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Community Engagement: Best Practices and Their Transformative Power

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Perceived “Barriers” to Community Engagement

- Cultural and Socioeconomic Differences
- Language and Communication Disparities
- Power Dynamics and Inclusivity
- Fear of Retribution or Reprisal
- Burnout or Engagement Fatigue

Public Information vs. Community Engagement: There is a Difference

	Public Information	Community Engagement
Purpose	Inform	Collaborate
Nature of Interaction	Marketing	Relationship Building
Level of Participation	Directional	Cyclical
Decision-Making Influence	What can A do for B?	What can A and B do together?
Timing	Short-term	Long-term

Overview: Best Practices for Community Engagement

1. Identify the communities affected by the project

2. Develop a cohesive framework for stakeholder outreach

3. Maximize community participation

4. Documentation and publication to build and foster trust

5. Evaluation of Outreach Efforts

6. Follow-Up and Follow Through

Identifying and Understanding Your Community

EJ Indicator		Considerations for Engagement
	Linguistic Isolation	• Provide multilingual materials, prioritizing those prevalent in the area • Include multilingual communication channels (i.e., newspapers, radio stations)
	Minority Status	• Ensure community centers focus on minority populations being intentionally invited to engagements
	Income	• Remove barriers to engagement that may not be attainable (internet access, public transit fare) by meeting people where they already gather (i.e., community centers, religious institutions)
	Level of Education	• Provide clear and concise materials • Speak to technical components in simple concepts and terms
	Single-Parent Household	• Provide childcare at engagement sessions • Hold engagements outside of working hours • Provide snacks at meetings held during a typical meal time
	Multi-Family Household[1]	• Provide more than one piece of communication per home if multiple adults are to be included
	Internet Access	• Provide engagement materials in offline formats • Ensure all announcements are accompanied by physical announcements (i.e., mailers, door to door, community boards)

Stakeholder Outreach Framework

- Go Beyond “What is Required”
- Center Community
- Establish Community Guides and Values with Community

Common Community Guide Components:

- Established Metrics
- Timeline
- Accountability Measures
- Reporting Mechanisms
- Community Concerns and Goals

Maximize Community Participation

- Use Multimodal Outreach Strategies
- Offer Services that Remove Barriers
- Educate Early

Common Barriers:
- Childcare
- Transportation / Location
- Time of Public Events
- Marketing Language

Documentation and Publication

- Truth and Transparency
- Convey Details
- Disseminate Data

Key Takeaways

- Community engagement is a mutually beneficial process
- Eliminating perceived fears, myths and barriers is key
- Implementing best practices cultivates community-building
- Community engagement is a continuous learning process

