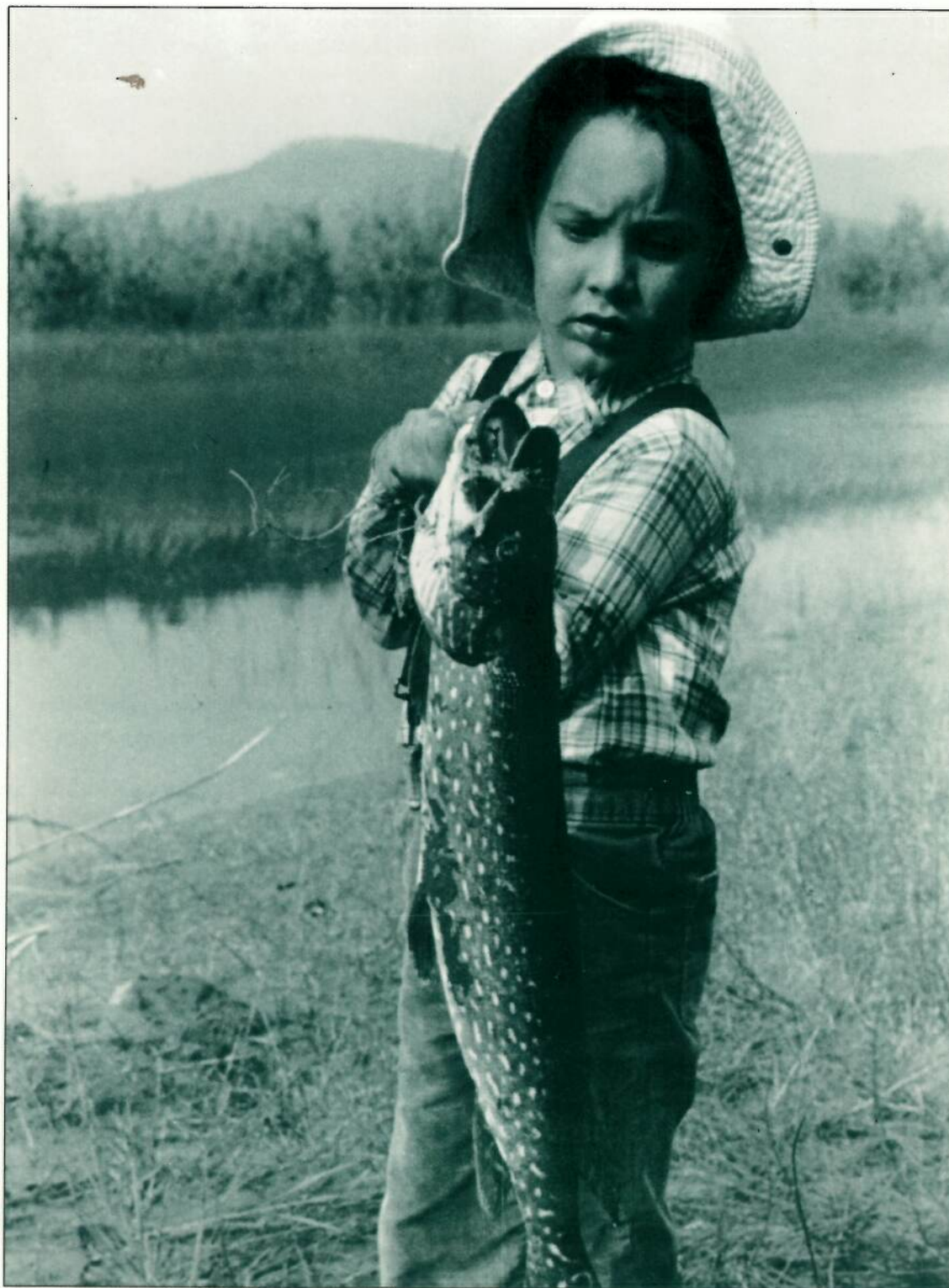


# New Designs

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## Mapping Community Capacity

No one can doubt that our older cities these days are deeply troubled places. At the root of the problem are the massive economic shifts that have marked the last two decades. Hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs have either disappeared or moved away from the central city and its neighborhoods. And while many downtown areas have experienced a "renaissance," the jobs created there are different from those that once sustained neighborhoods. Either these new jobs are highly professionalized, and require elaborate education and credentials for entry, or they are routine, low-paying service jobs without much of a future. In effect, these shifts in the economy, and particularly the removal of decent employment possibilities from low-income neighborhoods, have removed the bottom rung from the fabled American "ladder of opportunity." For many people in older city neighborhoods, new approaches to rebuilding their lives and communities, new openings toward opportunity, are a vital necessity.

