

Silver Medal Winner
Fruitvale Village
Oakland, California



This is an excerpt from:

Reinventing Downtown

2005 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

ROBERT SHIBLEY, AIA, AICP

WITH

EMILY AXELROD, MCP; JAY FARBSTEN FAIA, PHD; AND RICHARD WENER, PHD

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Fruitvale Village At A Glance

What is Fruitvale Village?

- A 257,000 square foot “transit village” built on former BART parking lots.
- An active, retail-lined connector between the BART station and the neighborhood’s primary retail artery.
- A pedestrian street and plaza that also serves as a major community-gathering place.
- Forty-seven units of mixed income housing.
- 114,000 square feet of community services (clinic, library, senior center) and office space (including the Unity Council’s headquarters).
- 40,000 square feet of neighborhood retail (shops and restaurants).
- 150 car parking garage within the buildings (plus a large parking structure for BART).

Project Goals

- To strengthen existing community institutions and catalyze neighborhood revitalization – physically, economically and socially.
- To reduce poverty, build assets, and contribute to the local economy by providing a stable source of jobs and income.
- To encourage and leverage public and private investment.
- To enhance choices for neighborhood residents, including services and retail choices.
- To provide high quality, affordable housing.
- To improve the perception and reality of safety.
- To beautify a blighted area.
- To increase BART ridership and reduce traffic and pollution.
- To be sustainable and environmentally sound.

Project Chronology

1964 The Unity Council (UC) was founded.

1969-1974 Arabella Martinez serves as first Executive Director of UC.

1974-1982 Martinez's groomed successor leads UC.

1982-1988 Another Executive Director takes over UC; a period of substantial decline follows.

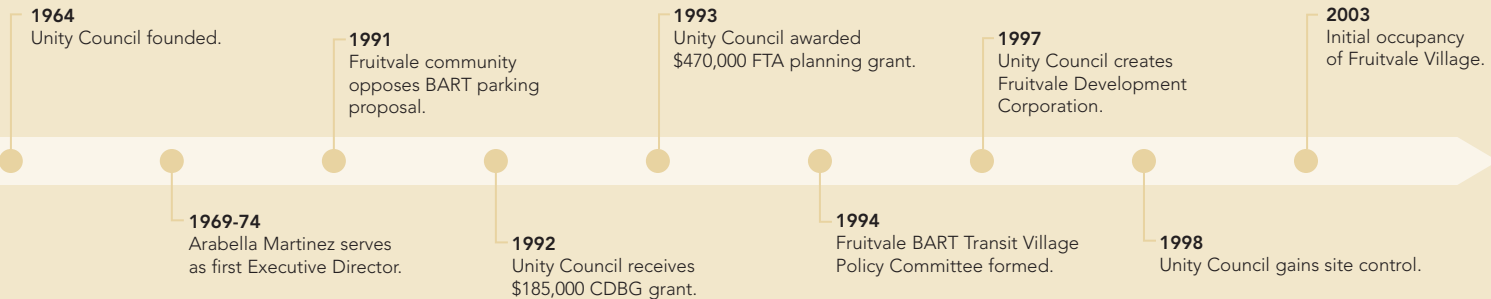
1989 Arabella Martinez returns as UC Chief Executive Officer.

1991 The Fruitvale community opposes BART's proposal to build a multi-level parking facility at the Fruitvale station.

1992 The Unity Council receives \$185,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to develop an alternative plan for the station.

1993 The Unity Council is awarded a \$470,000 Federal Transit Administration planning grant for predevelopment activities including economic, traffic, and engineering studies of the area.

1994 The Fruitvale BART Transit Village Policy Committee is formed through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by The Unity Council, BART, and the City of Oakland.



1995 The Unity Council holds a series of community planning meetings.

1996 The City of Oakland passes a zoning ordinance creating a new transit village zone, which allows higher density, mixed use development, and reduction of parking requirements around BART stations in Oakland.

1997 The Unity Council creates the Fruitvale Development Corporation (FDC).

1998 The Unity Council gains control of the site through a land swap with BART.

1999 BART receives \$7.65 million from the FTA to build replacement parking near the Fruitvale station. Construction of the Transit Village project begins.

2003 Initial occupancy.

2005 (January) Arabella Martinez retires and Gilda Gonzales takes over as Chief Executive Officer of UC.

KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

ARABELLA MARTINEZ, *former Unity Council and Fruitvale Development Corporation Chief Executive Officer*

GILDA GONZALES, *Unity Council and Fruitvale Development Corporation Chief Executive Officer*

MANNI (MANUELA) SILVA, *former Unity Council Operations Director and Fruitvale Development Corporation Senior Executive Officer (interviewed by phone)*

JEFF PACE, *Unity Council Vice President of Finance & Business Operations*

MARSHA MURRINGTON, *Unity Council Vice President of Programs*

TOM LIMON, *Unity Council Public Market Manager; former Project Manager for Fruitvale Village*

JENNY KASSAN, *Unity Council Program Manager, Main Street/BID*

GENESTA IRANI, *tenant of housing and retail*

IGNACIO DE LA FUENTE, *President, Oakland City Council (interviewed by phone)*

JEFF ORDWAY, *Manager of Real Property Development, Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)*

ANITA ADDISON, *Director of Planning, La Clinica de la Raza*

PEGGY JEN and CATHY CRAIG, *LISC*

KEN TAYMOR, *ATTORNEY, MBV LLC Law*

CHEK TANG, *Design Architect*

LUIS ARAMBULA, *Project Architect*

ROBERT APODACA, *Marketing Director, MVE & Partners*



Fruitvale Transit Village Site Plan

Project Description

Urban Context & History



Entry to the Village from BART station

Riding the BART train (which is elevated along this stretch – and especially northbound where you can see most easily to the east), you cannot help but notice a bright, colorful new complex of buildings – with palm trees, banners and apartment balconies all visible from the platform. Descending and exiting the station, one is drawn into a lively pedestrian plaza, lined with retail shops and small restaurants, and equipped with seating areas and a fountain. This path takes you naturally in the direction of International Boulevard about a block to the east. International Boulevard is a vibrant commercial artery with a wide variety of shops and other businesses, and connects the neighborhood to downtown Oakland. In a few moments, unless you stop to visit the clinic, library or senior center, you have traversed Fruitvale Village.

The project is located in the Fruitvale neighborhood, a few miles south of downtown Oakland. Historically predominantly Latino (in a city where African-Americans are the majority and whites are a minority), this neighborhood has become more diverse in recent years, with particular growth in the Asian-American population.

