

Revitalizing Urban Areas: Partnerships

Examine the “Big Picture”

Community revitalization is gaining momentum with Rebuild America partnerships that are taking a big-picture view of the program’s role in their communities. They are discovering innovative ways to marry Rebuild America goals with community goals to give new hope to economically depressed areas. This story examines how two partnerships – in Los Angeles and Toledo, OH – are marshalling their resources and leveraging those of others to affect positive change in urban communities.

The L.A. Story

The **City of Los Angeles Partnership** was formed to work within the framework of the Los Angeles Empowerment Zone (EZ), one of several impoverished urban areas designated by the Clinton Administration to receive targeted federal resources, including \$100 million in aid for social service programs. (See sidebar story).

Los Angeles’ 20-square mile EZ has a population of nearly 200,000 and occupies two geographic areas of the city. The main part of the EZ starts northeast of downtown Los Angeles near Chinatown and extends south to include portions of East and South Central Los Angeles. Also included are two census tracts located 20 miles northwest in the Pacoima community of the San Fernando Valley. This EZ, along with an additional 20-square-mile South Central Enterprise Community, suffers from the twin urban blights of poverty and unemployment and their attendant problems.

Supporting EZ Goals

The City of Los Angeles Partnership, led by Gary Gero of the City’s Environmental Affairs Department, is exploring ways for Rebuild America to support EZ goals to maintain economic self-

support for residents and achieve long-term self-sufficiency. The partnership will work with the Los Angeles Environmental Affairs Department and Global Green USA, a national non-profit organization that specializes in the greening of affordable housing, to develop a voluntary, incentive-based Sustainable Building Program.

The program’s initial focus will be on the rehabilitation of affordable multi-family housing. It will address renewable energy, energy efficiency, water efficiency, environmental and healthy building materials, indoor air quality, mixed-use and transit/pedestrian-oriented development, community gardens/open space, and other sustainable features. The first phase is designed to:

- educate and inform lending institutions, architects, developers, contractors, building owners and residents about the value of sustainable housing;
- provide technical and marketing assistance on how to design, construct and maintain such housing;
- educate developers and residents on the cost savings, resource efficiency and health benefits that result from living in such homes; and
- identify, develop and offer incentives to encourage sustainable buildings.

The City of Los Angeles hopes to address commercial development in the second phase of the initiative.

Sustainable Redevelopment

The landscape of the L.A. EZ is dotted with approximately 30,000 multi-family units in low-rise buildings of typically 20 to 30 units. The partnership will encourage and provide incentives for adopting an approach to housing rehabilitation that better reflects resident needs and that

introduces resource efficiency, healthy materials, and green space, such as community gardens, to developments, Gero said. Many building exteriors will be retained while interiors will be gutted and reconfigured to better accommodate occupants, many of whom were squeezing into 1- and 2-bedroom apartments when they really needed three or four bedrooms, he said. A number of apartments are overcrowded or sitting vacant for this reason.

“We also see potential to help create jobs with programs like welfare-to-work and others,” said Gero. “Area residents could be employed to help with energy- and water-efficiency installations in the renovated apartments.”

This also would be compatible with the economic development and social services mandates of the EZs. The fully developed program is expected to be submitted to the mayor and city council this fall and rolled out by the start of 1999.

For more information, contact Gary Gero at ggero@ead.ci.la.ca.us.

Rebuild Downtown Toledo

Like many of America’s cities, downtown Toledo deteriorated between the late 1950s and the early ‘80s with the exit of retailers and other key businesses.

Today, a public/private effort to stimulate and revitalize downtown Toledo is having the desired effect, according to Paulette Huber of the Neighborhood Housing Services of Toledo, the lead partner for the City’s **Rebuild Toledo** initiative. A hands-on Center for Science and Industry has opened, a 100-year-old theater has been pulled out of mothballs and revitalized, and a boarded-up Macy’s department store has been reinvented as an apartment complex. Such developments buoy the efforts of Rebuild Toledo in its revitalization work

Rebuild Toledo has formed strategic liaisons with developers, businesses and community development corporations to use energy-efficiency retrofits as a catalyst for economic development. Its efforts are aimed at making a difference for 200-plus businesses in downtown Toledo and for multifamily housing residents who live nearby.

Snap Shots of Success

Under Rebuild Toledo Program Monitor Richard Freed's tutelage, the partnership has conducted energy audits in the target area and has facilitated the retrofit of the 105,000-square-foot Erie Street Indoor Fresh Food Market, a converted civic auditorium outfitted with geothermal heating and cooling systems. Also completed is the

energy retrofit and conversion of a vacant funeral home into the 18,000-square-foot Toledo Home Ownership Center. When the City passed the Rebuild Toledo baton to Huber of Neighborhood Housing Services, the partnership teamed with the Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority (LMHA) to address the retrofit of a high rise for seniors that is saddled with a dysfunctional hot water system and runaway operating costs. An investment of \$450,000 in modernization funds provided by HUD/LMHA is expected to yield \$90,000 in annual energy savings.

Rebuild Toledo has also been a catalyst for the inclusion of energy-efficiency measures in rehabilitation plans for a 36,000-square-foot landmark – the former Columbia Gas building.

Education is Key

Huber says education is the key to getting architects, engineers, building owners and managers, and City officials on board with the program. Toward this end, the partnership is planning a day-long “Sustainable Building Technologies” seminar on July 7 and is tapping DOE Chicago regional staff Mark Burger and Bill Hui and Chicago developer Kev Derderian, a green building practitioner, as presenters.

Huber reports that the cumulative effect of these urban revitalization efforts has captured the attention of some businesses that are opting to leave the suburbs and return to downtown.

For more information, contact Paulette Huber at (419) 691-2900.