

# Economic Revitalization Post-Disaster

*Lynn A. Knight, CEcD*



INTERNATIONAL  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL

# Outline

- Challenges and opportunities
- Mobilizing for change
- Developing a vision for revitalization
- Assessing revitalization needs
- Revitalization tools & resources





From 2000 to 2010, the total number of vacant housing units in the U.S. grew by over 4.5 million, an increase of 44%



Vacant, abandoned properties are linked to increased crime (particularly arson) and declining property values.

Maintenance or demolition of vacant properties is a huge expense for many communities.





# Vacancy & Blight

## Complex causes:

- Owner leaves and can't find a buyer
  - Population decline due to local business or industry losses
  - Foreclosure
  - Obsolescence of building
  - Manmade or natural disaster – rapid or widespread loss
- 
- Left alone, a problem can grow rapidly – like a cancer – as it affects businesses around it
  - Properties located within 500 feet of vacant buildings lose as much as 8.7% in value, according to HUD

*Do any of these images look familiar?*



# Group discussion

## *How are you dealing with these issues?*

1. Chronic vacancy in certain locations?
2. Lacking infrastructure affecting business areas?
3. Lack of resources for revitalization?
4. Out-migration of young people due to lack of activities?
5. What have you strategies to deal with these issues?



# Challenges

- Worsening of poor pre-disaster conditions
- Lack of capacity
- Neighborhood-oriented commercial activity overlooked



# Challenges

- Difficulty in seeing revitalization potential
- Small neighborhood businesses hit hard
- Divisive social lines or underlying issues



# Opportunities

- Chance to re-group, re-connect, re-focus
- Ability to leverage prior distressed status for resources and services
- Opportunity to build back better



# Opportunities

- Rehabilitate or repurpose existing assets for new purposes
- Improve quality of life for existing residents and adjacent neighborhoods
- Establishing commercial uses for vacant property helps to reclaim such locales and plant seeds for future, local economic growth





A holistic approach  
is required





# Assessing Revitalization Needs



# Assessing Neighborhood Revitalization Needs

## Business and Community Surveys

- Great way to gather needs and current issues
- Provide qualitative and quantitative information
- Information collected from surveys can be used to:
  - Formulate issues
  - Gather ideas for redevelopment
  - Gauge what is valued in the neighborhood

# Assessing Revitalization Needs

## Information to gather

- Estimates of property and equipment damage
- Economic activity loss
- Workforce disruption and loss
- Utility disruption
- Loss of suppliers
- Loss of customers
- Financial and technical assistance needs

What is the format for these meetings?

## Business and community surveys

- Large group meeting with businesses
- One-on-one meeting with business owners or managers
- Neighborhood gatherings or meetings
- Neighborhood asset mapping



# Assessing Neighborhood Revitalization Needs

## Asset Mapping

- Shows assets of the neighborhood and highlights interconnections among them
- Doesn't have to be very detailed
- Assets are not only physical
  - e.g. relationships, cultural mapping, and human capital



# Organizations to Assist With Revitalization

## Redevelopment/Revitalization Taskforce

- Group of key neighborhood and community stakeholders
- Pool financial and human resources
  - Take advantage of existing resources
  - Can be community clubs, organizations, personnel from a nearby military base
- Scope of the task force varies - can oversee redevelopment or bring neighborhood needs to city level

# Organizations to Assist With Revitalization

## Community Development Corporations (CDCs)

- Do not have standard service – flexible to address needs
- Advocates for neighborhoods
- Resource:  
<http://www.useful-community-development.org/start-a-community-development-corporation.html>

# Organizations to Assist With Revitalization

## Roles of a CDC

- Providing leadership to stimulate the development process within the community
- Packaging public and private financing
- Investing in development projects
- Developing and managing development projects
- Providing technical assistance
- Assisting in directing city investments



# Roles and Responsibilities

# Leadership Roles & Responsibilities

- Successful neighborhood revitalization takes your leadership
  - Driver of redevelopment
  - Inspire and motivate stakeholders
  - Organize resources
  - Support strategies for revitalization
  - Appoint local volunteers to expand your capability to get things done

# Roles & Responsibilities of the Community

## Residents and business owners

- Participate in organizations
- Provide input for planning efforts
- Provide volunteer resources



