



## **MERION~SOUTHWOOD REINVESTMENT AREA REPORT & ACTION PLAN**

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## **MERION~SOUTHWOOD REINVESTMENT AREA**

Merion~Southwood is the last pilot Community Reinvestment Area to receive planning assistance. Formal planning activities took place during the Spring and Summer of 1996—although for many in the neighborhood, it probably seems a lot longer. The Report and Action Plan documents these activities.

Residents of the reinvestment area, many of whom are active members of the Merion Village Association, have been anticipating the start of the Community Reinvestment Program in their area since 1994. City staff, appreciative of their enthusiasm, periodically stopped by the Association's meetings to give a progress report on how planning was proceeding in the other reinvestment areas.

With the help of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers, the Saturday workshops and associated task force meetings attracted over 100 participants. Working together they identified area strengths and problems, devised potential solutions, and set priorities.

Located south of the city's downtown, the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) shares a mutual boundary with a well known older city neighborhood. Nursery Lane, the alley between Thurman Avenue and Mithoff Street, is the north and south boundary for German Village and the Merion~Southwood CRA, respectively. The remaining reinvestment area boundaries are roughly, as follows: the alley south of Morrill Avenue, on the south; Bruck Street on the east; and the Conrail Railroad tracks west of High Street, on the west.

Merion~Southwood is the city's largest community reinvestment area. According to a 1990 U.S. Census core report, the reinvestment area comprises 226.35 acres and contains approximately 1,532 housing units. The total population was estimated at 3,432 persons, the majority of whom are white (96.5%) and over 17 years of age (76.5%). (Core report information, though limited, reflects the actual boundaries of the Merion~Southwood CRA.)

To get a more detailed demographic profile, 1990 U.S. Census data was collected for an area slightly larger than the reinvestment boundaries as described (see map on next page). Although the reinvestment and Census boundaries are not an exact match, they are close and the socio-demographic profile contains useful information.

The average median household income reported was \$22,256, approximately twenty-five percent less than the city-wide average of \$31,860. The poverty rate, estimated at 19.6%, is slightly higher than the city-wide rate of 17.2%, though considerably lower than the older-city poverty rate of 29.1%.

The 1990 Census for the larger area records a total of 1,963 housing units, (431 units more than the core/reinvestment area). Approximately 68.3% of the total units in the profile area were built before 1940. The percentage of reinvestment area home owners, at 44.5%, is on par with the city-wide home ownership rate of 46.6%. A closer look, however, shows a 10.7% decline in reinvestment home ownership rates between the period of 1980 and 1990. This is important to note, because changes in home ownership can be a strong indicator of neighborhood stability, improvement, or decline.

The total 1990 population for the larger demographic area was reported at 4,724, an 8% reduction in total population over a ten year period. Population declined in all age groups, with the exception being persons aged between 30 and 44 years of age, an age group which experienced a 39% rate of increase over the same ten year period. And at 56.7%, a workforce population of persons aged 20 to 59 years, comprise the largest segment of the overall population. The population is rounded out by persons 19 years or younger and seniors over the age of 60, at 28.6% and 14.7%, respectively.

## **COLUMBUS COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT AREAS**

1994-1996

Announced in Fall 1993, the Community Reinvestment Program (CRP) signified a new approach to community reinvestment efforts in Columbus. Started as a pilot program in six of Columbus's central-city neighborhoods, the CRP differs from earlier revitalization efforts. Instead of narrowly focusing on single issues, problems or programs from a "downtown" perspective, the CRP is a neighborhood-based initiative that takes a comprehensive approach to neighborhood revitalization. Residents and stakeholders work with each other and the city to develop action plans that speak to each neighborhood's goals and preferred activities for getting things done. New ideas have emerged during the planning process and the city has made a three year commitment of staff and resources to each of the community reinvestment areas. Successful neighborhood revitalization, however, will require a variety of planning and implementing partnerships involving residents and the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD REINVESTMENT: THE HOLISTIC APPROACH**

The Community Reinvestment Program is one of the city's responses to recommendations made by a Low-Income Neighborhood Advisory Panel of The Urban Land Institute (ULI). In March 1992, the ULI Panel visited Columbus to examine our local situation and offer recommendations to improve the delivery of housing and neighborhood revitalization.

Sponsored by the local ULI Chapter and various business and development interests, the Panel examined background information, toured three study neighborhoods, and interviewed over 100 representatives of Columbus neighborhoods, financial institutions, development organizations and city government. The Panel concluded its public inquiry with a presentation of its findings. These recommendations included a statement on the need to clarify public policies addressing affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization.

The Panel also advised that neighborhood revitalization activities be based on comprehensive, holistic, neighborhood plans. The plans should include a definition of neighborhood boundaries that work, thus enabling resources to be concentrated in an area small enough to make an impact, yet large enough to be significant. Overall two things were stressed: to meaningfully have an effect, revitalization efforts must provide for resident and stakeholder participation at every step of the process and be able to build upon an area's strengths and successes.

### **REINVESTMENT AREAS AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION POLICY**

In response to the ULI challenge to clarify the city's affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization policies, Mayor Gregory S. Lashutka convened the Housing and Neighborhood Development Committee (HNDC) in March 1993. Comprised of city officials, neighborhood leaders, community service providers, and representatives of the development community, this group drafted policies and strategies reflective of all housing and neighborhood interests. The policies serve as the city's statement on the delivery of housing assistance and the revitalization of Columbus neighborhoods.

Additionally, the HNDC developed reinvestment area selection criteria. The criteria contain several broad themes, as follows: residential and stakeholder involvement, community based planning, holistic programs, small areas to maximize impact, and signs of decay and distress. The committee also advised that the city give priority consideration to areas that have a history and a culture—that were once vital, and are now demonstrating the desire to regain their earlier vitality.

The six reinvestment areas were selected using this criteria. Most of the reinvestment areas are smaller sub-neighborhoods of existing community planning areas. They are referred to here as South of Main, Hilltop I & II, Greater Linden, Merion~Southwood, and Italian Village.

Each of the reinvestment areas have at least one “solid” border to build from. In some instances, the border is an interstate highway or industrial location that separates the neighborhood from other areas of decay and distress. For others, a stable neighborhood serves as the base from which to address revitalization activities. Other common strengths include active development organizations, other development activity underway that the program can build upon, strong resident participation and organization, affordable housing, and committed local institutions.

Planning activities began simultaneously in the 1994 designated reinvestment areas of South of Main and Hilltop. The two reinvestment areas, Hilltop I & II were combined for planning purposes.

A planning process precedes the expenditure of Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds set aside to implement reinvestment activities. Following completion of the Hilltop and South of Main planning efforts, the remaining reinvestment areas were phased in one at a time.

The Department of Trade and Development’s Planning Division has led the planning phase of the Community Reinvestment Program. The Neighborhood Development Division will use the plans created to coordinate a three year implementation phase in each of the reinvestment areas. It is believed that this new approach to neighborhood reinvestment, holistic in nature and defined at the neighborhood level, will yield positive results for Columbus’s older city neighborhoods.

