

# **DRAFT**

## **Avondale Neighborhoods of Choice Strategy**

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### **Introduction**

Avondale was selected to participate in the Neighborhood's of Choice program in the Spring of 2004 from a pool of seven applicants. The Community Building Institute, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) developed a training and follow-up implementation assistance program around Neighborhood's of Choice, a concept being taught and refined by the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and its trainers Mike Schubert and Marcia Nedland.

Over the course of the last six months the Avondale Neighborhood's of Choice group (ANOC) has been meeting, walking, talking, interviewing and strategizing on how to apply the model to a portion of Avondale surrounding Rockdale Academy. One of the basic theme's of the ANOC proposal was that Rockdale Academy, one of the first schools to be rebuilt as a community learning center in the Cincinnati Public School district, should be the centerpiece of a revitalization in this part of Avondale.

### **Study Area**

The target area of the ANOC team has been the area of the neighborhood bounded by Forest Avenue on the north, Dury Avenue and the Zoo on the west, Erkenbrecher Avenue and Children's Medical Center on the south and Reading Road (but not including the Reading Road frontage) on the east. This area includes the Brunet Avenue business district at its center, and a wide variety of housing types. It also and very intentionally includes Rockdale Academy as a central community institution in this part of the neighborhood.

### **Overview of the Neighborhoods of Choice Approach**

Neighborhoods of Choice are places where "it makes economic sense for people to invest their time, money, and energy. They are also places where neighbors manage change successfully." This definition of healthy neighborhoods is at the heart of the neighborhoods of choice approach to community revitalization. It suggests that for communities to succeed they must be the kind of places where people choose to live. They have to be places where people are proud to tell their family and friends they live, where they believe their investment in housing will grow in value, and where they are comfortable enough with their neighbors to participate in community activities.

There is also an assumption that no amount of public investment can create a neighborhood of choice. If the people who live in a neighborhood are not taking care of their properties, if new residents are not moving into the neighborhood when older residents leave, and if people are not participating in the life of the community, no amount of public investment will save a place.

Neighborhoods of last resort are places people live because they feel they have no options. They do not generate confidence from the market, neighbors often do not know or trust one another and these places usually have reputations that make people with choices choose other places. Neighborhoods of Choice are not all wealthy neighborhoods, nor are all low-income neighborhoods places of last resort. There are lots of examples in the Cincinnati area of neighborhoods of modest housing where people love their communities and new people choose them. Likewise there are neighborhoods in this region that started as traditional suburban or middle-class neighborhoods that for many reasons are not places people want to be, or places where new home buyers are looking.

## **Elements of Change**

So how does a neighborhood become a Neighborhood of Choice, and how does a community transform a neighborhood into the next “up and coming neighborhood”, a Neighborhood of Choice? You focus work, outcomes, and strategies on four areas of concern or four levers of change:

- \*Market**
- \*Physical Conditions**
- \*Image**
- \*Neighborhood Management**

The discipline of the approach suggests that you must be working in all four of these areas to make meaningful change in communities that have suffered disinvestment and deteriorated quality of life. A brief definition of each area follows. Each is a direct excerpts from the training material used by the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation. The remainder of the report is built around these four areas.

### **Market**

The residential and commercial real estate market will reflect this confidence. The neighborhood will make economic sense for key investors - homebuyers, homeowners, landlords, business and government – because property values will be steadily increasing. This will enable homeowners, homebuyers and landlords to carry out improvements and build assets. It will enable businesses to remain or locate in an improving neighborhood, and it will enable government to see the property value base stabilize. At the same time, the neighborhood will offer housing options for, and be attractive to, a variety of income groups. It will help neighbors who want to, stay and benefit from revitalization.

## **Physical Conditions**

Physical conditions, whether residential or business, will reflect pride of ownership and a high standard of maintenance. Public infrastructure will be maintained and improved to a standard similar to neighborhoods currently viewed as better.

## **Image**

The neighborhood will have a positive image that attracts investment – from homebuyers, homeowners, business, and government. People will be confident in the future of the neighborhood.

