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Using Innovation to Improve Community Development In Jackson, Mississippi

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Abstract

This research is intended to inform policymakers and other interested parties on how innovative approaches to community development can be used to improve socio-economic conditions in the City of Jackson and other urban areas. Five specific community development models are discussed: community development corporations (CDCs), community development financial institutions (CDFIs), transit-oriented developments (TODs), community improvement institutions (CII), and community land trusts (CLT); along with how they can practically applied to benefit the City of Jackson and other urban areas. The above models can be effectively used as stand-alone models, or they can be taken apart, reassembled, and/or combined in order to better adapt to existing community conditions, needs, and assets. The challenges facing the City of Jackson and urban areas require stakeholders and decision-makers to be prudent and bold in adapting models for community development, and to continue creating new models using data and a growing knowledge base, which built the existing models. This research is the first step of several upcoming activities designed to determine how community development models can be explored, adjusted, and applied to help solve socio-economic challenges facing the City of Jackson and other urban areas in Mississippi.

Introduction

This research discusses innovative community development models that have shown success in addressing socio-economic problems in urban areas. The City of Jackson is an urban area facing many community development challenges. Based upon quality of life indicators presented in this report, the effectiveness of current community development models in the City of Jackson is debatable. The use of innovative community development models has helped urban areas like the City of Jackson overcome many community development challenges. This research brief provides a framework for helping policymakers and other interested parties understand what innovative models are available; how they can improve the quality of life for local citizens; and how they can be implemented in urban areas like the City of Jackson.

Brief History of Community Development

As a process, community development in the United States has always been fluid and evolutionary nature. Since the years of its early emergence in the 1960s, community development largely focused on land redevelopment projects. Yet by the 1970s, attention shifted to also considering the social and philanthropic needs of communities. Evolving yet again, the 1990s saw the incorporation of building capacity, social capital, and individual empowerment into community development theory and practice, and recent times are seeing a rise in the demand for equity and social justice for both marginalized groups, communities, the environment, and the ecosystem itself (Von Hoffman, 2012). In the wake of decades of evolution, community development now has the potential to address many of today's complex challenges facing urban areas. By merging innovative approaches with the incrementally-growing knowledge base from which community development operates, urban areas can address these complexities in more efficient and effective ways.

Context for Community Development in Jackson

For the City of Jackson, the evolution of community development represents a unique opportunity to analyze outcome evidence and create a new agenda, which is more informed, more inclusive, and more strategic than ever before. Since the late 1980s, community development in Jackson has largely utilized the community development corporation (CDC) model. The CDC model focuses primarily on housing, as well as economic and infrastructure development via public services.

There is mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of some community development efforts in Jackson, with some ongoing projects like Farish Street and West Jackson struggling to produce tangible results. A review of city-wide quality of life indicators also raise questions regarding the effectiveness of current community development models. For example, according to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact Finder, Citydata.com, and U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2015 the rate of property crimes and violent crimes in the City of Jackson were 80% and 90% higher (respectively) than the national average (City-data.com, 2016; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics); the Jackson Public School District received an accountability rating of 'F' for the 2015–2016 school year (MS Dept. of Education, 2017); 25.6% of families in the city have incomes below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015); and 10.1% of households do not own a vehicle to use for personal transportation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Additionally, in 2015 Moody's Investors Service lowered the bond credit rating for the City of Jackson from Aa2 to A3, citing "population outmigration," "high poverty rate," and "significant infrastructure needs" among its reasoning (Moody's Investors Service, 2015). Given these circumstances, it has become necessary to move beyond traditional community development approaches and begin utilizing innovative strategies to address Jackson's community development challenges.

The need to consider shifting community development models in Jackson becomes all the more apparent as federal cuts in funding to socio-economic programs, including the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, have been proposed by President Trump. In particular, the CDBG program has been described as "not well-targeted to the poorest

populations” and “not demonstrating results (Korte, 2017). " The City of Jackson’s Office of Housing & Community Development prepared its “Five Year Consolidated Plan” for fiscal years 2015–2019 with an expected annual contribution of \$1,697,933, and a total contribution of \$6,791,732 in resources from CDBG funds (City of Jackson FY 2015-2019 Five-Year Consolidated Plan and FY 2015 Annual Action Plan, 2015). With budgetary threats looming at the federal, state, and local levels, community development practitioners must use innovation to tool and drive their community development efforts.

