



THE VANCE AVENUE RENAISSANCE PLAN OUTLINE

*Prepared by the neighborhood sub-committee
For residents review and comments
February 4th, 2012*

INTRODUCTION

In March of 2011, Vance Avenue residents, business owners, institutional leaders, and appointed and elected officials were pleased to learn that the City's proposal to secure a Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was successful - one of only seventeen cities out of nearly 120 that had applied for these new Federal funds for community revitalization.

In July of 2011, Mayor A.C. Wharton and MHA Director Robert Lipscomb participated, along with HUD officials, in a community meeting during which they invited local stakeholders to partner with the City and its planning consultants to prepare a comprehensive transformation plan designed to improve the overall quality of life for current and future residents of the community.

With the assistance of planning consultants from the University of Memphis, more than 1,000 local stakeholders have become involved in a highly participatory planning process to produce a neighborhood improvement plan that builds upon the extraordinary history and impressive assets of this historic African American community.

Major Warthon's speech at the July 2011 Community Meeting.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

At the beginning of the planning process, those participating in the Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant's Neighborhood Sub-Committee agreed to produce a plan that would:

- honor local stakeholders' hopes and aspirations for the future;
- build upon the neighborhood's many assets;
- respect the natural features of the land and the surrounding environment;
- minimize the demolition of homes, businesses, and institutions;
- encourage green building design, construction, and operations;
- improve mobility within the neighborhood and throughout the region for local residents;
- address the needs of the area's long suffering homeless population;
- promote public safety through enhanced resident/police communication and cooperation;
- expand employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents;
- enhance the physical appearance and functioning of the neighborhood through inspired urban design and public art;
- support greater citizen participation and voice in neighborhood problem-solving, planning, and design; and,
- document our participatory planning and design activities so they can be studied, critiqued and improved upon and where appropriate, replicated by others seeking to improve conditions in similar urban communities.

METHOD

During the past six months, members of the N\Choice Neighborhood Sub-Committee, working with students and faculty from the U of M, Rhodes College, and the University of Tennessee have completed several research activities to gain a deep understanding of current conditions and local stakeholders' hopes and aspirations for their future within the Vance Avenue neighborhood. Among the research activities local residents have worked with their academic partners to complete are:

- **Archival research** - A review of fourteen historic reports, studies, and plans documenting existing neighborhood conditions along with possible improvement strategies;
- **Population and housing trends** - An examination of recent demographic, economic, and housing patterns shaping the neighborhood;
- **Community asset mapping**- Identification of nearly eighty significant landscapes, historic sites, educational and cultural institutions, local businesses, and community-based organizations that represent important forms of social capital;
- **Neighborhood conditions Inventory** - Fifty local residents and university students took more than 1,200 digital photographs documenting the neighborhood's most important strengths, challenges, and underutilized resources;
- **Parcel-by-parcel land use, building conditions, and site conditions surveys** were completed offering a detailed record of the physical condition of more than 1,400 neighborhood building lots and structures;
- **Institutional interviews** - One-on-one interviews were held with more than fifty local institutional leaders to elicit their views of current conditions and preferred future development alternatives;
- **Community visioning exercise** - Forty-five local residents formulated a detailed picture of an improved Vance Avenue neighborhood that they are prepared to work together with city, county, state, and federal officials as well as other external allies to create;
- **Best practices research** - Surfaced specific improvement projects that had been successfully undertaken by other economically challenged neighborhoods to address local employment, public safety, school performance, food access, and affordable housing issues; and,
- **Resident Interviews** - More than 180 resident interviews conducted in 2009 were re-analyzed to verify the major research findings and recommendation emerging from the above mentioned data collection and analysis activities.



People working with the timeline, used to construct the history of the neighborhood.

A SUMMARY OF MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

The major research findings emerging from this mixed-method research approach are summarized in table 1, following the traditional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis format pioneered by analysts at the Stanford Research International (SRI) and the Harvard Business School (HBS). Such a methodology is able to describe the nature and functioning of complex systems, such as extended families, tribal networks, business organizations, and communities.

The empirical support for these findings will be presented, in detail, in the final draft of the Vance Avenue Renaissance Plan to be completed by mid-March 2012.

