

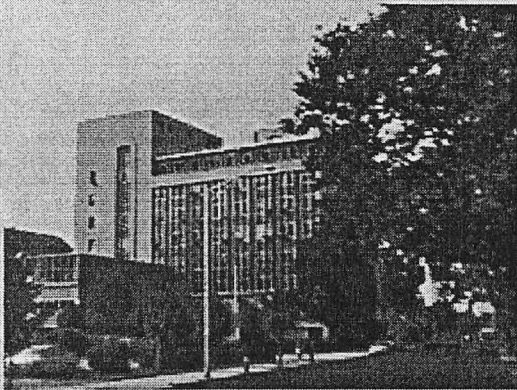
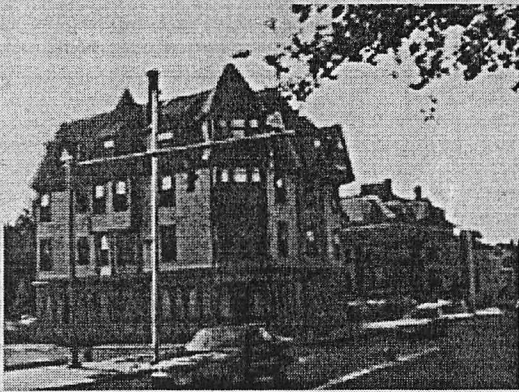
Elmwood



**Elmwood Neighborhood Proposal to R.I. Housing for the Neighborhood
Revitalization Program**

The Elmwood Collaborative
Providence, RI; August, 2000

Images From Elmwood...



ELMWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD

Proposal to R.I. Housing for the Neighborhood Revitalization Program

Applicant:
The Elmwood Collaborative

- City of Providence
- The Elmwood Foundation
- Greater Elmwood Neighborhood Services
- Providence Preservation Society Revolving Fund

August 18, 2000

DESCRIBE THE APPLICANT

The Elmwood Foundation, Greater Elmwood Neighborhood Services (GENS), the Providence Preservation Society Revolving Fund (PPSRF), and the City of Providence have joined together to apply for the RI Housing for the Neighborhood Revitalization Program to address the Elmwood neighborhood in Providence. These four groups all have a long time history of working in and commitment to the Elmwood neighborhood. During this past winter, the executive directors of the three organizations, GENS, the Elmwood Foundation, and the Providence Preservation Society Revolving Fund met and decided to collaborate on future projects. The RI Housing RFP was fortuitous in providing an opportunity for these organizations, as a collaborative, to engage the community in a "bottoms up" planning process. Given the commitment of the City to the Elmwood neighborhood the organizations invited the City to join them in this planning process.

The four organizations will collectively apply for the program, and the Providence Preservation Society Revolving Fund will function as the fiduciary agent for the Collaborative. Mr. David Knowles of GENS (461-4111) will be the contact person for the application process. The Collaborative has effectively been meeting for three months and will form a management committee to coordinate the planning grant. *The Collaborative is committed to developing the capacity of neighbors to manage the problems of the neighborhood. The planning process will focus on community involvement that builds civic capital investing residents with ideas and responsibility.*

DESCRIBE THE PARTNERS

The **Elmwood Foundation**, founded twenty-five years ago, has evolved as a true community development corporation as evidenced in its mission: ...is committed to enhancing the urban livability of the Elmwood neighborhood. Working in collaboration with the neighborhood residents the Elmwood Foundation supports a holistic approach to community development by working to maintain a safe, stable environment; promoting and maintaining decent and affordable housing; and preserving, restoring and publicizing the cultural, architectural and historical heritage of Elmwood in a manner that respects and strengthens the cultural diversity of the community. The projects of the Elmwood Foundation reflect the holistic approach of the organization. The Elmwood Foundation publishes a newsletter, *The Gateway*, has rehabilitated buildings for rental and sale, administered a revolving loan fund for home repair and landscaping, and conducted homebuyer programs specifically for the Hispanic community and the English speaking Elmwood neighborhood in general. Most recently, the organization spearheaded a traffic calming program in Elmwood, completed 32 rental units, and hosted an Elmwood family day at the Children's Museum, all fulfilling its mission for community development.

