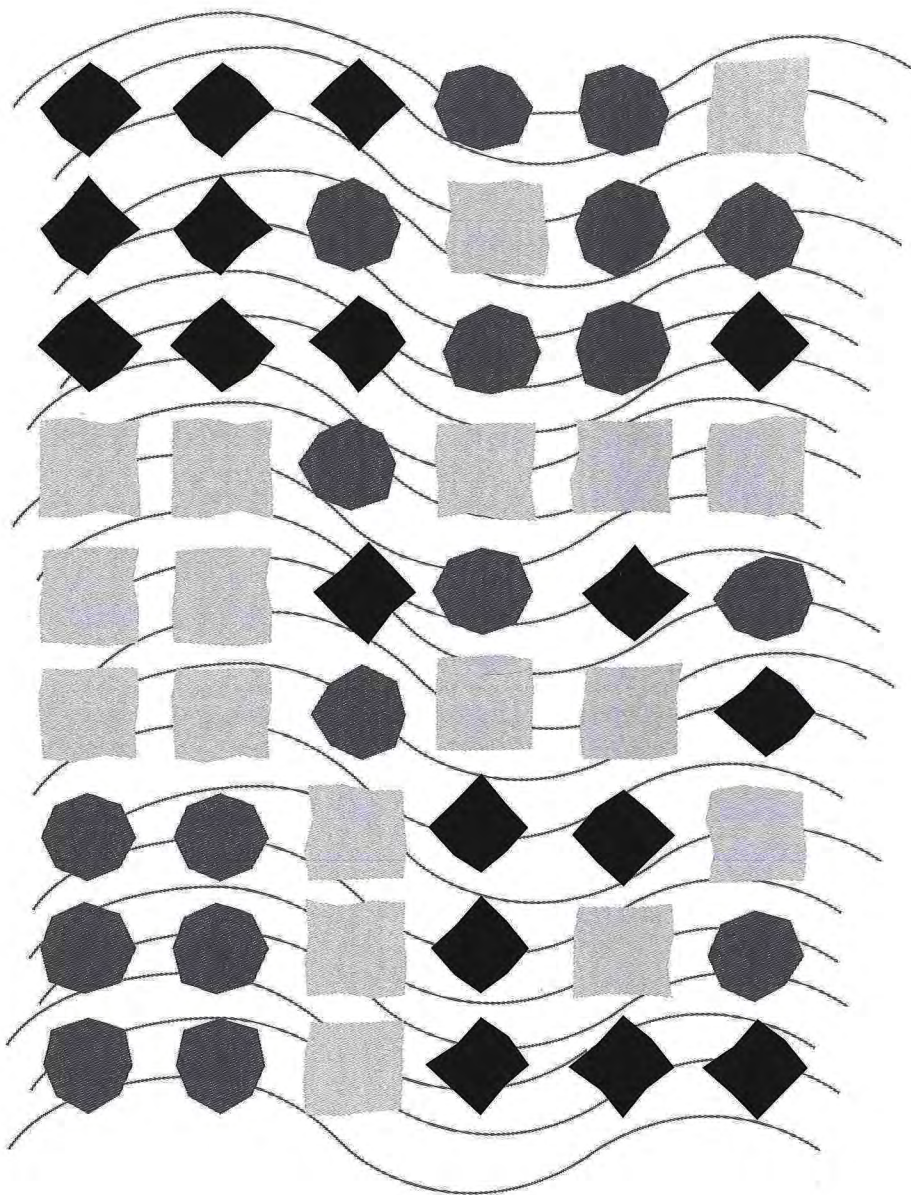


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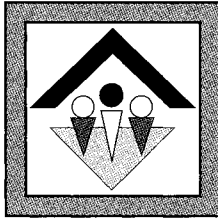
BUILDING COALITIONS FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

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MAYA ANGELOU COMMUNITY INITIATIVE Portland, Oregon

SUMMARY OF SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Initial Reasons For Including This Project as a Finalist

- This project brought a community together.
- They developed low cost residential units and assured long term sustainability of affordable housing.
- The area in which the development occurred was blighted and has been significantly improved by this effort.
- This was a small-scale, grassroots program — neighbor helping neighbor.
- The project involved housing and community organizing and improvements.

Selection Committee Concerns and Questions

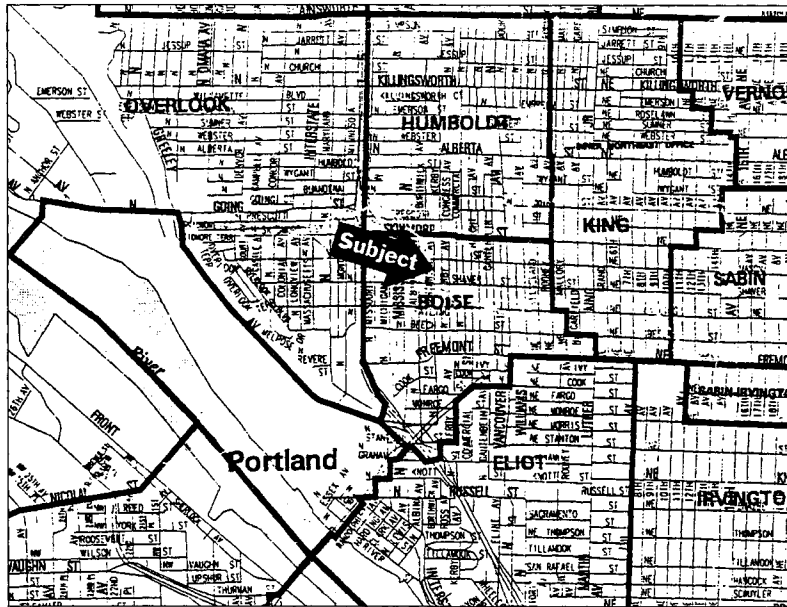
- Were any other projects (in Portland or elsewhere) useful as models? How did the participatory strategy develop?
- What was the relationship between the city and Housing Our Families (HOF)? Was there real “empowerment” (did HOF have real control)?
- What strategies have been used to develop/sustain community activism? What evidence is there on how well it has been sustained? Has internal leadership emerged?

- What is the history and makeup of HOF? Does HOF go beyond this project?
- What is the design quality of the project (building and landscaping) — including issues such as meeting residents’ needs, aesthetics, use of materials and finishes, ease of maintenance, and defensible space?
- What evidence is there of impact on the surrounding neighborhood (crime, pride, appearance, property values)?
- Was there an overall neighborhood plan prior to the development of this project? Is there now?
- \$30,000 per unit is very inexpensive. Is that a real figure (that is, are there expenses that aren’t included in that figure)? What were the tradeoffs made to reduce cost?

THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

What It Is

- Maya Angelou Community Action Initiative is “a comprehensive strategy for urban renewal that used renovation of a key apartment complex to leverage broad community revitalization in the surrounding neighborhood.” It consists of:



Location

- renovation of 42 units of low-income housing aimed at women and children — the Maya Angelou Apartments
- organizing the surrounding community to develop and implement a multifaceted action plan for broader revitalization.

Who Made the Submission?

- Housing Our Families. HOF is a women’s community development corporation whose mission is to develop projects which address the impact of poverty on the lives of women and children.

Major Goals

- To create stable, affordable rental housing mainly for minority and low income families headed by females.
- To revitalize a community beset with drugs, crime, deteriorating business districts and diminished hope.

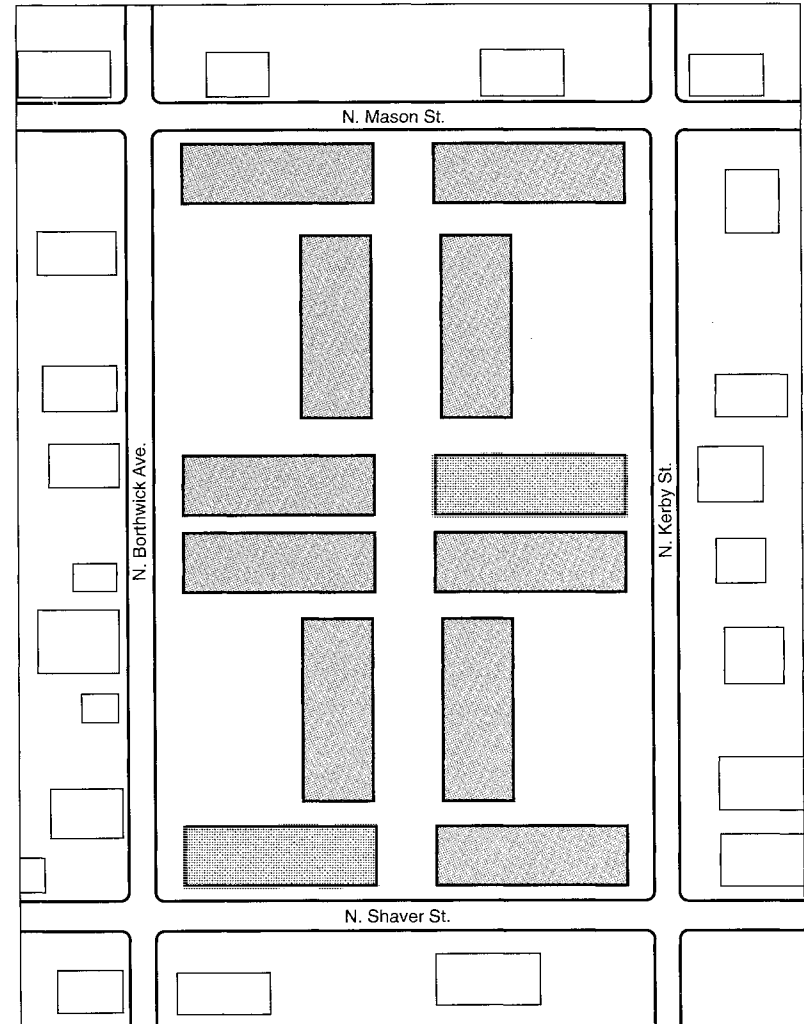
Accomplishments

- Following a string of failures by private landlords, HOF has successfully renovated this complex into 42 units of safe, comfortable and affordable rental housing.
- There was a strong element of community participation in the planning, and an especially successful program for using minority contractors and local labor in the construction.
- The construction was completed at a very modest cost and is fully occupied.
- Neighborhood organizations have been reinvigorated or created, and are strong and active.
- Ongoing programs are successfully providing physical improvements to local homes and streets, anti-crime efforts, and youth jobs and enrichment activities.
- Housing abandonment has subsided, housing values are up, and new families (including many who are white and professional) are moving into the neighborhood. There is little evidence of original residents being forced out.
- Crime is down (by perception and police statistics) and community spirit is improved.

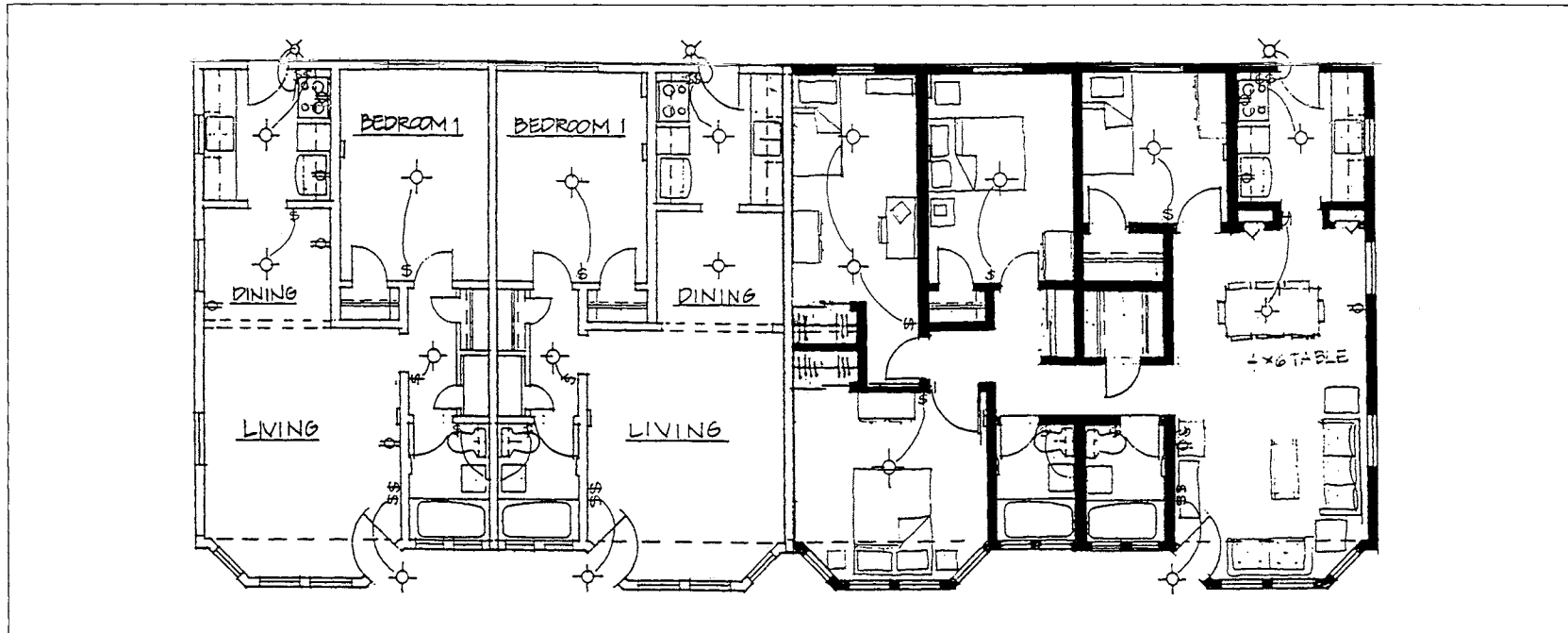
Issues That Could Affect Selection as a Winner