## **MERION~SOUTHWOOD HISTORY**

The Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area has an important story to tell in the history of South Columbus. Located in the city's Near South Side, and part of the Merion Village Neighborhood, the Merion~Southwood area has enjoyed a lively and distinguished past. Early settlers were British and Nova Scotian Canadians who came to the area in 1798, when as compensation for their help in the revolutionary war, Congress deeded 50,080 acres of land east of the Scioto River.

During the mid-nineteenth-century, the neighborhood saw an influx of German immigrants. Irish, Italian and Eastern European immigrants located throughout the area as well, as did migrants from the Appalachian foot hills and southern United States—thus sealing the area's reputation as a port of entry for industrial workers and their families. Neighbors came to comment that you could tell the nationality of a homeowner by the kind of garden kept.

A building boom in Columbus' Near South Side began around 1900 and ended in the 1930s prior to the Great Depression. The boom was largely fueled by the railroads which linked the South Side to points east and northwest. Dubbed "Steelton," the area of Parson's Avenue south of Reeb-Hosack, quickly developed into a center of manufacturing and was home to two large iron and steel plants. Street car lines were quickly established to supply Steelton with workers. With the construction of the Parsons Avenue Line and the Steelton Trolley Line along Fourth Street, farm land and other undeveloped portions of the near South Side grew with houses, churches, stores, and businesses.

Locating within Merion~Southwood were institutions that traditionally represent community stability—churches, schools, a hospital, and businesses employing local residents. Religion played an important role in community life and many churches were built, reflecting the varied religious beliefs of area residents. Today there are eight churches active in Merion~Southwood, some of which have been providing sanctuary and religious instruction for the past 75 years and longer—among these are: Emmanuel Lutheran Church; St. Leo Church; Southwood Church of Christ; Gates-Fourth United Methodist Church; South Side Baptist Church; St. Paul United Church of Christ; Power of Faith Christian Center; and the Fountain of Life Ministries Church.

Merion~Southwood also has two historic elementary schools—one public and one parochial. The Southwood Elementary School, a public school located at the corner of Southwood Avenue and Fourth Street, has been educating Columbus children for over a century. The School site was purchased in 1890 from a local family for the cost of \$3,000. Built in 1894, the eight room school cost \$16,000 to construct. Children living in an attendance area roughly bounded by Hanford Street on the north, Marion Road on the south, High Street on the west, and Parsons Avenue on east, attended grades one through eight, and special bi-weekly classes in carpentry and cooking.

In its early days the school was staffed by five teachers and the teacher-pupil ratio was 50 to 1. Miss Mary Esper was the school's first principal and its German instructor as well, staying until her retirement in 1923. Southwood Elementary held its first graduation ceremony in 1896, with 6 boys and 7 girls being promoted to high school. By 1912, the school grew to 17 rooms, with 16 teachers and 735 pupils. Also in that year, seventh and eight graders were assigned to the new high school.

A Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was formed in 1917 and over the years the organization has helped to raise money for many different projects, including: heating equipment; books; a piano; athletic equipment; milk, food, and clothing for needy Great Depression families; trees on the school grounds; boxes of cookies and candies for World War II service men; remodeling the auditorium and teacher's lounge; a new library learning center; scholarships; and much more. In 1904, less than two years after the parish of St. Leo was formally dedicated, the church opened a free parochial school. An opening enrollment of 150 students were greeted by three Sisters of the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity of Stella Niagra. The Sisters

commuted to school from the St. Vincent Orphanage (now St. Vincent Childrens Center) located on Columbus' east side.

An account related in a 1996 letter to the "People of St. Leo's Parish," states, "...The Sisters' chronicles tell us that various parishioners transported Sisters Lina, Mercedes, and Alice to school in every manner of horse-drawn conveyance, of which was a wagon often used as a hearse because it was closed against the elements." In time a Convent was built to receive the Sisters teaching at the school. The original brick structure is now at the core of the present Convent, which over the years has undergone several renovations to create home-like accommodations for the Sisters residing there.

For 68 years St. Leo's, located at Freebis and Bruck Streets, was the city's only free parish school. A program prepared for the Church's 75th anniversary relates that in 1972 it became necessary for the school to charge tuition. Increasing costs and decreasing contributions had eventually taken their toll. The program went on to note that the Church "reinitiated the annual Parish Festival" to help defray school and parish expenses.

Early in the School's development there were few organized, parochial athletic leagues in Columbus. Over time, however, that situation changed and St. Leo offered its students the opportunity to participate in organized athletic competition. Both the boys and girls fielded championship teams, including football, basketball, softball, baseball, and swimming. It is a good assumption that the sports programs at St. Leo, along with those at the Southwood Elementary School, have gone a long way toward sustaining the area's city-wide prominence in baseball and softball.

Columbus Community Hospital has also been a stabilizing force in the neighborhood, providing area residents and workers with local access to quality health care. According to Julie Perkins, the Hospital's Director of Public and Industrial Relations, the hospital opened in 1903, when Doctor Theodore Davids, aided by several civic-minded women, established the Mercy Hospital in a large house at 1522 South High Street. Although Davids left a year later, the women working with him formed the Mercy Hospital Association and were able to save the hospital.

1904 was an important year for the hospital. A charter was established authorizing its operation and establishing a school of nursing, and enough money was raised to purchase a new, permanent hospital location. During the same year, the hospital moved to its present location at 1430 South High Street—then a larger house with twelve rooms, one bathroom, and a large attic divided into five rooms. A valued community institution, the hospital was supported by local merchants, civic organizations, churches, and the schools, who donated supplies, food and linen.

During 1907, the School of Nursing graduated its first class and a decision was made to begin fund raising efforts for a new, larger facility. By 1910, the new facility was open and in 1930 an addition was constructed. The present day Medical Arts building was constructed in 1958. The last major construction project, completed in 1971, was the present day hospital building. The Medical Arts building and the main hospital are connected by an underground tunnel.

Changes in health care led to the 1987 merger of Mercy Hospital with Saint Anthony Medical Center, part of the Franciscan Sisters of Poor Health System. The merger proved to be a short-term solution and in 1987, under the threat of closure, a group of five physicians organized the purchase of the hospital. Renamed Columbus Community Hospital, it is now a for-profit institution managed by American Healthmark, a Nashville-based company. Columbus Community Hospital now has 156 beds, providing medical-surgical, chemical dependency, critical care, and level II emergency patient care.

The businesses of Merion~Southwood tended to concentrate along street car lines, and accordingly, stores, restaurants, offices, theaters and bars thrived in the area. Although Parson's Avenue was the true "Main Street" of the South Side, Fourth Street, with its street car line, served

as the hub of commercial activity in Merion~Southwood. (High Street developed more residentially on the Near South Side.)

