HOUSING NEEDS IN MILWAUKEE:

A Summary of a Survey of Milwaukee Non-Profit Organizations Assessing Housing Needs, Development Efforts and Collaborative Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years there have been several dramatic changes at the State and City level regarding housing and welfare policy. This report documents the results of a survey of over 90 non-profit organizations involved in housing and social service in Milwaukee. The survey was designed to assess the impacts of these policy changes on housing and organizational needs for non-profits as well as to assess opportunities for University-Community collaborations to address these needs. Four common organizational needs were identified as well as four general community housing needs. Several other housing needs were identified which are relevant to specific client groups. This project was carried out under The Milwaukee Community Partnership Initiative, sponsored by the Community Outreach Partnership Center's Program Office at the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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Overview

Issues related to housing and neighborhood development are in the news in Milwaukee on a daily basis. Recently, there have been several changes in the way business, in relationship to these issues, is conducted in the City. Most notable of these changes is the newly implemented Neighborhood Strategic Planning process. In addition to changes in funding policy in the City, the press has reported that the recent sweeping changes in the welfare system in Wisconsin have had numerous impacts on individual housing situations and on the rate of eviction from privately owned housing. One of the purposes of this telephone survey of over 90 non-profit organizations working in the City of Milwaukee was to assess the status of current housing development efforts, and to gather perceptions of current and projected housing and organizational needs in inner-city areas of Milwaukee in light of recent policy changes at local and state levels. A second purpose for this telephone survey was to identify some potentially fertile areas for collaboration between the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UWM and non-profit organizations with housing and neighborhood development concerns in inner-city Milwaukee.

Methodology

An initial master list of organizations (see Appendix A) was created from the membership list of the Non-profit Center of Milwaukee and a list of invitees to UWM's School of Architecture and Urban Planning's Housing Development and Design Forum - 1996. This list was edited to include 93 organizations that seemed most likely to have some involvement with housing issues. As the survey progressed, seven additional organizations were added to the list based on referrals from organizations and people contacted.

An attempt was made to contact every organization by phone in Spring 1998. Contact was made with 93 of the organizations on the list of 100. In some cases information about organizations was obtained from contacts in related or parent organizations, when contact could not be made with the listed organization. The larger, more well established organizations were contacted near the end of the survey because several of them were already involved in grant proposal development with UWM departments.

Each phone interview was initiated with a brief introduction to the main purposes of the survey: to assess the status of current housing development efforts, to gather perceptions of current and projected housing and organizational needs in inner-city areas of Milwaukee, and to identify some potentially fertile area for collaboration between the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UWM and non-profit organizations. Each contact was asked about past housing efforts and the types of housing issues they were presently addressing in their organization. Contacts were then asked where they saw their organization headed in the future in relationship to housing development. Finally, each contact whose organization had been or planned to be involved in housing was asked follow-up questions about past, present and future development activities and concerns in order to engage them in thinking about ways that research, design, planning, and technical service resources at UWM's School of Architecture and Urban Planning or other UWM departments might lend support to their organization's efforts. In several cases follow-up, on-site visits were made at the suggestion of the organization's contact.

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Organizational Needs

The following needs were mentioned specifically by organizational contacts or came to light after conversations with several different contacts. These needs are not direct housing needs but deal with funding, planning and the capacity of organizations to perform their present missions. The first three issues deal with organizational and planning concerns within and between non-profits. The fourth issue is related to local policy changes.

Realizing the need for creating new or reassessing/revising strategic or long-range plans.

These long-range or strategic plans were considered vital to increase funding options for the work of various non-profits. In addition, several non-profit housing developers and providers mentioned the need to stop and assess their current programs in order to discover ways to serve a more diverse population in some cases, and in other cases to target programs more nearly to the needs of populations and neighborhoods already being served.

Need to assess the impact of existing projects.

In relationship to recent changes in CDBG funding in the City of Milwaukee, several contacts mentioned the desire to assess the success of the work they had done over the past, in some cases, fifteen to twenty years. The need to be able to demonstrate to potential funders the impact of existing projects was very important in establishing credibility with a funder with whom the organization had no existing track record.

Development of collaborative efforts between various non-profit organizations with overlapping needs and goals.

With the exception of those organizations involved in providing emergency shelter, there were few non-profits working together to accomplish common goals. While this issue was mentioned by several contacts, it also became apparent through conversations about present and future housing efforts. Organizations which were focused on work in a particular neighborhood seldom mentioned working with a social service provider with housing issues/interests in that geographic area. In several cases there were housing organizations and social service organizations with similar concerns in similar geographic areas. However, the organizations did not know of each other's existence or had not made contact. For example, an organization which had as its mission the provision of housing for persons with developmental disabilities, had not thought of contacting or creating a partnership with a non-profit housing developer working in the area where they were considering a new project. In several cases it was clear that two or more organizations could have worked together on common concerns with better use of resources and a more expeditious, positive outcome. The organization providing housing for persons with developmental disabilities had spent considerable time looking for a site for housing. The local non-profit developer, most likely, was more familiar with available sites in the area and could have been a useful resource.