It was German immigrants settling in the San Francisco Bay area who first established the fruit orchards in the 1800s in what is now called Fruitvale. The orchards, in turn, formed the base for a new fruit canning industry, contributing to a thriving commercial and manufacturing base that became known as Oakland's "second downtown."

The community of Fruitvale was annexed by Oakland in 1909 and continued to thrive through World War II. It was during these war years that many Hispanic and African American workers were attracted to the local war industry jobs. Following the war, however, the area began a decline that continued into the 1990s. Businesses, canneries, and factories left, along with white middle class residents who were relocating to more affluent suburbs. As the businesses left and the manufacturing base eroded, Fruitvale began to suffer from problems typical of neighborhoods in decline – vacant storefronts, joblessness, poverty, and crime. The area continued to be troubled into the 1990s, with a reported retail vacancy rate of forty to fifty percent, and the second highest crime rate in the BART system at the Fruitvale station.¹

The Unity Council was founded in 1964 as a response to some of these problems. This organization emerged as a social service provider that also defined its mission as strengthening and organizing the political voice of the local community. Originally, the Council focused its efforts on the large Latino population, but has since expanded and diversified to meet the needs of new immigrant groups. Today, the population of Fruitvale Village is very diverse. There are many recent immigrants, and over half of all families in the area speak a language other than English at home. Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese are typical first languages. One fifth of the households in the Fruitvale community live under the poverty line.

Not far from the project site are two prior RBA silver medalists, one of which is the Hismen Hi-Nu Terrace (1997), an affordable housing project with retail at the street level, which is several blocks north of Fruitvale on International Boulevard. Also nearby is Swan’s Marketplace (2001), a mixed-use development in an historic building downtown. There is also a new, strikingly modern middle and high school campus in the neighborhood.

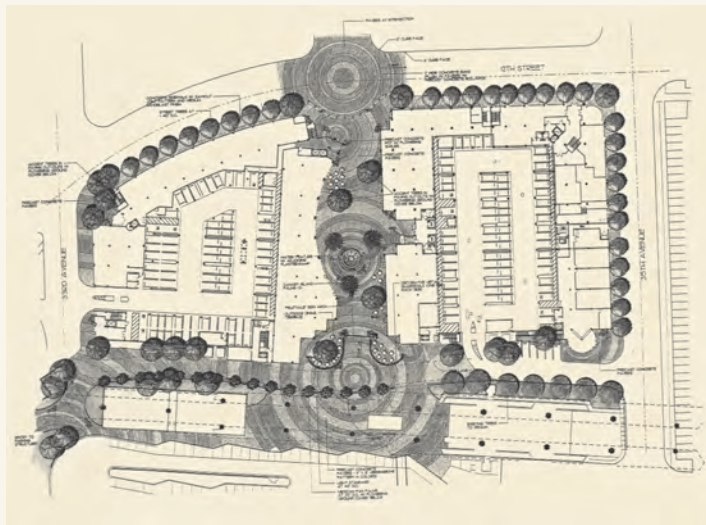
Fruitvale Transit Village

TRANSPORTATION AND PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

The neighborhood is very well served by transportation. It is bordered on the west by I-880, the main north-south freeway serving the East Bay. A BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) line runs through the neighborhood, with a station which is part of the project. In conjunction with the Fruitvale BART station (used by 6,400 daily commuters), there is an inter-modal transit hub where ten local and regional bus lines converge. There is also a taxi stand, and a bicycle station (part of the project and the largest in the United States) that provides free “valet” (attended) bike parking.

¹ U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT), Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transit Administration; *Transportation and Environmental Case Studies* (Publication Number FHWA-EP-01-010; Case Study 6 on Fruitvale Transit Village Project (2000)

A key goal of the project was to connect the BART station to the neighborhood, particularly International Boulevard. In fact, the project's origin dates to the community's protest over BART's 1991 proposal to construct a multi-level parking structure on what was at the time a surface parking lot along East 12th Street between 35th and 37th Avenues, further separating the station from International Boulevard. Instead, Fruitvale Village was constructed along East 12th Street between 33rd and 35th Avenues, and 34th Avenue was replaced with a two block pedestrian walkway and plaza, connecting the BART station and International Boulevard. The Fruitvale Village project flanks the



Interior parking ringed by commercial program; plaza paving links future public market to BART.

plaza, and its four-story mass frames the space. The plaza gives access to ground floor retail on both sides. In the block to the east, by contrast, the plaza faces the mainly blank walls of buildings that front on International Boulevard and, while there is one shop window, some seating, planting and a small stage, it is much less lively than the other block. However, plans call for the establishment of a Public Market for small vendors in this area which, if successful, would contribute greatly to increasing activity levels. With or without the Public Market, the connection is highly effective and there is a real sense of linkage from the BART station to the heart of the neighborhood.

As part of assembling the project site, the street parallel to the BART line, East 12th Street, was realigned and narrowed to slow traffic, and parking was added along it. This street is also lined with retail and access points to most of the social services.

Parking was a very large issue for this project, in part because BART required that all surface parking that was taken away had to be replaced. While BART originally had funds earmarked for this station's parking garage, the community protest led to those funds being diverted to other stations. The Unity Council had to find the funds to build a new, multi-story parking structure, now completed on the west side of the BART elevated tracks. This structure, along with new surface parking to the north of the station, provides sufficient capacity

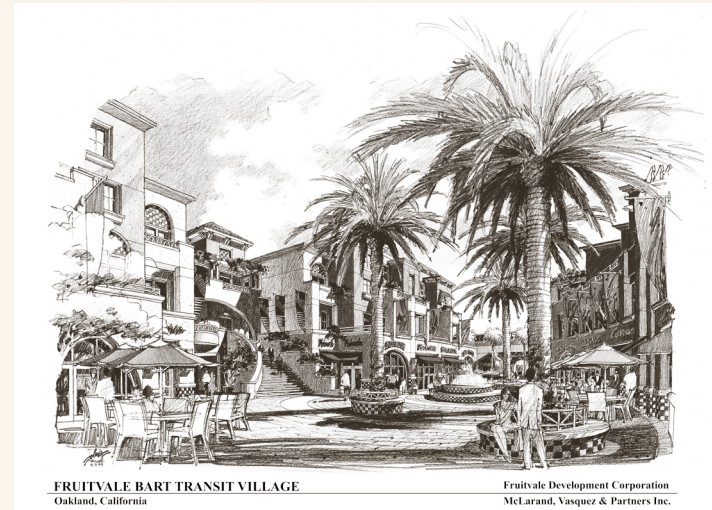
to replace the spaces in the remaining surface parking lots to the south of the project, which will be the site of the second phase of Fruitvale Village.

