

Belmont Cragin Quality-of-Life Planning Task Force Meeting, April 30, 2015

With a full agenda and a new planning consultant facilitating the conversation, the Belmont Cragin Taskforce's April 30th meeting was a turning point for the community's quality-of-life planning process.

Vanessa Valentin of the Northwest Side Housing Center opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, including some new faces, and introducing the planning consultants.

“Over the next months, we'll work together to create an overall vision, goals, strategies and projects,” said Scott Goldstein from Teska Associates, the consulting firm chosen from several candidates to facilitate the planning process. “We'll be thinking about how to mobilize the community around the goals and projects, building trust and getting people and groups together that possibly haven't worked together before.”

Teska's Goldstein and Heidi Valenzuela asked the more than two dozen participants at the meeting to help build on ideas, information and momentum that the Taskforce has created over the last three months. After introductions, the meeting started by adding to the ideas for a vision of the community, supplementing the quick, small-group visioning session from the April 1st meeting.

The key ideas coming out of the discussion were to build on the work that was done at the prior meeting by adding the words in bold to one of the statements that had been developed: “Belmont Cragin is recognized as one of the most desirable, **united, multi-cultural, family and youth-friendly, affordable, and healthy** neighborhoods in the city.” More work will be done at the next meeting of the Taskforce to finalize the vision statement.

Participants were also asked to suggest key assets in the community for each of the working group categories. “The traditional way of creating a community strategy starts with the neighborhood's problems,” Goldstein noted. “An asset-based approach lets us see the strengths of the community and how our strategy can use those.” (Both the vision and asset lists from the meeting are at the end of these notes).

Teska and Northwest Side Housing Center, which is leading the Belmont Cragin quality-of-life planning process, suggested that moving forward, the assembled group change its organizational structure in a few ways. One or two representatives from each of the working groups will participate as “delegates” in the Taskforce's monthly meetings, freeing up time for others to maximize their involvement in the nuts-and-bolts work done in the working group meetings and projects. Public safety—a key issue in the community—will be a topic considered in each of the working groups, rather than as a stand-alone issue group. The Taskforce agreed with these changes.

Each of the working groups then gave a short presentation on their current status.

Youth: The youth group will be holding a Youth Picnic on May 23rd from 10 am – 2 pm at St. Peter’s Church. The event will provide food, fun and a safe place for youth from across the community to get together (students at Schurz, Steinmetz and Chicago Academy are involved, and the hope is Belmont Cragin teens from Foreman, Prosser and other CPS schools outside the community will attend, too). The youth group, which is meeting weekly, has applied for a grant from Mikva Challenge, but regardless, the event will be free.

Education: Planning is far along for the first Belmont Cragin Schools Coming Together education summit, one of two quality-of-life early action projects. Held on June 6th, from 9 am – 12 pm at Steinmetz High School, the summit is the first-ever assembling of schools from across the neighborhood for parents, students and other interested residents to learn more about what each of the public schools has to offer. It will also offer a chance to discuss parent mentors, tutoring, parent resources and social service resources. Representatives from the Chicago Public Library Portage-Cragin branch will be there as well, running a workshop on its summer reading program. Prosser and Steinmetz students are designing the event’s logo for t-shirts, and Prosser students will cater the event. The education working group is coordinating the efforts with the CPS Office of Family and Community Engagement.

Health: The health working group is looking to expand the scope of its work, including adding expanded perspectives on health in the community, such as bringing in Patrick Corcoran from Get Covered Illinois, the state program working to raise health insurance enrollment. The group is talking about how to bring more information to residents, such as a glossary of local resources for distribution and how to best use health care once someone has coverage.

Economic Development: The “Welcome to Belmont Cragin” street banner early action project is the main focus of the economic development group. Steinmetz and Foreman High School students are creating design (10 submissions from Steinmetz and 100 submissions from Foreman) and on May 12, at the Belmont Cragin “On the Table” picnic at Cragin Park, the designs will be on display, and the picnic participants will vote for a winner (the artist will win an iPad). Outreach will begin soon to local businesses and other organizations to sponsor a banner, which will cost \$75-\$100 each. The program will place 100 banners total on Cicero, Laramie, Belmont, Diversity, Fullerton, Grand and Central—three banners per mile.

