A CASE IN PROGRESS:

THE PROVIDENCE NEIGHBORHOOD
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Submitted by:
Jeanne’ S. Freeman
&
Kenya A. Milton

URP 5122: Dispute Resolution
Executive Summary

The Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department in Tallahassee, Florida is the agency responsible for neighborhood planning within the city limits. The goal of the planning department is to bring together the ideas and desires of the neighborhood planning authority. In order to achieve this goal, the City of Tallahassee, along with the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership, has developed The Community Neighborhood Renaissance Program to address the issues of Tallahassee’s central city neighborhoods. The program focuses on neighborhood revitalization in regards to social needs and physical needs of the neighborhood. It is key to understand that the neighborhood is responsible for identifying their issues and concerns that they would like to be included in the neighborhood plan. Including the residents of the neighborhood in on the entirety of the planning process adds to the program’s credibility and success rate.

The neighborhood planning process is often scrutinized for a lack of citizen/community involvement due to a lack of relating pertinent information to the public. There have been many cries of local governments leaving the neighborhood perspective out and not caring what they think. It has even gotten to the point in some places that the planners do not have any type of relationship with the neighborhood that they are planning for. Situations like this make it hard for the planning process to be a successful one and it becomes seen as a distrustful process by the residents in the neighborhood. There is much to be gained from this process, which means that the residents and the planners need to develop relationships and communicate to each other what directions they would like to see the neighborhood going towards.

If a neighborhood is interested in participating in the Neighborhood Renaissance Program, they must submit a completed application to the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department. The application will ask for basic information regarding a possible neighborhood plan. Each year there is an opening for applications for the next neighborhood to be chosen to enter the Neighborhood Renaissance Program. Once the applications are received, a selection committee is composed, which consists of community stakeholders and representatives from the Community Neighborhood
The Providence Neighborhood Renaissance Program. Only one neighborhood is chosen per year, so the process is very much competitive due to the great need of neighborhood revitalization. Preference is given to those neighborhoods located in the Southern Strategy Area, Central City and the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) (www.talgov.com).

The Neighborhood Selection Process includes five steps, which are, (1) application for renaissance neighborhood, (2) eligible neighborhoods, (3) eligible applicant organizations, (4) selection criteria and (5) the selection process. Each one of these steps will be further discussed in the case study. The neighborhood selected for this year is the Providence Neighborhood. In their application, the Providence Neighborhood listed the following three elements that they would like to preserve: children, families and the neighborhood itself. They would also like to increase the home-ownership rates; only 7% of the homes in the neighborhood are owner-occupied (www.talgov.com).

The case of the Providence Neighborhood starts with a background or informational sketch of the neighborhood. The remainder of the case study provides an in-depth explanation of the neighborhood planning process and a description of what is happening with the Providence Neighborhood.

**Neighborhood Background Information**

The area known today as the Providence Neighborhood was historically known as Bloxham Heights. It was named after one of Florida’s Governors; William D. Bloxham who was elected governor in 1880 and again in 1897. Although the neighborhood was officially named Bloxham Heights, the residents who lived in the area referred to the neighborhood as “Allen Hill.” The Allen’s were a large family that lived in the neighborhood at the top of Lake Avenue and who occupied and owned several homes in the neighborhood.

Providence is comprised of two separate subdivisions: Bloxham Heights and Hutchinson Heights. Bloxham Heights, the area bounded by Iamonia Street, Levy Avenue, Stuckey
Avenue, and Lake Bradford Road, was the first subdivision platted in the neighborhood. County records show that the City of Tallahassee approved the plat for Bloxham Heights on December 11, 1928. Kate Stuckey, a well-known resident then, was the landowner. Stuckey Street, a local street in the neighborhood, was named in her honor. Paul and Beauna Bishop bought Tract “O” in the subdivision and further subdivided that tract on April 12, 1949. According to records, the Bloxham Heights subdivision was paved and connected to city water in the 1950s.

