

2011 Highlights

Housing and
Community Development
Network of New Jersey



State and Federal Policy Advocacy

- **Promoted Housing Policies to Move NJ Forward:** The Network continued to advocate for policies that encourage the creation of homes people can afford near employment and transit. Early in 2011 we partnered with members and allies to shepherd key elements of our **Housing Market Reform Act** through the legislature. This proposal would have replaced NJ's housing delivery system with a strong new framework for creating a range of homes in the state, including new mechanisms to get every community to do their fair share, and to get local housing trust fund dollars spent more quickly with priority for nonprofit developers. While Gov. Christie's conditional veto ultimately killed this bill, his failure to get anything enacted left the Fair Housing Act and most of the 2008 housing reforms we worked on intact for now. In a parallel effort, we joined in an *amicus brief* on a major case being considered by the NJ Supreme Court regarding implementation of the state's *Mt. Laurel* principles.
- **Fought for Housing Funding:** The Network organized a coalition effort to restore housing production funds and capacity money for non-profit housing developers and maintain full funding for the State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP) in NJ's FY2012 budget, which the Legislature adopted. The SRAP funding was preserved, but Gov. Christie line-item vetoed the housing production and capacity funding. Meanwhile, eight counties collected revenues in their Homeless Trust Funds we helped enact, providing resources for members and other service providers. We helped defeat a move to eliminate NJ's 2% statewide non-residential development fee, instead getting the moratorium that was in place extended.
- **Advocated for Strong Communities:** As part of our Community Leadership Initiative, we worked with members and municipal partners to analyze state policy changes needed to restore neighborhoods and better address the foreclosure crisis. Priority proposals developed as a result include changing NJ's tax sale law to provide more options for generating revenue and gaining control of troubled properties, and facilitating local land banking operations to more strategically acquire, assemble and dispose of problem properties for redevelopment. We helped defeat legislative efforts that would have harmed NJ communities, including proposals to curb communities' ability to address blighted properties through proactive rental inspections and other interventions with property owners, and to penalize tenants (but not landlords) for overcrowded homes in certain communities. Also, the Network has joined with our planning and environmental allies in a consortium that won a \$5 million, 3-year Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from HUD for work in the North Jersey Transportation Region to support strong communities.
- **Promoted Federal Priorities:** Network members and staff worked with our national partners to help minimize cuts and restore funding to key programs, resulting in the restoration of \$45 million in housing counseling funds that had been eliminated earlier in the year.

Cities and Local Work

- **Launched the NJ Community Leadership Initiative:** In February the Network recruited teams from 5 municipalities -- Newark, Millville, Jersey City, Orange and Irvington -- through a competitive process to participate in the year long CPLI program being offered by the Center for Community Progress, to support targeted strategies to manage and repurpose vacant and problem properties. Since then we have also engaged with teams from a second group of municipalities, including Camden, Bridgeton, Plainfield, Paterson and Trenton, to help develop and implement local problem property strategies.
- **Summer Institute:** In July 80 individuals representing 13 municipalities participated in the Network's Summer Institute for Community Leadership, which brought together local and national experts and practitioners to explore proactive strategies and systems reforms to facilitate acquisition of problem properties, strategic code enforcement, integrated data and IT systems, and planning for effective reuse.
- **Gained Ground with Problem Properties Strategies:** We facilitated numerous customized workshops and strategy sessions for our partner municipalities to help them advance their problem properties plans. As

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a result, several (Camden, Jersey City, Paterson) have created official abandoned property lists, and are preparing to use spot blight eminent domain and other APRA tools to acquire and convey properties to CDCs and others. Newark, Jersey City and Paterson have joined Orange and Irvington in enacting Vacant Property Registration Ordinances to deter owners from leaving properties vacant, and generate registration fees to defray the costs of dealing with these properties. Several municipalities are exploring the use of land banking entities to support their problem properties strategies, as well as ways to make their code enforcement efforts more effective, pursue better management and maintenance of properties in foreclosure and other strategies.

- **Supporting Neighborhood Revitalization:** To complement our work with municipal teams we supported groups of members and local CDC associations to help identify and overcome obstacles to neighborhood revitalization, including an NCDN project to create a handbook mapping Newark's development process and recommend improvements. This work is being enhanced by our reconstituted Neighborhood Revitalization Task Force, made up of Network members who are creating and implementing participatory neighborhood plans, and a new partnership with APA-NJ to match pro bono planners with CDC projects.
- **Advanced Foreclosure Prevention and Recapture Efforts:** We helped housing counseling organizations to catalogue and analyze challenges to their work and pursue solutions, resulting in improvements in several HMFA programs and expedited fees to counseling agencies. We partnered with New Jersey Community Capital, Mercy Housing and HMFA to develop a proposal for the NJ Mortgage Resolution Fund, using \$100 million of NJ's Hardest Hit Fund allocation. The program is expected to provide resources that can assist members working to stabilize targeted cities and neighborhoods to prevent additional foreclosures and the related challenges they cause.

Membership Services

- **Provided Community Development Training:** Nearly 150 individuals participated in our formal course offerings on Property Acquisition Strategies, Property Management for Scattered Site Projects, Mixed Use Development Finance and Financing Renewable Energy Projects. We trained nearly 50 individuals on Newark's new Rehab Standards and the "Green Communities" certification process for Newark's NSP 2 consortium, including 11 CDCs as well as municipal and county staff, and helped each member develop a work plan to obtain "green" certification. We also developed a consultant pool and offered pro bono sessions on a variety of community development topics at our June Membership Meeting, and secured scholarship slots at each of the NeighborWorks® National Training Institutes for interested members.
- **Expanded Our Communications Efforts** to support our agenda, including greatly expanding our social media communications and redesigning our website to make it more use friendly. We garnered extensive media coverage on a range of topics and events, including our state housing policy efforts, our problem properties work, our NJ release of the NLIHC's Out of Reach report detailing the high cost of rental housing, and the success of HUD's HOME program in the state.
- **Sponsored Advocacy and Outreach Events:** Some 100 people attended our spring Advocacy Day, meeting with scores of New Jersey's legislators to educate them about our policy agenda and build support for our issues, and 25 Network representatives traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with members of the state's Congressional delegation. We supported three Housing Opportunity Breakfasts in Passaic, Union and Middlesex Counties, three press conferences and home visits for the *Out of Reach* release in Mercer, Essex and Union Counties, a Bus Tour featuring multiple homes created by members in Monmouth County, and three events highlighting the success of HUD's HOME funding in Burlington, Mercer and Morris counties. Combined, more than 300 people participated in these events.