# Mobilizing for Change

**Identify  
Relevant  
Stakeholders**

**Identify a  
Revitalization  
Champion(s)**

**Gather  
Residents to  
Spur Interest  
and Educate**

# Mobilizing for Change

## Identifying Relevant Stakeholders

- Inclusion ensures the proper representation recovery efforts can be easily organized.
- Local groups and charities should be involved
  - religious organizations, prominent business owners, and contacts at all govt levels
- Gather contact information through formal networks

# Mobilizing for Change

## Revitalization Champion

- Provides a point of contact
- Resource providing one stream of clear communication
- Can empower individuals who have a vested interest in their neighborhood



# Mobilizing for Change

## Gathering Residents

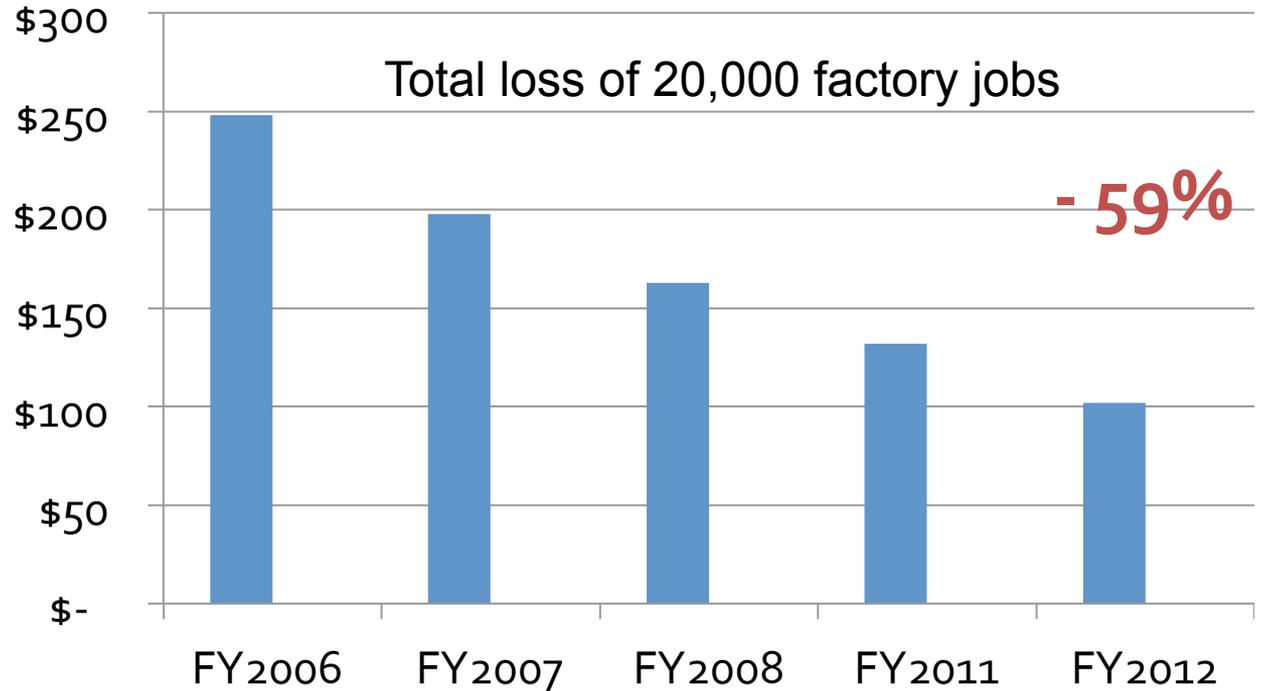
- Doesn't require long prep and man-hours
- Provides opportunity to educate residents on resources available and revitalization goals
- Can help ease abandonment of properties
- Can persuade residents to stay



## Case Study: A U.S. location with 65K population

Local economic depression due to loss of manufacturing

(revenues in millions)



**Local government lost \$146M per year in annual tax revenues**

# Result: blight & business closures in downtown



- Trash
- Untended landscaping
- Empty storefronts
- Stray dogs

# Case Study: Mobilizing self-help with volunteer resources

- With no resources for improvements, the Mayor appointed volunteers who stepped up as champions.
- Small businesses formed a business improvement district, organized cleanups and weekly night markets, special events.
- Local beautification efforts were done by volunteers of all ages, nationalities and religions -- organized on weekends through social media. Companies donated supplies. The program won a national EPA award.