Need for financial stability and continuity in the face of changes in the way the City of Milwaukee administers CDBG funds.

The change in the way the City administers CDBG funds has changed the focus of many organizations away from housing development and into housing repair. The change has put some organizations out of business. This policy change and the fact that numerous long-standing organizations have been forced to change, consolidate or close, has made many organizations wary of involvement in housing development. The policy change has compelled most housing development organizations to consider new sources of funding for development projects.

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Community & Client Needs

In addition to the funding, planning and capacity-building needs of organizations, four main housing needs which were of general concern to several organizations and which cut across several different geographic areas and/or clientele groups were mentioned, often by both housing and social service providers. These four needs are described below.

Concern about the housing implications of W-2, welfare reform, currently taking place in Wisconsin.

The concerns raised in relationship to this varied depending on the focus of the organization. Shelter care providers and those trying to prevent homelessness were concerned because they noted increasing numbers of families seeking shelter or at the brink of homelessness. Those involved in mental health issues noted an increased need to counsel individuals and families who were doubling and tripling up because of the stresses associated with many people living together in a small space. Neighborhood organizations were concerned because they were seeing increasing numbers of large female-headed families (with more than three children) forced to live in unsafe housing because they only received $600 per month for their W-2 work regardless of the size of their family. The local apartment managers association was concerned about an increase in evictions which is related to the uncertainty of income for W-2 participants.

Need for affordable rental units for large families needing three or more bedrooms.

This issue was mentioned by those trying to help homeless families find housing and also in relationship to W-2 participants trying to find safe, affordable housing for their families.

Need for safe and supportive neighborhood based transitional housing for single women leaving drug and alcohol treatment and/or criminal incarceration.

Currently space in this type of transitional housing is very limited in Milwaukee. Treatment programs are typically relatively short and women often need the support of others in a healthy, safe environment so that they are not tempted to return to previous dangerous and destructive situations. In addition, these women sometimes are trying to regain custody of their children. Safe, supportive housing helps show child-welfare caseworkers that they are able to provide a good, stable home for their children and increases the chance they will regain custody of their children.

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Much inner-city neighborhood stabilization work remains to be done

Many neighborhood organizations are involved in neighborhood stabilization efforts. These efforts take three forms. First, many organizations administer grants from the City to help low-income homeowners address deferred maintenance and code compliance issues. Second, many neighborhood organizations are aggressive in getting absentee landlords to perform building upkeep and maintain building appearance. Finally, a number of organizations work with City officals to determine which buildings in their neighborhood should be demolished and which buildings can be saved and rehabilitated. In some cases, these organizations take on these substantial rehabilitation projects to make deficient housing habitable.

Specific Client Needs

Numerous needs and issues were mentioned in relation to specific and specialized population groups. The range of these specific needs was broad. Three of these needs and the relevant client populations are detailed in the following section. The range of the needs and issues below is indicative of the range within the sample.

Safe, stable, long-term housing for individuals who are HIV positive.

The AID's Resource Center of Milwaukee is preventing homelessness and promoting safe housing situations for people who are HIV positive. The Center addresses these concerns through an aggressive rent assistance program and by building housing and SRO's, where necessary, to meet specific housing needs of the HIV positive population in Milwaukee.

Housing and home-buying assistance for immigrant groups.

The Council for the Spanish Speaking is developing new housing for the elderly and persons with disabilites from Hispanic cultures. The Hmong/American Friendship Association is providing home ownership counseling, prequalifying buyers, providing translation services and generally helping Hmong families figure out how to become home-owners.

Service-enriched housing facilities are needed for individuals with chronic mental illness.

Most housing for individuals with chronic mental illness in the City consists of SRO facilities which may provide three hot meals. Generally these facilties provide very limited assistance and services. Housing with Help, one wing of the Tri-Corp Organization, is examining the possibility of expanding its emphasis on special needs housing through the construction of a "Community Based Residential Facility." This facility would provide a limited independence model or assisted living for individuals with chronic mental illness. Single-room-occupancy units would be located in a facility with full food service, medical service and referrals, counseling services and social opportunities as well as other supports to enable a higher quality of life for individuals with chronic mental illness.

Possibilities for Collaboration

Most non-profit neighborhood and housing development organizations have limited staff and financial resources. Many individuals contacted were very creative in the types of collaborative possibilites they suggested. Below is a list of six ways that various organizations envisioned collaborating with departments at UWM, specifically within the School of Architecture and Urban Planning (SARUP).

