

2012 Highlights

Housing and
Community Development
Network of New Jersey



State and Federal Policy Advocacy

- **Promoted Housing Policies to Move NJ Forward and Build Strong Communities:** The Network continued to support our local Advocacy Teams of more than 100 community leaders in promoting policies to create vital communities and homes people can afford near employment and transit. We advanced bills to enhance land banking opportunities in the state and to expand the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit program by \$5 million, both of which passed in the Assembly and moved through key Senate committees after introduction in the spring. With our *Community Leadership Institute* partners, we got legislation introduced in December to change NJ's tax sale law to provide more options for generating revenue and gaining control of troubled properties, and we supported our *amicus* brief on the Mount Laurel case, which was heard by the NJ Supreme Court.
- **Fought for Housing Funding and a Fair Budget:** We partnered with a coalition on *A Plan for a HOME for All New Jerseyans* to re-fund the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund, and championed legislation to extend the deadline for municipalities to commit their housing trust funds, which passed but was vetoed by the governor. We worked to prevent these funds from being taken to balance the FY2013 budget or provide unnecessary tax cuts, an action the governor tried to pursue but which was challenged in Appellate Court, where a hearing is pending. We joined as an *amicus* to oppose the governor's attempt to take Municipal Housing Trust Funds without going through COAH.
- **Encouraged Transforming Foreclosed Houses into Affordable Homes:** We worked with a broad coalition on a bill to facilitate the purchase of foreclosed residential properties from lenders to use for affordable homes. While the initial bill was vetoed by the governor; an amended version was passed and is awaiting the Governor's signature. We successfully advocated for an expedited foreclosure process for vacant and abandoned residential properties, which was signed by the Governor on December 6.
- **Preserved a Balanced NJ Supreme Court:** The Network worked with an array of other organizations to help maintain NJ's 65-year traditional of a bi-partisan Supreme Court, preserving a balanced approach to judicial nomination that will yield fairer results on housing, education and other important state issues.
- **Promoted Federal Priorities:** We worked with our national partners to help minimize cuts and restore funding to key federal programs, and were pleased to host U.S. HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan at our June 2012 Membership Meeting. Network staff was featured at a Congressional briefing on sequestration, with more than 100 Congressional offices represented.
- **Coordinated Policy Responses to Hurricane Sandy:** We developed policy recommendations (available online) to help guide recovery efforts, with a focus on increased access to resources, and ensuring that lower income people are prioritized for new homes and economic opportunities created for those affected by the storm. We are promoting our members' involvement in redevelopment, and working to ensure that people who needed affordable homes even before Sandy hit continue to have access to homes they can afford under the laws and practices in NJ.

Cities and Local Work

- **Organized Second Annual Community Leadership Institute:** Nearly 100 city officials and community leaders from 17 NJ cities participated in our second Institute, which brought together local and national experts and practitioners to explore proactive strategies and systems reforms to facilitate acquisition of problem properties, strategic code enforcement, integrated data and IT systems, and plans for effective reuse.
- **Gained Ground with Problem Properties Strategies:** We facilitated customized workshops and strategy sessions for a number of our partner municipalities, leading to eight cities making significant progress with their systems and strategies for reclaiming and assembling problem properties for redevelopment. At least three passed vacant property registration ordinances with escalating fees; three enacted abandoned property list ordinances or lists; one is overhauling its code enforcement operation to align with its abandoned properties goals; three are using or preparing to use spot blight eminent domain to take pivotal properties at low cost for redevelopment; and several are exploring the use of land banking entities to support their strategies.
- **Supported Neighborhood Revitalization:** We continued to work with the Network's Neighborhood Revitalization Task Force to share good practices in a variety of areas, and to identify and overcome obstacles to neighborhood

revitalization, including challenges with the state Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program. The Network was appointed to DCA's NRTC Advisory Committee, reconstituted at the Network's request to help resolve these challenges, several of which were addressed as a result. To support the program's expansion, we partnered with Task Force members, investors and NJ Community Capital to design and publish a study demonstrating the positive economic and social impacts the NRTC program has had on NJ's older communities. On a parallel track, we worked with Rutgers and our planning and environmental partners in *Together North Jersey* to help roll out this \$5 million, three-year HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning effort in the North Jersey Transportation Region.

- **Advanced Foreclosure Prevention and Recapture Efforts:** We helped housing counseling organizations to catalogue and analyze challenges to their work and pursue solutions, resulting in improvements to several HMFA programs, particularly to the HomeKeeper program (funded by the federal government's Hardest Hit Fund), that helped families and individuals facing foreclosure to get the assistance they need. NJ was one of just a handful of states that received an increase in National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling funds as a result of the Network's assistance in preparing the proposal submitted.

Membership Services

- **Provided Community Development Training:** The Network conducted seven trainings attended by 68 individuals, including two workshops and five group training sessions offered in Newark, Elizabeth and Paterson. The formal workshops included *Advanced Construction Management* and *Marketing Homes and Neighborhoods*; the group sessions included *Becoming a CHDO*, *Green NSP: a Contractor's Workshop*, *Changes to the Home CHDO Rules*, and two sessions on *the Community Real Estate Development Process*. We also supported our members addressing vacant and foreclosed properties through these sessions.
- **CHDO TA:** Supported by a HUD grant, we provided CHDO TA in Passaic and Union County for two group training sessions, monthly meetings with potential CHDOs, and one-on-one sessions with eight potential CHDO's to assist them in preparing to apply for CHDO status, resulting in 7 of the 8 being ready to become CHDO organizations.
- **Expanded Communications Efforts:** The Network hosted two values-based messaging webinars and one Twitter training, and promoted the planning and community development efforts of leading members through interviews on our njvoices.com blog. We garnered extensive media coverage on a range of topics and events, including our state housing policy efforts, our problem properties work, our NJ release of the NLIHC's *Out of Reach* report detailing the high cost of rental housing, and the use of federal foreclosure settlement and local housing trust fund dollars.
- **Educated Our Members and Policy Makers:** Communications outreach to support our agenda garnered the Network and our members over 175 stories in print, radio, and television media. We distributed 16 TA Alerts, 11 Newsletters, and 24 Policy Bulletins to keep our members, supporters, and allies informed and up to date on all the latest in network news, policy and industry best practices.
- **Sponsored Advocacy and Outreach Events:** 100 people attended our spring Advocacy Day, meeting with scores of New Jersey legislators to educate them about our policy agenda and build support for our issues, and 25 Network representatives traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with members of the state's Congressional delegation. We organized a housing forum in Union County that focused on Neighborhood Stabilization strategies, and three press conferences and home visits for the *Out of Reach* release in Mercer, Essex and Union Counties. We conducted two bus tours, one in Jersey City with HUD that highlighted projects that members developed using HUD funding, and the second in Passaic County. With the City of Paterson and the Paterson Police Department, we supported the development and implementation of a community safety initiative that included a training curriculum for residents participating in the city-wide crime watch program, with a kick-off event attended by 70 people. Combined, more than 300 people participated in these events.