

RE:NEW

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A mariachi band helped celebrate the cleanup of Perez Plaza at 26th and Kolin. The banner proclaims the NCP principle of "planning and doing." For the full story, visit www.newcommunities.org/communities/littlevillage

PLANNING'S CASALINO READY TO PITCH IN

By John McCarron

Citizen-planners working on quality-of-life plans for their neighborhoods had better be careful what they ask for. Denise M. Casalino just might make it come true. That's the impression the city's new commissioner of planning and development gave in a recent one-on-one in her office at City Hall. She's not just respectful of the NCP effort—she's relying on the local task forces to produce plans that will become, in effect, the city's plans for those neighborhoods.

Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed Casalino in February, citing her supervision of the \$200 million Wacker Drive reconstruction project and her work as deputy at the Department of Construction and Permits. A licensed civil engineer, her gift for project management squares with the mayor's get-it-done approach...and with NCP's determination to turn comprehensive plans into solid action.

BUILDING COMMUNITY FROM MANY ANGLES

Mention "community development" at a cocktail party and you're likely to get a blank stare. Add the word "comprehensive" and the head-scratching really begins. But three projects underway in New Communities Program illustrate that building healthier communities—through "comprehensive community development"—often involves common-sense responses to local needs.

West Haven: Opportunities for ex-offenders

Responding to the return of some 15,000 former prison inmates into Chicago neighborhoods each year, St. Leonard's Ministries is building a three-story training center that will exclusively serve this population with the "very practical stuff" needed to avoid a return to prison.

The Michael Barlow Center, west of St. Leonard's existing facilities on Warren Boulevard in West Haven, will offer three types of skills training to about 350 clients a year.



The 19,000-square-foot employment center will teach skills and connect ex-offenders to jobs.

"The first thing you have to do on getting out of prison is cover your basic needs: food, clothing and shelter," says Bob Dougherty, executive director of the 50-year-old organization, which provides those basics at three residential facilities. "That allows a person to go to the second tier of figuring out what he needs to do to avoid going back to prison."

The center will provide participants with intensive training in three areas:

- Food service skills will be taught in a new kitchen facility, built with a LISC grant of \$30,000, by Inspiration Corp., whose Inspiration Café in Uptown created a new model for serving homeless men and women.
- Manufacturing skills will be taught by Jane Addams Resource Corp., with a focus on job opportunities in nearby industrial corridors.
- Facilities maintenance and carpentry will be taught by the LEED Council.

The center will also create a transitional labor pool to help participants earn a modest income and build a work history. Later it will add an on-site bulk-mailing center to create sheltered-workshop jobs.

Recidivism (return to prison) for St. Leonard's participants is about 20 percent, compared to more than 50 percent for the general ex-offender population. Dougherty said cutting recidivism in half isn't unrealistic if basic needs can be addressed. "To assume that people returning from prison can make it without help is foolish," he says. "But if you respond to their basic needs, then they can get somewhere."

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Denise M. Casalino
Commissioner, Chicago Dept.
of Planning and Development

Q: Does it make you anxious that neighborhoods are drawing up their own plans?

A: No, I was thrilled when they told me what was going on. We're in a situation here (City Hall) where everyone is operating short of staff. But we're supposed to get stuff done. So, as far as I'm concerned, when you have a credible organization like this (NCP) helping us plan communities, we're going to use that. We're going to get what we can out of it.

Q: Use it how?

A: The thing I want out of this is a list of what needs to be done. Sure, that list might have to be reconciled with what the city can afford, and the things where we have some control. But it will be very useful to see what neighborhoods want done with, say, vacant land, and to have a list of what other agencies—the CTA, the schools, the park district—ought to be doing. That's total planning.

Q: Nobody elected the NCP planners. Are you concerned whether they speak for their communities?

A: There are contentious issues, of course. In Logan Square, different groups might have different ideas about how to get more green space...and what to do with that space. It's not easy getting consensus, especially when other

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IN VIBRANT LA VILLITA, SOME HARSH REALITIES

By John McCarron



Former alderman and state senator Jesus Garcia leads efforts to address neighborhood issues.

The most vibrant neighborhood in Chicago—a place throbbing with music, labor and life—is not some hotspot on the North Side. It is Little Village, the reigning port-of-entry for the nation's fastest-growing immigrant group.

