



# Chapter XI: Neighborhood Revitalization Post-Disaster

## Introduction

What happens at the neighborhood level has a profound impact on people's lives. Whether neighborhoods move forward economically is largely dependent upon the key actors within a neighborhood – the residents, businesses, and property owners. Creating a framework for these actors to not only co-exist in a valuable, mutually supportive manner, but to also work together toward creating and sustaining a vibrant, energetic neighborhood is what neighborhood development strategies are all about.

Disasters sometimes have exceptionally severe impact in particular neighborhoods so that business recovery depends upon an integrated redevelopment of the neighborhood. Especially, there will be neighborhoods economically challenged prior to the disaster that will likely have greater difficulty recovering due to pre-existing lack of financial resources and stability. In the wake of a disaster, the EDO has the opportunity to leverage community engagement in the disaster recovery process into full neighborhood revitalization that will support a stronger business climate in these neighborhoods.

## Neighborhood Revitalization and Other Recovery Efforts

A disaster creates a chaotic environment. Existing, emerging, private, institutional, and public organizations will mobilize to meet recovery needs. By its very nature, a neighborhood revitalization process integrates a wide variety of stakeholders and stakeholder needs. The most successful processes let each partner bring its resources to bear, weaving them together in support of a shared built vision and assessment of community needs.

Neighborhood revitalization will often be one additional component of the overall EDO recovery work. The businesses in the identified neighborhood will be a subset of the EDO's inventory. The EDO brings the strength of its existing knowledge base and resource offerings to support the neighborhood development. Its general disaster recovery functions for the wider community will be directly applicable to the neighborhood. The additional service the EDO can provide is leadership that supports the collaborative revitalization planning process.

This chapter first reviews the particular challenges and opportunities during disaster recovery in a pre-existing distressed neighborhood.



The chapter then outlines neighborhood recovery processes:

- Mobilizing the community/neighborhood for change;
- Assessing neighborhood needs;
- Developing a shared vision;
- Potential organizations to drive planning strategies; and
- Putting together a Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.

This chapter then identifies some particular revitalization opportunity areas in disaster recovery: infrastructure, streetscape and façade improvements, incentive zoning and permitting, and disaster recovery funding.



Source: FEMA

The final section reviews communication strategies that support the success of this work.

Note that all implemented strategies must be tailored to the contexts of their respective communities. Not all disasters present the same challenges to communities, and distressed neighborhoods are frequently characterized by particular, pre-existing economic development challenges.

## Particular Challenges and Opportunities

The revitalization of neighborhoods in the wake of a disaster requires economic development projects at a local level to nurture and accrue individual and collective assets for the community. Often, a holistic approach, utilizing both traditional and non-traditional economic development activities, is required. Such an approach requires a revitalization plan that addresses socioeconomic needs, including a focus on local points of social conflict, barriers to entrepreneurship, barriers to affordable housing, infrastructure status, chronic vacancy, crime rates, unemployment rates, workforce issues, and the neighborhood's history. The following challenges and opportunities provide a baseline of questions and criteria that are useful when conducting a holistic assessment of the neighborhood's post-disaster needs.

### Challenges

Neighborhood revitalization and disaster recovery are two separate and specialized economic development undertakings. Integrating the processes presents the following unique challenges.

#### Pre-Disaster Conditions

Pre-disaster conditions and issues of a distressed neighborhood are exacerbated post-disaster. A disaster causes stress to those who were impacted directly or indirectly. This added stress can elevate tensions, pushing previous issues to a heightened level, such as crime or class and social issues. A disaster can also increase blight with increased vacancies, crime, and closing of neighborhood businesses or activity centers.

#### Lack of Capacity



Blighted neighborhoods often lack strong neighborhood organizations. This presents barriers in recovery, including lack of an established organization to disseminate information locally, lack of leadership, and lack of knowledge to recover from disaster.

### **Neighborhood-oriented Commercial Activity Overlooked**

Neighborhood commercial activity has to compete with the public and private sectors' attention when an active central business district exists. A downtown is seen as a highly visible symbol to the public sector, so programs or efforts pre-disaster and post-disaster are often directed to downtown(s) and not the neighborhood commercial activity.

### **Difficulty in Seeing Revitalization Potential**

Post-disaster, those in a distressed neighborhood may have increased difficulty in envisioning success for the area. They may be trapped in discussing the issues of the neighborhood that was, rather than the neighborhood it could be. Local residents of a distressed neighborhood will require further efforts to get involved, as the disaster draws down scarce resources.

### **Small Neighborhood Businesses Hit Hard**

The majority of neighborhood businesses are locally family owned businesses. The family's home may be in the same impacted area. The business might not be in a position to take on additional debt, forcing families to abandon the business. This is especially true if the neighborhood is impoverished, where businesses cash reserves are low, and their sales cannot support additional debt.

### **Divisive Social Lines**

In many distressed neighborhoods social and class issues exist, and during recovery the increased tensions can make a neighborhood more divisive. One class may yearn for a different sort of recovery or focus on social issues (such as educated vs. non-educated), and they can push recovery in a direction that doesn't represent the neighborhood equally. These challenges require identifying divisive lines or broken social networks, and developing programs to address these issues.

## **Opportunities**

While distressed neighborhood revitalization post-disaster presents many challenges, it also presents unique opportunities. These opportunities, which should be used to an advantage in recovery, include:

- **Opportunity to re-group, re-connect, and re-focus a neighborhood**
  - A disaster presents an opportunity in that everyone impacted can relate to the issues and pains of recovery. This common bond provides an opportunity to have people work together, to reconnect with each other, and to re-focus a neighborhood to address the neighborhood issues.
- **Ability to leverage prior distressed status for resources and services**
  - A distressed neighborhood does have programs and services it can receive, especially if a low-income neighborhood, which is often the case. During a recovery, these programs should be



leveraged, and the status of the distressed neighborhood can assist in marketing recovery efforts and needs.

