

5-29-2014

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Recommended Citation

McIntyre Miller, W. and Olberding, J. (2014). The “Community Entertainment District” designation as a tool for urban redevelopment in Cincinnati, OH. *Journal of Community Practice* 22(1-2), p. 10-28. doi: 10.1080/10705422.2014.901262

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published in *Journal of Community Practice*, volume 22, issue 1-2, in 2014, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/10705422.2014.901262>.

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**The “Community Entertainment District” Designation as a Tool
for Urban Redevelopment in Cincinnati, Ohio**

By Whitney McIntyre Miller and
Julie Cencula Olberding

ABSTRACT

Many urban neighborhoods in the United States have experienced an exodus of businesses. Their Main Streets – once consisting of bustling restaurants and stores – are now marked by “for rent” signs and boarded windows. Some community leaders have given up, but others are actively trying to bring businesses back. In Cincinnati, Ohio, several neighborhoods are starting to use the “Community Entertainment District” (CED) designation to attract entertainment and arts establishments. This paper presents an evaluation of the implementation and early impacts of the CED in one neighborhood, which may be insightful to leaders in other urban areas in Ohio and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

The state of Ohio has adopted a “Community Entertainment District” (CED) designation for “a bounded area that includes or will include a combination of entertainment, retail, educational, sporting, social, cultural, or arts establishments” (Ohio General Assembly, 2005, para.1). This designation, among other things, provides up to 15 liquor licenses that bypass expensive brokers’ fees and stay permanently connected to the district. The CED designation has been sought primarily by commercial development professionals for use in large suburban retail areas. One such area is Jungle Jim’s International Market in Fairfield Township, which is about 20 miles north of Cincinnati. Jungle Jim’s International Market is a mega store with more than 200,000 square feet consisting of an international grocery store, gift shops, food demonstrations, and other attractions (Jungle Jim’s International Market, 2013). A second example is Anderson Towne Center in Anderson Township, which is about **ten** miles east of Cincinnati. Anderson Towne Center is “lifestyle retail center” with more than 300,000 square feet housing a Kroger grocery, Macy’s department store, Uno’s Chicago Grill, TGI Friday’s and 30 more other stores and restaurants (Victory Real Estate Investments, n.d.).

In January 2011, the CED designation was awarded to the first nonprofit community organization – rather than a private developer – in the City of Cincinnati. Community members in the neighborhood of Pleasant Ridge decided to apply for this designation because they thought it would attract local entrepreneurs interested in developing new and unique restaurants in the business district. The hope was that this would ultimately lead to the creation of additional entertainment, retail, social, cultural and arts establishments, as well as the attraction of other

businesses and residents. It is one tool that the community members and organizations are utilizing to revitalize the struggling business district.

This paper evaluates the implementation and early impacts of the CED designation in Pleasant Ridge. This foundational understanding is important as the CED designation is expected to become more prevalent in Cincinnati, and, in fact, has already been approved in several Cincinnati neighborhoods (LeMaster, 2013). The CED is also likely to be utilized in other cities, as the designation has already gained some national attention. A recent article on the news website *Salon* stated, “A great example is Cincinnati, where, rather than busting in with relocation plans and a branding scheme, the city has designated five [now seven] neighborhoods Community Entertainment Districts” (Doig, 2012, para. 11). With plans and expectations building around the CED designation, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: 1) What was the process for acquiring and implementing the CED? and 2) What effects has the CED had on the Pleasant Ridge business district and neighborhood so far?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better get a preliminary sense of the CED process, impacts, and benefits, we reviewed literature in economics, urban planning, cultural policy, and other disciplines. This review focused on the increasing importance of arts and entertainment to the national economy in general, the role of arts and entertainment in urban neighborhoods in particular, and finally urban entertainment districts or zones.

Arts and entertainment in the national economy

The U.S. economy is increasingly based on knowledge and services rather than manufacturing and products, according to scholars and observers. In particular, arts- and

entertainment-related services have become critical products, directly sold by suppliers and bought by consumers. In addition, arts and entertainment can have indirect impact on local economies, as they can help to attract knowledge-based workers, particularly younger and more educated ones, who seem drawn to these opportunities and activities.

