

THE CANTON NEIGHBORHOOD WORKBOOK



2010

A shared guide for all concerned neighbors

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A SHARED WORKBOOK FOR ALL CONCERNED NEIGHBORS

INTRODUCTION

Canton has dozens of distinct neighborhoods; each has a unique set of desirable features and each has a number of serious challenges in today's economy. The first group of workplans describes more than a dozen different neighborhoods and offers a range of suggested activities that should be considered by city leaders, residents, investors, and local funders. The intent of the workplans is to give some initial structure that can pave the way for ongoing redevelopment as part of a revitalized Canton. Obviously, such plans can't be detailed step-by-step formulas, but they can be useful guides to action.

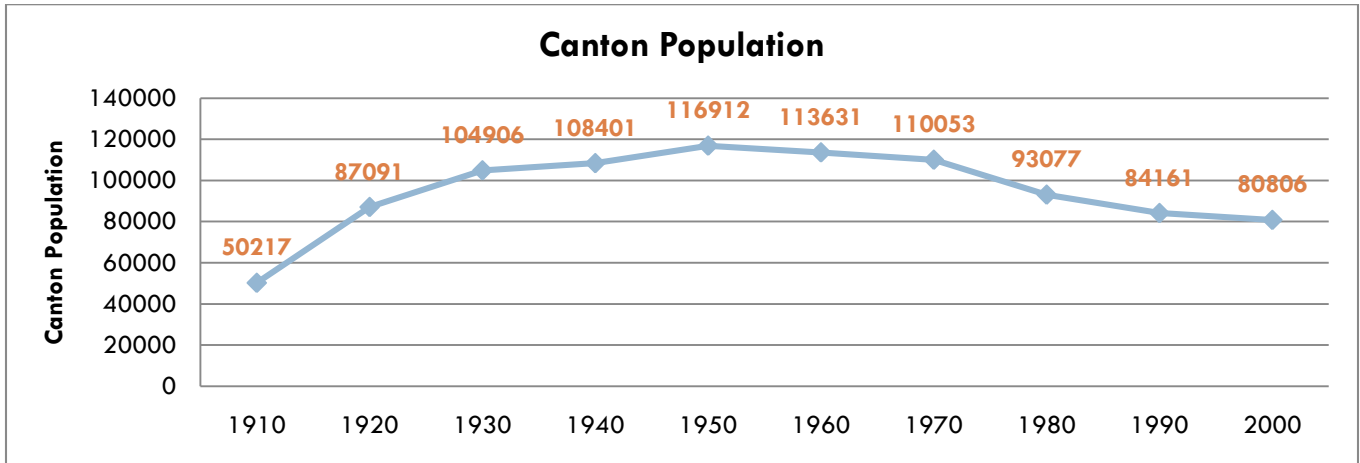
As part of this process, certain themes and concepts ought to be understood by residents, whether or not their neighborhoods have been included in this first set of workplans. These techniques and actions apply to most neighborhoods and some of the suggestions could be used in every community. In each case, questions frame the issue. Then a discussion will illustrate possible actions and how those actions might apply in Canton.

To decide what to do in the neighborhoods, it is important to understand how Canton's neighborhoods were built the way they were, and how this can influence what can be done in the future. Following that discussion, questions will consider how language is shaping the neighborhoods, especially when their identities are so muddled. Other sections focus on how confidence affects the neighborhoods. Additional questions discuss what to do now in terms of demolition, engaging residents in the process of renewal, setting priorities, promoting neighborhoods, selling houses, setting higher standards of maintenance, and the roles of the various partners in this transformation.

QUESTIONS

One | Let's start with that first basic question: How did Canton's neighborhoods get built in the ways that they were?

It should be remembered that Canton is really a miracle city. In 1910, the population was only 50,217, but by 1930, that number had more than doubled to 104,906. In rough terms, that means that Canton added about 10,000 housing units in 20 years.



This scale of construction began when donkeys and horses carted lumber to the sites and when men dug trenches to install the sewer systems. It is incredible that such a level of construction took place and that public services such as water, sewers, and roads were constructed to handle the doubling of population. All this was accomplished in a city with dozens of languages and dialects among its immigrants from Europe, the South, and from the farms.

Building that many houses meant that new neighborhoods had to be laid out and old neighborhoods had to literally squeeze in more houses. Modest houses were built on tiny parcels on small streets usually designated as Courts, Lanes, or Places. Larger houses were constructed on main streets, but often with narrow frontages since there was little need for driveways. It was the streetcars that carried most passengers and foot power moved much of the population to the factories and the stores.

Many houses were constructed near Canton's factories. Most of these operated on 10-hour days, six days a week. Other houses were built on busy streets to provide easier access to transportation. Grocery stores were located at nearby corners to help housewives shop when most refrigeration was still provided by ice. Development decisions that might seem strange today were actually rationally based on convenience in the era before the extensive ownership of automobiles.

Most of Canton's neighborhoods served a range of income groups. Although a neighborhood like Summit might have some of the city's most important houses, it also had working income properties literally out the

back doors. While better houses were being built on 11th and 12th NW, apartment buildings were constructed on the next lot. Indeed, it wasn't until the 1930's that neighborhoods like Ridgewood and parts of West Park really began to create exclusive areas for specific income groups.

That segmentation was slowed by the Great Depression and World War II, but after the war, the advent of mass ownership of autos meant that subdivisions like McKinley Manor in Northeast Canton could be built in a few years with almost identical houses selling for a narrow range of prices. Apartments were built as separate complexes, and smaller houses were no longer shoehorned into tiny lots on narrow streets. Of course, this transformation was not consistent. Many old practices continued into the 1950's, but by then, the shape of the neighborhoods was pretty much fixed.

The 1950's also brought another dynamic: large-scale suburbanization. In fact, although the region continued to grow, Canton saw its population reach its peak in the 1950's. By 1960, the city census data already showed a population in decline. From the high in 1950 of nearly 117,000, the city has lost nearly 40,000 residents. Based on today's family sizes, that figure translates into roughly 13,000 units of housing. And since the city was built primarily as single-family houses, the result is thousands of vacant houses, many of which are still standing today.

Further, reduced demand for housing also caused a decline in the cost of housing. When there are too few buyers for the existing supply, prices go down. The Canton neighborhoods are no exception. Too much housing makes this one of the nation's most affordable housing markets. That distinction can be good news and bad news. Low prices mean that more people can own a home. Although it's a great opportunity, many of these buyers don't have the skills or resources to maintain older houses. Also, depressed prices reduce the costs of becoming a landlord; so many inexperienced landlords enter the field. Some landlords become investors by default because they can't sell a family's home for what they consider to be a reasonable price.

Another negative impact of very low prices is that people must be very careful how they improve their homes. High quality improvements are expensive and sometimes these costs can actually exceed what the house is going to sell for if the owner needs to market the home. As a result, homeowners often opt for only modest repairs so they don't tie up money that may never be recovered through sale. Even quality homes often receive only marginal improvements. When this happens, nearby property owners take note and minimize their exposure as well. Thereby, the cycle is reinforced.

All of this is compounded by the original construction that took place mostly in the early decades of the last century. From 1910 to 1920, Canton grew from 50,000 to 87,000. Still, based on the larger households back then, that level of growth required about 800 units built every year. Attention wasn't on flexible floor plans, good positioning on spacious lots, or energy efficiency. The goal was building hundreds of houses every year by a construction industry with scores of builders each completing a few houses. Canton today has inherited those houses and thousands of others that compete for qualified homebuyers or good investor owners.

Making sense of a fifty to one-hundred-year-old legacy is the core challenge facing Canton. Everyone must be realistic about the neighborhoods and homes that were built and how those conditions impact the future of the city.

TO THE RESIDENTS: DO YOU KNOW THE HISTORY OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? HOW DO YOU THINK ITS HISTORY IS SHAPING THE COMMUNITY'S SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES TODAY?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: ARE YOU ENCOURAGING THE SCHOOLS, HISTORIC GROUPS, AND OTHERS TO COMMUNICATE THE HISTORIES OF THE CITY AND OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS? WITHOUT SUCH ENCOURAGEMENT, THIS IMPORTANT TASK CAN EASILY BE OVERLOOKED AND THE REASONS FOR TODAY'S PROBLEMS WILL LIKELY BE MISUNDERSTOOD.