Discussion of Community Development Models (CDMs)

The United Nations defines community development as “a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative" (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, 2016). This simple definition explains why community development models like the community development corporation (CDC) have more potential for success than random implementations of isolated programs. When more groups and organizations are involved, there are more ideas and resources to share, and more trusting relationships can be established. This is ideal for a city like Jackson, which struggles with limited resources and continued segregation across both racial and economic lines (Norton, 2012). Based upon the evolutionary nature of community development, and all the current changes taking place in society today, one of the first steps in utilizing innovative community development models is to look beyond the current CDC model. It is easy to understand the predilection towards it, given its integral role in community development theory, and because its long-standing practice has yielded much opportunity for data collection, evaluation, and refinement. But even this model has evolved over time to recognize that community development cannot be measured merely with increases in property value, but rather should include some measure of (and resulting level of satisfaction with) the engagement and empowerment of the neighborhood residents (Galster, 2005). This means recognizing there are other community development models, which have tremendous potential to improve quality of life when adapted to the unique needs of a community. The following section presents a summary of innovative models that have the potential to successfully overcome community development challenges in urban areas:

Table 1 CDMs, Key Characteristics, and Potential Benefits

Type of Community Development Model	Key Characteristics	Potential Benefits to City of Jackson
Community development corporations (CDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * High engagement of neighborhood residents and organizations * Significant public and private investment * Strong development program agendas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increased social capital for residents (typical objective) * Can be used for housing redevelopment activities
Community development financial institution (CDFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Available capital * Strong collaborative efforts across entities 	Economic support (particularly in the form of credit and financial services) to disadvantaged and marginalized communities
Transit-oriented developments (TODs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Availability of adaptive property * Consistency of local goals and resources * Lack of time constraints * Ideal for large metropolitan area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increased access to good and services * Brownfield development * Health and public safety benefits * Reduced traffic and air pollution
Community improvement institution (CII)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * High engagement of neighborhood residents and organizations * Homogenous community values * Strong collaborative efforts across entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Improvements driven by resident action, not large capital investments * Increased solidarity/‘sense of community’ among residents * Increased social capital for residents
Community land trust (CLT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Available capital * High engagement of neighborhood residents and organizations * Homogenous community values * Strong collaborative efforts across entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * High level of sustainability * Increased land value * Increased solidarity/‘sense of community’ among residents * Perpetual ownership and investment in local property

Discussion of Innovative Models

One innovative approach to community development, which emerged in the early 1970s was the community development financial institution (CDFI) model. Just as the (initial) focus of the CDC model was housing, the CDFI model focuses on providing economic support in the form of credit and financial services, particularly to disadvantaged and marginalized neighborhoods and communities.

Another innovative model is the Transit-oriented developments (TODs). This model came into prominence as a community development tool and later evolved much more gradually. There have been numerous evaluations and case studies into how and why this model works. As examples, case studies are available for TODs within multiple cities/districts, including Boston, Manhattan, Washington, D.C., Miami, Chicago, Dallas, Orlando, Aspen, Portland (OR), Atlanta, Salt Lake City, Charlotte, Oakland, and Baltimore. TODs are, in fact, typically utilized in large metropolitan areas to create communities that integrate community needs (housing, retail, community services, etc.) with public transit locations, creating self-sufficient “walkable” communities (Cervero, Ferrell, and Murphy, 2002). The City of Jackson with its population of around 173,000, although not a large metropolitan area, has a fairly limited public transit system. However, this does not negate that there are other benefits of the TOD model which can positively impact new and innovative community development efforts in Jackson (for example, Increased access to good and services; Brownfield development; Health and public safety benefits; and Reduced traffic and air pollution).

Similarly, the Community Land Trust (CLT) model and Community Improvement Institution (CII) model are somewhat less represented in practice and in the research data, but share some common characteristics (e.g., homogenous community values; strong collaborative efforts across entities; and strong engagement of neighborhood residents and organizations) (Davis, 2010; Reim, 2013). The diversity and often polarity of thought and culture of Jackson residents may seem to pose a challenge to any community development efforts with functionality based on homogenous community values; however, it must be considered that the City of Jackson is still highly self-segregated, both racially and economically, so finding areas within the city with strong homogenous community values is entirely possible.

Another advantage of considering the above models is that they can be effectively used as stand-alone models, or they can be taken apart, reassembled, and/or combined in order to better adapt to existing community conditions, needs, and assets. The challenges facing the City of Jackson and urban areas require stakeholders and decision-makers to be prudent and bold in adapting models for community development, and to continue creating new models using data and a growing knowledge base which built the existing models.

Applying Community Development Models in Jackson

As a new, Mayoral administration prepares to take the helm in Jackson, now appears to be an opportune time to begin considering innovative approaches to community development. The incoming mayor has an extensive list of issues whereby the use of innovative CDMs can help the city see positive results across numerous fronts. For example, creating CDCs which focus not only on housing and economics, but also on citizen engagement and empowerment can

help citizens assume more responsibility for the improvement of their communities. The challenges facing the City of Jackson and urban areas have proven to be too much for local governments to handle alone. Increasing the capacity and efficacy of citizens within the city has the potential to increase morale, which in turn has potential to reduce migration to satellite cities and increase community sustainability.

