

How We Change the Black East Side

A neighborhood planning and development framework

A Report to the Buffalo Center for Health Equity



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Abstract

The Harder We Run report indicated that Black Buffalo had not progressed in the past 30 years. This paper outlines a **bold vision** and a **strategic approach** to show how we can change the Black East Side into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

PROLOGUE

Following the release of **The Harder We Run** in September 2021, the City of Buffalo and its private sector partners continued to pursue a process of East Side neighborhood development that ignored root causes and focused on implementing an assortment of piecemeal projects aimed at profit-making rather than community building.

The City's profit-making approach will not change the Black East Side and threatens the community's long-term sustainability by unleashing the gentrification menace. The data shows that gentrification threatens Black neighborhoods along the Main Street corridor, downtown Buffalo, and those near big anchor institutions, such as the University at Buffalo South Campus and Canisius College.

In this context, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity asked the UB Center for Urban Studies to construct a conceptual framework to guide the development of a **neighborhood demonstration project**. The aim was to create a pilot project to show how to transform the East Side into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family. In the summer of 2023, drafts of the demonstration project were sent to over twenty-five Buffalo scholars, activists, community residents, and stakeholders. I received more than twenty commentaries on the draft, including several very detailed critiques.

In particular, several insightful conversations and communiqués occurred between myself and a highly insightful public scholar and bureaucrat, who goes by the **Unknown Warrior** pseudonym. The Warrior's contributions were significant, but many others also played a critical role in developing *How We Change the Black East Side*, including colleagues from Back to Basics, representatives from the local religious community, the King Urban Life Center, the UB Center for Urban Studies, UB Department of Urban and Regional Studies, the Community Health Equity Research Institute, the African American Health Equity Task Force, the UB Law School, and the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

The contributions of Pastor George Nicholas of Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church and the Buffalo Center for Health Equity, Dr. Timothy Murphy, Senior Associate Dean for Clinical and Translational Research and director of the UB Community Health Equity Research Institute, Dr. Heather R. Abraham, Associate Professor of Law and The Director of the U.B. Civil Rights and Transparency Clinic, and Dr. Robert M. Silverman, Full Professor in the UB Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and a Senior Research Fellow at the UB Center for Urban Studies were particularly helpful in fleshing out the ideas contained in this report. Lastly, Beth Kwiatek, a Senior Research Fellow at the UB Center for Urban Studies, played a significant role in developing ideas that inform **How We Change the Black East Side**.

The larger and more significant point is this essay is the product of the thinking and insights of many people, not just the author. It is a reflection of a **collective approach** that the Center for Urban Studies uses in the production of knowledge for social change. Establishing a neighborhood demonstration project is the next step in transforming Buffalo's East Side into a *neighborly community*. The time has come to obtain the resources necessary to realize the neighborhood demonstration project in practice.

INTRODUCTION

The neighborly community is the prize we seek.

It is why we struggle and fight.

So, keep your eyes on the prize.

Don't quit. Fight on. Fight on.

Keep hope alive.

The Harder We Run report indicated that Black Buffalo had not progressed over the past thirty years because of the interplay between socioeconomic forces and the city-building policies of long-serving mayors James D. Griffin to Anthony Masiello and Byron Brown. The forces underdeveloping Black neighborhoods also produced adverse social determinants that created undesirable health outcomes among Blacks. Therefore, you cannot abolish race-based health disparities and inequities without turning underdeveloped neighborhoods into good places to live.

Unless we forge another, very different approach to neighborhood development, health inequities and the underdevelopment of Black Buffalo will persist as if immutable and fixed in time and space. This paper proposes an **alternate neighborhood development strategy** that shows how we change the Black East Side into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family. The aim is to create a project demonstrating how to turn the Black East Side into a vibrant and prosperous community for the *existing* population. The proposed demonstration project will focus on the transformation of **a single neighborhood** to demonstrate the possibility and feasibility of a comprehensive approach to comprehensive planning and development. If successful, the approach can be applied to multiple neighborhoods in Buffalo.

The key to actualizing this strategy in a single neighborhood is identifying the seven targeted focus areas that correlate with the *root causes* of Black underdevelopment and undesirable health outcomes. Developing these will transform the Black East Side into a neighborly community with safe streets, quality uncostly housing, excellent schools, and a vibrant green infrastructure, where households are financially self-sufficient and residents experience physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

I want to stress that the **neighborly community** is an alternative neighborhood model, not a duplication or replication of the traditional White dominated middle-class neighborhood. These White neighborhoods are wealth-producing sites based on race and income exclusivity. They are physically and socially designed as homogenous residential areas, and **their anchoring values are exclusion and homeownership**. In the traditional White neighborhood, protecting and increasing property values is the driving force behind neighborhood development. *Property values are thus sacrosanct, even if it means embracing racial and income exclusivity.*

