Union Hill Neighborhood Plan

Sponsored by the Union Hill Civic Association

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Prepared for:
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Welcome to Union Hill, a dynamic neighborhood nestled in the heights of Richmond’s East End. This neighborhood plan seeks to tell the story of the community. As such, the story begins by exploring the roots of a neighborhood 195 years in the making. Established in 1817, Union Hill functioned over the course of a century to provide modest housing for tradesman and employees of local manufacturing firms. In the early 1930’s however, a noticeable economic and demographic transition began to occur when African-American families permeated the neighborhood; by 1950, the neighborhood was predominantly African-American. Ultimately, the integration of the neighborhood and the level of disinvestment that occurred as a result of these racial dynamics contributed to the erosion of the neighborhood fabric that can be witnessed even today.

These trends are consistent with those observed in the greater East Planning District in which Union Hill is situated. As stated in the 2000-2010 City of Richmond Master Plan, the presence of vacant and deteriorating housing stock, older, low-income residents, land use conflicts and a high quantity of large multifamily housing complexes challenge the triumph of Union Hill and adjacent neighborhoods. Despite these challenges, recent revitalization efforts have inspired a renewed sense of hope in the future of this fragile neighborhood and attracted a populace of young, urban professionals who value the convenience and amenities that are provided in this urban neighborhood unit. As a result of these forces, Union Hill now encompasses a greater diversity of race, ethnicity, income and affiliations.

While the Union Hill Civic Association has expressed a desire to maintain such progress, there is an equal concern that the vigor of neighborhood change will harm those residents of lesser means. The Union Hill Civic Association therefore solicited a neighborhood plan that brings focus to the needs and desires of neighborhood residents. The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan responds to this challenge first offering a description of the neighborhood today using the views of local residents to breathe life into the maps, data, and pictures that describe the realities of Union Hill and the quality of life that residents enjoy here. The plan then articulates a future for Union Hill as expressed through the voice of residents throughout the planning process. These concerns serve as inspiration for many of the recommendations that appear in this document. Recommendations are organized around four distinct themes that examine the built environment, demographic trends, political capacity and social cohesion in Union Hill. Take the time to read the vision and examine the recommendations that address the issues concerning you most. Then, get involved.
The recommendations provided in the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan are briefly summarized below. These strategies are designed to build upon the progress already at work in the neighborhood and to invest in Union Hill’s most valuable assets—the residents.

I. Union Hill as a pioneer for grass-roots community redevelopment in Richmond.

Many individuals will join the strong base of organized residents who are active and committed to the progress of Union Hill. The strength of the collective resident voice is expressed through the Union Hill Civic Association who partners with other organizations in the neighborhood to ensure that new investments in the neighborhood result in an equitable distribution of benefits amongst the resident body.

Objective 1.1: Engage a broader base of active neighborhood stakeholders to ensure continuity and fair representation of values.
Objective 1.2: Increase the effectiveness and reach of the Union Hill Civic Association.
Objective 1.3: Require that all construction and rehabilitation efforts result in the creation of neighborhood jobs, affordable housing units, living wages, or environmental improvements.

II. Union Hill as a desirable neighborhood of choice.

Union Hill’s strategic location to adjacent downtown, easy access to transportation networks, and inventory of historic architecture will be strengthened and built upon; the physical fabric of the community will be mended. With an improved appearance and greater recognition as a truly mixed-income neighborhood, a sense of permanence (rather than transience) is instilled amongst renters and homeowners alike.

Objective 2.1: Develop a program for blighted properties.
Objective 2.2: Stabilize vacant lots/underutilized land wherever possible by preserving as recreation or green space.
Objective 2.3: Ensure the provision of a wide range of housing options and neighborhood services.
III. Union Hill as an empowered neighborhood.

Just as the neighborhood buildings are being restored, as are the people of Union Hill. A well-balanced supply of need-specific services and activities are provided in the neighborhood context and residents take full advantage of these resources to improve their life circumstances. Community programs promoting educational attainment, skills development and healthy financial habits are vital elements that reduce real social and economic disparities observed in Union Hill.

Objective 3.1: Connect residents to resources that reduce vulnerability to economic cycles.
Objective 3.2: Promote homeownership opportunities for low-to-moderate income neighborhood residents.

IV. Union Hill as a cohesive community where tolerance, respect and diversity are embraced.

Union Hill has historically encompassed a rich mix of people. As the neighborhood evolves and begins to recapture population, the community will respond with tolerance and respect empowering residents and stakeholders to come together in celebration of the neighborhood’s charming authenticity.

Objective 4.1: Dissolve tensions between new and long-term residents.
Objective 4.2: Attract and maintain a diverse mix of residents.

Strategic Investments. Transformative Impacts.
About the Client Organization

The Union Hill Civic Association

The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan was requested by the Union Hill Civic Association and also fulfills the requirements of the Master of Urban & Regional Planning program in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. The Union Hill Civic Association organization operates with the mission to preserve the rich heritage of Union Hill while fostering growth and prosperity within neighborhood boundaries.

The association is governed by a four-member cabinet including a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary as well as a panel of six board members, at-large. All residents and stakeholders who live in and/or maintain a level of investment in the prosperity of the Union Hill neighborhood are encouraged to attend and actively participate in the activities, discussions, and decision-making processes carried out by the association.

Image 1

Members of the Union Hill Civic Association are pictured above at the Neighborhood Cleanup Day held in October 2010.

Source:
Union Hill Civic Association Facebook
Setting & Context
of the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan

Mosby, Carrington, North 25th Streets and Jefferson Avenue roughly define the boundaries of Union Hill (as shown in Map 2), an Old & Historic District situated in the City of Richmond’s East Planning District. Established in 1817, the neighborhood has functioned over the course of its 195 year legacy as a residential community that a diverse population calls home.

Union Hill’s story is much like that of urban neighborhoods throughout the nation that have suffered the pains of population loss, disinvestment and decline. Yet, now is a critical time for Union Hill. Revitalization efforts undertaken in the past decade have brought about an inspired sense of hope in a fragile neighborhood that has perhaps seen better days.

Collaborations between the city planning authorities and local non-profit community development entities have resulted in improved housing opportunities in Union Hill and stirred further private investment. Coupled with the neighborhood’s advantageous proximity to Downtown and other attractions, Union Hill has captivated a populace of young, high-income, urban professionals who value the beautiful collection of historic architecture, amenities and affordability provided in this urban neighborhood unit.
The Purpose of this Plan

As a result of the aforementioned dynamics, Union Hill now encompasses a greater diversity of race, ethnicity, income and affiliations. While the Union Hill Civic Association has expressed a desire to maintain this momentum of progress, there is considerable concern that the vigor of neighborhood succession presently occurring in Union Hill will harm—or worse, force out—those residents of lesser means.

The Union Hill Civic Association has pledged its commitment to fostering equitable growth that does not offend certain groups during the course of inevitable change. The Association thus solicited a neighborhood plan that examined the needs of residents with regard to education, employment, safety, transportation and access to goods and services to build citizen awareness of and involvement in the change that is underway.

- The Union Hill neighborhood plan first provides a comprehensive scan of key neighborhood indicators that positions Union Hill in relation to the greater East Planning District to which it belongs.

- The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan brings focus to the concerns and priorities identified through the quantified study of the neighborhood population as well as those identified through the engagement of residents, stakeholders and civic leaders who call Union Hill home.

- The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan identifies methods through which neighborhood assets can be developed and deployed to attract sustained investment and to increase capacity amongst residents.

- Finally, the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan articulates the necessary justification that will be employed in the petition for resources and expanded services.
The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan is guided by a thorough review of literature and case studies in neighborhood revitalization planning and community development. The mission of UHCA, demonstrated in their solicitation of this neighborhood plan, attests to the organization’s overall concern with the current state of Union Hill. There is a perception that the restructuring of what was formerly the Department of Planning (DOP) during the most recent mayoral transition and the consequent decline in resources appropriated specifically for neighborhood planning efforts, have left the City of Richmond planning authority less equipped to adequately respond to the needs of this evolving neighborhood.

