

**Housing and Community Development Network of NJ Annual Meeting  
Marriott Hotel  
Trenton, New Jersey  
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***Remarks offered by Kenneth M. Reardon, Professor and Director of the  
Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning, at the University of  
Memphis***

I want to thank Michael Powell for his very sweet and generous introduction.

One of the great joys of teaching is watching your former students go on to work with inspired professionals, such as Diane of the Network and Bob of the Corporation, making a significant difference in local communities in ways that far exceed your own achievements. I know I speak on behalf of all of the Cornell planning faculty when I say that we are very proud of the work Mike has done here in New Jersey.

I also want to thank Diane and the Program Committee for inviting me to come and share a few reflections regarding the current state and future development opportunities for the affordable housing and community development movement here in New Jersey and the rest of the nation.

It is always exciting for me to be back in Trenton where I started my community development career in 1971 working as a social work intern for Mt. Carmel Guild on North Clinton Street while a student at nearby Rider University. Later on I had the good fortune of working as the Director of the New Jersey Federation of Senior just one block north of the hotel at 33 W. Front Street.

New Jersey is indeed fortunate to have an organization like the Network that has helped create an awareness of and support for resident-led change efforts, in a manner, that has happened in precious few other places in the nation! The success of your policy analysis, issue advocacy, and technical assistance efforts far exceed those of most other regional and state-wide community development organizations in the U.S.

Listening to Diane and other members of the Network's Board and staff over dinner last night as they discussed the challenges facing the Network's

ongoing grassroots organizing, community planning and development, and strategic legislative work – I was reminded of the words of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere who, when asked, what is the secret for successful economic development in the Third World, responded very directly, "We must run while others walk!" During these difficult times, I believe that those of us in the affordable housing and community development movement are going to have to follow President Nyerere's advice - We are going to have to run while others walk!

As impressed as I have been, over the years by the Network, I really thought your political strategizing reached a high point this year. Knowing how challenging it has been to advance your affordable housing agenda in light of Governor Christie's politics, I thought it was a brilliant move on the part of your leadership to sneak into Iowa to seed a grassroots movement demanding the Governor run for president!

On a more serious note, during challenging times, it is important to take a few steps back to reflect upon the work of the state and nation's ever-expanding network of community-based organizing, planning, and development organizations which is rapidly approaching its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. If you consider the creation of Hough Area Development Corporation in Cleveland or the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation by Jacob Javits, Robert Kennedy, Franklin Thomas and, a young Ron Shiffman, in the early 1960s as the start of this bottom-up, bottom-sideways approach to urban revitalization then we are rapidly closing in on our Silver Anniversary!

The national community development network has accomplished amazing things that you are such an important part of, including:

- The creation of 100,000s of permanently affordable housing units outside of the nation's traditional high poverty areas;

- Pioneering efforts to create special needs housing for individuals with disabilities, those suffering from aids, and women and children who have been victimized by domestic violence;

- Supported and nurtures a new generation of inner city entrepreneurs who have brought critical goods and services, jobs, and a needed tax base to our

cities through a range of programs, including: incubators, creative finance mechanisms, initiation of mentor/protégé efforts, and advocacy of new policies, such as: linkage programs, exaction fees, and community benefits agreements:

- Transformation of streets, playgrounds, parks, and other open spaces into active social spaces where local residents, especially children, can strengthen their attachment to their community and each other;

- Assisted the unemployed and underemployed, especially ex-offenders in successfully entering or re-entering the labor force through Pre-GED, GED, job training, and financial literacy programs;

- Aided millions of homeowners and owners of small multi-family properties in avoiding foreclosure and the financial and psychological damage this can cause to individuals and the communities where these occur;

- Helped communities, plagued by violence related to illegal drugs, to reclaim their neighborhoods through crime watches, CPTED, and community policing programs; (This shift in approach to urban policing represents an enormous policy transformation.)

- Encouraged cities to abandon their reactive approach to economic and community development, accepting the notion that trend is destiny, in favor of pro-active planning at the neighborhood, city-wide, and regional scales with those most affected (i.e. poor and working class individuals) being placed at the center of the policy-making process;

- Enhanced the capacity of local communities to identify, analyze, and address, in very creative ways, the many educational, public safety, housing, and economic development challenges they face;

- Fostered a dramatic shift in urban economic development policy from a from a Downtown trickle-down model to a balanced growth approach to business development;

- In the process, the ever-expanding network of community-based development organizations, such as those active in the Network, challenged many Federal government policies encouraging the Obama administration to

move from a traditional "siloes" approach to urban development to a more integrated and holistic approach to economic and community development;

-In the process, American housing and community development professionals inspired those involved in urban planning and development in other countries, including: Italy, South Africa, and Brazil, to embrace a bottom up, bottom sideways approach to community-building, community planning, and community development

Nowhere has the work of housing and community development professionals been more inspired than here in New Jersey - think about what:

-New Communities Corporation has accomplished over a 40-year period pursuing an integrated approach to community development in Newark or

-Isles leadership in housing and educational reform has produced in the Trenton area or

-Parkside Community Development Corporation's pioneering neighborhood stabilization and redevelopment in Camden or

-New Jersey Community Development Corporation's leadership in housing, economic development, and leadership development, especially its recent success transforming the Great Falls Historic District in Paterson into a National Park site.

