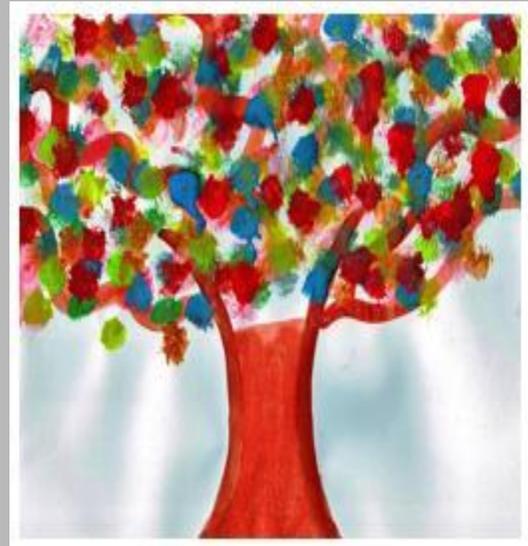




A Branding and Marketing Strategy for Fairmount



Prepared for NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley

By

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Executive Summary

The following report, supported by NeighborWorks America, is part of a national initiative on neighborhood marketing. It aims to provide direction to NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NWB RV) and its partners in building home buyer and responsible investor demand and in strengthening neighborhood pride and identity.

The report looks at the three neighborhoods that are part of the Our Neighborhoods District – Fairmount, Constitution Hill, and Downtown Woonsocket. It recommends a focus for branding and neighborhood marketing on Fairmount.

Fairmount is a “middle-market” neighborhood – not the worst neighborhood but one still needing organized attention. The report finds significant strengths in Fairmount that can be built upon and develops a brand statement for the neighborhood that was drawn from a series of individual meetings with neighbors and other stakeholders.

The brand statement – Fairmount: A Village in the City – is designed to capture the connections among neighbors that are so important in maintaining neighborhood health. It also conveys the international diversity of the neighborhood, while recognizing it is part of a larger city. Supporting the brand statement is a set of key marketing messages – attributes about the neighborhood that reinforce the brand.

A significant part of the report identifies a number of strategies that need to be deployed for neighborhood improvement. Key among them is the need to attract more home owners to the neighborhood. The report identifies target market segments of potential home buyers and how they might be reached. It also identifies a set of strategies to both improve physical conditions and enhance the social connections among existing neighbors. Fundamentally, neighbors need to be proud of Fairmount and see it as a special place. That pride needs to manifest itself in how the neighborhood looks and in how neighbors relate to each other. Pride becomes a currency to use in attracting home buyers to the neighborhood and making Fairmount a real neighborhood of choice in Woonsocket.

Introduction

Fundamentally the work of neighborhood revitalization is about influencing decisions around the investment of time, energy, and resources in a neighborhood. Whether to buy in a neighborhood or avoid that neighborhood, whether to invest for the long term or seek short term profits as a landlord, whether to open a business in this neighborhood or that, whether to invest one’s time in community actions or to withdraw that investment. These are the decisions that make or break neighborhoods.

All these decisions involve someone taking some level of risk and part of the work of neighborhood revitalization is making those decisions less risky.

The core of any marketing strategy has to be an emphasis on influencing that decision making in ways that can strengthen the neighborhood – to attract and retain homeowners, better landlords, and more businesses.

In so doing there is a recognition that neighborhood image is important – that a positive image of a place is more likely to attract the kinds of investments of time, energy, and money than a place perceived as negative.

What I want to do in this report is look at how the work of NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NWBRV) and its collaborative partners can be better aligned around building a stronger image for Woonsocket’s core neighborhoods. What I found in Woonsocket was a high performing community development corporation with many outstanding projects and both staff and resident leadership with a tremendous amount of knowledge about and relationships within the neighborhood. The challenge, as I see it, is to make sure that knowledge and relationships are getting maximum use – that they are being effectively leveraged to create a stronger sense of place.

This report will examine the context of the three neighborhoods that are part of the Our Neighborhoods Planning District (an artificial name that needs to be rethought). This report will address the following:

- An assessment of existing market conditions;
- Observations on what’s working and what’s not working in the downtown neighborhoods;
- Identification of target homebuyer market segments;
- Recommendations on a brand and marketing messages;
- Outline strategies to reinforce the brand.

Before I begin I want to thank the staff of NWBRV who set up a host of meetings with key people and I want to thank all the people who took time to speak with me. It is very clear to me these are neighborhoods that engender strong loyalties among residents, and that loyalty provides an important base on which to build.

