FROM PERIPHERY TO PRIORITY:
THE STRATEGIC PROGRESS OF NORTHEAST 42ND AVENUE IN PORTLAND, OREGON

by

Michael DeMarco

B.A., California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, 2006

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A note of acknowledgement:

The following document is the fruit of a community effort and would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of the people of Northeast 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue in Portland, Oregon. If anything, this is merely a surface-level summary of their contributions and does not serve their efforts justice. Included in this group are business people, residents, institutional and agency leaders. There are too many to list here. I have been involved with 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue for nearly three years – there are some who laid the seeds of success a decade-or-more ago, and I am truly riding their coattails.

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The concept of community economic development has an appeal that transcends borders. The mobilization of internal resources to improve the livelihood of community members is an idea that has application regardless of the context, though its results appropriately vary in accordance with the character of a given community. In the past, deliberative economic development in the United States has often focused on large-scale initiatives. At the federal and state levels, infrastructure projects and subsidies for business and land development are amongst the broad-scoped tools traditionally deployed to bolster the economy. Regionally and within cities, the recruitment of big companies and the facilitation of large-scale development have frequently rested at the heart of economic development strategies. Recent years, however, have made the fragility of these arrangements more apparent. With fiscal deficits hamstringing the ability of state and federal government spending, and with the ever-more obvious limitations of tying city economies to the fortunes of global markets, the push for robust community-driven economic development has emerged as a counterbalance to these macrocosmic approaches.

Where traditional economic development has operated with broad-stroke policies and projects, community-driven economic development is more granular in its focus. For this reason, it is better-geared to address questions of economic development in terms of how well economic opportunity meets the needs of community members in a variety of facets – Does it improve access to goods and services? Does it create quality employment opportunities for community members? Does it support social stability and avoid displacing community members? Is the wealth created recirculated through the community? Is the health of the local environment given consideration? Are the benefits of economic development distributed equitably amongst all community members? Are the means, measures and success of economic development determined by the community being served? All of these are important questions that necessarily require community-driven initiatives to be fully addressed.

Though city agencies have certainly begun to recognize the importance of a more comprehensive approach to community economic development, they have more frequently trailed behind efforts by self-organized community groups to connect economic development to community needs. The following report is one such case of an underrepresented community, its special circumstances and how it has self-organized to promote community-driven economic development. What makes this case noteworthy is the response it has evoked from city agencies and how the community has been included in crafting the policy tools it needs to steer its own economic development initiative. In the City of Portland, Oregon, where this has unfolded, the devolution of economic development planning from centralized, agency control to a much greater degree of community ownership over initiatives is a potentially redefining departure. If successful, this initiative may provide broad insight into the future of constructive partnership between cities and communities. With the future unknown, however, the story of the community detailed herein is still useful to communities throughout the United States in their efforts to self-organize and achieve priority in the minds of decision-makers.

During the past 30 months, I have been intimately involved in the organization of Northeast 42nd Avenue, the community at the center of this writing. Initially, I became involved as a member of a nearby neighborhood board in a loose effort to better tie businesses and residents together as a community. That initial effort quickly yielded a core group of individuals from various walks who served as advocates for 42nd Avenue. I am now serving as the District Manager for Our 42nd Avenue, a community-driven micro-urban renewal area that is largely the result of years of community effort. The report I’ve written is composed from the perspective of an active participant in this community process with an intimate knowledge of the area. Its
purpose is to detail the sociopolitical and economic context for our group’s efforts, the simple strategies that we deployed, early results, and the questions that have emerged and still remain unanswered. My hope in detailing this project is twofold: firstly, that communities facing similar or even more daunting challenges can find value in the simple strategies that we’ve utilized, and secondly, that city agencies in Portland and elsewhere recognize the value in partnering more thoroughly with organized communities.

The report aims to first provide some understanding of Portland’s historical and current citywide policy context. In this section, the City’s drive toward pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods encircling small commercial centers and the physical advantages that some neighborhoods have over others is explored. Additionally, the special policy importance given to issues of social equity is highlighted. After this, the justification for the study of Northeast 42nd Avenue amongst the many “disadvantaged” areas is provided. Its unique history is detailed, as are the circumstances of its land use patterns, physical characteristics, economic function, demographic and stakeholder profile, and political environment. The challenges faced by the community are illustrated in each of these subsections. The deliberative community responses to these challenges are then described chronologically, culminating in the establishment of the Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative (NPI). In its own section, the NPI is detailed in relation to other similar City initiatives and analyzed for its fit with 42nd Avenue’s community economic development. The community’s progress within the NPI is detailed, and next steps laid-out. Given this area background and chronology of community activity, the initial strategy pieced together by community members prior to the establishment of the NPI is presented and evaluated for both its efficacy and how it might now amended to meet new circumstances in a point-by-point fashion. Finally, the report is concluded with some reflections on the community process, some of the early lessons learned in community organizing and partnering with public agencies, and emerging challenges.
Context

Portland, Oregon is often cited as an urban planning leader amongst North American cities. There are a number of reasons for this distinction – its regional growth regulations, its bicycle and transit friendliness, and plentitude of eco-friendly architecture. However, Portland’s greatest claim to fame and its most palpable characteristic is its bevy of neighborhoods, each with its own character. In this way, Portland is a city of urban villages and viewed by some as a model for other North American cities. However, it’s worth questioning whether the successes that Portland has enjoyed are a product of contemporary planning, or if they’re instead the fruits of plans laid well-into the past.

In some ways, Portland is only now taking its place amongst large American cities (see Fig. 1.1). Unlike many older cities, Portland did not experience a population boom and then steady decline through the latter half of the twentieth century. Likewise, the city didn’t enjoy the exponential population growth of other western US cities, which occurred at the height of highway development. Instead, much of Portland’s growth has occurred after 1980, once regional growth management and historic preservation regulations had been set firmly in place. This late growth, combined with local appreciation for the city’s neighborhoods and a local economy that has failed to thrive since the collapse of the Oregon timber industry, has helped maintain much of Portland’s early-twentieth century infrastructure and building stock – both important components to the city’s most successful neighborhoods.

Of course, defining success is a decidedly subjective exercise. Like many other large cities, planning in Portland has come to revolve around walkable neighborhoods geared toward locally-driven economies and socio-economic equity. Because most of the city’s inner neighborhoods were developed before the rise of the automobile, it’s unsurprising that they’re conducive to walking. The consistent city street-grid (see Fig. 1.2) and clustered homes surrounding small-
scale commercial districts make this the case. In recent decades, development dollars have gravitated to these areas, especially to the commercial districts, bolstering the local economy (see Fig. 1.3a+b)\textsuperscript{3}. One of the drawbacks of this development, though, has been the displacement of minority and low-income people who traditionally resided in Portland’s innermost neighborhoods\textsuperscript{4}. Still, the city has recognized the demand for walkable urban environments and the advantages that they offer to the extent that much of its latest strategic plan is built around ambitions for walkable, ‘complete’ communities\textsuperscript{5}.

Whether walkability is an appropriate goal for urban development is a discussion in its own right, and not the subject of this writing. Whatever the merits of planning communities for pedestrians may be, Portland is hardly alone in taking this route. What is relevant is that city policy has coalesced around the push for walkable neighborhoods and this frames the future of neighborhood development in Portland. City planners have taken steps to capture walkability in a metric known as ‘the 20-minute neighborhood’. Like other efforts to capture pedestrian-friendliness, the measure accounts for the number of local destinations, the integrity of the pedestrian street network and population density. Conceptually, a 20-minute neighborhood is one in which residents can meet all of their basic daily needs within a 20-minute walk of their front doors. Unsurprisingly, the older neighborhoods of Inner Portland score highly, while the outer neighborhoods do not fare as well\textsuperscript{6}. There are a number of reasons for this, but simply stated, Portland’s outer neighborhoods were annexed and developed in a patchwork fashion. The city’s steadfast grid disintegrates in these neighborhoods and sidewalks are absent in most cases.

