

Journal of Community Power Building

**Reflections from Community Development
Leaders and Practitioners**

Injustice anywhere is a threat
to justice everywhere.
~ Martin Luther King Jr.

Ricanne Hadriane Initiative for Community Organizing

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The Journal of Community Power Building is an exploration of power building among community development corporations (CDCs) and their leaders, working to achieve significant change in urban and rural communities throughout Massachusetts. In the first volume of the *Power Journal*, contributors were asked to explore fears and ambivalence about power in the move toward community change. In this second volume, we ask people from the community development field—leaders, organizers, as well as other staff members—to define *justice*, and describe how it informs the work they do. What role do CDCs play in the pursuit of justice? In the call for papers, we presented the following questions:

- Do people with various backgrounds, nationalities or cultures see justice differently? How has your own experience of justice shaped the way you approach your work (as an executive director, organizer, volunteer leader, etc.)? Can individual understanding of justice clash with the way CDCs use justice to guide their work?
- How are CDCs (or your CDC specifically) striving for justice in your community? What initiatives have you undertaken in your CDC to make you think that CDCs foster justice? Are CDCs part of a broad “justice movement”? Is their ability to strive for or achieve justice limited by their nature or structure in their?
- How do we know if CDCs are effective in their work toward justice? In what ways do CDCs measure how they are able to achieve justice?
- Tell us a story of a person or event connected to your CDC work that illustrates an aspect of justice.

The responses to this call for papers indicate that people generally share compatible definitions of justice: Francisco Ditrén emphasizes the distribution of resources to those who have had less; André Leroux discusses equal access to information, education, and tools; Chong Y. Chow’s piece illustrates the importance of making sure the traditionally disenfranchised are heard; and Kevin Ksen focuses on the importance of giving decision making responsibility to people in the community. All of these examples demonstrate intentional action to put power into the hands of people who have less.

All of the authors tell very different stories about how they came to understand justice and why its pursuit plays an important role in their lives or their work; and yet a thread weaves through many of the pieces. For several of the authors, the pursuit of justice arises in response to appalling injustice. This may be an individual experience, such as Tamara Daly’s confrontation with discrimination in her search for housing; or the collective experience of injustice as experienced under oppressive political regimes in different parts of the world: Haiti, the Dominican Republic, China, Puerto Rico; etc. As an

example, Ditrén explains, “The politics of repression (in the Dominican Republic)...gave rise to the Revolution and then the emergence of a new civil society, populated by organizations that sought to create new spaces in the struggle for social justice.” The relating of global experiences helps deepen our universal understanding of justice, tying local struggles to those across the world.

Another important factor in shaping an understanding of justice is the example of leaders and mentors whose faithful approach to fighting for justice inspires and motivates others. We see this in Tito Meza’s poem about Ada Palmarin, and in Yvette Verdieu’s vivid description of her mother.

Coming to understand and fight for justice is one thing; turning this understanding into an effective plan of action is quite another.

Coming to understand and fight for justice is one thing; turning this understanding into an effective plan of action is quite another. We hear repeatedly from the authors that the most important building block toward justice is making sure that people have a voice, with explicit mechanisms in place for people to share decision-making power. Leroux, and co-authors Ditrén and Leavy-Sperounis illuminate the value of people educating themselves on relevant topics, whether it be financial management or local policy, as a way

to gain power and be better equipped as decision makers. This in and of itself is a form of justice, as more people become decision makers and leaders. But broad participation also ensures a more systemic level of justice as the decisions made by these players result in more equitable distribution of resources and education, and in social policies that benefit the disenfranchised.

Several authors speak of the importance of “sharing the struggle” to effectively reach desired outcomes. Leroux outlines LCW’s approach to establishing partnerships in a planning process that emphasizes collaborative vision instead of marking differences. With everyone at the table, an end result of a shared plan will more likely represent everyone’s interests. People are more effective when they work together toward a desired goal as they are able to build power. And the sense of solidarity and community support fuels the motivation and hope necessary to drive the continued fight for justice. Meza gets to the heart of this sentiment in his poem to Ada: “We will remember your home, always open to those who defended and still defend the path to freedom.”

As people equip themselves with educational resources, a shared understanding and a sense of solidarity between individuals, they are more prepared to step outside practices in society that promote injustice and are better able to

creatively assert new methods and means for shaping decisions that lead to justice. Daly describes this well: “A system that condones and accepts without question the building and availability of only market driven, high priced housing that is out of reach to the majority of people...is injustice. And we should be outraged. And we should allow this righteous anger to propel us into action on behalf of justice.”

These pieces give important insight for what factors motivate and strengthen people’s efforts in their pursuit of justice: firsthand experiences of injustice; exposure to leaders and mentors with strong convictions; the importance of becoming educated on relevant issues that will give people more power; and a sense of solidarity and shared struggle, both locally and globally.

For those of us in the field of community development, part of this discussion has to be about the role of CDCs. In theory, CDCs have the potential to be an important conduit between people and their pursuit of justice. The authors both support and challenge this notion. They talk about CDCs as the place where people and groups can come together; where people can learn and become leaders; and the place from which activism can spring. Leroux describes Lawrence CommunityWorks’ role in bringing seemingly disparate groups together in a planning process. Daly talks about how Allston-Brighton CDC’s Community Conversations led to a Community Summit which that spawned action groups. Ditrén likens LCW to the unions, workers’ cooperatives, and NGOs in the Dominican Republic that were vital in bringing about revolution.

Ideally, these authors say, the role of CDCs in pursuing justice goes beyond simply bringing people together—as residents enter into conversations and develop relationships, it is the role of the CDC to move those conversations to action and help participants gain the skills and strength they need to make real change.

Ksen implores CDCs to make change only if real needs and preferences in the community are reflected through resident-driven leadership. He doesn’t lay out what he thinks justice should look like, but puts that vision in the hands of the community itself. Others are explicit about what justice can look like: redistribution of resources will be the result of LCW’s work to demystify the City budget, say Ditrén and Leavy-Sperounis. Planning processes that include organized resident groups in a central way, such as LCW’s Reviviendo Gateway Initiative, will reflect social justice values and will result in greater equity, says Leroux.

All of the pieces in this *Power Journal* push us to make it real. They challenge CDCs to go beyond token representation. They urge us not to set our sights low, not to be content with incremental victories unless they are part of a

larger vision for change. The writers who are resident leaders remind those of us who work within CDCs that real lives and real communities are at stake. Some of us may at times be afraid to frame these struggles in the context of political change, but Francisco Ditrén and Ada Palmarin, through Tito Meza’s poem, were not afraid to talk about revolution and redistribution of wealth.

These writers are honest about the challenges all of us within CDCs —staff, board, leaders—face as we pursue justice for and with our communities.

Sometimes our challenges are internal. CDCs are institutions, and like other institutions they can develop a culture of resistance to change even as they push for change; internalized racism, classicism, and sexism can get in the way. Sometimes staff and board members are too ready to believe that only “professionals” can run CDCs appropriately or truly get things done. The trick is for leaders to use experts to inform decisions, not the other way around, and for residents to become educated about technical issues.

Throughout the *Power Journal*, the authors demonstrate resiliency and long-term vision. Through our very struggles we find our strength and power. Chong’s description of their efforts in Chinatown nods to this: “There will likely be a lot of failures on the way to achieving our goals. However, each success we gain, no matter how small, is invaluable...Great successes (in history) were built from humble beginnings.” Strength and power come from learning from mistakes, building trust, and using the hard periods to build deeper relationships.

As the editors, we are left with questions that we challenge you to consider as readers: Is community participation in and of itself a form of justice? Does community involvement or a well-thought-out planning process always result in justice? Who arbitrates justice between the various disenfranchised groups that see justice differently?

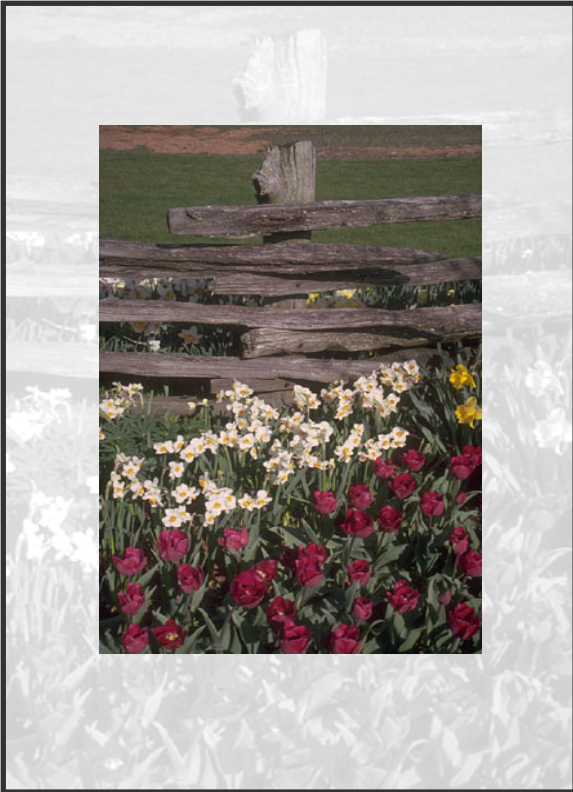
In closing, we are excited to share with you this thoughtful and provocative volume of perspectives, anecdotes, and personal histories that, undoubtedly, will shed light on how intrinsically important this notion of justice is to each of these authors. The challenges and insights they present call the community development field to examine its role in the far-reaching pursuit of justice.

Laura Buxbaum
Coalition for a Better Acre

Meridith Levy
Somerville Community
Corporation

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Ada Fue Luz y Esperanza Para Su Gente

Por Tito Meza

Ada mi amiga, nuestra amiga
Vecina de puertas abiertas
Con el corazón más grande
Que la Montaña del Yunque

Te recordamos, siempre
Lista para marchar
Siempre valiente
Siempre abrazando la causa de lo justo
La causa de lo bello, la causa libertaria

Recordamos tu casa, siempre abierta
Para los que defendieron y defienden
El sendero libertario
Para los hermanos de la Villa
Para los socialistas
Para los compañeros que como tu
Abrieron vereda para seguir la marcha

Te recordamos en las protestas
En las tertulias, en los festejos
En el corazón de la Villa Victoria

Ada, tu fuiste rayo de luz
Para los que luchan por el cambio
Tu voz siempre en alto, Junto a Jorge
Recorriendo el sendero, de lo justo
Apoyando a Lolita, Cancel Miranda y tantos otros
Hombres y mujeres que han levantado tu misma bandera

Te recordamos, llevando tu voz en las protestas
Cantando aguinaldos de casa en casa, las canciones
De tu pueblo que tanto quisiste

El día que partisteis, tus vecinos estaban contigo
Querían decirte tantas cosas
Te tocaban y de sus rostros derramaban
Lagrimas de amor por ti
Pushka tu hijo, acongojado en la esquina lloraba, lo ataba la ansiedad
Jorge hablaba con orgullo de quien le dio el amor
Y el ejemplo a seguir

Cuando Ada partió, llevaba su alma envuelta con una bandera
Iluminada por una estrella
También llevaba una flor de Flamboyán

Por mucho tiempo, Ada Palmarín fue activista social y líder en la lucha de inquilinos. Murió en noviembre de 2004 a la edad de 51 años. Nacida en Puerto Rico, de niña se mudó junto a su familia al South End en Boston. Su obituario en el *Boston Globe* describe sus primeros indicios de activismo: “El año era 1968 y ‘ No nos mudaremos de la Parcela 19’ era el grito de guerra que sonaba en el South End mientras los residentes luchaban en contra de los esfuerzos para derrumbar sus hogares y construir viviendas de alto costo. Ada solo contaba con 13 años cuando ella comenzó pasando prospectos motivando a los vecinos a expresar sus preocupaciones en las reuniones de la Autoridad de Redesarrollo de Boston.” El resultado de este esfuerzo organizativo fue Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), una CDC que salió de la exitosa lucha por la preservación de la Parcela 19, y Villa Victoria, la comunidad de 884 unidades desarrollada por IBA. A lo largo de toda su vida, Ada se unió a otros residentes y activistas del South End y ayudó a promover vivienda asequible para los residentes de Villa Victoria, donde vivió toda su vida adulta. Ada dedicó un gran cantidad de su tiempo a la lucha por la justicia. Ella apoyaba el movimiento de autodeterminación de Puerto Rico y fue miembro del Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño. Era la madre de Jorge Palmarín y Francisco “Pushka” Palmarín. Dejo una familia extendida en Boston.



