



Finding Solutions

Building Consensus

Generating Momentum

THE CITY OF AIKEN AIKEN, SC

December 3 - 4, 2014

ULI SC Technical Assistance Panel



Urban Land
Institute
South Carolina

What are Technical Assistance Panels

TAPs provide expert and objective strategic advice to sponsoring organizations on complex land-use and development issues. TAPs link public agencies and non-profit organizations to seasoned real estate, planning, financing, marketing and technical experts through ULI district councils. TAPs are part of ULI's Advisory Services program which has assisted more than 500 communities worldwide since 1947.

How do TAPS Work

Sponsors request the services of a TAP with regard to a specific issue that can be addressed by a panel of experts in one or two days. The District Council assists the sponsor in refining the scope of the assignment and convenes a panel to address those specific issues. The sponsor works within ULI guidelines to provide background information to ULI panelists prior to the panel's convening. When convened, members of the TAP view the subject site, hear from public and private stakeholders, and then deliberate on the assigned issues. At the conclusion of its work, the panel presents an oral report to stakeholders; that is followed by a written report within approximately six weeks.

What do TAPs Cost

TAP fees depend on the scope of the project, length of the panel and the detail of the final report, but typically fees run between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Each TAP is different and fees are negotiated individually. Panel members donate their time and are only reimbursed for their out-of-pocket expenses such as overnight lodging and transportation to attend the TAP. To ensure objectivity, panel members cannot be involved in matters pending before the sponsor, be working for the sponsor, or solicit work from the sponsor during the panel's assignment period.



Panelists deliberate after 24 hours of aggregating information

The Panel Process

TAP PANEL SELECTION

The ULI South Carolina District Council considered the City of Aiken's goals for the TAP and selected seven panelists based on their expertise.

SPONSOR PRESENTATION

The TAP panelists assembled at Aiken City Hall on Wednesday, Dec. 3, for a presentation by the TAP sponsor. The presentation was made by Roger LeDuc, former city manager for Aiken and currently interim city manager, and Emory Langston, special projects coordinator for the city.

TOUR OF STUDY AREA AND ENVIRONS

Following the sponsor presentation, TAP panelists toured the Crosland Park neighborhood as well as other neighborhoods that have been part of the City's north side revitalization initiative, via passenger van and on foot.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The afternoon of Dec. 3 and the morning of Dec. 4, panelists met with community stakeholders including elected officials, city and housing authority staff, property owners and landlords, neighborhood association members, members of the faith community, and middle and high school students who live in Crosland Park.

PANEL DELIBERATIONS

The panel held two working sessions, the first on Wednesday evening following the sponsor presentation, site tour and stakeholder interviews; and the second on Thursday upon the conclusion of stakeholder interviews and a second input session with the TAP sponsor. During these sessions, panelists reviewed the significant findings, addressed the focus areas, identified opportunities and challenges, developed recommendations and prepared a PowerPoint presentation that addressed the questions posed by the sponsor, the City of Aiken.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

The panel presented its PowerPoint presentation of findings and recommendations at 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 4, in an open session to the TAP sponsors, community stakeholders and interested public in the Aiken City Council Chambers. Panelists then took questions and comments from the audience.

REPORT PREPARATION AND RELEASE

The TAP, under the leadership of the ULI South Carolina District Council, prepared this report on its conclusions and recommendations. The report was presented to the sponsors in January 2015.

The City of Aiken Technical Assistance Panel

DECEMBER 3 - 4, 2015 | AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

The Urban Land Institute South Carolina
205 1/2 King Street
Charleston, South Carolina 29401

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SPONSOR & ULI PARTICIPANTS



SPONSOR

City of Aiken, South Carolina

PANEL CHAIR

- **Jefferson Fort**, Gramling Brothers
Charleston, SC

PANEL MEMBERS

- **Krista Hampton**, City of Columbia
Columbia, SC
- **Robert Morgan**, Greystar
Charleston, SC
- **Nathan Schutte**, instite strategy + architecture
Charleston, SC
- **Dale Stigamier**, Integrity Real Estate Advisors
Columbia, SC
- **Ginny Stroud**, City of Greenville
Greenville, SC



Recent investment in Crosland Park include renovated homes, the Rural Health Services Facility and repaving the roads

ULI SOUTH CAROLINA PROJECT STAFF

- **Heather Foley**, Executive Director
ULI South Carolina
- **Grant Jackson**, Consultant / Technical Writer
Columbia, SC
- **Sydney Parker**, Contractor
ULI South Carolina

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's South Carolina District Council, the Aiken Technical Assistance Panel convened at Aiken City Hall on Dec. 3 & 4, 2014, bringing together community leaders, stakeholders and a panel of planning, design, and development professionals for a day and a half session focused on helping the City of Aiken revitalize the 550-home Crosland Park neighborhood on the city's north side.

Crosland Park was developed in the early 1950s after the federal government announced the construction of the Savannah River Site. Originally known as the place to live for management and workers at SRS, later in its evolution Crosland became the neighborhood of choice for Canadian retirees. But over the years, the neighborhood has transitioned from predominately owner-occupied to approximately 55 percent tenant-occupied. The condition of the housing stock and the neighborhood infrastructure declined dramatically over time. Current efforts to revitalize Crosland are part of a City-led initiative that began in the early 2000s focused on declining neighborhoods on the City's north side. As part of that effort, the City of Aiken implemented a program of buying and rehabbing distressed properties. The City currently owns 31 parcels consisting of vacant lots, boarded-up houses; tenant-occupied homes, and completely remodeled homes that are listed for sale through area Realtors. The City has not been able to recoup its investment, and since the economic downturn funding sources once used to address affordable housing issues have been more challenging to secure.

