



# Housing

## PROJECT SCOPE AND GOALS

The City of Freeport has experienced economic and population declines in the East Side resulting from an exodus of manufacturing jobs; flooding, flood regulations, and lack of financial capital available for investment. As a result of these declines, the community has concerns about the East Side's existing housing stock. The Community, Activities, Partnership, Support (CAPS) housing initiative has expressed desire for the implementation of a strategic housing plan. Our aim is to provide information to support the city and CAPS in this effort, as well as recommendations for revitalization strategies.

The goal of the following project is to provide the City of Freeport and the organization CAPS with the information and resources that can allow for problem area identification and potential solutions. Included in our project is a brief description of neighborhood context, and demographics analyses of the target neighborhood.

The following document contains two different housing inventory criteria, one from Flint, Michigan, and one which we developed. We provide general and detailed observations from our preliminary inventory of the East Side neighborhood, and recommendations for future inventories. In addition, a geographic analysis of property values in the neighborhood is included.

In addition, the project seeks to provide strategies for more effective strategies of community organizing, and coalition building. In addition, we explore tactics to mitigate flooding through the use of green infrastructure and provide recommendation for where this infrastructure can be located.

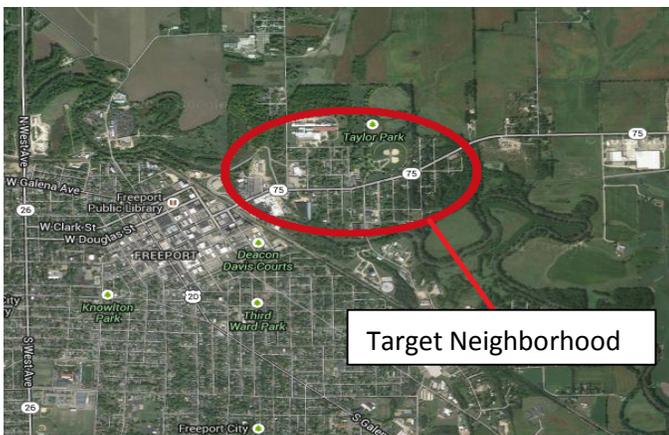


Figure 1. The targeted neighborhood aerial photo

## BACKGROUND

Ever since Tutty Baker founded what would become Freeport and throughout its rich history, the east side neighborhood across the Pecatonica River has always been a part of the “Pretzel City.” While the City’s east side consolidated rather than grew like the neighborhoods to the West, it has historically been described as nothing less than vibrant, healthy, safe, and by local accounts “bumpin.”

For years, the East Side was indeed a community that exhibited all of the characteristics of a healthy neighborhood. These features are strong manufacturing and other jobs base, high walkability, convenient transportation, and easy access to the local school and Taylor Park highlighted the area. A significant reason the majority of the city developed across the river because of severe flooding. However, residents continued living in the flood plain and maintaining their neighborhood. As has often been the case with urban floodplains, the introduction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodway designation residents have frequently found themselves unable to meet the imposed requirements and has led to a decline in investment in the neighborhood.

Today, only a small glimpse remains of the modest but healthy neighborhood that was Freeport’s East Side. There is very little of the housing stock left – vacant lots are widespread and sometimes encompass entire blocks. On the East Side of the river, economic vitality has slowed significantly. While some East Siders have been able to maintain a collection of healthy properties - and there are some beautiful homes that dot the area - there are also many who have not been as able to acclimate to FEMA codes. In the face of hardships, large populations of residents have left the neighborhood, and many of the former homes and businesses have fallen into disrepair.

This has had an impact on current residents, as home values have suffered a steady decline - today, median home values for the area are less than \$5000. To stress the issue further, significant amounts of infrastructure on the East Side have either degraded considerably or have disappeared entirely.

