

**Healthy Neighborhoods: Planning for Battle Creek's Success  
Community Forum Hosted by Project 20/20  
October 9, 2014, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m., Burnham Brook Community Center**

After presentations by Rebecca Fleury, City Manager from the City of Battle Creek, Chris Lussier, Community Development Supervisor from the City of Battle Creek and George and Denisha Reed from the Urbandale neighborhood, attendees (60) were asked to work in small groups to answer the following questions: 1) When you think about neighborhoods in Battle Creek, what is working well? Why? 2) What can be done to improve your neighborhood? 3) Based on the improvements we just discussed, how do we make those improvements happen? and 4) What could you do in the next 30 days to improve your neighborhood?

A recorder wrote down the ideas from members of each small group. The notes below contain the responses recorded by each group.

**1. WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT NEIGHBORHOODS IN BATTLE CREEK, WHAT IS WORKING WELL? WHY?**

- "I'm" working well – I reach out, I'm connected (shared garden and skills); neighbors come to her; safe haven
- Piper Park – well kept, walking path is used, active, we're invested
- People are connected, not best friends but know each other visually
- Fell Park is a social spot
- City services work well – plowed, clean streets, street lights, see police presence
- Engagement efforts pay off
- City Commission member is at all of our NPC meetings!
- I did experience good service in zoning department – seems to be getting better
- Seeing more demos – seen as progress
- Neighborhoods have their own character, personality
- Community garden has allowed neighborhood to bond
- Sidewalks added allows for connectivity
- Early Childhood Connections held play dates at park downtown
- Programmed events
- Demolition program increased value in neighborhoods
- Addressing vacant homes reduces bad behavior
- Habitat programs and NIBC programs
- Utilizing open lots (for gardens and fresh food)
- The look of the neighborhood after owners fix up homes (even after been cited for paint) – inspectors did their job – neighbors now encourage each other
- Engagement of neighbors – encourage more, work together more often
- Neighborhoods need to stay vibrant and safe
- The Land Bank program seems to be working
- Bowen Street park looks good this year – well maintained due to some committed neighbors in the neighborhood
- Basic infrastructure is in good condition in our neighborhoods

- Nice houses built on Wabash, noticed that other owners are making improvements
- Have some strong, concerned residents that know the landscape
- NPCs provide forum, good identity
- Sense that more houses were rehabbed vs. demolished
- Need to have less rentals; more home preservation
- People are communicating
- Street lights
- Residents appreciate historic homes on north side
- New to area - happy to see crime isn't as bad as people say
- Like the wall art – adds vitality, deters graffiti
- Neighborhoods are cleaner, more improvements being made
- Residents are vested in their neighborhoods, open to visit, to see improvements take place
- Residents are taking pride in side lots making sure the side lots are taken care of
- CA – community involvement in City grants to promote block parties, city provides picnic tables, annual event on Bennett/Yuba Streets; a way to get to know everybody, very feasible community/neighborhood event, provides security when you know each other
- Knowing neighbors helps protect each other's properties
- NPCs – monthly meetings, you get to talk to police officers, code officers, leadership on the council, develops trust
- I live in a nice neighborhood – walking trails, property always looking good, important to know everyone, I'm experiencing no problems and feel fortunate
- Battle Creek has people who care, who are positive
- Most people get along and have respect for each other
- Code compliance helps but others disagree and says it's dysfunctional, top down and forceful

## 2. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

- Rentals bring down my neighborhood – level of care i.e. trash, junk, don't care
- Code enforcement for rental properties don't seem to work, are there permits? What are the criteria?
- Tried to call on a house (in 2001) – city response has been rude in the past, prohibits people from calling
- Some are curious about multiple families living in what are thought to be single family houses – went to NPC to get more info
- Need to be more informed about what's moving in and out. Also what businesses are moving in (adult bookstore next to school (Post/Franklin))
- Why aren't land use and code compliance issues being followed?
- Make sure street lights are repaired (within a month); check lighting at night – a lot of trees are blocking the light
- Communicate when there a tree is taken down – should be replaced
- Community needs more sidewalks, promotes community interactions, in some areas the sidewalk just stops, more walkable communities
- Less rentals, more homeownership/less transient people
- Concern about theft although police department has been more active
- Landlords live out of state – don't maintain their properties, there's a desire to work together but they aren't there
- People don't feel safe – high activity occurring in rear lots, uncomfortable being alone in building at night, prostitution in the area
- More resident engagement with the NPCs

