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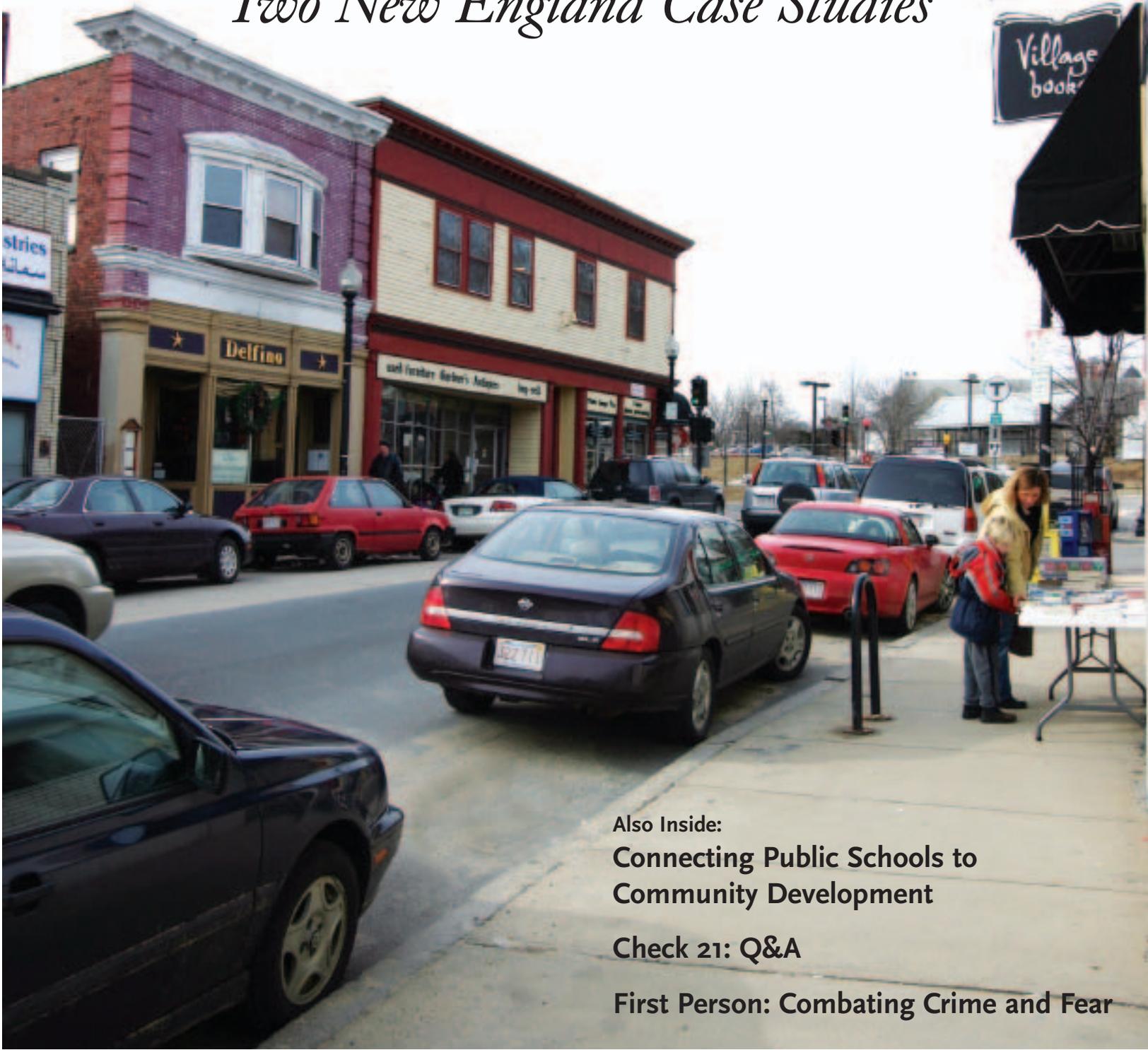
Communities & Banking

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Reviving Main Street:

Two New England Case Studies



Also Inside:

**Connecting Public Schools to
Community Development**

Check 21: Q&A

First Person: Combating Crime and Fear

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Communities & Banking seeks to offer insightful articles on topics in community development and fair access to credit, with a focus on innovative research and effective programs and partnerships within New England.

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Reviving Main Street:

Two New England Case Studies

*by Mamie Marcuss
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston*

In the age of shopping malls, discount super stores, and Internet storefronts, the traditional downtown shopping area may be making its way back. Centrally located and filled with historic architecture and public spaces, downtown commercial districts are being re-identified as valuable neighborhood assets, and across the country efforts are underway to reconstruct town centers. At the forefront of this commercial district comeback is the National Trust's Main Street program.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the Main Street program supports local efforts to transform anemic town centers into healthy, sustainable commercial districts. Established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation,¹ the Main Street program has combined economic development and historic preservation to create a revitalization strategy that addresses the physical, social, and economic components of a retail district. Today, more than 1,700 communities



Roslindale Village



Roslindale Village

use the Main Street model, working to create unique downtown centers that serve the needs of local residents. The strategy seems to be working. Since 1980, Main Street communities have generated more than \$17 billion worth of downtown investment, and over 60,000 new businesses have opened in Main Street commercial districts across the country.

Close to home, 95 New England communities are part of the national Main Street network. Main Street efforts are evident throughout the region. In Waterville, Maine, new yellow awnings recently brightened up Silver Street. Nard's Appliance Shop in Somersworth, New Hampshire, has been spruced up with a pleasing green façade, Victorian molding, and a new gold-lettered sign. In Middletown, Connecticut, five new stores have filled vacancies on Main Street, and more than 60 teenagers were seen cleaning up the town center in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Applying the four major principles of the Main Street strategy—design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring (see page 9)—many New England communities are successfully rebuilding their town centers. Importantly, the model is working in communities of all shapes and sizes, thanks to its emphasis on locally driven change.

Local Emphasis

The national Main Street strategy maintains that local communities are better equipped than anyone else to assess their needs and address their problems. Thus, while the national organization provides a conceptual framework for downtown revitalization, the “nuts and bolts” are up to each

individual community. Each Main Street organization must identify its own challenges and strengths and determine how to best apply the Main Street model in its own community. This local approach ensures that solutions arise directly from community residents, businesses, and other local stakeholders, not only increasing the program's effectiveness, but also raising community participation and buy-in—elements needed for long-term success.

“Main Street works because it is ‘self-help,’” says Boston Mayor Thomas Menino. “It is not about government coming in and

telling you what to do. Cities are there to lend our neighborhoods a helping hand, but each group does all the work.”

The work includes garnering needed financial and human resources. The National Trust does not provide any funding to local groups, and each Main Street organization is responsible for its own financial stability. This financial autonomy is considered a linchpin of the Main Street program's success. By raising support locally, each Main Street organization establishes a base of investors from the community. With a vested interest, these individuals are more likely to support events, shop downtown, and take other steps to ensure the success of their Main Street districts. “When it's your own money and time on the line, you work hard to make it worthwhile,” says Ruth Taylor, executive director of the Main Street organization in Littleton, New Hampshire.

Communities across the country are recognizing the value of their traditional town center.

With all of the efforts being driven at the local level, revitalization can be a slow process. “It doesn't happen overnight,” says Emily Haber, director of the Boston Main Streets program. “It takes much longer than you expect it to take.” As such, the Main Street strategy stresses an action-oriented approach that produces continuous improvements—even if changes are relatively small. Over time, these positive changes lead to major results.

¹Founded in 1949, the National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private nonprofit organization committed to preserving the nation's historic places and revitalizing its communities.

The region's Main Street communities believe it is worth investing for the long-haul. "A downtown is the heart of your community," says Taylor. "You can't recreate it, so you have to make sure you don't lose it."

The experiences of two New England Main Street communities—the urban capital of Boston, Massachusetts, and the small town of Littleton, New Hampshire—provide case studies of how the Main Street model is being adapted locally to revive the downtown hearts of the region's communities.