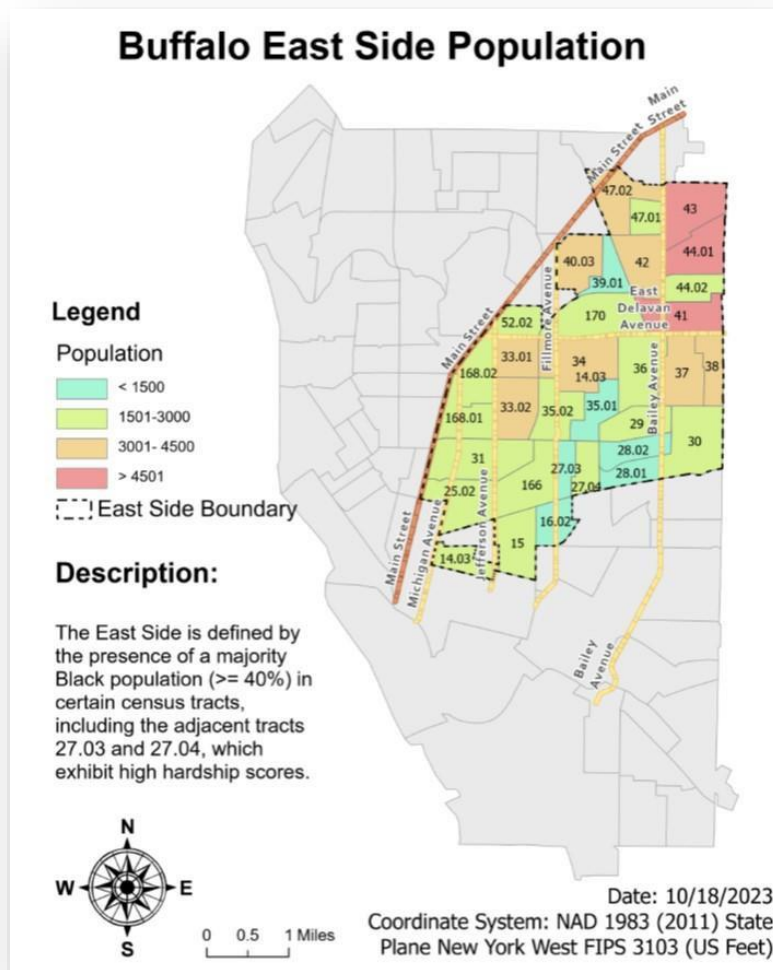
On the flip side, the neighborly community is based on the principle of residential inclusivity and aims to build a high-quality community with uncostly housing for residents across the income and race spectrum. **Here, the intent is to build community wealth and promote the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of Blacks** and other populations living in the community. Individual homeownership is celebrated, but the neighborhood is not designed to increase property values as a vehicle for individual wealth accumulation. Instead, the aim is to keep owner and renter-occupied **housing uncostly** so that even the lowest income groups can afford to live there.

In the White middle-class neighborhood model, the intent is to raise housing values by increasing property values throughout the neighborhood, causing increments in housing and rental properties. As the desirability and demand for living in the community increases, lower-income populations are eventually pushed out. In 1932, Frederick M. Babcock, a real estate assessor, developed the land valorization system used in the United States today. He theorized that the mere presence of Blacks in a neighborhood triggered its decline. In this valorization system, housing values increase as the share of the White population and income exclusivity (class) increases. Likewise, housing values decrease as the Black share of the population and income inclusivity increase. Thus, in Buffalo and elsewhere, the **wealth-producing capacity** of a neighborhood is inextricably linked to race and income segregation.

The transformation of the underdeveloped Black East Side into a neighborly community will be based on the principle of **targeted universalism**. This approach to neighborhood development aims to achieve universal outcomes by implementing targeted and specific strategies for different groups in the neighborhood. It recognizes that not all individuals or groups start from the same baseline, and to achieve equitable outcomes, interventions need to be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by the different individuals and groups living in the community. This perspective poses the question, “What do we mean by a neighborhood?”

A neighborhood is a spatially bounded residential area with well-defined geographic boundaries. It is characterized by **a sense of “community” and belonging** among its residents and some levels of social organization and shared spaces, including block clubs, community-based organizations, parks, schools, businesses, and the like. The “community” concept has both a geographical and social meaning. Geographically, “community” refers to a collection of contiguous neighborhoods with a shared history, destiny, and sense of belonging. Socially, “community” refers to a group with a shared identity, a common destiny, and a general sense of purpose and goals with people connected by a network of formal and informal social groups.

Buffalo’s Black East Side



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

Buffalo’s East Side community consists of a network of neighborhoods where Blacks comprise 40% or more of the population. We delineate the neighborhood’s geographic boundaries as a federal census tract or a group of census tracts. The City uses a similar approach in defining its official neighborhoods. For example, census tract 31 forms the boundaries of the Fruit Belt. In other instances, the city will aggregate several census tracts into one neighborhood. So, the Broadway-Fillmore community consists of census tracts 166, 28, and 16. Scholars and policymakers prefer this approach to establishing neighborhood boundaries because it facilitates data gathering and analysis.

TARGETED FOCUS AREAS

The UB Center for Urban Studies identified **seven targeted focus areas** that correlate with the *root causes* of neighborhood underdevelopment and health inequity on Buffalo’s East Side. The development of these targeted zones will trigger the East Side’s radical transformation. The identification of these seven targeted focus areas is based on the *Harder We Run* report, studies of Black Buffalo, focus groups held with residents following the Blizzard 2022, informal conversations with Black leaders and policymakers, and others concerned about the plight of Black Buffalo.

The seven targeted focus areas are (1) community control of the neighborhood, (2) fix the actual existing rental housing, (3) universal housing and property ownership, (4) universal education and skills training, (5) youth development, (6) bolster the neighborhood’s visual image, and (7) abolish neighborhood health inequities.

