

**RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
COMMUNITY OUTREACH
PARTNERSHIP CENTER**

**GRANT # COPC-NJ-98-029
*SEMIANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT***

JANUARY 1 – JUNE 30, 2002

PART A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted to:

**Armand Carriere, Government Technical Representative
Office of Community Partnerships
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**

Submitted by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rutgers Community Outreach Partnership Center (RCOPC) is completing its fourth year of activities in the West Side Park community in Newark, New Jersey. RCOPC has received approval from HUD for a one-year no-cost extension of the grant period to September 23, 2002. In June 2002, RCOPC submitted a *NEW DIRECTIONS* grant proposal to HUD requesting two years of federal funding through September 30, 2004

During this reporting period, West Side Park continued to experience the staff and leadership turnover among its community organizations that is becoming almost endemic in the neighborhood. Fortunately, RCOPC has some experience with this and we are working energetically to maintain institutional memory and create new productive relationships. We were aided by our efforts to create RCOPC's outreach agenda for the next two years, which formed the basis for our New Directions grant application and enabled us to build new relationships with community partners and with new university partners. These efforts were further aided by the data collected during the participatory neighborhood planning initiative. RCOPC researchers and students are working closely with old and new community partners to present and analyze neighborhood data to best meet the community's needs.

In addition to staff turnover, two other issues took center stage during the last reporting period. The first was the hotly contested mayoral election. The election drew work in communities and in City Hall to a halt for months prior to the election. And nearly all community meetings were either suspected as forums for the upcoming election or quickly became forums as candidates appeared unannounced and frequently dominated the agenda. Community meetings on more than one occasion became meetings to present entire slates of candidates, much to the concern of community residents.

The second issue is the overwhelming concern with public safety. As a result of increased gang activity, drug dealing, and car chases, West Side Park residents launched an organizing campaign and made public safety their "Priority Number One." The increase in these activities took place across the city and in the city of Irvington, which lies adjacent to West Side Park on its western boarder. West Side Park residents not only face their own public safety issues but they have the added burden of attempting to form alliances across two jurisdictions. Further complicating the issues, the gang activity in Irvington has reached such a height of activity, that a variety of federal law enforcement agencies are the front line in tackling these activities. Residents of West Side Park find it difficult to gain access to their own local police, and gaining access to unknown federal law enforcement agencies raises the difficulty level significantly.

Within these challenging contexts, RCOPC continued to support the work of the NEC and the participation of community residents, block clubs, churches, and newly formed community organizations. RCOPC completed projects in the areas of comprehensive planning, neighborhood revitalization, and healthcare. And RCOPC staff provided support for ongoing projects by attending meetings, conducting short research projects,

providing technical assistance, and gathering and disseminating information from public agencies and officials.

RCOPC continues to meet or exceed all of the goals in all of the functional categories identified in the Project Management Work Plan in our original funding proposal.

Following is a summary of major highlights for the past six months.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

- RCOPC completed the second round of the *land use and community asset-mapping project* and is working with Neighborhood Empowerment Council (NEC) committees to provide access to the data to inform neighborhood planning efforts.
- RCOPC supported the work of the Neighborhood Empowerment Council's (NEC) public safety committee by *facilitating access to public safety data*.
- RCOPC released *West Side Park Data Atlas* version 2.
- RCOPC is maintaining its *Interactive Mapping Server* to facilitate community-based planning in West Side Park and the City of Newark.
- RCOPC in collaboration with the Urban Planning Program's Community Development Studio completed an *assessment of the work of the New Community Corporation*.
- The continually updated *RCOPC Web Site* is on-line at <http://policy.rutgers.edu/cupr/rcopc> and provides project descriptions, printable reports, planning data, neighborhood maps, a photo-gallery, and much more.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

- RCOPC has continued its efforts to facilitate the *revitalization of West Side Park*, the 31-acre county park that is the heart of the West Side Park community.

HEALTHCARE

- RCOPC distributed the *West Side Park Health Care Services Directory*, containing a data base of 146 health care service programs available to West Side Park residents.
- RCOPC has continued to support efforts to develop the *West Side Park Community Health Center*.

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PART B. NARRATIVE DISCUSSION

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OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the activities of the Rutgers Community Outreach Partnership Center (RCOPC) during the period from January 1 through June 30, 2002. With completion of this reporting period, RCOPC is nearing completion of its fourth year of HUD-funded activities in partnership with the West Side Park community of Newark, New Jersey. Our one-year no-cost extension of the grant continues RCOPC funding through September 23, 2002.

