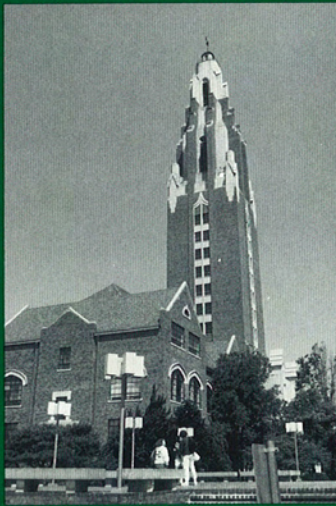


ULI

OKLAHOMA CITY OKLAHOMA



OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

An Evaluation of Revitalization Strategies For the Near Northwest

April 26–May 1, 1992
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute
625 Indiana Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

ABOUT ULI— THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit education and research organization that is supported and directed by its members. Its mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land to enhance the total environment.

ULI sponsors educational programs and forums to encourage an open international exchange of ideas and experience; initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues; proposes creative solutions based on this research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has approximately 16,000 members and associates from 40 countries representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. They comprise developers, builders, property owners, investors, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academicians, planners, students, and librarians. ULI members contribute to higher standards of land use by sharing their knowledge and experience. The Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

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This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

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- Oklahoma City University
- Shepherd Mall
- First Presbyterian Church
- Paul Strasbaugh

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THE LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD PANELS PROGRAM

Oklahoma City is the fifth panel assignment conducted under a new ULI program targeted at low-income neighborhoods. The Low-Income Neighborhood Panels Program was created under the auspices of the ULI Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Task Force, cochaired by ULI Trustees M. Leanne Lachman and Nina J. Gruen. The mission is to develop successful strategies for providing low-income housing and/or improving the physical and economic conditions of low-income neighborhoods.

Because of contributions from the financial institutions listed below, ULI has been able to offer its Advisory Services panels at a special price to six sponsors selected through a competitive proposal process.

The panels are designed to help participating communities resolve specific problems within designated neighborhoods. In addition, ULI will identify the commonalities among the six panel assignments and suggest solutions that could prove beneficial to other cities facing similar issues.

The panels in this program are made possible in part by grants from:

- The Aetna Foundation, Inc., and Aetna Realty Investors, Inc.;
- Chicago Title Insurance Company Foundation;
- Coldwell Banker Real Estate Group and Sears Mortgage;
- Equitable Real Estate Investment Management, Inc., and The Equitable;
- Lincoln National Corporation; and
- Teachers Insurance & Annuity Corporation.

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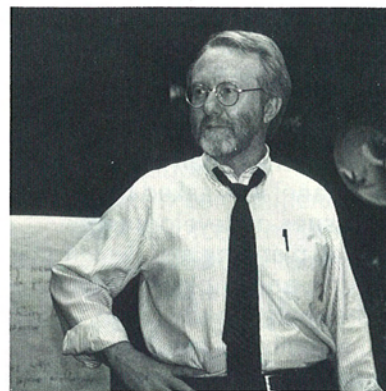
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FOREWORD: THE PANEL'S ASSIGNMENT

Like many cities throughout the nation, Oklahoma City has experienced a wide spectrum of problems in its inner-city neighborhoods. These inner-city areas are burdened by an aging housing stock, much of which was constructed in the early 1900s. In addition, migrants from the inner city are opting for newer housing on the urban fringe and in suburban communities. Population loss, deteriorating housing, aging infrastructure, inappropriate land uses, increased traffic congestion, and a school system perceived as undesirable have all contributed to decay in the Near Northwest.

The objective of the ULI panel assignment was to assess the Near Northwest sector of Oklahoma City with three principal goals:

- To bring new thinking to the urban revitalization process;
- To focus the attention of city leadership on the plight of this neighborhood and of the inner-city neighborhoods in general; and
- To identify a general strategy for stabilizing and improving the Near Northwest to make it a safe and desirable place to live and work.



Panel chairman Jim DeFrancia.

This report records the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the ULI panel. These findings were presented orally by the panel on May 1, 1992. The Urban Land Institute and the panel members hope that this effort will assist Oklahoma City in bringing vitality, reinvestment, and new stability to the Near Northwest.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*A boarded-up house
in the Classen Ten-Penn
neighborhood.*

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Neighborhood revitalization strategies have many components. In the case of the Near Northwest, the Urban Land Institute panel was asked to address issues of development potential, planning and design, marketing, and implementation.

The charge to the panel raised a number of specific questions concerning economic feasibility, application of zoning regulations, urban design techniques, and the role of neighborhood associations. In comprehensively approaching the assignment, the panel undertook to understand in the broadest context the various social, economic, and political influences that affect the Near Northwest.

The panel found the study area to be socially diverse, with a rich architectural heritage. At the same time, this area has clearly encountered major physical, social, and economic problems that are leading to instability and decline.



One consideration in addressing revitalization efforts in the Near Northwest is the fact that Oklahoma City offers virtually unlimited development potential. Hundreds of acres of land in the immediate metropolitan area are available for development, and both housing and commercial product are generally very inexpensive. Thus, revitalization and redevelopment efforts are constrained by the underlying economics of the process.

While rich in heritage and character, the Near Northwest must contend with increased crime and the perception of a lower-quality school system. These two issues must be confronted to achieve the area's underlying development potential.

Development potential must also necessarily draw upon the established institutions in the area. In particular, Oklahoma City University and St. Anthony Hospital are sources of both growth and stability.

The Near Northwest clearly offers development potential, but that potential must be addressed on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis with varying degrees of intensity and differences in focus as functions of the individual neighborhoods and their characteristics. The Heritage Hills neighborhood is one of the most desirable residential areas in the Near Northwest and must be protected from encroachment by surrounding deterioration. Mesta Park requires extensive focus to regain its desirability as a middle-class neighborhood. Jefferson Park, Paseo, and Central Park are all in need of moderate rehabilitation, while Edgemere Park, close to Heritage Hills in the quality of its housing stock, requires more cleanup than rehabilitation. By contrast, areas of Military Park, Corridor South, and Sequoyah are rapidly declining and need intensive focus to reverse the trend. The good housing stock in the transitional neighborhoods of Pennville, Youngs-Englewood, and Gatewood is in need of rehabilitation and stabilization.

Finally, Classen Ten-Penn and Metro Park are in need of significant redevelopment; these sections require major municipal support to deal with crime rates and other socioeconomic problems, as well as with the extensive rehabilitation and redevelopment they need.

To achieve the development potential of the different residential neighborhoods, the city could use various design techniques. These include traffic diversions, changes of through-streets into cul-de-sacs, restrictions on truck traffic, improvements in street lighting, the introduction of "gateway signage," comprehensive landscape plans, and the serious enforcement of zoning and development controls.

Revitalization of the commercial areas requires similar actions. A beautification program should be implemented; improvements in traffic flows, parking, signage, and landscaping will all contribute to enhanced business activity. As in the case of the residential neighborhoods, zoning regulations also must be consistently enforced to ensure quality.

As a general strategy, the city should focus its efforts on key subareas of the Near Northwest to capitalize on existing neighborhood assets. Revitalization of the whole sector must be undertaken on a segmented basis and must be tailored to the specific needs of the different neighborhoods and commercial or institutional concentrations.

Throughout the area, the sponsor must address three issues before revitalization and stabilization can occur: public education, security, and affordability. These factors affect the decisions of families who might seek to locate in the Near Northwest; of current residents who are considering whether or not to remain there; and of property owners, businesses, and institutions that must make investment and maintenance decisions.

Critical to all these efforts is regulatory reform. Oklahoma City must develop a planning process that will incorporate:

- Citizen involvement in the identification of issues;
- Mechanisms that will identify immediately required actions;

- Financial commitments that can be sustained over time;
- Zoning that provides incentive mechanisms and facilitates interdepartmental implementation; and
- Regulatory enforcement.

Code enforcement should not be relegated only to responses to complaints but should be an active component of the revitalization strategy. Efforts directed at redevelopment will be hampered if chaotic, uncoordinated regulation exists.

The city must also explore a wide array of financing mechanisms. These include federal program funds, special tax districts, private capital investment, bank loans stimulated by the Community Reinvestment Act, historic and low-income tax credits, and investment by institutions such as churches, Oklahoma City University, and St. Anthony Hospital that have a stake in the future of the community.

Finally, implementation of the recommendations contained in this report is critically dependent upon aggressive and committed leadership. The best strategies are ineffective if not responsibly executed by strong leaders.

City staff briefs the panel during a bus tour of the study area.



BACKGROUND

THE STUDY AREA

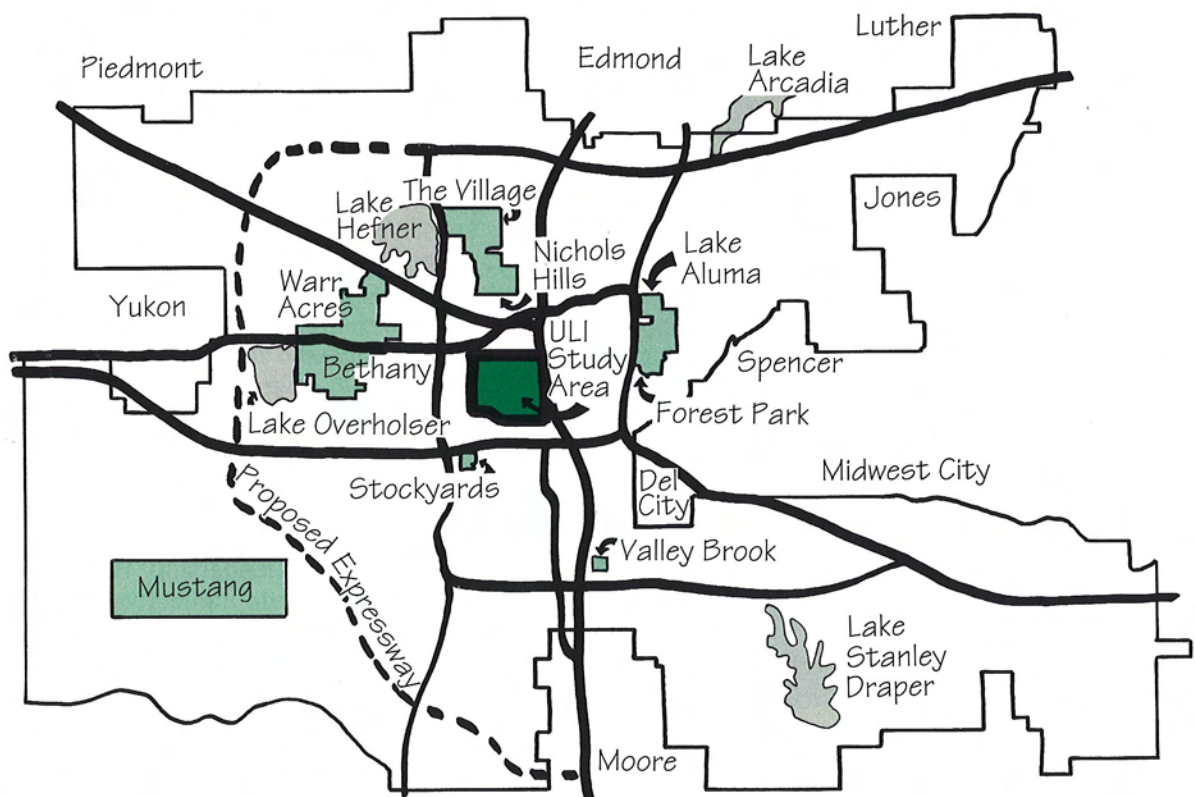
The Near Northwest study area consists of five and one-half square miles bounded by NW 36th Street to the north; NW 6th Street, Linwood Boulevard, and NW 10th Street to the south; Villa Avenue to the west; and the Santa Fe Railroad tracks to the east. Primarily a residential area, the Near Northwest includes

many neighborhoods; no fewer than 18 neighborhood associations exist, some of which claim overlapping boundaries. Many of these neighborhoods contain tree-lined streets, an amenity unusual in Oklahoma City.

