



OVERVIEW OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION PLAN

Convened by Shiloh Baptist Church and the Shiloh Community Development Corporation, the Trenton Historic Development Collaborative (THDC) is a group of stakeholders who have met on a monthly basis since 2006 to provide a forum for community discussion, to coordinate the services and projects of member organizations, and to strengthen and support the area’s civic groups. In 2010 and 2011, the THDC led the community in a planning process, organized by Isles, Inc., to identify assets, strengths, issues, priorities, and recommendations for the neighborhood. Over 450 people were engaged through the planning process. This plan subsequently received significant implementation funding from the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs under the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program (NRTC).

THE THDC NEIGHBORHOOD

Covering about 0.3 square miles, the THDC neighborhood is generally bounded by North Hermitage Avenue to the west, West State Street to the south, Willow Street to the east, and Rutherford and Bellevue Avenues to the north (see map). The THDC defined itself and this area of focus based on the rich history of the neighborhood, which is central to Trenton’s African-American community, and once claimed a thriving black middle class full of skilled tradesmen, lawyers, and teachers that resided in the neighborhood and influenced public policy throughout the city and state for decades. Despite its history and current committed leadership, however, the neighborhood has suffered from years of destabilization that the THDC is working to reverse. Key neighborhood indicators are extracted in the table at right.

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS

Participants in the planning process identified 91 assets in the neighborhood, including educational, faith-based, and community services; civic leaders; businesses; recreation assets such as the Delaware & Raritan Canal; the historic character of the neighborhood; interesting and unique housing stock; and a key location near downtown and the State Capitol.

ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

After identifying assets, stakeholders identified seventy issues of concern in the neighborhood and thought about how those issues could be addressed using the neighborhood's assets. The issues were then grouped into ten major categories, which stakeholders prioritized as follows.

- **Education:** basic life skills, financial literacy, parenting skills, job training
- **Safety:** crime, drugs, loitering, street lighting, safety in specific locations and recreational areas

THDC Demographics	2010	2000
Population	4244	3313
Households	1698	1886
Families	947	1169
Race and Ethnicity	2010	2000
White	7%	4%
Black	89%	88%
Hispanic or Latino	9%	8%
Age and Family Structure	2010	2000
Under 18	28%	33%
% of children under 18 who reside in families headed by single women	72%	66%
% of families with children under 18 headed by a single woman	45%	25%
Over 65	10%	11%
Housing	2010	2000
Housing units	2,117	2,347
Vacant housing units	20%	20%
Occupied housing units that are renter-occupied	71%	73%
Proportion of buildings that are vacant (2014)*	26%	
Proportion of all properties that are vacant (2014)*	29%	
Median household income (2012)**	\$32,240	

Sources: Census 2010; Census 2000

* Trenton Neighborhood Restoration Campaign Vacant Property Survey (available at www.centrin.trenton.nj.gov)

** American Community Survey 2006-2012 5-year estimates

- **Youth Services:** internet access, recreation, opportunities to engage, job training, college prep, after school programs, bullying
- **Economic Development:** job training, access to employment, local goods and services, Capital Health Campus
- **Community Services:** resource center, childcare, health and wellness, internet access, senior programs and housing
- **Housing:** abandoned and nuisance properties, affordable housing, homelessness, historic preservation, foreclosure prevention, condition and maintenance of housing units
- **Physical Improvements:** abandoned properties, beautification, Capital Health Campus, litter clean up, streetscape improvements, D&R Canal
- **Community Engagement:** community integration, involvement in community by local colleges, role models, church engagement, recognize/understand history
- **Recreation:** condition and amount of open space, recreational facilities, community gardens
- **Municipal Services:** library access, road repairs, snow removal, traffic and speed calming, high property taxes

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall goal that stakeholders identified through the planning process was for this historic community to become sustainable by capitalizing on its assets and focusing on seven core areas:

- Build capacity
- Engage the community
- Improve quality of life
- Create beauty
- Promote learning
- Secure funding
- Develop youth

The following specific recommendations stem from these core areas. THDC stakeholders have been working since 2011 to make them a reality, so progress is also noted.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Community Resource Center

A community resource center has been established at the Carver Youth and Family Center (“the Carver Y”). The Resource Center offers residents access to computers and the internet, as well as to information about the programs and services available to them related to homeownership, job readiness, recreation, emergency services, and more.. Use of space at the Carver Center has helped to enliven this historic building and provides the community with a central location to come together and learn about available programs and services.

2. **Neighborhood Watch**

The THDC has worked with local civic associations to explore the creation of a neighborhood watch. Some of the community's primary concerns include a lack of safety, the number of property crimes that take place in the neighborhood, and the presence of drug dealers and loiterers on the streets, which a neighborhood watch can help ameliorate.

Status: Although various residents and civic associations are involved in the North and West Ward CPACs (Community Police Advisory Council), and other community groups such as the Bellevue Area Civic Association have taken steps to address safety in the neighborhood using a phone tree, there is so far only one group that has approximated a neighborhood watch in a very small area (in the Willow Green Townhouse Association).