Plaza Roosevelt Case Study

Strong Community Engagement Leads to Transformational Change

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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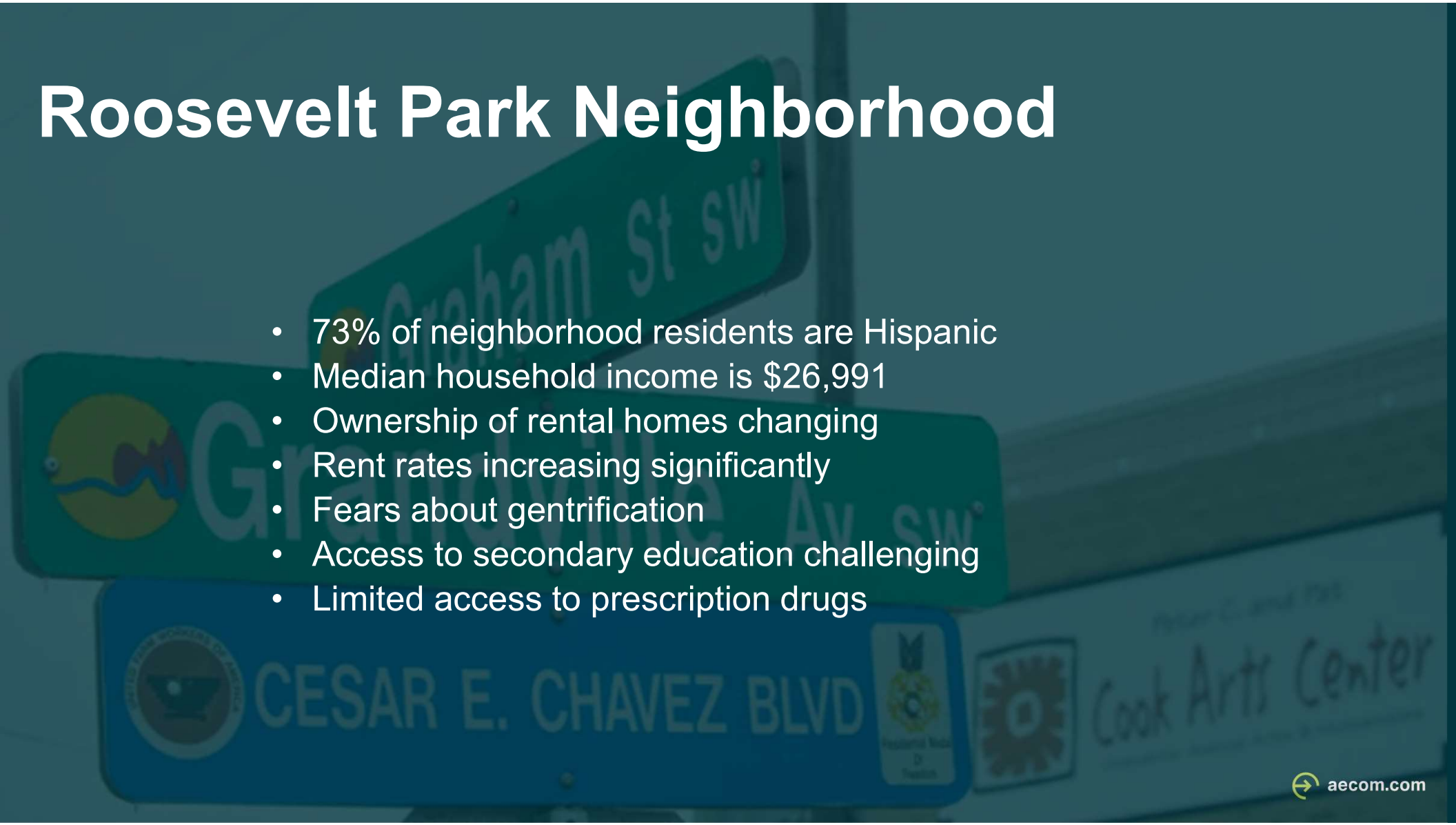
Project Summary

- Lead by Habitat for Humanity of Kent County, Michigan
- Community engagement was primary driver to fill education, housing and health care gaps
- Redevelopment of portions of two city blocks into affordable housing, a new middle/high school, expanded health care, park space
- $1M in brownfield redevelopment grants and tax-increment financing