GENS was incorporated as Elmwood Neighborhood Housing Services in 1978. GENS is a member of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corp., a Neighborworks organization and will have access to Neighborhood Housing Services of America's resources. GENS initially focused on providing rehabilitation loans and technical assistance to Elmwood homeowners. The goal was to stabilize a mixed income and ethnically diverse neighborhood by encouraging an increase in owner-occupied housing. In the mid- 1980's, with the rise in property values and speculation, GENS initiated a home construction and rehabilitation effort by buying abandoned properties and selling the renovated buildings to first-time homebuyers. At the same time, a small business loan fund was established to improve the stores along Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue and to encourage economic expansion and the creation of new businesses Expanding on local economic development, GENS created the first micro business training and lending program in the state, concentrating on the five poorest neighborhoods on the city's SouthSide

In 1996 GENS started another economic development project, "SouthSide/Broad Street", as a community effort to revitalize the city's longest commercial thoroughfare. That project has leveraged some \$9 million in new investment in the form of building construction and renovation, public improvements and related investments. Since 1995 GENS has been the major subcontractor for the City's Lead Abatement removal programs. In addition to making units lead safe, GENS trained workers for certification and helped start 7 minority owned lead contracting firms.

The **Providence Preservation Society Revolving Fund, Inc.**, was incorporated in 1980 as a separate, 501(c) 3 non-profit organization, affiliated with the Providence Preservation Society. Through rehabilitation loans, ownership, development, and sale of property the Revolving Fund is directly involved in the revitalization of historic neighborhoods in the city. The Revolving Fund is a high-risk development bank' with over \$1.9 million in assets. These funds are used to purchase endangered properties for resale to responsible owners and make low-interest rehabilitation loans to owners who cannot get conventional financing because of the debt-to-income ratio of the borrower and/or the loan-to value ratio due to the appraisals in the area. To insure sound investments and appropriate renovations, the Revolving Fund provides financial counseling and design services, including the preparation of plans and specifications and construction supervision for loan recipients. To maximize its impact, the Revolving Fund targets its resources to specific historic neighborhoods that are in need of revitalization. The Revolving Fund has concentrated its programs in the Broadway-Armory District since 1982 and North Elmwood, and part of Upper South Providence since 1986. Working with neighborhood steering committees, strategies are tailored to meet the needs of the area. This includes neighborhood marketing, providing technical and financial assistance, and the acquisition and development of abandoned buildings for resale.

The **City of Providence** has made a substantial commitment both in time and funds to the Elmwood neighborhood. Beyond the operating funds it has contributed to the CDCs, the City, through the Department of Planning and Development has provided guidance and staff assistance to the SouthSide Broad Street Program. Through its Community Development Block Grant Program the City provides operating funds to all three CDCs. For the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, the Department has committed the time and expertise of its planning staff as well as its resources. In January of 2000, the Ward 9 Project Area Committee with residents from South Elmwood and Washington Park with the assistance of the Providence Planning and Development Department developed a study of Ward 9, which addresses homeownership in the southern section of Elmwood and Washington Park.

DESCRIBE THE TARGET NEIGHBORHOOD

The Elmwood neighborhood is one of the most interesting areas of Providence. Elmwood is roughly triangular in shape, with Trinity Square at the intersection of Broad Street and Elmwood Avenue forming its apex and interstate I-95 forming its base. For purposes of this study both sides of Elmwood Avenue and Broad Street and their immediate environs are included. Not only is it geographically defined, but it also represents the diversity and vitality of a major city neighborhood. Providence has been the fastest growing Hispanic City in the country, and this presence is no greater than in Elmwood where in 1990 40.5% of the residents were Hispanic, 36% African American, 13.7% Asian, 2.8% American Indian, and 25.6% white. Elmwood continues to be an ethnically and racially diverse. This diversity is reflected in the stores located on Broad St. where the shops, restaurants, and entertainment clubs represent multiple nationalities and cultures. Both Broad St. and Elmwood Ave. are commercial streets with Broad St. serving as the major retail center for Elmwood and the South Side of Providence.

