

# Greenwood Neighborhood Plan Stakeholders Meeting at Sierra House- May 12, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Chair-Bill Hunter

Attendees- Natasha Akinyehe-East Orange Family Success Center, Itunu Balogun-East Orange MOET, Thurman Cohen-Flamingo Construction, Greg Conn-Investors Bank, Tumba B. Cool-Sunmint Energy, Corey Ellington-Aspiring Change, Keely Freeman-Sierra House Director, Pat Freeman-Sierra House Board, Wilbert Gill-East Orange Housing Authority, Greg Ginn-Investors Bank, Gregory Good-East Orange Planning Department, Keisha Harris-CIM of East Orange, K. Hassell-East Orange Family Success Center, CJ Jones-Green Technologies, Kim Montgomery-IDP , Sylvester Morgan-resident, Marie Morgan-resident, Karen Nichols-KNTM Architects, David Sacci-BCB Bank, Jeff Scheckner-Sierra House Development Director, Leo Smith-City of East Orange, Garfield Smith-Sunmint Energy, Donnel Smith-Sunmint Energy, Joi Smith-Joi's Angels, Wayne Smith-BCB Bank, Laverne Spruill-Aspiring Change Development Group

Keely Freeman, executive director of the Sierra House welcomed participants to the second meeting for the Greenwood Neighborhood Plan/first steering committee meeting. Keely talked about the Sierra House Transitional program for young women and the fact that 86% of the women who are residents transition from homelessness to self sufficiency. Keely briefly reviewed the other Sierra House initiatives; Individual Support Services (ISS) where help is provided to children and teens lacking basic skills, the Neighborhood Improvement Project and the cookie dough fundraising project (at the meeting's end, all participants were given a box of cookie dough).

Bill Hunter, the Greenwood Neighborhood Improvement Plan Project Development Consultant introduced the goals of the steering committee, defined the Neighborhood Plan, described why the plan is needed and discussed the cost. Mr. Hunter mentioned there are 250 abandoned properties in Greenwood and of 33 storefronts, only 13 are occupied. The goal would be to create a quasi-gated community with clearly defined borders. Existing housing would be improved and abandoned homes would be reconstructed with innovative environmentally friendly designs. Ideally, we would like to attract the 1000 plus city employees, teachers, police, and hospital workers to buy residences there and also attract commuters to New York City and Newark as Greenwood is a far less costly alternative to other places. Young first time home buyers (millennials) and urban pioneers would also be targeted. East Orange has an excellent police department and they have effectively reduced crime despite public perception that the streets are not safe.

In discussing the retail sector, Mr. Hunter mentioned that there are no banks or food markets in Greenwood and many other retail outlets which are needed in the community. Also there is a lack of cultural, arts and recreation centers in the area and currently there are not many pedestrians as there are few destinations to pursue.

The stakeholders in the community to participate in and promote the Neighborhood Plan would be area residents, the City of East Orange, the police department, merchants, banks, community groups, schools, medical facilities, land developers and non-profits. The role of Sierra House in this endeavor is to

coordinate community forums, hire consultants to write the plan, raise capital to fund the plan, work with the City of East Orange to gain approval and manage implementation.

Tumba B. Cool of Summit Energy stressed the need for renewable energy and solar paneling on reconstructed and newly developed homes and indicated how renewable energy saves the homeowner money. Karen Nichols of KNTM Architects indicated it would be beneficial to make Greenwood a destination place with arts and recreation opportunities. Several present indicated that Greenwood residents should not have to leave their community for basic needs such as food and entertainment.

Mr. Hunter revealed that we need approximately \$60,000 to execute our plan and about \$20,000 has already been raised. He added it is imperative that when individuals purchase homes in Greenwood, they should be the resident as we are trying to change the city pattern of 75% renters and 25% owner occupied. As we have an inventory of all housing in Greenwood, we can proceed with the plan.

Before the meeting closed, a sign-up sheet was passed around where attendees could sign up for one or more committees; Housing, Economic Development-Job Creation, Education, The Arts/Recreation, Public Safety and Events/Marketing.

*Minutes submitted by Jeff Scheckner*