Two | With an understanding of the ways neighborhoods developed, how should Canton's neighborhoods be described and identified to promote renewal?

First, let's talk about neighborhood names. These are important shortcuts to quickly identifying places. There are no successful neighborhoods in America that don't have well-known identities or specific names. Identity is a powerful tool for stability.

In Canton, most areas are labeled with general names (Northeast, Southeast, etc.). A few neighborhoods are known by specific names such as Fairgrounds, West Park, or Crystal Park, but many neighborhoods are just called by the names of local public schools.

While this has served in the past, many of the schools have now closed or their boundaries have changed so much that the communities they serve don't match the neighborhood names. This produces muddled identities. Without easily recognized names, most areas are easily overlooked or lumped together in ways that don't help them.

Consider some examples. Where is the Wells neighborhood? If you are relatively new to Canton, you probably don't remember Wells School, so you might call the area Southwest. But how does this term differentiate the area from blocks around Aultman Hospital? Where is the Lehman neighborhood and how far does it extend from the closed campus? And do people actually identify with a boarded building or do they refer to the street they live on?

National experience tells us that you can't promote your neighborhood as a place of choice if it doesn't have a name and people can't find it. Don't try to sell toothpaste in unmarked tubes and don't expect everyone to buy cereal in white boxes. Competition for good buyers and good renters means having a name that tells people who and where you are and might even give a hint as to what makes the place special.

Beyond names, other language creates expectations. If the focus of a community is crime watching, don't be surprised if people believe there is a crime problem. If an area is described in terms of its neighborliness, it is usually assumed that crime isn't a problem. Recognizing this, many cities avoid terms such as "crime watch" and instead talk about their "good neighbors" programs.

The first steps in neighborhood renewal are straightforward. Decide where the neighborhood is, what it is called, and how you want people to describe it. For example, we could say that Lathrop is an area of southeast Canton. Or we could describe Lathrop as a modest, very livable small historic neighborhood in the southeast. We could then augment the description by explaining that it is more like a village than an urban neighborhood, even though it is only a half dozen blocks from downtown. Its boundaries are well defined by highways, streets, railroad tracks, and a branch of the Nimishillen Creek. The community largely consists of

small houses on quiet streets. Due to years of investments by long-term residents and by dozens of new Habitat homebuyers, the neighborhood has become a community of homeowners. This added information gives life and importance to Lathrop. When people hear the name Lathrop, we want them to hear Lathrop: the Historic Village in the City.

Therefore, if we are to start the process of neighborhood renewal in Canton, it is critical that we use the names, boundaries, and language that position the various communities as special places where people are choosing to live.

TO THE RESIDENTS: DOES YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD HAVE BOUNDARIES, A NAME, AND A SET OF DESCRIPTIVE TERMS THAT HELP POSITION THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR RENEWAL? HAVE THE NEIGHBORS AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION REALLY THOUGHT THIS THROUGH AND CONSIDERED THE LONG-TERM FUTURE FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOW IT CAN BE NAMED AND DESCRIBED TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: ARE YOUR PROGRAMS SET UP TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNITIES TO PROMOTE POSITIVE IDENTITIES OR DO YOU FOCUS MOSTLY ON PROBLEM SOLVING OR GRANT COMPLIANCE ISSUES? ARE YOU ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE AND CONFIDENCE? ARE PUBLIC AND PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS WORKING TOGETHER WITH EACH OTHER AND IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE RESIDENTS?

Three | Since it is so important for our communities to have positive images, what can we do to promote our neighborhoods as great places to live?

You have already taken the first step by considering your neighborhood as a great place to live. So now, on paper, you should write a realistic list of its assets and an honest list of its challenges. Notice that you should start with what is working successfully and avoid the usual pattern of focusing first on problems.

Even in the most modest neighborhood, there will be wonderful examples of what is special about living there. Do people pay attention to the senior who lives alone? Does one neighbor always help by mowing the grass of the single parent next door? Is there a tradition of welcoming new neighbors? Do people still lend tools or even help each other on projects? In winter, do people help each other get traction on snowy streets? All of these are examples of a neighborly neighborhood, which is one of the most sought after features when people are looking for places to live.

Now let's look at the area and the properties. Does the neighborhood have small, easily managed houses? For many, that is a plus. Or does the community have well-built, large houses of architectural significance? There are many people seeking those choices. How about large yards with magnificent old trees? Convenient alleys? An outstanding school? Unique businesses? The list goes on. The point is that you need to create the list and remember that there are other places that don't offer those amenities, so your neighborhood has a competitive advantage.

Of course, it is equally important to be honest about what is not working. Is the main street in terrible need of repair? How many houses are abandoned? Is there a business that attracts undesirable customers? Does a local factory create noise and truck traffic? Some of these issues can be addressed or minimized; other so-called problems are just part of being part of an active community. The challenge is to minimize those negative aspects that can't be changed and to improve those that can.

At the same time, all of the communities, language, messages, and promotional materials must focus on why the neighborhood is a place of choice. That is perhaps the hardest step for residents to take; it is easy to spotlight what is wrong. It is just plain hard to "toot your own horn", but in the case of competitive neighborhoods, if you don't, no one else will.

TO THE RESIDENTS: HAVE THE NEIGHBORS COME TOGETHER TO CATALOGUE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD SO THAT YOU CAN SHAPE ITS TRANSFORMATION?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: ARE YOU CONTRIBUTING TO THE NEGATIVE APPROACH TO NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE? IF RESIDENT COMPLAINTS ARE WHAT TRIGGER ACTION, THEN THEY WILL COMPLAIN. IF RESIDENTS PROPOSE PROACTIVE, COORDINATED WORK FOR NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE, PUBLIC AND PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT SHOULD BE STRONGLY CONSIDERED.

Four | Okay, if we are willing to tell our story in positive language, how do we go about attracting good neighbors to buy or rent in our neighborhood?

Let's look at this in two parts. First, examine how the positive message about the neighborhood can be communicated. Second, consider more specifically how to market to your target buyers, renters, and others. In both cases, we should pay attention to two different audiences. First, there is the *internal audience*, meaning those people who already live or work in the neighborhood. Then there is the *external audience*, meaning the citizens of Canton including the elected officials, funders, and just everyday people that might know a little but not much about the neighborhood.

Once the neighborhood has determined what sort of message, themes, words, and branding should be communicated, it will be necessary to present those ideas to a larger audience, perhaps elsewhere in the neighborhood, in Canton, or even in the region. An additional goal might be to educate and influence political leaders, lenders, developers, or funders. It takes a well-thought-out strategy to communicate the key ideas to the specific audiences.

Good public communication and outreach first considers the messages to be conveyed in the neighborhood. Although they can be tailored to specific internal audiences, the total plan should cross lines of age, race, ethnicity, income, language, etc. The messages should present consistent images of sociability, fun, and neighborliness. The forums could include:

- ✓ Meetings to link blocks and tie the neighborhood together
- ✓ Local communication mechanisms and sites such as signs in the corner store or a regular neighborhood flyer
- ✓ Banners, placards, yard signs, and other tools with specific messages
- ✓ Presentations to community groups, churches, and schools, and other local public forums

In terms of the external audience, there should be clarity about the specific groups or individuals that ought to hear the message and what is expected from the communication plan. Again, the images and language should be positive and upbeat, but this audience is usually much less informed about your particular neighborhood so the presentation formats are usually more formal. They include:

- ✓ Press tours and information programs
- ✓ Specific programs for supporters and government officials
- ✓ Ad campaigns
- ✓ Broadcast "talk" shows
- ✓ Joint presentations with partner neighborhoods

Once these broader messages are being presented within the neighborhood and to the larger community, it is important to then focus on more specific actions. It is especially critical to speak to homeowners, homebuyers, and renters since it is their decisions that demonstrate confidence in the neighborhood. The primary group

that must be reached is your neighbors – owners, renters, local business leaders, teachers, etc. In this world of constant communication, don't undervalue the impact of word-of-mouth.