Take a walk down any residential street, even in the middle of a weekday, and simply listen. Unseen radios and CD players inside the brick cottages and two-flats pulse to a mariachi beat, then salsa, then Tex-Mex. Some houses carry more than one tune, hinting more folks inside than the size of the place might indicate.

Out back, from garages that line the alleys, there's the whine of Skil saws and the scraping of fresh cement being hand-mixed and troweled. Then there's all the wrought-iron fencing that separates sidewalks from front lawns and flower gardens. In Little Village they've got a homegrown look. No two are alike and many have family initials and curlicues welded onto their hinged gates.

"A lot of them are made from scrap in garages and basements," explained Jesus Garcia, executive director of the Little Village Community Development Corporation (LVCDC). He should know, having patrolled these streets for more than 20 years as a community organizer, an alderman, a state senator and, since 1999, head of the neighborhood's best-known community organization.

Garcia takes understandable pride in the sheer energy of the place. Besides do-it-yourself homeowners and landlords, there's the endless parade of shoppers and shop-keepers along 26th Street, with nary a vacancy along 20 blocks of

carnicerias, taquerias and panaderias, not to mention push-cart vendors selling everything from roasted corn-on-the-cob to steam-fitted Stetson hats.

Beneath the surface

On a sunny day, awash with mariachi music and the smell of fried beans, 26th Street seems too good to be true—a veritable commercial for the great American melting pot. Whatever happened to *The Jungle*? Where in Little Village, or La Villita, are the mean streets of immigrant Chicago? Where are the pitfalls that broke the spirits of Jurgis and Ona, the Lithuanian newlyweds in Upton Sinclair's muckraking 1906 novel?

"Don't be fooled," cautioned Garcia. "We have no shortage of problems here."

Indeed, there is another, poorer Little Village beneath the surface fiesta. At night, after the stores close, that same 26th Street is a cruising lane for the "Two Six," a local gang that vies for turf with the Latin Kings. The police district that covers Little Village recorded 50 murders last year. Only the district to the north (West Garfield/Humboldt Park) was deadlier, with 57. La Villita's high school dropout rate, approaching 50 percent, is among the city's worst. Median family income, at \$34,086, is well below city

"We have no shortage of problems here."

Jesus Garcia, executive director of LVCDC

average and less than half that of the metro region. The portion of households living below poverty level is 26 percent...and rising. Nearly a quarter of all births are to teenage mothers. And there's a deficit of political participation, as might be expected in a community where half are foreign-born and more than half are below voting age. In the 2002 general election barely 4,000 ballots were cast from the 22nd Ward, where 60,000 live.

There is, then, no shortage of issues for LVCDC to tackle as it anchors the New Communities Program for Little Village. But enthusiasm runs high. The NCP anchor organization has a base of 60 block clubs and programs in industrial retention, violence prevention and housing counseling. LVCDC helped lead the charge for a neighborhood high school, and when the four-schools-within-a-school complex opens next fall, it will reflect LVCDC's input on core curricula and dropout prevention.

At the table

In recent years a single giant but elusive project has dominated talk about the neighborhood's future: a proposed mixed-use development for the 44 dormant acres at 26th and Kostner, near the city's border with Cicero. LVCDC has invested hundreds of hours on the concept, first negotiating with would-be developers, then acting as "community partner." But site-preparation problems and a lack of financing caused at least one developer to walk away, and now LVCDC is working with the landowner to recast the deal.



A major development opportunity: 44 acres of vacant land on Little Village's western edge

"We are definitely still at the table," said Garcia. "We need a supermarket, an office supply store and a decent clothing store—a place where you can buy a business suit." South of 26th would be housing, including affordable rental units developed with a partner such as Hispanic Housing, and a "public benefits package" to include a new elementary school and park.

While that project looms, a Little Village planning task force has other irons in the fire. One is the makeover of Perez Plaza at 26th and Kolin, which had fallen into disrepair before a recent cleanup by neighborhood residents and corporate volunteers from CoreNet, a national real estate network. Next up for the plaza is a mural to be painted by youth working with the National Educational Service Center. At the other end of 26th Street, the neighborhood's signature archway and clock were spruced up by another partner, the Little Village Chamber of Commerce. And an even wider range of partners is being recruited for an August 21 rally with the Violence Prevention Collaborative (see page 3).

The challenges facing Little Village are big enough that even these projects are only a start, which is why LVCDC is lining up more partners and projects through its planning process. Next up: implementing the big ideas that residents have developed.

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LVCDC board president Elena Duran (right) spearheaded the cleanup of Perez Plaza.