Neighborhood Context

The Local Real Estate Market

In 2013, the Woonsocket Housing Authority and NWBRV received a planning grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Choice Neighborhoods Program. An extensive Needs and market Assessment was conducted for the neighborhoods in the Our Neighborhoods Planning District (the District). While I do not feel I need to replicate or add to the data contained in this report, there are several findings that I want to highlight:

- *House prices have declined steeply and continue to drop both in the Our Neighborhoods District and in Providence County. This decline has likely eroded the equity of many*

properties owners which can make it harder for them to refinance or repair their properties. Worse still, prices in the District appear to be reaching levels where the economics no longer support making basic maintenance investments in a home.

- *Since the housing market crash, the homeownership rate in the District has increased to reach 27% in 2011 Small multi-family structures of 2-4 units in Woonsocket are selling at 20% discount in price to single family homes, despite the greater number of units and the potential for rental income.*
- *We estimate there are around 150 renter households living in the census tracts containing the Our Neighborhoods District who could qualify for a mortgage and afford to purchase in common home price tiers in the District. Throughout Woonsocket, we estimate there are around 780 renter households who could become homeowners. These households represent a potential market segment to whom homeownership opportunities in the District could be marketed.*
- *...of the 573 residential structures in the District, 52% had an owner-occupant in 2013. However we see there are also 29 investor-owned single-family homes and 54 investor-owned two family homes, which together comprise 15% of all residential structures in the District.*
- *Low prices combined with still low-interest rates have created an unprecedented level of affordability for first time homebuyers. Houses prices and interest rates are at a point where owning a home may be more financially advantageous for some households.*

These findings present some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that there has been a significant erosion in property values. The good news is that this can present an opportunity to strengthen the owner-occupant base in the neighborhood. But the good news can only be good if NWBRV can take advantage of the situation. Just because properties are affordable does not mean potential home buyers will buy them. In many markets there is significant competition for properties from investors, particularly for properties at the lowest prices.

A change in market conditions can call for a change in how programs and interventions are deployed. In a strong market there are buyers, people are relatively confident home purchase is a good choice and mortgage money flows relatively freely. The challenge is not to convince people homeownership is a good choice but to find affordable opportunities.

In a weaker market the challenge is to convince people homeownership makes sense and to instill in them the confidence that the neighborhoods they can afford to buy into will be good choices.

Based on an estimate of 2013 performance from the Home Ownership Center, only around 15 of the 80 households assisted in home purchase by NWBRV (18.7%) bought in Woonsocket and it is not clear how many of those bought in the District.

The real estate market appears fairly active in at least one of the neighborhoods – Fairmount – over the last year (June, 2013 – August 2014). Using data from Zillow.com I researched these transactions and summarized them in an attached appendix. Unfortunately, this data does not clearly identify the number of units in the subject property. But it does (much of the time) indicate the number of bedrooms and baths. I assumed properties with more than 2 bedrooms and more than one and a half baths were properties of more than one unit. I also looked at pictures of the properties for signs of multiple use. Eliminated from consideration were sales at less than \$1,000 (including four that were for \$1.00) assuming those were not typical arm’s length transactions.

In the period identified, there were 32 sales – 14 assumed single-family and 18 assumed multi-family. The average sales price was \$88,071 for the single family properties and the median was \$83,000. The range in price was from \$20,000 to \$156,000. The distribution of these sales by price is listed below:

Number of Transactions	< \$49,999	\$50,000 – \$99,999	\$100,000 – \$149,999	\$150,000 +
14	3	5	4	2

It is interesting to note that one of these properties 187 2nd Avenue was purchased in early 2014 for \$40,000 and is now listed for sale at \$129,000. The listing did not indicate there was extensive renovation on this property.

There were 18 sales transactions of what appeared to be multi-family properties. The average price was even less than for that of the single families - \$77,611 – while the median is \$70,000. The low sale was \$3,432 and the high sale was \$152,000. If we eliminate that low sale the average price rises to \$80,000 – still below that of the single family average. The distribution of those sales is illustrated below:

Number of Transactions	< 49,999	\$50,000 – \$99,999	\$100,000- \$149,999	\$150,000 +
18	4	8	5	1

This current sales activity reinforces the idea that affordable ownership opportunities exist. But concern has to be raised about whether these sales – particularly in the single-family inventory

– are actually being purchased by owner-occupants or whether they are being purchased by investors for conversion to rental. It would be important for NWBRV to examine each of these transactions to find out if they are owner occupied or rental to get a complete sense of how the neighborhood market may be changing. How NWBRV might influence the direction of the market is discussed later in this report.

So what’s for sale now? How will be the outcomes for these transactions and how will they effect the neighborhood?