The panel, sponsored by the City of Aiken, was asked to consider:

- What is the best way to develop housing options in the Crosland Park neighborhood?
- How can the City improve the desirability of Crosland Park as the "Neighborhood of Choice" where families want to live?
- How does the City effectively address the issue with absentee landlords and neglected properties?
- How does the City prioritize phased development of Crosland Park? Are there any funding sources to assist with this development?
- Identify issues which separate areas of the North Side and develop strategies to unite the entire North Side of Aiken?

The Technical Assistance Panel prepared its recommendations based on a review of the briefing materials, a debriefing with City officials, a tour of the study area and extensive interviews with stakeholders. Panel deliberations included a SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats -- analysis, determining key focus areas and recommendations. The panel also made short-term recommendations.

The panel's findings and recommendations focused on:

Public Safety in Crosland Park

The public has a perception that Crosland is not a safe place. And while actual crime in the neighborhood may not be as great as the perception – perception is reality. The City in partnership with the Department of Public Safety and neighborhood partners must aggressively attack this issue.

Infrastructure

One way to begin mitigating the crime issue is to address a glaring lack of streetlights in the neighborhood. With the help of the Neighborhood Association and other neighborhood leaders, the City should launch a "Light up Crosland" initiative. Work needs to continue on revitalizing road and sewer infrastructure as well. Additionally, sidewalks and the development of neighborhood parks need to be part of the infrastructure agenda.

Quality of Life

The panel felt strongly that the City needs to concentrate more on improving the quality of life for Crosland Park residents and less on improving the real estate. Quality of life can create a sense of place and increase demand for housing. One suggestion is that the City take several of the vacant properties and empty lots it owns in Crosland and convert them into small parks that could create neighborhood gathering places around picnic shelters, playgrounds, basketball courts and community gardens. Additionally, the City should work with partners to better integrate renters into the neighborhood and create a sense of ownership of the neighborhood, and play a role in future revitalization efforts. Active engagement by the neighborhood association and its residents is essential to the successful revitalization of the Crosland Park neighborhood.

Image/Branding

Crosland Park clearly suffers from a bad public image. The City needs to consider a marketing/rebranding campaign that celebrates the successes of the neighborhood and touts the advantages – affordability, proximity to elementary and middle schools, etc. – of living in Crosland Park.

In the early 2000s, the City of Aiken began a revitalization effort focused on declining neighborhoods on the City's north side. Most of the city's development has been to the south and west.

BACKGROUND & SCOPE

The north-side redevelopment area is bordered by SC 118, Richland Avenue, Vaucluse Road, and Beaufort Street. The revitalization effort incorporated various non-profit and community groups, and businesses working with the City to address opportunities for affordable housing, improved infrastructure, recreational and educational programs as well as crime reduction initiatives. The focus area covers 10 neighborhoods with commercial development along portions of York Street, Richland Avenue, and Hampton Avenue. The early neighborhood revitalization projects included Ashton Oaks, Chesterfield North, and Toole Hill. The typical scope of these projects consisted of 60 homes or less. These projects proved to be successful in achieving most of the goals of the revitalization effort, prior to the economic downturn. These neighborhoods and others are still within the scope of the north side revitalization. While each neighborhood is separate, they all face similar issues and challenges for sustainability.

Presently one of the main areas of focus is the revitalization effort in the Crosland Park neighborhood. Crosland Park is a neighborhood that was developed in the early 1950s after the federal government announced the construction of the Savannah River Site. The neighborhood has a large footprint of roughly 550 homes, which provides its own challenges and opportunities for redevelopment. The neighborhood was originally known as the place to live for management and workers at the Savannah River Site. Later in its evolution, it became the neighborhood of choice for Canadian retirees seeking to relocate to the warmer South Carolina climate. But over the years, the neighborhood has transitioned from predominately owner-occupied to approximately 55 percent tenant-occupied. The condition of the housing stock has declined dramatically, and over time the infrastructure has declined as well. The City of Aiken continues to own 31 out of 55 parcels it purchased throughout the neighborhood. These properties consist of vacant lots, boarded-up houses, tenant-occupied homes, and completely remodeled homes that are for sale through area Realtors. The City has not been able to recoup its original investment. Since the economic downturn, funding sources once used to address affordable housing issues have been more challenging to secure. Crosland is very diverse in terms of age, income and race.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT AND KEY ISSUES

The City of Aiken sought the assistance of an Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel to address these questions:

1. What is the best way to develop housing options in the Crosland Park neighborhood?
2. How can the City improve the desirability of Crosland Park as the "Neighborhood of Choice" where families want to live?
3. How does the City effectively address the issue with absentee landlords and neglected properties?
4. How does the City prioritize phased development of Crosland Park? Are there any funding sources to assist with this development?
5. Identify issues which separate areas of the North Side and develop strategies to unite the entire north side of Aiken?

Following a briefing by Roger LeDuc, interim city manager for the City of Aiken, and Emory Langston, special projects coordinator for the city; a tour of the project area and portions of the north Aiken area; and interviews with numerous stakeholders, the panel identified several key issues with direct relevance to the questions posed for the TAP:

CRIME

Actual crime and the perception of Crosland Park as an unsafe, crime-ridden area is probably the single largest impediment to revitalizing the neighborhood. With very few exceptions, stakeholders expressed a concern with crime in Crosland. One stakeholder cited a lack of police presence in Crosland. Additional programs for young people would help, she said. People do not feel safe in Crosland Park, another stakeholder said. Several stakeholders noted that no one goes out at night because the streets are dark and they do not feel safe. The problem in Crosland Park is safety -- guns going off at night, one stakeholder said.

Aiken Public Service Director Charles Barranco pointed out that police have made efforts to concentrate on Crosland Park through various programs including Community Café, the PAL Program and Safe Schools (stairwell conversations and mentoring opportunities). Police have established a permanent presence with a substation on the neighborhood's edge. While crime may well be on the decrease in the neighborhood, there is still the perception of significant crime and local media have fueled the perception by continuing to refer to Crosland as "Combat Park." Police are making the effort to promote relationships with residents of Crosland Park. Director Barranco said that his philosophy could be captured in the phrase, "Relationship leads to Partnership which leads to Ownership."