Tito Meza emigró de Honduras a los Estados Unidos en 1970. Tito ha dedicado gran parte de su vida a la lucha por la justicia social. En el 1974, se incorporó a las luchas por el cambio social en Chelsea, MA. En los pasados 20 años, Tito ha participado en la lucha por la independencia de Puerto Rico, la lucha por los derechos de los inmigrantes, los derechos laborales y la organización sindical. Tito también tiene gran pasión por la música y la poesía. Estas dos pasiones lo inspiraron a dedicar un poema a su amiga Ada Palmarín.

Ada Was Light and Hope to Her People

By Tito Meza

Ada, my friend, our friend
Neighbor of open doors
With a heart bigger than
El Yunque mountain

We remember you
Ready for the march
Always courageous
Always embracing the just cause
The cause of beauty, the cause of liberty

We remember your home, always open
For those who defended and still defend
The path to freedom
For the brothers from the Villa
For the socialists
For the compañeros who, like you,

Were path breakers in the struggle onward
We remember you in the protests
In the chats, the celebrations
At the heart of Villa Victoria

Ada, you were a ray of light
For those who fight for change
Your voice always present, with Jorge,
Walking the path of justice
Supporting Lolita, Cancel Miranda and many others
Men and women who have raised your same flag

We remember you, raising your voice in the rallies
Singing carols from door to door, the songs
Of your country that you loved so much

The day you left, your neighbors were with you
Wishing to tell you so many things
When they touched you, tears of love
Poured down their faces
Pushka your son, devastated, cried in a corner, tight with anxiety
Jorge his brother spoke with pride of you who gave him love
And the example to follow

When Ada left us, her spirit rose wrapped with a flag
Illuminated by one star
And she held a Flamboyán flower

Ada Palmarin was a long-time tenant leader and social activist who died in November 2004 at the age of 51. Born in Puerto Rico, as a child she moved with her family to the South End of Boston. Her obituary in the Boston Globe describes her early activism: “The year was 1968 and ‘No nos mudaremos de la Parcela 19’ (‘We shall not be moved from Parcel 19’) was the battle cry that rang out in the South End as residents fought efforts to tear down their homes and build high-priced housing. Mrs. Palmarin was only 13 at the time, and she began passing out handbills encouraging neighbors to voice their concerns at Boston Redevelopment Authority meetings.” The result of this organizing effort was Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), a CDC formed out of the successful fight for the preservation of Parcel 19, and Villa Victoria, the 884-unit community developed by IBA. Throughout her life, Ada joined other activists and residents of the South End and helped to promote affordable housing for residents of Villa Victoria, where she lived her entire adult life. Ada dedicated a great deal of her time to fighting for justice. She supported the movement for Puerto Rican self-determination and was a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. She was the mother of Jorge Palmarin and Francisco “Pushka” Palmarin, and she left a large extended family in Boston.



Tito Meza emigrated from Honduras to the United States in 1970. Tito has a passion for social justice to which he has dedicated a large part of his life. In 1974, he became involved in the struggles for social change and democratic rights in the Latino community in Chelsea and beyond. Over the past 20 years Tito’s activism included the fight for the recognition and self-determination of Puerto Rico; immigrant rights; the union movement and labor organizing. He also has a great passion for poetry and music. These two passions inspired him to dedicate a poem to his late friend Ada Palmarin.



Photos: Valerie Seabrook

Empowering Community in Allston-Brighton

By Tamara Daly

Justice is really about the balance of power. I believe that the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation (ABCDC) is doing social justice work by empowering community members through the cultivation of civic engagement and grassroots democracy. Empowerment, involvement, and social responsibility lead to justice as people gain their voices to advocate for their own interests, creating visibility for the underrepresented and disempowered or disenfranchised. The organizing efforts of CDCs help to develop leadership skills among people from all walks of life, empowering them to speak for and represent their own issues, needs and perspectives. I am and have been one of those people.

I became actively involved with the Allston-Brighton CDC about five years ago, when my family was being forced to move from our affordable apartment. Our landlord had died, and his family had to settle the estate and was selling the house. Mind you this was tough enough, as we were looking for an apartment in a very heated rental market. But it was even more distressing as this was only months after my husband and I had *both* battled cancer, had filed bankruptcy and were slowly picking up the pieces of a normal life. We were facing the fact that we needed to more than double our rent with the rates being what they were. (I had gone back to work only part-time after my cancer, but this was not going to be an option any more.)

We had about six months to look, so I was systematic about it. I contacted real estate agents and kept lists of what was available and at what prices. Some trends began to emerge. First, none of the agents ever called me back. I started to hear the same things, that landlords wanted three incomes for a three bedroom apartment; that landlords didn't want children. My kids were above the age where lead paint was a legal issue, so I wasn't sure what the problem was. One landlord met my husband and me but when we mentioned we had kids, she increased the asking price by \$100/mo because, "children use so much water." (She hadn't seemed to mind the grown-up kids, the college students that had been living there, leaving their beer cans littered all over the apartment the day we visited it.) One agent had to cancel our appointment to look at what seemed a promising apartment, in a reasonable price range, in the neighborhood we lived in, because when the landlord was told that a family wanted to move in, he actually threatened the realtor, that he would never list with them again if they forced him to show his place to a family! The realtor was sort of sheepish, "You really wouldn't want him as a landlord if he feels that way" was what he said.

I started to notice other problems as well. Realtors were pushing us to look at apartments in buildings that looked like tenements, or alternately telling us that what we really wanted to do was to buy, which we couldn't do after all we had

just gone through. Then there were the “three bedroom apartments” that *only* had three rooms, a bathroom and a kitchen, basically converted into three bedrooms in order to reap the highest possible rent, and probably only attractive to students, who didn’t mind dorm-style living. It finally dawned on me that we were being discriminated against because we were a family.

I haven’t thought of the work I’ve done with ABCDC since those events transpired in terms of “justice work,” but it was the injustice I experienced that activated me through my righteous anger. If this happened to me, and my white middle-class family, what was happening to families of color? How much worse was it for families living closer to poverty, or led by single parents? What happened to make families with children second-class citizens? Had the value of the dollar taken precedence over the values of justice and equality? Was money really the only power, or could a dedicated group of people tip the balance of power through their group voice?

My involvement with my local CDC began as I started to work with them around affordable housing issues. I began by telling my story. I was invited by ABCDC to speak to the community at the annual state of the city meeting held by the Allston-Brighton Healthy Boston Coalition. I was asked to attend a MACDC meeting in the state house and speak with legislators. I was asked to speak to local TV stations. I spoke to Mayor Menino at one of his coffee get-togethers in our neighborhood. I was impressed because he remembered my story, and I heard him repeat it many times over the next couple of years when he spoke publicly about the local housing crisis.

I began to realize that my story wasn’t just about the problem of the lack of affordable housing. I couldn’t understand how families could be discriminated against; they are supposed to be the fabric of a community. It began to dawn on me that it was just this, *the fabric of the community* that needed mending--the lack of affordable housing was more a symptom of the broken fabric. This was evidence of a larger problem, a social, economic and political problem. The forces that see property as a means of financial gain were overpowering the forces that hold a community together, in relationship. Housing was eyed for profit, not seen as homes for friends, neighbors and families. I started seeing this problem in terms of the needs of a healthy community. We needed to grow community and build a stronger community in order to save it.

So in 2002, when Ava (one of ABCDC’s organizers) sent me an email asking if there wasn’t some way to get the community more involved, we started a dialogue that sparked into the creation of the Community Conversations. We designed that series of talks after we asked ourselves some questions like -- What’s of value to us as a community? How does any community, or any American citizen, get more involved with creating the society that reflects their values? How do we solve the problems that face us, on the local, state and national level?

We realized that people were having these conversations over their back yard fences and over coffee, and at work, but that so often these conversations were expressions of frustration and complaint. People were left dispirited, discouraged and disempowered. We wondered if there just weren't any real avenues for engaging people in a meaningful and productive manner.

I remembered when my children's school was asking parents these same questions. But in what way was I being invited to get involved? There had to be something more engaging and meaningful to me than helping with a bake sale! Perhaps more parents would become engaged if they felt their actions really contributed to something positive. People didn't want to prop up the tired

status quo. Maybe this was partly why so many appeared apathetic toward their children's school, or toward their community, for that matter.

We set out to engage the community in a meaningful process that would lead to real change, empower people and build community at the same time.

When we designed the Community Conversations series we planned the meetings on Friday nights, as an alternative night out, and made them relaxed and fun. We held it as a pot luck, (I brought my spinach lasagna each time!) and we played interactive games. We set out to engage the

community in a meaningful process that would lead to real change, empower people and build community at the same time. We started this process by simply listening to people. We let them set the agenda for the whole series by the topics and concerns that they brought to the table on the first night. We wanted to empower people by giving them a chance to voice their views in order to allow people to feel that they could make a difference. Then to validate their power and their voice, we took their ideas and worked together to build an agenda based on what the people cared about, not on any pre-existing agenda within ABCDC.

The topics people chose as most important were: education, housing, open space/green space, community growth/ institutional expansion, and economic stability. We planned that these Community Conversations would provide for the planning and lead up to a Community Summit.

The ideas, questions, and problems as defined by the group process were brought to the Community Summit in October 2003. We held the Summit in a local Catholic high school's auditorium and cafeteria. We had an interactive gallery set up on each topic area, and people mingled and talked about these displays, over coffee and donuts. We gathered everyone together for the first half of the day, and then, after lunch in the cafeteria, where people continued to mingle and talk, people were invited to take part in break-out groups on each topic area.

The Summit was also an effort to broaden the range of support from that of single individuals to participation by other community groups. This was very successful as a long list of active community organizations co-sponsored and participated in the Summit. We were working to build community cohesion, to build *a sense of community itself*. If we as a community were going to solve our problems and better still, to create a community aligned to our values and highest vision, we needed to cooperate and work together.

Since the summit, members with common goals worked in different “action groups” towards defining some initial steps.

The dynamic that requires community engagement is the necessity to build democratic process into our culture at a grassroots level.

At the Community Summit Report Back in March 2004, these action groups brought their ideas to the public again, for a democratic process to narrow those ideas to the “most important, most winnable” actions in each action group. This time we met in the community room at our local hospital. It was an evening meeting, and again food was served, and we broke out into groups to address each topic. We then collectively brought the results back to the whole group.

Again, it was the creativity and the lively interaction amongst community members that made the event rewarding.

This process of community organizing, community power building, building a *sense of community itself with its own voice* has continued and is flourishing. The Green Space group in particular seems to be cultivating civic engagement on larger issues; park clean up volunteers are now working on the next phase of the Summit process. It appears that an avenue for engagement that makes a difference has been seized upon.

The dynamic that requires community engagement is the necessity to build democratic process into our culture at a grassroots level. We’re supposed to be a country where we have “liberty and justice for all.” We are a democracy with these constitutionally defended rights. But our history does not prove that these rights are automatically enforced. People have had to fight and to speak up and make their rights an issue, so that they are recognized, affirmed and defended. We have always needed to speak up, to have our voices heard. Our democratic elections and elected officials have not always guaranteed that our rights were addressed. Many feel like they have no choices and no voice in the issues that affect them. They may complain, but they don’t know how or even if they can make a difference. They feel disempowered. This is where the ABCDC organizing efforts make a difference in the balance of power and social justice.

Out of injustice democracy was born, but apparently democracy needs nurturing. How do we cultivate social justice and equal access to the basic needs? Are laws upon laws necessary to prop up an ideal that we already supposedly support? We have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but we construe that independence, that liberty, to be an individual thing, so that “my happiness is more important than your happiness.” This ideal so easily becomes warped in this manner. Independence (vs. dependence), is misconstrued as individualism, and achievement of the American Dream is often pictured as the financial success of the competitive individual, *dependent on no one*. But with rights come responsibilities. Americans aren’t as keen on their responsibilities as citizens as they are on their rights. We need to remember that we aren’t so free as to trample on the rights of others--that’s wrong!

The right to profit from property is held sacred. We invest in our homes. But historically wealthy landowners were typically the “bad guys,” and the ones responsible for injustice. They were the Barons, the Kings, etc. and the very fact that they owned that which was necessary to life and well-being put them in a place of power, and extracting a price for it increased the imbalance of power. We are somehow finding ourselves in a similar situation here in this free, democratic country. When investment in property puts this imbalance back in place, then the very freedom we cherish is put at risk. Wealth has become the new dictator of freedom. We live under the tyranny of the marketplace. There are no checks and balances, providing a caring sense of responsibility to the community, and to the individuals within the community whose lives and well being depend on basics such as shelter, which is housing.

A system that condones and accepts without question the building and availability of only market-driven, high-priced housing that is out of reach to the majority of people implies to its people, “Let them eat cake.” This is injustice. And we should be outraged. And we should allow this righteous anger to propel us into action on behalf of justice.