Ebert's Pharmacy on Fourth Street was a popular spot, because of its medical services, and soda fountain. The Mykrantz Drug Store was located further down the street. The Derr Family operated a candy factory on the corner of Moler and Fourth Streets, and behind the factory were tennis courts and the Cortilian Club. The Schick Family owned a butcher shop on Fourth, near Jenkins Street; there was also Ollie Reeb's grocery and further south—Ester Reeb's dry goods and barbershop. The Mock Poultry House was in this area as was the Mueller's bakery.

The Metzmaiers green houses were also located on Fourth, near Jenkins Street, the Gregg home at Fourth and Moler housed a confectionary, and the neighborhood grocery became a "return store" for the bakery across the street. The Landmark Cafe remained a family saloon and popular meeting spot until burning down in July 1993. Hepple's Saloon, also a memory, unabashedly quenched the neighborhood's thirst. Along the Fourth Street side of Hepple's was a door bell—women would come to the door, ring the bell, and give their buckets to Mrs. Hepple, who filled the buckets with beer.

Home to historic houses, churches, schools, a hospital and businesses, the Merion~Southwood area remains a vibrant and special place. Today, many of the people residing in Merion~Southwood have strong family ties dating back to the early 1900s. The neighborhood continues to attract new families and individuals for many of the same reasons it did almost a century ago—pleasant, affordable and solidly built housing, strong neighborhood institutions, and easy access to area employers. However, instead of heading south to Steelton, many of today's residents commute to their jobs downtown, at the nearby The Ohio State University, or to other employers throughout the city and its suburbs—including those South Side manufacturing concerns still operation.

Sources:

- The Columbus Neighborhood Design Assistance Center, *The South Side: A History*, 1987
- Priscilla La Rue Lennox, *A History of the Merion Family*, 1986 (reprinted 1996), Prepared For The Merion Village Society.
- Southwood Elementary School, PTA Founder's Day, *Alumni Night Program*, February 18, 1976.
- St. Leo Parish, *Diamond Anniversary Program*, December 9 &10, 1978.
- Julie Perkins, Director of Public and Industrial Relations, Columbus Community Hospital.

*History Task Force Members:* Nancy Beals; Martin Cataline; Janice Heinlein; Kevin Himmelberger; Ken Fultz; Bob Leighty; Joanne Mase; and Steve Tweed, facilitator.

## **HISTORY OF THE MERION FAMILY**

A short history of the Merion family, as prepared for the Merion Village Civic Association in 1986 by Priscilla LaRue Lennox, reprinted in 1996.

Merion Village was named for the Merion family who settled in the South Side of Columbus in 1809, on a tract of land of 1800 acres. These Columbus Merions, were Nathaniel, William and Millie Merion Morrill. The family was of English descent, and the first to settle in the USA was John Maryon, who settled in Watertown, Massachusetts. The family remained on the east coast until the opportunity arose to purchase acreage in the Refuge Lands of Ohio. The Merions sold their Massachusetts farm, pooled their resources, and bought the land for about a dollar an acre.

William Merion married Sarah Walt in 1809. Their wedding was preformed by Rev. James Hodge, who was then a missionary in the Northwest Territory. Rev. Hodge's name is still known in Columbus, in the church he helped to found. After clearing the dense forests, the newlyweds settled in their new home in the vicinity of Moler and South High Streets. The house, grand for those days, has since been torn down, but two of the men who worked on it were David W. Deshler and Rev. George Jefferies. Deshler would later become a Columbus tycoon himself, but at that time, he earned a living with his carpentering skills.

By 1818, a growing family made a larger house necessary, and this house was really quite grandiose... now torn down, of course!

By the 1830's, canals were opening new markets for Ohio farmers and, ever the opportunist, William Merion built "Merion's Landing" and prospered greatly. The ONLY canal connection in Columbus was totally in the South Side... starting at Main Street and continuing south to Shadeville, crossing High Street and on south until it turned to join the main canal at Lockbourne, Ohio. The canal helped the Merions to prosper even more. One of the houses on West Moler is supposed to be originally a business office for the family, and another house was an inn which was erected to cater to passengers on canal boats.

Farming was important to most early settlers and, like others of the time, everything needed to sustain life was grown or cultivated on the Merion farm. William Merion is noted for cultivating the first grafted apples in the country, as an example of his farming skills.

Millie Merion Morrill and her husband, Moses, settled near the Scioto River, in the general area of Woodrow and High, where they prospered also. They had a brick yard as one of their businesses. A tribe of Indians once lived in the vicinity, and many artifacts were found in that general area when various excavations brought them to light.

Charles Merion, of a later generation, married Mary Fisher (another South Side pioneer) and one of their famous descendants was James Thurber, a world-acclaimed author who has become a cult figure years after his death; one sees his name at OSU and Thurber Towers, which is an apartment complex. Recently, one of his family's homes has been restored and is a place where gifted authors are encouraged to develop their writing skills. Many of James' cousins still reside in the South Side, being related through the Fisher side of the family. Charles Merion, Jr. was active in politics, in the state legislature, as well as an officer in the National Guard. Scanning the Merion genealogy is like taking a brief course in the area's history, as one encounters names like Stewart, Innis, Morrill, Clickenger, Sheldon, Walton, Kienzle, Obetz, Dering, etc.

Sadly, the William Merion family has now died out, though allied families are still on the scene. It is singular that the Merion's original 1800 acres so nearly approximate the boundaries of the present-day Merion Village. The family holdings were Reinhard Avenue to the South High Street viaduct; from the Scioto River to Lockbourne Road. The Merion Village boundaries (Editor's note: in 1986) are from the Scioto River to Lockbourne Road; from Frank Road to Whittier Street,

excluding all other "villages" now established, such as German Village, Hungarian Village, and the Reeb-Hosack organizations.

Not all, but most neighborhood groups define a geographical area, but it is fitting to name Merion Village for bona fide early settlers of early Columbus history. The Merions were not afraid to visualize the future and they seized all opportunities to better their fortune. They were dreamers AND doers... the same sort of people have made their homes in that original 1800-acre tract owned by the Merions. Although the Merions are no longer a family, it is fitting that their name be honored in the "Merion Village" of today, as a reminder of the sort of people who tamed this early American wilderness.

### **AN INTERVIEW...**

*Excerpt from oral interview with Helen Keefer of Morrill Avenue. Interviewing Helen were two high school students, Kristi Blair and Mrs. Keefer's grandson Chris Rogers, both members of SAIL, a teen group of Children Helping In Prevention, Inc.*

#### **When did you move here?**

I moved here in 1947, on the South end.

#### **In the same house?**

Yes, in this same house. I loved the families, I loved all the neighbors here. I am the only one left out of all the neighbors who lived here. The people were very, very strict here with their children, like I said, when the lights came on everybody was in their house. They were not allowed outside, not even on their porches and at night we were not afraid in this neighborhood at all, we felt safe. I can remember the nights we put blankets on the front porch and we could sleep out there all night long because it was so hot in the house, and we were never afraid. We left our doors open. We would go down the street, we would help people. We loved everybody, we were all close. All of us were like one big family in this neighborhood.

