



**Transit Oriented Community Development:
A Model for Disadvantaged Communities
Regional Plan Association**

Community Action Grant FY06-Round 1
Final Report
January 25, 2006 – March 30, 2007

March, 30 2007

Grant Overview

The project, “*Transit-Oriented Community Development: A Model for Disadvantaged Communities*,” is a New York City initiative that has expanded the transit-oriented community development model that RPA has developed over the last decade. This model has been recently profiled in the Funders Network publication, “Signs of Promise. Advancing Regional Equity and Smart Growth in Practice: Promising Philanthropic Initiatives.”

RPA has undertaken a visioning exercise that approaches growth as positive change in a disadvantaged, low-income or “new immigrant” neighborhood. The project seeks to relate transit infrastructure to the changing neighborhoods beyond the Manhattan Central Business District that are served by subways and commuter rails. The project has shown the effectiveness of community-based regionalism by connecting transit investment and community revitalization.

Members of the advisory group, that guided the project, include Candace Shafer, Chair ULI Westchester/Fairfield District Council, Victoria W Kahn, Executive Committee Member, ULI New York District Council, John Parkinson, Executive Director, ULI New York District Council, Prof. Vicki Been, Elihu Root Professor of Law and Director, Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy and Samuel Goodman, Bronx Borough President Office.

Project components

With the support of ULI’s 2006 grant and additional funding from the Ford Foundation, RPA has worked over the last year with community organizations in Hunts Point/Longwood in the Bronx on a visioning exercise that portrays growth as positive

change for this low-income neighborhood. The project has shown the effectiveness of community-based regionalism by connecting transit investment and community revitalization.

First, the initiative devised criteria to identify and map both bypassed communities and “new immigrant” neighborhoods that could capitalize on underutilized or new transit stations to create affordable housing and job opportunities. The screening result of this first phase of work identified the Hunts Point Station and its surrounding neighborhoods and potential community partners. This was reported by RPA to ULI Community Action Grants as its interim report of July 31 2006, and is appended to this report as Attachment 1. RPA has worked with local partners there to educate the community about its potential and help it visualize a development that capitalizes on these assets for the benefit of neighborhood residents.

Former commuter rail stations such as Hunts Point in the Metro-North New Haven commuter rail line could provide the catalyst for affordable housing and job opportunities that will be needed to accommodate the continued inflow of new residents who have fueled the labor force in the 1980s and 1990s, and will continue to do so in the coming decades. These areas are also the location of many of the region’s low-income neighborhoods and the home of a large share of the new immigrants who are revitalizing the economy. To develop the urban design and planning framework, RPA undertook the following:

- Established a community advisory group, as RPA has done in East Harlem and other communities, to guide the project.
- Synthesized all of the existing plans and analyzed them in terms of their relationship to the new train station.
- Analyzed development potential near a transit station, including analysis of zoning, land use, housing and commercial demand, local demographics and regional market opportunities.
- Analyzed existing and potential use of transit resources in the study area, including the ridership benefits of the new Metro North service.
- Organized and lead a community briefing workshop to establish neighborhood priorities, and illustrated urban design options that provide the basis for a feasibility analysis of the proposals.
- Completed a report of findings and recommendations.

The results of this second phase of work are appended to this report as Attachment 2. It describes the station transit implications and development impacts, synthesizes active community plans for the area around the station, identifies soft sites for redevelopment and potential reverse-commute labor market potential, and defines an urban design and planning framework to lay the foundation of further work in the community.

Project Status and Milestones

The results of the first phase of work have led to the identification and preliminary work on a demonstration project and found Hunts Point/Longwood in Southern Bronx as the most suitable area in which to focus the second phase of the project. The area has underutilized

subway service and is being considered for a commuter rail station on the Metro-North New Haven line.

The area already has subway access and potential for interim revitalization of vacant and industrial land uses. These conditions lend themselves to interim development and further transit advocacy for the commuter rail station as well as long-term community visioning and planning. Community support for the construction of the rail station has been identified by New York City Transit's Metro-North Railroad and in the draft community development plan for the area. A community partner coalition of area organizations has advised the project goals and process over the last year. Organizations of this coalition include: The Point CDC, Sustainable South Bronx, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice and Pratt Center for Community Development.

