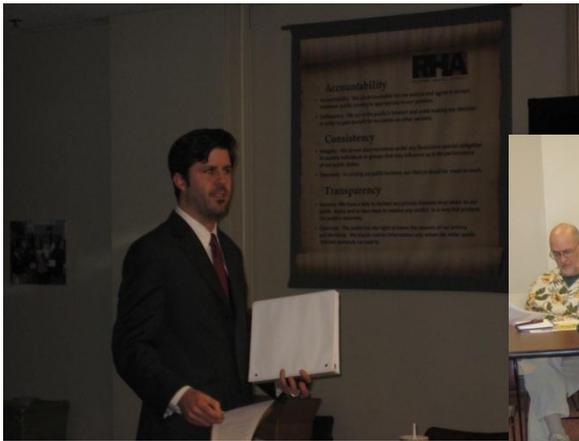


## Rockford Choice Neighborhoods Task Force Meeting Summary – May 17, 2012

### Task Force Meeting, Rockford Housing Authority Offices

*Purpose:* Recap the issues and project ideas identified during the prior Task Force and Community Meetings, introduce the planning framework for physical improvements, and discuss the preliminary strategic initiatives that have emerged from the previous discussions.



Meeting opened by Ron Clewer. Presentation by Adam Rosa and discussion by Task Force members.

- Presentation by Adam Rosa, Senior Associate, Camiros who provided an overview of input received from a survey of Fairgrounds Valley residents, key data book findings and project ideas generated at previous meetings.
- The project ideas generated to date were organized in five categories: 1) business and services, 2) capacity building, 3) youth engagement, 4) breaking down barriers and 5) physical improvements.
- An analysis of the existing land use and transportation network led to the development of an initial planning framework plan that organizes the neighborhood into a series of neighborhood subareas, commercial nodes, green corridors and development opportunity areas.
- Key elements of the planning framework include: 1) the West State Street Corridor, 2) the green network (including planned West State Street Corridor parks, Fairgrounds Park, Kent Creek, Water Works Park, and open space associated with Ellis Arts Academy and Lewis Lemon School, 3) neighborhood commercial centers, 4) infill redevelopment areas, 5) anchor blocks for preservation, and 6) blocks with development potential.
- The initial list of strategic initiatives included: 1) focus on youth, 2) safe, healthy neighborhood, 3) physical environment, 4) neighborhood income and jobs (resource development), and 5) community engagement/capacity building.

## Discussion:

Does the proposed planning framework seem reasonable?

- The Task Force felt that the overall planning framework made sense. There was some discussion about the subareas colored “orange.” It was clarified that the future land use could be commercial, residential or a combination.
- There are environmental issues with the vacant land along Avon, south of State Street. ComEd, which owns the property, is undertaking remediation; consequently, the most appropriate short term use may be open space.
- Henrietta School has been a Head Start site, which may be relocated in the fall. Ideas for repurposing this building for other educational purposes such as a job corps site were suggested.
- Consider viewing the industrial corridor on the south side of Preston Street (which includes the City Yards, some operating industrial uses, and vacant industrial buildings) as a training corridor; look for opportunities to convert vacant buildings into business incubators.
- Rock Valley College has a business incubator.
- Need to find a productive use for the boarded up Church School building.
- The design vision for the West State Street Corridor linear park is to keep people moving along the pathway system. Landscaped gateways, public art and signage are envisioned, but not picnic tables and other amenities that would encourage passive or longer term use of the open space.
- The Johnston/State Street commercial node identified on the framework plan would need to be rezoned for commercial development.
- The community use campus suggested by Banner of Truth is in conflict with the current West State Street Corridor Plan.

What is missing from the initial strategy list? What should be included under the initial list of strategic initiatives?

- Education should be listed as a separate strategic initiative, rather being incorporated into the “focus on youth” and “neighborhood income and jobs” strategies. Besides the focus on youth, there is a significant need to provide pre-GED education for adults so that they can access GED and job training programs.
- Work with major local employers.
- Recycle minds and communities.
- Include a stronger emphasis on bringing healthy food to the Ellis Heights neighborhood.
- Preventive services focused on ex-offenders to reduce repeat criminal behavior are needed.
- Connect people from the neighborhood with improving and maintaining the neighborhood.
- Need to create a climate where people are able to share and participate in articulating needs and securing basic services; motivate people to care.

**Next Steps:** Task Force was asked to suggest ways to broaden the community outreach in advance of the Community Visioning Session.

- Need to involve owners of rental property in the planning process; try to work through the Rockford Apartment Association.
- Need to do a better job of engaging RHA residents to increase participation. Consider scheduling meetings at the Fairgrounds community center and requiring meeting attendance; be more proactive in personally inviting people to community meetings.
- Create a climate for youth participation; in order to involve neighborhood youth, consider engaging the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council and church youth groups; youth outreach should also include personal invitations.

- Rock Valley College can help get information out into the neighborhood concerning the Community Visioning Session to participants in its GED and pre-GED classes.
- **Community Visioning Session:** June 26, 2012 – Resource Fair 5:30 – 6:30 PM  
Visioning Meeting 6:30 – 8:30 PM
- **Next Task Force Meeting:** June 27, 2012 at 9:00 – 10:30 AM