#### **Tell us about the different ethnic groups that have lived in the neighborhood.**

We had a Hungarian lady next door to me and she had two daughters and a son and I used to go to her house so much and watch her bake because I never knew a lot about baking then, when I was real young. Right after I got married I learned from her how to make different cakes and things and I would watch and see what she would put in jars and I made keeflies (sp?). I did learn a lot from the Hungarian people and the different natures and how they lived too.

#### **How has the neighborhood changed?**

The neighborhood, well I can't say it has changed a whole lot, not a whole lot down here I don't think so because I love all my neighbors and I've known them so long and I have been here so long I guess that's the reason that you become a family after a while, after you live in a neighborhood for so long!

## **GETTING STARTED IN MERION~SOUTHWOOD**

### **PLANNING WITHOUT A PLAN**

During the planning phase community members were encouraged to take a good look at their neighborhood, decide what is important, and then develop action plans to bring about desired changes. The process has entailed, "planning without a plan." A strange concept? Maybe. But it exemplifies the spirit of the Community Reinvestment Program: set aside preconceived notions and support a neighborhood-based revitalization process. Encourage resident and stakeholder participation in decision-making—from the earliest planning activities, through the final stages of implementation.

Planning without a plan recognizes that those living, working, and investing in Columbus' older city are in a unique position to know what is important to their neighborhood, as well as what is working and what needs attention. It trusts that citizens can work together, with city officials, and with professionals from the private sector, to devise logical, innovative and cost-effective solutions.

### **GETTING STARTED IN MERION~SOUTHWOOD**

Merion~Southwood is the last of the six pilot community reinvestment areas to receive planning assistance. And, although anxious to get the program underway in their neighborhood, being last has had its advantages—namely, learning from the experiences of those who have gone first. By the time that planning activities started in February 1996, Hilltop and South of Main were well into their second year of implementation, Greater Linden was one year along, and Italian Village was just getting started. Periodic visits by city staff to the Merion Village Association meetings helped to keep the group informed of what was happening in the other reinvestment areas.

The three months prior to the first workshop were devoted to community outreach. Visits were made to local clergy, social service organizations, and civic association meetings. Articles describing the program and listing important dates appeared in school, church, and civic newsletters, as well as in *Southside This Week*, the local weekly newspaper. Posters were printed and displayed, informational flyers were distributed door to door, and letters were mailed to property owners by the Mayor, informing them of the program and inviting their participation at the Saturday workshops.

The congregation of Emmanuel Lutheran Church opened their doors to the neighborhood, by hosting all of the Saturday workshops and many smaller task force meetings. Donatos Restaurant on Parsons Avenue treated participants at the February workshop to a pizza lunch. Refreshments and lunch at the remaining workshops was provided by "Catering By Morris," through the generous support of the Central Ohio Compliance Organization, a consortium of Columbus financial lending institutions. The Columbus Community Hospital provided meeting space, and catered many of the task force meetings. The Hospital also very graciously offered to host Merion~Southwood's Open House Celebration.

### **WORKSHOP 1: ISSUES AND ASSETS**

The first planning workshop, held on Saturday, February 24, got off to an excellent start. Over sixty individuals attended and had the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the Community Reinvestment Program. The discussion covered such topics as the planning and implementation phases of the program, the day's activities, and an introduction to the Columbus Neighborhood Design Assistance Center—a nonprofit organization providing technical expertise to older city commercial districts, reinvestment areas, and city staff.

Following the overview was a review of the proposed program boundaries. The group very quickly decided to extend the northern boundary to Nursery Lane (the alley north of Mithoff Street), the southern boundary to include both sides of Morrill Street, and to maintain Bruck Street as the eastern boundary. Decisions about the western boundary, however, were more complicated.

Initially, it was proposed that the east side of High Street serve as the west boundary. A number of business owners and residents, reasoned that both sides of High Street should be included and that the west boundary be extended accordingly. Others presented compelling arguments for extending the boundary even further west, to the railroad tracks beyond High Street. Among the reasons cited were poor property conditions, deteriorated infrastructure, and a concern that if it was not included in the reinvestment area, it would never receive any attention. Although most felt comfortable with including both sides of High Street, consensus was not achieved regarding the area further west. It was eventually agreed to table the discussion and decide the western boundary at the second workshop, scheduled for March.

After a short break, participants broke out into small groups to begin identifying neighborhood issues and assets. City staff were on hand to help facilitate the discussion and give everyone an opportunity to share their ideas and have them recorded. Participants were asked to consider and respond to two questions, as follows:

- 1.) What do you like about your neighborhood and want to keep?
- 2.) What don't you like about your neighborhood and want to change?

The responses were eventually reported back to the full group. What began to emerge was a broad picture of what people liked best and least about the neighborhood.

Many of the things that people liked directly related the area's history and role as one of Columbus' early neighborhoods—such as its small, quaint character, front porches and architectural styles, beautiful churches, and pedestrian friendly environment. People in the neighborhood were also viewed in a positive light, in particular: friendly neighbors; the high percentage of homeowners; residents who take pride in their property and maintain it well; and the strong family ties.

Although proud of their neighborhood, people saw room for improvement, as well. Some of the concerns cited dealt with physical conditions. The poor upkeep of some area homes and businesses, the deteriorated condition of neighborhood alleys and curbs, and the presence of boarded, abandoned homes were reported. Participants expressed a need for improved city services, making particular reference to code enforcement, trash collection, and help with traffic-related problems. Despite feeling good about the neighborhood, an overwhelming majority were concerned about the area's image—in particular, how it is perceived by the Greater Columbus Community.

The meeting concluded with participants casting “dot” votes to indicate what they believed to be the ten most important issues facing the neighborhood. Following the vote, two citizen task forces, “Memory” and “History,” were formed. The Memory group was given the assignment to summarize the morning's work, including the results of the issue vote. The History group was asked to research and report on the neighborhood's recent and past history.

## **WORKSHOP 2: PROBLEM DEFINITION AND RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION**

Workshop 2 was held on Saturday, March 23 at Emmanuel Lutheran Church. Following a welcome and review of the day's agenda, the Memory Task Force gave its report. Task force members Steve Topping and Bob Leighty explained how the group had reviewed the results and information collected from the first workshop and organized it into categories of related items for focus group discussion, as follows: Code Enforcement; Property Revitalization; Safety; Merion Village-Identity and Civic Pride; Recreation; Neighborhood Improvement; and Traffic.

Focus group discussions were used to clarify and expand on the issues raised at the first workshop, as well as to start identifying individuals and institutions with the expertise and resources able to help participants draft feasible, solution-oriented activities. Individuals were encouraged to participate in as many different discussions as their time and interests allowed.