Boston, Massachusetts **Coping with the Rise of the Suburbs**

When the national Main Street program was formed 25 years ago, the nation's urban cores had been losing population for decades. Throughout the 1900s, transportation innovations ferried families out of the cities and into a new suburbia. In the 1950s, the automobile and interstate highway system opened the door to affordable suburban housing, spurring a mass migration of post-World War II baby-booming families. In the second half of the decade, the nation's suburban population doubled, and by 2000, one-half of all Americans lived in metropolitan area suburbs. Not surprisingly, the exodus left many urban retailers struggling, especially in smaller neighborhood commercial districts.

The story is a familiar one for Roslindale Village. Located in the southwest corner of the city of Boston, Massachusetts, Roslindale was a vibrant middle-class neighborhood for the first half of the 20th century. The streetcar and railroad both stopped in the "square," picking up residents of this tree-lined community and transporting them to high-paying jobs in downtown Boston. The village center was picturesque, sporting a wide array of family-owned shops and restaurants.

But in the late 1960s and 1970s, Roslindale's streetscape dramatically deteriorated. As suburbanization heated up, the Dedham Mall opened in 1968 outside the city, enticing area shoppers and landing a blow to Roslindale retailers. In 1974, the situation worsened after a U.S. District Court ordered the city of Boston to integrate

its public schools. A controversial busing plan was implemented, generating turmoil among many city residents. Unhappy citizens left the city in droves, and Roslindale's population declined significantly. Low enrollment forced the high school to close, and a similar fate befell many retailers. On the square, the Parke Snow department store became a vacant lot. Liggett's drug store went out of business, and the neighborhood's supermarket and bank both closed. By the end of the decade, the once idyllic neighborhood was characterized by vacancies, vandalism, and crime.

Roslindale Village and the surrounding neighborhood were in need of help. Fortunately, Thomas Menino, city councilor at the time, now Boston mayor, had a plan. Menino had recently learned about the Main Street revitalization strategy at a conference for public officials, and he believed the model could help turn around Roslindale. "I

**“Main Streets works because it is ‘self-help,’”
says Boston Mayor Thomas Menino.**

knew that a healthy commercial district is the nucleus of a strong neighborhood,” says Menino, “and I believed that by revitalizing Roslindale's business community, we could improve the lives of our residents.”

In 1985, Roslindale Village became one of the first urban Main Street programs. The community formed the nonprofit Roslindale Village Main Street organization and began to implement the Main Street four-point approach:





Washington Street, South End

Design: Tired storefront façades and unattractive signs were replaced with updated, inviting designs, and several historic buildings were renovated to preserve the unique character of the district.

Organization: To gain the support of the community's stakeholders, a board of directors was established, drawing members from the community's residents, small business owners, and local government officials.

Promotion: Community events were organized, including a tree-lighting ceremony, window display contests, and a two-day international festival. These activities brought people into Roslindale Village, generating customers for local businesses, building pride among residents, and increasing overall awareness of the neighborhood.

Economic restructuring: To create a vibrant business community, Roslindale Village Main Street worked with existing businesses in the square, helping them to clean up storefronts, expand where feasible, and adjust product mix to

better meet the needs of local consumers. The organization conducted market research to identify opportunities for new businesses and undertook recruitment efforts to fill Roslindale's vacant storefronts.

Within the first three years, Roslindale Village Main Street had made major strides. Twenty-nine new businesses had opened. Seventy façade improvements had been made. Forty-three buildings had been rehabbed, and nearly \$5 million in private investment had been brought into the community. Two decades later, in 2005, the Roslindale Village renaissance is in full swing. Described as "hip" and "trendy," the village now boasts five notable restaurants, three literary book stores, and a smattering of swank boutiques. Over one thousand people patronize the square's shops and eateries each day, and despite this success, almost all of the businesses remain locally owned.

Taking Main Streets City-wide

With Roslindale's success, newly elected Mayor Menino decided to expand the Main Street program to the city's other struggling commercial districts. In 1995, Boston created the first urban multi-district Main Street program, establishing an innovative model that other cities, including Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., would eventually follow. Today, in its tenth year, Boston Main Streets provides financial support and resources to 19 independent Main Street communities throughout the city.

"The ultimate goal of Boston Main Streets is to establish healthy, thriving commercial districts," say Emily Haber, director of Boston Main Streets. "Ninety percent of the businesses in the city's neighborhoods are locally owned, and they are a vital part of our economy. Boston Main Streets wants to support them as best we can."

Each of Boston's Main Street communities receives \$270,000 in start-up funding from Boston Main Streets. The money, allocated over four years, helps to pay for a full-time executive director, market research, promotional events, and technical assistance. Additionally, this money goes

Roslindale Village Main Street was one of the first urban Main Street programs.

toward physical improvement grants that help to fund public works projects and needed façade upgrades for retailers. After the initial four years, the city continues to provide operating funding to help sustain Main Street efforts.

In addition to funding, Boston Main Streets supports its members in each of the four Main Street areas:

- To assist design efforts, the city retains two architects and a graphic designer. To date, these professionals have worked with over 533 small business owners to create attractive building designs and storefronts.

- Boston Main Streets builds the organizational capacity of its member communities by hiring experts to help them develop and manage their boards of directors. The city also hosts networking events that acquaint stakeholders from the various neighborhoods with one another. “We have a tremendous capacity for sharing information across districts,” says Haber. “The directors of each Main Street district meet together every other month, and the meetings are always productive. For instance, one director will say, ‘I’ve got a guy who wants to open a bakery, but we don’t have any room for him.’ Usually, another district will have the space.”

- Boston Main Streets highlights all of its member communities through city-wide promotional campaigns. For example, the city developed a “Shopping on Main Street” card in conjunction with local retailers that offers discounts at over 300 Main Street shops throughout the city.

- Finally, on the economic restructuring side, the city provides market-research training and consulting services to help communities determine who shops in their districts and why. These efforts have helped communities boost sales at existing businesses and recruit new retailers to their districts.

While most of the new businesses are locally owned, a few chain stores have also opened up in member districts. According to Haber, “Some neighborhoods are very interested in having national chains. They view having a Starbucks as a sign of success and economic rebound. They feel that these businesses lend creditability to the neighborhood. Others don’t want chains at all. Boston Main Streets is interested in helping each district obtain the best mix of businesses for the neighborhood.”

Boston Main Streets created its own fifth principle—technology. Observing a need for greater technical sophistication among the city’s Main Street businesses, Boston Main Streets launched a series of technology-focused initiatives with the assistance of Verizon and the Boston Foundation. They partnered with TechBoston, an outgrowth of the Boston Public Schools’ computer science department, to pair knowledgeable student interns with local retailers in a program that helps businesses develop web pages. This year, they are conducting a survey of small business owners to determine their current technological capabilities. Additionally, the city is working to set up a wireless Internet network in the West Roxbury Main Street district.

Boston Main Streets is making a difference in the city’s neighborhoods. Since 1995, nearly 500 new businesses have set up shop in Main Street districts, new jobs have been created each year, and physical improvements and public events are making the city’s neighborhoods more desirable places to be. The success illustrates the value of having the public and private sectors work together for commercial district revitalization. “Thanks to the Boston Main Streets program, our small business districts are better today than they were ten years ago,” says Mayor Menino. “And these Main Street businesses are creating jobs and economic opportunities in the city.”

Banking on Small Businesses

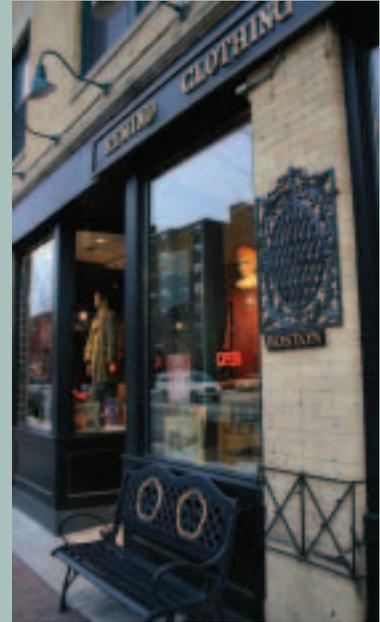
The region’s banks have played a vital role in Main Street revitalization in New England. Boston Main Streets has a “corporate buddy program” that links up each of the Main Street organizations with a major business sponsor. These corporate buddies provide financial support, expertise, and other resources to their partner communities, helping to build their organizational capacity and sophistication. Notably, of the 17 corporate buddies involved in Boston Main Streets, nine are financial institutions. In Littleton, the banking community is also a major supporter of the Main Street effort. Each of the town’s banks donates \$1,000 annually to the program, making the town’s financial sector one of the largest funders of Littleton Main Street.