PROGRAM

Retail

A total of 40,000 square feet of retail space lines the ground floor along the plaza and the northerly portion of East 12th Street, providing a variety of stores and restaurants. Among the businesses included are:

- convenience market (Market One)
- florist (Soap Garden)
- shoe store
- record shop (Acapulco)
- espresso coffee and bakery (Powder Face)
- phone store (Digicom Wireless)
- bridal shop (Casablanca)
- optometrist (Dr. Irani)
- private dental group (Premier)
- tax service (H&R Block)
- bank (Citibank)
- restaurants (Burger One, Subway, Saigon Wraps, Suruki's, K-Fusion [Korean BBQ], Jalisco Two [Mexican restaurant])



Concept sketch (top) reflects character of the plaza as built (bottom).

The Fruitvale Development Corporation (FDC) marketing brochure points to several attractive features of the project, including proximity to the transit hub, accessibility, potential for high sales, and adjacent social services – all of which draw traffic. There are large banners at each end of the plaza proclaiming, “New shops are open!” At the time of the site visit, several storefronts were still vacant, though FDC’s goal is to get them leased in 2005. FDC reports an effort to encourage diversity and refrain from competing with existing local businesses. Thus there is only one Mexican restaurant in Fruitvale Village, so as not to compete with existing restaurants on International Boulevard. This connection to the local business community derives in part from the Unity Council’s long sponsorship of a national Main Street Program for International Boulevard merchants. It is clear that the project is not limited to the Village, but continues throughout the area, with upgraded storefronts, street furniture, signage, traffic calming, and street trees.

Genesta Irani, the wife and partner of local optometrist Dr. Irani, spoke from a merchant’s point of view of their decision to locate in Fruitvale Village. In their modern and attractive shop, Ms. Irani explained why this specific location works well for them. They chose it because they were just starting out and wanted to be in a place which was somewhat under-served and had high demand so they would have many potential clients and less competition. Her husband

speaks Spanish, giving him a great advantage with the local population, which is reported to be highly appreciative of their services. Open for just under a year, they are doing better than they had hoped and feel very welcome and comfortable with the community. They love the warmth and spirit they find here, with customers dropping in to say hello, bringing gifts for their baby, and thanking them for their services. Ms. Irani feels they would not find this community support in a different, especially middle class, location. Interestingly, their shop sells frames and sunglasses mostly at the lower and higher ends, with little in the middle. While as many as sixty percent of their customers are very low income and use Medicare or Medicaid, another twenty-five percent have good union-provided health insurance and others pay cash.

They have also chosen to rent an apartment in Fruitvale Village, so they can have better access to their young child during working hours. While the Village felt safer to them than International Boulevard (which they considered as a location for their shop in part because the rents were lower), Ms. Irani does not feel entirely safe and at night does not walk outside the complex (where security is provided). She reports feeling that while the Village is safer than its surrounds, it is not that safe.

Finally, they find FDC to be an excellent landlord, effective and responsive. FDC holds tenant meetings to learn of their needs and provides them with help in marketing and advertising (including cash grants).

Social Services

A key component of the project is the generous provision of social services. These tenants (or in the case of the clinic, owners) occupy about 114,000 square feet, mostly on the second floor, and provide several benefits. They enrich the services offered to the community, draw people to the project (which helps the retail and makes it easier for clients to visit other services), and they provide valuable revenue which contributes to the project's viability.

La Clinica de La Raza, a community health provider, is situated at the southeast corner of the project, and occupies all three floors (about 42,000 square feet) including street frontage. A long-established, substantial institution, La Clinica has many locations and is the largest employer in the Fruitvale neighborhood. It serves a predominantly Latino clientele, though that has diversified along with the region. Its decision to be part of the project brought a substantial anchor "tenant." For financing reasons, they required that they own their building and the land it sits on (even though they sit in part over a shared parking garage), so unlike other tenants they are owners in the project.



Locating at the Village, while perceived as very positive for them and their clients, required trade-offs, including getting less space than they might have wished for. On the other hand, the smaller facility also kept down their occupancy costs. La Clinica chose to include mainly revenue-generating functions at the Village site in order to pay for the space, and to keep other functions in their prior building on Fruitvale Avenue. They find that there is considerable synergy with the Unity Council and its other services; La Clinica offers training and education as well as direct healthcare services to clients of the senior center and Head Start, and will have a booth at the planned Public Market.

East 12th Street façade

The limited space caused them to be very efficient and some spaces were scaled to be smaller than desired (such as waiting rooms and offices). The first floor has the dental clinic, laboratory, pharmacy x-ray, and cashier. The three main medical clinics (pediatrics, family medicine and women's medicine) occupy the entire second floor and can share exam rooms depending on demand. The third floor has less-visited functions including preventive medicine, social services, administrative offices and a large conference room.

In terms of design, La Clinica had its own team which coordinated with the Village's architect, mainly taking responsibility for interior design, but also for early phases of the exterior design. The process was said to have proceeded reasonably well, with accommodations in each direction. The Village's architect did exert final control over the exterior, eliminating arched windows and gabled roofs, which La Clinica wanted. La Clinica is relatively satisfied with the facility, rating it very high on aesthetics (inside and out) and moderately high on function, with many of their reservations being the result of informed decisions related to budget limitations (as mentioned, some spaces are too small, there are HVAC system problems, and there were some less than optimal finish material choices).

While La Clinica is a separate operation, the Head Start program is operated by the Unity Council, which leases the space from its

subsidiary, the Fruitvale Development Corporation. The De Colores Child Development Center offers a substantial Head Start program serving up to 244 children each week in its 16,000 square foot facility. With an entry on the southwest corner of the project (and a curbside drop-off and pick-up lane), most of the facility is on the second floor. There are many classrooms and a large outdoor terrace (over ground floor parking) with play equipment and craft areas.

The Fruitvale Senior Center, also operated by the Unity Council, is on the second floor, but in the building to the northeast side of the plaza. With a variety of function rooms, it has access to a second, quieter outdoor terrace (also placed over ground floor parking).