The plat for Hutchinson Heights, the section of the neighborhood south of Levy, was approved on March 24, 1947. Local residents, Roy and Theo Hutchinson owned the property. This area was actually referred to as Hutchinson Heights. Hutchinson Avenue, the southern boundary of the neighborhood, is named after the Hutchinson’s. Hutchinson Heights was re-platted and was granted approval on December 23, 1930. In the early days, Providence consisted of a patchwork of single-family homes. Most of these homes were built in the late 1940s to early 1950s, and were typified by wooden frames. During this time period Providence was establishing its roots as a thriving community intent on establishing its ground as a viable economic force within the Tallahassee area. The workforce consisted of carpenters, farmers, teachers and more. Previous resident, Adalle McPeat, reminisced about her father, a local carpenter, remodeling their new home and how happy her family was to be moving into the neighborhood. During this time period religious places of worship were essential ingredients of many communities. Providence was the home of several churches. Among these churches were the Bloxham Heights Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Church of God. Many residents received their early education at the Caroline Brevard School, located in the previously titled Bloxham Building.

Local neighborhood stores met most of the retail needs of residents. The local store, Crows Grocery (previously Wombel’s Grocery), located on the corner of Lake Bradford Road and Lake Avenue was the unfortunate scene of a bombing after the death of Dr.
Martin L. King Jr., which claimed the life of young Travis Crow. Tyson’s Grocery was located across the street.

According to previous residents, Caucasian homeowners and renters traditionally occupied Providence. As with many neighborhoods throughout the country, this area began to see a significant change in its racial composition. “White Flight” was an urban phenomenon that was occurring across the nation, and the neighborhoods in urban Tallahassee were no exception. Around 1980, this neighborhood began the transition from an all white neighborhood to a predominantly black neighborhood.

**Neighborhood Planning Process**

The City of Tallahassee adopted an initiative in 1999 to revitalize some of the depressed and distressed neighborhoods in the city. The Community Neighborhood Renaissance Program was designed to aid residents and local government officials in planning the future of community neighborhoods. As mentioned earlier, preference is given to those neighborhoods located in the Southern Strategy Area, Central City and the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). This program has been widely accepted by the Board of County Commissioners since its conception.

There are many people involved in the neighborhood planning process, due to the effort needed to take on a project of this magnitude. Some key coordinators have been identified to help manage the process. They include John Baker of the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department, Rosa Morgan of the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership Program, Debra Page of the Tallahassee Police Department, Kathy McGhin, Tallahassee Weed and Seed, Charles Connerly, Ph.D. of the FSU Urban and Regional Planning Department, Monica Lee of the Providence Neighborhood Association and the president of the Providence Neighborhood Association (www.talgov.com).
In 1996, the City of Tallahassee adopted a Neighborhood Strategic Plan, which directed the city to develop and adopt a neighborhood planning process. According to the City of Tallahassee, the Neighborhood Planning Process of the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Program contains eight different steps.

1. **Policy Framework**
   - Boundary setting (i.e., establishing the boundaries for the neighborhood to be studied);
   - Topics to be covered in a neighborhood plan;
   - Assessing neighborhood conditions and data;
   - A public participation plan;
   - Developing neighborhood priorities, within the context of the adopted Tallahassee-Leon County Comprehensive Plan;
   - Setting goals;
   - Identifying costs and benefits;
   - Choosing implementation strategies such as design guidelines, overlay and special assessment and taxing districts; and
   - Adoption procedures

2. **Why Neighborhood Planning?**
   - Neighborhoods are the foundations that cities are built on
   - Allows for active citizen participation
   - Identifies problems, issues, concerns and offers possible solutions
   - Encourages a better planning process

3. **What will a Neighborhood Plan do for my Neighborhood?**
   - Describe clearly what the neighborhood wants to accomplish;
   - Provide guidance for land use and zoning decisions in and adjacent to the neighborhood;
   - Give direction to the City and the County regarding the programs, services and capital improvements needed for the neighborhood;
   - Help guide and prioritize the Partnership expenditures of public funds in the neighborhood;
   - Provide a clear picture to residents, businesses, and developers of the types of
businesses and development desired by the neighborhood;

- Identify to the School Board the public education issues with which the community is most concerned, and recommendations to address those issues;
- Identify for the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership opportunities for partnering with a local neighborhood to effectuate neighborhood revitalization while fulfilling the purpose and mission of that organization; and
- Identify how the neighborhood will protect its assets and resources.

