

Silver Medal Winner
Lower Town Artist Relocation Program
Paducah, Kentucky



This is an excerpt from:

Reinventing Downtown

2005 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

ROBERT SHIBLEY, AIA, AICP

WITH

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Lower Town Artist Relocation Program At A Glance

What is the Lower Town Artist Relocation Program?

- A program that encourages artists from across the country to relocate to the Lower Town neighborhood of Paducah, Kentucky.
- A program for rehabilitating historic structures in a deteriorated neighborhood.
- A program to encourage infill of vacant lots in Lower Town with artist live/work space.
- An economic development program that strives to develop a new economic sector (art galleries and businesses).
- A job program that seeks to employ local workers in the process of rehabilitating historic properties and building new infill projects.
- A community building tool for Lower Town and for the City of Paducah.

Project Goals

- Attract working artists from around the country to relocate to Paducah.
- Increase home ownership and property values in Lower Town.
- Rehabilitate historic structures in Lower Town.
- Reduce crime and eliminate blight in the neighborhood.
- Economically revitalize Lower Town (and Paducah) with an influx of new retail and service businesses.

Project Chronology

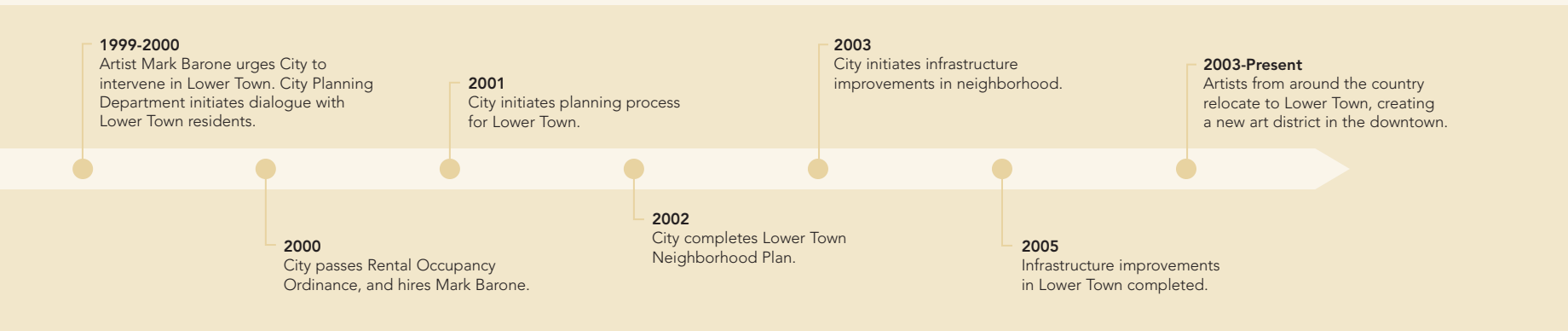
1999-2000 City of Paducah establishes policy of creating “vital neighborhoods” as a major policy direction.

Artist Mark Barone begins complaining to City officials about the condition of Lower Town. Simultaneously he begins exploring models of art-based revitalization in other cities.

Lower Town Association reorganized with purpose of decreasing crime and improving safety in the neighborhood.

City Planning Department and Director Tom Barnett initiate dialogue between neighbors and the City.

2000 City passes Rental Occupancy Ordinance, hires Mark Barone, and begins marketing properties to artists.



2001 Department of Planning initiates formal planning process through meetings with Lower Town residents to determine what they want for their neighborhood.

Department of Planning completes “Survey of Structures” in Lower Town, collecting data on over 300 parcels.

Artist Bill Renzulli decides to make the move as the first official out-of-town artist recruited through the program.

2002 Department of Planning completes Lower Town Neighborhood Plan, with the Artist Relocation Program as its cornerstone. Plan is adopted by City.

2003 City initiates infrastructure improvements in neighborhood.

Paducah Transit Authority undertakes rehabilitation of former plumbing supply facility as its new headquarters.

Artist Bill Renzulli renovates a home, builds a studio and moves into Lower Town.

2003 – 2005 Over forty artists relocate to Lower Town, in rehabilitated or infill structures.

2005 All planned infrastructure improvements are completed, and most available properties are turned over to artists.

KEY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

MARK BARONE, *Artist and Lower Town resident,*
City of Paducah Artist Relocation Program Coordinator

BILL PAXTON, *Mayor*

TOM BARNETT, *Paducah Director of Planning*

BUFORD WILSON, *Paducah Urban Renewal*

MIKE MCDOWELL, *Paducah Historic Commission*

WALLY BATEMAN, *Paducah Bank*

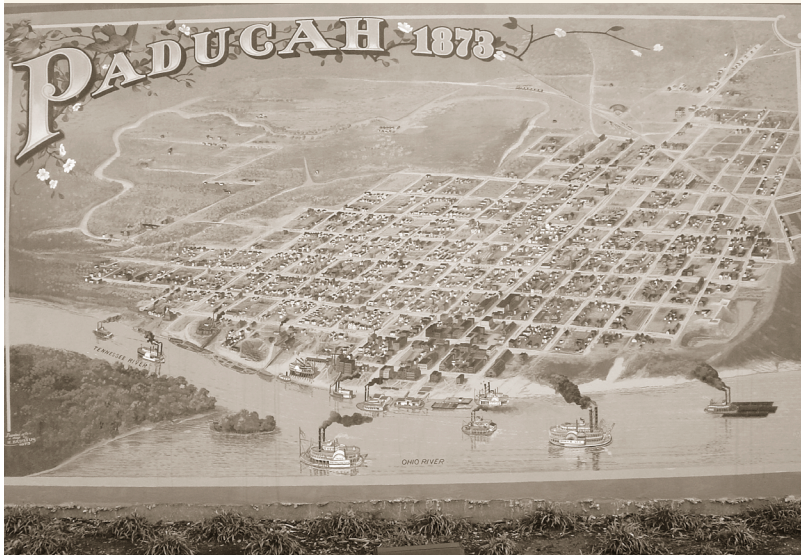
BILL RENZULLI, Julie Shaw, Mark Palmer, Monica Bilak,
Aynex Mercado, *artists and residents*