The proposed plan, therefore, represents an instance of a neighborhood-driven revitalization plan (as described in Figure 4), versus its counterpart, the city or municipal-initiated neighborhood plan through which resources are designated to certain neighborhoods based on priority criteria. Neighborhood driven plans are highly dependent on resident initiative and utilize bottom-up strategies to achieve neighborhood improvements. Such plans focus on:

- small scale development strategies
- fostering neighborhood pride
- improving community assets
- mobilizing residents to engage in small efforts sustained over a long period of time

Figure 4
Three Models of Neighborhood Revitalization Planning
Adapted From:
Neighborhood driven revitalization plans are better positioned to address the full range of challenges present in communities that have experienced decline given their emphasis on both neighborhood physical development as well as the capacity of residents. This particular attribute is a function of the definition of neighborhood, operationalized within the neighborhood driven revitalization model, which specifies that neighborhoods are dynamic systems arising from the interaction of economic, social and political systems with place.

And yet, the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan is also dependent on the pivotal support of Councilwoman Cynthia Newbille, who represents the 7th Planning District, and the City of Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review. Each party has facilitated access to information and resources that align this plan with the benefits of district-wide initiatives.

Image 5
Councilwoman Newbille was elected to Richmond City Council in November 2009. Newbille has very deep ties to the 7th Planning District, including being raised here, managing the City’s East District Initiative and serving as the director of the East District Family Resource Center.

Source: eastendvision.org

The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan draws from the following bodies of knowledge:

- Neighborhood collaborative planning
- Targeted neighborhood revitalization strategies
- Indicators of neighborhood satisfaction
- Neighborhood succession or gentrification
- Equitable development
Neighborhood Collaborative Planning
The collaborative approach to neighborhood planning states that planners must understand the economic, social, political and physical characteristics that contribute to sense of place and sense of community. This approach looks beyond improving aesthetics to include larger social objectives such as creating healthy social networks, empowering local residents, developing neighborhood economies, or preserving environmental quality. Recommendations provided as a result of the collaborative approach are especially sensitive to the expressed needs of local residents and stakeholders (Brooks 2002).

Targeted Neighborhood Revitalization Planning
The targeted neighborhood revitalization planning approach is one directing citywide resources to designated neighborhoods. Target neighborhoods generally have the political and organizational capacity to sustain expanded programs and services that benefit residents of a neighborhood.

The City of Richmond’s Neighborhoods in Bloom (NiB) program is a successful example of this particular course to neighborhood revitalization and informs which indicators are examined to assess the health and vitality of Union Hill. The NiB model targeted areas within the Richmond’s Old & Historic Districts. Target sites were selected using a basis of priority criteria examining a full panorama of neighborhood indicators including building conditions, demographics, incivility, organizational capacity, political influence and market trends (Accordo 2005).

Indicators of Neighborhood Satisfaction
A highly influential but often under-emphasized determinant of neighborhood health is how residents perceive and feel about their neighborhoods. Studies examining the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction generally find that a neighborhood’s physical attractiveness and friendliness amongst neighbors are among the most important factors in experiencing a positive neighborhood life. Though the concept of neighborhood like that of home can take on many meanings to different people these studies offer a compelling reminder that neighborhoods cannot be strictly defined by their geographic or physical boundaries. For the individual, one’s neighborhood also encompasses the psychological, cognitive and social experiences that shape who we are and how we perceive the world (Lee et al 1983).

Equitable Development
Equitable Development is the practice of enabling communities to prioritize and pursue development benefiting current residents and contributes to neighborhood resilience. Where urban development patterns and practices have resulted in disinvestment and disproportionate social, economic and environmental disparities, the equitable development planning model can implement solutions that directly correlate to community defined needs. Decision-making processes are viewed as integral to growing neighborhood capacity and therefore the development of community leadership is top priority in equitable development plans (Policylink).
Quality of Life Planning
The quality of life planning approach demonstrates how classic methods of engagement can facilitate meaningful resident participation in the planning process. Such methods include the resident advisory groups, surveys, community visioning exercises and focus groups.

The North Highland Park Quality of Life Plan exemplifies how the engagement of residents and stakeholders can foster civic ambition when engagement is not only a goal of the data collection process but a crucial component of the goal formulation and visioning processes as well.

The application of this approach, in the case of the Highland Park neighborhood, allowed for the creation of a neighborhood plan truly reflecting the needs and priorities of the community. The strongest message conveyed through the North High Park Quality of Life Plan, however, is the importance of humanistic vision. This is defined as a regard for the well-being of all who reside in the communities [planners] purport to serve (Brooks 2002).
Precedent Plans
In order to achieve the type of neighborhood plan that has specifically been requested by the Union Hill Civic Association, i.e., one that is considerate of both people and place, a number of precedent neighborhood plans have been consulted to influence the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan.

The Greater Spruce Street Neighborhood Plan, initiated by the New Jersey Community Development Corporation of Paterson, New Jersey is used as a model for achieving a well-adjusted approach to neighborhood revitalization. The plan examines both the social and physical infrastructure of the Spruce Street neighborhood to identify strategies that result in the improved capacity of each.

Similarly, the Northern Liberties Neighborhood Plan, initiated by the Northern Liberties Neighbors Association of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania creates a poignant vision for the future of a neighborhood facing many challenges. This plan adequately responds to social and economic disparities within the neighborhood context emphasizing resident interface.

The Rose Hill Sustainable Neighborhood Plan also serves as an example of what can be achieved through neighborhood planning. The plan focuses on the physical challenges of the Rose Hill community but attempts to address these challenges through the lens of what are termed the three E’s of sustainability: economy, ecology and equity. These principals guide the creation of the vision, goals, objectives and illustrative components to the Rose Hill plan. The incorporation of creative tools provided residents with tangible imagery of what their neighborhood could be. This is noteworthy because most citizens lack interest until they see specifically how a plan will affect them (Klein 2011).

Finally, a series of neighborhood plans funded by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in cities such as Boston, Chicago, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh through its New Communities Program, are used to guide the provision of targeted courses of action that respond to observed neighborhood dynamics. These plans achieve a graceful balance between traditional neighborhood physical plans and quality of life plans.
Previous Plans
Since 2002, two neighborhood plans have been executed for Union Hill. “Union Hill: A Revitalization and Neighborhood Plan (Wickham 2002)”, seeks to address the high incidence of crime and blight observed in the neighborhood. The plan proposes historic preservation, urban design improvements, and infill development as solutions to the aforementioned challenges.

“Union Hill: A Land Use and Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (Francis 2006)” builds upon the revitalization plan undertaken in 2002; the plan explores how land-use regulations and zoning can be used as tools to strengthen the neighborhood. The plan also identifies strategies for attracting investors and developers to take on infill development projects.

Each of these plans present focused strategies addressing the physical decline Union Hill has sustained while the needs of residents are generally overlooked. To this extent, precedent plans completed for Union Hill do not meet the needs of the Union Hill Civic Association.

Precedent plans completed for Union Hill have historically explored blight abatement, infill development and urban design improvements to strengthen portions of the neighborhood that would benefit from enhancements.

Source: Myia Bate
What Questions Must be Asked?

The literature review informs the questions that must be asked in order to make perceptive recommendations. These questions can be categorized into four distinct dimensions of knowledge:

**Built Form**
- What are the boundaries of Union Hill? How are they defined by residents?
- What types of structures are within in Union Hill?
- Which are predominating?
- What is the general condition of these structures? Is there a high incidence of vacancy and dilapidation?

**Demographic Trends**
- How many people live within the boundaries of Union Hill? How has this changed over time?
- How is race and ethnicity distributed amongst the Union Hill population?
- How educated is the population in Union Hill?
- How many families and individuals live below the poverty threshold in Union Hill?
- How many housing units are occupied by homeowners versus renters in Union Hill?
- How many residents receive benefits through government sponsored entitlement programs?
- What is the incidence of crime in Union Hill?

**Social Dynamics**
- How do residents of Union Hill identify their neighborhood?
- How do neighbors in Union Hill interact with one another? Are there social supports and networks among residents? How adequately do these networks meet the needs of residents?
- How do the dynamics of Union Hill, with respect to its built form, social-economic dynamics, political capacity and social cohesion impact the desires of residents to remain in the neighborhood?

**Political Capacity**
- How many active civic groups and organizations operate in Union Hill? What is the rate of participation in these organizations? Who participates?
- Which existing redevelopment plans impact Union Hill, if any? To what extent do these plans overlap with the priorities of Union Hill residents? Are there gaps?
- What services and resources are available to Union Hill residents within neighborhood boundaries? Which services and resources are not provided in the context of the neighborhood?
Sources of Information
The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan has both quantitative and qualitative objectives. Quantitative methods are used to analyze data yielded from such sources as:

- City of Richmond Assessor’s Office
- City of Richmond Department of Economic & Community Development
- City of Richmond Department of Planning & Development Review
- City of Richmond Parks & Recreation
- City of Richmond Police
- Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA)
- US Census Bureau

These data sources are useful in capturing economic, demographic and market factors.

