

Chelsea Neighborhood Plan

July 2020

Section 2: Executive Summary

The Chelsea neighborhood in Atlantic City is the area of focus for the NRTC Plan. It is a 0.75 square mile area from Annapolis Avenue to Texas Avenue and from the Beach to the Bay - its boundaries follow census tracts 3, 4, and 5. The neighborhood is home to 10,433 residents. Chelsea's greatest assets are its diversity of people, businesses and institutions, as well as its pristine beach and expansive bay access.

Due mainly to Atlantic City's economy of tourism and gaming, and associated low wages, the City has experienced limited economic opportunity in recent decades. This lack of economic diversity has exacerbated longstanding and deep rooted challenges such as social problems and inequities, blight, low educational levels, crime, and other negative indicators.

Property taxes have also risen dramatically in recent years, starting with the Great Recession that began in 2008, and sharpening with the steep decline of the casino industry in 2014. Adding to these challenges, the effects of COVID-19 in 2020, have been devastating for Atlantic City. Casino hotels, the primary employer of City residents, have just reopened on an extremely limited basis after three and a half months of closure. Many casino workers had difficulty receiving unemployment payments due to the system being overwhelmed, going months without any source of income. The Brookings Institute reports the Atlantic City region as likely the third hardest hit in the country due to its reliance on tourism and hospitality¹. This further exemplifies the need to grow other industries, while concurrently preparing the residents for better jobs.

While ACDEVCO's 2018 Gateway project, consisting of Stockton University's Atlantic City Campus and South Jersey Gas Headquarters, has had a significant positive impact on the neighborhood and provides a solid foundation on which to build, the challenges still exist, and are the reason for this plan and intended actions.

The foundation of the Chelsea Neighborhood Plan is inclusive of every person, business, and organization in Chelsea. The strategies in this report will strengthen community, increase economic opportunities, and provide for better housing.

This plan is the culmination of nearly a year of projects, resident engagement and public input, including meetings, surveys, focus groups, and research. Hundreds of Chelsea community members expressed their opinions, suggested impactful strategies, and overwhelmingly offered to help put these ideas into action.

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/17/the-places-a-COVID-19-recession-will-likely-hit-hardest/>

ACDEVCO, the applicant organization, led the transformative redevelopment of Chelsea's Gateway Area, which opened in fall 2018. The \$220M project was designed to help meet the educational and redevelopment needs of Atlantic City. Building on its experience with the Gateway project, over the past year ACDEVCO partnered with Chelsea EDC and other local organizations to undertake a series of neighborhood projects to expand economic opportunity and improve the quality of life as the planning process got underway. These projects were invaluable in understanding the business community's needs, the housing conditions, and the capacity of the many organizations that will help carry out the proposed strategies.

Over the next 10 years, ACDEVCO will work to implement a series of strategies to chart a path for a better future. Seeking to foster community, increase economic opportunities, and provide better housing for all Chelsea residents, this plan has five (5) distinct focus areas:

Strengthening Community: Chelsea has an incredible diversity of cultures. Engaging residents, promoting the arts, and fostering the leadership capacity of Chelsea residents are paramount for success.

Safety & Resident Wellness: Residents and stakeholders continually brought up issues that relate to the overall wellness of the community. Working to improve neighborhood safety, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, and healthy lifestyles pays dividends long into the future.

Youth & Recreation: Improvements are needed to existing parks and recreational facilities as well as programming for Neighborhood youth. The Chelsea Neighborhood will benefit from the activation of O'Donnell Park and the establishment of quality recreational programming for youth.

Housing: Housing needs were very clear – better quality housing priced within residents means. Supporting individuals looking to purchase a home, improving the quality of the existing housing stock, and promoting the overall resilience and beautification of Neighborhood properties.

Economic Development: The strategies in this section fall into two categories – supporting the businesses in the neighborhood; and providing resources to the residents to earn a living wage with opportunity for advancement. Diversifying the Neighborhood economy, supporting existing businesses, and preparing workers for good, local jobs will lead to a vibrant Chelsea.