When people speak highly of a place – a store, restaurant, school, etc. – we listen and usually give credence to the statements. And if we hear negative descriptions from those most informed, we tend to believe those words. So, once we start marketing our neighborhoods as good choices, others will tend to mimic those same words and phrases. “Oh, it is neighborly.” Or, “It is probably the best housing value in town. It has beautiful houses and such magnificent trees!” When our neighbors begin to talk about their homes and their neighborhoods with phrases like that, our marketing task is much easier.

If the neighbors speak more highly of the neighborhood, it is likely that property owners will be more willing to invest in repairs to properties. When homeowners and landlords improve their properties, the positive message internally and externally is reinforced.

From this process of communicating with neighbors, your marketing messages to others will become clearer. Ask yourself, “Do I need to focus on a specific part of the neighborhood or a particular kind of house?” Or ask, “How do I reach buyers or renters who are able to fix up older units, or households that are able to pay extra for quality houses and apartments?” Our neighborhood, especially its residents and its houses, is the product we have to market, so our job is to match our product to the target customers. When we see an obstacle, such as the wrong kind of loan packages or too few renovated houses, we can negotiate with the city, with lenders, and with developers to make it easier for people to choose our neighborhood.

TO THE RESIDENTS: DO YOU HAVE A COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? IS THE PLAN FOCUSED BOTH ON CURRENT RESIDENTS AND ON PEOPLE FROM GREATER CANTON? ARE CURRENT RESIDENTS WILLING TO INVEST TO SHOW THEIR CONFIDENCE? HAVE YOU DETERMINED WHICH SPECIFIC PROPERTIES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO MARKET? DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO INCREASE SALES TO HOMEBUYERS AND TO WELL-QUALIFIED INVESTORS? DO YOU HAVE PLANS TO ATTRACT STRONGER RENTERS?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF AND FUNDERS: IF NEIGHBORHOODS DEVELOP MARKETING PLANS, ARE THE CITY SYSTEMS AND STAFF SET UP TO REINFORCE THOSE EFFORTS? CAN THE CITY QUICKLY DEMOLISH A KEY ABANDONED PROPERTY? IS THE CITY ABLE TO INSTITUTE A TARGETED EXTERIOR CODE COMPLIANCE EFFORT? TO REINFORCE NEIGHBORHOOD PROMOTIONAL EFFORTS, WILL THE CITY GOVERNMENT MAKE AVAILABLE ITS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS TO ASSIST IN NEIGHBORHOOD PROMOTIONS? AS FUNDERS, WILL THE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY HELP INSTALL NEIGHBORHOOD ENTRY SIGNS, ASSIST IN NEGOTIATING AND FUNDING BETTER LOAN PACKAGES, OR PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES TO SUPPORT QUALITY MARKETING?

Five | In Canton's renewal, what should be the role of house demolition?

While there may be a concerted effort to be proactive about the neighborhoods, the language used, their identities, and how people work together, there is still a reality. Canton's housing market is weak and the most visible sign of that is the abundance of boarded, abandoned houses.

Canton has too many houses to serve its population and too many of the vacant houses will never again be used. They were usually built to low standards of energy efficiency and are often structurally unsound. They may have lead and asbestos contamination and have inconvenient floor plans. Some simply cost too much to ever compete with the thousands of quality houses that are regularly available for purchase in the Canton area.

Over the next decade, Canton will need to remove thousands of current and future abandoned houses. Unfortunately, the resources to complete this work are very limited and might not always be available. While the city government will continue to work aggressively to raise more resources and to bill responsible parties whenever possible, the reality is that too little money and too many houses means there must be a plan for determining priorities for demolition.

What follows is a set of suggested priority criteria. Those properties that meet one or more of these criteria should be removed sooner. They are as follows:

- ✓ The structure presents an immediate risk to health and safety.

EXAMPLE: A VACANT PROPERTY HAS BEGUN TO FAIL STRUCTURALLY TO THE POINT THAT THERE IS SERIOUS CONCERN THAT ALL OR PART OF THE BUILDING MIGHT FALL, ESPECIALLY WITH A HEAVY SNOW LOAD.

- ✓ The structure is in close proximity to a school, community center, day care facility, or other sites that attract children.

EXAMPLE: ACROSS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, THREE ABANDONED PROPERTIES HAVE BECOME A SITE FOR CHILDREN TO PLAY AFTER SCHOOL HOURS.

- ✓ The structure is on a lot that has a qualified sponsor willing to own or to manage the vacant lot over the long term.

EXAMPLE: TWO PROPERTY OWNERS HAVE REQUESTED THAT AN ABANDONED BUILDING BE DEMOLISHED AND HAVE AGREED TO HAVE THE LOT SUBDIVIDED, WITH EACH PART ATTACHED TO EACH OWNER'S DEED AS PART OF THE TAX ROLLS.

- ✓ The structure is linked to a community initiative.

EXAMPLE: A BLOCK GROUP OF RESIDENTS DOES AN ANNUAL CLEAN-UP AND COMMUNITY PICNIC AND THE MEMBERS HAVE WRITTEN AN AGREEMENT TO CLEAN THE LOT PERIODICALLY AND USE IT FOR THE ANNUAL EVENT.

- ✓ The structure is the only abandoned property on an otherwise stable block.

EXAMPLE: A NUMBER OF LONG-TERM HOMEOWNERS AND CONSCIENTIOUS LANDLORDS HAVE COME TOGETHER TO REQUEST THAT A SINGLE ABANDONED PROPERTY BE REMOVED IN ORDER TO REBUILD INVESTMENT CONFIDENCE.

- ✓ The structure is on an important gateway street or in a highly visible location.

EXAMPLE: THE PRIMARY WAY INTO OR OUT OF A NEIGHBORHOOD IS A MAJOR CORNER WITH AN ABANDONED PROPERTY BLIGHTING THE WHOLE AREA.

- ✓ The structure is one of a number of crowded structures on a single block.

EXAMPLE: THE STRUCTURE IS LOCATED ON A BLOCK THAT WAS ORIGINALLY BUILT WITH HIGH DENSITY. DEMOLITION WILL ALLOW THE BLOCK TO APPEAR MORE OPEN AND SAFER.

In a very few cases, certain vacant houses are integral to the heritage of the city and, therefore, should be saved. However, in most situations, the houses have simply outlived their usefulness and need to be removed so they don't undermine efforts to maintain and improve surrounding homes. Abandoned buildings inflict an enormous cost on nearby property owners. Home values are further depressed, there is a reduced sense of safety, and there is a significant impact on the confidence needed for reinvestment.

For those of you who are acquainted with the many larger, older homes in the Summit neighborhoods, you know the profound impact these houses are having on efforts to renew that community. That same impact occurs in the blocks south of 15th Street NW between Cleveland and Walnut. This is a neighborhood of beautiful homes and hardworking homeowners, who see their homes undermined by abandoned properties such as those on Woodland Avenue NW.

If you have seen the many smaller vacant houses in the southwest area of Canton near the closed Wells school, you know that those abandoned houses are not only quite old, but usually weren't built as quality housing.

If you have visited the smaller interior streets in Crystal Park, you know that the abandoned properties built on tiny lots and located on narrow streets have a significant negative impact on properties all around them.

In almost every case, an abandoned property disheartens the people who must live near it. It distresses people from around Canton who see a constant reminder that the city is not recovering from its fifty-year decline. Beyond the financial impact, the emotional cost of abandoned houses is enormous.

Of course, the cost of removal is very high, so not every house can be addressed immediately. Canton city government has done an excellent job of keeping the cost of demolition low, but there are still resource limits. Therefore, the city government needs to set its priorities and consult with local residents regarding particular properties. The process should be open and fair, but it must happen as often as possible, especially on highly visible streets and on blocks where the property owners are keeping their houses in good repair.