The following chart shows properties for sale as of 8/14 as well as buildings that are wending their way through the foreclosure process.

Address	Sales Price	Beds/ Baths	Square Feet	Description
342 Olo	139,342	N/A	N/A	Multi-unit
719 Fairmount	57,500	4/2	1576	Single family – foreclosure
4 th Avenue	149,900	9/4	3609	
187 2 nd	129,900	3/3	2340	Single family
227 Chapel	81,600	3/2	1539	Single family foreclosure
81 1 st	99,000	3/2	1363	
186 6 th	110,000	5/3	3147	Multi-unit
287 6 th	134,900	3/2	1242	Single family
10 4 th	69,000	4/2	2340	Multi-family
298 Asylum	149,900	3/2	1040	Single family
35 3 rd	69,900	3/2	3228	Two units
206 2 nd	69,800	4/2	1685	Two units
100 Olo	80,300	3/1	1241	Pre-foreclosure
363 10 th	90,000	3/1	1540	Single-family foreclosure
170 4 th	72,000	3/1	1100	Single- family foreclosure
Chestnut	107,000	-	-	Pre-foreclosure
2 nd Avenue	97,000	6/2	3390	Multi-family foreclosure
Fairmount	120,000	4/2	1576	Foreclosure
Chestnut	137,000	4/1	1615	Multi-family foreclosure
11 th	139,000	3/1.5	1072	Single-family foreclosure
Mason	83,000	4/1	1404	Single-family foreclosure
Chapel	132,000	3/2	1539	Single family pre-foreclosure
3 rd Avenue	85,000	3/1	1396	Single family pre-foreclosure
Olo	117,000	3/1	1241	Single family pre-foreclosure
10 th	103,000	3/2	1092	Single family pre-foreclosure

What happens to these 24 properties will be critical to how Fairmount evolves. Any effort to revitalize the neighborhood has to pay attention to the market and how these transactions might be influenced in ways that are beneficial to the neighborhood..

What's Working and Not Working in the Neighborhoods

The three neighborhoods of Fairmount, Constitution Hill, and Downtown are referred to as the Our Neighborhoods District. However, I want to address each neighborhood separately.

In some ways the neighborhoods suffer from the fact that Woonsocket itself has a negative image. There is a common belief that people come to Woonsocket to get welfare benefits, a belief based on a story in the Washington Post a while ago. This belief has poisoned the atmosphere a little and has helped detract people from addressing the problems of an old mill city collectively.

Woonsocket has been slow to recover from the economic crisis of 2008. It has suffered serious job loss. City government has been and continues to be in financial difficulty and the property tax rate is quite high.

But it also seems to not value how it looks. The river, a tremendous asset in many cities, is undeveloped and the river front is in many places unmanaged. The downtown, which has an infrastructure of nice buildings that could attract quality commercial uses has too many vacant and under-utilized storefront spaces.

Fairmount

Fairmount historically has been a working-class neighborhood of primarily homeowners and families. It is generally perceived as safe, but there are concerns about empty buildings. More properties have been converted to rental from home ownership – although this needs to be verified. At least one outside observer saw it: “sliding backward, with an unstable population, and high rates of unemployment.” The neighborhood also lost two schools as they were consolidated into one school.

At the same time the neighborhood has a pleasant, urban feel to it – less dense than Constitution Hill with its multi-family frame properties. Costa Park was a great example of neighbors coming together to build a park, yet it still needs a little reinvestment.

The context exists in Fairmount to build a great urban neighborhood. It is what some might call a “middle-market” neighborhood – one that is fundamentally solid but whose future path can be either up or down. It's not a huge problem – which is why it may not get the attention it deserves – but if there is no intervention it will likely fall into a pattern of decline.

Constitution Hill

Constitution Hill seems to be the neighborhood where NWBRV has had the most impact. It has been dramatically changed and this is apparent to even an outsider. While primarily rental,

much of the rental housing stock has been redeveloped by NWBRV and there are higher rates of tenant stability and less transiency. There are several social services functions in Constitution Hill that provide a fairly full range of services to local residents. Constitution Hill is also where the Northeast Distance program is housed – an innovative program to house runners training for the Olympics in the neighborhood in exchange for their assistance in the community.

Downtown

The downtown area has some incredible strengths in terms of the texture of the existing buildings and the availability of space for quality urban retail. There have been a number of plans for the Downtown, but it seems the only effort that had traction was the Main Street Program, which provided a staff person to work on organizing revitalization efforts downtown. This effort was generally viewed as successful but it was discontinued when the funding expired. Concerns were raised about high taxes in Woonsocket dampening commercial demand and the obstacle of improvement costs on commercial spaces being another hurdle. These I am sure are factors but at this point a primary concern is that there is no organized and staffed effort to improve Downtown. There seems to be a leadership vacuum that is un-filled.