### TRADITIONAL NEEDS-ORIENTED SOLUTIONS

Given the desperate situation, it is no surprise that most Americans think about lower-income urban neighborhoods as problems. They are noted for their deficiencies and needs. This view is accepted by most elected officials who codify and program this perspective through deficiency-oriented policies and programs. Then, human service systems—often supported by foundations and universities—translate the programs into local activities that teach people the nature of their problems, and the value of services

as the answer to their problems. As a result, many low-income urban neighborhoods are now environments of service where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being depends upon being a client. They see themselves as people with special needs to be met by outsiders. And gradually they become mainly consumers of services with no incentive to be producers. Consumers of services focus vast amounts of creativity and intelligence on the survival-motivated challenge of outwitting the "system," or on finding ways—in the informal or even illegal economy—to bypass the system entirely.

There is nothing "natural" about this process. Indeed, it is the predictable course of events when deficiency and needs-oriented programs come to dominate the lives of neighborhoods where low-income people reside.

### THE CAPACITY-FOCUSED ALTERNATIVE

The alternative is to develop policies and activities based on the capacities, skills, and assets of low-income people and their neighborhoods.

There are two reasons for this capacity-oriented emphasis. First, all the historic evidence indicates that significant community development only takes place when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. This is why you can't develop communities from the top down, or from the outside in. You can, however, provide valuable outside assistance to communities that are actively developing their own assets.

The second reason for emphasizing the

development of the internal assets of local urban neighborhoods is that there is very little prospect that large-scale industrial or service corporations will be locating in these neighborhoods. Nor is it likely, in spite of a prospective "Peace Dividend," that significant new inputs of federal money will be forthcoming soon. Therefore, it is increasingly futile to wait for significant help to arrive from outside the community. The hard truth is that development must start from within the community and, in most of our urban neighborhoods, there is no other choice.

Unfortunately, the dominance of the deficiency-oriented social service model has led many people in low-income neighborhoods to think in terms of local needs rather than assets. These needs are often identified, quantified, and mapped by conducting "needs surveys." The result is a map of the neighborhood's illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, criminal activity, drug use, etc.

But in neighborhoods where there are effective community development efforts, there is also a map of the community's assets, capacities, and abilities. For it is clear that even the poorest city neighborhood is a place where individuals and organizations represent resources upon which to rebuild. The key to neighborhood regeneration is not only to build upon those resources which the community already controls, but to harness those that are not yet available for local development purposes.

The process of identifying capacities and assets, both individual and organizational, is the first step on the path toward community regeneration. Once this new "map" has re-



placed the one containing needs and deficiencies, the regenerating community can begin to assemble its assets and capacities into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production.

## MAPPING THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR REGENERATION

It is useful to begin by recognizing that not all community assets are equally available for community-building purposes. Some are more accessible than others. The most easily accessible assets, or building blocks, are those that are located in the neighborhood and controlled by those who live in the neighborhood.

The next most accessible are those assets that are located in the neighborhood but controlled elsewhere.

The least accessible are those potential building blocks outside the neighborhood and controlled by those outside the neighborhood.

Therefore, we will "map" community assets based upon the accessibility of assets to local people. We turn now to a more detailed discussion of each of these clusters of building blocks.

## PRIMARY BUILDING BLOCKS — ASSETS AND CAPACITIES LOCATED INSIDE THE NEIGHBORHOOD, LARGELY UNDER NEIGHBORHOOD CONTROL

This cluster of capacities includes those that are most readily available for neighborhood regeneration. They fall into two general categories: the assets and capacities of individuals and those of organizations or associations. The first step in capturing any of these resources is to assess them, which often involves making an inventory.

### Individual Capacities

Our greatest assets are our people. But people in low-income neighborhoods are seldom regarded as "assets." Instead, they are usually seen as needy and deficient, suited best for life as clients and recipients of services. Therefore, they are often subjected to systematic and repeated inventories of

their deficiencies with a device called a "needs survey."

The starting point for any serious development effort is the opposite of an accounting of deficiencies. Instead there must be an opportunity for individuals to use their own abilities to produce. Identifying the variety and richness of skills, talents, knowledge, and experience of people in low-income neighborhoods provides a base upon which to build new approaches and enterprises.

