

5th City: Chicago 25 Years of Community Development

by Neil Vance

Recently I had the opportunity to visit some community-based development projects around the nation. Although there are regrettably few—no surprise given the lack of funding this decade—the successful projects are truly remarkable. While it is fashionable to say the last twenty-five years have been fruitless, there are some very effective community development projects around the nation.

If you visit any major city in the United States and ask about the successful community development projects in the city, you will receive a fairly common list. The alarming thing is that the list is so short. For example, in Newark, knowledgeable people will automatically mention the New Communities project and La Casa de Don Pedro. These projects, like most enduring community-based development projects, have relied on the charisma and energy of their founders, which is hardly surprising given the arduous nature of the work. After people in Newark mention these projects, the list dwindles.

There are similar multi-program community projects in every major city. As we enter the next decade, it is important to look at the successful projects and establish the reasons for their success, their points of failure and lessons for the future.

The community project that provided some of my earliest experiences in development is called 5th City: Chicago. It began in the 60's when the Ecumenical Institute moved its headquarters from Evanston, Illinois to the West Side of Chicago. The program began as a result of conversations and workshops between the Institute staff and the community people. The project began in earnest with the 1968 riots and the incorporation of the 5th City Community Corporation. Over the years, the Ecumenical Institute and its successor corporation, the Institute of Cultural Affairs, assigned staff to work with the



The Newest Addition to Fifth City's Economic Development is a Multi-Service Autocenter

full-time community staff. The Institute, with a changing program focus, moved from the West Side 15 years ago and several years ago withdrew any day-to-day relationship with 5th City.

A Visible Difference

5th City is certainly no "Shangrila" in the ghetto. It is still a disadvantaged neighborhood. But as you enter it, you are aware that it is different from the blight of the surrounding neighborhoods. 5th City has a preschool which has operated since the mid-60's, and all of the teachers are from the neighborhood. The current director, Ruth Carter, began as a teacher's aide and upon getting a GED and a teaching certificate, was chosen as director. 5th City has a shopping center—the first privately funded new construction in the West Side after the riots—that is run by local residents. In spite of chronic problems, the center has continued to provide necessary commercial services. Eleven multi-family apartment buildings were rehabilitated with HUD-insured financing and they too are financially strapped. Despite the consistent inadequacies of

HUD's below-market financing, the buildings remain attractive and reflect their residents' pride. Most of the two-flat and single residence buildings are now owner-occupied—not the slumlord properties they used to be.

The 5th City community has its own identity. Street signs read "5th City" and a large wrought iron statue of the "Iron Man" stands in the center of the shopping mall. The statue serves as a symbol of the resilience and stamina of those who would try to rebuild their community. There is an Auto Center that provides car washing and service, and a job training center that equips young men and women with clerical skills. All of these programs have experienced problems but have continued to function. Numerous other programs were started but were terminated due to lack of interest or funding.

The most striking aspect of 5th City is its community leadership. All of the project leaders are neighborhood residents and many date back to the days of the project's conception. Community corporation offices are in an old union hall and space is rented to other social service programs. However, not all of the community renewal efforts have been initiated by the community corporation. The efforts of the community leaders have attracted collaborators. A new hospital was built, the bus company changed an eyesore into an attractive bus barn and the national Neighborhood Housing Services has instituted a branch office in the community.

Most importantly, 5th City feels like a neighborhood. Residents claim that crime is appreciably less and what used to be a transient community is now a vital neighborhood.

Reasons for Success

There are four aspects to the 5th City approach which account for its success and are instructive for other community development efforts. One is program comprehensiveness. We, the Institute staff and the community people were committed to the working hypothesis that piecemeal approaches would never get at the real issues. We saw that the new housing would not endure if there were not educational, employment, and commercial opportunities. We also

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saw that all ages had to be involved; that it wasn't sufficient to just educate the children and neglect the youth or adults or elders. So we embarked on implementing the 5th City Model, which was a comprehensive program plan built with the community in mind.

In retrospect, some of our implementation efforts were comical. I was part of the team assigned to develop housing and it took years to get housing rehab loans and financing for the shopping center. At the time there weren't intermediary organizations to provide assistance. Now there are willing external agencies and support organizations who are willing to start programs in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These programs still need to be integrated into a unified comprehensive program.