Seven target focus areas



This section outlines the challenges *and* aspirations found in each focus area. During the neighborhood planning phase, a **roadmap** consisting of solutions, proposals, and recommendations will be created to guide the community's movement from the neighborhood's focus area challenge to realizing the aspiration. This *roadmap*, it should be emphasized, must be developed during a comprehensive planning process led by residents in partnership with progressive planners and specialists in neighborhood development. Most importantly, these seven targeted neighborhood focus areas are interconnected and must be **collectively planned** during the comprehensive neighborhood planning stage of community development.

1. **Community Control of the Neighborhood**

Blacks do not control any aspects of the growth and development of their neighborhood, leaving them vulnerable to everything from natural disasters to persistent underdevelopment to gentrification. In this setting, landlords can rent substandard housing at exorbitant prices, vacant lots can be left unkept, and developers can build whatever they want as long as the City approves it. Residents have little or no say in what happens inside their community. This approach to neighborhood development must change. **Communities need to be highly organized to drive the development of their community.**

The goal is to use **participatory democracy and community land trusts** to gain control over East Side neighborhood development. Building a neighborly community necessitates participatory democracy and control over neighborhood land and property. We have two aims. The first is establishing a democratically elected neighborhood council, or some other governance system, to oversee and guide the community's growth and development. The council should consist of appointed and elected members. The appointed members should be Block Club members, representatives from community-based organizations, neighborhood businesses, and residents. In this governance structure, the neighborhood residents will comprise 70% of the neighborhood council members.

The second aim is to establish a **community land trust** (CLT) to gain control over the physical neighborhood by acquiring residential, commercial, vacant, and abandoned properties for the community's benefit. The CLT is a democratically run non-profit that acquires and places land under the community's control. The goal is to establish a publicly financed CTL to create greater stability and capacity to hire more experienced and professional staff.

2. Fix the actual existing Rental Housing

Substandard rental housing is one of the top problems facing Black Buffalo. It is the root cause of many other East Side socioeconomic issues, including race-based health disparities. The rental housing problem is characterized by **substandard housing** and **rent gouging**. Almost two-thirds of Black Buffalo households are renters living in substandard dwelling units with excessive housing costs. Many health and socioeconomic challenges Blacks face cannot be solved without fixing their rental housing. Therefore, we aim to establish a minimum level of housing quality that all rental units must reach and sustain. The intent is to ensure that all East Side renters live in healthy, safe housing suitable for raising children.



Source: Center for Urban Studies

Fixing the rental housing problem also requires lowering the high rents Blacks pay. A high-rent wall traps most Blacks on the East Side or similar neighborhoods, limiting their housing options in the regional housing market. For example, the 2022 Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Buffalo SMSA was \$963 (and is scheduled to climb to \$1,163 in 2024). Here, one should note that market-rate housing will be more expensive than fair market-rate housing.

Low incomes limit the housing options available to Blacks. The actually existing number of two-bedroom fair market-rate housing is not plentiful. A household had to earn \$3,210 monthly or \$38,520 annually in 2022 to afford this market-rate apartment without paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing (rising to \$3,880 monthly and \$46,560 annually in 2024). To put this figure in perspective, 56 percent of Black Buffalo households earned less than \$40,000 annually in 2022. About 80 percent made less than the median household income of whites living in Erie County (\$77,300), 68 percent made less than the median household income of whites living in the city (\$62,900), and a staggering one-third of Black Buffalo households earned less than \$20,000 in 2022.

Thus, for most Blacks, even fair market-rate housing is beyond their economic reach, forcing them to search for housing in the **predatory East Side housing market**. Consequently, most Black East Siders pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent, with a significant number paying 50 percent or more. High rents cause evictions, produce homelessness, generate moves for better housing conditions, and spawn the constant movement from one house to another. Given their low incomes, most Blacks are permanently trapped in this predatory housing market, where they will perpetually pay exorbitant rent for poor-quality housing. Therefore, the aim is to improve housing quality and lower the rents to about 20 percent of a household's income. The lowered rents mean that households will have more money to spend on other commodities, thereby raising the quality of their lives without increasing what are often fixed incomes.

3. Universal housing and property ownership among residents

Blacks do not own or control the land where they are building their communities. This lack of ownership and control over neighborhood land is a source of **residential instability** because **absentee property owners** are primarily concerned about profit-making, not community building. The prime source of Black neighborhood underdevelopment is this **singular focus** on exchange value and profit maximization. Rather than concentrate on strategies for making Black neighborhoods great places to live, developers emphasize ways to generate profits. The lack of ownership of community lands means that residents have no control over the land, allowing absentee property owners to operate freely in the community, doing as they please.



Source: Google Earth Pro

Therefore, the aim is to protect and develop the community by increasing the residents' home and property ownership rates. Only about 31% of Blacks own the dwelling unit where they live. We aim to increase this by promoting individual, group, and community ownership of homes and property, especially group ownership. The intent is to encourage groups of residents to purchase condominiums, co-housing, and other forms of shared-equity housing while promoting individual ownership.