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*It is clear that even the poorest city neighborhood is a place where individuals and organizations represent resources upon which to rebuild.*

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To assist in identifying the skills and abilities of individuals, an inventory of capacities can be developed.

Neighborhood residents have used the "Capacity Inventory" to identify the talents available to start new enterprises. For example, people have begun a new association of home health care providers and a catering business. Public housing residents in a number of cities have formed local corporations to take over the management of their developments. They immediately needed to identify the skills and abilities of neighbors in order to be effective. The "Capacity Inventory" provided the necessary information allowing people to become producers rather than problems.

*Personal income.* Another vital asset of individuals is their income. It is generally assumed that low-income neighborhoods are poor markets. However, some studies suggest that there is much more income per capita than is assumed. Nonetheless, it is often used in ways that do not support local economic development. Therefore, effective local development groups can inventory the income, savings, and expenditure patterns in their neighborhoods. This information is basic to understanding the neighborhood economy and developing new approaches to capturing local wealth for local

development.

*The gifts of labeled people.* There is rich potential waiting to be identified and contributed by even the most marginalized individuals. Human service systems have labeled these people "retarded, mentally ill, disabled, elderly, etc." They are likely to become dependents of service systems, excluded from community life, and considered as burdens rather than assets to community life.

In the last five years, there have been a growing number of unique community efforts to incorporate "labeled" people into local organizations, enterprises, and community associations. Their gifts and abilities are identified and are introduced to groups who value these contributions. The results have been amazing demonstrations as the "underdeveloped" hospitality of neighborhood people has been rediscovered and gifts, contributions, and capacities of even the most disabled people are revealed.

*Individual local businesses.* The shops, stores, and businesses that survive in low-income neighborhoods — especially those smaller enterprises owned and operated by individual local residents — are often more than economic ventures. They are usually centers for community life as well. Any comprehensive approach to community regeneration will inventory these enterprises and incorporate the energies and resources of these entrepreneurs into neighborhood development processes. The experience and insight of these individual entrepreneurs might also be shared with local not-for-profit groups and with students.

*Home-based enterprises.* It is fairly simple to inventory the shops, stores, and businesses in low-income neighborhoods. However, as neighborhoods become lower income, there is often an increase in informal and home-based enterprise. Local development groups have begun to make an effort to understand the nature of these individual enterprises, and the additional capital or technical assistance that could increase their profits and the number of people they support.

## Associational and Organizational Capacities

Beyond individual capacities are a wide range of local resident-controlled associations and organizations. Here is an initial inventory.

**Citizens associations.** In addition to businesses and enterprises, low-income communities have a variety of clubs and associations that do vital work in assuring productive neighborhoods. These groups might include service clubs, fraternal organizations, women's organizations, artistic groups, and athletic clubs. They are the infrastructure of working neighborhoods. Those involved in the community-building process can inventory the variety of these groups in their neighborhoods, the unique community activities they support, and their potential to take on a broader set of responsibilities. Then these groups can become a part of the local asset development process. Or they may affiliate in other ways (e.g., by creating a congress of neighborhood associations.)

**Associations of businesses.** In many older neighborhoods, local business people are not organized. Where they are organized, they are not informed about effective joint partnerships in neighborhood economic development. Connecting local businesses with others and expanding their vision or their self-interest in community development is a major effort of effective community-building activities.

**Financial institutions.** Relatively few older neighborhoods have a community-oriented financial institution, such as a bank, saving institution, or credit union. But where they do exist, they are invaluable assets.

One ambitious and successful example of a locally-controlled financial institution is the South Shore Bank in Chicago. The bank has been a continuing experiment in how to capture local savings and convert them to local residential and commercial development. A related effort in Bangladesh, called the Grameen Bank, is a successful experiment in very small capitalization for small community enterprises. Similar experiments are taking place in the United States involving credit unions. All of these

inventions are new tools to capture local wealth for local development. Their presence or potential is a central resource for the future of a developing community.

**Cultural organizations.** People in low-income neighborhoods are increasingly giving public expression to their rich cultural inheritance. Celebrating the history of the neighborhood, and the peoples who have gathered there, is central to forming a com-

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*People in low-income neighborhoods are increasingly giving public expression to their rich cultural inheritance. Celebrating the history of the neighborhood and its people is central to forming a community identity and countering the negative images that originate outside the community.*

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munity identity and countering the negative images that originate outside the community. Neighborhood history fairs, celebrative block and neighborhood parties featuring the foods, music, dancing, and games of diverse peoples; cross-cultural discussions and classes; oral history projects, theatrical productions based on oral histories — all these hold great potential for building strong relationships among residents and for regaining definitional control of the community. In many neighborhoods, local artists are central to the creation of these expressions.