The second thing that accounts for 5th City's endurance is its local leadership. Rather than "import" college-educated leadership from outside the neighborhood we assumed that the leadership was there. And they were, although they didn't fit the usual criterion of a director or administrator. Most of the initial leaders hadn't finished high school and were unemployed. We felt that their desire to serve and to lead far outweighed their "qualifications" in the usual sense. However, considerable time had to be spent in leadership training. Through much trial and error, we developed curricula and methods that would enable a leader to confidently stand before the community and lead it in community planning sessions. The assumption about local leadership is important, for many of the same leaders are still "at it" in 5th City. Mrs. Lela Mosley is still coordinator of the 5th City Corporation, Floyd Stanley still runs the shopping center, Lily Fox is still a neighborhood volunteer in housing efforts and Verdell Trice is a leader in several economic development programs.

The third element of 5th City's success was its planning. It is embarrassing to think of some of our early planning attempts. Some of our plans were abstract dreams that had no hope to be actualized. But in later years we enabled community people to gather community groups and lead them in action planning. This is important for

several reasons. First, the planning and re-planning was stimulating because it continually gave the community fresh ways to rekindle its vision. Second, the planning provided a practical bridge

between the community leaders and the people. Too often community organizations are as divorced from the neighborhood as external service providers are. Planning can involve the community—

"The Fourteen Actuating Programs"
Comprehensive Community Reformulation in Fifth City

One

Toward The Building of Economic Prowess in Fifth City

Employment Formation		Capital Circulation	
Light Industries Projects	Print Shop Program	Commercial Development Complex	Mall Creation Program
	Electronics Assembly Program		Plaza Development Program
	Industry Promotion Program		Common Market Program
	Home Industries Program		Retail Co-op Program
Automotive Service Project	Supplies Co-op Program	Finance Services Center	Credit Union Program
	Equipment Rental Program		Financial Advisor Program
	Service Center Program		Insurance Accessibility Program
	Mechanic Apprenticeship Program	Business Management Association	Capital Development Program
			Wholesale Purchasing Program
			Retail Promotion Program
		Central Services Program	
		Commercial School Program	

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not merely represent them. Finally, planning provided leaders with objective methods to divide labors among themselves and to account for their successes and failures.

Finally, 5th City is unique in its use of community-created symbols. This may have been our most important discovery and the one most difficult to describe. Because rebuilding a commu-

nity is so difficult, a sense of common purpose must be created. So we created songs about the community, chose common colors for pre-school uniforms (red and black), encouraged commu-

Fifth City is a comprehensive community action project located on Chicago's West Side. The fourty block area is situated four miles directly west of Chicago's Loop in an old and decaying area. The project was initiated 25 years ago with an emphasis on comprehensive—economic, social and physical—development. In 1976 community residents and consultants gathered to evaluate the project and make concrete plans for new programs. This chart, The Fourteen Actuating Programs, is a summary of the new projects the community felt necessary to fulfill their vision of a renewed community.

Two Toward The Building of Community Engagement in Fifth City				Three Toward The Building of Social Effectiveness in Fifth City			
Utilized Space		Citizen Care		Practical Preparation		Style Creation	
Neighbor- hoods Environment Corps	Blocks Restoration Program	Neighbor- hood Safety Network	Community Patrol Program	Child Development System	Satelite Care Program	Social Activities Project	Recreation Facilities Program
	Maintenance Team Program		Citizen Action Program		Community Facility Program		Seasonal Activities Program
	Community Arts Program		Home Security Program		Preschool Center Program		Urban Olympics Program
	Public Works Program		Modern Equipment Program		Elementary Academy Program		Community Festivals Program
Community Housing Enterprises	New Housing Program	Community Engage- ment Services	Community Forums Program	City Life Institute	Basic Education Program	Urban Agriculture Project	Lot- Farm Demonstration Program
	Housing Rehabilitation Program		Transportation Enablement Program		Employment Techniques Program		Home Garden Program
	Craftsman Guild Program		Information Interchange Program		Elder Engagement Program		Farm Development Program
	Construction Service Program		Health Delivery Program		Life Methods Program		Equipment Pool Program
				Urban Student House	Urban Curriculum Program		
					International Exchange Program		
					Work Corps Program		
					Academic Support Program		

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community art (murals and statues), community insignia (the geographical shape of the community on a circle) and so on. All of these activities gave identity to a real neighborhood.