- This was one of most distressed neighborhoods in Portland, suffering serious deterioration and HOF has clearly had a major impact on it. Significant progress has been made in turning the community around: crime is down, structures are being improved, property values have improved and community spirit is growing.
- While neighbors are well organized, progress has been slower in organizing tenants. Only a handful of tenants are involved in management and there is not yet an effective and empowered tenants association.
- HOF created a strategy to deal with the threat of gentrification by providing stable low cost rental housing as well as assistance to low income and elderly residents to improve and maintain their property.

- A negative side effect of improvements and increased property values is that it is getting harder for HOF to find additional inexpensive houses to buy and renovate for low cost rental units. There is a potential for future gentrification.
- HOF is an unusual and strikingly democratic organization — a feminist consciousness raising group that evolved into a community developer. It is particularly atypical in its focus on poverty as a women's and children's issue, and in its adherence to a non-hierarchical, consensus-based decision making style.
- HOF is a very hands-on operation. Some worry that, as it grows in size and complexity of projects, the organizational style that serves it so well now might prove unwieldy.
- Maya Angelou Apartments is the restoration of a visually pleasant but architecturally modest building. Its design could have been improved slightly with more attention to some aspects of materials and detailing. The site plan does make good use of principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).
- The project got off the ground with a 100% loan of public funds, about half of which has now been replaced by private financing. The development could not have happened through initial reliance on private, market mechanisms.
- Rehabilitation was very cost-efficient. HOF set clear priorities on where money should be spent — providing solid, safe, decent housing — and maintained tight control of the budget. Expenses were kept down by retaining and reusing most of the structures and fixtures and by use of volunteer labor.
- HOF demonstrated an ability to move very quickly through the planning and construction process using (some would say in spite of) their consensus management style. The fully rehabilitated facility opened one year after purchase.



Site Plan



One- and Four-bedroom Unit Plans

PROCESS

Chronology

- **1990.** HOF founded.
- **1992.** HOF renovates fourplex for low income rental.
- **Spring 1993.** HOF and the Portland Development Corporation begin discussion of possible HOF purchase and renovation of Colonial Park.
- **Spring 1993.** Before purchase HOF begins outreach and discussions with community, through flyers and door-to-door interviews, on needs for the apartment complex and neighborhood. HOF holds community meeting to present possibility of buying and renovating Colonial Park. HOF asks for and gets community "go-ahead" for purchase.
- **August 1993.** Colonial Park is purchased by HOF at sheriff's sale. HOF uses 100% loan from Portland Development Commission.
- **September 1993.** HOF holds a "paint-a-thon" of neighborhood house to increase community awareness of change and sense of hope for the future.
- **October 1993.** HOF runs community forum to elicit concerns, suggestions about the design and management of the property.
- **November 1993.** Second community forum develops a list of four major community concerns: safety (drug dealers, dangers in Unthank Park); physical revitalization (need to rehabilitate neighboring homes); community programming (social events); and youth problems (need for activities and employment).

- **December 1993.** Construction begins on apartment renovation.
- **January 1994.** Third community forum — residents are presented with possible projects which address their list of needs. A fourteen-project action plan is created and approved.
- **February 1994.** Resident committees and HOF meet to develop timelines, budgets and implementation strategies for the start of each aspect of the action plan.
- **September 1994.** Maya Angelou Apartments is completed and opened with neighborhood party.
- **February 1995.** Community meeting is held to kick off second year, with review of previous action plan (all projects underway or completed) and development of new projects for coming year.
- **March 1995.** Poet Maya Angelou visits her namesake apartment complex.
- **April 1995.** Maya Angelou Apartments mortgage is refinanced through \$575,000 private (CRA) loan.

Key Participants

(people we interviewed are indicated with an asterisk*)

Housing Our Families (HOF)

- Gretchen Dursch*, Executive Director, HOF
- Kris Smock*, Maya Angelou Project Coordinating Committee (VISTA volunteer in charge of community outreach)
- Debra Knapper*, Maya Angelou Tenant Outreach Coordinator (VISTA volunteer)
- Linda Grear, Housing Manager
- Carmen Schleiger, construction manager
- Board of Directors and staff (met and interviewed over pot luck dinner).



City of Portland

- Gretchen Kafoury*, City Commissioner
- Eric Sten*, Assistant to City Commissioner
- Neyle Hunter*, Portland Development Commission (PDC)
- Nike Kutkendal*, former Deputy District Attorney
- Steve Rudman*, Bureau of Housing and Community Development
- Martha McLennan*, Bureau of Housing and Community Development
- Lt. Findling*, Portland Police.

Designers and Contractors

- Martha Andrews, architect
- Mike Purcell*, general contractor
- Will White*, construction manager and consultant from Housing Development Center
- Shirley Minor*, plumbing sub-contractor
- Duane Johnson*, demolition sub-contractor.



Financial and Legal Services

- Thomasina Gabriele*, Gabriele Development (financial packager)
- Margaret Van Vliet* (NOAH; private CRA lending consortium)
- Ward Greene, Greene and Markley (lawyer).

Maya Angelou and Neighborhood Residents

- Corlin Beum*, tenant, MAA
- Sonya Tucker*, Boise Neighborhood Improvement Association
- Stacy Cooper*, neighborhood resident.
- Others interviewed include: a number of neighborhood residents met at a organizational meeting and a walking tour, Richard Brown of Black United Front, local police officers, other members of the community, and other people met on the street.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Neighborhood History

The Maya Angelou Apartment's neighborhood is part of what was Albina, an independent city founded in 1869 and merged with Portland in 1891. Albina, in what is now known as Inner North/Northeast Portland, was a diverse community that attracted some of Portland's wealthiest citizens around the turn of the century. In the 1920s, these wealthier citizens left for more distant, automobile-accessible suburbs and the area attracted more working class families, including the majority of Portland's small African-American community. During and after World War II, the African-American community grew rapidly in a nearby area called Vanport City, largely because of the shipbuilding industry. Most of this population moved to Albina when Vanport City was destroyed by a flood in 1948. The neighborhood declined economically and housing stock deteriorated through the 1950s.