# Developing a Vision for Revitalization

# Developing a Vision for Revitalization

- Sustainability and success depends on engagement
- Engagement can awaken authentic desire for change from the community
- Jump-start the process with an inclusive gathering
  - e.g. charettes or activities that get attendees identifying issues, recognize progress



# Case Study: Tuscaloosa, AL

- Struck by an EF<sub>4</sub> tornado in April 2011. Ripped through downtown Tuscaloosa.
- “We wanted to build it back to where they’re proud of living there, and give businesses incentives to build in that area.”



## Case Study: Tuscaloosa, AL

- Led to the “Tuscaloosa Forward Generational Master Plan”
- Included rezoning from purely residential to mixed-use to drive commerce opportunities
- Tuscaloosa used the lag time -- it was waiting on (HUD) rebuilding funds -- to build support for its new vision



# Case Study: Tuscaloosa, AL

Key to the success, Mayor Walter Maddox says, was identifying early on that the city will be rebuilt differently -- better -- than before, and it would address the concerns of citizens who want their city back as fast as possible



# Tools & Strategies for Revitalization

- Business improvement districts (BID)
- Revolving loan funds (RLF)
- Strategic use of incentives
- National Main Street Programs
- Grassroots / volunteer campaigns
- Art centers as a catalyst for revitalization



# Organizations to Assist With Revitalization

## Main Street Program and Business Improvement Districts

- Focus resources on a specific area
- Comprehensive strategy that addresses challenges for traditional commercial districts
- Does not only apply to downtown's main streets
- Leverages local assets to revitalize districts
- BIDs often incorporate maintenance, safety and marketing



# Organizations to Assist With Revitalization

## Main Street Programs

- Budgets vary according to:
  - size of the commercial district
  - local priorities and resources
  - regional variations in salaries
- Program budgets can range from \$45,000 to \$100,000 annually
- Financial support comes from local entities that have a stake in commercial area

<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>

# Revitalization Opportunity Areas

## Improving Infrastructure

- Distressed neighborhoods *pre-disaster* often face issues with infrastructure
- Improved infrastructure should be aligned with redevelopment vision
- Post-disaster, local leaders and economic development professionals should identify revitalization funds or grants



# Examples of Building Back Better

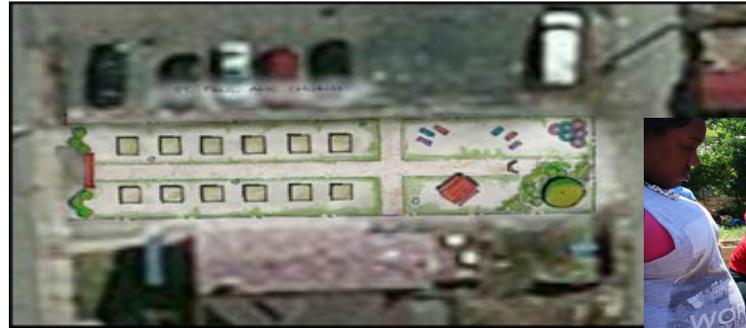
## Examples:



- Rebuilding damaged bridges so that they include wider access to make a business district more marketable
- Implementing long-desired street redesign when water and sewer lines are replaced downtown
- Planning a new parking garage in a damaged area to accommodate denser future development

# Case Study: ReClaim Pittsburgh

- **Non-profit organizes collaboration to turn vacant spaces to green space**
  - Worked with over 55 partners in 33 neighborhoods to clean up 56 acres of vacant land and install 23 permanent projects on vacant land



# Case Study: ReClaim Pittsburgh

- Twofold approach: individual empowerment along with place-based impact on vacant land
- Recruited and train ambassadors who serve a year and propose projects from their area to implement
- This also helps build the next generation of local leaders



# Revitalization Opportunity Areas

## Revolving Loan Fund for Streetscape and Business Façade Improvements

- Streetscapes and facades speak loudly to an image of the neighborhood
- Can be a critical impetus for reinvestment from developers
- Landscaping can help increase retail sales by as much as 30%



# Case Study – REVOLVE Detroit

- REVOLVE is a collaborative program of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) that partners with local leaders, building owners, entrepreneurs, and artists
- Activate vacant storefronts with transformational businesses and art installations.