4. How does my Neighborhood go through the Process?

- Open and competitive application process
- Selection committee makes a recommendation to the Community Neighborhood Partnership Board
- Final selection

5. Who is the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership and What is its Role?

- A non-profit organization made up of organizations in Leon County
- Two groups: Institutional Partners and Covenant Partners
- Brings human, material and financial resources to the neighborhood planning process

6. What is the Neighborhood’s Role?

- Select a Neighborhood Steering Committee that is representative of the neighborhood.
- The neighborhood steering committee will be the hub of the planning team that will lead the neighborhood through the planning process;
- Secure a regular meeting place;
- Establish meeting and workshop agendas in consultation with the neighborhood planner and the other players in the neighborhood planning process;
- Provide direction for the development of the plan’s goals, objectives and implementation strategies;
- Take an active role in the implementation of the plan by identifying the actions that the neighborhood can do on its own, as well as those activities that they can do with help from others; and
- Assist with any update of the plan.
7. What is the Role of City Staff?
   • Demographic, land use and zoning data;
   • Research and analysis;
   • Maps;
   • Field data;
   • Tools to identify, clarify and prioritize issues;
   • Methods to determine goals, objectives and implementation strategies;
   • Coordination with other City departments and services;
   • Assistance with plan implementation; and
   • Assistance in updating the adopted plan.

8. What are the Adoption Procedures for the Plan and What Status will the Plan have?
   • Preliminary draft of neighborhood plan is given to all parties involved for review
   • Neighborhood presentations are made to different community groups
   • Neighborhoods make efforts to resolve some of their conflicts
   • Adopt and endorse a final plan (advisory document) (www.talgov.com)

Stakeholders

In order for any neighborhood revitalization effort to be successful it is imperative that each of the principle parties involved participate fully in the planning process. Participation by each of these parties will ensure that the planning process is carried out in an effective and efficient manner. In addition, it will allow each party to voice their ideas and concerns. Furthermore it ensures that the neighborhood’s vision is a collective representation of the entire community and that the neighborhood’s plan is designed and implemented in a holistic fashion.

The Providence Neighborhood is composed of a mixture of individuals, businesses, organizations and institutions. Each of these parties plays a key role in the functioning of this neighborhood as well as the neighborhood planning process. There are four principle parties who collectively have the potential to mold and steer this process into a viable neighborhood plan, which addresses and meets the needs of the entire neighborhood. The
principle parties involved are local area residents, Community Renaissance Partnership along with the Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department, and the steering committee members. Other key stakeholders include various governmental agencies, local business owners, local churches, public and private organizations, real estate and banking institutions, local institutions of higher learning, as well as neighboring communities. In truth, there are many stakeholders in any planning process--some play a major role, while others play a minor role. However, each party’s role is significant in shaping the neighborhood and the plan. See appendix 6 for the stakeholder analysis chart.

A list of specific and non-specific stakeholders and their interests were generated during a neighborhood association meeting and is provided below:

Stakeholders:

**Residential Interests** – Interested in the residential quality of life in the neighborhood and neighborhood revitalization.

- Residents:
  - Rental tenants
  - Home owners
  - Neighborhood Association Members

- Local and Non-Landlords
- Tallahassee Landlords Association
- Capital City Apartment Association

**Business Interests** – Interested in business related aspects of the community such as financial stability and economic potential.

- Local businesses
- Elder Care
- Tal-Tran

**Financial Interests** – Interested in financial resources associated with the neighborhood and in providing financial assistance to qualified individuals.

- Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce
• Local Banks of homes to be foreclosed
• Various lending institutions
• Tallahassee Lender’s Consortium

**Educational Interests** – Interested in the provision of affordable housing for students. Also providing educational opportunities for residents.

• Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University
• Florida State University
• Local Schools

**Neighborhood Interests** – Interested in improving the quality of life for residents.

• Community Renaissance Partnership
• Tallahassee Urban League
• Mothers in Crisis
• Tallahassee Police Department
• ADAVA
• Neighboring communities

**Religious Interests** – Interested in providing religious oriented support for residents.

• Local Churches/Religious Institutions

**Political Interests** – Interested in establishing and furthering their political platforms and objectives.

• Local Politicians

**Land Use Interests** – Interested in ensuring that the requirements and standards are adhered to during the planning process.