In response to 1960s urban renewal pressures, the Albina Neighborhood Improvement Committee (ANIC) developed, through efforts of the Portland Development Commission. Houses were rehabilitated and constructed, and citizens successfully fought attempts of city officials to respond to deterioration by turning it into a largely industrial area.

A major physical alteration to the immediate neighborhood of this project came in 1967 with the building of Unthank Park through the Model Cities program. While the park was praised locally and elsewhere for its planning and design, its construction involved the demolition of two blocks of single family homes. Some residents attribute much of the decline of this neighborhood to this destruction of a significant part of its residential core. For most of its history the park has been seen as a site of gangs, drugs, and violence.

The decline of the area continued and accelerated through the 1970s and 1980s, as families and businesses left the neighborhood. Police say that gangs and drugs became a major problem in the mid to late 1980s, and, while gang activity declined at the close of the 1980s, drugs remain prevalent.

In the 1970s, Portland created and officialx designated (sometimes artificial) boundaries for neighborhoods throughout the city, and

provided each with its own neighborhood association. The area which includes the Maya Angelou Apartments is now part of the Boise Neighborhood, and is represented by the Boise Neighborhood Improvement Association.

Housing Our Families

HOF began in 1989 when 100 people of Inner North/Northeast Portland came together to discuss housing experiences. It evolved out a search by a group of Portland women to find ways to deal with poverty, which they saw as a problem that had its biggest impacts on the lives of women and children. For example, HOF notes that female-headed families in Oregon “are five times more likely to be poor than other families.” These families are often struggling simultaneously with work, child care, neighborhood crime and difficulty in finding and keeping decent, affordable housing. After a second conference, held in 1990 with 120 women, HOF emerged determined to move beyond advocacy by taking direct action and become a provider of low income housing for women and their families. Its guiding principles speak to affirming spiritual values, empowering women, creating partnerships, providing opportunities for economic self determination, and working at the neighborhood level, in a diverse community for the purpose of strengthening family life.

HOF began its housing efforts in January 1992 by renovating a fourplex into low income rental units. The property had been in foreclosure and was given to HOF by the county. The structure was renovated with a \$70,000 loan at 3% interest from the Portland Development Commission. The renovation was completed in a year and was at the time of our visit occupied by four single women with children earning less than 50% of median income. Their second project, a duplex, was renovated in 1993 and was also occupied by single women with children. These projects represented the bulk of HOF’s experience in development and construction at the time they committed to rehabilitate the troubled Colonial Park property with over 40 units.

HOF’s focus on poverty as a women’s issue led directly to their emphasis on providing low cost rental housing, rather than home ownership programs. They felt that ownership, even with incentives, ignores many people who are lacking the resources to own a home. Maintaining a significant base of low income rental housing

units is seen as an effective strategy to reduce the problems of gentrification in improving neighborhoods.

HOF’s operational approach is modeled to a significant degree after the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, whose rules form the basis for HOF’s egalitarian, consensus-based approach to decision making (“all participants have equal time to speak...no cross-talk — listen without judgement or debate”). This emphasis on group process and non-hierarchical structure has remained central to HOF’s organizational personality.

HOF’s commitment to a consensus-based decision-making style means that decisions can be slow in coming, but they are thoroughly debated and, once reached, widely supported. There is no single person whose loss would be fatal to the organization since it largely operates as a group and disperses power. The lack of a single person to whom someone from the outside can turn for an answer can be frustrating for contractors and governmental agencies. It is also true, however, that there are many people who can be reached in order to bring an issue to the fore. Implicit in this model is the diminution of the role of “experts”. HOF seeks and uses expertise where needed, but their decision style (where everyone gets equal time and hearing) assures that experts carry limited weight. When one of the “experts” on HOF’s board argued that the Maya Angelou project was a mistake, she was listened to politely and, eventually, overruled. We had the opportunity to observe one (admittedly atypical) HOF board meeting. To be sure, there were members of the group who emerged as leaders but, on the whole, the group process model was in force and seemed to function well.

The HOF Board and membership are largely made up of women from inner North/Northeast Portland and are racially, ethnically, and economically diverse. The Board takes a hands-on approach to development, and typically volunteers for such activities such as painting, stripping, hammering. HOF has used the Maya Angelou project to develop greater in-house expertise. They now have an architect on their board and they are using a property management firm to train their own staff.

While HOF has its own unique style and approach, it did not develop in a vacuum, independent of other local CDCs. It worked with and received training from Ed McNamara (a 1993 Bruner Award selection committee member) of the Neighborhood



Partnership Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation and REACH (a 1991 Bruner Award finalist), a CDC in Southeast Portland. There are, in fact, important aspects of HOF's process that significantly resemble the REACH approach such as the targeting of efforts in a small, delimited area, developing a combination of stable, affordable rental housing along with community organizing around an action plan, and the use of quick impact activities like the paint-a-thon.

Since the Maya project, HOF obtained three apartment buildings with a total of 92 units, two more homes which have been renovated and a lot on which they hope to build nine apartments and 3,400 square feet of commercial space. At the time of writing, HOF operated a total of 144 units of low income rental housing.

The Building

The property now known as Maya Angelou Apartments was originally the Kerby Square and Borthwick Court Apartments, built in 1948. For many years these high quality rental units remained an attractive, well maintained, and desirable address. They suffered, however, with the general decline of the neighborhood.

In the late 1980s, as gang and drug activity increased in the area, the property changed hands several times. Some owners showed little interest in screening tenants or maintaining the property. One resident said that he had obtained an apartment there in a matter of minutes, with no paper work and for only \$100 in cash. We were told that at one point ownership had changed so many times that the courts had difficulty identifying its legal owners. As part of Portland's community policing effort, the buildings were targeted as a high crime site and police met with landlords to brainstorm approaches to the crime problem. In 1986, with the support of local police, the building was closed by court order for a short time.

Renamed Colonial Park, the complex was bought for rehabilitation by a group of investors in 1988. They ran out of funds, however, and declared bankruptcy, leaving the property in a state of disrepair and in the hands of the county. A property manager was hired by the court on a fixed-fee basis, and had no incentive to fill empty units. By the time the site was put up for auction in August 1993 it was in "unlivable" condition, and half empty. The only bidders were HOF and the bank who held the mortgage — and in all likelihood did not want to "get stuck" with this property again. The bank bid once (\$540,000) and dropped out, leaving the property to HOF for \$541,000.