The reason is that **collective ownership** is more realistic for low-income populations, such as Black Buffalo, and it is a way to break away from the traditional middle-class White neighborhood model. The aim is to “free the land” from *absentee* ownership and control so it becomes a community asset owned and controlled by the residents. The goal is to **build community wealth and individual wealth**. *Community wealth* refers to developing neighborhood assets to service the entire community and help all residents gain financial security.

4. Universal Education and Skills Training

The **creation of barriers** to education and opportunities to realize one's complete physical, cognitive, emotional, and social potential causes Blacks to be *reproduced* as low-paid, unskilled, and semi-skilled workers. Blacks will remain locked in the economic basement without the education and work skills to navigate the employment and hiring system in America's labor market. Most Black students do not read at grade level, holding back their educational achievement and skills acquisition at every stage in the life cycle. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a sector

of the US Department of Education, in 2019, 84% of Black students lacked proficiency in reading skills, meaning they struggled to read and comprehend written text that is developmentally appropriate for their age. Under these conditions, the Black community becomes a **factory that perpetually reproduces Blacks as low-wage workers** or raw material for the prison-industrial complex, a billion-dollar-a-year business enterprise.

Therefore, we aim to attack the education and skills problem in two interrelated ways. First, we intend to have every neighborhood child reading at their appropriate **grade level**. Reading is required to access and understand the written text, thus making possible knowledge acquisition, language skill development, critical thinking, problem-solving, cultural awareness, and the ability to earn a living and create a better world. Reading is thus the most critical skill required for people to reach their full potential in a highly developed society such as the United States.

Second, every able-bodied neighborhood worker, sixteen years and older, will be able to develop **the literacy and work skills** needed to earn a living and become **financially self-sufficient**. The aim is to develop innovative on-the-job training programs to develop literacy and work skills. The reconstruction of the Black community will be an economy of scale. So, a training program incorporating literacy, computational, and work skills development into a singular program will be created for neighborhood workers. The intent is to train them as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, roofers, landscapers, and the like so they can rebuild their lives as they rebuild their neighborhoods.

5. Youth Development

In parts of ancient Africa, when members from different tribes met, they greeted each other by asking, “How are the children doing?” In Buffalo, **the children are not doing well**. Black youth face many challenges, including getting a quality education, graduating from high school, completing college, finding employment, earning a living wage, staying out of trouble with the police, and navigating the ever-present danger of violence.



Source: Center for Urban Studies

For example, a Black East Side resident recently told me, “My nephew said he is trying to stay out of trouble because he wants to reach his eighteenth birthday.” The resident said, “I asked him why he felt that way, and he ran off a list of friends who had been killed before their eighteenth birthday.” I thought, “We have to **stop the violence**. A youngster who believes he might not live to be eighteen will have a hard time imagining adulthood, acquiring a career, and living a good life. For many East Side young folk, the quest to survive has replaced the desire to thrive.

The Black leader, Fredrick Douglass, said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Therefore, the aim is to **build strong children** by developing varied youth development activities, including violence prevention and youth education, recreation, leadership, and cultural and work-related activities year-round. These programs will be tied to neighborhood development and problem-solving activities connected to the Kwanzaa theme, “collective work and responsibility,” to create a culture of collective living.

6. Bolster the Visual Image of the Physical Neighborhood

The visual image of the *physical* East Side community is that of an unhealthy, run-down, desolate, and forgotten place. This foreboding neighborhood image reflects a dilapidated physical environment and the absence of a green infrastructure. Green infrastructure refers to a network of natural and

semi-natural elements that enhance the neighborhood's environment with trees and vegetation, pocket parks, and delightful open spaces. This existing physical image of the neighborhood is disconnected from and **hides the beauty and vibrancy of the people** living in this environment.



Source: Google Image and the UB Center for Urban Studies

This negative physical image of East Side neighborhoods is about the community's mental and physical health, not just perception and likability. This forlorn neighborhood image reflects a deteriorating physical environment that exposes the residents to various health hazards, including rat and roach infestation and air and noise pollution. We aim to **reconstruct the physical environment** so it accurately reflects the beauty of East Side residents. The intent is to improve the physical image by fixing the sidewalks, curbs, and streets, beautifying vacant lots and abandoned structures, and creating a vibrant green infrastructure throughout the neighborhood. The intent is to transform the East Side into a healthy, walkable community filled with trees, shrubbery, flowers, and natural amenities that enhance its health, safety, and beauty.

7. Universal Improvement in Health Outcomes

The most pressing problem facing Black Buffalo is race-based health inequities. The life expectancy of Black Buffalo is 10 to 12 years shorter compared to that of Whites. African Americans are 300% more likely to have chronic, often preventable, diseases than whites in Buffalo.

