

**Neighborhood Planning
for Community
Revitalization**

**The Cleveland Neighborhood Issues
Campaign:
“The Cleveland Clean-Up”**

A CONSORTIUM PROJECT OF: Augsburg College; College of St. Catherine; Hamline University; Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs; Macalester College; Metropolitan State University; Minneapolis Community College; Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program; University of Minnesota (Center for Urban and Regional Affairs; Children, Youth and Family Consortium; Minnesota Extension Service); University of St. Thomas; and Minneapolis community and neighborhood representatives.

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The Cleveland Clean-Up: The Process of the Issues Campaign

I. Choosing the Issue

II. The Research Stage: Identifying the Options

III. The Strategy: Pulling It All Together

I. CHOOSING THE ISSUE

The Cleveland Neighborhood Association started their issues campaign in September 1996. The idea was to identify an issue that was solvable and needed the immediate attention of the neighborhood. Residents were asked to determine the most pressing issue in Cleveland. The criteria utilized in establishing issues included:

- Must be winnable in six months
- Should not repeat something the organization has already done
- Must demonstrate top concern by the residents involved
- Must help unify the neighborhood
- Must be of benefit both materially and psychologically to the neighborhood
- Must expand volunteer base
- CNA's involvement must be key to the success of the issue

Using these criteria, the residents brainstormed issues for the neighborhood to address which ranged from problem properties and crime, to substandard housing and demolition/rehab, to maintenance on homes, to more lighting on Penn Avenue and in alleys. Under the final vote, the issue of substandard housing was chosen as the issue campaign focus.

II. THE RESEARCH STAGE: IDENTIFYING THE OPTIONS

What is the problem?

Cleveland residents chose to focus on substandard housing because it affects all members of the community by bringing down property values. More specifically, the concentration

was to focus on substandard exterior physical conditions such as roofing, broken steps, garbage, and unkept yards. By doing this, the city could serve as a powerful force through its housing codes and other inspection policies. The final goal was seen as ridding the Cleveland neighborhood of substandard housing, or at least a good portion, by designing a strategy to effectively deal with these properties and ensure that they do not reappear as problem properties in the future, either through demolition or rehabilitation.

What are the options?

In order to proceed on this campaign Cleveland residents had to research the information necessary to deal with problem households including how to find out owner information, tax and utilities status, who is the caretaker, and how to determine if the house is eligible for rehabilitation. In addition, they also had to become familiar with determining code violations and the process for reporting them to the city. To do this, the residents looked into various resources that could provide this information. This included:

- other neighborhood organizations such as Jordan and Powderhorn Park:
 - Jordan initiated a substandard housing campaign dealing with absentee landlords called the Dirty Thirty. In the process, they discovered that laws were in place to deal with violations, however they were not being enforced. Jordan was able to get the mayor to commit city resources to clean up properties. The properties were chosen by block clubs and it was the block clubs responsibility to get specific information, make recommendations, and meet with the housing committee and inspections to present their findings. This campaign was successful in that 27 of the 30 properties identified were cleaned up. Powderhorn Park also approached substandard housing, but from a different angle. They focused more on drug

houses and used the number of police calls to identify which houses should be addressed.

- Inspections Department:

- The inspections department provided a booklet of code violations to help residents determine what the nature of each violation of a property. In addition, they suggested making a list of the properties which Cleveland is concerned about and presenting them to the inspections department in that manner. The process of the inspections department in dealing with properties is as follows:

1. The inspector checks the problem property, fills out a form and takes photos.
2. A letter is sent to the property owner, and the owner is given four days to comply upon receipt of the letter.
3. A re-inspection occurs, and if the problem is not taken care of a warning letter is sent.
4. Another reinspection is issued. The third time, the city is authorized to clean up the problem properties and the owner is billed for the services. The exception is painting which the city cannot do, thus a fine is assessed to the property owner.
5. If the problem is not resolved, the city inspections will condemn the property, evict residents, and board the house. Inspections will continue to deal with boarded houses which are broken into until the mortgage holder of the property sells to another owner.
6. As soon as the property is boarded, it is placed on the 249 list. If the owner rehabs the property, it must meet all minimum codes.

