

2013 Network Highlights

Housing and
Community Development
Network of New Jersey



PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION & ADVOCACY

- **Coordinated Responses to Hurricane Sandy:** We developed policy recommendations to help guide recovery efforts based on the work members are doing and the needs of their affected communities. We worked with our allies to organize over 80 groups to support a fair and transparent recovery process. Our advocacy to address the needs of lower income communities and residents helped secure \$75 million in funds being redirected to creating more rental homes and helping housing authorities recover. The Network provided significant input to President Obama's Long Term Recovery Task Force, whose report will help shape the nation's disaster response for the foreseeable future. Our recommendations, many of which were incorporated in the report, include increased housing counseling resources, expanded public comment periods, community engagement and mechanisms to ensure that lower income residents are treated fairly. We are supporting our members' involvement in NJ's rebuilding effort, advocating for a fair and open distribution of resources and continuing to ensure that people who needed homes before and after Sandy have a home they can afford.
- **Protected the *Mount Laurel* doctrine:** The Network mobilized members and allies to stop efforts to gut NJ's Council on Affordable Housing and undermine the Fair Housing Act. Our advocacy helped achieve two major decisions by NJ's Supreme Court, preventing Gov. Christie from shifting COAH to the Department of Community Affairs and overturning the Third Round rules that promoted a flawed "growth share" methodology. We filed two amicus briefs that helped inform the Court, including one that outlined why non-profit developers needed to be represented on COAH's board and another, with NJ Future, the American Planning Association (APA) and the APA-NJ chapter showing how the growth share rules were not adequate to meet NJ's housing needs.
- **Promoted Housing Policies to Move NJ Forward and Build Strong Communities:** The Network maintained our Advocacy Teams and local developer networks of more than 100 leaders around the state to advance policies to create vibrant communities and homes people can afford near employment and transit. Advocacy efforts helped move bills to enhance land banking opportunities, to change NJ's tax lien sale law to provide more options for generating revenue and gaining control of troubled properties, and to give municipalities tools to reduce the impact of foreclosure. An increase in the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) to \$15 million was passed by the legislature but vetoed by the governor. However, additional investors are now permitted to contribute to the program. We hosted over 100 members, allies, and supporters at our annual Lobby Day at the Statehouse, meeting with numerous state legislators to educate them about our policy agenda and build support for our issues.
- **Preserved a Balanced NJ Supreme Court:** We worked with a coalition of organizations to help maintain NJ's 65-year tradition of a bi-partisan Supreme Court, preserving a balanced approach to judicial nominations and preventing attempts to overhaul the makeup of the Court.
- **Fought for Housing Funding and a Fair Budget:** We worked to prevent municipal housing funds from being taken to balance the FY2013 budget or provide unnecessary tax cuts. We helped organize successful efforts to prevent Governor Christie's attempt to take Municipal Housing Trust Funds to balance the state budget.
- **Furthered Federal Priorities:** With our national partners, we sought to minimize cuts and restore funding to key federal programs. To highlight the negative impact of sequestration, we partnered with Monarch Housing and Congressman Andrews to bring a townhall meeting to Camden. We also met with members of New Jersey's Congressional delegation as part of NLIHC's Lobby Day. A webinar cohosted by the Network, the National Alliance to End Homelessness and NLIHC was also held to educate members on advocating for federal priorities.

COMMUNITY STABILIZATION & NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

- **Fostered Problem Property Restoration:** Continuing our work with municipal officials and statewide partners, we advanced efforts to reclaim and restore problem properties around NJ. Over 35 municipalities have adopted vacant and/or abandoned property ordinances to address these problems, giving municipalities the tools they need to identify and hold property owners responsible, and providing critical resources for local communities to control the impact of these properties. We provided technical and organizational assistance to several towns to evaluate their ordinances based on their local experiences, helping them strengthen their laws to increase effectiveness by raising fees and expanding

their reach. Some municipalities have begun to use spot blight eminent domain to acquire key properties as part of their redevelopment strategies. We sponsored the NJ Caucus at the Center for Community Progress's 2013 Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference where members and community leaders began to share experiences and create new strategies to solve similar issues

- **Supported Neighborhood Revitalization:** Our Neighborhood Revitalization Task Force met regularly to share best practices in a variety of areas, and to identify and overcome obstacles to neighborhood revitalization, including challenges navigating the state NRTC Program. One session included a walking tour of Interfaith Neighbors' work in Asbury Park, NJ. We continue to work with Rutgers and our planning and environmental partners in *Together North Jersey* (TNJ) to implement the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning effort in the North Jersey Transportation Region. We are working with TNJ to provide technical assistance to five Micro-Grant recipients, providing support for planning efforts associated with TNJ's Local Demonstration Projects to promote regional planning initiatives and supporting resident participation. This work includes our ongoing partnership with APA-NJ on a second round of the Community Planning Assistance Program, providing volunteer planners to promote and assist with local planning projects with Network members and other groups.
- **Advanced Foreclosure Prevention and Recapture Efforts:** We initiated a housing counseling association to provide additional support to our members and their staff providing this key service. We made recommendations to HUD for programs and services needed in disaster recovery situations, including a comprehensive response to HUD's Office of Homeownership Counseling. We communicated regularly with policy makers to relay the concerns of counselors and offer suggestions for improved implementation and administration of various foreclosure-related programs and services, which resulted in relaxed HomeKeeper eligibility requirements and a re-examination of fee structures for all programs. We continued to participate in local foreclosure task forces and meetings/hearings to provide updates on statewide and national legislative and advocacy efforts. The Network joined with the National Housing Resource Center to address national policy, resource and program issues related to foreclosure prevention and counseling efforts. In addition, we continued to support NJ Community Capital's efforts to mitigate foreclosures through loan purchase modifications.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT & MEMBER SERVICES

- **Provided Community Development Training:** The Network conducted five trainings attended by over 100 individuals including a *CBO Planning Conference in Partnership with APA NJ*, *Low Income Housing Tax Credit Exit Strategies*, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)*, *Tools for Using the Community Reinvestment Act*, and *Generating Unrestricted Income*. We conducted a Community Forum on the tools available in the Abandoned Property Rehabilitation Act for more than 30 Paterson residents engaged in restoring their neighborhoods.
- **Conducted CHDO TA:** Supported by a HUD grant, we provided CHDO TA in Passaic and Union County through monthly meetings in Paterson and one-on-one sessions with potential Union County CHDOs to inform them about proposed changes to the HOME CHDO regulations.
- **Expanded Communications Efforts:** 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, our efforts to promote fair and sustainable rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy, and several NJ Supreme Court decisions impacting affordable home development. To support our members involved in our Sandy Rebuilding Working Group, we developed a webpage dedicated entirely to Superstorm Sandy containing resources and news articles. The Network expanded its social media portfolio by joining LinkedIn
- **Educated Our Members and Policy Makers:** We engaged in extensive communications outreach to support our agenda and promote the important work our members are doing around NJ. As a result, the Network and our members were covered in over 225 print, radio, and television media stories. We distributed 15 TA Alerts, 11 Newsletters, and 20 Policy Bulletins to keep our members, supporters, and allies informed and on the cutting edge of Network news, resources, policy opportunities and industry best practices.