INFRASTRUCTURE

Closely tied to the perception of crime in Crosland Park was concern over the neighborhood's lack of or declining infrastructure: especially the absence of streetlights. The neighborhood is dark at night and that darkness provides cover for criminal activity. Middle and high school students, with whom the panel met, commented on the lack of street lights contributing to an unsafe feeling at night. Several said they would not go out on the street at night. Other stakeholders said the neighborhood needs more sidewalks and the existing sidewalks need to be better maintained. While the City continues to make efforts with a paving and sewer line replacement program in Crosland Park, some stakeholders see the need for more. One noted potholes at an entrance to the subdivision and landscaping that needs attention. The declining infrastructure contributes to a general feeling that the neighborhood has a poor appearance.

A lack of recreational infrastructure is also of concern. A single large park with a heavily used basketball court sits at one corner of the 550-home neighborhood, but there are no restrooms at the park. Additionally two small neighborhood pocket parks are adjacent to the elementary- middle school complex. But the neighborhood lacks other recreational opportunities. A large recreation complex is planned nearby, but several stakeholders said lack of access via sidewalks is a concern and that the neighborhood needs additional parks. There is a need for more activities for young people, additional parks and playgrounds and more sidewalks to better connect the neighborhood, said one stakeholder. Another stakeholder said there also needs to be more programs for senior citizens.

OWNERS VS. RENTERS

Crosland Park's shift from primarily owner-occupied homes to majority rental homes – 45% homeowner vs. 55% rental – has created several problems and at least some tension between the two groups, although the homeowners focus has been more on the rental property owners, the landlords, than the tenants. Some of the rental property owners were characterized as “slumlords” by stakeholders. There is a general feeling that rental home owners do not invest in or maintain their properties. All the blame was not placed on the landlords however. Several stakeholders said the renters need to take more responsibility for maintaining the homes they lease. Renters are not taught to keep house, another stakeholder said. One stakeholder who owns a large number of properties in Crosland complained of juvenile vandalism to his property – windows broken by 10-year-olds -- and said police do little to try to arrest the individuals involved. Landlords also said they have difficulty getting police to help them evict problem renters. Crosland Park does have a neighborhood association that is composed largely of older homeowners with little to no representation from rental property owners or tenants. Several stakeholders also mentioned the need for increased code enforcement and property maintenance of these problem properties by the City.



Community gateways in Crosland Park and Edgewood don't reflect the improving housing stock and changing conditions of the neighborhood.

IMAGE/BRANDING

Crosland Park has seen a huge transition over the years from when it was originally built to accommodate the workers at the Savannah River Site and was as one stakeholder put it, "the place to live in Aiken." After years of decline the neighborhood has developed a very poor image. People do not want to move there. Another stakeholder said, "Crosland Park has become the neighborhood of last resort." According to stakeholders familiar with the local residential market, the average rental in Crosland Park is \$500-\$600 a month versus a \$1,000 a month in other areas. Home purchase prices can range from \$20,000 to \$30,000 for properties in need of repairs to \$50,000 to \$60,000 for homes in perfect condition, versus an average of \$75,000 to \$85,000 for comparable single-family homes elsewhere in the area. But Crosland is not a desirable place even for those who do qualify said one stakeholder. Because of issues in the neighborhood, selling properties in Crosland is a "risky business," another said.

While there is certainly a perception of vacant and neglected properties, this perception may be far worse than the reality. Panelists found that the neighborhood housing stock, overall, is in good condition. From a marketing and sales perspective, however, a home with only one bath can be a challenge to sell given the needs of families in the market place. On a positive note, there are also long-term residents, both owners and renters, who are dedicated to the neighborhood and its revitalization.

“Crosland is not a bad neighborhood, said high school student. “Bad things happen there” said another. “Each street is like a family, and the neighborhood is quiet most of the time” added a third.”

Youth Perspective

Several panelists interviewed students at the adjacent Aiken Middle School and also at Aiken High School. All of the students either currently live in Crosland Park or had lived there previously. The students expressed many of the same sentiments as the adult stakeholders:

- Safety is a major issue for the students, some of whom said the problem is exacerbated by gangs of older teens coming in from the outside
- Sommers Avenue and George Street are the two really bad streets, with fights and shootings.
- A greater police presence would be welcomed, especially at night.
- Police need to live in the neighborhood.
- More streetlights would help make it safer. “It’s not safe at night, you can’t see,” one said.
- More sidewalks are needed.
- Dogs roam the neighborhood.
- Roads need to be fixed.
- More parks are needed. “The big park gets a lot of use.”
- People need to do a better job of keeping up their property. “The No. 1 thing is maintenance and upkeep of property,” one student said. “Owners don’t care about the rentals,” another said.

“Crosland is not a bad neighborhood,” one high-schooler said, “bad things just happen there.” Another said, “each street is like a family,” and the neighborhood is quiet most of the time.



Secure Neighborhoods: The goal of the Secure Neighborhoods Initiative is to improve public safety by engaging police with Atlanta communities through housing opportunities. The program offers sworn police officers—who are committed to living in the communities they protect and serve—affordable options, incentives to stay and clear pathways to homeownership. As individuals from the police force become pillars of their communities, it increases the neighborhood’s stability, capacity and overall security.

<http://www.atlantapolicefoundation.org/SecureNeighborhoods-8>

OBSERVATIONS & FINDINGS (SWOT)

Based on the briefing, tour and stakeholders' interviews, the Panel performed a simple SWOT: – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats – analysis.

