

I was impressed by Mr. Frece from Maryland, especially by the practical, wide-ranging but integrated set of tools his state is using to achieve definable objectives. But my alarm returned when he told us that smart growth, Maryland-style, means 3.5 units per acre. And I almost fainted when I heard a senior official in charge of municipal policy in Ontario say that smart growth is "all about integrated decision making."

What do we believe in? What are we trying to achieve? We'll never change anything if we hide that basic confusion behind a collection of smart phrases and ship them off naked to the political fleshpots.

I understand the difficulty. It is the basic problem Sir Peter Hall, whose absence from this conference we all regret, identified when he famously described planners as "handmaids of industry." That problem complicates matters of conviction, but it needn't obviate them. The best case histories highlighted at this conference demonstrate how much value planners can create for all concerned with skillful, purposeful market interventions. Doing that requires exceptional conviction of the sort that is too rarely seen. Equally it demands clearly stated goals and the confident use of the practical tools needed to achieve them. For planners to succeed in their appropriate role, which is to abet the city's struggle to be itself, they must be leaders.

John Barber, the urban affairs columnist for *The Globe and Mail*, was our "rapporteur" for the conference. He had a mandate to visit as many sessions as he could and report his off-the-cuff impressions to the delegates at the end of the second day.

Best Presentation Awards

Prix des meilleures présentations

Collaboration

between Municipal Planners, a Citizens' Association, and an Academic Institution in the Rehabilitation of Le Village (Cornwall, Ontario)

by **Avi Friedman, Ken Bedford, MCIP RPP, and Chuck Charlebois**

For over a century, the city of Cornwall has been economically reliant on traditional manufacturing-based businesses. Over the past thirty years, however, changes in global markets and production practices have translated into a significant decline. One distinct east end neighbourhood within the city, traditionally referred to as "Le Village," has been significantly affected by this shift in industrial importance.

The district of Le Village comprises approximately 107 hectares along the St. Lawrence River. Originally established in the 1870's to house textile workers, the neighbourhood has a rich francophone tradition established by families who moved to Cornwall from Quebec seeking employment. The community experienced many decades of socio-economic prosperity, from the late 1800s into the 1960s. However, following the closure of the textile mills, unemployment increased significantly and those families who were able to leave did so. The area fell into a state of disrepair with many residences turning into rental units. In addition, the infrastructure was neglected for many years, and the viability of the commercial core of Le Village came into question.

Despite these trends, the spirit of community persevered and, in 1998, a group of concerned business owners, citizens, and organizations banded together to form the Groupe Renaissance group. This not-for-profit organization focused on developing a vision of the district with clear objectives to create a viable, sustainable "community" within the city of Cornwall. Priority projects were identified

and key partners were secured. The evolution of general projects over the last three years has now meant focusing energies on more specific initiatives.

Numerous characteristics of this neighbourhood distinguish it from the rest of Cornwall and the jurisdictions beyond:

Socio-economic characteristics

Income: Average income levels are low compared with both the Cornwall and Canadian averages. An average income in the Renaissance area is \$16,375, while in Cornwall it is \$21,294 and in Canada \$24,828 (Census Canada). Household incomes represent even a greater disparity.

Education: Slightly more than half of the secondary and post-secondary education-age group (15 to 24) are not attending school. Of the Renaissance population over fifteen years old, about 15 per cent have graduated from high school, 26 per cent have non-university post-secondary education, only 4 per cent have either a university bachelor's degree or diploma, and 2 per cent have not yet graduated from university. The combination of low numbers in pursuit of post-secondary education and high numbers not even attending school means employability for a large segment of youth in the area is limited.

Employment distribution: The unemployment figure for the community is high at 23 per cent, especially compared with the Cornwall figure, which is under 14 per cent. (Note: These figures are based on 1996 Census information.)

Physical characteristics

The general physical characteristics of the Renaissance area can be described as a combination of aged and poorly maintained housing stock, average-condition infrastructure, substandard park-space/open-space opportunities, and sporadically maintained commercial buildings

In 1999, an extensive housing stock condition exercise was conducted by the McGill University Architectural team, headed by Dr. Avi Friedman. The team, working in conjunction with Groupe Renaissance, produced a comprehensive data base addressing general condition and ranking of residential units.