Marketing Approach

Although organized under the moniker “Our Neighborhoods” the three area - Fairmount, Constitution Hill, and Downtown – are all very separate places. From a branding and marketing standpoint there are two possible approaches. The first is to define this area as simply The District and to talk about the features and benefits of the three separate places. This would imply utilizing the graphic design talent to create a logo for The District.

A second approach is to focus the marketing and branding work on the Fairmount neighborhood. Fairmount is a fundamentally strong neighborhood with some challenges and it could certainly benefit from an image-building campaign reinforced by an actual strategy to intervene in the market. This is also the neighborhood closest to the potential Choice Neighborhoods redevelopment, and should this be selected, could benefit from resources available to the broader neighborhood through that grant.

Focusing on Fairmount may also make sense because there is a branding package already prepared for the Downtown, and it is important to unify around promoting that package.

Constitution Hill has seen a tremendous amount of redevelopment and appears to be much more stable than it was a few years ago, based on resident and stakeholder testimony. It has, in my opinion, crossed a “tipping point” and will likely to continue to improve.

As a result, it is my recommendation that the branding and marketing work focus primarily on Fairmount. In this report I want to address all three neighborhoods in terms of strategy.

Marketing Goals

- Change the messaging about Fairmount from an undesirable place to a desirable place.
- Create a sense of excitement about what's happening in the neighborhood.
- Attract more homebuyers and stable tenants to Fairmount.
- Create a stronger, more visible sense of neighborhood pride.

The Key Marketing Message

Fairmount is a great neighborhood. It is a lively place – a mosaic of all kinds of people and a place with a strong sense of community and neighborhood pride.

What I want to do with this message is keep it fairly simple and reflect some of the themes I heard at the Marketing Committee meeting. The current message is that it is not a “great” neighborhood; that it is changing for the worse - that immigrant in-migration is a negative, and that the neighborhood is getting poorer. What I want to do with this current message is to promote it as a strength rather than a weakness.

What is Undermining this Message?

- The neighborhood lacks identity as a special place;
- Property conditions and standards are generally weak. They do not suggest (in some places) pride of ownership;
- Too many empty houses;
- Costa Park, which is a living example of community pride at work, is starting to look a little worn. It needs to be re-established as a strong, physical asset;
- The consolidation of three schools into one, the ongoing rumors of the closure of Kevin K. Coleman School, and the generally poor condition of this important neighborhood institution are all seen as a public disinvestment in the neighborhood. The neighborhood school is a critical core institution that can strengthen the local housing market;

- It's common and too easy to hear negative talk about the neighborhood. As one person said: "People should defend where they live";
- Related to the above, there is great potential in this neighborhood for bringing neighbors together around positive activities that can build on the neighborhood's assets.
- Property values are relatively low and seem to be declining. This provides a disincentive for property maintenance and improvement.

The Fairmount Brand

Branding a neighborhood creates both a visual and a verbal identity for a place. It defines an image that can re-introduce the neighborhood to the larger community by making the neighborhood known in a certain way. Branding can also instill pride among residents, recognizing they live in a special place and not just an amorphous collection of streets.

I am recommending the following branding statement for Fairmount:

Fairmount – A Village in the City

This concept tries to incorporate the idea of a village – a place where people know each other and look out for each other. It connotes smallness and familiarity as well as a sense of security. Yet Fairmount is part of the City of Woonsocket – part of a larger area with urban amenities. So in Fairmount one can experience the positives of village life and the positives of city life.

This assumes – rightly or wrongly that historically people came to Fairmount from smaller towns – villages – in Canada and that newer immigrants may have a similar journey. It is a way of celebrating that collective history.

The Brand Promise

The brand promise is a statement about the attributes of the Fairmount neighborhood and what people who commit to it will receive. It basically answers the question: "What do I get if I live in Fairmount?"

I think we need to say these things about Fairmount:

Living in Fairmount connects you a diverse range of people and their cultures....it connects you to the world;

Living in Fairmount offers you a strong network of neighbors – people who will look out for you.

Living in Fairmount is living in a neighborhood that is getting better – where property values are getting stronger and where neighbors are involved in making the neighborhood better.

Living in Fairmount is fun.

Fairmount needs to tell the world they are proud of their neighborhood. Housing in Fairmount is already pretty affordable. Resident and stakeholder efforts need to build confidence in the neighborhood and that home values will increase.