Table 1: Erie County Health Indicators by Race		
Health Indicator	White	Black
% premature deaths (<75 years)	36%	61%
Heart disease mortality per 100,000	166	209
Stroke mortality per 100,000	34	50
Diabetes mortality per 100,000	20	44
Diabetes hospitalization per 100,000	13	48
Asthma hospitalization per 10,000	3	15
% Low birthweight births (2500 grams)	7%	14%
Infant mortality per 1000 live births	5	11
Source: New York State Department of Health, County Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity 2018-2020		

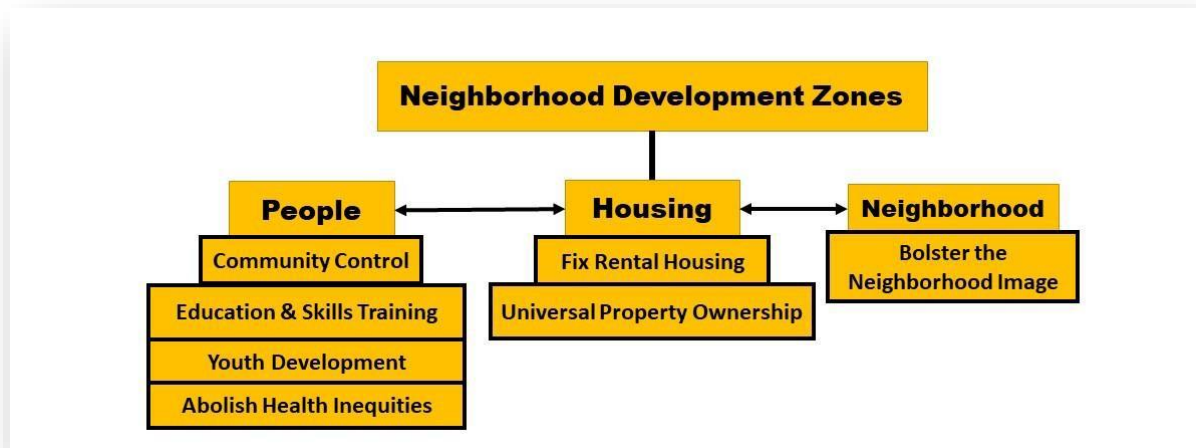
The social determinants that drive these adverse health outcomes are inextricably tied to the marginalized and underdeveloped neighborhoods where Blacks live. **The neighborhoods where Blacks live are killing them.** We aim to abolish race-based health disparities and inequities by turning the Black East Side into a neighborly community and building **a culture of health that stresses prevention,** including access to **healthy foods,** exercise, health screenings, increased access to health services, and navigating the healthcare system and providing transportation to and from doctor’s offices. Creating a food security system is central to transforming the Black East Side into a **healthy place to live.** The concept that **food is medicine** and the secret to healthy living will drive the creation of a decentralized, collectively-owned food distribution system and uncostly transportation to and from supermarkets. We intend to bolster the residents’ health literacy and provide them with health navigators and advocates. Lastly, we intend to produce a generation of physicians and researchers who study health inequities on the East Side, across Western New York, and the United States to deepen our knowledge and understanding of Blacks’ health challenges and how to abolish them.

COMPREHENSIVE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING and TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

Comprehensive neighborhood planning should be used to construct a guide to East Side development. Development strategies that implement a hodgepodge of piecemeal projects that ignore **root causes** and are unrelated to a broader neighborhood vision will never turn the East Side into a neighborly community. Achieving this goal requires a comprehensive neighborhood planning strategy that forges the seven targeted focus areas into a material force that drives the transformation of the Black East Side. The realization of these seven targeted focus areas will require strengthening existing community-based organizations, block clubs, schools, health, and social institutions and developing new institutions, including non-profit housing organizations, business development incubators, and neighborhood-based cooperatives.

The neighborhood planning process aims to integrate the seven targeted development areas into a comprehensive strategy that informs and drives the neighborhood transformation process. The aim is to resolve Black Buffalo's challenges at **the neighborhood scale**. The *seven targeted focus areas* are categorized under **three neighborhood development zones**: people, housing, and neighborhood. We will use the targeted universalism principle to drive the development of the development zones and research to increase knowledge, understanding, and insight into the *seven targeted focus areas* and how to move from neighborhood problem identification to aspiration realization.

The **people zone** will consist of four targeted focus areas: *community control of the neighborhood, universal education and skills training, youth development, and abolish neighborhood health inequities*. The **housing zone** will consist of two targeted focus areas: *fix the actual existing rental housing and universal housing and property ownership*, while the **neighborhood zone** will oversee the *bolstering of the neighborhood's visual image* targeted development area.



The planning and development process is an extended one, and the following principles will inform and keep the comprehensive neighborhood planning process on track:

Resident leadership and engagement: The people actually living in the neighborhood will lead the planning and development process and be engaged in all aspects of the neighborhood’s growth and development. The residents will oversee and guide the work of a professional planning and implementation team.

Neighborhood Vision: the neighborhood vision is an aspirational description of the type of community the residents seek to build. It is based on the community’s values, beliefs, and attitudes and guides the neighborhood planning and development process. The residents will collectively create the neighborhood vision.

Community Organizing: The neighborhood must be viewed as a social organization. From the onset, full-time professional organizers should be part of the planning and development process. The aim is for these organizations to promote solidarity, build trust, and create interactive connections between community leaders, residents and neighborhood planners and community developers.

Collaboration and Partnerships: The radical transformation of the demonstration project neighborhood involves the development of seven targeted development areas. No single neighborhood can effectively address all these aspects alone. Thus, there is a need to bring together multiple partners from across the urban metropolis to collaborate on the planning and development of the demonstration project neighborhood.

