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Research Summary

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Service Learning in Community Development: Partnering with East Cleveland

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Residents of East Cleveland are fighting to improve the quality of public education and access to vocational opportunities. "White flight" (Frey, 1979, p. 425), economic disinvestment, and ineffective political leadership have led to the disadvantages faced by East Cleveland (Kathi & Cooper, 2005). Nearly 1,200 vacant structures blight their 3.1 square mile landscape. Case Western Reserve University recognizes the potential roles that they can serve in aiding neighboring East Cleveland into becoming a desirable place to call home. MSSA students joined residents and firefighters to survey every vacant property in the City. Students utilized their experiences with conducting the survey, and through additional fieldwork, recommended strategies for the impact of vacant housing on topics like workforce development, education, safe streets and neighborhoods, and the senior population. This research, aided in part by the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University will serve as the basis for a partnership for the revitalization of East Cleveland with contributions from students, the university, residents, community organizations, and the City of East Cleveland.

A RICH HISTORY

The City of East Cleveland was for many years a suburb of economic wealth, beginning as the summer retreat for John D. Rockefeller and many industrial tycoons living in Cleveland during the late 1800s. The community grew and retained much of its prominence through the 1950s. "White flight" in the 1960s and 1970s brought about drastic change in the demographics of the population and led to economic disinvestment. Today, the proud residents of East Cleveland are fighting to improve the quality of public education and access to vocational opportunities. A history of corrupt political leadership has led to the misuse of funds and neglect that contributed to the disadvantages currently faced by East Cleveland residents and businesses.

FROM NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS TO PARTNERS

Case Western Reserve University and the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences recognize the potential roles that they, and other institutions in University Circle, can serve in aiding surrounding

communities such as East Cleveland in reshaping themselves into desirable places to call home. As Chupp (2008) states, "Neighborhood revitalization, therefore, requires a people-based strategy to improve the lives of residents and a place-based strategy to transform the negative effects of living in a poor neighborhood" (p. 1). When the geography of East Cleveland is considered, with wealthy resource-laden neighbors like Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals, Cleveland Clinic, Severance Hall, and the museums, it truly does not make sense that the community is in its current condition.

In 2008, faculty at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences spearheaded efforts to engage students in service learning directed toward the revitalization of East Cleveland that led to a community partnership between MSASS and the community of East Cleveland. A first step was a presentation at MSASS by former East Cleveland Mayor Eric Brewer to faculty, staff and students. In addition, the East Cleveland Public Library Executive Director, the East Cleveland City Schools Superintendent, the East Cleveland Police



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Department Chief, and the East Cleveland Fire Department Chief have all taken time out of their busy schedules to meet with students and faculty in order to align priorities and actions within the community partnership.

SERVICE-LEARNING ON VACANT HOUSING

CITY ACQUIRES \$2.2 MILLION

Aware of the increasing number of vacant and abandoned houses in East Cleveland, MSASS assistant professor Mark Chupp and researchers from the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development responded to an invitation by the City of East Cleveland to assist them in applying for \$2.2 million in federal Neighborhood Stabilization Funds; the City received notice that funding would begin Summer 2009. An ambitious but important task, Mark Chupp and other instructors designed a service learning component to the course SASS 478: Macro and Policy Practice Skills for Work with Groups, Organizations, and Communities (required by all students in the Foundation curriculum). Then City Council President Gary Norton and Councilwoman Mildred Brewer directed student tours of East Cleveland aboard a motor coach.

For many students, this was their first time seeing East Cleveland, given stereotypes and safety concerns expressed about East Cleveland.

In the Spring 2009, SASS 478 students, along with firefighters and residents from a local nonprofit organization, Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope (NOAH), conducted a vacant housing survey of every residential street in East Cleveland.

The map (see Figure 1 that focuses on Census Tract 1517), prepared by the Center, depicts the results of these surveys with vacant lots cross-hatched, and vacant houses progressively red depending on the grade A-F. An A-grade estimated that the house could be reoccupied in its current condition while an F-grade suggested the house would need to be demolished. Table 1 features the data collected of all properties in the City of East Cleveland.