Little Village Community Area

POPULATION		
Population (2000)	91,071	Almost 10,000 new residents in 10 years.
Pop. Chg. (1960-2000)	Up 30,131	Has surpassed 1920 peak of 84,000.
Racial/Ethnic Makeup (2000)	83% Latino	Now 13% African-Amer., up from 9% in 1990.
HOUSING		
Housing units (2000)	20,991	Up 961 since 1990.
Number of vacant units (2000)	1,778	8.4% rate, up one point since 1990.
Owner-occupied housing (2000)	36%	Little change from previous decades.
INCOME		
Pop. below poverty level (2000)	26.5%	Up from 22% in 1990.
Hsholds w/ pub. assistance (2000)	1,498 (7.8%)	
Hsholds w/ income above \$35,000/year (2000)	7,623 (40%)	1,644 households had income above \$75,000.

Sources: U.S. Census data from www.chicagoareahousing.org and Local Community Fact Book Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1984 and 1995.



Ornamental ironwork and images of the Virgin Mary are commonplace on Little Village's side streets.

THOUSANDS OF VISITS TO NEW NCP WEB SITE



Plenty of people are interested in the 16 neighborhoods in the New Communities Program. At least that's the conclusion that might be drawn from the steady traffic to NCP's new web site at www.newcommunities.org.

More than 3,500 visits were made to the site during its first six weeks of operation, through mid-July. One of the biggest surprises has been the steady demand for data sheets and maps of the

neighborhoods. Visitors have requested more than 1,000 downloads of data sheets, the Planning Handbook, first NCP Report and past issues of RE:NEW.

In addition to data on population change, housing values, land use and income, the site also includes:

- profiles of lead agencies
- brief descriptions of the neighborhoods
- slideshows of two visioning sessions
- photo tours of four neighborhoods (Chicago Lawn, Little Village, Logan Square and Washington Park)
- links to other organizations.

The most recent additions are health and demographic profiles of each neighborhood and downloadable versions of the quality-of-life plans for Pilsen, South Chicago and West Haven.

Casalino CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

agencies, like the parks, are involved.

Q: You come from an on-time, on-budget background, but in planning you'll have to negotiate the shape of projects. That can take longer. And some things never get off the ground.

A: It's an enlightening change for me. There are all these forces that stop things from getting done. So it can be kind of frustrating. That's why I'm focusing first on the process of how we do things. And to jump-start some things that had been gathering dust. We need to keep project management the focus. A person is in charge of a project and they carry it through...not just drop it off to the TIF (tax increment financing) people or the PD (planned development) people.

Q: There's a lot of talk that downtown gets the gravy and neighborhoods get the beans. The opening of Millennium Park will renew that debate. Is NCP a chance to prove otherwise?

A: Yes, it is! Because it will give us "what to do" plans for these neighborhoods. But there's already a lot of resources going there. We have over 130 TIFs (districts) in the city, and considering there are only three downtown, that means there's a lot of focus on neighborhoods and on getting areas of the city revitalized.

Q: What about gentrification? Will the city help people stay where they are?

A: Definitely property taxes are an issue. I was living in Wicker Park for five years and three times had a doubling of my taxes. It's painful. It's the middle class that we want to stay and to

use the schools, but they get hit by the taxes. It's the key group to focus on, but too often they get left out in the cold.

Q: How about mandatory developer set-asides to produce more affordable housing? There's a proposal before the city council.

A: I'm not too big on legislating and over-controlling the marketplace. Eventually it (the market) figures out what the needs are. Government is supposed to guide it in the right direction. For instance, when you use TIF, you have to have some affordable housing.

Q: Do you look forward to working with community development corporations? Some can be erratic.

A: I worked with several in the Department of Transportation, where I oversaw bridge location and design. The people at Lathrop Homes were terrified about the new Damen Avenue bridge. So we made renderings. We talked to the residents. They just wanted to know what's happening, that's all.

Q: What, exactly, are you going to do with the NCP plans when copies reach your office?

A: Our neighborhood division has three regions—north, west and south. Staff will be assigned to review them as project managers, and they'll keep track of what are the city's responsibilities. They'll also report to the deputy commissioner for their region. Then, at some point, we'll need to sit down and go over the plans with the other agencies. These are going to be our planning studies. This is what should be going on in these neighborhoods.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD



12th District Police held roll call at Dvorak Park before a march against violence in Pilsen.