- If you are cited by code compliance, encourage your neighbors to comply – help each other out
- Need to include youth in neighborhood work (youth advisory board)
- Engage parents and kids
- Need youth employment opportunities
- Model the behavior we want to see
- Help seniors with snow removal/leaves/grass/etc.
- Need to build up NPCs
- Need to get more done together
- Code compliance is not addressing the issues
- Street sweeping is only done once per year
- Code compliance drives through the neighborhood but doesn't address the problems
- Need to enforce people painting houses
- Had banners that promoted our neighborhood association, but not replaced or fixed
- Improve city response time to our concerns, both staff and elected officials
- Bring vested homeowners together with new homeowners and landlords – we need to impact the mindset that some renters have where they don't take care of their properties. We introduce ourselves to prospective buyers in our neighborhood and talk in our tight knit community. We also introduce ourselves to landlords and build a relationship. I feel like this approach gives more power to influence.
- You can't get anything done by going to Commission or neighborhood meetings; I have complaints but can't get anyone to give me an answer or a solution; two years is too long for a solution
- Better communication
- South side – better street lights, too dark
- More sidewalks on south side
- Trim trees so you can use sidewalks, improves visibility, lowers crime, less storm damage
- Solution for abandoned homes (animals are getting in and further degrading) – sell them for \$1
- Reduce speeding – not safe for kids, streets are 25 mph
- Find solutions to ensure sidewalks are clean
- Would like to see park for exercise/walking by the mall
- Commitment from City Hall and residents; there is inconsistent police presence at NPC, no regular code officer at NPC meetings, decisions are made before the NPC can talk to residents
- The key is getting information to people
- Need other neighborhood residents to visit other BC neighborhoods
- Still visible buildings that are making the neighborhood a cause for concern; Calhoun is being worked on as well as Frelinghuysen St.
- Need schools to have higher student scores in public schools, important that public schools are being effective
- There are models for programs to help citizens/homeowners to receive training/education to lift up the neighborhood e.g. the HERO in Lansing – plumbing, electrical, carpentry, etc. mechanics of how to's; homeowners are overwhelmed or just don't know how to do repairs
- Repairs are expensive, Comstock Community Center offering home repairs
- Winterizing homes
- Younger generation can't move up because of past behaviors – credit, background checks
- The system is not helpful to those who don't have an education
- Slum lords don't take care of properties – multiple families in a single dwelling
- Owners don't take responsibility of home ownership
- There's a lack of pride and investment

- There's a difference of opinion on what the city does and doesn't do - who decides? Who decides where money is spent?
- Blight – burn out houses, tear down wrong houses, need more decision makers, City is making the wrong ones