TO THE RESIDENTS: HAVE YOUR NEIGHBORS COME TOGETHER TO DETERMINE IF ANY HOUSES SHOULD BE DEMOLISHED AND IN WHAT ORDER? REMEMBER THAT THE MOST CRITICAL HOUSES MIGHT NOT BE DIRECTLY IN YOUR COMMUNITY BUT ON A MAIN STREET INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD OR ADJACENT TO THE SCHOOL SERVING YOUR AREA. ALL ABANDONED PROPERTIES INFLECT A COST ON CANTON, BUT SOME ARE A GREATER COST THAN OTHERS.

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: HAVE YOU ESTABLISHED A CLEAR SET OF DEMOLITION PRIORITIES AND LINKED THOSE PRIORITIES TO REBUILDING SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL EQUITY IN THE CITY? WOULD YOU CONSIDER CRITERIA SUCH AS THOSE OFFERED HERE? HAVE YOU WORKED WITH RESIDENTS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT CAN BE DONE AND HOW THEY CAN BE PART OF THE SOLUTION TO THIS FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM FACING CANTON?

Six | Once abandoned properties are removed, how should the city government and the residents deal with the vacant lots?

One of the most important responsibilities for Canton is dealing effectively with vacant lots. Many are far too small to ever be used again. Even the larger lots are often in neighborhoods that are already too dense, making new housing unlikely for decades more. Vacant lots usually mean that substandard housing was removed or density was reduced. These are obviously good outcomes. The problem is the vacant lots are seen as symbols of decline instead of opportunities for a better community.

Recently a group in Youngstown decided to come up with creative ideas for addressing vacant lots in one neighborhood. Some of you may have gone to the old amusement grounds called Idora Park. That neighborhood has not only lost the park itself; it has also lost scores of houses. After a few months of planning, the resident group has identified uses for 112 of the lots. Some lots are being added to the city park, others are being given to neighbors; still others are being planted as orchards, tree nurseries, and gardens. Individuals and groups are acting as sponsors. Instead of seeing the lots as a negative, the neighbors are treating the open space as an amenity that makes their neighborhood special. This same process is happening in Cleveland where there are dozens of examples of proactive use of vacant lots under the *Re-imagining Cleveland* program.

Stark County is approved for a landbank. This can make the legal process much easier, more efficient, more reliable, and can help provide good titles to the lots. However, a landbank doesn't develop priorities or establish options for reuse and certainly doesn't create outcomes. Those are the responsibilities of the elected officials, city staff, and involved residents.

Canton will need to set procedures for the use and distribution of the lots. The rules should be fair and understandable to everyone. The residents working with city staff and with landscape specialists should identify the different desired uses. Some of the uses will be short term; others will be permanent changes. Each action ought to project a positive re-use of the land and each desired outcome needs to be communicated by yard signs expressing the new use of the land.

In some cases, small amounts of flexible funding will be needed. This can be provided by neighborhood groups, individuals, local businesses, and community-focused foundations. The costs of reusing the lots can be minimized if there is careful attention paid to the demolition of the houses and the preparation of the land. Having regular forms to simplify ownership or sponsorship can speed the process and a few demonstration grants can be used to illustrate best practices. The most important story is that the lots must be treated as an opportunity or the lots will become a cost to everyone in the neighborhood.

TO THE RESIDENTS: DO YOU HAVE A COMPLETE SURVEY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD LOTS AND ABANDONED STRUCTURES? DOES THIS SURVEY PROVIDE A SUMMARY OF THE OWNERSHIP OF THE LOTS? DO YOU HAVE IDEAS ABOUT REUSING THE LOTS, BOTH IN THE SHORT TERM AND FOR THE LONG RUN? ARE YOU COMMITTED AS A COMMUNITY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LOTS? HAVE YOU SET UP SYSTEMS TO MAKE THAT SUCCEED?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: VACANT LOTS ARE AN ENORMOUS COST TO THE CITY BEYOND JUST THE CLEANING AND MOWING. DO YOU AGREE THAT VACANT LOTS LITERALLY STEAL EQUITY VALUE FROM THE NEARBY PROPERTIES? DO YOU RECOGNIZE THAT THIS SITUATION REDUCES RESIDENT SATISFACTION AND DECREASES THE TAXABLE BASE FOR CITY OPERATIONS? IS THE CITY WILLING TO PARTNER WITH THE NEIGHBORS AND THE FUNDING COMMUNITY TO CREATE THE CATALOGUE OF ALTERNATIVES THAT WILL BE NECESSARY TO MAKE SURE THIS HAPPENS? DOES THE FUNDING COMMUNITY RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A MORE PROACTIVE APPROACH TO VACANT LOTS AS PART OF EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT?

Seven | With everyone so busy, how can neighbors be encouraged to come together for a better neighborhood?

Americans work hard and this is especially true for the residents of Canton. In the current economy, earning a living often means working two jobs for very modest wages. It is hard to be an involved neighbor when both time and energy are so limited. Moreover, much of the work of being a committed neighbor isn't easy. It involves helping a senior replant a garden, assisting a new neighbor in cutting back overgrown bushes, or overseeing the neighborhood children on a hot summer afternoon.

Further, neighborhoods have transformed dramatically over the last few years. In the past, some blocks never saw a single change in who lived there for years in a row. Now most blocks experience repeated changes. It is easy to know your neighbors only by sight or not even know them at all. When this happens, we are no longer neighbors; we are just residents of the same neighborhood.

Limited time and energy and fewer strong relationships make it much harder for neighbors to come together to solve problems. Even minor issues like a missing street sign or a bad pothole don't get quickly resolved because no one takes responsibility to report the problem. And everyday disagreements about noise or parking are dealt with through the police instead through conversation. All of this makes living in the same place less safe and less comfortable.

Fortunately, there is an answer that doesn't require more meetings or work projects. Indeed, the first step to building good neighborly relations is to have fun together. The NEAR organization has recognized this with their celebrations in the park and at other neighborhood success sites. Other groups have created such unique events as "Happ'n in the Hood" and "Rock and Rod Reunion". These are just a few examples of ways to get to know your neighbors as more than just people on the same block.

In many cities the night before the first day of school is an opportunity to bring the neighborhood kids together for a last day of summer party. This gives everyone a chance to meet with the kids and to meet their parents who are asked to show up as well. In one Louisiana community, with extensive abandonment after Katrina, all the neighbors drove to one site and handed out candy at "Trick or Trunk." Again, while the costumed kids were the excuse, the reality was that adults got a chance to meet and exchange their "hellos" without being part of a meeting or a work project.

Other cities use different approaches. In one place, there was a small fund of money so that whenever someone moved into the neighborhood, lemonade and brownies could be provided as a way to say "Welcome to our neighborhood!" In another place, awards are given out for the best decorations on holidays. Another neighborhood does the same for the most attractive yards and most improved houses.

In every case, the gifts and awards are there to acknowledge and encourage the efforts of good neighbors. They are also there to give all the neighbors an excuse to meet each other and to build a sense of community. This isn't done by accident; there has to be a conscious decision that knowing each other is the first step in creating a safer and more desirable community. Celebrations and awards are just examples of ways to achieve this and they certainly are enjoyable.

TO THE RESIDENTS: DO YOU HAVE AN INFORMAL OR FORMAL SYSTEM FOR NEIGHBORS TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER? DOES IT WORK WELL OR DO YOU NEED TO TAKE MORE STEPS? DO YOU HAVE THE RESOURCES TO REACH OUT TO PEOPLE AS NEIGHBORS AND NOT JUST AS VOLUNTEERS FOR A PROJECT? DOES YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD HONOR THOSE THAT ARE MAKING A SPECIAL EFFORT?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: CITY GOVERNMENT AND FUNDERS TEND TO SEE THEIR TASKS AS "SOLVING PROBLEMS", BUT WE ALL KNOW THERE ARE TOO MANY PROBLEMS AND TOO FEW RESOURCES. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE CITY AND PHILANTHROPIC RESOURCES ARE DIRECTED AT HELPING PEOPLE RE-ENGAGE WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS? DO YOU SUPPORT PROJECTS SUCH AS THE STARK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION'S WORK IN RESIDENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT? WOULD YOU SUPPORT NEW EFFORTS, PERHAPS A MAYOR'S AWARD OR CITY COUNCIL CITATION, FOR EXCELLENCE IN HOME UPKEEP?

