Identifying and Targeting Neighborhoods For Revitalization

DRAFT

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Throughout the history of urban planning since World War II, planners have been confronted by the need to identify and target neighborhoods for special treatments and interventions. This has been true regardless of whether planners were operating in the context of the Federal urban renewal, community action, Model Cities, or Community Development Block Grant programs, each of which required some form of neighborhood targeting, or within the context of general land use planning in which appropriate land use designations must be developed for a diverse set of city, suburban, or small town neighborhoods. At both the national and local levels, planners have recognized that the relative lack of resources to address neighborhood issues and problems has required the development of sound approaches to neighborhood identification and targeting. Quite simply, with relatively few resources, planners have to be very selective in how they allocate resources to the neighborhoods in their cities. Moreover, neighborhoods have varying needs and problems and therefore planners must take care to identify and target neighborhoods with policies and programs that are appropriate to the specific issues confronting each neighborhood.

Consistent with these persistent imperatives, this paper's purpose is to help planners think about ways they can refine their procedures for identifying and targeting neighborhoods with appropriate policies and programs. Fundamentally, planners have used two approaches to identifying and targeting neighborhoods. This paper builds upon these approaches and identifies specific indicators that planners can use to identify and target neighborhoods for revitalization initiatives.

APPROACHES TO NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTIFICATION AND TARGETING

Planners have generally used two methods for guiding the targeting of neighborhoods. The first is the needs-based approach in which planners identify neighborhoods with specific needs, such as deteriorated housing, and then target appropriate policies and programs, such as concentrated code enforcement policies or housing rehabilitation programs, at such neighborhoods. This approach is clearly based on the concept that neighborhoods with specific needs should receive treatments that address those needs.

Planners have also taken a revitalization-potential approach to identifying and targeting neighborhoods in which they identify neighborhoods that may have certain needs, but also have the potential for revitalization. This technique was utilized as early as the Federal urban renewal program (Frieden and Sagalyn 1989) and entails the identification and targeting of neighborhoods

which are blighted, but also have development potential. This approach is based on the concept that while resources should be targeted to needy neighborhoods, that if planning was to be successful in stimulating the economic revitalization of certain neighborhoods, then planners must select those needy neighborhoods which have the greatest potential for revitalization.

Planners should recognize that these two approaches are only partly compatible with each other. Although the revitalization-potential approach focuses on both need and the potential for revitalization, its application can result in resources being shifted away from neighborhoods with significant needs, but with less apparent potential for revitalization than is found in other neighborhoods. This has obvious equity implications.

For example, planners in Birmingham, Alabama in the late 1970s attempted to concentrate that city's Community Development Block Grant resources in neighborhoods with greater potential for revitalization. In its complaint against this action, a citizens group charged that the City of Birmingham had relegated 32 of the city's neediest neighborhoods to the "...lowest priority for community development resources..", a decision which "smacks of 'triage', a policy of writing off the poorest neighborhoods as unsalvageable [*sic*] (Citizen Complaint 1979)." Elsewhere, the triage approach to targeting neighborhoods for public investment was criticized not only for its equity implications, but also for its "hidden agenda" of using neglect to encourage the depopulation of neighborhoods so that they can be redeveloped eventually for other uses (Weiler 1983, 173).

The chief weakness of the revitalization-potential approach to identifying and targeting neighborhoods is that it has the potential for ignoring the ability of some neighborhoods, even neighborhoods with significant economic, physical, and social needs, to regroup themselves and assemble resources, both from in and outside of the neighborhood, to combat the forces of urban decline and to initiate an effective process of neighborhood revitalization. This is particularly so when neighborhood analysis concentrates its attention on real estate-based indicators of economic potential and ignores the social and organizational fabric of the neighborhood.

A recent case study highlights the implications of planners failing to recognize a neighborhood's social and organizational fabric. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a neighborhood organization operating in the economically depressed Dudley Street neighborhood just two miles south of downtown Boston. As detailed in *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Medoff and Sklar 1994), the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) had effectively concluded that portions of the Dudley Street neighborhood were not salvageable and in the mid-1980's put forth a $750 million new town strategy that would radically transform the neighborhood with new commercial, light manufacturing, and mixed-income residential development (Medoff and Sklar 1994, 50). In a 1979 report, the BRA had also said that the Dudley Street neighborhood's problems were in attributable, in part, to the apathy that pervaded the neighborhood (Medoff and Sklar 1994, 35).