Richard Florida (2002) asserted that we are in an age of “tremendous economic and social transformation” and that “creativity has become the driving force of our economy” (p. 3). The “creative class” – which accounts for nearly half of all wage and salary income in the United States – includes workers engaged in arts, music, aesthetic and design work, science and engineering, research and development, technology-based industries, health care, finance, and law (Florida, 2002, 2004 & 2012). The key to economic growth in modern cities, according to Florida (2002), is threefold: talent, technology, and tolerance (i.e., openness and inclusion, particularly related to race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation). The most thriving cities have an environment that attracts the “talent” – i.e., the creative class – including jobs that are both challenging and rewarding and that are supported with high technology. The environment, however, also needs to have “quality of place” characteristics including arts and cultural opportunities, recreational amenities, and a healthy environment.

Other scholars have made related observations about the evolution of the American economy, the growing importance of arts and entertainment within it, and the ways that cities and communities are trying to adjust to and leverage this phenomenon. Krutarth (2004) noted that entertainment is now a driving force of the American economy; consumers do not just want to shop, they want to be entertained. People are looking for a whole experience when going out, which can include shopping, dining, movies, etc. Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris (2007) said

there is a growing “professional population interested in urban lifestyles with significant disposable income spent on leisure activities, and the growth of consumption as a means to affirm one’s status and identity” (p. 350). The authors stated that some cities have attempted to tap into this market by creating “a consumer and tourist economy” based on shopping, entertainment, and other leisure activities. It is this thought of connection to arts and entertainment lifestyles that have fueled the development of these areas in urban neighborhoods.

Arts and entertainment in urban neighborhoods

Some scholars have identified arts and entertainment industries as critical factors in the revitalization of downtowns and other urban areas. For example, in a report published by the Brookings Institution, Christopher B. Leinberger (2005) stated that entertainment venues are necessary for urban revitalization because they “get feet on the street.” In other words, these venues provide reasons for individuals to visit an urban area, particularly in the early years of revitalization when the image of it may be negative to some degree. Just as a crowd in a restaurant is a signal that it has good food and ambiance, a crowd on the streets of a neighborhood is a sign that it is interesting and safe. Crowds – at a restaurant or neighborhood – are somewhat self-perpetuating in that they tend to continue attracting more and new people. Urban entertainment venues can include restaurants, night clubs, movie theaters, performing arts centers, artistic events and street festivals, unique clothing and gift stores, and other retail (Leinberger, 2005). Leinberger (2005) also asserted that a critical mass of these venues – and the “walkable urbanity” that they create – must be in place to attract not only visitors but, more importantly, residents who are willing to live and invest long term in these neighborhoods.

Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris (2007) identified types of development strategies used by cities or urban neighborhoods in the United States. One type, called “creative class strategies,” is designed to attract new residents and businesses through quality of life amenities, which ultimately lead to economic growth. The geographic focus of creative class strategies tends to be the central city and historical urban neighborhoods, and targeted audiences are prospective and existing residents that are young urban professionals and knowledge-based workers (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007). The kinds of cultural projects on which these strategies focus are arts and entertainment districts, which generally involve collaboration between arts organizations and the private sector. Creative class strategies have been implemented in cities such as SoHo in New York City, Wicker Park in Chicago, and South of Market (SoMA) in San Francisco.

Urban entertainment districts or entertainment zones

Many cities, townships, and other local governments have designated districts or zones labeled for entertainment, arts and/or cultural purposes. One study found that at the time of publishing there were at least 90 entertainment districts in the United States (Campo & Ryan, 2008). These designated areas capture some or all of the following: dining, bars, nightclubs, art, culture, cinema/motion pictures, sports stadiums, and other forms of entertainment.

Campo and Ryan (2008) distinguished between urban entertainment districts (UEDs) and entertainment zones (EZs). Generally speaking, UEDs tend to be large and self-contained “megaprojects” in historic downtowns or along a waterfront with at least one attraction entirely meant for entertainment, such as a cinema complex, restaurant, nightclub, sports stadium, civic and cultural center, or multimedia experience (Campo & Ryan, 2008). In order to stimulate and

revitalize a downtown area, a UED must offer interesting opportunities for families during the day and for adults at night, including stores, restaurants, and accessibility to art and culture.

Campo and Ryan (2008) stated that UEDs are more successful – in terms of impact on the local economy – if they are done in combination with new and alternative residential development and, of course, if it allows opportunities for small, local businesses including art galleries, shops, and restaurants. Critics have noted, however, that most UEDs do not work this way. They tend to be created through a centralized, bureaucratic process and, thus, do not allow for grassroots, organic development. For the *Salon* article, Doig (2012) interviewed a Minneapolis-based planner, who said that UEDs lack “urban authenticity” because they are “created purely by committee for economic purposes” (para. 15). This planner added: “The problem with these created-overnight districts is that you’re trying to create a culture as opposed to letting one grow. You’re getting the culture that one developer or city council member thinks the city needs, as opposed to the ground-up culture that comes from multiple players” (Doig, 2012, para. 3).

In contrast to UEDs, entertainments zones (EZs) develop organically – almost spontaneously – with little or no design, planning, or government involvement (Campo & Ryan, 2008). Another difference is that EZs tend to be smaller and less expensive than UEDs. They tend to cater to the nightlife, which today includes alcohol, dancing, and televised sports. Campo and Ryan (2008) identified four types of EZs: 1) old downtown faded commercial corridor or district; 2) industrial buildings with relatively nondescript multi-story lofts and single-story sheds with open plans; 3) traditional and mature neighborhoods; and 4) “suburbanscapes” of strip malls and freestanding commercial buildings along arterial roads.

Campo and Ryan (2008) conducted a case study of the “Water Street” zone in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and they concluded that key characteristics of EZs are informality, flexibility, and adaptability, allowing them to evolve as they go, not to be created according to a plan. They also found that EZs facilitate uniqueness and vibrancy, which are lacking in UEDs. The authors identified several strategies for community leaders and members who are interested in developing an EZ. One strategy is to re-conceptualize new urban development and reduce its scale; in other words, keep the redevelopment area or zone relatively small, providing opportunities for local business owners and entrepreneurs. Another strategy is to focus on preserving older areas or zones, but not necessarily all buildings in those areas; in other words, allow for substantial alteration to the physical properties and landscape.

We understand, then, that it is important for arts and entertainment districts in urban neighborhoods to be adaptable to the neighborhoods themselves. It is essential for them to include some of the more “popular” ways for people to spend their time, during the day and night. With the growing number of districts and zones in the United States, it is important to increase understanding about their development, successes, and challenges. It is with this further quest for knowledge that this study was conducted.

METHODS

In order to more fully understand arts and entertainment zones, we studied the Community Entertainment District (CED) in Pleasant Ridge as it was the first neighborhood to receive the designation in Cincinnati, Ohio. We utilized the qualitative case study method because it is designed to increase understanding about the how and why of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2008). The following two research questions were posed as a way to begin understanding

the CED designation in the neighborhood: 1) What was the process for acquiring and implementing the CED? and 2) What effects has the CED had on the Pleasant Ridge business district and neighborhood so far?

These questions served not only as a guide to the overall study, but also in the creation of an interview protocol, which was used as a guide during the in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with community leaders and others involved in the CED process. **Between June 2012 and December 2012**, ten interviews were conducted as part of this study. We first interviewed formal community leaders in the neighborhood. From there, we utilized a snowball sampling technique, by asking those being interviewed for the names of other potential interviewees. Each of the ten interviews was approximately one hour in length and was recorded using a digital recorder. These recordings were transcribed, the results coded, and analyzed along with written notes to better understand the impact of the CED designation in Pleasant Ridge.

Case Study: Pleasant Ridge

Pleasant Ridge is one of the 52 neighborhoods in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. It is located in the northeast of the city and is home to approximately 10,000 residents. Pleasant Ridge is one of the more ethnically diverse and racially stable neighborhoods in the city, with 36% of residents identifying as black and 58% identifying as white (Casey-Leininger, 2011). The neighborhood also has a great deal of variation according to class and wealth, and has various types of housing options.

First settled in the late 1700s, Pleasant Ridge is a mostly residential neighborhood with gaslight streets and Tudor and Colonial Revival homes, generally built in the 1920s

and 30s. It has a relatively small business district that dates back to the mid-1800s when a tavern was built at a major crossroads for travelers to and from Cincinnati. This historic crossroads is the heart of the current business district, which emanates from Ridge Road for one or two blocks in each direction (north and south) and from Montgomery Road about three blocks in each direction (east and west). Many of the district's buildings are three-story brick structures with businesses on the first floor and apartments on the second and third floors.

The businesses – mostly small and locally-owned – include restaurants, pubs, coffee shops, retail stores, pharmacies, child-care centers, hair and tattoo salons, home and auto repair services, and other service providers (e.g., doctors, dentists, tax preparers, and a yoga center). Some of these businesses have been operating for decades, including the Pleasant Hour Cafe (1930s), Pleasant Ridge Chili (1960s), Everybody's Record (1970s), and Queen City Comic and Cards (1980s). In the past five years or so, however, nearly a one dozen of businesses have pulled out of the district or closed altogether, including two major ones at the Ridge-Montgomery intersection – a collectible toy mall and a stained/art glass studio; leaving empty spaces in the central business corridor.

Other institutions in or near the business district include: three elementary schools (one public, one private, and one charter); a public library; a fire station; a city-owned community center with a pool, baseball fields, tennis courts, and after-school and senior programs; and a 100-year-old private nonprofit golf club with an 18-hole course, pool, and tennis courts. (Additional information on the business district can be found at the following web site: [http://pleasantridge.org/business-district/pleasant-ridge-businesses/.](http://pleasantridge.org/business-district/pleasant-ridge-businesses/))

The neighborhood has two organizations that make up its governance. The Pleasant Ridge Community Council (PRCC) is the official body designated by the City of Cincinnati to represent and serve the neighborhood. The Pleasant Ridge Development Corporation (PRDC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing development of the business district. Relevant to the case study is the fact that both the PRCC and the PRDC had a new president almost every year, mostly due to financial and legal problems involving a young entrepreneur, who also was a leader in these community organizations. She headed up an investment group that purchased a large portion of buildings in the business district, all of which ultimately went into foreclosure. This situation resulted in lawsuits, and the many vacancies in the business district discussed previously. Also, as a result there were a number of resignations from the boards of both community organizations and a loss of trust in these organizations. The context of the rebuilding of these organizations was a key element to this study.

In addition to the neighborhood-based governance bodies, there is a nonprofit organization called the District A Citizens Initiative, which was developed in 2007 to link Pleasant Ridge to neighboring Kennedy Heights and enhance development through the arts. **At the time of this study, District A's primary activities were to organize an annual arts and music festival and to "build community dialogue and relationships with business and property owners" (District A, 2012).**

FINDINGS

This section presents key findings from qualitative interviews with community leaders and members regarding the Community Entertainment District (CED) in Pleasant Ridge. First,

the creation of the CED is discussed. This overview is followed by the community leaders' and members' perceived successes and challenges to its implementation and execution.

Overview of the CED Process

The CED designation in Pleasant Ridge (PR) – the first one acquired by a nonprofit community organization in Cincinnati – was an effort to keep the Emanu East African Restaurant in the neighborhood. A community member who was a regular patron was concerned when he learned that the restaurant would leave the neighborhood if the owner could not get a liquor license to make his business more profitable and sustainable. A liquor license runs approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 in cash on the open market, and a bank or other lender will not loan money for this purpose. Therefore these licenses are expensive and hard to come by.

The community member, wanting to help, researched strategies to keep the restaurant in Pleasant Ridge. He had read about the use of the CED designation in communities across Ohio, including in large retail areas in the suburbs of Cincinnati and thought it might fit in this situation as well. The CED essentially provides additional liquor licenses to the district that must remain within the district. Therefore, local businesses can apply for these licenses and pay only for the renewal fees charged by government agencies, about \$1,500 to \$2,000 annually.

It appeared as though the CED might be a good fit for Pleasant Ridge and for the Emanu East African restaurant. The CED concept, the community member learned, was created by state legislation, but each application was reviewed and approved by the local government- the city of Cincinnati in this case. **With this understanding, he connected with the two local community groups and began completing the application by collecting the necessary information including: a plan for the PR business district, letters of support from community**

organizations, such as the Pleasant Ridge Community Council (PRCC) and various churches, and a land survey of the business district to assess total acreage (which determines number of new liquor permits). This land survey was acquired from the Cincinnati Area Geographic Information System (CAGIS), which is a consortium among the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County and local utilities to provide key GIS data to government agencies and the public (Cincinnati Area Geographic Information System, 2012).

The community largely supported this plan as people were worried about additional businesses and property owners going into foreclosure due to the downturn in the national economy and the property ownership change in the local business district. Even with community support, the Emanu supporter took the initiative to make the CED happen. “This was clearly his vision and a project that he defined. No question about it,” said one interviewee. “He is one of the major players that turned things around.”

In addition to his work preparing the application, the Emanu supporter found out that the City of Cincinnati charged \$15,000 for an entity to apply for a CED. The lead community member contacted one City Councilmember about the possibilities in reducing the fee, who said:

I found out really it was kind of an arbitrary number that they came up with as a fee to cover so-called “processing.”...The Legal Department has to review it, and the Economic Development Department has to review it. But I talked to them about the possibilities that this would open up if we didn’t charge such a high fee.

In addition, the City Councilmember and her staff learned that the previous applicants, such as those for Jungle Jim’s and Anderson Towne Center, were major private or corporate

developments. Thus, the City Councilmember proposed a change in the CED ordinance that would enable a nonprofit organization to request a reduced fee and suggested \$1,500 for Pleasant Ridge. This fee was much more manageable for a nonprofit community group, and the application was sent to the City Council. Fortunately, a second City Councilmember was already in favor of the application to help Emanu. She “was an early user of the restaurant and [brought] other city council members there,” said an interviewee. “So we got lucky with those three guys [the Emanu supporter and both City Councilmembers]. They were the critical people.”

In November 2010, the Cincinnati City Council reviewed the proposed change to the CED ordinance to allow flexible fees for nonprofit organization and, during the same meeting, granted CED designation to Pleasant Ridge for a \$1,500 fee. The City Councilmember who worked to reduce the fees said:

We really didn't know, first of all, if it would pass Council, if there would be all kinds of questions, concerns. So I think, luckily, Pleasant Ridge had done a lot of pre-work. They had the marketing survey, or marketing plan, done for their community.

The Council did approve both of the measures, granting five additional liquor licenses to the PR business district based on square footage measured in the land survey. Restaurants currently located in the district or new restaurants opening in the district are able to apply to the state for these licenses. It is these licenses that are the tangible results of receiving the CED designation from the city and the state.

Successes

The CED designation brought with it several successes for the community and the business district. These range from its acquisition, to the opening of restaurants and other businesses, and other community intangibles.

Acquiring the CED. When asked to identify successes regarding the CED designation for the Pleasant Ridge neighborhood, one interviewee said, “Getting it is number one.” Another interviewee said, “It is a resource – something that we can tap into, something that we can reach into our tool bucket for and say we have this going for us. It is a wonderful asset....” The CED designation was also said to create “buzz” or excitement about Pleasant Ridge and the potential for new entertainment- and arts-related businesses. When the City Council approved the CED designation, articles featuring the neighborhood were published in local and regional media outlets, including the *Cincinnati Business Courier*, *Cincinnati City Beat*, and *Soapbox Media*.

Saving Emanu. Beyond acquiring the CED, the most common success identified by interviewees was “saving” the Emanu East African Restaurant – that is, keeping it in Pleasant Ridge. Immediately after City Council approved the CED designation, Emanu’s owner applied for and received the first of the five new liquor licenses. The owner estimated that the license – enabling sale of beer, wine, and liquor – has increased the restaurant’s total sales revenue by 15 percent. This increased revenue provided the owner with the opportunity to buy the building in which Emanu is located. He remodeled the first floor space beyond the restaurant as well as second floor space; however, he has not yet found tenants for the space. One interviewee said, “Emanu is the best of what has gone well.” Another interviewee said Emanu – a beloved family-owned operation – is “the poster child” for the CED in Pleasant Ridge.

Beans and Grapes. An additional success was the opening of a new coffee and wine shop in the neighborhood. Called Beans and Grapes, the shop acquired one of the new liquor licenses and opened their doors in November 2012. Beans and Grapes is owned and operated by the local Episcopal church. Some have called it a social enterprise, as it serves coffee that is direct trade and supports 20 families in Guatemala, among other things. Beans and Grapes also strives to achieve its mission by providing spaces for community organizations: “It’s all about relationships for us – building and creating relationships that are mutually beneficial and life giving” (“News from Beans and Grapes,” 2013, para. 1).

New arts businesses. In addition to these food- and drink-related establishments, other successes in the neighborhood since approval of the CED designation include the openings of several arts-related businesses. One is photography studio and gallery, while the other is a vintage art gallery and showroom with posters, industrial sculptures, and other items. These new ventures build upon the existing arts-related business and reinforce the efforts of the District A Citizens Initiative to connect Pleasant Ridge with neighboring Kennedy Heights through the arts.

Additional investments. Also, the CED helped to motivate one local entrepreneur to purchase six foreclosed, mostly vacant buildings – a total of about 20,000 square feet – which make up one of the main corners of the PR business district. The PRDC wrote and acquired a \$200,000 grant for the purpose of redevelopment of these properties. One interviewee said, “We knew that any redevelopment effort we were going to have here would not be successfully done without a public private partnership.” The new owner is “white boxing” the empty buildings – i.e., fixing basic structural issues, such as roofs and wiring, and repairing the walls – so they are ready for potential tenants to customize the space for their own purposes. He has been trying to

market these spaces to restaurant owners in the Greater Cincinnati area and even national restaurant chains. This has yet to be successful, though, because these buildings, like most other buildings in the business district, are older and therefore are not equipped with professional-grade kitchens, fire suppression systems, bathrooms, plumbing, etc. that meet local building codes. This equipment – with a cost of \$50,000 to \$100,000 – is partly offset by an inexpensive liquor license, but not completely.

Community intangibles. Some interviewees indicated that the CED's success goes beyond physical developments in the business district. One positive outcome is that the process encouraged the Pleasant Ridge Development Corporation (PRDC) to create a vision that focused on two things: 1) recruiting restaurants and other businesses to the neighborhood, and 2) generating ideas and concepts to improve the business district, including facilitating more public parking options and helping small businesses apply for grants and loans, possibly to add commercial-grade kitchens. "It spurred us to be able to start doing something and have some focus, so that's been good...It's kind of established a vision," said one interviewee, who was actively involved with the PRDC. "From a pure neighborhood standpoint, it's given us something to kind of rally behind. We really had nothing."

Also, a few interviewees said the CED process strengthened the neighborhood's presence and relationships at City Hall, particularly those with the two supportive City Councilmembers. This seems to be to the credit of community leaders who took the time to meet with city council members to explain the project. "We did a lot of due diligence beforehand with members of city council," one interviewee said. "And in knowing that we had a certain support for our program, we knew that we could turn in [the application] in confidence."

Challenges

The acquisition of the CED designation in addition to coming with successes also came with challenges. These challenges ranged from inconsistent leadership, business acquisition and communication, and neighborhood communication among other issues.

Inconsistent leadership. A major challenge was “that we did not have community leadership [during the time of the CED application process],” as one interviewee put it. Not only was leadership limited, one interviewee believed that the leaders that did exist were quite young and inexperienced in their roles. Once the CED was in place, there was another challenge related to leadership – or lack thereof – in terms of guiding or influencing the development process. The new liquor licenses in a CED district fall under the “regular” liquor license application and review process at the state level; therefore, community organizations or members do not have input regarding who applies for and receives them. One interviewee explained:

“There is nothing really that prevents unscrupulous business owners from accessing a low cost liquor licenses through a CED, setting up a business, and then having that business be detrimental to the surrounding community either by the way they run the business or the type of entertainment they provide.”

Not securing an anchor. Another challenge identified by many interviewees was attracting the first new major restaurant to the CED – that is, the “pioneer” or “anchor” restaurant. Potential restaurateurs have contacted the PRDC about the CED in Pleasant Ridge; but, they have yet to open a restaurant. One aforementioned reason is the lack of area buildings with a commercial-grade kitchen, requiring an entrepreneur with significant time and money – i.e., “patient capital” – to build out and get approval from the city’s permit division. Another

related reason was economic conditions, both on the national level and on the local level. Said one interviewee:

If you are looking to do a small business initiative, it is still very difficult because banks are still squeamish about lending....A lot of folks that we were talking to had brilliant ideas and great business plans in place, but maybe they lacked the collateral to go to a bank and say, 'Hey I want to do this.'

Problematic communication. Interviewees said the PRDC did not work with residents, business owners, and other property owners to inform them of the purpose and potential of the CED, to obtain buy-in from them, and to overcome any fears that more liquor licenses would result in an unruly bar and club scene. After receiving the CED, the PRDC did not actively market the CED or work with other community organizations and members to “get the word out” at a grassroots level in order to find entrepreneurs who may be interested in taking advantage of the new reduced-cost liquor licenses. “I don’t think we’re doing enough to recruit restaurants. We did a little push a year ago, but we’re kind of stagnated,” one interviewee said. “We’re kind of waiting for them to come to us. We’re muddling our way through it.”

This lack of communication and engagement was particularly challenging for Pleasant Ridge because it does not have a neighborhood business association which, of course, could have helped with communication and networking. Also, many of the business owners do not own the properties in which they are located and many of the commercial property owners are not PR residents; therefore, they may not be as aware of and invested in “happenings” in the neighborhood. In fact, some local business and property owners, who knew of the CED, did not know that the number of new liquor licenses was limited to only five.

Limited engagement of property owners. On an even more basic level, another hurdle has been that some property owners in the Pleasant Ridge business district are not responsive to inquiries. “Even though this is a kind of effort that directly benefits them in the long run, many times they don't want to do anything for it,” said one interviewee. “They want to sit back and cash checks.” Beyond that, it can be difficult to “find the right fit between property owners and business owners” and for the entrepreneur and property owner to ultimately reach agreement on the details of a deal, especially price, even if there space has sat open for a great deal of time.

