

Testimony

By

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The Coalition for a Better Acre**

Before the

Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Business

June 1, 2011

In support of

The Community Development Partnership Act (H.988 and S.1427)

Good Morning Good morning Chairwoman Dorcena Forry, Chairman DiDomenico and members of the Committee My name is Emily Rosenbaum and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for a Better Acre in Lowell and I am here to testify in support of House 988 and Senate 1427, the Community Development Partnership Act.

The Coalition for a Better Acre (CBA) is a membership based community development corporation dedicated to resident empowerment and sustainable community revitalization for current and future residents of Lowell. We promote healthy, vibrant neighborhoods by developing resident leaders, affordable housing and economic opportunities, and by responding to community needs through collective action.

CBA has been actively involved in the development of affordable housing and commercial development for the past 28 years. In that time, the agency has been responsible for the development of 402 residential rental units, 50 homeownership units, plus retail, office, community center, and light industrial space.

At our Home Preservation Center we partner with our local cap agency, Community Teamwork Inc., to provide foreclosure education workshops, one-on-one foreclosure prevention counseling, budget counseling, post purchase education and access to additional resources to keep people in

their homes. We assist over 300 families annually at the Home Preservation Center and have a more than 65% success rate with helping counseled families avoid foreclosure.

Through our 28 year history, CBA has made a real difference in the City of Lowell by joining together two powerful elements: community economic development and resident empowerment. CBA's Community Organizing Program provides leadership training and empowers residents to take hold of their futures and the future of their neighborhoods. CBA's community organizers also work closely with real estate development staff to ensure that these two crucial functions support each other and result in tangible outcomes for community residents.

On recent example of this work that has proven very successful is the Unity Place Apartments. CBA's Unity Place Apartments involves the redevelopment of two troubled properties as a new 23-unit apartment building. These properties had passed through numerous ownerships and foreclosures through the years, finally culminating in condemnation and a place on the City of Lowell's "Troubled and Abandoned Property List." With the help of CBA organizers, resident leaders at CBA identified these properties as priority properties for redevelopment and CBA Real Estate staff spent years pursuing them to acquire them. Most private developers would not have the patience nor the appetite to pursue troubled properties in this way. As a non-profit community developer, we target the most troubled properties so that other investors can come in afterwards and which creates a win, win, win (for the neighborhood, city and private investors who follow us.) CBA acquired the approximately 17,000 square foot parcel in May 2009 – after setting its sights on it in 2005 - and subsequently demolished the two existing structures. Today, in their place, CBA is developing a 4-story elevator building, incorporating the latest in energy and water-conservation measures.

Redeveloping this property is part of a comprehensive redevelopment of the Upper Merrimack Neighborhood that CBA in partnership with private and public funders has undertaken over the past decade, bringing in over \$50 million in investment to the neighborhood through these efforts. CBA's long term investment in the neighborhood is paying off, as a private developer subsequently acquired a 12-unit property adjacent to the site where he invested nearly \$1M in rehabilitation. Likewise, the shuttered, former Catholic Church on the next block - Nuestra Senora Del Carmen - was also acquired by a private developer who is redeveloping the Church with rental apartments and

performance and event space. Further investment is expected once the new University Avenue Bridge opens in 2012, which will redirect traffic onto Merrimack Street, a block away, providing the primary connection between UMass Lowell and the Downtown.

As you can see, our work addresses many of the different issues facing community. The flexibility of the funding we will be able to leverage through *The Community Development Partnership Act* will allow us to continue addressing the needs of Lowell through our different programs.

I urge you to report this bill out favorable and help CBA expand on the work that we excel in: bringing together local stakeholders to build family and community assets.

Thank you for your support and for your leadership.