Because these outer areas were developed later, they lack the early-century commercial districts nestled amongst dozens of homes – instead, strip malls and metal buildings exist as islands in seas of surface parking, and the surrounding homes are often on large lots with low population density. Investment in the neighborhoods of Outer Portland has trailed far behind their siblings closer to the city center or the suburbs beyond the municipal boundary. Indeed, the picture cast using the 20-minute neighborhood metric is one of two disparate realities in the City of Roses (see Fig. 1.4).

The planning challenge that Portland faces in accomplishing complete communities will play out in the city’s outer neighborhoods, and not in the places where the built form is already favorable to walkability.

\textsuperscript{2} Figure 1.2. Image courtesy of the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.
\textsuperscript{3} Figures 1.3a+b. Images courtesy of Our 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue.
\textsuperscript{5} The Portland Plan. P. 84. 2012.
\textsuperscript{6} 20-Minute Neighborhoods.2011. Figure 1.4 derived from this document. Courtesy of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.
http://www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan/index.cfm?a=288098&c=52256
Evaluating the needs of these communities and cultivating more success within them will require unique strategies for each place, and may also necessitate a flexible notion of that which makes a community ‘complete’. In addition to having less than favorable built qualities, the neighborhoods of Outer Portland are also amongst the City’s most diverse. A central tenet of Portland’s latest strategic plan is the nurture of socio-economic equity and, as such, the steps taken to improve life quality in these communities must do so for all people. In that light, neighborhood development strategies should be crafted with the needs and desires of existing community members at the forefront. This is any easy assertion to make, and one that is even more easily written-off, but the depths of accomplishing complete communities in Outer Portland make any route other than that which goes through the community antithetical to Portland’s strategic goals.

In the pages that follow, a strategy bred of community action and the results of its deployment will be laid out and evaluated for its progress thus far. The community detailed herein, Northeast 42nd Avenue, is one of many that fall into the category described above, though its circumstances are unique in their own right. Some would dispute placing it amongst Portland’s outer neighborhoods, due to its proximity to some of the City’s most vibrant commercial districts. In some ways, this is understandable, because 42nd Avenue’s deficiencies are not as severe as those further from Downtown Portland. This said, 42nd Avenue is a sort of drop-off point, where both the quality of infrastructure and levels of socioeconomic diversity come to resemble Outer Portland. As an area of focus, it’s instructive not for the depth of its struggles in any single area of community development, but because its challenges are broad and can help inform strategies elsewhere in Portland and perhaps elsewhere in North America.

Why Northeast 42nd Avenue?

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Figure 2.1
Inner Portland, Oregon
Northeast 42nd Avenue highlighted in red.

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http://www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan/index.cfm?c=52257
The Northeast 42nd Avenue business district may not evoke much recognition amongst Portlanders from other parts of the city. Unlike other commercial districts, such as Hawthorne, Alberta Street or Mississippi Avenue, 42nd Avenue is not a citywide or regional destination. Nor is the district a city-designated neighborhood, but instead it is the boundary of three separate neighborhoods (see Fig. 2.2)\(^8\), each encompassing other commercial areas of their own. Due to this, 42nd Avenue has been something of a peripheral concern for those not living within close proximity. Still, there is sound reason that the district deserves more attention heading forward, especially as Portland tries to become a more walkable and socially equitable place.

If complete communities strive to contain all essential daily destinations within walking distance of residences, Portland’s neighborhood commercial districts are at the heart of this vision. 42nd Avenue is the only district with the zoning and buildings to accomplish this goal for a good number of residents in Northeast Portland. Even as the district is primarily zoned for commercial use, the surrounding area has little capacity for commercial development and is without significant commercial zoning or structures (see Fig 2.3)\(^9\). While the average Portland neighborhood has roughly 10% of its land area available for commercial development, the areas around 42nd Avenue have only 3.5%\(^10\). One conclusion that might be drawn from this statistic is that more of the area needs to be zoned for commercial use.

Simultaneously, the importance of optimizing the usefulness of existing commercial space on 42nd Avenue is strengthened in this light. A strategy to enhance the area’s utility as a pedestrian district for residents likely needs to account for both the suboptimal use of existing commercial capacity in the near-term and for the general dearth of commercial zoning and development in the longer-term.

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\(^8\) Figure 2.2. Courtesy of Our 42nd Avenue.

\(^9\) Figure 2.3. Zoning map courtesy of Portland bureau of Planning and Sustainability. portlandmaps.com.

Aside from its place as a necessary neighborhood commercial center with respect to Portland’s pedestrian goals, the district marks a dividing line at which socio-economic diversity increases heading eastward. Couple this with its close proximity to areas that have undergone rapid development (see Fig. 2.4)\(^1\) and seen significant displacement in recent decades, specifically the Alberta Arts District\(^2\), and the need for a proactive strategy to promote equitable economic development is made apparent.

A goal of this strategy must be to ensure that bolstered economic activity does not displace residents or existing neighborhood-serving businesses. An influx of new destinations combined with affordable housing prices and easy access to the central city stand to increase area real estate demand. This might’ve begun to occur more rapidly, however the economic recession of 2008 dampened housing demand and business investment. At risk is not only neighborhood affordability, but also the cultural diversity of 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue’s denizens. Beyond creating equitable opportunities and ensuring a level of affordability in both housing (see Fig. 2.5)\(^3\) and commercial goods, any strategy must work to promote culturally accessible commercial environments – a lesson that was not heeded in the past. Though the majority of business owners and people located in the area are white, there is a long-standing African American community served by the district, and there is also a small, well-established community of Korean business owners. Changing economic factors are not the only threat to these populations – so too are perceived cultural barriers that can make a commercial district seemingly less hospitable to people of a given background.

Improvements to 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue are necessary for Portland to fulfill its vision of a city of complete communities, but the manner in which that vision is realized must be crafted with issues of socioeconomic diversity in mind. The 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue district is one of the principal fronts on which the forces of displacement must be actively curbed. While there is a good chance that time will bring more investment interest to the area without any stimulative action, the chances that the resulting enhancements improve the lives of all of the area’s current residents are diminished. Instead, special and active care should be taken to connect community needs with future development and to reinforce the stake that current community members hold in 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue.

Still, having identified the district as a strategically important place, the challenges to making 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue a walkable, equitable and inclusive district are plenty. Broadly, the challenges fall into four categories: physical, social, economic and political.

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1\(^{1}\) *Figure 2.4*. Image courtesy of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.


3\(^{3}\) *Figure 2.5*. Data and image courtesy of Trulia.com. Accessed March, 2012.
Physical Challenges

The first distinction a visitor might notice between 42nd Avenue and other, more successful commercial districts in Portland is the lack of visual appeal and cohesion. Indeed, some might go so far as to say that 42nd Avenue is without a discernible ‘sense of place’. The reasons for this extend beyond abstract concepts of community and place-making. Indeed, 42nd Avenue lacks some measurable ingredients that contribute to walkable places. The history that bred the district’s current physical state is deep and confused, and it’s a tale told in its odd mixture of structures. For most of the twentieth century, the areas east of 42nd Avenue were unincorporated county lands, and the entire area was largely agricultural. During Portland’s wartime population boom, small businesses cropped up along the avenue, especially grocers. Until 1966, the Air National Guard base that rests just north of the district was the Portland Army Air Base, which significantly contributed to area economic development (see Fig. 3.1). Over time, the orchards that lined 42nd Avenue gave way to small commercial buildings, then to light-industrial uses, and then back to auto-oriented businesses. The resulting building mix has traces of all of these periods, from a small neighborhood tavern built in the 1920s to large metal buildings erected during the 1990s. Unfortunately, 42nd Avenue’s economic decline through the latter half of the twentieth century meant that opportunities for the hodge-podge of structures to better integrate with each other were limited. Though there remain some old storefronts that predate auto-oriented development, much of the avenue is lined with surface parking and industrial buildings. Additionally, and due partly to zoning that has not been updated since the area’s incorporation into Portland in the 1980s, single-family homes sit amongst commercial buildings in spots. Mismatched zoning has also led to a significant occurrence of non-conforming commercial uses (see Fig. 3.2), which are frozen by their status and have limited development or improvement options.