The Cesar Chavez Library is a branch of the Oakland Public Library, and appears to be well used and a valued amenity in the community. It occupies about 15,000 square feet on the second floor at the north-



The Unity Council offers a Head Start program in their DeColores Childcare Development Center.

east edge of the Village and features a variety of areas targeted to specialized uses and user groups (children, young adults, computer users, etc.). In an innovative financing arrangement, the library prepaid twenty years rent (as did the Fruitvale Senior Center), helping to capitalize the project.

Housing

Rental housing units occupy the upper two floors of both buildings. The units have separate, secure elevator access from the garages and plaza. Forty-one units are loft-style (with double-height living rooms and one or two bedrooms that overlook the living space). The one-

and two-bedroom units range in size from about 800 square feet to about 1,100 square feet. All units, market or affordable, have the same, relatively high, level of finishes (including granite counter tops). Of the forty-seven units, ten are designated “affordable.” The affordable designation sets the rents at a percentage of median income. The rental price of the market rate units is \$1,100 to \$1,700 depending on size and orientation. There is a broad mix of residents in terms of ethnicity and prior housing location due to a widely distributed marketing program. The Unity Council also constructed an attractive sixty-eight unit senior housing project a block or two from the Village (Las Bougainvillas) and has plans for about 500 more units as part of the Village’s Phase Two.

Offices

There is substantial office space on the second floor on either side of the plaza. On the south, the Unity Council occupies the entire 13,000 square foot space, though it appears to be under-utilized. On the north side of the plaza, there are about 21,000 square feet of vacant office space that has not yet gotten its tenant improvements. The FDC has identified it as one of this year’s priorities to find an appropriate tenant for this space. It is being offered at \$1.80 per square foot per month for full service. When leased, it is expected to carry the overall project into profitability.



Left: Decorative stair from public plaza to second floor commercial spaces

Top right: Senior Center

Bottom right: Entrance to Oakland Public Library



PARKING

Parking was a key aspect of the project, required not only to support the new uses, but to fulfill the requirement to replace all BART parking spaces lost in conversion of the site. BART agreed that once the multi-story garage was completed, all needed parking would be in place for the Village, including its planned second phase. The site has the following number of spaces:

LOCATION	SPACES
FDC/Unity Council Parking	
Building A	72
Building B	78
Lot C	138
Phase 2 lots (on future construction site)	<u>550</u>
Subtotal	838
<i>(77 Lot C spaces have been given to BART as part of the long-term plan)</i>	
BART Parking	
Parking Garage	558
Derby Street Lot	223
Surface Spaces	<u>28</u>
Subtotal	809
Total Currently Available Parking	1,647

DESIGN

The movement and transportation aspects of site planning, as well as the basic disposition of functions, were described above. These resulted in the project being broken into two structures which frame a pedestrian plaza linking the BART station to the neighborhood's commercial artery.

In terms of the project's architectural design, it is somewhat reminiscent of other recent projects in the area (including the RBA winner Hismen Hi-Nu), with visual elements borrowed from the California Mission Style including massing, roofs, and colors. The three and four story mass of these substantial buildings is broken down into smaller elements and colors are rich and saturated. Both the architects and the client representatives described the intention to be culturally relevant to the Latino community and to ensure that other ethnic groups would not have difficulty relating to the image or feel excluded by it. Thus, the image is simplified and modernized, with very limited references to historical forms.

The design of the pedestrian plaza uses multi-colored paving in a swirl pattern, a ramp and stairs to deal with a small change in grade, a strategically placed fountain, and art and seating to enliven the pathway. With large palm trees and other plantings it is an attractive

The Phase II FDC/Unity Council parking lot, designated for future housing.

and well used space. A great deal of attention was paid to the graphics and signage program, with information kiosks at each entry, clear directional signage, and integrated informational signage as well. It contributes to the colorful, almost festive character of the plaza.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This project grew out of community resistance to BART's proposal in 1991 to construct a parking garage on a surface lot between the Fruitvale station and the neighborhood's commercial center. BART held a public meeting to present its proposal and received many

complaints from local residents and community leaders concerning adverse effects on crime (the station already had the second highest crime rate in the system), traffic, air quality, and separation of the station from the commercial district. Because of the opposition to the proposal, BART agreed to work with the community to develop an alternative.

The Unity Council, which had led the opposition, became the natural medium for community participation. In 1992, the City of Oakland gave the Council a grant of \$185,000 from Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to develop an alternative plan. The Council worked with the University of California at Berkeley's National Transit Access Center to sponsor a community design symposium. Five architectural teams were invited to study and prepare proposals for the site, which were then presented to about sixty community leaders, including then-mayor Elihu Harris and BART area director Margaret Pryor. Key themes that emerged from the interactions were the need to revitalize the surrounding neighborhood and to better integrate local businesses into the station development. There were subsequent community meetings that took the concept designs to a broader segment of the neighborhood. The following year, based on the success of the initial process, the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Authority awarded the Council \$470,000 to continue and expand planning. In addition to conducting



Concept sketches by McLarand, Vasquez & Partners, Inc., illustrate the character of facades and streetscape along E. 12th Street.

further workshops, the Council commissioned economic, traffic and engineering studies of the site.

In 1994, the three main players formalized their relationship for the project in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Unity Council, the City of Oakland, and BART. This established the Fruitvale Policy Committee with two representatives of the Council, one from BART and two from the City, including the mayor and the council person representing the area. La Clinica de La Raza also participated in these policy meetings. Apparently, BART had never before utilized such an arrangement to plan the area around a station.

By 1995, workshops were held with the goal of achieving consensus on a conceptual site plan. To reach that place, basic principles were revisited, including discussions about the positive and negative attributes of the existing situation, as well as goals and preferences for the way the Village should be. In the third workshop, participants chose between two alternative plans and the selected one established the direction for the development. It included the principal elements of the actual project: location on the BART parking lots, pedestrian plaza connecting the station to 12th Street, ground floor retail and restaurants, and a mix of housing, retail and offices.

As the project became more “real,” a structure was put in place to handle its development. The Unity Council formed the Fruitvale Development Corporation (FDC) in 1996. While BART does not normally sole source its contracts, due to the special nature of the project and the pre-existing relationships to the community and the Policy Committee, for this project it awarded FDC an exclusive negotiating agreement.

