



WEST CLINTON ACTION PLAN Portland, Oregon

INITIAL SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Initial Reasons For Including West Clinton as a Finalist

- Small scale, neighborhood-based project (“cities don’t save neighborhoods, neighborhoods save cities”).
- Action oriented — 10 homes done in 6 months.
- Concentrated effort to have impact on neighborhood.
- Rehabilitated homes to a style appropriate for the area (“simple and handsome”).
- It is a housing rehabilitation project (Committee wanted at least one housing project).

Selection Committee Concerns and Questions

- Is it far enough along?
- Is there evidence of success?
- How inclusive was the process?
- Did neighboring communities feel left out?
- How is the process going to sustain itself?
- Is it replicable? Is it a model for others?
- Do people feel their lives have been enriched?



Residents gather to plant trees (renovated houses in background).

THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

What It Is

- Community revitalization and low income housing development in a small, focussed site (8 x 9 blocks, 250 homes)

Who Made Submission

- REACH (a community development corporation)

Major Goals

- Identify target area in need of revitalization.
- Provide local residents opportunity to develop plan for improvement.
- Provide model for coordinating public/private investment.
- Focus housing rehab in target area and supplement with "community strengthening programs."
- Revitalize community while maintaining architectural character and community values.

Accomplishments

- Conducted extensive research and participatory planning process to identify target neighborhood.
- Facilitated community planning to develop the action plan.
- Negotiated *detente* between community and local industry.

- Developed on-going relationship with local lending sources.
- Successfully initiated physical change aspects of plan: rehabilitation of homes; tree planting.
- Growth of community spirit and local organizations.
- City perceives plan and process as models for community development.

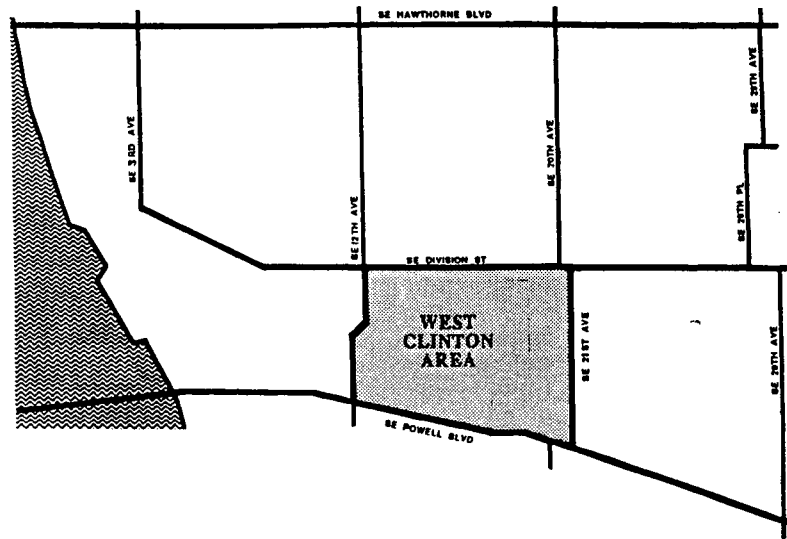
Issues That Could Affect Selection As Winner

- Has enough been accomplished yet? This is the early stage of a multi-year plan —few units have been acquired and only two have been occupied so far.
- Is it too soon to see significant follow-up private investment?
- Can it be a model for redevelopment under harsher, inner city conditions?

PROCESS

Planning/Implementation Process/Chronology

- Early 1980's: REACH's early history: organization arose from school closing crisis; several early projects were unsuccessful (learning experiences).
- 1982-1988: REACH successfully developed several special needs projects (housing for battered women and mentally disabled). Developed expertise in housing from successfully completing many scattered site housing projects (REACH owns and manages about 400 units of housing).



West Clinton Action Plan: target area.

- 1989: Began organizational re-evaluation; concluded need to work in more focussed manner in order to have a greater impact.
- Jan. 1990: REACH initiated West Clinton Action Plan (WCAP) planning process.
- Jan.-Mar. 1990: REACH worked with Inner South East Coalition on the target area selection criteria and selection process.
- April-June 1990: Conducted neighborhood survey, ran planning meetings in West Clinton.
- June 1990: Action Plan adopted.
- August 1990: Action Plan published; implementation began.