- **Ability to prevent blight from spreading within and/or to other neighborhoods**
  - Post-disaster blight can easily spread with many people who are tired of the neighborhood abandoning houses and businesses.
  - A recovery program or plan presents an opportunity to stop and eliminate blight. This is especially appealing to surrounding neighborhoods and residents who may be concerned with their property values declining.
- **Rehabilitate/repurpose existing neighborhood assets for new purposes that meet both neighborhood and city needs**
  - Every neighborhood has assets, and post-disaster these assets can serve new purposes. This can include vacant spaces or buildings, which can be used to house (temporarily or permanently) city services, offices, or businesses. Increased vacant land can allow for large development projects in a city that may have a lack of large parcels. Another example is increasing green space for the neighborhood and the city to utilize.
- **Improve quality of life for existing residents and adjacent neighborhoods**
  - A blighted neighborhood hurts the city and residents in many ways, including reduced property values for adjacent properties and neighborhoods, which affect the city's tax base. A disaster can present the opportunity to revitalize the area and therefore increase property values and the tax base.

## Getting Started - Mobilizing for Change

In a post-disaster situation, efforts need to be organized quickly, while the disaster is still front and center and before valued parties lose interest. The daunting task of recovery and revitalization will require a collaborative effort from multiple parties. These stakeholders include residents, merchants, local organizations, and government agencies. Expressing the ambition to revitalize is a start in organizing efforts. From these interested parties, or a neighborhood meeting, or government sources, ideas for revitalization strategy will begin to form. Committing to a specific recovery strategy is not required right after a disaster, but ensuring the neighborhood is included in recovery efforts and that the needs are brought to the attention of stakeholders during redevelopment are beginning steps for neighborhood revitalization. Efforts to organize include:

### Identify Relevant Stakeholders

It's important to know whom to involve so that the neighborhood is properly represented and recovery efforts can be easily organized. Identify local groups and charities involved in the neighborhood, religious organizations, prominent business owners in the neighborhood, and contacts at the city, regional, and state level. Gathering contact information through formal networks can bring many stakeholders to light, but informal discussions on the goal to revitalize the neighborhood can spur interest and bring forward additional contacts.

### Identify a Revitalization Champion(s)

Whether it's your organization, another organization, or individuals, a champion of the revitalization should be identified. This allows for an individual or organization to be a point of contact and resource providing one



stream of clear communication. Identifying local residents as a champion can occur at neighborhood meetings and can empower individuals who have a vested interest in their neighborhood.

### **Gather Residents to Spur Interest and Educate**

Gathering local residents of the distressed neighborhood doesn't have to require long prep and man-hours. A gathering right after a disaster can allow the opportunity to educate residents on resources available for recovery and on the goals to revitalize a neighborhood. This can help ease abandonment of properties in the neighborhood by showing property owners that revitalization is in the works and plans to improve the neighborhood will be developed. Just knowing efforts will happen to improve the neighborhood can be a powerful enough message to persuade residents to stay, as seen in the spotlight box below.

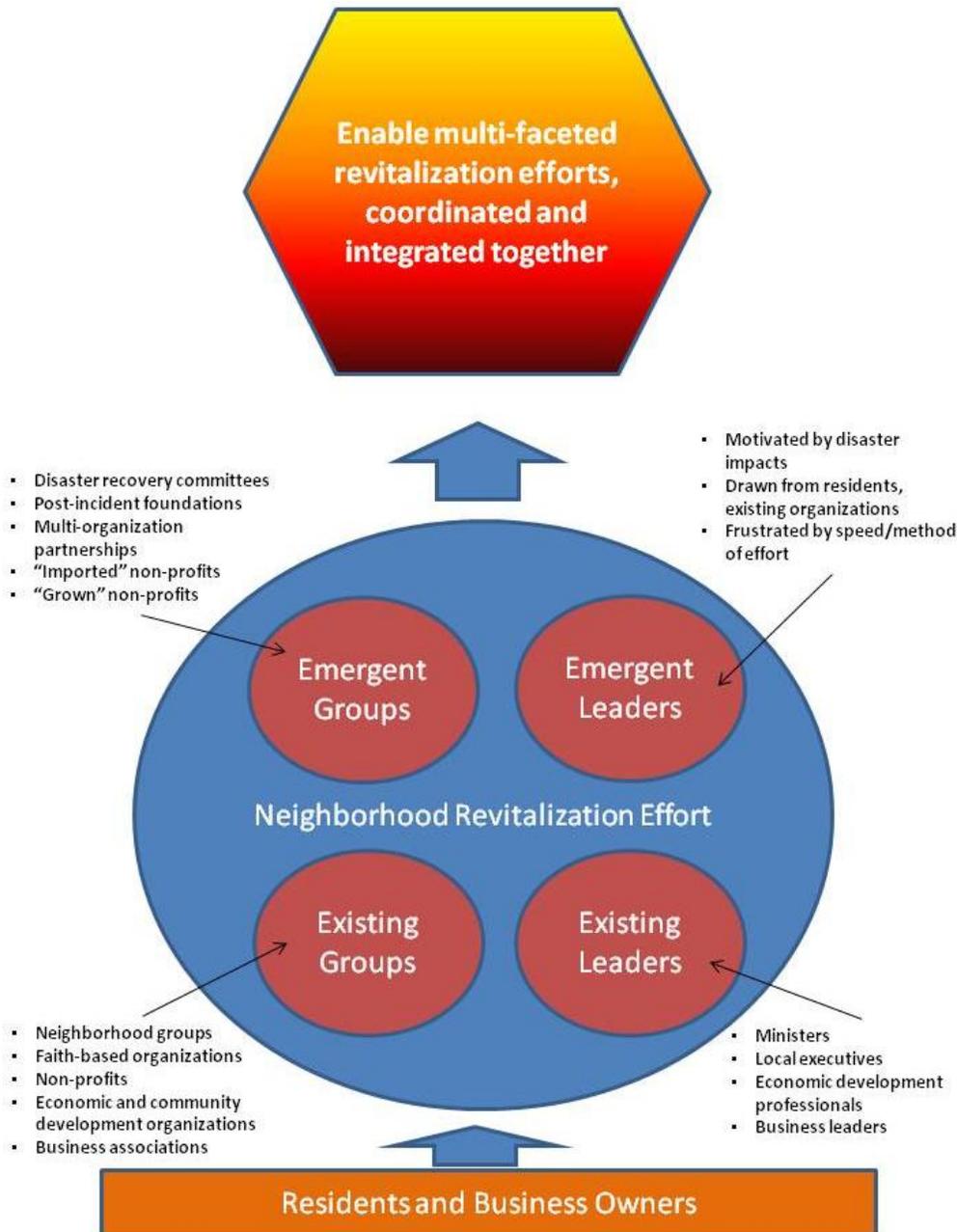
#### **Case Study: Broadmoor Neighborhood Rallies for Recovery**