• Various Governmental Agencies
  
  Leon-County Planning Department

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**The Process in Action**

The Providence Neighborhood revitalization process began when the neighborhood was selected as the next neighborhood to go through the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Program, in August of 2002. After being selected, the Providence Neighborhood began the transition into the neighborhood planning process, which consisted of four distinct phases. These phases are as follows:
Phase I:
Phase I of the Neighborhood Planning Process includes the following steps:

1) Neighborhood Selection;
2) Defining the Neighborhood Boundaries;
3) Building the Neighborhood Planning Team (who will participate); and
4) Neighborhood Assessment. The neighborhood assessment is a process by which the visual information (what the neighborhood looks like), and numerical indicators and other aggregate statistics (e.g. crime rates, traffic counts, etc.) are gathered. Background information regarding historical development and existing conditions is gathered through surveys, research, and observations. A neighborhood profile will be created based on socio-economic, demographic, employment, cultural, public safety statistics, infrastructure inventory, and housing data. The data collected in this phase will be used by the Neighborhood Steering Committee to define neighborhood issues and concerns during the plan development phase. (www.talgov.com)

Phase II:
Phase II of the neighborhood planning process is the plan development phase. This phase involves all stakeholders. During this phase the neighborhood’s needs are defined, alternatives are created and analyzed, resources are identified and implementation strategies are identified to address the neighborhoods needs. The steps for this phase are as follows:

1. Definition/Refinement of identified needs
2. Look to the Future: In this step the determination as to how the neighborhood wants to look (visual) and where it would like to be in the next three to five years. Goals are also defined in this step.
3. Plan Development: The primary focus of this step is the development of recommendations for implementation of the goals set previously in
the process. The recommended goals and other items will be the
foundation for a preliminary neighborhood renaissance plan. This plan
will be presented to the public in a series of workshops that are
designed to obtain public input and response to the preliminary plan.

4. Plan Support and Approval: The preliminary neighborhood
renaissance plan will be developed and approved by the neighborhood
planning team based on consensus. The plan will then be reviewed by
various stakeholders including the neighborhood for their comments
on the goals and objectives, implementation strategies, and timelines
of the plan with respect to the impact the plan will have on its budget,
personnel and any other resources. Once the comments are reviewed
by the neighborhood planning team, changes will be made, and the
final plan will be presented to all interested parties.

(www.talgov.com).

**Phase III:**
Phase III involves the plan implementation and monitoring. This stage is
extremely important to the planning process. It is imperative that all parties work
together to ensure that the plan is properly implemented in a timely manner. The
steering committee and the Community Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership,
to ensure this, will establish a monitoring committee. (www.talgov.com).

**Phase IV:**
Phase IV is the evaluation stage of the process. During this process it will be
determined if the plan may need to be revised. The plan will be reviewed on a
yearly basis to ensure that it is accomplishing what the neighborhood set out to
achieve. The neighborhood planner, working in conjunction with the
neighborhood association will conduct the review. Revisions will follow the
procedures that were used to adopt the original plan. (www.talgov.com).
The Providence Neighborhood has completed Phase I of the planning process and is gearing up to begin phase II of the process. In December of 2002, the Providence Neighborhood Association sponsored a community outreach event. This event allowed residents to interact one-on-one with members of the neighborhood association and to inquire about the upcoming Neighborhood Renaissance planning project. The first phase of the planning process for the neighborhood also involved information-gathering and an analysis of Providence’s culture and values, the goals and expectations of stakeholders, the external environment and those opportunities and threats it holds for Providence’s future, and the internal environment with a focus on Providence’s special strengths as well as its weaknesses. The first major task completed was the historical analysis of the neighborhood. The historical analysis featured past trends, initial housing stock information, and the historical development of the neighborhood. The next step to be completed was the neighborhood survey. Florida State University planning students developed the survey. The Neighborhood Renaissance Partnership, residents, and FSU students conducted the survey. The information and resulting analyses were shared and discussed with planning subgroups and neighborhood residents. Upon completion of the survey, the neighborhood assessment process began. A neighborhood road walk project was the means by which the assessment was completed. During the road walk the physical assessment of the neighborhood, neighborhood resources mapping and the housing inventory was completed. In addition, the neighborhood association, renaissance partnership, and FSU students conducted outreach and community organizing to get people interested in participating in the planning process. Next a stakeholder’s meeting was scheduled in order to shape a shared vision for the planning process, clarify roles of organization and interest group leaders, seek consensus on the planning process and to agree on coordination and communications mechanisms.