STRENGTHS

- The City of Aiken is debt free
- Neighborhoods have some recreational amenities
- A new rural health services facility recently opened in the area
- The City has made a substantial investment in public infrastructure and housing units
- Crosland Park is the second largest community in Aiken County, giving it critical mass
- Much of the housing stock in Crosland is in good shape.
- Middle school students identified the streets as their families
- Long-term residents are invested in the community
- Nonprofit partners have invested in the north side
- Crosland has good proximity to Middle and Elementary schools



Neighborhood access to the elementary school, the new rural health services facility and the renovated homes provide the Crosland Park neighborhood with improved housing stock and desirable community amenities.

WEAKNESSES

- Perception of and actual public safety issues
- Three bedroom homes with a single bath are not desirable.
- Location of recreational facilities
- Connectivity to area amenities is not good.
- Code enforcement and livability laws not adequately enforced
- Quality of life within the neighborhood
- Renters not committed to the long-term improvement of the neighborhood
- Gateways into the community in disrepair
- Successes in the neighborhood not celebrated
- Street lighting is poor



Vacant lots, disjointed sidewalks and lack of street lighting contribute to the perception of blight and crime in the neighborhood.



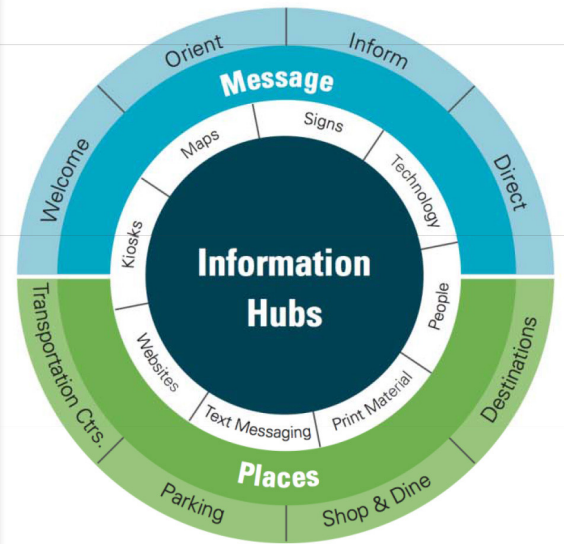
The Community Garden is an under-utilized

“ Many sociology studies have found that residential stability strengthens social ties with neighbors. Other research has focused on how mobility diminishes the depth of social ties because there is less time to build long-term relationships. Sampson and his colleagues argue that social cohesion and strong ties are paths through which resources for social control are made.”

Source: *Social Benefits of Home Ownership and Stable Housing*, April 2012

OPPORTUNITIES

- Build relationships to build partnerships to build ownership of the neighborhood (in reference to policing)
- Leverage the new Rural Health Services as a starting point to grow support services in the north side area
- Improve public infrastructure with street lighting and traffic calming measures
- Leverage community assets
 - Existing recreation
 - Community gardens
- Create tenant associations and strengthen the Neighborhood Association
- Develop more housing options

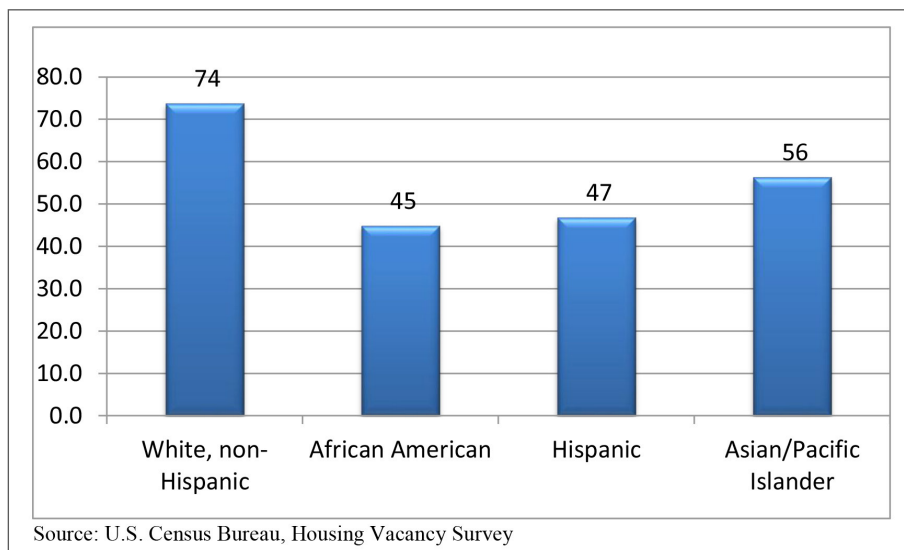


1. Create exterior lighting guidelines for neighborhoods, parks, buildings and streetscapes.
2. Update zoning and design review documents to include energy efficient lighting and associated incentives.
3. Identify lighting goals (i.e. safety, identifying pedestrian connections, enhance nighttime use of SMUA District, highlighting architectural features and seasonal celebrations)
4. Develop a signage and lighting strategy to enhance public safety and security

THREATS

- Market competition
- Code enforcement and livability laws
- Less than desirable housing configurations (3-bedroom, 1-bath)
- Long-term financial viability of the City's investment in residential real estate
- Pressure of more renters coming back in to the community.
 - Owner-occupied housing decreasing
- Public perception of Crosland Park