The Broadmoor neighborhood post-Katrina was slated for destruction because of what city officials initially saw as an unsalvageable neighborhood. Neighborhood resident Virginia Saussy and the neighborhood group, the Broadmoor Improvement Association, jumped into action and organized a rally to initially show neighborhood solidarity, educate residents of the proposed destruction, and, as one organizer put it, "as really just a news opportunity". Meeting signs were posted throughout the neighborhood, and residents who had moved away were called. The efforts brought a large crowd to the rally. This rally accomplished more than just educating the residents on how they could personally recover. After hearing remarks, a pledge was passed around, and residents and businesses promised to come back to Broadmoor. By the end of the rally the pledge had 300 signatures, and neighborhood champions had provided the momentum that ultimately brought forth efforts for revitalization of the neighborhood.

Source: "Broadmoor Lives" Harvard Case Study, pp 7-8

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Successful neighborhood revitalization strategies require a commitment of numerous actors, including residents, neighborhood institutions and organizations, and economic developers. These roles and responsibilities may have changed from the pre-disaster situation, and the adaption to the new environment will enable a more cohesive revitalization. The figure below captures the way these different groups can interact and integrate to support revitalization efforts.



**Residents and Business Owners**

**Roles:** Drivers of redevelopment and primary stakeholders.

**Responsibilities:** Participate in neighborhood organizations. Provide input for planning efforts, including attending neighborhood meetings and hearings. Support local economy and businesses. Embrace or work against a negative neighborhood image or identity.

**Emergent Leaders**

**Roles:** Drivers of change, visionaries.



**Responsibilities:** Represent needs of the community. Encourage community involvement. Publicly advocate for the community. Bring attention to the community and its needs.

**Emergent Organizations/Groups** - These are groups that likely respond to heightened needs.

**Roles:** Develop capacity to attract and distribute resources.

**Responsibilities:** Represent needs of the community. Encourage community involvement. Publicly advocate for the community. Bring attention to the community and its needs. Partner in planning work and collaboration.

**Established Organizations** - May include local business development organizations, religious groups, community centers, and social service agencies.

**Roles:** Provide institutional resources to support neighborhood revitalization . Attract or reposition resources to respond to post-disaster needs and neighborhood revitalization work.

**Responsibilities:** Inform and connect the community with resources. Represent needs of the community. Encourage community involvement. Publicly advocate for the community. Represent neighborhood interests, provide capacity for redevelopment, reach out to local professionals for skills, and provide knowledge of neighborhood to community and other parties. Bring attention to the community and its needs. Partner in planning work and collaboration.

### **Economic Development Professional**

**Roles:** Lead capacity-building, redevelopment and revitalization process for disaster recovery.

**Responsibilities:** Serve as an analyst of the needs and conditions of the neighborhood, a catalyst and advocate for change, an educator to the public and other officials, and a visionary to assist in visioning a revitalized neighborhood and connecting resources to do so.

### **Local Government**

**Roles:** Health, safety and welfare of the community.

**Responsibilities:** Provide resources for disaster recovery, support strategies for revitalization, collaborate across departments and agencies. Recognize the individual needs of each neighborhood, enforce housing codes to fight blight and vacancy, streamline permitting process, work with community organizations to stimulate neighborhood confidence. Provide planning services and data in support of neighborhood revitalization.

## **Assessing Neighborhood Revitalization Needs**

Assessing revitalization needs can begin during initial organizing of efforts, during the visioning process, or during the recovery planning process. Ideally, this would occur immediately after a disaster, before people and businesses permanently leave a neighborhood. Assessing the revitalization needs of a distressed neighborhood post-disaster will require additional assessment needs as compared to just post-disaster assessments. An assessment doesn't have to be a long process or require intensive hours, but should be done on a local level to the ability that resources allow. Be wary of over-assessing; people may get weary of having multiple



assessments post-disaster and may be tired of the assessment process. If this happens assessment results will not be true, and other informal evaluations can occur, such as casual one-on-one meetings.

The goal of assessing revitalization needs is to understand what specific needs or barriers may exist in a neighborhood in order to complete the revitalization. This should be completed as soon as possible after a disaster and followed-up during recovery, such as a year later, to see if needs have changed or still need to be addressed. Generally, the information collected can include key neighborhood assets to reopen/preserve, neighborhood values, prior issues/barriers that may arise again, neighborhood-wide recovery needs, and property status. One unique way this was done was using volunteers to identify all properties' vacancy status by the organization Beacon of Hope. To learn more, please see the profile of Beacon of Hope in [Case Study Appendix 8](#).



Source: FEMA

## Tools to Assess Revitalization

### Reaching out to Businesses

Businesses require special attention during recovery to identify their needs and issues. Means to identify their needs and issues can include electronic or paper surveys or in-person meetings. Examples of information to collect, no matter the format, include:

- 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.

### Business and community survey

A business or community survey is a great method to gather the needs and current issues facing the neighborhood. Qualitative and quantitative information can be used to formulate issues, gather ideas for redevelopment, and gauge what is valued in the neighborhood. Many different groups can implement the survey, such as a CDC, BID, or a local neighborhood group. Whoever implements the survey should have a level of trust and some relationship with the recipients to ensure a better, truthful response. An example of a business survey is below. This was implemented by the Main Street program and was for business owners and managers. This survey allowed the Main Street program to help in writing development strategies of their revitalization plan. Mailing to local businesses and spending one-on-one time with business owners increased the response rate.



## Sample Business Survey



### Czech Village/New Bohemia Main Street District Business Survey

Dear Business Owners & Managers:

The Czech Village/New Bohemia Main Street District Program is conducting this survey of area businesses. Your answers will provide direction for marketing and business development strategies.