CAROL GAULT, *Director, Paducah Main Street Association*

GAYLE KALER, *Former President Lower Town Association*

Project Description

Urban Context & History



Map of historic Paducah

Paducah is proud of its history, which dates back to the Revolutionary War. In 1779, a small army landed on the banks of the Ohio River and defeated British posts in nearby Illinois. In 1818, President James Monroe purchased the area from the Chickasaw Indians in what came to be known as the Jackson Purchase. The town itself was founded in 1827 by William Clark (of Lewis and Clark) who named it for the Paducah Indians, once the largest nation of Indians known in the country. Paducah was incorporated in 1830, and was already a thriving and growing town.¹

Despite Kentucky's policy of armed neutrality during the Civil War, Paducah became the site of a battle in 1861 when Confederate soldiers seized the area on September 3 and Ulysses S. Grant landed in Paducah the next day to oust them. After the invasion by the Confederacy, the State of Kentucky declared itself loyal to the union. The famous Battle of Paducah was fought on March 25, 1864, when the Confederate Army attacked a union fort there. It is interesting to note that the recruitment of African Americans as soldiers actually began in Paducah in 1864; any black citizen who joined was freed from slavery, as was his family.²

In the nineteenth century, much of Paducah's economic base was river-related industry, as large quantities of goods moved up and down the Ohio River. Boat and barge manufacturing and other related

^{1,2} <http://www.paducahky.com>

activities thrived for many years, and are still in evidence. Today, one can still see large barges of coal, gravel, and other dry goods as they are moved along the Ohio River, the “northernmost ice-free inland waterway in the United States.” In fact, Paducah claims to be directly accessible to more miles of navigable waterways than any city in the world. A recent Chamber of Commerce survey estimates that there are still approximately 3,500 jobs in the larger fifteen-county region that are directly related to the river industry.

Paducah maintained a healthy manufacturing and river-related economy up through the early years of the twentieth century. The emergence of railroads in the mid-nineteenth century again brought Paducah to prominence when it became a major transportation node and supply center. Railroad engine manufacture emerged as another major industry, when a steam engine production company located in town.³

Paducah today is a city of 26,000, located in a region of 250,000. The nearest large cities are Nashville, St. Louis, Memphis, and a bit farther along, Chicago. The major economic sectors now providing employment within the City are education, health and social services, retail, manufacturing, and arts, entertainment, recreation, hotel and food. Its population is seventy-two percent white and twenty-four percent African-American, with small numbers of other races including Hispanic and Native American.⁴

³ <http://www.paducahky.com>

⁴ <http://www.city-data.com/city/Paducah-Kentucky.html>

Paducah’s economy has had a similar trend to many other small cities across the country. For many years it fared well based on its historic industries and excellent accessibility. Its downtown remained the center of commerce, with handsome, historic structures located near and adjacent to the river. Like many small city downtowns, however, with changes in the manufacturing and transportation sectors, the downtown began to decline as early as the 1930s. The arrival of a major shopping mall to the west of town in the 1980s delivered the final *coup de grace*.

The Paducah Main Street Association (part of the National Main Street Program) reports that fifteen years ago the downtown was deserted. The Director reports with considerable pride, however, that the downtown is making a comeback, with a ninety percent occupancy rate in approximately 300 downtown structures. The 300 buildings in the downtown district employ close to 4,000 people, with a recent net gain of 120 new downtown jobs. Similarly, the number of downtown businesses jumped from 290 to 300 in the past year. Higher occupancy rates in downtown residential units also attest to a more vibrant city center.

The recent revival started with the construction of the Quilt Museum in 1990, and was followed by the City’s purchase of the Petter properties in 1995 and the subsequent redevelopment of the almost entire square block of properties located at Broadway and Water

Streets. The most visible signs of the downtown revival include the recent rehabilitation of several key blocks of historic structures along the river, including historic Market House Square, a former market, which now houses a cinema, museum, and community space. Across from Market Square small scale historic streets have seen the advent of new shops and restaurants that appear to be doing well, and contribute to a lively atmosphere.



Left: Historic buildings in downtown Paducah
Right: Revitalized street in the downtown

Paducah has, in recent years, enjoyed a growing reputation as a center for arts and culture. The annual quilt show and the Museum of the American Quilter together draw over 100,000 people annually, and have given Paducah the reputation of "Quilt City USA." The Museum of the American Quilter's Society itself draws about 70,000 every year, and approximately fifty riverboats stop in Paducah annually, providing the community with a healthy tourism base. In addition, Paducah recently completed the \$40 million Four Rivers Performing Arts Facility, built on the river's edge adjacent to the downtown. With \$20 million contributed by the state, Paducah was able to raise \$20 million in private dollars to build this state-of-the-art facility, no small achievement for a town of 26,000.



Other downtown festivals and events draw tourists to Paducah. The BBQ and Arts Festival for example, draws approximately 40,000 people. The Paducah Main Street Association helped to create the “First Friday Cultural Trolley,” in which a free trolley runs back and forth from Lower Town to downtown from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm on the first Friday of every month, encouraging people to visit the Lower Town art district. During “Saturday Nights After Dinner,” a program that runs from May to September, the downtown streets are closed, making way for gatherings, small parades and performances, street theater, food vendors, and a general community gathering. Paducah continues to cultivate its local attractions and is increasingly a destination for people traveling within the region to view the growing number of galleries and shops related to its art venues.

URBAN DESIGN

Consistency of scale and well preserved historic structures built in the mid to late 1800s and early 1900s characterize the downtown, much of which is encompassed by a National Historic District. The dominant architectural style is five to six story Victorian and Art Deco buildings, with arched windows and stylized cornices and entries. Some of the central buildings in the downtown have been renovated and adapted to new uses relating to tourism, culture, and entertainment, while others maintain a more traditional mix of office above and

retail at the ground floor. Mixed-use zoning also permits residential uses above the first floor commercial uses.

The Ohio River is the dominant organizing factor in the downtown. Although Paducah was originally developed along the river and oriented to it, major floods have taken their toll. The most recent major flood was in 1937, when the Ohio flooded to as far as 32nd Street (thirty-two blocks inland from the river). This event resulted in the construction by the Army Corps of Engineers of a flood barrier in the form of a wall, approximately fifteen feet high, running along the river the length of the downtown. The barrier wall seems to provide the necessary flood protection, as there have been no such disasters since, but serves to literally wall off the river, the town’s major natural amenity, from the downtown.