Target Markets

We can have clear messages about the neighborhood and we can be reinforcing those messages with stories and activities, but we need to target communications to have the greatest impact.

There are several ways to think about target markets:

- Who are the groups we need to influence if we want to change the perception of the neighborhood (General Influencers)?
- Who are the likely market segments to target for homeownership in the neighborhood (Homebuyer Markets)?
- Who are the influencers of these market segments (Homebuyer Influencers)?

General Influencers

Group	Message
Media	Fairmount is Woonsocket's oldest, newest neighborhood. New residents are making Fairmount their home. It is primed to improve because it has neighbors who have intense pride in their neighborhood. Community survey indicates neighbors like and feel safe in Fairmount
Civic Leadership	The leadership of Woonsocket can feel proud of the positive changes that have been occurring in Fairmount and Constitution Hill.
Political Leadership	The city and state have played a major role in providing a floor of support for Fairmount. Now it is time to take the next steps to strengthen the housing market and the property tax base in the neighborhood.
Realtors	Fairmount is a neighborhood that is rising in value It is a great choice for first time buyers and for younger buyers looking for spacious, interesting spaces. Fairmount is primed for substantial new development

Homebuyer Markets

Group	Message
East Asian immigrant households	This is a neighborhood with a lot of people like yourselves. Home ownership can be accessible and affordable and we can show you how.
Participants in NWBRV Home Buyer Education	Fairmount is a great choice. It is a real neighborhood with a village feel. It is a smart place in which to buy a home because NWBRV is going to be featuring it for intensive work. It is a neighborhood with great neighbors
Friends and family of existing neighbors	Buy into a neighborhood with built-in friends and relatives
School parents	You can walk your child to school or they can walk to school. Becoming a homeowner can stabilize your housing condition and help your child be more successful in school.
Young homebuyers seeking interesting spaces	In Fairmount you can have a stunning, 2000 square foot duplexed single family home...some with income potential from a rental unit.

Home Buyer Influencers

Group	Message
Local Catholic Parish	The idea of stewardship and how it relates to people's relationship to the neighborhood.
Other congregations	Homeownership can be a positive factor in people's lives
Realtors	We can help you sell homes to homeowners in Fairmount. We can show buyers the positives in this neighborhood and introduce them to people who will be their neighbors.
NWBRV Staff and Board	Staff and Board need to be imbedded in the positives of the Fairmount neighborhood.
Existing Neighbors	We need to treat existing neighbors like they were prospective home buyers and constantly communicate the positives of the neighborhood to them

Strategies for Fairmount

Before I begin a discussion of this I want to make a few points.

First, the kind of work required by NWBRV and its partners in an intervention in Fairmount is different from the work traditionally been done and will require a different orientation. NWBRV has had enormous success as a property developer and a regional home ownership center. It has also brokered a number of social services to serve its residents and the neighborhood. This has been a major achievement.

But the work in Fairmount will require a different approach. It will require connecting homebuyers to available homes – even those not owned by NWBRV. It may involve what I refer to as intervention buying – buying and holding/selling properties as is with rehab financing to keep those properties out of the speculative market. It will also require much more engagement with neighborhood residents on the block by block level.

The second point is that resident leaders and groups like NWBRV want to “solve problems”. This often leads to a language that describes the neighborhood by its problems. Ultimately there needs to be a higher level of trust among neighbors and stronger levels of confidence in the future of the neighborhood. When people are confident in their ability to bring people together to do something, their sense of collective efficacy - the general feeling that action can be taken that will yield positive outcomes – is likely to increase.

This is not to say the neighborhood is without problems or that problems can be ignored – just that realistically neighbors or even NWBRV and its partners may not have the resources they need to address those problems in demonstrable ways. However, there are resources to get neighbors knowing each other better and forming attachments to others and to the neighborhood.

People may not want to go to “neighborhood meetings” to talk about problems. Most people lead pretty busy lives and don’t have time for what might be perceived as more work. But they will come (if invited) to an ice cream social on their block or an event that involves their kids. These casual “fun” activities also serve as a vehicle to get people talking and often surface people who might want to do more. The idea is not to just do an ice cream social or an event. The real outcome is to connect neighbors to each other and in so doing build up levels of trust and confidence. This is a critical first step in a larger neighborhood change strategy.

Any intervention to strengthen Fairmount has to focus on four things: stabilizing the real estate market, raising the physical standards, strengthening the capacity of people to self-manage the neighborhood, and reinforcing a positive image of the neighborhood. So what are the specific things that need to happen in Fairmount?