Qualitative methods to be used within the context of the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan include focus groups and personal interviews. These methods capture pertinent indicators that cannot be articulated through numeric data. Such topics include spatial, political and cognitive observations and experiences.

The findings yielded from these processes will be analyzed, integrated and presented in terms of opportunities and challenges which will inform the planning goals.

Road Map to the Document
The Union Hill Neighborhood Plan is organized into three sections as given below.

I. Union Hill Yesterday & Today
II. A Strategic Vision for Union Hill
III. Recommendations & Implementation

Union Hill Yesterday & Today constitutes the review of existing conditions beginning with a brief historical account of the neighborhood. A snapshot of the findings yielded from the quantitative data collection processes is provided as well as a discussion of current planning efforts in the neighborhood.

The existing conditions chapter seeks to corroborate the quantitative findings with information yielded from the qualitative process to draw meaningful conclusions about Union Hill. These conclusions are categorized in terms of opportunities and challenges and shape the vision of Union as articulated by residents.

The Recommendations chapter of the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan proposes actions and strategies for change. Recommendations are roughly organized in terms of the four dimensions prefaced on page 17. For each recommendation, the implementation guide identifies responsible parties and potential partners that will execute each recommendation.
The planning process for the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan began in January 2012. The primary components of the planning process included:

- A review of Census information from 2000 and 2010 to compare the socio-economic characteristics of Union Hill vis-à-vis adjacent neighborhoods comprising the East Planning District;
- A broad survey of the neighborhood to create an up-to-date land use map and to determine the overall condition of structures within Union Hill;
- A mapping of key variables such as vacant properties;
- An assessment of the organizational strengths of the Union Hill Civic Association, as well as potential opportunities for collaboration, resource sharing, and technical assistance.

In neighborhood planning, an effective public outreach campaign is critical to building support for the planning effort. For the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan, two focus groups and several personal interviews were conducted with the intent to review specific portions of the analysis with those in the neighborhood who are involved and familiar with the issues and challenges Union Hill faces.

One focus group was held on Saturday, February 18 at the Tricycle Gardens Farm Stand and a second focus group was held on Saturday, March 3rd at the East District Initiative Center. Though the Civic Association made every attempt to recruit participants for each of these meetings, the focus groups involved only five people. Residents, representatives of neighborhood faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders were in attendance.

A questionnaire (which appears in the appendix) was administered in a conversational format at each focus group meeting to garner a deeper understanding of neighborhood priorities, the extent to which neighborhood challenges and issues impact residents desire to live or remain in Union Hill and the social cohesion of neighbors and friends in Union Hill. The responses to these discussion points in turn guided the goals, objectives and recommendations developed in this plan.

Additional information was collected as needed through meetings held with key partners and community organizations to discuss mutually-relevant components of the plan and to refine the implementation strategies provided. The planning process culminated with the development of the final planning document in April 2012.
Yesterday.
Union Hill
The Historic Legacy of a Neighborhood 195 Years in the Making
Much of Union Hill’s early history is tied to Colonel Richard Adams I (1726-1800) who acquired large tracts of land from the prominent William Byrd. Adams believed that the future of Richmond lied to the East. A neighborhood 195 years in the making, the name Union Hill first appears in 1817 property records accounting for the joining of Doings’ and Adams’ Hills.

The name Union Hill is literally derived from the topography of the neighborhood which forcefully guided early patterns of development (as pictured in Image 9). It is a steep ravine that separates Union Hill from adjacent the Church Hill neighborhood providing for a breathtaking overlook of Shockoe Valley and downtown Richmond.

The street network was largely prescribed by John Adams and Benjamin Mosby who in 1805 created an irregular street pattern to accommodate the hilly terrain of Union Hill. Characterized by carefully scaled, oddly shaped blocks (as depicted in Map 10), the street pattern witnessed in Union Hill lies in rigid contrast to the traditional grid pattern found in adjacent Church Hill (Chen 2001).

“They used a grid pattern, but instead of a rigid plan with equal size squares like that of Richmond, the grid was adapted to curve and climb with the hills. This resulted in several narrow, bending streets, and squares of various sizes and shapes (Chen 2001)”.

Map 10
An 1864, detailed map of Union Hill shows the distinctive network of streets in comparison to Church Hill.


Image 9
A black and white photograph of Kenneth Harris’ watercolor painting titled “Venable Street,” depicts the difficult terrain of Union Hill during its early years.

Source: Valentine Museum Exhibition, Richmond, VA.
Map II
Union Hill and adjacent City of Richmond Old & Historic Districts
Map Created By:
Myia Batie
Prior to 1830, very little activity was occurring in the neighborhood, “Union Hill was almost a wilderness with a sparse population,” writes J.L. Wiltshire in 1943. The Union Hill Historic District registry identifies the presence of only four structures during the Early National Period (1789-1830), only one of which remains standing today. Constructed in 1824, the Adam Miller House (pictured above), is the oldest residence and contributing structure in the Union Hill Old & Historic District.

By 1830, Richmond had emerged on the national frontier as one of the three most affluent cities in the United States largely due to the success of its three leading industries, tobacco, flour and iron. Industrial growth which occurred at the wake of this era necessitated the construction of new housing to accommodate an emergent workforce. New homes constructed during this period were generally modest dwellings occupied by tailors, tanners, butchers, coach makers, teamsters, mechanics, painters, and carpenters (Chen 2001).

Industrialization resulted in both dramatic population growth for Union Hill and an increased diversity of economic status and race. The Union Hill Historic District registry notes that German-born immigrants and slaves, moving into free black boarding houses present in the neighborhood flocked to Union Hill. An article appearing in the Richmond Times Dispatch of March 18, 1856 provides a vivid description of Union Hill and its residents:

Union Hill is rapidly becoming a town within itself, and ... will soon be as thickly settled as almost any portion of Richmond. Most of the residents of this hill do business in Richmond—many of them are industrious, hard-fisted mechanics, who now own the tenements they occupy, and all of them are sober, honest citizens. We do not know of a neighborhood in the States where the laws are more rigidly observed by all classes than on Union Hill, and where, in the same amount of population, as few crimes are committed. The residents act as their own policemen[...].
Very little growth occurred in Union Hill during the years of the Civil War. Building materials became increasingly more scarce as the City was ravaged by war. Until 1865, Union Hill was isolated from adjacent Church Hill due to its difficult terrain; 25th and Venable Streets were the only thoroughfares providing access to the hills east of Shockoe Valley. Infrastructure and street grading improvements undertaken during the reconstruction years were completed to enhance access to the neighborhood (Chen 2001).

In 1867, Union Hill was officially annexed from Henrico County by the City of Richmond. This transaction spurred further improvements along Jefferson Avenue which was graded to facilitate ingress from the southern tip of Union Hill. In 1887 the privately held land belonging to Joshua Doing was purchased for the use of what is now Jefferson Park. In 1888, Sprague Electric Railway Motor Company announced the extension of the trolley line to Union Hill (Chen 2001).

As the terrain of Union Hill was smoothed and altered, it was not uncommon for the foundations of homes to consequently be exposed. The raising of homes resulted in the incidence of "skied porches" and "precipitous steps" that distinguish Union Hill from adjacent neighborhoods today.

By the 20th Century, much of the neighborhood was built to capacity and the commercialization of North 25th and Venable Streets and Jefferson Avenue was well underway. Many two story buildings were converted to accommodate a mix of uses; most frequently witnessed was the addition of store fronts on the first story of buildings located along these corridors.

The 1930’s introduced service stations as well as a noticeable economic and demographic transition in Union Hill. While the neighborhood had traditionally encompassed a diverse working-class population, by 1950 the neighborhood was largely impoverished and predominantly African-American. Ultimately, the level of disinvestment that occurred as a result of these dynamics contributed to the erosion of the neighborhood fabric that can be witnessed even today.

Images 15 & 16
Commercial properties as witnessed in Union Hill during the early 20th Century
Union Hill
Today.
An Analysis of Existing Conditions
The People of Union Hill

A Demographic Overview

The following quantitative analysis was compiled using United States Census records for 2000 and 2010. The assessment of certain demographic conditions helps to anticipate impending change or neighborhood succession, i.e., the process through which a neighborhood is rediscovered and revitalized.

