

Progress Report

The Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Task Force

The work of the City's Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Task Force is informed by three findings of the Poverty Reduction Blueprint. The first is that there are numerous organizations and institutions in Buffalo and Erie County, which are working on various aspects of poverty reduction and neighborhood development. The problem is this work is mostly carried out in silos with little or no collaboration taking place within and between the various poverty reduction and neighborhood development sectors. Second, to carry out a successful battle to reduce poverty and redevelop distressed neighborhoods, the City of Buffalo must be joined by county government, the private sector, higher education and the medicine, the foundation community, New York State, and the federal government. Without all seven sectors working in partnership, including the feds and city government, the fight to reduce poverty and redevelop distressed neighborhoods in Buffalo cannot be won. Third, urban poverty is reflected in the growth and development of distressed neighborhoods. Therefore, the battle to reduce poverty must also include the quest to redevelop distressed neighborhoods.

Toward this end, the Task Force is working on a plan that will get organizations and institutions

The Work of the Task Force

Within the Task Force has devised an action plan to implement the strategy outlined in the poverty reduction blueprint. The goal of the task force is to establish a Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development System with the capacity to reduce poverty and create neighborhoods that change what it means to be poor in Buffalo. While we might not be able to stamp out poverty, we can create nurturing communities that create a high standard of living and quality of life for those with incomes that fall below the poverty line. Toward this end, we are working on the development of an action plan with two interactive elements.

The first is the establishment of a neighborhood development demonstration project in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. This purpose of this demonstration project is to discover the mix of city policies, partnerships and

resources (human and financial), which are required to carry out the comprehensive and integrated development of a neighborhood. While the Task Force would work with neighborhoods throughout the city, it would build a model of comprehensive and integrated change in the MLK neighborhood.

The second component of the plan is the implement of a citywide strategy aimed at getting organizations and institutions to prioritize poverty reduction and the redevelopment of distressed neighborhood. The goal is to establish work teams in the following areas: (1) education (2) workforce development and job placement (3) social development (4) housing and neighborhood development (5) neighborhood economic development (6) regional economic development and (7) higher education and medical institutions.

Task One: Redevelopment of Distressed Neighborhoods

Over the past several months, we have worked toward developing the Better Schools/Better Neighborhoods initiative in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood. We have established a collaborative that consists of the following members:

- Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation (BERC)
- Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA)
- Buffalo Museum of Science
- Buffalo Public School District
- Community Action Organization of Erie County, Inc.
- CAO-UB Wellness and Neighborhood Development Center
- City of Buffalo
- CRUCIAL Organization
- East Delevan Good Neighbors Planning Alliance (GNPA)
- Fillmore Business District Association
- Groundwork Buffalo
- HSBC Bank
- King Urban Life Center
- Masten District Office
- MLK Block Club
- New York State Energy and Research Development Agency (NYSERDA)
- Olmsted Park Conservancy
- Outsource Training Organization
- University at Buffalo, Center for Urban Studies
- The Wendt Foundation

The following catalytic projects have been started:

- **Fillmore Avenue Commercial Revitalization Initiative**

1. The Fillmore Business Association has been set-up and has received its 501C-3 status.
2. A redevelopment plan has been developed for the Fillmore Avenue Commercial District.
3. A façade improvement plan is being implemented in the district.
4. The Fillmore Avenue Infrastructure Improvement (1.2 million). The funds have been allowed from the Office of Congresswoman Slaughter and a contract has been awarded to Watts Engineering.

- **Housing Development**

1. A 15 million grant for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, Phase 2 has been submitted on behalf of the MLK neighborhood. If received, this grant would make it possible to launch a major housing rehabilitation and repair program in the MLK neighborhood in the area between the expressway and Fillmore Avenue, between East Ferry and Dodge Streets.

2. MLK Energy Challenge Initiative (Weatherization Program with NYSERDA)

3. This fall, the UB Center for Urban Studies is developing a housing plan that will focus on new housing construction in the MLK neighborhood.

4. The Buffalo Olmsted Conservancy will start work on the establishment of a Park Improvement District that is anchored by the MLK Park. Within this framework, the Conservancy will focus on the improvement of housing along the Parade streets, which are situated along the edges of the MLK Park.

- **The Martin Luther King, Jr. Park Improvements**

1. Redevelopment of the Park Wading Pool

2. Both the improvement of homes along the Parade streets and the establishment of a park improvement district will impact on the development of the MLK Park.

- **General Neighborhood Improvements**

1. Route 33 Land Bridge (New York Department of Transportation Region 5–Buffalo, Route 33 Expressway—Humboldt Parkway Reconnection (Dodge Street to East Ferry) Project Scoping Report).

2. Brownfield Opportunity Area Study. The City is initiating the process of applying for a New York State Brownfield Area Opportunity Study for the industrial lands in the MLK neighborhood.

Task Two: The City Reduction of Poverty and Neighborhood Development [Establishment of Task Force Members]

We have completed three main tasks in the process. The fundamental principle guiding this work is to engage simultaneously in planning and implementation. Thus, even while we are engaged in the planning process, projects will also be established.

To date, work has unfolded on three primary tasks. First, we have formulated a framework that integrates the activities of seven work sectors. Second, we have identified the organizations and institutions that will be responsible for carrying out activities in these work sectors. After the list has been finalized, representatives will be contacted and the task force will be formally set up. This task will be completed by the end of September.

The third task relates to the implementation of a work force development and placement strategy. We are prioritizing the establishment of the workforce development and placement task force. The operationalizing of this taskforce is essential to the implementation of our employment strategy. This approach has a twofold plan.

The first is to develop a pipeline of employment ready workers. We are developing two programs that fall into this category.

First, the CAO has established the Keep Buflo Neat initiative to provide grass cutting, lawn maintenance, and snow removal services for city residents, especially in the MLK and Fruit Belt neighborhoods. A fundamental goal of the program is to identify those workers that are employment ready. In other words, these are laborers that come to work on time and carry out their responsibilities in a timely fashion. When these workers are identified, we will systematically transfer them to more advanced job training programs, or place them in higher paying positions.

Second, the CAO is establishing a general repair and maintenance program with the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority. The housing authority has approximately 20 apartments that need to be prepared for re-occupancy each month. A program is being developed that will use section 3 workers in preparing these apartments for re-occupancy. The strategic plan will be to identify those workers who are employment ready and that are suitable for more advanced worker in the building trades industry. When identified, these workers will be given opportunities for more advanced training in the building trades industry.

Third, a job placement program is being developed for the Health and Life Sciences industry. Employment partnerships will be developed with specific industries, which the program will provide workers for jobs when they become available. Many of the industrials in this sector have regular turnover in entry level positions and the program will provide job-ready workers for these positions. The program will be housed at the CAO/UB Center for Wellness and Neighborhood Development in the Fruit Belt. The program is currently in the process of hiring an employment specialist to coordinate the program.