By the end of the meeting, the Church walls were covered with the easel paper used to record each group's thoughts and progress. It was explained that after the day's workshop concluded, citizen task forces would begin meeting to continue the focus group work and ultimately draft action plans for the neighborhood. The focus groups were consolidated into four citizen task forces, as follows: Property Revitalization and Code Enforcement; Identity, Civic Pride, and Recreation; Traffic and Neighborhood Improvement; and Safety.

Two other items were decided at this workshop. The first established the western program boundary and the second involved the name of the community reinvestment area. The Memory Task Force recommended the west reinvestment boundary be extended to include both sides of High Street and the area west of High, to the Conrail railroad tracks. Though it was generally agreed that the majority of structures and infrastructure west of High Street were a mixed lot with many of the buildings in deteriorated condition, participants had a difficult time deciding whether this area should be included in the boundaries. Concern was expressed that the needs of this western area might exhaust available resources, and that High Street itself presented a barrier to instituting any joint east-west improvements or resident participation. To decide the matter, workshop participants decided to vote, with the majority of those present voting to extend the west boundary to the Conrail Railroad tracks.

The group also expressed some preferences regarding the use of the CRA dollars (Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds). Many participants felt that the CRA dollars were not sufficient to assist the larger commercial and industrial uses and should the need arise, other sources of funding should be obtained.

The Memory Task Force also suggested that the group consider changing the name of the reinvestment area from "Southwood" (as named by the city), to "Merion Village." It was pointed out that the "Image of the Southside" was voted the top issue at the first workshop. Therefore referring to the area as "Southwood," would do little to reinforce the identity of the area and in the long run may only confuse people. Reactions to this suggestion were mixed.

Some strongly supported the idea; while others did not. Many felt equally as strong that the name remain "Southwood." A compromise emerged from the discussion which advocated calling the reinvestment area, "Merion~Southwood." The only consensus reached during this lively discussion was that there wasn't any consensus at all. It was decided that the three names would be posted and at the end of the workshop, each participant could vote for the name of his or her own choice.

Prior to adjourning for a well-earned lunch, Janice Heinlein updated everyone on the status of the History Task Force, including some of the topic areas being investigated for inclusion in the final report. Janice also distributed a hand-out entitled, "The Merion Family - A History," written in 1986 by Priscilla LaRue Lenox, for the Merion Village Association.

### **WORKSHOP 3: "IT'S A STICK UP"**

The third workshop was held on Saturday, June 8. This was to be the final planning workshop, however more time was needed to develop and evaluate potential reinvestment activities. So instead, this meeting was used to update the community on task force work to date, and to solicit input. Many, many task force meetings had been held since the second workshop in March. Over the last two months, task force participants met with each other, city staff, and other experts to learn about existing programs and initiatives, and to brainstorm new ways to address the issues of concern. This information was used by the task forces to develop goals, objectives, and potential activities.

During the workshop, representatives from each of the task forces gave an overview of their work, thus far. Workshop participants were encouraged to comment on the task force reports and meeting discussion. The theme "It's A Stick Up," referred to the "sticky-backed" note pads and

pencils distributed to workshop participants. The pads were supplied to encourage feedback in response to the task force presentations. Many community members took advantage of the opportunity by recording and posting their suggestions and concerns.

Neighborhood input was also collected in response to the CRA "Concept Map," The map divided the CRA into six sections in order to best show the improvements being discussed. (See Concept Map on pages 14-15.)

#### **WORKSHOP 4: PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

The final planning workshop was held at Emmanuel Lutheran Church on Saturday, August 17. Steve McClary, Planning Division Administrator, was on hand to welcome participants and thank them for their hard work and congratulate everyone on a job well done. Those present were asked to keep in mind the ongoing nature of the program and view the day's activities as a new beginning, rather than as an end.

The reports presented by the task forces, in addition to containing goals and objectives, provided an assessment sheet for each of the activities being proposed. The assessment sheets were used to estimate, where feasible, a particular activity's cost and potential funding sources, as well as its interaction with other reinvestment projects and probable measures of success. The reports also listed an "impact evaluation score" for each of activities proposed.

The task forces were asked to evaluate their proposed activities using a standardized set of criteria, including: desirability, leveraging, timing, longevity, goal achievement, collaboration, and community empowerment. (A sample, of the evaluations used is in the report appendix.) The scores were used by the task forces to distinguish those activities they felt would have the strongest positive impact on the reinvestment area.

Many questions were asked during the task force reports as participants sought to clearly understand the information presented. The workshop was enriched by the participation and questions from a number of individuals new to the Community Reinvestment Program and workshop meetings. Once everyone was satisfied with the information, they moved on to the priority vote. Participants were given ten (10) dots with which to vote for the activities they believed would do the most—and be the best, for the Merion~Southwood CRA.

After the voting was complete, Roxyanne Burrus, a Project Coordinator with the city's Neighborhood Development Division, welcomed participants to the implementation phase of the Community Reinvestment Program and gave an overview of what would come next.

This workshop concluded formal planning activities in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area.

## **PRIORITY ACTIVITIES**

### **MERION~SOUTHWOOD's TOP TEN ACTIVITIES**

1. Establish a Community Crime Patrol Program (33)
2. Create an on-going code enforcement task force (30)
3. Improvements to Southwood Park and Elementary School grounds (28)
4. Eliminate drug-related and crime producing hot spots (27)
5. Recondition alleys (24)
6. Youth Entrepreneur Program (23)
7. Organize a neighborhood clean-up (20)
- 8.\* Visually enhance key neighborhood streets (17)
- 8.\* Establish a "store-front" location for CRA activities (17)
- 9.\* Develop an exterior rehabilitation program (16)
- 9.\* Set up a crime prevention resource center (16)
10. Improved refuse collection services (15)

\* Denotes activities receiving an equal number of votes.

## **TASK FORCE GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITY DESCRIPTIONS**

### **IDENTITY, CIVIC PRIDE, AND RECREATION TASK FORCE**

- **Goal**

- √ **To develop and foster an appreciation of the impact and positive contributions of the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area to Merion Village, its residents, and the community at large.**
- √ **To develop and expand recreational opportunities in the Merion Village area.**

- **Objectives**

- √ **Create opportunities for neighborhood youth to learn and develop employable skills, engage in community service, and earn extra money.**
- √ **Honor and recognize individuals of all ages and backgrounds who have made positive contributions to the greater Merion Village community.**
- √ **Celebrate and promote an awareness of the neighborhood's rich historical past.**
- √ **Improve active play and recreational opportunities.**

- **Proposed Activities**

- √ **Improvements to Southwood Park and Elementary School Grounds**  
Physically improve the grounds of Southwood Elementary School and Southwood Park. Create a subcommittee to survey the school- park block and develop a plan identifying capital improvements, recreational uses for the park and playground areas, and other general landscape enhancements. The school and park are important neighborhood features, providing a place for active recreational and educational uses. The project can be used as a catalyst for getting more people, especially families and young people, involved in community and reinvestment activities. It also highlights the importance of the Southwood Elementary School to the neighborhood.