**Communications organizations.** Strong neighborhoods rely heavily on their capacity to exchange information and engage in discussions. Neighborhood newspapers, particularly those controlled by local residents, are invaluable public forums. So too are less comprehensive media such as newsletters, fliers, even bulletin boards. In addition, both local-access cable TV and local radio hold promise as vehicles relevant to community building.

**Religious organizations.** Finally, any list of organizational assets in communities would be woefully incomplete without the local expressions of religious life. Local parishes, congregations, and temples have involved themselves increasingly in the community-building agenda, sometimes through

community organizations or community development groups, sometimes simply building on the strengths of their own members and networks. In fact, the ability of local religious institutions to call upon related external organizations for support and resources constitutes a very important asset.

## Summary

In summary, then, the primary building blocks include those community assets that are most readily available for rebuilding the neighborhood. These involve both individual and organizational strengths. Our initial list includes:

**Individual Assets:** Skills, talents, and experience of residents, individual businesses, home-based enterprises, personal income, gifts of labeled people.

**Organizational Assets:** Associations of businesses, Citizens associations, Cultural organizations, Communications organizations, Religious organizations.

## SECONDARY BUILDING BLOCKS — ASSETS LOCATED WITHIN THE COMMUNITY BUT LARGELY CONTROLLED BY OUTSIDERS

Though a good many individuals and associational capacities are already within the control of the people who live in the neighborhood, others, though physically a part of the community, are directed and controlled from outside. To capture these assets for community-building purposes, neighborhood actors will not only conduct inventories but will construct strategies designed to enhance the regenerative uses of these assets. The examples which follow fall into three categories: private and not-for-profit organizations; public institutions and services; and other physical resources.

## Private and Non-Profit Organizations

**Institutions of higher education.** Private and public junior colleges, colleges, and universities, remain in, or adjacent to, many older urban neighborhoods. However, they are often quite detached from the local community. Community building groups are creating new experiments with partnerships in community development between local in-



stitutions of higher education and those who are mobilizing community capacities.

**Hospitals.** Next to public schools, hospitals are the most prevalent major institution remaining in many older neighborhoods. They are a tremendous reserve of assets and resources to support initiatives in community enterprise. In a few cases, hospitals have created innovative local partnerships. Creative development groups are exploring the nature of the development assets controlled by their local hospitals.

**Social service agencies.** Though often dedicated to the delivery of individual services to the clients — an activity that does not necessarily contribute to community building — local social service agencies do have the potential to introduce capacity-oriented strategies to their programs. Many, in fact, have begun to see economic development and job creation as appropriate activities, while others have entered into networks and partnerships with community organizations and neighborhood development groups for community-building purposes.

## Public Institutions and Services

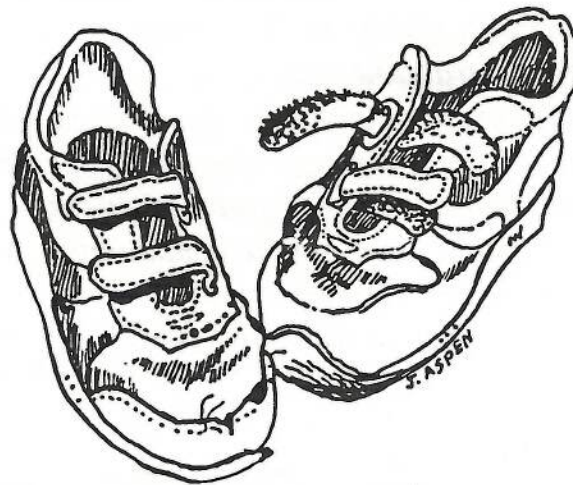
Of the range of public institutions and services that exist in low-income communities, a few deserve to be highlighted for their community-building potential.

**Public schools.** Big city schools have often become so separate from local community initiatives that they are a liability rather than an asset. The Carnegie Commission on Public Education has said that the primary educational failing of the local public school is its separation from the work and life of the community. Therefore, localities need to teach their schools how to improve their educational function by connecting themselves to community development efforts. As an integral part of community life, rather than an institution set apart, the local public school can begin to function as a set of economic and human resources aimed at regenerating the community.

