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Moving Forward **Together**

The Residents Define the Qualities and Priorities of the
Revere School Community

June 23, 2007

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Comer Science and Education Foundation,
and is done in cooperation with Alderman Hairston
and the City of Chicago, for the benefit of the residents
and the stakeholders of the Revere School Community.

PREFACE

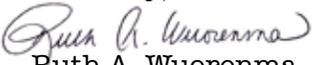
This book represents the start of a journey. It is the journey of a neighborhood starting with its ideas and leading to a **plan for the built environment**, a plan that is compatible with the identity of the neighborhood and is economically viable.

This is a little book of what planners call “big ideas.” These big ideas come directly from the residents—not the planners—but they can hold their own against those of any professional team. The book records the voices of the residents who collectively have hundreds of years of experience living in the 15-block area. It records who they are now, what they honor and what they hope for. It records a shared appreciation for the area’s potential, but also acknowledges areas of need.

This book will be used throughout all following stages of the planning process—beginning with interviews of the many other stakeholders and ending with the final redevelopment plan. Although every careful community planning process must reflect many stakeholders and the input of knowledgeable professionals, **the priorities of this book shall remain the priorities of the planning process.**

We hope that all readers will see what we see—a unique neighborhood of great heritage and cohesion, one that respects quality but is not pretentious, and that is open to respectful and appropriate new investment.

Sincerely,


Ruth A. Wuorenma
President



Neighborhood Capital Institute



This document is a summary of the thoughts and ideas expressed by residents of the Revere School Community at a kick-off meeting for the redevelopment planning process. This meeting, with the theme **“Building on Your Past : Moving Forward Together”**, was held in Paul Revere School on June 23, 2007.

The day’s agenda included:

1. An introduction to the process;
2. A presentation showing the key characteristics of the neighborhood (such as transportation, local and regional amenities), as well as trends in neighborhoods around Chicago and beyond;
3. A breakout session where attendees energetically and eagerly responded to questions about the past, present and future of their community. Directing the conversation at each of the six randomly assigned tables was a volunteer facilitator from the University of Chicago. A resident scribe at each table recorded all the input; and
4. A reconvening session where input from all the tables was summarized in a “top 3 ideas” format.

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It is clear from the opinions expressed on June 23 that the residents of the Revere School Community love their neighborhood and are committed to it. It is a tight knit community due, in large part, to the stability of its residential population, as well as the man-made boundaries—the Skyway, Metra and Oak Woods Cemetery—that encircle it. People know each other and look out for one another. They are working together in their neighborhood to make positive changes. The community feels safe, relative to other areas, but desires a continued emphasis on safety and crime prevention.



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This is a community that is thoughtful, optimistic, and eager. They are eager to improve their surroundings, and eager to work together to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. They care deeply about the full life cycle: children and youth, adults and seniors. Although highly cohesive, the members of the community are not exclusionary. They see the undeveloped land along South Chicago Avenue as a “blank canvas” that could be attractive to investors, developers and corporations that could respond to their goals of jobs, new black-owned businesses, shops and services. Interestingly, they see their inner urban neighborhood as one that could support agriculture and related activities such as open markets, nurseries and landscaping businesses (these are as important to them as industries and services related to seniors).

GETTING DOWN TO BASICS

At the close of the breakout sessions, each table was asked to sum up their thoughts using the following questions. The most commonly cited responses are listed here. They support the richness of the residents’ other ideas documented in this book.

Best reasons to live here, right now:

- Revitalization and property value increase (“people don’t feel like they’ve wasted their time or efforts”)
- Location, transportation, convenience
- Good neighbors, familiarity
- Feeling of safety

Highest priorities for the future:

- Continued emphasis on safety
- Better shopping—high quality and more choices
- Cleanliness and beautification
- Satellite education campus, especially for vocational and career training programs

Best reasons for someone to invest here:

- Well developed residential
- Significant available land
- Friendly atmosphere, good people
- Low competition, and good location

Another big idea...

Starting a planning process with direct conversations with the residents is in itself a big idea. **Why?**

- ★ Rather than beginning with a plan already in mind, no plans will be drawn until after the stakeholder input is collected.
- ★ Starting with residents—as individuals rather than their organizations—yields better, fresher (and often inspiring) content about what is loved in a neighborhood. An asset-based (not problem-based) mentality gives planners a solid starting point.
- ★ Defining those assets from the resident perspective enhances a plan’s durability and predictability because the plan isn’t subject to a changing business, institutional or political landscape; **the residents are the keepers of the plan.**
- ★ And, finally, plans that begin this way are more likely to represent the true identity of a neighborhood and not suffer “strip mall sameness” which is so widespread.



THEMES

In reviewing the residents' input, themes about community life in the Revere School Neighborhood became clear.