- √ **Youth Entrepreneur Program**  
Youths receive training in areas such as: babysitting, snow shoveling, trash removal, raking, mulching, etc. Youths would then perform community service work for Merion~Southwood's Implementation group, the civic association, or designated persons (particularly individuals physically and financially unable to do the work themselves). This program has three major components:

- 1) Teach employment skills;
- 2) Provide community service opportunities; and
- 3) Establish and recognize neighborhood youth entrepreneurs.

Upon completion of their community service hours, neighborhood youths would receive some form of recognition, possibly a "good worker certificate," set of business cards, and a listing in the CRA information booklet (property revitalization activity).

All components would be supported by in-service training and adult supervision and/or contact. In-service training would look at safety, business finance, skill building, certificate programs (babysitting and lifeguard, etc.) and job opportunities.

Focus age groups include elementary school and middle school-aged young people. Youth entrepreneur efforts could be highlighted in the newspaper and newsletters published by the Merion Village Association and Southwood Elementary School.

- **Historic Street Names**

Conduct research to discover historic names of city streets in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area. (Original German names were changed during W.W.II.) Where appropriate, work with the Columbus Public Service Department to develop a system of decorative signage identifying original street names.

- **Good Neighbor Awards and Reception**

The Good Neighbor Program has two goals: 1) To recognize those people who give their time, talent and resources to serve others and make our community a better place to live; and 2) To encourage people to become more involved in our neighborhood and help meet its needs at whatever level they are able to serve. Good neighbor nominations, in the form of postcards, will be developed and distributed throughout the community. A committee will be formed to review the nominations and send congratulatory letters and a "Good Neighbor" sticker to the individuals nominated each month. An annual neighborhood celebration will be held to more publicly recognize the individuals nominated.

- **Develop a Neighborhood Walking Tour**

Focus on the historic aspects of Merion Village and the southern portion of the CRA. Tours of different length and emphasis could be created. Highlight historic events and places, people, neighborhood culture, folklore, and favorite pastimes (baseball?). Create tour maps and decorative, information markers. Consider holding an annual guided tour to promote the neighborhood and to raise funds for other neighborhood activities.

## **PROPERTY REVITALIZATION AND CODE ENFORCEMENT TASK FORCE**

- **Goal**

√ **To improve the physical condition and appearance of residential and commercial structures in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area.**

- **Objectives**

√ **Enforce city zoning, building, and health codes.**

√ **Assist elderly, disabled, and low-income home owners to maintain their property and make needed repairs.**

√ **Preserve and protect the character of the Merion~Southwood CRA's housing and commercial building stock through compatible rehabilitation and new infill construction.**

√ **Improve the condition of rental housing in the Merion~Southwood CRA.**

√ **Support the expansion of home ownership opportunities in the Merion~Southwood CRA, in particular, help qualified area renters become home owners.**

- **Proposed Activities**

√ **Create An On-Going Code Enforcement Task Force.**

Form an on-going Code Enforcement Task Force to work with code enforcement officials (building, zoning, health). One representative from each of the six Merion~Southwood planning "sections" should be represented on the task force. Code officials will advise on the status of properties currently in enforcement. Task force members will report to the

Merion~Southwood Implementation Group. Taskforce members will work together to establish additional strategies and activities to address code-related concerns.

√

**Establish A “Store-Front” Location For CRA Activities.**

Investigate the possibility of the CRA implementation group setting up shop in a “store-front” location and using it as a home-base for community reinvestment activities. Survey the neighborhood to determine potential sites and costs. Look into the possibilities of shared-use, leased, and purchased space.

√

**Develop an Exterior Rehabilitation Program.**

Develop an exterior rehabilitation program for owner occupied housing. Use the specially developed South of Main and Greater Hilltop programs as a starting point and allocate appropriate CRA funds to implement the program. Ensure that the program supports quality residential improvements that are compatible with existing housing stock and neighborhood character. Structure the program so that CRA funds can be used for grants and/or loans (low-interest or deferred), as appropriate. Work with the city to recapture the funds back into the reinvestment area as the loans are repaid. Consider supplementing city rehabilitation programs with CRA funds when it furthers neighborhood goals and objectives.

√

**Market and Promote the Neighborhood To Realtors and Lenders**

Promote Merion Village and the Merion~Southwood area through a series of press releases and ongoing contacts with area Realtors and the Columbus Board of Relators (CBR). Involve local lenders in this effort and emphasize the positive attributes of the neighborhood (quality, affordable housing, good neighbors, history, location, access, etc.). Possibly host or attend a CBR function.

√

**Conduct a Land Use Study of the Areas Zoned C-4 Commercial Along the Fourth Street Corridor in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area**

Conduct a land use study of the area zoned C-4 Commercial along the Fourth Street Corridor in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area. Determine whether or not the existing zoning classifications appropriately reflect current land uses and the character of the area.

√

**Create and Publish a Merion~Southwood CRA Information Booklet**

Create a booklet with information about the Community Reinvestment Program and associated Merion~Southwood goals, objectives, and activities. Emphasize opportunities for community involvement and include a schedule of meeting dates, times, etc. Periodically update the booklet and consider distributing it with the promotional piece developed by the Merion Village Association. Develop an outreach plan and distribute the booklet to CRA residents, businesses, and property owners.

√

**Start a Pilot Housing Rehabilitation Assistance Program.**

Work with Habitat for Humanity to start a Pilot Rehabilitation Assistance Program for short-term (one or two day) projects. The program would assist homeowners physically or financially unable to make necessary interior and exterior home repairs themselves.

√

**Recruit Area Mowers/Landscape Contractors For The City’s Weed Abatement Program.**

Work with the city Health Department to secure area landscape/mower contractors for the summer weed abatement program... thus prioritizing weed abatement projects in the reinvestment area.

√ **Develop a property revitalization program for investor-owned residential structures in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Area. Initially target for assistance the community improvement areas identified on the concept map.**

A. Market and promote the city's Rental Housing Development Program.

- Minimum of 51% of the rentable floor space is residential
- Property must require at least a minimum of \$5,000 in rehabilitation work
- City may invest up to 50% of the total project cost (maximum of \$12,000 per unit)
- Units must be affordable to households at or below 60% median income (In Cols. a family of four at 60% of median income would earn \$27,720)
- Rental housing projects include: single family rental, multi-family rental (2 or more units), supportive housing for people with special needs, and single room occupancy units.

*Note: Program priorities established by a city-wide housing/service/economic development collaborative called the Columbus Consolidated Plan. Projects that raise living standards and provide housing opportunities for low and very low income households are usually given the highest priority for funding.*

B. Develop an envelope housing rehabilitation program for investor owned residential properties similar to the program being proposed for owner occupied properties. Investigate the feasibility of requiring an owner match equal to at least 50% of the rehab. costs and determine a maximum loan amount per unit. This program would require the use of Merion~Southwood CRA funds (CDBG set aside).