In 1990, the area was home to 25,765 residents—down 24 percent from 1980. During this period, the number of housing units within the study area also declined (by 16 percent). Though the character, condition, and value of the housing stock vary greatly, over 30 percent of the housing is vacant today, compared with about a

15 percent vacancy rate for the city as a whole. Crime rates within the study area are reported to be three times that of the city overall.

Two commercial corridors run through the area: 23rd Street is a major east/west artery along which commercial strip development has reached varying stages of decline; and Classen Boulevard is a north/south arterial characterized by office and service-type development. Shepherd Mall, a 630,000-square-foot (GLA) shopping center, is located at 23rd and Villa, with a recently vacated Sears store just down 23rd Street from the mall. The study area also contains three minor commercial nodes, one at 16th Street and Indiana Avenue; a second in Paseo, near 30th Street and



THE NEAR NORTHWEST STUDY AREA

Walker Avenue, which is attracting some arts and entertainment activity; and a third at 23rd Street and Classen Boulevard, which is becoming a center for Asian stores and services.

The Near Northwest community has 14 neighborhood parks totaling 60 acres. Many of these parks, which are attractive and well maintained, offer active recreational facilities.

Institutional uses within the study area include public and private schools, numerous churches (many of which draw their congregations from all across the city), and two major institutions: Oklahoma City University and St. Anthony Hospital. Oklahoma City University

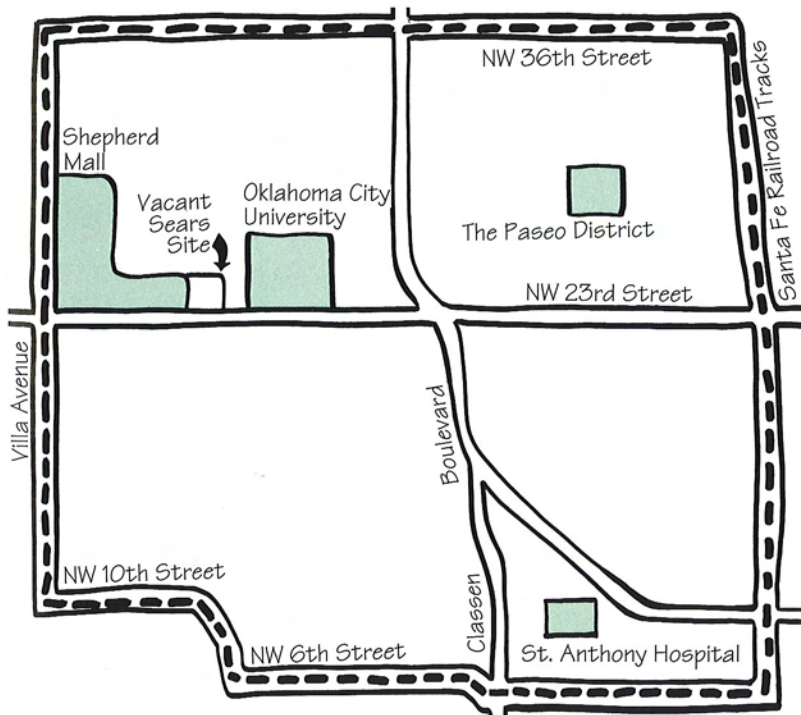
(OCU), which grew by 64.5 percent between 1988 and 1991, now has 4,200 students, including a large international contingent. St. Anthony is a 684-bed hospital employing more than 2,000 persons.

The Near Northwest is a microcosm of Oklahoma City, a diverse area that mirrors both the best and the worst that Oklahoma City offers. The study area exhibits a cultural and social richness without equal in the community, including a socially and economically mixed population, major institutions that can boast international prominence and recognition, and an impressive architectural heritage. A significant number of Oklahoma City citizens over the age of 30 were born and bred in this area. For many Oklahoma City citizens, the Near Northwest is the home of their childhood. It

houses the rich, the middle class, and the poor.

Yet the area also suffers from major problems, conflicts, and contradictions that must be addressed if the community is to thrive and prosper. Major physical, social, and economic problems limit potential, deter investment, and threaten the stability of surrounding areas. These issues must be addressed—and resolved—with genuine effectiveness.

No discussion of the Near Northwest would be complete without mention of two major issues that pervade the atmosphere and underlie all development decisions within the broad center city: the perceived poor quality of the Oklahoma City school system and the image of the Near Northwest as a high-crime area.



KEY FEATURES OF THE NEAR NORTHWEST STUDY AREA

If there is one contention on which there is widespread near-unanimity, it is that the city school system is viewed as vastly inferior to those of surrounding jurisdictions. The reality is that, because this area has many educationally disadvantaged students, its test results are lower; also, because the schools are generally located in poorer neighborhoods, the system has less tax-generated income to spend on education. Thus, the perception that poor neighborhoods will have poor schools becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In addition, the panel learned that the negative image of the Near Northwest schools was and is largely based on court-ordered school busing policies. Though interviewees blamed busing for destroying the neighborhood schools and parent interest in the schools, the panel felt that the real problem was citizen disdain for governmental overview and for the intrinsic purpose of the busing program. To some degree, however, the school busing issue is moot; a recent Supreme Court decision diminished the need to bus children to achieve racially balanced schools.

Regardless of whether the school quality problem is truth or perception, if the system is perceived to be bad, households, particularly those with school-aged children, will prefer to live elsewhere. While numerous people spoke positively to the panel about the school system in general—its leadership, its programs, and its commitment—overall, the comments were negative. While avoiding naivete, the community should recognize those aspects of its school system that are not only good but in some cases excellent. Clearly, the system has problems, but many of these are being addressed by major task-force actions, such as the Education Round Table. Such actions deserve widespread community support.

Crime is the second major factor that motivates people to leave the area and discourages newcomers from entering the Near Northwest. Some neighborhoods have hired private security firms to supplement police protection, while others have initiated neighborhood watch programs. Yet widespread drug and gang activities continue to flourish, and overall crime rates are significantly higher than elsewhere in the city. Evidently, solutions to problems of such complexity require more than simplistic answers. The city's recent saturation campaign focusing enforcement resources within the area has won widespread support and may prove to be a promising approach.

The 23rd Street corridor is lined with commercial uses in varying states of repair.



THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Oklahoma City as a whole is blessed—and cursed—with several traits that greatly influence the study area and its development potential. First is the fact that Oklahoma City is characterized by almost unlimited land availability, with good access and utility support. With more than 600 square miles of land within the city limits and more available outside the bounds of the city, opportunities for physical growth are virtually unlimited. Flat topography, an excellent highway network, reasonable land prices, and widespread utility availability make development possible in all directions. These factors—combined with a strong progrowth, prodevelopment sentiment—encourage continued outward growth at the expense of older portions of the central city. When combined with a “newer is better” philosophy, these forces have meant that little incentive historically has existed to focus on older portions of the inner city.

Oklahoma City offers some of the best and least expensive housing in the nation. Few, if any, major cities can offer such high-quality housing at prices affordable to households of middle income; indeed, a range of affordable housing options that would make most cities envious is available within 20 minutes of City Hall. The widespread availability of new affordable housing on the city's periphery encourages an outward movement of population and has usually discouraged middle-income households from entering into or remaining in older portions of the central city.



David Goss and Marc Weiss
interview Jackie Jones of the
Arts Council.

This outmigration has caused a population decline in the Near Northwest that seems destined to continue unless strong steps are taken to intervene in the development process.

Despite the generally affordable nature of housing in Oklahoma City, low-income households clearly have far fewer options. The city recently completed a Comprehensive Housing Assistance Strategy (CHAS), which assesses housing needs and establishes goals for assisted housing as part of the process for applying for federal funds. According to the CHAS, over 56,000 households, or 31.7 percent of all city households, experience problems of disrepair, overcrowding, or excessive cost. The CHAS noted, first, that the city's large number of housing vacancies has not lowered costs to the point at which housing is generally affordable for many low-income groups and, second, that the demand for rehabilitation of owner-occupied units far exceeds the available supply.

DEVELOPMENT ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

The potential for residential development in the Near Northwest must be viewed within the broader context of the city and the metropolitan area. Today, Oklahoma City has a population of 445,000 people. According to the city, population is expected to rise to between 480,000 and 545,000 people by 2010—an increase of 35,000 to 100,000 persons over a 20-year time period. This suggests an annual population growth of between 1,750 and 5,000 persons.

If one assumes an average household size of 2.5 persons, then the city will only need a total of 700 to 2,000 additional housing units annually. Factoring in the current vacancy rate, future demand should be even lower. Thus, even according to the most optimistic scenario, future demand for new housing units will be modest. If Oklahoma City continues to support and encourage unrestrained residential growth in outlying areas, the city will undermine efforts to revitalize center-city neighborhoods. Potential demand for new or newly rehabilitated housing units will be diverted from areas such as the Near Northwest. As noted, however, the market for assisted housing is much stronger, and pent-up demand exists for housing that is affordable to low-income families.

With this in mind, the panel notes that different neighborhoods within the study area exhibit different potentials for development or redevelopment. For example, Heritage Hills is one of the most beautiful and desirable places to live in Oklahoma City. A neighborhood listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it needs to be protected from encroachment from nearby deteriorating neighborhoods; yet it is well maintained by its residents and is generally not in need of rehabilitation or redevelopment. However, it abuts Mesta Park—an area in slight decline—on the east and north.

Though Mesta Park is generally a healthy section of diverse housing stock, it needs a focused investment of time and effort to increase its marketability as a middle-class neighborhood that is already a good place in which to raise a family. This is not an area that needs redevelopment but one that should be considered for some neighborhood improvement and light rehabilitation. As housing stock is replaced, new housing should be architecturally controlled to assure the continued historic significance of Mesta Park.

On the other hand, the Jefferson Park, Paseo, and Central Park neighborhoods all need some moderate rehabilitation. Because their housing stock has degenerated somewhat, these areas need to reassert their neighborhood pride and recreate their intrinsic attractiveness. They need some investment and, in some places, moderate rehabilitation and infill redevelopment. These sections call for immediate attention to avoid the more extensive deterioration that will, in turn, blight Edgemere Park, which these neighborhoods surround.

In Edgemere Park, the quality of the housing stock is close to the near-pristine standard of Heritage Hills. It requires only moderate cleanup and repair and little or no rehabilitation.

Military Park, the Corridor South area, and Sequoyah, however, are declining areas that need immediate attention to reverse the trends begun by neglect and absentee ownership. Infill redevelopment, as well as significant rehabilitation, is necessary to stabilize these neighborhoods. In addition, consideration should be given to the use of creative zoning and code enforcement ordinances to discourage absentee landlords from failing to keep up their property and to encourage buyers to become owner-occupants wherever possible.