So where does it go from here? As it stands, the situation on the East Side is far from perfect, but there is a positive to build on. The overall design of the neighborhood, for example, is extremely conducive to healthy development. Major neighborhood assets are all located within walking distance, and the neighborhood as a whole is highly navigable. Additionally, the remaining neighborhood has a diverse racial makeup. In addition the area has been extensively studied and surveyed, so data is available. Although there is considerable work to be done, the East Side of Freeport certainly has many obtainable forward-looking outcomes.

## ANALYSIS

### Target Neighborhood Demographics



Figure 2. The targeted neighborhood & the neighbors

According to the 2010 U.S. Census Block Group data, there are approximately 588 people living within the target neighborhood. Income levels are a major concern in the neighborhood. The median individual income for neighborhood residents is approximately \$13,438 which is well under half of the state of Illinois at \$31,179. The median income of families in the neighborhood is \$21,411, which is well under half of the state median at \$68,236. The 2010 U.S. Census Block Group 000700-1 data shows that approximately 25% of families are below the poverty line.

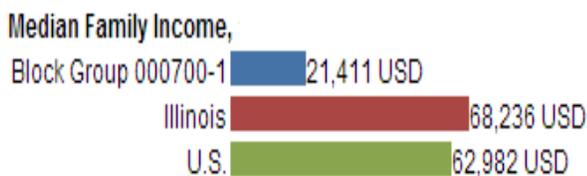


Figure 3. The median family income

The racial makeup of the neighborhood is striking when compared to the city of Freeport as a whole. Approximately 52% of individuals in the target neighborhood identify as Black compared to 16% in the city of Freeport. Nearly 40% of neighborhood residents identify as White compared to 77% in the city of Freeport. It is clear that the neighborhood consists of a concentration of African-Americans as 7% of all of Freeport's African-American population lives within our target neighborhood.

The target group population is somewhat younger than the city of Freeport and state of Illinois. Approximately 33% of the target neighborhood is under the age of 18 compared to 23% in the city of Freeport and 24% in the state. A little over half of the population under the age of 18 is located in two blocks. The 100 and 200 blocks of N. Adelbert Ave is home to the neighborhood's public housing property and according to U.S. Census Block Data from 2010 is home to 105 of the estimated 194 minors in the community.

### The Flooding Issue

The target neighborhood is consistently affected by flooding from the Pecatonica River and Currier Creek. All development in the target neighborhood is located within a floodway and as a result residents are forced to deal with recurring floods problems and the negative externalities, such as mold and structural degradation, impacting their property. The East Side has experienced fifteen major floods in the past 80 years on record, as well as several small floods. The floodway has contributed greatly to the trend of neighborhood disinvestment.

Flooding is viewed as one of the primary challenges faced by the community. Therefore, strategies for improvements to Freeport's housing stock will necessarily lend some focus on flood mitigation techniques. Green infrastructure can provide a cost effective method of mitigating the impact of flooding on the neighborhood. We identify three specific contributors to the flooding which must be mitigated; they are overflow from nearby Currier Creek and the Pecatonica River, and storm drain overflow. Sewer realignment has helped to some extent, but the problem persists. The Freeport 'Sidewalk Beautification Project' failed to include storm drains in its design.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's revisions to existing flood zones and designated floodways has had significant impact on investments in the community. Since FEMA's designation the community has declined rapidly. Methods of floodway mitigation are a critical component of larger issues in the housing stock.

Exploration of strategies for mitigation will be explored in the strategy recommendations portion of this text. For now, we will turn our attention to the housing conditions inventory and material useful for future inventories.

### Borrowing Concepts from Flint, Michigan Inventory

Performing a citywide survey in Freeport may merit borrowing concepts from the criteria developed in Flint, Michigan. In the fall of 2012 the City of Flint, Michigan conducted an inventory of all residential structures within their municipal boundaries. We view Flint's inventory as a worthy model because the city utilized community members to conduct the survey and developed a simple criteria. However, the criteria may be viewed as overly simplistic; if so, the inventory criteria our group developed may be a better option for Freeport.

The Flint, Michigan inventory featured a four point rating system: 1 being good, 2 being fair, 3 being poor, 4 being substandard, and a category for vacant lots. Defined below are the specific conditions which define each scoring category.

