Community Development Partnership Network
April, 2003

Building a New Framework for Community Development in Weak-Market Cities

by Paul C. Brophy and Kim Burnett

Download Full Report
(PDF -131KB)

Executive Summary

While the decade of the 1990s was a good one for most American cities, recovering health was not a uniform phenomenon among American cities or within them. Fifty-five percent of cities over 100,000 lost population, had no-growth, or experienced modest-population growth. Even in cities that experienced growth, the bulk of the growth was in neighborhoods on the edge of cities, with most cities seeing population losses in their core neighborhoods.

This group of cities—those that are losing population, those marginally growing, and those that have declining cores are “weak market cities.” Weak market cities face challenges that are quite different from cities experiencing significant population growth. For weak market cities the primary threat is continuing population loss and stagnant economies.

For those living in weak market locations -- many of whom are low and moderate-income households— continuing population decline has a very real impact on their ability to retain and build personal wealth and to access public services and amenities that improve their quality of life. To help individuals and families in poverty or at near poverty levels accumulate wealth and build assets, community development strategies in weak market cities must:

- **strengthen the existing markets**
  to make these areas more competitive
  as places to live, work, and invest

Related Links

Neighborhood Progress, Inc.
Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative
Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative
Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development
The Reinvestment Fund
Rally for the Region
Healthy Neighborhoods
16:62 Design Zone
Live Baltimore Home Center
Central Philly Development Corp.
Cleveland Land Bank
Neighborhood Transformation Initiative
Project 5000
Homeownership Choice
Cool Space Locator
Vital Signs Project

as places to live, work, and invest,

- **stimulate private market forces** to bring people and capital into these areas in order to create mixed-income communities of choice, and

- **promote equity** by ensuring that residents have the capacity to act as full partners in guiding investment in their neighborhoods.

This paper describes a more comprehensive, equitable, and market-oriented framework for community development in weak market cities has traditionally been pursued. Based on the examination of work underway in four weak market cities, the analysis lays out a system, along with a set of policies and strategies, that is stimulating markets while ensuring equity by focusing on the needs of low and moderate income households and small businesses. This system includes: taking a partnership approach, using sophisticated market analysis, making regional connections, targeting neighborhood planning, marketing neighborhoods, aggressive land assembly, more diverse housing development/ rehab tools, economic development, and procedures that measure impact.

While the system outlined here provides a powerful new context for shaping community development practice, these efforts have succeeded despite a policy and program environment that often fails to recognize the particular goals and needs of these weak market places. Shifts in policies and approaches at the national, state, and local levels would make it easier for these weak market cities and others like them to achieve their goals. The authors identify key components of a weak market policy framework, including: building a belief system for weak market cities, working at a scale that can achieve impact, forming new coalitions, repositioning key stakeholders, and developing the right policy and program tools to aid weak markets.

Sponsors:

CDPN thanks The Surdna Foundation, The Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative, Neighborhood Progress, Inc., The Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative, and The Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development for their support of this project.