



WESTSIDE COMMUNITY RETENTION COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY **Plan Finalized February 2017**

Vision:

To address Westside residents' concerns about displacement and gentrification through the creation of vetted policy recommendations and strategies in a Westside Community Retention Plan that targets the Atlanta University Center, Ashview Heights, English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods.

Process:

- In February 2017, the Westside Future Fund (WFF) started leading the transition of the Problem Property Collaborative into the Westside Community Retention Collaborative (WCRC) to continue to work on problem property concerns and focus on implementing community retention strategies in the neighborhoods of English Avenue, Vine City, AUC and Ashview Heights.
- WCRC focused on understanding the current conditions, available data, resources and existing issues that renters, homeowners and businesses face in the four neighborhoods.
- The WFF and the neighborhood associations of Vine City, English Avenue, AUC and Ashview Heights each hosted a series of community meetings to share existing housing and rental data with residents and get feedback on potential strategies.
- Based on the community meetings and feedback, the WCRC proposed multiple strategies needed to retain each group. There are some universal challenges that apply to each group including - access to information about existing programs, crime, and blight in the area. Broader insights included:
 - Homeowners need incentives to keep existing homeowners in the Westside as well as provide a pathway to renters for homeownership in the neighborhoods;
 - Renters need strategies centered around subsidies, inclusionary zoning, and other methods for maintaining quality affordable rentals in the area; and
 - Business strategies need to focus on maintaining affordability to retain existing businesses and nonprofits serving the community while also increasing the quality and amount of available commercial spaces needed to retain and attract new Westside businesses and entrepreneurs.
- After reviewing the data and the assets and opportunities in the Westside, the WCRC reviewed best practices and draft strategies with each neighborhood association. The WCRC finalized the Westside Community Retention Plan in February 2017 with the expectation that strategies will be refined and tailored through the collaborative process prior to being implemented.
- For the four impact areas, the plan builds on 12 existing programs available to Westside residents with 7 new short-term strategies that address the following issues for each of the groups:
 - Universal issues facing all residents: Access to information, and Safety and Blight;
 - Homeowners: Threats to Staying, Low Levels of Homeownership, Quality Affordable Housing
 - Renters: Threats to Staying, Decreasing Availability of Affordable Housing Units, Quality Affordable Housing;
 - Businesses: Threats to Staying, Low Quantity of Leasable Space, Declining Conditions

(1) Universal Issues Facing all Westside Residents

Goal 1: Increase resident access to information.

Goal 2: Address safety concerns in these neighborhoods.

Goal 3: Address blighted and vacant properties.



Specific Strategies

- **One Access Point** - Create one web-based location where community members can access all information related to community retention and identify physical locations within each neighborhood to provide hard-copy information to residents without internet access.
- **Outreach Strategy** –Work with neighborhood associations to develop an outreach strategy to inform residents about the community retention strategy, tools and resources.
- **Marketing and Branding** –Work with the neighborhood associations and partners to share the positive stories and news from the Westside to help tell the good news stories about the residents and neighborhood.
- **Design** -Increase “eyes on the street” or the number of witnesses at any public location, effectively deterring serious crime throughout the redevelopment of the communities.
- **Special Populations** -Ensure that special populations, especially the homeless and the mentally ill are considered in resident retention strategies.
- **Neighborhood Security**-Build on community and neighborhood policing and security strategies in the area.
- **Code Enforcement** -Strengthen code enforcement.
- **Acquisition** -Acquisition of blighted and vacant property for redevelopment. Provide financial products that meet local needs in partnership with the On the Rise Financial Center.

(2) Homeowners

Goal 1: Increase assistance to existing homeowners so that they may remain in their homes.

Goal 2: Increase rates of homeownership among residents in the neighborhood through the conversion of renters to owners.

Goal 3: Increase the supply of affordable housing within the communities.

Specific Strategies

- **Homeowner Rehabilitation Programs**-create or improve existing rehab programs to make them accessible to all homeowners.
- **Historic Preservation**-Create an affordable historic preservation tool that would give guidance and financial assistance to future restorations.
- **Legal Aid**-Continue to support existing programs that provide legal aid for property owners and education to combat predatory lending practices.
- **Tax Fund**-Establish a fund that could help aid current residents in paying their tax delinquency and/or temporarily freeze current homeowners’ taxes.
- **Job Training and Employment**-Support and promote existing job training and employment opportunities for residents, along with creation of jobs accessible to neighborhood residents.
- **Credit Counselling**-Address credit issues that might prevent residents from being eligible to own a home.
- **Education**-Support homeowner education programs that provide guidance to new homeowners in their transition from renters to owners including home maintenance, finance, etc.
- **Incentives**-Provide incentives to developers to encourage the inclusion of affordable units in new developments in the communities.
- **Land Trust**-Work with the Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority and Atlanta Land Trust Initiative to provide for long term housing affordability.