- A score of 1 means the building is structurally sound, the roof is in good condition, the foundation has no cracking and no leaning, the porch is attached and is straight, no broken or boarded windows, siding is intact and aligned, and there is no fire damage.
- A score of 2 means the building is structurally sound but minor repairs may be necessary, roof may have damaged shingles, the foundation is in good shape, porch may be leaning or crooked but is attached, windows may be boarded but none are broken that are not boarded, siding, trim, and gutters may need repair or replacement, painting may be boarded but none are broken that are not boarded, siding, trim, and gutters may need repair or replacement, painting may be needed, and there is no fire damage.
- A score of 3 means the structure may not be sound, the roof may be sagging and a tarp may be visible, foundation is cracked and the house may be leaning, the porch may be detached from house, windows may be broken without boards, siding is need of repairs, painting may is needed, and only minor exterior fire damage may be present.
- A score of 4 means the structure is unsafe and repair is not feasible. The roof may have openings or is collapsed, the walls may possess holes, porches are detached or collapsed, more than minor fire damage is present, or only a basement is present.

The Flint city staff assessed roughly 35% of residential properties and 27 community groups assessed the remaining 65%. The City of Flint provided Neighborhood Inventory Mini-Grants. The mini-grant amount was only \$500 provided to each participating group. Given Freeport is a smaller community, the number of groups that may be utilized may also be smaller. Five hundred dollars may be used worthy incentive that can attract community groups to participate.

### Creating Our Inventory Criteria

The intent of our inventory was to gather information on the current structural conditions in the targeted neighborhood so as to allow us to define critical issues. The information gathered may allow for the creation of a strategic plan that can pin-point structural issues such as such a broken windows, and poor roof conditions. Our findings may also provide benchmarks that can be used to assess qualitative and quantitative progression.

Our inventory was created by performing research into best practices in pilot housing reinvestment, NSP grants and design survey data, and incorporating concepts from the housing inventory methods used in Flint, Michigan. Our inventory attempts to further quantify specific structural characteristics.

The Flint, Michigan criteria contains four scoring categories that lumps together issues like foundations, roofs, windows. Our inventory attempts to break apart those structural conditions into specific scoring categories, placing windows, roofs,

and foundations into separate categories. It is our belief that our inventory criteria better portrays the structural issues which are specific to each residential structure. Displayed below is the criteria we developed:

Figure 4. The inventory criteria

### Performing the Inventory

On October 11th, three members of Studio 912’s Housing team conducted a preliminary housing inventory. The aim of the housing inventory was to gather data of the specific housing conditions present in the neighborhood and to test the inventory criteria we developed. We chose to concentrate our inventory in the portion of the neighborhood south of US Highway 75 as we found this portion to be most affected by flooding. The streets covered by our inventory are displayed in the map below.



Figure 5. The streets covered by our inventory

### General Observations

There are approximately 70 residential structures in the inventory area, of which 15% appear abandoned. Approximately 44 of the occupied homes are located on S. Hooker Ave, S. Johanna Ave, S. Rose Ave, and N. Louis Ave; while only 15 of the apparent occupied homes are located throughout the rest of the neighborhood. Most of the surveyed area consists of vacant lots, many of which feature heavy overgrowth. Some properties did not have a displayed address which made documenting addresses on inventory criteria worksheets difficult.

As expected, the overwhelming majority of residential structures were single family homes. Approximately 80% of the occupied residential structures appear to be over 50 years old. Despite the age of the occupied housing stock, the majority of the structures possessed good foundations. However, the majority of the homes need painting and siding repair.. Porch and window conditions are also a concern. If the observation were tabulated using the Flint, Michigan criteria, it would be fair to say the majority of homes would score 2.

A brief window survey was performed on the blocks and streets outside of our inventory coverage area. It appears the neighborhood to the north of E Stephenson St. is healthier than that of the south, but issues common in the south are present in the north. Occupied homes along E. Orin St. possess poor foundations, sagging roofs, and collapsed porches.