As it turned out, the Boston Redevelopment Authority had read the neighborhood entirely wrong. Beginning in the mid-1980s, various leaders and organizations within the neighborhood came forth to organize the Dudley Street neighborhood residents to take action on the neighborhood's problems, to challenge the City of Boston's government to take on more responsibility for cleaning up the many trash-ridden vacant lots in the neighborhood, and to build effective alliances with Boston's Mayor Raymond Flynn and with several foundations, all of which enabled the neighborhood to develop its own neighborhood plan and begin the process of redeveloping the neighborhood to meet the needs of its existing residents.

The general lesson to be learned from the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative is that neighborhood identification and targeting requires planners to do more than look at various measures of physical, economic, and social need and to do more than simply look at whether a neighborhood is potentially attractive to private economic investment. Planners must also look at what Roland Warren has called a neighborhood's horizontal and vertical ties (Warren 1963). A neighborhood's horizontal ties reflect the strength of social networks and the overall social fabric within a neighborhood: how strong are the personal ties between people living in a neighborhood, how strongly do residents feel attached to their neighborhood. A neighborhood's vertical ties reflect the relationship that neighborhood has with outside entities: government, banks, industry, realtors, residents of other neighborhoods, foundations. In the Dudley Street neighborhood case, residents with a strong commitment to staying in the neighborhood had emerged as effective leaders in the community and were successful in attracting key support from both city government and several foundations.

In their model of neighborhood change, Temkin and Rohe (1996) have made a similar argument and have posited that a neighborhood's social fabric and relations with outside institutions help determine the degree to which a neighborhood responds negatively or positively to the various outside economic, social, and political forces that influence a neighborhood's well-being. Their view is consistent with the community organizing case studies that have shown how poor neighborhoods have been able, with significant social networks and the help of outside resources, to stem the tide of urban decline (Slayton 1986; Rohe and Mouw 1991; Rooney, 1994; Medoff and Sklar 1994).

IMPLICATIONS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTIFICATION AND TARGETING

Information Needed for Neighborhood Identification

Not surprisingly, the process of neighborhood identification and targeting first requires the identification of neighborhoods. Consistent with the belief that neighborhood identification and targeting should be sensitive to the social fabric of neighborhoods, it is imperative that planners work with neighborhood residents to delineate neighborhood names and boundaries that conform with those utilized by neighborhood residents and organizations. After all, if planners are to build

upon neighborhood social fabrics, they need to use neighborhood names and boundaries that reflect those fabrics.

Unfortunately, planners don't always define neighborhoods in the same ways as the residents. In 1974 in Birmingham, Alabama, when community development planners were preparing a new neighborhood-based citizen participation plan, they recognized that planning department neighborhood names and boundaries frequently did not correspond to the names and boundaries utilized by the city's residents. In order to gain wider acceptance for their citizen participation proposal, therefore, that city's planners worked closely with residents and neighborhood organizations to delineate the city's neighborhoods (Connerly and Wilson, forthcoming). Similar procedures were used to map the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh in the Pittsburgh Neighborhood Atlas project (Ahlbrandt 1984). Moreover, through the U.S. Census Bureau's User Defined Areas Program, cities, for a fee, can obtain census data that are broken down by locally adopted neighborhood boundaries, as well as by census tracts (Sawicki and Flynn 1996). Census data, therefore, can be adapted to locally-defined neighborhood boundaries.

Information Needed for Neighborhood Targeting

Table 1 displays the information that is needed in most instances to target neighborhoods for revitalization initiatives. In examining neighborhood needs, planners generally look at five dimensions of neighborhood need: 1) physical and environmental conditions, 2) accessibility to public and private services and facilities, 3) quality of local public services and facilities, 4) social conditions, and 5) economic conditions (Connerly and Marans 1988, Sawicki and Flynn 1996. These dimensions and their indicators and sources are shown in Table 1 and briefly described below.