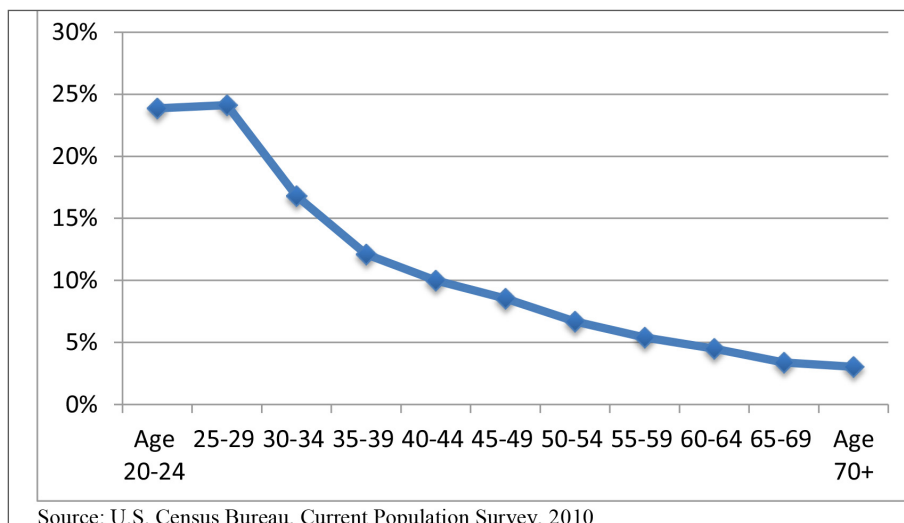
Percentage Point Gains in Homeownership Rate by Racial Group (1994 - 2011)



Demographics of Crosland Park

- White: 24.8%
- African-American: 70%
- Hispanic: 3.2%
- Asian / Pacific Island: .2%
- Other: 4.9%

Mover Rate (percentage of people changing residence) by Age



Demographics of Crosland Park

- 25 - 34 yrs: 12%
- 35 - 44 yrs: 11%
- 45 - 54 yrs: 11%
- 55 - 64 yrs: 8.5%
- 65 - 74 yrs: 10%
- 75+ yrs: 4.25%

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- The north side area neighborhoods lack amenities and services (daycare, after-school care, family services, healthy restaurants)
- Passionate residents committed to making the neighborhoods a better place
- Difficulty for new residents / renters to be accepted by the larger community
- Police presence is welcome
- Public transit stops for the Best Friends Express may not be in the right location
- Land can be more valuable than the house that sitting on it
- The City may be able to better leverage existing investments by using these investments to respond to resident and stakeholder concerns
- The City's home purchase process could be streamlined

City of Milwaukee

Fall 2013

Vacant Lot HANDBOOK

A Guide to Reusing, Reinventing and Adding Value to Milwaukee's City-owned Vacant Lots

Some strategies in this book can be implemented easily with minimal resources. Other strategies take time to develop the ideas, and to gather support and resources .

1. Neighborhood Amenities & Green Space
2. Urban Agriculture & Community Gardens
3. Active Multi-Use Spaces
4. Environmental Strategies
5. Residential & Commercial Development

RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS



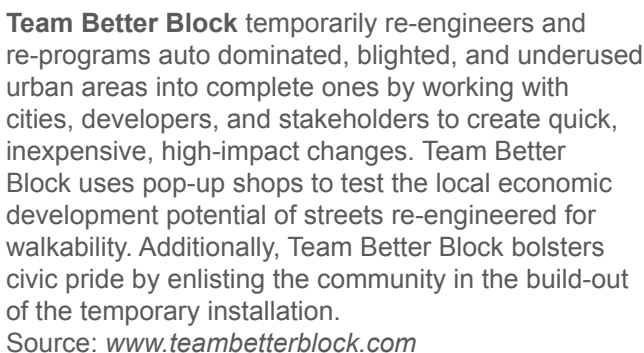
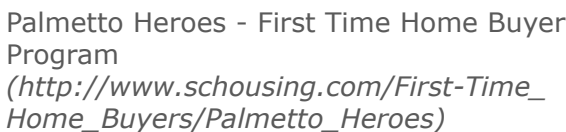
Source: *Small Towns, Big Ideas: Case Studies in Small Town Community Economic Development*; UNC School of Government

The South Carolina State Housing Finance and Development Authority launched the Neighborhood Initiative Program. The goal of NIP is to stabilize property values through the removal of blighted properties in strategically targeted areas, in an effort to prevent future foreclosures for existing property owners. NIP will assist communities by stemming the decline of home values and acting as a catalyst to initiate redevelopment and revitalization in areas suffering from blight and decline. Demolition of blighted properties will have a positive effect on preserving existing neighborhoods.

(Source: http://www.schousing.com/Housing_Partners/Neighborhood_Initiative_Program)

1) What is the best way to develop housing options in the Crosland Park neighborhood and how do we effectively address the issue with absentee landlords and neglected properties?

- Focus on improving infrastructure and quality of life for Crosland residents to create greater demand for relocation to the neighborhood.
- Demolish vacant & dilapidated houses (City-owned or privately owned where applicable) Many of these homes are serving as gathering places for criminal element and are in such poor condition that a vacant lot with other potential uses would be the highest and best use for the lot.
- Focus on single blocks of property or streets at a time rather than taking a checkerboard approach. This will create critical mass on which to grow.
- Implement stronger building code enforcement.
- Consider applying for the SC State Housing Finance and Development Authority's Neighborhood Initiative program. Additional information can be found at http://www.schousing.com/Housing_Partners/Neighborhood_Initiative_Program
- Partner with a non-profit entity to acquire property and demolish homes
- Offer housing to public safety, teachers and first responders for rent/buy at a discount (one source of down payment assistance is the Palmetto Heroes Program. More information can be found at http://www.schousing.com/First-Time_Home_Buyers/Palmetto_Heroes). An occupied home, even at a discount to the City, is a better use than a vacant home
- Explore short-term rental programs.



Perhaps start by marketing available homes to Police and Fire officers and then expand to teachers. In exchange for a year-long lease, these public servants can lease the home for \$500-\$600 or less per month. Renters might also have the option to extend the lease for up to two successive one-year terms. Another incentive might include a lease with an option to purchase the property after the one year period.

These programs can be as flexible as the City is willing to make them. One suggestion is to meet with Police and Fire officers to discuss what types of incentives might encourage interest in living in Crosland Park or other neighborhoods.

2) How can we improve the desirability of the Crosland Park as the “Neighborhood of Choice,” where families want to live?