**Police.** As with all other local institutions, the police need to participate in the neighborhood revitalization enterprise. Much of the hesitance about new investment of all kinds relates to issues of security. Therefore,

local police officials should be asked to join the asset development team acting as advisors and resources to development projects. In a number of instances, responsive police departments have joined with local community organizations and other groups to devise and carry out joint safety and anti-crime strategies.

**Fire departments.** In both small towns and large cities, the local fire department boasts a tradition of consistent interaction



with the community. Because of the sporadic nature of their important work, firefighters are often available for a variety of activities in the neighborhood. Retrieving and building upon that tradition is an important strategy for community building.

**Libraries.** Many older neighborhoods contain branches of the public library, often underfunded and under-used. Considered not only as a repository for books and periodicals, but also as the center of a neighborhood's flow of information, the library becomes a potentially critical participant in community regeneration. For example, neighborhoods which choose to enter into a community planning process will need localized information on which to base their deliberations. The availability of library-based personal computers can enhance access to a variety of relevant data bases. The library can also provide space for community meetings and initiate community history and cultural projects.

**Parks.** In many low-income communities, the local parks have fallen into disrepair

and are often considered uninviting and even dangerous. But when local citizens organize themselves to reclaim these areas, they can be restored not only physically, but functionally. As symbols of community accomplishment, they can become sources of pride and centers for important informal relationship building. Often, groups of existing associations will take joint responsibility for renewing and maintaining a local park.

## Physical Resources

Besides the private and public institutions in the neighborhood, a variety of physical assets are available. In fact, many of the most visible "problems" of low income neighborhoods, when looked at from an asset-centered perspective, become opportunities instead. A few examples follow.

**Vacant land, vacant commercial and industrial structures, vacant housing.** Most older urban neighborhoods are thought to be "blighted" with vacant lots, empty sites of old industry and unused industrial and commercial buildings. However, in some U.S. cities, local groups have found creative and productive methods to regenerate the usefulness of both the land and the

buildings. They identify potential new uses, create tools to inventory and plan for local reuses, and organize the redevelopment process. Similarly, abandoned housing structures are often structurally sound enough to be candidates for locally controlled rehabilitation efforts.

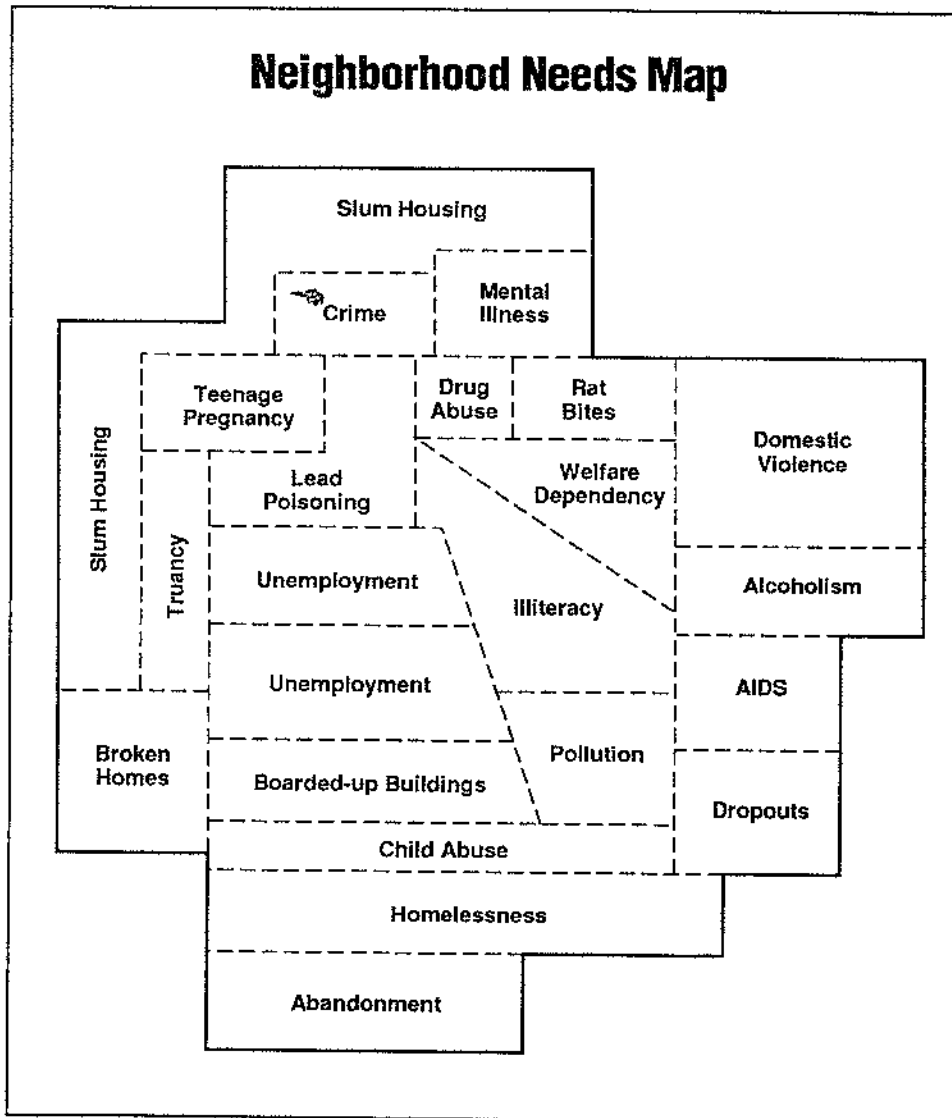
**Energy and waste resources.** The costs of energy and waste collection are relentless resource drains in older neighborhoods. As their costs escalate, they demand a disproportionate and growing share of the limited income of poorer people. As a result, maintenance of housing is often foregone and deterioration speeds up. However, in some neighborhoods, this "problem" has become an opportunity. New local enterprises are developing to reduce energy use and costs and to recycle waste for profit. These initiatives need to be identified, nurtured, and replicated.