Also within the Elmwood neighborhood are a number of industrial and institutional uses that provide job opportunities, including St. Joseph's Hospital, and Narragansett Electric. The Amtrak railway line passes through the southern part of Elmwood. A swath of industrial land between Elmwood Avenue and the railway line south of Reservoir Avenue is underused and is an asset for job creation.

Some neighborhood facilities in the area include, the Elmwood Community Center, AIDS Care Ocean State that provides housing and services to persons living with HIV/AIDS, and CityArts providing arts based education.

The internal streets of Elmwood are generally residential ranging from large single family structures, to housing units in buildings with two to four units. The architectural diversity of the housing stock reflects the growth and development of the neighborhood as a 'street car suburb'. Elmwood is fortunate to have three distinct areas listed on the National Register of Historic Districts. The richness of this history has made Elmwood an attractive residential environment for the middle class, who have reinvested in the neighborhood by rehabilitating historic houses for single-family living. Many of the large houses in Southern Elmwood on streets such as Adelaide Avenue, Lenox Avenue, Atlantic Avenue, Ontario Street and Congress Avenue are beautiful large single family houses which have invited 'gentrification' but remain a minority among expanses of multi-family rental housing units for low and moderate income residents often owned by absentee landlords. The northern and eastern sections of Elmwood include a concentration of derelict houses.

WHY ELMWOOD NEEDS TO BE PLANNED

Preserve Unique Balance and Create a Positive Neighborhood Image: Elmwood has achieved a delicate balance of; middle class residents who have invested, low and moderate income residents, a rich mix of ethnicities, and a vibrant street market economy, all densely located in a well defined area. Taken together, these are the traits that make urban neighborhoods special. No other neighborhood in Rhode Island can claim to embody all of these characteristics. While Elmwood's balance is desirable it is also fragile, and many social and physical problems remain. Elmwood needs a holistic neighborhood plan so that it can address problems and continue to improve the neighborhood quality, and at the same time create housing and economic development programs that addresses the diverse needs of the residents.

Elmwood distinguishes itself from other troubled neighborhoods in Providence, because it has more to build on. The sponsors of this application feel that Elmwood is at a tipping point. With a neighborhood plan and a sequence of funded implementable projects, Elmwood can move into another level, where public funds will leverage private resources, and the area will be able to stand on its own. A goal of this effort will be to strengthen the real estate market so that all families can take advantage of the appreciation of the housing stock.

Build on Existing Efforts: The Team recognizes that there have been other recent planning and development initiatives in Elmwood. The Elmwood Foundation, GENS and the PPSRF have plans for housing renovation, and the SouthSide/ Broad St. Program has addressed the retail sector. Also the Ward 9 Project Area Committee prepared a Redevelopment plan, a very thorough document, but it speaks only to homeownership in southern Elmwood. The recently completed Elmwood Revitalization Project which focuses housing rehabilitation and new construction within a few streets, Laura Street, Mitchell Street, Congress Avenue and Hamilton Street demonstrates the positive visual and social impact a planned housing development can make in a neighborhood. These however, are not holistic neighborhood plans, which are needed to address people's needs, services, job creation, recreation and open space, and housing simultaneously. A neighborhood vision for the whole area, with an action plan, and pointed implementation table is sorely needed.