RCOPC's target neighborhood is the West Side Park community of Newark, New Jersey. West Side Park, a community of approximately 13,500 residents in 120 square blocks on the west side of the Central Ward, is Newark's target area under New Jersey's Urban Coordinating Council initiative and is included in Newark's federal Renewal Community (Newark gave up its designation as a federal Enterprise Community to secure designation as a federal Renewal Community). RCOPC's principal objective is to assist and support the community-based revitalization efforts underway through these state and federal programs.

RCOPC has met or exceeded all of the goals for this period in each of the functional categories identified in the Project Management Work Plan included in our original funding proposal. Our emphasis in this reporting period focused on several major substantive tasks identified in the Neighborhood Empowerment Council's Community Action Plan. Highlights for this reporting period include:

- ❑ completion of the *re-inventory of parcels and community assets* in West Side Park and *materials* for neighborhood planning efforts
- ❑ completion of an *assessment of the New Community Corporation* that identifies strategies for building capacity in community organizations
- ❑ distributing the *West Side Park Health Care Services Directory*, listing health care services available to West Side Park residents
- ❑ continuing efforts to facilitate the *revitalization of West Side Park*, a 31-acre county park, as the focal point of the West Side Park community
- ❑ distribution of the *West Side Park Data Atlas v2*
- ❑ maintenance of an *Interactive Mapping Server* to support community-based planning

RCOPC continues to work closely with our community partners in West Side Park. Our principal community contact is the Neighborhood Empowerment Council (NEC)

established under the New Jersey Urban Coordinating Council initiative to plan and implement the revitalization of West Side Park. RCOPC leadership is provided by Robert Lake and Kathe Newman at the Center for Urban Policy Research (CUPR).

During this last reporting period, West Side Park community organizations experienced additional staff turnovers. The director of Tri-City People's Corporation took a leave of absence in the Spring and is no longer with the organization. A new director has not yet been hired. Dina Levy, the energetic coordinator of the NEC, also recently announced that she is leaving her position for a new position in New York. The reverend who was the force behind Corinthian Housing Development Corporation passed away. And finally, the interim director of the Newark Community Development Network, which hosts the NEC, is leaving and a new director has recently been named.

Despite what's become a revolving door for leadership at many of the neighborhood's CDCs, this is an exciting time for leadership development in West Side Park. A number of new block clubs, community associations, and neighborhood churches have recently become engaged and are working together on neighborhood issues including public safety and neighborhood planning. These issues pose an imminent threat in the neighborhood and are significant enough to draw formerly uninvolved or semi-involved individuals to community meetings and to participate formally on committees.

The public safety issues are the most significant in the neighborhood. Car chases, gangs, and drug activity are all clearly evident throughout much of West Side Park. Car chases have resulted in personal and property damage. And the drug activity is rampant making it difficult to walk down some blocks and nearly impossible for children to find a drug free route to and from school or the neighborhood's 31-acre park.

The second issue is the rapid rate of redevelopment in the neighborhood. West Side Park is experiencing two opposing forces – continuing abandonment and rapid reinvestment. A few years ago, nearly a third of the neighborhood's parcels were vacant. As of the winter of 2002, 24 percent of parcels were vacant. The reinvestment is spurred in part by the tight private housing market but it is funded with public support. All of the housing under construction in West Side Park is either public housing or receives some form of public subsidy—federal or state grant or pass through or land from the city of Newark. The city owns 27 percent of the land in West Side Park.

RCOPC's staff continues to work closely with CDC directors and staff, with block clubs, community and religious leaders, and with public agency staff. We continually provide access to RCOPC projects, data, and maps. In the context of the rapid staff changes, RCOPC materials have helped to provide continuity by documenting neighborhood change and project progress. In addition to formal conversations and project meetings, we schedule frequent informal meetings with CDC directors and staff and community leaders during which we tour the neighborhood and talk about their concerns, needs, and project highlights.

1. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

RCOPC has continued to expand and develop the West Side Park Community Asset Mapping activities initiated at the very outset of the project. These data gathering and dissemination activities support the planning and revitalization efforts of community partner organizations and provide essential neighborhood information for community residents.

THE NEW WEST SIDE PARK PARCEL INVENTORY

RCOPC conducted an initial parcel inventory of the West Side Park neighborhood in June of 1999 and updated the inventory during the winter of 2002 to document neighborhood changes. West Side Park is in the midst of a rapid physical transformation. The Newark Public Housing Authority, non-profit community organizations and private developers are building hundreds of new single and two-family homes, nearly transforming the neighborhood overnight. A vast array of builders is evident throughout the neighborhood as they pour foundations and frame new homes. Their work is in stark contrast to the array of cranes, bulldozers and asbestos removal teams demolishing existing structures and clearing land.