Neighborhoods respond to violence with marches, meetings

By Patrick Barry

It's a sad reality in many NCP neighborhoods: guns and gangs are an everyday presence.

In Little Village, a June gang war triggered more than 15 shootings and four deaths. Humboldt Park experienced drive-by shootings and in South Chicago, there was a marked increase in violence at the high schools. In Pilsen, a drive-by shooting in May injured four young men, and on July 2, another shooting wounded an eight-year-old boy. He had just finished a karate class at Dvorak Park and was with his family when shot.

The communities are fighting back.

PILSEN: More than 200 residents organized by the Dvorak Park Advisory Council marched July 12, chanting "¡Pare de matar! ¡Pare la violencia!...Stop the killing! Stop the violence!" Local police were out in force. They held roll call on Cullerton Street in front of the park and announced that two men had been arrested for the shooting.

"I don't think the bad things will go away until you put positive things in their place," says Alvaro Obregón, NCP organizer for The Resurrection Project, referring to a second march and basketball tournament planned for Aug. 3, which is National Night Out. "Positive activities are a way to take back the street and say, 'it doesn't belong to you, it belongs to the whole community.'"

LITTLE VILLAGE: The Violence Prevention Collaborative, a collective of 25 groups, organized two public forums with Chicago Police in June and July. That was a prelude to workshops and a rally, called "Peace-ing Little Village," which will begin at 10 a.m. Saturday, August 21.

The workshops will be held in two locations on either side of the gang boundary that divides east and west Little Village, said Alicia González, NCP organizer for the Little Village Community Development Corp. Targeted to families and youth, the workshops will cover early detection of violence, root causes and the role of mental and physical health.

At noon each gathering will march to St. Agnes Church, 2656 S. Central Park Ave., where speakers will include a police official and a former gang member. "This will be an opportunity for the two sides of Little Village to unite," says González, "and for the youth to see each other on neutral ground."

SOUTH CHICAGO: A spike in violence at local high schools—with many freshmen students involved—prompted the Southeast Chicago Anti-Gang Initiative to organize a conference for eighth grade students to help them resist summer recruitment by gang members. The initiative, composed of most of the area's youth agencies, hopes a revitalized Youth Council will provide more opportunities for positive interaction between teens and 4th Police District officers.

HUMBOLDT PARK: Hundreds of children participated in the Seventh Annual Peace March and Rally on June 25, chanting and waving posters as they streamed down California Avenue and into Humboldt Park.

"They're tired of the gunshots. They're tired of the gangs," said Lorena Alonso, director of resource development for Casa Central, which organized the march and recruited participants from 15 organizations. "They're tired of not being able to ride their bikes in the street or play outside."

Humboldt Park and surrounding neighborhoods in the 11th, 13th and 14th Police Districts experienced 104 murders in 2003. That number is down dramatically this year, with just 17 murders through May.

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Hundreds of children marched for peace in Humboldt Park.

PHOTO BY PATRICK BARRY

PHOTO BY JUAN FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ

NCP neighborhoods and lead agencies

The New Communities Program supports comprehensive community development in 16 Chicago neighborhoods. A lead agency in each neighborhood coordinates efforts and leads a quality-of-life planning process to determine improvement strategies. LISC/Chicago provides technical assistance, seed money for projects and support for two staff members at each lead agency.

Auburn Gresham

Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corp.

Chicago Lawn

Greater Southwest Development Corp.

Douglas, Grand Boulevard and North Kenwood-Oakland

Quad Communities Development Corp.

East Garfield Park

Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance

Englewood

Teamwork Englewood

Humboldt Park

Bickerdike Redevelopment Corp.

Little Village (South Lawndale)

Little Village Community Development Corp.

Logan Square

Logan Square Neighborhood Assn.

North Lawndale

Lawndale Christian Development Corp.

Pilsen (Lower West Side)

The Resurrection Project

South Chicago

Southeast Chicago Development Commission

Washington Park

St. Edmund's Redevelopment Corp.

West Haven (Near West Side)

Near West Side Community Development Corp.

Woodlawn

Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corp.



Printmaking is one of many art activities brought to Thorpe Elementary students by the South Chicago Art Center.

Community CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

South Chicago: Art center goes independent

After three years under the umbrella of Claretian Associates, the South Chicago Art Center has applied for its own non-profit status and has expanded its programs for local youth.