Why choose Elmwood : Elmwood is precisely the type of neighborhood for which the RI Housing neighborhood revitalization plan is designed. Revitalization impact in Elmwood has often been on a project-by-project basis, the benefits have not spread across the neighborhood. The RIH Rental Production and other housing efforts are making a major difference in Elmwood, yet the neighborhood still suffers in many ways. A neighborhood plan is needed in Elmwood that coordinates the efforts of the area's many contributing groups and reflects citizen involvement. (There are 16 street associations in the neighborhood in addition to the many organizations who sponsor this application.) A coherent neighborhood plan with a detailed action component can assign roles and tasks, and function as a delivery system whereby groups collaborate for a common goal. This process has already begun, as GENS, the Elmwood Foundation, PPSRF, and the City have come together to prepare this application. In Elmwood, a neighborhood plan can empower existing groups to address all important issues: including industrial and commercial development, and green space provision as well as housing renovations and housing developments.

The following is a list of some of the issues that an Elmwood neighborhood plan will address. They are included to demonstrate the neighborhood's need.

Social: **Fragile Families:** The area is home to many fragile families, and a lack of support systems places additional strain on them. **Poverty & Unemployment:** remain at levels that significantly exceed citywide averages. **Occupancy of Substandard Housing:** An obstacle to neighborhood redevelopment in Elmwood is the occupancy of dilapidated houses by families adding relocation costs to rehabilitation costs. **Crime:** There has been a recent pattern of violent crime in Elmwood.

Physical: **Derelict Houses:** Many neighborhood houses are boarded and burnt out. This is particularly the case in Northern Elmwood, where reinvestment by the middle class has not taken root to the same degree.

Vacant Lots: Unkempt vacant lots dot the neighborhood. As magnets for trash and illegal activity they degrade the neighborhoods and completed rehab efforts. **Lack of Park/Green Space:** A severe shortage of park/green space exists in Elmwood. Some existing parks are poorly maintained with aging chain link fences and graffitied signs and benches. **Vast Housing Stock:** The area's vast and varied housing stock presents a great opportunity, but strategic planning is needed to exploit it. **Absentee Landlord Property Control:**

Ownership of residential properties by absentee landlords with no desire to make improvements is common. **Industrial Buildings:** Several former industrial complexes are integrated into the residential core, (e.g. Corner of Potters and Melrose). While a detriment to neighborhood quality right now, they are assets for future development. **Environmental Challenges:** Vacant lots and buildings often include environmental problems.

Economic Development: **Vacant Commercial Buildings and Land:** Some vacant commercial buildings and multiple lots remain on Broad Street and to a lesser extent on Elmwood Ave. These can be developed into marketable parcels for community business or non-local business. SouthSide/ Broad St. has addressed these issues in its marketing plan, but an implementation program with funding sources is needed. **Underused Industrial Land:** Some underused industrial parcels remain in Elmwood, such as the swath of land between Elmwood Ave. and the railway line. These can be transformed into business incubators, which provide jobs to residents. South Providence Development Corp. has successfully completed this type of project at "The Center". **Street Improvements:** Underway on Broad St., further streetscaping is needed for an integrated program. **Market Broad Street:** The program was begun, but inadequate funding has stymied it. Broad Street is Providence's most vibrant multi-ethnic marketplace. **MBTA Extension:** The MBTA railway line extension into Warwick has potential to foster economic development in Providence along Elmwood Avenue and bring local jobs to this area. Planning is needed to capitalize on this opportunity.

Current and Potential Municipal and State Commitments: **The Annie E. Casey Foundation,** committed to improving the chances of vulnerable children by helping to strengthen their families and neighborhoods, has selected the Elmwood Foundation as a co-partner to expand the street association network. Providence is one of 22 cities selected for the Making Connections program and Elmwood is one of the identified neighborhoods. **The City-Wide Bike Network,** which is currently out to bid, will include both Elmwood Avenue and Broad Street. **Trinity and Cahill Squares,** have received dollars for landscaping and streetscaping improvements. **Street Resurfacing** is underway on Broad Street, and Elmwood Avenue may soon be added to RIDOT's list of roads needing repair. **Grace Church Cemetery,** will be restored up by a consortium led by South Providence Devel. Corp and Women's and Infants

Hospital and supported by the Elmwood Foundation. **The Route 95 Overpass At Broad Street** will be rehabbed with guidance from South Side Broad Street. This improvement will enhance one of the gateways to the neighborhood.