Pennville, Gatewood, and Youngs-Englewood are neighborhoods in transition. While each section possesses areas of solid housing stock, each also has areas in need of moderate rehabilitation, infill redevelopment, and stabilization.

Many of the houses in Heritage Hills, such as this mansion, are historic structures.



Classen Ten-Penn and Metro Park will require significant re-development. These two neighborhoods suffer from high crime rates, widespread drug use, and other socioeconomic problems that can be corrected; revitalization into new neighborhoods can stress the value of neighborhood security and promote community activities such as recreation and education. In the western portion of Classen Ten-Penn and Metro Park, the panel suggests creation of new neighborhoods of low- and moderate-income households, with a transition to solid middle- and upper middle-income neighborhoods to the east.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Oklahoma City is characterized by widespread commercial overbuilding. Today, the city-wide office vacancy rate stands at more than 25 percent, down from its peak but still far above desirable levels. High vacancy rates, a decimated commercial development community, and limited available financing suggest that new construction of private offices will be the exception rather than the rule, city-wide, at least for the next several years. Thus, the potential for new office development along the Classen corridor, or indeed elsewhere in the study area, will not likely revive until the development climate improves.

Likewise, retail development opportunities are limited, with two notable exceptions. The panel notes the growth and success of Asian-oriented retailing, centered at 23rd and Classen.



Not only does this area serve the specialized needs of a growing Asian population, but also it serves to bring shoppers into the area to take advantage of the specialized stores and restaurants not available elsewhere in the community. To the extent that growth potential for such specialized uses exists in the future, it should be encouraged, stimulated, and supported.

The panel also notes the need for additional neighborhood retail facilities to serve the study area population. A major supermarket, drugstore, and related retail uses would be important assets to the community and appear to be economically viable options. An additional 75,000 to 125,000 square feet of such facilities is warranted, probably on the site of the recently closed Sears store.

Shepherd Mall will require continued monitoring. This major community asset faces tough competition from the recently modernized and expanded Penn Square Mall, with its four department stores and two levels of shops. Remarketing and repositioning of Shepherd Mall will likely be needed.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Two major institutions, Oklahoma City University (OCU) and St. Anthony Hospital, anchor the northwest and southeast quadrants, respectively, of the study area. The continued well-being of these institutions is vital to the health of the Near Northwest, and the stability that each helps to provide cannot be underestimated. OCU plans a major expansion to the north and east of its present campus—a concept the panel enthusiastically endorses.

Despite relatively limited short-term potential for new private construction, the panel believes that significant possibilities exist for reinforcing and strengthening the already desirable portions of the study area and for upgrading and enhancing the more troubled portions of the Near Northwest.

The panel believes that the environs of the OCU campus and St. Anthony Hospital should slowly be absorbed by these institutions for related uses. Over time, these uses may include specialized housing for students and medical personnel, as well as offices for incubator businesses and medical offices.

The St. Anthony Hospital complex in the First NW Addition should be allowed to expand to the borders of the surrounding neighborhood. The expansion will be a long-term stabilizing force that will also diversify the population by including senior citizens and low- and moderate-income households. As the number of residents grows, so will the demand for support retail in this area. In turn, this new demand should stimulate the revitalization of the commercial development along lower Classen Boulevard.

Oklahoma City University is a towering presence in the Near Northwest.

Mark Viets, Lew Bolan, and David Goss advise as Jim Wentling prepares a concept drawing.



Opportunities for expanded commercial space, as well as for large and small facilities for health-related services, exist in the mixed-use area east of Clasen between 6th Street and the southern boundary of the Heritage Hills Historic Preservation District. Two main concerns that will affect the district's potential for future growth are the need for improved safety and the need to find new uses for vacant or underused older buildings that still can be preserved and modernized.

PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Urban design issues for the study area vary according to the needs of individual neighborhoods, with design goals ranging from enhancing basic security and preventing crime to maintaining the architectural integrity of historic districts. Certain themes apply almost universally, however, varying only in degree of application.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Because the Near Northwest was originally developed on a grid street system, the problem of excessive through-traffic on neighborhood streets is a major issue. The panel generally approves of the discouragement of through-traffic with various techniques and believes the city should support this effort to a reasonable extent. City goals of reducing congestion, improving traffic flow, and easing emergency access must be balanced with neighborhood priorities of keeping residential streets free from high-volume traffic, noise, and attendant disruption.

Techniques similar to those implemented in Heritage Hills East, such as placing traffic diverters along Broadway Avenue to bar inbound traffic, and eliminating traffic lights along 23rd Street, seem appropriate. In other study area locations, transforming through-streets into cul-de-sacs may also be an effective way to curb traffic and support the tranquillity of residential streets. One-way streets, stop signs, and signage banning trucks and other rush-hour traffic can help cut the volume of traffic through the neighborhoods.

Creation of dead-end streets, however, should not become so widespread that it begins to interfere with the ability to maintain security within a neighborhood. Just as pedestrians serve as "eyes on the street," the presence of some traffic within a neighborhood helps maintain a human activity level that effects some natural policing.

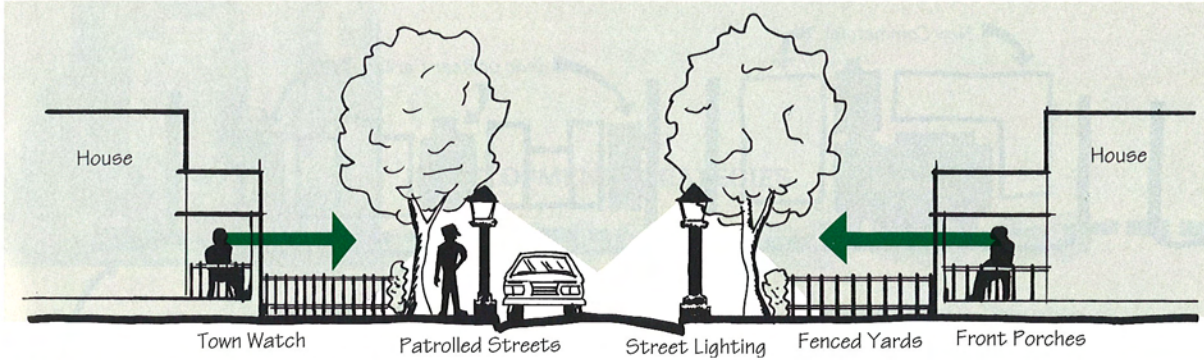
STREET IMPROVEMENTS

Other municipal street improvements that aid security include lighting and emergency telephones. Lighting should be designed to be low enough (8 to 10 feet) to be below the tree line and close to the street; poles should be placed at reasonable intervals.

To deter intruders, residents should be encouraged to supplement street lights with house lighting at the front, sides, and rear of their homes. The idea of locating on street corners emergency telephones with direct links to police should be considered in certain high-crime neighborhoods.



Poorly maintained sidewalks in parts of the study area contribute to the impression of neglect and decline.



DEFENSIVE HOUSING DESIGN

Some neighborhoods in the study area have “gateway” signage to announce their entry points. Others also have “signature” street signs and town watch notices that both identify the area and give notice of paid and/or volunteer security programs. These concepts should be encouraged throughout the study area. The fair number of boulevard streets in the Near Northwest represents a wonderful visual asset when these boulevards are properly maintained. The panel recommends that the city formalize a public/private effort to enhance these features where possible.

PROTOTYPICAL HOUSING DESIGN

Much of the housing stock in the study area is equipped with one of the best design elements to promote neighborhood security—a front porch. The sweeping porches of bungalows and other turn-of-the-century designs encourage “street watching” by affording the residents a good view of the front yard, sidewalk, and street. This simple concept should be reinforced in rehabilitation and infill housing designs, both for aesthetic and for security reasons.

Many homes in the study area have perimeter fencing, which ranges from decorative wrought-iron to chain-link examples. This is another simple concept in site design that helps establish territoriality and defensible space, and the panel encourages its use in rehabilitation programs as well as new designs.

ZONING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS

Existing zoning does not appear to deter development. In certain neighborhoods, minimum property standards should be enforced to discourage total abandonment of marginal housing stock. Designation of historic districts or urban conservation districts is endorsed, and design controls should be implemented to maintain the integrity of historical architectural styles.

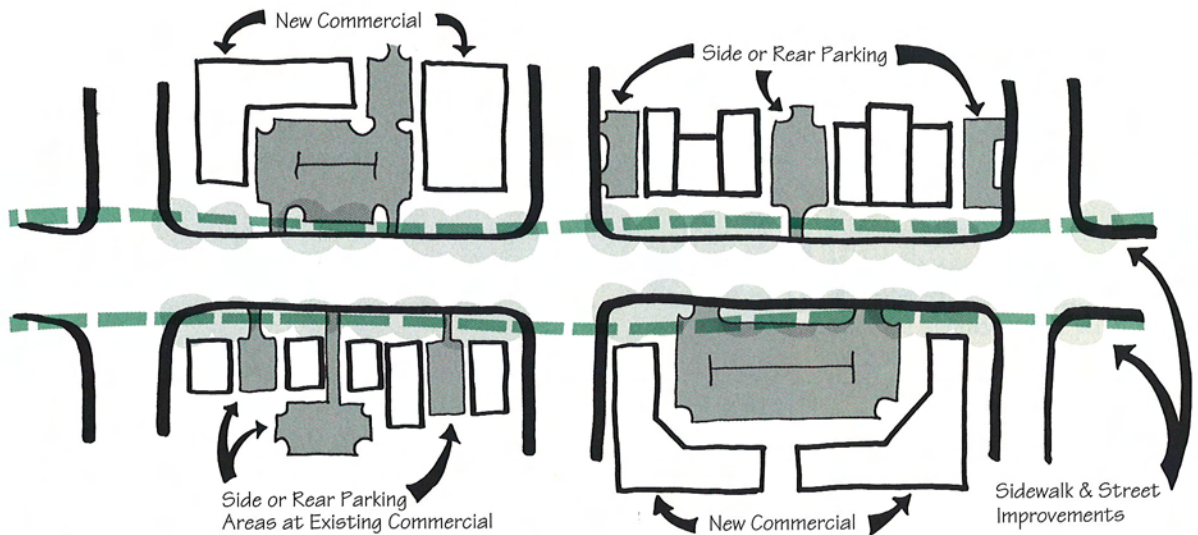
In some of the most deteriorated neighborhoods in the study area, appropriate infill prototypes designed to be affordable to low-income households should be encouraged. These low-cost housing prototypes could still incorporate some historical design elements, materials, and colors that would harmonize with the character of the neighborhood and promote defensible spaces, as discussed above in connection with perimeter fencing.

COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION

Through planning and design controls, the city should encourage the improvement of 23rd Street as a commercial and services “main street” for the study area. A merchants’ association similar to the Classen Beautiful program should be implemented to address improved traffic flow and parking, facade improvements, new signage, and landscape concepts that will enhance business activity on 23rd Street.

PARKING

Adequate parking has been cited as one of the most critical issues in attracting new businesses. On several new development parcels along 23rd Street, buildings are set back, with sufficient parking provided in front of storefronts. On certain older strips, however, where redevelopment is inappropriate or infeasible, the city could help smaller businesses by building the occasional off-street parking lot on a vacant parcel between existing buildings. Some building owners could independently provide side or rear parking, with direct building access where possible.