Focused on the Millgate area between 87th and 93rd Streets, the art center offers structured classes and

open studio sessions to expose youth to well-known artists and to teach the basic principles of drawing, painting and sculpture. It also offers in-school programming at Thorpe Elementary and Our Lady of Guadalupe schools, plus "cultural fieldtrips" to museums and sketching sites. The center's director, Sarah Ward, a registered art therapist with a master's degree from the School of the Art Institute, has more than a decade of experience working with troubled youth.

The center will use a \$3,800 grant from LISC to purchase computer equipment to ease the transition from Claretian Associates.

Humboldt Park: Summer immersion for youth leaders

Old-fashioned door-knocking is combined with music production and graphics software in the eight-week Youth Building Through Technology project developed by Near Northwest Neighborhood Network.

Working from the Batey Urbano storefront on Division Street, 15 youth are surveying local residents about youth needs; designing and publishing a Youth Resource Book; taking hip-hop and poetry classes; and learning how to produce music CDs, web sites, digital photos and printed publications. The students work with six college-age mentors and four consultants, and spend part of each day on the street doing surveys. The storefront lab includes 15 Macintosh computers loaded with sound, video and graphics software. The program received a \$20,000 grant from LISC.

"The survey is a youth assessment of what they need and of what is out there already, as opposed to guessing," says Michael Reyes, NNNN's Youth Action Team organizer. "The idea is to prolong the program beyond this summer. These students can go on to organize others in the fall and to work on a youth agenda for the community."

LISC AWARDS GRANTS FOR 23 NCP PROJECTS

Lead agencies and local partners launched 23 projects in the first half of 2004, using \$450,000 from LISC/Chicago's New Communities Program. Most grants leverage other funds from private and public sources.

Bickerdike Redevelopment Corp.

"BickerBikes" provides teens in Humboldt Park with bike repair training and healthy physical activity, with Chicagoland Bicycle Federation (\$15,000).

Breaking Ground Teaching Factory

Manufacturing Credentialing Center will train and certify North Lawndale residents in skills needed by manufacturers (\$30,000).

Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corp.

Three-day art and film festival at Thurgood Marshall Library to increase patronage of library (\$6,000).

Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corp.

St. Sabina Employment Center hosted free income-tax preparation services, with Center for Economic Progress (\$4,000).

Greater North Pulaski Development Corp.

Survey to determine if employers find skills they need among residents of Logan Square and Humboldt Park (\$30,000).

Greater Southwest Development Corp.

Partnership with Metropolitan Family Services brings seniors into child-care center (\$6,000).

Illinois Facilities Fund Workshop series helped groups submit proposals to develop charter, small or contract schools (\$13,000).

Instituto del Progreso Latino Improved facilities in Pilsen to host free income-tax preparation services, with Center for Economic Progress (\$20,000).

Little Village Community Development Corp.

Organized cleanup and improvements to Perez Plaza, with CoreNet, a national real estate development group (\$25,000).

Little Village Community Development Corp.

Feasibility study to renovate and expand social service facility for St. Anthony's Hospital (\$22,000).

Near Northwest Neighborhood Network

Eight-week youth leadership project uses technology and media arts to engage high schoolers (\$20,000).

Project Match Neighborhood employment center provides services to any community resident seeking assistance (\$43,210).

Quad Communities Development Corp.

Small grants awarded for beautification and improvement projects (\$10,000).

Quad Communities Development Corp.

Organized summer and fall institutes for school principals and staff at local public schools (\$15,000).

St. Leonard's House Build-out of food-preparation area in new center in West Haven to train ex-offenders (\$30,000).

South Chicago Art Center Newly incorporated center serving youth will purchase computer equipment and a digital camera (\$3,800).

South Chicago Youth Council Anti-gang conference for eighth graders to help improve their transition to high school (\$1,000).

Southeast Chicago Development Commission Year-long leadership development program provides seminars and volunteer opportunities (\$12,500).

Southeast Chicago Development Commission Neighborhood employment center provides services to any community resident seeking assistance (\$43,210).

Trust for Public Land Seeks to acquire land for badly needed park space in Pilsen (\$35,000).

West Humboldt Park Family and Community Development Council Local youth design and paint a mural at Chicago and Lawndale Avenues, with Chicago Public Art Group (\$10,740).

Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corp. Small grants awarded for beautification and improvement projects (\$10,000).

Woodlawn Preservation and Investment Corp. Neighborhood employment center provides services to any community resident seeking assistance (\$43,210).

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