

SCOPE OF PROBLEM

Several factors are combining to push the need for inner suburb revitalization. Over the last twenty years, vibrant growth and development in the Cincinnati metro region has affected Hamilton County in both positive and negative ways. Most significant among these impacts is the population loss in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. After peaking at 924,000 in 1970, the County's population has declined ever since. The 2000 Census population of 845,303 is slightly less than the population in 1960. The effects of population loss are felt across the entire county, but perhaps most acutely in those older suburbs and neighborhoods that have seen their population levels plummet, their tax bases erode, their social problems increase, and their service quality decrease.

Development patterns in the Cincinnati metropolitan area are producing a few winning communities that boast high quality of life and ample resources to care for their populations. Along with the winners are many more communities with declining quality of life and few resources to face challenges. Older suburbs within the core metro area are among those which are losing out. As summed up in *Cincinnati Metropatterns*, a report prepared by the Metropolitan Area Research Corporation for the Cincinnati region:

Lacking Cincinnati's central business district, older neighborhoods with strong housing stock capable of gentrification, arts, culture and amenities, inner suburbs can be more vulnerable than the central city. For this reason, as poverty and social instability cross the city/suburban border the problems often accelerate and intensify. Increasing social stresses in schools and neighborhoods, comparatively less valuable homes, the loss of local businesses and jobs, and the erosion of slower than average growth of the local tax base are symptoms of this decline.

OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The *Community Revitalization Initiative Strategic Plan* is the result of a concentrated effort to build intergovernmental cooperation in Hamilton County. Individual jurisdictions working together to solve shared problems is not the tradition in Hamilton County. The partnership approach for implementation recommended in this plan draws on the strengths of different perspectives from Hamilton County's communities and civic organizations. The Community Revitalization Initiative brings all these groups together around a shared vision for Hamilton County's older suburban communities and creates a partnership where each member can bring their strengths to bear on the problem.

The Community Revitalization Initiative was a resounding success in achieving its aims. The planning process engaged many volunteers from public, private, and civic sector to discuss problems of older communities and devise strategies for solving them. Twenty-four of Hamilton County's forty-nine jurisdictions participated in the CRI. The relationships formed during this process create the groundwork for partnerships that will be necessary to implement various strategies recommended in the plan. Through this collaboration, the members of CRI prepared the *Community Revitalization Initiative Strategic Plan* report. This document provides a starting point for inner-ring suburbs to identify appropriate strategies for them to implement alone or in

cooperation with other communities. The plan report includes a Vision Statement and six corresponding goal areas:

The Community Revitalization Initiative promotes revitalization of mature, built-out communities and neighborhoods in Hamilton County. This mission applies to all older suburban communities including separate cities and villages, unincorporated areas, and large outer Cincinnati neighborhoods.

Older suburban communities in Hamilton County will:

- 1. preserve buildings and neighborhood districts to create clean, safe, and walkable communities,*
- 2. attract many new residents with a variety of new and renovated housing, accessible neighborhood parks, and excellent schools,*
- 3. build a new sense of prestige and identity by capitalizing on the convenient locations, historic buildings, vibrant neighborhood business districts, and cultural amenities,*
- 4. make investment in older communities easier by streamlining the development/redevelopment process and coordinating with financial institutions,*
- 5. provide transportation alternatives which connect neighborhood business districts, local attractions, residents, and visitors, and*
- 6. have 21st Century infrastructure in place which allows business development on formerly vacant commercial and industrial sites, fostering creation of local jobs and promoting a vibrant economy.*

The CRI plan also provides a new source of data for effective policy-making. Through the Results Accountability Process and development of the eight indicators used to track the plan's progress, participating communities will be able to objectively determine the impact of particular policies and strategies on community redevelopment. As part of the *Community Revitalization Strategic Plan* implementation, these indicators will be updated annually to provide feedback on program performance and results.

Many of the communities that participated in the CRI are now members of a new organization, the First Suburbs Consortium of Southwest Ohio. This group is charged with, among other things, implementing the recommendations of the *CRI Strategic Plan*. With 18 member communities representing over 149,000 Hamilton County residents, the First Suburbs Consortium will bring the expertise of elected mayors, council members, and city managers to bear on the issues facing Hamilton County's older suburbs.

So far, First Suburbs Consortium of Southwest Ohio has incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and built alliances with first suburbs organizations in Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio. In order to promote legislative changes that would encourage redevelopment and reinvestment in older communities, First Suburbs Consortium of Southwest Ohio is working with Greater Ohio, a statewide advocacy and education organization dedicated to promoting smart growth principles in Ohio's various land development and taxing regulations. Locally, First Suburbs Consortium of Southwest Ohio partnered with the University of Cincinnati School of Urban Planning for various research projects related to analysis and revitalization of first

suburbs. An \$18,000 grant from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation obtained by First Suburbs Consortium of Southwest Ohio will partially fund these research projects

LESSONS LEARNED

As mentioned previously, collaboration on common problems among different jurisdictions is not a widespread practice in Hamilton County. Overcoming this reluctance to come together on shared problems—especially through a county-initiated program—is a significant achievement. The relationships between communities and elected officials through this planning process will greatly benefit future joint projects.

The Community Revitalization Initiative is the first program produced under the Hamilton County *2030 Plan and Implementation Framework*—the first new comprehensive plan in over 40 years. This strategic plan used the Results Accountability Model to identify desired results and stakeholders, to develop objective data indicators and trends, and to track progress toward identified goals through project implementation.