

Chelsea Neighborhood Plan

July 2020

Section 7: Proposed Vision, Strategies, Activities & Outcomes

A. Vision Statement

Building on Chelsea's strengths, this plan seeks to chart a path for a better future. We seek to foster community, increase economic opportunities, and provide for better housing for all Chelsea residents.

B. Strategies

The Chelsea Neighborhood Plan outlines strategies in 5 distinct yet interconnected focus areas meant to address the long-term revitalization of the community. The focus areas are: **Strengthen Community, Safety & Resident Wellness, Youth & Recreation, Housing, and Economic Development.**

Grounded in data and the engagement of Neighborhood residents and stakeholders, this plan seeks to build on the Chelsea Neighborhood's assets, address perceived weaknesses and threats, and position the community to take advantage of opportunities for everyone to thrive. The strategies in this plan address the social determinants of health – economic stability, neighborhood and physical environment, education, food, community and social context, and the health care system. Broadly speaking, the plan's 5 focus areas seek to foster community, increase economic opportunities, and provide for better housing for all Chelsea residents.

Focus Area #1: Strengthen 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.

Strategy 1.1: Celebrate the Chelsea Neighborhood's Diversity

The diversity of the Chelsea Neighborhood was consistently identified as one of its strengths during the public input process. With 42% of the Neighborhood's population identifying as Latinx or Hispanic, 34% identifying as Asian (including Bangladesh, Pakistani, Chinese, Vietnamese), and 4% identifying as African American, there is a wide variety of cultures present in Chelsea, each with its own rich history. At Sovereign Avenue School, 18 different languages are spoken and 21 countries are represented. Neighborhood residents want both an understanding of their own culture, and to celebrate other cultures. Building on established events and the work done by existing partners, ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC are looking to help take these events to the next level.

In addition, there is strong interest in creating a Community Hub; a place to celebrate and preserve Chelsea's diversity and to host community programming, educational offerings, and trainings.

Potential activities include:

- *Cultural Events & Programs:* Work with cultural organizations to organize, promote, and facilitate events and programs highlighting the diversity of the Chelsea Neighborhood; the fine, performing, and culinary arts are areas expected to be highlighted.
- *Promote International Cuisine:* In partnership with local grocers and restaurants, promote the diverse culinary offerings found in Chelsea, coordinate food-related programs, and market the Neighborhood as an “International Food District”.
- *Building the Capacity of Cultural Organizations:* Help organizations to execute elements of this plan. Examples would be training on nonprofit management, grant writing, and financial and program management.
- *Community Hub:* Assist in establishing a place for Neighborhood residents and businesses to utilize for education, referrals and resources. This Center will have space for events, activities, and informational sessions and will be supported by community partners such as Stockton University, AtlantiCare, and other neighborhood groups.

Strategy 1.2: Engage residents through the Arts

Arts programs and activities will foster individual and community creativity and expression by engaging residents of all ages and cultures. The Plan will work through the Atlantic City Arts Foundation (ACAF), the Atlantic City Arts Commission, Stockton’s Noyes Museum of Art, the African American Heritage Museum of South Jersey, and nonprofit partners such as MudGirls Studio, to engage youth and adults with cultural programs.

Potential activities include:

- *Fine & Performing Arts Programs:* Support established partners as they expand their fine and performing arts programs for Chelsea residents.
- *Public Art Installations:* Work with arts organizations on the development and installation of permanent public art by local artists.
- *Arts & Beautification:* Work with arts organizations to identify artists for neighborhood beautification projects (e.g. murals, vacant storefront window displays and graphics, branding and promotional art, decorative bike racks, decorative waste receptacles, decorative electrical boxes).

Strategy 1.3: Empower residents to become community leaders

The residents of the Chelsea Neighborhood have a deep love of their community and are interested in expanding their civic involvement. Resident leaders can play a role in the implementation of this plan. By offering regular informational and educational sessions on critical and timely topics such as immigration, anti-racist/implicit bias trainings, and health issues, Chelsea EDC and ACDEVCO hope to further promote a knowledgeable and confident resident base, from which leaders will evolve. The Chelsea Neighborhood Association has been active for more than 45 years and has served as a springboard for resident involvement with neighborhood and municipal affairs. It will look to expand its membership, help develop a network of block captains, and promote active resident participation in the implementation of this plan. It will also help residents engage with smaller organizations through volunteerism and sponsorships.