The ‘street-friendly’ storefronts that do exist – those that have windows and doors directly adjacent to the sidewalk – are almost entirely disconnected from each other. Only a small handful of pedestrian-friendly businesses are clustered together. Even if existing businesses made strong efforts to improve their street appeal, the poor contiguity of the 42nd Avenue district presents a major if not defining physical challenge. Because there are large gaps in the commercial district that lack both

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14 Figure 3.1. Image courtesy of Motivasi Coffee.
15 Figure 3.2. Image courtesy of Our 42nd Avenue.
destinations (see Fig. 3.3)\(^{16}\) and pedestrian-friendly design, there is little to suggest that the northern and southern parts of the district form a single place. Some of the district’s largest properties are undeveloped or underutilized, and this exacerbates 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue’s contiguity issues.

Equally troubling is the area’s sub par pedestrian grid. Nearly all connecting streets on the east side of 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue are without sidewalks (see Fig. 3.4)\(^{17}\), reflecting Portland’s late annexation of the Cully neighborhood and its fiscal inability to fund street improvements. Perhaps even more problematic are the stretches of 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue that have substandard sidewalks, or are completely without them. Poor pedestrian connections serve to hamper a district striving to be more walkable. On top of this, the number of protected pedestrian crossings that bridge 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue totals four in the entire mile-long stretch. While there are some adequate connections to Portland’s robust bicycle network toward the southern part of 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue, the northern section has no route that connects it to the heart of the district. In general, lackluster north/south connectivity is a barrier to access for residents seeking to patronize district businesses.

Finally, district design offers little in the way of eye-catching or culturally unique elements. There is very little embellishment to the streetscape, whether with public art, pedestrian amenities or landscaping. Many of the planting strips remain unplanted, there is very limited street furniture, and cultural identifiers that might distinguish the district are few and far between. Public gathering places are non-existent, with the exception of Fernhill Park, which is fairly removed from the bulk of businesses.

Overall, the district faces steep physical challenges. The most attainable goals are to improve district design and to better utilize existing commercial capacity. In the longer term, improvements to the pedestrian network and infill commercial development are worthwhile goals that could be of significant help in drawing the district together.

\(^{16}\) Figure 3.3. Courtesy of Our 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue.

\(^{17}\) Figure 3.4. Courtesy of Our 42\(^{nd}\) Avenue.
Economic Challenges

There are a number of successful businesses on 42nd Avenue, and area institutions help build workforce skills and provide employment, but the nature and performance of the district economy doesn’t match the profile of a complete neighborhood. In nearly all neighborhood market segments, 42nd Avenue has significant leakages (see Fig. 4.1). Very few residents rely on district businesses to meet their daily needs. This is perhaps where 42nd Avenue least resembles the successful neighborhoods of Inner Portland. Many of the district’s businesses operate remotely or serve other businesses, with few providing regular retail goods to the area’s residents. The basic building-blocks of a neighborhood-serving business district are largely absent – there is no grocery store, no full-service restaurants that aren’t primarily pubs, and access to durable retail goods is limited to three storefronts (one of which specializes in women’s swimwear, and another in pest control devices). The only abundant community-serving business activities that are not exclusively food-related are hair salons (of which there are four), dog-training facilities (two, in total) and convenience stores (three). In all other market segments, there is room for significant growth with respect to demand. On the ground, this means that residents go outside of the district for most, if not all of their daily needs. The physical impediments to 42nd Avenue’s economic development were summarized earlier, but in addition to these physical deficiencies, there are economic reasons that the area has struggled to prosper and meet the needs of residents.

Figure 4.1. Chart and details courtesy of Cully-Concordia Community Assessment.
Undoubtedly, the economic profile of area residents has limited district investment, especially in businesses that target community members. Just as it is split politically and physically, the district is an economic dividing point rather than a center of gravity. Roughly speaking, the areas to the west and south of 42nd Avenue house higher per capita incomes than the areas to the east of the district. The neighboring business districts of Alberta Street and Beaumont Village have higher densities of everyday retail and commercial opportunities for residents, and attract many Beaumont-Wilshire and Concordia neighborhood residents (see Fig. 4.3)\textsuperscript{19}. Additionally, a pocket of businesses surrounds a high-end local supermarket near 33rd Avenue, which also draws commercial attention westward from 42nd Avenue. Unfortunately, though these commercial districts make their respective areas more livable for residents, they have not contributed to a sense of community-ownership for 42nd Avenue and provide purchasing opportunities that are largely beyond the means of lower-income residents. As a result, wealthier residents living near the district are more invested in neighboring areas to the west, while lower-income residents are underserved\textsuperscript{20}.

Another economic challenge for the district is the absence of an anchor destination, such as a supermarket, or a substantial agglomeration of neighborhood-serving businesses. Where Alberta Street has 111 businesses and Beaumont Village has 92, both with significant numbers of full-service food and entertainment venues, 42nd Avenue has a total of 30 businesses (see Fig. 4.2)\textsuperscript{21} and nothing that can be characterized as an everyday anchor destination. Minus this, and in light of the fact that neither the physical infrastructure nor the demographic profile is appealing to many investors, the area has yet to see economic development geared toward meeting neighborhood needs.

The biggest challenge nested in achieving economic growth might be developing new businesses without a demographic shift away from lower income people and toward higher-income earners. A strategy to equitably strengthen the district’s economic performance and meet resident needs must be careful not to rely on drawing the interest of wealthier residents to the district alone, but should instead create a diversity of opportunities to match the needs and means of all of the district’s people. Further, the economic opportunities developed should aim to provide employment opportunities to a diverse array of people and to ensure that consumer opportunities are culturally inclusive.

\textsuperscript{19} Figure 4.3. Photo courtesy of Alberta Main Street.
\textsuperscript{21} Figure 4.2. Table courtesy of Cully Main Street Project Redevelopment Analysis.
Social Challenges

The social challenges facing 42nd Avenue are not merely defined by the area’s growing racial and ethnic diversity, though these certainly present hurdles to community cohesion. Regardless of race or ethnicity, many area residents do not feel a sense of ownership for 42nd Avenue or its businesses. For most of the past several decades, there has not been an organizing force through which residents from all three of the district’s neighborhoods could regularly contribute to community or economic development. Efforts have been made to form greater community cohesion through independent campaigns and programs. Examples include community advocacy for the former Whitaker-Adams Middle School site, the foundation of the 42nd Avenue Business Association and the Cully-Concordia Community Action Plan, organized by the city’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. Each of these has added momentum to the drive to better organize 42nd Avenue, but none have constituted the foundation of a permanent and broad-based organization for sustained community involvement. This organizational void detracts from a sense ownership over the district amongst residents, as there is no formal conduit for their contributions to translate into district development.