**This is a confidential survey.** Please place the survey in an envelope and a Main Street volunteer will pick it up within two to three days. Survey questionnaires will be tabulated by an independent consultant. If you have any questions, please contact the Czech Village/New Bohemia Main Street District Program office at (319) 432-9785. Thank you for your time and participation.

**Please select one response to each question unless otherwise indicated.**

- What is your primary business type?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Retail	D. <input type="checkbox"/> Financial/Banking	G. <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing
B. <input type="checkbox"/> Service	E. <input type="checkbox"/> Food & Beverage	H. <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit
C. <input type="checkbox"/> Professional/Office	F. <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	I. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____)
- Do you own or rent your business location?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Own	B. <input type="checkbox"/> Rent
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- How long has your business been located in the Czech Village/New Bohemia district?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year	B. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 4 years	C. <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 9 years	D. <input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 20 years	E. <input type="checkbox"/> 21+ years
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- Which one of the following best describes your **primary** customer base? (*Select one answer*)
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Local/Regional Cedar Rapids Residents	B. <input type="checkbox"/> Visitors and Tourists
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- Which one of the following best describes the main reason for customers to do business with you? (*Select one answer*)
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Selection & variety	C. <input type="checkbox"/> Convenience	E. <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation
B. <input type="checkbox"/> Customer service	D. <input type="checkbox"/> Price of goods & services	F. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (_____)
- Of the following media and direct marketing resources, which two (2) are most effective for your business?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper	E. <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Pages	I. <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
B. <input type="checkbox"/> Shoppers Guide	F. <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Mail	J. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (_____)
C. <input type="checkbox"/> Television	G. <input type="checkbox"/> Internet Website	K. <input type="checkbox"/> None
D. <input type="checkbox"/> AM/FM Radio	H. <input type="checkbox"/> Email Marketing	
- Does your business have an Internet website?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	B. <input type="checkbox"/> No
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- Does your business have a Facebook page?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	B. <input type="checkbox"/> No
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- Would you consider participating in a Czech Village/New Bohemia District cooperative advertising or marketing program?
 

A. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	B. <input type="checkbox"/> No	C. <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know
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- What type of new businesses, located near you, would help your business generate more revenue? (*Please be specific*)
 

A. First Choice: _____
B. Second Choice: _____
C. Third Choice: _____

**Please complete questionnaire on reverse side**

## Large group meeting with businesses

It is important to meet with business owners in an impacted area. Meeting with owners will divulge needs and information that may be missed from a survey or online form. Meeting in person, whether in small groups, at neighborhood business meetings, or through other forums will open the communication channels of needs and issues and allow your organization to build, mend, or create a relationship that will be useful in building trust throughout revitalization.

## One-on-one meeting with business owners or managers

If your organization has the capacity, or a limited number of businesses were impacted by the disaster, having a one-on-one meeting with the business owner can provide a wealth of knowledge that a survey cannot. Hearing



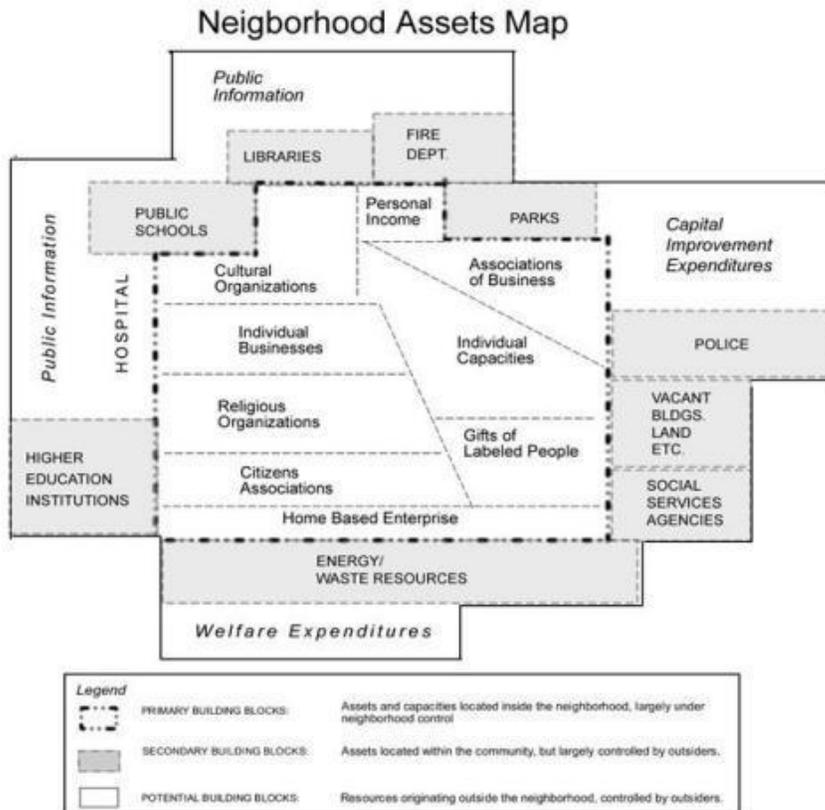
personal anecdotes or needs can be fruitful in identifying needs you can immediately address and other needs to address during a revitalization planning process.

### **Neighborhood gatherings or meetings**

A fruitful means to gather input in a neighborhood is with a gathering or meeting. Especially post-disaster when neighborhood members are looking for answers on how to recover, a gathering or meeting can be a great tool to gather feedback on the needs and issues of revitalization. It's also great to give a business or community survey during this time for personal feedback.

### **Neighborhood asset mapping**

Asset mapping shows the assets of the neighborhood and highlights the interconnections among them. This can also be completed in conjunction with the city at the city level. This effort doesn't have to be very detailed as staff time post-disaster is already stretched thin. Identifying assets and how they are interconnected reveals how to access those assets. These assets are not only physical assets, but also include relationships, cultural mapping, and human capital. There is no one way to complete neighborhood asset mapping, but for a sample structure and more information, look at resources from The Asset-Based Community Development Institute: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/introd-building.html> See the neighborhood asset map diagram below for an example of the framework.



