

Priority Agenda for 2014

1/16/14

To help guide the collaborative work of the Detroit-Wayne County Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI Detroit-Wayne County), the following priority agenda has been developed for 2014:

1. Establish Healthy Homes as a Critical Housing Strategy

GHHI Detroit-Wayne County will work to establish healthy homes as the most critical housing strategy for the city's renewal, especially in the face of strong support for wide-spread demolitions. Being mindful of the target area priorities of the city, private investors, non-profits and other stakeholders, GHHI Detroit-Wayne County will continue to focus on creating systemic coordination and alignment with city priorities and leveraging funds for investment. This would include preventing the demolition of houses that have received healthy homes services and aligning healthy homes services to reduce barriers to weatherization.

Proposed Action Steps:

- a. Tell our story better to help educate the community and key policy makers including the mayor, emergency manager and governor. Include concrete data on the cost/benefit of green and healthy homes investments, talk about our strategy for braiding resources and make it clear that GHHI provides the healthy housing stock needed for revitalized neighborhoods and a viable city. Make Healthy Homes a buzz word like blight or demo that is defined in policy makers minds as a large picture strategy that is on the forefront of their minds.
 - GHHI leadership is working on developing a piece entitled Refocusing Housing Policy in Detroit that could be distributed to key policy makers to tell the story of GHHI.
 - GHHI leadership is exploring the possibility of meeting with the mayor and other key local, state and federal stakeholders to educate them about GHHI and our success.
 - Wayne State University is working to extend its data system to collect cost information about healthy homes and health.
- b. Gain a better understanding of the different housing strategies and standards being employed in Detroit, especially from the City, to determine how GHHI fits into these existing plans. Target green and healthy homes services in line with these strategies and tap into neighborhood support to help build credibility.
 - GHHI leadership has been in communication with representatives of the City, Detroit Future City, the Blight Task Force and the Detroit Land Bank to gain a better understanding of their housing strategies, particularly surrounding demolitions, and to determine how GHHI fits into these strategies.
 - GHHI is working to expand green and healthy homes services in the North End/Central Woodward area and in Southwest Detroit, two areas that are strongly aligned with the housing strategies of multiple key stakeholders.
- c. Create corporate partnerships with companies like DTE, Lowes and Home Depot to develop funding and help them to feel like they're part of renewing the City through helping families on the ground.
 - Peg Tallet Strategic Consulting has been contracted to assist with advancing development efforts for GHHI and will help to cultivate relationships with corporate and foundation partners with the goal of increasing funding for green and healthy homes activities.

- d. Develop a communications and marketing plan through website, hard copy publications and meetings with community stakeholders.
 - A website and hard copy information kit have been created and continue to be developed and refined. Multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have also been developed.
 - Peg Tallet will create a development plan which will include meeting with key community stakeholders.
- e. Break GHHI down into subcommittees to increase effectiveness and direct involvement by members including specific assignments. Topics could include development, marketing, communications with policy makers and research.
 - We are ready to propose a development committee to assist Peg Tallet in her development efforts and will come back with a proposal for other committees at our March meeting.
- f. Consider using the HHST across GHHI partner organizations to help establish which homes are eligible for service.
- g. Develop Healthy Homes branding like Energy Star so that people recognize what a Healthy Home means.

2. Secure Resources and Support for Healthy Homes

GHHI Detroit-Wayne County will work to secure resources and community support for making Detroit a safe and healthy place for families to live in their homes as a vast majority of Detroiters will stay in existing homes and current data shows that a majority of those homes have health and safety hazards.

Proposed Action Steps:

- a. Force systemic alignment of GHHI partners through RFPs to help agencies think about collaboration and referrals.
 - GHHI leadership is working to facilitate the collaboration and alignment of several GHHI partners in the production of green and healthy homes in North End/Central Woodward and Southwest Detroit.
- b. Leverage blight funds to be repurposed or earmarked for lead abatement.
 - GHHI leadership is in communication with key stakeholders in the blight arena to make sure that they are educated about lead and to advocate for the use of lead-safe demolition and deconstruction practices as a part of the City's blight removal strategy.
- c. Make parents lead-free ambassadors.
 - The Detroit Lead Partnership, which includes several members of GHHI, has developed a relationship with the Great Start Wayne Parent Coalition to help educate parents about the risk of lead and empower them to become advocates against lead poisoning.
- d. Improve communication and increase outreach and sharing of information among service providers so that everyone is aware of all the resources that are available.
 - GHHI leadership is working on developing ways to increase communication between GHHI partners including collecting monthly updates from partners and sharing this information on our website and social media platforms. There will also be more opportunities at the bi-monthly collaborative meetings for various GHHI partners to provide updates about their organization, services, events and funding.