Flood control barrier on the Ohio river

The barrier wall strongly inhibits the natural integration of downtown life with activity and vistas on the river. There are openings in the wall for pedestrian access to the river where from the river's edge one can view considerable waterborne activity – large barges loaded with gravel, coal and other dry goods are pushed up and downstream by working tugs. In the summer months, large paddle wheel steamers provide additional commercial activity and tourism on the river. Bike paths, pedestrian paths and seating have been developed at the river's edge, but remain completely separated visually by the wall from the pedestrian level in the downtown.



Mural on flood control barrier

Efforts have been made to mitigate the effects of the wall with a mural depicting Paducah's history. It is nevertheless evident that the flood barrier presents significant challenges to development of the riverfront as the major downtown resource it could become. Similarly, a large part of the downtown waterfront is currently paved over with at-grade parking, further limiting development potential in the heart of downtown.

Artist Relocation Project

LOWER TOWN

Adjacent to the downtown lies the Lower Town neighborhood, Paducah's oldest residential neighborhood. In the city's early days, Lower Town was "where prosperous citizens built brick and frame houses in the Greek Revival and Italianate styles."⁵ Over the years, however, the historic fabric has withstood numerous assaults, beginning as early as the Civil War when Union soldiers occupied Paducah in 1864 and ordered all two story residences within "musket range" of the nearby fort to be burned. Much of the historic housing stock in Lower Town was lost at that time, only to be rebuilt in the ensuing years.

⁵ <http://www.paducahky.com>

“Lower Town neighborhood is in crisis and at a crossroads... Without a comprehensive effort, the City will lose the opportunity to stabilize and reinvigorate this neighborhood”

In 1982, the importance of Lower Town’s historic structures was realized when it became part of a National Historic District, requiring zoning review by the local Historic Architecture Review Commission (HARC) for all exterior façade changes in the District. Lower Town is also an Enterprise Zone, enabling tax credits for certain types of improvements, and is included as a state designated Renaissance Area. Historic zoning allows for “mixed-use much like what was found at the turn of the century,” including live/work space for artists.⁶

Lower Town, a thirty-three block area, is flanked by the major downtown anchors of the Four Rivers Performing Arts Center on one side, and the Museum of the American Quilter and Convention Center on the other. Despite its illustrious history, prime location, and its historic designation, Lower Town had fallen into serious disrepair in the past decades. As recently as 2001, some would not walk or drive into the neighborhood, where drug deals, crime, and blight were commonplace. Residents and neighbors were in despair over the extent of urban blight in the neighborhood, and its future looked bleak.

⁶ <http://www.paducahky.com>



Planning and survey work in the neighborhood underscored its deplorable condition. According to the *Lower Town Neighborhood Plan*, published by the City in 2002, fifty-one percent of people in the neighborhood were living in poverty; seventeen percent were unemployed, and the average per capita income was \$8,000. Coupled with a seventy percent rental profile, only thirty percent home ownership, and renters who were for the most part transient, the neighborhood was in real trouble. In the previous year, seventeen drug related crimes were reported, and property values were thirty to fifty percent lower than in other areas of town. A long history of lax code enforcement had made matters worse. *The Lower Town Neighborhood Plan* described the general consensus that the “Lower Town neighborhood is in crisis and at a crossroads... Without a comprehensive effort, the City will lose the opportunity to stabilize and reinvigorate this neighborhood” (City of Paducah, 2002).

Blight conditions prevailed in Lower Town

The neighborhood did, however, have some allies, as well as a history of concerned residents. In the late 1980s, the Lower Town Association had been established by a group of preservationists with the purpose of preserving historic structures in the area. This group was ultimately ineffectual, however, and was reorganized in late 1999 as a “phoenix organization” whose purpose was to organize a core group of community residents to partner with the City’s initiative to address issues of deteriorating infrastructure, crime and urban blight in their community. These neighbors valued the historic character of the neighborhood and saw its proximity to downtown, its scale, and rich historical character as an asset. They believed Lower Town could be restored.

The impetus for this new activism was artist Mark Barone, whose home and studio had been in the neighborhood for sixteen years. He witnessed a drug deal just outside his house, became fed up with the deterioration of his neighborhood, and began agitating for the City to address the neighborhood’s problems. In Barone’s words, the neighborhood had become “dangerous, blighted, and unacceptable” as a place to live and work.

The Planning Department was well aware of the problems in the neighborhood and was equally concerned. Planning Director Tom Barnett had lived in Lower Town when he first moved to Paducah in



1994, and had advocated for a revitalization program for Lower Town in 1996. The City had long since made vital neighborhoods a primary goal for the city government. With support from Barone and the Lower Town Association, the Planning Department initiated a survey of the area as a precursor to developing a Lower Town plan. Lower Town then encompassed 333 structures and 546 units. Of these, 257 were residential units, divided among multi-family (103) and single-family (154) structures. About eighty-five percent of these units were concentrated in a fifteen block area, and seventy percent were rental units. Another seventy structures were commercial, and the neighborhood also included seventy vacant lots (City of Paducah, 2001).

The process of developing the Plan involved an active citizen participation process. The City began meeting with the residents to determine which issues were of concern to the neighborhood, and which were most pressing. They discussed issues of infrastructure (broken sidewalks,

An historic property acquired by the City for restoration

In Barone's words, the neighborhood had become "dangerous, blighted, and unacceptable" as a place to live and work.

absence of lighting), issues of blight (deteriorated and poorly kept properties, abandoned properties), crime, and traffic. There was general agreement that the combination of absentee landlords who had no incentive to keep up their properties, and a policy of non-enforcement of building codes, had contributed to the deterioration of the neighborhood. As a first step in reclaiming Lower Town, in 2001 the City passed the Rental Occupancy Ordinance, which required the purchase of a business license to run rental property and provide for regular inspections of rental property as a condition for issuing licenses. It also gave the Inspection Department the authority to remove tenants from substandard units. The City was aware, however, that active code enforcement ran the danger of resulting in demolition of historic structures, so as buildings were inspected, landlords were given ample opportunity to make improvements. The City also helped market properties in cases in which landlords were unwilling or unable to make the required improvements and wished to sell.