As previously mentioned, the growing diversity of the district presents a dynamic challenge to collective action and equitable economic development (see Fig. 5.1). Long-standing racial and ethnic divisions affect community relations, and new immigration to the district presents another dimension, still. To the west of 42nd Avenue, a new influx of white residents has changed the area’s racial make-up, as has the growing population of Latinos locating east of the district. In addition to racial and ethnic diversity, linguistic diversity also shapes community development in the area. Language differences impact both community involvement processes and the extent to which non-English speakers can participate in social and economic activities. A strategy for 42nd Avenue needs to accommodate these differences in terms of both process and results.

Political Challenges

Just as 42nd Avenue has had difficulty capturing the energy of nearby residents, so too has it struggled to garner attention from local policymakers. This is less likely due to malignant ignorance of the district by Portland’s government representatives, and more likely a result of a lack of organization for the district. Whereas city commissioners regularly visit neighborhood associations and coalitions, there is no such arena for them to engage the people of 42nd Avenue as a whole. Beyond being divided amongst three different neighborhoods, the district is also the boundary between two neighborhood coalitions, through which various neighborhoods pursue joint interests. There exists no entity through coalitions regularly cooperate on specific projects, rather they collaborate on general citywide programmatic strategies. These divisions directly impact city funding for the district in addition to creating organizational issues. Even if the political will exists to invest public dollars more heavily in the district, without a sole entity to advise or administer investments, a cohesive and accountable

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22 Figure 5.1. Map courtesy of SocialExplorer via the New York Times.
strategy for the district is untenable. Moreover, minus political cohesion, it is difficult for city agencies to effectively engage community members, as each such effort requires the assemblage of a cross-community task force. Future strategies for the development of the district should address the deficiency of cohesive political representation to create a clear connection between community members and policymakers.

**Community Responses to Challenges:**

Despite the challenges that 42nd Avenue faces in its continued development into an equitable and complete neighborhood center, there have been a handful of efforts to reinvigorate the district through the years. Most of these have centered on time-specific projects or issues, though others have made attempts to organize community members for lasting involvement. Of the ongoing community activities, perhaps none has had more staying-power than the establishment of the 42nd Avenue Business Association (see Fig. 6.1)\(^\text{23}\). Starting in the late 1990s, and initiated by St Charles Catholic Church, the business association has worked to promote the district citywide and has seen steady growth in participation. Activities organized by the business association include the annual 42nd Avenue Street Festival and Parade, a holiday breakfast social and the installation of street banners marking the district. In addition to this work, community members participated in both the 42nd Avenue Target Area Study, and in the Cully-Concordia Community Assessment and Action Plan. Many of the details summarized in this report were more thoroughly investigated through these projects, and their outputs continue to aid in district organizing.

There has also been considerable energy invested in site-specific issues facing the district. In particular, the potential redevelopment of the former Whitaker-Adams School Site has been a rallying point for members of both the Concordia and Cully neighborhoods (see Fig. 6.2)\(^\text{24}\). The Site, which is approximately ten acres in size, is viewed by many to be of critical importance for future development in the district. Different uses have been proposed, ranging from affordable housing to an indoor track and field facility. To date, Portland Public Schools has maintained ownership of the Site and has shown little indication that it will sell to another

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\(^{23}\) Figure 6.1. Courtesy of Our 42nd Avenue.

\(^{24}\) Figure 6.2. Courtesy of Our 42nd Avenue.
entity. Regardless, the Whitaker-Adams Site is of high priority to several area residents and business-owners.

A number of issue-related organizations and projects have also emerged through the years, and though they may not be directly related to the development of 42nd Avenue, there is reason that their missions might play a role. Most obvious of these are the community-based organizations with a focus on socioeconomic equity. Included in these and highly active in the area around 42nd Avenue are the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), Verde, and Hacienda Community Development Corporation, which is headquartered in the district. These three groups each provide economic development programming targeted for people of ethnic and racial minority. Additionally, both NAYA and Hacienda are affordable housing developers. Though run as a public entity, the Portland Community College Workforce Training Center also provides economic development resources to low-income and minority people in the area. While each of these organizations serves its own unique mission, all have participated in the effort to maintain area equity and diversity.

Other community groups include the Friends of Fernhill Park, the Ainsworth Street Collective, Columbia EcoVillage and the Cully Community Market. There are also a number of religious organizations in the district that have been active within the broader the community. This is especially true of St. Charles Church, which regularly organizes and houses community events.

Most recently, there have been a number of city initiatives that have invigorated participation amongst 42nd Avenue residents.

**Portland Main Streets**

In early 2010, the City of Portland and the Portland Development Commission (PDC) introduced the Portland Main Street Program. This program was derived from the nationwide approach developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation known as ‘Main Street’. Traditionally, the Main Street Approach has been deployed in smaller American cities that are built around struggling early-century commercial districts. The purpose of the program is to promote historic preservation by enhancing the economic performance of traditional American town centers, or ‘main streets’. Its success has been well-documented, with a return-on-investment of nearly 25 to one.

Portland’s incarnation of the Main Street Approach was made available to the city’s numerous commercial districts through a competitive process, with only four being selected to participate -- a number that would eventually be reduced to three for lack of funding. The selected districts were to receive annual matching funds and technical assistance from the city in accordance with the Main Street model of economic development. To participate, community leaders would need to collaborate in writing a detailed grant application with a full community profile. On top of this, each community was charged with raising $90,000 in commitments to help fund the first three years of the program. 42nd Avenue was one of several districts to initiate the process to participate, and one of only five to successfully raise the requisite funds to complete its application. A collection of residents, business-owners and institutional leaders helped lead this drive and, though the district was not ultimately selected for the program, built
community momentum that piqued the interest of surprised city leaders who had not expected such a competitive showing.

Perhaps the most important result of the Main Street application process was the mobilization of diverse community members toward the goal of strengthening the 42nd Avenue district. After the successful Main Street districts had been chosen, this group continued to meet, taking on the moniker of the 42nd Avenue Main Street Collaborative. Applying the committee structure of the Main Street Approach, the group planned small-scale initiatives and developed partnerships to advocate for district development. One such community-building process congregated longtime neighbors together to share the stories and history of 42nd Avenue – something with which many newer residents were previously unfamiliar. The group also worked with city officials to bring a district scrap metal facility, which had long been considered a nuisance by neighbors, into compliance with city code. Another initiative of Main Street Collaborative invited neighbors to re-imagine a district intersection (see Fig. 6.3). An offshoot of this intersection visioning process was the installation of two, publicly-funded murals (see Fig. 6.4). Together, all of the activities and relationships developed by the group continued to draw attention to 42nd Avenue, eventually contributing to the birth of a new community economic development approach from PDC.

The Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative

While the Portland Main Street Program provided an excellent impetus for the 42nd Avenue community to organize, it was a poor fit in other ways. The need for district organization and economic development continues to be apparent, however the Main Street Approach generally targets commercial areas that already possess the physical characteristics conducive to walkability. In many ways, the program plays to the strengths of Portland’s inner neighborhoods. It is less fitting of auto-oriented districts that were developed later in the twentieth century. The members of the 42nd Avenue Main Street Collaborative recognized this fairly early in the Main Street process, and understood that the district’s physical deficiencies would continue to hamper its viability, even if the city eventually expanded the program to more districts. In discussions

25 Figure 6.3. Image courtesy of Michael DeMarco.
26 Figure 6.4. Photo courtesy of Evans Martin.
with city agencies and others, members advocated for a modified version of Main Street to assist neighborhoods not possessing strong pedestrian infrastructure.