Eight | Money is tight, so how can we expect neighbors to set high standards in repairing and maintaining their houses?

Canton has blocks and houses that could easily be picture postcards for great neighborhoods in America. This doesn't just mean beautiful, higher-priced places like Ridgewood, Market Heights, or Colonial Boulevard NE. This also includes dozens of blocks at the far eastern end of the city and meticulously maintained blocks near the fairgrounds. Indeed, every neighborhood in Canton has houses and groups of houses that are outstanding quality homes maintained with real pride of ownership. Certainly every work plan neighborhood can boast of high-standard homes succeeding even in today's economy.

Unfortunately, too often we pay attention only to the troubled houses. We urge the government to use code enforcement as a way to get people to do a better job of property upkeep. While this can be a useful strategy, just fixing the most troubled properties won't significantly change the neighborhood. Fixing properties to a minimum standard only reinforces a second choice status. We have to move beyond just removing a negative condition and instead replace the image with a positive change.

What we remember about a place isn't that a problem got fixed, but that something special has happened. A newly landscaped yard, a three-color paint job on a porch, welcoming porch lights, and seasonal flags are all positive images that we use when we remember and describe a place. We talk about the standards that prevail in a neighborhood; the more we see people doing something special, the more we have a positive image of the place.

Therefore, if neighborhoods in Canton are to strengthen their image, it is critical that the residents pay attention to the standards being set. In stable neighborhoods, it is expected that yards are raked and bushes are trimmed and that trashcans are set out on the right pick-up days and removed quickly. But sometimes we just stop seeing the low standards because they have been in place for years.

Therefore, it is recommended that three or four neighbors and perhaps two or three people from other neighborhoods come together and walk on a variety of blocks. As the walk proceeds, the participants should mention what looks positive and what is undermining the neighborhood. One community in Hartford, CT decided that some old fences had become eyesores so the residents got together and hired one firm to remove all the rusty chain link and metal fence posts. Neighbors in one New York City community decided the same type of fences looked shabby, but they hired a firm to straighten the bent posts and together, the neighbors rented the equipment to spray paint all of the fences black. In each case, they had long overlooked a glaring negative feature, but one walk made the low standards obvious.

Now, to answer the underlying question about high costs: standards aren't really based on money. Keeping the yard clean, planting a packet of seeds for annual flowers, hosing the dirt off the vinyl siding, tidying the front porch, and even painting the front door can all be done for only a few dollars or just a little personal effort. What we have learned around the country is that those people who make that sort of effort are the

same people that go further and make the other extraordinary improvements that set the standards for a successful neighborhood.

TO THE RESIDENTS: GO FOR A HIKE AROUND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD. ACT LIKE YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN THERE AND RECORD WHAT YOU SEE. ARE THERE SMALL CHANGES THAT COULD MAKE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD MORE ATTRACTIVE? HOW CAN YOU MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO ACT ON THOSE CHANGES? DO YOU NEED INCENTIVE FUNDS OR A VOLUNTEER CORPS? ARE YOU WILLING TO ADDRESS A PROBLEM EVEN IF SOME NEIGHBORS AREN'T WILLING TO JOIN YOU?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: IF NEIGHBORS IDENTIFY MANAGEABLE PROBLEMS WITH NEIGHBORHOOD STANDARDS, DO YOU HAVE A PLAN TO HELP? FOR THE CITY, WOULD YOU MAKE SMALL CHANGES IN TRASH PICK-UP, MINOR CHANGES TO THE HOUSING CODE OR EVEN THE USE OF SPECIAL FUNDS LIKE CDBG GRANTS? AS FOR FUNDERS, DO YOU HAVE A SYSTEM FOR SUPPORTING SELF-HELP AMONG NEIGHBORS NOT JUST THROUGH GRANTS BUT ALSO THROUGH TRAINING, WORKSHOPS, AND STAFF ASSISTANCE? HAVE YOU CAREFULLY LOOKED AT THE WORK OF THE FUNDED NONPROFITS TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE ACTING AS STANDARD-SETTERS?

Nine | If we encourage homeowners to upgrade their homes, there will still be poorly maintained investment properties nearby. Why should anyone improve a home if landlords are given a free ride?

This is a tough question that involves a number of different issues and each deserves attention.

1. First, let's remember who loses if housing declines. Everyone does. Why should homeowners lose even more equity in their homes because others aren't carrying their fair share? Should we only invest if everyone else does? With that reasoning, we would all move to the lowest standard of upkeep. Do people really want to cede that much power to others? Keeping your home in good condition is a matter of pride, as much as economics, so house-proud owners need to accept that they will lead the process.
2. Second, landlords shouldn't get a free ride, and they shouldn't ask for one. The reason is that declining housing values impact them in two ways. They lose the equity worth of their properties and they aren't able to attract good tenants if the neighborhood is failing.
3. Third, the answers are never found in absolutes. The soft real estate market and low rental costs mean that it is difficult for even the best landlords to maintain every property in an excellent condition. Nevertheless, everyone – investors and homeowners - can keep their properties in good repair and can especially give much greater attention to the exteriors of the houses.

In many cities, the code compliance programs are set up to deal with any house when the property is transferred or when there is a change in tenants. This is fine, but it doesn't really speak to what troubles so many residents. It is what they see day-to-day that tells them where their neighborhood is heading and too often they don't like what they see. In those cases, some cities have set up programs where trained neighbors do an annual survey of the exterior of the properties – both homeowner and investor – to identify the exterior code violations. Everyone is sent these informal observations, well in advance, of a neighborhood-wide inspection by city staff. Most people are able to make the necessary repairs without getting a legal notice from the city government, and those people with economic or physical limitations have time to seek help before being cited. All of this planning helps to reduce tension involved in code compliance, while also assuring that no one is exempt from maintaining at least the exteriors of the properties to keep them in good repair.

TO THE RESIDENTS: ARE THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PROPERTY OWNERS MAINTAINING THE HOUSING STOCK? ARE PARTICULAR INVESTORS OR EVEN HOMEOWNERS UNDER-MAINTAINING THEIR PROPERTIES? IS THIS DISCOURAGING OTHERS? DO YOU HAVE A PLAN TO ESTABLISH A CLEAR SET OF EXTERIOR STANDARDS TO KEEP THE HOUSING IN GOOD CONDITION? ARE THE CITY GOVERNMENT, VOLUNTEERS, AND FUNDERS PART OF THIS PROCESS? WOULD YOU CONSIDER INSTITUTING A NEIGHBORHOOD-WIDE CODE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM IF YOU HAD THE RIGHT RESOURCES?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: INVESTMENT PROPERTY IS A MAJOR ELEMENT IN MANY AT-RISK NEIGHBORHOODS IN CANTON. DO YOU HAVE A SET OF STANDARDS AND REQUIREMENTS THAT NONETHELESS ESTABLISH GOOD EXTERIOR UPKEEP? AS THE CITY GOVERNMENT, ARE YOU WILLING TO INVOLVE NEIGHBORS IN THIS PROCESS? AS FUNDERS, ARE YOU WILLING TO OFFER THE PLANNING SUPPORT AND TRAINING TO MAKE THIS WORK?

Ten | What is often being said in this workbook is that people pay attention to what others are doing. However, does that really happen?

Most of us want to be good neighbors and we want to trust that our neighbors will take care of their houses so our community is stable and well maintained. We may not say it, but we do notice houses that need paint, rooftops in need of repair and vegetation that needs trimming. If we see too many of these problems, we question whether it makes sense for us to make our own investments of time, effort, and money. A patched roof instead of a replacement shows a lack of confidence. Installation of pressure-treated wood railings instead of attractive, historic porch rails makes a community look shabby. Not improving the old family house shows that the next generation doesn't think the neighborhood is a good investment.