Targeted Universalism: Neighborhood residents differ in terms of income, housing tenure, educational attainment, health status, employment, income, and gender and face different challenges. For example, homeowners face challenges that differ from renters. Residents earning less than \$20,000 annually encounter problems that differ from Blacks making \$50,000 or more. The Black worker without a high school diploma faces challenges that differ from Blacks with some college but no degree. The targeted universalism principle recognizes that people have different starting points and face different barriers and thus require different levels of resources and varying types of support and assistance to grow and develop.

Regulate market dynamics: In urban neighborhoods, the unregulated market will increase rents, housing, and property values, eventually pushing out the lower-income residents. Therefore, a regulatory system must be developed to regulate and control market dynamics.

Planning and Implementation as a Simultaneous Process: Simultaneous planning and implementation enable communities to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and take advantage of emerging opportunities. It also allows the residents to view tangible progress, demonstrating the planning team's commitment to action and change.

Connect On-the-Job Training to Neighborhood Reconstruction: Reconstruction of an underdeveloped neighborhood will produce an economy of scale that creates jobs and business opportunities. The aim is to use the rebuilding process to train residents as carpenters, electricians, plumbers, roofers, landscapers, and other work aligned with the neighborhood development process.

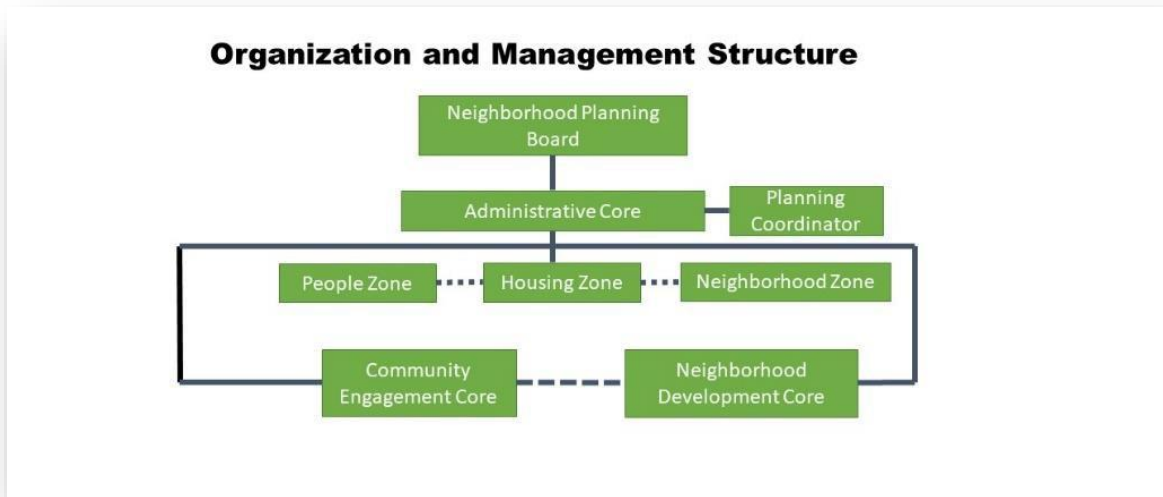
Collectivism: Low-to-moderate income can only grow and develop by having residents pool their resources and leveraging their collective strength to address common challenges and make investments that benefit the entire community. In these communities, the individual is only as strong as the collective. Thus, collectivism is the secret to developing a community culture based on planning and working together.

ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The aim is to establish a democratic organization and management framework to guide the planning and development of the neighborhood selected for the demonstration project. Neighborhoods have to be **highly organized and democratically** run to overcome the barriers to development. The intent is to create a structure that enables the residents to lead the planning and development project and to provide structured input and leadership in all phases of the planning and development process. A **neighborhood planning board** will be established to provide overall leadership and guidance for the project, including approval of hiring all consultants and team members, including fiduciary responsibility. The planning board will consist of the representatives of the lead organization, residents, and stakeholders. The majority of the members will be neighborhood residents.

An **administrative core** consisting of the project director, coordinators of the People, Housing, and Neighborhood zones, and coordinators of the community engagement and neighborhood development cores will oversee the neighborhood planning and development process. This team will provide the day-to-day leadership of the neighborhood planning and development process. The **People Zone** will consist of targeted focus areas in community control of the neighborhood, universal education and skills training, youth development, and abolishing neighborhood health inequities. Four working groups will be established to plan and develop these four targeted focus areas. The **Housing Zone** will consist of two targeted focus areas: fix the actual existing rental housing and universal housing and property ownership.

Working groups will be established to plan and develop these two targeted focus areas. Likewise, the **Neighborhood Zone** will oversee the bolstering of the neighborhood’s visual image targeted development zone, and a working group will be established to plan and develop these areas. Each subcommittee will consist of consultants working in partnership with community residents.



SELECTING THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT NEIGHBORHOOD

The demonstration neighborhood project will focus on initiating a project in a single neighborhood to show how to transform an underdeveloped neighborhood into a neighborly community. If the plan succeeds, it can be applied to multiple neighborhoods in Buffalo. Selecting a neighborhood for the demonstration project will not be easy. The East Side is not a homogenous community. Instead, the neighborhoods vary in their social, economic, and physical conditions. Although every neighborhood experiences some degree of underdevelopment, the challenges in some communities are more significant than others. The Center for Urban Studies developed a weighted **Hardship Index** (HI) based on ten indicators from the American Community Survey to assist in selecting the demonstration project neighborhood.