With regards to poverty, the CDFI model can be structured to have the most impact by directly assisting with economic access and opportunities for wealth creation. Jackson can take advantage of two existing CDFIs in the city - Hope Enterprise Corporation/Hope Federal Credit Union, and the Small Business Capital Fund of Mississippi, Inc. City administrators can assist these organizations by creating policies, which supports CDFIs in protecting citizens from predatory and discriminatory private financial institutions. In addition to helping citizens grow their personal wealth, supporting local CDFIs can also help offset the potentially huge loss of funding through the CDBG program. The Community Development Financial Institutions Fund was established within the Department of the Treasury in 1994; this fund has provided over \$34 million to organizations across the state over the last 20 years, and by investing in and promoting CDFIs in the City of Jackson, city administrators can assist these organizations in receiving competitively-awarded community development funds (CDFI Coalition, 2013).

In terms of TODs, they are seen as being well-suited for large, metropolitan areas, generally because these areas have more comprehensive public transit systems than those found in smaller cities like Jackson. However, this model should not be disregarded as a community development tool in Jackson because the various benefits produced by TODs can help promote growth in across many areas. Transit-oriented developments (TODs) have been found to provide the following benefits --- reduced air pollution and fossil fuel consumption (through the reduction in automobile traffic); increased use of public transit resulting in additional fare revenue; increased access to job opportunities and public services for low-income households; more discretionary household income (through the reduction in transportation expenses); and even reduced crime rates through a phenomenon known as “eyes on the street” – meaning more people out and about being potential witnesses deters crime in public areas (Transit Oriented Development Institute, 2016; Pacheco, 2015). “Walkable communities” such as those created by TODs even improve public health by supporting an active physical lifestyle. (Transit Oriented Development Institute, 2016)

The Community Land Trust (CLT) and Community Improvement Institution (CII) models also hold potential for the City of Jackson. The CLT model has played, and continues to play, a large role in protecting minority communities from losing all ownership over community land, particularly in the South. For Jackson city leaders, facilitating and investing in such a trust will result in not only an increase in social capital and solidarity among community residents (similar to the CDC model and its effect on citizen empowerment), but will also allow for the emergence of shared resources like community gardens and income from leasing communal land.

In terms of education and improving the performance of the public school district, the CII model can create cooperative networks within the community rooted within particular institutions, which usually include family, school, and church (Reim, 2013). Conservative

communities within the City of Jackson are ideal for this type of model since so many citizens identify so strongly with church and family (60% of Mississippi residents reported weekly church attendance (Palko, 2010), and 63.7% of Jackson residents live as part of a family household (City-data.com, 2016). As such, utilizing the CII model would yield a collaborative relationship between neighborhood schools, community residents, and religious organizations who are engaged in a formal agreement to improve school performance and outcomes, to provide family service support services, and to reduce the incidence of crime within the neighborhood.

Moving Forward

Community development has continuously evolved from its beginnings as only a housing improvement tool. It has transformed itself from a movement to simply eliminate urban blight into a movement to reduce social inequities and environmental harm, and to empower individuals and groups as effective and self-determining agents of change. If history is a reliable indicator, it will continue to evolve and change as time goes on. As such, it is critical for city leaders and community development practitioners in Jackson to take advantage of the many benefits these kinds of innovative approaches have to offer in today's environment.

For the immediate future, City officials can begin by utilizing available data to make evidence-based decisions regarding what is needed to improve which community, and which model (or particular function of a model, if not the model in its entirety) should be implemented. This can take the form of a SWOT analysis and/or some type of needs assessment. The next step is to arrange formal meetings between all involved stakeholders to begin the creation of a shared agenda, with goals and objectives that are strategic, realistic, and most importantly, mutually beneficial. Once this shared agenda has been set, the question becomes not just "which model should we implement?" but rather "what aspects of which models will most closely meet the citizens' needs?"

Specific Recommendations

1. Begin integrating these models into the city's overall approach to community development.
2. Collect data from existing CDCs, CDFIs, and other community development organizations in the local area.
3. Conduct a needs assessment and econometric analysis for the purpose of identifying what approaches/models are working or not working in the city.
4. Conduct a comprehensive internal study of existing CDMs for the purpose of identifying their strengths, weaknesses, and "success factors".
5. Create a report recommending what models should be implementing for addressing specific problems existing in select areas of the City of Jackson.
6. Conduct ongoing evaluations of all community development activities to assess progress and needed adjustments.

The above process does not end with creating a unique "Jackson" community development model. It should also include involving community groups and residents who will sustain any community development progress achieved. Finally, community development is ongoing, and city administrators and other stakeholders should be engaged.

Special Note: This research is the first step of several upcoming activities designed to determine how community development models can be explored, adjusted, and applied to help solve socio-economic challenges facing the City of Jackson and other urban areas in Mississippi.

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