A preliminary schedule of activities planned for the Providence Neighborhood and the survey results have been included in the appendix. Please see appendices 2 and 3.

**Basic Issues and Concerns**

While city staff, the Renaissance Partnership and consultants had ideas of what they wanted a revitalized Providence to look like, it was imperative to ask citizens for their
input, and then work with them toward a more livable neighborhood. Resident involvement was facilitated through neighborhood association meetings and steering committee meetings. During a neighborhood steering committee meeting, on February 4, 2003, the residents along with the steering committee identified several basic issues and concerns they had. The overarching concern that was identified was that there was indeed a need for neighborhood revitalization in the Providence neighborhood. Other issues and concerns which were identified were as follows:

- Increasing citizen participation in the neighborhood planning process.
- Establishing a flow of information between the community and local government about the neighborhood planning process.
- Increasing the percentage of owner-occupied housing.

**Observations and Findings**

The current methodology that the existing process utilizes satisfied two criteria. First, it allowed the neighborhood to define what it wanted to accomplish—based on citizen input—up-front, and therefore design incentives and disincentives for the neighborhood plan. Second, it allowed Providence to let developers and business owners know what the neighborhood’s plans were in order to prepare appropriately.

Upon completion of the analysis of this situation, several underlying issues were observed. These issues are as follows:

- *The process is extremely time-consuming:* The neighborhood planning process involves many aspects that are not easy to begin. It is important for all parties involved to be informed of the time horizon and show patience in their expectations.
- *Organization is a key element:* It is difficult to organize different people with different interests to meet goals. Each interest group feels that their issues are the most important ones.
Residents are hesitant about participating in the process: This is due to the fact that most people do not like change and are not assured that their interests, desires and issues will be represented fairly.

Trust is an issue: As in developing any new relationship, a level of trust must be established. This can be done by discrediting the stereotypes about the planning process and explaining the planning process to the residents.

A crucial step for the renaissance project was bringing in the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium under the leadership of Dr. Tom Taylor to aid in the facilitation of the planning process. “The purpose of the consortium is to serve as a neutral resource to assist citizens and public and private interests in Florida to seek cost-effective solutions to public disputes and problems through the use of alternative dispute resolution and consensus-building.” (http://consensus.fsu.edu/).

Recommendations and Conclusion

It is our opinion that those responsible for implementing the neighborhood renaissance project adhere to the following recommendations in order to ensure that this process is as effective as possible:

- Seek out assertive and aggressive leaders
- Redefine and refine organization techniques
- Create a database, which contains a preliminary timeline, ongoing and scheduled events, and a progress report.
- Schedule more community events targeted at increasing participation in the planning process

Often when a revitalization effort is initiated, the process of neighborhood gentrification is also initiated. It is vital to the sustainability of existing residents that the program includes an aggressive mechanism to avoid this occurrence. In the event that the gentrification process does begin, we encourage coordinators of the project to develop a
relocation assistance program for those who may be displaced do to rising taxes associated with property value increases.

In addition we challenge the neighborhood to continue to accumulate intellectual capital through its provision of affordable housing to students. By cultivating and maintaining the existing pool of intellectuals this neighborhood may be able to raise the average income in the Providence area by offering them an affordable and desirable living environment.

We also challenge the local government to encourage development of the surrounding business community in order to channel revenues into the neighborhood. Hopefully this would expand employment opportunities for all segments of the incumbent and emerging workforce in this area. In addition, we challenge the local government to develop public policies specifically aimed at preserving the heritage and neighborhood themes that residents value.

The neighborhood renaissance project can be beneficial to ensuring that underprivileged neighborhoods reap the benefits of a well-designed planning endeavor. This process can be effective as long as there is sufficient community participation and an efficient method for sharing information between parties. With the aid of the Neighborhood Renaissance Program and other partners, the Providence Neighborhood has the potential to evolve into a neighborhood that is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable.
Appendices:

1. Map of the Providence Neighborhood
2. Providence Neighborhood Planning Schedule
3. FSU Providence Neighborhood Survey Results
4. Neighborhood Planning Team Diagram
5. Neighborhood Planning Process
6. Stakeholder Analysis/Issues Chart