“Banks are invested in Main Streets because it makes good business sense for them. It is win-win for everyone,” says Boston Mayor Thomas Menino.

In fact, financial institutions derive several benefits from their involvement in commercial district revitalization. First, supporting local Main Streets is good corporate citizenship and enables banks to demonstrate their commitment to the community. Additionally, this support qualifies for credit under the Community Reinvestment Act, helping banks to reach their federal regulation requirements. The most enticing draw, however, is the opportunity to build relationships with local small businesses.

“Banks are developing relationships with small businesses through the Main Street program, and, as a result, they are finding that they can expand lending and increase deposits in these communities,” says Emily Haber, director of Boston Main Streets. Moreover, by supporting Main Street efforts, banks are supporting the long-term health of local businesses, a vital customer base.

Tom Kennedy, senior vice president and CRA manager for Sovereign Bank, concurs, “We are delighted to participate as the Corporate Buddy for East Boston Main Streets. Not only is the program having a very positive impact on East Boston, but it is helping to strengthen the community’s small businesses—the lifeblood of our business.”



Littleton, New Hampshire Surviving the Decline of Manufacturing

Just 150 miles northwest of Boston, the cozy White Mountain town of Littleton, New Hampshire, feels light years away; yet the Main Street model has also been successful in sparking this community's downtown revitalization. Once considered "the most prosperous village in Northern New Hampshire," Littleton was an important manufacturing center in New England in the 1800s, producing every-

located here. Combined with the industrial park, these institutions employ several thousand people who come to Littleton to work each day. These workers represented a sizable consumer base that could support a Main Street effort."

In 1997, the Littleton Main Street organization was formed and began applying the Main Street approach. A board of directors was formed, an executive director was hired, and the organization began raising money for its efforts. The community was responsive, and in less than one

week, nearly \$400,000 was raised—enough to fund the program for three years. The organization used a portion of its annual budget to fund matching grants for façade improvements to spruce up the "look and feel" of downtown. Another share

went to programming efforts to entice people to spend time downtown. Weekly dance lessons began filling the evenings at the historic opera house, and window display contests drew attention to Main Street storefronts. A final portion of

Littleton learned they couldn't compete with Wal-Mart on price; they would have to offer unique products and services.

thing from gloves to the famed stereoscope. The town's industrial success quickly gave rise to an active commercial center. By 1787, Main Street had already been staked out with a saw mill, a grist mill, and a general store. By 1820, a hotel and post office had joined them, and by end of the 19th century, Main Street supported over 30 stores.

The town's success continued into the early 20th century. However, in the 1950s, Littleton became a one-industry town: shoes. For the next 20 years, the town's economic hopes were pinned on the footwear industry, and when shoe manufacturing moved overseas in the 1970s, Littleton suffered. In 1979, the last shoe plant in Littleton closed, putting 700 people out of work. The town's economy stagnated, and once booming Main Street began to deteriorate. To counteract the declining trend, town leaders aggressively pursued various economic development initiatives, including building an industrial park for small-scale manufacturers. Despite these efforts, revitalization was slow in coming, and by 1992, 17 storefronts sat vacant on Main Street.

That year, however, the owner of a Littleton furniture shop visited her parents in North Carolina. During her visit, she happened to learn about the Main Street program and the success it was having in her parent's town. Excited that a similar approach might work in Littleton, she pitched the Main Street model to town leaders and other business owners. The idea was well received.

"We knew that the Main Street concept could work in downtown Littleton," says Ruth Taylor, executive director of Littleton Main Street. "With Littleton still being a regional center, the hospital and social security offices are



the budget was devoted to market research and other efforts to strategically understand the local needs of consumers.

“More than anything, we worked to generate good will—to let retailers know that there is someone out there who cares about them and to let residents know that downtown Littleton is changing,” says Taylor. The efforts have made a difference. Today, only one storefront remains vacant on Main Street, and Taylor points to the generosity of contributions as a solid indicator of the community’s support for the program. Moreover, the town’s achievements have been nationally recognized. In 2003, Littleton was named a Great American Main Street by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Big Box Threat

In 2000, Littleton’s shops faced a new challenge. Wal-Mart built a new store on Meadow Street, mere miles from the downtown commercial district. The retail giant offered lower prices and one-stop shopping, and Littleton retailers feared that they would be unable to compete. To map out a survival strategy, a busload of Littleton business owners drove to Bath, Maine, to talk with Bath’s Main Street business owners who had faced a similar situation two years earlier and were still thriving.

“What they learned is that you can’t compete with Wal-Mart. Not on price,” says Taylor. “Rather, they discovered that they would have to offer their customers products and services that Wal-Mart didn’t have.”

The retailers returned to Littleton with lessons in hand and began making strategic adjustments to their business plans. Northern Lights Music used to sell small electronics.

The Four-Point Approach to Main Street Revitalization

1. Design:

Enhance the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging supportive new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and promoting long-term planning.

2. Organization:

Build consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals that have a role in the revitalization process.

3. Promotion:

Market the traditional commercial district’s assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens, and visitors.

4. Economic Restructuring:

Strengthen the district’s existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities—and challenges—from outlying development.

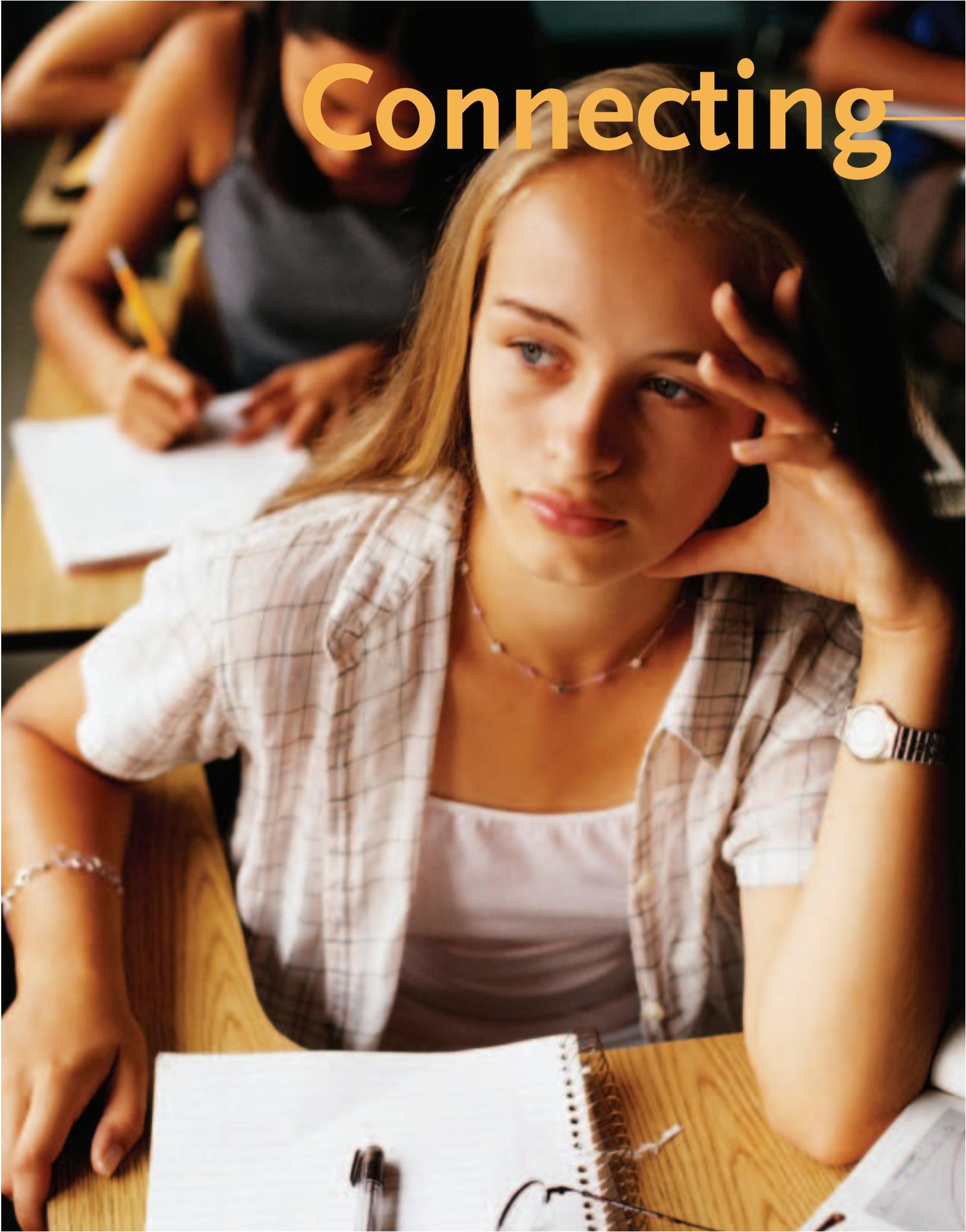
Reprinted with permission of the National Trust Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.mainstreet.org).