Homes that appear abandoned are scattered throughout the northern half of the neighborhood. We observed 9 abandoned homes in the neighborhoods outside of our surveyed area. We observed 21 apparent abandoned homes in target neighborhood as a whole, but it is likely that there are several more. The northern half of the target neighborhood also possesses a number of vacant lots and vacant non-residential structures.



Figure 6. Homes in need of revitalization or demolition

The northern half of the eastside neighborhood does possess clusters of healthy blocks. Though most of the housing structures along E. Crocker St could use siding repair, many have good foundations and good roofs, and most residential structures are occupied. The public housing units located along N. Sheridan Ave contain the largest concentration of population in the entire neighborhood and appear to provide a quality standard of living. The demolition of the vacant non-residential structure on the southwest corner of Crocker and Adelbert can provide green space for the neighboring multi-family housing units.

### Response from Residents

While performing the inventory, our group had the opportunity to interact with members of the community. We spoke with an individual who owned property on S. Louis Ave. They said they enjoyed the quiet aspects of the neighborhood and had no problem with our being here. Most of the residents we came across paid little attention to us and those who did made sure to say hello and had favorable opinions.

However, this was not the case with all residents, as we did re-

ceive hostility from some residents. Some felt we were violating their privacy and that our efforts would do little to improve their community. The reactions reaffirmed the community's negative perception of the past efforts carried out by the City. The negative reactions also affirmed the need for further social cohesion and organization efforts; in addition the city must build a better relationship with the East Side community.

Given our status as outsiders, it is not surprising that we should face hostility from community members. Going forward, future surveys should be performed by members of the community and community organizations who have built relationships with residents in the community.

### GIS Data Analysis

Through the use of Geographic Information Systems, we furthered our data analysis to account for the values of each individual parcel of property in the target neighborhood. We attained this information through data used by the Stephenson County Assessor.

As expected, property values in the neighborhood are extremely low. The large majority of property values of parcels fell between the \$0 to \$8,999 ranges. Approximately 63% properties have value below \$2,999, while 18 out of 469 property values are over \$12,000. 92% of all parcels in the target neighborhood had values below \$9,000. The mean property value for taxable properties is \$8,226.

Ownership was another factor explored through GIS. There were 469 total of parcels of which 320 appear to be privately held. 102 of the parcels appear to be owned by some form of government, as no property tax was charged to these parcels and no owner was listed. 47 parcels were owned by 'other institutions.' These other institutions include neighborhood churches, Freeport Housing Authority, and the school district.



Figure 7. The overall property value heat map

Figure 7 displays the values throughout the neighborhood regardless of ownership. The parcels with the lowest values are displayed in beige, the highest values are depicted red. Almost all properties with values over \$12,000 are industrial and commercial properties. The large majority of residential property values are below \$9,000 in value.



Figure 8. The private property value heat map

The above graphic is a property value heat map with government and institution owned properties distinguished by the color blue. As expected, the most valuable parcels are located in the industrial corridors to the west. In fact, 13 out of 18 properties with values above \$12,000 in value are non-residential. The hot spot on S. Hancock is a large industrial parcel. The hot spot on S. Johanna Ave is an unused non-residential facility, which was at one time a mechanics garage. The total value of the overwhelming majority of residential parcels is below \$9,000.



Figure 9. The tax bill heat map

The above graphic displays the value of tax bills issued in 2013 to property owners in the target neighborhood. Complementing the previous maps, the highest tax bills are all non-residential parcels to the west of the neighborhood. The majority of residential property owners were billed between the 0 to \$400.00 range. The largest concentrations of low taxed properties are found along the most southern portions of S. Louis Ave and S. Mary Ave's. Another low concentration is found on S. Sheridan Ave and S. Sherman Ave.

### Revitalization Recommendations

For our revitalization recommendations, we chose to take a three-pronged approach that provides methods of flood mitigation used in other cities, green infrastructure recommendations, and community development recommendations. Our group took a look at various case studies where similar cities and neighborhoods used different means to put an end to the flooding situation.