Increase in the number of owner-occupied structures, particularly single-family and two unit properties.

To achieve this outcome, NWBRV needs to influence as many property sales transactions as possible – even if they are not within NWBRV’s inventory. This can be done closely monitoring what is for sale in the neighborhood and what is coming onto the market and engaging the listing agent in conversation about the property and how NWBRV can be helpful to them in selling the property. Here are some specific actions NWBRV and its partners can take:

- Buy and deconvert small duplexes to single family or triple deckers to two units. There appear to be several buildings for sale with smaller (600-800 square foot) apartments. These properties could be transformed into larger more contemporary single-family homes and could be positioned to attract a broader market of potential home buyers. There seems to be little price differential between single family and multiple unit properties so there might be an opportunity to acquire these smaller units at an affordable price.
- Do realtor training. Develop a curriculum for understanding urban neighborhoods with a focus on the positives of Fairmount and Constitution Hill. Have the Local Board of Realtors certify the training for continuing education.
- Develop a sales incentive program for realtors. Offer realtors a sales bonus of \$1,000 for sales to owner-occupants and \$2,000 for sales from investors to owner-occupants. You may wish to target this on certain properties. This is a not too expensive way to influence sales transactions.
- Contract with a realtor on a retainer basis. This gives NWBRV a better vehicle for understanding the market and in communicating with realtors.
- Develop a stock neighborhood tour of Fairmount and Constitution Hill. See the tour as a communication strategy that can show people the positives in the neighborhood and script it appropriately. Train multiple staff and leaders on delivering the tour. Use the tour for potential homebuyers, for public officials, and for realtors.
- Do a brochure and a video about the neighborhood that has testimonials from people who live there and like it and who reflect the target market. Have the video subtitled and brochure translated into appropriate languages. Show and give the video to realtors and key people.
- Do a Home Buyer Education program in Partnership with the Center for Southeast Asians in Providence. Use specific examples of various kinds of properties for sale in

Fairmount, and have existing Fairmount owners there to talk about why they like living there.

- Fairmount is the first “Feature Neighborhood” of the Home Ownership Center – other neighborhoods can be added later. This means participants can tour the neighborhood and someone from the neighborhood will come to class to tell them how nice it is to live there.
- Hold open houses on for-sale properties with realtors. Organize neighbors to view the house and ask them if they have friends or family that might like to buy that house. Bring home buyer education families and graduates to the open houses.
- Organize Fairmount Ambassadors and train them in giving tour and in communicating positives of the neighborhood. The Ambassadors will be 2-3 neighborhood residents who can answer people’s questions about the neighborhood and are people who are proud of where they live. If possible they should reflect the target homebuyer markets.

It should be noted that there is a significant opportunities for neighbors and other stakeholders in the neighborhood to be part of this market intervention effort.

Residents can:

- Help design the neighborhood tour and be prepared to give the tour with the script that is prepared;
- Outline what might be in the promotional video and brochure and give testimonials about why they like living in the neighborhood;
- Can provide testimonials for participants in home buyer education and in outreach to the Southeast Asian Center;
- Help organize open houses with realtors and help get neighbors to those open houses;
- Be Neighborhood Ambassadors and be able to communicate the positives of living in Fairmount. Recruit additional Neighborhood Ambassadors.

Realtors who are involved with NWBRV can:

- Help develop a curriculum for landlord education and enroll realtors in the Woonsocket market to participate;
- Locate properties appropriate for deconversion;

- Develop a sales bonus program for realtors and engage their participation;
- Help raise resources to support the home sales marketing effort;
- Be a realtor on retainer.

Promote higher levels of trust among neighbors and increased confidence in their own ability and in the neighborhood.

- As a first step, NWBRV and its leadership should sit down and begin to name all the people they know in the neighborhood and map their location. While this may be a bit tedious, it can provide a map of where people are known. If, for example, leaders wanted to do a block project on any given street, they could know who they knew on that block and begin to contact them first.
- Introduce social activities on blocks so people get to know each other – these could include ice cream socials, coffee and rolls on a Saturday morning. On blocks where this has traction where some interested people emerge plan to do more.
- Develop a simple neighborhood newsletter. Organize a small committee of 3-5 neighbors and/or others to generate story ideas about Fairmount. This could be done online and a post card sent to people informing them it is online.. A good example of a neighborhood newsletter is the one produced online by Layton Boulevard West Neighbors (LBWN) in Milwaukee. The newsletter is not about news – it is about communicating a message about Fairmount as a great neighborhood.

Provide opportunities for neighbors to engage in grass roots activities that help make the neighborhood better.