Even though the neighborhood is experiencing a phenomenal rate of redevelopment, evidenced by the new housing construction, economic development projects including a Home Depot, re-habilitation of many older single and multi-family homes, and clearance of lots in preparation for new construction, significant amounts of older housing remain in varying states of deterioration. And vacant lots are still prolific—24 percent of parcels are vacant, according to the 2002 parcel inventory.

Community leaders have been unable to keep up with the rate of neighborhood change making community planning nearly impossible. During the last reporting period, in an attempt to grasp the changes in their specific neighborhood service areas, Tri-City Peoples Corporation and Corinthian Housing Development Corporation both asked for and received updated neighborhood surveys and maps. The NEC then asked RCOPC to conduct a new parcel inventory for the entire neighborhood and complement it with a study of neighborhood assets.

The need for accurate neighborhood level data is paramount. Community leaders are watching changes take place but they lack information that could enable them to influence the transformation. They are most concerned about the rate of redevelopment, open space preservation, and the construction of housing that is affordable for people with very low incomes. Residents also want to support the development of community owned and run businesses on the commercial corridors and want their churches and other local institutions to have access to available land to build needed office space and community centers.

Community organization leaders were somewhat stunned to learn that even though they had pieces of paper from the City's Adopt-A-Lot program that gave them right of first refusal on publicly owned land in the neighborhood, that many of these lots are no longer available. Organizations have watched housing development go up on some of these parcels. And other organizations that have attempted to claim their lots have been told they are not available.

Neighborhood leaders who want to participate in comprehensive citywide planning efforts lack the data necessary for effective participation. Without an up-to-date picture of the availability of vacant land, it is impossible for them to influence the process, leaving an elite few holding the cards.

To gather up-to-date data, RCOPC staff, NEC staff, and community leaders conducted a new parcel inventory. Walking every block in the neighborhood, researchers and community partners collected data on every parcel including parcel occupancy, building condition, land use, construction status, noted if the properties were for sale and the real estate agent, and for occupied non-residential buildings, listed the name of the business, community group, nonprofit service provider, or religious institution. RCOPC researchers entered the parcel data into a database, linked it to the city's digital parcel map, and made corrections to reflect recent changes in the parcel map due to lot consolidations, address mistakes on the city's parcel map, and other anomalies.

Researchers expanded the database with building and parcel ownership and lot size gathered from the Newark city tax assessor's office. Finally, data on residential building permits for new construction and rehabilitation for the period January 1999-October 2001 were added. RCOPC researchers are using the new building permits to accurately attribute new housing constructing to a particular builder (it has proven difficult to attribute all of the CDC housing to the appropriate builder given problems with CDC record keeping, staff changes, and turn-key developments).

RCOPC created poster size maps and presented the initial parcel survey findings at a well-attended community meeting (even the Mayor came). Community residents, leaders, and organization staff formed a planning committee to work collaboratively to develop a neighborhood plan. RCOPC meets biweekly with this group to develop and modify maps and data formats to best meet neighborhood needs. Based on these discussions, RCOPC is creating a master poster size map that includes block, lot, street address, parcel occupancy, ownership, and neighborhood assets. Maps will be distributed to all community organizations, public schools, and other local institutions. Individual residents and groups are also using the maps. One of the block clubs is using maps of their block and surrounding blocks to do their own block plan. Another resident is using the map that shows the location of the neighborhood's 114 religious institutions as part of a marketing plan for the Christian bookstore he is planning to open in the neighborhood.

WEST SIDE PARK DATA ATLAS V2

RCOPC completed the second version of the West Side Park *Data Atlas*.

The *West Side Park Data Atlas v2* contains maps and charts that show:

- ◆ Updated political boundaries (Congressional Districts, State Assembly Districts, Newark Wards and Ward Districts)
- ◆ 1990 and 2000 Census geography (tracts and blocks)
- ◆ 2000 U.S. census variables released to date: population counts, race/ethnicity, and basic housing characteristics
- ◆ Planning areas (State Enterprise Zone boundaries, State Urban Coordinating Council area)
- ◆ Location and contact information for all Newark community development corporations
- ◆ Community-based organizations (location and contact information)
- ◆ Location of all recreation resources
- ◆ Location of community programs (i.e., afterschool, computer labs, etc.)
- ◆ Location of the neighborhood's 114 religious institutions
- ◆ West Side Park community organizing districts (location and contact information)
- ◆ RCOPC 1999 and 2001/2002 Parcel Survey data (land use, building condition, occupancy status, vacant lot condition, construction status)
- ◆ School data (location, grade levels, enrollment, student-teacher ratio, student mobility, class size, computer and Internet access information, and results of 4th, 8th, and 11th grade proficiency tests)