At the time the HOF effort began, the property was largely unoccupied, in "appalling" condition, and part of a neighborhood suffering from abandonment, disinvestment and crime. It was considered by city officials to be one of the "top five troubled properties in Portland." One HOF board member admits to being a little scared at the prospects.

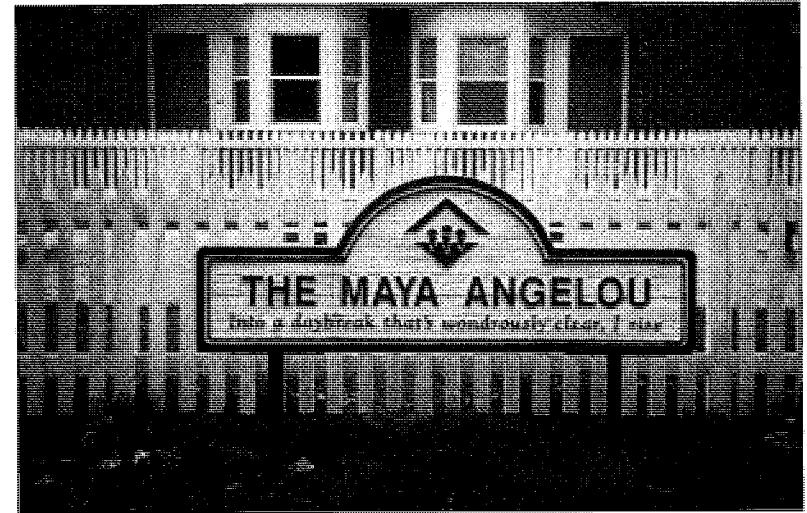
HOF and the Maya Angelou Apartments

There are distinctly different recollections about how HOF's purchase of Colonial Park was brokered. The Portland Development Commission (PDC) staff recall inviting HOF to consider the idea, while HOF remembers broaching the idea to PDC. The differences probably reflect the multiple parentage typical of successful efforts (to paraphrase the old saw, "success has many mothers; failure is an orphan"). There is consensus on the critical thrust — the sheriff's sale was recognized as a one-time opportunity to address the critical problems of this project and the entire neighborhood, but only if there could be quick action.

In a standard analysis of assets and experience, HOF and Colonial Park would seem to have been a bad risk. Certainly, no private bank would have backed the project at that point. HOF had a brief organizational history, a non-traditional management style, little formal design, development, or financial expertise on staff, and a small capital base. Colonial Park had failed under a series of presumably more sophisticated owners. Why then was the City of Portland willing to take a chance on them with over one million dollars in loans?

There are several answers. First, HOF had previously demonstrated the ability to move quickly from concept to completed housing. They had successfully completed a few low income rental projects, albeit of a much smaller scale. Thus, Colonial Park was seen as "a stretch" for HOF but not so far beyond their capacity as to be unlikely to succeed.

Second, their approach and philosophy of development was seen as an important strength. HOF told the PDC that a conversation with input from the community about needs, concerns, and visions for the apartment complex was critical before it could commit to the project. This step meant a delay for PDC in getting a firm "yes" to the proposal but, according to PDC and city officials, it proved HOF's deep commitment to local participation and control, increasing PDC's confidence that HOF could "pull it off." HOF responded to the opportunity by sending its VISTA volunteer, Kris Smock (who came to be known in the neighborhood as "that girl on the bicycle") into the community, knocking on doors, interviewing



residents, and distributing leaflets calling a community meeting to discuss HOF's proposed purchase.

Third, individuals members of HOF's Board were known and trusted in Portland government circles because of their experience in planning and development issues. Finally, this was a very distressed property in a troubled area and there was no other community developer available and willing to take the challenge. The city perceived that it was HOF or nothing.

While the financial (if not political) risk to the PDC was mitigated somewhat by a contract that returned the property to them if the project failed, the risk to HOF was very real. HOF committed considerable time, energy, resources, and credibility to the project. It was, as one observer noted, "a make-or-break project" for them.

Once HOF received its go-ahead from the community, it had to find financing in time for the August sale. The staff at the PDC recognized that its standard procedures for community development loans, which involved providing partial funding, matched by private loans, would not work in this case. There was no time to arrange for other funding, and it was unlikely that private banks would support this project anyway. To enable the project to



proceed, the PDC broke precedent and provided a \$1.2 million loan to cover almost the entire purchase and development cost.

HOF was not able to inspect the property before the auction. When they were able to thoroughly review needs, they concluded that several larger apartments were needed to serve big families, a decision strongly reinforced by their discussions with the community. They proposed creating four four-bedroom apartments, even though the change would increase costs and decrease revenues. HOF sought and obtained a \$94,000 grant from the State Housing Trust Fund to pay the added costs.

Community Organizing

One of the centerpiece of HOF's plan was the concept of using the apartment complex as a lever to begin organizing the surrounding community. VISTA volunteer Kris Smock was designated community outreach coordinator and assigned full time to community organizing.

The outreach effort began in Spring 1993, as Kris circumnavigated the neighborhood on bicycle, handing out flyers which announced the possible purchase of Colonial Park by HOF and called for a

community meeting. In living rooms and on porches, she interviewed over 100 residents about their needs and concerns for the neighborhood — not only to collect data, but also to gain entree and establish rapport and trust.

After the purchase of Colonial Park, HOF organized a series of four community forums to develop and implement an action plan for the neighborhood. At the first forum, HOF presented its commitment to making resident concerns central to the planning process. Residents, by their own admission, were skeptical (“We saw nothing but white people...we didn't think they had a clue how bad it was.”). They expressed concern that HOF appeared to be a group that was “bringing their ideals” from the outside. Residents say that by the third forum, the skepticism dissipated as they saw that HOF truly listened and ceded power and control of the planning to the community groups.

Through these community forums, the **Maya Angelou Community Initiative** was dedicated to increasing the safety and livability of the Central Albina Community. In the forums, the neighbors established four broad goals and a set of strategies and specific projects to achieve them — each with clearly identified partners, funding sources, and timelines. The goals were:

1. To rehabilitate neighborhood houses and streets and to improve the physical appearance of the area, including:
 - Christmas in April (where volunteers repaired homes of elderly and low income residents)
 - Spring Planting Day
 - Boise CREATE (Community Revitalization, Employment and Training Effort) — painting houses for free as a training tool which over the summer vacation taught a team of neighborhood youth how to prep and prime houses
 - cleaning up backyards and alleys of elderly neighbors.

