



REDEVELOPMENT THE RIGHT WAY

by ROBERT POHLMAN
February 2005

The Williams Administration is talking about redeveloping a number of neighborhoods in the District of Columbia that suffer from high rates of crime and other social ills. It appears that central to their plans is the intention to tear down public housing or other federally assisted buildings and replace them with new higher density mixed-income developments.

Residents of buildings that might be infected are understandably concerned about what this means for them. They've all heard about the displacement that occurs in other major redevelopment projects sponsored by the government and are skeptical that the housing will be designed to meet their needs and wonder whether they will actually be able to return to live in the new housing. They've seen large scale "urban renewal" style development before in Georgetown, Southwest, and elsewhere. Many don't want to see the old buildings torn down and their neighbors scattered.

Another more user-friendly model for redevelopment has emerged in Shaw, where the former Immaculate Conception apartments at 1130 7th Street, NW, has been renovated and renamed, simply, "1330" Elsewhere in this issue, the article, "1330: A Touch of Affordability in Shaw" tells that story.

There are a number of ways in which the revitalization of 1330 took place that differ from the way many other redevelopments have been done.

1. The residents got involved before any planning took place for the redevelopment of their property. Manna CDC worked with the tenants to form a tenant organization that then worked with the developer of the property to make sure things were done right.

2. The developer was a nonprofit, Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC), whose primary motive is to benefit the low-income residents, not make a big return on investment.

3. The redevelopment plan made sure residents were not displaced, even temporarily. So often in redevelopments the residents are moved out



so that old buildings can be torn down. When that happens, typically many families do not return. In this case the building was left standing and substantially renovated. It was done section by section so that people didn't have to leave.

4. Project-Based Section 8 support was retained. If the developer had torn down the building, HUD might not have continued its commitment to provide subsidy tied to each unit in the building that houses low-income households.

5. The nonprofit CPDC didn't just renovate the building, they landscaped around the building and added playground equipment for the children who live in the building to use. In addition, they are installing a computer lab in the building and have furnished a large community room with brand new kitchen facilities to encourage gatherings, meetings and educational activities.

The essential difference between the revitalization of 1330 7th Street, NW, and the typical major redevelopment of public housing and other large multifamily projects is the degree of involvement and control by the residents. Too often, when government redevelops they don't involve the residents in making the most important decisions about what will be done, at the very beginning of the process. They develop plans without resident input and then invites the residents to react to those plans. And, they rarely provide the residents support and assistance to independently evaluate technical aspects of the proposed redevelopment.

As the District considers the possibility of redeveloping major federally assisted properties in the future, it should pledge to adhere to the principles that have made 1330 a model for success. It should not automatically assume that massive redevelopment is the right thing to do - renovation of existing buildings that preserves community and avoids displacement - even temporary displacement - may be the far superior solution. The key to making this determination is listening to the people who will be most affected - those who live there. If redevelopment is not for their benefit, then it shouldn't be done.

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