23RD STREET DESIGN

Added parking spaces, public or private, should be controlled for the use of business patrons only, though the panel discourages the installation of parking meters.

ZONING REGULATIONS

Zoning for the 23rd Street commercial corridor should foster service uses compatible with adjacent neighborhoods. A Main Street-type program or master plan should be pursued to preserve what remains of certain multitenant blocks that once included theaters, shops, and stores in a unified structure or a series of integrated structures. Such a master plan should be consistent with the stated goals of additional parking. Certain blocks are worthy of preservation and rehabilitation, while others are more appropriate for demolition and new construction.

LANDSCAPING AND SIGNAGE PROGRAMS

Street improvements such as new sidewalks, signage, and landscaping are typically recommended for the revitalization of commercial areas. In the case of 23rd Street, however, block-to-block pedestrian activity is now limited, and initial resources should be focused on accommodating shopping by automobile. The city should give priority to signage that identifies parking.

An overall commercial street enhancement program that includes sidewalk paving, street trees, lighting, benches, and other street furniture is a suitable longer-term goal that could be implemented at first on older, multitenant blocks and required later as street improvements for new development.

Many cities have used a "street theme" concept to encourage a spirit of identity along certain sections of a major artery. The theme is typically accomplished inexpensively with colorful banners repeated at regular intervals along the street and accentuated at gateways on major cross-streets. Such a gateway might be the intersection of 23rd Street with Centennial Expressway or the junction with Classen Boulevard.

DESIGN CONTROLS

The city should develop commercial design guidelines or controls for the 23rd Street corridor to promote a more unified, coherent relationship among buildings. Issues to address include setbacks, facade design, and signage standards, which are spelled out in such existing programs as the Oklahoma Main Street program.



Panelist Mark Viets poses a question during the interview process.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES NEIGHBORHOODS

SAVE THE "HEART," EAST OF CLASSEN

Central to the panel's recommended development strategy is concentrating public and private resources on key sub-areas of the Near Northwest so as to build on existing neighborhood assets. One vital focus of the development strategy is strengthening and improving the area north of 14th Street and east of Classen Boulevard. This area is anchored by several strong residential neighborhoods; Heritage Hills, Edgemere Park, Crown Heights (not in the original study area but added by the panel),

Heritage Hills East, and Mesta Park, in particular, are historic communities with fundamentally sound housing stock. Only the last two sections have pockets of deteriorating homes that need renovation. The panel suggests a major concurrent effort to restore the small commercial district in Paseo and the dilapidated and abandoned housing east of Robinson—particularly in the vital center of the Paseo and Jefferson Park areas.

THE PASEO COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

The historical character of Paseo warrants public and private investment. Here, extensive, pedestrian-oriented street improvements are appropriate to promote neighborhood shopping, which is currently taking on a theme of artisanship. Lamp-posts, seating, street trees, and other improvements are recommended to encourage people to walk.

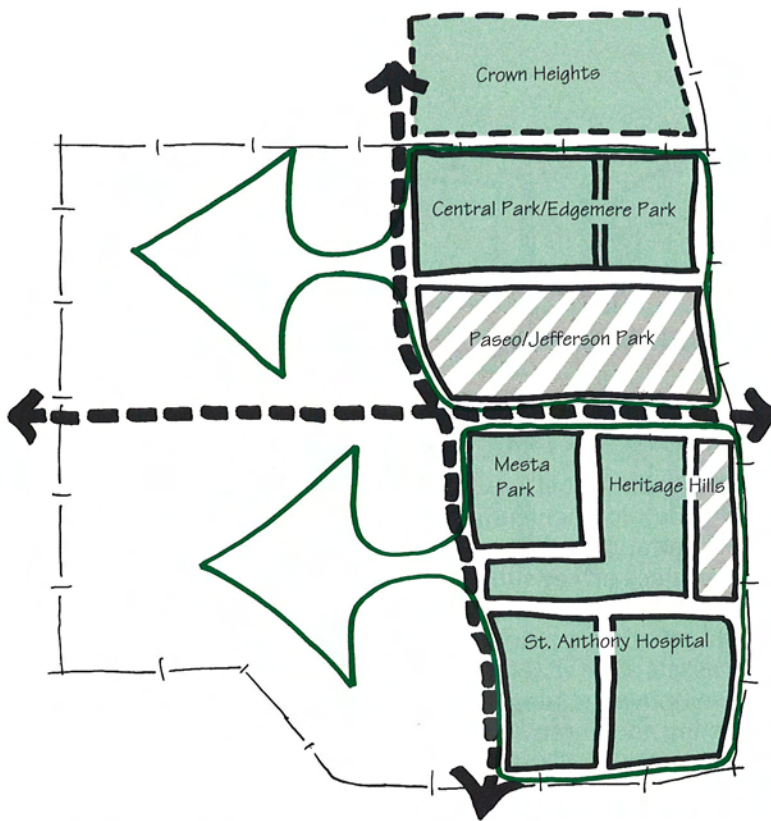
Redevelopment, rehabilitation, or new construction in the Paseo district should be implemented with design controls that maintain the original neo-Spanish architectural theme. A revitalized Paseo commercial district should pay off in heightened residential activity in the adjacent neighborhood.

16TH STREET CORRIDOR

The panel found the 16th Street commercial corridor in the study area to be extremely deteriorated. While some potential may exist for neighborhood retail development, without significant private investment the area will continue to decline and will exert a negative influence on adjacent neighborhoods. Strict code enforcement, with the demolition of noncompliant buildings, is recommended.



Some streetscape improvements have already been made in the Paseo district, an area that the city hopes will attract more arts and entertainment activities.



RESIDENTIAL REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

The panel believes that systematic efforts to restore the soundness of the worst housing, including larger-scale projects on entire blocks such as 29th Street east of Shartel Avenue, will appeal to new owners and occupants attracted by the good neighborhoods, convenient location, and recreational and cultural amenities of the Near Northwest. Potential residents include people who work or study at Oklahoma City University, medical personnel, downtown entrepreneurs and professionals, and state capitol employees, among others.

Concentrated improvement efforts in the "heart" of the area east of Classen, north of 14th Street, and west of the Centennial Expressway will exert ripple effects throughout the district—in Central Park, Corridor South, and the other neighborhoods—and should lead to a major upgrading of housing and living conditions.

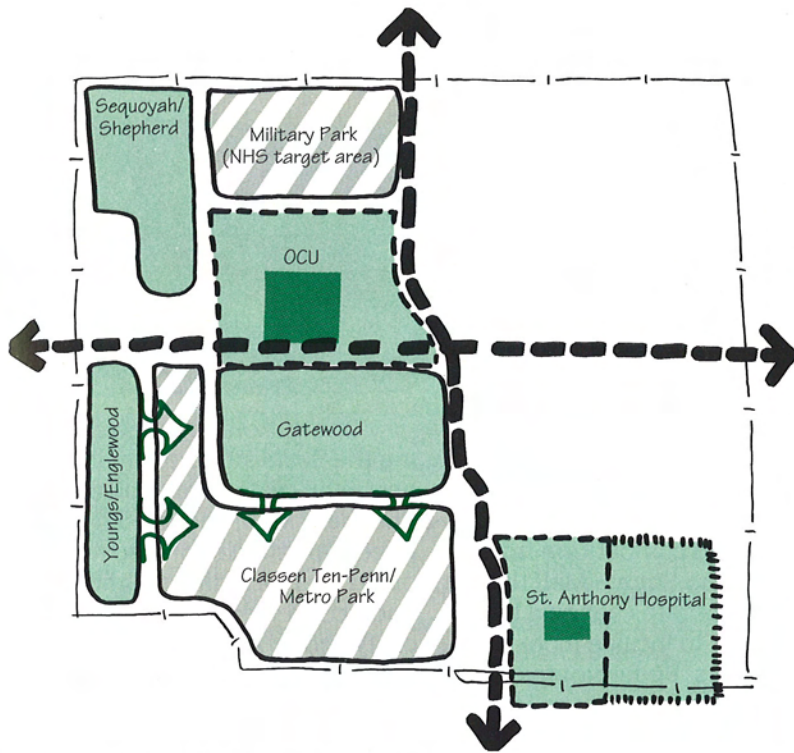
In the next few years, this success can be expanded upon by establishing new small shops along 23rd Street to cater to the increased neighborhood demand and to take advantage of the special cultural identity of the area. Such commercial revitalization would require expanded parking and could be aided by facade improvements and merchant cooperation in planning and management.

STRENGTHEN THE OCU NEIGHBORHOODS

The Gatewood neighborhood, south of OCU, is vital to the Near Northwest and may require some assistance to conserve Carey Place and other attractive community features. North of OCU is Military Park, targeted for support by Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS). Using special loan financing, homeowner education, and community organization will strengthen this community, which is anchored on the north by historic Putnam Heights and on the south by OCU. Such efforts within neighborhoods to the north and south of OCU are necessary to protect the Sequoyah, Shepherd, and Pennville neighborhoods west of Pennsylvania Avenue.



The Youngs-Englewood neighborhood has essentially sound housing stock.



RESIDENTIAL REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

RESCUE THE HOMES WEST OF CLASSEN

A more challenging task within the Near Northwest is salvaging the areas west of Classen Boulevard, particularly the Classen Ten-Penn and Metro Park neighborhoods south of 16th Street and east of Pennsylvania Avenue. Many houses are boarded up and many lots are vacant. This area is being targeted under the Mayor's Neighborhood Initiative for vigorous law enforcement efforts to eliminate crime and drugs and is also being served by Habitat for Humanity. To reinforce these efforts, the panel recommends incentives such as downpayment assistance, lease/purchase arrangements, credit counseling, and federal HOPE funds to stabilize this section by significantly increasing owner-occupancy.

These efforts should begin on the western edge of the subarea and proceed systematically eastward. Early intervention will help preserve Pennville and Youngs-Englewood, immediately to the west.



Many of the houses in Metro Park need repair.

If NHS, OCU, Gatewood, the Mayor's Neighborhood Initiative, and related activities together prove successful in improving their target areas, then the rest of the district west of Classen should also be greatly strengthened. Because many of the houses are occupied by senior citizens, programs to boost social services and help with home repair would prove useful in maintaining neighborhood quality and encouraging a smoother transition to a new generation of young homeowner families. Many elderly people have limited incomes and can be aided in financing home modernization and maintenance through shared equity loans and other innovative methods.

Asian-oriented commercial uses have begun to cluster near the intersection of 23rd Street and Classen Boulevard.