CURRENT STRENGTHS (S)	CURRENT WEAKNESSES (S)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rich African American history and strong identity • Central location within the city and region • Well served by local elementary, middle, and high schools • Aided by the work of inspired local churches • Served by many excellent non-profits • Location of many historical and cultural sites • Home to many long-standing neighborhood businesses • A significant supply of decent affordable housing • A community which local officials appear committed to assisting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents who are in a poor competitive position to secure good jobs due to their low education status • Poor access to living wage jobs in Downtown, the Medical District, Aerotropolis and out east • Local sidewalks, streets, playgrounds, parks and other infrastructure that have been poorly maintained • A high crime rate fueled by a lack of economic opportunity and a robust illegal drug trade • A limited range of educational, recreational, and cultural opportunities for area youth and young adults • The absence of quality neighborhood retail services – especially a full service grocery • Widespread health problems aggravated by the neighborhood’s status as a “food and primary health care desert
FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES (O)	FUTURE THREATS (T)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize local residents, businesses and institutions to design and innovative transformation plan inspired by Dr. King’s vision of The Beloved Community • Successfully compete for a HUD Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant • Work with the City to incorporate a community benefits agreement into all city-assisted economic development grants providing for an enforceable level of local jobs and contracts • Secure a “fairshare” of local CDBG funds to restore neighborhood infrastructure • Work with local businesses, new and old, area non-profits, regional lenders to support the recently established Teaching Youth Entrepreneurship Program • Expand community/university partnerships to enhance the provision of quality public health and transformative education programs • Serve as the City’s premier demonstration site for a community policing program to reduce the incidence of serious crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The demolition at great cost to the residents and the City of Foote Homes – our last family housing project • A continued increase in crime due to a lack of community/police cooperation in part due to the unintended consequences of Blue Crush • Persistently high unemployment and poverty rates due to the lack of living wage jobs available to local residents • Gentrification of the neighborhood due to the unintended consequences of well intentioned tourist-oriented development driven by Downtown interests • Undermining of our local public schools due to the loss of students resulting from unintended displacement • Further loss of faith in public institutions caused by redevelopment plans of City officials that “improve” the neighborhood at the expense of long-time residents, businesses, and institutions

RESIDENTS' VISION FOR THE FUTURE: CREATING DR. KING'S BELOVED COMMUNITY IN THE SHADOW OF THE LORAIN HOTEL

Based upon a careful review of the empirical evidence describing local conditions and local stakeholders' hopes for the future, those participating in the Neighborhood Sub-Committee formulated the following overall development goal, specific improvement objectives, and individual economic and community development projects. This preliminary community transformation framework was guided by the planning values articulated at the beginning of the report, a careful consideration of the Vance Avenue neighborhood's most important and distinctive qualities, and the conscious use of the community's many physical, financial, organizational, human, and spiritual assets.

The bold nature of the Vance Avenue Renaissance Plan is also inspired by the hopes and aspirations of the Harlem Renaissance which was a period

of deep spiritual renewal of people of color that produced an artistic, literary and political movement that led to an era of extraordinary economic and political emancipation and ascendancy for African Americans which supported the inspired social change efforts of Dubois Niagara Movement, Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Council. In this year when we celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Harlem Renaissance, the Neighborhood Sub-Committee seeks to challenge the Vance Avenue neighborhood, its elected officials, and external allies to work together to achieve the following economic and community development goal and objective for our community.

OUR OVERALL DEVELOPMENT GOAL

Transform the Vance Avenue neighborhood into the nation's leading example of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideal of the Beloved Community – a place where local residents and leaders are working together to overcome the legacy of economic and social injustice by providing individuals, of all ages and backgrounds, quality educational opportunities, access to critical health and wellness resources, opportunities for living wage employment and entrepreneurial opportunity, convenient retail services and a range of attractive housing choices, in a safe and nurturing urban environment.

SPECIFIC ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

Members of the Neighborhood Sub-Committee are confident that local stakeholders working with municipal and county officials, such as Mayors Wharton and Luttrell and Director Robert Lipscomb, along with other allies in the public, private, and non-profit sector can achieve this goal during the next fifteen years through the strategic pursuit of the following people, housing, and place-related objective suggested by HUD's Choice Neighborhood Program.

