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Re: PROPOSAL FOR A NEIGHBORHOOD ROUNDTABLE

RATIONALE

President-elect Clinton has built a powerful consensus around the twin concepts of Change and Inclusion. Neighborhoods and community revitalization have been topics that have surfaced in the roundtables already held on economic issues, homelessness and affordable housing, and meeting the social and health care needs of the whole nation. The Transition provides an opportunity to carry through on President-elect Clinton's theme of Putting People First. **Now is the time to let neighborhood people speak for themselves.**

People live in communities: strong communities are those where problems can be dealt with TOGETHER, where there are institutions and structures that help us take care of ourselves and each other. **Community based organizations are a tool for dealing with whatever threat a community might face:** racial tension, social disfunction, drugs, crime, family disintegration, inadequate housing, joblessness, and inadequate education. All of these issues and more have been addressed by community based groups, neighbors organized to help neighbors.

Neighborhood and community based organizations are taking on the toughest problems in the toughest areas of urban and rural America. They have survived and triumphed in spite of years of neglect and the systematic withdrawal of public resources. **Public policy that empowers neighborhoods and strengthens their ability to develop community based solutions will result in healthy communities in urban and poor rural areas.**

Neighborhood and community based organizations are the best and cheapest instrument to re-empower cities and poor rural communities. The Clinton Administration has the opportunity to use this national resource to rebuild America.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

Through a Roundtable on Neighborhoods, these community and neighborhood based organizations can pull together the lessons they have learned, and help the transition and the new Clinton Administration define both short range and long term strategies for community revitalization.

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*Proposal for a Neighborhood Roundtable*

Some of the questions they could address at the Roundtable include:

- ♦ What is it that government should NOT do?
- ♦ How could Federal leadership make their job easier?
- ♦ What locally created strategies have worked, and could be used in other neighborhoods?
- ♦ What strategies have not helped, and should be avoided in the future?
- ♦ What are the investments that we could make in the short term that could pay off in jobs, decent, affordable housing, and communities where people can live together?
- ♦ How can we create a new generation of community leaders?
- ♦ What are the 'infrastructure' needs of these organizations - what kind of support systems, training, technical help, regulatory reform, do they need to make their job easier?

#### PARTICIPANTS

To this date, discussions on this topic have often been dominated by the national intermediary, support and coalition groups associated with community and neighborhood organizations. Although these groups play a vital role, Clinton Administration public policies that affect neighborhoods need to come from the bottom up - from the grassroots. **The people on the front lines of neighborhood and community organizations in low income urban and rural communities need to speak directly for themselves.**

Twenty local, community based organizations that are doing good work should be selected to send their best leadership to the meeting. National networks, intermediaries, funders and coalitions might be asked to contribute suggestions for participants, but **the meeting itself should consist substantially of those involved in the day to day work of community organizing, housing development, commercial revitalization and community based economic development.**

#### PROCESS

**We would be willing to play any role that could help bring the meeting together in a timely fashion:** we could suggest individual participants, networks and national coalitions for transition staff to solicit names from, or we could directly recruit a set of participants based on a set of criteria developed with transition personnel.

#### DATES

The session should be held within the first two weeks of January, subject to the availability of key transition participants, and time to recruit participants. We suggest Thursday or Friday, January 7 or 8, or Monday, January 13. **We believe it is of the utmost importance that the Roundtable on Neighborhoods take place before the Inauguration.**

SUMMARY OF THE STATE OF THE ART  
IN  
COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Generally, community based development work falls into three categories: Community Organizing, Housing Development and Commercial/Economic Development. Some groups use only one of these strategies: a growing number use all these, and work towards a comprehensive community development approach. Within each of these areas there are support systems.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Community organizing has seen a growing emphasis on church- or institutional based organizing, with intermediary and support training and staffing coming from groups that are national or regional in scope. Key actors in this field are: ACORN, a national low income organizing group that was founded in Little Rock in the '70's; Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), now based in NY, whose church based and aggressive style are typified by the COPS organization in San Antonio; the Southern Empowerment Project, based in Tennessee, whose network is loosely organized and includes both urban and rural groups; the Center for Third World Organizing, based in Oakland, CA, whose training and writing on multiculturalism has led the way for new organizing in poor minority areas; Chicago based National Peoples' Action (NPA), who took the lead in creating the Community Reinvestment Act, requiring financial institutions to meet community credit needs; and a series of independent regional support center in California, the Northern Rockies, Chicago, Florida, Philadelphia, Boston, Hartford, and more.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

In the field of housing development, the three biggest support systems are the Local Initiatives Support Center (LISC); the Enterprise Foundation and the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation. LISC, in NY City, provides matching funds to local affiliates which are private sector dominated, and gives loans and equity grants to projects sponsored by community based development groups. Enterprise, founded by developer Jim Rouse, provides project grants and equity loans to community based groups, as well as technical help to put deals together. Neighborhood Reinvestment is a non-profit, chartered by Congress, which supports a national network of local groups called Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) or NeighborWorks. They are partnerships between banks and communities that mostly provide loans for moderate income areas.

### ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The community based economic and commercial development field is best represented by the DC based National Center for Community Economic Development (NCCED). NCCED provides technical help and training and a semiannual conference where groups can plug into resources available.

### TRAINING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The training and technical support field has been critical to the survival of community groups: leaders in this are the Center for Community Change, a DC based group that provides on-site help to groups in organizational development and housing and economic development; the Development Training Institute, which does training in the skills needed to develop strong groups and good projects; New Hampshire College, which provides a degree program in Community and Economic Development; and the Pratt Institute, which also gives a graduate degree in Community Planning and Design.

### NATIONAL COALITIONS

Important national coalitions and related interest groups are: the Council on Community Based Development, DC based, which connects with key funders and private sector supporters of community groups; the National Neighborhood Coalition, also DC based, which convenes a monthly meeting of the coalitions and organizations that work on related issues; and the National Council of LaRaza, DC based, connecting Hispanic organizations that work on community issues across the board; and the National Preservation Coordinating Council, which has brought together historic preservation people inside and outside of government and developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for action.

### LOCAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

There are many important local support systems around the country that serve community groups by providing technical guidance and organizational training for staff and leadership, operating support and serving to impact local public policy. Examples include The Working Group on Neighborhoods in Toledo, The Pittsburgh Neighborhood Coalition, The Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Development Organizations and the Community Design Centers in more than 20 communities.

The whole field is much more complex than this summary reveals. We recognize there are dozens more groups that could be listed. Our work on the local and national scene over the last twenty years

provides us with access to almost all the networks and groups.