3. **The History Project**

The history and texture of the neighborhood was fondly referred to by many residents throughout the planning process. There was a sense, however, that neighborhood youth have little knowledge of its history, particularly experiential knowledge – what buildings used to be, the memory of Spring Street lined with businesses, and how the neighborhood was an extension of the family. Residents expressed a need to foster intergenerational learning, and to give young people a sense of being rooted in a strong place.

Status: In 2014, the THDC organized the History Project – three days of celebration at the Carver Center that included recording eighteen Story Corps interviews with older residents, as well as performances and lectures. Neighborhood youth were engaged to staff and participate in the project. A year later, a second event was held to continue the new “tradition”, featuring more performances as well as audio-visual media from the first event assembled by neighborhood youth. Related projects include a THDC Small Grant for community historian Ms. Betty Lacy to work with teenagers in Shiloh CDC's Leadership Institute.

4. **Supporting and strengthening existing services**

Many of the services residents identified as lacking are already offered in the neighborhood, so a key effort of the THDC is to make sure residents are informed about available programs and that available programs better align with residents' specific needs. The THDC supports several important initiatives through its partners:

- **Job Training:** Shiloh CDC offers the Capital City One-Stop Center, and several other THDC member organizations, including Isles, UIH Family Partners, and the Vocational Arts and Science Training Center (VAST) offer job training and job placement programs.
- **Community Jobs Board:** This was initially conceived as a neighborhood exchange for youth to earn pocket money by assisting residents with shoveling snow, picking up groceries, doing minor repairs, etc. The neighborhood-level board has not yet been created. However, Shiloh CDC is currently working to establish a larger jobs board sourced from regional employers.
- **Life skills and job training for at-risk youth:** Several organizations offer services to at-risk youth, such as Mercer Street Friends' Youth Enrichment Program and Isles' Youth Institute.
- **Coordinated social and health services:** THDC families often deal with cross-cutting issues, but programs are often piecemeal. Mercer Street Friends' Parent-Child Center West on Hermitage Avenue provides many wrap-around services that families can access, ranging from a food pantry to computer literacy to parenting programs. The CRC also works with residents to help them find programs and services offered by THDC member organizations and others to meet all of their needs in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

- **Financial literacy:** Several organizations in the neighborhood offer residents the tools to achieve financial stability, including Isles, Shiloh CDC, and Mercer Street Friends.

LONGER-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Create a Youth Advisory Council:** Over the past few years, THDC organizations have engaged a number of youth. The next step, creating a youth advisory council to the THDC itself, will allow for the voices and concerns of young people to have a seat at the table. Isles and Mercer Street Friends are working on this currently.
- **Expand and strengthen partnerships:** The THDC is working to engage additional partners, ranging from the grassroots level to the regional, state, and national level, to serve and improve the community. The Small Grants Program has strengthened the engagement of a number of small, grassroots groups and activists with the rest of the THDC community.
- **Improve the D&R Canal and Belvidere Greenway:** These beautiful assets connect the THDC neighborhood with the larger region, but are under-utilized and under-maintained. They should play an integral role in the overall revitalization and redevelopment of the neighborhood. Isles' new Clean & Green project is a first step in this process.
- **Recreation:** An ongoing concern in the original planning process was the limited recreation options available to young people and the community generally. Consequently, in 2014 Isles led a community planning effort focused on recreation, which identified assets, challenges, priorities, and actions. This plan identified that the key challenge is not a lack of programs but rather their disconnect from community members and their needs. The plan is currently being implemented, and includes a mobile recreation van (to be launched in 2015), a program to clean and beautify vacant lots and parks – Clean & Green mentioned above, and upgrades to existing facilities.
- **Community cleanups:** Litter, cleanliness, and dumping are significant concerns in the neighborhood. Isles has launched the Clean & Green project to improve and maintain parks and vacant lots in the THDC neighborhood, and multiple resident-driven initiatives have been supported through the Small Grants program.
- **Parking:** Surface parking lots, which sit vacant outside of weekday work hours, occupy a large proportion of the neighborhood. In the medium term, while the THDC works to build support for redevelopment of these parking lots from the State and other owners, the THDC Plan calls for improving the streetscape along the edges of these parking lots, and finding creative pop-up or short-term uses for them in their off hours. One Small Grant has supported a beautification project along one of these surface lots, and pop-up uses are being explored as part of implementing the recreation plan.
- **Smart urban design:** The plan calls for THDC stakeholders to work with the City of Trenton to improve the look, feel, and design of the neighborhood, by strengthening its existing historic fabric and improving gateways into the neighborhood, such as the D&R Canal and key streets.
- **Improve access to goods & services:** The THDC once had a number of neighborhood retail strips and a mix of goods and services. Many of these businesses, however, have since been shuttered; the closed supermarket on Hermitage Avenue is a particularly visible reminder. The plan calls for improving residents' access to goods and services by identifying and tracking commercial activity, then identifying ways to foster it. Isles currently has a commercial study of the neighborhood underway, which will generate more specific recommendations.