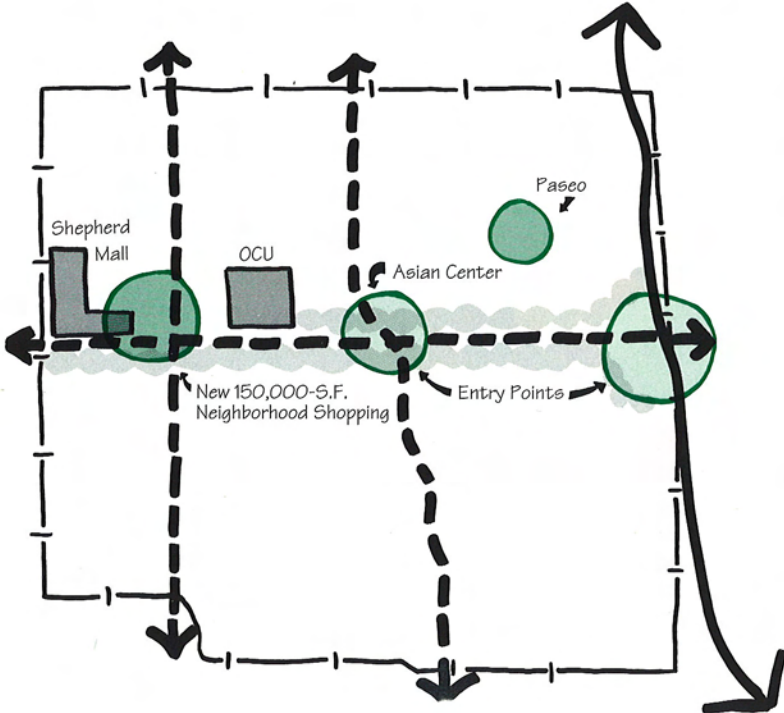
COMMERCIAL USES

Centered around 23rd and Classen is a growing number of Asian restaurants and retail stores serving Oklahoma City's Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese residents and a wider clientele of interested shoppers and tourists. The Asian retailers can help strengthen the commercial life of 23rd Street and stimulate residential improvement and cultural diversity within surrounding neighborhoods.

At the western end of 23rd Street within the study area is Shepherd Mall. Once a thriving retail attraction, the mall has recently faced competition from nearby Penn Square Mall that may necessitate changing the tenant mix to include more large discounters. Redevelopment of the adjacent Sears site will help anchor commercial activity in this vicinity; the successful new Buy-for-Less at 23rd and Pennsylvania demonstrates the potential business opportunities.

One option for redeveloping the Sears site is to create a new retail center to complement Shepherd Mall, anchored by a large supermarket or discount outlet and including neighborhood convenience stores, specialty shops, and restaurants. A possible international cultural theme could be linked, through some of the center's events, to Oklahoma City University's international and arts programs.

Along Classen Boulevard, the central spine of the study area, possibilities exist for development of a modest amount of additional office space. The Classen corridor has proved to be a desirable location for certain commercial uses, and with good maintenance, security, and services, this advantage can be enhanced.



COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

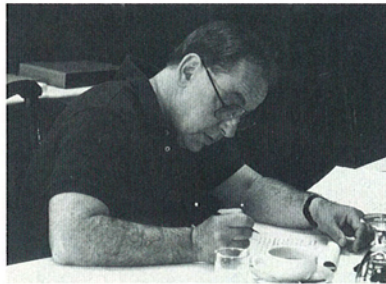
OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY

Oklahoma City University (OCU) is the major economic development asset in the study area, as well as an important marketing focus nationally and internationally and a source of pride for the entire community. The OCU Board of Trustees consists of many public and private leaders who could provide a nucleus of potential leadership to direct the redevelopment of the Near Northwest.

The current OCU campus is bounded by NW 23rd Street, Kentucky, NW 27th Street, and Blackwelder. As a result of recent successful fundraising and expanded programming efforts, however, OCU has developed a facilities master plan to guide campus growth beyond these boundaries. The plan would expand the campus to Virginia on the west; to certain blocks of NW 30th, NW 28th, and NW 27th Streets to the north; and to some stretches of McKinley and Classen to the east. This aggressive master plan includes augmented student housing, expanded athletic fields, an athletic wellness center, an International House, a daycare facility, added educational and administrative buildings, a retirement community, a hotel/conference center, and additional parking.

This vision for the future of OCU should be supported by all segments of the city and the Near Northwest because it provides a critical focal point for leveraging other residential and commercial development within the study area.

The OCU Board of Trustees should immediately initiate a land acquisition strategy to obtain control of the land parcels necessary to achieve its campus vision. But before embarking on this land acquisition process, OCU should establish an ongoing relationship with the city and with surrounding neighborhood associations in Gatewood, Pennville, Shepherd, Sequoyah, and Military Park. OCU's aims would be to discuss the facilities master plan with these entities and gain their acceptance of it; to decide how OCU can best achieve a sense of neighborhood while implementing its master plan; and to formulate a program for the equitable relocation of existing residents who own or rent houses that must be acquired during the land acquisition process.



Panelist Lew Bolan, hard at work.

Furthermore, if the city expects that a long period of time will elapse between a property's acquisition and its demolition, OCU should make special efforts to ensure that this transition period does not physically damage the adjoining residential and commercial areas.

OCU also should concern itself with the perceived image of its "sphere of influence" along the edges of the campus. For this reason, the panel urges that OCU acquire property as it becomes available, as part of an expanded edge development strategy to incorporate the following borders: Pennsylvania, NW 30th, Classen, and NW 22nd. OCU should consider establishing, either as an in-house or community-based organization, a facilities management entity to rent housing acquired as part of this strategy to students or employees. The management entity would also repair or rehabilitate substandard housing before renting it out and would maintain all housing in good condition. Any commercial property acquired could be demolished and its site held in a land bank for future development, or it could be leased to tenants that would support the mission of the university.

To facilitate this stage of the land acquisition effort, OCU and the city should appoint a special task force of representatives of the city, the neighborhood associations mentioned previously, Shepherd Mall management, and Classen Beautiful. Primarily, this task force would address community concerns related to OCU expansion activities, with the aim of avoiding or minimizing delays and uncertainties in this land acquisition process.

ST. ANTHONY HOSPITAL

When it was founded in 1898, St. Anthony Hospital was the first health care facility in Oklahoma City. It is still an important activity center for the city and the Near Northwest, with a staff of more than 800 physicians and a total employment of about 2,100 persons.

Because St. Anthony is such an important asset to the study area, the panel recommends a specific development strategy for the environs of the hospital. Before this strategy can succeed, however, St. Anthony must take the leadership role in convening a community-based group composed of representatives of the following parties: the city; the First NW Addition, Heritage Hills,

The Heritage Hills neighborhood is characterized by large, beautifully maintained homes.



Classen Ten-Penn, and Metro Park neighborhood associations; and applicable health and social service agencies that have an operating presence in the St. Anthony strategy area. In providing a forum for discussion of development issues and their related impacts, such a community-based group should help to defuse much of the distrust and rumors often associated with institutional growth and development.

The primary St. Anthony strategy area recommended by the panel is bounded by Classen Boulevard, Walker, the southern boundary of the Heritage Hills Historic Preservation District, and NW 5th Street. The panel proposes that the St. Anthony Foundation and the city work closely together to acquire (and control) as much of the property in the area as possible. Many of the land parcels to the south and west are already vacant properties; when assembled, they should provide the opportunity for expedited hospital expansion and/or the provision of various new housing options for St. Anthony employees, downtown workers, and senior citizens.

The panel recommends that the northern border of this proposed St. Anthony development area be contiguous with the southern border of Heritage Hills. Ideally, this shared border will provide the stimulus for joint efforts to redevelop the subarea north of the hospital that includes the Villa Teresa School. As part of this process, the panel recommends that the city work jointly with St. Anthony, Heritage Hills, and applicable health and social service agencies to evaluate the current municipal policy of clustering drug rehabilitation facilities, homeless shelters, detox centers, and similar operations in the St. Anthony area.

Drug detox centers, alcohol rehabilitation facilities, and similar uses can generate a negative environment if not carefully controlled. Continued concentration of these uses in the south end of the study area should be subject to close community review through a conditional use permit process; in this way, the city could consider and approve adding more uses of this type on a case-by-case basis. To develop and market a potentially full range of housing options within the St. Anthony area with any success, all parties must agree on a mutually acceptable redevelopment strategy for the entire area.

The panel also advises that serious consideration be given to creating a secondary strategy area by expanding the primary St. Anthony development area east to Broadway. This strategy area would be the focus for leadership and decisions regarding several commercial activities proposed for the area around NW 4th Street and Broadway Avenue. Examples are the development of a common administration building for social service agencies operating within Oklahoma City and the potential expansion (over the next 10 years) of the Oklahoma Medical Center west of the Centennial Freeway. The latter project would also enable the city to create a strong economic development corridor for medical uses along NW 10th Street, to be anchored by St. Anthony and the Medical Center and to include new biomedical enterprises.

MARKETING

The sponsor should pursue three basic marketing strategies, in conjunction with the development strategies described above, to attract families back into the Near Northwest and to induce current residents to remain. The recommended strategies center on improving public education, security, and housing affordability within the study area.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

As noted earlier, throughout the interview process the panel heard that the negative perception of the Oklahoma City Public School District was a major deterrent to new families who might otherwise move to the area and was the primary reason for the outmigration trend of the past 20 or 30 years. Yet the panel also heard from many current residents who praised the elementary schools located in their neighborhoods.

Because of the strength of the negative perception, however, the city will find it extremely difficult to stimulate reinvestment in the Near Northwest and to attract new families without improving the public school district's performance and image. Recent programs begun by the corporate sector, such as Adopt-a-School and the Public School Foundation, are starting to achieve this goal. Of special significance is the Education Round Table, composed of some 125 representatives from education, government, business, and civic and community organizations.



Panelists David Goss, Marc Weiss, David Nelson, Jim DeFrancia, and Jim Wentling work through an idea.

Since the Education Round Table was convened by private sector leaders to provide new directions for the public school district, it has formed six task forces to focus on curriculums, teachers, new school structuring, facilities planning, training, and high school graduation standards. The panel is convinced that this type of community coalition is the proper approach to a comprehensive strategy. This strategy, together with the recent federal court decision limiting the conditions under which busing must occur, should speed the implementation of the reforms necessary to enhance the public school system's performance and image.

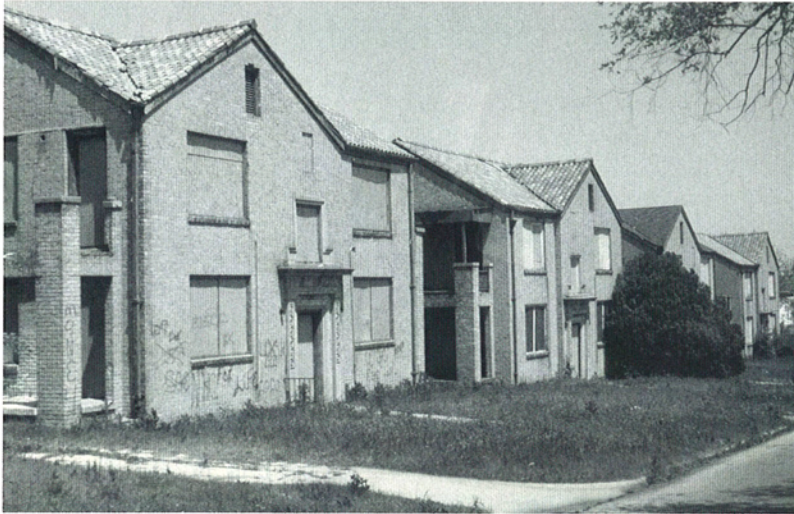
The Education Round Table is expected to release its final report in June 1992. To facilitate the marketing of the study area, the panel recommends that the sponsor consider implementing the major recommendations of the Education Round Table report as possible pilot projects throughout the Near Northwest. Such action should send a strong message to the marketplace that the public and private sector leaders in the city are serious in their commitment to redeveloping inner-city neighborhoods.