On the basis of discussions with neighbors and extensive survey work, the City published the *Lower Town Neighborhood Plan* in 2002, the culmination of several years of community and city activity. The plan called for a variety of strategies to be applied to Lower Town. Recommendations are related to transportation, lighting,

police enforcement, code enforcement, infrastructure improvements, promotion of the neighborhood, downtown trolley linkage, waterfront planning, funding strategies, and the newly conceived Artist Relocation Program.

The code enforcement strategy relied heavily on the previously enacted Rental Occupancy Ordinance and related fines, and called for the Inspection Department in conjunction with the Paducah Police Department to initiate a Lower Town Task Force for one year. According to the *Lower Town Neighborhood Plan*, this team would, beginning in April 2002, canvas the area door-to-door "initiating enforcement proceedings and or citations to all violators. No stone will be left unturned in cleaning up the neighborhood and having all violations abated" (City of Paducah, 2002). This part of the plan set the tone, and began in earnest the process of rescuing historic structures from further deterioration.

With the implementation of the more aggressive code enforcement program, the extent of deterioration of structures within the neighborhood became clear. Several structures inspected by the City were simply too far gone to rehabilitate, and were demolished. Many more were cited for code violations, with landlords given several six month periods

in which to correct violations. In many instances, however, landlords were unwilling or unable to bring their properties up to code, claiming to have insufficient funds to improve the properties. Also in the course of the inspection process, three low and moderate-income households were relocated to newly rehabilitated structures.

The Department of Planning and the Department of Building Inspection have been careful to build a “firewall” between their departments to avoid the perception that the City is using building inspection as a tool to pressure owners into selling. As Planning Director Barnett stated, “...The city’s goal is to get these properties fixed up. If the landlords can do it, so much the better.” When landlords were unwilling to repair the structures, they would sometimes contact the City, knowing that the property was virtually without value on the open market. Prior to acquiring a property, the City advertised and posted properties for sale in the paper, having done the work to acquire clear title to it. In the case of properties acquired by the City, they were most often purchased at prices exceeding their market value and then transferred at below market value to artists willing to invest.

ARTIST RELOCATION PROGRAM HISTORY

The idea for the Artist Relocation Program (ARP) was brought to the City by Lower Town resident and artist Mark Barone, who is generally

credited with the idea and now serves as the program coordinator. The creation and implementation of the day-to-day program was the result an ongoing collaboration between Barone and Planning Director Tom Barnett. Based on discussions with the community and an assessment of the tools available to them, the ARP became the cornerstone of the *Lower Town Neighborhood Plan*.

The concept behind the ARP is simple. Initially, the hope was to attract somewhere between twenty and thirty artists to relocate to Paducah to repopulate the Lower Town neighborhood, and bring their entrepreneurial, intellectual, and artistic skills to create a new artists’ district in the downtown. The ARP was viewed as an economic strategy as well as a residential one. Artists, it was thought, would become a new community of residents who would rehabilitate their structures, live in the neighborhood, and run galleries and studios out of new live/work spaces. They would also provide new investments of time and money, and thus creating a new economic underpinning to the neighborhood. The additional promise of the plan was that if they were successful in Lower Town, the City would use similar tools in other areas of town.

The Artist Relocation Program model is straightforward. Once the City has acquired a property in Lower Town, it is advertised through the ARP to artists across the country. Mark Barone, first employed by



the City in 2000 to run this program, places advertisements for the program in prominent art magazines across the country. It is Barone who is the first interface between artists and the City. He gives artists information about the incentives available to them, discusses the city and the neighborhood, and hosts those who decide to come to Lower Town to explore the possibilities. He shows them available properties and tries to match artists' needs and interests to available spaces. Interested artists then submit proposals to the City; these are reviewed by the Urban Renewal Authority. Often, according to a representative of the Urban Renewal Authority, they are looking at as many as three applications for one property. To date, the City has spent \$639,000 acquiring and stabilizing historic properties in the area. The City estimates that private investment from artists (including bank loans) within the district is now over \$14 million.

Everyone involved agrees that home ownership is central to the success of the program. Too many artists have been victimized by the now well-known pattern of artists populating fringe areas, only to make it

The Mark Palmer gallery

attractive as a destination and be forced out by gentrification. The ARP offers home ownership and the long-term security associated with it. Barone and Barnett agree that they "would have been happy with thirty artists." As of March 2005, twenty-seven artist galleries (mainly rehab projects, with some infill) were open as artist living space and galleries. Another seven infill projects were permitted and underway; an additional three new infill projects were to start construction in the spring of 2005. In addition, thirteen rehabs are currently underway through the Artist Relocation Program, and three rehabs are currently underway as independent projects. Among those building a new infill project is the recent winner of the annual quilt show, who is building an 8,000 square foot living space and production facility in the neighborhood. Already her presence has attracted two quilt artists who are planning on opening galleries in the area. Almost all of the vacant lots in the area of heaviest residential concentration have been spoken for.

DEPARTMENTAL COOPERATION

The success of the ARP involves close cooperation among city agencies. The Department of Building Inspection operates independently, inspecting properties in the district, and working with landlords to bring properties up to code. Director of Planning Tom Barnett oversees the ARP, and is actively involved in all aspects of it, with Mark Barone

serving as the liaison between the City and artists interested in the program. The Director of Planning makes decisions and recommendations about property acquisition by the City. When the City wishes to purchase a property it is publicly advertised, and the Planning Department seeks approval from the Paducah Urban Renewal Authority, which is the entity that actually acquires the properties.

A third critical public agency is the Historic Architecture Review Commission (HARC). HARC is empowered through the National



Julie Shaw Gallery

Historic District guidelines to review any proposed exterior changes in the District, and evaluates them according to Secretary of the Interior Standards. HARC views the ARP as an effective tool for saving many at-risk historic structures. There has, however, been tension between the program and the “strict historic interpretationists” who feel the ARP allows improvements that are not strictly in character with the historic structures. Despite this ongoing tension, overall HARC has positive feelings about what has been accomplished, particularly in light of a history of frequent demolition as the principal method of code enforcement. Issues regarding the cost of authentic restorations and available funds do crop up, but have been negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

HARC remains concerned as well about the nature and quality of infill development. Several lots have been infilled to date, again with negotiation with HARC. All involved noted the caveat that in terms of the infill structures, the City does not want to engage in the “futile attempt to make the new appear old,” but is looking for designs that reflect and respect the historic materials and scale of the neighborhood. A good example is storefronts recently built on spec by Paducah Bank. This four-unit gallery structure mimics the scale of historic storefront, with tall glass storefront windows, and residential or studio uses above. All four of the units are occupied by artists and present active and well-tended facades on the street.