- If you find there are some interested neighbors that want to do things to make their block better, plan small projects with them. These could be landscaping projects, fence repair projects, lighting projects, coordinated house numbers, house flag design and installation, yard sales, block parties, or combinations of all of these. Every event needs to have some kind of celebration at the end. These small scale “pride projects” have been proven to have an impact both on physical change and on the psychology of neighbors.

- Pull some neighbors adjacent to Costas Park to first determine a scope of work to get the park improved. When there is some sense of what needs to be done then the challenge is finding resources and people to do the improvements. This might be done by attracting volunteer groups to work with neighbors.

Residents can play a key role in this effort. Residents can:

- Help with the development of the newsletter by generating article ideas. It would be good if a journalism intern could be recruited to write the articles and interview residents about why they like the neighborhood;
- Enroll neighbors for block projects and block focused social events;
- Organize activities on their own blocks;
- Lead the effort to revitalize Costas Park.

Promote higher standards of property maintenance and improvement.

- Do a most improved porch contest or the Fairmount Fence Fiesta – some effort designed to award physical change activities. The model for this comes also from Layton Boulevard West Neighbors (LBWN) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which developed a porch improvement contest with significant prize money. This effort created a “buzz” in the neighborhood and people who didn’t participate in the contest also did their porches.

Key steps in doing this strategy are:

1. NWBRV pulls a group of leaders together as a task force to plan this contest;
2. The task force outlines the scope of the project – prize money, categories; other benefits to participants - e.g. a gift certificate to a home improvement store for all participants; whether this is just for homeowners or for landlords as well, and time frame – e.g. the contest is announced in May and people have to September 30 to do the work; identifying anyone who might give participants advice; who will judge the contestants;
3. Getting sponsors for the contest, e.g. a bank, a local hardware outlet, etc.;
4. Announcing the contest, marketing the contest in Fairmount so that everyone knows about it;

5. People apply with a simple one page form with their contact information and what they are thinking of doing;
 6. Staff or a volunteer takes a “before” picture;
 7. People have a substantial period to do the work. When they complete the work they call NWBRV to have someone come out and take an “after” picture;
 8. When the contest is complete and all the work is done a panel of judges is pulled together. This panel should be people from outside the neighborhood and not neighborhood residents. This can be an opportunity for the planning task force to build relationships with people they see as important resources for carrying out the neighborhood strategy, e.g. a local bank representative, the head of the Board of Realtors, a key city official, someone from CVS etc.;
 9. The winners are chosen by the panel;
 10. A large neighborhood celebration is held in a church hall or school. Dinner is served and the award winners are announced.
- Develop a small home improvement loan program. This is somewhat more complicated. It could be sourced through a lender pool or a small program-related investment from a foundation. Avoid federal dollars for small home improvements since they often require substantial amounts of work. Encourage exterior curb appeal type upgrades.
 - Depending on the number of participants, this should cost in the \$10,000 - \$15,000 range. This assumes a couple of first prizes – one homeowner and one landlord at \$3,000 each, one second place at \$2,000 each, one third at \$1,000 each, fourth and fifths at \$500 each, and 20 participants getting a \$50 gift certificate.

Give greater prominence to quality landlords.

- Organize good landlords. There appear to be a number of well-maintained landlord properties in Fairmount. These landlords have a self-interest in seeing the neighborhood improve and bad landlords make the investments of these good landlords more vulnerable. Pulling good landlords together and including them in the larger strategy could be feasible. In one such organizing model, good landlords would meet with problem landlords and would offer to help them or to buy their building. In another,

landlords would share information about problem tenants, contractors, and insurance coverages. Steps to carry out this strategy would be:

1. Identify well-maintained rental properties through visual observation and research ownership;
 2. Talk with realtors and local lenders and ask them to identify good landlords;
 3. Do individual meetings with landlords to listen to their experience;
 4. Invite landlords on a tour of the neighborhood so they can better understand what's going on around them. Include in the tour a look at a few of the more distressed privately owned rental properties;
 5. Ask landlords how the organization can be helpful to them. Assess from landlords the feasibility of pulling local landlords together.
- Do landlord training. NWBRV already has a component for home buyers who are buying multi-unit properties. NWBRV might want to look at this training and determine if it speaks to the positives of owning and living in a small apartment building. NWBRV might also look at developing a special curriculum designed for existing landlords.

Provide constant messaging about positive neighborhood change.

- NWBRV and its partners need to have a constant communication strategy that reinforces a story of positive change for the neighborhood. All neighborhood leaders need to be saying the same positive thing about the neighborhood. All NWBRV staff need to do the same. The website and the newsletter need to reflect the positive message.