2. To improve neighborhood safety and increase community residents' sense of security through:
 - addition of motion sensor security lights to homes
 - development and use of block watch training programs
 - foot patrols to reduce crime
 - identifying drug houses for block watches and foot patrols.
3. To provide structured, enriching activities for young people, including:
 - after school tutoring
 - summer youth employment projects
 - African dance classes.
4. To foster a sense of community and reclaim the neighborhood through social events and activities, including:
 - School's Out Family Activity Day
 - a neighborhood party
 - Christmas carol singing.

All of these projects were successfully established in 1994 and the community had met again, early in 1995, to review progress and redefine goals for that year. Residents who had been part of the organizing effort were obviously enthusiastic ("we reclaimed our streets", "it was inspirational to me to fix up my place"). Others we met who were more peripheral to the process were still generally aware and appreciative of the changes, even if they were not specifically cognizant of HOF, Maya Angelou, or the community process. There is a clear sense that the neighborhood has improved and is a significantly more livable place.

Efforts have been made at organizing the Maya Angelou tenants since the building opened, but these have been less successful. As of our visit there was not a large, effective or empowered tenants association. Only a handful of tenants were active and attending meetings.

Design

The Maya Angelou Apartments (MAA) benefited from starting with buildings that were attractive, nicely scaled, and well constructed of sturdy, attractive materials. They are red brick and wood frame on the exterior, and the small amount of new construction and any needed renovation generally was sympathetic to the original (though some cheaper new siding was used in a few locations).

Design and construction entailed rehabilitating the buildings and site, creating four four-bedroom units, constructing a new building which contains an office, laundry, community room (for tenant and other group meetings), and child care facilities (for Head Start and other uses). There was little new construction. Key design goals for the complex centered on making it livable, useful, pleasant, homey, and safe.

Principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) were introduced by the architect and played a major role in the design. Landscaping and fencing were used to create real and symbolic barriers, and to identify areas as semi-private spaces. Picket fences mark the boundaries between MAA and the street, and are used to create private, "backyard" spaces for each unit. The fencing, besides creating territorial markings, provides a symbol of residential tranquility, though in a few places the fences proliferate creating a visually awkward array (see photo, page 19). Heavy foliage was removed to eliminate places where criminals could easily hide drugs (a common past practice) and to create more open views between the street and the site. New lighting was added on the street and within the grounds to further reduce hiding places. The laundry room was moved from the basement to a new, ground floor location, and placed so that it had a clear view of the playground. A cul-de-sac was created, closing off an alley which had passed completely through the site. This served to reduce through traffic and eliminated its possible use as a "get-away" route.

Cost control was a key factor in the rehabilitation. Materials were reused where possible. In most cases, for example, kitchen cabinets were stripped, painted and left in place, as were windows and doors. HOF notes that the architect was so bent on reducing costs

that she flirted with cleaning and reusing carpet but, ultimately, new carpets were installed. New kitchen appliances were also purchased, although the previous space and water heating systems were kept. The only major design change came in the remodeling to create four larger apartments.

Finances

HOF began the project with skill, some experience, a lot of good will, and very little in the way of financial resources — their total cash investment in the project was only \$4,675. The Portland Development Commission (PDC) provided a loan of \$1,289,366 at 3% interest, with funds coming largely from HUD’s HOME program. This loan covered the purchase price and most hard and soft costs of rehabilitation (see table). While the PDC usually finances only part of a project — and looks to private lenders for the rest — here they took the risk of providing sole funding, hoping that private refinancing would eventually return about half their investment (the private refinancing came through in April 1995). HOF also obtained a grant of \$94,700 from the Oregon Housing Trust Fund to cover the costs of creating four four-bedroom apartments. Remaining funds came from donations, volunteer labor and VISTA and ACTION volunteers, donations and other grants. The inclusion of \$36,000 under development costs for tenant and neighborhood organizing efforts demonstrates the special nature of this project and the up front commitment to having an impact on the neighborhood.

Unit rents are lower than the maximum levels allowed for projects using HUD HOME funds and are aimed at people with 50% or less of median income. Rents range from \$300 per month for one-bedroom units to \$465 per month for four-bedroom apartments. At full capacity (with about a 7% vacancy factor) the project generates enough net income to qualify for private financing. Their refinancing (\$575,000 at 6.5% from Network Oregon for Afford Housing (NOAH), a coalition of 18 local banks) was used to pay back to the PDC half of the value of the original loan, making it available to the PDC to invest in other non-profit housing ventures.

Construction costs were very low because the original structure was essentially sound and HOF took a very conservative approach to renovation. Total development costs were under \$36,000 per unit.

Maya Angelou Apartments Costs and Sources of Funds

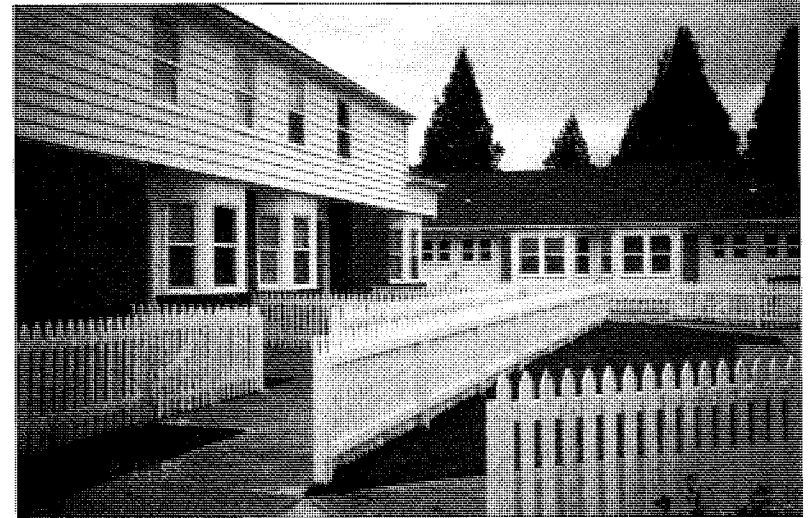
Costs	Project	Per unit (42)
Acquisition Costs		
Purchase	\$548,000	\$13,048
Liens/taxes	23,790	566
Closing	4,171	99
Subtotal	575,961	13,713
Construction Costs	603,857	14,378
Volunteer labor (at \$25/hr.)	50,000	1,190
Development costs		
Architecture/engineering	\$42,380	
Fees	108,033	
Tenant & neighborhood organizing	36,000	
Lease up/operating reserves	50,000	
Taxes & insurance during construction	19,816	
Other (consultants)	18,600	
Subtotal	\$274,829	\$6,544
Total Project Cost	\$1,504,647	\$35,825
Sources of Funds		
Loans	\$1,289,366	
Donations	\$17,806	
Volunteer labor	\$50,000	
Action/Vista and BHCD	\$36,000	
HCS Grant	\$94,700	
Other grants	\$12,100	
HOF cash	\$4,675	
Total	\$1,504,647	

Crime

When HOF arrived, crime was a major problem in this neighborhood, and thus it became an important target for both the design of MAA and the community organization effort. First, the area was targeted for a community policing effort. This effort brought an assistant district attorney into the neighborhood to coordinate with HOF and the police. Police set up special patrols of the neighborhood, focusing on the apartment complex in particular. By most accounts, these efforts began to have some impact even before HOF's entry to the area.