Lack of affordable housing isn’t so much the problem as the symptom of a community that is not strong enough to show that it cares. Disempowered people don’t know how to effectively channel their outrage, but empowered people can. We do live in a democracy, and it is in the power of our collective voices that we can ensure justice. Community building---creating a neighborhood of caring committed people who work together, communicate their issues and take action on them, and builds power, this power then can counter balance the tyranny of the marketplace. When we have a strong and healthy community that has a voice, it speaks up for its needs.

One of the rewards of my own work with ABCDC was that my opportunity to be a voice and organize within my community built leadership skills, personal confidence and a sense that I had something to offer and could make a difference. I have come to the understanding that this is part of my

responsibility as an individual who enjoys freedom; this freedom is to be worked at, and all of us can enjoy it equally. And the amazing thing is that this empowering of the individual is actually contagious, and that this is the stuff of democracy and the essence of social justice.



Tamara Daly is a 20-year resident of Allston-Brighton who has been active in housing, parks, and open-space issues with Allston-Brighton CDC for more than eight years and is a member of its board of directors. This fall, she will combine her experience as a community activist and a psychiatric nurse and pursue a master's degree in public health policy at Boston University. Tamara, her husband, Steve, and their children, Christopher and Taylor, currently live in Brighton.

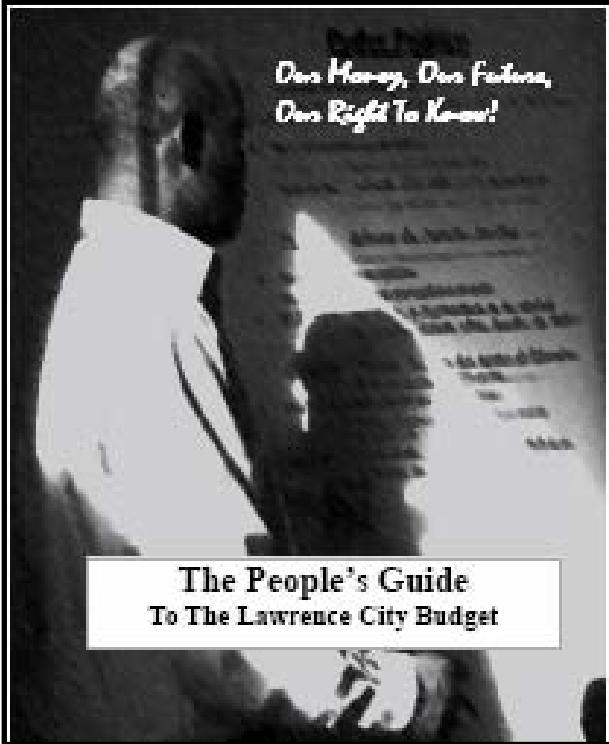


Image: Lawrence CommunityWorks

Mecanismos de la justicia distributiva: De la revolución al presupuesto de la ciudad

By Francisco Ditrén with Marianna Leavy-Sperounis

Hay un país en el mundo

*Hay un país en el mundo, colocado en el mismo trayecto del sol ...
– Pedro Mir, Poeta nacional de la República Dominicana*

Salgo por las mañanas, a suplicar trabajo.

¡Que me den lo que sea!

Un jornal miserable.

Y en to'a parte lo mismo

Una cara muy larga ... y un

Tenga usted paciencia.

*– Verso de un poema gaucho argentino,
Autor desconocido, invierno del 1940*

Apenas cumplidos sus primeros siete meses de ejercicio, había sido derrocado por fuerzas retrógradas, apoyadas por el gobierno norteamericano, el primer gobierno democrático de la República Dominicana que dio al país una constitución que garantizaba los derechos civiles, la soberanía nacional y las libertades públicas.

La nación dominicana, en búsqueda de consolidar su vida republicana y democrática después de 30 años de tiranía, eligió en 1962 un presidente, el Profesor Juan Bosch, fundador del Partido Revolucionario Dominicano y líder de los dominicanos en exilio. Antes habíamos vivido una dictadura y después una mascarada: una caricatura de democracia representativa, que en realidad era una semi-dictadura ilustrada, que corrompía arriba y golpeaba abajo, profundizando la división social entre los oligarcas y terratenientes que se hacían millonarios y la inmensa mayoría del pueblo humillado, explotado y burlado.

A temprana edad, había sido arrancado del seno familiar e integrado al servicio militar obligatorio. Ubicado en la Policía, era testigo mudo de persecuciones, atropellos y actos de injusticia contra estudiantes y obreros por protestar y reclamar libertad y justicia social. Sumido en la impotencia, mi frustración se fue tornando en rebeldía.

Mi conciencia estaba al lado de la justicia, las reivindicaciones y las libertades plenas con la lucha de los estudiantes, los trabajadores, los campesinos y los militares honestos. Cuando la Revolución por la vuelta a la constitucionalidad empezó el 24 de abril de 1965, me puse a su servicio.

Nuestra lucha por la libertad y contra el estado de corrupción se convirtió en

guerra patria al producirse la invasión de tropas de los Estados Unidos que intentaban castrar la culminación de una gesta histórica del pueblo dominicano. Luego de un año de invasión, en 1966, las fuerzas estadounidenses forzaron elecciones y en una lucha desigual, Juan Bosch, que nos había dirigido en los 7 meses breves de democracia, "perdió" ante Joaquín Balaguer, cerebro de la maquinaria política del dictador Trujillo y patrocinado por el sector reaccionario del gobierno norteamericano. Esto nos costó 12 años de una semi-dictadura en la que se profundizaba la pobreza y la represión.

Surgimiento de las ONGs y su Papel en la Redistribución de la Riqueza

Sin dudas, hay acontecimientos en la vida de los pueblos que lo marcan para siempre, afectando su proceso histórico y su desarrollo. En el caso de la República Dominicana, toda esta política represiva tuvo un efecto destructivo en la psicología del pueblo dominicano, pero a la vez, encendió las luces para el surgimiento de múltiples organizaciones de la sociedad civil, en la búsqueda de espacios para consolidar la lucha del pueblo por la justicia social. La capital del país, Santo Domingo, constituía la caldera que emanaba el calor de la lucha que se extendía por todo el país.

Es así como nos organizamos en sindicatos, cooperativas, frentes estudiantiles y de profesionales, ligas agrarias, clubes de amas de casa, movimientos culturales, y clubes barriales. Luchaban junto al sector progresista de la iglesia católica, a diferencia de la jerarquía de la iglesia que, con su pasividad, apadrinaba la injusticia. El desarrollo de líderes conductores del proceso se puso en marcha y ahí estaba el autor de esta crónica, en función de activista comunitario organizador.

Desde sus diferentes escenarios, todas estas fuerzas comenzaron a presionar por las libertades civiles y mejores condiciones de trabajo, logrando seguros, aumentos salariales, apoyo económico para la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo y la educación primaria y secundaria. Además se luchó por mejoras al sistema de salud, transporte, desayuno escolar, las fuerzas armadas, la modernización de la Policía Nacional, los cuerpos de bomberos y la creación de la defensa civil.

En esta jornada de lucha iniciada durante la tiranía de Trujillo, en que se produjo el asesinato de las hermanas Mirabal y el Dr. Manolo Tavarez, el pueblo y sus organizaciones aportaban una apreciable cuota de mártires y héroes. Entre estos luchadores se encontraban jóvenes dirigentes, valientes periodistas y militares y gente humilde de las barriadas. Los resultados están ahí, tangibles, aunque no podemos ufarnos de haber alcanzado un aceptable grado de desarrollo integral. Nos encontramos en la mitad del camino.

Lamentablemente los procesos de cambio, si no son profundos, resultan como los ríos y cañadas que junto a la blanca espuma que producen sus aguas,

arrastran también la basura y los desechos contaminantes. De ahí se alimentan los oportunistas y corruptos que han hecho y hacen fortuna con los recursos del pueblo.

El Crecimiento Humano en la Labor Social

Mientras participaba en todo el proceso de cambio narrado, entendí que en la lucha social no bastaba con organizarse para reclamar los derechos sociales; había que enseñar al pueblo a manejar su economía para garantizar el desarrollo integral. Miraba a las cooperativas como modelo, una doctrina, una forma de pensar y empresa de carácter social. A los sindicatos los visualizaba no solo como mecanismos de presión y lucha por mejores condiciones salariales y beneficios sociales, sino también como parte militante de la lucha popular.

En esta cruzada de tiempo completo estaba yo, como parte de una segunda generación de luchadores y como promotor de desarrollo de la comunidad.

Sin vacaciones compartimos el trabajo de organizar coaliciones de organizaciones comunitarias y decenas de cooperativas de producción, de consumo, agropecuarios, y de ahorro y créditos, en campos y ciudades. Al mismo tiempo que militaba en sindicatos y federaciones, internacionalizaba la acción de integración junto a decenas de compañeros. Esta labor me llevó a Panamá, Costa Rica, Curaçao, Uruguay, Puerto Rico y otras latitudes.

En esta cruzada de tiempo completo estaba yo, como parte de una segunda generación de luchadores y como promotor de desarrollo de la comunidad.

Para mí, el trabajo social tiene incontables variables y cada una de estas te reporta una rica experiencia y una profunda satisfacción. Hondas huellas han dejado en mí los años servidos en el Banco de los Trabajadores, un proyecto de reivindicación económica. Este proyecto liberaba de la usura y mejoraba la calidad de vida a miles de trabajadores, educándolos económicamente y ofreciéndolos servicios de crédito a bajo costo y con seguro de vida.

Reflexiones sobre Crecimiento, Desarrollo y Justa Distribución

Desde mi experiencia en Santo Domingo, he profundizado mis convicciones sobre los conceptos y contenidos de los términos de "crecimiento" y "desarrollo." Creo que, en cuanto a la justicia social y económica se refiere, todo depende de quiénes elaboren las leyes y del sentido ético y humano de aquellos en quienes recaiga la delicada tarea de aplicarlas.

Pero resulta que tradicionalmente se ha dado una especie de complicidad

conciente y activa entre los sectores que ostentan el poder económico, social y político. Estos sectores, apoyándose mutuamente en su capacidad de maniobra y en el silencio culpable de segmentos sociales auto-considerados “de clase,” se posan como aves de carroña sobre las espaldas de los más débiles, marginados sociales y desarraigados, que impotentes miran cómo las soluciones a sus padecimientos son postergadas en el tiempo.

Los modelos económicos aplicados en los países sub-desarrollados y en vías de desarrollo o tercermundistas son impuestos por las grandes potencias a través de sus organismos financieros internacionales y con el aval de los que quieren mantenerse en el poder. Con sus medidas globalizantes, apuestan al crecimiento económico como sustentación para impulsar el desarrollo. Estas promesas se desvanecen en el camino, tornándose en simples ilusiones. Así, esas aparentemente buenas intenciones de los expertos del poder económico internacional terminan en serias frustraciones para los más humildes.

Entre tanto, la población de estas naciones espera en su impotencia y sus desgracias, luchando para sobrevivir en un estado de carencias, de extrema baja calidad de vida y desesperanza. En fin que las condiciones sociales retratadas en el verso que inicia esta narrativa persisten aún en las favelas, los ghettos, las aldeas, los arrabales, las vecindades y los barrios, con su sabor a pueblo. Lo que demuestra es que podemos alcanzar elevados niveles de crecimiento económico que no se traduce en desarrollo integral.

En su forma ideal, el presupuesto define claramente las prioridades y la visión de una ciudad, una visión creada con la participación amplia de los ciudadanos: padres, jóvenes, trabajadores, hombres y mujeres de negocio, y oficiales del gobierno.

Lawrence desde mi óptica

Después de haber visitado varias veces, me mudé a Lawrence, Massachussets con mi esposa en enero de 2004 para vivir por unos años con nuestra hija menor y nuestros nietos. Viviendo aquí he tenido la oportunidad de profundizar mi análisis de esta ciudad, que siempre ha sido conocida como una comunidad de inmigrantes y trabajadores.

En Lawrence, observo su composición social y la estructura administrativa y no puedo evitar un ejercicio de comparación con mi ciudad de origen. Tal como Lawrence creció y se desarrolló económicamente a base de una industria de labor intensiva y mal pagada, así creció Santo Domingo; este último en la industria azucarera y minería y Lawrence en la industria textil. Y en ambos lugares, organizaciones no-gubernamentales han estado y siguen tratando de

revertir los efectos de años de desarrollo imbalancedo. Pero a diferencia de Santo Domingo, en Lawrence, donde hay poca presencia de sindicatos y cooperativas - los agentes de cambio que usualmente toman el papel de luchar para justa distribución de recursos - la tarea corresponde a las corporaciones de desarrollo comunitario (CDC).