From: Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J.L. (1993). *Building Communities from the inside out*. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University Press.

(c) 2006, Northwestern University. \*Restricted use.

## Developing a Vision for Neighborhood Revitalization

To build support for neighborhood revitalization, all stakeholders, especially existing local residents, need to start to build a vision for a stronger neighborhood. The sustainability and success of revitalization attempts depend upon the engagement of local residents and an authentic desire for change from the community. A sense of ownership of a neighborhood, its challenges, and the implementation interventions can be created by building a vision and engaging local residents throughout the revitalization process.

A distressed neighborhood can have divisive lines or a “shattered” social network. Using the common thread of the recent disaster gives a common ground for neighborhood residents upon which to connect and begin the rebuilding process of not just the physical neighborhood, but of the identity and connectedness of a neighborhood.

To jump-start this process, a meeting or gathering should occur that engages residents and revitalization partners in a visioning, or similar process. An example of this is highlighted in the spotlight box of Broadmoor. This can be tied in with assessing revitalization needs (discussed later in this chapter) and can help rally residents around the neighborhood and be a catalyst for change. Potential exercises include charettes or other engaging



activities that get attendees identifying issues with the neighborhood and begin developing a vision of what it can become. Tips can be taken from the strategic planning chapter of this toolkit. Additionally, including individuals from the communities with professional skills, such as moderating public meetings, can assist in engaging conversation without imposing additional work on weary staff.

## Potential Organizations to Drive Planning Strategies for Revitalization

The first two steps of recovery are mobilizing the neighborhood and community for change and assessing revitalization to help feed a planning strategy. The fundamental purpose of a planning strategy is to guide the vision and provide a framework from which revitalization decisions can be made. Many of the strategic planning processes as outlined in the strategic planning chapter of this toolkit can be tailored to neighborhood revitalization. Below a few select strategies are discussed. Choosing one of the model strategies will not facilitate revitalization alone, but with neighborhood support and partnership with other local stakeholders, it can be a start. Other organizations can undertake a recovery planning process such as a business improvement district or special assessment area. Choosing which organization works best for you should be completed in the “identifying initial stakeholders” stage. After a disaster, many things will change, but a planning strategy and the lead delivering organization should account for this by being flexible while outlining a framework for the revitalization to continue.

### Five Key Elements of Neighborhood Revitalization

Engaging residents and community leadership catalyzes and sustains comprehensive change efforts

1. Developing strategic and accountable partnerships leads to lasting change
2. Maintaining a results focus supported by data presents a strategy for achieving specific objectives, helps to focus multiple stakeholders on a common goal, and can lead to a common dataset to measure progress
3. Investing in and building organizational capacity helps the community meet its objectives
4. Aligning resources to a unified and target impact strategy builds a critical mass of efforts in a neighborhood to reduce neighborhood distress

Source: The White House (July 2011). *Building Neighborhoods of Opportunity* (White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative Report). Retrieved from:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/oua/initiatives/neighborhood-revitalization>

### Neighborhood Redevelopment/Revitalization Task Force

A redevelopment or revitalization task force is a group of key neighborhood stakeholders and community stakeholders. Developing a task force/coalition of neighborhood-based actors that can pool financial and human



resources is one effective way to take advantage of the neighborhood's existing resources. The scope of the task force can vary depending on neighborhood need, but it can be used to oversee revitalization efforts, or to bring neighborhood level needs to agencies' and local government's attention. A task force is beneficial in that it can provide local insight on neighborhood issues and work specifically to address these issues.

One of the first steps in creating a redevelopment task force is to identify the stakeholders who will be members. This can include residents, neighborhood organizations, government officials, and professionals with potentially relevant skills. Residents can be gathered from the visioning meeting or a neighborhood rally meeting. If there is no interest/lack of stakeholders, bring in nearby neighborhood stakeholders or organizations and explain how issues in this neighborhood will affect/spread into the surrounding area and city unless work is done. An additionally important step is to define the scope of the task force work. This will enable the task force to stay on track, and defines goals that can be described to outside parties.

Guiding steps for forming a task force:

- Involve stakeholders of the public and private sector with varying skills. Liaisons to other recovery strategies and neighborhood representation are just as important.
- Identify clear goals and scope of the task force (who they report to, who reports to them).
- Give the task force a voice: Identify representatives who can speak on behalf of the force to city, regional, and state officials.
- Partner with an enforcing power: Partnering with a city office, CDC, or other organization allows the task force to use established organizations' representations to enforce planning steps and reach out during the planning effort.

### Utilizing or Developing a Community Development Corporation

A community development corporation (CDC) can play a unique role in neighborhood economic development and revitalization post-disaster. The University of Maryland defines CDCs as "community-based organizations that anchor capital locally through the development of both residential and commercial property, ranging from affordable housing to developing shopping centers." CDCs do not have a standard service, and this flexibility allows neighborhood CDCs to adjust the mission and scope of the organization for specific neighborhood needs. While the CDC is not the only form of neighborhood redevelopment group, it works with the same essence of all neighborhood development groups as an active advocacy organization trying to solve neighborhood problems.

#### 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 within neighborhoods to achieve the greatest impact and leverage



## Funding

Although CDCs can be for-profit or nonprofit, most are nonprofit 501(c)3 tax-exempt organizations. This status qualifies them to obtain financial support from the government and private foundations. For-profit CDCs are generally subsidiary organizations of larger entities (such as corporations) and undertake some profit-making development work.<sup>53,54,55</sup>

## Creating and Using a Main Street Program

A Main Street program is a great tool for neighborhood revitalization in that it can focus resources to a specific area. Even though the words “Main Street” are in the title, this doesn’t mean they work in downtown’s main streets. For example, the highlighted case study of Cedar Rapids was a commercial area south of the city’s downtown. They were able to secure Main Street status, and as seen in the profile, assisted with the successful revitalization.

As a unique economic development tool, the Main Street Four-Point Approach® is the foundation for local initiatives to revitalize their districts by leveraging local assets—from cultural or architectural heritage to local enterprises and community pride. It is a comprehensive strategy that addresses the variety of issues and problems that challenge traditional commercial districts.<sup>56</sup> The four points are Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring.