However, the store’s selection of TVs, VCRs, and radios was now available at Wal-Mart at significantly lower prices. Owner Dan Salomon knew that he had to change his business model if he was going to survive. Returning to his love of music, he refashioned the store as a high-end musical instrument boutique. Today, he sells the widest selection of guitars in the region and carries instruments from all over the world, filling a market niche and drawing customers from as far as Massachusetts and Maine. Following similar logic, The Village Book Store decided to cut back in its departments that were in direct

competition with Wal-Mart. Instead, the shop beefed up its selection of educational and high-end toys, and positioned itself as an entertainment destination by hosting book readings and other events. Finally, it strengthened its commitment to employing a knowledgeable sales staff to offer customers outstanding service. When Wal-Mart first opened, Littleton’s small businesses saw sales dip, but the changes helped its retailers to rebound.

The town knows that it is only a matter of time before other discount retailers enter the Littleton market. With price wars being an ineffective strategy, Littleton Main Street is working hard to beat new competitors on quality. An attractive, new pedestrian foot bridge was built last spring, offering access to an outdoor farmers market in the summer. Street and sidewalk improvements are being implemented in 2006, and efforts to improve the quality of storefront design are ongoing. “We want to give shoppers something different. Instead of wondering what mall they are in, we want them to enjoy a unique experience in downtown Littleton,” says Taylor.

Connecting



Public Schools to Community Development

Public schools are intimately linked with communities. They serve as centers of learning. They employ residents, and they connect neighbors with one another. As place-based institutions, they are part of a neighborhood's physical fabric, impacting local housing markets and influencing the aesthetic character of a community. Moreover, public schools have access to a myriad of local resources including funding, land, and political goodwill. Given the central role that public schools play in communities, community development practitioners are beginning to consciously include them in neighborhood building and economic development efforts.

By Connie Chung

In recent years, a national movement to link public schools with community development efforts has unfolded, uncovering an expansive range of synergies. From enhancing urban revitalization efforts to providing community-oriented spaces, public schools are emerging as invaluable partners for community development practitioners on a wide array of fronts. This article offers an introductory look at the roles that public schools play in community development, and how these linkages help to address neighborhood needs.

The Backdrop

School districts have not always been perceived to be willing partners in community development efforts. Residents are rarely engaged in a school's capital planning processes, and school planners often overlook community concerns. Moreover, as many schools sport "big-box" designs, create "school sprawl," and generate traffic congestion, they are seldom viewed as community assets.

To address the disconnect between public schools and neighborhoods, new networks of planners, community development professionals, educators, and policymakers are being formed to explore the connections between schools and communities. Their efforts have uncovered the valuable contributions that schools can bring to housing and community development efforts, and vice versa. Simultaneously, the U.S. Department of Education's National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, an online research portal, has drawn attention to the links between public school facilities and smart growth, sustainable development, and community engagement. By raising awareness of the benefits of working together, this research has encouraged greater interaction between public schools and communities.

Several trends have helped to accelerate the process. In recent years, the nation's school-age population has risen dramatically, and many communities have been challenged to accommodate a growing number of children. At the same time, the nation is facing a school facilities crisis. Many of the country's aging public schools, particularly in low-income urban areas, are in need of capital improvements and modernization. The demand for school facilities is creating intense competition for land and other resources, especially for other community needs, such as affordable housing, parks, and community centers. Out of necessity, some community development practitioners, planners, and public school officials are beginning to combine and coordinate school and community development efforts. Today, whether driven by need or inspired by research, community-based organizations are becoming increasingly involved in the develop-

ment and support of public schools, generating partnerships that achieve broader community development goals.

The Links

Community development organizations are linking up with schools in a variety of ways, depending on their institutional experiences, focus, and capacity. Most strategies fall into two categories: onsite and offsite approaches. In onsite strategies, community development organizations directly affect the school—its size, shape, use, location, staff, and student body—in ways that benefit the community. Offsite, or indirect, strategies tie nearby community development efforts, such as affordable housing initiatives or neighborhood improvements, to a school. Many of the strategies are interrelated and can be used alone or in combination with one another, depending on the desired outcomes and the availability of resources.

Onsite Strategies

Public School Facility Development

Community development practitioners can use their real estate and development expertise to support a school district's efforts to build more neighborhood-oriented school facilities. For example, some community organizations have helped to develop new charter schools. These innovative schools are designed to meet community needs, and community development organizations are supporting their creation by locating and developing facilities for them. Similarly, some community groups have worked to bring new public schools to their neighborhoods by developing and leasing property to school districts.

Community development practitioners can also use their development expertise to assist in the rehabilitation and enhancement of existing school facilities. These projects offer an opportunity to add or improve a resource that ben-



efits the entire community, such as a computer learning center or a playground. In Massachusetts, for example, some community development corporations have been involved in the Boston Schoolyards Initiative. This public-private partnership rehabilitates the city's public schoolyards, not only benefiting the schools' students, but also providing assets to the surrounding neighborhoods.¹

Sustainable Development

Public schools can play a valuable role in sustainable development and smart growth efforts. Infill strategies can be employed to curb what smart growth advocates have termed "school sprawl"—the trend to build new schools in outlying areas that are disconnected from existing neighborhoods. Additionally, the pressing demand for new school facilities, especially in the inner city, makes a school a desirable candidate for the redevelopment of a brownfield or other underutilized site.

Community development practitioners have worked with local government and school district officials to successfully promote smart growth projects. They have ranged from building small-sized schools with rooftop playgrounds to the adaptive reuse of buildings and the preservation of historic school facilities. Pueblo Nuevo Development in Los Angeles, California, for example, rehabbed a declining strip mall into an award-winning charter school.² The Pratt Institute Center for Community and Economic Development and the Cypress Hills Community Development Corporation in Brooklyn, New York, are currently rehabbing an old industrial building for the Cypress Hills Community School.³

Joint Uses

Community groups can also promote the shared use of facilities between schools and other community entities. The joint use of a library or a park, for instance, offers an effective solution in urban areas where land for new community facilities is not readily available. In rural areas, shared-use projects can make economic sense for communities that must concentrate their resources.

One joint-use strategy that has received considerable attention is the use of public schools as community centers. Often referred to as the "schools-as-centers-of-the-community" concept, the idea is to create new public service facilities, such as a health clinic, gym, or senior center on a school site. The concept also promotes the use of existing school facilities for community activities during off-school hours. Noble High School in North Berwick, Maine, is an example of the concept in practice. The school serves as a community center for three nearby towns and includes a restaurant, an adult education center, a performing arts center, and a health clinic.⁴ By benefiting the whole neighborhood, joint-use projects draw the support of empty nesters, senior citizens, and other residents who might not otherwise have a vested interest in a neighborhood school.

Economic Development

Schools are often the largest institutions and employers in a neighborhood, making them an invaluable partner in economic development efforts. Community development organizations can harness this economic influence by linking schools with the local business community and labor force. For example, community groups have actively encouraged public schools to purchase supplies and services from local businesses and to award school construction and capital improvement projects to local contractors. In some communities, schools are now emphasizing local hiring practices. The Cypress Hills Community School in Brooklyn, for example, developed a program to employ parents in its cafeteria lunch program.⁵

Some communities are also partnering with schools to provide job-training and trade school classes for community members. In schools where these types of adult-learning programs already exist, community development organizations are working to enhance current offerings and better link classes with local economic development initiatives.