En el presente, una condición negativa nos iguala: Ni en Santo Domingo ni en Lawrence, participamos en el desarrollo de los presupuestos locales en sus diferentes etapas de concepción, formulación, consultas, discusión y ejecución, ni siquiera en los ajustes y en la evaluación posterior. Sin duda, la espina dorsal de la distribución equilibrada radica en presupuesto y por eso, el asunto llama a nuestra atención.

La Lucha por un Presupuesto Justo en Lawrence

En su forma ideal, el presupuesto define claramente las prioridades y la visión de una ciudad, una visión creada con la participación amplia de los ciudadanos: padres, jóvenes, trabajadores, hombres y mujeres de negocio, y oficiales del gobierno. Debe ser un instrumento de responsabilidad fiscal, planificación, evaluación y práctica en destrezas democráticas, como debate y conciliación.

Existe una escala de métodos que un gobierno puede utilizar para crear y presentar su presupuesto; desde un proceso cerrado y un documento incomprensible, hasta un proceso donde las prioridades del pueblo determinen la distribución de recursos y la producción de un documento detallado y claro. Lawrence está casi al principio de esta escala. Y mientras que casi cada conversación sobre el desarrollo de Lawrence lleva a la pregunta de cómo la ciudad esta invirtiendo o no el dinero público, el asunto se torna más y más urgente. Nos preguntamos ¿De qué manera podemos asegurarnos entonces de que sea un presupuesto justo?

En Lawrence, durante los últimos años, hay una CDC, Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc. (LCW), del cual soy miembro, que está reflejando preocupación por el presupuesto y tratando de dar respuesta a esta interrogante. Esta Red Comunitaria esta trabajando para crear conciencia sobre el papel que deben jugar los presupuestos municipales en la justicia distributiva.

En nuestra ciudad de Lawrence, resulta impostergable que más organizaciones se involucren en la lucha por un presupuesto justo. LCW ha dado el primer paso a través de una campaña por un presupuesto justo, junto al Instituto de Liderazgo PODER, del cual soy participante, y en el cual me preparo, junto a otros 19 líderes, para los procesos de lucha en los diferentes escenarios. Apoyada en la Red Comunitaria, hemos lanzado esta campaña organizativa y educativa para abrir el proceso presupuestario a la participación comunitaria, empezando con la publicación de una guía al presupuesto, llamada: Nuestro dinero, nuestro futuro, nuestro derecho de saber: *La guía del pueblo al*

presupuesto de Lawrence.

En la Red tenemos una visión de un presupuesto más participativo que enfoque en las prioridades de la población e invierta en los bienes comunitarios; por ejemplo, en la ciudad de Lawrence, donde el 32% de los residentes son menor de 18 años, las decisiones de inversión en el presupuesto deben de reflejar este importante dato demográfico.¹ Tenemos también una visión de una ciudad donde la gente tenga la información para participar libremente y por gusto, en la vida pública.

Creemos que nuestra publicación de La guía del pueblo al presupuesto es un paso en la lucha larga hacia la democracia participativa y justicia distributiva. Sabemos que el mercado no nos va a entregar la justicia. Tal como ocurre en Lawrence, las CDCs con sus membresías tienen que tomar un papel activo, luchando por una distribución de recursos más justa.

CDCs como Mecanismos de Democracia Participativa y Justicia Distributiva

En la lucha por una justa distribución de recursos y mejorar los niveles o estándares de vida de la gente, hemos de marchar con el pueblo en dos direcciones: La primera, crear conciencia del potencial que poseemos a través de unificar nuestros talentos y trazarnos objetivos y metas. La segunda, organizarnos en una correcta acción de demanda y presión, para que los responsables del proceso de distribución de los bienes y servicios lo hagan con equidad y sentido justiciero.

Nos referimos al término "justicia" analizado desde tres diferentes vertientes:

- *Participativa*: En la medida que somos escuchados, consultados y tomados en cuenta, en el proceso de elaboración de políticas, presupuestos, planes, etc.
- *Distributiva*: Cuando se toman en cuenta las condiciones sociales, limitaciones, nivel de vida, etc. y se consideran estas realidades en las líneas maestras del presupuesto local.
- *Atributiva*: Interpretamos esta fase como actitud que debe primar para que se respeten nuestra dignidad como persona humana, y nuestros derechos inalienables consagrados en la Carta de los Derechos Humanos.

Creo que, así como en Lawrence, las CDCs están llamadas a jugar un papel importantísimo en el proceso de reclamo y logro de estas tres facetas de la justicia. En la lucha por una distribución de recursos comunitarios, las CDCs tienen un papel singular como agente de cambio en asegurar que la ciudad implemente un presupuesto participativo y justo.

Veo a LCW trabajando en la comunidad en el aprovechamiento de los talentos

¹ Censo de 2000, Lawrence, Massachusetts.

y en el desarrollo de las destrezas. En la medida que esto se va logrando, la gente va escalando mejores posiciones en el orden social y productivo y por eso, mejorando su calidad de vida y la de su comunidad. Pero este proceso deberá ir acompañado de una formación de conciencia sobre las necesidades, el poder de la unidad, la solidaridad y la capacidad para elaborar y demandar soluciones en pos de la justicia. En LCW estamos al principio del camino hacia la creación de un espacio que provea oportunidades de desarrollo paralelo de destrezas y conciencia, pero todavía hay mucho que hacer.

Además, entendemos que entre estas tareas se impone, tal y como ocurrió en la República Dominicana, ampliar el proceso de alianzas y coaliciones con otras organizaciones con fines similares. Sin embargo, hemos aprendido que, en Lawrence, esta tarea es particularmente difícil. Años de falta de visión y liderazgo en la vida pública ha generado un ambiente de desconfianza, pero es por ésta razón exacta que, en el interés del desarrollo comunitario sostenible, necesitamos invertir en la creación de una esfera pública vibrante, llena de alianzas ricas y productivas.

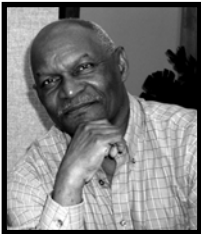
Conclusión

Creo que La humanidad se mueve cada vez más hacia espacios oxigenados buscando respirar, soñar y realizarse. Las personas que han tenido experiencias en estos espacios revolucionarios comparten un concepto casi claro y unánime de justicia, dado que ésta influye en su propia existencia. Algunos de nosotros en la red de LCW hemos traído nuestras experiencias liberativas, pero para los que no las han vivido, es el deber de la Red crear un espacio donde la gente puede compartirla.

Los sindicatos, cooperativas, asociaciones y ONGs han logrado en mi país agrupar a buena parte de la población, movilizándolo para la acción y creando este espacio. En Lawrence este papel corresponde a la CDC. Lawrence CommunityWorks, por su naturaleza, composición y a base del prestigio de sus líderes, está llamada a jugar un papel determinante en el seno de la población. Es la entidad más capacitada para sintorizar con las aspiraciones de la comunidad, interpretando sus inquietudes, necesidades, frustraciones y sueños.

Pero al fin, el éxito dependerá de la calidad y el trabajo de los líderes en los diferentes niveles y escenarios, para que los afectados los entiendan y apoyen. Por ello y dependiendo de la preparación, experiencia y decisión de sus responsables, estarán en capacidad de canalizar poder comunitario hacia las soluciones en la búsqueda de la justicia. A Lawrence CommunityWorks le toca seguir organizando a la población para convertirla en sujeto de su propio destino.

Los autores quisieran agradecer a nuestra editora, Alma Couverthié, por su perspicacia profunda y su compromiso firme a la justicia.



Francisco Ditrén es de la República Dominicana, con dos años resediendo en Lawrence, Massachusetts. Es miembro del Instituto Liderazgo PODER y facilitador de Círculos de vecinos de Lawrence CommunityWorks. Es diplomado en Trabajo Social, Administración de Empresas Cooperativas y Desarrollo de la Comunidad de la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo.



Marianna Leavy-Sperounis, Coordinadora de la Red Familiar de Lawrence CommunityWorks, es de Newton, Massachusetts y estudió la Política en el Colegio de Oberlin y la Universidad de la Habana, Cuba. Tiene experiencia previa en organización contra la guerra y en políticas sobre los derechos de salud de mujeres y relaciones entre los EEUU y Cuba.

From Revolution to the City Budget: Mechanisms of Distributive Justice

By Francisco Ditrén with Marianna Leavy-Sperounis

There is a country in the world

There is a country in the world that lies in the very path of the sun ...
– Pedro Mir, National Poet of the Dominican Republic

*I go out in the mornings, begging for work.
Please give me whatever there is!
A miserable wage.
And everywhere the same
A long face ...and they tell me
To have patience.*

– Verse from an Argentine peasant poem,
Author unknown, Winter of 1940

In 1960, at the age of 17, I was torn from my family and forced into compulsory military service under the Dominican dictator, Raphael Trujillo. Placed in the police force, I bore mute witness to persecution, abuse, and acts of injustice against students and workers fighting to reclaim their liberty and demanding justice for all. Submerged in a feeling of impotence, I channeled my frustration into rebellion.

For more than thirty years, from 1930 to 1962, the people of the Dominican Republic had suffered under the dictatorship of Trujillo and the charade of his successor, Joaquim Balaguer, whose government was nothing more than a caricature of representative democracy—well-dressed despotism that, like the previous government, ruled by corruption from the top and by violence from below.

During these years, the lines of social stratification in my country deepened, separating the oligarchs and landowners who profited in the millions from tyrannical rule from the immense majority of the population who endured humiliation and exploitation. This very majority had sought to build a democracy and in 1962, had elected a president, Professor Juan Bosch, founder of the Dominican Revolutionary Party and a leader of Dominicans living in exile.

But in 1963, reactionary members of the Dominican military, acting with U.S. support, overthrew his government, the first in the Dominican Republic to honor a constitution guaranteeing civil rights and national sovereignty. President Bosch had barely completed his first seven months in power.

By this time, I fully identified with the movement for justice and allied myself with the struggle of the students, workers, peasants and honest members of

the military. When the Revolution for a return to constitutionality began on April 24, 1965, I put myself at its service.

Our fight for liberty and against the state of corruption became a war to defend our country in 1966 when U.S. forces invaded the Dominican Republic in an attempt to castrate the struggle of the Dominican people. After one year of invasion, U.S. forces held a rigged election in which Bosch, who had led us in those seven brief months of democracy, lost to Balaguer, chief strategist of Trujillo's political machine and puppet of the American government. This resulted in twelve further years of cloaked dictatorship; the conditions of poverty and repression in which we lived only worsened.

The Emergence of Non-governmental Organizations and Their Role in the Redistribution of Wealth

There is no question that there are events in the life of a community that permanently mark its history and development. In the case of the Dominican Republic, the politics of repression has had a dual effect: At once destructive to people's collective psychology, it also gave rise to the Revolution and then the emergence of a new civil society, populated by organizations that sought to create new spaces in the struggle for social justice.

In the geography of our fight, the capital city, Santo Domingo, was the cauldron from which the heat of struggle emanated. In rural and urban areas, we organized coalitions and community organizations: unions, production, consumer and agricultural cooperatives, savings and credit unions, student and professional associations, agrarian leagues, women's clubs, cultural movements and neighborhood groups. We also fought alongside the progressive wing of the Catholic Church that, unlike the church hierarchy, refused to support injustice in our country. And from these groups rose new leaders; the author of this story, a life-long community activist, counted himself among them.

From their respective positions, all of these organized groups began to pressure the government for civil rights, better working conditions, and increased economic support for the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo as well as for primary and secondary schools. They also fought for improvements to the health care system, public transportation, school lunch, the armed forces, and fire departments, and for the modernization of the National Police and the creation of a Civil Defense.

The struggle of this period found its roots in activism that began under the tyranny of Trujillo, and also in the violence committed against activists, which included the infamous assassinations of the Mirabal sisters and Dr. Manolo Tavarez. This violence continued unabated as many martyrs fell to advance our fight for justice. Among them were leaders of the youth, courageous journalists and soldiers, and the humble people of our neighborhoods.

And although the results of their sacrifice are tangible, we still cannot boast

that we achieved the kind of integrated development that we sought for our country. As elsewhere, the process of social change in the Dominican Republic took the form of a polluted river: Despite its forward momentum and our tireless efforts to clean the water, the river continues to carry trash and contamination, food for those who make their fortune at the expense of the people.

Human Development in the Work of Social Change

During this time, I began to understand that it was not enough to fight only for social rights. In order to achieve truly integrated development, we also had to teach one another new economic models and ways of managing money. I viewed cooperatives as a particularly instructive model; they were not only businesses of social conscience but also a model for thinking. And unions I saw not only as mechanisms with which to pressure for better wages and benefits, but also as a militant arm of the popular struggle.