Physical and Environmental Conditions. The dimension represents what are often the most visible characteristics of a neighborhood's quality of life and are frequently manipulable by physical planning and design. Attention is focused on building condition as reflected by actual field or windshield surveys, as well as by market value and incidence of code violations. Transportation infrastructure is extremely important in a neighborhood, especially since traffic intrusion can dramatically affect the quality of life if traffic is heavy and noisy. The environment between the buildings and the streets can also have a significant impact on neighborhood quality, whether it be in the form of vacant lots, toxic waste sites, air pollution, or water pollution. Finally, special problems, including, but not necessarily limited to arson or poor drainage, can have a significant impact on neighborhood quality.

Accessibility to Public and Private Services and Facilities. Although we have become an automobile-dependent society, the mobility attendant with the automobile is not equally distributed. The poor, the elderly, and children are especially dependent on being able to walk or take public transit to shopping, schools, parks, and libraries. Even for those who have access to an automobile, we are well aware of the pollution and congestion costs associated with

automobile dependency. Finally, the doctrine of neotraditional design encourages planners to enhance the accessibility of residential neighborhoods to private and public facilities.

Quality of Local Public Services and Facilities. Clearly, the quality of local public services and facilities can have a significant impact on neighborhood quality. Hatry *et al*. (1977) provide a comprehensive guide to evaluating public services, incorporating both resident surveys and objective indicators such as park usage rates. Because each public service has its own performance measures, planners should consult Hatry for detailed ideas on how to measure the quality of specific public services. Because residents are the primary client for most public services, it is common for city governments to directly ask residents, through surveys or focus groups, to comment on the quality of public services in their neighborhood. Connerly and Marans (1988) provide an overview on using surveys in obtaining resident opinions on neighborhood quality. Their work can be used as a supplement to general texts on survey research, such as Babbie (1995) or Salant and Dillman (1994), while Krueger (1994) provides a useful guide for conducting focus groups.

Social Environment. Indicators of a neighborhood's social environment are useful for both identifying neighborhood needs as well as identifying the horizontal and vertical ties discussed earlier that indicate a neighborhood's capacity for addressing its problems. Population data from the U.S. Census are critical for understanding changes in the number and type of people living in the neighborhood. Dowell Myers's *Analysis with Local Census Data: Portraits of Change* (1992) provides a comprehensive guide to neighborhood population change analysis.

Other neighborhood needs are reflected by data on crime, including crimes committed against people, property, as well as behavioral crimes, such as drug use and dealing and prostitution, and data on child abuse and homelessness.

At the same time, planners can use resident surveys, focus groups, and key informants, such as leaders from the neighborhood, as well as government, private, and foundation leaders, to better understand the horizontal ties within the neighborhood and the neighborhood's vertical ties to various outside resources. Ahlbrandt's (1984) Pittsburgh study provides an excellent guide to the application of survey research to obtaining data on social ties in neighborhoods throughout a city. Too often, however, planners lack the resources to implement a comprehensive neighborhood social survey or to interview people outside the neighborhood about a neighborhood's organizational capacity. A grant incentive program can provide planners with an efficient alternative for identifying those neighborhoods that exhibit the horizontal and vertical ties that best enable them to organize for community improvement. By creating a program of neighborhood grants, in which neighborhoods compete with each other, cities are able to use the application process itself to help determine which neighborhoods have the greatest capacity to organize for change.

In implementing such competitions, planners should attempt to make sure that neighborhoods have equal access to community organizing resources. As the Dudley Street neighborhood example illustrates, neighborhoods can appear to be poorly organized and apathetic, but may nevertheless have the latent resources needed to organize for a better neighborhood. To enable such neighborhoods to blossom, cities such as Birmingham, Alabama; Dayton, Ohio; Portland, Oregon; and St. Paul, Minnesota have adopted city-wide neighborhood-based citizen participation programs in which city government resource officers provide technical assistance to neighborhood organizations throughout the city (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993). In these four cities, each neighborhood has an association with elected officers. City government staff work in various ways with these organizations to help them meet varying neighborhood needs.