7. If the property remains on the 249 list, it is determined whether the property should be rehabed or demolished. It is demolished when the property costs more to rehabilitate than its expected market value. A hearing is scheduled and the property owner, the neighborhood association, and neighbors within 30 feet are notified of the hearing. The City Department of Inspections determines if the building should be rehabed. The property owner and the neighborhood association are notified.

- Laws and Ordinances:

- The Nuisance Property Law deals with behaviors at specific properties. To act on this there must be at least two incidents dealing with drugs, prostitution, gambling, sale of alcohol, or unlawful possession of a firearm. CCP/SAFE and the county attorney can act as enforcers.

- Other Non-Profit Support:

- MCDA offers a variety of home improvement loans including:

1. Basic Home Improvement Loans: Loans up to \$15,000 to homeowners for home improvements. Homeowners must have a good credit history and ability to repay the loans. Maximum income: \$44,000
2. Deferred Rehabilitation Loans: Loans up to \$15,000 for homeowners with adjusted gross income of \$27,000. Loans are repaid only if the homeowner sells, moves, or transfers the title within seven years.
3. Minneapolis Home Repair Loans: Loans up to \$15,000 for homeowners with bad credit, high debt ratio, or little home equity. Interest rate varies depending on income. Maximum income: \$27,000

4. City Code Abatement Loans: Loans up to \$8,000 to homeowners or landlords who have received orders from the Minneapolis Department of Inspections.

- The MCDA also offers incentive programs for recycling boarded and vacant homes. This includes:

1. Home Ownership Works: First-time home buyers can purchase recently rehabbed homes at below market interest rates.
2. Urban Homestead Program: First-time home buyers with incomes between \$18,000 and \$48,000 can enter a lottery to buy and fix up a home with a \$750 down payment.

- MHFA also offers a variety of home improvement loans including:

1. Deferred Loan Program: This provides deferred payment loans which can assist low-income homeowners in financing home improvements.
2. Home Energy Loan Program: This enables home owners to increase the energy efficiency of existing houses.
3. Revolving Loan Program: This provides rehabilitation financing to low and moderate income homeowners who are unable to qualify for other types of assistance.
4. Greater Minnesota Fix-Up Fund: This provides property improvement loans to assist homeowners in improving the livability and energy efficiency of existing homes.

- PPL is a non-profit developer which also offers such services as tool lending libraries for home improvement.

- Habitat for Humanity gets donated properties from the city and rehabs them for sale at a below market rate.

III. THE STRATEGY: PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now dubbed the "Cleveland Clean-Up", the substandard housing committee was ready to develop a strategy to tackle these properties which involved the residents, the city, and the property owner working jointly. The final process was outlined as follows:

1. **KICK OFF EVENT:** Obtain a commitment from Alice Rainville to clean up the Cleveland neighborhood and to make inspections accountable.
2. **TARGET PROPERTY:** Blocks can nominate a property by signing up at the kick off event or by meeting with their neighbors and identifying a property of high concern to the majority of residents on the block. The property must have at least one code violation.
3. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** A background sheet regarding ownership of the property, what the violation is, the history, etc., must be provided to the substandard housing task force.
4. **CONTACT OWNERS:** An attempt must be made to contact the property owner by phone or in person to clean up the property. Assistance will be offered and a book of resources will be available to help the property owner with the problem.
5. **BOARDED AND VACANT PROPERTIES:** Arrange a walk through of the property to determine if rehab or demolition is appropriate. CNA will find a developer or put the property on the 249 list and demolish it.

6. OCCUPIED PROPERTIES: Inspections is notified of the violation by CNA.

Block representative meets with inspections and CNA monthly to follow up on the progress of the property to ensure that it does not fall through the cracks.