I worked in community development, as part of a second generation struggling for justice, and found myself in a full-time crusade. Every facet of my work brought with it rich experience and a tremendous amount of satisfaction. As we fought at the local and national levels, we worked to internationalize our struggle; this brought me to Panama, Costa Rica, Curaçao,

I worked in community development, as part of a second generation struggling for justice, and found myself in a full-time crusade.

Uruguay, and Puerto Rico, among many other places. But my years of service in the Workers' Bank left a particularly large impression. This project sought to improve the lives of thousands of workers by providing them with financial literacy training, low-rate credit and life insurance.

Reflections on Growth, Development and Distributive Justice

Throughout my years of work in Santo Domingo, I continued to deepen my understanding of the concepts of "growth" and "development." I came to believe that, as far as social and economic justice are concerned, everything depends on the ethical sensibilities of those with the delicate task of developing and applying the laws. What traditionally results, I found, is a conscious and active complicity between the sectors that hold fast to economic, social and political power. These sectors, with the mutual support that they provide one another, and with the tacit agreement of the upper class, act as vultures that prey on marginalized and displaced people. Powerless, this majority often sees the solutions to their suffering as beyond their grasp.

I also saw that the economic models applied to developing countries are imposed from above by organizations of international finance, with the endorsement of those at national levels who seek to maintain their power.

With confidence, they tell people that their global economic policies will bring development and prosperity, but their promises are empty, offering nothing more than illusions of a better life.

In this way, the seemingly good intentions of international economic experts give way to grave frustrations for the most humble, who, disempowered, struggle to survive in a state of deprivation, low quality of life and hopelessness. The resulting conditions, depicted in the verse at the beginning of this narrative, continue today in the world's shantytowns, villages, neighborhoods and slums where we see that higher levels of economic growth do not necessarily translate into truly integrated development.

Lawrence, from My Perspective

After having visited several times, I moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts with my wife in January of 2004 to live for a few years with our youngest daughter and our grandchildren. Living here, I have had the opportunity to deepen my analysis of this city, known since its inception as a community of immigrants and workers.

In its ideal form, a budget clearly defines the priorities and vision of a city, a vision created with the full participation of citizens: parents, youth, workers, businessmen and women, and city officials.

I cannot help but compare the social and administrative structures that I see in Lawrence with those of my city of origin. Just as Lawrence depended on industry and low-wage labor for growth, so did Santo Domingo; the former on textiles and the latter on sugar and mining. And in both places, non-governmental organizations have been working to reverse the effects of years of unbalanced development. But unlike Santo Domingo, in Lawrence, there is little presence of

unions or cooperatives, the agents of change that typically assume the role of fighting for just distribution of resources. Instead, the work falls to community development corporations (CDCs).

Today, Santo Domingo and Lawrence share a particular condition: In both cities, residents are denied the opportunity to actively participate in the local budgeting processes, including the different stages of budget formulation, consultation, implementation, adjustment, evaluation. Without question, the budget is the spine of equitable resource distribution, so this condition warrants our attention.

The Struggle for a Just Budget in Lawrence

In its ideal form, a budget clearly defines the priorities and vision of a city, a vision created with the full participation of citizens: parents, youth, workers, businessmen and women, and city officials. The budget, and the decision-

making process that surrounds it, should serve as an instrument of accountability, planning, and evaluation and of practice in important democratic skills, such as debate and compromise.

There exists, however, a spectrum of methods that a government can use to create and present its budget, starting with a closed process and an incomprehensible document to a process and document like that described above. The method used by the City of Lawrence falls near the beginning of this spectrum and, as nearly every conversation about the development of Lawrence leads to the question of how the city is and is not investing public money, the issue becomes more pressing. We find ourselves asking how we can ensure that we have a fair and just budget for our city.

For the last few years, Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW), a CDC of which I am a member, has been focusing its attention on the budget and trying to answer this question. Our Community Network is working to raise consciousness about the role that municipal budgets play in distributive justice.

In our city, it is imperative that organizations join the struggle for a fair budget. LCW members have taken the first step by initiating an organizing and educational campaign to open the budget process for greater community participation, beginning with the publication of a guide to the budget: *Our Money, Our Future, Our Right to Know: The People's Guide to the Lawrence City Budget*. As a member of the current Lawrence CommunityWorks PODER Leadership Institute, I have been working on this campaign with former PODER members and other leaders of our Network.

We share a vision of a more participatory budget for Lawrence that focuses on the priorities of the population and invests in community assets; for example, in the city of Lawrence, where 32% of the residents are younger than 18, budget decisions should reflect high investment in youth development.² We also share a vision of a city where people have access to information so that they can freely participate in public life in ways that provide satisfaction and rich new experiences.

We believe that our publication of *The People's Guide to the Lawrence City Budget* is a step in the long struggle towards achieving distributive justice and a more participatory democracy. We know that the market alone will not deliver justice. CDCs, with their memberships, must take an active role in the fight for a more just distribution of resources.

CDCs as Mechanisms of Participatory Democracy and Distributive Justice

In this struggle, and that for higher standards of living in our communities, we must march with people in two directions. First, we must create

² 2000 Census, Lawrence, Massachusetts.

consciousness of the potential that we have when we unify our talents and clarify our goals and objectives. Second, we must organize ourselves to take action, making demands and applying pressure so that those who distribute resources do it with an understanding of equity and justice.

When we refer to the term “justice” we take into account three necessary conditions:

- *Participation:* People are consulted and heard in policy-making, planning, and budgeting.
- *Distribution:* Social conditions, limitations, and standard of living influence the major allocations in a local budget.
- *Respect:* Decisions reflect an overriding attitude of respect for human dignity and the inalienable rights consecrated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As in Lawrence, CDCs are called to play an important role in the process of demanding and developing these three facets of justice. In the struggle for a just distribution of community resources, they have a unique role as agents of change in creating conditions where communities can implement participatory and just budgets.

I see LCW working in the community on the development of assets and the application of talents and skills. As this continues, people are improving their lives, socially and economically, and as a result, improving the quality of life in the community. But this process needs to be accompanied by consciousness-raising about community needs, the power of unity and solidarity, and our ability to demand justice and develop strategies to win it. At LCW, we are beginning to create a space where skill-building and consciousness-raising happen as part of the same process, but there remains much work to do.

We also understand that among the tasks at hand, we must continue to form alliances with like-minded organizations like those that developed in the Dominican Republic. We know, however, that in Lawrence, where years of lack of vision and leadership have generated an environment of distrust, this task is particularly difficult. It is for this exact reason though, that we must invest in the development of a vibrant public sphere, full of rich and productive partnerships.

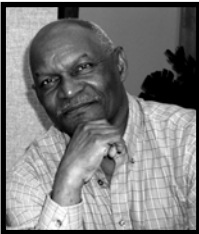
Conclusion

I believe that people continuously move towards oxygenated spaces, places where they can breathe, dream, realize and fulfill their ambitions. Among people who have had experience in these revolutionary spaces, there is a shared and clear concept of justice because it has influenced our very existence. While some of us in Lawrence CommunityWorks bring with us these liberating experiences, for those who do not, it is the responsibility of the network to provide space where these experiences may be shared.

The unions, cooperatives and community organizations in the Dominican

Republic organized the population, mobilized them for action, and created these spaces. In Lawrence, this responsibility belongs to CDCs and Lawrence CommunityWorks. By their nature, composition, and the prestige of its leaders, they are called to play determining roles in the heart of the community. Our Network has great capacity to synthesize the aspirations of the community, interpreting its worries, needs, frustrations and dreams. But in the end, the quality and the work of leaders in all areas of the Network—their preparation, experience and methods of decision-making—will determine whether our work receives widespread community support and whether we are able to channel community power towards justice-seeking solutions. We must continue organizing people so that they may become the subjects of their own destiny.

The authors would like to express gratitude to our editor, Alma Couverthié, for her deep insight and unwavering commitment to justice.



Francisco Ditrén is from the Dominican Republic and has lived in Lawrence, Massachusetts for two years. He is a member of the Lawrence CommunityWorks PODER Leadership Institute and is a NeighborCircle Facilitator. Francisco has degrees in social work, cooperative business administration, and community development from the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo.



Marianna Leavy-Sperounis, Family Network Coordinator at Lawrence CommunityWorks, is originally from Newton, Massachusetts and studied politics at Oberlin College and the University of Havana, Cuba. She has previous experience in antiwar organizing, policy and advocacy around women’s reproductive health rights and U.S-Cuba relations.



Beyond Broken Windows

By Kevin Ksen

For years now, city and community leaders nationwide have trumpeted the “broken windows” theory as the path to inner-city revitalization. Advocates of the “broken windows” theory argue that if you remove the graffiti, the abandoned vehicles, boarded up buildings, prostitutes and druggies you will be well on your way to new neighborhoods. It was Giuliani’s pre-9-11 *raison d’être* for hosing down the homeless and evicting community gardens.

These are extreme examples, but in similar ways I believe that local governments, police departments and even neighborhood organizations have latched onto the “broken windows” theory as the best remedy in all situations. More specifically, many CDCs have followed this course as an overly simple solution for redeveloping our urban core. What took us in that direction?

For the past 15 years I have lived in the Piedmont neighborhood of Worcester. During that time I have also worked for the local CDC, Worcester Common Ground, both as the Coordinator of Neighborhood Initiatives and as Associate Director. Much of the community development work in Worcester over this span of years has been based on “broken windows” thinking and efforts to “address quality of life issues.” Whereas in the past the idea of strong and vibrant neighborhood groups threatened City Hall with expected demands and challenges, neighborhood groups organized around ‘watching’ provided the city with a safe and controlled structure to which they could point as examples of them being responsive to community needs. In Worcester, neighborhood groups became nearly sanctioned and vetted by city government. In Worcester it became a given that each City Hall press conference would reference the “spread,” “success” and “growth” of neighborhood watch groups. “We now have 18...21...33 groups across our city,” would be the recurring chorus. “We are a better city now,” would be the implied conclusion.

Local CDCs supported the neighborhood watch group strategy based on the “broken windows” framework, believing increased resident participation in the growing neighborhood group schema would make neighborhoods and peoples’ lives better. Improving our neighborhoods, and I would argue some people’s definition of justice for our neighborhoods, became intimately intertwined with the quantifiable cataloguing and removal of graffiti, potholes, abandoned cars, etc. Monthly arrest statistics showed ‘progress’ with higher and higher arrest totals. And as community-based organizations, our organizing became enmeshed around getting more people to these meetings. Questions frequently focused on, “Where’s the graffiti?” “Has anyone seen any gang graffiti?”

and “Have you reported the abandoned cars to the City?” At one point, Worcester had an abandoned car hotline, graffiti hotline, illegal dumping hotline, drug tip line, the “Grime Watch” hotline, “Keep Worcester Clean” hotline and of course most importantly, our 24/7 pothole hotline (508.754.9696 in case you’re visiting someday).

Less potholes and less graffiti became how justice was to be defined for the neighborhood. We needed to be responding to the “quality of life issues” we were all told; but few asked, who defined these as the neighborhoods’ quality of life issues?

There was now a growing body of scientific research that I felt showed that one person’s “bad neighborhood” wasn’t necessarily someone else’s.

As a CDC, Worcester Common Ground has regularly participated in ‘community surveys,’ street corner ‘asset based mapping’ and one-to-one interviews. As part of our most recent survey, neighborhood residents were asked “What do you think are the biggest problems in our neighborhood?”. As always, “No Jobs,” “High Rents,” “Drugs” and “Violence” were the primary responses. “Trash in

the street” was sixth on the list along with “People hanging out” down near the bottom in the ninth slot with just a few responses. Abandoned buildings, vacant lots, graffiti and abandoned cars were not listed as survey responses. Why have these become the priorities now collectively called “quality of life issues”?

I was only partly awake a few months ago when I heard a National Public Radio report on Chicago’s core neighborhoods. This empirical research, conducted by Professor Robert J. Sampson of Harvard University, challenged the “broken windows” theory.¹ Briefly, researchers working in 196 Chicago neighborhoods decided to count the “quality of life” street by street occurrences of graffiti, abandoned vehicles, vacant buildings, and other similar situations. This physical documentation was joined with resident and community leader interviews, police reports and more. The research group found that increases or decreases of the occurrences did not affect people’s perceptions, but rather changes in the concentration of minority groups and level of poverty best predicted people’s neighborhood perceptions.

That’s a heavy line, so let me restate how I interpret it after re-reading it myself a dozen times. *If you want to predict what people are going to say about how “good” a neighborhood is, broken windows, graffiti, sidewalk trash, etc. is one way to do that, but you’ll actually be more accurate if you use poverty and race to guide you. The more poor people or people of color living in a neighborhood the worse the perception people will have of that neighborhood.*

And that was the “Ah-ha moment,” the justice connection. There was now a growing body of scientific research that I felt showed that one person’s “bad neighborhood” wasn’t necessarily someone else’s. Worcester’s City Hall and the Police Department “quality of life issues” probably aren’t the same “quality of life issues” neighborhood residents find to be relevant. Most importantly, it was clear that a non-resident’s vision of justice for the neighborhood probably would not match a community resident’s.