DESCRIBE THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Elmwood Team is committed to an inclusionary process of “bottoms up” planning that will involve *all* of Elmwood residents. The planning process will be centered on COLLABORATION between residents and community organizations. Throughout the process interpreters will be available and public information, invitations, and notices will be in Spanish as well as English. A Neighborhood Steering Committee will be formed at the outset of the process. The framework is already in place through existing street associations and organizations. On July 26th a preliminary planning meeting with many neighborhood groups was held to discuss the preparation of this application. SouthSide Broad Street, CityArts, Oasis Credit Union, South Providence Development Corp., AIDS Care Ocean State, CHISPA and St. Elizabeth’s Home were all in attendance. Also, the following have already agreed to be collaborators: The RI Indian Council, The Elmwood Community Center, The International Institute, the Providence YMCA and RIPTA. The list below includes other future collaborators. Many of them have well-functioning community development operations already in place. The following list includes additional groups that may be collaborators in the planning process as well as those already committed.

SouthSide Broad Street	Providence YMCA	Prov. Housing Courts
RI Indian Council	AIDS Care Ocean State	Department of Building
Elmwood Community Center	CHISPA	Inspector and Code Enf.
RIPTA	Faith Based Institutions	Narragansett Electric
The International Institute	St. Elizabeth’s Home	St. Joseph’s Hospital
CityArts	Prov. Parks and Recreation	Ward 9 Project Committee
Oasis Credit Union	Providence School Department	PROCAP
South Providence	Prov. Police & Fire Dept.	Prov. Human Relations Comm.
Development Corp.	The Providence Plan	

The sponsors of this application met with the Ward Nine Project Area Committee, which has just completed a Redevelopment Plan for the southern section of Elmwood and Washington Park. That group of thirty residents and the Councilwoman wholeheartedly endorsed the submission of this application to RI Housing.

Input from the community will be gathered in all stages. The first step will be a visioning process as described in the RFP.

Visioning Process: Residents will be asked to answer the four questions: *Where are we now? Where are we going? Where do we want to be?, and How do we get there.* This “bottom up” public involvement process will be led by a facilitator experienced in visioning. The process will involve residents understanding the neighborhood today, discussing the outcomes if current trends continue, and evaluating where the community wants to be. The goal is to create a community where the citizens are empowered in determining their future. The preferred scenario will not only identify specific projects for housing (rental, homeownership, new construction, rehabilitation), opportunities for job development and commercial revitalization, and infrastructure improvements, but also identify the neighborhood services that will result in a healthy functioning community with citizens that care.

The following are elements of the planning process.

- **Form an Elmwood Neighborhood Steering Committee:** The Committee will provide a voice for the planning process.