Safety formed a key part of the action initiative. To control crime HOF installed motion-activated lights on 60 homes, trained residents to organize block watches, worked with the police to target and eliminate drug houses, and worked with the block watches to organize foot patrols on high crime streets. Foot patrols, for instance, are operated through the auspices of the Black United Front, an African-American organization working in several Portland neighborhoods. At the time of our visit, four or more citizens walked the most crime-ridden streets in the neighborhood nightly from 6 to 11 pm. They are rarely confronted — prostitutes and drugs dealers move away quickly when the group, in their bright yellow rain coats, approaches. The local residents believe these foot patrols to be highly effective. On the night we accompanied a foot patrol, a passing car stopped, the driver leaned out the window, said simply "thank-you" to the group, and drove on. We are told this is a common occurrence. One couple new to the area said that they had once seen and rejected the area as unsafe. Two years later, however, after MAA was open and the community initiative process was underway, they perceived "drastic change in the neighborhood" and purchased a home there.

In addition to crime prevention design features, the MAA addressed crime by screening tenant applicants in an attempt to weed out likely drug dealers, although this screening plan became a point of some controversy between HOF and the local police. The police wanted HOF to use arrest records as a screening device, while HOF wanted to use only convictions — feeling that arrests were more likely to be subject to racial bias. HOF argues that the success of MAA shows the reasonableness of their screening approach. The police, on the other hand, are convinced that, over the



Picket Fences

years, HOF has, become more "realistic" and adopted more restrictive screening standards.

One incident demonstrates the role tenants have taken in addressing crime problems. Soon after MAA opened, one tenant was found to be using and selling drugs. In earlier times, residents hid in their apartments when incidents occurred. In this case, a group of tenants began to watch and harass the seller and buyers. The tenants are proud of what they call their "sad victory" — the eventual eviction of the tenant.

A policeman we interviewed who once worked this beat was very impressed by MAA's turnaround, for which he credited HOF more than police efforts ("we're great at arresting people, but not at property management"). The decrease in crime on the block, he said, was unique to the area and not part of a city-wide trend. At the time of the interview, he was trying to get owners of a building on his new beat to adopt HOF's approach.

Residents in the complex and in surrounding blocks were impressed and pleased at the change. While there was still crime and drug trafficking, all reported that there was marked improvement. An eight year old boy told us that a few years ago he wasn't



allowed to play outside, which now he can. Elderly people who had felt imprisoned in their homes noted the reduction of fear. Police were pleased that residents call them when they see trouble, whereas residents remark that police no longer ignored their calls.

Minority Contracting

HOF was committed to using minority, women, and local contractors and workers so that project funds would “flow back to the community.” To make this involvement a fact, HOF pushed for it at every turn. It was one of the leading factors in choosing as the general contractor someone who was a board member of another Portland community development corporation. Minority and local subcontractors were hired, and were, in turn, pushed to hire workers from the neighborhood. In the end, 90% of the workers were drawn from, and 80% of the funds went to, minority and community firms.

This effort was not without risks and problems. Many subcontractors were relatively small and had limited experience for a job of this size. The general contractor expended considerable time and effort advising, helping and teaching them on the job. The problems had less to do with technical expertise than with the ability to

administer the job and supervise workers. Some subcontractors did not have the resources to maintain cash flow between payments. The general contractor responded to this problem by billing and paying twice a month. One subcontractor ran into significant problems and was not able to finish the work, forcing the general contractor to step in and complete the job himself. Remarkably, these two firms are still working together with the general contractor supplying work and training and, in the process, collecting payments still owed due to the subcontractor’s problems at MAA.

MAA has become known in Portland as a striking success story for minority involvement. HOF and the prime contractor have received many calls from others asking for help in locating qualified minority firms.

THEMES AND LESSONS

Participatory Planning and Design

While this project is not “grassroots” in the sense that its origin was not from those in the immediate neighborhood, it is hard to imagine a process that could be based more solidly on local control and participation. At every step in the process HOF insisted on community input and control. The value system inherent in HOF’s internal consensus-based operation transferred to its approach to project management. While this added time and complexity to the effort, the payback is obvious in the community’s high level of involvement and ownership in the revitalization effort.

Combining Physical Rehabilitation with Community Revitalization

A most important aspect of this project was the direct connection HOF made between the rehabilitation of a single apartment complex and broader issues of community revitalization. Community organizing was not an afterthought, it was integral to the project and began even before the decision was made to purchase the building. The rehabilitation of the apartments and the revitalization of the community supported one another and provided strength that neither could have achieved alone.

Leveraging a Visible and Stigmatized Project to Organize a Community

HOF made use of a physically and symbolically important trouble spot (the apartment complex) as the “foot-in-the-door” to create change in the community. The building was seen as a lever into the community. The city and HOF felt that improving the problematic focal point of a troubled neighborhood was the best way to get the attention of residents and raise their hopes for the future.

A Feminist Approach to Fighting Urban Poverty

HOF is unusual as a community developer in having as its *raison d’être* combating the impact of poverty on women and children:

- HOF defines poverty as a woman’s problem, and seeks solutions that deal with the needs — especially housing — of poor women and their children.
- Its feminist base also plays a significant role in creating an organization rooted in community values, eschewing hierarchical models of organizational structure, and using consensus-based decision making models.

Building on the Success of Other Community Developers

HOF was able to learn from and model some of the successful approaches of others in Portland — most notably REACH (a 1989 Bruner Award finalist). In particular, they made good use of the concepts of targeting (picking a small community for intense revitalization efforts), of community organizing to develop an accepted and achievable “action plan,” and the early use of quick, inexpensive interventions to galvanize the neighborhood and instill optimism (such as a paint-a-thon).