It is likely that no one anticipated the hurdles that remained or how long it would take to overcome them. One major hurdle was to assemble the development parcel and find a mechanism to give the FDC ownership rights. It took two years to finalize a land swap, whereby the FDC was granted fee simple title to Parcel A (which contains the Unity Council’s Offices, its Head Start program, La Clinica de La Raza and the pedestrian plaza), plus a ninety-five year lease for Parcel B (which houses the senior center and the library), in exchange for giving BART a parcel behind the station owned by the Unity Council as well as other nearby parcels owned by the City. Thus, BART was able to meet a long-standing requirement of its real estate policy by maintaining the value of its holdings in the area.

The other major issue was dealing with BART's policy of maintaining parking spaces. Any spaces lost due to development were required to be replaced one-for-one. This required a structure to accommodate about 500 cars. Remarkably, the Unity Council helped obtain a grant from FTA for \$7.65 million for this purpose. The Council hoped FDC could build the structure and when that proved to be unacceptable to BART, the cost escalated (due to BART's higher overheads). This would have meant that fewer spaces would be built, which would not have adequately replaced lost parking (for both phases). A remarkable aspect of this story is that the Council had twice tried to find additional funds in order to build a large enough garage, and it did. The final increment involved a complex deal whereby the Council borrowed money in part against an income stream it could earn by charging for parking at surface lots which would be built a later phase. It also got a release from BART from having to provide any additional replacement parking in the future.

In 1999, plans for the project were finalized, but it took two more years for financing to be secured. Almost ten years after the initial BART proposal, construction began on Fruitvale Village.

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

This project is "transit-oriented development" (TOD) as currently defined by the Congress of New Urbanism. The specifics of the project were derived at exactly the same time that Congress's self-professed "movement to reform North America's urban growth patterns" emerged. TOD, according to the principles of the Congress, combines a mix of uses including housing, retail and commercial space with public transportation in a pedestrian-friendly environment. The 1000 Friends of Oregon, early subscribers to the Congress's principles, describes such transit-oriented development in one of the earliest publications of the concept as follows. (This citation was published a year after the Fruitvale Village Project started to evolve.)

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a simple concept: moderate and high density housing, along with complementing public uses, jobs, retail and services, are concentrated in mixed-use developments located at strategic points along the regional transit system. Each TOD has a centrally located transit stop and core commercial area; accompanying residential and/or employment uses are within an average 2,000 feet walking distance. The location, design, configuration, and mix of uses in a TOD provides an alternative to current suburban development trends by emphasizing a pedestrian-oriented environment and reinforcing the

use of public transportation. This linkage between land use and transit is designed to result in an efficient pattern of development that supports the transit system and makes significant progress in reducing sprawl, traffic congestion, and air pollution. The TOD's mixed-use clustering of land uses within a pedestrian-friendly area connected to transit provides for growth with a minimum of environmental and social costs. (1000 Friends of Oregon 1992, quoted in U.S. DOT 2000)

Transit-oriented development plays out in Fruitvale successfully according to Rodney Slater, U.S. Secretary of Transportation. At the formal launch of the Fruitvale Transit Village on July 9, 1999, he stated: *“Transportation planning should be about more than concrete and steel. It should be about building communities, and we are all looking to Fruitvale as an example of how that can happen.”* (quoted in U.S. DOT 2000)

ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

The Unity Council

From a community perspective, this project was led – from protest through planning, design and development – by the Unity Council. The Council was born in 1964 with roots in the anti-poverty movement and Latino organizing (starting with a campaign against a measure that would have rescinded the state’s Fair Housing Act). It started life as the Mexican-American Unity Council, quickly shifting from a political action group to a social service provider. Initially, the Council was concerned with ensuring that this section of Oakland, with its largely Latino population, would get its share of federal monies flowing to the City. Later, it changed its name to the Spanish Speaking Unity Council, to broaden its representation of people with roots from countries other than Mexico. In 1989, recognizing the still-greater diversification of the neighborhood, it ceased identifying itself with any particular ethnic group (though its Latino connections remain evident).

In its years of service to the local community, the Council developed deeply connected roots. Not only has the Unity Council been in existence for over forty years, but it has been involved with many people in its diverse programs. These programs evolved over time in

response to funding availability and community need. Some of the programs include, or included, information and referral services, English as a second language, job readiness training, and economic development. As time went on, sponsors (such as the Ford Foundation) suggested that they move into housing, and the Council did, indeed, build a number of housing projects in the surrounding areas (including to the south of Oakland). In this way, the Council became a community development corporation (CDC), though it still sees itself primarily as a community-based service organization, and makes much of the difference in perspective this entails. In other words, despite constructing a very substantial project, it does not feel that building projects is its primary objective.

The Council was also one of the original providers of a national Main Street Program, currently housed in the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This allowed, and indeed required, the Council to develop even broader ties in the community, since participants were local business and commercial property owners. It was natural, then, when the BART parking garage proposal surfaced, that the Council would act as community spokesman in protesting the proposal and working to develop alternatives. International Boulevard. International Boulevard, at the time of the negotiations with BART was less than fifty percent occupied. It now boasts over ninety percent occupancy in largely rehabilitated structures serving the local business community and residents.

Arabella Martinez

It is impossible to imagine this project happening without Arabella Martinez. Martinez was part of the group that formed the Unity Council and served her first term as its executive director from 1969 to 1974. She returned to the Council in 1989 “to rescue her baby” from a decline so substantial that its continued existence was threatened. In the intervening fifteen years, she had risen in the social service field to become an Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare in the Carter Administration. Her experience, administrative skills, and contacts in Washington and elsewhere made her an invaluable asset to the Council. For example, when added funding was needed to build BART’s garage, she was able to call Federico Pena, then U.S. Secretary of Transportation.



Left: Arabella Martinez

Right: Revitalized International Boulevard

Manni (Manuela) Silva

As crucial as Martinez's contributions were, she could not have done it alone. Another key player was Manni (Manuela) Silva, who Martinez brought in on her return in 1989 to help turn around the near-defunct Council. Silva's role was, from the beginning, that of implementer, the one who "got things done," while Martinez focused more on vision, lobbying, and oversight. Silva also had a background in housing development (having built a substantial number of HUD-assisted units), which helped with the interim projects. She was also appointed to run the Fruitvale Development Corporation, the entity that handled construction and development of Fruitvale Village. In this role, Silva made many of the deals for financing as well as managing the development process. Silva left the Unity Council after over a decade of service eight months before Martinez. Her replacement as Executive Director, Gilda Gonzales, brought strong political ties and knowledge of the City, having previously served as the mayor's chief of staff.

