

PARKSIDE BUSINESS & COMMUNITY IN PARTNERSHIP

Community Development Case Study

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SUBURBANIZATION TAKES ITS TOLL ON PARKSIDE

Parkside Business and Community in Partnership (PBCIP) is rooted in a historically close knit community in Camden, NJ. The Parkside neighborhood was developed in 1915; advertised by developer John M. Kelley as the first "streetcar suburb" (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2008). The neighborhood, whose namesake is the 70-acre Farnham Park, was originally a Jewish community, with a vibrant social life centering on the synagogues as well as the Haddon Avenue business district (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2008). From 1916 through 1920 there was a large influx of Jewish citizens, who created a vibrant community and founded a temple for worship. A rich sense of community in Parkside led to substantial social investment and small businesses development along Haddon Avenue (Gillette, 2005).

After building a community for over thirty years, the out migration of the Jewish Community began in the late 1950's precipitated by the opportunity to suburbanize (Gillette, 2005). As Jewish residents moved to the suburbs of Cherry Hill, Voorhees, and others, the African American community began to purchase homes in the neighborhood. During the 1960's, real estate agents and advertisements began to direct African Americans to the neighborhood, and by 1970 the community was estimated to be made up of 87.9% African Americans (Gillette, 2005). Although its population shifted significantly in the 1960's from white to African American, Parkside maintained its reputation for stability well into the 1990's. After the 1992 real estate revaluation, however, Parkside began to witness abandonment and housing decline (Gillette, 2005).

FROM NEIGHBORHOOD MARCH TO NOT-FOR-PROFIT

In 1991, the Camden Community Affairs and Police Departments came together to successfully apply for a federal community-policing grant to eliminate drug and other criminal activity in Camden's neighborhoods. In Parkside, the grant funded community activities including block clean-up efforts, monthly community meetings, and a march on a known drug corner (Hillier Architecture, Portfolio Associates, & S.Huffman Associates, 2005). On October 19, 1991, residents from throughout Camden gathered on the corner of Kenwood and Lansdowne, vowing to take back their streets from drugs and beginning the redevelopment movement in Parkside (Phillips, 1991).

Residents sought to keep up the momentum of community involvement and formed the Parkside Business and Community in Partnership organization (PBCIP). In February of 1993, PBCIP was incorporated as a non-profit corporation in New Jersey. Initial funds were derived from a \$12 annual membership fee and fundraisers and allowed the group to promote community building activities. At these early stages, the organization was staffed with an all-volunteer team of community residents (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). Initial efforts focused on community building, civic engagement and providing small forms of assistance to disadvantaged residents. PBCIP held monthly community meetings, organized Parkside Fun Day, and coordinated a food basket drive, filling Christmas baskets with turkeys and all the trimmings for holiday meals (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).



Exhibit 1: The Parkside Neighborhood (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005)

NEIGHBORHOOD DRIVEN CHANGE

The Parkside neighborhood was characterized as a largely African American family community. According to an analysis compiled in the strategic plan, the median incomes for Census Block Groups in Parkside ranged from a low of \$17,857 to a high of \$41,923, which was significantly higher than the City's median household income of \$24,612. Yet, the neighborhood still had significant challenges with both employment and housing. The largest nearby employers, Campbell Soup and Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, employ a significant number of individuals. However, it was estimated that 40% of residents 25 years and over had no high school degree and 50% had only a high school diploma, indicating a mismatch between the skill level of the population and the jobs available in the community. In Parkside, many of the block groups had an older housing stock, with over 90% of the housing stock in each block group built before 1970 (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). In addition, the Parkside area had almost a 10% increase in vacancy between 1990 and 2000 resulting in 22% of the housing units becoming vacant.

The neighborhood began to recognize the trends of disinvestment in the early 1990's. In 1994, an analysis of crime hot spots in the neighborhood showed a correlation between the presence of vacant and abandoned properties and trash-filled streets (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). PBCIP resident surveys and discussions during community meetings had also identified the abandoned properties as havens for drug use, prostitution and other illegal activities (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). Based on this information, PBCIP sought to become a non-profit development corporation to preserve the solid housing inventory as a strategy to reverse the trend of abandonment. Once PBCIP was granted 501 C(3) status in 1996, the organization was able to expand funding resources through federal, state, and local grants and donations (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). Grant money from the City of Camden and the New Jersey Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency in 1998 provided funds toward acquisition and rehabilitation of PBCIP's first ten-unit affordable housing program in Parkside (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005).

In 2002, PBCIP launched a two-year participatory neighborhood planning process with funding from Wachovia and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). PBCIP held a leadership conference in 2002, hired consultants and created a committee structure that same year, and held a planning kickoff in 2003 (Lake et al., 2007). At the time of completion in 2004, PBCIP had solicited the input of over 600 community members through a series of community meetings, resident surveys, and stakeholder interviews (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). The plan identified four main goals addressing quality of life, housing, commercial development, and neighborhood amenities (Lake et al., 2007).