In addition to the community’s push for a modified approach to economic development, leaders of minority and underrepresented groups were also voicing a need for a more equitable, inclusive and comprehensive model. Portland’s primary place-based tools for economic development at the time included Main Street, which best-applied to inner commercial districts already housing a fair number of businesses, and Urban Renewal, both administered by PDC. Traditionally, Portland’s use of Urban Renewal designated large swaths of the city eligible for Tax Increment Financing (see Figs. 7.1 & 7.2).

Through this program, physical development could be incentivized with public funding – usually bonds issued against future revenue, which would thusly be bolstered by any new developments. Though a powerful development tool, Urban Renewal has earned a reputation for its displacement of low-income residents and top-down decision-making. Because of the size of the investments made, the need to improve real estate values has often been nested within Urban Renewal spending. This has led to a number of development decisions that did not reflect the desires of residents. For this reason, Portlanders have grown leery of Urban Renewal, and PDC itself.

In some respects, Main Street is not a sufficiently powerful program to bring community-serving prosperity to 42nd Avenue, given the district’s poor physical starting point. By the same token, though powerful, Urban Renewal has traditionally failed to meet the standards of equitable and community-driven development necessary to achieve Portland’s goals on 42nd Avenue. Without creating a wholly different paradigm for development, which would require significant bureaucratic and legislative commitment, PDC conceived of a new tool bred from the strengths of Main Street and Urban Renewal: the Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative (NPI).

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27 Figure 7.1. Image courtesy of the Portland Development Commission.
28 Figure 7.2. Graph courtesy of the Pelican Post.
http://www.thepelicanpost.org/2011/06/06/hidden-taxes-without-popular-vote/
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
<th>DRAWBACKS</th>
<th>BEST APPLIED TO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban Renewal</td>
<td>Leverages large amounts of capital</td>
<td>Top-down control</td>
<td>Undeveloped land or large reclaimed sites</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increases property value, causes displacement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street</td>
<td>Community controlled</td>
<td>Works best in developed commercial districts</td>
<td>Struggling commercial districts with strong infrastructure and building stock</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Requires significant fundraising</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative</td>
<td>Community controlled</td>
<td>Requires significant fundraising</td>
<td>Struggling commercial districts with substandard infrastructure and buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More dedicated resources than Main Street</td>
<td>Participating communities often have few internal resources</td>
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Like Main Street, the NPI is a community-driven effort to revitalize neighborhood business districts. The key difference is in its funding and operating strategies. Where Main Street is funded with limited annual matching grants and invests heavily in organization-building, the NPI is funded primarily through small-scale Tax Increment Financing, and the bulk of its expenditures are directed toward permanent physical improvements. In this way, the NPI functions like a tiny Urban Renewal Area (URA), at least in terms of the Tax Increment funding. In most other ways, the function of the NPI bears no resemblance to traditional Urban Renewal. Community control of the process and investments contrast starkly with the large URAs, which have been criticized for a lack of transparency and responsiveness to community needs. Importantly, the Tax Increment funds used for the NPI are un-bonded, meaning that no money is leveraged against future revenue. This eliminates the need to make investments with the express goal of increasing real estate values (see Fig. 7.3)\(^{29}\). The initiative goal is to achieve equitable and community-serving economic development through grassroots organizing backed with modest investments on the part of the city, totaling $1 million per district over a roughly ten year period.

Six struggling commercial districts were selected to participate in the NPI. These districts were identified based on demographic profiles and business ownership that hold higher concentrations

\(^{29}\) Figure 7.3. Courtesy of Our 42nd Avenue.
of low-income and minority people than the city average. 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue was amongst of the selected districts (see Fig 7.4). \textsuperscript{30}

During the three months following the introduction of the initiative, each district was provided grant funding to kick-start community involvement, build capacity and to begin to explore a potential vision and goals for their area. For 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue, this process yielded unexpected involvement, with more than 160 community members participating in a visioning process and contributing specific desires for the future of the district (see Figs. 7.5 \textsuperscript{31} & 7.6\textsuperscript{32}). Additionally, stakeholders collaboratively mapped the investment area for the NPI that will be eligible for funding for built improvements (see Fig. 7.7\textsuperscript{33}). Many community members have gone on to become involved in initiative leadership, which has begun to develop action plans for the NPI’s first operating year, beginning in July of 2012.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7_5.png}
\caption{Community Visions.}
\textbf{Figure 7.5}
A vision word-cloud generated by community members. More frequently mentioned words appear larger.
Community members were asked to identify word that will ideally describe the district in a decade’s time.
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7_6.png}
\caption{Community Participation.}
\textbf{Figure 7.6}
Community members share their conclusions during the NPI kickoff event. More than 160 neighbors, business people and institutional leaders attended this event.
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7_7.png}
\caption{The 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue NPI Area.}
\textbf{Figure 7.7}
A finalized map of the 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue NPI investment area, created by community members.
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Figure 7.4}. Image courtesy of the Portland Development Commission.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Figure 7.5}. Image courtesy of Our 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Figure 7.6}. Image courtesy of Our 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Figure 7.7}. Image courtesy of the Portland Development Commission.
Strategy and Review

Prior to the introduction of the Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative, members of the 42nd Avenue Main Street Collaborative had begun to construct a strategy to accomplish the goal of making the district a walkable, prosperous and equitable place. Its foundation has been to assert 42nd Avenue as a priority area for the City of Portland. This strategy is laid out in the pages that follow and is evaluated and built-upon in light of the NPI. To some extent, the NPI has changed the landscape of the district’s effort. Still, the physical, economic, social and political challenges largely remain, and new challenges have arisen.

Strategy Goal

To foster a vibrant, prosperous and equitable pedestrian-oriented commercial district that serves the needs of the existing community by engaging community members and the city as a whole in the development of 42nd Avenue.

42nd Avenue is one of the most affordable areas in the inner ring of Northeast Portland. Directly to the west and south, property value and per capita income sharply increases. The Alberta Arts District, which is 42nd Avenue’s westerly neighbor, has seen rapid gentrification during the past fifteen years and has developed into a regional retail center. The relative affordability of the 42nd Avenue district and its close proximity to Northeast Portland’s more prosperous districts lends itself to a strong likelihood that interest in the area will increase over time. For this reason, it is important that community members take an active role in the district’s maturation to ensure that economic development works to meet the needs of area residents, rather than as a force of displacement.

The following objectives support the overarching project goal by addressing the essential areas of district revitalization. It should be noted that the drive toward greater ecological, social and economic sustainability underlies all of these objectives insofar as they represent the development of a physical and organizational infrastructure more conducive to sustainable living.

As previously mentioned, the key challenges to achieving the goal of this strategy fall into four categories: physical, economic, social and political. The objectives and actions herein are geared to address these challenges by building upon existing strengths. In every respect, the process of mobilizing these actions is as important to district development as are their end results. Building capacity through participation and, in effect, building community is the fundamental feature of this strategy that will ensure progress on 42nd Avenue endures time and change.

Objectives

- Develop an active and open decision-making body to represent Northeast 42nd Avenue and enact district strategies.

Due to the lack of coordination within the community and citywide representation, the organizational capacity to determine directions for the district and to secure the means to implement change is essential. Transparency and participation are fundamental to the legitimacy of the organization, given that it possesses no statutory authority.
➢ *Promote the culture, activities and interests of the district within the larger city and regional contexts.*

Drawing attention to the strengths and challenges of the district is important both internally and externally. Not only does this directly strengthen social interaction and commerce, it also illuminates the district amongst citywide priority areas.

➢ *Improve the urban design and network features of the district in support of pedestrian traffic, active public spaces and accessible local culture.*

The existing physical features of the district present a number of barriers between residents and businesses. Additionally, public spaces dedicated to social interchange and artistic expression are few and far between. Enabling residents to easily navigate the district on foot and providing spaces for interaction will better connect community members with local commerce while also giving them greater ownership of the area.