- Celebrate the successes of the neighborhood – implement a rebranding and marketing campaign
- Create a sense of pride within the neighborhood
- Launch a major crime reduction initiative to include:
 - Greater police presence in the neighborhood
 - Relocation of the police substation from the perimeter to the interior of the neighborhood
 - Support for cooperative efforts between public safety and neighborhood associations
 - Open dialogue on suitable methods to address crime prevention needs, specifically between the police and the landlords that own multiple units.
- Prioritize improvements to streets:
 - Street Lights
 - Sidewalks
 - Curb & Gutter
 - Stormwater drainage
 - Traffic Calming Devices
- Develop the capacity of the Crosland Park Neighborhood Association to play a greater role in the revitalization of the



Source: <http://greaterohio.org/projects/neighborhood-initiative-program>

Resources designed to stabilize property values by removing and greening vacant and abandoned properties in targeted areas:

- *Green Investment Strategies, How they matter for urban neighborhoods;*
- *Land Bank Playbook*
- *Laying the Groundwork for Change; Demolition Urban Strategy and Policy Reform*
- *NSP Land Banking Playbook*
- *Vacant Property: Strategies for Redevelopment in the Contemporary City*
- *Vacant to Vibrant: A guide to revitalizing vacant lots in your neighborhood.*

neighborhood:

- Launch a take back the streets program
- Create a crime watch / neighbor accountability program
- Add representation from owners and renters
- Commit a senior City administrative official to active participation in regularly scheduled meetings with neighborhood leaders and property owners
- Unify renters and homeowners toward a common goal
- Pursue opportunities to leverage the neighborhood's proximity to the elementary and middle schools; work with the school district to improve school performance, as well as explore a shared use of facilities for Crosland residents, i.e., can school recreational facilities be used by neighborhood residents during non-school hours.
- Explore opportunities with healthcare and daycare facilities
- Encourage development of service-based businesses on Crosland Drive
- Expand the Safe Routes to School Program
- Pursue grants to fund improvements of entry monuments & ongoing maintenance of the entry points.
 - Croft at Wire
 - Aldrich at York North
 - Aldrich at York South
- Repurpose City-owned vacant lots for:
 - Playgrounds for young children with appropriate equipment
 - Community Shelters & Community Grills. South Carolina is blessed with a mild climate that leads to plenty of opportunity to get outside. Why not provide places where the neighborhood can gather.
 - Basketball Courts. There is a large park with a basketball court at one corner of the neighborhood, but a large development like Crosland could add a second or third court that is more accessible.

The **Redevelopment Ready**

Community initiative in Michigan is a state-wide certification program that supports communities to become development ready and competitive in today's economy. It encourages communities to adopt innovative redevelopment strategies and efficient processes which build confidence among businesses and developers. (michiganbusiness.org)



- Community Gardens. Yes, there is one, but Crosland Park is a large neighborhood, it could easily accommodate more than one community garden. The gardens themselves can take many shapes: a vegetable garden, community orchard, flower garden, native planting site. Active community gardens might even lead to the establishment of a neighborhood farmers market with residents sharing produce.
- Contemplative Space. Why not a well-maintained flower garden with benches and sculpture, a place for people just to come and enjoy the space.
- Side-Yard Expansions. Where feasible the city might consider offering vacant lots for sale to adjoining property owners to increase the size of their yards.

Repurposing city-owned lots can be a major catalyst for the area. There are many examples of reuse, especially in some of the country's larger urban areas. There are lessons to be learned from them. The City of Aiken might take a look at: 1. The "Greening of Detroit." The city is transformed 10 vacant lots into greener, healthier public spaces. http://www.dwsd.org/downloads_n/announcements/press_releases/pr2013-06-06_greening_of_detroit_installs_green_infrastructure.pdf

2. "Occupy Vacant Lots" in Philadelphia. Includes efforts to create food producing spaces, community parks, flower gardens. <https://transitionphilly.wordpress.com/occupy-vacant-lots/>

3. "Lots of Green" in Youngstown Ohio. A wide range of conversions to community gardens, community orchards, pocket parks. <http://www.yndc.org/programs/lots-green>

4. Milwaukee <http://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityDCD/planning/pdfs/VacantLotHandbook.pdf>

5. Cleveland. <http://planning.city.cleveland.oh.us/ftp/8IdeasForVacantLandReuseCleveland.pdf>

But key to all of these transformative initiatives is working with the neighborhood residents. Ask them what they want and then involve them in the change. What not actually enlist neighborhood volunteers in the physical labor to make some of the changes. Could a lot for a garden or a pocket park actually be deeded to the neighborhood association which would then have the responsibility for mobilizing the residents and working with the city to transform the lot? This would promote ownership of the neighborhood.

Branding is more than a logo. Your brand is something the whole neighborhood can stand behind and share with others.

"Some neighborhoods in the city are not as well known as others, [some] have kind of gotten lost over the years, [some] are victims of sometimes negative reputations or are simply not clearly defined," explains Jeff Fisher of LogoMotives. "Branding one's neighborhood offers an opportunity to create a verbal and visual identity, reintroduce a community, instill pride in the residents, and make the place known to others in the city."

The actual development of the brand can be a wonderful opportunity for community engagement and activity

Source: http://www.neighborhoodnotes.com/news/2012/05/neighborhood_branding_determining_what_to_change_and_how/

REBRANDING CROSLAND PARK

Any attempt at rebranding Crosland Park must be coupled with the city and the residents' efforts to create positive change in the neighborhood. A brand is not just a logo and a tagline that are part of a public relations campaign. A brand reflects the essence of the community; it says this is who we are and what we are about. A rebranding especially for a community that may have had a lot of negatives in the past has got to say we have put all that behind us and we are moving forward.