Youth Development

Community development organizations can create neighborhood service-learning opportunities and after-school programs for youth that benefit both schools and communities. Designing projects that take the classroom into the community, community groups have organized a wide variety of programs from neighborhood clean-ups to tree plantings, design projects, tutoring programs, and technical assistance help for local businesses. These projects benefit the community at large, enrich the educational experience of students and school staff, and foster a sense of neighborhood pride.

Offsite Strategies

Affordable Housing Development

Public schools can play an important role in the development of affordable housing. School quality can have a significant impact on a local housing market, with healthy, stable neighborhoods supported by healthy schools. Developers of affordable housing can boost the long-term viability of their projects by investing in the quality of nearby schools. Similarly, community development groups can make neighborhood improvements near a public school to attract families and qualified teachers to a neighborhood. These projects can be as simple as neighborhood clean-ups or as complex as addressing specific infrastructure needs, such as sidewalk improvements.

Improving schools and the surrounding area can be a particularly useful strategy to support the success of mixed-income housing projects. A high-quality school in the neighborhood can entice home buyers to purchase market-rate units in a mixed-income development. However, organizations should be mindful that many factors, such as local housing market conditions and community outreach efforts,

affect the ultimate success of these projects. For example, despite improvements to the local elementary school in the Cabrini Green area of Chicago, Illinois, occupants of market-rate units within the area's mixed-income housing development still chose to send their children to private schools.⁶

More generally, there are many ways that housing developers can coordinate efforts with schools to the mutual benefit of one another. For example, building affordable housing in conjunction with the development of a new school can create a stable base of students for the school, as well as increase the housing stock for low-income households. Locating senior housing near a school can create a safer environment for students by providing more watchful eyes on the street, as well as present student volunteer opportunities that benefit seniors. Finally, community development practitioners can work with schools to develop workforce housing for teachers, enabling school staff to live in the communities they serve.

Transportation

Community development organizations can work with public school districts to alleviate neighborhood traffic concerns. According to the Local Government Commission, only 10 percent of today's students get to and from school by bicycling or walking, compared with 50 percent in 1980.⁷ To help reverse this trend, Safe Routes to School initiatives have popped up all over the country to encourage more students to bike and walk to school.⁸ Additionally, many community development organizations are advocating the placement of schools within walking distance of residential areas and transit stops. They are also working to ensure that school areas contain sufficient bicycle racks, traffic-calming devices, and other pedestrian-friendly safety amenities. These transportation strategies not only reduce school traffic in neighborhoods, but also help to address childhood obesity by encouraging children to walk to school.

Community Building

Often, local school reform efforts work disparately from community organizing initiatives. As a result, the relationship between good neighborhoods and good schools is lost. In some communities, school reform advocates and community organizing groups are working together to create a unified and comprehensive neighborhood strategy. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, Massachusetts, the Northeast Community Clergy Coalition in the South Bronx area of New York City, and the national Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) have all developed education initiatives that directly relate to their community-building goals. These and other efforts to tie education and community building together have proven effective in persuading state and local decision-makers. The Neighborhood Capital Budget Group in Chicago, Illinois, for example, has successfully organized communities to oppose school closures. In cases where the schools are even-

tually closed, the group has effectively organized school officials and neighbors to advocate keeping the facilities open for other community-oriented uses.⁹

Overcoming Obstacles

As illustrated above, there are a variety of strategies to successfully engage public schools in community development efforts. However, it is crucial to recognize that public schools are complicated entities. They face a host of social and political challenges that are beyond the scope of what community development organizations can address alone. Additionally, school districts have various levels of bureaucracy that can create potential obstacles for community development efforts. Given the unique nature of school districts, three key considerations must be made when including public schools in community development strategies:

1. Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Outreach

First, stakeholder outreach is a necessary element of every community/public school partnership. Whether the task at hand is to choose a site for a new public school or to design an addition to a school facility, buy-in from all interested parties is essential. End-users of the facilities and other residents of the neighborhood can be invaluable sounding boards, helping to determine the most appropriate site location, design, or implementation strategy. Other stakeholders, such as developers, businesses, and local government officials, can offer perspectives on what resources and opportunities are available.

2. Intergovernmental Collaboration

Collaboration between different governmental agencies is also essential. While the majority of school districts are governed primarily by their state department of education, various government agencies play a role in school-related land use, traffic, and infrastructure issues. Intergovernmental cooperation is particularly crucial in joint-use projects or those that employ innovative designs. Community development organizations and school districts must communicate their intentions to all government stakeholders early in the planning process. By working collaboratively, resources and information can be shared and projects can be coordinated.

The need for intergovernmental collaboration between public housing authorities and school districts has drawn national attention. In 2002, the U.S. Conference of Mayors recommended that school districts and public housing authorities work together to address the need for affordable housing in the United States. At a hearing of the Atlanta Millennial Housing Commission in 2000, Beverly Hall, superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, also emphasized the importance of coordinating housing and schools. She related how crossing agency boundaries by talking to the Atlanta Housing Authority about their plans to build a HOPE VI project ultimately prevented the slated closure of a nearby public school that had been struggling with low enrollment.¹⁰

3. Creative Financing

The final consideration when involving public schools in community development strategies is the possible need for creative financing mechanisms to bring projects to fruition. Public schools are public facilities that must meet costly development standards, yet these institutions offer virtually no financial returns for investors. Given this paradigm, it can be difficult to entice a community development financial institution to commit funds for projects that include public schools. The challenge is to make the case to funders that community/school partnerships make sense and can produce significant social benefits.

As the number of partnerships has increased over the years, funders have been more willing to invest in community/school projects. The Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Knowledgeworks Foundation have all funded various school and community development-related studies and projects. To date, however, most financing has remained at the advocacy, policy, and research levels. A few community development financial institutions, including LISC and the Low Income Investment Fund, have awarded loans to community-based organizations for the development of school facilities.

Additionally, public funding is becoming available for school/community development projects in some states. In New Jersey, for instance, the state's School Renaissance Zone program is funding pilot projects that use smart-growth strategies in the redevelopment of public school facilities. Some community development organizations are accessing more general school-related public funding, such as capital improvement bonds or health grants, to leverage financing for their projects. In Los Angeles, the nonprofit New Schools, Better Neighborhoods organization leverages school bond dollars with other funding to build joint-use educational centers.¹¹



Importance of Schools in Comprehensive Community Development

Including public schools in community development strategies is one way community development practitioners can achieve more comprehensive results in their work. It is approaching what some have called “the next frontier” in community development.¹² From locating community health clinics within a school to creating pedestrian-friendly school routes, community development organizations are improving neighborhoods by re-establishing community and school links. Together, advocacy for long-term education policy solutions and greater efforts to link public schools with community development initiatives will both improve the nation's public schools and increase the effectiveness of community development efforts.

Connie Chung is the author of “Using Public Schools as Community Development Tools: Strategies for Community-Based Developers” (2002), a working paper sponsored by the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. She is a planner with the Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning.

Endnotes

- ¹Boston School Yards Initiative, online at <http://www.schoolyards.org/home.htm>.
- ²Pueblo Nuevo Development, online at <http://www.pueblonuevo.org>.
- ³Pratt Institute Center for Community and Economic Development, online at <http://www.picced.org>.
- ⁴Marcotte, Robert M., and Clifton W. Greim. "Maine's Noble Success." *Engineered Systems* (March 2, 2003).
- ⁵Conversation with Joan Byron, Pratt Institute Center for Community and Economic Development (September 2003).
- ⁶Conversation with Andrea Lee, Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (August 2002).
- ⁷Local Government Commission, online at http://www.lgc.org/community_design/schools.html.
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- for Health Training and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation (2004).
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- ¹¹"City of Paramount and Paramount School District Approve Work With NSBN On Planning For Joint Use At Los Cerritos Elementary School." Online article. New Schools, Better Neighborhoods. (December 5, 2003). Interview with David Abel, New Schools, Better Neighborhoods (September 2004).
- ¹²Grogan, Paul and Tom Procio. *Comeback Cities: Blueprint for Urban Neighborhood Revival*. Boulder, Colorado. Westview Press (2000).

