

# Quality of Life Plan Update

2009-2014

## Blue Hills Community

Built predominantly in the 1930s, the Blue Hills neighborhood is populated with small bungalow and medium sized shirtwaist houses with arts and crafts characteristics. During the 1960s, the Blue Hills population shifted from mostly Caucasian to 90% African American and it remains so today. The neighborhood experienced a renaissance of reconstruction and development in the 1990s when several community development groups, including Blue Hills Community Services, Swope Community Builders and Kansas City Neighborhood Alliance, all operated within its boundaries. The neighborhood became attractive to new residents and real estate values increased. Unfortunately, the neighborhood became attractive to others as well, namely predatory investors who moved into the area looking to make a quick profit. Also for a period of time, mortgage brokers promising low payments sold adjustable rate mortgages and equity loans door-to-door in the neighborhood. Because of these predatory practices, Blue Hills has been hit extremely hard by foreclosures of both owner-occupied and rental housing. As the economy worsened, foreclosures increased.



Blue Hills has an active neighborhood association and a highly productive community development corporation, Blue Hills Community Services (BHCS). As a result of this strong leadership and collaboration, significant progress was made on their first Quality of Life Plan, which focused on the target area in northeast Blue Hills known as Wabash Village. Progress was especially strong in minor home repair, single-family renovation and new construction, and community organizing. However, sales of newly built homes have stalled, including the five new Energy Star rated homes that have been complete for two years.

During their recent Quality of Life Planning, residents expressed frustration that the new homes were not selling; with the increase in foreclosures; and that the media had sensationalized the neighborhood's crime

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During Phase I of NeighborhoodsNOW, Blue Hills made significant progress with minor home repair, acquiring property for future development and community organizing.



rate. Residents pointed out that Blue Hills has many assets. Homeownership, while down to about 55%, is better than other urban neighborhoods. The neighborhood has good access to public transportation; borders two college campuses, UMKC and Rockhurst; is close to several economic areas of the city including The Plaza and the Museum District; has an active neighborhood association and a Community Action Network Center. With these clear advantages on their side and with the neighborhood's strong leadership, the current problems, while daunting, are not insurmountable.

The residents and stakeholders feel that improving the physical aspects of the neighborhood is critical to success. In response to the current economic climate, BHCS has temporarily suspended single-family new construction and is placing an emphasis instead on the renovation of vacant homes and continued home repair services.

Their plan reflects a strong interest in acquiring homes out of foreclosure for energy-efficient rehabilitation and reuse, and selling existing inventories of homes that have not sold. They would like to offer assistance to low-income residents to weatherize and otherwise repair their homes. Residents envision a clean neighborhood, especially around the transportation corridor of 55th Street, and they would like to see Blue Hills Park revitalized and utilized fully. Francis Willard

School, a large vacant school located in the heart of the neighborhood, is targeted for re-use as are key areas of the Prospect commercial corridor.

Residents cited criminal activity as a particular problem for the neighborhood and asked for programs that will help improve relationships with law enforcement. They also want programs that improve students' school readiness, leadership/mentorship programs that put youth in contact with positive role models, and out-of-school activities to keep youth engaged. Job development, training and a plan for affordable housing need to be developed for re-entering ex-offenders and adults with barriers to employment.

The Blue Hills neighborhood is one of the most organized in Kansas City. Its residents know what they want and they have the partnerships in place to affect positive change. Resources are scarce and to accomplish the new plan will require advocacy, cooperation and the coordination of various organizations and funding sources. Residents and stakeholders were highly involved and energetic at the Summit. This translated into an ambitious yet realistic plan that residents are eager to put into action. Because of the proven accomplishments and vision for the future, Blue Hills deserves to be a NeighborhoodsNOW community and deserves the quality of life improvements requested by residents.

# The Quality of Life Plan Priorities: Blue Hills

## PHYSICAL REDEVELOPMENT

**WHAT:** Blue Hills will have active minor home repair and weatherization programs. Homes in foreclosure will be acquired, rehabilitated and sold through various housing programs. New homes will be built in strategic locations. A beautification program will be in place and Francis Willard School will be redeveloped.

**WHO:** Blue Hills Community Services, Blue Hills Neighborhood Association, City of Kansas City, Mo., Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority

**WHEN:** By 12/31/2014

**WHERE:** Blue Hills

### HOW:

- The current inventory of seven homes will be sold.
- Additional 25 homes (newly constructed or acquisition/rehab) will be sold.
- Work through the City and Neighborhood Association to reduce illegal dumping.
- Work through City Parks and Recreation to support Blue Hills Park improvements.
- Work with the City to identify vacant lots that need mowing or develop a neighborhood mowing program.
- Beautify 55th Street through neighborhood clean-ups, curb and sidewalk improvements, new landscaping, and regular summer mowing.
- Provide neighborhood/resident input into the redevelopment of Francis Willard School with the KCMO School District and selected developer.
- Demolish six blighted structures.
- Continue proactive land-use planning and zoning in partnership with residents/stakeholders.
- The community organizer will work with city officials to improve city services in areas of bulky item pick-up, recycling programs, illegal dumping and waste tire removal.