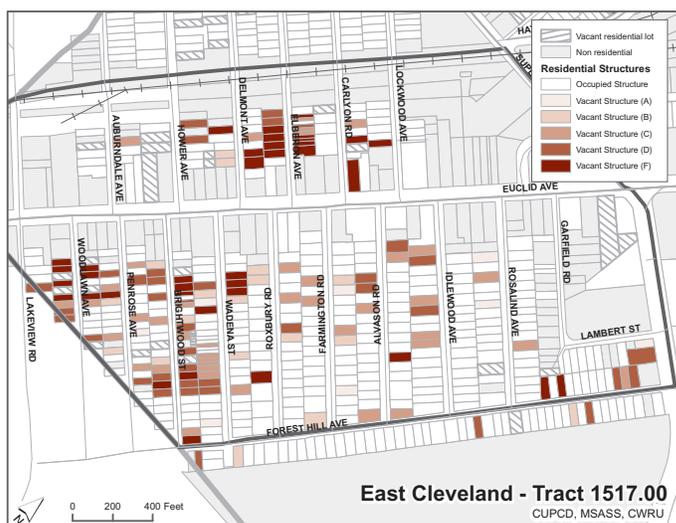
STUDENTS STUDY AND CONSIDER CHANGE

The Poverty Center then compiled and provided to the City administration the survey data along with a vacant property map. The survey work found that about 20 percent of all parcels with residential structures were vacant and of those, 40 percent of the vacant housing earned a “D” or “F” grade. There were 236 vacant lots, accounting for about 4 percent of all lots. This data and map are aiding the City to decide which structures to rehabilitate, and those that should be demolished.

Student groups utilized their experiences with conducting the survey, along with additional interviews with key informants, to design and recommend strategies for the impact of vacant housing on specific topics including workforce development, education, safe streets and neighborhoods, and the community’s senior population.

In Spring 2010, students in the next cohort of the SASS 478 class have taken the next step and conducted detailed property investigation on every parcel in the City’s target revitalization area along Euclid Avenue. The East Cleveland Department of Community Development is now using this information as they assess needs and assets and develop their strategy for restoring this blighted area of East Cleveland to its place of prominence. Students interviewed key informants and are currently developing proposals that are intended to marshal the economic and social assets in the Forest

Figure 1. Vacancy Map of Census Tract 1517.00 in East Cleveland



“After working on this project, I was able to really look for the hidden assets in a community,... the residents and the strengths they bring. I began to see something prosperous among all the destitution. Instead of seeing something scary and broken, I started to see how things get put back together and all the places in which East Cleveland could start.” -MSASS Student

Hill Neighborhood, the City as a whole, and CWRU to assist current residents and unite University Circle and a revitalized East Cleveland.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Anthony D. Houston NSP Program Manager for The City of East Cleveland states in a 2009 letter regarding the ongoing service-learning contributions from MSASS and the Poverty Center: “We believe [the students, faculty and staff’s] work will further support the City’s efforts in neighborhood and economic development revitalization.”

This service-learning opportunity provided the start of a transformational experience; it changed some East Clevelanders’ views of CWRU, and students changed their views of East Cleveland. One student states, “My views of East Cleveland have changed completely. After working on this project, I was able to really look for the hidden assets in a community, and of particular importance were the residents and the strengths they bring. I began to see something prosperous among all the destitution. Instead of seeing something scary and broken, I started to see how things get put back together and all the places in which East Cleveland could start. As the project progressed, I began to see East Cleveland as a community, not just a city.”

Many new opportunities are developing with the election of Mayor Gary Norton and the expansion of the MSASS East Cleveland Partnership to a university wide initiative of the Social Justice Alliance.

Beyond service learning to enhance student learning, the impact of partnership extends to the lives of those within the community, faculty and their research and ultimately, the university. In fact, interest in supporting the revitalization has grown so rapidly that a tour organized by the CWRU Social Justice Alliance resulted in 75 leaders from over a dozen educational and community institutions. Working groups are now forming to expand the partnership to focus on effective government, economic development and community building and development. The goal is for all 8 schools at CWRU and the administration to join together in this effort along with other organizations across the region.



Photo courtesy of: Erin Chester

Table 1. Property Vacancy Survey Results for the City of East Cleveland

City of East Cleveland: 2009 Vacancy Survey Results	
Residential parcels (estimate)*	6,146
Improved parcels	5,910
Vacant parcels (no structure, unimproved)	236
Vacant parcels (no structure, unimproved)	3.80%
Improved parcels	5,910
Parcels with a vacant structure	1,185
Vacant structures rated A (excellent)	96
Vacant structures rated B (good)	273
Vacant structures rated C (fair)	348
Vacant structures rated D (deteriorated)	259
Vacant structures rated F (unsafe/hazard)	209
Total	1185
Parcels with a vacant structure	20.05%

*A parcel may consist of one or multiple units

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Research summaries from
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The Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development seeks to address the problems of persistent and concentrated urban poverty and is dedicated to understanding how social and economic changes affect low-income communities and their residents. Based in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, the Center views the city as both a laboratory for building communities and producing change locally, and as a representative urban center from which nationally relevant research and policy implications can be drawn.

A community resource for expertise and data analysis for over 20 years, the Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development created the groundbreaking community data system NEO CANDO (Northeast Ohio Community and Neighborhood Data for Organizing), a web-based tool that centralizes a broad array of indicators, making it easier to overlay and analyze disparate data. Community development corporations, foundation program officers, local governments, neighborhood activists and residents, students at the Mandel School and other institutions, the media, community reinvestment professionals and academic researchers are among those who have found NEO CANDO invaluable in their work. The Center conducts extensive training and maintains a listserv so NEO CANDO users can get the most out of its vast data collection. You can visit the NEO CANDO webpage at <http://neocando.case.edu>.



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