PADUCAH BANK

The *sine quo non* of the ARP is its private partner, Paducah Bank. A community bank with its headquarters in Lower Town, Paducah Bank was, in their own words, willing to “throw all standard banking processes out the window.” In the beginning they were worried about investing in a neighborhood that was so blighted, but were reassured by the fact that one of their largest early loans was to a doctor who had stable finances and who had decided to become a full-time artist. He was moving to Paducah through the ARP to restore a Victorian house and add gallery space to the rear. The doctor is pleased with the partnership with the bank and the City, and remains committed to the program.

Today Paducah Bank has a loan officer whose job is to work with artists who are interested in relocating to Lower Town. Once they have established that the artist is creditworthy, they will loan up to 300 percent of appraised value for rehab and construction, at seven percent on a fixed thirty year term. (In some cases the City bought down loans from an earlier seven and one-half percent.) The philosophy of the bank in this unusual lending practice is that they want their loan to cover both purchase and renovation costs because they want the artists to be able to support themselves while the work is in progress. They view the artists’ success as a priority and are willing to



be flexible in their lending practices to maximize that possibility. As the bank is quick to point out, this is not a purely philanthropic activity on their part. They are making a decent return on their money, have seen their home community turn around, and have their name associated with the most successful revitalization in town. To date they have loaned about \$6 million in thirty-six loans to relocating artists, with an average loan amount of \$168,000. An additional eleven loans for a total of \$2,465,000 are pending, and with the approval of loans pending the average loan amount will increase to \$181,000. The bank estimates they currently talk to five to ten new artists per week. To date the bank has had no problems with late loan payments.

Ongoing neighborhood renovation

PROCESS

In order to be accepted into the program, interested artists must submit a proposal, which is reviewed by the Urban Renewal Board before properties are turned over to them. These proposals contain information on intended use of the property; detailed plans; drawings of all related elevations and façade details; detailed cost estimates of the proposed work; a timeline for the work; and evidence of financial ability to complete the project. These are reviewed by both the ARP coordinator and more formally by the Urban Renewal Board. In some cases the Board reviews more than one proposal for a site, trying to choose artists who are most likely to be successful.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to the ARP, the *Lower Town Neighborhood Plan* recommended a variety of infrastructure and street improvements. In 2004 the City installed new street lights throughout the neighborhood. The fixtures have a traditional/historic design style, and lateral poles to accommodate banners advertising upcoming events and festivals. The lighting was funded through a \$650,000 Federal Highway Department grant acquired under the auspices of the Paducah Area Transit System, which is located in Lower Town and has been a strong partner from the beginning. In addition, as individual structures are improved, the sidewalk and curb adjacent to them are fixed through a \$500,000 city fund.

To prevent high speed “boom box traffic” cutting through the neighborhood, most intersections have been posted with four way stop signs. Although a simple fix, this change has dramatically reduced the amount of traffic traversing the neighborhood at high speeds. These infrastructure improvements have been accompanied by a more visible police presence, with police officers sometimes accompanying code enforcement officials and inspectors into certain properties.

COSTS AND BENEFITS

It is difficult to see any disadvantages to the Artist Relocation Project. The advantages to artists are clear. The ARP offers a variety of benefits, the most significant of which is the opportunity to own the building



Texaco Station gallery, before and after

in which they will live and work, and to acquire it at little or no cost. Properties are often offered at cost, or even free, as an incentive to artists to “take them on,” and to come and be a part of the program.

In addition to the property itself, the artists benefit from:

- One hundred percent financing for purchase and rehab of an existing structure or for the building of a new structure in Lower Town;
- Thirty year fixed rate financing for up to 300 percent of appraised value;
- Free lots for new construction;
- \$2,500 for professional fees;
- Sales tax exemptions for all construction materials, due to inclusion in the Enterprise Zone;
- Websites funded by the City of Paducah;
- National marketing of the City and Lower Town; and
- Mixed-use zoning to allow for live/work space.

There are also significant intangibles. All of the artists agreed that a major incentive was to join a pioneering group of artists in forming a new art-based community. Many had been living in more isolated circumstances, and others felt frustrated with environments where the cost of doing business was consistently prohibitive. Lower Town offers a welcoming environment, and a community ready, willing and able to support the artists’ work and lives.

The City is also a winner with the ARP. As Mayor Paxton states, “these folks are active citizens. They serve on boards and they care about the City.” Paducah has also seen an historic neighborhood rehabilitated, an increase in its tax base, and the addition of the creative and intellectual capital of a new community of citizens whose work and neighborhood will attract tourists to a revitalized arts district. In some cases there is also a spillover effect when people elect not to relocate to Lower Town but like Paducah, and seek to locate homes and businesses in the adjacent downtown.

The ARP has resulted in the investment of \$14 to \$15 million in the Lower Town neighborhood, much of which has gone to local contractors. The fruit of their investment is a renovated and beautiful new community adjacent to the downtown. The City has also gained a great deal of national publicity for the program, partly as part of a deliberate strategy to apply for national awards to bring attention to Paducah and the ARP. The ARP has received a national APA Award, among several others, and with the continued advertising campaign its reputation is growing. Mark Barone estimates that he has spoken to about 200 artists from 41 states; the web site, www.paducaharts.com, has gotten in excess of 45,000 hits.

Several people noted that the previous year had seen a \$10 million increase in tourist spending in Paducah, much of which they attribute to Paducah's growing reputation as a center of arts and culture. Although this increase cannot be attributed entirely to the ARP, most feel the program has played a significant role in increasing tourism. Paducah's stated objective is to become the "Soho of the South," or the new Santa Fe. Among the artists and the representatives of the city there is a real belief that Paducah is well on its way.

The ARP has also resulted in new investment in Lower Town independent of the program. Two local television broadcasters are moving into the neighborhood, having bought and rehabilitated historic homes privately. The Paducah Bank has built three attached gallery-studio units on spec, and all are fully occupied. Although the Department of Planning recognizes the importance of continuing to support this fledgling program until it is completely stabilized, early indications are that it is having the intended effect of increasing private investment in the area.