Affordable Housing: The affordable housing group is reworking its plan to provide 10 – 20 micro-grants to homeowners for exterior beautification such as flowers, window repairs and trees. The program could run from July to October, and the committee will propose the idea at a later date.

To end the meeting, Teska introduced a demographic data profile it compiled about Belmont Cragin, capturing totals, trends and statistics around the neighborhood’s

population, housing, youth, education, economic development and safety. The group gave some insights into the information, such as how illegal conversions of single-family homes into multi-unit buildings are part of the reason the community's total population is rising, and how gentrification is becoming an issue. Students, even as young as in elementary grades, don't feel safe at some schools, and transit is underutilized in part because busses don't run all night long, and Uber is becoming more popular. The profile is available in English and Spanish and will be posted on a new project website that is being created for the quality-of-life plan.

The working groups took on an assignment before the next meeting: review and compile more resources in the neighborhood, document challenges and possible strategies to overcome them, and review the data provided to decide what else is needed to help make conclusions. The Taskforce will use this at the next meeting to revisit the demographic conversation, visioning ideas and lists of local assets and form an outline that can be taken out to the community. Beginning in June and continuing through the summer, larger community meetings will give more residents an opportunity to be able to augment and deepen the ideas. The next stage of planning in Belmont Cragin has begun in earnest.

Meeting Participants

James Rudyk, Northwest Side Housing Center
Vanessa Valentin, Northwest Side Housing Center
Mimi Bandera, Northwest Side Housing Center
Rev. Elaine Bellis, Northwest Side Housing Center
Julio Rodriguez, Northwest Side Housing Center
Maritza Banderas, 5300 W Wrightwood Block Club leader
Liz Caton, 5200 W Nelson Block Club Leader
Maria Chavero, 25th District Police Department, CAPS
Cliff Gabor, CPS
Mario Garcia, Onward House
Celia Hernandez, Belmont Cragin Elementary CPS
RB Jossierand, CPS
Ernie Lukasik, Housing Leader
George Melgar, Belmont Cragin Elementary, CPS
Mariana Osoria, Family Focus
Pat Corcoran, Get Covered Illinois
David Potete, Northwest Community Church, Pastor
Alma Rivera, Alderman Suarez's office and 5300 W Schubert resident
Cindy Rice, Resident/Block club leader
Lionel Smith, CPS, Family and Community Engagement Manager
Stacy Stewart, Belmont Cragin Elementary School, CPS
Gloria Valencia, Block club leader
Collins Yearwood, HAS
Irma Cornier, New Life 3:16 Church
Ricardo Bonafe, Community Resident
Gloria Valencia, 4600 W Deming Block Club Leader
Randel Jossierand, Chief of Network #3 CPS

Irma Rizzo, Chicago Park District Cragin Park

Staff Support

Scott Goldstein, Teska Associates

Heidy Valenzuela, Teska Associates

Jake Ament, LISC

Carl Vogel, LISC scribe

Ideas for Vision Statement

- Safe community
- Stable
- Strong community schools
- New schools
- United community
- Prosperous
- Safe and affordable housing
- Family-oriented
- Range of resources for families, e.g. local affordable health services
- Diverse: Latino (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban)
- Multicultural
- Parks with recreational activities
- Mix of different income/social levels
- Opportunities for good jobs
- After-school activities
- Youth-oriented
- Strong institutions

Resources and Assets

Housing

- **Northwest Side Housing Center:** foreclosure, financial education/credit, first time homebuyers, rental counseling, MMRP
- **Spanish Coalition for Housing:** financial assistance to renters, foreclosure, financial education, first time homebuyers, MMRP
- **Hispanic Housing Development Corporation:** George and Cicero development for 55+
- **Senior Suites:** Several developments
- **Community Bank and Trust:** Belmont and Cicero, financial Ed, counseling