1. PEOPLE INVESTMENTS

A. Education Excellence and Attainment | To support the educational achievement of Vance Avenue children by addressing the low educational

attainment levels of their parents and caregivers through a comprehensive literacy and lifelong learning program involving the Memphis City Schools, Southwest Technical Community College, and nearby undergraduate and graduate colleges and universities, including LeMoyne-Owen and Rhodes Colleges and the University of Memphis, Christian Brothers University, and the University of Tennessee.

B. Health and Wellness Promotion | To address the lack of primary care physicians and health professions that require local families to depend upon the Emergency Room of The Med as their sole source of medical care by working with the Shelby County and State of Tennessee Health Departments, the Tennessee Medical Association, Healthy Memphis Common Table, the Church Health Center, Christ Health Corporation, area hospitals and clinics, and our local medical, dental, public health, and social work programs to establish a cooperatively funded, managed, and staffed

public health center to meet the needs of poor and working-class Memphians who are currently egregiously underserved in our city which prides itself in being a world-class medical center.

C. Employment and Entrepreneurial Opportunity | To aid local residents who have been unemployed or underemployed for a long period of time to successfully enter or re-enter the workforce by aggressively pursuing Section 3 employment opportunities within the Cleaborn and Foote Homes redevelopment projects. Require community benefit agreements assuring local residents needing employment assistance a “fair share” of jobs generated by businesses that are publicly assisted in the City or County. This assistance may include grants, loans, tax forgiveness, training support, and/or zoning relief.

2. HOUSING INVESTMENTS

A. Improve Local Public Housing | To assist individuals and families requiring quality affordable housing by preserving and improving the majority of the existing housing units at Foote Homes while removing a limited number of deteriorated units and buildings in the southeast corner of the complex which have been compromised by the location near a long abandoned underground stream called the Little Bitty Bayou which has caused recurring foundation and mold problems for residents occupying these units. The small number of units to be demolished would be replaced within the community while the remaining Foote Home units would be significantly improved with modernized kitchens, updated bathrooms, new energy efficient heating and air condition systems, upgrading or front porches, the addition of rear decks and small private rear yards, and the improvement of common areas.

B. Encourage New Housing Development | To encourage a combination of employees from Downtown, Medical District, and Aerotropolis firms; artists, musicians, and production workers; members of local religious congregations; university students, faculty, and staff, and empty nesters looking for quality, energy efficient and affordable housing, in a well designed historic neighborhood, that is safe, walk able, and convenient to Downtown to relocate to the Vance Avenue neighborhood. Local and national developers would be encouraged through a variety of incentive programs to create the kind of new urban housing recent national

studies carried out by the AIA and ULI suggest today’s energy, budget, and time-conscious families want.

C. The Regreening Vance Initiative | To enhance the physical appearance, environmental health, and overall fitness of the Vance Avenue community and its surrounding neighborhoods by restoring and connecting its existing public playgrounds and parks, and creating an exciting new linear park beginning in the southeast corner of the community and running northwest to Robert Church Park by uncovering and re-naturalizing the historic Little Bitty Bayou which has been covered since the late 1930s. Encourage the establishment of a bike facility, repair shop, and coffee/tea bar to service our City’s growing number of cyclists and to encourage through riders from the nearby Mississippi River Trail to visit the neighborhood and its many historical and cultural sites.

D. Vance Transportation Alternatives | To place the Vance Avenue community in the forefront of forward-thinking and acting neighborhoods conscious of the increasing complications caused by escalating oil and gasoline prices and global warming by expanding transportation choices for local residents seeking to get to school, work, shopping, and cultural events. Work with the planners from the MPO, MATA and Aerotropolis to evaluate existing bus routes, insure good neighborhood service on the proposed light rail/bus rapid transit line designed to connect the Airport with Downtown, explore possible bike rental and sharing schemes popular in other cities, investigate possible provision of ZIPCARS for individuals and families requiring only occasional access to private automobile service, and collaborate with MLGW regarding the possible location for electric re-charging stations for future users of hybrid and electrical vehicles. Finally, work with the new leadership of EDGE, the Downtown Memphis Commission, the Medical District, the Aerotropolis Advisory Committee, and local university leadership to explore possible shuttle service to the neighborhood enabling residents’ access living wage jobs.

3. NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENTS

A. Restore Vance Avenue as the Neighborhood’s Main Street | To address the neighborhood’s need for conveniently located (walk able) neighborhood-oriented retail services such as a: full service grocery, drug store, barber shop, beauty salon, coffee and sandwich shop, men’s and women’s clothing store, quality assignment shop, shoe repair service and

live music venue by re-establishing Vance Street (the historic commercial and civic center of the community) between 3rd Street and Danny Thomas as the commercial center of the community. First floor retail stores and services could be supported by second story housing providing what Jane Jacobs called “eyes on the street”. Additional support for these services could be provided by the construction of a larger public library at a central location along this corridor and the location of the offices of local along the Vance Avenue Strip allowing for one-stop shopping and services.

B. Expand Local substance Abuse Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment Programs | To respond to the serious lack of appropriately designed alcohol and drug prevention, intervention, and treatment programs, especially for teenagers, by working with the community’s existing service providers, faith-based communities, and public health officials to address missing links in the delivery of these services. An indicator of the problems in this area is the lack of Twelve Step Programs within the community. A possible model for this initiative might be the Outreach Project’s Substance Abuse Ministry Program located in Jamaica, New York – a national best practices for teenage substance abuse programs.

C. Facing History and Transforming the Future through the Arts | To introduce our neighborhood, city, and region’s children to the extraordinary contribution that African Americans have made to the intellectual, economic, cultural, social, and political life of Memphis, the Mid-South, and the nation by transforming Clayborn Temple into a social history museum complimenting the remarkable collections and programming of the nearby National Civil Rights Museum. This building would be restored and enlarged to house permanent and rotating collections dedicated to the contributions those African American denominations, service fraternities and sororities, business organizations, sports teams and others have made to American social life. Space would also be reserved for a permanent exhibit on the 1968 Sanitation Workers Strike with an emphasis on the oral history of the event and its meaning provided by a wide variety of leaders, participants, and supporters of this effort. Steps should also be taken, in cooperation with the National Civil Rights Museum, the Benjamin Hooks Center for Social Justice, Booker T. Washington H.S., LeMoyné-Owen College, the NAACP and others to get the National Park Service to establish the Greater Vance Avenue Neighborhood as the newest national urban park dedicated

to assisting the Memphis community in preserving, interpreting, sharing it Civil Rights story with all who are interested.

D. Ida Arts Project | To encourage local schools, churches, and service organizations to work with local arts and cultural organizations to develop age appropriate art, theatre, and performance programs celebrating the rich economic, cultural, and political history of the Vance Avenue community. The results of these efforts would be celebrated through a community mural project, similar to that found in North Philadelphia, an annual art exhibit where student and adult work could be displayed and made available for sale as part of possible Africa in April, and a series of poetry readings, one-act plays, and longer theatrical and musical pieces offered during a new community arts festival taking place during African American History month or the Annual Memphis Black Writers and Film Makers Conference.

E. Community Policing Demonstration Project | To establish a community/police department partnership to design, implement, and evaluate a community policy strategy aimed at responding to the structural causes of crime and violence in the Vance Avenue neighborhood while enhancing the capacity of local residents and community-based organizations to solve the problems that often lead to conflict.

REFINING AND FURTHER DEVELOPING THIS PRELIMINARY OUTLINE

This document was developed in an effort to accurately summarize local stakeholders’ input on the Vance Avenue Choice Neighborhood Plan in the context of a dramatically accelerated planning schedule triggered by HUD’s recent announcement of HUD’s Notice of Funding Availability for the next, and maybe only, remaining round of CN funding. This was prepared to provide local stakeholders with as accurate a statement of their neighborhood observations and improvement proposals as possible. Despite our staff’s best efforts, it will need a careful review by local stakeholders to correct errors and omissions. Those who participate in the Neighborhood Sub-Committee’s meetings during the coming weeks will address these issues.