Mistakes Were Made

This is not to say that mistakes weren't made. At times it seemed to rain errors. Perhaps the very fact that the Institute's offices were in 5th City flawed the project. Our presence did communicate concern and create a bond, but it also created a subtle kind of dependency. In retrospect, there were some assumptions and operating hypotheses that now seem to be mistakes.

First, we overemphasized the 5th City model instead of emphasizing the community planning and participation that created the model. Our mistake was in our failure to understand our means rather than our end. For purposes of replication we had to look to our planning methods, not to the 5th City model. Clearly, each community should create its own practical vision.

Second, the Institute saw its role as singular in the development process

rather than as one among many. I suppose it is human nature to be proprietary over something you've worked hard at, but the project had the tendency to exclude other social service agencies. Now there is a healthy mix of outside agencies. Any new development project should be seen as a collaboration of many agencies rather than an "experiment" of one.

Third, we stressed social development more than economic development. We lacked outside expertise for effective economic development—I was the "housing expert"—so naturally we were inclined to social programs. Consequently, too few jobs were created.

Finally, the Institute never had developed a precise schedule for how long it would remain in the community and how long it would assist the community. It is not that the Institute kept these things from the community people. The Institute just couldn't decide ahead of time what its relationship was to the community.

Lessons for the Future

From these experiences of 5th City,

what lessons have we learned for the future?

First, it seems imperative that any serious new effort at revitalization of disadvantaged neighborhoods should pay particular attention to the training of grassroots leadership. No matter how sophisticated our separate social interventions are, if we ignore the human development of the neighborhood people, our programs will crumble.

Second, the days of outside organizers—be they black, white or hispanic—are over. We need to train community people to re-enter their own community as catalysts.

Third, comprehensive programming is not a luxury, it is requisite. Comprehensive is a fairly common adjective these days, so I should be more specific. Nothing short of economic and social and physical development will do. Unlike the "old days", there are many effective social and economic programs ready for application and initiation. However, these programs need to be integrated into a holistic one for the community.

Fourth, action planning—strategic planning on the local level, if you will—can and should be used as a form of organizing and rekindling a community vision. It can also serve as a bridge between the community leadership and the community residents.

Finally, much work needs to be done on ways of allowing a community to create its own identity. Practical how-to's must be formulated for community symbols, songs and other means for creating community identity.

The most gratifying thing about 5th City is that they are still at it. When you consider how many community development efforts have come and gone the last 25 years, it is reassuring to know that there is a community in Chicago quietly at the task of renewing itself. They are ordinary people in most senses, but by banding together to rebuild their community, they have become a very special people.

Neil Vance began his career in community development over 20 years ago living and working in 5th City. Currently he is consulting with Youth Policy Institute in the development of a Neighborhood Leadership School.

Lela Mosley — 25 Years of Community Leadership

Lela Mosley, the executive director of the 5th City Community Center dates her involvement in 5th City back to 1963. In 1964 she was employed as a factory line worker who supplemented her income as a beautician. She "took a cut in pay" to become one of the first pre-school teachers in the 5th City pre-school because she wanted to learn teaching to assist in the home instruction of her retarded son.

Over time, her commitment to 5th City deepened. When the Board of Managers was formed after the April 1968 riots, she took full responsibility for the health and education programs in the community. Her natural abilities and determination at leading meetings, quickly distinguished her as a community leader. Lela has gone back to college to earn an associate degree and is only 15 hours short of a B.A.

According to Lela 5th City is a success because, "We had a model or plan of what we wanted to do. And set about doing it." But when pressed as to why she and others are still at it after 25 years, she responds differently, "We have a sense of commitment; of working on behalf of others that gives meaning and fulfillment." Says Lela, "Meaning and commitment aren't difficult things to see. The real key is the style of community leadership. When people see you at the task day after day; when they see a consistency, they know that you are serving. Sometimes they will disagree or dislike you. Regardless, you go out and do what you have to do."

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