But this isn't just window-dressing and it can't be "greenwashing," the term used when many products tried to relabel themselves as environmentally friendly, when they really were just the same old product repackaged. Rebranding a neighborhood means that it has or is the process of getting rid of all the bad stuff such as poor housing, crime, and blight and is reintroducing itself as something new, something better. Real change in the neighborhood has got to be part of any rebranding and accompanying public relations campaign for Crosland Park. It can also deal with old misperceptions about the neighborhood, such as a crime problem that may not be borne out by the statistics.

But just as importantly, rebranding cannot be thought of as a quick-hit fix. This is an initiative that will take years, but if the rebranding of Crosland is coupled with real change in the neighborhood it can be successful.

Some areas where this approach has been successful include neighborhoods in Portland, Ore.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Reno, Nev.; and Midtown Detroit. "We Believe in 118" is a community coalition working together towards a safer community on Edmonton, Canada's, Alberta Avenue. Closer to home in Columbia, S.C., a regional initiative resulted in Columbia SC, Famously Hot, a wildly successful rebranding.

But the key to any rebranding initiative is for the city to work together with the stakeholders in Crosland – owners, tenants, landlords, business owners – to determine what Crosland brand is and what they want it to be. Community involvement is absolutely critical. Leverage the neighborhood association’s Facebook page. This may be an area where the City wants to enlist the aid of a professional marketing firm to guide the process.

5) How do we prioritize phased development of Crosland Park and are there any funding sources to assist with this development?

- Demolish vacant & dilapidated houses (city-owned or privately owned where applicable)
- Implement a Neighborhood Initiative Program
- Partner with a non-profit entity to acquire property and demolish homes
- Concentrate redevelopment efforts on streets identified as the worst in the neighborhood, rather than hop-scotching throughout the area.
- Provide high quality rental housing as a part of future redevelopment priorities
- Explore the use of incentives or other support mechanisms for:
 - **City-owned property that is ready for redevelopment** -- Property can be donated and/or sold to non-profit and for profit developers. Properties should be free and clear of liens, environmental issues and ready for redevelopment. In Greenville, for example, the city sells properties to non-profit organizations for \$1 and to for-profit developers for \$10,000. Developers then construct affordable homes for rent or for sale. The City of Aiken should define roles and responsibilities of each partner in an executed development agreement. This may include the range of prices for homes, monthly rental costs, income levels to be served, period that the unit will remain affordable.
 - Public Improvements -- Upgraded streets with sidewalks, street lights and trees offer incentives to potential developers and support marketing efforts. Public improvements also include parks, playgrounds and open space.
 - Down Payment Assistance – The City can use Community Development Block Grant funding to provide down payment assistance to income-eligible families interested in purchasing the new homes.
 - Waiver of Fees -- The City might consider waiving building permit and impact fees for area where City would like to see development activities.

6) Identify issues which separate areas of the North Side and develop strategies to unite the entire north side of Aiken?

- Wide thoroughfares don’t comfortably accommodate pedestrians and cyclists
 - Highway 19 and US 1
 - Add more and wider sidewalks.
- Collaboration is needed on all funding programs and municipal improvement programs.
- Competition for limited funding

The panels overall recommendation is that to improve Crosland Park, the City of Aiken needs to focus on improving the Infrastructure and Quality of Life in the neighborhood and begin to extricate itself from the residential real estate business. The major issue of crime or its perception and its causes in the neighborhood must be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

The Panel divided its recommendations into short and mid-term efforts:

SHORT TERM (PRESENT – 1 YEAR)

- Dedicate a City administrator to meet with stakeholders on a regular basis and attend monthly neighborhood association meetings
- Develop a strategy and begin implementing a street lighting program
- Address the vacant and dilapidated properties
- Develop a public relations program that addresses the image and perception of Cro-
sland
- Explore incentives for landlords to improve properties, an example could be tax
credits for measurable improvements.
- Offer housing to public safety, teachers and first responders for rent / buy at a dis-
count

MID TERM (PRESENT – 5 YEARS)

- Work with the neighborhood to develop an open space and recreation plan for the
entire neighborhood
- Identify and implement plans for improvements for vacant lots (housing, parks,
community gardens, basketball court, etc)
- Enhance and broaden access to schools
- Improve infrastructure.

Key Takeaways

1. Crosland Park is not viewed as a safe neighborhood.
2. The neighborhood has significant infrastructure needs, especially street lights.
3. Crosland Park's current image may be far worse than its reality.
4. While there are dilapidated and rundown properties, the overall housing stock is good. However, the current layout of the homes may not meet the needs of families searching the current market (3-bedroom, 1-bath).
5. The City Aiken should focus its limited resources on improving the neighborhood's infrastructure and the quality of life for its residents and work with residential partners on the purchase, renovation and sale of these homes.

Measuring Success

A number of national measuring sticks have been developed to track neighborhood health. It may help to look at the work of the Knight Foundation; the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative of the Urban Institute; or the Neighborhood Allies in Pittsburgh, PA. The Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative suggests tracking six indicators:

1. Housing Vacancy Abandonment Rate
2. Market for Single-Family Homes
3. Business Activity/Particularly Retail
4. Crime Rates
5. Socio-Economic Status
6. School Quality / Educational Attainment

The biggest measure of success for Crosland Park likely would be an increase in property values in the neighborhood coupled with a decrease in the number of vacant or abandoned properties. Likewise decreases in crime rates and vandalism in the neighborhood also would connote success.

From an image and rebranding standpoint the City could measure the negative vs. positive mentions of Crosland in the media. Has the media quit referring to it as "Combat Park?" You could also track mentions of the neighborhood across social media platforms.

THE PANELISTS BIOGRAPHIES

Jefferson Fort, Vice President of Community Development, Gramling Brothers Real Estate & Development

jfort@gramlingbrothers.com

Jeff Fort is responsible for project management including coordination of planning, design and engineering efforts, construction management and HOA operations for Gramling Brothers Real Estate & Development, in Charleston. He received his Bachelor of Design and Master of Architecture degrees from Clemson University and has more than 20 years of experience with a diverse range of project types. An architect by training, Fort is an active member of the Urban Land Institute and Mount Pleasant Land Conservancy.