- Feb. 1991: Community tree planting.
- Mar. 1991: 16 units purchased, 3 houses completed, 2 units occupied.

Key Participants

- REACH Community Development Corporation (lead organization for the Action Plan, developer, planner, facilitator; provides part time community organizer for West Clinton).
- Governmental and quasi-governmental agencies:
 - Portland Mayor's Office
 - Bureau of Community Development (supports neighborhood associations)
 - Portland Development Commission (provides or channels block grant funding)
- Private lender (First Interstate Bank).
- Local university graduate students (Portland State).
- Community-based organizations:
 - Hosford Abernathy Neighborhood Development ("HAND": the local neighborhood association; a co-sponsor of the West Clinton Action Plan and its link to the community).
 - The West Clinton Task Force of "HAND" (the residents' group which gave immediate input to the development of the West Clinton Action Plan).
 - Inner Southeast Coalition ("ISEC": a group of neighborhood associations, with some city staff).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Context

There are three pieces to the immediate context of the West Clinton Action Plan:

- the political and neighborhood structure of the City of Portland
- the background and structure of REACH and
- the history of the West Clinton area.

Each of these is described below followed by a description of the Action Plan itself.

Urban Context: Portland

Portland has paid considerable attention to the idea of community and to developing organizations to implement it. Within the last decade, formal political boundaries were established which were meant to correspond to community identities where they existed and were viable — and to support the development of such identities where they were not.

A set of official, quasi-official, and independent organizations exist to support these neighborhoods at several levels of operation, ranging from city-wide agencies (Bureau of Community Development), through organizations serving several neighborhoods (Inner South East Coalition), to local neighborhood groups (such as the Hosford-Abernathy

Neighborhood Development organization, “HAND”).

Learning to “Let Go”. Dealing with neighborhoods seems to be a part of Portland’s political milieu and has, apparently, figured in recent elections. The current mayor claims support for grassroots community operations as part of his platform and policy. The stated goal is to have communities come to the city for help; to have communities take the lead in developing plans, rather than following city-created guidelines. The infrastructure for this support includes the Bureau of Community Development and the Portland Development Commission. City officials cited the need for its agencies to learn to “let go”, giving local communities control — as well as accountability — for development projects.

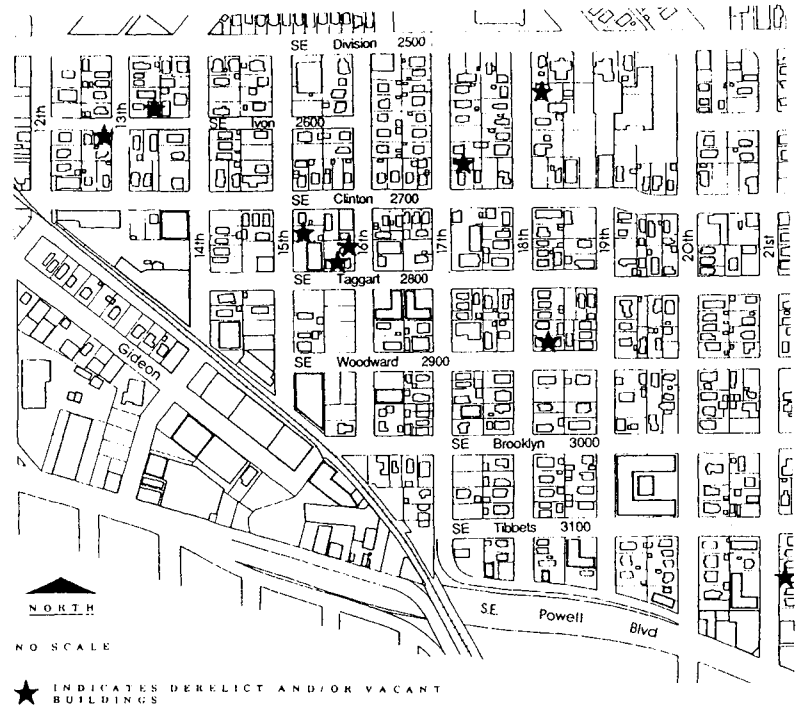
Organizational Context: REACH

REACH started as a local development organization trying to organize in Southwest Portland around the closing of a school. The organization was not successful in preventing the closing or in its other early efforts (a proposed joint venture at housing development).