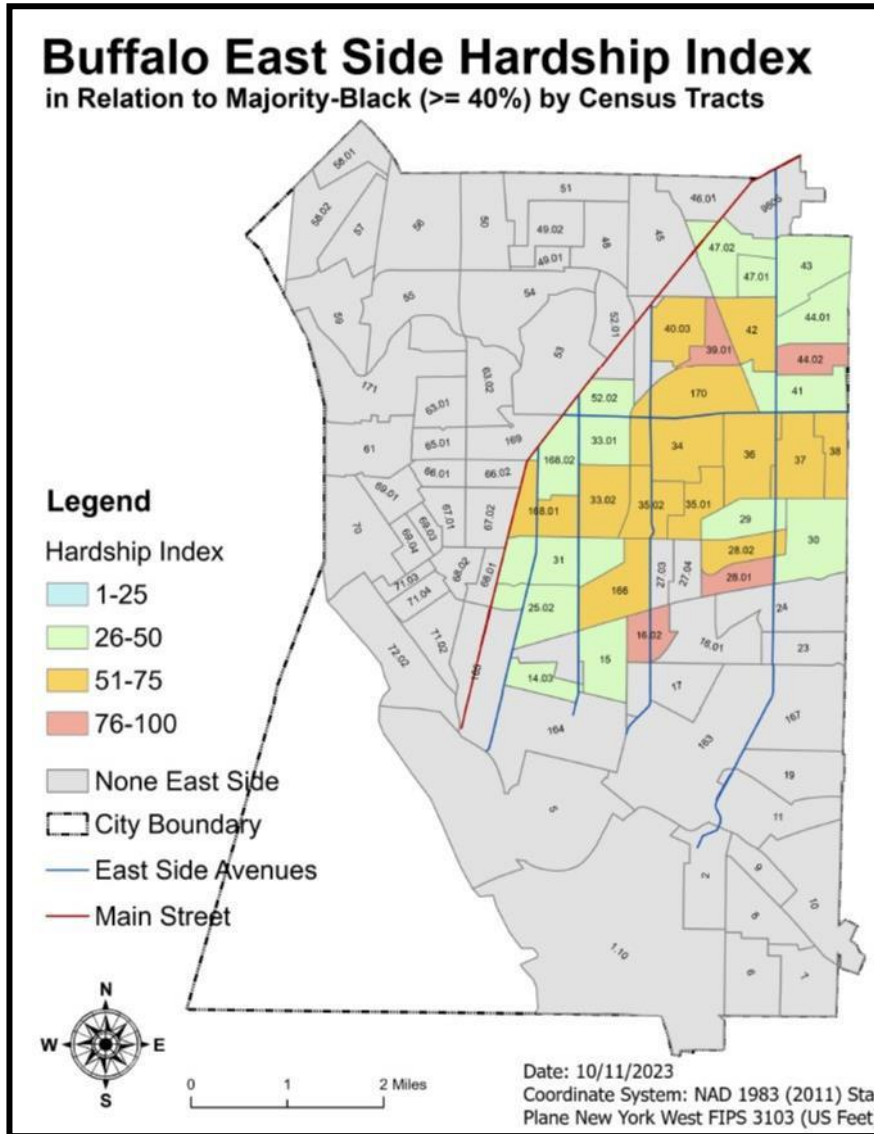
These variables are:

- 1. Share of persons 25 and older without a high school diploma**
- 2. Share of persons 25 and older with a college education**

3. **Unemployment rate of persons 16 and older**
4. **Per capita income**
5. **Median household income**
6. **Share of households that are homeowners**
7. **Median value of owner-occupied housing**
8. **Median gross rent**
9. **Share of household paying at least 40 percent of their income on housing**
10. **Share of housing units built before 1940**

HARDSHIP INDEX

The Hardship Index ranges from 0 to 100. The higher the HI, the greater the level of neighborhood hardship, and the lower the index, the less the neighborhood hardship. Using this index, 0-25 is *no hardship*, 26 – 50 is *hardship*, 51-75 is *severe hardship*, and 76-100 is *extreme hardship* (Map 2). The demonstration project neighborhood should range from severe to extreme hardship. Additionally, the demonstration project neighborhood should have a well-established community-based organization to house the initiative and help build interactive connections between the project team and the community. And as **gentrification** increasingly threatens the East Side, the demonstration project neighborhood should be proximate to a gentrification danger zone to serve as a buffer to protect other East Side neighborhoods from this threat.



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

TIMETABLE

This project is a long-term one that will be implemented over several years. The aim is to demonstrate that a project based on comprehensive planning, simultaneous community organizing, neighborhood planning and implementation, and attacking root causes will transform an underdeveloped neighborhood into a *neighborly community*. The five-year plan is a simulation designed to provide a framework for the type of work that should occur each year. After an extensive planning process has started, assessing the actual stages in planning and developing the initiative will be easier.