Downtown Woonsocket

There was a substantial amount of input gathered from neighbors and other key people about the revitalization of the downtown – Main Street. While a major focus of this report is on Fairmount, I wanted to offer some insight on what I think a strategy might look like for this area.

Fundamentally, efforts to revitalize downtowns include these components:

- Investment in public infrastructure and other place making activities;
- Incentives to attract businesses to locate, particularly early in the process;
- Special financing to help existing owners make repairs on their storefronts;
- Events that attempt to get people downtown;
- Using affordable housing development strategically to catalyze the development of market rate housing downtown;
- Coordinated advertisements from local businesses to reinforce the image of the downtown as a special place.

Woonsocket has done some of these but has not done them all. These all need to be done together so they can reinforce each other to the greatest extent possible. The focus on business recruitment has been abandoned and needs to be resuscitated.

Downtown Woonsocket needs to be configured as an arts district with small scale interesting commercial that cannot be found anywhere else in Woonsocket.

The trend in a lot of small city downtown revitalization is to focus on the arts and to attract smaller-scale quirky commercial uses. Downtown Woonsocket has some of these but it is not clear that this is the direction.

What are the kinds of retail uses for Main Street? Here is a vision for some of the kinds of uses:

- Coffee house
- Small grocery with artisanal foods
- Bookstore
- Curated re-sale stores
- Art gallery
- Bike shop
- Outdoor outfitter
- Restaurants
- Men's clothing store
- Women's clothing stores featuring local designers
- Milliner
- Asian and Latino grocers

There is currently no leadership in improving downtown. Improvement efforts require staff.

No matter how attractive a logo might be or how elegantly written a plan might be, somebody has to wake up every day focused on attracting appropriate commercial tenants and selling them on locating in the downtown. Some organization has to own the outcome of a revitalized Downtown.

It seems this was in place and there was success in attracting people and businesses, but when the outside funding stopped, the program was terminated. While there are many dedicated people that want to see the revitalization of downtown happen, they all have businesses they manage. This is a full time job and if NWBRV and the City are serious about revitalizing the downtown, they will find money to fund this position.

The identity package for Downtown – “Create History” – has a lot of merit and should be adopted by the City.

The City has indicated they will be hiring a public relations firm to brand the downtown is, in my opinion, a waste of resources. There is an identity package that has been developed locally in partnership with another administration and, in my opinion, resources should support actual work recruiting commercial users.

The City of Woonsocket needs to look at its requirements for space usage to see if they present obstacles to businesses locating in the Downtown.

Several respondents indicated onerous requirements for businesses wanting to locate Downtown. It is unclear if this is a major or a minor obstacle, but the City needs to review whether they are putting impediments in the way of potential users. At the same time, there are uses on Main Street that hinder further development – junk stores, stores with less than standard setting signage, derelict buildings – that are allowed.

The realtor on retainer could focus energy on working with owners to put attractive for rent signs in available store front. Just doing this can create a buzz that something is happening.

This is a very simple strategy but it could create some buzz right away. Right now spaces are empty but there are no signs announcing their availability. Even signs up can help create a sense something is going to happen.

The most significant action to improve Downtown might be the extension of super high-speed internet to downtown properties.

Experience in other cities has shown that access to high speed internet can attract a wide range of entrepreneurial talent to those locations. If such an opportunity exists in Woonsocket, it needs to be taken advantage of as a way of attracting enterprise to the Downtown. This might be the most significant thing that could be done to revitalize the Downtown.

Conclusion

NWBRV has a great track record in dramatically turning around Constitution Hill. When it had support, the organization was beginning to be successful in improving Main Street.

Of the three neighborhoods, I think Fairmount has a serious set of challenges. If nothing is done, the neighborhood could easily slip into decay. What I am proposing is a relatively modest strategy. It doesn't require millions of dollars of new capital to be effective.

But it does require a different orientation from NWBRV around its work. It calls for a closer monitoring of the neighborhood real estate market, influencing sales transactions on regular for-sale properties, and a real focus on enrolling buyers for Fairmount. This will require an expanded mission for the Home Ownership Center and a greater focus on aligning the organization around a change strategy for Fairmount.

The work that is needed is granular – getting somebody to buy, getting them to enroll others; being able to articulate the benefits of the neighborhood, connecting potential new buyers with neighbors who like living in Fairmount. The goal is to make Fairmount a “first choice” neighborhood. The challenge will be getting all the stakeholders that influence the home buying decision moving in the same direction to attract new buyers to Fairmount. We only need a few to begin.