The Renaissance partnerships

In the spring of 1998, a small number of well-established business people in the Le Village Business Improvement Area (BIA) met informally to discuss growing concerns about the economic viability of the area. With several vacant or under-utilized buildings, and the closure of such key commercial anchors as the Bank of Montreal office, it was evident that some sort of local action was needed to reverse the trend. The BIA members, many of whom had family businesses that dated back several generations, were joined by the Nativité Parish, Caisse Populaire de Cornwall, and a dynamic former city councillor and community activist, Chuck Charlebois. The combination of "founding members" to the soon-to-be-formed Groupe Renaissance group now took on a broader economic and social perspective.

Following a couple of informal meetings, staff in the city's planning department were contacted to determine if there was interest in assisting with an initial "visioning" exercise to determine the extent of community concern and possible courses of action. The start-up money needed to conduct visioning sessions and numerous meetings were gathered by the original members and were entirely from the private sector, including the Le Village BIA, individual business owners, the Nativité Parish, and a number of financial institutions.

The Groupe Renaissance group solidified into a not-for-profit volunteer organization soon after the successful first meetings. The response from hundreds of local residents, commercial owners and non-governmental agencies was extensive and genuine. Over the course of 1998 and 1999, more than twenty financial and philosophical partners joined Groupe Renaissance, including the City of Cornwall.

Initial Results

In the past three years, since those first open-workshop sessions, there have been several successful actions. Collectively, these projects will improve the overall quality of life and create a favourable environment for economic revitalization. These include:

- > Development of a Renaissance Housing Rehabilitation Program catering to lower-income home owners and rental-unit owners;
- > Planning and construction of two "Grow Homes" in partnership with Habitat for Humanity;
- > Parkland improvements;
- > Community neighbourhood watch and residents' association;
- > Police outreach initiatives;
- > Comprehensive architectural studies examining commercial and residential properties in the Renaissance area (conducted by the McGill University Architectural Team);
- > Fundraising campaigns to assist new lower-income homeowners with their first mortgages;
- > Neighbourhood "clean-up" days; and
- > Millennium program funding for shoreline restoration and park improvements.

Subsequent projects are focusing attention on the commercial strip of Le Village and on redevelopment of the Cotton Mills complex district, both of which have significant potential to attract new employers to the area.

Contributions

With over twenty partners (including Groupe Renaissance) officially associated with Renaissance, it is challenging to identify any one specific key player. Partners have contributed money, expertise, and/or moral support to different initiatives and entrenchment of positive community activism. There are several partners, however, that deserve special mention for their efforts:

- > **Groupe Renaissance and its spokesperson, Chuck Charlebois:** Began community-based movement in 1998 with approximately \$30,000 of its own money (business owners, Nativité Parish, La Caisse Populaire de Cornwall, etc.).
- > **Delcan Corporation:** Conducted the first sessions and report to establish a community vision with goals and objectives based on local input.
- > **McGill University School of Architecture (Affordable Homes Program) and Dr. Avi Friedman:**

Participated in numerous research reports and architectural design studies specifically related to Renaissance housing and commercial needs. This relationship continues to the present day, with a strong liaison between McGill University and Groupe Renaissance. A major initiative with "Grow Home" development, has evolved from the work of Dr. Avi Friedman's team.

- > **Nativité Parish:** Has contributed financially, physically (through donated hall space) and spiritually in all the efforts and projects.
- > **HRDC/Federal Millennium Fund program:** Have contributed financially to both the McGill Team studies and to parkland/shoreline improvements in Renaissance. This positive partnership will probably continue in other projects, likely involving affordable housing.
- > **City of Cornwall:** Contributed financially and technically through initiatives involving community policing, parks improvement, funding and administration of housing renovation programs, and property standards, to mention a few. A Renaissance Liaison Committee made-up of city staff, council representation and Groupe Renaissance members oversees the budget from the City for Renaissance projects. This budget ranges from \$175,000 to \$225,000 per year over the next five years, subject to annual council approval.

The primary point for any new partner in Renaissance to understand is that the projects being developed and implemented in the area must adhere to the community vision "to build a clean, safe, and well-maintained community, taking full advantage of our multi-cultural and historical traditions...a community which offers ample business opportunities, recreational facilities and visitor attractions...a community where residents can feel a sense of pride and belonging!"

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