Healthcare

- **HAS:** Behavioral health services (includes family violence, post-partum depression, prisoner re-entry, ACA health care enrollment)
- **Get Covered Illinois:** Education, enrollment, health coverage enrollment
- **Metropolitan Family Services:** Counseling, mental health
- **PrimeCare:** Connected to Resurrection
- **Community First Medical Center:** Fullerton and Long, formerly PCC
- **El Rincon**

Senior Services

- **Central Nursing Home**
- **Kelvyn Park Senior Suites:** Aging and Disability Center, field trips, lunches
- **Mathers Café:** yoga, lunch
- **CPD 25th District Senior Subcommittee:** bingo, safety awareness, self-defense, check on seniors in winter
- **Belmont Cragin Senior Suites:** Grand

Youth

- **Schools**
- **After School All Stars:** Belmont Cragin Elementary
- **21st Century Schools:** Belmont Cragin Elementary, Chicago Academy
- **Foreman High School:** Gear Up, Parent Program, Parent Outreach, Tech, Mikva Challenge, Youth Guidance BAM
- **Chicago Academy:** Family Focus, 21st Century School
- **Steinmetz High School:** BUILD, After School Matters
- **Park District: Riis Park**
- **CPD 25th District:** Peer Jury, Youth Explorers, Community Service
- **Metropolitan Family Services:** Afterschool programs
- **Onward Neighborhood House**
- **St. Peters**
- **Brickyard Bible Church**
- **Chicago Public Library**
- **Hoops in the Hood**
- **After School Matters**
- **Girls in the Game:** Just starting in Belmont Cragin
- **Safe Haven:** Church youth groups
- **CPS Socio-Emotional programs:** Lyon, Belmont Cragin, Steinmetz, other schools

Vocational and Adult Education

- **Onward House:** Computer lab, GED
- **Safer Foundation:** Ex-Offender re-entry
- **Heartland Alliance:** ESL, citizenship classes, GED
- **Austin Special:** Adults with disabilities
- **Family Focus:** not placement, but do have resume assistance
- **CALOR:** In Humboldt Park
- **Wright Community College – Humboldt Park Vocational Center:** GED, ESL
- **CPS community schools, Belmont Cragin, Cameron:** ESL for parents
- **Erie House:** Citizenship classes

- **St. Augustine College:** Interns
- **Northeastern University:** Interns
- **DePaul John Marshall:** Interns, volunteers
- **Greater West Town**

Immigration

- **Heartland Alliance**
- **Erie House:** citizenship classes
- **Latinos Progresando**
- **Family Focus:** DACA, licenses
- **World Relief Chicago:** Not housed in Belmont Cragin, but does some work in community

Economic Development

- **Belmont Cragin Chamber of Commerce – Belmont Cragin SSA** (parking garage)
- **CPD 25th District:** Business Committee, meetings with alderman
- **First Midwest Bank**
- **PNC Bank:** Branch has Polish speaking staff
- **Community Savings Bank**
- **Liberty Savings:** Outside Belmont Cragin
- **Brickyard Mall:** Not one entity. Has Target, Menards, Chipotle, Starbucks, Jewel-Osco
- **El Gordo**
- **Magos:** Started from pushcart, now two locations
- **Capital Roofing**
- **Taco Burrito King**
- **Gene’s Sausage Shop**
- **Oak Mill Bakery**

Safety

- **CPD 25th District:** Beat meetings, committees, resident/block club/business outreach, Safe Haven, call-in meetings with gangs
- **Alderman Suarez Office:** Meetings with residents, commanders, safety rally
- **Belmont Cragin Elementary:** Partner with 25th District, “Walking with Police”, gang resistance programs, DARE, Officer Friendly program
- **Ministerio de Nacer**
- **New Life 316:** Safety meetings
- **NWSHC:** formed and support block clubs
- **Spanish Coalition for Housing:** Block Clubs support