Community Advancement for All Ages

- The importance of investing in the younger generations (mentoring programs, education)
- The importance of jobs, protecting existing businesses and stimulating new businesses, including an emphasis on black-owned businesses
- The need to provide for the senior population (housing, healthcare, education and programs)
- The desire to improve their lives both intellectually (education) and physically (exercise, eating right, access to good health care)

Community Pride

- Friendliness and dignity
- Cleanliness and upkeep
- The neighborhood is on the upswing
- Residents have confidence that they have some thing to offer (a supportive community, great location, underserved spending power and available land)

Community Growth

- To build on the good that already exists in the neighborhood
- To provide additional residential development
- To carefully avoid potential parking issues with any new development
- To recognize that churches are a significant part of community life

Community Choices

- “We want the same things as everyone else wants” (ie. stores, restaurants, beauty, safety, quality)
- The need for basic retail goods and services
- The desire for recreational amenities. (Exercise, followed by movies, shopping and gatherings were the most enjoyed free time activities.)



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IMPLICATIONS ON PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

What does this mean for THE PLAN?

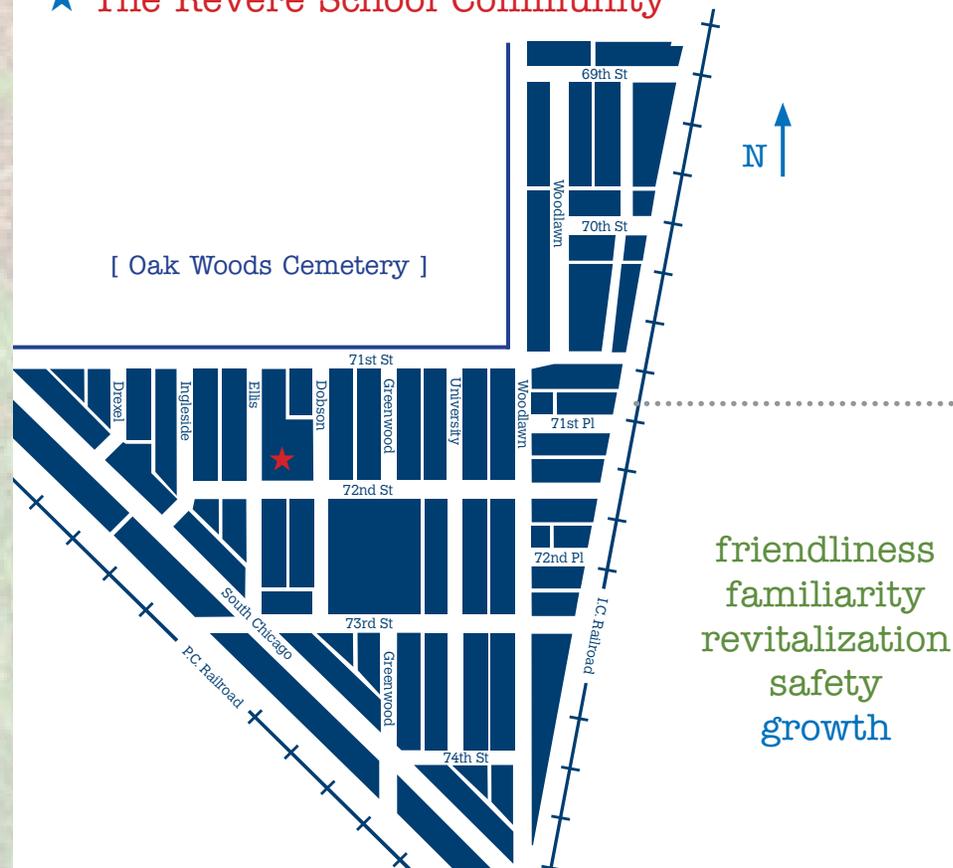
The input from the community residents shapes the principles and directions for the neighborhood redevelopment plan. These principles will guide the professional planning team as they begin to develop a physical plan for the neighborhood.

- Maximize land available for retail development, job creation, and expanded educational and career training sites.
- Develop South Chicago Avenue for neighborhood amenities. It is an ideal, yet untapped location. Development along this road would benefit the neighborhood without bringing increased traffic into the residential areas.
- Direct development to create safe streets and a safe “center” to the neighborhood, perhaps including an outdoor gathering place.
- Augment both active and passive outdoor recreation areas, with special attention to amenities for adults and seniors. Consider walking paths.
- Improve streetscaping.
- Improve existing transportation amenities, including bus stops and the Metra station.

And yet another big idea...

★ **Gary Comer** grew up in the Revere School Community and made a major commitment to it—seen in programs that range from education to housing to recreation (such as the Gary Comer Youth Center which is also the home of the South Shore Drill Team) and now this redevelopment planning process. The Comer commitment is without precedent. Few philanthropists concentrate so intently on a specific area, especially one of only 15 blocks and about 4000 people. But Mr. Comer saw something in this neighborhood that had continuing merit and was worth preserving. **We think this little book will help others see what he saw.**

★ The Revere School Community



revitalization

TO:

