NPSG Conference Workshop

Economic Development Strategies for Diversifying Small Towns

South Kelso Story: 
*Neighborhood Revitalization*

Presenters: 
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Kelso, Washington

Population – 12,000

Little to no residential growth anticipated

Low income community with significant transient community

Aged & deteriorating infrastructure

Resource-based economy in transition hit hard by Great Recession
South Kelso Neighborhood

- Largest neighborhood, widespread poverty

- Includes:
  - Downtown
  - Residential area (5,800 pop.)
  - Elementary school
  - Two small parks
  - Three Rivers Golf Course
  - Southwest Washington Regional Airport
  - Talley Way Industrial Area
  - Amtrak Station/bus depot
  - “Donut hole” of unincorporated Cowlitz County
Organic Chronology of Study

• 2012
  – Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments received EPA “Building Blocks” technical assistance
  – 2-day workshop with officials to help local communities achieve Economic Vitality and Fiscal Health
  – “What tools are needed to make this happen?”

• 2013
  – Portland St. Univ. MURP graduates performed subarea revitalization plan
  – Delivered South Kelso Revitalization Strategies
  – Began implementing identified focus areas
Organic Chronology of Study

- **2014**
  - EPA SGIA 3-day community workshop re: South Kelso:
    - Downtown
    - Residential neighborhood
    - Talley Way industrial corridor
  - Defined the context for each area
  - Set measurable goals
  - Identified existing assets and barriers
  - Selected implementing tools

- **2015**
  - Developed and adopted CDBG program income re-use plan: *Neighborhood Revitalization & Community and Economic Revitalization (NICER) Initiative*
Steps to Renewal

Building Blocks Workshop

South Kelso Revitalization Strategies

Smart Growth Economic Development Toolkit

Kelso NICER Initiative
## South Kelso Revitalization Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Form neighborhood association</th>
<th>6. Conduct pedestrian mobility and safety audit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop Neighborhood Crime and Safety Plan</td>
<td>7. Improve housing and neighborhood appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Improve parks and public spaces</td>
<td>8. Revive Main Street Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Establish Wallace Elementary as Community School</td>
<td>9. Coordinate business support services through economic gardening initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Build/acquire South Kelso community center</td>
<td>10. Implement downtown streetscape improvements</td>
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Results: Downtown

Goals
- More shops/restaurants
- Year-round events
- Attractive & walkable destination

Assets/Barriers
- New businesses moving downtown
- Public investment (City Hall)
- Run-down buildings & unkempt properties
- Lack of communication between groups and businesses with common goals

Tools
- Downtown website/calendar
- Improved wayfinding signage
- Façade improvements
New Investment at Three Rivers Mall
Results: Residential Area

Goals
• Improve quality of existing housing stock
• Build community pride
• Enhance residents’ health & well-being

Assets/Barriers
• Energetic residents
• Neighborhood association
• Untenable housing
• Lack of coordination among entities and government

Tools
• Assessment of housing conditions
• Enhanced code enforcement program
• Evaluate first-time homebuyer program with local employers
Neighborhood Park Cleanup - Americorps
Results: Talley Way Industrial Area

Goals
- Stronger relationship between Talley Way businesses and City
- Opportunities for workers to live close to jobs
- More transportation links/options

Assets/Barriers
- Diverse array of living wage jobs
- No workforce collaboration between City, neighborhood, and business community

Tools
- Regular engagement with Talley Way owners
- Tracking of business activity through private data sources
- Explore local improvement district to fund streetscape/walkable infrastructure improvements on Talley Way
Words into Actions

• South Kelso Neighborhood Association
  – Graffiti Abatement

• Downtown Landscaping improvements
  – City/Community collaboration

• Safe Routes to School project
  – Make pedestrian-oriented improvements

• Community Schools program
  – State grant administered by local non-profit
Community Action
Downtown Landscaping Project
Neighborhood Improvement & Community Economic Revitalization (NICER) Initiative

Enhanced Code Enforcement

Condemned Housing Abatement

NICER
CDBG Program Income Re-use

Pedestrian Oriented Sub-Area Planning

Streetscape Improvements
Potential Streetscape Models
West Kelso Streetscape Improvements
Words into Actions

- Healthy Living Collaborative
  - Community Health Workers in S. Kelso
  - Connecting residents in need to applicable resources

- S. Kelso Railroad Grade Separation
  - $25 million BNSF mainline overpass crossing
  - Creates new housing opportunities and investment
  - Improves connectivity, noise reduction, safety

- Planning/Zoning updates
  - Adopted new Comprehensive Plan with primary theme of redevelopment & revitalization
  - Updating zoning/development code to incorporate smart growth design and strategies
Lessons Learned

- Community Renewal takes long-term commitment
  - Kelso’s discussions started in 2012...

- Organic path to right strategy
  - Kelso is several planning initiatives deep with each building on the other

- Trial and error is a given
  - Each community has unique circumstances and limitations

- Community volunteers can be their own worst enemies
  - SKNA vs. Volunteer Kelso

- Embrace creativity in using and leveraging resources
  - CDBG program income, vacant city buildings, etc.
We Are Kelso!