FINANCES

It is difficult to identify all the various expenditures related to the Artist Relocation Program. Many were one-time infrastructure improvements such as lighting and paving. Others involve one-time property acquisition



through the Urban Renewal Revolving Fund and the City's General Fund. The combined expenditures on property acquisition as of 2005 from these sources are approximately \$639,000. Other costs include those related to more stringent building inspection services, staff, and administration.

Within the Planning Department, the ARP budget was \$42,000 in the first year, and is \$65,000 this year. The Department intends to request \$100,000 for the 2006 fiscal year, but predicts an actual budget of approximately \$75,000. This budget covers the salary of the project administrator, costs of advertising the project nationally, costs of the \$2,500 worth of services and support offered to artists, and other miscellaneous costs. The City estimates it gets a \$6 return for every \$1 spent.

In addition to Paducah's investment, the artists themselves have invested many thousands of their own dollars in securing and improving their home and gallery spaces. A recent estimate of dollar investment for the forty-five artists who have relocated to Paducah is \$14 million. In a city this size, this scale of investment is having a significant impact on the local economy.

Paducah Bank gallery project

LOWER TOWN ARTIST RELOCATION PROGRAM COSTS

CITY OF PADUCAH COSTS

Item	Cost	Source	Use
Lower Town Redevelopment	\$639,443	CD-39	Property acquisition, stabilization, etc.
Architect Fee, 524 Harrison St.	\$2,388	CD-71	524 Harrison St.
Artist Relocation 2001	\$13,338	General Fund	Promotion of program
Artist Relocation 2002	\$15,015	General Fund	"
Artist Relocation 2003	\$21,745	General Fund	"
Artist Relocation 2004	\$26,453	General Fund	"
Artist Relocation 2005	\$30,708	General Fund	"
Artist Relocation Grant	\$6,000	CD-70	"
Architect General Fund	\$33,405	General Fund	Reimbursement for professional fees
Art Festival 2003	\$8,144		Promotion
Art Festival 2004	\$12,551		Promotion
Lower Town Lights match	\$110,000		City contribution to new lighting
Salaries to Date	\$122,920		
Total Artist Relocation Program Cost	\$1,042,110		
Less Sale of Property	-\$130,758		
Total ARP Cost to City to Date	\$911,352		

LOWER TOWN ARTIST RELOCATION PROGRAM COSTS

OTHER INVESTMENTS IN LOWER TOWN

Item	Cost	Source	Use
Sidewalk Improvements	\$500,000	General Fund	Safety
Lighting Improvements	\$650,000	Federal Highway Grant	144 Period Lights installed
Stop Signs	\$137,500	General Fund	Safety
Artist Investments in properties	\$7,600,000	One time only	
Paducah Bank Rehab Loans (34)	\$5,632,517	Paducah Bank	Historic Structure Rehabs
Paducah Bank Loans for Infill (13)	\$2,892,000	Paducah Bank	New Infill Constructions
Paducah Bank Spec Project	\$400,000	Paducah Bank	3-3000 sq ft Spec Bldgs sold to Artists
Paducah Transit Authority Improvements	\$5,100,000	Federal Highway Grant	Rehab Historic Hoe Supply Bldg into PATS Hdqtrs and Transfer Station
Total Investment in Lower Town	\$22,912,017		

ESTIMATED REVENUES

Property Taxes (59 new residents)(annual)	\$183,218	Estimated total over the 5-year period; \$36,643 annual average
Building Permits	\$44,096	
Electrical Permits	\$3,540	
Contractor Licenses	\$34,140	
Artist Business Licenses	\$17,404	Estimated total over the 5-year period; \$3,480 annual average
Total Revenues to Date	\$282,398	

THE ARTISTS

In the course of the site visit, the team interviewed four resident artists and one resident non-artist, all of whom had relocated to Paducah through the Artist Relocation Program or because of the art community there. The interviewed residents all felt that there were certain elements in the ARP which were critical to its success. The character and size of the Lower Town area was top on the list. They felt that the historic character, defined boundary, proximity to downtown, and general feel of the area were important elements in their decision to move there. The ability to own homes and to have live/work space was equally important.

For most of them the small town environment was both a plus and a minus. It had the advantage of providing a welcoming and familiar community, and the negative of being somewhat limited socially and culturally, especially in the winter months. Some artists travel to visit family or for a winter break during those months. They all agreed that there was something exhilarating to them about having moved outside their respective “comfort zones, into an urban pioneering situation.” They were pleased with being part of a new urban adventure.

Mark Palmer

Mark Palmer, a painter since the 1990s, owns one of the oldest structures in the neighborhood. He had been running a gallery in Washington, D.C. and had recently made the decision to become a full-time artist when he heard about the ARP. He expressed frustration at having been an “urban pioneer” in a tough neighborhood in Washington, D.C. to find gallery and studio space he could afford, only to be pushed out by gentrification. He was also fully aware that making it as an artist in the D.C. market would be very difficult due to the high cost of living. The prospect of home ownership was very appealing to him, and he was also looking for a change.

In Mark’s case, he had run the Washington, D.C. gallery with artist Craig Kittner, who had already moved to Paducah and was encouraging Mark to do the same. Mark saw an ad in a national art magazine and decided to visit in January of 2002, deciding soon thereafter to make the move. His gallery features many nationally known artists, and he does some art showing and buying at shows and through the Internet, so he had some flexibility in choosing a base location. By September of that same year he was moving in, and was the fifth artist to relocate through the program.

Like many of the artists, he cited Mark Barone as one of the most persuasive factors in his decision to move. Barone, as a practicing artist himself, whose work Mark Palmer knew, could talk from his own experience about many of the factors of concern to artists. Barone's enthusiasm, and own personal story of seeing the neighborhood improving, welcoming other artists, and running a successful gallery space himself, all contributed to Mark Palmer's decision.

Mark expressed great satisfaction with his move. As he says, he has much more gallery space here, and much nicer space than he would have anywhere in Washington D.C. He likes living above his studio and gallery, and also really appreciates the welcoming community of other artists. He finds Paducah very open, and looks forward to growing his gallery business with Paducah as a base. Like the other artists, Mark stressed the idea that the next frontier for the new artist community would be to develop their marketing strategy for local and regional buyers as well as for the tourist trade.



