

REBUILDING A NEIGHBORHOOD MOVEMENT:

**Low-Income Housing in South Providence-- A Community History of
Oxford Gardens and Peoples Redevelopment Corporation**

by

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ABSTRACT

Housing is the basic physical infrastructure of a neighborhood. It lays the groundwork for the basic social, political, and economic infrastructure that generates and serves a residential community. Low-income housing development that approaches housing in the context of neighborhood development and as a process of building communities is more likely to be successful and have a stronger impact. Broad resident involvement and support in a community-led and community-controlled, low-income housing initiative is more likely to meet neighborhood needs and interests, and to establish mechanisms for sustainable development.

An indepth South Providence neighborhood case study demonstrates why and how this can happen. A comprehensive national and local analysis of the roots and dimensions of the housing and urban crisis and of the Community-Based Low-Income Housing Development Movement provide the background for the case study. A proposed Community Reclamation Model suggests an alternative grassroots framework to respond to past successes and shortcomings and to the current context, and to evaluate the case study. The model centers around four activities: community organizing and advocacy, neighborhood planning, community-led development, and accountable community management. Each activity plays an essential role in a process of neighborhood revitalization.

The case study includes an extensive community history of Oxford Gardens, a multi-family low-income housing development, and its sponsor, Peoples Redevelopment Corporation, a non-profit Community Development Corporation. Beating the odds through a neighborhood-wide effort, Oxford Gardens has become a focal point in a community reclamation process. It is the result of a vision which sought to build socio-political power and establish economic control. Through the four activities of community organizing and advocacy, neighborhood planning, community-led development, and accountable community management, Peoples Redevelopment Corporation realized its goals. Today, Oxford Gardens is regarded as one of the best low-income housing developments in the State of Rhode Island.

Despite the constraints, tensions, and conflicts of interest inherent to community-based housing development-- the clashes between the technical and the political, the efficient production and the inclusive process, the development and the advocacy-- community-based development efforts serve a key role in the struggles against shelter poverty and inner-city neighborhood deterioration. Ultimately, long-term social change necessitates the rebuilding of a broad neighborhood movement for community power.