A New Approach to Comprehensive Sustainable Community Development
By Alfred Worley, ARM

Introduction and Background
This short paper is a new voice offering a new approach and direction to policy issues and activities in community planning and development impacting the characteristics and future of urban communities’ field in the areas of housing, sustainable economic development, and community engagement.

Alfred Worley, (ARM) the principal of the consulting firm, AWDevelopment Group, LLC since 2011, has been in executive nonprofit management since 1985 serving community development corporations engaged in creating mixed-income communities in New York City before moving to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to serve as interim executive director of the Community Action Commission. He earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology from Long Island University, and certifications in Non-Profit Management from the Graduate School of Business of Columbia University Institute for Nonprofit Management; U.S. Dept. of HUD Housing & Community Development Education Program at University of Maryland at College Park, Accredited Residential Manager (ARM) accreditation from the Institute for Real Estate Management (IREM), with additional certifications in Community Economic Development, Affordable Housing Development, Multifamily Housing Development, Neighborhood Revitalization, Community Leadership and HUD- Certified Housing Counseling from the NeighborWorks America Training Institute. For the past 27 years, he has provided extensive expertise in the administration of public grant-funded procedure and regulations in the areas of affordable housing development, large-scale redevelopment, community facilities/commercial real estate development, community economic development, human capital development, business districts revitalization, public safety, and integrated, service area/comprehensive planning.

Community Conditions
Urban communities face challenges on multiple fronts affecting their residents choices in how they live, work and play due to economic, physical and social conditions including, a depressed economy; high unemployment and economic inequality; failed public education system; lack of affordable rental and ownership opportunities; foreclosures causing a downward spiral of disinvestment, leading to more foreclosures; neglected infrastructure; low- and middle-income families struggling to make ends meet; lack of transportation choices; emerging trends such as population growth in urban city centers, practices of racially-based harassment in the form of stop-and-frisk on African Americans and Hispanics, growing portion of reverse-mortgage consumers using lump sum proceeds to pay off other debt and neglecting to pay taxes and insurance and therefore, risking foreclosure; mistrust among certain segments of the population,* and the impact of voter disengagement especially among those traditionally marginalized in the political process.

Planning and policy development is often based on redistributing public resources through selective policies (Warnick, 1966; Arefi, 2003) that target people’s needs either directly through subsidies, or indirectly through improved physical conditions. When policymakers talk of rebuilding New Orleans or revitalizing cities such as Detroit or Peoria, they have place-based strategies in mind. Direct, ‘people’ policies that target needy individuals over time institutionalize and spread ‘entitlements’ and a culture of dependency (Mead, 1986). Policy-makers and other stakeholders have explored alternatives to the needs-based approaches to community development whose

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1 Winnick, I. (1966) Place Prosperity vs. People Prosperity: Welfare Considerations in the Geographic Redistributing of Economic Activity, University of California.

policies focus on what communities lack as opposed to what they have through “a standard deficits calculations approach.” Urban planners, for example, calculate housing deficit as the difference between the number of dwelling units and the number of units produced. These policies are a reflection of ongoing debates about ‘people-’ and ‘place-targeting’ on the one hand, and community economic development, capacity-building, empowerment, and knowledge-partnerships on the other.

**A New Approach**

**For Comprehensive Sustainable**

**Community Economic Development**

The practical and powerful approach of *community economic development* involves a comprehensive, resident-led, community-based program of activities for the overall revitalization of the community as a place to live, work, and play. Because it is comprehensive in approach, it can include virtually any activity seen as a community improvement (for example, reduced criminal activity, housing rehabilitation, and neighborhood healthcare improvement). Successful development incorporates HUD’s Livability Principles; fosters neighborhood development in commercial districts; promotes financial and economic opportunities among minority- and women-owned businesses; prepares residents for jobs and links employers with a skilled and qualified workforce and creates a service infrastructure to develop business-training programs to create jobs, improve the wages and skill sets of employees and new hires. At its most effective, community economic development is characterized by

**Housing**

Policymakers need to prepare and develop strategies to challenges both in the market and emerging trends, such as sudden changes in income. A new troubling trend according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is the growing portion of reverse-mortgage consumers using lump sum payments to pay off other debt – not paying taxes and insurance, and therefore, risking foreclosure. A proactive approach for place-based housing development is designing and implementing comprehensive supportive service plans to households experiencing income shock with tools to assist with rent arrears. To protect and expand affordable housing, improve economic integration and reduce economic segregation, redevelopment plans must be required to combine one-for-one replacement of existing affordable housing units with market-rate rental units, workforce units and replacement units with and without subsidies. Augment the housing mix with rental townhouses, condominiums, for-sale townhouses, and mixed-use commercial redevelopment to serve the community (e.g. supportive commercial and retail, such as sit-down or take-out restaurants, office space or drug store), community facilities, linear parks, and pedestrian connectivity to public transportation with access to the central employment and shopping core of the community. A variety of for-sale products, rental options for housing units and pricing should vary based on the incomes of target market segments; based on design, new homeowners should have options to choose from apartment-style condominiums, stacked townhouses and standard townhouses terraced throughout the development, and rental housing alternatives should include low- and mid-rise apartments with family-style townhouses offered for larger households.