The “broken windows” research re-illuminates and reframes questions about where power resides within CDCs and how CDC priorities are chosen in a way that make the questions harder to ignore. It is also a strong reminder that the quest for justice is not simply a cookie-cutter social justice statement but more of a never ending listening session that requires not only good ears but many eyes. I believe this research provides yet another call for CDCs to be structured around economically and racially representative resident led boards of directors, not simply efforts to mimic diversity and affiliation.

As organizers we need to always be bringing the real world into our organizations. Certainly some CDCs have done this, while others lag far behind. Concrete statements of community and residential justice need to be coupled with growing research and brought into our organizations as part of ongoing efforts to build or strengthen community-based organizations.

As research grows on the role of race and socioeconomics in seeking definitions of justice it becomes fair to assume that even the best non-resident led, best-intentioned and social justice focused organization will not and cannot replicate residents’ own personal definitions of community justice. Nor can such an organization simply discern and pursue the community’s priorities.

This research sounds a strong warning which we all must find a way to hear. Many CDCs by their financial structure are already born addicted to property development. Oftentimes there is a tension that exists between development work and community organizing. If science says justice is in the eye of the beholder then we need to make certain all the seats at the table are not filled. In order to be *community* development corporations it is absolutely necessary that community residents are our guides and bosses, otherwise it will remain a never ending danger that our priorities will always become skewed not only towards bricks and mortar but also towards merely fixing broken windows.

I “Seeing Disorder: Neighborhood Stigma and the Social Construction of ‘Broken Windows,’” Robert J. Sampson, Harvard University and Stephen W. Raudenbush, University of Michigan in *Social Psychology Quarterly*; 2004, Vol. 67, No. 4, 319–342. Copies of the report and audio of the NPR story are available at <http://worchester.indymedia.org/news/2005/03/912.php>



Kevin Ksen has been working with Worcester Common Ground (WCG) for 15 years in the Piedmont neighborhood of Worcester where he also lives. Kevin is an active member of the Worcester Global Action Network (WoGAN) and Worcester Indymedia. He is a founding member of “Real Solutions” a community-based organization opposed to the recent anti-panhandling efforts implemented by the City of Worcester. He is currently employed by WCG as their Neighborhood Initiatives Coordinator.



Planning for Equity: Coalitions and Moral Vision

By André Leroux

Most urban development strategies are shaped by the power elite and professionals in an environment where issues of equity and justice never make an appearance. Equity and justice are not considered relevant urban planning issues. Local planning debate tends to be dominated by physical design—architecture and roadway concerns. Major developers, property owners, and project proposals often drive the agenda on a short time frame and focus attention on a few parcels of land. Residents and city government are often forced to react, leaving undone the more important work of building a long-term future vision for the neighborhood. This is a problem because urban development strategies shape investment in the city and directly answer the question—what kind of a community will we become?

My experience at Lawrence CommunityWorks leads me to conclude that planning techniques are some of the most important tools that can be used by CDCs to advance social justice beyond typical concerns and effect profound, lasting change in a city. If we recognize that planning can be an ongoing political process based on good information and local support, we can shape it to effectively build coalitions, manage conflicts, and link physical development with social development.

As co-coordinator of a grassroots planning effort called the Reviviendo Gateway Initiative (RGI), I have seen how issues of equity and justice can come to the center of a public discussion about our city's future and set the precedent for a new understanding of how we relate to one another.

This article will examine how this new “social compact” came about and its challenges for survival in the long run. Finally I will comment on specific strategies we have utilized to promote equity and social justice within the framework of RGI.

Background

The Reviviendo Gateway Initiative (RGI) had its origins in the early organizing and planning efforts of Lawrence CommunityWorks in 1999 and 2000. Centered on the North Common neighborhood of Lawrence, Massachusetts, the organization adopted the term *Reviviendo* (Spanish for “coming back to life”) to refer to a parcel-by-parcel revitalization strategy in an area of the city where one-third of the property was vacant or abandoned. Over the next couple of years, Reviviendo became associated with a homeownership project (the Reviviendo Summer Street Homes), a new playground (Reviviendo Playground), a multisite historic rehab project (Reviviendo Family Housing), and a neighborhood planning committee composed of residents, small business owners, church leaders and others, called the Reviviendo Planning Group

(RPG). Soon city residents and officials began to pick up the term to refer to several different things: an actual physical place in the city, a specific group of people, and a grassroots movement for change.

At the same time, the Gateway Project was taking shape just outside the North Common neighborhood, a massive brownfields (a term for contaminated properties) clean-up and infrastructure project pursued by the City, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and a major private corporation named Gencorp. The project entailed: demolition and remediation of a five-acre heavily contaminated mill complex owned by Gencorp; remediation of the adjacent and also heavily-contaminated three-acre Oxford Paper site owned by the City; the subsequent creation of a 1200-space surface parking lot and passive green space on that land; and a series of road improvements connecting the project to Interstate 495.

We eventually agreed that the basis of any collaboration would have to be a broad-based planning effort.

Since the Gateway Project would require significant public funding to complete, federal agencies and the congressional delegation began to ask about the community's role in the project and what public benefits could be expected. Up to that point, public participation in the Gateway Project had been limited to abutting property owners and municipal officials. As a result, representatives

of Gencorp approached Lawrence CommunityWorks for its support in 2000 and presented us with something of a dilemma.

Did we really want to validate the Gateway Project, both in terms of *substance*, (where we would in effect be advocating for massive amounts of funding for a parking lot) and *process* (where engineers and lobbyists were driving the plans and there had been little to no community input)? The quick and obvious answer was "no." However, we also reasoned that we needed this project to be cleaned up and completed as quickly as possible, and that an adversarial relationship would not accomplish that goal, nor would it give our constituency a place at the table to shape a more ambitious revitalization agenda tied to social justice and equity. We eventually agreed that the basis of any collaboration would have to be a broad-based planning effort.

Beginning a Public Discussion

Lawrence CommunityWorks is a membership-based community development corporation dedicated to building a strong and active network of families in the city. One of our guiding principles is to only spend time on initiatives that find *resonance* with our members, meaning that we hear about the same issue from different members in different contexts. Once that informal feedback rises above the chatter, we create an opportunity for structured dialogue among

members, staff, and other interested stakeholders. This kind of meeting offers a place to make consensus-based decisions about the issue and decide whether the group wants to take some next steps. If so, those individuals often become a working group or committee. As projects are completed or resonance declines over time, these groups may go away or become dormant. It is important for staff not to force the issue, or everyone soon burns out. We have found that we can generate a significant number of sustainable groups when the staff plays a supporting role—almost like a consultant providing technical assistance—and does not lead.

So we were not hearing much from our members about the Gencorp or Oxford sites except for, “What in the world is going on over there?” The site was surrounded by a chain link fence and seemed empty after the demolition of the mill complex. Residents were much more concerned about safe parks and activities for young people, affordable housing, trash on the streets, better city services, and public safety. Still, staff brought the issue to the attention of the Reviviendo Planning Group for consideration in late 2000, which led to technical briefings by Gencorp and the City in February and March of 2001. The RPG discussions suggested that local people were interested in learning more about the contamination on the sites and were concerned about redevelopment plans and their impact on the neighborhood. The sense from participants was that there should be a larger discussion including more neighbors and that the redevelopment of the sites should be situated in the context of a broader visioning process for the entire neighborhood, downtown area, and mill district.

As a result of this feedback, CommunityWorks held its first Neighborhood Summit in May of 2001 focusing on brownfields. At that event, we convened property owners of several major polluted sites including Gencorp to present information and dialogue directly with area residents about cleanup challenges and redevelopment opportunities, as well as to start building some positive working relationships. The rest of that year was dedicated to “planning the community planning process”—recruiting partners and stakeholders, performing research, and gathering data.

From January to March of 2002, eight different focus groups were convened under the auspices of a so-called “Reviviendo Gateway Initiative,” representing a marriage of sorts between the Reviviendo Planning Group and the Gateway Project. RGI was hosted by two nonprofit organizations with full-time planning staff: Lawrence CommunityWorks, the local community development corporation, and Groundwork Lawrence, a nonprofit dedicated to improving open space and the physical environment. The City of Lawrence was a crucial third partner who played a supporting role. Each focus group represented different interests and met separately: residents, mill owners, mill tenants, small business representatives, the cultural community, youth, civic and government leaders, and nonprofit organizations. One of the biggest problems plaguing

Lawrence over the last generation has been its social fragmentation and a lack of communication among these stakeholder groups. We wanted to meet with each group separately so that people felt comfortable talking freely among their peers, because we knew that everyone had their own analysis of the city's dysfunction and their own version of past history. But we wanted to keep the conversation positive, productive, and focused on the future, so we created a standard presentation to begin every focus group, which established a baseline of shared information for the ensuing discussions. We then asked participants to envision the long-term future of the district and loosely structured the conversations with a set of ten questions.

Contrary to our expectations, we discovered that most everyone wanted the same things: a proud, dynamic, and diverse city; safe, clean streets; infill housing and residential development in the mill buildings; thriving street-level shops and restaurants; job creation, particularly for local residents; cultural facilities; infrastructure improvements; a balance between new development and affordability; and new park development. Afterwards, we realized, *why wouldn't everyone want all that?* We realized that we had an unprecedented opportunity to build a broad-based coalition in the city.

One of the biggest problems plaguing Lawrence over the last generation has been its social fragmentation and a lack of communication among these stakeholder groups.

We brought the groups together for the first time at a follow-up meeting to share the results. Since we had videotaped the focus groups, we were able to project a number of clips where individuals from very different backgrounds said almost exactly the same thing. Residents realized, for example, that many mill owners had a civic conscience and truly cared about the community, while property owners realized that residents were not tearing the city down with trash and blight. The discovery of a common cause and the possibility of creating a unified vision for the city generated tremendous enthusiasm, and more than 50 people representing all of the focus groups volunteered to form a Steering Committee to draft the vision and build an agenda.

Our Vision

We, the Reviviendo Gateway Steering Committee, envision the Gateway district as the historic heart of an international city—a place that is vibrant, dynamic, diverse and proud. We envision clean streets and beautiful parks, safe neighborhoods, and a thriving business district with new job opportunities. We envision a local economy built on creativity and entrepreneurship, from software engineers to metal smiths. We support the development of arts and cultural facilities that highlight our unique talents. We support a sustainable mix of uses, with housing, shops, restaurants,

recreation, and offices within walking distance of each other. As we look to the future, we also recognize the need for measured progress that balances new development with affordability. We are committed to making the Reviviendo Gateway a place of opportunity through investments in high-quality housing, jobs, and education.

*From Reviviendo Gateway Initiative Steering Committee Final Report,
November 2002*

This vision was issued as part of a substantial report on the district that also included a zoning and real estate analysis, artistic renderings that brought to life the future vision, and goals and investment strategies in four areas: bricks and mortar projects, public infrastructure, marketing and promotion, and most importantly for us, family and community asset building. With this last piece, we placed *investment in people* on the same level as investing in the physical fabric of the city. Through the report, our guiding principles and agenda were endorsed *as a bundle* by everyone from residents to politicians up to the federal level. On November 7, 2002, the Steering Committee's Report was released at a public kick-off event that had over 350 people in attendance.

Making Our Ideal City Our Real City

We felt proud about the progress we had made in incorporating equity and justice issues into a larger public discussion about the future of the city, but we also realized that after two years, we had an eager coalition, a vision, and no idea about how to make it reality.

The first thing we did was insist on joining Gateway Project representatives on an advocacy trip to Washington, D.C. "We" meant 60 volunteers representing all constituencies of RGI. Although the Gateway team was extremely reluctant and suspected us of undermining them by pushing for other priorities, the group very successfully articulated the RGI vision and all of its needs, with the Gateway Project being the foremost priority. We met with nine different federal agencies and the entire congressional delegation from Massachusetts. Most people we encountered had never seen direct, grassroots lobbying like this before. Although the RGI efforts resulted in over \$7 million for the Gateway Project that year but little else, the trip bonded the group together in a powerful way, demonstrated to policy makers that exciting change was afoot in the city, and helped establish direct personal relationships with elected officials and federal agencies—an impact that has been indirect, but proven its value over time. Since that trip, for example, Senator Kennedy knows who "Reviviendo!" is, knows how to pronounce it correctly (he usually shouts it), and has come to visit several times. When we ask for support now for other priorities, our friends in Washington understand that it is part of an overall plan.