Partnerships

While the Unity Council took the lead on all aspects of this project from the perspective of the community, they "partnered" with a number of entities who contributed to its realization. These partners included:

- Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)
- City of Oakland
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MPO for Bay Area)
- Federal Transit Administration
- U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit)

BART was obviously a key player in this project, having started the process with its proposed parking structure and, eventually, making the site available to the Unity Council. BART was represented on the tri-partite Policy Council, but its contributions need to be understood in terms of the role of one of its real estate staff, Jeff Ordway. Within certain strong but flexible limits, Ordway served almost as an in-house advocate for the project. Ordway explained that from BART's perspective, in the early 1990s they were losing ridership due to lack of parking at certain stations – thus the parking structure requirements reflected at Fruitvale. There was little sensitivity to urban planning issues (more of a transportation engineering perspective) and little or no awareness of the emerging principles of transit-oriented development (TOD); for example, BART often destroyed street grids to create huge parking lots. This was also the first time their projects had been subject to environmental review and they were more than surprised at the community response shown at mandatory public meetings.

However, it was not that the community was opposed to the parking structure *per se*, only that it was being located in the wrong place. In order to move forward, BART agreed that the local community could have input, and joined the Unity Council and the City on the newly formed Policy Council.

Why would BART, a regional authority whose main goals are to increase ridership and operate in the black financially, bother to do this? The answer may lie in its unusual structure, with an elected board composed of representatives of each area it serves. Margaret Pryor, who represented the area that includes Oakland, supported the community, and her fellow board members fell into line behind her. BART was also looking to exploit its real estate holdings adjacent to its stations, and was entertaining notions of joint development with the private sector. Ordway appears to have been able to insert some “soft” objectives into the equation, including better links from the gates to the community in terms of perceived safety, enlivening the surroundings with retail, and the public service convenience of being able to shop on the way home. In the spirit of Jane Jacobs’ *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* (1961), these objectives provided the security of “eyes on the street” for Fruitvale.

The project would also put tax-exempt property back on the rolls, a benefit to local government rather than BART. While Ordway was

also an advocate for TOD principles, they were not so clearly articulated when the project started; rather, they emerged in the visioning and design workshops described above.

The relationship between BART and the Unity Council is complex and multi-faceted. At times, BART provided very substantial support. But at other key points, BART was a considerable obstacle (for example, enforcing its policies and standards delayed the project, raised the cost of the parking structure and required it to be larger than it otherwise might have been in order to replace all lost parking spaces). On the other hand, BART was also able to demonstrate considerable flexibility, at times bending or changing long-standing policies.

City of Oakland

The other key partner in this project is the City of Oakland. The City was the third member of the Policy Council, provided substantial funding early on and throughout the project, lent expertise and oversight, cooperated in realigning and abandoning streets, participated in land swaps that helped assemble the site, and now occupies a substantial part of the project as tenants (the senior center and the library). The City was principally represented by Ignacio De La Fuente, who started as a local labor leader and organizer and was then elected to be the City Council representative for the area (and more recently has become Council President). De la Fuente was an

early community advocate for the project, and then guided it through numerous city reviews, approvals, and deals. Having such an advocate at the City was essential to the project's progress, though it appears somewhat unusual from an observer's perspective that a council member played this role rather than the mayor. However, De La Fuente did, clearly, gain the support of the entire council and two mayors – mainly Elihu Harris; by the time Jerry Brown was elected in 1998, the project had its major components in place. While Fruitvale Village did not figure prominently in De La Fuente's first election campaign in 1992, it did for his re-election in 1996.

FINANCES

Project Development

The Unity Council and its partners were able to obtain very substantial financing for the project, initially in the form of planning grants, then later as grants and loans for construction. Once basic sources of equity and other contributions were committed, Citibank sponsored tax-exempt bonds for the balance. The variety and complexity of sources was remarkable, with approximately thirty different contributors. The following table shows sources and uses for the project.

SOURCES OF FUNDS 07/31/04

EQUITY

FEMA _____	1,045,304
Ford Foundation _____	122,000
R&R Goldman Fund _____	300,000
Levi-Strauss _____	226,881
E&W Haas Jr. Fund _____	400,000
PG&E _____	50,000
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corp. _____	100,000
NCLR _____	25,000
Land Proceeds _____	517,025
Total Equity _____	\$2,786,210

CITY OF OAKLAND

City EDI _____	3,300,000
EDA Grant _____	1,380,000
Measure K Bonds (Prepaid lease) _____	2,540,000
City Library (\$4.5 million prepaid lease) _____	4,900,000
CDBG/Other _____	77,339
EPA Grant _____	99,998
City-BTA Bike Station _____	400,000
Tax Increment Allocation (B) (LISC) _____	4,000,000
Total City of Oakland _____	\$16,697,337

DOT/BART

MTC _____	47,121
FTA Child Development Center _____	2,300,000
FTA Pedestrian Paseo _____	780,000
FTA-CMA Bike Facility _____	400,000
FTA-Pedestrian Plaza _____	2,228,534
Dot/Bart _____	\$5,755,655

SOURCES OF FUNDS 07/31/04

INTEREST/MISCELLANEOUS

Interest/Other _____	643,707
Additional Bond Funds Interest/Misc. _____	176,661
Total Interest/Miscellaneous _____	\$820,368

DEBT

Unity Council FTV/Perm Loan _____	885,473
Unity Council Bridge Loan _____	911,830
NCBDC _____	750,000
City Section 108 _____	3,300,000
Citibank Subordinate _____	1,400,000
City Housing Loan _____	750,000
501 (C) 3 Bonds _____	19,800,000
Total Debt _____	\$27,797,303
TOTAL SOURCES OF FUNDS _____	\$53,856,873

USES OF FUNDS

Predevelopment

Staff & Overhead _____	645,985
Contract Services _____	389,286
Total Predevelopment _____	\$1,035,271

Hard Construction Cost

Off-Site _____	1,291,931
Building Structure _____	27,793,806
General Contractor Fees _____	1,095,138
Construction Contingency _____	1,679,789
Bond Requirements _____	144,935
Tenant Improvements _____	2,341,680
Plaza Improvements _____	1,800,000
Public Art _____	24,185
Total Hard Construction Costs _____	\$36,171,464