## Funding

Financial support for the program comes from the local entities that have a stake in the commercial area: city government, merchants, businesses, and the public. The success of the Main Street program over the years lies in the fact that it is a local initiative, both organizationally and financially.<sup>57,58</sup>

## Neighborhood Revitalization Plan – Short and/or Long Term

One of the most common strategies for revitalization of a distressed neighborhood is to develop a neighborhood revitalization plan that can guide and organize efforts. A revitalization plan will help in identifying the current issues, capturing the neighborhood’s vision, defining action steps to revitalization, and defining a structure for

<sup>53</sup> University of Maryland (n.d.) [Additional Resources]. *Models and Best Practices*. Retrieved from: <http://community-wealth.org/resource-type/models-and-best-practices>

<sup>54</sup> University of Maryland (n.d.) [Additional Resources]. *CDC Overview*. Retrieved from: <http://community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/cdcs/index.html>

<sup>55</sup> University of Maryland (n.d.) [Additional Resources]. *Toolbox: Community Development Corporation (CDC) Tools*. Retrieved from: <http://community-wealth.org/content/community-development-corporation-cdc-tools>

<sup>56</sup> National Main Street Center (n.d.). *The Main Street Four Point Approach*. Retrieved from: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/#.U-uEj-NdXOV>

<sup>57</sup> National Main Street Center (n.d.) [Additional Resources]. *Getting Started: Using the Main Street Approach*. Retrieved from: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/getting-started/#.UVSFPNnbRpg>

<sup>58</sup> National Main Street Center (n.d.) [Additional Resources]. *Resource Center: Ideas and solutions for issues facing main streets*. Retrieved from: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/resources/#.UVSGqNnbRpg>



revitalization for existing and new stakeholders. This plan and framework can be referenced by the city, new developers, or organizations and can assist in the revitalization. A plan can follow the strategic planning process, but additional guidelines should be noted with a neighborhood revitalization plan.

### **Engage the public and private sector**

A revitalization plan that has not engaged the private and public sector will not garner support for adaptation and can be left unrecognized by key players who support and facilitate the revitalization. Continuing initial meetings during the mobilization for change will provide an opportunity to engage the public.

### **Make sure the plan reflects an understanding of new market realities after the disaster.**

The economy of any area after a disaster will be different than pre-disaster. Clientele can change with the changing neighborhood; businesses may no longer serve neighborhood needs, and social or physical needs of a neighborhood may change as well. A plan should avoid utopian ideals and recognize the changed market of the neighborhood. This change can be identified during the initial needs assessment.

### **Ensure plan identifies action steps to fight prior issues/barriers**

Acknowledging why the distressed neighborhood was the way it was before the disaster is the first step to identifying solutions. Identifying action steps to combat these issues, and barriers that existed before, is critical to the revitalization. A common issue of vacancy or blight is addressed later in this chapter and provides example strategies to tackle this problem.

### **Follow Up with Implementation and Monitoring**

The implementation of the plan is the “make or break” of the plan’s effectiveness. Without properly outlining implementation steps in the plan and identifying those responsible for the implementation, the plan can easily be shelved with strategies and ideas never being brought to fruition.<sup>59</sup> During the implementation, it’s important to hold previously identified implementers accountable and follow up with these parties frequently to ensure implementation occurs.<sup>60</sup>

### **Connect plan with broader citywide recovery plan and policies**

When possible, it is important to connect a revitalization plan to the broader citywide recovery plan and policies. Not doing so can induce consequences such as being overlooked by developers or other groups who are looking at the city plan alone and can create disinvestment of the neighborhood. The revitalization plan, however, should not just conform to the city/region plan, but should work to inform the plan. Being able to provide neighborhood level perspective, action items, and other decisions informs the plan and city on subject matter that may otherwise not have been discovered.

<sup>59</sup> Newberg, J. (n.d.). *Neighborhood Revitalization Planning and Implementation Tips and Strategies* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from: <http://www.blueprintcommunities.com/wv/pdfs/newberg%20presentation.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (n.d.). *Neighborhood Revitalization Program Examples* [Webpage]. Retrieved from: <http://www.neighborhoodrevitalization.org/programs/Index.aspx>



## Revitalization Opportunity Areas

### Improving Infrastructure

Distressed neighborhoods pre-disaster often face issues with infrastructure, such as broken sidewalks, insufficient street lighting, or older water and sewage systems that can be causation for economic stagnation or decline. Without proper infrastructure, commercial activity cannot function to a degree of normalcy and may relocate within the community to an area with better infrastructure. This holds true post-disaster when infrastructure can be severely damaged. Using the disaster as a benefit, work with the city and identify funds or grants that can help in revitalization of the neighborhood and its infrastructure. Infrastructure is also important if a redevelopment vision has been completed that sees different use of an area, which may require different infrastructure. More details on infrastructure redevelopment opportunities are outlined in the Redevelopment chapter of this toolkit.

#### Initiatives and Strategies for Fighting Vacancy & Blight

- Identify and map blight to better understand the sprawl over time and use as a tool for advocacy. Beacon of Hope in New Orleans used volunteers and donated software to map all parcels in the neighborhoods (See [Beacon of Hope Profile in Case Study Appendix 8](#))
- Organize vacant property tours for developers and the public to raise awareness of available properties. (See [NewBo Case Study Appendix 7](#))
- Find creative uses of vacant spaces – urban farming, pop-up art installations, pop-up cinemas/ event venues, temporary parks.
- Partner with the city to create a vacancy program. Examples include Newark, NJ: Adopt-a-Lot and Pittsburgh, PA: Vacant to Vibrant program.
- Work with city for re-zoning or overlay to ease/speed new commercial activity.

### Streetscape and Facade Improvements

Along with infrastructure, the streetscape in a neighborhood and commercial area can speak loudly to an image of a neighborhood. Seizing the opportunity to rebuild post-disaster, funding for streetscape improvement (benches, street-lights, banners, planters, etc.) should be actively pursued. Infrastructure and streetscape improvements can be a critical impetus for reinvestment from developers in an area if completed in conjunction with a revitalization strategy.