Over the next five to ten years, ACDEVCO will support resident leaders through these activities:

- *Develop a network of Block Captains:* Engage Chelsea Neighborhood residents in the creation of block associations and the election of block captains to assist with community building activities. Block captains would receive training on topics such as code enforcement, block beautification, and leadership.
- *Promote Volunteerism & Active Community Participation:* ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will work to engage residents through volunteer fairs and referrals to local organizations serving the Chelsea Neighborhood.
- *Resident Leadership Training:* ACDEVCO will work with Atlantic City groups looking to reinstate the Lead AC program and/or develop new leadership development programs or trainings for residents, including a proposed program for youth leadership development.

Strategy 1.4: Facilitate opportunities to connect the Chelsea community to anchor institutions and employers

The relationship between Chelsea residents and Neighborhood anchor institutions, students, employers and employees, is central to this plan's success. Approximately 2,000 Stockton and South Jersey Gas affiliates use the Neighborhood daily. The goal is to have students and employees frequent Neighborhood restaurants and businesses. A combination of events, activities, and programs designed to foster communication and interaction among and between residents, Stockton and South Jersey Gas affiliates, and other workers will help to forge a strong relationship between these groups, and lead to a Neighborhood goal of faculty, students and workers also becoming Chelsea residents.

Potential activities include:

- *Neighborhood-wide Events:* Coordinate and market all neighborhood events (e.g. neighborhood clean-ups, arts programming, cultural festivals, block parties, etc.) with and to the broader community (Stockton University, South Jersey Gas employees, and residents).
- *Neighborhood Tours:* Coordinating with Stockton University, City walking tours currently offered by a local historian will be expanded to cover Chelsea history, culture, architecture, and food.

Focus Area #2: 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.

Strategy 2.1: Interventions for a safe community

Residents generally feel safe in the neighborhood; however, there are several areas of concern that residents want to see addressed. Addressing blighted property conditions and the need for social services will improve residents' and visitors' perceptions of the Chelsea Neighborhood. Building on the successful Neighborhood Coordination Officer (NCO) program implemented by the Atlantic City Police Department, a Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) framework will engage residents, the ACPD, and other stakeholders while building trust in the community. Improvements to technology and the engagement of Stockton University – their Public Safety office and Criminal Justice Department – will result in Stockton students becoming Class 2 Officers in the community.

The activities below represent an example of ways ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will implement this strategy:

- *Reporting Platform:* Work with the City to establish an app that allows residents to report code enforcement issues. Work with residents to advocate for targeted code enforcement to ensure vacant, abandoned, and other nuisance properties are maintained and remediated to City standards.
- *Partner with Social Service Agencies to Provide Outreach:* Identify and refer individuals for health, housing, and social services focused on long term solutions.
- *CPTED Training & Implementation:* Work through the Chelsea Neighborhood Association to host CPTED training workshops for property owners. Provide small grants to participants to implement CPTED tactics.
- *Lighting & Cameras:* Coordinate with the ACPD to incentivize property owners and the City to install lighting in dark areas of Chelsea and ensure camera feeds are connected to the City's network - areas of particular focus include Pacific Avenue and the "H Alleys".

Strategy 2.2: Improve pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure

Chelsea is a largely walkable neighborhood, a fact much appreciated by residents. 23.7% of housing units in Chelsea do not have a car, and 22.2% of residents walk to work. However, there are safety issues involving speeding cars, dangerous crossings, and lack of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Over the next 5-10 years, ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC plans to build on the walkability of the Neighborhood to ensure the comfort and safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Building on this Neighborhood strength is important and steps will be taken to ensure Chelsea remains walkable into the future.

Potential activities include:

- *Improved Pedestrian Infrastructure:* Work with the City and other partners to develop, install, and maintain innovative pedestrian infrastructure improvements in Chelsea (e.g. decorative crosswalks, street trees, pedestrian countdown clocks, etc.).
- *Decorative Bicycle Racks:* Work with the Atlantic City Arts Foundation to commission decorative bicycle racks to be developed by local artists.
- *Pilot Permanent Bicycle Infrastructure:* In partnership with the City, pilot and evaluate several bicycle infrastructure improvements along key Neighborhood corridors with the goal of installing a permanent bicycle infrastructure in Chelsea by 2030.