Roosevelt Park Neighborhood

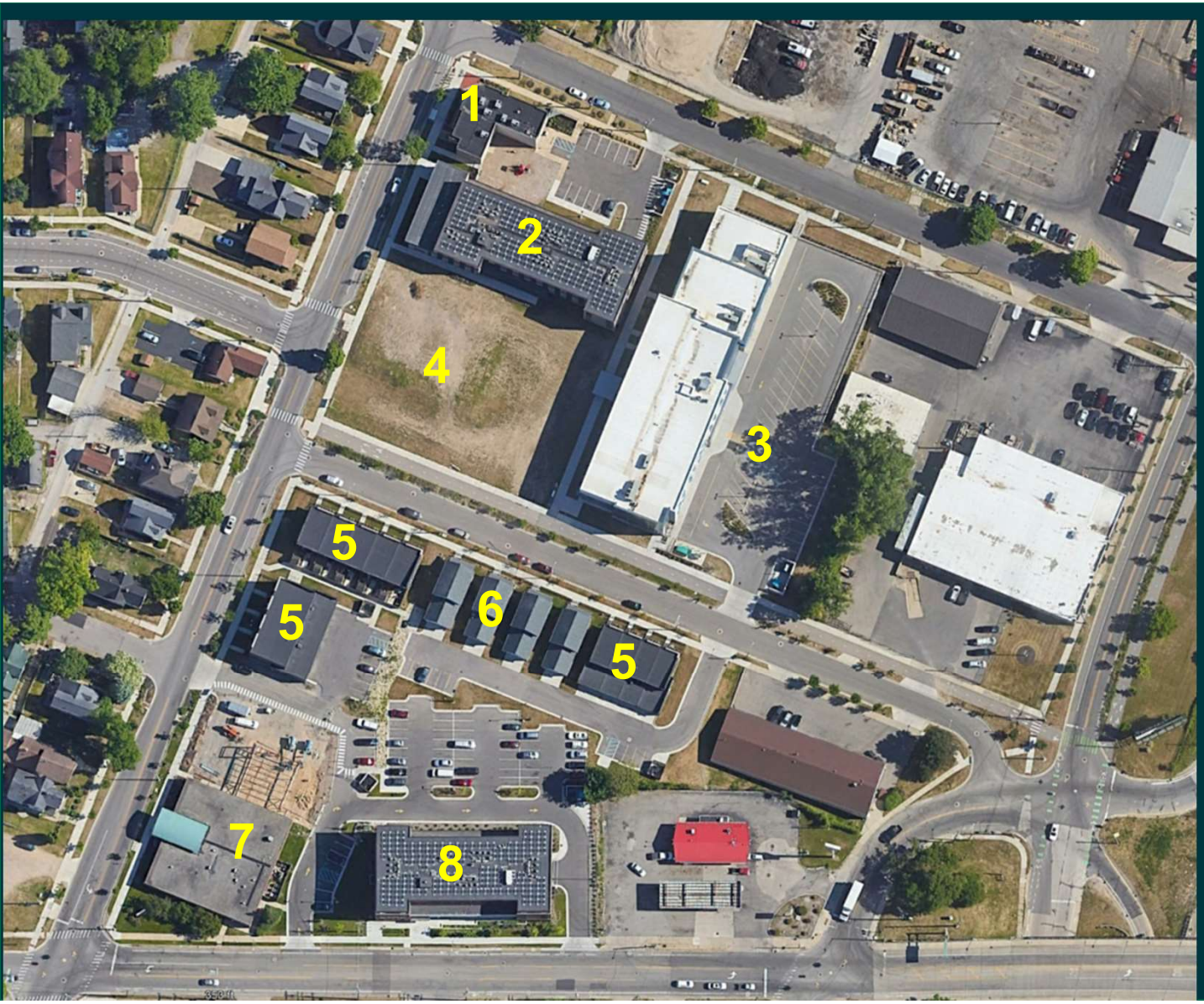


- 73% of neighborhood residents are Hispanic
- Median household income is $26,991
- Ownership of rental homes changing
- Rent rates increasing significantly
- Fears about gentrification
- Access to secondary education challenging
- Limited access to prescription drugs

Plaza Roosevelt Redevelopment Stakeholders

Before

1. Cook Arts Center
2. Former residences
3. Residences
4. Church and school
5. Auto repair shop
6. Former residences
7. Medical clinic
8. Residences



After

1. Cook Arts Center
2. Affordable Housing & commercial space
3. New middle/high school
4. Public park (in-progress)
5. Habitat for Humanity townhomes
6. Habitat for Humanity houses
7. Expanded medical clinic and new pharmacy
8. Affordable housing & commercial space

Plaza Roosevelt Redevelopment Outcomes

17 new homes built by Habitat for Humanity

Plaza Roosevelt Redevelopment Outcomes

- 48 affordable two- and three-bedroom apartments built by Dwelling Place
- Commercial and community space on first floor of both buildings

Plaza Roosevelt Redevelopment Outcomes

- New combined middle and high school built by Grand Rapids Public Schools
- Dual Spanish and English immersion programs

Plaza Roosevelt Redevelopment Outcomes

- Expanded medical clinic
- New bi-lingual pharmacy
- Built by Trinity Health (formerly Mercy Health)

what the community is saying

"True collaboration, instead of competition, is what's going to drive this development. Watch us work!"

Gerol Bailey

Neighborhood Partner Committee

"This project reflects our hopes and dreams – to be a place where we can raise strong and healthy families."

Reggie Smith, President

Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association

"I applaud the creativity and the collaboration in the Plaza Roosevelt plans...Plaza Roosevelt is a model for public, private, nonprofit, and residential cooperation."

Rosalynn Bliss

Mayor, City of Grand Rapids

"We are pleased to be a partner in something that is...benefiting our neighbors and driven by our neighbors. This is a step toward a bright and strong future for an already vibrant neighborhood."

Amy Brower, Director

Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association

"This amazing development opportunity truly demonstrates the power of people and partnership and how we in Grand Rapids come together to support our students, families, and neighbors."

Teresa Weatherall Neal

Superintendent, Grand Rapids Public Schools

"The Plaza Roosevelt development...represents what is – and what could be more often – the best of Grand Rapids...it is a story tenacious neighborhood residents and community spirit aligned in the light of empowerment."

Carole Valade

Grand Rapids Business Journal

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Thank You

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