Similar to the benefits of streetscape improvements, a facade improvement program can bring about a sign of recovery with improved faces of local commercial establishments. Working with local organizations and businesses to identify funding opportunities, connect volunteers, or address other barriers to improving the facade is a great means to start an improvement.

An example of a successful facade program is with the Czech Village and New Bohemia Main Street Organization. A local organization gave a \$50,000 donation to the organization for a matching facade program. This money was used to match what local businesses could pay to improve facades. This started with a few neighborhood businesses taking advantage of the program and word of mouth accelerated the number of



participants. The program was a great means to improve many of the historic facades that otherwise would be financially difficult for business owners to complete on their own.

Another example of facade improvements comes from New Zealand. A “Facade Squad” works in distressed neighborhoods to repaint vacant or other buildings in need of repair. Made up of local volunteers with donated materials, they are able to give a fresh look to buildings.

### **Changing Zoning and Easing Permitting For Commercial Activity**

As part of the recovery process, it is important to work with local businesses and the city to ease the permitting process for rebuilding, renovating, or creating new businesses. Post-disaster city staffs are often overwhelmed with duties, so a large influx of permit applications often creates a back up. In addition, current zoning in the neighborhood may be detrimental to development due to the delay in the permitting process. As seen the spotlight below, Feret Street residents saw this and identified a solution to speed redevelopment.

#### **Case Study: Encouraging Business on Feret Street:**

In post-Katrina New Orleans, Feret Street neighbors were looking for a means to revive the neighborhood. Like many areas post-disaster, they were dealing with a commercial street with little business activity. Local neighborhood leaders launched multiple efforts, including starting the Feret Street Market. More notably though, neighborhood leaders successfully encouraged the City Council to designate Feret street as an “arts and cultural overlay district,” welcoming nighttime establishments that meet certain standards, such as limited operating hours. This fueled a small-business resurgence with 20 new small businesses opening from 2008-2012. This city planning designation, put into effect in 2008, eases the permitting process for restaurants, entertainment venues, and galleries, bringing these businesses to the area at a faster pace than if they had not rezoned the neighborhood. The street is now seen as a “restaurant row” destination for the community and activity continues to flourish as businesses continue to redevelop and open on Feret Street.

Source: Waller, M. (November 27, 2012, updated June 19, 2014). Freret Street resurgence continues with new wave of businesses planning to launch. *The Times-Picayune*. Retrieved from: [http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2012/11/freret\\_street\\_resurgence\\_conti.html](http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2012/11/freret_street_resurgence_conti.html)

### **Attracting Funding**

Neighborhood revitalization post-disaster has additional opportunities for funding in that it can leverage its prior distressed status and the disaster impact for more resources. Establishing a sheet or flyers of resources can provide useful material to neighborhood commercial activity. Some strategies for funding opportunities include:

- Seek donations of not just monetary, but professional services from organizations and businesses in the community who were not affected by the disaster;



- Tap volunteer networks for not just labor, but also organizational work, such as updating social media pages;
- Seek donations from local foundations and organizations. See façade improvements section for example;
- Seek grants that apply to your neighborhood’s circumstances, such as low-income, food deserts, or historic preservation grants/tax credits;
- Consider a Federal Neighborhood Revitalization Grant;<sup>61</sup>
- Work with the city to establish tax incentives. Examples include an “opportunity zone”, “enterprise redevelopment zone”, or a “revitalization overlay.”

## Communication Strategies

With any post-disaster recovery situation, communications are important for recovery. Crisis communications are outlined in Chapter VII of this toolkit where many of the strategies can be applied for the post-disaster portion of recovery. The recommendations in this section are additions to the section and adaptation of how they apply to a distressed neighborhood revitalization effort. It is important post-disaster to communicate specifically with neighborhoods to:

- Combat misinformation by acknowledging false information and providing correct language or directing to the correct agency/office
- Having a trusted and visible platform to deliver this information is important. During Hurricane Sandy, the city of New York used its Twitter and Facebook accounts to dispel rumors and misinformation, saving some citizens from fraud and wasted time.
- Use neighborhood-level grassroots network to share information (group listservs, meetings, events)
- This can establish or build the reputation of your organization as an agent of information and partner in recovery by using established groups.
- Use multiple avenues of media (newspaper, television, flyers, newsletters, social media, websites)
- Tap informal networks in the neighborhood (e.g. posting meeting notices in a key neighborhood business) to reach those who may not be part of a formal network such as a neighborhood group.

### Recognition – Marketing the New and Improved Neighborhood

Part of revitalizing a neighborhood is building an identity for the neighborhood. Distressed neighborhoods tend to have an associated identity in the community, but celebrating recovery efforts can showcase development and spark interest to bring in additional businesses or residents. It’s important to celebrate neighborhood achievements not just amongst neighborhood residents, but to use the media to raise community awareness of the development of the neighborhood. Examples of this can be seen in the spotlight of Goderich, Ontario, below.

- Host large neighborhood events at anniversaries (i.e. 1 year post-disaster)
- Host ongoing celebrations for re-openings, or new business/ ribbon cuttings

<sup>61</sup> Example: US Department of Housing. *Public and Indian Housing Choice Neighborhoods* [2012 Financial Statement Report]. Retrieved from: [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=Choice\\_Neighborhoods\\_2012.pdf](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=Choice_Neighborhoods_2012.pdf)



- Feed “feel-good” recovery stories locally, regionally, and nationally, even if not requested. These feel-good stories can include a business that has excelled post-disaster, new neighborhood assets such as parks or infrastructure, or a proposal for new development.

### Case Study: Goderich, Ontario – Marketing Recovery

In August of 2011, an F3 category tornado ripped through the town of Goderich, Ontario, severely damaging the city’s historic downtown. Through recovery efforts, 137 out of 158 businesses opened up again in their original location within a year. This is in part due to many efforts from the city, the citizens of Goderich, and the province of Ontario. This is important not only to the local economy, but to the thousands of tourists that visit the city every year.