Conditions indicating the likelihood of neighborhood succession include a shift from rental tenure to homeownership, higher income levels observed amongst the population of neighborhood residents, an expanded racial mix of residents and finally, an influx of amenities that serve newer affiliates of a neighborhood (Myerson 2006).

Population
In 2000, the US Census recorded 999 residents living in Union Hill. Since 2000, Union Hill’s population has increased by thirty-five percent, a rate of population growth far greater than that of the East Planning District during the same period. According to the 2010 US Census, the total population of Union Hill had increased to 1539 people between 2000 and 2010.

Race
In 2000, the racial composition of Union Hill was eighty-nine percent African-American (black) and eleven percent white. Compared to its neighbors, Union Hill had a slightly higher concentration of minority residents. However, the racial composition has significantly changed since 2000. The 2010 US Census reports that seventy-four percent of residents are African-American, twenty percent white, and five percent identify as another race.

In examining trends in the racial composition of Union Hill between 1990 and 2010, the neighborhood’s dramatic transformation becomes even more evident.

Estimates from the 1990 US Census indicate the neighborhood was ninety-five percent African-American.

Age Composition
The age composition of Union Hill is not particularly different than that of the greater East Planning District, except a higher percentage of elderly residents. Approximately fifteen percent of neighborhood residents in Union Hill are over the age of 65. Also of concern is the fact that nearly twenty percent of families in Union Hill are composed of single mothers with children. Both of these statistics have serious implications for the neighborhood as such populations often require tailored support services.

Image 17
The Church Hill House located at 2400 Burton Street fulfills a critical need for affordable housing amongst seniors and persons with disabilities in Union Hill. The building was fully renovated from its former use as a furniture warehouse and now features spacious and efficient one bedroom apartments.

Source: Myia Batie
Income & Poverty

The median annual household income for years 2006-2010 is estimated to be $15,422 for Union Hill, as observed in the American Community Survey. This is of particular concern as this statistic is the second lowest median household income observed in the East Planning District for the same years. Union Hill lies in harsh contrast to adjacent neighborhoods, such as Church Hill and Church Hill North in which the median annual household income is more than twice that observed in Union Hill.

Approximately forty-three percent of households earned an income below the poverty threshold between the same years. This statistic positions Union Hill as the third largest concentration of poverty in the East Planning District. Thirty-four percent of Union Hill residents earn less than $10,000 per year. Twenty-three percent of Union Hill residents receive assistance through such programs as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) which provides food subsidies to needy families.

While there is a perception that “extremely” high-income families and individuals are populating the neighborhood, this is not entirely reality. There does, however, appear to be a growing demographic of wage earners with incomes between $50,000 and $74,999 per year. The 2000 Census observed no more than six percent of Union Hill residents earning an income within this range; in 2010 however, approximately twenty-eight percent residents earned incomes between $50,000 and $74,000 per year. All of these findings position Union Hill as a neighborhood of disparate means.

Faith-based organizations in Union Hill, such as Cedar Street Baptist Church and Temple of Judah (both pictured to the right), run effective outreach campaigns that serve residents in need. These congregations distribute food and clothing to families in need and also administer financial assistance in the instance of imminent eviction or utility disconnection.

Source: Myia Batie
Educational Attainment

Union Hill is unique from other neighborhoods in the East Planning District in that it has both high proportions of persons who have not finished high school and persons who have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Approximately twenty-three percent of neighborhood residents age 25 years or older have not finished high school while nearly twenty percent of residents of the same age group have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Figure 20 shows the educational attainment for Union Hill as estimated by the US Census Bureau for years 2006-2010.

Employment

Of the population 16 years of age and older, fifty-five percent are participants in the labor force. Second only to Church Hill North, Union Hill has the lowest unemployment rate in the East Planning District. The mean travel time to work for Union Hill is 18.3 minutes, the shortest mean commute time observed in the East End where workers travel up to 28.2 minutes to their place of employment. This finding is likely a reflection of Union Hill’s advantageous proximity to Downtown and its ease of access to I-95 and I-64 which carry workers to other employment centers in the region.

Sixty-three percent of Union Hill residents who commute to work drive alone while eighteen percent rely on public transportation. The percentage of workers who utilize public transportation is among the highest observed in the East Planning District. Fairmont, the neighborhood situated immediately North of Union Hill boasts the highest use of public transportation of all East End neighborhoods.

Figure 20
Educational Attainment, Population 25 Years of Age and Older (American Community Survey 2006-2010).
Housing Tenure
Seventy-seven percent of residents living in Union Hill are renters; only twenty-three percent of residents are homeowners. Maps 21 and 22 show the overall distribution of housing tenure in Union Hill by block. The highest concentrations of owner-occupied units lie in the central and southeast portions of the neighborhood. Renter-occupied units are observed to be more densely concentrated north of Burton and Venable Streets. Since 2000, the number of homeowners have declined while the number of renters have increased in Union Hill. The 2000 US Census observed that seventy-four percent of residents in the neighborhood were renters while twenty-six percent of residents were homeowners.
Crime
Crime, both real and perceived, has been a challenge for Union Hill. While criminal offenses against people and property present legitimate concerns for residents of the neighborhood, the crime statistics for Union Hill show improvement over time.

In 2011, a total of 388 crimes were committed in the Union Hill neighborhood, 64 or sixteen percent of which were violent in nature. Violent crimes are defined by the Richmond Police Department as those involving homicide, aggravated assault and robbery.

While the overall occurrence of crime in Union Hill decreased by nine percent over the past five years, violent crimes remain steadfast—comprising between twelve and sixteen percent of all crime in Union Hill for this same period.

The majority of criminal activity occurring in Union Hill today is petty in nature involving theft of property, burglary or vice. Though more serious criminal activity, such as drug dealing can be observed in some corners and pockets of Union Hill, nuisance crimes are more frequently witnessed. Crime of this nature accounts for more than eighty percent of all crimes occurring in the neighborhood.

Figure 23
Source: City of Richmond Police Department, First Precinct
The Built Form of Union Hill

Land Use & Vacancy

Land Use

The land-use patterns of Union Hill have not drastically changed since its initial development. Union Hill remains a predominantly residential neighborhood featuring densely massed single family homes (as shown in Image 24). Of the 1,154 residential structures in the neighborhood, 411 of these are vacant and 743 are occupied as observed in the 2010 Census.

While Union Hill is primarily a residential neighborhood, the 25th Street corridor has re-emerged as an attractive commercial center. Here, two and three story commercial and mixed-use structures, many of which have beautiful architectural detailing, can be found.

The corridor is anchored by the City of Richmond First Police Precinct and the East District Initiative Center. Though many of these commercial and mixed-use structures currently sit vacant most have been rehabilitated and are now available for lease. As shown in Image 25, efforts to bring new life to this corridor are visible.

Images 24 & 25

Densely massed single-family homes are most frequently witnessed in Union Hill. However commercial uses can be witnessed along 25th Street (as shown above). Many of these properties have been rehabilitated and are now for lease.

Source: Myia Batie
Map 26
Land Use Map, Union Hill and Vicinity.
Map Created By Myia Batie
Vacancy
The area north of Venable Street and West of 21st Street can be characterized as the most severe landscape with Union Hill as the prevalence of vacant land and dilapidated properties is witnessed more frequently. Vacancy in Union Hill exists in two distinct forms, contiguous and scattered. Much more prevalent are scattered vacancies clustered amongst occupied structures. 22nd, 23rd, Burton, Tulip, Pink and Russell Streets are characterized by this form of vacancy. Mosby, O, 21st, and Venable Streets are better characterized by contiguous vacancy. Map 27 illustrates the concentration of vacant buildings in Union Hill.

Map 27
Clusters of Vacant Buildings and Land Use
Map prepared by Myia Batie
Images 28 & 29
Vacant properties along N. 25th Street.
Source: Myia Batie
An estimated 37% of residential properties in Union Hill are currently vacant.

Pictured to the right is an example of the physical desolation that can be witnessed in Union Hill (as witnessed at Venable & 22nd Streets). While the neighborhood initially developed as a densely massed residential community, over time structures have been demolished resulting in the erosion of the physical fabric (as shown in Map 30-figure ground) and the creation of voided, desert-like pockets.

Map 30
Union Hill Figure Ground Map.
Map prepared by Myia Batie
Image 31
Voided space at Venable & 22nd Streets.
Source: Myia Batie
Active Civic Groups & Organizations
The Union Hill Civic Association is the solitary civic group active within neighborhood boundaries. In addition to sponsoring this neighborhood planning process, the Association and its members have played an integral role in acquiring and promoting Union Hill as Richmond City’s 15th Old & Historic District.