Economic Conditions. Finally, a neighborhood's economic conditions can reflect its needs as well as its economic potential for revitalization. While data on income, homeownership rate, housing cost burden (usually measured by whether housing costs exceed 30 percent of gross income), property tax delinquencies, public assistance, and assisted housing can provide useful measures of need, they also provide significant indicators, especially when measured over time, of economic change and therefore the potential for future economic change. Building permit and market value data, in particular, are of use in reflecting economic change because such data are reported more frequently than Census data and can therefore give planners a more up-to-date reading of what economic changes might be occurring.

In general, planners will benefit greatly from attempting to collect the information displayed in Table 1 over time. Data collection in planning can often be episodic, done in response to special needs or one-time planning requirements. This frequently results in a snap-shot approach to looking at neighborhood needs, however, and no attempt is made to compare the current situation to the past. The advent of geographic information systems is providing a healthy response to this problem, however, has cities are now more likely to have city-wide data systems that enable them to periodically update geographic-based data, including data on neighborhood needs.

CONCLUSION

As discussed above, there is a potential tension between needs-based and revitalization-potential approaches to neighborhood identification and targeting. The information sources displayed in Table 1 are presented in the belief that while both approaches are vital to neighborhood planning, the tension that lies between them needs to be at least softened by efforts to fully appreciate the social environment of the neighborhood, particularly its horizontal and vertical ties, which indicate the potential for organizing for neighborhood change. Planners can better appreciate the strengths of neighborhoods by taking the time to meet with their residents and leaders. While neighborhood grant incentive programs are useful for structuring a process by

which the best organized neighborhoods emerge, it is also imperative that planners see that all neighborhoods have equal access to the resources they may need for organizing themselves.

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Table 1. Neighborhood Need Data: Dimensions, Indicators, and Sources

Dimensions	Indicators	Sources
Physical and Environmental Conditions	Housing and Building Conditions	Field Surveys
	Market Values	Appraisal Data
	Code Violations	Building Department Data
	Traffic and Street Conditions	
	Traffic Counts	Traffic Surveys
	Noise	Noise Surveys
	Safety	Accident Reports
	Lighting	Field Surveys
	Pavement Conditions	Field Surveys
	Other Neighborhood Conditions	
	Yard and Vacant Lot Upkeep	Field Surveys
	Abandoned Houses	Field Surveys
	Toxic Waste Sites	Environmental Agency Data
	Air/Water Pollution	Environmental Agency Data
	Arson	Fire Department Data
	Lead Paint	Public Health Department Data
	Drainage	Flood Plain Maps, Direct Observation, Resident Opinion
Accessibility to Public and Private Services and Facilities	Percentage of Population Located Near Shopping, Schools, Parks, Libraries, Public Transit	Census Data, Maps, Geographic Information Systems
Quality of Local Public Services and Facilities	Recreation	Resident Opinion, Usage Rates
	Schools	Student Performance
	Police	Resident Opinion, Crimes/Arrests
	Fire	Resident Opinion, Cost of Fire
	Solid Waste Disposal	Resident Opinion
	Neighborhood Libraries	Resident Opinion, Number of Books
	Public Transit	Resident Opinion, Frequency of Service

Table 1. Neighborhood Need Data: Dimensions, Indicators, and Sources (continued)

Social Environment	Population Structure and Change	U.S. Census
	Physical and Property Crime	Police Crime Data
	Behavioral Crime	Arrests for Drugs, Prostitution
	Juvenile Crime	Juvenile Arrest Data
	Child Abuse/Neglect	Police, Social Services Data
	Homelessness	Homeless Surveys and Counts
	Neighborhood Social Relations	Resident Opinion
	Number, Type, and Capacity of Community Organizations	Key Informants
Economic Conditions	Household Income	U.S. Census
	Homeownership Rate	U.S. Census, Property Tax Data
	Market Values	Appraisal Data
	Building Permits	Building Department Data
	Housing Cost/Income Ratios	U.S. Census
	Overcrowding	U.S. Census
	Property Tax Delinquencies	Property Tax Data
	Residents on Public Assistance	Public Assistance Agencies
	Number of Assisted Housing Units	Public Housing Authorities, Other Housing Agencies