



June-July 2017

Useful Community Development... quick notes

This Month: Looking for possible value instead of always focusing on problems.

Visit us and explore at www.useful-community-development.org.



How about this structure? Is it a problem or an asset? No doubt it's both. This month we ask you to focus on the asset side of the balance sheet. How could it be an asset to the community?

Walk through the Community Looking for Your Assets

Of course we aren't talking about financial assets. We're talking about the people, relationships, places, and things that bring value to your community already or that could add value in the future if more fully developed on behalf of the community.

A community asset might be a particularly talented community member, a large stock of craftsman homes in various states of repair and disrepair, plenty of vacant lots, school buses not being used between 8 am and 2 pm, churches that are underutilized through the week, a good contact at city hall, an active business association, wide streets, a known history, or any of a thousand things that might be maintained or refined into a community plus.

We certainly don't advocate for ignoring problems, but people do their best work when they feel as if they already possess resources to help lift their communities, or maintain them at to a high standard. So sometimes take a break from problem identification, and just for a morning, ask people to identify and focus on only the potential good things.

In this asset-based community development approach, our favorite way to kick off the discussion is by organizing an actual group walk. Encourage one another to see the neighborhood with fresh eyes, to remind one another to postpone talk about problems until a later date, and to support each other in this fresh exploration for new ideas.

If necessary, you can brainstorm at a meeting, but getting out and experiencing the community together inspires many more questions and creative thoughts. We really recommend the walk.

Many negatives also present a positive opportunity. Abandoned homes afford an opportunity for newcomers to upgrade your existing housing. Loss of a community center might mean that two or three places of worship step up to fill the void, and in the process find new ways of cooperating. Lack of interest in your neighborhood at city hall might lead to strengthening your neighborhood organization in order to get more attention. Lack of something for the kids to do might inspire the community to mobilize to restore the old movie theater, enabling parents to show movies for the teens and older children once a week.

Using these examples you could view abandoned houses, multiple non-cooperating congregations and their mostly empty buildings, your struggling neighborhood association, and long-vacant businesses as assets rather than problems to be addressed.

Emphasis on assets also creates a welcoming climate in meetings. If your conversation from meeting to meeting repeats the same complaints over and over, a certain percentage of the population will stop attending. Even leaders burn out when you're stuck in a rut of negativity.

So just for a day, put aside the weighty problems and look for the valuable and the not-yet-valuable in your buildings, people, organizations, history, architecture, and location. Coming back to a central location for refreshments and sharing observations should round out your morning or evening. Be sure to continue emphasizing existing and future assets throughout that discussion. Have a recorder compile your list on a flip chart so you can use it in future meetings.

For much more on this approach and its history, see our [asset-based community development page](#) on the website.

See you in August!

New Website Content This Month. We answered visitors questions on the following topics: [Cellular Antennas on Historic Buildings](#), [Rehab Center in Residential Neighborhood](#), [Deed Restriction on Property Deceased Relative Once Owned](#), [Best Zoning for a Ministry](#), [Violent Extremism and Terrorism as a Hindrance to Community](#).

[Development, Community Development Corporation Approval by the United Nations](#), and [Career Paths for Addressing Urban Sprawl](#).

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