The issue of historic designation for Union Hill has been both controversial and polarizing in nature. While the Union Hill Civic Association pre-dates the Union Hill Historic District Initiative by several years, the Association’s sponsorship of the Old & Historic District Initiative fragmented the neighborhood into two distinct groups—those for and against it.

The Historic District Initiative materialized at a time when the preservation of the neighborhood and its celebrated housing stock was threatened by increasing instances of dilapidation and consequent demolition.

By Fall 2009, the Union Hill Historic District Initiative had achieved its intended goal: On November 23, 2009, Richmond City Council voted 8-1 to designate Union Hill as the 15th Old & Historic District.
In effect, this decision empowers the City of Richmond Commission of Architectural Review to regulate the nature of future development which must now be effectuated in a manner regarding the architectural integrity of the building stock in Union Hill.

The Association created strategic partnerships with faith-based entities in an effort to reach a greater mass of Union Hill residents who were highly skeptical of historic designation benefits. Despite these efforts, an equal mass of contenders incited a highly publicized debate as to who the historic designation would benefit— or more importantly, harm.

Residents expressed that Union Hill remains very divided for these reasons today. Resentment toward the Old & Historic District Initiative coupled with the overall disinterest in civic engagement that is observed in our greater society are perhaps stifling the growth of the Union Hill Civic Association. The Treasurer estimates that there are no more than 12 active members.

While the Association is eager to involve greater numbers of residents in its social and political activities, the group remains small and largely homogenous. This is of particular concern in a neighborhood that encompasses a significant diversity of race, income, ethnicity and other affiliations.

Councilwoman Cynthia Newbille recommended the designation despite division over the historic district initiative.

Source: www.cynthianewbille.com
Media Coverage of Union Hill

Local media coverage of Union Hill particularly in the era of the Union Hill Historic District Initiative (2008-2009) focused heavily on the tensions between those for and against the historic designation. Many articles discussed concerns that the historic designation and the regulatory burdens that accompanied it would make it difficult for lower-income and elderly homeowners to maintain their properties and thereby force out long-time residents.

Though the Union Hill Civic Association was attempting to market itself as an organization that represented the interests of Union Hill and its diverse resident base, the media’s slant had a profound effect on neighborhood morale and public perception of the neighborhood. While some would argue the reality of neighborhood dynamics was sensationalized, Union Hill was portrayed as a neighborhood ravaged by both classicism and racism—a neighborhood in which the Commission of Architectural Review was willing to impose restrictive regulations concerning the status of properties owned or occupied by thousands of black residents to serve the interests of far fewer wealthy white residents.

Union Hill is finding its way back into the news, but this time to a much different tune. In the spring of 2011, Union Hill residents banded together to fight crime through the use of social media. For 45 days, Union Hill residents posted anonymously to Twitter about drug dealing and other neighborhood problems until the police division determinedly responded to their pleas for intervention by undertaking a door-to-door outreach campaign. This is an example of positive change in Union Hill made possible through the strength of its residents.

The above quotes appeared in the Style Weekly article “Preserve or Push Out.” This piece documented the strife between residents for and against the designation of Union Hill as a historic district.

Overlapping Redevelopment Plans: The East End Transformation Initiative

In June 2010, the City of Richmond joined forces with the Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority and Bon Secours Hospitals to plan for a more vibrant East Planning District. The goals of this planning effort, known as the East End Transformation Plan, were to address social, educational, and physical challenges in the 7th District.

This planning effort is relevant to the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan as many of its goals respond to challenges witnessed in Union Hill. The direction yielded from the engagement of community members, stakeholders, and business owners was used to support grant applications for two federal programs— the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative and the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative. Unfortunately, these grant funds were not captured.

Still, the plan proposes infill development along 25th Street as well as the creation of an arts and learning center at the intersection of 25th and Venable Streets. The City of Richmond views this site as an important town center and given the number of vacant commercial structures at this site, foresees an opportunity to provide targeted activities for children, elderly, and working artists.

Improvements are also proposed for the Martin Luther King Bridge which provides direct access to Union Hill. Renderings stipulate the expansion of sidewalks and a reduction in the number of lanes dedicated to vehicular traffic. These improvements will facilitate an improved connection between Union Hill and the greater city.
Services & Resources
Though Union Hill is a small neighborhood, it is home to a number of benevolent faith-based and non-profit service providers. A map of key neighborhood services, as identified by Union Hill residents appears below.

A. East District Initiative, 701 N 25th St, Richmond, VA
B. East District Family Resource Center, 2405 Jefferson Ave, Richmond, VA
C. Cedar Street Memorial Baptist, 2301 Cedar St, Richmond, VA
D. Temple of Judah, 2120 Venable St, Richmond, VA
The Social Fabric of Union Hill

Neighborhood Cohesion

Generally, neighborhood cohesion can be gauged by observing three factors: public spaces, community activities, and what is occurring at points of physical division. In each of these instances, an inspiring sense of unity between residents of diverse perspectives can be witnessed in Union Hill.

Public Spaces
An initial study of public spaces in the context of Union Hill would only reveal Jefferson Park, the East District Initiative Center and the node at 25th and Venable Streets as public spaces provided in the neighborhood. However, residents identified a plethora of quasi-public spaces frequented by activity.

Some owners in Union Hill have began to purchase vacant lots to preserve for green space and urban farming as pictured in Image 37. These vacant parcels accommodate a variety of uses that are in most instances beneficial to the neighborhood. Residents indicated that bonfires, barbecues and other gatherings are commonly hosted in these spaces during warmer months.

Residents also mentioned neighborhood movie nights at which a large sheet is hung on the side of a house and movies are projected onto the makeshift screen; neighbors are invited to congregate in the adjacent grassy area to enjoy the movie being displayed.

Occasionally witnessed throughout Union Hill is the preservation of vacant lots as green spaces particularly dedicated to gardens or urban farming as shown above.

Source: Myia Batie.
Community Activities
The Union Hill Civic Association sponsors three annual events including a holiday progressive, Brunswick Stew Festival and the neighborhood clean-up. These events promote a sense of mutual support and solidarity amongst residents reinforced through smaller, more spontaneous community activities (such as the bonfires and movie nights described by residents).

The Civic Association also partners with neighborhood faith-based organizations to support the CLARITAS initiative through which shelter and meals are provided to the city’s homeless population at various sites throughout Richmond. The faith-based organizations in Union Hill play a pivotal role in serving and reaching out to the less fortunate residents of Union Hill.

While all of the aforementioned efforts are largely successful and well-patroned by residents and friends of Union Hill, many residents expressed a need for more neighborhood activities—particularly those that benefit the elderly and the youth of Union Hill. While the elderly comprise a significant portion of the Union Hill population, in the case of this planning process, this population cohort was the most difficult to reach. Some residents speculate that the fear of violent crimes and drug-related activity taking place in the neighborhood may discourage elderly residents from venturing out.

Many residents expressed concern with the location of this particular ABC store in the neighborhood especially its location so close to the Church Hill House. Loitering and other incivilities are often witnessed on this particular corner.

Image 37
The Brunswick Stew Festival, 2010. Sponsored by the Union Hill Civic Association.
Image Source: Union Hill Civic Association Facebook.

Image 38
Many residents expressed concern with the location of this particular ABC store in the neighborhood especially its location so close to the Church Hill House. Loitering and other incivilities are often witnessed on this particular corner.
Image Source: Myia Batie
Similarly, when asked if Union Hill was a good place to raise children, parents in Union Hill often cited crime and the lack of well-planned activities and outlets for youth as the factors that make Union Hill less than ideal to raise school-aged children. “Starting off was great,” described one parent, “but [Union Hill] is not good for the long term.”

Physical Division
Though Union Hill is effective at mobilizing its assets to effect change, some residents discussed a noticeable divide in the neighborhood that roughly occurs at Venable Street, the point at which North Union Hill is distinguished from South Union Hill. “We don’t know much about our neighbors North of Venable,” described one resident who views the neighborhoods lack of a collective community vision as a hindrance to its progress. This point of physical division coincides with the distribution of owners and renters observed in the neighborhood as shown in Maps 21 and 22 (see page 30).

This perception was substantiated in conversations with other residents and stakeholders who discussed the noticeable economic disparities in the neighborhood. “The divide in Union Hill is not racial,” one resident stated, “its more about who owns what.” Active participants in the neighborhood indicate that the high incidence of renters in Union Hill remains a challenge for fostering neighborhood cohesion. “It’s hard for renters to get excited or invest in the changes that are underway.”

