

mapping on the near East Side. Four commercial and residential properties will be used as examples to explore the possibilities for change in the neighborhood.

- Meeting Three: July 22 -- Residents will outline their priorities for revitalizing the neighborhood. Those priorities will be turned into reports for city staff and alderman. The reports will be used to focus the spending of grants and other federal dollars.

- All meetings are from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Fred Rodgers Community Center, 501 College Avenue, Room 315. No registration is necessary and anyone is welcome. For information, contact Karen Christensen at 630-264-3060.

East Side facts and figures

Using Galena Boulevard and South Fourth Street as the centerpoint for the near East Side neighborhood:

Within one mile:

- There were 8,575 households
- The average household income was \$46,628
- Average house had 3.74 people living in it
- The average home was worth \$149,819
- The average home was built in 1944

Within five miles:

- There are 80,198 households
- The average household income was \$73,829
- Average house had 3.01 people living in it
- The average home was worth \$229,218
- The average home was built in 1988

In the Near East Side Neighborhood being targeted for neighborhood revitalization:

- 73 percent speak a language other than English (compared to 35 percent citywide)
- 73 percent of homes are sold in foreclosure
- 36 percent of community properties are vacant

Source: Metropolitan Planning Council

"The last thing they want to do is to have the professional planning staff telling you what your neighborhood should be like," Karen Christensen, Aurora's manager of neighborhood redevelopment, said in impassioned comments at the end of the meeting. "It isn't outside experts or even outside money that's going to make the difference. It's the people in the community."

(For the federal government, the near East Side includes most of downtown Aurora -- it stretches as far west as Lake Street -- and is bounded roughly by Liberty Street, North Avenue and East Avenue.)

The meeting had a tone of optimistic frustration. The approximately 50 people in attendance were librarians, business owners, aldermen and community leaders. Only 26 percent of them lived on the near East Side; most worked there.

And most of them had been to meetings like this before where plans to bring the near East Side back to life had died or at least withered. Some people were openly critical of what seems like an endless cycle of meetings.

Former congressional candidate John Laesch -- who moved from Kendall County to an East Side home -- wondered aloud when someone would address the problems' root causes instead of more cosmetic fixes.

Perhaps it was more telling that weariness didn't keep these cynics from the meeting. They were there because they care about the community. They were hopeful that change is possible and -- even if they have to be bludgeoned by meetings to get there -- they'll keep fighting.

"It's (the change) not going to be made by government," said Matt Hook, who moved his family from Naperville to the near East Side. "It's going to be a lot of people who are pissed off."

Indeed, during group discussion sessions, residents identified the community spirit and "real people" as some of the community's best attributes.

These group discussions were part of the unique strategy of this three-meeting process. The first was mainly ice breakers and brainstorming, focused on getting residents to think about what was best in their community and what needed to change.

Those in attendance voted through electronic keypads that showed instantaneous results. Among the best parts of the East Side, according to those at the meeting? The architecture, the Fox River and the diversity. The worst? Lack of retail, lack of community centers and high-density housing.

"I think we have enough tattoo parlors, check cashing companies," community leader Sharon Jacobs offered in one session. "We have too much of that."

The process that started Thursday was designed specifically for Aurora. Now organizers are hoping Aurora will show up. Everyone was encouraged to attend the next session, scheduled for June 29, and bring a friend.

"This plan is only as good as the people who show up here," Christensen said.

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trash_dude wrote:

Wow, 80k less, I need to make copies of this article and hand it out to all the people in the area so they can take it down to the Kane County Assessors office so we can appeal our tax assessments. I am on the east side, and other than the school district which we don't send the kids to, we think its a good place to live. The Aurora cops and fireman are the best, we use the bus when we have to, and were close to work for me in Naperville, so I am satisfied. I do get upset that I have to go to Oswego, Naperville, or Montgomery to get grocery or go to a restaurant, but not many chains want to set up shop away from the subdivisions and the big intersections.

6/6/2010 9:41 AM CDT on suburbanchicagonews.com

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pep103 wrote:

I grew up on the eastside but,like so many former residents I wouldn't live in most of those neighborhoods if they were rent free.The city has let itself be overrun by illegal immigration and gang activity.District 131 has meager school funding from the white flight that started at the end of the 1960's.How many times can a place be robbed before it has to close its doors?The city planners have made all the wrong decisions for the eastside.Even the worst parts of Chicago have school busing.Rebuilding city blocks does sound like a good idea but how do you start undoing what took 50 years to accomplish?Years of a bad economy and lost blue collar jobs has taken its toll on a city that was not able to roll with the changes.

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lissakatt wrote:

Being one of the families that live in the Near East district, I'm highly resentful of "Broke in Aurora" and "beforeyoujudge"'s comments. My husband and I move here in our early 30s and have spent \$30K fixing up the house that we bought, doing most of the labor ourselves. Several of our neighbors have also poured their time and effort into restoring their homes. Some of us ARE doing everything we can to improve the area.

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frank a wrote:

WOW 80,000.00 less, let's look at the population on the east side. You got 5 or 6 families living in single family homes. Of these 5 or 6 families half are probably illegal. So you need all the check cashing places that don't care if they are illegal or not as long as they have fake ID'S and pay to get checks cashed. Then you need tattoo parlors for all the gang bangers. Let's get rid of all the gang bangers and illegals, then start cleaning up and enforce housing codes. Let's get rid of the stupid colored house they seem to like. They all want hand outs when they are here illegally. RT47 you are completely right on your comment

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broke in aurora wrote:

agree with you beforeyoujudge, consider this idea, there are 26 homes on a city block more or less, give the owners 50k cash, that would come out to 1.3 million per block, you could give them give them access to low interest guaranteed loans as long as they buy in another part of the city. We could clean up 10 blocks for 13 million. For the businesses that are being displaced give them first dibs on the new blocks, and with guaranteed construction loans for their buildings. Then advertise the area as a special tif district and guarantee reduced property taxes for 10 years for an incentive. Put together a special quasi-government-private bank group to review and give out business loans.

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beforeyoujudge wrote:

In Chicago the bad neighborhoods are being torn down. New homes are being built, young couples are moving in and improving the area. This is what needs to happen in Aurora. The City of Aurora has a thing about conserving old buildings "historical" that will never improve the city, if you want history take a picture and put it in a museum. It is time to tear everything down and start over

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thesmartestpersonyouwillevermeet wrote:

The community has to want to change. Any improvements the city makes will become UN improvements within months if the community does not take part and embrace them.

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route47 wrote:

Aurora's Near-East side is diverse? It's over 90% Hispanic, how is that diverse?

The article fails to mention the gang activity that has plagued this area.
Businesses won't move in because of the high risk.

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