These organizations, and many others like them throughout the state, have shown extraordinary staying power – why?

They have been:

- 1.) Responsive to community needs
- 2.) Committed to identifying and developing new leaders
- 3.) Delivery oriented – offering high-quality products and services on time
- 4.) Taking advantage of and sharing best practices
- 5.) Offering flexible programs
- 6.) Constantly looking for new allies

- 7.) Practicing smart hiring and demonstrating a willingness to invest in their workforce, and,
- 8.) Engaging in constant reflection

In these difficult times, some are asking if the golden years of community development are behind us?

There are several reasons why I believe the answer to this question is a resounding no?

- 1.) the increasing combination of housing, home fuel, and gasoline costs make the continued development of low-density ex-urban communities much less likely;
- 2.) the inevitable reduction in the Federal government's willingness and ability to cover the lion share of infrastructure costs required to support low density development;
- 3.) the impending retirement of the baby boom generation, many of whom will find, the increasing costs of maintaining larger suburban homes an unwanted and unbearable burden due, in large part, to their very low savings rate;
- 4.) the rapidly changing demographic profile of the US featuring an increasing percentage of individuals and families rejecting the large stand-alone suburban garage with house attached structure in favor of more compact urban housing types; and
- 5.) the clear preference for city living among the nation's most rapidly growing immigrant groups.

As the economy begins to improve, and it will, people will begin to act on these preferences and the opportunities to stabilize and attract these families to established residential communities within our central cities and mature suburbs will increase.

Positioning the community development network to be effective partners in the future reclaiming of the city is going to require more heavy lifting. Remember, this is not the first time that this movement has had to address

critical challenges! Think about other critical periods within our movement's fifty-year history!

- 1.) Shortly after the founding of the movement, there was the urban uprising and suburban (white) flight following the Dr. King's assassination
- 2.) Within ten years of this crisis period, were the beginnings of massive cuts in domestic social programs that started in the second half of the Carter Administration
- 3.) These cuts were further intensified by additional reductions made during the Reagan/Bush years
- 4.) Finally, the movement had to endure additional federal cuts enacted by the most recent Bush Administration

The housing and community development movement managed to grow and prosper despite the challenges presented during each of these historic periods. Now is the time to seriously consider the steps the movement must take to put itself in the strongest possible position to capitalize on the renewed interest in city living to stabilize and restore our nation's existing urban neighborhoods. This will require us to:

- 1.) Continue to diversify our funding base through the cultivation of new partnerships. This may require us to cross Delancey Street to engage in new joint ventures. To support a mobile farmers market serving Memphis' many food desserts we are working with an NBA Team, a pharmaceutical company, an evangelical church organization, and a HOPE VI housing director - an unlikely coalition that we would have been unable to imagine putting together one year ago!
- 2.) Increase commitment to community organizing and participatory planning to broaden the base for progressive approaches to urban policy-making and planning.
- 3.) Expand traditional community development programming from housing and small business development to include:

Urban food security  
Primary care: health and wellness  
Energy conservation  
Arts and culture

- 4.) Attract new staff with different skill sets, including: organizing, planning, finance, management, and new age communications.
- 5.) Developing strategies to build municipal capacity. In many towns and cities, non-profit CEOs have served longer than many mayors and city council presidents. Recent efforts to "down-size" government has encouraged long-time staff members with valuable information and skills to retire leaving these communities without the capacity to deliver high quality services and to effectively partner with non and for-profit housing and community development organizations.
- 6.) Find new ways to communicate with the community. Electronic communications and new forms of social media, including texting, are becoming increasingly important forms of communication in low-income urban communities. Our communications strategies must include texting, Facebook, Twitter, Linked, and other forms of social media if we are to maximize the effectiveness of our community organizing, planning, and development activities.
- 6.) Finally, we need to operate simultaneously in several different policy arenas and at several scales. We need to engage local municipal officials in their economic development, community development, affordable housing, urban transportation, job training, human services, and land use policy-making and planning. We also need to encourage state and federal legislators and administrators in devising and implementing policies and programs that support our efforts, such as HUD's new Choice Neighborhoods Program.

Can we do it?

Absolutely, the success of the organizations represented in this room and the Network, as a whole, suggests that our response to President Obama's is, now more than even, "Yes, we can!"