For Additional Information

Recommended Reading

Beaumont, Constance and Elizabeth G. Pianca. *Why Johnny Can't Walk to School: Historic Neighborhoods in the Age of Sprawl*. National Trust for Historic Preservation (1999).

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Stone, Clarence, et al. "Schools and Disadvantaged Neighborhoods: The Community Development Challenge." In *Urban Problems and Community Development*, eds. Ron Ferguson and William Dickens. Brookings Institution (1999).

Weathersby, William, Jr. "Timothy Dwight Elementary School, New Haven, Connecticut." *Architectural Record*, vol. 190, no. 2 (February 2002): p104 – 107.

On-Line Resources

21 Century Schools Fund (Washington, D.C.): www.21csf.org/csf-home

Boston Schoolyards Initiative (Boston, MA): www.schoolyards.org

Building Educational Success Together (BEST): www.21csf.org/csf-home/BEST/best.asp

Coalition for Community Schools: www.communityschools.org/

Knowlegeworks Foundation (Cleveland, OH): www.knowledgeworksfdn.org

LISC NYC (New York, NY): www.lisc.org/new_york/programs/community_4616/index.shtml

Livable Places (Los Angeles): www.livableplaces.org/policy/jointuse.htm

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: www.edfacilities.org

National Trust for Historic Preservation: www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/index.html

Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (Chicago, IL): www.ncbg.org/schools/schools.htm

New England Compact: www.necompact.org

New Schools, Better Neighborhoods (Los Angeles, CA): www.nsbns.org

NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy (New York, NY): www.nyu.edu/iesp

Pratt Institute Center for Community and Economic Development (New York, NY): www.picced.org

Rural School and Community Trust: www.ruraledu.org/index.html

Smart Schools, Smart Growth Initiative: www.smart-schools.org

Southern California Association of Non Profit Housing (Los Angeles, CA): www.scanph.org

State of New Jersey School Construction Corporation: www.njscc.com/CommunitySchools/AboutSchoolRenaissanceZones.asp

Surface Transportation Policy Project California: www.transact.org/Ca/saferoutes.htm

Mapping New England

Median Family Income of the Region's Communities, Relative to the Metropolitan Area Median

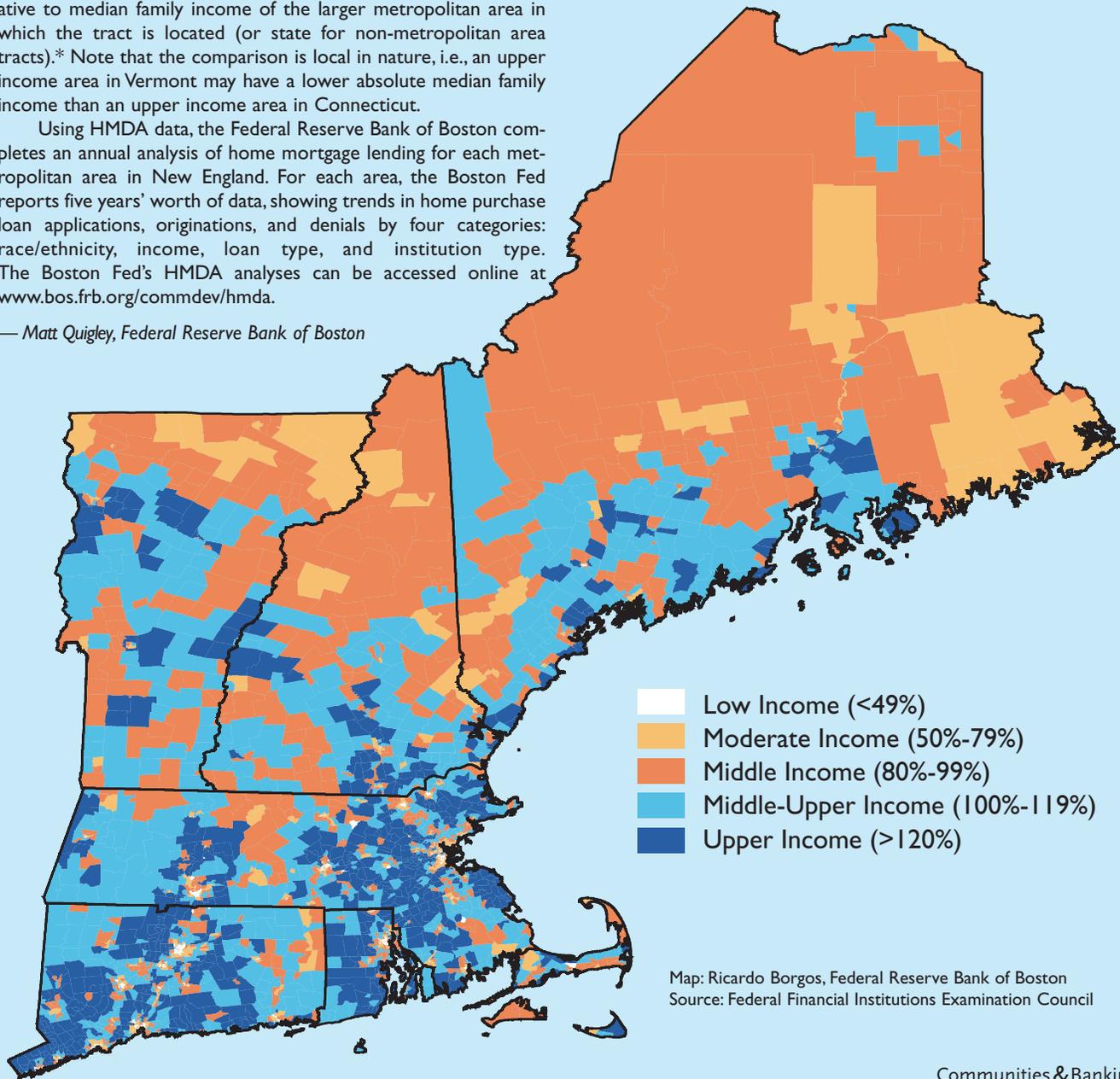
Analyzing HMDA

The community affairs program of the Federal Reserve System supports economic growth by promoting community development and fair and impartial access to credit, particularly in low- and moderate-income areas. One tool at the Fed's disposal for accomplishing this mission is the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA). HMDA requires banks to report data on home mortgage lending by various demographic characteristics, including income. The map shows median family income by census tract relative to median family income of the larger metropolitan area in which the tract is located (or state for non-metropolitan area tracts).^{*} Note that the comparison is local in nature, i.e., an upper income area in Vermont may have a lower absolute median family income than an upper income area in Connecticut.

Using HMDA data, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston completes an annual analysis of home mortgage lending for each metropolitan area in New England. For each area, the Boston Fed reports five years' worth of data, showing trends in home purchase loan applications, originations, and denials by four categories: race/ethnicity, income, loan type, and institution type. The Boston Fed's HMDA analyses can be accessed online at www.bos.frb.org/commdev/hmda.

— Matt Quigley, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

^{*} Using 2000 U.S. Census data, each census tract is sorted into one of five income categories. A tract's category is determined by the ratio of its median family income to the median family income of the metropolitan area (as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget's core-based statistical areas). For tracts outside of a metropolitan area, median family income of the state's non-metropolitan areas is used as the denominator in calculating the ratio.



Map: Ricardo Borgos, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
Source: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council

Check 21 Basics:

A Quick Guide for Consumer Advocates



Recently, there has been a flurry of attention around Check 21, the new banking law that took effect on October 28, 2004. Known formally as the Check Clearing for the 21st Century Act, this federal law was designed to make the nation's check processing system faster and more efficient. By authorizing a new instrument called a substitute check, Check 21 enables electronic check exchange. Rather than the costly and inefficient process of physically transporting paper checks from one bank to another, banks can now capture a picture of a check and send it electronically.

The following quick reference guide answers commonly asked questions about how this new law affects consumers. For more information, please visit the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's Check 21 website: www.bos.frb.org/consumer/check21 or call the Boston Fed's consumer hotline at (617) 973-3755.

Q. What is a substitute check?

A. A substitute check is a paper copy of the front and back of an original check. Under Check 21, this copy has the same legal status as the original check, as long as it accurately represents all of the information on the front and back of the original check and includes the following statement:

This is a legal copy of your check. You can use it the same way you would use the original check.