Strategy 2.3: Promote an active and healthy lifestyle

This plan seeks to learn more about residents' health concerns through the neighborhood urgent care, medical offices, and clinics with the goal of supporting residents as they address chronic health issues and lead healthy, productive lives. This strategy also promotes an active, healthy lifestyle for all residents through physical activity and accessible health care.

Potential activities include:

- *Healthy Chelsea:* Partner with local healthcare providers and institutions such as AtlantiCare and Reliance to ensure quality medical care. Partners will share information on health insurance and healthy living, including nutrition.

- *Fitness Activities for All Ages:* Work with partners to develop and facilitate fitness programming for all Chelsea residents. Activities may be geared toward different population segments, including seniors, adults, and youth.

Focus Area #3: 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 renovation of O'Donnell Park and the establishment of quality recreational programming for youth.

Strategy 3.1: Renovate & improve O'Donnell Park to make it accessible and actively used

The largest, most prominent green space in the Chelsea Neighborhood is O'Donnell Park. The park contains numerous memorials honoring those who served in conflicts from the Civil War through Vietnam. In addition, O'Donnell Park has distinctive landscaping and is equipped with electricity to be able to host outdoor events. During focus groups, residents called for the renovation of O'Donnell Park that maintains the memorials while allowing for Neighborhood events and activities to take place on a more wide-open expanse of green-space. There are three additional blocks of green space along O'Donnell Parkway that are also usable. This green space is more easily accessible to pedestrians and should also be improved.

Potential activities include:

- *Redesign & Renovation of O'Donnell Park:* Work with the City and the CRDA to hire a landscape architect to engage the community in planning for the future of O'Donnell Park. The resulting plan will guide the renovation of the park while maintaining existing memorials, improving landscaping, and ensuring accessibility of the park for active and passive recreation.
- *Park Programs:* Partner with neighborhood groups to host small- and medium-scale events (e.g. food truck festival, movie nights, yoga, farmers' market, etc.) at O'Donnell Park.
- *Friends of O'Donnell Park:* Formation of a "Friends of O'Donnell Park" entity that can fundraise for and support the upkeep of O'Donnell Park. This group will advocate for municipal support for the park and apply for funding to support programming.

Strategy 3.2: Improve and expand recreational facilities in Chelsea

The quality and quantity of recreational facilities and programs, especially for youth, conveys a community's priorities. The Chelsea Neighborhood contains several open space and recreational facilities; however, there was overwhelming public opinion that the physical appearance, safety, and programming of these spaces can be improved to better serve residents. This strategy will bring people together and help foster community.

Potential activities include:

- *Improve and Expand Existing Facilities:* Work in partnership with the City to secure resources to improve the maintenance of and expand the existing recreational facilities at Pallitto Field and the Texas Avenue Playground, as well as supporting neighborhood institutions to add or expand recreational facilities for the community.

- *Organized Recreational Programming:* Work with the City and local organizations to develop and promote a calendar of recreational programs offered by public and private organizations locally. Work to ensure programming is varied, accessible, and convenient.

Strategy 3.3: Partner with local and national organizations to increase access to youth programming

During a youth focus group, gaps in programming – especially life-skills and career-focused – were evident. Neighborhood youth want the opportunity to work in meaningful careers without having to move out of the area. Several local organizations (e.g. ACIT and the Boys & Girls Club) recognize these gaps and have begun expanding their life skills, educational, and career programming to expose area youth to career pathways in fields such as STEAM, Healthcare, IT, Green Energy, Building Trades, Culinary, and Aviation.

In addition to career-focused programming, organized recreational programming was found to be lacking. Cultural activities administered by organizations such as Dynesty Alliance, Atlantic County Hispanic Association, and faith based organizations, expose youth to cultural programming while teaching them other life skills. Additional programs (e.g. Junior Lifeguards, Soccer) can be promoted in the neighborhood as options before/after school or during the summer months.

Potential activities include:

- *Youth Development:* ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will work with local partners to promote their existing offerings as well as youth development courses on subjects of particular interest to Chelsea youth (e.g. balancing a check-book, applying for college and financial aid, etc). These organizations will also host career development nights focused on different pathways and industries.
- *Youth Sports:* ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will work with groups such as Youth in Motion, Asian American Sports Club of Atlantic City, and Atlantic City FC Soccer Team to develop youth sports teams (e.g. soccer, cricket, crew, etc.) that offer quality, affordable programming for boys and girls.
- *Maker-Space, Robotics, and STEAM Programs:* ACDEVCO, in partnership with Stockton University, the Boys & Girls Club, and Neighborhood Schools, will provide programming involving Robotics and other STEAM subjects. Mentors and volunteers will be sought from neighborhood employers such as South Jersey Gas. A Maker-Space will be developed in Chelsea to support youth entrepreneurs and creatives.