Competition. At least six other neighborhoods in Cincinnati have since acquired the CED designation (LeMaster, 2013). One interviewee said, “We may have competition now, [so] we get further and further behind.” With this additional competition, there may be a need to hire someone to communicate about the CED outside of the neighborhood, but funding for such a position does not exist. “We’re not bad enough that we can get a lot of grants, a lot of federal money,” said an interviewee. “It’s always been slightly frustrating because we’re kind of okay, but we were seeing ourselves slide.”

Traditional concerns. Further, there are other challenges with opening a restaurant in Pleasant Ridge, which may be similar in other urban neighborhoods. A few interviewees mentioned that panhandlers may be a concern for potential business owners and their customers. Although debated amongst interviewees, another issue may be limited parking in the business district. Only a few buildings have designated (private) parking areas, and street parking is metered and limited to 85 spaces in the business district. Sometimes creative solutions can come from such challenges. In one case, the Emanu supporter communicated with two banks and a pharmacy in the neighborhood and asked them for a “good neighbor policy.” They agreed to

ease up on their “customers only” enforcement so that visitors to the business district could park in their lots after their business hours, primarily in the evenings.

LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This section discusses the lessons learned from both the application for and implementation of the CED for both the community of Pleasant Ridge and for other communities hoping to engage in the CED process. Lessons may also be applied beyond Cincinnati and Ohio to others that may be considering a Community Entertainment District (CED) designation, an Entertainment Zone (EZ), or a similar policy or program.

Planning and Implementation

While all of the interviewees saw the acquisition of a CED for Pleasant Ridge as a very positive thing – a coup even – the shared hindsight was that it would have been much better if there had been a plan for implementation in place at the time it was acquired. As will be discussed in more detail below, ideally, a team of community leaders and members would have developed a common vision, longer-term goals, and shorter-term objectives that addressed not only the application process but also active marketing of the CED and the recruitment of restaurants and other businesses to the neighborhood. Of course, such a plan needs a manageable timeline that identifies key activities, responsible organizations or individuals, and deadlines. “Think of it as a ten-year project,” one interviewee said, “Don't think of it as let's just get this through City Hall.”

In addition to having a plan, one interviewee suggested that, ideally, the order of activities should have been in an alternative sequence (almost opposite) of how they actually happened. The alternative sequence would be: 1) work with existing businesses and property owners to demonstrate PR is a desirable place to locate and make it even more desirable through renovation and beautification projects; 2) recruit restaurants to the neighborhood; and 3) apply for the CED so new restaurants or potential restaurants can obtain these liquor licenses. This lesson demonstrates that it might be best to “get your ducks in a row” before applying for an entertainment district or zone designation. This means that once you get your status you can move right into implementation rather than sitting on the designation while you begin to get things moving in your community. Having things in place first will ensure that people are on board and that liquor licenses go to the business you have connected with, rather than those who may just hear about the designation and apply directly to the state.

In many ways, this actually emphasizes Campo and Ryan’s (2008) discussion on entertainment zones- or smaller scale redevelopment efforts for these types of projects. By building the process from the ground up with community support and businesses in place, the process becomes organic rather than forced. Once the community establishes a plan and the business district that they desire, then the application for a formal CED can be submitted. As the CED was given before the changes to the business district were planned or in place, the result was not a swift implementation of the CED, but a more stagnant and challenging process that is working toward community buy-in after the fact. In fact, at least one interviewee believed that community discussions and planning helps to ensure the process of development using a CED occurs organically and likely more quickly.

Leinberger (2005) came to a similar conclusion in the “Twelve Steps to Revitalization” report, for which the first two steps are capturing the community’s vision and developing a strategic plan. The report indicated that capturing the vision can help to identify emotional, economic and other motivations for urban revitalization, which can be powerful assets in the revitalization process. If a community-based organization leads the visioning and planning and it seeks input from a wide range of community members, leaders and groups, then this may minimize negative effects, such as the inhibition of organic, grassroots efforts. Additional research on the processes in place prior to and after the establishment of CEDs and the role of organic formation may be of interest.

Community Leadership

As previously mentioned, community leadership is essential to the process of application for and implementation of the CED. The lessons are somewhat mixed in terms of community leadership. On the positive side, this case demonstrates that one individual can bring about significant change in his or her community. Specifically, one resident of Pleasant Ridge – the Emanu supporter – was able to identify an existing public policy tool designed to attract entertainment- and arts-based businesses. He worked through bureaucratic processes to make it a reality in his neighborhood and, ultimately, to other urban neighborhoods in Cincinnati and Ohio.