SOFT COST

Acquisition Cost _____	1,764
Architecture and Engineering _____	2,819,787
Permits, Fees & Taxes _____	773,218
Development Staff/Operating _____	2,840,686
Utility Hookups _____	600,000
Environmental Remediation _____	188,680
Legal, Insurance & Other _____	744,031
Contingency _____	630,144
Bike Facility Soft Cost _____	262,968
Total Soft Costs _____	\$8,861,278

INTEREST AND FEES

Construction Interest _____	2,671,049
City Section 108 _____	150,000
NCBDC _____	76,285
Unity Council _____	172,868
Bond Issuance Cost _____	790,490
Reserves and Lease-up _____	323,600
Total Interest and Fees _____	\$4,184,292

BRIDGE LOANS

Unity Council Bridge Loan _____	911,830
NCBDC _____	750,000
Total Bridge Loans _____	\$1,661,830

TOTAL USES OF FUNDS _____ \$51,914,135

SURPLUS (DEFICIT) _____ \$1,942,738

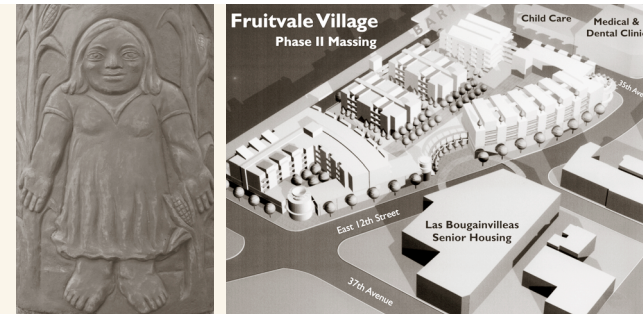
Operating Budget

The operating budget is almost as complex as the capital financing. Given that FDC and the Unity Council are separate legal entities, they are reported individually. The FDC, which owns and operates Fruitvale Village and three other properties, has about \$3 million in annual revenue. While its total expenses are about \$4.5 million, much of the difference is accounted for by depreciation, so that the net bottom line cash operating loss is relatively small (around \$30,000 for the Village and a similar figure for the other properties). FDC also shows net assets of over \$32 million. Since the operating loss is essentially an accounting artifact, it appears that the projects are viable at the current level of occupancy and interest rates.

The Unity Council has an annual operating budget of over \$10 million (plus an additional \$1.5 million for two of its properties) and appears to operate with a small net asset surplus. The Council pays about \$300,000 per year in rent to FDC for its office space.



Space for future public market with indoor market space adjacent to the plaza.



FUTURE PLANS

One of the primary goals of FDC for 2005 is the completion of lease-up, including the few vacant retail spaces and especially the large vacant office space. Also planned for 2005 is the opening, by the Unity Council, of the Public Market in the plaza connecting to International Boulevard. The major project, however, is the so-called Phase Two of the Village, which will construct housing (and perhaps other uses) on BART's surface parking lots on the two blocks immediately to the south of Fruitvale Village. Preliminary plans call for 500 to 600 units. Further project definition and feasibility studies will be conducted in the next year, followed by design, financing and construction on an unknown timetable. The land, however, is tied up for them and the Unity Council currently derives income from parking fees to repay the loan it secured as part of the financing of the BART parking structure. Also, the replacement parking has already been constructed as part of the structure, so that part of the deal, at least, is completed.

Top left: Detail of art in market plaza

Top right: Model of Phase II massing on the existing parking lot

Assessing Project Success

Success in Meeting Project Goals

→ *To strengthen existing community institutions and catalyze neighborhood revitalization – physically, economically and socially.*

Fruitvale Village would appear to be having a very substantial positive impact on its community. It is very attractive visually, and delivers the benefits promised by transit-oriented development: it forms a connector between transit interchanges and the broader community; it has enlivened activities and provided community space; and offers a viable mix of housing and of retail.

Fruitvale Village would also appear to be playing a key role in transforming the broader community, which is becoming safer, more attractive, and more viable commercially. Commercial retail vacancy rates along International Boulevard are reported to have fallen from the forty to fifty percent range ten years ago to one percent today.

→ *To reduce poverty, build assets, and contribute to the local economy by providing a stable source of jobs and income.*

The Village claims to have created 500 jobs (documentation was not obtained and it is possible that some were limited to construction). Though the project itself houses a number of significant employers, it is uncertain how many of the jobs are new.

→ *To encourage and leverage public and private investment.*

The project itself attracted substantial investments from the City and from La Clinica de La Raza. In addition, developers are building market rate housing in the vicinity. (It would seem, however, that the area has a considerable distance to go before it could be considered to be gentrifying).

→ *To enhance choices for neighborhood residents, including services and retail choices.*

The Village is a focus of important community services (library, senior center, Head Start, clinic), providing a convenient place for people to come to meet many of their needs on the same visit.

This use of community services complements the now traditional TOD model of mixed housing, retail, and commercial space. It also reinforces the Unity Council's commitment to meeting social needs. Retail and housing choices were also expanded by the project.

→ *To provide high quality, affordable housing.*

Phase One has provided forty-seven units of housing, of which ten are affordable. The units are well planned and finished to a higher level than would be typical for the market. There are no physical differences between market rate and affordable units. Phase Two will provide approximately 500 more housing units, but the affordable mix will likely depend on requirements of the financing sources. Near this project, the Council has also built sixty-eight units of subsidized senior housing.

→ *To improve the perception and reality of safety.*

The project provides "eyes on the street," as well as passive and active security devices, and private security guards are visible. Residents and businesses report that the area is safer, but not yet as safe as it might be. One measure of success is that the Fruitvale BART station was reported to have the second highest crime rate in the system prior to the project's construction, and now it has one of the lowest.

→ *To beautify a blighted area.*

Before and after photographs illustrate the degree to which Fruitvale Village has improved the area. However, the project was built on a landscaped parking lot, which was not particularly unattractive in itself. The surrounding area has also been improving, in substantial measure due to the Unity Council's Main Street program.

→ *To increase BART ridership and reduce traffic and pollution.*

BART estimates that 300 to 600 new daily trips have been generated since the project opened, though some may be due to extraneous factors (such as the increasing cost of gasoline). No data were available on reductions in traffic and pollution, though such impacts are typically claimed by TOD proponents (and may, indeed, have been achieved).

→ *To be sustainable and environmentally sound.*

Again, this is a typical TOD goal, but no data were available for measuring the environmental impacts of Fruitvale Village. The project was not presented as being particularly "green" in its design, use of materials, or construction.