RCOPC WEB SITE

RCOPC staff continually update RCOPC's Web site located at <http://policy.rutgers.edu/cupr/rcopc>. The Web site continues to provide access to RCOPC data, information about West Side Park, and RCOPC reports and publications. The site includes project descriptions, reports, databases, data sets, maps, presentations, posters, the West Side Park Data Atlas, slide shows, a photo gallery, a West Side Park and Newark bibliography, and links to relevant Internet sites. The City of Newark has included a link to the RCOPC Web site on the City's homepage <http://www.ci.newark.nj.us/>. GoNewark.com, the city's premier information exchange, also links to RCOPC <http://www.gonewark.com/civic.htm>.

2. NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

WEST SIDE PARK REVITALIZATION

RCOPC has continued its efforts to facilitate the badly needed revitalization of West Side Park, the 31-acre County park located in the heart of the West Side Park community. Working with RCOPC, the graduate Community Development Planning Studio in the Rutgers Department of Urban Planning and Policy Development, taught by RCOPC Co-Director Kathe Newman, prepared a three-phase redevelopment plan for the Park during the Spring semester 2000. Based on extensive community consultation and participation,

the redevelopment plan contained concept and site designs for a playground and a tot lot and presented recommendations for a 3-phased redevelopment of the entire Park. In May 2000, the West Side Park community was awarded a \$500,000 Green Acres grant from the State of New Jersey, matched by an additional \$500,000 from Essex County, expressly devoted to Park revitalization.

Despite the allocation of funds, the active involvement of community groups, and the RCOPC/Planning studio redevelopment plan, as of Fall 2001, work had not yet begun. RCOPC staff has continued to support the efforts of the NEC and community groups to pressure Essex County to move forward with the badly needed Park revitalization. RCOPC has facilitated and participated in meetings between West Side Park community organizations, County Parks Department staff, representatives and staff from the County Board of Freeholders, and other County and State officials.

As a result of the meetings, organized community pressure, and the Freeholder Board President's commitment, Essex County has completed nearly all of the items identified in the three-phase plan marking a significant reinvestment in the park. The County installed a new perimeter fence to keep out cars (drag races and doughnuts throughout the park continually tear up the fields and threaten personal safety). It hired a new onsite permanent maintenance staff, making West Side Park the only park in the County's historic park system with a permanent county funded staff. The presence of a permanent maintenance staff has served a few unanticipated functions. It has helped to reduce crime and it has facilitated communication about park usage and needs since there is a County staff person there throughout the week. The County Freeholder President convinced PSE&G, the local utility company, to fix all of the park's perimeter lights. For residents, seeing their park adequately lit up at night was one of the most visible signs that change is on the horizon. Finally, and perhaps most excitingly, work is almost completed on the new playground and tot lot. Plans for the playground and tot lot were developed in partnership with the 2000 Community Development Studio, neighborhood residents, Essex County, and a playground design firm.



West Side Park's New Playground and Tot Lot (Spring 2002)

3. HEALTHCARE

WEST SIDE PARK COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

During this reporting period, RCOPC staff continued to support Corinthian HDC and Tri-City Peoples Corporation in their efforts to develop the West Side Park Community Health Care Center. The initial feasibility analysis was conducted as a semester-long project of the graduate Community Development Studio in the Department of Urban Planning and Policy Development, taught by Professors Norman Glickman and Kathe Newman during Spring semester 2001.

In January, Tri-City was in the lead position to develop the health center and the New Jersey State Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), which owns the land, was expected to release its RFP for the parcels in early January. Just as NJHMFA was about to release the long overdue RFP, the state imposed a moratorium on new projects because of the budget crisis, which meant that NJHMFA had to file for special permission to release the RFP. Unfortunately, in the interim, the leadership at Tri-City Peoples Corporation changed and the strong religious leader behind Corinthian HDC passed away. RCOPC is continuing to work with interested community organizations to move this project forward.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES DIRECTORY

RCOPC is distributing the *West Side Park Health Care Services Directory*. The *Directory*, intended as an information resource for residents of West Side Park, identifies 146 health care programs and providers organized by type of service, contains a detailed description of the services provided and includes maps of the location of all service providers.