

A Strategy for the Redevelopment of Riverwest

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1.0 Area Description

The Riverwest area was 120 blocks, bounded to the east and south by the Milwaukee River and to the north by a large industrial park across Keefe Avenue. For historical reasons, most Riverwest residents perceived Holton Street as the western edge of their neighborhood. For years Holton Street separated the Polish East End from the German North Side – at the time of the Plan, it separated an integrated Riverwest from the largely African-American North Side.

2.0 Purpose

This report dealt with the problem of economic revitalization and stabilization in the Milwaukee neighborhood of Riverwest, an area of about 13,000 people. It sought to answer the following question: What kind of community organizations and what kinds of activities would best fulfill the needs and stabilize the future of the Riverwest neighborhood?

3.0 Housing Analysis

The report and recommendations were based on the basic premise that the major economic activity in Riverwest revolved around housing. The state of the housing market was evaluated from two perspectives: (a) property value changes relative to the strong housing market to the east of the Riverwest over the past 25 years; and (b) housing sales activity within Riverwest from 1976-1977. Through this process, the following major conclusions were produced:

- Values of single family and duplex units rose in value by approximately 21% between 1976 and 1977 – this rate was almost twice the citywide average
- Rapid appreciation suggested that Riverwest is being upgraded relative to the preceding decade in the perspectives of buyers of real estate
- In the post World War II period, the overall trend in housing values in Riverwest was very similar to a comparable neighborhood on Milwaukee's East Side
- Since 1950, there was a realignment of relative status, as indicated by property value levels, among census tracts in Riverwest. A relative decline in the census tract at the far southern tip of the neighborhood was noted. This relative decline in property values was closely linked to an increase in the number of deteriorated structures in the area
- In 1976, single-family and duplex units that were sold were divided about equally between owner occupants and absentee owners. Owner occupants tended, on average, to pay higher prices for better quality structures. In 1977, absentee owners purchase approximately 75% of single-family and duplex units sold and also tended to acquire the more expensive, higher quality structures. This dramatic change in buyer characteristics raised several questions regarding possible speculation and displacement in this housing market and suggested the importance of continued monitoring of all aspects of this market by the redevelopment organization
- Subdivision of the Riverwest neighborhood into a variety of groupings: north and south of Locust Street, east and west of Humboldt Boulevard, and into seven sub-neighborhood groups, confirmed the presence of housing market sub areas. In all sub areas, rates of appreciation equaled or exceeded the citywide average for the same period of time, thus suggesting that all the underlying sub areas were highly viable as housing markets. The principal differences between

sub areas tended to reflect average sale price, age of structure, and quality of structural maintenance

4.0 Nonresidential Activity

Investigation into nonresidential activity in Riverwest focused on: the types and amounts of business activity as it changed between 1967-1977; the spatial distribution of business activity; and current shopping behavior and business potential in Riverwest. Major conclusions included:

- The overall decline in business activity, although partially attributed to neighborhood decline over the past decade, was primarily due to factors such as the development and expansion of shopping centers, resident mobility, and steady population loss in Riverwest
- There was no single major business arterial in Riverwest. Any strategy for business redevelopment must be sensitive to the balance of activities on the various arterials in the neighborhood, so as not to encourage destructive competition among already existing businesses
- The expansion or introduction of hardware, drug, and liquor/beer activities was appropriate for the Riverwest market. More detailed market surveys were needed to expand this list of possibilities.

5.0 Recommendations

Following these general analyses, several specific redevelopment activities were proposed as follows:

- Home Improvement Contracting Service: a service focusing on energy conservation, home safety and security, and home maintenance and repair
- Community Brokerage Service: to promote reinvestment in the area by new homeowners and to monitor neighborhood investment as a safeguard against the negative effects of displacement
- Property Investment and Management: the purchase and rehabilitation of neighborhood property as a means of improving housing quality
- Housing Aide: concentration of housing counseling in selected demonstration areas dealing on a case by case basis with rehabilitation and deterioration problems effecting property values and housing quality
- Business Development: supportive activities to the new Riverwest Business Association and encouragement of new business development and special development on Locust Street
- Inter Neighborhood Cooperation: sharing of programs and experiences with other neighborhoods; in some cases, joint application for funding; or collaborative work on neighborhood issues
- Resource Development: generation of funds including activities such as community fundraisers or various funding proposals from foundations and public sources

In light of these recommendations, the report suggested that all activities be started under the umbrella of ESHAC, Inc. At the end of the first year, an evaluation should be conducted and options for the second year operation of the redevelopment activities should be considered, including:

- Separate corporate status for the redevelopment program
- An independent neighborhood development corporation
- Continuation of the status quo