Krista Hampton, Planning Director, City of Columbia

kmhampton@columbiasc.net

Krista Hampton is the Director of Planning and Development Services for the City of Columbia and is a firm believer that good design can improve the economic, cultural, and physical well-being of a City. Hampton began her work as the Historic Preservation Planner for the City of Columbia and worked for eight years to promote the benefits that maintaining the unique identity of a community can provide. Later, she was tapped to establish and lead the city's Development Center, which created a streamlined one-point-of-entry process for construction review that other governments have used as a model. Her work in these areas led to her appointment as Director in 2010 where she established as her first priority rewriting the significantly outdated zoning and land development ordinance. She holds a BA in American Studies from Miami University in Ohio and an MA in Public History from the University of South Carolina.

Robert Morgan, Asset Manager, Greystar

rmorgan@greystar.com

Robert Morgan is an asset manager with Greystar Development Group's Southeastern Region. His portfolio includes multifamily properties located in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Morgan has overseen 5,000 units in 19 communities since joining Greystar, while also leading the disposition of five assets totaling \$230 million in sales value. Prior to joining Greystar, he worked as a Vice President of Development for Carlisle Development Group and as a Managing Director for Trammell Crow Residential (TCR). Morgan received a Master of Science degree in Real Estate Development and a Master of Architecture degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Clemson University. He currently serves as the treasurer of the Clemson Architectural Foundation (CAF) and the treasurer of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) South Carolina District Council.

Dale Stigamier, Managing Principle, Integrity Real Estate Advisors

dale.stigamier@IntegrityREA.com

Dale A. Stigamier, CCIM, has a diverse range of experience in commercial real estate development, asset management, property management, and market/feasibility analysis. Stigamier's background in institutional real estate development and construction separates him from his peers and provides a unique perspective on approaching projects. He has been in the development and asset management

business since 1998 working in multiple markets throughout the country. His career began in Cincinnati, Ohio, and also spent time in Atlanta, Ga.; since 2004, he has worked throughout the Southeast from Columbia. During this time, he has developed Class "A" office, medical, retail and industrial, mixed-use commercial, master-planned land developments, urban infill projects, and public/private partnerships.

Stigamier graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a BA in Finance and Real Estate. He serves on the City of Columbia Planning Commission, ULI Reality Check Midlands Action Collaborative, and the Historic Columbia Foundation Board of Directors & Advocates and Development Committee. He is a member of the CCIM Institute, Urban Land Institute, Institute of Real Estate Management, and Historic Columbia Foundation. He served as the ULI Midlands Young Leaders Chair from 2007 to 2009, is a graduate of the Leadership Charleston Class of 2010, a past Board Member of the Congaree Vista Guild, and was awarded the prestigious University of Cincinnati Real Estate Student of the Year in 2001.

Grant Jackson, Principal, GrantJax Communications, Columbia
CgrantJackson@gmail.com

C. Grant Jackson is a private consultant for economic & community development, strategic planning and communications. Prior to forming GrantJax Communications, he served as Senior Vice President for Community Development for the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce from 2008 to 2013. Jackson joined the chamber following a long career as a newspaper journalist. He holds a bachelor's degree from Mercer University in Macon, Ga., and a Master of Arts in journalism from the University of Missouri. He is a graduate of ULI's Center for Sustainable Leadership and was involved in planning and execution for the 2011 Columbia Connectivity ULI Technical Assistance Panel: Linking Main Street and the Vista, and the ULI National Advisory Services Panel in 2013 on Columbia: Strategies for a Connected City.

Nathan Schutte, Co-Founder, insite strategy + architecture
Nathan@insitesomething.com

Nathan Schutte has developed an expertise in master planning, visioning and design through practicing architecture in the Southeast. His experience includes numerous urban design, mixed use and community development projects. Schutte is a licensed architect with professional degrees in Architecture and Community Development. He is the founding principal of insite strategy +architecture, an architecture firm creating unique solutions to project planning and execution while providing a comprehensive vision and delivering the total design package. Perspective delivers services that enable aspirations and compliment the community. He is a LEED Accredited Professional, has completed a Gold level LEED project, and is the first, and currently the only, LEED for Neighborhood Development Accredited Professional in South Carolina.

Ginny Stroud, Community Development Administrator, City of Greenville
Gstroud@greenvillesc.gov

Virginia "Ginny" Stroud, a native of Greenville, serves as the Community Development Administrator for the City of Greenville's Community Development Division. Prior to returning to the City of Greenville, she served as Deputy Director for the City of Charleston's Department of Housing and Community Development where she was instrumental in the creation and implementation of affordable housing and economic opportunity initiatives for the City's Federally designated Enterprise Community. Stroud returned to Greenville in April 2001 to lead the Community Development Division in implementing effective housing strategies and programs to improve the wealth of low to moderate income families. Stroud holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of South Carolina's College of Social Work and a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of South Carolina. She is a Licensed Social Worker and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners .

Who is ULI

ULI was founded in 1936 as a nonprofit institute to facilitate the open exchange of ideas and information among local, national, and international real estate industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. Today it has more than 37,000 members worldwide.

ULI does not lobby or act as an advocate for any single industry. The Institute is committed to providing leadership in the responsible use of land and creating and sustaining thriving communities through the experience of its members.

It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

ULI South Carolina

ULI South Carolina was founded in 2005 to support the larger mission of ULI. The District Council has some 500 members across the state who are working to support the mission by growing leadership, weaving the state together and creating a blueprint for statewide growth.



Panel Members from Left to right: Grant Jackson, Ginny Stroud, Robert Morgan, Jeff Fort (chair) Nathan Schutte, Krista Hampton, Dale Stigamier



205 1/2 King Street
Charleston, SC 29401
843-513-9331
southcarolina@uli.org

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