SECURITY

The second most frequently mentioned marketing deterrent for the study area was the perceived lack of security within the neighborhoods. Over the past several years, these neighborhoods have seen a dramatic increase in crime and violence. Drugs and drug-related crimes, as well as the rise in street gang activity, have heightened fear and eroded residents' and potential residents' sense of security.

The Near Northwest's shady, tree-lined streets are unusual assets in Oklahoma City.





The Paseo neighborhood is blighted by street after street of abandoned eightplexes.

In response, many neighborhood associations have established their own security forces—some volunteer, some paid—with varying degrees of success. However, in the complexity of these security-related issues are revealed basic societal problems that transcend individual actions. It is neither accurate nor appropriate to define the threat as a police problem; nor can law enforcement alone adequately address these security issues. Solutions will involve the coordinated efforts of the entire community.

Recognizing this, the city began its Neighborhood Initiative early in 1992 to implement a comprehensive strategy for building safe neighborhoods. The strategy consists of two programs—one run by the community and one by the city government—that share the following goals:

- Provide residents with neighborhoods in which they feel safe and secure.
- Organize and support neighborhood associations and other neighborhood-centered organizations.
- Improve the physical appearance, safety, and design of residential areas.
- Help neighborhood residents obtain basic human services.
- Strive to establish economic and social stability in target neighborhoods.
- Support children and families.
- Monitor and report on the progress of the Neighborhood Initiative.

The initial, short-term actions undertaken as part of this strategy in a target neighborhood within the study area won a positive response from residents. The panel strongly encourages city and community leaders to continue to fully implement this strategy throughout the study area. This action, again, should send a strong message to the marketplace that fostering safe inner-city neighborhoods is a high-priority community goal.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The panel recognized soon after its arrival in Oklahoma City that the economics of the city-wide housing market affects the marketability of inner-city housing to middle-income families. Today, no significant cost difference exists between buying a relatively new suburban house and acquiring and renovating an older, inner-city house.

A middle-income homebuyer may be attracted by the housing designs, central location, and community amenities in the Near Northwest if he or she can buy and restore a home there at a lower total cost than the purchase price of a comparably sized suburban house. And, if the home is a really good value, the buyer might be willing to face the additional school and safety challenges of living in the Near Northwest. Lenders and the city government should make available financing to reduce the costs of purchase and rehabilitation, as was done in the Heritage Hills/Mesta Park area during the 1960s and 1970s with HUD Section 312 low-interest loans. If this kind of financing can again be made available, then neighborhood associations, homeowners, and realtors can help market the area to prospective buyers not only by describing the positive community features but also by pointing out what a good value a center-city home purchase could be, compared with suburban alternatives.



IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the panel's recommended revitalization strategy requires a new planning process based on regulatory reform, use of new resources, and a new leadership and organizational structure.

REGULATORY REFORM

A NEW PLANNING PROCESS

With limited exceptions, the planning and regulatory process has generally proven ineffective in efforts to revitalize the Near Northwest. In any case, the planning function in the inner city is a sensitive process that requires a more comprehensive approach than does traditional preparation of broad, long-range plans, studies, and zoning regulations.

The approach to planning in areas such as the Near Northwest must be both participatory and strategic. The panel suggests that a new planning process be developed for such areas, to incorporate the following components:

- Substantial citizen and community involvement in the identification of issues and desired outcomes.
- A mechanism to call for and carry out immediate actions concurrently with the planning process.
- Financial commitments that can be sustained over time and that can aid in capital investment, economic development, and housing revitalization.

Panelists Marc Weiss, Lew Bolan, and Bill Reynolds, intent on their work.

Prospective low-income homeowners who want to buy houses in the Near Northwest may not, of course, be able to afford them. This group includes renters already living within the community. The city government, in cooperation with organizations such as the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) of Oklahoma City, Habitat for Humanity, and local financial institutions, needs to expand creative financial incentives to reduce the cost of inner-city homeownership. Techniques that can help expand the market for owner-occupied housing and improve neighborhood economic and social stability in the study area include, for instance, public and private programs to provide assistance with downpayments, lower interest rates, lease/purchase plans, technical assistance and credit counseling, and loans and grants for home repair. Other promising initiatives are the federal government's HOPE program and the church-based Nehemiah Homeownership Opportunities program.

- Zoning that provides incentives for projects that move the program forward and disincentives for undesirable development.
- Identification of specific and tangible outcomes.
- Use of cross-departmental implementation teams. The various city departments involved in carrying out a proposed plan should be evaluated and made accountable for the success of the team in meeting specific objectives of the plan.

To make this process effective, the sponsor must develop a new type of inner-city planning structure. The resultant plans will require city council adoption and approval, as well as direct ties to city capital improvement programming and to the budgetary approval process.

Hershel Lipow discusses implementation strategies at the final presentation.

As well as intensifying commercial and multifamily fire code inspections, the city should explore an approach to residential code enforcement that would be targeted to areas in which in-fill housing development and rehabilitation are proposed. In these areas, the panel suggests that the city consider implementation of two types of code enforcement activity.

First, Oklahoma City should develop and enforce property maintenance ordinances. Ordinances and methods for systematic, neighborhood-scale code enforcement must be implemented. Signs of poor property maintenance—the presence of abandoned automobiles, overgrown and unkept lawns, the accumulation of excessive trash and debris, and the general disrepair and deterioration of homes' exteriors—are symptoms of neighborhood neglect and disinvestment. In many cases, needed improvements can be made without structural repairs and can have a dramatic impact on the perceived quality of the neighborhood.

Second, the city should devise mechanisms to enforce residential codes and should reinspect dwellings for code compliance. In doing so, the city may want to consider a program that requires residential code compliance whenever a property is sold.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Oklahoma City must make a serious effort to create and enforce meaningful zoning and code regulations. The lack of enforcement is a major contributor to the housing blight so pervasive in the Near Northwest. While this lack is not the sole cause of the abandonment problems in the area, it is clearly a major factor. This type of benign neglect can result in troubled, declining neighborhoods that are incubators of crime. By improving and restoring its neighborhoods, the city would save money it now spends on police protection; funds formerly required for police protection could be used to improve the neighborhoods.

Currently, the city conducts code enforcement in response to complaints. In areas such as the Near Northwest, however, an expanded, more systematic, and ongoing approach to enforcement will be required before genuine, long-term improvement in structural quality can occur. Mechanisms for regular reinspection will also be needed.

Unsightly exterior maintenance mars this home in Metro Park.



RESOURCES: THE FINANCIAL WAYS AND MEANS

Execution of the development program for the Near Northwest will require new and sometimes substantial financial commitments from the public, the business and financial communities, and institutions within the area. Significant resources from each of these important sources are required; the program will fall short of its mark if all available local and nonlocal funds are not leveraged to generate private and nonprofit investment and reinvestment in the area.

Broadly, the resources the city may want to consider as it begins a program for revitalization of the Near Northwest include federal and other governmental funds, tax-based funding, monies generated for improvement districts, and institutional investments.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) FUNDS

The city currently receives about \$4.5 million annually in CDBG funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The funds are drawn yearly, on a "pay-as-you-go" basis. HUD now provides the opportunity for cities to capitalize or borrow against a portion of their entitlement to assist in financing the one-time costs of major revitalizing efforts, such as those outlined in the panel's recommendations. Repayment of the borrowed funds can take place over as many as 20 years, with the loan's interest rate being based on treasury securities with a similar term.

Leveraging of CDBG funds could provide the seed money necessary for such projects as the Paseo redevelopment effort or the 23rd Street improvements. Or such leveraging may accelerate the property acquisition activities that support other development objectives, such as the expansion of OCU. Seven million dollars in principal could be raised by committing \$1 million of CDBG funds to the Section 108 program to debt service for a 10-year term. (In the event that the federal government discontinues the CDBG program, the city would be required to guarantee repayment of the principal.)

While the Section 108 program offers the city a mechanism to increase significantly the financial resources available for early investment in the revitalization effort, several additional factors should be considered as block grant funds are allocated. A strong local policy is needed that will give high-priority support to revitalization projects within the study area. Such a policy would direct the concentration of resources to specific programs or projects in the Near Northwest.

FEDERAL HOME PROGRAM FUNDS

A new financial resource that will soon be available to the city will provide some \$2.5 million in HUD HOME funds. The city has an approved Comprehensive Housing Assistance Strategy (CHAS) in place and is anticipating approval of its HOME application in the near future. From several perspectives, these funds represent a powerful new resource for inner-city residential revitalization. Fifteen percent of the amount allocated to community housing development organizations (CHDOs) each year must be used to support community-based nonprofits. This requirement may provide an early financial source for nonprofits such as NHS that plan to be active in the Near Northwest. HOME program monies, if targeted to the study area, will augment the available nonlocal revenue for housing rehabilitation. As the city policy for HOME funds evolves, the panel recommends that housing rehabilitation efforts be targeted in the Near Northwest.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

The panel was asked to comment on the effectiveness of tax increment financing as a funding vehicle for development projects in the area. Though state constitutional amendments permit tax increment financing, the enabling legislation is not currently in place and not anticipated in the near term. For this reason, the panel concludes that financing redevelopment activities with project tax increments is not a realistic option for the foreseeable future.

Though tax increment financing as it relates to property tax may not be possible, the city may want to consider a variation of this financing approach based on incremental sales tax generated within the area. Such a technique would be subject only to annual city council appropriation. Under this concept, the city would identify the current sales tax generated in the Near Northwest; based on that revenue stream, the city would set a base sales tax floor for the area so that funds would continue to flow to the city as they do now. The difference would be that all or a portion of the additional sales taxes collected through new sales tax generators or through business growth could be reinvested in the area for improvements or projects undertaken in the Near Northwest.

Uses such as this freestanding pawn shop have become more characteristic of commercial activity in the Near Northwest.



For example, if redevelopment of the Sears site on 23rd Street resulted in new commercial uses totaling 100,000 square feet that generated \$125 per square foot annually in taxable sales, then incremental revenues of \$375,000 would be available annually. A portion of these revenues could be reinvested in the Near Northwest.

This source of revenue might provide a funding vehicle for the urban design, streetscape, and parking programs recommended for Classen Boulevard and 23rd Street. Subject to further exploration of this concept, the city may find it practical to use all or a portion of the incremental sales tax to guarantee annual debt service on bonds issued by the public trusts for revitalization activities.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Business improvement districts (BIDs) provide a method by which business owners and tenants in a given district can self-fund streetscape improvements, security, and marketing and promotional activities. In general, these districts assess their member businesses annually and use the proceeds of the annual assessment for activities such as these. This approach may provide one mechanism for funding the recommended activities for the Classen and 23rd Street commercial areas. Often, a local government contributes matching funds to a BID.

ENTERPRISE ZONES

The panel was asked to comment on the potential of enterprise zones as a development incentive in the study area. In general, experience with enterprise zones has been mixed nationally, and the panel feels that local incentives such as fee and permit waivers may be more useful in the short term.

TAX CREDITS—A POTENTIAL LOCAL INITIATIVE

Syndication of tax credits available for low-income housing production and historic preservation may represent a suitable financing resource for the Near Northwest. Such mechanisms have played a vital role in housing production in other parts of the country and might afford significant funds for large-scale housing efforts such as those proposed for the Paseo district. With specific projects such as Paseo, the city may want to consider a local initiative that would allow local corporations to take advantage of tax credits generated by well-conceived projects within the Near Northwest. This move would open up an as-yet-unexplored local market for tax credits.