Mark Palmer Gallery, before and after

Julie Shaw

Julie was living in rural Ignacio, Colorado on a piece of land where she had built a large studio and jewelry production space, her own log cabin, and a guest house. Her one-of-a-kind jewelry is sold in over 250 stores across the country. When she first heard about the ARP, she was already looking to relocate to a less remote location.

Although she was aware of the website for the ARP, she didn't really consider it until she broke her foot and was stranded on her land for over six weeks, when she had the time to really ponder a move and study the options. It was during that period that she contacted Mark Barone to talk about the ARP. After talking to Barone, she came for a three-day visit, fell in love with the building she now occupies and with the area, and made the decision on the spot.

Julie now produces her jewelry in a downstairs workshop, with gallery space adjacent, and lives above in a restored Victorian brick house. She says the opportunity to be in on something new, be an urban pioneer, was enormously appealing to her. She was also in search of a community of like-minded artists, and feels she has found that in Paducah.

Monica Bilak

Monica and her husband lived for several years in Kenya, East Africa. They had returned home to the U.S. and had located in Nashville when they came to Paducah to visit friends. With three children, aged four, six, and eight, they were looking for a less urban setting than Nashville, and for a friendly community where they could raise their children. Although not practicing artists, Monica learned about what was going on in Lower Town, and she and her husband decided to make the move.

The Bilaks bought their house privately, not through the ARP, and run a coffee and gift shop on the ground floor of the house, featuring specialty coffees. Her husband, a nurse-practitioner, found work in one of the two major hospitals located nearby, and they are now firmly ensconced in the Lower Town community. This family was attracted by the good public schools in Paducah, by the ease of small town life, and by the welcoming community. For them it was far more affordable even than Nashville, and they are committed to raising their family in Lower Town.

Bill Renzulli

Bill Renzulli was one of the first artists to move to Paducah through the program. A practicing physician in the Wilmington, Delaware area, he had decided to become a full-time artist, and was looking for a place where he could have the space and community support to do so. He saw an advertisement in *Art Calendar*, and subsequently contacted Mark Barone and visited Lower Town.



The Global Nomad coffee house and gallery

During his visit he met not only with Barone, but also with Mayor Paxton and with the directors of the local museums to try and assess the art environment. He was attracted by the energy of the people he met, and felt Lower Town offered the scale and density of community he was looking for. In 2002 he moved to Paducah, restored the large Victorian in which he and his wife live, and added on a studio and gallery space at the rear of the building.



Global Nomad coffee house interior

He states that having been in Paducah three years, he never expected the success the program is experiencing. The number of artists coming to the community far exceeds his expectations, and he is very pleased with the community that is developing. Bill noted the large number of non-artists and locals who are now moving into Lower Town as a result of the ARP. He felt this was a good sign for the viability of their neighborhood.

Like other artists, he sells his work in galleries in other cities, but is based in Paducah for his work and for the gallery he operates. He agreed with the other artists who stated that although there is a lot of tourism in Paducah, it has not historically been art buyers who come to town. He is at the forefront of the effort to improve marketing of the artist district and gallery community, with a goal of increasing the number of people coming into the neighborhood to see and buy good art.

Bill cites the possibility for home ownership, the well-defined historic neighborhood, and the critical mass of artists that has now developed as the most important factors in this new venture. Like the other artists, he is very committed to the place and feels that as more and more artists arrive and complete their gallery and home spaces, the reputation of the gallery district will continue to improve.

Aynex Mercado

Aynex is a quilt artist who was living in western Massachusetts until this year. She has a home/studio renovation under construction in Lower Town, and is planning to open her gallery in the next couple of months. Aynex was feeling isolated in Massachusetts, and was also looking to be part of a community of artists. As she stated, every quilter knows about Paducah. She had visited many times to see the Quilt Museum and to attend the annual quilt show.

When she saw the ad for the ARP in an art magazine, and saw the low housing prices, she decided to visit. When she visited, she attended a potluck at Bill Renzulli's home and was impressed with the friendliness and welcoming environment among the artists. Her decision to relocate to Paducah was based upon the people she met while visiting, as well as the knowledge that one of the most famous quilters in the country was relocating her studio to the neighborhood as well.

She agreed with the other artists that marketing is a priority for them, and like the others felt that full commercial viability is still several years away. She noted, however, that six to eight major cities are within driving distance for access to other galleries and outlets.

FUTURE PLANS

The City intended from the beginning to use the ARP and the Lower Town Neighborhood Plan as a blueprint, or at least as an incubator, for ideas for revitalizing other neighborhoods. Two nearby neighborhoods have been identified as the next target areas, and planning work is already beginning in the Fountain Avenue area and in Upper Town.

As far as the artists themselves are concerned, now that many of them are settled in their new spaces, the priority for them is to improve the marketing of their galleries not only for the tourist economy, and for those visiting Paducah for the many special events and festivals, but to attract local residents back into Lower Town into the new arts district. Plans are in place for a campaign of colorful banners around town to advertise the open studio days, and for an ongoing program of open studios and galleries throughout the year.



A restored gallery house in Lower Town

IMPACTS

The ARP has clearly had many significant impacts on the neighborhood and on Paducah. Within the Lower Town neighborhood, Paducah Bank and individual artists have invested approximately \$14 million. In addition, the City has overseen significant improvements to the infrastructure of the neighborhood, and has guided public investment such as that of the Paducah Transit Authority into the area. Crime has been reduced, and drug-related traffic has diminished considerably.

Home ownership is now dominant in the area, and a new arts district is in fact in place. The Main Street Association and others associated with the program credit a recent rise in tourism and the stabilization of downtown to the program. There is no doubt that the neighborhood is a bustling and energized area, with construction ongoing on every block, people on the street, gallery windows open and attractive, and a new coffee house in place.

The long-term impacts remain to be seen. The City has expressed a desire to create a national image for Paducah as an arts and cultural destination and increase regional tourism. The Artist Relocation Program in Lower Town has certainly increased Paducah's visibility in the national arts community. Paducah is somewhat difficult to get to for those outside the region, and is competing with many other national art districts around the country. Much will depend upon the artists' economic success, and their ability to market the district to locals and to visitors. With the City of Paducah firmly committed to the success of the program, and with the collective experience of the artists who have moved there, ongoing efforts at marketing will evolve.