Consumers who were previously receiving cancelled checks with their statements may now receive a mixture of cancelled original and substitute checks. Similarly, consumers who received image statements containing pictures of original checks may now receive some images of substitute checks. Note that although an image of a substitute check will also reflect the statement above, a check image is not the legal equivalent of an original check under Check 21.

Q. Do consumers still need an original check as proof of payment?

A. No. A substitute check, which is legally equivalent to the original check, as well as a check image or a line item statement, may be used as proof of payment. An original paper check is not necessary.

Q. Can consumers demand original checks from their banks?

A. No. Federal law does not require a bank to provide cancelled checks to consumers, although banks may choose to provide them upon request as a service to their customers. In Massachusetts, however, state law grants Commonwealth consumers the right to receive cancelled checks, or their legal substitutes, free of charge.

Q. What happens to the original checks?

A. When substitute checks are created, the original checks are removed from the collection and return process. Check 21 does not impose any requirements on banks to retain the original checks. The bank that removes the original check from circulation may either keep the check for its records or destroy it.

Q. How will Check 21 affect the speed at which checks are processed?

A. Since banks no longer have to physically transport checks for processing, checks will be paid more quickly. Therefore, it is important that consumers have sufficient funds in their checking accounts at the time they write a check.

Q. If checks are processed more quickly, does that mean that when a check is deposited in a consumer's account, the money is available sooner?

A. Not necessarily. The Expedited Funds Availability Act, not the Check 21 Act, sets the maximum time periods that a bank can hold deposited funds. The Federal Reserve Board may adjust these hold times if/when the processing time for checks improves substantially enough to warrant adjustment.

Q. What are a consumer's rights if a loss is suffered related to a substitute check? For example, what if the substitute check is not the legal equivalent of the original check? What if both the original check and the substitute check are paid?

A. In these cases, a bank may be liable for damages related to the substitute check, including the amount of loss suffered (up to the amount of the check), interest, and expenses such as attorney's fees. Check 21 mandates a special refund procedure called expedited recredit for consumers who receive substitute checks. This procedure is intended to restore these consumers to the position they would have been in had they received original checks.

Consumers who suffer losses related to a substitute check can file a special refund claim with a bank if they believe:

1. A substitute check was incorrectly charged to their account;
2. They lost money as a result of a substitute check being charged to their account; and
3. They need the original check or a sufficient copy to show that a substitute check was incorrectly charged to their account.

To file, consumers should contact their bank as soon as possible and no later than 40 days from the date they receive an erroneous statement or substitute check. A consumer who makes an untimely claim is not entitled to recover losses using the expedited recredit procedure. He or she may, however, have rights under other consumer protection laws.

Banks must investigate expedited recredit claims promptly. If a bank cannot determine the validity of a claim within 10 business days, the bank must refund the amount of the claim, up to \$2,500. If the claim is not resolved within 45 days, the bank is obligated to re-credit any remaining balance, including interest if applicable.

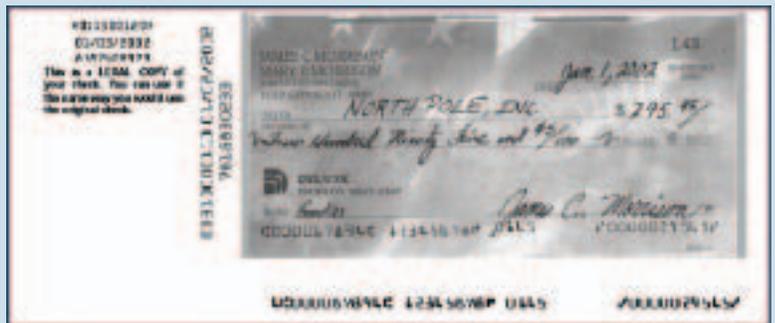
Q. Are there any other consumer protections under Check 21 that consumers should know about?

A. Yes. Consumers who receive substitute checks or representations of substitute checks are protected under the Check 21 substitute check warranty provisions. Banks must warrant that:

1. Each substitute check meets all Check 21 requirements, rendering it legally equivalent to the original check; and
2. Consumers will not be asked to make duplicative payments on a check as a result of the creation of a substitute check. Additionally, Check 21 protects consumers against loss incurred by the receipt of a substitute check in lieu of an original check.

In all, the consumer protection provisions of Check 21 are simply added safeguards to address issues that may arise from substitute checks. The preexisting federal and state check laws remain unchanged and continue to protect consumers against unauthorized, fraudulent, and erroneous check payments.

A Substitute Check



Front

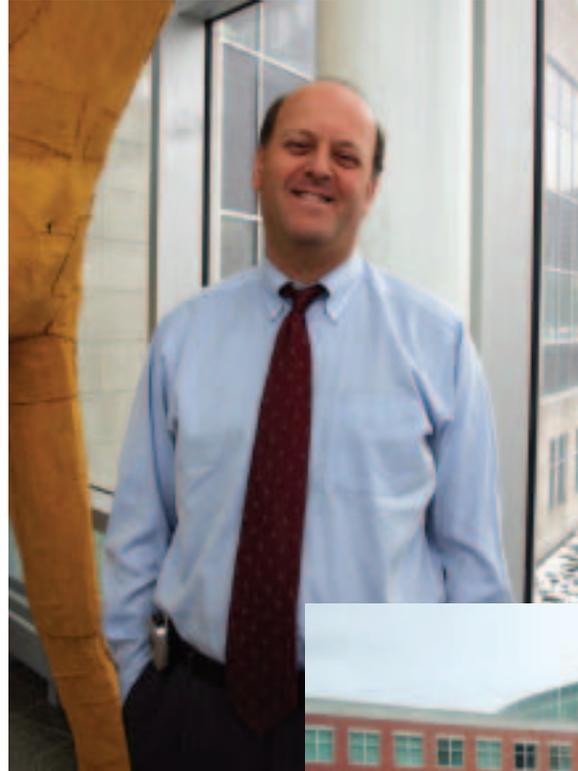


Back

Dean Esserman:

Community Policing in Providence: Combating Crime and Fear

When Dean Esserman was hired as Chief of the Providence, Rhode Island, Police Department in 2003, he faced a daunting challenge. The city was trying to spark an urban renaissance, but crime rates were high, people were afraid to come downtown, and the police department was troubled by corruption and distrusted by the community. In the last two years, Esserman has managed to revamp the city's crime-fighting force, replacing the department's traditional methods with a new community policing concept. Now, crime is falling in Providence, and the police are becoming better integrated into the community. *Communities & Banking* talked with Chief Esserman about his community policing philosophy and its effects in Providence.



C&B: Chief Esserman, you have said that strong connections between police officers and the communities they serve are an essential part of any healthy, safe community. What first shaped this conviction?

Esserman: When I was in high school and again in college, I worked as an intern with the New York City police department. I would have never expected that in my first month, I would be delivering a baby in a tenement with a police officer. Through this experience and others, I came to understand that the police deliver more babies than they shoot bad guys. They are engaged in people's lives in intimate and personal ways. Communities, especially lower-income communities, are dependent on the police for much more than crime fighting.

C&B: Such as?

Esserman: We help people deal with their landlords. We get them heat when they need it. We find children when they are lost. We deliver babies. In many ways, the police are the agency of first and last resort for people, especially for people in poverty.