Goderich claims to be “Canada’s prettiest town” and this is shown by the droves of tourists every year. To make sure Canada knew that Goderich was “open for business,” media campaigns were organized. Todd Letts, the Community Economic Revitalization Committee Executive Director, and Susan Armstrong with the Business Improvement Area, tackled two media campaigns. The first was a “Thank you Ontario” and a “Thank you Canada” campaign that told stories of the recovery while giving thanks for assistance. This went out to numerous media outlets and was seen by over 300,000 people. The city also invited one of Canada’s national morning shows to host a show in the historic town square, which displayed recovery efforts.

To not let these efforts go to waste, a second campaign leveraged the current efforts of outreach, and the Rediscover Goderich Campaign was launched. This campaign built an internet presence through [www.rediscovergoderich.com/](http://www.rediscovergoderich.com/) and social media sites such as Facebook. This focused on showcasing to people and businesses how resilient the city is and why they should rediscover the city for life or business. Both Todd and Susan stated that these campaigns were effective in feeding positive news stories to the media.

Post-disaster, much of the news, especially around the year after, can be negative. Feeding news outlets, even if they didn’t ask for them, positive stories of recovery can help shine a light on the city and raise awareness that the city is “open for business.”

Source: Letts, T. & Armstrong, S. (December 2012). Personal Communication.

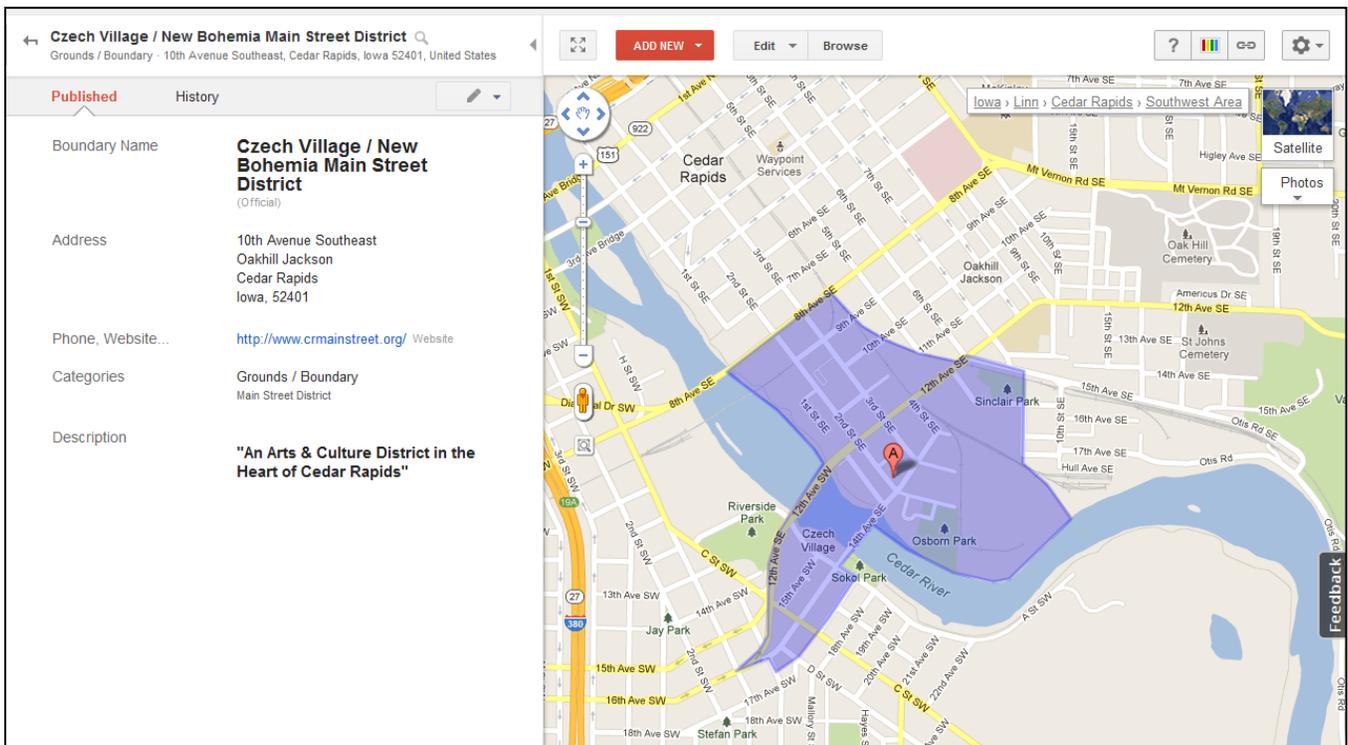
### Social Media and Online Presence

Communication has taken on an additional role in the age of technology with new avenues onto which information can be distributed. Using social media and websites post-disaster can provide a quick, real-time opportunity to deliver information that traditional communication doesn’t allow. This delivering of information builds your reputation and raises awareness of recovery efforts that may have otherwise been uninformed.

- Update information and provide useful links regularly to keep readers engaged



- If you do not have social media accounts, as you build your social presence you can:
  - Deliver information to partnerships to post to social media sites
  - Co-sponsor events with established partnerships and gain credibility via their social media presence.
- Build an online presence if non-existent. Easy interfaces allow simple site building and free hosting, such as with Google sites.
- Ensure your neighborhood is recognized by major map sources. For example, Google maps allow neighborhoods to appear on their maps. Visit [Google Map Maker](http://www.google.com/mapmaker) (<http://www.google.com/mapmaker>) to build and submit your neighborhood. As seen below, the area of the neighborhood was drawn and submitted to Google Maps. Now, when Google Maps users are looking at the map, the neighborhood is identified. This provides recognition and can help further market the neighborhood.



## Summary

Working to revitalize a neighborhood post-disaster takes a long-term strategy and requires at times creative thinking, collaboration, and communication. As many of the strategies outlined in this chapter exemplify, building support for revitalization is key for sustainable success of efforts. Without local buy-in, only resistance will be met along the path for revitalization. This is important to avoid post-disaster, as a distressed impacted neighborhood can become a bigger issue for surrounding neighborhoods and the community itself. Organizing efforts quickly post-disaster allows efforts to begin in a time frame that can bring commercial activity back and work to build an environment that encourages further business activity.