### OUTCOME:

- 33 new and/or rehabbed homes sold.
- 25 homes weatherized and/or provided minor home repair.
- Three families receive first-time homebuyer down payment assistance and 10 low income families obtain mortgages.
- Four vacant properties acquired.
- Six dilapidated structures demolished.
- 25% reduction in illegal dumping along 55th St.
- Five neighborhood clean-ups completed.
- Illegal dumping in Blue Hills will drop by 25%.
- At minimum, 10 residents request and receive bulky item pick-up per year (total of 50).

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

**WHAT:** Decrease drop-out rates and truancy at local high schools by engaging students in after school learning programs such as computer technology, athletics, construction and green gardening. Develop mentoring and leadership programs for students. Help students obtain job skills and GEDs through, YouthBuild partnership.

**WHO:** Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission, Kansas City Police Athletic League (KC PAL), Jackson County Youth Court, KCMO Parks and Recreation, Paseo Academy, YouthBuild, Blue Hills Community Services, Blue Hills Neighborhood Association and residents

**WHEN:** By year end 12/31/2012

**WHERE:** Blue Hills and Blue Hills Park

### HOW:

- Blue Hills Community Services will partner with the Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission to implement a summer youth athletic program centered in Blue Hills with the Kansas City Missouri Police Athletic League Park.
- An after school program will also be implemented at a local school.
- Start a youth mentorship and leadership program out of the Blue Hills Neighborhood Association.
- Parents of participating youth to complete pre and post surveys indicating their child's school attendance and overall GPA.
- Begin adult education courses out of Blue Hills Neighborhood Association.

### OUTCOME:

- 30 youths enroll in the athletic program annually.
- 30 youth participate in the after school program each year.
- Five youth take a leadership position in their school or community each year.
- 70% of youth program participants reduce school absences and show an average 5% GPA increase as reported through parent surveys.
- 10 adults will take education courses.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOBS

**WHAT:** New businesses open on Prospect Avenue. Adult workforce training will be available.

**WHO:** Full Employment Council, Blue Hills Community Services

**WHEN:** By 12/31/2014

## The Quality of Life Plan Priorities: Blue Hills cont.

**WHERE:** Prospect Avenue in Blue Hills

**HOW:**

- Implement a workforce training program by year end 2012.
- Start an entrepreneurship program for green companies or other program that opens new businesses on Prospect.

**OUTCOME:**

- Three new businesses open on Prospect Avenue, creating three new full-time jobs.
- Increased tax base based on statistical analysis.
- 80 people trained and 20 are placed in jobs.

### CRIME AND SAFETY

**WHAT:** Increase resident participation in crime reduction programs through education and awareness. Increase opportunities for prior offenders through job training and placement programs.

**WHO:** Blue Hills Community Services, Metropolitan Crime Commission, 2nd Chance Foundation, Full Employment Council, Blue Hills Neighborhood Association, Greater Kansas City LISC, Kansas City, Mo., Police Department, residents

**WHEN:** By 12/31/2012

**WHERE:** Blue Hills

**HOW:**

- Engage a community police officer from the neighborhood's CAN Center to target specific blocks and to have visible crime watches.
- Increase policing efforts in Blue Hills with a particular emphasis on ending drive-by shootings and violent crime.
- Engage a community organizer at Blue Hills Community Services to coordinate neighbors in community policing efforts.
- Two CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) trainings provided each year (total of six).

- Implement a job training and placement program in Blue Hills for individuals with crime-related barriers to employment.
- A formal block watch program is implemented.

**OUTCOME:**

- Blue Hills' murder rate will drop.
- Reduced number of drive-by shootings in Blue Hills during 2010 or 2011.
- There will be a steady yearly increase (5% is target) in attendance at resident meetings held by the Blue Hills Neighborhood Association and Blue Hills Community Services.
- There will be 15 ex-offenders living in the Blue Hills neighborhood trained and/or placed in a job.
- 30 new residents participate in the block watch program.

### HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

**WHAT:** Blue Hills Park will be improved with new walking trails, shelter facility and a sports field. Blue Hills Community Garden is maintained and utilized by Blue Hills residents.

**WHO:** KCMO Parks and Recreation, Blue Hills Community Services, Kansas City Community Gardens and residents

**WHEN:** By 12/31/2010

**WHERE:** 49th Street and Olive in Blue Hills and Blue Hills Park

**HOW:**

- Work through City Parks and Recreation to support Blue Hills Park improvements.
- Develop a garden implementation plan.
- Develop a garden maintenance plan.
- Engage funders and agricultural groups to build the garden.

**OUTCOME:**

- Blue Hills Park improvements completed.
- One community garden established and maintained.



**For information on how you can invest in the revitalization of Blue Hills, contact us today:**

3535 Broadway, Suite 200  
Kansas City, MO 64111  
Phone: 816-753-0055  
[www.lisc.org/kansascity](http://www.lisc.org/kansascity)