PRIVATE CAPITAL

Regardless of the public financial commitment to the Near Northwest, public resources alone will not be sufficient for the revitalization effort; a program based solely on public investment will fail. Substantial investment of private capital and continued institutional investment will be essential.

To obtain maximum leverage, Clearing House loans should be structured for use with CDBG programs for downpayment assistance.

The city may also want to explore the promotion of additional private lending programs for the area, such as the current program offered by Central and Boatman's Banks.

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTMENT

Both St. Anthony Hospital and Oklahoma City University are critical to the success of the Near Northwest. Both institutions are going forward with expansion plans that will have a long-term stabilizing effect on the study area. These programs should be supported, when possible, with concurrent public investment.

To effect this support, the city may want to consider actions to coordinate the needed capital improvements and the CDBG demolition program with institutional master plans and near-term institutional investments. The same concept should be considered for the major churches in the area; Our Lady's Church, for instance, has expansion needs.

LEADERSHIP

Successful redevelopment of inner-city neighborhoods is occurring in many cities throughout the United States. Although the numbers and types of stakeholders in these redevelopment initiatives vary, the programs have one common element—strong leadership provided by both the private and public sectors. The term "public/private partnership" has become almost synonymous with successful urban redevelopment.

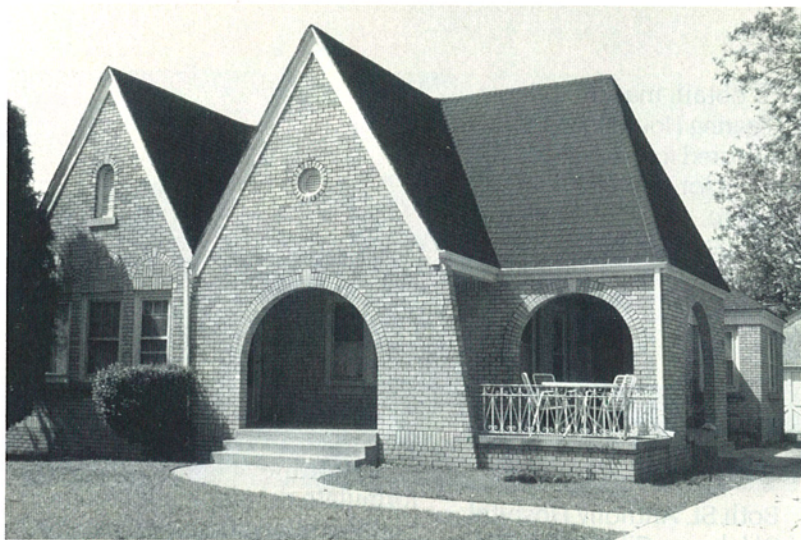
The city's banks, stimulated by the requirements of the Community Reinvestment Act, are the most readily available source of private reinvestment in the study area. An immediate opportunity exists through the Central Oklahoma Clearing House, which has agreed to commit a \$1 million, one-time fund to home acquisition and improvement loans in the city. These loans will have a 97 percent loan-to-value ratio, with a maximum principal of \$40,000. Though the institutional framework is in place to originate the Clearing House loans, the process has yet to be implemented.

Implementation of the Clearing House lending activity must take place soon, as these loans will provide an excellent source of takeout financing for the new construction and rehabilitation activities of NHS and Habitat for Humanity. If a secondary market source could be developed for these loans, additional funds would become available to Clearing House participants for potential use in the program.

The Clearing House program is an excellent start, but with a \$40,000 maximum loan the pool will only finance 25 homes. This effort must be expanded if the program is to have a significant impact on reinvestment in the Near Northwest. As the pool is implemented and a lending history established, the Clearing House should consider additional capital infusions on a revolving-fund basis.

As the panel analyzed the development potential of the Near Northwest and started to formulate development and implementation strategies, a common concern arose within the group. Where would the leadership come from—especially the private sector leadership—to spearhead this critical initiative?

During the interview process, the panel began to understand the serious damage wrought by the economic recession on Oklahoma City's corporate leadership over the past 10 years. Not only has the closing of several local banks decimated the leadership of the local financial community, but also the loss of home-based oil- and gas-company executives has created an even greater void among business leaders. Now that Oklahoma City is starting to rebound from its economic woes, however, new corporate leaders seem to be emerging from the local utility companies, the revitalized banking community (although many of these banks now have headquarters in other cities), and corporations and institutions such as OCU, Oklahoma Medical Center, and St. Anthony Hospital that are headquartered in Oklahoma City.



An attractive home in the Edgemere neighborhood.

This emerging corporate leadership can be seen in the following events:

- The recent creation of the Education Round Table to create a broad-based community strategy to improve the image and performance of the Oklahoma City Public School District;
- The initiation of a long-range planning process by the chamber of commerce to establish economic development priorities for the region; and
- The direct financial participation of the corporate community in several development and redevelopment programs throughout the city, such as OCU's expansion.

However, to make a success of the development and implementation strategies for the Near Northwest proposed in this report, strong, highly visible private sector leaders must come forward. They must marshal the necessary community resources, win public and private sector commitment, set priorities, and inspire real enthusiasm for the effort. This private sector leadership must achieve an effective public/private partnership of neighborhood associations and religious, institutional, and governmental leaders. Such a partnership must be similar in scope and intensity to the recent community coalition achieved when the city competed for selection as the site of the United Airlines maintenance facility. Redeveloping the Near Northwest, a challenge of even greater magnitude, can only succeed with the same degree of community effort as was put forth to attract United Airlines.

ORGANIZING FOR ACTION

From advocacy and organizing to counseling and training, the neighborhood development process requires the active and direct participation of a broad range of knowledgeable and committed individuals and groups. It also calls for the commitment and involvement of community leaders who understand well and can communicate the dramatic impact of neighborhood improvement on the future of an entire community. Neighborhood development restores hope and builds confidence, but it can only do this when planning leads to action and action leads to lasting, positive results.

Recognizing the interrelations of many urban problems is the first step toward identifying the factors that cause neighborhood decline. In turn, consensus building is the first step toward implementing a comprehensive solution to these problems. Oklahoma City is fortunate to have a wealth of resources in its many talented citizens and numerous public and private organizations. Many new undertakings, such as the Neighborhood Initiative, the Parks Foundation, and the Clearing House, have begun or will soon be getting underway. The response to these initiatives has been strongly supportive. But, to achieve maximum effectiveness, these efforts must be better coordinated and supported by dynamic leaders and by responsive, innovative organizations actively engaged in affordable housing development, commercial enterprise, and neighborhood improvement.

In this section of the report, the panel suggests roles for the five primary actors in the Near Northwest: business interests, lenders, neighborhood residents, city government, and the large institutions located within the community.

The Business Community. Many sectors of the Oklahoma City business community have been active partners in supporting neighborhood and business improvement. One of the more innovative examples is the Classen Beautiful organization, which works with property owners and tenants to improve the appearance of Classen Boulevard and its vicinity. Classen Beautiful members include merchants, property owners, individuals, institutions, neighborhood organizations, and business groups. This type of support should be expanded to include such activities as the Adopt-a-School and Adopt-a-Park programs, the Oklahoma City Beautiful campaign, and a revitalized 23rd Street Main Street program. All of these initiatives will require additional support and participation from the business community to reach their important objectives.

The chamber of commerce is to be commended and should be encouraged to continue its support of public education as a top community priority. It should also give further recognition to the importance of small business retention and job creation as sources of employment for graduates of the local school system. Developing leadership within the local business community should also become a high priority for the chamber. Supporting such activities as small business incubators and development centers, perhaps in conjunction with OCU, should yield high dividends in the form of a growing local economy, increased business ownership, and broadened employment opportunities. In this regard, the emerging minority business communities should be welcomed and ushered into the chamber's affairs.

The Financial Community. Oklahoma City's local financial community has emerged from the recession and its related banking reorganizations with renewed enthusiasm for and participation in community reinvestment. The Central Oklahoma Clearing House exemplifies the kind of cooperation among Oklahoma

City's financial institutions that would support the first steps in a comprehensive approach to community renewal. The area's lenders have also been very responsive to the needs of local businesses and of the elderly, although the lending and underwriting policies dictated by recent changes in banking regulations have restricted loan opportunities.

The sponsor must find ways to increase resources and continue these initiatives in a more systematic and sustained manner. In some communities, lenders have created highly leveraged revolving funds. In other communities, they have established their own bank community development corporations (CDCs). In still others, they have joined in active partnerships with non-profit, community-based CDCs. A case in point is the Paseo CDC, which affords the opportunity for the lending community to take a more active role in the redevelopment of the Near Northwest. Lending institutions could be instrumental in expanding the capacity and functions of the Paseo CDC and in creating new CDCs within the community. Creative ways to back grass-roots initiatives must be found.

The financial community must also find ways to address the credit barriers to homeownership for some people residing in or wishing to reside in Near Northwest. Resident assistance programs, with emphases ranging from home repair to credit counseling to homeownership and tenant training, must be enhanced to expand the housing market demand and to provide additional opportunities to live in the area.

Edgemere Park is one of many beautiful parks within the Near Northwest.



*A streetscape in the Classen
Ten-Penn neighborhood.*

Neighborhood Residents. Because of their intimate knowledge of their communities, neighborhood residents, through participation in neighborhood associations, can tackle many problems and engage in an array of community-building activities that could not be supported by traditional means of funding or service delivery. Pursuing a comprehensive and integrated strategy of neighborhood revitalization requires a sophisticated level of coordination and consensus building. Alas, these activities are often sidetracked by pressing social problems or by the burning issues of the day.

Oklahoma City is fortunate to have the Neighborhood Alliance, which has acted to educate and train neighborhood associations throughout the city. As a citywide organization, the Neighborhood Alliance is ideally positioned; it can do a lot, both to gain additional community resources for the Near Northwest and to leverage the support and confidence of a wide range of private and public sector partners on behalf of revitalization.



However, the number and the level of sophistication of neighborhood associations in the Near Northwest suggest that the associations themselves should unite to form their own neighborhood coalition and focus more directly upon the problems and opportunities of the area. This coalition of neighborhood associations should begin as a loose, nonlegal affiliation or confederation of associations. In this way, the coalition can encourage flexibility and innovation and can promote maximum communication and sharing among neighborhoods.

Additional funding should also be sought to unify the activities and increase the capacities of the many local neighborhood associations. An umbrella group, such as the proposed coalition of neighborhood associations, should coordinate this funding process and the activities of each member association.

Habitat for Humanity, which has taken on the building of several houses in the Metro Park neighborhood, is an exciting and promising addition to the city's efforts to demolish unsafe structures. Habitat is interested in helping young families now renting in the area to become first-time homebuyers. Similarly, Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) is committed to promoting homeownership in the Military Park neighborhood through another creative partnership of public and private resources. The lessons learned by NHS and Habitat in strengthening community ties and generating a mix of public and private resources must be shared. The cross-fertilization of resources and commitments is pivotal to forming new alliances and bringing about lasting change.