## **Neighborhood Management**

Collective action by residents, institutions, and businesses will ensure neighborhood will compete well with other neighborhoods for resources. Residents will have the capacity to manage the day-to-day activities on their blocks. Neighbors will feel comfortable being “neighborly” – looking out for each other, getting together to work on problems, taking action to reinforce positive standards and actions, etc. Neighbors will feel safe in the neighborhood.

## **Elements of the Process**

The approach presents a process to work through the various elements of change for a neighborhood. Taking a critical look at your community from a homebuyer’s perspective to determine “What’s Working and What’s Not” is the first step. Identifying realistic outcomes and determining measures of success is the second step. Identifying the strategies that will move you to the stated outcomes is the third step. Identifying the capacity of your organization to implement is the fourth step. Implementation and ongoing monitoring are critical.

### **Walking Tour (What’s Working and What’s not Working)**

During a neighborhood walking tour the community looked critically at their neighborhood with the eyes of a potential homebuyer to see what they might see and to determine how they might respond to Avondale, why or why wouldn’t they choose this neighborhood? These findings are presented for each of the four change elements in the report. Residents noted what was working in their favor, and what wasn’t working. Those results are presented in tables for each element.

### **Outcomes and Measures**

As communities work on revitalization efforts it is easy to get sidetracked by the latest funding program offered by the City or an unrelated but great idea from a participant, or a well publicized crime event. Creating clear well articulated outcomes are the best way to keep an effort on track. In each of the four change areas the group has created a set of realistic, stretch, but achievable outcomes, and ways to measure them.

### Strategies for Change

The work group created a set of strategies for each of the change areas that were based on the findings from the walking tour and the stated outcomes. In each area there is a priority strategy and a number of additional strategies. All are designed to move the community forward. Some are initiatives that have already begun. Others will become ongoing efforts that the community will have to commit to for the long-term.

### Capacity for Change

The final section in each area is an assessment of how ready the community is to accomplish the stated outcomes. In many cases we have identified capacity enhancements that will be needed if the community is to successfully implement change.

## The Avondale Neighborhoods of Choice Strategy

### Market

<b>What's Working</b>	<b>What's Not Working</b>
Get a lot for your money – good residential value Location (central to the zoo, hospitals, downtown) Evidence of renovations Evidence that the market can support higher sales prices Potential demand for housing from area employees and institutions Money available for subsidized housing (good and bad) Homeownership maintains family wealth Transitioning and inheritance of real estate (good and bad)	Poor image affects market value No competition in the market Short sale dynamic Greater and lesser neighborhoods (Avondale and North Avondale) Money available for subsidized housing (good and bad) Lots of vacant housing Too much debt on properties Properties stay on the market a long time Transitioning and inheritance of real estate (good and bad) Financial management 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation not “vested” in Avondale

### Market – Outcomes and Measures

- \*Burnet Avenue Business District will attract new neighborhood-serving businesses
- \*60% of Real Estate Closings will go to Owner Occupants within 18 months
- \*The number of investors purchasing foreclosure property will be down by 25%
- \*Ten listings above \$70,000 on an annual basis

## Market - Strategies

Create a market intervention strategy that gets properties out of the hands of unscrupulous investors and into community hands, this should be done in conjunction with LISC and the Uptown Task Force

- Identify properties to buy and hold

- Create packages of properties for redevelopment

- Create purchase rehab lending products to attract target market

Expand new housing in Avondale with Ca-Josh

Create a marketing campaign targeted at middle-class African-American families

- Conduct market group interviews with target market representatives

- Develop a message

- Target Children's the Zoo, Rockdale and other area employers as prime market

- Create a detailed marketing plan for this part of Avondale

Promote homeownership training to area parents of Rockdale students

Provide bonuses to realtors who convert homes back to owner-occupied

## Physical Conditions

<b>What's Working</b>	<b>What's not Working</b>
Solid community standards Mature landscaping and greenspace Solid rental units that are well-maintained Beautiful architectural features Stained glass Crests Landscaping and yard treatments Big buildings Evidence of successful mixed uses Strong historic African-American culture "The houses attract you but the neighborhood keeps you." Rick Hardy	Trash is everywhere Vacant lots have trash Lots of houses are in poor condition Lots of overgrown landscaping and dead trees Vacant buildings Streets and sidewalks in poor shape Churches need work Burnet Avenue looks bad Lots of trash on Burnet Avenue People don't live up to standards for property maintenance

