

King Henry Moore

John McKnight

Henry Moore was the assistant City Manager of Savannah Georgia. He was responsible for planning and neighborhood development. In this role he administered millions of dollars of community block grants. After several years of introducing and managing these programs, he decided that they had not made much difference in the lives of the people in the neighborhoods.

He said that having a leadership position and the millions of dollars made him feel like he was King Henry. However, measured by outcomes in the lives of local people, he was a failed royal leader. Therefore, he tried to figure out how he could use his power to produce real change in the neighborhoods.

He thought it would be worth seeing whether or not people in the neighborhoods could produce a better life if he stepped down from the throne and gave them some authority. He did this by writing a letter to the people in each household in the quarter of Savannah where the greatest number of low-income people lived.

The letter said that he appreciated what the neighbors had been doing to improve

their neighborhoods and that he wanted to know what the City could do to support their efforts. He said that any local resident could write him a letter (of no more than one page) describing what they would like to do to improve their block during the coming summer. Then, he asked that they have at least two other people on the block sign the letter indicating they would join in producing the improvement. Then, he said that if the City could help them achieve their goal, they should let him know. If they needed any money to complete the project he said that he had up to \$100 that he could contribute – although the neighbors couldn't use the money to pay themselves.

About 80 neighbors submitted a proposal and none of them asked for the entire \$100. This proved that no agency or other institution had applied!

At the end of the summer Henry held a dinner celebration at the finest hotel in Savannah for all of the neighbors who had been involved in the initiatives. Each block project was presented in a display that could be viewed by all the other participating residents. As a result, all the blocks learned of many more activities they could engage in in the future.

In the course of the dinner meeting Henry said, “Now I know who the real leaders are in Savannah’s lowest income neighborhood. They’re the people in this room who mobilized at least two neighbors on their block to engage in a group activity that improved their neighborhood. Instead of millions of dollars, their improvements cost the City very little money. So that’s why I abdicated from being the King of community development in Savannah and became a supporter of the productive capacities of our neighbors.”

At the end of the summer, you could walk through the neighborhood and see how much physical and social transformation had occurred, but you could not see that on every block there was a neighbor who had become a king with a royal court. They were the sovereigns of the neighborhood holding real power instead of being consumers of King Henry’s millions dollar programs.