- e. Use crowd funding to raise funds, tell our story and get people from around the country invested in being a part of the revitalization of Detroit. Consider using college students or creating a powerful video that could go viral.
- f. Educate teachers on how asthma and other healthy homes hazards affect students and their ability to learn. Perhaps existing education funding from various federal agencies could be redirected for this purpose; look into the Green Schools Initiative and Detroit Youth Energy Squad.
- g. Become more aggressive in policy and advocacy with key policy makers by getting GHHI partners on strategic advisory committees so that committee members better connect to what we're doing and understand our barriers. Think more systemically including thinking of green jobs as a small business strategy.
- h. Explore the possibility of property owners selling off their properties to bonified purchasers who would commit to rehabbing the property before selling it to generate additional funds.
- i. Identify funding to assist those on rent to own plans with renovations.

3. Healthy Homes Barrier Busting

GHHI Detroit-Wayne County will work collaboratively to bust barriers to healthy housing in Detroit. The major barriers that have been identified by GHHI partners are listed below in order of member priority:

i. **Poor Home Condition**

Faulty roofs, friable asbestos or poor housing structure can prevent a home from getting weatherization or lead abatement services.

ii. **Property Taxes**

Many programs, including the City of Detroit Home Repair Program, require that taxes are current. The MDCH Lead Safe Homes Program requires that taxes are minimally behind. However, families who are one or two years behind or who need just a little assistance to qualify for home repair grants are not eligible for any tax assistance. Families can receive limited help when they are at risk of foreclosure but by this time, their bill has increased with additional interest and fees. Families can get on a payment plan with Wayne County in order to prevent tax foreclosure but this plan only addresses taxes that are 3 years behind; the payments do not cover taxes that are only one or two years behind, so families must repeat the process the following year.

iii. **Lack of Awareness**

There needs to be increased awareness in order to tell our success story about the alignment of healthy homes services and green jobs, particularly with the community and members of the Blight Authority. In addition, there needs to be increased awareness about the funding that organizations have for healthy homes services so that all GHHI partners and the community are aware of these services.

iv. **Eligibility & Identity Restrictions for Services**

Often families in need may be qualified to receive healthy homes services or green jobs training but are not eligible due to lack of documentation (i.e. photo ID for every adult in home), outstanding tickets (or warrants due to unpaid tickets), lack of insurance, or back-taxes. In addition, some programs that provide healthy homes services are restricted to families that have a child under 6 or under 18 with asthma leaving out many people in need of help.

- v. Buying 'As-Is' Homes**
While homebuyer programs exist, these programs may be targeted towards families purchasing homes through mortgage and down payment versus families who are buying investor-owned homes and/ or 'as-is' homes with cash sales. Education is especially important for 'as-is' homes, given the possibility of scams including very high back tax bills and unhealthy conditions in homes, but homebuyer education may not reach these families before they purchase these homes.
- vi. Utility Shutoffs**
Due to limited resources, THAW assistance is usually only available January – March, so families who receive shut-off notices in April or May have very limited options for assistance. This creates a shut-off season that leaves many people without assistance.
- vii. Water Shutoffs**
While there are a variety of programs to assist with utility shut-offs, families facing water shut-off cannot access these programs because water is not considered a utility. A lack of water can lead significant health issues and other serious outcomes (e.g. an order to vacate, potential investigation by Child Protective Services) but families cannot access many forms of utility assistance.
- viii. Prioritization of GHHI Issues for Families Facing Many Hardships**
Some families face so many social and economic hardships that it is hard for them to prioritize a GHHI issue and stay motivated during a process that can take a long time.