

Conclusion

One City, Two Streets

The division between the past and present in Newark can be realized by walking along two of the city's most famous streets: Broad Street and Springfield Avenue. The downtown stretch of Broad Street between Washington and Military parks is where much of the current real estate investment has occurred; old buildings received new tenants and new structures were built on vacant lots. Several of the abandoned buildings purchased for renovation by the New Newark Foundation to create a downtown arts neighborhood border Broad Street, along with the 20-story former headquarters of Mutual Benefit Life that is now home to the technology company TDI. The refurbished National Newark building, the tallest structure in the city, stands near the corner of Market and Broad streets — known in earlier and more prosperous decades as the “Crossroads of the World.” The city's main avenue is also the home to the three large public projects built or planned for Newark. The minor league baseball stadium, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, and the proposed basketball arena are all located on or adjacent to the six busy lanes of Broad Street. Coincidentally, Mayor Sharpe James and the officials in the department of development who campaigned to bring much of this investment to Newark also have a Broad Street address at City Hall.

Springfield Avenue, on the other hand, is a lifeless stretch of closed stores and broken sidewalks that reaches out diagonally across the Central Ward and through the heart of Newark. Springfield Avenue once bustled with hundreds of stores and profitable businesses that attracted shoppers from all over the city and even nearby suburbs. Now the avenue is served by only one infrequent bus line that carries its riders through neighborhoods that can only be described as bombed out. One can still find charred bricks dating back to July 1967 in the many vacant lots along Springfield Avenue.

The small stone memorial to the 26 victims of the riots placed at the intersection of Springfield with Irvine Turner Boulevard is not far from the police substation where the initial violence of the riots broke out. Ironically, this area of Newark has the greatest elevation of any part of the city; a person standing at riot memorial can clearly see the office buildings of lower Manhattan to the east, and the populated hills of New Jersey's suburbs in the west. Closer in view are the public housing high-rises dating from the era when Louis Danzig directed the Newark Housing Authority and when city planners believed social problems were a result of geography. These structures stand forgotten and indistinguishable from each other in empty fields, still sheltering thousands of mostly poor residents of the Central Ward.

However, there is some change occurring in the heart of Newark.

A partnership between the New Community Corporation and the Metropolitan Baptist church recently announced that a block of undeveloped land along Springfield Avenue would be the future site of a Kmart store and small shopping mall. Officials from both organizations negotiated from more than a year to convince Kmart to come to Newark, while the city donated the land that will be developed into the retail site.

In August 1999 a cluster of vacant public housing towers known as the Hayes Homes were dynamited and rows of new affordable housing built by the New Community Corporation began to rise from the rubble. The 206 town houses will comprise the Community Hills development and will be joined by other projects planned by NCC and the Newark Housing Authority on parcels of land once inhabited by high-rises.¹

A more unconventional development project in the Central Ward was the arrival of an International House of Pancakes fast-food restaurant on Berger Street. The IHOP restaurant

¹ Garbarine, Rachele, "For Newark's Central Ward, 206 Town Houses." *New York Times*. November 7, 1999.

represents the first sit-down late-night chain restaurant built in Newark since the riots and Mayor James claims to love their blueberry pancakes.²

Not Enough

While these examples demonstrate that investment occurs in the neighborhoods of Newark, the community development is happening on a much smaller scale than the investment in the central business district. Neighborhood leaders explain that if government officials intend to rebuild the infrastructure of business district, they must also work to establish viable and productive neighborhoods that will support the downtown.³ They say that Newark should follow in the footsteps of post-industrial models like Cleveland and Baltimore, both of which reinvented their urban centers along with their residential communities by investing hundreds of millions of dollars.⁴ Newark's department of development has made considerable progress in attracting companies and businesses during the recent development boom, but many observers believe that officials in City Hall have not showed the same commitment to the future of the people who actually live inside the city.

From the Past

In examining the current development projects in Newark, it is important to consider how the practice of economic development has changed over the past thirty years. Although modern-day politicians and entrepreneurs use different language and operating procedures than their counterparts during the 1960s, a similar level of hostility and distrust exists between City Hall and neighborhood groups in both eras. But how does the contemporary

² Stewart, Nikita. "Newark pulls out the stops to salute new pancake house." *Star-Ledger*. February 9, 2000.

³ "What we are advocating is that the lower end of the economic totem pole should get on the level playing field with the downtown development. So if they get the resources, we should get them too." Interview with Raymond Codey. August 26, 1999.

⁴ Smothers, Ronald, "Cleveland mayor Warns Newark an Arena is No Cure-All." *New York Times*. October 20, 1998. First Section.

friction differ from the tensions that grew out of the damaging urban renewal projects of the 1960s?