➢ *Incubate, develop and attract local businesses that serve community needs and enhance district prosperity.*

By identifying community needs and activating entrepreneurship within the community, economic development can be geared to create jobs locally and attract area-appropriate businesses, both of which help ensure that prosperity is shared amongst community members.

**Actions**

A strategy of this nature presents a chicken-or-egg circumstance. On one hand, active economic development and improvements to the built form require organizational capacity. On the other hand, building organizational capacity for its own sake can be difficult, especially on the backs of volunteers. With this in mind, the following action strategy strives to build capacity around small events and projects, which can then be applied to ever-larger initiatives, thus building more capacity. In this sense, organizational capacity and projects serve each other in perpetuity.

1. *Create a targeted public enhancement to symbolize the purpose and direction of the district organization.*

Enthusiasm for district improvement is certainly palpable in the 42nd Avenue community, however, progress toward this end can be difficult to gauge if gains are purely organizational rather than material. Additionally, building organizational capacity can be made easier when community members have the ability to contribute to projects that materialize relatively quickly and yield easily discernible results. Creating a small public enhancement, whether in the form of street furniture, public art or another amenity, can help achieve several strategy goals. There exist several spots on the avenue that are of everyday importance to people in the district, however, few of these locations are illuminated with complementary cultural or utilitarian street features. These spots represent opportunities to draw community members to participate in district improvement through community-generated art and collaborative design, thus bolstering the local streetscape, building internal capacity and embodying neighborhood character.
Objectives Addressed:
- Builds organizational capacity
- Promotes local culture and interests
- Creates place-specific urban design

Horizon:
Short-term -- within one year.

Progress:
In the summer of 2011, the 42nd Avenue Main Street Collaborative wrote and received a grant from the Regional Arts and Culture Council to install a set of twin murals at the intersection of 42nd Avenue and Alberta Court. These murals have served as a spark for district enthusiasm and involvement, and are nested into a larger community-driven vision for the development of the Alberta Court Crossing. From this process, district organizers have added to their ranks and mobilized previously latent community resources. Additionally, the painting of the murals received publicity in several local newspapers, including the region’s most widely circulated.

Amendments and Next Steps
The murals have been largely successful in achieving their purpose and have served as a symbolic place-marker, indicating that change is coming to the intersection. However, there is quite some distance to be covered in turning the Alberta Court Crossing into a community gathering-place. A proactive approach needs to be applied to identify and realize the next improvement to the intersection. Perhaps more importantly, organizing similar participatory streetscape improvements in other parts of the district can help create more community cohesion in an area lacking for physical contiguity. It will be important to build upon this momentum with more visible progress in the district.

2. Derive a district design advisory committee to inform public realm enhancements and prioritization.

To draw on enthusiasm stemming from local improvement, interested community members will be organized into a design advisory committee. This group will help expand design initiatives throughout the district, thus replicating Action 1 at other points. By creating a formal committee, the foundations of greater district representation can be laid and the legitimacy of the 42nd Avenue organization will be set more firmly in place. This legitimacy is ever-important to effective lobbying for resources, as the City of Portland is currently working toward the completion of a new comprehensive plan that will prioritize funding for capital improvements.

Objectives Addressed:
- Builds organizational capacity and supports transparency
- Promotes local culture and interests citywide
- Assists in the development of design improvements

Horizon:
Short-term – within one year.
Committee members worked through the second half of 2011 to conduct a detailed analysis of the district, providing comment on design, land use and transportation issues throughout 42nd Avenue. This information was collated into a broad concept for the continued development of the district, with specific recommendations made for each segment of analysis. While this work provides useful insights into district deficiencies, it was primarily driven by a few individuals, and a more collaborative approach will need to be taken to prioritize improvements.

Amendments and Next Steps

The establishment of the Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative has thrown a wrinkle into district design prioritization, as there is now significant funding available for storefront and streetscape improvements. This will undoubtedly shape prioritization and necessitate deliberate public involvement. The levels of funding available will help slate some of the next steps, but it will be incumbent upon district organizers to draw more people into the collaborative design process. The NPI has recast the purpose of public realm priorities from a tool for advocacy to an internal decision-making aide, as the community will now have significant financial capability to enact its own visions.

3. Develop a set of district-wide recommendations for urban design and network improvements.

Re-imagining the 42nd Avenue district as a more walkable area within Portland’s 20-minute neighborhood paradigm will help locals define improvements for themselves, thus better ensuring that new developments support the existing community. Importantly, a proactive approach to evaluating existing deficiencies and opportunities will assist in lobbying for public improvements as the city considers its priorities. Producing analysis and recommendations can serve as a launching pad for more detailed design work, and will help the district organization cultivate further strategies for public realm enhancements. In addition, more easily attainable improvements that can be executed without heavy public investment will become clearer, highlighting where the organization and private individuals can achieve gains without municipal backing.

Objectives Addressed:
- Directly supports district design improvements

Horizon:
Short-term – within one year.

Progress:

As mentioned, a team of committee members trained in civic arts (planning, landscape architecture and architecture) conducted a detailed analysis of the 42nd Avenue district through the end of 2011. This work was to be presented to community members in January of 2012, but was tabled after the introduction of the NPI. Still, the analysis can help shape the prioritization and design strategy that will help community members invest in the district. Additionally, the City of Portland’s pending update to its comprehensive plan presents an opportunity for the community to use this analysis to advocate for more appropriate district zoning. Committee
members have been working in concert with city planners to make appropriate adjustments to zoning along 42nd Avenue.

Amendments and Next Steps

As was originally the plan, the analysis produced from this process will serve as a starting point in discussions about how to invest NPI-related funds. Once reviewed by community members, it can help inform next steps both externally and internally, which might include appealing to city planners for desired zoning changes or planning specific public realm improvements. Developing recommendations for improvements to the district transportation network is still as important as ever, because NPI funds are not significant enough in size for most transportation improvements. In this sense, the role of the district organization remains to advocate with city agencies and decision makers on behalf of community interests. While much of the initial analysis regarding both land use and transportation have already been conducted, greater community input is necessary to strengthen the appeal for changes and improvements to city agencies.

4. Formalize organizational structure.

As the initiatives of the organization take shape and community members take greater ownership of district objectives, earning official recognition amongst the local political bodies (neighborhoods, coalitions) – perhaps as a ‘special district’ of shared interest – will pull 42nd from the periphery of official neighborhood business. Rather than being underrepresented due to its geographic location, the district can have a voice from within several entities, thus transforming a structural weakness into a point of strength. To enable this action, the 42nd Avenue organization will need to develop a clear structure and transparent procedures.

Objectives Addressed:

- Defines and formalizes district organization within Portland’s existing neighborhood structure
- Promotes the district within the citywide and regional context

Horizon:
Midterm – within two years.

Progress:

The NPI has been something of a galvanizing force with regard to organizing the district. While the 42nd Avenue Main Street Collaborative was a loose association of neighbors and business owners without specific boundaries of interest, the NPI requires the founding of a broad-based district organization. Because of its use of Urban Renewal, the district is legally defined in geographic terms. This helps create a clear sphere of interest that is easily communicated to area residents. Additionally, the NPI has required a temporary non-profit fiscal sponsor for each participating district, with the expectation that districts will eventually form their own federally recognized non-profit organizations. 42nd Avenue’s initiative district has temporarily become a project of the Central Northeast Neighbors neighborhood coalition, which has given credibility to the effort and helped to build partnerships. In many ways, this action is nearly complete, progressing at a much more rapid pace than could have been anticipated.
Amendments and Next Steps

With a geographically and legally defined boundary, the next step for district organizers is to explore options for a future non-profit organization. Developing an organizational and collaborative decision-making structure will allow community members to more easily become involved in district development. However, a challenge arising from this is navigating the bureaucratic requirements associated with non-profit status and the NPI. Another challenge is ensuring that the new organization is sustainably inclusive – especially of people who do not speak English or have felt alienated from past public initiatives. If the 42nd Avenue district organization is to take on broad-based economic development representing all area residents, it must include representative stakeholders in the construction and execution of its functions.