However, some residents indicate its equally difficult for homeowners of lesser means to participate in the evolution of Union Hill. When asked what was most impressive and most discouraging about Union Hill, several residents indicated an appreciation of the restoration that is taking place but expressed an equal level of discouragement in their inability to afford improvements to their own properties. Yet, the physical improvement of aged and dilapidated properties was frequently cited as the one action that would have the greatest impact on the quality of life experienced by all residents.

The above images illustrate the two faces of Union Hill. In many areas, revitalization efforts are underway however in others, the aesthetic is more severe.

Source: Myia Batie
People & Quality of Life

More important than any other facet of a neighborhood is its people. Union Hill distinguishes itself amongst Richmond City’s slew of urban neighborhoods with its impressive level of diversity and educational attainment. However, many residents are captive to the burdens of poverty. Disparities in the neighborhood must be addressed in order to prevent displacement and the onset of other negative consequences to neighborhood succession.

Built Form

Vacancy and dilapidation throughout the Union Hill neighborhood is both an obstacle and an opportunity for Union Hill’s residents. Derelict properties present an occasion to create more accessible and affordable housing options. Rehabilitation efforts also present opportunities to create jobs and retain buying power within the context of the neighborhood.

Political Capacity

Union Hill has a strong and active Civic Association that has leveraged the collective talents of its members to effect positive change in the neighborhood. However, its growth in membership remains stagnant. It is imperative that the association recruits more resident involvement and a diversity of perspectives. This will ensure that the priorities of the neighborhood are determined equitably and reflect the desires of all neighborhood participants.

Neighborhood Cohesion

Union Hill has a strong core of committed and active residents who network to involve neighbors in making the neighborhood a nice place to live. However, healthy relationships must be fostered between long-time community members and newcomers, renters and homeowners, and North and South Union Hill, to solidify a unified, collective voice for Union Hill. This will allow the neighborhood to more clearly position itself as a desirable neighborhood unit attracting the attention of new residents, inquiring developers and other partner organizations.
Community Priorities
Union Hill is poised for holistic revitalization. From the planning process emerged a vision for the future of the Union Hill building upon the neighborhood’s rich history and fascinating present. Residents highlighted building a better sense of community, rehabilitating existing buildings, attracting new residents, the need for more businesses in the neighborhood and improving 25th and Venable as a commercial center as top neighborhood priorities. Many also identified improving local volunteer efforts and relationships with neighbors as important goals.

A Strategic Vision for Union Hill

Union Hill as a pioneer for grassroots community redevelopment in Richmond.
Many individuals will join the strong base of organized residents who are active and committed to the progress of Union Hill. The strength of the collective resident voice is expressed through the Union Hill Civic Association who partners with other organizations in the neighborhood to ensure that new investments in the neighborhood result in an equitable distribution of benefits amongst the resident body.

Union Hill as a desirable neighborhood of choice.
Union Hill’s location adjacent to downtown, easy access to transportation networks and inventory of historic architecture will be strengthened and built upon; the physical fabric of the community will be mended. With an improved appearance and greater recognition as a truly mixed-income neighborhood, a sense of permanence (rather than transience) is instilled amongst renters and homeowners alike.

Union Hill as an empowered neighborhood.
Just as neighborhood buildings are being restored so are the people of Union Hill. A well balanced supply of need-specific services and activities are provided in the neighborhood context and residents take full advantage of these resources to improve their life circumstances. Community programs that promote education attainment, skills development, and healthy financial habits are vital elements that reduce social and economic disparity.

Union Hill as a cohesive community where tolerance, respect and diversity is embraced.
Union Hill has historically encompassed a rich mix of people and races. As the neighborhood evolves and begins to recapture population, the community will respond with tolerance and respect empowering residents and stakeholders to come together in celebration of the neighborhood’s authenticity.
The vision for Union Hill translates into four goals, each of which encompasses a series of specific objectives echoing the desires of Union Hill residents as expressed throughout the planning process. A set of strategies (or recommendations) follow each goal statement and objective detailing steps that the Union Hill neighborhood and its leadership should undertake to achieve the community defined goals.

These recommendations seek to build upon efforts already at work in the area while also introducing new ideas that help form a more comprehensive approach to managing neighborhood change. Based on neighborhood priorities, observed neighborhood dynamics and the intensity of the proposed course of action, each recommendation has been assigned a phase.

**Short-Term Recommendations** are those objectives that should be implemented within 1-2 years. Generally, these activities are low-cost, programmatic initiatives that will be relatively easy to execute.

**Intermediate Recommendations** are those objectives that should be implemented within 3-5 years. Generally, these activities are secondary priorities dependent on the success of short-term strategies and may require dollars to be raised.

**Long-Term Recommendations** are those objectives that have a horizon of 5-10 years or greater. These activities are big-picture, big-cost ideas that are highly dependent on smaller triumphs sustained over time.
Objective 1.1: Engage a broader base of active neighborhood stakeholders to ensure continuity and fair representation of values.

**Strategy:** Organize a neighborhood advisory board to coordinate and guide revitalization efforts.

**What?** Union Hill should convene a Neighborhood Advisory Board to build support for and oversee implementation of the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan. The Board should include representatives of committed neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations, service providers, business owners, resident volunteers and public officials ready to work with each other, the City of Richmond, potential funders, and private partners to serve the neighborhood populace and push for real change.

The Community Advisory Committee should be charged with tracking the status of the plan and organizing subcommittees leading each initiative provided in the plan. The board should meet quarterly to coordinate and report on implementation achievements, ensure that specific milestones of the plan are met, and review neighborhood updates.

**Why?** The advisory board will be useful in mobilizing neighborhood support of the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan. For this reason, the advisory board must be seen as a collective voice channeling the support of a wide range of neighborhood leaders.

**Who?** Union Hill Civic Association in partnership with neighborhood organizations and stakeholders.
Objective 1.2: Increase the effectiveness and reach of the Union Hill Civic Association.

**Strategy: Relocate meetings and activities to a more central and accessible location.**

*What?* The location of Union Hill Civic Association meetings should be moved to a central destination that can be more easily accessed by all residents. The current location of UHCA meetings places unnecessary burden on those neighbors who do not live in the southern portion of the neighborhood.

*Why?* This gesture would promote greater transparency and inclusiveness.

*Who?* Union Hill Civic Association

**Strategy: Mobilize the Union Hill Civic Association to welcome and tend to the needs of new and current residents.**

*What?* Implement a resident networking strategy that builds relationships between new and old neighbors and further encourages participation in neighborhood activities and events. Continued use and expansion of the Union Hill Civic Association’s social media and blog sites is encouraged to disseminate Union Hill news and information to all residents.

*Why?* All residents should feel welcomed, heard and informed of opportunities to become involved. Developing and improving relationships between neighbors, especially if some of them are new to Union Hill, can be one of the most important things seasoned residents do to help the neighborhood survive in a changing environment.

*Who?* Union Hill Civic Association
Objective 1.3: Require that all construction and rehabilitation efforts result in the creation of neighborhood jobs, affordable housing units, living wages, or environmental improvements.

Strategy: Execute a Community Benefits Agreement that must be yielded to in all cases of proposed developments.

What? A Community Benefits Agreement is a legally enforceable contract signed by community groups and by a developer, setting forth a range of community benefits that the developer agrees to provide as part of a project in exchange for the community’s support of the proposed project. Reflecting community values and priorities, Union Hill’s Community Benefits Agreement could require developers to help fund one of the initiatives identified in this plan or address the following:

- An affordable housing minimum.
- An open or public space maintenance criteria.
- A neighborhood security criteria.
- A job creation and local hiring criteria.

Why? A Community Benefits Agreement will be useful in negotiating with developers of market-rate projects impacting the residents of Union Hill.

Who? Union Hill Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.
Objective 2.1: Develop a program for blighted properties.

*Strategy:* Assemble and deploy a home maintenance and improvement volunteer corps.

*What?* Assemble and deploy a volunteer corps to help with more manageable home improvement and maintenance projects—especially assisting elderly and low-income homeowners throughout Union Hill.

*Years 3-5*  

*Why?* While some property owners care very little about the upkeep of their assets, most property owners want to maintain and improve their homes. Assistance should be available to property owners who do not have adequate resources or ability to manage their properties to a high standard.

*Who?* Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.
Strategy: Petition the City of Richmond to exercise use of the receivership law recently passed by the House and Senate.

