

### Case History: East Baltimore Revitalization Project

- **Describe the impacted community (population, neighborhood, general statistics, history, etc.)**

Like many cities across America, the target area, East Baltimore, has faced a dramatic decline over the past half-century as the economy shifted from the industrial age to the information age. The target community is the section of East Baltimore that is undergoing extensive redevelopment. The target community is located just north of the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions campus that includes the Schools of Public Health, Medicine, and Nursing and the Hospital. This community has a long legacy of negative relations with JH such that a much-needed collaborative partnership effort devoted to capacity building and public health is essential. The relationship has been an exceedingly stormy one. This is one of the **most** economically disadvantaged areas of the City. Due to the reduction in manufacturing plants and employment due to closings, relocation and downsizing has led to the abandonment and isolation of this urban neighborhood. Shifts in the economy and in population patterns have resulted in clusters of highly concentrated minority and low-income communities, leaving them with large inventories of abandoned residential properties with little prospect for occupancy and neighborhoods with deteriorated housing. These thousands of abandoned and derelict houses will be razed/and or gut rehabilitated. Such housing contains multiple environmental hazards, including lead based paint and dust, asbestos, rats, cockroaches, allergens and molds

Nearly two-thirds of the area's adult population has not completed high school. Relative to Baltimore City, East Baltimore has a lower mean family income (\$25,458 v. \$37,355) nearly twice as many families in poverty (32% vs. 18.8%) and higher rates of employment (15.5% vs. 9.1%); one in three families lives below the Federal poverty level. Most (98% of the population is African American. Housing vacancy rates are also high (56%). Health problems in children, including asthma (over 1700 in East Baltimore) is overwhelming. Young children under the age of five years are at high risk of lead poisoning. During the late 1990s, 30% to 50% of tested children had blood lead (PbB) elevations.

- **What are/were the problems affecting the community?**

Because of the lack of respect, the unsafe practices of demolition by the City, there was no notification whatsoever of demolition scheduled for a particular area. The major problems affecting the community were the huge number of unbelievably deteriorated housing stock and the residents keen awareness of the horrendous results of the razing of these thousands of old houses, and the emitting of pollutants, lead and toxic dust into the community's environment during and after demolition. Most residents as well as worker were also keenly aware of the blatant arrogance of the City in it efforts to make way for the revitalization of the 88-acre site, the East Baltimore Revitalization Project.

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#### • **What partnerships were formed to address the problems and challenges?**

There were an extraordinarily huge number of partnerships formed to address the problems/challenges. These included:

Community, residents;  
 Community-based Organizations,  
 Baltimore Community for Environmental Justice,  
 The Community Environmental Justice Partnership;  
 Businesses;  
 Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning,  
 Community Law Center;  
 The Clergy;  
 City Government: all departments of the City (Department of Housing and Community Development, Health Department, Planning Department, Police Department, The City Council, The Mayor, Baltimore Housing, et al.);  
 Maryland Department of the Environment;  
 Politicians: Cong. Elijah Cummings, Senator Milkulski;  
 Foundations: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Enterprise Foundation, Goldseker Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, MacArthur Foundation;  
 Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions;  
 Morgan State University,  
 Sojourner-Douglass College;  
 The Federal Government: Department of Housing and Urban Development, & the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Independent Demolition Advisory Panel.

#### • **What were the major challenges the community faced or faces in overcoming the problem?**

The major challenge the community faced in overcoming the problem was *improving the method of demolition so that it promoted and protected the health of the community residents, demolition workers, and natural resources.*

#### • **How did the community overcome the challenges? If the community wasn't able to address the challenges, what were the impacts on the project? How did the project move forward?**

The community was able to overcome the challenge, the demolition challenge, by coming together and remaining completely dedicated/committed to structuring the demolition protocols in a way to obviate the emitting of hazardous lead dust, etc., into the area. **No matter what ensued, and there were some horrendously, exceedingly mean-spirited "battles", verbal of course, even a temporary moratorium for 18 months on demolition, we persevered.**