Report on Activities and Accomplishments January 25, 2006, to March 30, 2006

The project has finalized the first year as stated above, including phases 1 and 2. The following activities were accomplished with support of the ULI Community Action Grant:

(1) Identified significant transit investment projects: After evaluating the projects included as part of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council's Regional Transportation Plan for 2005-2030, three projects in New York City were identified as potential and significant investments that result in improved transit capacity either with either new tunnels or new stations: East Side Access, Second Avenue Subway Lower Manhattan Phase and New Haven Line Penn Access Study.

(2) Identified potential revitalization areas: The new stations and existing stations that will be impacted by the projects identified in (1) were analyzed with a Geographic Information System (GIS) methodology determining the Census Tracts that lie within 1,320 feet or ¼ mile radius from the station. Census Tracts are the smallest unit of analysis for real estate, demographic and community development analysis as they portray neighborhood-based characteristics and trends as they relate to broad market forces and conditions. As a result, 30 station areas were identified.

(3) Consolidated demographic data for the potential areas: Disadvantaged communities were identified after analysis of the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act database (HMDA), the most relevant and current income determination tool used by the private and government sectors in the reinvestment toward disadvantaged communities. The areas determined in (2) were surveyed with HMDA data and other Census 2000 information on transit use and housing vacancy and RPA-calculated density to characterize the 30 potential demonstration project areas.

(4) Identified preferred community revitalization area: Tabulation of demographic characteristics defined in (3) and examination of the land use and development capacity led to the identification of the area of Hunts Point/Longwood in the South Bronx as the preferred community revitalization area and demonstration site. The real estate characteristics of the area and its potential for revitalization are demonstrated by presence of industrial uses, vacant parcels and parking facilities suitable for community revitalization

efforts. Two other sites (Flushing and Far Rockaway both in Queens) are still being considered as potential areas, but their location, demographics and civic infrastructure have been deemed less robust for our purposes. Other potential areas, such as Jamaica, Chinatown or Long Island City, would be suitable but are not under consideration for a variety of reasons, such as scope and complexity, in the case of Long Island City, lack of development capacity in Chinatown and existing TOD projects in the case of Jamaica.

(5) Potential partner screening and community will: The Hunts Point area in the Bronx has been identified by preliminary studies conducted by Metro-North as a community that favors economic development. This attitude was important in selection of the community for the potential transit stop in the commuter rail network. A community partner coalition of area organizations has advised the project goals and process over the last year. Organizations of this coalition include: The Point CDC, Sustainable South Bronx, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice and Pratt Center for Community Development. This coalition has developed a set of draft recommendations for community development. This document states as a recommendation to “renovate the Hunts Point Station and improve public transportation for workforce.” Other sustainable economic development projects along the waterfront have been identified as well as next steps to continue to build political support for these proposals and secure their funding. In addition, the Bronx Borough President was contacted for guidance and support.

(6) Advisory Group: Members of the advisory group include John Parkinson, Coordinator, ULI NY District Council; Candace Schafer, Chair, ULI Westchester/Fairfield District Council; Vicky Been Director, Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, New York University; and Samuel Goodman, Bronx Borough President Office; as the principal members. The Advisory Groups Advice was instrumental in defining the approach for the work in the selected community. The group suggested a building survey to base the project’s planning analysis; research of the real estate characteristics through New York City’s Automated City Register (ACRIS) and confirmed the usefulness of a labor market analysis to compare the community to the potential labor markets in Westchester and Connecticut. The group also agreed that the goal of the project is to leverage existing transit assets to facilitate redevelopment and economic development for an affordable housing and public realm strategy.

(7) Summarized all of the existing plans: Analyzed currently active plans that have physical components in terms of their relationship to the new train station. This was done by interviewing several community leaders and reviewing an inventory of existing plans. A Summary of these documents across several issues range from the proposal of a reactivated Metro-North Station, waterfront access and streetscaping, housing and economic development, and trucks and brownfields. The result of this exercise is appended to Attachment 3 of this report. A longer report with excerpts for each plan as they refer to the issues mentioned above was handed to the community leaders and organizations and was highly praised for its relevance to the activities of the community. The two documents serve as a snapshot and summary of the current and active plans in the community and contribute to consolidate CBO’s capacity and sharing of goals and objectives.

