



Metropolitan Information for Neighborhood Development (M.I.N.D.)

Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership, Inc., Mixed Income Communities Initiative (MICI)

Fall, October 2003

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What's on MICI's Mind?

Community Based Regionalism: A Strategy for Metropolitan Atlanta's CDCs

The role of Community Development Corporations (CDCs) is one of critical importance to neighborhood stability in the face of shrinking housing subsidies, gentrification, predatory lending, property neglect, rising housing prices, growing property taxes, and limited opportunities for economic advancement. Through targeted housing development-including both residential and commercial construction and rehabilitation-

CDCs aim to provide a stable base from which residents can build their lives and communities. Armed with an intimate knowledge of their respective communities and committed to resident-led neighborhood development, CDCs utilize community organizing, affordable housing production, workforce/ economic development, and policy advocacy to develop well-calibrated responses to the challenges that face their communities.

Although the work of CDCs has traditionally been completed on the local level, the disbursement of employment opportunities, affordable housing, goods and services, and the municipal tax-base from the central city, require that CDCs begin to examine the problems they face in their respective neighborhoods from a regional perspective. The doctrine of Community Based Regionalism affords them an opportunity to do just that.

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Environmental Justice and Equitable Development: A Unified Camp

In a community framework, growth can mean a number of positive things including the creation of new jobs, new business development, and new places for residents to live. Unfortunately, along with these positive attributes can occur problems if the growth is unplanned or poorly managed.

The Atlanta region is a prime example of this. Over the years unplanned growth coupled with overburden and neglect of its infrastructure, the implementation of outdated policies and pollution prevention methodologies, and the lack of enforcement of regulations designed to control pollution, have lead to disparities in the quality of life for some of the city's residents based on geography, age of housing areas, socio-economic status, and race.

The realization that disparities exist as a result of poorly man-

aged growth has spurred the creation of "Smart Growth" and "Equitable Development" debates. Environmental justice has been identified as a key component needed for these strategies to work. Though it may seem that environmental justice and equitable development represent two different "camps of thought", the two are inextricably linked.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a regulating authority, defines environmental justice as, "equal protection from environmental hazards for individuals, groups, or communities regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status" (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 1997).

According to the EPA, the protection refers to "...the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies,

and implies that no population should be forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of negative environmental impacts of pollution or environmental hazard due to a lack of political or economic strength levels." (U.S. EPA)

In 1991, 17 Principles of Environmental Justice were adopted at the First National People of Color Leadership Summit. These principles affirm the need for urban ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature; while providing fair access to the full range of resources for everyone. This includes the right of all people to live in housing that is affordable, environmentally safe, and free of indoor toxins as well as external environmental hazards.

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What's on MICI's MIND?

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More specifically, it calls for organizations to understand that "the future of low-income communities is tied to broader regional, social, political and economic factors; and that improving the well-being of low-income neighborhoods requires an understanding of the regional context and... action beyond a neighborhood or community level." [1]

Accordingly, as Metropolitan Atlanta grows, CDCs must learn to serve in the dual role of neighborhood champion and regional advocate. In this new role, CDCs must continue to lead local efforts to revitalize their communities while becoming vocal advocates for "regional" issues. Community Based Regionalism encourages CDCs and other neighborhood based entities to partner with suburban stakeholders to address issues that effect their community from a regional perspective. The rationale includes establishing a broad-based coalition around key issues

that have regional implications, but typically have a disproportionate affect on urban communities. Prominent issues include transportation, the environment, and economic development. Other issues that could also benefit from a regional approach are affordable housing, workforce development, and the provision of social services.

Recognizing that the challenges they face in their efforts to revitalize their respective neighborhoods occurs within the context of the broader region affords CDCs an opportunity to maximize their advocacy efforts by joining with regional stakeholders. The key barrier for CDCs in this process will be demonstrating the regional implications for issues that are commonly believed to be exclusive to urban areas. However, once CDCs are able to build regional support for their core issues, great strides will be made towards realizing the goal of balanced community

revitalization that CDCs have long sought.

As a strong and vocal proponent of Community Based Regionalism, the Mixed Income Communities Initiative's (MICI) "Making the Case" campaign provides an excellent opportunity for Atlanta's CDCs to advocate from a regional perspective. As the Communications Sub-committee looks to grow, the perspective and passion of Atlanta's CDC community is desired to make this a truly successful collaborative endeavor. For additional information on MICI please call 404-522-2637.

[1]PolicyLink, Oakland CA, 1999.

Online source available at http://www.policylink.org/ress_overview.html

This article was contributed by Sule Carpenter, Executive Director of Atlanta Housing Association of Neighborhood Based Developers.

Environmental Justice and Equitable Development

Unfortunately, all communities were not created equal. In Atlanta, sprawl has widened the gaps between the "haves" and "have nots". The region's sprawl is the result of rapid population growth, an increase in employment opportunities, and new housing construction in suburban areas.

Equitable development and smart growth can address environmental justice concerns and create vibrant, livable communities through "smart" planning and equitable distribution of resources

such as housing stock. Environmental justice seeks to ensure the availability of affordable housing in safe and healthy neighborhoods. Well-managed land use and development that includes revitalizing urban areas to provide economic opportunities, mixed use, mixed-income developments, and livable communities can help to advance the goals of environmental justice.

To ensure that environmental justice in

the context of equitable development becomes a reality local governments, citizens, non-profit organizations and the private sector must all have a place at the planning and decision-making tables. There must be cooperation, involvement and commitment by all to be successful.

This article was contributed by Na'Taki Y. Osborne, MPH of the Center for Environmental Public Awareness



D I D Y O U K N O W ?

14% (13.7 million) of families in America have critical housing needs.

- Between 1995 and 1997, the number of moderate income working families with critical housing needs rose by about 440,000 - a 17 percent increase in just two years.

Source: The Center for Housing Policy, June 2000

For more information on these and other housing issues contact:

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