Focus Area #4: Housing

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

Strategy 4.1: Support individuals and families looking to own a home

Only 21% of housing units in the Chelsea Neighborhood are owner occupied. A plurality of residents rent their home (48%), while 16% of housing units are seasonally occupied and 15% are vacant. This plan seeks to facilitate and encourage Chelsea renters to become home owners, reducing the likelihood of long-term displacement and preserving the Neighborhood’s diversity, by hosting homeownership events and connecting them to housing and credit counseling organizations. ACDEVCO will also take a

targeted approach to incentivize local homeownership for community builders such as teachers, mentors, social workers, first responders, and health care professionals, as well as employees of Tropicana, Stockton University, South Jersey Gas and other employers.

Potential activities include

- *Homeownership Events:* Work with local institutions and other partners to host events aimed at preparing people for the home buying process, through informing residents of the many down payment assistance programs offered, housing and credit counseling, and identifying or providing other incentives.
- *Targeted Incentives:* Work with CRDA and local institutions to create and administer targeted incentives (e.g. down-payment assistance, closing cost assistance, rehab costs, match-savings accounts) to targeted populations (e.g. first responders, government employees, teachers, employees of local businesses).

Strategy 4.2: Improve housing quality

For many housing projects, the cost to acquire and rehabilitate housing, or to buy land and build new construction exceeds the end market value. Additional costs are incurred to become FEMA compliant for flood protection. Using subsidies is an important strategy to ensure quality housing is available at affordable prices for those looking to purchase a home.

Leveraging ACDEVCO's strength as a developer, they will work with local development partners and contractors to create a mix of quality and affordable residential and mixed-use properties that provide a lower-cost entry into the Neighborhood's housing market. Vacant lots and structures will be developed in a manner that complements existing housing while offering new and different models of housing. ACDEVCO will also work with the City and their Abandoned Property Ordinance to acquire blighted properties for rehabilitation.

Potential activities include:

- *Revitalize abandoned and vacant properties:* Utilize local ordinances to acquire and rehabilitate properties that meet statutory definitions under the Abandoned Properties Rehabilitation Act.
- *Acquire properties for new housing:* Identify bank owned and distressed properties for sale to create new housing.

Strategy 4.3: Promote the preservation, resilience, and beautification of the Neighborhood's homes

Properties in the Chelsea Neighborhood are among the oldest in Atlantic City. Over 67% of the Neighborhood's homes were built before 1960 and more than 40% of all homes were built prior to 1940. Investment in the physical condition of the Neighborhood's housing stock will make Chelsea more attractive to potential homebuyers. ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will work directly with property owners on this strategy. Improvements will happen incrementally; however, the plan anticipates private investments will contribute to these efforts once a few key properties have been rehabilitated. Historically significant homes and buildings will be prioritized for renovations rather than demolitions, where feasible.

- *Home Repair & Resiliency Programs:* ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will direct residents to existing home repair programs and partner with organizations such as ACIT to bring home repair classes to homeowners in the Neighborhood. ACDEVCO will partner with local organizations to

implement weatherization, alternative energy, flood prevention, and other measures for homeowner occupants in the form of grants, technical support, and referrals.

- *Property & Block Beautification:* ACDEVCO and Chelsea EDC will hold monthly and annual competitions for residents to compete for community building and beautification projects (e.g. block parties, installation of decorative flags, landscaping improvements, banners, etc.)
- *Housing & Neighborhood Advocacy:* ACDEVCO will work with residents to advocate for sensible ordinances and policies related to housing maintenance, short-term rentals, and quality of life issues. ACDEVCO will also support residents' efforts to have a portion of the Neighborhood designated as a Historic District and will ensure Chelsea benefits from planned infrastructure improvements.

Focus Area #5: 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.