### **3. BASED ON THE IMPROVEMENTS WE JUST DISCUSSED, HOW DO WE MAKE THOSE IMPROVEMENTS HAPPEN?**

- Require City Commission members to attend NPC meetings; need to have effective chairperson at NPC meetings; need to have active NPCs with city support
- Neighborhood associations are important – organized places/process for addressing issues – city supports leadership and these organizations
- Need more communication before things happen i.e. trees on Jackson. Use social network!
- Clean up weeds/overgrown areas at entry points to the city!
- Help the police with eyes and ears
- Utilize city programs
- City needs to communicate with partners/residents prior to code compliance so providers can be prepared
- Need a program available for those who are not low to moderate income but living paycheck to paycheck
- Have a clear location for information – even if the information is available, not sure where to direct the question
- Move prostitution off from Capital Ave, makes the City a less desirable place to live
- Panhandling on Beckley is consistently being done
- Help homeless people find shelter
- Loan program for critical home remodel/rehab – pot of money that providers access to get started, no interest, revolving loan fund
- Make contact with City Commissioners
- Make contact with Code Compliance/City staff
- Understand what actions can be taken
- Have neighborhood residents take “ownership” of their neighborhood to make things happen – reclaim our neighborhood
- Address safety concerns; improve trust with police department; address gang issues/activities – involve police; identify problem houses and let police know
- Start neighborhood watch programs
- Make landlords accountable for property conditions and type of renters they allow
- Must work together, collaborate
- Signs – “Take pride, don't litter”
- Have a clean-up day in neighborhoods
- Need City support; we used to have someone that worked with us that supported our association.
- Have more of a customer service attitude. When people are showing they care, they should be treated with great customer service.
- We do some things because we have always done them that way. We can be more creative.
- Respond to questions from citizens at Commission meetings
- Can we find ways to strengthen neighborhood groups, more than NPCs? We may not be able to go back to the Yes We Can or Neighborhood Services days but can we be more empowering?

- We formed a small group and named ourselves. We use NPCs but our group is less bureaucratic and able to do more things
- We are able to get a code report at NPCs and hold our code officers accountable to addressing conditions. We have gotten some results from our guy.
- In the past, we had picnics, held events for all neighborhood groups
- South side – install more streets
- Sidewalks – attract more people to NPCs, share info re: groups that will help seniors
- Vacant houses – not sure of solution
- Hold banks accountable for properties they own
- Increase awareness/access to support funds for repairs
- Have an interim step before punishment – insert resource info into water bills
- Speeding – post signs for streets that are supposed to be 25, ENFORCE! Smart cart out more often – need more than one
- Let neighborhoods decide what is needed – code compliance money could be spent on improvements
- Property owners could sign an ownership pledge to do (whatever action)
- Need to take a bottom up approach to neighborhoods
- Neighborhoods aren't one size fits all
- Need to educate people, need “community builders”; in the past received training through WKKF funds, went to classes, signed contracts to take responsibility
- We have lots of programs but people don't know about them
- Need Commissioners to look and listen to neighbors

#### **4. WHAT COULD YOU DO IN THE NEXT 30 DAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?**

- Help neighbors with leaf blowing
- Clean out storm drains
- Edge and trim a section of sidewalk
- Inquire about how to help take care of entry point weeds
- Direct staff to write about their issues
- Promote 211 more for people to get help
- Warn providers when code compliance letters go out
- Communicate what we know to others
- Neighborhood help – who to call, etc.
- ALICE – resources for people in the middle to fix up their homes
- Get together with your City Commissioner
- Meet with neighbors to determine problems
- Work with police on public safety issues
- Speak up
- Clean up efforts in the neighborhood
- Model the behaviors you want to see
- Responsible reporting
- Engage neighbors
- Pat and Mel agreed to meet to learn from each other
- It's about building valuable relationships across neighborhoods and with community leaders, City staff. We need to lift up people that are committed citizens and honor them – show that people leading is valued. These small investments in small community groups lead to lasting meaningful relationships.

- Talk to neighbors
- Ask how you can help
- Share resources with neighbors
- Encourage men to buy toys – snow blowers
- Buy teens shovels
- Get trash cans on north side for litter problem
- Go to the folks on Bennett in Urbandale and take brochures about CA services
- Visit the Share Center, community meal centers to give out brochures so they have new information for help. Need to establish trust
- Encourage people to attend NPC meetings
- Work on giving correct information instead of perpetuating incorrect stereotypes that people have
- Visit BC neighborhoods; getting to know people, sharing with them that ownership is important
- Neighborhoods Inc. needs more funding
- The HOME statistics need to see an increase in numbers being served
- Transportation to community meals, expand to get jobs
- Support Ma and Pa grocery stores – actual good, not convenience stores
- Write letters to HUD – code compliance not being done, let them investigate
- Increase communication