Guiding principles set forth by the Parkside strategic plan were aimed at retaining existing residents, attracting a diversity of new homeowners, and encouraging new market-rate housing development (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). Housing policies were created to preserve to the extent possible the housing stock currently available in Parkside, provide new housing only on vacant lots or in serious decay, and preserve blocks with significant historic value (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005).

In 2001, plans moved forward for the 250-home renovation program known as the Park Boulevard Project. The Park Boulevard Project began in 2004, and in 2005 PBCIP sold its first market rate rehabilitated home (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). In addition to the creation of market rate housing, Phase II project also includes 51 units of senior rental housing known as Faison Mews. This project, in collaboration with development partner Pennrose property management, used low income tax credits to restore the historic Pearlye Building along Park Boulevard and includes and newly constructed attached building that replaces the blighted Parkview Apartment buildings (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). Opened in 2006, it was the first new housing exclusively for seniors to be constructed in the City of Camden in 40 years (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2008).

Housing development and rehabilitation remains a focus of PBCIP. The organization continues to support the rehabilitation of homes in the community, and is beginning to partner with other organizations in the Whitman Park neighborhood to lend their expertise (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). However, PBCIP's leadership is cognizant of the fact that housing alone will not address neighborhood problems (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2010).

THE GROWTH OF THE ORGANIZATION

As PBCIP continued to execute significant housing rehabilitation projects, the community engagement strategy continued to evolve. PBCIP focused on supporting democratic processes and participatory decision-making by the community in all of its efforts and at all levels of the organization (Lake et al., 2007). PBCIP engages the community through its network of block captains, who are charged with disseminating information about PBCIP events and programs to the community. Under the direction of PBCIP staff, the Parkside Block Captains Network provides a connection to the community for each resident in the neighborhood's 55 blocks. Block captains disseminate information, serve as a resource to solve problems and mobilize residents to address problems and work for change in the neighborhood (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2008). PBCIP focuses on personal interactions and hand delivered newsletters in order to continuously engage the residents. During their deliveries and conversations, block captains are also able to solicit

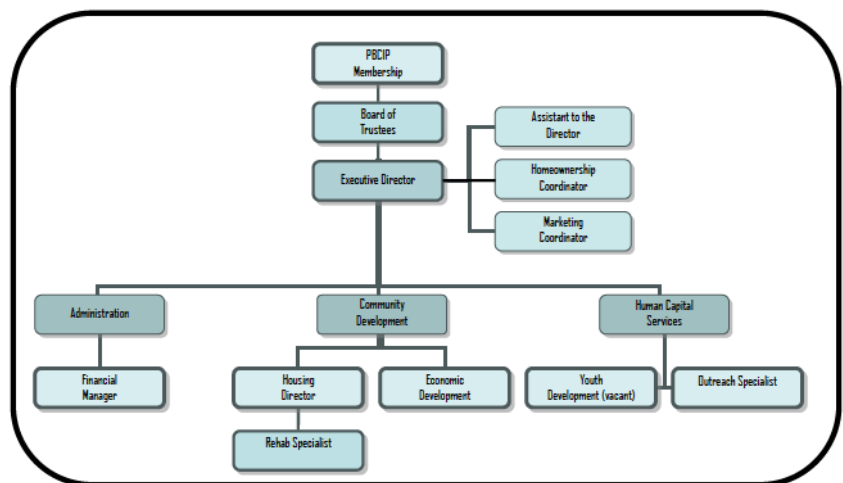


Exhibit 2: PBCIP Organizational Chart (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

information about neighbors' concerns and priorities for the community (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). Block captains also work closely with the police to address crime and safety issues in the neighborhood (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2008).

The inclusive democratic and participatory philosophy embodied in the organizations' members and block captains also carries over to PBCIP's Board of Trustees, which is comprised of 12 elected Parkside residents and 3 business partners who are stakeholders in the success of the Parkside neighborhood (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). The organization, headed by executive director Bridgette Phifer, has had a paid staff since 2000 and currently operates with a full-time staff of eight and an operating budget of over \$500,000 (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2010). Driven by the members and the community at large, PBCIP is charged with delivering on the vision of creating

"A unique and vital multigenerational setting, where sophisticated urban living overlooks Farnham and Forest Hills parks. Parkside is a place where residents, institutions, merchants and visitors find a strong workforce, solid infrastructure and well-developed sense of community." (Parkside Business & Community in Partnership, Inc., 2010)

IT'S A NEW DAY IN PARKSIDE

While the development of housing was the first and most visible project taken up by the community and PBCIP, the staff of PBCIP has also invested significantly in other portions of the strategic plan. PBCIP has collaborated with a number of partners, including Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, Rowan University, the Boys & Girls Club of Camden County, and Camden Wellness to bring health and wellness programs and resources to the community (Hillier Architecture et al., 2005). In expanding their role as a community economic development organization, PBCIP is beginning to show greater emphasis on commercial redevelopment along Haddon Avenue and job creation. In fact, Ms. Phifer suggests that, "If PBCIP could address one issue, it would be to help take people off of the streets and have them employed in well-paying jobs (personal communication, December 2, 2010)."