5. Create a master plan for design.

As a vision for the district emerges and community members become more involved in the formal district organization, developing a design master plan for the area that promotes all of the objectives of this strategy will be important. This plan should draw upon previous analyses and community input to provide specific design improvements. It will likely be necessary for the organization to acquire funding to advance this action. The design master plan can be used directly for district improvement, but also promote area interests within the city and to recruit appropriate investment to the community.

Objectives Addressed:
- Feeds into place-specific urban design and character

Horizon:
Midterm – within two to three years.

Progress:

No master plan for the district has been drawn to date, though the urgency of creating one has increased with the introduction of the NPI.

Amendments and Next Steps

The aforementioned district analysis and improvement prioritization will ultimately help to shape the creation of a master plan for 42nd Avenue. Now that the district has the ability to fund some of its own improvements through the NPI, the timeline for completing a community-driven master plan has tightened, as each decision will need to be conducive to a strategic vision for the district. This said, it is difficult to pursue a design master plan without first having decided upon an organizational and decision making structure for the district.

6. Form alliances with neighboring districts for comprehensive planning and strategic advocacy.

In striving for complete, walkable communities, Portland districts must consider their place in the context of their neighbors. While 42nd Avenue aims to become a community-serving district, it can’t do so in isolation. By forming alliances with neighboring business districts, 42nd can
more comprehensively develop the district economy to fit with the economic activities of the wider area. This can serve to inform the direction of economic development efforts for the district organization. Another benefit yielded from partnership with neighboring districts is increased political weight for all partners and their collective initiatives. Ultimately, working together so that the varying district strategies nest into a broad vision through collaborative planning will be essential to the ascension of grassroots plans to the upper levels of city policy.

**Objective Addressed:**
- Promotes the interests of the district within the context of the larger city

**Horizon:**
Mid-term – within two years.

**Progress:**
District organizers had begun to work with representatives from the three neighborhoods that comprise 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue to focus on selected issues. One of the biggest successes was the cooperation to pressure a district scrap metal business to comply with city land use codes. However, there is still work to be done in coordinating with neighboring commercial districts. The 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue Business Association has made some inroads with the Beaumont Village Business District, which rests directly to the south, however strategic partnership has not been broached at any depth. At the time the initial strategy was proposed, the NPI had not yet been introduced and district organizers believed that Portland’s Main Street Program would continue to be PDC’s primary vehicle for neighborhood economic development. Were that the case, Beaumont Village’s pedestrian-friendly environment seemed a more appropriate candidate for Main Street and a potential strategic partner to draw attention to the area more broadly. Though the development of Beaumont Village remains important to 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue, the NPI has altered the circumstances of partnerships.

Alberta Street, which is directly to the west of 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue, and Beaumont Village are both conducive to the Portland Main Street Program – indeed, the former was selected to participate in the program. 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue and its neighboring commercial district to the east, Cully Boulevard, are less so. However, with the introduction of the NPI, both 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue and Cully Boulevard were selected as participating districts. Additionally, because both are at least partially encompassed in the Cully Neighborhood, many community members have been involved in both initiatives simultaneously. This has led to a growing strategic partnership between the two districts, which share similar socio-demographic characteristics. Together, the districts have found operational synergies to promote their respective causes across the city.

**Amendments and Next Steps**

District organizers must redouble efforts to develop an economic vision of 42\textsuperscript{nd} Avenue that meshes with the economic function of its neighbors. Identifying opportunities for partnership will be critical, particularly with both Alberta Street and Beaumont Village. The district has already grown closer to Cully Boulevard and its NPI organization, and this partnership should continue to flourish with time.
7. Establish an economic development committee.

In order to connect economic opportunities to enabling resources, the organization will need to have a group dedicated to strategize specific economic development initiatives and to provide face-to-face support for businesses and potential entrepreneurs. Members of this committee will provide guidance to individual business owners and startups, directing and coordinating any resources that may be available. This committee will serve as the on-the-ground face of the organization for economic development, and will require a relatively significant commitment of time due to its intensive activities – however, it will be of critical importance as the organization applies market research and analysis to long-term plans.

Objectives Addressed:
- Facilitates economic development within the district
- Perpetuates community participation in the organization
- Promotes the district to potential businesses

Horizon:
Mid-term – one to two years.

Progress:

Interest in local economic development has been growing on two fronts, both within the 42nd Avenue Business Association and the 42nd Avenue Main Street Collaborative. Still, there is not a single face that connects new entrepreneurs and existing businesses to resources. That said, district organizers have become a de facto contact point for businesses looking to locate in the district. The NPI has also piqued the interest of neighbors and business people to participate in economic development, as they view community-controlled funds as an opportunity to attract businesses that could strengthen the area and help achieve district goals. As a part of NPI organizational development, an economic development committee is in the incubation stage.

Amendments and Next Steps

Over the next several months, the business association and the 42nd Avenue NPI organization need to determine how best to manage district economic development. Whatever form this effort takes, it will need to explore the areas of economic development need, including recruiting new businesses and connecting existing businesses with resources. Additionally, this group will need to develop criteria for the allocation of NPI funding and to eventually develop the programs to usefully deploy funds to achieve district goals.

8. Conduct district economic needs-analysis.

Understanding the existing economic deficiencies and opportunities of the district is essential to the recruitment and development of area-appropriate businesses. A needs-analysis will help identify the commercial elements that fulfill the consumer necessities of locals, while also assisting the location of commercial operations that fill voids in the economy of the broader area. This analysis will help make the case that firms looking to relocate, financial institutions providing seed money, and agencies allocating funds to the area can do so with confidence.
when economic development coalesces with analytical results. Of equal importance, this analysis can be scaled to individuals looking to create or improve a business within the district.

Objectives Addressed:
- Assists in attracting and recruiting appropriate businesses to the district

Horizon:
Midterm – one to two years.

Progress:

The beginning steps of a needs analysis were conducted during a community visioning meeting in January of 2012. More than 160 community members contributed to the analysis that yielded some telling results insofar as specific desired commercial and community destinations. Additionally, the sharing of ideas amongst this large group led some community members to explore opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Amendments and Next Steps

Building-upon the community input that’s already been gathered, district organizers must expand this analysis to identify the types of businesses that are most likely to find success in the district, while also meeting strategic goals. Future iterations of this work might strive to synthesize recommendations based on both community desires and more traditional market research, so as to make a stronger case for community-serving businesses. The results of this research can be used by the economic development committee, as well as circulated to brokers and realtors representing businesses seeking a location.

9. Identify opportunities for local entrepreneurship.

Once a needs-analysis is conducted, the following step will be to connect individuals to appropriate facilities and resources. By matching the results of the analysis with existing facilities, the economic development committee can begin to map out opportunities geographically, while also detailing available resources. This will make the opportunities existing within the district more accessible for newcomers to the district, and also make recruitment priorities clearer for the committee. Further, as mapping this information creates a geography of opportunities and resources, it can also improve the quality of future urban design and changes to the built environment.