## Summary

These secondary building blocks are private, public, and physical assets, which can



## Neighborhood Needs Map



be brought under community control and used for community-building purposes. Our initial list includes:

**Private and Non-Profit Organizations.** Higher education institutions. Hospitals. Social service agencies.

**Public Institutions and Services.** Public schools. Police. Libraries. Fire departments. Parks.

**Physical Resources.** Vacant land, commercial and industrial structures, housing. Energy and waste resources.

### POTENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS — RESOURCES ORIGINATING OUTSIDE THE NEIGHBORHOOD, CONTROLLED BY OUTSIDERS

In this final cluster are resource streams which originate outside the neighborhood,

are controlled by institutions outside the neighborhood, but which nonetheless might be captured for community-building purposes.

There is a sense in which all local public expenditures are potential investments in development. However, in low-income neighborhoods they are usually expenditures for the maintenance of an impoverished neighborhood, and for individuals in the absence of work. We need tools and models for converting public expenditures into local development investments. In addition to the public institutions cited above, two other public expenditures are critical.

**Welfare expenditures.** In Cook County, Illinois, over \$6,000 is expended annually by government for low-income programs for every man, woman, and child whose

income falls below the official poverty line. This substantial investment (\$24,000 for a family of four) is distributed so that on a per capita basis, poor people receive only 37 percent in cash (\$8,880 for a family of four) and 63 percent in services (\$15,120). This creates an impoverished family dependent on services. Creative community groups are developing new experiments where some of these welfare dollars are reinvested in enterprise development and independence.

**Public capital improvement expenditures.** Every neighborhood is the site of very substantial "infrastructure" investments. In downtown areas, these dollars leverage private investment. In neighborhoods, the same funds are usually applied only to maintenance functions. Effective community development groups are creating experiments to convert local capital improvement funds into development dollars.

**Public information.** Wherever we have seen community innovation in local neighborhoods, the people there have had to gain access to information not normally available. What is the vacancy ratio in the worst buildings? How many teachers have skills that could help our development corporation? What time do the crimes that threaten our shopping center occur? How much property is off the tax rolls? What does the city plan to invest in capital improvements? Unfortunately, most useful development planning data is collected for the use of "downtown" systems. But as neighborhoods become responsible for their future, information must be decoded and decentralized for local use.

Some neighborhoods have done pioneering work in developing methods to translate systems data into neighborhood information. This "neighborhood information" is an invaluable asset in the development process.

### Summary

These potential building blocks include major public assets which ambitious neighborhoods might begin to divert to community-building purposes. At the beginning, at least, these are: welfare expenditures, public capital improvement expenditures, public information.