Assessing Project Success

Success in Meeting Project Goals

In the City's estimation, the goals of the Lower Town Neighborhood Plan have been essentially accomplished, and the Plan is now considered to be "fully implemented." This assumes the successful completion of all of the planned infill developments, and the long-term success of the artists who have relocated to Lower Town.

→ *Attract working artists from around the country to relocate to Paducah.*

The City has been successful in attracting the number and kind of established artists they had hoped to Paducah. Early indications are that the artists and gallery owners are pleased with what they have received from the City and with the welcoming environment they have encountered.

→ *Increase home ownership and property values in Lower Town.*

There is little question that the ARP has increased home ownership and property values in Lower Town. In a neighborhood that was seventy percent rental, and mainly transient, every property that has changed hands is now owner occupied. Although final demographics in the area are not yet settled, this goal seems to have been reached.

→ *Rehabilitate historic structures in Lower Town.*

Through the inspection and city acquisition process, some structures were lost, but many have been rehabilitated. Although there is some ongoing tension between strict preservationists and the ARP, the general consensus seems to be that the program has resulted in the preservation and rehabilitation of a significant number of historic structures.

→ *Reduce crime and eliminate blight in the neighborhood.*

Again, new figures on crime in the neighborhood were not available at the time of the visit, but there is clearly a great deal more street life and visible community in Lower Town than there was before the ARP. Much of the drug trafficking has been driven out of the neighborhood, and the streets are again safe to walk in the day and night.

→ *Economically revitalize Lower Town (and Paducah) with an influx of new retail and service businesses.*

The twenty-seven galleries that have opened so far and the ten new infill projects that are in planning or under construction will certainly achieve the goal of creating an influx of new retail businesses. It is too early in the program to assess the economic success of these businesses, but if marketing efforts are successful, and the reputation of the arts district continues to grow, the future looks promising.

Selection Committee Discussion: What We Learned

The Selection Committee discussion identified several important lessons to be learned from the Lower Town Artist Relocation Project. These observations and themes can help placemakers and policymakers in other cities to learn from the experience in Paducah.

Creative Partnerships

Revitalization of an entire historic neighborhood is difficult for either a private or public entity to undertake alone. The code enforcement power of the City was a necessary foundation for what was to follow. Similarly, it was important for the City to be willing to take the risk of acquiring properties which, although historic in nature, were compromised by years of neglect. However, it took the private sector, in the form of the artists themselves as well as the support they received from Paducah Bank, to begin to reinvest in this historic neighborhood. Once some momentum was established, these entities could take advantage of economic investment in the area that was in turn spurring other adjacent investment, thereby strengthening the position of both the public and private partners.

Achieving Critical Mass

The Artist Relocation Program has demonstrated the power of community, and its ability to transform neighborhoods and even cities. Each of the artists we interviewed underscored the importance for them of relocating to a community of other artists whose creative energy could stimulate their own work, and who could provide a supportive group of friends and neighbors with whom to undertake the process of creating a new arts district. It would have been difficult, or maybe even impossible, to attract artists on the same scale without as large an area of good housing stock and building lots to work with.

Creative Economy in Action

Although still in its early stages, the Lower Town Artist Relocation Program is adding credence to the recent research on the power of the creative economy. The new arts district that is being created has already jump-started a struggling downtown, and brought new visitors from throughout the region to Paducah. Challenges remain in attracting more art buyers from the local area and from beyond the region, but the program has added to an already existing reputation for Paducah as an arts hub, and has strengthened Paducah's power as an arts destination.

History is Important

One of the most important factors in attracting artists to Lower Town was the quality of the historic structures that were being offered, and the rich history surrounding the neighborhood. The town leaders and Paducah's citizens felt a strong allegiance to this beleaguered neighborhood which embodied so much of Paducah's rich history. Historic buildings and historic districts add character and quality to any city, and can become a draw in the larger process of economic revitalization.

Adapting the Ideas

The ideas underlying the Artist Relocation Project can be adapted to other cities across the country. The role of the private and public sectors may vary, and even the nature of the group to be appealed to might differ, but this project demonstrates that creative thinking and partnering, centered around home ownership, can invent new ways of bringing new life and an entire new community to a city, and at the same time revitalize a struggling neighborhood.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

See project website: <http://paducaharts.com/flash.html>

See City of Paducah websites:

<http://www.city-data.com/city/Paducah-Kentucky.html> and

<http://www.paducahky.com>

City of Paducah (2001), *Lower Town (Survey of Structures)*,
Department of Planning.

City of Paducah (2002), *Lower Town Neighborhood Plan*,
Department of Planning.

RELATED RUDY BRUNER AWARD WINNERS

Text taken from <http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner/>; see also <http://www.brunerfoundation.org>

Project Row Houses, Houston, TX; 1997 Silver Medal Winner

Project Row Houses has forged new connections among Houston communities through the rehabilitation of twenty-two historic “shotgun” style houses which now provide art gallery and installation space, showcasing the work of prominent African-American artists. In addition, Project Row Houses provides five houses and support services for single working mothers, and a variety of daycare and after school programs for neighborhood youth.

Village of Arts and Humanities, Philadelphia, PA; 2001 Gold Medal Winner

The Village is a private, non-profit community-based organization dedicated to revitalizing its host neighborhood through the arts. Begun in 1986 as a summer project to engage neighborhood children in building a community park, the Village has grown into a major provider of arts-inspired programs in education, land transformation, construction, and economic development. The organization serves over 10,000 low-income, primarily African-American youth and families in North Philadelphia. It seeks to build community through innovative arts, educational, social, construction and economic development programs. In all of its activities, the Village seeks to do justice to the humanity and social conditions of people in North Philadelphia and in similar urban situations.

Betts-Longworth Historic District, Cincinnati, OH; 1993 Silver Medal Winner

The Betts-Longworth Historic District consists of a ten-block subneighborhood in the West End of Cincinnati (one block northwest of downtown) that contains both Italianate and Queen Anne architecture. The project sought to establish a new mini-neighborhood through the preservation of historic buildings and the creation of new homes. This revitalization of a blighted historic neighborhood in downtown Cincinnati provides affordable housing in a socially and economically integrated setting, with minority involvement in both development and construction.