Strategy 5.1: Promote and support businesses located in Chelsea

The Chelsea Neighborhood boasts a diverse mix of nearly 200 businesses, including restaurants, shops, and entertainment venues that cater to locals and visitors. Promoting and supporting these businesses is a major priority. The needs and interests of the businesses are different, but all would like to increase foot traffic in the Neighborhood and provide an appealing atmosphere for their customers. Moreover, there is an opportunity to promote and leverage the neighborhood's designation as an Opportunity Zone. As the Chelsea Neighborhood becomes a fully-realized 'University District', businesses will need to adapt their marketing, appearance, and/or products. Collaborating with local and regional partners, ACDEVCO will ensure the businesses in Chelsea continue to serve Neighborhood residents, tourists, and Stockton students.

Potential activities include:

- *Provide support to businesses:* Partner with various agencies such as the Greater Atlantic City Chamber, the Latin American Economic Development Agency, New Jersey Community Capital, Stockton's Small Business Development Center, the Small Business Administration, and others to administer training and support to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and micro-enterprises.
- *Neighborhood Branding & Marketing:* Engage in a branding process leading to the creation of a cohesive identity for the entire Chelsea Neighborhood. Specific marketing support will be given to the business district and to promote the Chelsea Neighborhood as a great place to live.
- *Facade Improvements:* Work with store owners to facilitate the cleaning up of nuisance signage, creation of appealing window displays, and the hiring of local artists to paint murals. ACDEVCO will encourage and support attractive, creative signage and facades.
- *Filling Vacant Storefronts:* Market vacant boardwalk and commercial district storefronts to businesses. Work with property owners to address barriers to leasing/selling space to a mix of different business types.

Strategy 5.2: Connect residents with Education and Career Pathways

Empowering youth (14-18), young adults (19-25), and workers (25+) through training, continuing education, and other career pathways is a long-term investment in the sustainability and resilience of the local economy. Currently, there are myriad skill and job training and entrepreneurial programs offered locally. The Atlantic County Vocational School District (ACVSD), the Atlantic County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC), Stockton University's Small Business Development Center, and other local organizations all offer programs for adults to learn skills, certifications, and other continuing education programs. In addition, employers such as AtlantiCare, South Jersey Gas, and the FAA, actively recruit, train and provide pathways for career and financial growth.

Looking to the future, a coordinated approach to the structure and schedule of these offerings would benefit the youth, young adults, and residents of the Chelsea Neighborhood. Potential activities include:

- *Resident & Employee Skill Training:* Partner with local providers to directly support the participation of Chelsea residents and employees to secure additional training, certifications, and education. Support residents with degrees and training from other countries to translate their education to secure a comparable job.
- *Bridging the Digital Divide:* Working with internet providers and local institutions to increase the accessibility of the internet, access to computers, digital literacy education, and online learning.
- *Youth and Young Adult Education & Training:* Support the expansion of youth and young adult career exploration and training programs administered by local partners such as the Boys & Girls Club. Provide support and referrals for individuals seeking to complete their GED.
- *Youth Employment:* Work with local employers to facilitate summer and afterschool employment opportunities for Chelsea Neighborhood youth.

C. NRTC Investment as a Catalyst

The Chelsea Neighborhood Plan seeks to build on the area's considerable assets, the strength of ACDEVCO and its partners, as well as the enthusiasm and commitment of Neighborhood residents. Throughout this plan document, the case has been made that the Chelsea Neighborhood is at a crucial tipping point. The recent investment by Stockton University and South Jersey Gas is significant; however, more work needs to be done to ensure that these projects produce equitable impact throughout the community for businesses and residents alike.

This plan lays out a series of strategies focused on: Strengthening Community, Safety & Wellness, Youth & Recreation, Housing, and Economic Development. The strategies serve to channel investment into projects, programs, and activities that positively impact Chelsea and build on the work that Chelsea EDC has done engaging youth, seniors, and the business community. Over the course of this plan's 10-year horizon, ACDEVCO will undoubtedly work with other partners to leverage their resources and strengths while implementing this plan.

ACDEVCO has the experience and track record needed to affect real, positive change in the Chelsea Neighborhood. From serving as the developer for both the Stockton University and South Jersey Gas projects to their continued support for local organizations such as Chelsea EDC, ACDEVCO remains committed to the long-term revitalization of the Chelsea Neighborhood. Utilizing the NRTC program, the work that still needs to be done to fully realize the Chelsea Neighborhood's vision for the future will

happen sooner and in a more coordinated fashion. The opportunity to build-out a shared vision for Chelsea in 2030 was an important exercise to ensure that ACDEVCO, local stakeholders, and residents know how to work collectively and collaboratively to achieve this plan's aims.