Objectives Addressed:
- Feeds directly into active economic development
- Supports future comprehensive design decisions

Horizon:
Midterm – within two years.
Progress:

The design analysis conducted during 2011 and the initial needs analysis have provided a baseline understanding of vacant storefronts and community needs. What is lacking is the organizational infrastructure to cultivate and recruit entrepreneurs, and thus no new businesses have yet cropped up as the result of organizational efforts.

Amendments and Next Steps

As the economic development committee organizes around the NPI, one of its first tasks shall be to record available commercial spaces and to develop relationships with property owners and managers to better connect potential businesses with leasing opportunities. Beyond this, district organizers will need to gather resources in a clear and concise manner to offer a suite of assistance to aspiring district businesses. This step will help translate economic opportunities and latent skills into NPI priorities, giving a better understanding of how the organizational capacity and district funds can be leveraged to achieve community economic goals.

10. Lobby city agencies, decision makers and charitable organizations for funding and policy support.

Throughout the enactment of this strategy, advocacy for the district with policymakers and charitable organizations will be ongoing. All actions in this strategy are geared to elevate the status of Northeast 42nd Avenue within city priorities, and though the case for the district will become stronger over time, continuing advocacy will ensure that progress is appreciated beyond the area’s boundaries. With recognition from the three neighborhoods, and having accomplished both material and organizational goals without paid labor, it will become easier to advance the district as a policy interest.

Objectives Addressed:
- Promotes the district's interests within the broader regional context

Horizon:
Ongoing.

Progress:

The establishment of the NPI helps many of the political objectives that 42nd Avenue has identified, primarily providing a lasting vehicle for advocacy through the district organization and placing the district’s fortunes amongst the city’s highest neighborhood economic development priorities.

Amendments and Next Steps

Despite the policy victory represented by the NPI, lobbying on behalf of the 42nd Avenue district will need to continue for a variety of reasons. Though the community now has some leverage in pursuing its goals with respect to economic development, there are still other policy areas that require attention, including transportation and housing. Further, responsibility rests upon community members to ensure that the political commitment to the NPI does not wane as time
passes. Additionally, the community must still raise money to pay for organizational programming on a yearly basis, so it cannot simply rest on its accomplishments. Developing the political, bureaucratic and institutional relationships to convey the importance of the initiative and continued efforts to improve the community in other ways will be essential to the lasting success of the district.

Reflections and Conclusion

The 42nd Avenue community organized its strategy to draw attention to its needs and to elevate the area’s importance amongst the City’s priorities. To a large extent, this goal has been accomplished. The Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative has seemingly cemented the attention of local policymakers and city agents on 42nd Avenue and the other participating districts. The opportunity that the NPI presents is tremendous for a variety of reasons. Chief amongst these is the chance to recast the partnership between the City and its many communities, allowing more localized control of economic development. Indeed, despite the limited resources allocated through the NPI as compared to traditional Urban Renewal, the initiative promises a more comprehensive and participatory approach to the allocation of public investments. If successful, the program will give cities throughout the country reason to consider devolving some economic development powers to micro-local scales. It will also act to reinforce Portland’s model of complete communities, which centers on neighborhood-serving commercial districts. However, the success of this strategy in drawing attention to the district has brought with it a new set of challenges.

Organizing a community without any expectation other than to garner attention is wholly different from operating a publicly funded organization responsible for equitable economic development. As a small effort, the projects initiated by community members were necessarily scaled to the ability of the community to oversee them. Now, with greater resources, the community must work rapidly to expand its capacity to administer much larger investments. Moreover, as a public organization, Our 42nd Avenue has a responsibility to ensure that its projects are decided upon and executed in a representative manner. In this sense, the community now finds itself trying to catch up to its new responsibilities. Exacerbating this challenge is the newly piqued interest that developers, entrepreneurs and investors have in the district. While the interest is welcomed in some ways, there is concern that the organization is not yet in a position to be effective in forwarding its objectives. Amongst these objectives, provision for social equity in economic development is a primary concern. Heightened investment interest has shortened the window for the establishment of measures to ensure economic opportunity for low-income and otherwise vulnerable residents. Additionally, questions about the continued accessibility to housing for people of lesser means must be considered in tandem with economic development. While housing policy is beyond the purview of the NPI, the entanglement of economic development and residential property value requires active strategies on the part of community partners to ensure that home renters are not forced out. These emerging challenges were largely expected, however the urgency to address them effectively is heightened now that the wheels of economic development have been set in motion.

The benefit of a community-driven approach is the ability to identify issues and potential solutions with acute precision – something that broader policy tools have often failed to accomplish. By empowering community planning and economic development through organizations like Our 42nd Avenue, the NPI is attempting to build the community networks to be more effective and responsive to new challenges. This said, because the NPI is a pilot project,
the necessity for customization and recalibration in the partnership between the City and the community is evident. Already, Our 42nd Avenue has made apparent the need for a heavy investment in community engagement and partnership development amongst different stakeholders at early stages. Currently, community members are working to design a process to help set community-specific goals and metrics for socioeconomic equity, and to develop supportive actions and tools. The continued willingness of the City to resource community-requested processes such as this will help forge a clearer path to community-driven economic development in the future.

Overall, the move from the periphery of City concerns to a place of priority has come only because community members self-organized and defined for themselves the importance of the 42nd Avenue district. By actively strategizing and lobbying for the tools needed to make the district fit within Portland’s paradigm of walkable, complete communities, community members achieved two important goals: firstly, they were able to draw attention to an area that has frequently gone unnoticed, and secondly, they were able to show a level of organization that convinced City leaders to entrust more power to the community. Of equal importance, each step of the community strategy has acted to enhance capacity and include more people in the process, contributing to an organization with more than twenty members deeply involved. In this way, the efforts of the 42nd Avenue community have been a success – what will enhance that success and make it transferrable to other contexts both inside Portland and beyond, is whether the community can grow its partnership with the City and effectively achieve its goals for equitable economic development. If localizing economic development by granting greater control and fiscal power to small communities proves fruitful in meeting community goals, it will provide a useful model for the recast of city-community relationships and how city economies grow.

In Portland’s past, as in many other places, concerted economic development has been conducted as a centralized activity of city agencies in conjunction with business interests. More recent times have seen increased consideration for residential input into this process, though usually in an advisory function and supporting agency-driven action. As a result, the prevailing arrangement has had residential concerns segregated almost entirely from economic development in commercial districts. Further, where some districts have seen extensive investment and attention, others, like 42nd Avenue, have failed to thrive. The City’s new, integrated vision of complete communities challenges this prevailing arrangement, and communities like 42nd Avenue have led the way. The new model that is being formed now places economic development tools directly in the hands of community members, with city agencies playing a supporting role. Of equal importance, the Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative has decentralized the conversation about economic development, with local communities now serving as the primary fora through which business and development interests connect with community members to realize mutually beneficial economic opportunity. This represents a departure that may prove instructive to economic development planning elsewhere. As US cities have been tasked with the challenge of growing their economies despite diminished fiscal resources, there is a clear benefit to mobilizing community capacity in the administration of economic development. Similarly, organized communities stand to benefit more palpably from economic development when they’re granted some power to influence its direction. Further, these organized community members are in unique position to provide special local knowledge and insight with respect to market characteristics, and are particularly invested in success of their local economies. In this respect, the localization of economic development and the recast of community to include residents, institutions and businesses together promise an optimized model of economic development whereby supply meets demand, yielding benefits such as employment
and entrepreneurship opportunities. If this proves to be the case, it will surely stand to inform the path forward for economic development in US cities and give ample reason for city agencies to rethink older, centralized models. Likewise, for communities facing economic stagnation or recession, efforts to self-organize may take new aim, not at advocacy for specific city-led measures, but instead for an evolution of the relationship between city government and communities that vests greater authority at the local level.