Low Cost Renovation to Allow for Very Low Rents: Functionality over Style

HOF was very frugal in its approach to renovation, getting the most value out of their limited capital. Materials and fixtures were reused wherever possible. This helped keep the rents below levels permitted by the financing agencies. Fortunately, the complex was originally built of sound and attractive materials, so that the end product is still appealing today.



Head Start Center

Using “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” to Increase Safety

MAA is a good demonstration of the principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). Along with management and operational efforts, design has helped reduce crime and improve real and perceived safety.

Willingness to Take Appropriate Risks

The sale at auction presented a one time only opportunity to obtain this property inexpensively. The size of this project and the financial commitment was well beyond HOF’s resources and represented a significant risk to the organization’s viability. For this project to proceed, a government bureaucracy (the PDC) had not only to move quickly but also to override its co-funding requirement and approve a loan for the full project cost. Their flexibility and willingness to assume the entire financial risk was essential to allowing this project to happen.



Commitment to Rental versus Home Ownership

Many government and non-profit programs focus on home ownership as a means to improving low income neighborhoods. HOF, however, makes a compelling case for the role of rental units, owned by non-profits to assure affordability and as a means to provide stability in a neighborhood in the face of possible gentrification.

Supporting Minority Contractors

For many minority contractors, this was their first chance at a large development project, and some did not have the administrative experience or cash flow to handle it. Placing small, minority contractors in this situation can be risky (for them as well as for the developer) unless technical support is provided, as it was here, to help them develop needed administrative skills.

ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS...

...BY ITS GOALS

Provide Affordable Rental Housing for Families

HOF succeeded in quickly and inexpensively renovating an apartment complex into safe, pleasant and affordable housing that is occupied by low (less than 50% median) income families. This significant number of units (given the population density of the neighborhood) will remain as affordable rental housing for the foreseeable future. HOF's willingness to incur additional costs and forego some income in order to create four-bedroom units demonstrates their commitment to meeting the needs of this population.

Revitalize a Community Damaged by Drugs and Violence

Considerable progress has been made in addressing this broader, more diffuse and difficult goal. The community looks and feels better to longtime residents. Crime has been reduced and perceived safety has increased; there is a greater sense of community and more participation in community activities, the appearance of individual properties and public walkways has improved; and activities and training programs for youth are being provided.

...BY SELECTION COMMITTEE CONCERNS

What was the city's role in acquisition of the building? Was there a partnership? Was there real "empowerment"? Did HOF have real control?

The city of Portland, through the PDC, played a crucial role in helping HOF obtain the building. This project, at the start, could not have been funded through private market sources. HOF, the PDC and other city agencies worked actively together to make this development to happen, although HOF always held the lead role in planning, organizing and developing. HOF has ownership of the building and control over all decisions concerning its operation and maintenance.

Were any other projects (in Portland or elsewhere) useful as models? How did the participatory strategy develop?

There were models which were useful in parts of HOF's approach and strategy. Certainly, the most relevant model was that used by REACH, which actively consulted with HOF. Its influence is most obvious in the targeting of a specific neighborhood, use of a community organizer to generate participation, and the development of a clear and achievable action plan with the community. HOF also modeled itself on the National Organization of Neighborhood Women, using its consensus-based decision making approach.

What strategies have been used to develop/sustain community activism? What evidence is there on how well it has been sustained? Has internal leadership emerged?

Community activism has been developed in several ways. Most important in the early stages was the considerable time spent by a community outreach coordinator walking and cycling the streets, meeting and talking with residents. In a series of community forums, residents controlled the agenda and developed a statement of needs and an action plan to address them. Also important was the strategy of providing quick successes in the form of weekend projects that made obvious improvements (paint-a-thons, house fix-ups). Participation at the community level is growing and internal leadership has developed.

Successful empowerment has been less obvious at the tenant level in the Maya Angelou Apartments. At the time of our visit, only a handful of tenants were actively involved in meetings and management activities. This is an area which has been targeted for more attention.

What is the history and makeup of HOF? Does HOF go beyond this project?

HOF had a brief history before this project which is its largest development. HOF has done other projects since, and has a number of plans for future development in this community. There was some concern expressed about their ability to continue to operate as they do (in their consensus-based and highly personal management style) if they grow very large.

What is the design quality of the project (buildings and landscaping)?

The main positive aesthetic features of the buildings are those which were present at its construction in 1948. This is a handsome apartment complex. No major construction or design improvements were made by HOF for aesthetic purposes. The primary new construction involved the addition of a building for day care and community meetings plus a small office. This building closely matches the original construction in style.

The major design changes were to the landscaping, and much of that was aimed at improving site security. This project made very good use of the principles of CPTED in removing hiding and lurking spaces, using picket fencing to identify semi-private areas, creating good visibility to the street and between the laundry room and playground, improving lighting, and creating a cul-de-sac, cutting off an alley which passed through the complex.

What evidence is there of impact on surrounding neighborhood (crime, pride, appearance, property value, etc.)?

Property values are up, tax defaults are down, crime rates are down, private investments are being made to improve properties, more people are moving into the community (including professionals and white families), and residents say they feel safer and more hopeful.

SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

In selecting the Maya Angelou Community Initiative as the winner of the 1995 Rudy Bruner Award, the Selection Committee was greatly impressed by many aspects of this project. Community participation and control were at the very core of philosophy and practice. This project dealt with the most critical issues facing urban neighborhoods (such as affordable housing and crime). It had a dramatic impact on the Maya Angelou Apartment complex and on the surrounding community — lives and places have changed for the better. It is a project that fosters personal responsibility, and bridges gaps of race and class.

The Selection Committee saw Housing Our Families as unique in its status as a woman-based collective, its focus on poverty as a women's issue, and its attention and follow through in supporting local and minority contractors. HOF modeled itself on the National Organization of Neighborhood Women, and it may have used the model better than anyone else.

The Selection Committee was somewhat concerned about the replicability of the project because of its very low cost renovation, which was in part due to the quality of the building with which they started. The Committee also noted the tremendous commitment and energy required in this effort, and the danger of burnout for those engaged in the process.

The Selection Committee was especially encouraged at the positive role taken by the City of Portland. In an era of increasingly hands-off government, Portland was able to take risks, modify its own rules, and move quickly to provide 100% financing for the project. "This is a message to cities — something you think can't be done, can be done, but not without some risk-taking, support and vision on your part." In awarding Maya Angelou Community Initiative, the Selection Committee explicitly hoped to send a message to cities that there is no substitute for this type of city involvement and support. This was a model of "principled partnership" between the public, not-for-profit, and private sectors.

For More Information...

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