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## The Massachusetts Community Development Innovation Forum

### Phase 2

**Introduction:** In June 2008, MACDC, LISC and other community development stakeholders in Massachusetts launched the Community Development Innovation Forum for the purpose of examining how well the community development field is performing, to look deeply at the challenges facing the field, and to think about how we can be more effective in creating healthy communities. While the Forum was established before the economic collapse in the fall of 2008, it also quickly stepped up to address some of the immediate issues created by that crisis. For ten months, a number of working groups tackled a variety of issues and opportunities facing the field and developed a series of recommendations for additional work. In April 2009, Phase 1 of the Forum was brought to a conclusion and a report on the Phase 1 work is now available at [www.macdc.org](http://www.macdc.org) and at [www.lisc.org/boston](http://www.lisc.org/boston). MACDC and LISC are now planning to continue this effort in Phase 2.

**Innovation Forum -- Phase 2:** We believe that Phase 2 should be structured so that it help advance the recommendations developed during Phase 1, foster new ideas and projects that are still emerging, and provide a broader forum for identifying, celebrating and supporting innovative efforts at all levels within the system. We do not think the Forum itself needs to control or manage all of these projects, nor should we try to facilitate a consensus on every idea. We expect Phase 2 to run from July 1 through June 30, 2010. During phase 2, we will expand the steering committee to about 7 – 10 members. The steering committee will manage this project and look for other ways to promote innovation in the field (awards, publications, etc.) and establish an on-going mechanism for promoting innovation at the conclusion of Phase II (approximately June 30, 2010.) While the steering committee will not have oversight of individual projects (see below,) it will help to ensure that the projects are moving forward, help recruit people to join working groups and committees, identify and foster linkages among the groups, identify new project opportunities, oversee the quarterly “forums” described below, and distribute information about the work being done.

During Phase 2, the Forum will therefore consist of the following elements:

**We will Support Multiple Innovation Projects:** Several projects and efforts have emerged from Phase 1 and we should support efforts to advance those projects over the coming year. However, we believe that each project must sustain its own initiative, secure its own funding and manage itself going forward. At least one organization and one person must be prepared to take responsibility to advance these efforts. The Forum would give those projects a platform for promoting their ideas and recruiting others to participate. The Forum could also connect these project sponsors to

resources – financial and others. The projects that are already underway or contemplated are listed below with the lead agency identified.

1. **Supporting Comprehensive Community Building – Project #1: A CDC Practice Group (MACDC)** - This group met on June 3 to get started and will be working over the summer to plan one or two sessions in the fall for CDCs doing this work to discuss particular issues or challenges. The group will also be a forum for discussing emerging opportunities for working with other sectors and initiatives that support broad community building efforts. The group will also be developing a proposal for community building training to be undertaken by the Mel King Institute. MACDC's Sr. Organizer Pam Bender will staff the group. We are still recruiting chairs to lead the effort.
2. **Supporting Comprehensive Community Building – Project #2: Developing a Comprehensive Community Building model for Transit Oriented Development (LISC)**- LISC is exploring with the Fairmount Collaborative and with other community development corporations how transit oriented development visions can be deepened to embrace a comprehensive community building approach. LISC is also working to encourage a dialogue between others interested in comprehensive place based strategies and those in the community development field that have been or are pursuing a comprehensive agenda. LISC has committed \$50,000 to begin this work.
3. **Telling our story – A project to improve our communications strategy (MACDC)** - MACDC is interested in hiring Action Media to conduct training for community developers on how to more effectively talk about our work and garner support at the local, state and federal level. This project will require substantial funding to fully implement, but will start with a short workshop on September 17 to determine whether there is substantial interest across the sector. MACDC will take the lead on this issue.
4. **Promoting Collaboration - Project #1: Shared Development Entity (MHP)** - MHP has hired VIVA consulting to conduct a business analysis to determine the feasibility of a shared real estate development entity that several CDCs could own/manage. MHP has convened an advisory committee to oversee the project.
5. **Promoting Collaboration - Project #2: Research report on models of long term collaborations and mergers (New Sector Alliance/LISC)** - New Sector Alliance has agreed to conduct research and produce a report on models for deeper collaboration, strategic integrations and mergers. They have assembled a terrific team of pro bono professionals and graduate school students to work on this assignment.
6. **Promoting Collaboration - Project #3: Establish a Collaboration Practice Group:** Several CDCs have indicated an interest in forming a practice group to enable those CDCs considering major strategic partnerships to learn from each other and share information. We still need an organization to step forward and staff this group and recruit participants. We think that perhaps New Sector could convene one meeting over the summer to explore whether there is interest in pursuing this and to discuss how that would happen.
7. **Improving CDC Financial Health – Project #1: Research Report on the health of the sector (LISC)** - LISC, tBf and NFF are conducting a study on the financial health of the sector that will inform our thinking on how we can help CDCs be more financially

sustainable, what strategic realignments are needed to assist some/many CDCs that comprise the sector to achieve greater sustainability, and what policy changes may be needed to support these gains in sustainability and impact.

8. **Improving CDC Financial Health – Project #2: Convening stakeholders (LISC & MACDC)** - MACDC and LISC have convened a stakeholder group of community development leaders who are working collaboratively to help CDCs manage the current economic crisis and identify strategies for long term sustainability. This group should continue to meet periodically to coordinate our individual and collective efforts in this arena.
9. **Improving CDC Financial Health – Project #3: Implementing policy reforms in the real estate finance system (LISC)** - The Real estate working group identified several policy reforms that could strengthen the sector. We need to decide how we advance those ideas given that there are many potential “homes” for this work – the MACDC Boston Committee, the CHAPA multi-family committee, the Stakeholders Group referenced above, the MACDC Housing Peer Group, etc. This question is not yet resolved and we welcome input. In the meantime, LISC and MACDC will try to keep pushing the issue forward through various avenues.

**We Will Host Four Innovation Forums:** We propose 4 larger group forums over the course of the year in July, November, January, and April. Each Forum would be for 3-4 hours and include:

1. Updates reports from those project teams that want to share their results and/or get input and feedback
2. Presentations from individuals or groups who are engaged in an innovative projects that they want to share with the broader community; and
3. A panel, presentation or workshop on a particularly “hot” topic. The Committee has developed the following schedule as an initial thought about how to proceed. However, the specific topics can be adjusted as appropriate.
  - i. September 17, 2009 – Communications strategies with Action Media
  - ii. November/December – Health of the Sector – report, discussion, action steps
  - iii. March – Innovative efforts where CDCs are pursuing strategies that link community development and environmental sustainability.
  - iv. June – Collaboration/Mergers

**We will maintain up-to-date innovation web sites:** MACDC or LISC will establish an Innovation Site on their web sites where we can post articles, reports, and profiles about innovation in the field. We will also link to other innovation sources.

**We will participate in the national dialogue** – The economic crisis has prompted a growing dialogue nationally about the community development sector. MACDC and LISC participated in a National Summit in June 2009 in Washington DC with other leaders from around the country and will remain active in this discussion. This process may result in proposals for changes in federal policy and new support programs for the community development sector.