A new approach for communities looking to bring high-tech graduate schools to build a future with the global academic and research community is to build world-class campuses in public housing developments. That’s right, the projects – an underutilized and untapped major community asset. With

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4 New York City Housing Authority (2011). In Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood, a new privately built apartment house is rising on a former parking lot in the Elliott-Chelsea Houses. 7 Strickland, Roy (2012) “Right Idea, Wrong Place.” A University of Michigan study of open space in NYC Housing Development’s on
plenty and underutilized open spaces, new laboratory buildings can thread among project buildings and revitalize their surroundings. Here's how: design and build in configuration of existing buildings; cantilever or build platforms over project-adjacent infrastructure; use terraces and roofs for gardens and playgrounds that integrate green design with neighborhood life; at the ground level, put features like K-12 schools, libraries, recreation rooms and retail shops for easy public access; where possible, build new streets through the projects to connect both housing and the campus to the community and promote social and economic exchanges; hire project residents to maintain and run the campus, and provide campus internships for project kids to have the chance for access to opportunity, a seamless education all the way through graduate school, and help strengthen families across generations. Is this idea too outside the box? In Harlem, a state-of-the-art charter school is being built on open land in the St. Nicholas Houses. This is an example to maintain and enhance properties through public and private investment.5

Community Economic Development

Plans to revitalize infrastructure, reduce pollution and build better transportation, will generate new opportunities for businesses and contractors, and employ thousands of workers. Yet, as ambitious as these plans are, they miss a vital opportunity to make communities truly sustainable – one that harnesses growth and public investment to generate jobs paying living wages and allowing everyone to participate in the economy. Too often, private developers and large corporations receive generous subsidies and incentives but create mostly low wage jobs, or actually reduce jobs over time. Without focusing on creating good jobs and training a new generation of skilled workers, the city’s growth will not benefit all communities. To help strengthen the business community local government can look beyond large corporations, to helping manufacturers and small businesses struggling with rising rents. Reduce economic inequality by engaging the core problems of the economy: how to train workers in the skills required. Link quality job training programs to targeted industries or sectors, and provide a range of new tools to ensure that economic development delivers living wages, career ladders, affordable housing, local hiring requirements, and community benefits agreements.

Community development corporations (CDC) and practitioners should collaborate with government, private sector and higher education partners in implementing economic development strategies by focusing on key industry clusters that can benefit from a skilled labor force, business-to-business opportunities and knowledge spillover. Cluster initiatives, neighborhood outreach and business development activities are helpful approaches to market the communities’ image as a dynamic business, technology and education hub for work, and a place where cultural and entertainment activities abound. Prepare a market analyses for each cluster defining actual market opportunities to identify business target opportunities, refine target strategies and focus on cluster targets, including construction, healthcare, human services and information services that have a strong community presence, will utilize the skills of knowledgeable workers, and pay higher than average wages; conduct technical presentations to in-house property development teams searching for new locations and community relations teams working in neighborhoods to ensure retail needs are met; meet with individual investors, business owners and all economic development clients or prospects interested in the community, and collaborate with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) in the delivery of technical assistance to anchor commercial projects for capital and capacity gaps within local markets.

Bring economic opportunities to neighborhoods to address unemployment, economic inequality, encourage entrepreneurship, and spur job growth with comprehensive micro-enterprise training programs through culturally
competent services and networks for high-potential low-income individuals and college students who have a desire to become entrepreneurs, who can develop, pitch, validate and launch business concepts; partner with educational allies to assist clients with business and entrepreneurial readiness, mentoring in personal development, and training in financial accounting and management, planning, marketing and other business skills to nuture business ideas, operationalize them and bring them to life as actual businesses, and secure funding from a variety of financing routes from loans to new investment trends such as ‘locavesting’ to fund community-based businesses; and use business incubators to provide start-ups and entrepreneurs with fully-developed action plans and timelines to achieve their goals - the space and resources they need to grow their businesses in a collaborative environment, low-cost work spaces with access to high-speed Internet, multimedia conference rooms/meeting spaces, mail boxes, business addresses, and networking opportunities.

Develop a comprehensive business district revitalization plan along commercial corridors with business assistance and support services that embraces the changing social, economic, physical and political diversity in neighborhoods that are becoming increasingly culturally, racially, economically and religiously diverse as places to live, work, worship and recreate. Recognize the enormous value of immigrants and understand where immigrant business owners gravitate and often concentrate in specific clusters. Among them: construction, retail, education, health and social services, entertainment, accommodations and food services; market available retail and commercial spaces in business districts to qualified businesses and incorporated new immigrant entrepreneurs most of who are from China, Korea, Dominican Republic, India, Italy, Greece, Columbia, Former Soviet Union, Israel (including Palestinian territories) and Jamaica, and refer new businesses and entrepreneurs to city services to remove unnecessary regulations to open their doors more quickly.

