allowing homeowners to gain equity as values rise.
- Focus on wealth building opportunities, not just affordable rental housing, which includes homeownership, workforce development, financial counseling, and small business development

Detroit, MI – Boston Edison and Fitzgerald

- Provide legacy residents with opportunities for wealth building, such as shared equity in redeveloped properties, including rehabbed rental homes.
- Invest in locally owned businesses by prioritizing contracts with construction, rehabilitation, and landscaping firms based in the city.
- Consolidate vacant land to maximize redevelopment impact while supporting existing residents by providing needed population density.

Desoto, TX – Desoto Market Place

- Consolidate vacant land to maximize redevelopment impact while supporting existing residents by providing needed population density.
- Make use of existing assets to bring urbanism to aging commercial corridors.
- Build the capacity of small business owners through mentorship, collaboration, and access to tools.
- Convert surface parking to active spaces through creative placemaking, landscaping, and retail uses.
- Work with local officials to reduce regulatory barriers to creative reuse projects, including zoning and building code changes and reduced parking requirements.

Louisville, KY – Portland Neighborhood

- Acquire inexpensive, dilapidated property to minimize acquisition costs and maximize community benefit.
- Allow neighborhood residents to realize permanent affordable housing through homeownership.
- Target rehab projects that raise neighborhood comp prices, allowing property owners to receive better mortgage rates.
- Use a “one building at a time” approach to repair the most dilapidated properties.

Atlanta, GA – Historic Westside Neighborhood

- Use gap financing to create more affordable housing.
- Give current homeowners in distressed neighborhoods relief from rising property taxes that result from increasing home values.
- Form partnerships between the city and nonprofits to work with communities to refurbish existing parks and build new ones at varying scales.
- Leverage corporate and philanthropic funding to permanently ensure housing is affordable for legacy residents.

South Bend, IN - Westside Neighborhood

- Implement a “complete streets” approach to help to break the cycle of decline.
- Facade improvement and home maintenance programs encourage local business owners and residents to have “skin in the game” by investing in their own neighborhood revival.
- Zoning updates and policy reforms, like reducing minimum parking requirements, permitting accessory dwelling units, and incentives for renovation and affordable housing can encourage investment

Tools for Implementing Neighborhood Change

- 1. Permit Accessory Dwelling Units**
- 2. Acquire and aggregate land for developer RFP's**
- 3. Finance through Crowdfunding and Crowd Investing**
- 4. Provide opportunities for local ownership**
- 5. Promote incremental development**
- 6. Build “Missing Middle” housing**
- 7. Create an active and beautiful Public Realm**
- 8. Create a philanthropic fund or revolving loan fund**
- 9. Use tactical urbanism**

*Inclusive development is about building communities, not just housing. A holistic vision for community development is missing from many long-neglected neighborhoods. It's hard to focus on the big picture when the problems are immediate and severe—yet without that vision, neighborhoods may be caught in long-term poverty cycles or waves of displacement. A community vision—addressing cultural, social, health, and economic concerns, formed through robust community participation—is a necessary part of a successful revitalization effort.**

**CNU: Building Local Strength – Emerging Strategies for Inclusive Development*



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