Paying attention to these sorts of neighborhood details happens in many different ways. Of course, we see the houses next door and down the street often, so we know more about the decisions people are making. But we also learn about the larger neighborhood from our cars as we move back and forth to schools, jobs, shopping, etc. This means that much of what we know happens unconsciously as we travel 25 MPH making it easy to not take notice until we're stopped due to traffic. That's when we see the neighborhood isn't as well maintained and attractive as it once was. This has real implications when property owners consider a major repair or improvement. Should only the leaking part of the roof be fixed or should a new roof be installed? That can be a very drastic cost difference so we look at what others are doing. How about the aluminum siding? Paint on metal siding oxidizes over the years. Should the house be painted or should nothing be done since no one else is investing? Also, when we cut down an old tree, should the stump be left to rot or should it be removed and replaced by a newly planted tree?

These decisions are shaped by what we think others are doing. If we all cooperate and make good investments, then the values of all houses are stabilized. If we decide to wait to see what our neighbor does, and he waits to see what his neighbor does, then the whole neighborhood will stagnate and begin to lose value. Once we see housing prices go down, we are vindicated that we made a good decision not to invest. Of course, once values go down, the best answer is to do no more improving and the neighborhood undergoes subtle but significant disinvestment.

Can this cycle be broken? If disinvestment is already in place, are there still effective answers? As Americans, we are proud of our homes and investments. We appreciate that government requirements are relatively few compared to other major countries. We like the ability to express ourselves through our homes and investment properties. And frankly, Americans love competition and hate to think that others are doing a better job. To kick-start an investment cycle, it usually only requires an owner or a group of owners making a first investment. Fortunately, that investment doesn't have to be large. As has been noted, this can simply mean new house numbers, seasonal flags, new landscape plantings, or fresh paint on the front door. This list of small actions is extensive yet affordable.

These actions make a real difference because they show that people are making a commitment of their time and effort, even when the dollar investment is modest. Once we see others taking those steps, it makes it much

easier for us to make an even more sizable one. That builds confidence by others and the process of investment is put into play. At that point, it is also important to reach out to others to make sure they know about resources so they can participate. Can someone help an elderly owner get the gutters cleaned and reattached? Which roofer has done a great job at a reasonable price? Which city programs can help a low-income owner or a landlord improve a property? How else can the city and the neighborhood association help in the process?

We do pay attention to what is changing around us and we can influence those transformations to improve the homes and the neighborhood. But this won't occur by accident; neighbors must take the lead in managing change.

TO THE RESIDENTS: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN TERMS OF THE APPEARANCE OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? ARE THERE ACTIONS THAT YOU AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION COULD TAKE TO ENCOURAGE BETTER UPKEEP AND IMPROVE PROPERTY INVESTMENT? HOW COULD THE CITY GOVERNMENT, VOLUNTEERS, AND FUNDERS HELP IN THE PROCESS? GETTING AS MANY HOUSEHOLDS TO PARTICIPATE AS POSSIBLE MEANS THAT HOUSING VALUES WILL BE STABILIZED AND EQUITY IN YOUR HOMES WILL INCREASE. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THIS?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: HAVE YOU CONSIDERED CREATING A FUND WITH LOCAL BANKS SO THAT RELATIVELY SMALL LOANS AT LOWER INTEREST RATES COULD ENCOURAGE MORE INVESTMENT IN ALL NEIGHBORHOODS? ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL RESOURCES PROVIDED? (THIS COULD BE A RESOURCE SUCH AS PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL TECHNICAL HELP TO PROPERTY OWNERS WISHING TO GET BIDS FOR HOME IMPROVEMENT.) CAN A NONPROFIT BE ENGAGED TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN A CONTRACTOR REFERRAL SYSTEM TO HELP INEXPERIENCED HOMEOWNERS? CONFIDENCE IS THE BEDROCK FOR THE RECOVERY OF CANTON. AN ACTION TAKEN TO INCREASE CONFIDENCE IS THE BEST INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY-WIDE REVITALIZATION.

Eleven | If involvement of residents is so critical to the health of a neighborhood, how can we engage as many residents as possible in this process of change?

We live in an age of constant information. Television, email, text messages, newspaper articles, advertisements, radio announcements, and bulletins are just a few ways of getting our attention. This means that we tend to pick and choose what we pay attention to and in most cases; flyers about a neighborhood event are fairly low on the list. We know one method still works, a personal invitation. If someone calls or stops by your home to invite you to an event, you give special weight to that request. You realize someone went out of their way to ask for your presence, so in most cases you respond by trying to attend.

Therefore, the first step to engaging residents is to reach out to them as neighbors and as friends. The second step, which is equally important, is to make sure the invitation is to an event that residents want to attend. Naturally, if there is a serious neighborhood problem, many people will attend to express those concerns, but overall, people still ought to come together around everyday issues and opportunities.

It makes no difference if we are in West Park or Fairgrounds or Lathrop. The term “neighborhood meeting” doesn’t cause people to quickly add it to their calendars; whereas, the terms “picnic”, “party”, and “celebration” increase the chances people will attend. All this can happen while creating a memorable activity people will think about when describing their neighborhood. Most recently, this was successful at the “Parade of Homes” site in Summit and it can happen anywhere.

For example, at the corner of Edward Avenue NE and 19th Street NE, there are four, wide parkways that spread out in each direction. If the residents were invited to bring a folding chair, find a spot on a median, and enjoy strawberry shortcake for an evening get-together, attendance would likely be much higher than if they were asked to attend a neighborhood meeting at the nearby middle school. Once people are in attendance, minor business can be discussed, but the primary purpose is for the neighbors to meet each other and see the potential for positive community change.

This has been called the “Ice Cream Social Approach” to resident participation. It works because it targets the central goal of all neighborhood involvement efforts: building relationships among the neighbors. Too often we bring residents together to do a project or back a proposal, but we forget that none of this has real value unless the neighbors know and trust each other. You can paint houses, clean up a park, or cut back bushes, but in the long run, new paint will be needed once more, litter will reappear, and overgrowth will happen again. It is the willingness of neighbors wanting to work together that must be sustained. This happens by building solid trust and confidence among residents so they can be the long-term managers that every neighborhood needs. That is the fundamental basis of any sustainable, thriving community.

TO THE RESIDENTS: HAVE YOU OR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION FOCUSED ON BUILDING IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS AMONG YOUR NEIGHBORS? WHAT CONCRETE STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO FOCUS ON THIS CORE ISSUE?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: FOR YEARS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, CITY STAFF, NONPROFIT LEADERS, AND FUNDERS HAVE ATTENDED NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS TO HEAR CONCERNS OF THE RESIDENTS. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO INVEST SOME OF THAT TIME MEETING WITH PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT IS WORKING WELL IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND HOW THAT CAN BE EXPANDED? ARE YOU ASKING FOR THOSE OPPORTUNITIES?

Twelve | There are real problems. More needs done than just getting together, so how should we involve residents in the major issues of the neighborhood? What happens if the neighborhood association decides to focus on other topics?

Let's start with the second question first. Some very effective associations have targeted specific themes such as traffic congestion or youth problems, which is fine. Other neighborhood associations are primarily social groups. Still others have made the choice of creating long lists of issues such as sidewalks, bad rental, or overflowing dumpsters. We need to remember these points:

- ✓ It never hurts to have more ways to improve a neighborhood; this isn't a zero sum game. We all benefit from more involvement in the long run.
- ✓ It is better to see all groups – associations, churches, schools, clubs, etc. – as partners other than competitors.
- ✓ It is more effective to pay attention to what is working in the neighborhood and less attention to always trying to solve problems. No one in Canton has enough resources to solve all the problems; everyone in Canton has the ability to contribute to making it a better place.

Therefore, whether through the association, another group, or as individuals, it is best to focus on your neighborhood's strengths as the initial step to recovery. Once you have started the process of knowing the residents as neighbors and as friends, you will see that some neighbors want to do more to improve their community. When the interest begins to emerge, basic steps will need to be taken.