## **Physical Conditions – Outcomes and Measures**

- \*Burnet Avenue Business District will be free of litter and trash
- \*100 % of vacant lots will be maintained by the end of the summer of 2005
- \*Renovate 10 buildings in a way that creates more functional living spaces
- \*50% of buildings in the area meet neighborhood standards by June of 2006
- \*50% of yards maintained to an neighborhood standards by August 2005

## **Physical Conditions – Strategies**

Implement door to door improvement assistance program

- Target homes with most problems

- Make personal contact to assist homeowners

- Market loan products tailored to existing property owners maintenance needs

- Create discount incentives for lighting, fencing and landscaping improvements

Create a property acquisition program to get the worst houses into community hands  
(consistent with the market intervention strategy stated above)

Target rental rehabilitation program to worst structures on good blocks

Create a set of neighborhood standards

Hold porch-a-rama

Establish “make a difference teams” with CPOP for monthly clean-up events

- Focus on Burnet Avenue

- Focus on the vacant lots in the target area

# Image

What's Working	What's not Working
<p>Good landscaping            Architectural details            Cleanliness            Stately Grand Neighborhood                Wide streetscapes                Quality of construction                Solid housing stock            Evidence of care and maintained            Sense of community pride</p>	<p>Unkempt structures            Bad press                Perceived reputation v. reality            No trespassing signs indicate problems            Out of control nature of area            Incongruent mix of mentalities among renters/owners and buyers/inheritors/investors                Different agendas work against each other            Clearance center community (showcased like the bargain bin)            Loitering            Handicapped ramps            People stuck in the wrong place (homebound)            No standard of excellence – feels like anything goes</p>

## Image – Outcomes and Measures

- \*Neighbors, realtors, and homebuyers (including middle-class homebuyers) view this part of Avondale as safe and family oriented
- \*Neighbors, realtors and homebuyers will view Burnet Avenue as safe
- \*Avondale attract positive media attention

## Image - Strategies

- Create a neighborhood public relations committee
  - Develop the “Good News Network”
  - Website
  - Newsletter
  - Develop a relationship with area media
  - Recruit good news reporters (area youth)
  - Produce multi-media presentations with Media Bridges

- Develop a program to clean up Burnet Avenue (consistent with the “make a difference teams”, and LISC anti-litter campaign)
  - Work with merchants to address loitering on Burnet Avenue

- Develop a promotional piece for area realtors
  - Provide tours of Avondale to realtors
  - Create Rehabarama event for properties acquired in the market intervention strategy

- Work on safety
  - Support efforts on Burnet Avenue
  - Work with CPOP and LISC safety initiatives

- Support home owners association by creating block clubs (Avondale Block by Block Program)

- Use youth in neighborhood to support efforts

## Neighborhood Management

What's Working	What's not Working
People pay attention to what is going on Some parts of the neighborhood are well taken care of Urban neighborhood with vitality	People are more internally focused People don't know each other (don't know families, kids parents) No block clubs Community council not playing the role it could (should) Lack of a voice in City politics Lack of organized community engagement

### Neighborhood Management – Outcomes and Measures

- Half of the people in the target area will know their neighbors
- Half of the people in the target area will participate in community activities
- Children will be involved in neighborhood activities
- 75% of neighbors participate in neighborly behavior within one year
- People will view Burnet Avenue as a viable option for goods and services

## **Neighborhood Management – Strategies**

Hold the Jay Street Market

- Involve block clubs, existing merchants and area youth

Support community home owners association by creating a block club on every block by 2006 (Avondale Block by Block Program)

- Homeowners Association to hold landscape and gardening workshops

Enhance and distribute neighborhood newsletter widely

- tell good stories

- pay attention to the message you send to target market

- highlight new residents, old Avondale families, and renovation stories

- Create a neighborhood information directory (separate from the newsletter) to communicate neighborhood and social service information and key contact people and institutions

Create “block –a – rama” program

- Focus clean-up and renovation efforts on a block by block basis

- Create competition for the best improved block

- Tell the story!

Create strategies and projects that involve parents and children from Rockdale Academy

- Work on school/parent involvement and volunteerism

- Create children’s leadership program with area organizations

- Business owners will support youth athletic teams

Engage faith-based community