PBCIP RENEW PROJECT
OPENING SPRING 2012

View of Haddon Ave. and Liberty St.

Exhibit 3: Rendering of New Commercial Space (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010)

Development programs along Haddon Avenue are numerous in both their breadth and depth. Among the current projects are façade replacements, job training programs, a public arts program and a new LEED certified commercial building (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). The new 23,000 square foot commercial building, slated to be developed at the corner of Kaighn Avenue and Haddon Avenue, is intended to serve as a business incubator, community education center, and as a commercial office space for PBCIP (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). The building is fully leased, and will include a bakery, a massage spa owned by a Parkside resident and with the assistance of PSE&G, a sustainability center, which will promote sustainable energy usage and practices for the residents of Parkside (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). The building will be constructed with approximately 40% involvement from local construction contractors and subcontractors, and will include a green construction job incubator through a partnership with Dunbar Construction (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

PBCIP has taken a comprehensive approach to community development, and strives to serve the community through any manner which helps to further their development mission. Despite progressing from a small unpaid volunteer organization to a full-fledged housing rehabilitation, economic development, and health and wellness organization, the organization maintains their weekly community meetings, Fun Day, and Christmas baskets. Monthly meetings held for the community now include educational sessions on a wide range of topics from safety updates to home ownership to energy efficient home improvements (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). The Fun Day event is now attended by between 600 and 700 people and includes a literacy program where community children must select a book before participating in any of the activities. After Fun Day, the trash filled streets that once served as an unwelcome foundation for community organizing now serve as an important indicator for success, "...for all the plastic cups and paper plates they (the residents) have picked up, nobody has ever found a book" (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

DISCUSSION

The evolutionary path of PBCIP is modeled in the form of a comprehensive community-building initiative. The organization derives its influence based on a bottom-up model, "... by which residents' rights to the city become based more on what they do as active citizens than who they are as urban neighborhood residents" (Lepofsky & Fraser, 2003). This philosophy is evident throughout the organizational model, which holds members and community residents as the guiding force behind many of the initiatives that are undertaken in the community, including their initial foray into housing rehabilitation and the development of their neighborhood plan. "For PBCIP, civic engagement means that the community has participated widely... and knows and trusts the organization, and that this smoothes the way for future development" (Lake et al., 2007). However, as PBCIP continues to grow, managing the tensions between and constraints on capacity become an area of concern.

The main focus for continued development at PBCIP appears to be in building programmatic capacity, which requires great organizational dexterity, extensive strategic planning and careful deliberation (Glickman & Servon, 1998). PBCIP has seen great success in this regard, which many would attribute to the detailed development framework and guidance developed through the creation of their neighborhood plan. A strong community-building approach was demonstrated through a neighborhood resident that noted, "It wasn't something brought into the community from the outside. We, the organization, realized and asked community folk what they would like to see: issues, concerns. We grew from that to a whole neighborhood planning process" (Lake et al., 2007). Most of the projects undertaken now, and planned for the future, were created through the development of the neighborhood plan, including the reestablishment of the Haddon Avenue business corridor and all of the associated façade replacements, public arts programs, and other related projects (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

At PBCIP, significant effort is made in conducting surveys and engaging the community through the block captains' network. This investment in political capacity is most successful when the CDC focuses provision of education, training, support, and confidence building for leaders within the community (Glickman & Servon, 1998). While PBCIP has provided for success through community meetings, planned job incubators, and other community involvement programs, PBCIP does have concerns about growing the actual membership of the organization. The current 120 members have remained at a relatively constant level, although more and more individuals are showing up at meetings to get involved and search for resources for assistance (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010). PBCIP views it as critical to remain engaged with the community and to attempt not to be overtaken by the daily activities involved in development (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

Network capacity defined by Glickman & Servon as "the ability to build networks with other organizations" is the most critically managed form of capacity at PBCIP (1998). In creating partnerships critical to the growth of the organization, a growing understanding and focus on roles and responsibilities has evolved. At PBCIP, formal memorandums of understanding are now used in developing projects to ensure that everyone is on the same page as it regards expectations, deadlines and funding requirements. These documents, whether formal or informal, play a critical role in managing the network required to deliver such comprehensive solutions to communities (B. Phifer, personal communication, December 2, 2010).

A pattern of clear and formal communication is evident throughout PBCIP's management of organizational growth over the lifetime of the organization. The network of block captains serves as a critical communication link between residents and PBCIP, helping to keep both parties informed on current events, upcoming projects and community concerns. Additional monthly membership meetings create an open forum for community residents and PBCIP staff to discuss critical community issues. The Parkside strategic plan serves as formal communication of the vision for the community in guiding the initiatives of PBCIP and other community stakeholders. Formal written communications help to create clear expectations and communication between PBCIP and its partners in service provision, housing rehabilitation, and the various other services that they provide. A sustained focus on effective communication has allowed Parkside to successfully manage a broad set of services for the community, and will remain critical to the success of the organization in the future.

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