- **Year One:** Establish a Neighborhood Governance System. Establishing working groups, community organizing, and building partnerships with organizations and groups across the city. Hold focus groups, organize resident tours of the neighborhood, and initiate research and planning in each of the three Development Zones. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the first-year activities.
- **Year Two:** Project Implementation commences based on available opportunities, and research and neighborhood planning continue. Work with the City to strengthen neighborhood building codes and develop unique code enforcement zones. Develop partnerships with housing organizations and establish a community land trust. Fundraising activities initiated. Initial plans for education, youth development, and health equities will also be launched. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the second-year activities.
- **Year Three:** The planning phase ends, and implementation takes center stage in the development process. Performance is measured against the indicators established during the planning phase. Partnership building and fundraising intensify. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the third-year activities.
- **Year Four:** Community Fair held to evaluate the planning and development initiative and review and establish new priorities if necessary. Implementation is accelerated. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the fourth-year activities.
- **Year Five:** A summative evaluation will be held after the initiative's first five years are assessed, and the next five-year plan is formulated based on the accomplishments and shortcomings of the initiative.

CONCLUSION

We **change** the Black East Side by developing a **new model of neighborhood development** based on community control of the neighborhood, income inclusivity, collective living, communal ownership of the land, and the building of community wealth.

Constructing this new model requires **fixing the actually existing neighborhoods** where Black folks live. **Neighborhoods matter** because they positively or negatively *affect their residents' life chances*. They determine people's access to residential stability, uncostly suitable housing, quality education, health services, supermarkets, social services, employment opportunities, and exposure to pollution and other environmental toxins.

The bottom line is that the neighborhood is a powerful predictor of a person's life chances due to the socioeconomic, educational, environmental, and healthcare factors tied to where they live. The problem is that uneven neighborhood development causes most Blacks to live in marginalized, underdeveloped neighborhoods that produce undesirable social determinants and adverse health and socioeconomic outcomes. The good news

is that these neighborhoods are not **natural places** that are immutable and fixed in time and space. Instead, they are the conscious and deliberate outcome of a structurally racist approach to city-building. Thus, if private and public sector partners can intentionally build underdeveloped neighborhoods, then it is possible to build another, very different, and better neighborhood for Black Buffalo to reside in—**the neighborly community**.

We must construct a **new neighborhood paradigm** to create this neighborly community in the existing world. The White middle-class neighborhood model should not be replicated since it is based on race, class homogeneity, and income exclusion. It bolsters property values and uses homeownership as a wealth production tool. Housing and neighborhoods are commodified to maximize profits in buying and selling owner-occupied houses. The hard reality is the White neighborhood's focus on using **income exclusivity** to increase property values inevitably **leads to race and class exclusivity**.

Therefore, we are proposing a new neighborhood model based on income **inclusivity** and **class integration** that promotes racial, economic, and social justice and stresses community wealth accumulation. The approach to neighborhood development outlined in this essay is our best hope of creating communities and a city where Blacks and other racialized populations reach their full human potential and live a good life. The time has come to transform the Black East Side into a *neighborly community*.

Lastly, I want to stress that the neighborly community is not a neo-type of separate but equal. In contrast, it is a declaration that all people have the right to live in a community based on **neighborly community principles**, and the long-term strategy is to dismantle the system of **neighborhood inequality** and transform Western New York into a neighborly community where all people live in healthy communities where they become the best that they can be.

We call for establishing **a neighborhood demonstration project** to show how to build a neighborly community.

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Glossary of Terms

Underdeveloped neighborhood refers to Black and racialized communities of color that systemic racism, public policies, and private practices marginalize to accumulate wealth made possible by their limited housing options. These policies and practices cause poor housing, inadequate schools, low-capacity institutions, decaying infrastructure, and other conditions in these communities.

Predatory housing market refers to housing markets in underdeveloped neighborhoods where residents are charged excessive rents for substandard, poorly maintained housing.

Regulating market Dynamics refers to the perpetual quest of real estate and land development markets to catalyze continuous increases in property values, housing prices, and rentals, making neighborhoods too costly for low-income populations and groups. About 34% of Black Buffalo make under \$20,000 annually, and 56% make under \$40,000 and cannot afford to live in an apartment that costs \$900 a month without paying more than 30 percent of their income. Thus, without regulation, the market will increase rents and housing values as the neighborhood develops, pushing out lower-income residents.

Community Control of Neighborhoods is a neighborhood governance structure where residents have significant decision-making power over what happens in their neighborhood, especially over land use, housing, and planning and community development. In these communities, governance is transparent, leaders are accountable, and residents actively participate in decision-making, planning, and development activities.

Root causes are the fundamental factors or conditions that give rise to the problem or series of problems that challenge a neighborhood. These root causes are often situated deep within systems and are not immediately apparent. The overall conditions in the neighborhood will persist, becoming increasingly complex, until the root causes are abolished.

Community wealth accumulation refers to the ability of locals to own and control the neighborhood economy and community-based assets and use these community resources to reduce disparities and improve residents' mental, social, and physical wellbeing. It stresses building cooperatives, worker-owned businesses, and various forms of shared-equity housing, including condominiums and co-housing. The aim is to create neighborhood financial prosperity and bolster all residents' quality of life and standard of living.

Collective living refers to neighborhood residents pooling resources to achieve economic and social goals based on cooperation, mutual support, reciprocity, collective decision-making, and community solidarity. It promotes a culture of shared responsibility, social cohesion, pride, and belonging.

Targeted Universalism is a concept and strategy used to operationalize equity by addressing systemic inequalities and disparities. It sets universal goals and policies while recognizing that neighborhood residents have different starting points, challenges, and issues. Therefore, targeted strategies are developed to address the unique needs and circumstances of various individuals and groups in the neighborhood.