OTHER MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The project also benefits from very good planning and urban design, with a site plan that successfully integrates the BART station with the commercial development on International Boulevard. The architecture provides a functional accommodation of community services, retailing and public plaza activities.

Fruitvale Village has the potential to serve as a general model for other sites, although many factors make it unique and unlikely to be replicated as such. For example, BART and the City are looking at three other stations as possible TOD sites and each has special features and factors that make it different from Fruitvale. Generally, it is unusual to find the strong community organization and leadership this project had. Also, the mix of uses and of financing would have to be tailored to each site. Fruitvale, however, deserves credit for being one of the first (if not the first) substantial TOD project in the region, certainly the first led by a non-profit agency. The project should also be commended for inspiring others to strive to achieve their level of accomplishment.

Selection Committee Discussion: What We Learned

The Fruitvale Village experience provides a number of lessons that can be of value to other projects – even ones that are not necessarily transportation-oriented.

Effective Partnerships

To some extent, the Unity Council, BART and the City of Oakland make strange bedfellows. Each has its own mandates and interests. However, each apparently realized that they needed the others in order to achieve their own objectives. Thus, they formalized the partnership in 1994 as the Fruitvale Policy Committee. This was of tremendous value to the project, helping it to overcome challenges as they arose. And, in the end, each of the entities did benefit: the Unity Council improved the community for its constituents (and increased its income and equity, as well as developing its capacity); BART increased ridership (estimated to be between 300 and 600 new daily riders) and improved safety at a problematic station; and the City increased property taxes, became more effective in delivering services, and reduced crime and other problems in a troubled neighborhood.

Effective Leadership

Convincing Arabella Martinez to return to the Unity Council may be the single most important decision anyone made to benefit the project (though that outcome was unknown at the time). Without her, the Unity Council likely would have failed, while with her, it was in a position to guide the project for the community. Martinez also brought in others, such as Manni Silva. The Unity Council appears generally to have understood the importance of careful transition planning. Of course, national connections helped as well. BART found Jeff Ordway who grew into an advocate for the project, and the City's Ignacio De La Fuente provided crucial leadership at that leg of the triangle.

Public Involvement

This project started as a proposal for a BART parking structure. But community opposition to its placement, voiced at public hearings, led to an effective community planning process. This happened in part because the community had a history of action and had an effective voice in the Unity Council. Throughout its evolution, key decisions and directions were set with broad input from the community and other stakeholders working together in a public forum. This resulted in strong community support for the project. The Unity Council contrasts this process, which it characterizes as community based, with what sometimes happens when CDCs that are well intentioned

but less connected to the community propose a building project that does not really tap into the community's needs – and may not get the same level of local support.

Perseverance

This project required more than ten years of commitment by its participants, with serious stumbling blocks presenting themselves with some regularity. The degree of perseverance required is probably more than could be expected – particularly if the participants had known from the beginning what would be required of them. More likely, the commitment developed gradually as people spent more and more time on the project and began to see its possibilities and benefits.

Creative Financing

As described above, this project required highly complex financing – as many as thirty-one sources had to be tapped, blended and coordinated (since funders' requirements are often different). The Unity Council and its partners showed creativity and flexibility in locating and obtaining support. When a potential source of funds such as the Federal Transit Administration wanted to support the project but could not award funds to the Unity Council, BART agreed to accept the funds and allocate them to the project.

Quality Design and Construction

This project would not be as good as it is without a desire for, and commitment to, quality. The Unity Council hired the best professionals it could find to assist it with the project, from consultants and planners to architects and builders. Their approach was to aim for high quality, and then to compromise only where they had to.



Village housing above retail space at East 12th St. entrance to plaza

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

See Unity Council websites: <http://www.unitycouncil.org/> and <http://www.fruitvalevillage.net/>

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transit Administration; Transportation and Environmental Case Studies (Publication Number FHWA-EP-01-010); Case Study 6 on Fruitvale Transit Village Project (2000). Online at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ejustice/case/case6.htm>

RELATED RUDY BRUNER AWARD WINNERS:

Taken from <http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner/>. See also www.brunerfoundation.org

Center in the Square, Roanoke, VA; 1997 Silver Medal Winner

Center in the Square incorporates restoration of a 1914 warehouse to create a downtown cultural center housing the Art Museum of Western Virginia, Science Museum of Western Virginia, Roanoke Valley History Museum, Mill Mountain Theater and The Arts Council of the Blue Ridge. By bringing together these cultural entities in a rent free space and by encouraging community input, Center in the Square has created a new cultural and educational destination in Roanoke and has spurred revitalization in downtown Roanoke.

New Community Corporation, Newark, NJ; 1993 Gold Medal Winner

Born out of the riots of 1967, the New Community Corporation (NCC) rebuilt the devastated central ward of Newark through creation of the largest community development corporation in the country, offering a range of comprehensive and innovative services to meet a variety of urban needs. NCC includes manufacturing, retail, educational, housing and other initiatives in the Newark area. This grass roots redevelopment venture houses over 6,000 individuals in apartments and homes contained within fifteen housing developments (2,498 units ranging from senior citizen high rises, family town houses, to mid-rise mixed tenancy buildings) in Newark, New Jersey. The Corporation also serves as a source of employment, day care, educational opportunities, social and health care services, and job training.

Roslindale Village Main Street, Boston, MA; 1991 Silver Medal Winner

Roslindale Village Main Street is an organization of merchants and citizens devoted to revitalization efforts in the former Roslindale Square in southwest Boston, MA. Between changes in retailing (such as malls and huge discount stores) and urban/demographic forces, the area declined by the 1970s from a thriving commercial district to a metal-gated, burned-out zone with but a few determined business concerns remaining. Through concerted, innovative historic preservation efforts, including rehabilitation of storefronts and commercial signage to revitalize a commercial center through street improvements, sidewalks, lighting, benches, small parks, and landscape improvements, the area was designated a National Main Street Center Urban Demonstration Program (the only one of the original eight to endure) and incrementally very successful results occurred. The once again thriving district had seventeen building renovations and thirty storefront facade improvements. A program of cultural and promotional events was developed. A ripple-effect can be seen beyond its immediate purview: the MBTA reopened and greatly improved a closed transit station, the closed Roslindale High School was converted to apartments, and local banks nicely enhanced landscaping efforts. An effective coalition of local community groups were able to make Roslindale Village Main Street the most lasting National Trust Main Street Urban Demonstration Program in the country.