### TWO COMMUNITY MAPS

This paper only begins to map the assets

# New Designs

that exist in every neighborhood and town. It is a new map that can guide us toward community regeneration. But, there is another map, an old map of neighborhood deficiencies and problems. As we noted at the outset, it is a "needs-oriented" neighborhood map created by "needs surveys." This is a powerful map, teaching people in low-income neighborhoods how to think about themselves and the place where they live.

This map is initiated by groups with power and resources who ask neighborhood people to think of themselves in terms of deficiencies in order to access the resources controlled by these groups. Among the groups that ask neighborhood people to inventory their problems, needs, and deficiencies are government agencies, foundations, universities, United Ways, and the mass media. Indeed, the institutions that produce this map not only teach people in low-income neighborhoods that their needs, problems, and deficiencies are valuable. They also teach people outside these neighborhoods that the most important thing about low-income people and their neighborhoods is their deficiencies, problems, and needs.

In this way, low-income people, helping institutions, and the general public come to follow a map that shows that the most important part of low-income neighborhoods is the empty, deficient, needy part. An example of this Neighborhood Needs Map is shown at left.

It is true that this map of needs is accurate. But, it is also true that it is only half the truth. It is like a map of the United States that shows only that portion east of the Mississippi River. The United States is also the portion west of the Mississippi River, and a map omitting the west is obviously inadequate in the most fundamental ways.

Similarly, every neighborhood has a map of riches, assets, and capacities. It is important to recognize that this is a map of the same territory as the neighborhood needs map. It is different because it shows a different part of the neighborhood. But the most significant difference about this capacity map is that it is the map a neighborhood must rely on if it is to find the power to regenerate itself.

Communities have never been built upon their deficiencies. Building community has always depended upon mobilizing the ca-

pacities and assets of a people and a place. That is why a map of neighborhood assets is necessary if local people are to find a way toward empowerment and renewal. An example of a Neighborhood Assets Map is shown below.

Finally, it is important to remember that this assets map is very incomplete because it is new. It does not even begin to identify all of the assets of every community. Therefore, we know that as more and more neighborhood regeneration processes are created, residents will identify many more skills,

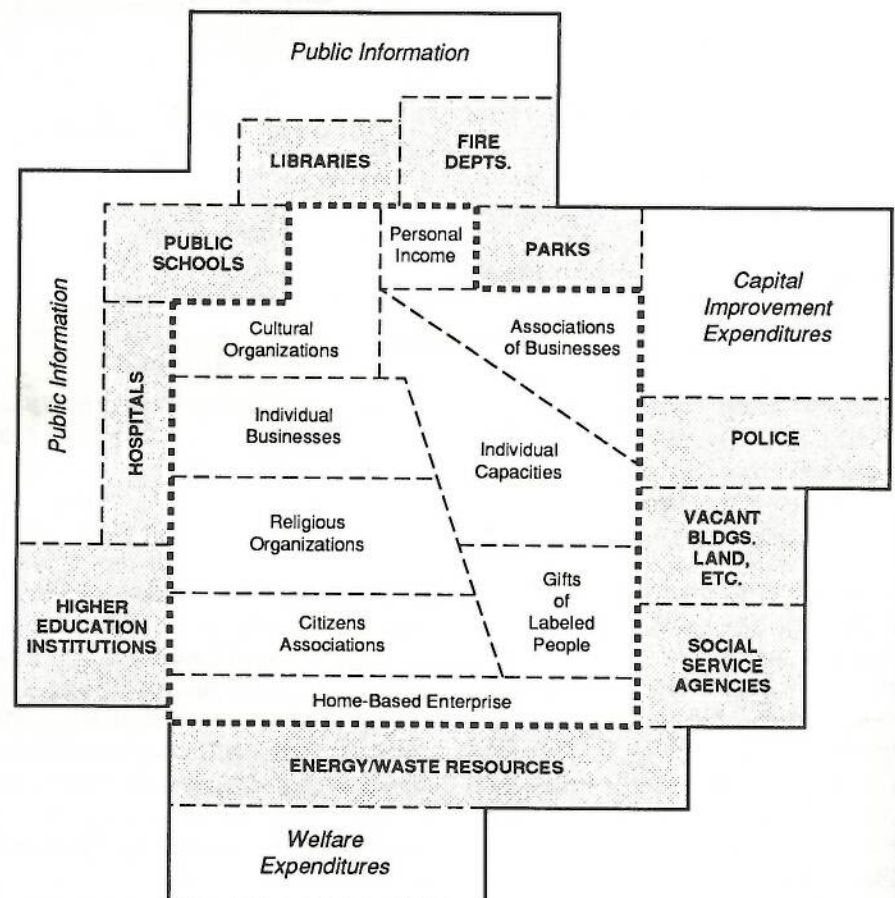
capacities, riches, assets, potential, and gifts to place on the map.