RGI also began to meet as subcommittees based on the four investment strategies discussed earlier. The subcommittee that took off fast was the Bricks & Mortar Committee, because they realized that we couldn't create our urban village with outdated zoning regulations. So we acquired the services of a seasoned zoning consultant to help us draft an overlay district that would achieve our objectives. In October of 2003, eight long months later, we obtained a unanimous vote from the Lawrence City Council and the first major zoning change in the city in over 60 years.

One of the keys to our success is that we have naturally drifted to complex issues that affect all of the member constituencies.

How did a zoning proposal promote equity and justice? The RGI overlay incorporated a 10% inclusionary zoning clause, practically unheard of in a city with Lawrence's demographics. The proposal also enabled residential conversions of mill buildings for the first time in the city, which worked toward increasing the overall housing supply and included a 10% affordable housing requirement. Furthermore, it made the permitting process more streamlined and

transparent, and encouraged more density in keeping with the historic fabric of the city—reintroducing townhouse-style units, for example.

Currently we are also tackling the canals and alleyways, and have established personal relationships with the Italian multinational energy corporation that is the owner of record for those properties in order to work together to create a long-term solution that satisfies everyone. This is not only an economic development issue for the city, but a real safety and public health concern in the neighborhood. Some of the alleys are becoming community gardens, and others could become public streets. The area around the canals can become public open space with walking paths and festivals.

One of the keys to our success is that we have naturally drifted to complex issues that affect all of the member constituencies. More narrow issues may be tackled by individual groups or organizations, but some things require a broader coalition. We try to make this complex coalition work with a simple process and structure. We have one regular meeting all together each month, with self-selected working groups as needed. Decisions are made by consensus, and there are no officers. Everyone has equal standing, though the group is supported by two staff co-coordinators from two different community organizations who try to keep all the balls rolling.

The most difficult challenge we have had is to get the whole coalition invested in the social investment strategy. Not because people don't support it, but because we struggled with how to frame it in a way that touched everyone, whether resident or businessperson or mill owner. Everyone can get involved in designing a park or a building, or attend a cultural event, but how do you get

a broad range of people excited and active in the never-ending struggle to fund social programs? We find that most people need to see change and feel that their energy is making a concrete impact in the city. The social service model wasn't going to do it for this group. When we called subcommittee meetings, we found that it was a gathering of community organizations who are already working on these issues anyway.

Over time, we have realized that the key was to link the social investment to improvements in the physical redevelopment—essentially, a linkage program, but one in which the investment in people and place were joined. If we could work to help business people and property owners overcome market obstacles in Lawrence, we could work to help individuals and families overcome market barriers to full participation in the local economy. Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) seemed to be a perfect solution because they leveraged small-scale private investment into homeownership, higher education, or small business development. Lawrence CommunityWorks already had a small but effective IDA program, and we felt that if we could just open the opportunity to participate to 500 or 1000 people in the city, we could unlock a grassroots economic transformation of the community. Imagine the collective impact of 200 new prospective homeowners, 200 new college students, and 200 new micro-business entrepreneurs, all generated from within the city! Essentially, we would help to generate the demand-side of the economy and not just the supply-side.

Since we had been doing a lot of planning work around smart growth, and talking explicitly about the RGI vision as a model of smart *equitable* growth, we realized that some of the new state smart growth legislation could be the vehicle we were looking for. If we could revisit our zoning overlay district, expand it to most of the prime redevelopment areas, and tweak it to match the new state 40R regulations, we could not only bump up our inclusionary zoning from 10% to 20%, but also make the city eligible for state incentives. And if we could get the Mayor and City Council to dedicate those funds to IDA programs, we could expand the program to a large scale. We know that it will be a challenging road, but when we put an IDA participant and a 40R expert together in front of RGI to talk about their respective expertise, the group made the leap itself. We didn't know it when we started, but this is the social justice campaign that only something like RGI might be able to accomplish.

Conclusions: A Seat at the Table

One of the things that has made RGI successful and sustained strong participation have been the use of good information, well presented, to break down entrenched positions and give a wide range of people access to the problem at hand—all of which offer a better chance for the group to identify solutions that are equitable.

Secondly, we place a heavy focus on relationship building. The planning process is really a scaffolding for relationship-building based on problem-solving. Mutual respect and consideration have so far led the coalition to want to solve problems in such a way that everyone benefits directly or indirectly. It is a safe environment for discussion and managing conflict because it is a non-adversarial forum.

Finally, our work centers around the vision, not structure or hierarchy. Everybody has a perspective to be valued by virtue of his or her participation. Everybody to an extent self-selects, but the process has to be engaging and fruitful enough to motivate people to come. There is no reason to have meetings when there is no clear agenda, actions to take or decisions to be made. We are careful not to tap people out.

My experience coordinating the Reviviendo Gateway Initiative at Lawrence CommunityWorks suggests that it is possible to engage atypical CDC constituencies like property owners, business leaders, and politicians in processes and actions that promote social equity and the resource needs of working-class residents. For me, therefore, social justice has meant getting these atypical but powerful constituencies—through education, relationship building, persistence, and occasional mobilization—advocating for equity strategies such as: inclusionary zoning, linkage programs, public and private investments in family and community asset building, recreational space, improved city services, workforce development, and infrastructure improvements.

Planning can be a powerful political tool when it is guided by vision and values, a coalition, and constant information flow—not by written plans that never change. We all know that equity and justice is an ongoing struggle, but our friends and neighbors will be unable to determine the soul of the community if we do not plan for it.



André Leroux is the Neighborhood Planner of Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW). He has worked on power-building issues as an academic, a political aide, and an urban planner. At LCW, André now directs all facets of neighborhood planning, including zoning reform, alleyway reclamation, trash barrels in neighborhoods, muralist recruitment, and neighborhood tours. His work also involves schmoozing with the public and private sector, resource trolling, "good cop" role-playing, and development of a community design center.



Photo: Lolita Parker, Jr.

There Will Always Be Light

By Yvette Verdieu

When I was five or six years old, growing up in Port-Au Prince, Haiti was a fun place to be. At that time the situation was not so bad in terms of political unrest and poverty. My family was not rich, but we were a middle-class family. For the sake of protecting people's identities, I will not use their real names. In those days there was a classmate that I considered a close friend. Her name was Sophia. We were always doing fun things together. We were always at the same gatherings and family activities. One Monday morning while our class was in process we heard a loud commotion outside the school yard. The students rushed to the balcony and saw Sophia's father getting a beating by two officers. I assumed his beating had something to do with his involvement with the government. Sophia rushed to her father's rescue and begged the officers for mercy. The officers rudely pushed her away without acknowledging her pain and sadness. Because of his mistreatment and the soldiers ignoring Sophia's feelings, I sensed the powerlessness that Sophia felt at that time. Because of my age I didn't know then what I know now. Normally, when people think of Haiti they think about the poverty and the political chaos the country is under. As time went on, it was not unheard of to hear of beatings, murders, and even people disappearing because of the politics in Haiti. All these events happened under the regime of Papa Doc Duvalier, the late president of Haiti, and the Tonton Macoutes.

From a young age and as the only girl in my family I was sheltered by my family from a lot of these atrocities. But as a child I could still feel and sense the pressures of the unfairness around me. It would appear that even with the changing of leadership the situation in Haiti today in terms of poverty and politics has not improved. Some may say it is even worse today because it is almost unspoken of or ignored by the rest of the world.

When I first arrived to the Boston area, as a native Haitian woman, it was not easy for me. I faced many challenges and obstacles. The language was one of the biggest obstacles that I faced, along with cultural differences. I did not let this deter me. I still wanted the American dream. I finished my education and went on to get my master's degree. And I never stopped working until I got my first home. There were times I worked three jobs to support my dreams, and I was always a faithful employee remaining in my position for many years. But time after time I was passed over for a promotion in favor of less experienced and less educated people. Some of them were fresh out of high school. The only difference between them and me was that I was an immigrant, but I had more experience and more education. Why didn't I receive those promotions? The only assumption that I can make is because I have an accent. They thought that because I had an accent I was not intelligent or could not hold a conversation. Even though I tried so hard to be the best I

could be, my experience taught me that there will always be people who try to keep me down. But they cannot keep me down. I will not stay down! I have a voice and I want to be heard.

Part of the American dream is fighting for what you believe in. In a situation like that I feel that people try to take away my sense of pride and power, just like those soldiers made Sophia feel so many years ago. I didn't know better then, but now I know that my accent is a part of me. I embrace it; I should not be made to feel ashamed of it. To make anybody feel that their accent makes them less than others is trying to diminish who they are. To me that is social injustice. The questions that I ask myself often are: Should I let these obstacles handicap my mind, my soul and my spirit? Should I let people's insecurities keep me down? Should I lock myself in the closet feeling sorry for myself? NO: I choose to stand tall. I choose to pursue my dreams. I will not allow intimidation run my life. Instead of standing by to let all these negative things happen to me or to others I choose to take control by being active in my family, my church, and my community.

To make anybody feel that their accent makes them less than others is trying to diminish who they are. To me that is social injustice.

I thank God for a strong black Haitian mother who taught me--and is still teaching me!--how to be strong and to persevere. She believed in me and she has been an inspiration in my life. Mother has been always there for me. She has always reminded me not to give up. She is a woman full of gentleness, wisdom, and kindness. In her sweet quiet voice she is always whispering to my ear, "After the darkness there will always be a light. God is able and God is good." My mother is a living testimony to how God is good and God is able. The strongest person I know is my mother. She is a role model in my life.

I never knew my father. My mother was pregnant with my twin brother and me when he passed away. Even though my father was not there, my mother took on the role of fighter and protector of the family. She always made sure that all of her seven children were provided for. Everything that we did was grounded in prayer. This was my foundation. This is my legacy. It is because of an angel like her that I am who I am today. I feel God always places people in my path to help me along the way. Now I feel it is my turn to help others along the way.

Editors' note: *We asked Yvette to tell us more about how her experiences in Haiti and as an immigrant and how the inspiration of her mother led her to get involved in her neighborhood and become an active leader at Somerville Community Corporation (SCC). Here is what she had to say:*

My relationship with Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) and East Somerville Neighborhood for Change (ESNC) began with a meeting. This was a meeting with one of the organizers who wanted to find out what I was all about. Due to this meeting we realized that we had similar goals for the people of Somerville. It was then at that point that she referred me to the CEO and the president of SCC, who eventually invited me to become a Board member. Little did I know that this new relationship would affect me so profoundly and change my life for the better. By getting involved with SCC and ESNC it allowed me to come out of my timidity and shyness. Their encouragement gave me more confidence and strength to become more vocal.

My excitement and joy started after a community gym project ended as with a big success. It was a long journey for the dream to become a reality. With the help of SCC and the residents of East Somerville, we were able to work as a team and make the dream come true. I was so happy that I was part of that project. Now the youth of East Somerville have a place to go to after school. To me it is a great success. This forever changed my life because I realized how much influence one person can have. From this point on, I decided to align myself with different community-based organizations such as SCC and ESNC. ESNC is definitely one of the organizations that I feel very passionate about. My involvement with these organizations allowed me to become less timid and more open to challenges. This planted a seed in my life to help me realize my leadership potential and how I can be a role model for others. These organizations and their leaders believed in me and encouraged me to become the leader that I never thought I could be. It is my hope that I can inspire others to find their voice to become part of this journey toward social justice for everyone.



Yvette Verdieu sits on the board of Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) and is a key neighborhood leader of East Somerville Neighbors for Change (ESNC). She's also very active in a number of community efforts and organizations in Somerville such as volunteering for progressive political candidates, serving on the Human Rights Commission, and playing a big role in the St. James's Church community and its choir. She came to the United States from Port Au Prince, Haiti in 1973.

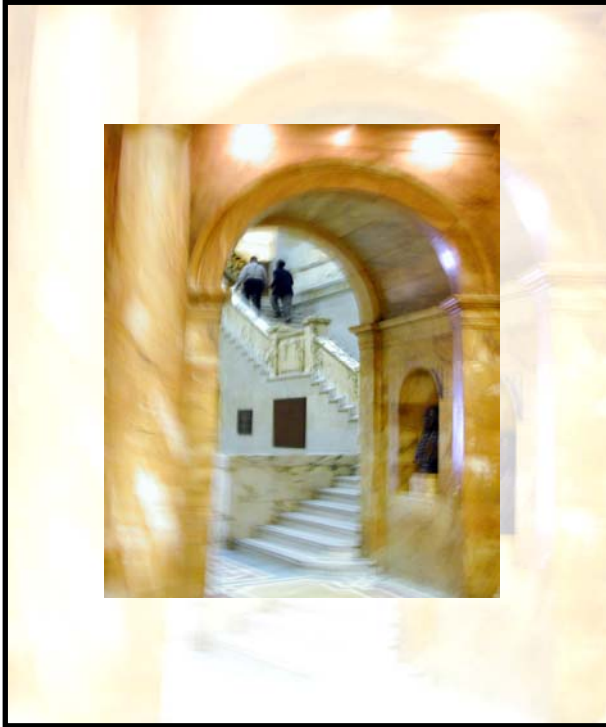


Photo: Lolita Parker, Jr.