Foster neighborhood development in commercial districts and promote financial and economic opportunities among minority- and women-owned businesses through outreach efforts, technical assistance, workshops and other innovative forms of assistance; target new training programs to build opportunities in low-income and immigrant communities; prepare residents for jobs and link employers with a skilled and qualified workforce; partner with local community colleges in workforce development through key areas of specialty and assorted business services to start-up businesses and entrepreneurs.

**Community Engagement**

Successful civic engagement is a core element in the community-based planning process and requires a special focus on marginal populations traditionally isolated from the public review process. Facilitate equitable engagement in planning by forming working groups among community leaders, neighborhood residents, educational allies, and other stakeholders to find solutions to community problems, develop a policy toolkit, and forge a *quality-of-life agreement* between committed parties to follow through on achievable and practical programs for the common good. Community leadership development training is useful for community leaders to identify objectives and action steps, ensure that the people process is aligned and integrated, promotes teamwork, and builds networks. As an example, the resident association leadership at St. Nicholas Houses in Harlem completed leadership development training with on-site technical assistance resulting in their obtaining 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status and expand on their relationship with the Harlem Children’s Zone and the New York City Housing Authority to build a state-of-the art charter school on open land in St. Nicholas Houses (Worley, 2008). Resident-led, community-based planning activities to create new communities should use on-line tools for community leaders, residents and other stakeholders to better understand their affordable housing and community development needs, and to be able to set priorities, target resources, track outcomes, and

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enable residents to participate and provide opinions and feedback. Software such as HUD’s eCon Planning Suite complete with CPD Maps and website helps citizens to better understand relevant community development needs, and design and implement solutions. MindMixer is an on-line program that facilitates live citizen input from home or other remote locations from populations that normally do not attend public meetings for reasons such as transportation issues, physical disabilities, child care issues, or fear or expressing an opinion that is different from the mainstream. Success Measures Data System is a participatory outcome evaluation process to measure outcomes of community development investments. CommunityViz is GIS based software to facilitate the scenario planning process, and help visualize and analyze possible futures for the community. Include using a sign language interpreter and translation services for community meetings, webinars, MindMixer forums, surveys, and other planning documents. Webinars can help solicit information and provide updated information sharing through surveys and Q&A sessions.

Merge community planning activities and youth development for participation in the creation, articulation, and implementation of efforts to support neighborhood-based community change, contributing to both the development of community and psychological development of the youth involved, skills enhancement, confidence building, and ownership that prepares them as they navigate toward adulthood. As an example, an area-wide youth essay competition, titled “My Community…My Likes, Dislikes, and…What I Would Do to Change It” engaged 55,000 Central Brooklyn elementary-to-high school grade-level students to identify existing community conditions and provide input to create solutions to affect community change. The grade-level winning essays were incorporated in a community-driven, integrated neighborhood revitalization plan resulting in the production of 300 affordable rental housing units, and development of a business district plan along a commercial district to attract new immigrant entrepreneurs from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and West Africa. (Britton, Worley, 1987)

Plan and manage community building and leadership development programs to strengthen and expand civic participation with non-housing programs, projects and functions, and maintain a shared agenda with all partners in neighborhood revitalization to foster and enhance support for community-led neighborhood revitalization activities.

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1 Research and analysis of emerging trends is needed to guide planning to gain an understanding of the rise in evictions due to a sudden loss in income, short and long-term unemployment; converting for-sale homes to rental properties needs to be studied to determine if it can offset the shortage of affordable rental housing. Redevelopment plans should provide a guarantee of the one-for-one replacement of existing low-income housing units in a newly mixed-income community and early integration of the Human Capital Plan and Physical Plan is necessary to ensure that residents take advantage of this guarantee.

ii Britton, Andrea and Worley, Alfred (1988) Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Association, Inc. (BNIA) The staff-driven Youth Essay Competition project was developed in response to the dysfunction in the home, lack of year-round and out-of-school youth programming, and serve as an opportunity to participate in the planning process to identify existing community conditions, offer solutions for community change, and to build upon community assets and public and private sector resources supporting neighborhood revitalization.

* Mistrust, friction, and fear of authority (especially the police), is nowhere stronger than in African American and Latino neighborhoods who view their own existence as both perilous and hazardous. The most favorable of crime-fighting tactics used in the last two decades in New York City finds no use to support the use of stop-and-frisk; in the past, for a “stop-and-question,” police used a “common law of inquiry,” meaning they could ask questions unless there were factors elevating a situation to a reasonable suspicion that a crime has been committed. The “frisk” part came into play if possession of a weapon was suspected, or reasonable suspicion of a possible crime escalated to probable cause for arrest based on facts developed after the initial stop-and-question. During the 1990s police officials in New York City incorporated the “stop, question and frisk” when Compstat was developed. It is unclear what positive impact, if any, the practice has on improving public safety outcomes, but its tendency towards racially-based harassment ruins community-police relationships. Non-aggressive community policing used in the 1980s was successful in combating drug-related criminal activity during the crack-epidemic. Coordinated efforts to improve a community’s quality of life should include increased foot patrols with proper training.