Impact Circle for Imagine Flint Master Plan Implementation
November 21, 2014
207 Northbank Center

Meeting Minutes

Present: Mark Allison (UM-Flint Computer Science Faculty); Charles Banks, Jr. (UM-Flint Student); Jennifer Burger (UM-Flint AmeriCorps); Elizabeth Collardey (UM-Flint Social Work Faculty); Zach Hayes (UM-Flint Student); Keshanda Jones (UM-Flint Health Care Opportunities Program Staff); Collette Kelly (UM-Flint Student); Diana Kelly (Metro Community Development, BNCP); Christi Leshock (Forge Flint); David Lossing (UM-Flint Government Relations Director); Murali Mani (UM-Flint Computer Science Faculty); Robert McCathern (Joy Tabernacle Pastor); Victoria Morckel (UM-Flint Earth & Resource Science Faculty) Mona Munroe-Younis (UM-Flint University Outreach Staff); Matt Soulia (Forge Flint); Kristen Stevenson (City of Flint Planning Office); Lindsey Tarrant (UM-Flint Health Care Opportunities Program Staff); Christyn Timmons (UM-Flint Student); Stephen Turner (UM-Flint Computer Science Faculty); Barbara Urlaub (UM-Flint University Outreach Staff); Gabrielle Veal (UM-Flint Student); Todd Womack (UM-Flint Social Work Faculty); Tom Wyatt (Habitat for Humanity)

Presentations on Focused Partnership/Investment Opportunities in Strategic Flint Neighborhoods

After the welcome and introductions Mona Munroe-Younis gave an overview of the last two meetings. Building from those prior conversations, some core questions underpinning this meeting’s discussion were:

- How do we shift UM-Flint’s community engagement from being scattershot to more intentional efforts with real potential to create visible transformation that is felt at the neighborhood level?

- How can we work alongside community members and community leaders, and build upon the work of already established anchors in Flint neighborhoods?

Mona provided context for the presentations. She explained that these questions have come up in prior Impact Circle meetings and three geographic areas in Flint have organically emerged since the last meeting as places to focus UM-Flint partnerships due to community need demonstrated by the Master Plan, established anchor institutions, existing relationships with eager community partners, and complementary University needs such as relationship building at the neighborhood level and capacity. While there will continue to be room for one-time projects and engagement in other areas of the community, it is imperative that UM-Flint coordinate community engagement efforts in order to meaningfully invest and build relationships in areas of Flint where UM-Flint’s presence is relatively thin. While focusing on a few strategic areas for investment, other neighborhoods of need will inevitably receive less attention from the University. However, if we fail to begin somewhere out of concern for leaving someone out, UM-Flint will continue to have broad community engagement that does not lead to deep, sustainable change. The best that we can do is to branch out beyond the downtown to invest in areas of high need first, then leverage relationships and lessons learned in other high need areas of the city.

Three geographic areas were proposed for strategic partnerships related to the Master Plan, with presentations from ready community partners or University staff. These areas are: the Building Neighborhood Capacity
Program (BNCP, Wards 1 and 3), the Civic Park neighborhood, and the ½ mile radius around UM-Flint. Maps from BNCP and the City of Flint, respectively, were provided for each area.

Diana Kelly from Metro Community Development gave an overview of the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program. The City of Flint was one of four distressed U.S. cities chosen to receive federal funding (Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Grant) in 2012 through five agencies including the Departments of Justice, Education, and Health & Human Services. The BNCP areas were selected for the grant through a research-based process that identified these neighborhoods as the most disinvested in the City and positioned for the grant. The areas being served are in the City’s first and third wards where there are two anchor organizations working in each ward, respectively WOW Outreach/Our Savior Lutheran Church and Foss Avenue Baptist Church/Habitat for Humanity. An advisory council was formed which surveyed the residents to identify priorities for focus. The top three were public safety, housing and employment. As illustrated on the BNCP map handout, which was developed by the UM-Flint GIS Center through a connection with Prof. Victoria Morckel, BNCP initiatives are already aligned with the Imagine Flint Master Plan. Diana reminded the group that “You cannot disinvest in place without disinvesting in people.”