EARS WIDE OPEN

By Chong Y. Chow

We were finally meeting with Representative Boston in his office at the State House. As a board member of the Chinatown Resident Association (CRA), I went representing both the CRA and as a member of the Hudson Street for Chinatown (HSC) coalition. The HSC coalition was formed in January 2003 and came out of the organizing work Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC) was doing around the return of a state owned parcel, Parcel 24, in order to benefit the community. For the last six months we five organizations in HSC worked closely to support the passage of a bill that would ensure community-controlled development on Parcel 24, one of the last developable sites available in Chinatown. We were meeting with Representative Boston that afternoon to encourage his support for our bill. We had arrived a few minutes early and stood near the secretary's desk, taking in his well-appointed furnishings. It reminded me of the nice government offices I had seen on television. The furniture was very clean, large paintings were positioned just right, and pictures of the representative with other senior politicians hung neatly on the wall. Everything looked perfect.

Representative Boston came out just then and greeted us. He had an impeccable appearance, the type of appearance that could bring about the same reception I imagine Tom Brady receives: jaws dropping to the floor. He wore an attention-grabbing double-breasted suit, well-made leather shoes, and he stood at just over six feet tall. He smiled warmly in greeting and I found myself smiling in return. We were led to his room and invited to sit around the large, oak conference table. We gave him a detailed presentation about the struggles of Hudson Street and the community. We told him that gentrification, the unfair displacement of working-class residents in our neighborhood, had been happening to Chinatown for many years.

The politician nodded each time we spoke; he showed us the utmost respect and seemed to be very understanding of our situation. Representative Boston told us that in his own neighborhood, gentrification had similarly driven out many of the working class. To that end, he recounted a childhood story about his own working-class background. I was impressed. He seemed very caring. He seemed to say these things sincerely and with class. As the meeting ended, we thanked him for his time and he thanked us for coming. I left the room feeling like we had accomplished a lot: we had gained a valuable supporter for our cause and the bill had a strong chance of being passed.

"Another typical politician. What a great dog-and-pony show," one of the meeting attendees sighed. This person was a community organizer who had spent the last year organizing development projects. Wuh? What did you say? I thought. "That's what these politicians do," she continued. "They put on a great display of emotion like they really care about us and then they barely

listen.” As I found out later on, she was absolutely right. It appeared that something was uncovered from beneath the smooth appearance of the representative’s office.

After our meeting with Representative Boston, we organized more efforts on behalf of our bill. We hosted a lunch with the decision-making members of the State Transportation Committee, other legislators who could help pass the bill. Again, they put on a great show with not much gained from the outcome. We organized a walking tour of Hudson Street where politicians were shown around by residents displaced from Hudson Street. Again, the dog and pony show. Again, we talked into deaf ears. For all our efforts engaging these politicians on the importance of this parcel, we had failed. The bill was not going to pass.

To achieve political respect, we need to create and publicize an agenda, be united, seek allies, and involve ourselves in politics.

After these incidents, I came to the conclusion that the government as a whole didn’t readily listen to the concerns of Chinatown. We did have important allies in the government, some truly amazing people who provided us with much assistance, but we still didn’t have enough allies to leverage that support.

I have decided to learn from this experience so that we can plan better strategies in dealing with future developments, especially with the upcoming South Bay parcels in which Chinatown could potentially expand by thirty percent. Our community needs to build political clout and have strong representation of our interests in the local government so that our neighborhood remains vital. The time has come for Chinatown to be treated fairly. To achieve political respect, we need to create and publicize an agenda, be united, seek allies, and involve ourselves in politics. Each of Chinatown’s major organizations, including ACDC and CRA, needs to pool their strengths to form a strong coalition. The South Bay parcels are the next opportunity for the community to practice what we’ve learned from organizing with the Hudson Street for Chinatown coalition. To better understand the significance of the South Bay parcels to Chinatown as well as the need for building political representation, it is important to begin with the community’s troubled development history.

Historically Boston Chinatown is not a neighborhood that has received reasonable treatment from the local government. A good example is the history behind the struggle for Parcel 24. Back in the 1960s, Chinatown was a very vibrant part of Boston in which Syrian, Lebanese and Chinese families lived next door to each other and whose children went to the same neighborhood school together. Boston Chinatown, though not as big as the New York or San Francisco Chinatowns, was large enough to have many of the important

facets that make a strong and close-knit neighborhood: many local businesses, popular hangouts, a library, and social centers. But this landscape changed drastically under Boston's urban renewal program.

In the 1950s and 1960s, during the urban renewal period, Chinatown was labeled a blighted neighborhood and chosen for significant redevelopment. The urban renewal program was conceived by the federal government for the purpose of rebuilding decaying neighborhoods in cities. A noble plan, the idea was to create an upsurge in economic development and help produce jobs to local areas. However, the negative side of such an ambitious plan was that it could cause gentrification and the displacement of the poor and the working class. The displaced would have a very difficult time finding new affordable housing. As a result of the urban renewal program, Chinatown became a classic example of gentrification.

As part of urban renewal, large stretches of highways were constructed through Chinatown. As a result, buildings in Chinatown had to be torn down. The Chinatown Merchant's Association building was one of the victims. The building was the first large social center for community arts in Chinatown and was erected just before the urban renewal plans for Interstate-93. Faced with this dire prospect, the Chinatown community sprang into action and protested against the highway's construction. The community's efforts were rebuffed. The highway had to be built to help reshape a decaying city, according to the state agencies. The Chinatown Merchant's building was spliced for the I-93 highway. Residents of Hudson Street, one of the liveliest streets in Chinatown, were also forced to move out to make way for a highway ramp. Overall, Chinatown subsequently lost one half of its size due to the highway developments.

Not unlike orphans, Chinatown residents were left to suffer on their own with little sympathy from the government. The government never seemed to see Chinatown residents as part of its constituency. Time and time again, Chinatown's concerns did not seem to matter much to the government. The many reasons for this failure were sociological as well as circumstantial, including Chinatown's lack of political clout.

Gaining political clout and respect first begins with involvement of the people, no matter the consequences. Most revolutions in history came about because of mass involvement from people who had had enough of intolerable situations. The French Revolution came about because many had had enough of the unfair treatment by the wealthy who took advantage of the peasants. The United States of America came out of the desire to rid themselves from the chains of British imperialism. China itself went through several revolutions, first with the Taiping Rebellion, then the Nationalist Revolution and finally the Communist Revolution. All these revolutions originated from social unrest.

The people of Chinatown need this level of involvement as a foundation for change. Since immigrating to America, freed from the earlier oppressions of their motherland, Chinese Americans have succeeded in many areas. Many of us have gone to universities and become doctors, engineers and accountants. We make up some of the most brilliant scientists and inventors of this century. We helped build the United States into the greatest center of technology and medical advancement. We own big companies that sell products around the world. However, something we still lack is significant political respect, especially in the Greater Boston area. Presently many Chinese Americans do not want to get involved because they are afraid of authority or are too occupied with personal and family matters, as well as professional growth. Another disconnect includes language barriers that make communication with authorities difficult.

To resolve some of these issues, community leaders of Chinatown should promote involvement as a vital factor in effecting change. The leaders should tell Chinatown residents that personal growth is beneficial but community-wide growth is even more so. The leaders need to tell the residents that even with language barriers, they can be assisted by organizations that can get their concerns across to those in powerful positions. Helping people to develop this type of mindset is very important. This involvement has been achieved before with HSC. Though HSC succeeded in certain respects, we needed much more involvement. An organization such as ACDC can educate and present development issues to Chinatown residents. This mindset will be needed for the South Bay parcels, the biggest development project in Boston since the Big Dig.

The South Bay parcels, or Chinatown Gateway area, make up twenty-seven acres of land and is one of the major entrances into Boston. One third of the land is in Chinatown. This part of Chinatown is presently made up of highways on land torn down in the 1960s, the same time Hudson Street was unfairly taken from Chinatown residents. The South Bay project could take place over many years. Mass involvement is a key factor, but is still only a small piece of this titanic puzzle. As mentioned before, to achieve political respect and have Chinatown's needs recognized, we need to create and publicize an agenda, be united, seek allies, and involve ourselves in politics.

The community organizations in Chinatown should sit down and agree on an agenda. A splintered Chinatown will provide no ammunition for getting concessions from politicians. The agenda should not be based on idealism, but be practical and presentable. In making the agenda, all parties should have a firm understanding of the issues, which in this case is development, real estate financing, and zoning laws. A very thorough study of the area should be done; one that will offer the most economically viable as well as socially viable benefits to the people of Chinatown. A project with unrealistic demands that carry a very small chance of being passed would surely give Chinatown poor

credibility, a credibility that can be damaged beyond repair. An organization like ACDC should educate, listen to resident concerns, and get advice from Chinatown organizations to create viable plans within such an agenda.

Communication is an important part of creating a strong agenda and a strong coalition. After the Chinatown organizations agree on an agenda and become united, they can then present themselves as a force to be reckoned with. Indeed, our credibility with those outside of Chinatown will be strengthened.

We need to hold political forums with political candidates to gauge their viewpoints about our agenda.

Being united in Chinatown only is not enough. Once united, we need to also reach out to people outside Chinatown to find formidable allies. We need to reach out to other neighborhood associations, political organizations such as the New Majority and Whose Boston that can provide much recognition and give us much

support. We even need to seek assistance outside of Boston. We should learn from similar struggles in other Chinatowns, including San Francisco and New York Chinatowns. San Francisco leaders have much experience in these matters and thus could be great resources in getting knowledge and forming strategies.

Once united and strengthened in our alliances, we need to publicize our agenda to the media.

Finally, we need to build political clout by forming strong relationships with politicians. We need to hold political forums with political candidates to gauge their viewpoints about our agenda. In forming relationships, we should be respectful to all politicians, even if in private we feel that the politicians do not listen to our concerns.

For gaining long-term political respect, we need to involve our community at all levels of civic engagement, from voting to running for political positions. In general, many Chinese Americans, especially recent immigrants, do not have a great interest in politics. There is a lack of political representation in the Boston area. Perhaps another contributing factor to lack of interest is that there are simply not enough Chinese to vote for an Asian candidate sensitive to Chinese American matters. Chinese make up only a minority of the voting population in Boston. Yet, if we have succeeded in forming strong alliances with our neighbors we could potentially elect an Asian American legislator. In that vein, community leaders should encourage Chinese professionals to get involved in politics and seek candidacies in the House and Senate. Once elected, these politicians can help pass bills that can affect Chinatown in positive ways.

To build leaders in Chinatown, we would need to also take a long-term approach. Interest in politics is not something that can be gained overnight.

People interested in politics need to be encouraged when they are very young, ideally during high school and college. They need to be very active in the community. They need to have great charisma and know how to build relationships with residents and politicians. They need to learn how to speak in public, engage in debates and be excellent promoters of our agenda.

Undertaking these challenges will be a monumental task. We don't expect everything to go our way. There will likely be a lot of failures on the way to achieving our goals. However, each success we gain, no matter how small, is invaluable. The key thing is we will have learned and gained a lot from these struggles. Future generations will use these gains to create far greater successes. For example, we had lot of setbacks with the Parcel 24 struggle, but the small successes along the way have enabled Chinatown to incorporate a united vision into the final development plan for Parcel 24. We also agree on what important items need to be focused on in the South Bay project: media exposure, education of Chinatown residents on real estate development, and gaining allies and recognition. These are pretty minute gains. However, in the long, problematic history of mankind, great successes have been built from humble beginnings. Bill Gates created his gigantic technology empire Microsoft by first dropping out of college. The Roman Catholic Church now comprises over one billion members after a beginning in which the religion was persecuted by the Romans. Genghis Khan built his empire from a small group of people in Mongolia; an empire that covered almost half the world. The New England Patriots and Boston Red Sox won their World Championships after a long history of monumental defeats.

We in Chinatown are not afraid to fail, because we are so certain that we will succeed sometime in the future. We know that living in the greatest democratic country in the world; we will eventually be integrated as equals with all other races in America. And then politicians will look at the Chinatown residents with ears wide open.



Chong Y. Chow is the Treasurer of the Chinatown Resident Association, a member of the Hudson Street for Chinatown Coalition, and has worked on many Chinatown issues. When he is not being a freedom fighter for Chinatown causes he is a software engineer