Financial Competence in Community Development. A key lesson the organization seemed to have learned from that experience was that it needed to “do well in order to do good”. That is, they needed better business sense — to “understand the numbers of redevelopment” to gain credibility with agencies and banks and make the projects work. A new executive director was brought in and bankers were included on the REACH board.

Over the next 8 years, REACH initiated a series of successful





Vacant and derelict buildings.

projects. Two large scale special housing developments were completed: one housing for homeless battered women and the other a home for the mentally disturbed. They also successfully completed the rehabilitation of hundreds of units of scattered site housing. In the process they gained considerable expertise in rehabilitation of housing and a strong local reputation for competence among city agencies and the banking community .

Self-Examination as the Basis for Innovation. The REACH director and board, however, were not completely satisfied with the outcome of these projects. While, individually, they were successful, they left an uneasy feeling that, for all the housing created, they were not making a sufficient impact on

the quality of the local communities. The organization proceeded to re-evaluate its goals and program. As a part of this self-assessment, they interviewed about a dozen local community leaders, asking them what REACH could do to have more of an impact on their communities.

The consistent recommendation was that they should focus their efforts on concentrated areas, rather than spreading them throughout many communities. By concentrating efforts, it was hoped that significant and visible change could be made in a neighborhood, which might then radiate to other areas. The next step was to develop and initiate a process to select the target community.

Targeting the West Clinton Area

Neighborhood Selection: Focus on a Target Area. REACH worked with the Inner Southeast Coalition (ISEC) — which coordinates community development work for a number of Southeast neighborhoods — to develop and implement a neighborhood selection process. The process involved gathering primary data about candidate neighborhoods. Three larger communities made their short list: Hosford-Abernathy (within which West Clinton is located), Sunnyside and Kerns. Two graduate students from Portland State University’s planning department were recruited to develop indices of community well being and collect the needed information on the three communities (the work resulted in a master’s thesis and course credit).

Identifying Strengths As Well As Problems. The indices consisted of measures of community **strengths** as well as problems. An explicit principle was that the target community must have identifiable strengths upon which to build its redevelopment. The three communities were rated quantitatively and qualitatively and the results were presented at a marathon meeting, sponsored by ISEC, at which representatives from all three areas were present.

REACH served as facilitator of the meeting, reviewing and discussing the findings. The result of the session was a consensus agreement that the Hosford-Abernathy neighborhood represented the best mix of strengths and needs, and should be the first target area (implicit was the understanding that this targeted area would be followed in short order by at least one more, bringing the REACH expertise to other neighborhoods). Working with "HAND," REACH identified the West Clinton area as the best place for the first targeted area plan.

Neighborhood Context: West Clinton

West Clinton was described as the "second poorest neighborhood in Portland". It had a long history as a "solid, blue collar Italian" neighborhood of mostly modest houses, until its gradual deterioration began in the 1950s. The biggest single blow to West Clinton came in the late 1950s when Portland announced plans to create a new inner-city highway,

cutting through the heart of the neighborhood. Long time residents left, new investment ceased, and housing stock began to be left to deteriorate. Industrial encroachment into residential areas further diminished the residential character of the area. By the time the highway plan was canceled, significant damage had been done and many area residents had lost hope for reclaiming the neighborhood.

How Bad Was It? At the time the REACH program was initiated, the deterioration was marked. Much housing stock was in obvious disrepair and drug and gang activity were expanding. By comparison, a tour of supposedly worse and largely Black inner Northeast neighborhoods revealed that they had started with a superior housing stock (of larger, more middle class buildings) and were not obviously more deteriorated than West Clinton (our guide — who was trying hard — could only find one boarded up building). On the other hand, nothing we saw in Portland could compare to conditions in inner city Eastern slums, such as the ones bordering parts of the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway.



West Clinton home before renovation.



West Clinton home after renovation by REACH.

The Action Plan

In developing the Action Plan, REACH worked closely with HAND and its West Clinton Task Force. They helped develop a further survey (conducted by the graduate students) of each block in the area. Every one of the 250 homes was surveyed for resident opinions of problems, needs and directions for change.