Pastor Robert McCathern from Joy Tabernacle shared background about Civic Park, Flint’s oldest neighborhood and historic area (and the first fully planned subdivision in the U.S.). There are many long-time residents still living there amongst growing numbers of abandoned homes. Pastor McCathern is working with Habitat for Humanity, the Genesee County Land Bank and faith-based organizations like Forge Flint to address blight in the neighborhood. The blight project involved boarding up houses in ways that made it difficult to discern vacant from occupied buildings, causing the ripple effects of quickly reduced crime and an improved sense of community safety as older residents began re-emerging from their homes. Civic Park has been long overlooked for investment due to redlining and in part due to its designation as a historic district, which previously made it ineligible to receive demolition funds, contributing to the neighborhood’s uphill struggle to stop blight in its tracks. In September 2014, through negotiations with the City, Land Bank and community advocates, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) made the landmark decision to fund $2.6 million for demolition of 225 unsalvageable houses in Civic Park. Now help is needed to create green space and Pastor McCathern sees value in connecting University assets to Civic Park. There are opportunities for students to work and learn in the community, including with a strong neighborhood association that formed six months ago.

David Lossing spoke about the need to invest in the ½ mile radius around the university, as requested in the Master Plan for all anchor institutions in Flint. U3 Ventures from Philadelphia is working in Flint now to develop an “Eds and Meds” anchor strategy with Genesys, McLaren, Hurley, MSU, UM-Flint and other higher education institutions. The three key objectives for the anchor strategy are on living local, buying local and maximizing other opportunities, such as making the University Avenue corridor a corridor of public safety.

Discussion of Strategic Partnership and Investment Opportunities

After the presentations, the floor was opened up for discussion.

Elizabeth Collardey would like to hold a class in Civic Park. What are UM-Flint’s policies about teaching off-campus? Mona will find out and report back to the group.

Victoria Morckel asked how we can be sure we are fair about choosing areas to invest in and asked if the University has mapped our existing community engagement. Mona explained that University Outreach recently
began mapping the locations of programs and classes supported by University Outreach (see the Outreach Project Map at http://www.umflint.edu/outreach/resourceslinks). Todd Womack said that it makes sense to build from the relationship we have and anchor institutions who come to the table, because any approach will be biased. Pastor McCathern pointed out that major Flint institutions are engaging in Civic Park now, except for UM-Flint. He stated that there is a need to invest in grassroots-led, unchartered areas.

Mark shared that he is a new faculty member who has learned in his three months at UM-Flint that young people in Flint feel disenfranchised. He asked about the availability of support for small business start-ups. Mona explained that the Innovation Incubator [IN] primarily supports businesses that are 50% or more owned by UM-Flint students and that Innovation Incubator workshops are free and open to the community. Staff of the [IN] are part of a network of entrepreneur-serving organizations in the area and Mona agreed to connect him with [IN] staff for more information. The School of Management’s Michigan Family Business Center and the Flint Area Reinvestment Office are also good sources of support.

Tom explained that residents are hearing about the Flint land use plan, do not fully understand it, and think it means that there will be no more investment in their areas (i.e. from hearing about “shrinking cities”). Tom suggested that the University could engage residents to shed more light on the land use plan and discover what they want for their neighborhoods and amenities within a 5-15 minute walking distance.

**Next Steps**

Mona checked in about the feeling of the group and whether people were comfortable moving forward. Given that Chancellor Borrego was scheduled to attend the next meeting, she offered to type up the rationale for working collaboratively with these three geographic areas. Victoria said that she is fine with moving forward, composing a rationale makes sense, and (given the Thanksgiving holiday) recommended having an email discussion about what we want from the Chancellor.

What do the community partners need from the university?
- Dissemination of information to residents to help them envision and understand what is happening.
- Build curriculum to ‘train the trainer’
- Have interdisciplinary teams in the neighborhoods
- Think of ways to work together to support each others’ work

Elizabeth Collardey will not be able to attend the December meeting because her class will be presenting at the Center for Hope.

Meeting adjourned.