Furthermore, we have provided green infrastructure implementation recommendations that serve as idea generators for future initiatives. We end our recommendation session with strategies for effective community organizing. The recommendations are based from academia and real world techniques utilized by community organizations in Chicago.

It is our sincere hope that these case studies and recommendations will provide CAPS and the City of Freeport with useful ideas for future efforts.

### Urban Flood Mitigation Case Studies

To better articulate our own approach on how to alleviate or reverse the symptoms of urban floodway restrictions imposed on the residents of Freeport's east side, we analyzed successful initiatives undertaken in communities dealing with similar difficulties. To our optimism, we found several projects across the country that mirror problems found within the target neighborhood. Of the case studies, acquisition, green infrastructure, and floodwalls (some being "invisible") were the most frequent approaches. Per the expressed municipal interests of Freeport, property acquisition - the most frequent and studied method of the three aforementioned - will not be considered as a potential strategy.

### Greenbelts and Green Infrastructure: Scottsdale, AZ

Due to topography and an arid climate, Scottsdale was subject to frequent flash floods and flooding, especially as development in and around Phoenix boomed. After major flooding incidents in the 70s left some homeless and claimed one life, the city took initiative. The city council called a flood control bond election in 1973 to approve the sale of \$10 million in bonds for the purpose of funding flood control and drainage projects.

With the funds approved, the project was completed in 1999 – it became known as the Indian Bend Wash Greenbelt.

Today, Scottsdale's greenbelt attracts “high-end apartment complexes, attractive shopping centers and resorts.” The achieved concept of a linear park system rather than a concrete channel or other invasive measures has both been beneficial to the neighboring areas and functionally successful. The Wash maintains effective protection against floods by providing a capacity of 30,000 cubic feet of water per second, while the most significant historical flood for the area recorded 22,000 cubic feet per second. Additionally, the Wash is also greatly utilized as a walking/recreational area by local residents.

## Floodwalls – Invisible and Permanent: Columbus, OH and East Grand Forks, MN

### 1. Columbus, OH

As opposed to trying to deal with flooding mitigation by way of environmental infrastructure improvements, floodwalls offer a man-made barrier that prevent floodwater from spilling over into the communities protected. In this section, both permanent and invisible floodwalls are examined – invisible floodwalls being temporary, removable, and reusable barriers erected for the same purpose as their permanent counterparts.

Columbus, OH – The Franklinton neighborhood of Columbus, the oldest neighborhood of the city, faced occasional devastating floods (most notably the flood of 1913) and, similar to east Freeport, firm FEMA restrictions regarding development and upkeep. While always a working-class neighborhood, Franklinton faced sharp economic and social decline in the wake of these restrictions. In an attempt to have FEMA remove the floodplain designation (and, thus, the restrictions), the City of Columbus sought and was approved over \$90 million by the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Conference (EWDAC) in the House of Representatives for the construction of a floodwall. The rest of the projects funding, approximately \$42 million dollars, was funded by the city and further successful efforts to procure dollars from the EWDAC.

Completed in 2003, the Franklinton floodwall was successful in lifting the floodplain restrictions that had burdened the neighborhood for decades. Taking just over 10 years to complete, the floodwall now scenically lines 7.5 miles of the Scioto River, including the area adjacent to downtown Columbus. Though revitalization of the Franklinton community has been slow-moving, the floodwall has finally stagnated some of the difficulties that plagued the area and has also promoted some development; the city has recently released a large scale plan for near-complete redevelopment of the East Franklinton neighborhood.

### 2. East Grand Forks, MN

After levees and sandbags failed to contain the devastating 1997 flood, city officials in East Grand Forks, MN decided to invest in relatively new flood-control technology – the ‘invisible’ flood control wall (IFCW). IFCW is the product of Flood Control America, whose mission is “Harmony with Nature.” The ‘invisible’ aspect of the IFCW is the relative ease of labor required to erect and remove the wall. The East Grand Forks IFCW is made up of aluminum siding and provides 980 linear feet of flooding protection with a height of up to 14 feet.