What? Receivership for blighted buildings is the process through which a court can take possession of a vacant and blighted building in order to repair it and make it habitable again. The Union Hill neighborhood should petition city authorities to exercise use of this law in order to remedy extreme instances of dilapidation and blight.

Why? The Virginia derelict building receivership law offers relief to those most affected by blight: the surrounding neighbors. Often, the property rights of those who live near blighted properties are forgotten in the debate over blight and private property rights. Every passing day presents a new risk of fire, collapse and incivility, a solution resulting in the cleanup and repair of a blighted buildings while protecting the owner of the blighted property is good for Union Hill.

Who? Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.

Virginia Derelict Building Receivership Law: How does it work?

Receivership for blighted buildings is the process through which a court can appoint a receiver to take possession (but not ownership) of a vacant and blighted building in order to repair it and make it habitable again.

The value of the asset, in this case the blighted building, is not only preserved but actually enhanced. This is of direct benefit to the Union Hill neighborhood as well those property owners who have neglected their properties overtime.

The Virginia derelict building receivership law recently passed in the Commonwealth is very limited in scope. In its current state, the law allows a locality to petition the court to be appointed as the receiver for a vacant and blighted residential property that has already been the subject of a Spot Blight Abatement ordinance by the local governing body.

Acting as receiver, the locality can then contract for all reasonable repairs necessary to bring the property into compliance with the building code. The cost of the repair work is attached to the property as a “lien on par” with delinquent real estate taxes. The owner of the property can redeem it at any time by paying the receiver’s lien (Pearson 2011).
Objective 2.2: Stabilize vacant lots and underutilized land wherever possible by preserving as play and/or green space.

**Strategy: Identify and inventory open space in Union Hill.**

**What?** Vacant land that is not suitable for new development in the near future should be inventoried and considered as an opportunity for community building activities. The parcels can serve as productive space for nearby residents.

**Why?** Vacant lots can be transformed to accommodate temporary uses like gardens, play spaces, picnic areas or dog parks. In other cases, vacant land represents an opportunity to explore more permanent reuse possibilities including urban farming, tree nurseries or fruit orchards.

**Who?** Neighborhood Advisory Board

**Strategy: Connect parcel owners with local resources for green space development.**

**What?** Initiate discussions with those already involved in greening activities within Union Hill. A database of local individuals who have expressed an interest in greening should be compiled. The opportunity to create a tool shed in the community should also be explored.

**Why?** The idea of this loosely structured “greening alliance” is to share information but also offer assistance in neighborhood clean-ups, plantings, etc carried out by the volunteer corps (see Objective 2.1). The tool shed is necessary as many residents who may be willing to help maintain lots may not be able to do so because they do not have access to the necessary tools.

**Who?** Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the James River Green Building Council and the Richmond Association of Renters.
Objective 2.3: Ensure the provision of a wide range of housing options and neighborhood services.

**Strategy:** Encourage and advocate for the rehabilitation of vacant properties as affordable, mixed-income housing.

**What?** The neighborhood should work with the local and state housing authorities to encourage future housing developments to blend market-rate units with a set aside of affordable units for renters or buyers earning equal to or less than 80% of Area Median Income (AMI).

**Why?** Housing rehabilitation is a key ingredient to the revitalization of Union Hill. However, improving access to quality affordable housing opportunities is equally important and will help attract a diverse population of future residents.

**Who?** Neighborhood Advisory Board

**Images 41 & 42**
Shown to the left is an affordable housing development located on Venable Street before and after rehabilitation. This multifamily complex now contributes four permanently affordable units to Union Hill. Prior to rehabilitation, the building was blighted and in severe disrepair. The owner partnered with the Virginia Housing Development Authority to finance the redevelopment of this property which has set the pace for additional investments along Venable Street.

**Source:** VHDA (Image 41), Myia Batie (Image 42).
Strategy: Re-establish the intersection of Venable and 25th Streets as a thriving neighborhood center aligning the course of development with that proposed in the East End Transformation Plan.

What? With new interest and investment in housing, Union Hill needs to balance its residential growth with equal emphasis on improving its commercial opportunities. Union Hill should be proactive in attracting a new business to this node—especially a small supermarket that provides a range of healthy and fresh food choices. Continuous coordination with local officials and developers will be needed to re-establish the 25th and Venable Street node as a commercial center.

Why? There is an expressed need for more retail options provided in the context of the neighborhood. Additionally, new jobs and services within the neighborhood unit are necessary to reducing economic disparities in Union Hill.

Who? Neighborhood Advisory Board in collaboration with the City of Richmond Department of Economic Development.

Other Considerations:
The Neighborhood Advisory board should consider advocating for the permitting of food carts and other mobile commerce to operate along the 25th Street corridor. Mobile commerce will bring activity and flavor to this commercial node. Food carts can especially help fill a gap in services until new development is completed in the area that accommodates a traditional supermarket or grocery store. Such ventures can also be a source of income for neighborhood residents looking to start small businesses.

Image 43
The Economic and Community Development Institute of Columbus, Ohio offers a “menu” of programs for facilitating the creation of a mobile food vending businesses at a very low upfront cost. Instead of having to raise the money to buy a cart, new vendors can rent a cart by the day or the month from ECDI. The vendor just needs to obtain a peddlers license and liability insurance. Vendors add their own branding and signage to the cart.

Source: www.ecdi.org
Objective 3.1: Connect residents to resources that reduce vulnerability to economic cycles.

Strategy: Develop a neighborhood resource directory where residents can access information and assistance.

What? Create a directory, complete with a map, of programs and services available to residents of Union Hill. The directory should function as a tool to initiate better coordination of services in the neighborhood. The cooperation necessary to compile the directory, alone, should facilitate better communication between providers and develop referral relationships between entities serving Union Hill residents. To further facilitate referrals, a Union Hill neighborhood service providers’ subcommittee should convene several times throughout the year to coordinate outreach and referrals. The directory should be distributed to all Union Hill residents once per year to ensure that people remain informed about neighborhood resources. Encourage all service providers to keep copies of the directory in their offices for additional distribution. Include information about city-wide resources and service providers located in adjacent East End neighborhoods as well.

Why? A neighborhood resource collective is necessary to initiating better coordination, marketing of programs and services available in Union Hill.

Who? Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with neighborhood service providers.
Strategy: Educate residents about the Virginia Individual Development Account program.

What? Asset poor families at times must rely on public resources, this is a function of a system that discourages rather than encourages savings and investment. The VIDA program provides low-income participants with training in asset-building skills and an opportunity to generate savings through an account matched at a 2:1 ratio. Increasing the capacity of Union Hill families to be savers and investors in their communities promises long-term economic and social returns.

Why? The VIDA program is an opportunity for families to build financial assets and enables participants to weather economic crises, upgrade their job skills and invest in their communities. Building family assets helps to strengthen communities by ensuring that residents have the capacity to participate—as consumers and investors—in the neighborhood economy.

Who? Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.
Objective 3.2: Promote homeownership opportunities for low-to-moderate income neighborhood residents.

**Strategy: Recruit local housing counseling agencies to provide homeownership education.**

*What?* Homeownership education should target renters who are potential buyers for affordable homeownership opportunities in Union Hill. These educational opportunities will help prepare potential first-time buyers for homeownership through counseling, credit repair courses and financial literacy courses. Existing homeowners should also be supported with courses on building and leveraging home equity.

*Why?* A focus on increasing the neighborhood’s homeownership rate is necessary to reduce the level of transience observed in Union Hill. This will afford the neighborhood an opportunity to build continuity as Union Hill continues to evolve. A desirable benchmark would be a homeownership rate of 50% within the next 10 years.

*Who?* Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Virginia Association of Housing Counselors.

**Strategy: Pilot a non-traditional homeownership model such as a Limited Equity Housing Co-Operative within Union Hill.**

*What?* Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives are business corporations in which residents share ownership of a building. Co-op members work together to reach mutual goals based on democratic control and decision-making. Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives offer ownership opportunities to lower income households while limiting the return from resale received from the housing thereby preserving the affordability of units contained within the development.

*Why?* A Limited Equity Housing Cooperative is one approach to resident-controlled housing in Union Hill. It provides an alternative pathway to homeownership for those who may experience barriers to traditional homeownership. Similar techniques include limited-equity condominiums, mutual housing associations, co-housing, and community land trusts.

*Who?* Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with a public or non-profit developer.
Objective 4.1: Dissolve tensions between new and long term residents.

**Strategy:** Recruit a neutral party to facilitate workshops discussing the benefits and requirements of the Old & Historic District designation.