(3) Renters

Goal 1: Provide resources and encourage development that will help existing tenants afford their rents.

Goal 2: Ensure that housing projects with state funding and upcoming expiration dates for the low-income housing tax credit continue to be in place for low income households.

Goal 3: Increase the supply of quality affordable rental properties in the Westside.

Specific Strategies

- **Building Size**-Encourage production of small and medium scale affordable housing developments rather than large luxury style condos.
- **Supplement**-Create a funding mechanism to assist current renters afford increased rent and provide tax breaks to current rental property owners to provide affordable units.
- **Intermediary Housing**-Offer emergency short term housing to those who are already victims of displacement during this process.
- **AHA Incentives**-Work with Atlanta Housing Authority to preserve affordability on their sites in the area.
- **Tax Incentives**-Offer property tax reductions to rental owners who commit to long-term affordable rents for lower income households.
- **Existing Affordable Rental Incentives**-Work with owners of existing affordable housing sites in the Westside to preserve affordability on those sites.
- **Developer Incentives**-Create incentive programs for developers to include affordable housing in their new projects.
- **Rental Rehab**-Create a rental rehab program for small investors to use specific funds to redevelop and create additional affordable units.
- **Inclusionary Zoning**-Consider adopting Inclusionary Zoning for all new developments regardless of funding structure.
- **Historic Preservation**-Create an affordable historic preservation tool that would give guidance to future restorations.
- **Land Trust**-Continue to explore the creation of a land trust.

(4) Businesses

Goal 1: Provide resources and encourage development that will help existing tenants afford their rents.

Goal 2: Increase the supply of affordable commercial properties in the Westside.

Goal 3: Provide resources to encourage the rehabilitation of existing commercial structures.

Specific Strategies

- **Funding** -Develop a funding mechanism where current owners of properties can obtain tax breaks to keep rents lower.
- **Resources** -Target funding programs for local small businesses and nonprofit development & capacity building.
- **Incentives** -Incentivize developers to set aside a portion of their commercial development for existing local businesses and nonprofits at lower rents.
- **Mix of Uses** -Encourage a mix of uses in future and existing developments and site plans to address the community's need for more readily available commercial space.
- **Program** -Enhance and create program for current owners and tenants for improvement of commercial properties, specifically for façade improvement.



- **Preservation** - Create an affordable historic preservation tool that would give guidance to future restorations.

Year One Implementation

Ongoing Strategies:

- **Police Presence** -Increase police presence in the area.
- **Code Enforcement**-Strengthen code enforcement.
- **Acquisition** –Acquire blighted and vacant property for redevelopment.
- **Legal aid** Continue to support existing programs that provide legal aid for property owners and education to combat predatory lending practices.
- **Job Creation**-support the creation of jobs accessible to neighborhood residents to provide for financial stability.
- **Down Payment Assistance**-Help renters become new homeowners through down payment assistance programs.

Short-Term:

- **One Access Point** -Create one location where community members can access all information related to community retention.
- **Outreach Strategy** -Develop an outreach strategy to create awareness about where to access information.
- **Homeowner Rehab Programs** - Create or improve existing rehab programs to make them accessible to all homeowners.
- **Credit Counselling**- Address credit issues that might prevent residents from being eligible to own a home.
- **Emergency short term housing**- Provide residents who are already victims of displacement during this process.
- **Incentives** - Incentivize developers to set aside a portion of their commercial development for existing local businesses and nonprofits at lower rents.
- **Acquisition**–Consider targeted strategic commercial property acquisition on sites that are dilapidated or otherwise disinvested.

Medium Term:

- **Program** –Create program for current owners and tenants for improvement of commercial properties, specifically for façade improvement.
- **Resources** -Target funding programs for local small businesses and nonprofit development and capacity building.
- **Land Trust**-Continue to explore the creation of a land trust.
- **New Program** – Create program for developers to include affordable housing in their new projects.
- **Partner** – Work with Atlanta Housing Authority to preserve affordability on their sites in the area.
- **Incentives** - Provide incentives to developers to encourage the inclusion of affordable homes in new developments in the communities.