Government. The question of restoring neighborhood confidence is almost as much a question of civic credibility as it is of restoring the physical and social environment of the Near Northwest. It is legitimately government's role and duty to work side by side with other parties to build confidence. This attribute is sorely needed to cure a certain perception of helplessness, one that stems from the pervasive feeling that civic problems are not being solved.

The supportive leadership of elected and appointed officials is critical. True, many activities that aid in the long-term stabilization of neighborhoods might best be funded or implemented by other parties, or by the city in partnership with other parties. But it is increasingly important that local government and its leaders act as catalysts to unite the community.

As Oklahoma City's heart for many years and as the site of many current civic resources, the Near Northwest demands and deserves the same attention and support given to revitalizing Bricktown and the Stockyards. Just as the city both nurtured and capitalized upon those efforts, so must it support the efforts to reclaim the Near Northwest. The coordination of government's activities and leadership is a critical factor in creating an action plan to resolve issues and promote new ideas. The city's new Neighborhood Initiative is an exceptional opportunity to promote a flexible and responsive service delivery system that will work with the community to create a grass-roots learning and implementation process.

The highly targeted nature of the Neighborhood Initiative should be balanced with other opportunities to participate in neighborhood revitalization. The city should consider adding staff and boosting financial support for creative and cultural activities, as well as augmenting support for grass-roots planning and neighborhood organization. The possibility of expanding or replicating such events as the Paseo Festival and the Redbud Run into Near Northwest should be explored. Of course, special events programming cannot take the place of more substantive activity, but it is an essential ingredient in building confidence and celebrating the assets of a community.

Institutions. The Near Northwest is fortunate in the abundance of private and religious institutions within its borders. These institutions provide an economic stability and human resource pool that few other sectors of the city can claim. Unanimously, representatives of these institutions who were interviewed by the panel called for a convergence of leadership to "step up to the plate and do the right thing."

This energy should be channeled into a more formal alliance than already exists. As an example, in many communities members of the clergy have united to form an interfaith ministry council that provides services and counseling as well as spiritual leadership. Such a coalition could settle many neighborhood disputes and gain consensus on such matters as the placement of halfway houses. It could also encourage a more widespread sharing of facilities and programs and provide a direction and vision for the entire community.

While posing special challenges, St. Anthony Hospital and Oklahoma City University both offer unusual and valuable resources to the Near Northwest that must be given high-priority consideration. And both will need help and community support to realize their own long-term planning and expansion goals. If these institutions are to reach their full potential of service to the community, their campus plans must be harmonized with the interests of their immediate neighbors.

Many as-yet-unexplored opportunities exist for collaboration and sharing. For example, because the Near Northwest includes OCU, a fine university with a department of education specializing in early childhood instruction, the sharing of ideas between OCU and the Oklahoma City public schools could be beneficial to both and could help improve the quality of education within the community. Likewise, OCU has sent a delegation to China to forge business linkages and discuss business development. The expertise and commitment OCU has shown through its successful development of these linkages could also help the merchants along the 23rd Street corridor to establish sustainable revitalization programs. The panel believes it is time to rethink OCU's relationship to the community and, in particular, the university's level of participation in community affairs.

Increasing public recognition and support for this type of participation will lead both to a healthy future for these important institutions and to the overall success of the Near Northwest's redevelopment.

IMMEDIATE STEPS

To facilitate the development process and promote immediate reinvestment, as well as to elicit clear signs of positive change, the city should undertake the following activities. Although, the major development strategies recommended by the panel will require several years to implement, early and immediate action is still needed. The list below identifies a number of actions that could visibly change the area in the next 12 months, while programs effecting the revitalization strategy get underway.

- Rename the Near Northwest to reestablish the commercial area's historic strength and identity.
- Create a council of neighborhoods to coordinate neighborhood improvement and to facilitate the activities of neighborhood associations.
- Expand the involvement of Classen Beautiful in promoting the aesthetic and physical improvement of 23rd Street. As part of this expansion, the city should contribute financially to the staging of promotional events and a beautification campaign.
- Start a gateways improvement program, which should include street banners, landscaping, lighting, signage, street furniture, and other amenities.

- Develop a commercial area revitalization district (CARD) program to include facade modifications, parking expansion, and rebates to private owners for facade and sign improvements.
- Coordinate public infrastructure improvements and public events to support private revitalization efforts.
- Set up a special neighborhood liaison within City Hall to support and expand the Neighborhood Initiative.
- Support a residential neighborhood identity program to enhance and beautify entry points and to give each neighborhood a distinct identity.
- Initiate a boulevard planting program, and designate routes that link neighborhood parks, open spaces, and boulevards.
- Implement a seed fund that will challenge local businesses to contribute funds, on a matching basis, toward innovative or otherwise exceptional projects to enhance the area's schools, parks, and public spaces.

Within the next year, the city should commit \$500,000 to implement these initiatives. Meanwhile, it should obtain immediate and tangible results.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The panel can offer the city a list of goals and strategies, but only the city can move forward and implement them. As Napoleon declared, "Everything is in the execution." Oklahoma City has shown itself capable of organizing and mobilizing strong leadership to achieve civic goals. An example is the recent effort to attract a major United Airlines facility. A wide spectrum of municipal interests was involved in that effort on an organized, coordinated, and committed basis. Any revitalization of the Near Northwest will only be achieved if a similar commitment is made by the political, civic, and business leaders of the community. These leaders must commit to a program with the intention of sustaining it to its full achievement.

The history of Oklahoma City is unique. The city was established in a single day, yet civic leadership emerged immediately to provide the direction and focus to channel the new city's boom-town energy into permanent and productive growth. With such a heritage, Oklahoma City can certainly quickly produce the leadership needed to guide the revitalization of the Near Northwest, one of its most historically significant sections.

ABOUT THE PANEL

JAMES M. DEFRANCIA
Chairman
Sterling, Virginia

DeFrancia is a principal and an owner of Lowe Enterprises, Inc., a national real estate development company. He serves as president of Lowe's mid-Atlantic subsidiary, headquartered in Loudoun County, Virginia. Lowe Enterprises Mid-Atlantic is engaged in the development of several properties throughout the eastern United States, including large-scale projects in metropolitan Washington, D.C., that comprise the 2,500-unit planned community of CountrySide in Loudoun County and a nearly 2,000-acre development in suburban Maryland. Lowe Mid-Atlantic is also involved both in new development and in renovation of existing office and retail properties and has been retained as a consultant/manager for properties held by institutions such as the FDIC, RTC, and several major banks.

DeFrancia has been a visiting lecturer and jurist at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University and is a past national director of the National Association of Home Builders. He is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.

LEWIS BOLAN
Washington, D.C.

As the cofounder of Bolan Smart Associates, Inc., Bolan is a real estate economist and development consultant with over 20 years of professional experience. A recognized expert in the fields of strategic planning, market and financial analysis, development planning, and investment analysis, he has worked with many of the nation's leading developers, Fortune 500 companies, and financial institutions. He has also served as real estate adviser to numerous local, state, and federal government agencies.

Before the establishment of Bolan Smart Associates, Inc., Bolan was managing director of Leggat McCall Advisors, Inc., a national real estate consulting firm; vice president of Real Estate Research Corporation; and director of planning for Victor Gruen International, a European-based planning and design firm. Bolan has a bachelor of arts degree in sociology and economics from Columbia University and a master's degree in city planning from the University of Illinois.

DAVID N. GOSS
Cleveland, Ohio

Goss is the vice president for economic development of the Gateway Economic Development Corporation. Among other responsibilities, he coordinates with applicable public and private sector entities to optimize the development and redevelopment potential—retail, office, housing, hotel, and parking—within the Gateway Planning Area, the southern part of downtown Cleveland. The designation of this planning area resulted from the construction of the Gateway baseball stadium and arena, a \$350 million project.

Prior to his involvement with Gateway, Goss served as the executive director of CLINITEC, Inc., a wholly owned, for-profit subsidiary of the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, a health care institution. In this capacity, he managed the Cleveland Clinic's real estate interests, identified and pursued new health care business opportunities, and provided general management for the clinic's for-profit ventures and technology transfer programs.

HERSHEL LIPOW

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Lipow is president of MUSCLE, Inc., a 14-year-old nonprofit developer of affordable housing in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area. Before coming to MUSCLE, Lipow was director of housing and community development for the city of Memphis. He has held numerous positions in government and the private sector, including director of government affairs for the American Institute of Architects. Lipow has also served as a board member of the Tennessee Housing Development Agency and the National Community Development Association. Lipow has a master's degree in real estate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

DAVID ROBERT NELSON

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Nelson is president and chief executive officer of the Nelson Companies, a development firm. The Nelson Companies and its executives have been involved in projects ranging from high-rise urban apartments to large-scale open shopping centers. The Nelson Companies, through their related companies, also serve as construction managers, real estate brokers, and real estate asset managers. Nelson himself is a leadership group member of the Urban Land Institute, as well as a member of the National Association of Home Builders and the International Council of Shopping Centers. He is also the author of a number of articles on the real estate industry.

WILLIAM C. REYNOLDS

Pasadena, California

Reynolds is the director of the housing and development department for the city of Pasadena and its community development commission. He is responsible for citywide economic development, real estate, and housing programs, including the management of seven redevelopment project areas. Before his appointment in 1981, Reynolds was the deputy executive director of the Pasadena Redevelopment Agency during construction of Plaza Pasadena and the world headquarters of Avery International. He has been involved in the management of inner-city commercial, residential, and retail development for 15 years, including the public sector participation in Plaza Las Fuentes, a 1 million-square-foot mixed-use project; the development of 400 residential units within Pasadena's National Register Civic Center District; and a \$28 million parking program to support the revitalization of the Old Pasadena Historic District. He is a graduate of the University of California at Los Angeles and holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the California state university system.

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Kansas City, Missouri

Viets is director and principal of Peckham Guyton Albers & Viets, Inc., Architects and Planners, in Kansas City and St. Louis. PGAV's work includes major office, residential, and commercial development projects throughout the United States, with an emphasis on family entertainment projects for Anheuser/Busch, MCA-Universal Studios, and others in Florida, California, Virginia, Spain, and Japan.

MARC A. WEISS

New York, New York

Weiss is director of the Real Estate Development Research Center and associate professor of real estate development in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University. He is the author of *The Rise of the Community Builders*, a book about the history and political economy of large-scale real estate development and urban planning. Currently, he is writing *Own Your Own Home*, a book about homeownership and housing policy.

Weiss is a fellow of the Urban Land Institute and coauthor of ULI's new university textbook, *Real Estate Development Principles and Process*. In addition, he has served as a frequent consultant to industry and government, has written many articles and research monographs on urban development, and is producing a series on the history of development for public television. A former faculty member at MIT and fellow of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, he received his undergraduate degree from Stanford University and his PhD from the University of California at Berkeley.

JAMES W. WENTLING

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Wentling is the principal of James Wentling/Architects, a Philadelphia firm specializing in residential design and planning. His design experience includes a broad range of housing types, from single-family detached houses through urban infill projects and mixed-use communities. Wentling holds a bachelor of architecture degree from the University of Notre Dame and is a graduate of the San Diego School of Law. He is a frequent speaker and published author on the topics of residential design trends and new housing forms; in addition to coediting *Density by Design*, which was published by ULI in 1988, he wrote *Housing by Lifestyle*, a publication of McGraw-Hill that describes design issues of importance to residential builders.

AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT
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