

Urban Habitat Presentation by Juliet Ellis
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Health Policy Institute
Place Matters Conference
Oakland Marriot
July 23, 2008
1:30pm - 2:30pm

I. Background on Oakland

- Oakland is the 8th largest city in California
- Oakland's population reached 420,183 in 2006.
- Amazing assets: including diversity of city; major west coast port; significant transportation infrastructure; water access; historic neighborhoods; strong nonprofit base of organizations that do policy work, organizing, advocacy, and work pretty well together.
- But it's also a city facing many challenges similar to the structural issues facing cities throughout the country. Issues like disinvestment, racism, sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, a failing educational system, inadequate representation of decision makers by low-income communities of color.
- City wide: African Americans have almost 4 times the unemployment rate of whites.
- 3,000 parolees return to Oakland each year without the needed infrastructure and supports to meet their needs.
- You are going to visit organizations doing work in two of the poorest neighborhoods in Oakland and the County: East and West Oakland.
- Urban Habitat has been partnering with organizations doing work in West Oakland for over a decade. So I thought it might be helpful to provide a little bit of history of that neighborhood to provide some context for when you meet with People's Grocery and folks from the Port campaign.

West Oakland

History

- WW1 brought job opportunities in the shipyards and an influx of workers and business growth
- Decline in the Depression in the late 1930s, and some residential areas became dilapidated.
- In the 1940s and 1950s, dozens of blocks were bulldozed and replaced with public housing projects.
- The 1940s and World War II saw a new influx of workers for the shipbuilding industry and the newly constructed Oakland Army Base
- When the Cypress Freeway, a double-decker freeway connecting the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge with the Nimitz Freeway, was built in the 1950s above Cypress Street, it effectively split the neighborhood in half and isolated it from downtown Oakland.

- In the late 1960s and early 1970s, block after block was razed and thousands of residents were displaced for the building of the Oakland Main Post Office, the West Oakland BART Station, and the Acorn Plaza housing project.
- These projects coincided with a period of economic decline characterized by unemployment, poverty, and urban blight. West Oakland became a primarily African American neighborhood, with a small Latino population.
- Groups of African American residents of West Oakland mobilized to resist the "urban renewal" projects during this period.
- The Black Panthers grew out of this resistance and West Oakland became the center of the Black Panthers in the late 1960s.
- In the mid-1980's the introduction of crack cocaine further undermined the community.

If you fast forward today:

- An African American child born in West Oakland is 1.5 times more likely to be born premature compared with a white child in the Oakland Hills.
- 7 times more likely to be born into poverty.
- 79 % live in homes that are rented
- And 4 times as likely to have parents with only a high school education or less.
- Median household income is \$17, 945.
- 49% rate of car owner ship.
- WO residents breathe air that contains 3 times more diesel particles than the rest of the Bay Area.
- Born in West Oakland this person can expect to die almost 15 years earlier than a White person born in the Oakland hills.

These types of disparities continue to plague the regions low-income communities and communities of color. UH's mission is to.....

II. Background on UH

- a. UH's mission is to build power in low-income communities of color to advance social, economic, and environmental justice.
- b. At UH, we have a very broad definition of EJ that includes social and economic justice. Race and class at the core of our analysis. Community participation and leadership is fundamental. Need to understand how issues connect – not just about toxics and siting issues.
- c. EJ needs to be seen as a movement and not just an issue. When we think this way, we can push ourselves to directly address the fundamental challenges facing the movement – capacity, scale, long-term vision, strategic coalitions, internal politics etc.
- d. As a regional EJ/SJ organization UH often finds itself at a variety of decision-making tables at the local, regional, and state level.
- e. When UH was founded in 1989, we were often the only org. at the table representing ej/social justice especially in the fields of transportation and urban planning.

- f. UH recognized this as a huge problem, and dedicated itself to increasing the participation of communities of color in these decision-making arenas.

III. UH Core Strategies

- a. Want to share UH's strategies and touch on concrete examples of them on the ground and will flag the intersection with the Joint Center approach: public policy, community organizing, and shifting power
 - 1. Regional – try to connect local issues to a regional context/understand that often time local communities are reacting to decisions that take place outside of their neighborhood. And that a regional approach allows us to achieve a certain level of scale.
 - 2. Multi-issue and Multi-sector coalitions/partnerships –
 - 3. Electoral - Inside/outside –
 - 4. Capacity-building - Community engagement - LI
 - 5. Reframing the debate –Proactive; Alternatives/policy solutions –

IV. Examples of Programs, Campaigns and successes/challenges

- a. REDI – General Plan campaign
 - 1. land-use planning and General Plan campaign = opportunity to make changes upstream at a larger scale
 - 2. **Successes:** inside-outside strategy; Proactive policy solutions and implementation steps; LI increasing capacity of community partners to participate in land-use planning processes in a meaningful way over time...
 - 3. **Challenges:** Different desired outcomes by ally groups
- b. Transportation
 - 1. UH prioritizes Public Transportation because it is a fundamental lifeline for the majority of low-income communities and communities of color. Connects people to jobs, services, health, education, etc...
 - 2. **Successes:** RTP campaign and 216 million for Lifeline; increased participation of those most impacted by transportation policy Describe Leadership Institute with CalWorks women and why we pursued this opportunity. Describe impact: Lifeline funding, Lifetime women on TALC board and MCAC committee etc.
 - 3. **Challenges:** When there are scheduled opportunities for communities to participate, they often lack the technical expertise and information to effectively engage. As a result, community participation low. Info is extremely technical and funding streams hard to influence.
- c. SEC
 - 1. Importance of multi-sector, multi-issue

2. Successes –Proposition 54
3. Challenges – finding opportunities to create scale of change throughout region. How to get a local organizations to continue to participate in something regional when struggling at local more immediate.

V. Looking Ahead

- a. REDI –Green economic dev
 1. Climate Change/Justice movement is growing and UH is increasingly being asked to play a leadership role.
 2. Equity advocates must participate and be at the decision-making tables as global climate policies get developed and enacted. If not, the historical patterns will repeat themselves and low-income communities and communities of color will be marginalized and disproportionately impacted...
 3. There is a real opportunity to be forward thinking, solution driven – example green economic development/REDI – so that low-income communities and communities of color can benefit from the development of new, clean, quality jobs. ..
 4. Briefly describe our plan to create a green economic development strategy for the City of Richmond, CA.
- b. T&H – Transit Riders Union
 1. Need base to hold electeds accountable
 2. Describe how a TRU would compliment TJWG and vice versa
- c. SEC –Boards and Commissions
 1. Moving out of reactionary mode
 2. Want to do more than hold decision-makers accountable
 3. Want to help get community leaders on boards and commissions and support them once they attain these positions

VI. Tour

- a. Some thoughts on organizations you will be visiting.
- b. Community Reformed Church- in East Oakland not a lot of organizations doing work here. Intrigued by their time banking project where community members build trust through bartering and trading their talents. Fill out a survey that is put inventoried on a database. We are trying a member interactive database for SEC. Idea is that share talent, don't reinvent wheel, reduces isolation.
- c. People's Grocery. Alternative approach to the need for a grocery store. 53 liquor stores, 0 grocery stores. Been talk of TESCO coming to West Oakland. Curious how People's Grocery is relating to that effort.
- d. West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project. Regional target because of its impact on bordering local community. Margaret Gordon long time resident and

now is on Port Commission. Interesting story of what do you do when you go inside into a power position?