√ **Home Buyer Counseling and Assistance Workshops**

Contract with Columbus Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc. or another similar entity to facilitate the workshops. Advertise the workshops throughout the neighborhood and to area employers. Use "Home Buyer Counseling and Assistance" as a way to promote home ownership opportunities in Merion Village.

## **SAFETY TASK FORCE**

- **Goal**

√ To have a safer neighborhood where:

- Parents feel it is safe for their children to play outside;
- Alleys are clean, well lit, and free of speeding cars;
- Drugs are not openly dealt and youth are not hanging out, creating loud noise, and acting in an intentionally intimidating manner; and
- There is a decrease in the incidence and perception of crime, as felt by residents and validated through police crime statistics.

- **Objectives**

√ Develop and implement a balanced program of nuisance abatement, elimination of crime "hot spots" and intervention with youth gangs.

√ Engage police in a dialogue and working partnership with area residents and groups to improve communication and build stronger relationships.

- **Proposed Activities**

√ **Establish a Community Crime Patrol Program**

Work with the Citizens Crime Patrol program (CCP) to establish a pilot Citizens Crime Patrol in the Merion~Southwood CRA. The basic program would be similar to the patrol

programs currently in operation in the University, Hilltop, and Franklinton Areas. Start with four patrollers in teams of two, on mountain bikes. The CCP is a supervised program whereby a team(s) of young adults work in pairs, both on foot and on bicycle, to patrol a neighborhood and report suspicious activity to the police.

- √ **Eliminate Drug-Related and Crime Producing Hot Spots**  
Work with the police to identify and eliminate drug-related and violence generating “hot spots.” Initially concentrate attention on the intersections of Fourth and Morrill, and Fourth and Jenkins. Place a special emphasis on intervening with youth gangs and other youth who are hanging out and creating a nuisance. Develop a strategy with the assistance of the police community liaison officer.
- √ **Set up a Crime Prevention Resource Center**  
Arrange for the assignment of two VISTA and two Americorp volunteers to the reinvestment area to assist with the implementation of crime prevention strategies. Arrange for appropriate supervision through a neighborhood-based agency and investigate the possibility of setting up a center at the Southside Mission Project or in a neighborhood store-front location.
- √ **Form Neighborhood Block Watches**  
Work collaboratively to form neighborhood block watches throughout the reinvestment area. Identify an organization(s) able to assist residents in forming block watches. Consider forming a block watch in each of the neighborhood sections identified on the concept map. Implement a program of personal and “at home” security awareness. Develop resources to provide security lighting, dead bolts, alarm systems, and other security precautions for residents. Give special priority to senior citizens, disabled, and female-head of households who couldn’t afford these devices without assistance.
- √ **Expand Education, Prevention, and Mentoring Programs for Youth**  
Work with the Southside Mission Project, Children Helping In Prevention, Southwood Elementary School, and other local child-serving organizations to develop an education, intervention, and mentoring program for area youth, ages 10-18 .
- √ **Enforce Speeding Laws and Loud Noise Ordinances**  
Insist that police enforce speeding laws and loud noise ordinances to reduce the occurrence of speeding cars and loud music on neighborhood streets and alleys. (If enforcement measures are not effective, work with the city’s Public Service Department to develop other traffic calming measures.)
- √ **Address Concerns Related To Mental Health Patients Seeking Services in the Neighborhood**  
Work with Columbus Community Hospital and the Southeast Mental Health Agency to reduce neighborhood concerns about mental health patients hanging out on the street near these facilities. Develop a series of educational programs for patients and residents.
- √ **Start a Systematic Nuisance Abatement Program**  
Use a systematic nuisance abatement program to deal with chronic problems, both residential and business-related. Bring Civil Court actions which could shut down problem locations for at least one year. If nuisance situations are not corrected, ask the court to post bonds equal to the appraised value of the property in question. Include underage alcohol sales.

- √ **Establish A Connection With The Lighthouse Program**  
For at-risk youth experiencing drug or gang-related pressures, establish a connection with the “Lighthouse” program and the “Mothers Against Crack” program starting in the Reeb-Hosack area. Match youth with adult mentors from area churches in an effort to intervene in problem situations and provide individual support.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT AND TRAFFIC TASK FORCE**

- **Goal**

- √ **To improve the physical environment of the neighborhood.**

- **Objectives**

- √ **Improve overall trash service and decrease littering within the neighborhood.**
- √ **Recognize and visually identify streets that are important to the neighborhood.**
- √ **Increase the visual compatibility between the neighborhood and major institutions, and employers.**
- √ **Install or repair sidewalks and curbs as needed in the neighborhood.**
- √ **Improve alley conditions for pedestrians and vehicles.**
- √ **Reduce vehicular speeds on neighborhood streets and improve traffic control at key neighborhood intersections for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.**
- √ **Bring the existing street lighting system up to an acceptable level.**

- **Proposed Activities**

- √ **Recondition Alleys**  
Inventory and prioritize alleys in the reinvestment area for reconditioning improvements. Focus efforts on prioritized alleys and fill potholes as part of the overall reconditioning treatment. Coordinate activities with other divisions as appropriate to clear alleys of bulk trash and overhanging tree limbs, and to ensure that adequate lighting levels are achieved.
- √ **Organize a Neighborhood Clean-Up**  
Work with all appropriate entities and the community to schedule a monthly or bi-monthly neighborhood clean-up. Efforts should focus on alleys, high litter areas (i.e. Wall Street), vacant lots, and illegal dumping sites.
- √ **Visually Enhance Key Neighborhood Streets**  
Install special street scape treatments: benches, special street signs, flower planters, trash receptacles, pedestrian scale lighting, street trees or banners along identified streets and at key intersections. Investigate the possibility of removing billboards along South High Street.
- √ **Improve Refuse Collection Services**  
Work with the Refuse Division and the community at large to improve the city’s refuse collection services. Establish regularly scheduled bulk pick-up for large items. Engage in a public outreach effort with all appropriate entities to advise citizens on the proper procedures to dispose of waste. Investigate the possible development of a community compost for yard waste.

