

# Improving the Community Development System in St. Louis County

Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis

April 17, 2013

There is widespread agreement on the characteristics of successful community revitalization:

1. **Market Savvy:** Interventions must be appropriate to the market strength of each community.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Sufficient Scale:** In order to move the market and change the investment psychology, a critical mass of investments is needed.<sup>2</sup>
3. **Cross-Silo:** Especially in weak market communities (where housing supply exceeds demand) comprehensive, cross-silo community development plans are necessary to rebuild the market and connect residents to sustained opportunity and resources. Cross-silo planning addresses the many facets a community needs for success, including housing, health, education, jobs and business development, social services, safety, community building, transportation options, and public spaces.<sup>3</sup>
4. **Civic Engagement:** Input and buy-in from area residents and businesses is essential.
5. **Cross-sector Collaboration:** The public sector cannot do the job alone; collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit actors is necessary.
6. **Marketing:** Image-building and marketing are crucial components of successful community revitalization.

To see successful community revitalization flourish in St. Louis County, the right policy environment must be in place. Because multiple sectors impact community revitalization initiatives, the Community Builders Network (CBN) has created regional policy recommendations for the government, business, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors which can be found on the CBN website ([www.communitybuildersstl.org](http://www.communitybuildersstl.org)). This particular brief focuses on recommendations that St. Louis County government could take to more fully support and realize the benefits of successful community revitalization.

## Recommendations

- 1) St. Louis County should establish a process to better align the St. Louis County Executive's Office, Department of Planning (and Office of Community Development), the St. Louis County Economic Council, Public Works, and other departments/offices around priorities, investment, and

partnerships for strategic impactful investment in community development. This process should include educational opportunities about what practices are working in community development.

- 2) St. Louis County should establish a fund out of community development dollars like CDBG, HOME, and Port Authority Dollars that disburses larger grants to initiatives that meet the scale of the need in communities and that are part of larger, cross-silo, market sensitive plans with buy-in from area residents and businesses. (See item three for recommendation on transparent RFP process.) These larger grants should be allotted as part of a transparent competitive grant process.
- 3) St. Louis County should increase transparency in the funding process of community development funds (e.g. CDBG, HOME, Port Authority, etc.) by creating a point-based RFP that lays out the goals of the County, good community development practices (e.g. multi-year, place-based, comprehensive community development, community engagement, collaboration, etc.), and ranks applications across a range of criteria related to those goals and practices to select awardees.<sup>4</sup>
- 4) Political leadership in the County, along with representatives of nonprofit, philanthropic, and private sector community development actors in the region, should begin conversations with local and national foundations about investing in community revitalization in St. Louis. The County should build partnerships with area banks to grow support for and leverage public investment in community development initiatives as they work to meet their obligations under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA).<sup>5</sup>
- 5) The County should invest in switching to electronic forms, document submission, and file management.
- 6) The County should work with the Convention and Visitors Bureau, St. Louis Regional Chamber, and the real estate industry to market St. Louis neighborhoods and communities to homebuyers and investors.<sup>6</sup>
- 7) The County should allocate funds in a transparent grant process for capacity building and professional training of CDCs. Grant process should encourage CDCs to collaborate with each other to realize economies of scale and professional expertise; CDCs should be encouraged to merge where appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Brophy and Kim Burnett, "Community Development in Weak Market Cities," (2003) available at: [http://www.ppnd.org/media/weakmarketspaper\\_4.03.pdf](http://www.ppnd.org/media/weakmarketspaper_4.03.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> George Galster, Peter Tatian, and John Accordino, "Targeting Investments for Neighborhood Revitalization," available at: [http://www.clas.wayne.edu/multimedia/usercontent/File/Geography%20and%20Urban%20Planning/G.Galster/Galster\\_Tatian\\_Accordino-Targeting%20Resources%20JAPA-06.pdf](http://www.clas.wayne.edu/multimedia/usercontent/File/Geography%20and%20Urban%20Planning/G.Galster/Galster_Tatian_Accordino-Targeting%20Resources%20JAPA-06.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> On the importance of cross-silo, comprehensive community development practices, see the Low Income Support Corporation's (LISC's) Sustainable Communities Initiative: <http://www.lisc.org/sustainable/> and Ann C. Kubisch, Patricia Auspos, Prudence Brown & Tom Dewar, *Voices from the field III: Lessons and challenges from two decades of community change efforts*. Washington D.C. : Aspen Institute, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent example of a transparent and objective RFP process, see the Affordable Housing Program: [http://www.fhlbmd.com/media/cms/2012\\_AHP\\_Implementation\\_Plan\\_B79B54B77316F.pdf](http://www.fhlbmd.com/media/cms/2012_AHP_Implementation_Plan_B79B54B77316F.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> A regional coalition in St. Louis is actively pressing area banks on their CRA obligations. See the St. Louis Equal Housing & Community Reinvestment Alliance: <http://www.slehcra.org/>. A Metropolitan St. Louis CRA Association has formed which enables banks around the region to share best practices in community reinvestment.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of neighborhood marketing initiatives in other cities include Live Baltimore and Healthy Neighborhoods in Baltimore (<http://www.livebaltimore.com>; <http://www.healthyneighborhoods.org>). Similar initiatives exist in Milwaukee.