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It is unfortunate, no matter, this is the real world; **we have on our team, a very minute group who are steeped, if I may, in railing against, railing at all of our efforts,** these are the only appropriate terms I am able to grab onto in describing their behavior, throughout the entire five years of this \$1.5 billion worthy endeavor; at any rate, we stayed the course, and, somehow, **the project moves on, methodically.**

Again: It continues to move on methodically. To move more deeper into our determination to do “what is proper and correct, and humane” if you will, we pulled together an Independent Advisory Panel – experts – to assist us in enhancing **the practice of safe and respectful demolition. These protocols were analyzed, tested, and approved by the Panel. The Panel came periodically, to the community and answered our questions, between testings and analyzing of the lead dust accumulation at our various pilot sites.**

**To reiterate: “The Independent Advisory Panel was convened due to a need by the City and EBDI,” all the partners and stakeholders,” for protocol review so that the health of the residents of the neighborhood being demolished could be safeguarded.”** This effort, incidentally, was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation. (From the Executive Summary of the Independent Advisory Panel Report on EBDI Enhanced Protocols and Demolition Activities – December 20, 2005)

#### • **What tools or methods did the community use that is transferable to other communities facing similar issues?**

Tools or methods: Tenacity. Determination. Listening.

If a question could not be answered at a meeting, the residents were assured they would get an answer at the next meeting. They, did indeed, get the answer at the next meeting. If the results sounded foreign to residents, a panelist would break down the results into examples in everyday language. The panel’s leader, Dr. Janet Phoenix, Chair, Coalition for Environmentally Safe Communities, assured the residents, if there was a need to be in touch with her at anytime to feel free to ring her, directly.

**A Side Bar, please:** In our determination to make the urban renewal experience less painful, if you will, **we all listened to each other.** This is to say: We, the residents listened to those implementing the bold undertaking, EBDI, AECF, the Independent Panel, et al. They, those in charge of the project, EBDI, AECF, JHMI, et al..., listened to us, the residents. All of this was incorporated into the plans and as a result, the EBRP is moving on methodically, with grand new approaches to urban renewal; offerings of benefits to residents being relocated that have never been done in the history of urban renewal, to homeowners as well as renters.

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We have been asked by our coordinators of this conference, EJ/AIR, to keep our formats for our presentations to a certain limit, therefore, I am unable to give you the entire list of benefits and services passed on to residents. I speak to this with such depth because, all my adult life I have involved myself in learning everything possible about urban renewal. Reading books by different folk from academia and other disciplines on urban renewal, in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and a host of other cities.

Now, I am experiencing the phenomenon, right here in my community. Now, I have taken on the task of writing about urban renewal from a residents' point of view in my East Baltimore, chronicling this experience in a book. What we are doing here in my corner of East Baltimore, in my opinion, in my research, has never been doing before, I reiterate, in urban renewal.

**The tools or methods, again, are Tenacity, Determination, and most especially, Listening to each other.**

- **What were the major successes in the eyes of the community?**

The major successes in the eyes of the community were:

1) The most important one, to me: (This was also taken from the December 20, 2005, Panel's Executive Summary:) "While the committee could offer no guarantees to residents that they would be safe, they expressed their confidence that the protocol was thoughtfully and carefully constructed and therefore was likely to be far more protective of human health than standard demolition practices."

2) **Because our protocol is a living document, EBDI (East Baltimore Development Inc., the non-profit charged with the planning and implementation of the massive, bold undertaking) reserves the right to adjust the protocols and practices where warranted. Phases 2 and 3 are next.**

**Finally, this is straight from my heart as a resident: Due to the fact I am an EJ Commissioner, there are 15 of us from around the City and State, on the Governors EJ Commission, we are attempting to have our Demolition Protocols legislated, which, will, enable their use citywide, statewide, hopefully nationally, and beyond.**

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