## Using the Capacities Map

Most of the assets listed above already exist in many low-income neighborhoods. They are waiting to be inventoried and turned toward the goal of rebuilding communities.

Different communities will approach this challenge with different strategies. Leaders in every community, however, will need to consider at least three questions which are central to the rebuilding task.

## Neighborhood Assets Map



### LEGEND



**Primary Building Blocks:**

Assets and capacities located inside the neighborhood, largely under neighborhood control



**Secondary Building Blocks:**

Assets located within the community but largely controlled by outsiders



**Potential Building Blocks:**

Resources originating outside the neighborhood, controlled by outsiders.

1. Which organizations can act most effectively as "Asset Development Organizations" in our neighborhood?
2. What kinds of community-wide research, planning, and decision-making processes can most democratically and effectively advance this rebuilding process in our neighborhood?
3. Having inventoried and enlisted the participation of major assets inside the community, how might we build useful bridges to resources located outside the community?

### Asset Development Organizations

To begin with, who might lead the community-building process? Where might the necessary Asset Development Organizations be found?

Two kinds of existing community associations are particularly well-suited to the task of knitting together a neighborhood's various assets and capacities. The first, already central to the lives of many older city neighborhoods, is the multi-issue community organization, built along the "organization of organizations" model of the late Saul Alinsky. Community organizers already understand the importance of associational life to the well-being of the neighborhood, and to the empowerment of the local residents. A number of these community organizations are beginning to incorporate a capacity-oriented approach to community building in their ongoing activities.

The second potential Asset Development Organization is, of course, the community development corporation. Groups that are dedicated to community economic development have often worked hard to assemble the business assets available to the neighborhood. Many have championed strategies emphasizing local purchasing and hiring, and have encouraged home-grown enterprise development. All of these approaches can only be strengthened as the local development corporation broadens and deepens its knowledge of community capacity.

Together or separately, these two types of community-based organizations are well-suited to the challenge of asset development. But in many communities, neither the multi-issue organizing group nor the development corporation may exist. In these settings,

neighborhood leaders face the challenge of creating a new Asset Development Organization. This new organization may be built on the strengths and interests of existing citizens associations, and will challenge those associations to affiliate for these broader purposes.

### The Community Planning Process

Having identified or created the Asset Development Organization, community leaders face the challenge of instituting a broad-based process of community planning and decision-making. Capacity-oriented community planning will no doubt take many different forms. But all of them will share at least these characteristics in common:

1. The neighborhood planning process will aim to involve as many representatives of internally located and controlled assets as possible in the discussion and decisions. In fact, the map of neighborhood assets provides an initial list of potential participants in the planning effort.
2. The neighborhood planning process will incorporate some version of a community capacity inventory in its initial stages.
3. The neighborhood planning process will develop community-building strategies which take full advantage of the interests and strengths of the participants, and will aim toward building the power to define and control the future of the neighborhood.

### Building Bridges to Outside Resources

Finally, once the Asset Development Organization has been identified, and has begun to mobilize neighborhood stakeholders in a broad-based process of planning, participants will need to assemble the many additional resources needed to advance the community-building process. This will involve constructing bridges to persons and organizations outside the neighborhood.

It is clear that no low-income neighborhood can "go it alone." Indeed, every neighborhood is connected to the outside society and economy. It is a mark of many low-income neighborhoods that they are uniquely dependent on outside human service sys-

tems. The need, however, is to develop their assets and become interdependent with mainstream people, groups, and economic activity.

Organizations leading developing communities often create unique bridges to the society. These are not to government alone. Instead, they bridge to banks, corporations, churches, other neighborhood advocacy groups, etc. These bridged relationships in the non-governmental sector are vital assets in opening new opportunities for local residents and enterprises.

The task of the Asset Development Organization, then, involves both drawing the map and using it. It involves leading the community interests into capacity-oriented planning and creating the organizational power to enable that process to become the map of the neighborhood's future. The challenge facing the Asset Development Organization, and all of the participants in the neighborhood planning process, is both daunting and filled with promise. However, meeting this challenge to rebuild our neighborhoods from the inside out is crucial the hopes and aspirations of city dwellers everywhere.

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