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- C&B:** Following those internships, you took a fairly irregular career path for a police chief. After college, you went to law school, and spent many years working in the district attorney’s office in New York City. Why did you ultimately decide to become a police officer?
- Esserman:** I had some wonderful mentors who challenged me to think more broadly about the police profession and to see how it could make a difference in society. I came to truly believe that the police could be a force for social justice. So, when an opportunity materialized to take a job as police chief in New Haven, Connecticut, I took it. I was the highest ranking rookie to ever enter the police academy. Let me tell you, the academy was definitely harder than law school—at least the push-ups were.
- C&B:** You mentioned your mentors. How did they influence your current ideas about the role of police in the community?
- Esserman:** My mentors expanded my understanding of what a police officer does. Part of our job is the protection and preservation of life. We arrest criminals to keep communities safe. But, to see the police simply as enforcers of the law is to miss the point of what we spend most of our time doing. More than any other agency of government, the police are part of a community’s fabric. We don’t work apart in offices; we work around the clock in neighborhoods. We work on rainy Sundays. We work on loud Fridays nights. We’re there. And so, we play a role in community organizing, in capacity building, and in neighborhood development. We are there to do what the community needs us to do.
- C&B:** What do you think the community needs from the police?
- Esserman:** I think there are a few things. Obviously, the community wants us to address crime, but I also think they want us to address fear. People don’t want to live in fear.
- C&B:** Are these needs being met?
- Esserman:** When it comes to crime—yes. Over the last decade, nationwide, police have become remarkably effective at addressing crime, and crime rates have fallen dramatically. When it comes to fear—no. We have not yet wholly embraced this idea.
- C&B:** The police have been effective in fighting crime, but not in fighting fear. That seems dichotomous. Can you explain?
- Esserman:** Crime is not the only thing that provokes fear. In March 1982, *The Atlantic Monthly* featured a story by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling called “Broken Windows.” The article’s main idea was that you do not need to be directly assaulted to feel afraid and victimized. The environment around you can be fearful. If you are walking in a neighborhood where the buildings are vacant, cars are abandoned on the street, there are broken windows in the buildings and graffiti and garbage on the sidewalk, chances are, you will feel assaulted.
- Take the New York City subway system, for example. There used to be enormous fear about the subway, but it turned out that there was very little crime. Rather, it was the environment that was fearful. If we can address the environment, we can address fear.
- C&B:** How can the police change the environment?
- Esserman:** Through collaboration and partnership. Police departments do not work alone anymore. Rather, the value is on partnership, not just in terms of working with other police agencies, but with all parties that have a vested interest in the same results: reducing crime and fear and improving our community. In Providence, for example, we are partnering with a whole range of groups: social service delivery agencies, schools and educators, community development corporations, merchants, and residents.
- C&B:** How do these partnerships work?
- Esserman:** The Rhode Island Community Safety Initiative, sponsored by LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation), is a great example. This program invites local police supervisors and officers to sit at the table with community development corporations. Together, we try to figure out what problems need to be addressed in the community, and how we can address them. The police no longer have to decipher problems on our own. Now we hear about issues directly from the community.
-

C&B: What are the some of the issues you are finding?
Esserman: Sometimes it's about crime. But, other times we hear, "You know what, if the city built a park, the kids would come." Or, "You know what, I feel assaulted by the environment in my community." Once we know what the specific problems and concerns are, we can talk to city officials and say, "If we want safer communities, we need to put some energy into cleaning the streets, getting rid of the graffiti, and redoing lighting."

C&B: Are these partnerships part of the new community policing philosophy adopted by the Providence Police Department?
Esserman: Absolutely. The three fundamental tenets of our community policy program are problem solving, prevention, and partnership.

C&B: Can you explain the basic community policing concept?
Esserman: Community policing is essentially about breaking down the anonymity of the police officer. It relates to the idea of reducing fear. If we want to create a fearless environment, we must first ensure that people are not afraid of the police. Too often, seeing a uniform makes people feel uneasy. If they get to know the person in the uniform, that fear goes away.

To foster the relationship between police and citizens, community policing calls for decentralized, neighborhood-based police agencies, in which local officers are permanently assigned to communities. This model allows police officers to get to know the neighborhood and the neighborhood to get to know them. Both sides of the badge become more at ease with each other.

Ideally, community policing results in two things. First, crime and fear will decline. And second, partnerships, mutual trust, and respect will develop between the police and the rest of the community. In practice, community policing is hard to do effectively. On the one hand, if you are super crime fighters, but alienate the community, you have failed. Conversely, you can be loved and embraced by the community, but not bring down crime, and then you have also failed. In Providence, we try not to crash onto either shore.

C&B: How have you implemented the community policing model in Providence?
Esserman: The first thing I did was to work with my employees to redesign and reengineer the department. There were 27 patrol beats in this city when I first got here. Do you know why?

C&B: No.
Esserman: You're not alone. Nobody knows why. And even though the city changed, there is no one alive in the building that ever remembers it being done another way. When I asked officers if they thought it made sense, they said, "No." But, no one had ever asked their opinions. So the first thing I did was to get together with my people and say, "How are we going to redesign our department, our home, so that it makes sense?"

Structure is supposed to follow strategy. We were introducing new strategies, so we needed a new structure. Our community policy concept told us we needed to be a neighborhood-based agency. So we carved up the map. People in Providence live in neighborhoods, so we built a police department around neighborhoods, opening up new local offices in nine neighborhood districts.

C&B: This must have come at some cost to the city.
Esserman: No. Not at all. The new offices were opened at no cost to taxpayers. Everything was donated—space, utilities, volunteers, everything. From universities to local merchants, everyone donated.

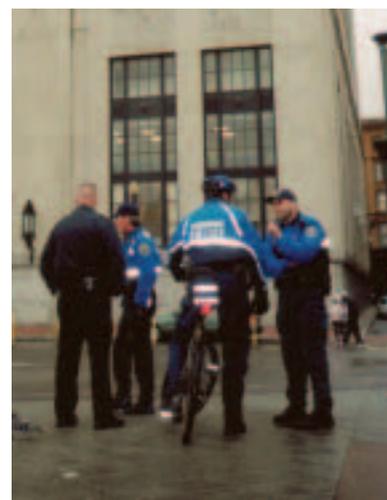
C&B: Wow. People must have wanted police presence in their communities.



Esserman: The desire for local police is always there. I saw it happen in 1991 when I opened up neighborhood offices in New Haven, Connecticut, and again in 1998 in Stamford, Connecticut. Everything was donated. Everything.

C&B: Has the decentralized system helped you to reduce crime?

Esserman: Yes, decentralization together with better communication. The department had never had a staff meeting before I arrived. Now every Tuesday, we have one. We go around and each neighborhood's lieutenant briefs the group on the happenings in that district. The special crimes unit gives an update. We have a member of the parole office in the room. Probation is in the room, the district attorney, social services. While we are talking, we project maps of crime locations and photos of suspects on the wall in real time.



With all of these resources in the same room communicating with one another, breakthroughs are made. We discover trends. Information is swapped on suspects' MOs. Links are made between probation offenders and recent crimes. We are being smarter about how we address crime, and we are beginning to wean ourselves off 911 and the radio.

C&B: Do you think that the police should eliminate 911?

Esserman: No, I think we will always have 911. The problem arises when all we have to offer is 911. Let me tell you a story. I have three kids. My oldest, Rolando, is graduating from college this year, so I'm told. And I suspect he will get a job, live in some city far from home, and share an apartment with a couple of friends. Try to start a life. One day, he might come home and find he has been burglarized. His few measly possessions—his bicycle and his TV set—will be gone. Let me ask you a question, "Who will he call first?"

C&B: His parents.

Esserman: Yes. But, how is that possible? He is the son of an American police chief. Doesn't he know that every good American is supposed to first call 911? But, of course, he won't. What do you do when you are the victim of a crime? You call who you know. You call who you trust. And today, most people do not know the police well enough to trust them. In Providence, we are trying to get back into the relationship business—so that people know us and trust us again.

C&B: Is it working?

Esserman: Well, crime is down in Providence for the second year in a row. It is the largest decline in crime and violence the city has seen in more than 30 years. So, those two-part results? Crime is down significantly. Fear is down significantly. And people are embracing the police department. Everyday, people stop me on the street to tell me the difference we are making. My cops tell me they see it in the neighborhoods where they work. Even the editorial pages of the newspaper are writing about it.

C&B: Chief Esserman, can you leave us with one last thought—what is the most important lesson you have learned over the years?

Esserman: I would say that the most important thing I have learned was captured in the words of Mohammad Ali. He was invited to speak at Harvard University, where he gave what I like to think of as his most famous poem. It was also his shortest. He stood up in front of the crowd and in his quintessential moment, he said simply two words, "Me, we." And then he sat down to thunderous applause.

If I have learned anything, it is, "me, we." There is no me, there is no Dean Esserman. I don't have the word "I" in my vocabulary, nor should this police department. It is all about community. It is all about partnership. It is all about collaboration. There is no other strategy for success. No other recipe. This police department is practicing "we" every day, working to make Providence's communities stronger.



Inside this issue: Connecting Public Schools to Community Development

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