**What?** Conduct a series of workshops to educate residents about the benefits and requirements of the Old & Historic designation.

**Why?** Helping residents understand the Old & Historic designation will help dispel negative perceptions about the impact and intent of historic preservation efforts in Union Hill.

**Who?** Union Hill Civic Association in partnership with the Storefront for Community Design.

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**Goal Four:** Reinforce the relationships amongst neighbors and strengthen the unique identity of Union Hill.

**Strategy:** Promote and expand organized neighborhood events which are opportunities for productive interactions.

**What?** The Union Hill Civic Association organizes special events for children and families, such as the annual Brunswick Stew festival. This is a wonderful gathering to meet new neighbors and reconnect with old ones. Additional festivals should be integrated in the spectrum of the Union Hill Civic Association’s outreach efforts. These might include a neighborhood garage sale, home tours or music and art related showcases.

**Why?** A key to cultural diversity in neighborhoods is finding common ground among citizens. Neighborhood events facilitate opportunities for dialogue and interaction.

**Who?** Union Hill Civic Association.
Objective 4.2: Attract and maintain a diverse mix of Residents.

Strategy: Expand opportunities for target populations in Union Hill including youth and elderly residents.

What? Union Hill needs recreation space where youth of all ages can play year-round and elderly residents can network and engage. Improvements to existing programs housed within the Family Resource Center and the East District Initiative will allow for the expansion of activities that benefit neighborhood youth and elderly including an activity center.

Why? Union Hill lacks activities that cater specifically to the needs of youth and elderly residents. Residents expressed a need for improved opportunities in this regard often citing the lack thereof as a compelling force in one’s decision not to remain in Union Hill.

Who? Neighborhood Advisory Board.

Strategy: Market Union Hill as a diverse mixed-income neighborhood.

What? The following steps should be taken to put Union Hill on the local map:
- Increase the awareness and attendance of Union Hill sponsored events by marketing the events in nearby neighborhoods.
- Work with graphic designers and local fabricators to develop and produce new signage at a range of scales for Union Hill’s gateways and corridors. The design and use of language should be welcoming to existing residents and promote local diversity to visitors.

Why? Ethnic and racial diversity infuses Union Hill with a distinct vibrancy that should be marketed as a defining characteristic of the neighborhood’s present and future identity.

Who? Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.
The Union Hill Civic Association has proven extremely capable and knowledgeable demonstrating the ability to undertake strong leadership responsibilities in guiding these many recommendations toward reality. But with new ideas comes the need for more people to be actively involved. As the lead entity and sponsor of this plan, the Union Hill Civic Association will need to present this plan before a number of public officials, potential partners, and quality developers to jump-start the implementation of key recommendations, further refine the plan, and prioritize individual projects. Progress is underway, the challenge now is to maintain the energy and momentum.

Poised for Change
References


Fainstein, Susan S. The Just City. 2010.


References (continued)


### Implementation Matrix

**Years 1-2**

*Note that strategies are organized in terms of priority*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy (Recommendation)</th>
<th>When to begin</th>
<th>Organizational Responsibility and Partner(s)</th>
<th>Contact or Resource for Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relocate meetings and activities to a more central and accessible location.</td>
<td>Immediately.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association leadership cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a series of workshops to educate residents about the benefits and requirements of the Old &amp; Historic designation.</td>
<td>6 months – one year.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association in partnership with the Storefront for Community Design.</td>
<td>Storefront for Community Design 1001 North 25th Street Richmond, Virginia (804) 322-9556 <a href="mailto:info@storefrontrichmond.org">info@storefrontrichmond.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilize the Union Hill Civic Association to welcome and tend to the needs of new and current residents.</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association leadership cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize a neighborhood advisory board to coordinate and guide revitalization efforts.</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association in partnership with neighborhood organizations and stakeholders.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association leadership cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a neighborhood resource directory where residents can access information and assistance.</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with neighborhood service providers.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and inventory open space in Union Hill.</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy (Recommendation)</td>
<td>When to begin</td>
<td>Organizational Responsibility and Partner(s)</td>
<td>Contact or Resource for Implementation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemble and deploy a home maintenance and improvement volunteer corps.</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association leadership cabinet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Educate residents about the Virginia Individual Development Account program. | Year 3 | Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. | Louellen Brumgard  
Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development  
(804) 371-7069  
louellen.brumgard@dhcd.gov |
| Recruit local housing counseling agencies to provide homeownership education. | Year 4 | Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Virginia Association of Housing Counselors. | Catrina Paige, Secretary  
P.O. Box 610  
Urbanna, VA  
cpaige@bayaging.org |
<p>| Encourage and advocate for the rehabilitation of vacant properties as affordable, mixed-income housing. | Year 4 | Neighborhood Advisory Board. | To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy (Recommendation)</th>
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<th>Organizational Responsibility and Partner(s)</th>
<th>Contact or Resource for Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect parcel owners with local resources for green space development.</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the James River Green Building Council and the Richmond Association of Renters.</td>
<td>James River Green Building Council 2415 Westwood Avenue Richmond, VA (804) 440-0599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execute a Community Benefits Agreement that must be yielded to in all cases of proposed developments.</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Union Hill Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Implementation Matrix

**Years 5-10**

*Note that strategies are organized in terms of priority*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy (Recommendation)</th>
<th>When to begin</th>
<th>Organizational Responsibility and Partner(s)</th>
<th>Contact or Resource for Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petition the City of Richmond to exercise use of the receivership law recently passed by the House and Senate.</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-establish the intersection of Venable and 25th Streets as a thriving neighborhood center aligning the course of development with that proposed in the East End Transformation Plan.</td>
<td>Years 5-6</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board in collaboration with the City of Richmond Department of Economic and Community Development.</td>
<td>Ashley Peace, Senior Planner Department of Economic and Community Development 1500 Main Street Station, Suite 400 Richmond, VA (804) 646-5633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand opportunities for target populations in Union Hill including youth and elderly residents.</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot a non-traditional homeownership model such as a Limited Equity Housing Co-Operative within Union Hill.</td>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with a public or non-profit developer.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote and expand organized neighborhood events which are opportunities for productive interactions.</td>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>Union Hill Civic Association leadership cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Union Hill as a diverse mixed-income neighborhood.</td>
<td>Years 9-10</td>
<td>Neighborhood Advisory Board in partnership with the Union Hill Civic Association.</td>
<td>To be determined after the formulation of the Neighborhood Advisory Board.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus Group Questions:

Greeting: Hello! Thank you for taking time to participate in this focus group. The dialogue exchanged today will be used to identify opportunities for neighborhood improvements. Your concerns will directly inform the direction of the Union Hill Neighborhood Plan.

What are the circumstances that brought you to Union Hill?

Tell me about the relationships you have with your neighbors.

As you walk or drive through Union Hill, what impresses you? What discourages you?

Would you agree that Union Hill is a good place to raise a family? Why or why not?

In your opinion, are there adequate programs, services and opportunities in Union Hill to meet your needs?

In your opinion, what is one action Union Hill could address that would have the greatest impact on the quality of life you experience?

Participants were also provided with copies of the following maps and were asked to identify positive or negative aspects in their community and areas where they most desired to see improvements occur.
Notes on Research Methodology

Demographic/Socio-Economic Data

Statistical data was collected from the 2000-2010 US Census American Fact Finder website. Whenever possible data was obtained for the Block (100) level which provides 100% data.

The American Community Survey does not provide as precise of data. ACS Estimates for 2006-2010 are provided at the Tract Level only. In these instances, data was collected for all tracts situated in the East Planning District (202, 203, 205-212) and for the three tracts that encompass Union Hill (205-207).

Vacancy/Crime Statistics

Information regarding vacant buildings was provided by the City of Richmond Department of Code Enforcement. The Vacant Building Registry was last updated in August 2011. Addresses were geocoded by address and overlaid on top of the neighborhood boundary file to approximate the location of vacancies in Union Hill. Crime statistics were provided by the City of Richmond First Police Precinct for the period beginning January 1, 2011 and ending December 31, 2011.

Political Capacity

A thorough review of literature indicated that neighborhood succession (or gentrification) could be measured by examining trends in population, race, and income for a neighborhood. For these reasons, an analysis of CDC investment and mortgage lending activity was omitted from the process.

Social Dynamics/Resident Cohesion

Data obtained through the engagement of residents and stakeholders is not intended to statistically substantiate quantitative findings as resident outreach efforts did not capture a high quantity of residents.