Construction of the IFCW in East Grand Forks took only a little over 6 months – from late 1998 to early 1999 – with the total project cost being \$1.2 million. Providing much needed flooding protection, the floodwall has been the spark for over \$20 million dollars of reinvestment in the area, including job-creating retail developments. Residents also comment on the attractiveness of the riverfront view, which, while still providing for flooding protection, the IFCW does not affect. The IFCW also does not carry the same negative environmental externalities as a permanent floodwall might incur, and is obviously much cheaper (compare to the Franklinton example).

## Green Infrastructure Recommendations

Improving storm water infrastructure in Freeport can be performed most effectively by incorporating principals of green infrastructure. A green infrastructure approach to storm water management can make use of the natural waterways and existing green space which makes the approach far more economical than a grey infrastructure alternative. We advise the city use the natural environment rather than build expensive artificial structures like levees.

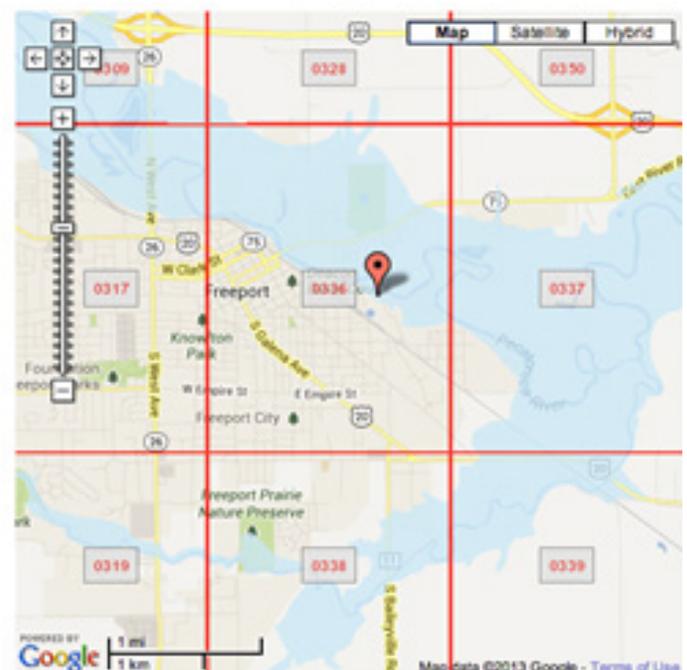


Figure 10. The flood hazard area

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As can be seen from the Freeport flood map (see Fig.1.1), the Freeport Nature Preserve can be an excellent site for flood containment mechanisms as it is located directly in a designated Flood Hazard Area. Freeport could incorporate the use of greenways, drainage ponds, and rain gardens into the nature preserve, thereby not only protecting the preserve but also as a means of utilizing this existing resource to reduce flood water.

Other areas in Freeport which provide a potential sight for Green Infrastructure are Taylor Park, Knowlton Park, and the Deacon Davis Courts; all of which are located close (see Figure 1.2). The Deacon Davis Courts could be the sight of an effluent irrigation facility. Placing ponds into area can provide a method of storm water collection through the use of culverts.

Another important approach is educating community members about what they can do to assist in mitigation efforts. Community residents can be educated on how rain gardens can help protect their individual properties as well as their community. Additionally, providing residents with incentives will still prove more cost-effective than traditional gray infrastructure.

### **Community Development Recommendations**

The negative reactions by residents towards our inventory are indicative of the skepticism and isolation being felt in the East Side neighborhood. This is in addition to stakeholder meeting participants making it abundantly clear that an improved relationship between the city government and the East Side neighborhood is needed. Neighborhood residents have expressed they feel they receive a lesser portion of services than other neighborhoods in the city and past failures provide reason for skepticism about city initiatives.