(8) Analyzed Development Capacity: Potential development near the transit station was characterized by conducting a building survey that identified new construction and soft and

potential development sites. This included analysis of zoning and land use scenarios on which to base the potential capacity for new development in the area around the station in a radius of ½ a mile from the proposed Metro-North Station location. The two scenarios, one under current zoning, and the other with zoning changes from industrial to residential uses of soft and potential development sites, determined that about 2,400 housing units could be built in the area around the station under current zoning, and 3,200 housing units with zoning changes in the same area.

(9) Analyzed Labor Market Demand: Using historical data of Bronx, Westchester, Stamford and New Haven counties, we identified traditionally higher unemployment rate for the Bronx compared to the Metro-North New Haven Line corridor market area. This suggests that the potential accessibility to those markets for residents of the Bronx will be able to connect job seekers in the Bronx with job openings in the Metro-North New Haven Corridor. We determined that the occupational profile of most workers in Hunts Point/Longwood is Medium Skill (5,300 workers) or Low Skill (4,800 workers). The forecast for the labor market areas in the alignment of the Metro-North New Haven Line Corridor market for the next decade pointed to new openings of about 23,200 in Medium Skill Occupations and about 65,600 for Low Skill Occupations, with the remaining 65,800 for opening in the High Skill Occupations. This means that most job opportunities for occupations currently held by residents of the study area will be in the Low Skill jobs such as sales, transportation and health care (is that considered low skill job?) and less in the Medium Skill Occupations such as office, production and construction.

(10) Analyzed Station Transit Impacts: Existing and potential use of transit resources on the study area, including the ridership benefits of the new Metro North service were determined. According to Metro-North the potential peak period routing into Penn Station and construction of new stations requires completion of an ongoing environmental Impact Statement, selection as a preferred alternative, funding, and completion of the LIRR ESA construction. Hunts Point performs as well or better than most other stations with about 1,600 riders forecasted going from Hunts Point Station north –i.e. workers who live in the Bronx and work in Westchester or Connecticut. Existing subway ridership in the Hunts Point station strongly supports a redevelopment strategy based on transit as this station has recovered at 103% its former peak use in the 1960's pointing to latent transit oriented development in the region's urban core. This point is important as subway transit assets can be leveraged for TOD as well and as interim steps to the potential development related to the Metro-North Station.

(10) Organized and lead a community briefing workshop: Established neighborhood priorities, and illustrated urban design options that provide the basis for an urban design and planning framework. This Framework is organized around three areas of interest: access and mobility, open space and cultural resources and land use. This preliminary framework was created by distilling from each of the nineteen plans analyzed those essential recommendations in each of these three categories that are “map-able” – that is, those proposals which have some manifestation in the built environment. The access and mobility synthesis of the existing plans reveals the extent to which the community wants to be connected to the many resources that surround the study area. It also highlights a widely recognized conflict between truck access to the industrial areas and the other forms of pedestrian and bicycle mobility. As with the mobility access analysis, a synthesis of the

existing plans shows that these recommendations are synergistic and add up to a comprehensive open space armature for the open space and cultural resources synthesis. Collectively, the land-use recommendations of the various plans describe a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood, but also reflect the tension between this vision and the desire to reinforce and build on the industrial base.

(11) Completed a report of findings and recommendations: The work of activities 1 through 10 is presented in a report titled “Hunts Point Station Development Framework” that showcases the conclusions of the work of the grant over the past year. This report can be found as Attachment 3 to this final report on activities.

Potential Next Steps

To build on the success of our first year, the project will develop specific recommendations for both affordable housing and public realm strategies in connection to the proposed station. Proposed project second year components are the following:

- Continue staffing the community advisory group and engage more stakeholders that represent the economic development community in the area to guide and discuss project outcomes and interim findings of the demonstration project;
- Based on the preliminary identification of infill opportunities in year 1 conduct a market analysis for affordable housing in the study area especially as potential development relates to the transit station, contained in the ½ mile radius from the station including the Hunts Point/Longwood neighborhoods;
- Develop public realm and streetscape strategies to seam the neighborhoods of Longwood and Hunts Point through the proposed station as a connector between both areas, currently separated by the Bruckner Boulevard;
- Complete a second year report of findings and recommendations

Financial Report

Project expenses of \$40,000 through March 30 2007 are detailed in Attachment 4.

Appendices

- Appendix 1. First Phase Report
- Appendix 2. Second Phase Report
- Appendix 3. Final Report
- Appendix 4. RPA Budget for ULI Community Action Grant FY06-Round 1 (Budget to Actual Report)