1. First, convene your neighbors for an honest conversation to evaluate where the neighborhood is and decide what needs to happen. Don't worry if your initial group is small; when you are effective, it will grow over time.
2. Second, determine what the residents, investors, and local businesses can do and what needs to be done by the city government, the school board, or another responsible agency or group.
3. Third, set reasonable goals. For example, it could be listed that all the sidewalks in front of the elementary school will need repairs this year and the city should remove four abandoned houses on a specific block. Or, the residents will commit to maintaining six vacant lots and will host one neighborhood-wide clean-up day. Perhaps local businesses will jointly sponsor a "kids' day" for the night before school starts, or an investor will work with the neighbors on a Saturday event to trim back all overgrown bushes as part of a safety campaign.
4. Fourth, track your progress and ask more residents and other stakeholders to join. Your camera is the best way to show the energy of the "before-during-after" that makes projects so special. Get fresh

ideas about how to solve problems. Revisit the priorities to make sure that what is being done is making the neighborhood a better place.

5. Fifth, make sure that you have as much fun as possible. Although it's stated repeatedly in this workbook, it's important to understand that awards, celebrations, and good times can be the glue in a changing neighborhood.

TO THE RESIDENTS: NO NONPROFIT OR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION OR CITY COUNCIL MEMBER CAN FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD; YOUR NEIGHBORS HAVE TO BE THE AGENTS OF CHANGE. ALL OTHER PLAYERS ARE ONLY PARTNERS, BUT AS PARTNERS YOU CAN ALL ACHIEVE MUCH MORE. HAVE YOU LISTED ALL OF YOUR PARTNERS AND HAVE YOU ENGAGED THEM IN THE REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS? HAVE YOU MADE SURE AS MANY NEIGHBORS AS POSSIBLE ARE INVOLVED AND ENCOURAGED TO STAY INVOLVED? ARE YOU USING THE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE STARK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP TRAINING?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: ARE YOU ENCOURAGING NEIGHBORS AND GROUPS TO WORK TOGETHER? ARE YOU INVOLVING OTHERS AS EQUAL PARTNERS? HAVE YOU BUILT THE RESOURCES INTO PROJECT BUDGETS TO DO THE EXTRA IMPACT ACTIVITIES AND TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE A BROAD RANGE OF RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT?

Thirteen | Some of these grand ideas are fine, but what if we just need to accomplish a specific project like a neighborhood clean up?

No one wants to hear this, but someone needs to take leadership and that usually means the person asking the question. Have you noted how often that is you? Regardless, once any one or more individuals or the neighborhood association members decide to undertake a specific project, there are a few basic steps to assure that the effort succeeds.

Make sure there is agreement. Just because you think a clean-up is the right project now, remember that others may want to do landscaping or install seasonal flags.

Decide on the real goals of the project. Remember that the primary goal usually isn't a cleaner neighborhood; rather, it's encouraging the residents to know each other and to jointly commit to a better community for the long term.

Create a plan that is realistic in terms of resources and resident capacity so the project is a guaranteed success. There is nothing so sweet as a successful project.

Be inclusive by thinking through every way that people can be involved. This can be homeowners pledging the tools in advance, seniors providing lemonade during the work, and young people committing to loading the dumpster.

Find the resources that make the job succeed, such as trash bags, rakes and shovels, yard signs to celebrate the work, and food for the picnic after the clean up.

Plan for fun since no one really wants to spend a Saturday loading a dumpster. So if you add a great barbeque, it makes the work seem less onerous.

Build in opportunities to socialize since a major part of being good neighbors requires relating to each other. Social time is a great way to build solid, productive relationships.

Make sure you leverage outcomes such as providing daffodil bulbs to all participating households, or free paint for the front doors of the houses. Since litter will reappear, it is always best to have something beautiful to distract the eye for months to come.

Tell your story to the larger community. Then, not only people in your neighborhood but also people around Canton learn that your neighborhood is taking responsibility for its upkeep and for its future.

Celebrate the success by using yard signs, banners, awards, and other branding opportunities to promote your neighborhood as a community of choice.

TO THE RESIDENTS: THIS SAME MESSAGE HAS BEEN REPEATED TIME AFTER TIME, BECAUSE IT'S IMPORTANT. DO YOU ACCEPT THE ARGUMENT THAT RESIDENTS BEING GOOD NEIGHBORS IS A MORE IMPORTANT OUTCOME THAN A CLEAN LOT? ARE YOU COMMITTED TO NOT GROUSING ABOUT LOW ATTENDANCE OR ABOUT APATHETIC NEIGHBORS? INSTEAD, ARE YOU FOCUSED ON RENEWAL THAT IS BASED ON PROACTIVE, POSITIVE ACTIONS TO RECREATE THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF THE COMMUNITY?

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: HAVE YOU LOOKED AT ALL OF YOUR PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND GRANTS TO MAKE SURE THEY ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SUCCEED, AND CELEBRATE EVERY GAIN NO MATTER HOW SMALL? DO YOU HELP THEM ACHIEVE THAT?

Fourteen | How can a neighborhood determine its priorities when it faces so many problems at once?

Because of limited resources, the weak economy, and the declining population base, there are just too many community problems for the city government to solve directly. City officials need to be clear that simply being the “squeakiest wheel” is not a reason for funding a particular project or activity. Residents should be expected to set priorities and negotiate for successful outcomes.

If neighbors want to play an important part in the recovery of Canton, they need to set achievable goals. That means determining what is and what isn't succeeding in the neighborhood. Is the image of the area a fundamental problem? How critical are changes in the real estate market and in ownership patterns? Are certain physical conditions such as sidewalks or abandoned houses the most important issues? What is the level of involvement of residents and others in revitalizing the community?

Of course, there isn't a single answer to these questions and no single action will solve all of a community's problems. However, it is critical to evaluate which problems and opportunities are more important. Once that has been determined, the residents need to have an action plan in which they state what should be done and who should be responsible. It is especially vital to determine the ways that residents can make change happen through their own efforts. If an elderly neighbor has a collapsing wooden fence, is there another neighbor who can help dismantle it? If a vacant lot is consistently littered, could local volunteers monitor the lot for a set period every year?

Such activities aren't complicated. However, when neighbors are collectively taking responsibility for certain problems, it puts them in a stronger position when asking for assistance from others, especially the city government. An active group of motivated neighbors will garner more support than a group that simply grouches about problems. This is a reasonable expectation from elected officials and city staff.

The residents, especially the active, involved neighbors, should decide what to request first. It doesn't make sense to ask for all the sidewalks to be repaired because there are simply too many that need work. Should it be the sidewalks on the most common ways to the neighborhood store or should it be the sidewalks with the most uneven surfaces? It is critical that the neighborhood residents identify the specific sites and create a list that is both limited and achievable. Desired actions need to be clear so government isn't held responsible for possible courses of action that may not meet local wants.

The same pattern should be used when considering demolitions, street repairs, or code enforcement. The residents must take responsibility to decide what is most important and then trim the list to what is achievable. Once that is done, it's fair to periodically review progress with agency and elected officials. The focus must always be on achievable goals and a willingness by residents to carry their share of the effort. Residents seeking outside support need to commit to:

- ✓ Meeting funding guidelines
- ✓ Recognizing political and fairness considerations
- ✓ Being transparent and open
- ✓ Seeking consensus among neighbors
- ✓ Negotiating partner responsibilities
- ✓ Demonstrating leveraged impact of actions
- ✓ Showing the links to realistic neighborhood outcomes
- ✓ Being timely and accountable
- ✓ Establishing clear next steps
- ✓ Creating a sustainable positive result
- ✓ Serving a larger mission in renewing Canton
- ✓ Bringing new resources to the neighborhoods

Not all of these will happen in every successful instance. Of course, all priority actions should meet all funding guidelines, be responsive to reasonable political concerns and fairness considerations, and be open and transparent. Rules should be followed, issues of balance and political realities should be dealt with, and every decision should be done fairly, openly, and with efforts to avoid favoritism. These are basic to any community work, but beyond that, there needs to be an evaluation of each of the other nine considerations when putting a plan together.