Improving the relationship between the city and the neighborhood must be viewed as a critical component of any future actions aimed at improving conditions in the neighborhood. Expanding the city's capacity to include recommendations and work done by community organizations will help build trust between the community and the city. Including community organizations in future improvement efforts, such as renovation and property nuisance prevention programs, will provide residents a sense of ownership over the future affairs in their community.

### **Strengthen Community Leadership**

Relationships between residents and their fellow community members must also improve. The key role of CAPS should be to build a network of community members who desire a better East Side Neighborhood. Through this network, relationships between community members can be forged, issues can be identified, and mobilization around these issues can occur. The first step in building this network is effective leadership development.

The leadership capacities of current CAPS participants must be nurtured. Through our stakeholder meeting, it is clear that current CAPS members are leaders in the community, even if they are reluctant in realizing so. Current CAPS members will benefit from further community organizing and leadership training as workshops can provide members the leadership skills and confidence needed for an effective organization. Community organizing workshops are offered regularly in the Chicago area.

Unengaged community leaders should be recognized and recruited for participation in CAPS. Untapped leadership can be found in the schools, the churches, and other spaces of community activity. Engaging these community members and encouraging their active participation in community affairs will provide for a stronger organization.

As leadership development should be a top priority in community organizing; it is important to remember that effective initiatives are always a group effort. In addition to focusing on elevating individual leaders, CAPS members must seek to model and develop group centered leadership which embraces the active participation of many members as opposed to a few.

### **Hosting a Workshop and Other Community Events**

Gaining further involvement will be a necessity for CAPS to become a successful organization. The first step in generating more involvement should be to host a workshop that provides community members the opportunity to provide input on the neighborhood improvements they would prefer to see.

For the workshop, the city should develop a committee that represents a wide range of interests that will present their suggestions for improvement's to community members. After the presentations, time should be provided for community members to be broken into small groups. Each group should then be provided a large notebook for brain storming, and a large map which can be used for problem area identification. Each group should then present their ideas to the other groups. This cost effective activity can provide problem identification, and community networking opportunities.

Community activities performed by CAPS should go beyond addressing issues and should be used to build stronger relationships between community members. Block parties and family fun events can be successful in reaching community members who may be wary of city politics and can also provide community members a sense of pride and belonging. Strong community relationships are often better built through recreational events than through traditional political events.

### **Building Coalitions**

A fundamental concept of community organizing and political power building is smaller organizations become stronger and more effective when they work together. Stakeholder

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comment's suggested a lack of networking between different institutional actors. Building a coalition should be an objective as further emphasis on coalition building will provide more effective implementation of future initiatives.

CAPS will benefit tremendously by focusing on building alliances with other institutions in the city. Building alliances between themselves and churches, parent teacher organizations, and other community organizations will build CAPS influence. Institutions such as the Freeport Housing Authority, Home-Start, and Habitat for Humanity can become far more effective through working together; these organizations can no longer exist in silos. Building coalitions on the East Side will provide the community and these organizations with more influence over future development decisions.

## NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The problems faced by the East Side neighborhood today are the product of decades of decline. The conditions of the neighborhood's housing stock will take decades to improve. Though the current situation appears overwhelming, it is critical decision makers focus their efforts on attaining small victories. Small victories, such as vacant lot clean-up and minor structural improvements; will do a lot to improve the mentality of residents in the neighborhood. Listed below are next steps which should be undertaken by the city:

- CAPS should hold a neighborhood meeting that will allow community members to brain storm and express their views on where improvements can occur.
- The city of Freeport should nurture the leadership of CAPS by sending current CAPS members to community organizing leadership workshops.
- CAPs should work with Home Start to build its community development capacities. Funding sources for home rehabilitation efforts, such as the HOME program through HUD, should be explored.
- A green infrastructure chapter which focuses on methods and implementation should be added to the city of Freeport's comprehensive plan.
- The city should apply for Illinois green infrastructure grant funding through the Illinois EPA and explore other funding sources for green infrastructure improvements.

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