Collect and assess data on the effectiveness of past development efforts.

Several housing and neighborhood development organizations discussed the need to collect and assess data on the effectiveness of past development efforts. They suggested the vital role that UWM and SARUP might play in these types of assessments. These organizations did not have the time, money or staff resources to take on these types of assessments. However, these types of assessments and documentation were seen as very important in order to establish credibility with potential new funders.

Helping distressed neighborhoods.

Several neighborhood organizations mentioned that the concensus-building skills and planning resources available in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning could be utilized to help distressed neighborhoods plan the best ways to redevelop vacant properties in their neighborhoods.

Student internships in neighborhood and housing development organizations.

Various organizations mentioned the possibility of having student interns work in their offices doing a variety of tasks, from housing surveys to helping with construction drawings for remodeling. The organizations saw this as beneficial to students and to the non-profits because it would provide students with the opportunity to see real world issues first hand and would provide additional skilled person-power for the non-profit organizations.

Assisting with solutions to innovative housing needs.

Several organizations had very specific housing issues which were not addressed by the housing available in the market currently. These organizations saw the possibility of design and planning expertise being used to provide solutions to, for example, neighborhood housing for women leaving treatment, and barrier-free housing for persons with progressive disabilties.

Research and technical assistance.

Several organization mentioned the possibility of benefitting from research and technical assistance on specific housing related issues, such as getting equitable access to City housing funds.

Partnerships for design/development of affordable housing.

Some of those organizations involved in neighborhood and housing development indicated a desire to work with the teams from the School of Architecture and Urban Planning, and other schools at UWM, to develop comprehensive proposals for neighborhood and housing development projects.

Appendix A : Organizations Contacted

30th St. Industrial Corridor Corp.
4C of Milwaukee County Inc.
ACHOICE
ACLU/WIF
Agape Community Center
AIDS Resource Center of Milwaukee
Alverno College
American Lung Association
American Red Cross / Milwaukee
ARC / Milwaukee
Archdiocese / Milwaukee - Catholic Charities
ASQC (American Society for Quality)
Assisi Homes of Wisconsin
Boys & Girls Club
Carpenter's Home Improvement Program
Central City Initiative II
Catholic Social Services / Milwaukee
Children's Service Society / Milwaukee
City of Milwaukee
Community Advocates, Inc.
Community Development Corporation of Wisconsin
Council for the Spanish Speaking
COWSA
Daughters of Luke, Ltd.
Daystar Incorporated
ESHAC, Inc.
Esperanza Unida
Fair Lending Coalition
Family Service / Milwaukee
Franciscan Ministeries, Inc.
Friendship, Inc.
Goodwill - Employment Solutions
Greater Milwaukee YWCA
Great Lakes CRDC
Habitat for Humanity
Harambee Ombudsman Project
Hispanic chamber of Commerce
Hmong / American Friendship Assoc.
Horizon House
Hope House
Housing Resources Inc.
Housing With Help, Inc.
Inner City Redevelopment Corp.
L. A. M. M. (Lesbian Alliance of Metro Milwaukee)
La Gaudalupana
Latino Health Coalition
LAND (Lisbon Ave. Neighborhood Development)
LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corp.)
Metcalf Park Residents Association
Metro Milwaukee Fair Housing Co.
MICAH (Milwaukee Innercity Churches Allied for Hope)
MIDA (Milwaukee Indian Economic Development Agency)
Midtown Neighborhood Association
Milwaukee Christian Center - NIP
Milwaukee Community Service Corp.
Milwaukee Housing Authority
Milwaukee Indian Health Board
Milwaukee United for Better Housing
Milwaukee Women's Center
Neighborhood House
Neighborhood Housing Services of Milwaukee, Inc.
New Hope Project
Next Door Foundation, Inc.
New Covenant Housing Corp.
Northwest Side CDC
Open Gate
Our Home Foundation, Inc.
Our Space, Inc.
Planning Council for Health and Human Services
S. A. F. E. Group Services

Salvation Army
Select Milwaukee
Shade Tree Family Resources Center
Sherman Park Community Assoc.
Sherman Park Redevelopment Corp.
Sojourner Truth House, Inc.
South Community Organization
Southeast Affordable Housing Corp.
St. Catherine's Residence for Women
St. Vincent DePaul Society
United Community Center
Walker's Point Development Corp.
WE Development Inc.
West End Community Association
Westown Association
Westside Conservation Corp.
Westside Housing Co-op
Wisconsin Community Fund
Wisconsin Partnership for Housing Development
Williamsburg Heights Community Block Association
WISCOSH (Wisconsin Committee for Occupational Safety and Health)