On the down side, the Pleasant Ridge neighborhood seemed to be lacking consistent, long-term leadership to implement this tool effectively and efficiently – that is, to attract a strong pilot or anchor restaurant within a couple years. Specifically, the issue with leadership was that community organizations, such as the PRCC and PRDC, had high turnover among presidents

and other executive positions in recent years. Consistent leadership is important in terms of maintaining a vision for a policy, program, or project and also creating and supporting a team of volunteers to implement key activities. In this case, a very critical activity was marketing the CED – that is, “talking up” the CED to those who might be interested in opening a restaurant in this urban neighborhood. Implications of this lesson for other communities planning to utilize a CED or EZ distinction would be to ensure there is a solid and dedicated leadership structure in place that **can provide community vision for the designated area**, has a plan for implementation, and a means of seeing the plan through.

Community Support

Also aforementioned, another related important lesson is that a CED – or an EZ or another arts- and entertainment-related district or zone – needs to gain community support from the beginning. In other words, community leaders need to inform residents, business owners, and other property owners and get their support during the very first steps or stages. Early buy-in can help **the process grow organically**, and can minimize any misinformation or misconceptions about the designation and, thus, opposition against it. One interviewee clearly articulated this lesson:

The biggest lesson learned...is to establish a team from the get-go. It is not a tough process but, if you don't have buy-in from volunteers, you are not going to get the energy that is needed to carry it through to the marketing....

In addition, engaging the community will build upon existing social capital in the neighborhood – or the networks, values, norms and social trust – that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (Cote and Healy, 2001; Putnam, 1995). Further down the road, community

support and social capital may be needed for action and activism. Specifically, in this case, residents, business owners, and other property owners could have helped with marketing the CED and recruiting new businesses. As mentioned earlier, communication with and support from businesses in the neighborhood, and even a local business association, could have assisted in more successful implementation of the CED. Therefore, it would behoove those interested in a CED or EZ to ensure that the current community and business district is onboard with the plan and engaged in bringing it to fruition.

Acknowledging Limitations of Community Organizations

With all of this said, it is important to acknowledge and be realistic about the limitations of community organizations in Pleasant Ridge and many other neighborhoods. In this case, both the PRCC and PRDC are all-volunteer nonprofit organizations. In other words, most of their presidents, other officers, and committee members hold “real” jobs during the day – mostly full-time jobs – and have other commitments, including spouses, significant others, children, and volunteer commitments in neighborhood schools, churches, and other organizations. In fact, one of the main reasons that Pleasant Ridge was able to obtain the CED in the first place and make some strides in implementing it was the fact that a couple community members were “in between” jobs and, thus, had some the time to complete the CED application, show empty commercial buildings to potential entrepreneurs, and so on. Said one interviewee, “Actually, for any community organization, if you don’t have people who are unemployed or retired, then your timelines grow exponentially.” It would have been helpful in this case if a foundation, corporation, or other funder could have provided some financial support to hire an individual –

even part time – who could have taken on policy or program implementation as a top priority for a limited time, until it was up and running and had some momentum.

CONCLUSION

The lessons and implications shared above demonstrate what has been learned as a result of this study about the CED process in one Cincinnati, Ohio neighborhood and application of these lessons to various other communities. The CED is considered to be a beneficial tool for the neighborhood of Pleasant Ridge, despite some of the challenges of implementation.

Communities considering such a designation should likely rely on solid leadership to put a clear and executable plan in place prior to receiving the designation. Community involvement and communication has been found to be important through every step of the process. Pleasant Ridge is still very much in the implementation phase of this project, but has already learned a great deal and is hopeful that the business district will see positive results overall because of the CED. Other communities interested in such a designation will likely also see positive benefits from the status alone, but may very well have increased success if able to put the lessons of Pleasant Ridge into place.

EPILOGUE

An interesting epilogue to this study is that the District A Citizen’s Initiative hosted, in partnership with both Pleasant Ridge and Kennedy Heights community councils and development associations, two “inter-neighborhood community conversations” in March and August of 2013. The goal was to examine the City of Cincinnati’s new strategic plan and begin developing a few key ideas on which the two neighborhoods could work together. About 90 residents, business owners, service providers, and community leaders

participated, and key outcomes were consensus agreement on the creation of two “vibrant neighborhood centers” and continued conversations and planning among community members and leaders from both neighborhoods. In fact, discussions of the business district, and therefore the CED, were still very much alive (District A, 2013).

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