The previous methods of urban renewal included slum clearance, forced relocation, and granting highways and railroads expansive rights of way through neighborhoods. These tactics inflamed neighborhood opposition to development projects and partially contributed to the tension leading to the 1967 riots. Inner-city residents of Newark felt so unfairly targeted by urban renewal in the 1960s that they re-titled the program as “Negro removal.”⁵ While the internal race issue largely vanished from Newark and other major cities, the conflicting priorities between downtown interests and neighborhoods leaders are still a source of friction in the debates over economic development projects. Developers and city planners claim to have learned from the mistakes of the past that historians have brought to light. Yet the recent debacle over the Newark arena project demonstrates that city officials are motivated by similar desires to rescue the city through an exclusive focus on downtown economic development that excludes community participation. Observers of Newark know that the city has been misled many times in the past over economic development controversies, and many hope that the current “renaissance” is not another false hope.

Lessons from the optimistic era of urban renewal in the 1960s can be extremely instructive to the development projects going on in Newark today. In 1962 the Newark Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency released a pamphlet titled, “Newark, a City Reborn” outlining the major development goals of the city in the decade ahead. The pamphlet contained artists’ conceptions of what the future development projects would look like, including a glowing depiction of high rise public housing towers that were eventually built as the Stella Wright Homes. The NHA also planned to build a performing arts center, a

⁵ Hayden, Tom. Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response. New York: Random House, 1967. 6.

convention center, and even middle class apartment buildings. The report began with the following proclamation: “There is little doubt, 1962... will be a YEAR OF ACTION and one which may truly be considered the year of Newark’s rebirth.”⁶ Viewed against the historical backdrop of the Central Ward over the past three decades, the drawings of proposed development projects in the NHA pamphlet could be compared to the space-age people movers and rocket packs promised by the 1980s at the 1964 World’s Fair in Queens. The accuracy of the development predictions in Newark have not improved considerably since 1962, making some modern observers wary of the growth projections and artists’ renderings of the city’s current development goals.

Newark as a Model

Newark resembles most urban cities in that the process of downtown economic development is dominated by the alliance of politicians and business leaders who make up the urban growth machine. The intense effort by city officials in Newark to attract and promote private development projects to the city has shifted city politicians into the same pro-development camp as profit-oriented entrepreneurs. Promises made by politicians to extend the reach of renewal into the residential wards of Newark have often remained merely promises made in public speeches and never actuated into programs. Instead, urban politicians and entrepreneurs in Newark remain transfixed by the potentially large benefits of high profile public ventures. At the same time that urban politicians pursue “big bang” investment opportunities, community development organizations are driven by the more pragmatic needs of their constituents to advocate development projects that will fulfill the basic needs of their communities. The sharp contrast between the goals of these two interest

⁶ “Newark, a City Reborn.” Newark Housing Authority. Newark, 1962.

groups creates the continual feeling of resentment between City Hall officials and neighborhood leaders.

During the Newark arena controversy, several community development organizations overcame the parochial divisions of the city and cooperated with other community groups to oppose the city's development goals. The most striking example of community cooperation occurred when experienced Ironbound activists helped residents of the arena neighborhood to file a lawsuit that ultimately halted the arena project. The ability for Newark community organizations to gain and share strategies that challenge the development goals of the city is an important trend in urban development conflict. For other cities with a similar history to Newark, the increasing strength of community groups foreshadows the larger role community activism will play in economic development decisions. While 30 years ago it took a riot that caused the economic collapse of a major city to halt the planning on the College of Medicine and Dentistry, in February 2000 it only took a single lawsuit to accomplish the same result to the arena plan without any collateral damage.

Newark in the Future

A balance between the goals of the city and the neighborhoods can only be achieved if community groups are allowed to participate more freely in the economic development process. According to Anker West, a Newark artist and community activist, the city has made it difficult in the past for community groups to approach the economic development process on equal footing with city agencies. "The city appears to show disdain for community input. People who are active in the community appear more timid when they approach the city council because the system is so unbalanced."⁷ City Hall has built a very high wall around the economic development process to prevent community groups from

⁷ Interview with Anker West. January 4, 2000.

playing any part. If Newark's community development organizations push to have a larger role in downtown development at the public hearings, they must also decide if the economic benefits of the development projects outweigh the potential damage their organizations. These groups will be placed under considerable strain by the reaction of the city's growth machine.

Despite the forthcoming reforms in the public hearing process forced by the C.H.A.R.G. lawsuit, Al Faiella and the development office will not give up their control of Newark's future quite easily. But the risks of inaction by community groups are even greater. The development goals of City Hall and the majority of neighborhood groups are so divergent that unless the community development network can participate in the economic development process, Newark residents can rightly fear as Newark Councilwoman Mamie Bridgeforth did that "residents of this city twenty years from now will not even know that we were here."