A series of community meetings discussed the results of this study, and used them to create the West Clinton Action Plan, which they termed "A 'Holistic' Plan for Community Regeneration." The Action Plan was completed in June 1990, and published in August 1990. Implementation began immediately. Its main **goals** and attendant implementation strategies included:

Improve owner-occupied and rental housing conditions.

- As of March 1991, 16 deteriorated houses had been purchased by REACH. Rehabilitation had been started on 12 and completed on 3. All of these were being rehabilitated as rental units, as a way of reducing gentrification. The worst properties were identified for earliest purchase. Home ownership programs are for the latter phase of the plan.

Improve safety and livability. Make area cleaner and more attractive.

- A neighborhood, volunteer "Paint-A-Thon" painted three badly deteriorated houses in one day, providing immediate evidence of change in the neighborhood.
- A volunteer tree-planting resulted in placing 150 new trees in front of homes in one morning.
- A community clean up day is planned for May.



Increased involvement.

Reduce industry-resident conflict.

- Meetings between residents and representatives of the largest local industry (Desdero Lumber) have resulted in increased understanding as well as solutions to several problems (e.g, re-routed truck traffic and plans to build berms to buffer residential areas and reduce noise).

Increase involvement and pride.

- Monthly community meetings have discussed targeted building code enforcement, low cost weatherization, community safety, zoning, and future improvements. Attendance at these meetings has steadily increased.

Create supervised child activity areas.

- A small park is planned on land already acquired by REACH. Negotiations are continuing with the City, which appears to strongly support the plan. It is intended to be an urban garden, to be self-maintained by neighborhood gardeners.

Increase home ownership.

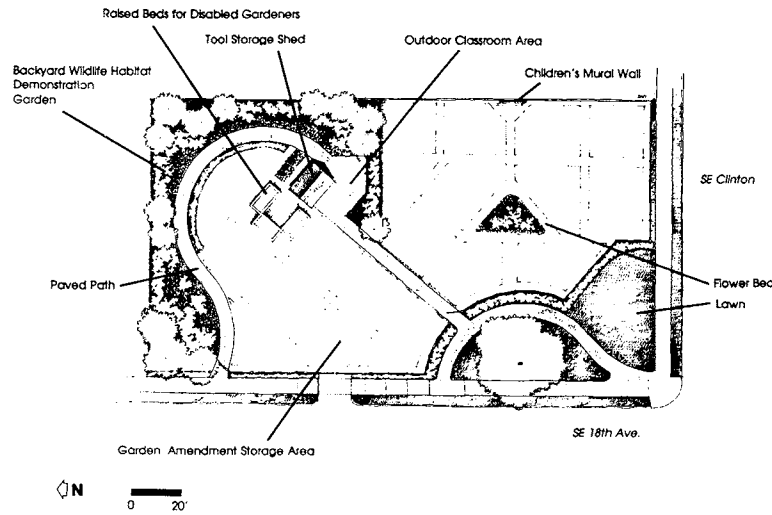
- REACH recognizes home ownership as contributing to community stability and plans to participate in programs to expand it in the next phase of the action plan. Interestingly, REACH's history has been built on successfully keeping low and moderate housing opportunities available through its ownership of rehabilitated rental housing.



REACH sign at community garden site.

Financing

- **Total public investment: \$1,360,000** over 2-1/2 years.
- **For planning:** Bureau of Community Development provided neighborhood self help grant and half-time coordinator. State housing agency provided \$4,000 for planning expenses.
- **Housing acquisition and renovation** financed by Portland Development Commission low interest loans and private bank money supported by Oregon Lender's Tax Credit program and encouraged by the Community Reinvestment Act.
- **Other improvements** supported by small donations and grants, volunteers, and existing city programs (e.g., tree planting).
- **Typical Housing Rehabilitation Costs and Financing.** Purchase of a 2-family house from a "slumlord" for \$27,500, spend \$53,672 to rehabilitate, for a total of \$81,172. Finance \$68,000 from the PDC (which funneled federal and private bank money) at below market rate (4.78%). The remainder of \$13,172 (equity) came from a Community Development Block Grant. Rent each of two units for \$325/mo. to a qualified lower income tenant (market rate would be \$425/mo.). Rent covers all costs, including mortgage payments, utilities, trash, repairs, insurance, move-in costs, and a 3% replacement reserve. There are no property tax payments for low income housing in Oregon.