- **Assemble Committee of Organization Leaders/ Collaborative Partners:** A Planning Committee of collaborators will be assembled so that the offerings of all neighborhood groups will be utilized. The City, PPSRF, TEF, and GENS will be the Committee directors, while other neighborhood organizations hold seats.
 - **Create a Task Force of City Agencies:** The City will coordinate public sector agencies in a Task force to specifically and holistically focus on Elmwood.
 - **Form a Youth Sub-Committee:** Youth should play a pivotal role in the planning process. A special initiative to engage youth in the process through the Schools and churches will be focus of this neighborhood plan.
 - **Focus Groups:** A series of focus groups will be held at differing venues to provide residents with convenient opportunities to share input.
 - **Public Involvement:** The primary vehicle for gathering community input will be the **street associations** that already function in Elmwood. The network of street associations will blanket Elmwood and provide grass roots feedback from each area.
 - **Engage Faith Based Institutions:** The Collaborative envisions specific roles and opportunities for Faith Based Institutions to provide community leadership.
 - **Letting People Know: Newsletter:** In order to broadcast the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan to residents for maximum participation, two newsletters will be sent. The first will go out at the beginning, to launch the project, describe it, and invite residents to participate in their street association sessions. The second newsletter will be sent after the street association visioning process.
 - **Press Releases:** Periodic press releases will inform all Elmwood residents as well as the greater Providence community as the planning process is unfolding in Elmwood. **Word of Mouth** through the street captains will also disseminate information during the planning process.
 - **Public Meetings:** Public meetings will be held after the street association meetings. These will have a neighborhood wide scope, and will seek to prioritize potential activities. Spanish and other language interpreters will be provided as needed. Focus groups may be conducted at the Steere House in the Calvary Baptist Church, and Knight Library.
 - **Inventory Land Use**
 - **Catalogue Vacant and Available Land:** Every single parcel of vacant or available land will be taken into account under the neighborhood revitalization plan.
 - **Inventory Social Services:** The planning process will also involve the neighborhood's social services such as Police and Fire Departments, schools, and municipal agencies. The City Planning Department will enable the Team to access these municipal agencies.
 - **Evaluate Recreation and Park facilities, and Day Care Services**
 - **Identify Best Uses For Buildings** by taking into account community needs and market demand.
 - **Create A Multi-Faceted Map** of land uses, vacant and available land, and properties to rehabilitate.
 - **Develop Prioritized List of Properties to Address**
 - **Document Steps:** Elmwood feels that it can serve as a model for successful revitalization of other neighborhoods in Providence and the region. The Team will be committed to tracking several indicators, and documenting its steps during the five-year execution of the plan so that other neighborhoods can learn from Elmwood.
- The finalized neighborhood revitalization plan will capture in text and with clear maps and graphics all of the above steps.** A realistic action plan to achieve the vision over the next five years will be created. We will develop an action plan that sets out specific actions that will address physical, social and economic activities to accomplish the vision. This will include specific projects in the areas of housing (including rental, home ownership, and rehabilitation), community facilities and services, infrastructure improvements, economic development, and commercial revitalization. The plan will identify responsible parties, potential funding sources, and a timetable for

implementation of each project. The vision will be documented with a list of prospective improvements, and with graphics and prospective renderings.

DESCRIBE THE TIMELINE AND BUDGET FOR COMPLETION

Tasks and Time Schedule

Task	Month:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Hire outside contractors									
Form steering committee									
Assemble committee of organization leaders									
Create city task force									
Form youth sub-committee									
Review existing plans and current land uses									
Inventory social services									
Newsletter									
Organize street assoc. & public meetings									
Conduct street assoc. focus groups									
Conduct public meetings									
Catalogue vacant land parcels									
Determine best uses for parcels									
Prepare action steps for priority review									
Evaluate all input									
Develop draft plan with sketches									
Document steps and track indicators									
Final action plan									

Budget breakdown

Task	Cost
Conduct inventory studies	\$ 12,500.00
Conduct Committee Meetings, Focus Groups and Public meetings	\$ 14,500.00
Two Newsletters	\$ 3,000.00
Draft and Final Plan	\$ 20,000.00
TOTAL	\$ 50,000.00

This includes hiring of a consulting, printing and mailing. Approximately 550 hours have been allocated. Leveraging will be provided by donation of in kind services by the applicant agencies.

CONCLUSION

The Elmwood neighborhood is at the tipping point. Too often people leave the City. What sets Elmwood apart from many other City neighborhoods is the passionate commitment of many diverse residents to live and invest in the neighborhood. Residents of Elmwood care about their neighborhood. An action plan, as well as the planning process, will result in better housing choices, improved services, and the opportunity for the residents to take community stewardship of the neighborhood.