# Case Study – REVOLVE Detroit

REVOLVE uses “pop-ups” as a catalyst to accomplish objectives:

- recruit and grow permanent tenants
- spark public and private investment
- change the image and experience of neighborhood business districts.



# Revitalization Opportunity Areas

## Incentive Zoning and Permitting

- Work with local businesses and the city to ease the permitting process
- Address current zoning that may be detrimental to redevelopment
- New designations can improve commercial streets with little business activity
  - Example – Feret St, New Orleans – overlay as “arts and culture district” eased permitting – 20 new biz’s opened 2008-2012



# Art Centers as a Catalyst for Revitalization



*Glasstown Arts Center,  
Milleville  
Cumberland County, NJ  
One of the poorest towns is  
experiencing revitalization in  
its arts district*



*Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria, VA  
A surplus federal building became a landmark attraction and special  
event space – attracts \$16M annual economic benefit*

# Case Study: New Orleans

- New Orleans holds the record as America's most blighted city, with over 68,000 vacant buildings – 12.6%
- Mayor Mitch Landrieu created a task force that created 5 pillars for tackling blight:



- 1) Data-driven decision making
- 3) Blight tool alignment and improvement
- 3) Organizational architecture and processes
- 4) Strategic deployment of resources
- 5) Place-based revitalization

# “Tough Love” solution

- New Orleans created tough standards for repair and renovation of buildings by City Code 26
  - Establishes minimum standards
  - Fines of up to \$500/day
  - Foreclosure
  - City remediation – may demolish the building



*City Councilman Jon Johnson  
tours a lot that the city will clear*

For more information:

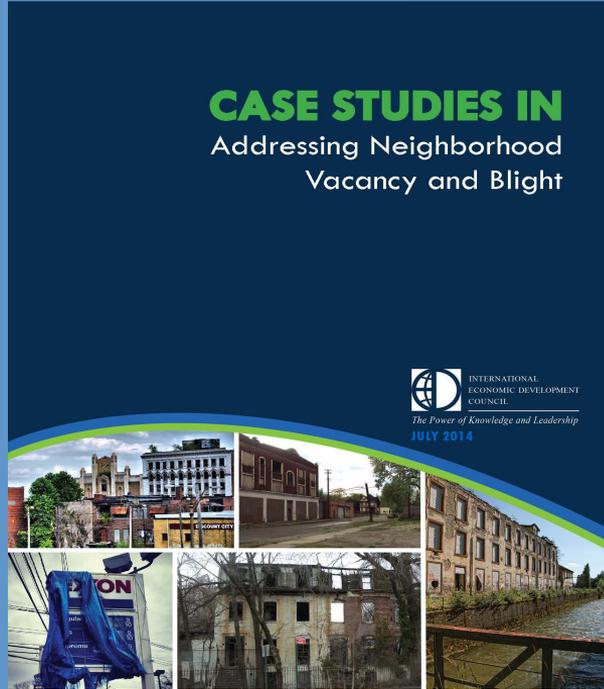
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# Results in New Orleans

- 13,000 properties remedied in 4 years
- BlightSTAT – monthly meetings where properties are prioritized that have potential to stabilize neighborhoods
- BlightStatus – Partnered with Code for America to create website that allows public to track properties



# More Resources



## 6 Case Studies in Vacancy and Blight

- In July 2014 IEDC launched a publication highlighting case studies from across the country

<http://restoreyoureconomy.org/case-studies-addressing-neighborhood-vacancy-and-blight>

# Additional Resources

IEDC paper – “Revitalizing Neighborhoods, Empowering Residents: Economic Development in Disinvested Communities”  
<http://www.iedconline.org/web-pages/resources-publications/edrp-publications/>

“Rural Community Downtown Revitalization” -  
<https://ric.nal.usda.gov/downtown-revitalization>

“Thoughts on the Economic Revitalization of Small Town Downtowns” - Econ Dev Journal -  
<http://goo.gl/JfRcKl>



## Takeaways in how to lead revitalization

- Listen to your community – 2-way dialogue
- Create a better vision
- Policy environment – sometimes “Tough Love” is the right course
- Leverage resources - grants, public-private support
- Secure, safe environment
- Use a variety of tools
- Product development: maximize existing assets
- Enlist community support – appoint future leaders
- Persevere: this is a long-term process