West Clinton community garden plan.

ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS...

...By REACH'S Goals

Identify target area in need of concentrated revitalization.

- Successfully completed participatory and consensus-based process in reviewing three possible neighborhoods for targeting and settling on West Clinton. No sign of dissatisfaction among "losers."

Provide local residents opportunity to develop a plan for improvement.

- Strong participatory process. Plan appears to be "owned" by local residents. They clearly feel they had a major role in developing and implementing the plan and are encouraged by visible progress.

Focus housing rehabilitation in a target area and supplement with "community strengthening programs".

- With 1/2 time coordinator (read "community organizer"), clear progress has been made in strengthening local community activity. HAND has benefited by increased activity and other Portland agencies and groups notice the change (e.g., more calls to Neighborhood Watch programs).

Revitalize community while maintaining architectural character and community values.

- Character maintained in part by focus on low-cost rental units at first (ownership renovations later) as way to maintain low cost housing stock over time and avoid gentrification. Housing rehabs focus on low cost and adequate layouts, with only limited sensitivity to architectural character (for example, they will remove outer layer of asphalt shingles to reveal original finishes, but will also use Texture 1-11 siding on minor additions, which is out of keeping with the original character).

Provide model for coordinating public/private investment.

- Relatively low budget operation with moderate use of public funds. Heavy reliance on private donations and lending. No ground-breaking financial innovations, but good job of tapping and leveraging available sources of funding.

...By Selection Committee Concerns

Is it far enough along? Is there evidence of success?

- Process has demonstrated success in terms of

enhanced community organization and spirit. Some physical change had taken place, and it is clearly noticeable in the area where it has occurred. Several houses are finished, others are visibly in progress, still others have “coming attraction” signs in front of them. About 150 trees have been planted. Yet, the project is obviously still in an early stage. Few houses have been finished, and few new residents have moved in.

How inclusive was the process?

- Extremely inclusive, from the process of selecting target area through development and implementation of action plan. No identifiable segments of the community were left out or are unhappy with it.

Did neighboring communities feel left out?

- Immediate bordering (candidate) communities took part in selection process and seem comfortable with the choice of West Clinton. Reports are that inner Northeast neighborhoods do not feel ignored because of developments in West Clinton.

How will the process sustain itself?

- City agencies and local banks are very supportive. HAND and the West Clinton Task Force plan to carry on after the action plan is finished and REACH moves on to its second targeted area plan. REACH did not have clearly enunciated transition plan, but (during our visit) began to discuss the need for such a plan and ways to effect a smooth transition. REACH is a stable and successful organization with offices near the West Clinton area.

Is it replicable? Is it a model for others

- The city, the Portland Development Commission, banks, the Inner Southwest Coalition and West Clinton residents themselves all see this a model community planning process for Portland neighborhoods — and the model is actively being promoted to other community groups. Important elements of the model include developing financial and real estate expertise, the targeted focus, and the heavy emphasis on local participation in planning.

Do people feel their lives have been enriched?

- For many residents, the answer seems to be “yes”. If their physical conditions have not yet changed very much, there is already a far greater sense of control over their surroundings and involvement in their community. There are still many residents, however, who have not been significantly touched by the project.

SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Selection Committee cited West Clinton as an excellent process in consensus building for neighborhood redevelopment. They felt that REACH “covered all the bases” in involving elements of the community, government, industry and financial institutions in planning and implementation. It was both comprehensive and responsive in attending to neighborhood needs.

While there were some elements of the project which the Selection Committee thought less than exemplary (such as the aesthetics of materials and colors of renovated houses) they felt these were relatively insignificant within the context of the broader effort. They noted with appreciation the “tremendous sense of involvement” of neighbors, the attention to the problem of industrial encroachment on

residential areas, and the focus on the needs of low income renters. West Clinton shows, they suggested, the successful implementation of a very thorough process.

The Selection Committee did have some reservations, however, finding that it was somewhat premature to consider West Clinton as an award winner. While the project has made striking progress in a short period of time, the effort was just getting under way. The Selection Committee felt that the success of the project could be better judged at a later stage of development.

For More Information...

Dee Walsh, Executive Director or
Marjorie Hamon
REACH
2405 SE 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97314
Phone: (503) 231-0682

