

CHAPTER 6 NEIGHBORHOOD INDICATORS: MEASURING SUCCESS

Tracking the success of community revitalization through on-going neighborhood indicators involves three types of measurements. The first focuses on whether the status of the neighborhood is improving in comparison to other communities-in effect a set of broadly recognized impact measures. The second assesses whether the specific plan objectives are achieved-the measurement of operational success. The third focuses on the impacts of plan implementation on current residents-the measurement of impact on plan participants.

Neighborhood Status Indicators

With regard to the broad assessment of neighborhood status, the Philadelphia Neighborhood Development Collaborative (PNDC) has researched potential measures of neighborhood conditions (neighborhood indicators) to assess the possible impacts of revitalization efforts on the health of neighborhoods. That research suggested eight measurements to track six indicators of neighborhood condition that would apply to all revitalizing neighborhoods (in fact, to all neighborhoods). The six suggested indicators are:

1. Housing vacancy/abandonment rate
2. Market for single-family houses
3. Business activity, particularly retail
4. Crime rate
5. Socio-economic status
6. School quality/educational attainment

The eight specific measurements recommended to track these indicators are:

1. Vacancy/abandonment (overall). The recommended measure that can be regularly updated involves tracking the ending of water service as reported by the Philadelphia Water Department, through the University of Pennsylvania Cartographic Modeling Laboratory's Neighborhood Information System (NIS).
2. Single-family housing market. The recommended measure includes specific dimensions of house sales price, rate of change in house price, turnover (sales) rate, owner-occupancy rate, and population change that can be tracked through local government records reported in various databanks, including NIS and The Reinvestment Fund.
3. Rental housing vacancy. PNDC recognizes that the suggested measurement--the percentage of all multi-family properties that seem to have at least one unit vacant, as evidenced by a water shut-off--does not provide a particularly accurate indicator. For the three neighborhoods in this study, an alternative approach may involve developing a list of multi-family property managers in the area and conducting an annual survey of them for vacancy as of a particular date.
4. Business activity. The suggested measure is rate of commercial vacancy in designated commercial concentrations (commercial corridors, etc.). An annual community-business association survey, beginning with a baseline set at the beginning of plan implementation, would provide tracking of this condition.
5. Crime/safety. PNDC recommends using the University of Pennsylvania reporting of crime data from the City Police Department. This data can be used to compute crimes, or serious crimes, per capita.
6. Socio-economic/demographic status. Obviously, this information can be tracked through decennial census data. PNDC further recommends use of the rate of household poverty, drawn from the Philadelphia Health Management Corporation (PHMC) bi-annual survey, although there appear to be serious limitations with this data at many neighborhood levels.
7. School quality/educational attainment. Three types of data are available - testing data, school attendance and enrollment data and school characteristics. All data is completely public for every school (including charters, privates and publics), conveniently available and can be manipulated.
8. Early Distress Signals. PNDC proposes two indicators that over time could indicate that a community is undergoing negative changes. The one that appears to be more easily tracked is sheriff's sale data, which is a decent partial indicator of abandonment, to complement the vacancy information from water records.



We recommend that Chinatown utilize these eight indicators to track general conditions, although issues of commercial vacancy are less important in this community.

Specific Plan Objectives

Success in achieving several priority plan objectives will be tracked through the eight neighborhood status indicators detailed above. For instance, successful rehabilitation activities will result in a decrease in property vacancy.

Other indicators of success in achieving plan objectives would include:

1. Availability of affordable housing
2. New housing construction and conversion
3. Expansion of available commercial space
4. Achieve of targeted image and community facility improvements: "The Big Lid," viaduct, Chinatown Community Center, Franklin Square
5. Investment in streetscape, parking, and open space improvements.

Specific measurements recommended to track these indicators are:

1. Affordable housing supply. Tracking the number of affordable housing units available in the neighborhood.
2. New housing construction and loft conversion. Tracking the number of new housing units constructed and the number of units provided through loft conversions.
3. Commercial space rehabilitation & construc-

tion. Tracking the square footage of new retail/commercial space constructed and commercial space rehabilitated throughout the community.

4. Achievement of targeted image and facility improvements. Monitoring a checklist of key facility improvements: "The Big Lid," viaduct, Chinatown Community Center, Franklin Square.
5. Streetscape, parking, and open space improvements. Tracking the dollar investment in streetscape improvements. Also tracking the square footage of available public open space.

Impacts on Current Residents

One key community concern is whether current Chinatown residents and businesses benefit from the process of revitalization or whether they are displaced for economic reasons. To track these impacts, we recommend three indicators:

1. Household mobility rate
2. Availability of affordable rental housing
3. Business turnover.

Specific measurements recommended to track these indicators are:

1. Housing mobility rate. This recommended measure is likely to be effective only once. Decennial census data reports at the block group level the number of households residing in the same house as five years previously. 2010 data would report on household mobility since 2005 (effectively the

start of plan implementation). Comparison of this data with data from the 2000 census would indicate whether mobility has increased—a potential indicator of displacement.

2. Availability of affordable rental housing. Decennial census data on rent distribution will give a timely report of data for 2010, though less timely for subsequent periods. This data can track the number of rental units with rents below a selected threshold of affordability. (Note: Number of affordable units is more useful than proportion of affordable units, since revitalization may be associated with increases in the number of market-rate units.)
3. Business turnover. The annual tracking of business vacancy in the community (see above) could be extended to collecting an annual business roster for year to year comparison. At the annual update, notation could be made of the reason for businesses leaving the area to track any economic displacement of current businesses.