TO THE RESIDENTS: HAVE YOUR NEIGHBORS AND YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSSED REASONABLE, ACHIEVABLE PRIORITIES? IS THERE A PROCESS IN PLACE TO NEGOTIATE FOR IMPROVEMENTS AND TO CREATE BENCHMARKS TO MAKE SURE THAT WORK IS PROCEEDING AS AGREED? ARE THE NEIGHBORS KEEPING UP WITH THEIR PART OF THE BARGAIN BY BUILDING ON THE WORK DONE BY THE PARTNERS? IF YOU DON'T SET PRIORITIES AND MEET YOUR PART, OTHER PLACES WITH CLEAR PLANS AND GOOD FOLLOW-THROUGH WILL COME FIRST.

TO THE CITY LEADERS, CITY STAFF, AND FUNDERS: ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE EXTRA ATTENTION AND RESOURCES TO THOSE NEIGHBORHOODS THAT SET REALISTIC PRIORITIES? DO YOU ACCEPT THAT THIS NEGOTIATION IS TOUGH BECAUSE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE ANOTHER PLACE WITH SERIOUS PROBLEMS? DOES FUNDING HAVE TO BE TIED TO NEED OR CAN IT BE LINKED TO EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES? THE QUESTIONS SOUND SELF-EVIDENT, BUT THE PRACTICE ISN'T SO OBVIOUS.

DISCUSSION

A perspective on Successful Community Change

Even if the city government, the funders, and the nonprofits had much greater resources, conditions would be much the same. There is no free lunch; if any neighborhood wants to be part of the renewal process, the residents need to be informed, involved, and responsible. Of course, not every resident has the time or the inclination, but if no one accepts the neighborhood's share of the change, then no amount of change will make a difference.

Therefore, as organizations and individuals commit to the recovery of Canton, there are certain basic common sense concepts that should be part of instituting any workplan or funding any local endeavor. Some of these concepts are as follows:

- ✓ Effective investments build on the strengths in the neighborhoods.
- ✓ Residents need to commit to their role in order for others to commit to theirs.
- ✓ Direct involvement of residents leads to sustainable change.
- ✓ Subsidies are tools for change and are not the goal of change.
- ✓ The best investments are those that make long-term economic sense.
- ✓ Many small activities usually produce more impact than one large action.
- ✓ Resident pride is a powerful force for stability and greater housing equity.
- ✓ People tire of just criticizing and want to work together for a shared and positive outcome, so listen to the proactive voices, not just the complaints.

As residents, you need to decide if you are willing to convene your neighbors around these principles. The principles don't deal with what others haven't done or what hasn't worked in the past. Instead, the principles focus on the future. Taking this positive approach can sometimes be very hard to do, but it's the best approach to neighborhood recovery. You must act for results to happen.

As city leaders, you need to ask yourselves if you agree with these principles. If so, can you build into council meetings, time to celebrate neighborhoods or can you make this approach part of the grant process? If the neighbors are willing to step back from complaint-driven shifting of responsibility, are you willing to reward them with more tools for positive change? And can the city government do this with the current staffing? Canton has no city planner and no real city plan. Canton has a staff that works hard just to fulfill the requirements of the various funding sources and laws. Where is the person that can facilitate the type of actions recommended in this workbook? Committing to change without investing in the plans and personnel to succeed is simply avoiding the whole issue. Canton is on the edge of recovery, but that won't happen in the current format. Action is required.

As funders, you need to determine your roles in building the civic culture of Canton. The neighborhoods haven't only lost population or wealth; they have also lost social fabric. It is the interconnections and relationships that make urban life viable. Without resident engagement or neighbor-to-neighbor communication, Canton's neighborhoods will decline. Communities work only if people work together and over the long run people will do this only if there is a payoff. In this case the payoff is a thriving, prideful neighborhood. How you target your grants, your support for leadership training, and your investment in outreach initiatives will determine if this critical outcome can be achieved. Again, the response must be action.

Canton is beginning a second hundred years of dynamic change. This process will not succeed if attention is only given to addressing problems; there are too many problems and the costs of managing all of them are too high unless there is broad, proactive buy-in. This kind of broad-based community involvement is the real basis for success and it's been discussed repeatedly in this workbook and in the various neighborhood plans. It's up to everyone to decide whether or not to take this approach to community change. If there is agreement on the process, Canton can surely achieve its second miracle.

APPENDIX

Selecting Community Projects for Neighborhood Change

There are many possible community projects that are used in neighborhoods nationally that could be used in Canton. This list concentrates on only four themes: image, market, physical conditions, and neighborhood management. The list isn't exhaustive; it only illustrates possible options once a neighborhood is clear about what it wants to do and what resources are available.

Creating a More Positive Neighborhood Image

1. Neighborhood Identity Efforts and Promotion

- ✓ Selecting a neighborhood name and/or slogan
- ✓ Clarifying neighborhood boundaries and identities
- ✓ Creating an oral or written history of the neighborhood
- ✓ Developing a neighborhood logo or brochure
- ✓ Facilitating a neighborhood newsletter or communication system

2. Neighborhood Pride-Building Activities

- ✓ Clean-up campaigns
- ✓ Neighborhood or block festivals
- ✓ Potluck dinners and neighborhood social events
- ✓ Yard beautification and landscaping
- ✓ Neighborhood banners and entry signs
- ✓ Billboard campaigns

3. Exterior Enhancements and Positive Standard Setting

- ✓ Self-help initiatives for exterior improvements
- ✓ Paint grants or volunteer paint/repair programs
- ✓ Landscaping incentive loans or purchasing cooperatives
- ✓ Coordinated block projects

Re-establishing a Healthy Real Estate Market

1. Market Analysis

- ✓ Inventory of the local real estate market
- ✓ Surveys and interviews with real estate professionals, buyers, and lenders
- ✓ Reports on market trends through neighborhood stories

2. Promotion of Positive Real Estate Activity

- ✓ Open houses jointly with local agents and neighbors
- ✓ Neighborhood-sponsored workshops with real estate agents
- ✓ Referral of qualified buyers to cooperating agents
- ✓ “Bring-a-Buyer” program for open houses

3. Market Intervention Activities

- ✓ Direct problem property clean-up and marketing
- ✓ Targeted marketing of selected properties, especially high quality houses
- ✓ Great tenant referral program for conversion to homeownership
- ✓ Homebuyer welcoming initiatives

Improving the Physical Environment

1. Clean-ups and Community Improvements

- ✓ Property owner co-ops for sidewalk and driveway repairs
- ✓ Rake up, fix up, paint up programs
- ✓ Provision of a dumpster
- ✓ Installation of yard and porch lights
- ✓ Neighbor-with-neighbor problem solving on drainage, overgrowth, etc.

2. Public Space Treatments

- ✓ Improvement of existing median strips, parks, and open space
- ✓ Upgrading of public buildings, such as libraries, schools, senior centers
- ✓ Creation of flower gardens at gateways

3. Promotion of Small Scale Home Improvements

- ✓ Share-a-Tool (e.g., ladders, power washers, etc.)
- ✓ Volunteer assistance to the elderly and disabled
- ✓ Cooperative efforts on high impact projects on individual properties
- ✓ Contractor referral

Building a Neighborhood Management System

1. Block Level Activities

- ✓ Block self-help projects
- ✓ New neighbor parties
- ✓ Clean up, fix up, paint up block events
- ✓ Open houses and other events
- ✓ Block directory
- ✓ Welcome program
- ✓ Block groups (formal and informal)

2. Neighborhood-wide Initiatives

- ✓ Marketing campaigns
- ✓ Pride-building and history programs
- ✓ Neighborhood festivals
- ✓ Communications efforts (newsletters, etc.)
- ✓ Social events, welcome parties, award ceremonies, etc.
- ✓ Neighborhood associations

3. Leadership Development

- ✓ Resident management of projects
- ✓ Mentoring other blocks in project management
- ✓ Hands-on training for young people
- ✓ Public presentations