- √ **Replace Broken or Missing Curbs**  
Replace or repair missing or broken curbs as identified and prioritized in the reinvestment area. Focus rehabilitation efforts on replacement or repair of entire block sections rather than “spot improvements”.
- √ **Increase Frequency of Street Cleaning Along Identified Streets**  
Work with the Public Service Department to establish regular street cleaning of major neighborhood thoroughfares. Adopt a rigorous public notification campaign to advise the community of scheduled street cleans so that on-street vehicles can be moved.
- √ **Replace Broken or Missing Sidewalks**  
Replace or repair missing or broken sidewalks as identified in the reinvestment area. Focus rehabilitation efforts on replacement or repair of entire block sections rather than “spot improvements”. Investigate the feasibility of a shared cost approach, whereby property owners contribute a portion of the repair costs.
- √ **Improve Visual Appearance and Safety Around the Hospital**  
Screen parking lots and auxiliary uses (dumpsters, storage sheds, and mechanical equipment) in the vicinity of the hospital. Investigate additional lighting around hospital parking lots and popular pedestrian paths.
- √ **Improve Snow Removal on Heavily Traveled Neighborhood Streets**  
Work with the Public Service Department to re-evaluate streets for snow removal. Focus efforts on Fourth Street (COTA route), Southwood & Jenkins Avenues, and Hanford Street (emergency vehicle routes).
- √ **Investigate Installing Traffic Calming Devices on Busy Corridors**  
Investigate the potential for using one of the following traffic calming devices: traffic circles, a traffic “maze”, traffic barriers, speed bumps, and additional stop signs. Traffic calming methods are used to slow down automobile traffic and increase pedestrian safety along busy neighborhood streets. Initial investigations should focus efforts on intersections along Fourth Street, and near Southwood Elementary and St. Leo’s School, and the Southside Mission Project.
- √ **Create Neighborhood Gateways**  
Create gateways to enhance the image and identity of the neighborhood. Potential gateway sites identified include; High & Moler, Hanford & Fourth, Fourth & Southwood, Fourth & Jenkins, High & Southwood, High & Jenkins, and Hanford & Jaeger. Install a neighborhood identification sign at Jaeger & Nursery Lane Alley. Gateways may include any of the following features: banners, signs, special landscaping, benches, pedestrian-scale lighting, trash receptacles, brick paving and flower planters.
- √ **Identify and Install Key Street Lighting Projects as Needed**  
Create a Community Steering Committee from the Merion~Southwood Implementation Group to identify key street lighting projects in the neighborhood. Conduct an after dark survey of street lights in the reinvestment area to determine which light are working properly. Ensure that all intersections in the neighborhood are adequately illuminated. Initially focus efforts on areas heavily used by pedestrians and in areas where safety concerns have been identified.
- √ **Power Wash Heavily Used Sidewalks**  
Work with the appropriate city division or subcontract with a private company to power wash heavily used sidewalks in the neighborhood (i.e. High & Fourth streets, and Jenkins & Southwood avenues).

## **ACTIVITIES RANKED BY VOTE, BY TASK FORCE**

*Number of votes indicated in parenthesis “( )”.*

### **Safety:**

- 1) Establish a Community Crime Patrol Program (33)
- 2) Eliminate drug-related and crime producing hot spots (27)
- 3) Set up a crime prevention resource center (16)
- 4) Form neighborhood block watches (14)
- 5) Expand education, prevention, and mentoring programs for youth (12)
- 6) Enforce speeding laws and loud noise ordinances (10)
- 7) Address concerns related to mental patients seeking services in the neighborhood (7)
- 8) Start a systematic nuisance abatement program (5)
- 9) Establish a connection with the Lighthouse Program (0)

### **Property Revitalization and Code Enforcement:**

- 1) Create an on-going code enforcement task force (30)
- 2) Establish a “store-front” location for CRA activities (17)
- 3) Develop an exterior rehabilitation program (16)
- 4) Market and promote the neighborhood to Realtors and Lenders (14)
- 5) Conduct a land use study of the areas zoned C-4 commercial along the Fourth Street corridor, in the Merion~Southwood Community Reinvestment Program (10)
- 6) Create and publish a Merion~Southwood CRA information booklet (7)
- 7) Start a pilot housing rehabilitation assistance program (5)
- 8) Recruit area mowers/landscape contractors for weed abatement program (4)
- 9) Develop a property revitalization program for investor-owned residential structures in the reinvestment area (4)
- 10) Home buyer counseling and assistance workshops (1)

### **Neighborhood Improvements and Traffic Task Force:**

- 1) Recondition alleys (24)
- 2) Organize a neighborhood clean-up (20)
- 3) Visually enhance key neighborhood streets (17)
- 4) Improved refuse collection services (15)
- 5) Replace broken or missing curbs (13)
- 6) Increase frequency of street cleaning along identified streets (7)
- 7) Replace broken or missing sidewalks (6)
- 8) Improve visual appearance and safety around the hospital (5)
- 9) Improve snow removal on heavily traveled neighborhood streets (5)
- 10) Investigate installing traffic calming devices on busy corridors (4)
- 11) Create neighborhood gateways (3)
- 12) Identify and install key street lighting projects as needed (2)
- 13) Power wash heavily used sidewalks (0)

### **Identity, Civic Pride and Recreation Task Force:**

- 1) Improvements to Southwood Park and Elementary School grounds (28)
- 2) Youth Entrepreneur Program (23)
- 3) Historic street names (7)
- 4) Good neighbor awards and reception (5)
- 5) Develop a neighborhood walking tour (3)

## **NEXT STEPS**

Merion~Southwood has benefitted from the voluntary actions, talent, and unique perspective that each member of the community brought to the reinvestment planning process. Residents and friends of the neighborhood have enthusiastically participated in workshop and task force meetings and their commitment is evident in the quality of the goals, objectives, and activities contained in this report.

To assist the neighborhood in meeting its goals, the city of Columbus has made a three year commitment of staff and resources. The city's Neighborhood Development Division will work with community members to coordinate reinvestment activities and to establish a neighborhood-based citizens council to guide decision making. The implementation effort will be supported by an allocation of Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG).

Merion~Southwood is also scheduled to receive additional funding for capital improvements through the Urban Infrastructure Recovery Fund Program (URIF). The URIF, developed by Columbus City Council member Michael P. Coleman, is a funding source dedicated to completing capital improvement projects in older-city neighborhoods. In addition, Merion~Southwood commercial enterprises will have the opportunity to access some of the special design and financing tools available through the city's Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization Program (NCR).

The next steps will be very important as the neighborhood moves from the planning to the implementation phase of the Community Reinvestment Program. More hard work, creativity and commitment will be necessary to successfully bring desired activities to fruition. The work accomplished so far has given Merion~Southwood a good start, but there is still so much more to be done. Continue to talk to your neighbors about the program and be sure to inform them of reinvestment activities. Make an extra effort to encourage the participation of people who may offer a different perspective from your own or represent a group of people under represented in the planning phase—such as young families, or renters and individuals living on the west side of High Street. By recognizing what brings people together in the neighborhood and better understanding what keeps them apart, Merion~Southwood will be best able to create an improved future for all.

## **THANK YOU**

The success of the reinvestment workshops is directly attributable to the active participation of community members living and working in the Merion-Southwood Community Reinvestment Area. Many other individuals and organizations played a supporting role by helping to get things organized, facilitating discussion groups, providing technical expertise, and distributing information.

### **Workshop and Task Force Participants**

Daniel R. Abrahamson	Dan Lallathin
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NBD Bank,  
Society Bank,  
Star Bank, and  
State Savings Bank;  
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