



*Visioning Our Future: Looking Ahead to 2015*

## Summary Report

January 18, 2012

**In the Spring of 2011 the Clarkston Development Corporation** initiated a series of community dialogues to increase consensus among a wide range of residents and other stakeholders in Clarkston. In the first two sessions a total of more than 100 participants gathered at the Clarkston Community Center to enjoy food, each other, and lively conversations.

Out of the first two sessions grew groups that have been working to make ideas from the sessions come alive. On January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012, more than 100 people came out to hear about recent successes and do additional work on the topics that have emerged from the community conversations: Making and keeping Clarkston clean; strengthening the connection of the schools to the community and to students; and ensuring that the apartments are managed to benefit the residents who call them home.

These ideas have again been collected and sorted into similar categories. We have identified the major ideas and themes from the January session. These have been prepared in this document and are being **sent back to participants**, made available to the community through the website, and will be available for review by individuals and community organizations to decide the next stages of planning and action.

**Additional opportunities to meet and to envision the future will be planned** since this is an ongoing process.<sup>1</sup>

### **Themes and Vision Statement: A Summary**

The latest visioning session asked participants to respond to two questions about the three topic areas: a clean Clarkston, apartments managed to benefit residents, and community/school connections:

- What do you see and experience that are important to you in this area of community life?
- What are the things that you and the community could do to make a difference?

These questions were considered in 9 small groups: 3 groups on each of the topic areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Report prepared by Jon Abercrombie of Common Focus. An appendix is also available for download so that the reader can see every idea written on the easels. Suggestions for edits are welcomed.

Participants in the 9 groups described how the issues were affecting the community and they then generated more than 80 ideas for solutions. The following are the major themes that emerged from the groups.

This list of ideas does not claim to be a comprehensive list. The themes that attracted the most ideas are at top of the lists below. It is most importantly another step toward building resident problem-solving in the community. City government, foundations, places of worship, businesses, schools and other partners are critical supports for these resident actions. Ideas that created additional energy in the groups are included in an appendix along with all of the observations and ideas from the group easel.

## **The Three Topics in the Discussion Groups**

### **1. The Community with Apartments that Benefit the**

**Residents:** How does the community ensure that its apartments are managed to benefit its residents? What can the community do to create apartments that better serve the families, individuals, and children in apartments? Currently the groups said that maintenance and security are significant issues that face the apartments. Traffic and fast drivers endanger children who do not have places to play in their apartment complexes. Maintenance is slow and often done only when an inspection is due.

#### **Apartments that are Safe and Managed to Benefit Residents**

We want apartments that are well managed and residents who are aware of their rights and their responsibilities. Advocacy and education are both important elements of the solution.

#### **The Principles that Shape this Theme:**

- City and county officials, apartment managers, and the community need to work together.
- Apartment management is part of the solution as well as the engagement and the development of residents and resident groups.

#### **The Major Ideas for Action: (Themes with longer lists of ideas are in larger letters.)**

- Improve communication, advocacy, and increased negotiation
  - Create resident councils.
  - Increase the options for translators to help with rent negotiations.
  - Include county code enforcement from the county.
  - Create new city codes that may be needed.
  - Create newsletters within the apartment complexes.
- Create targeted education about health and safety issues.
  - Educate the community about health standards.
  - Provide training for apartment managers and residents.

- Share options and renter rights to renters along with what to do when there are problems.
- Build relationships with those who can provide legal assistance.
- Address rodent and insect issues aggressively.
- Add or improve resource centers, class spaces, and playgrounds like KABOOM

**Important Questions:** One group listed important questions to answer:

- What responsibility do service providers have when they place someone?
- Are families getting enough support with their housing?
- Refugee Family Services brought together 16 managers. How do we build on that?

**2. The Clean and Green Community:** How does the community experience the cleanliness of its streets and neighborhoods? What can it do to make the city and surrounding neighborhoods attractive? We see things we can celebrate including the many ways that residents are working together on cleanup. The Clarkston Community Center is working with the community. There are plantings and gardens that we have seen.

### **Cleanliness and the Community**

We want a community that creates clean and attractive streets and neighborhoods through creative projects. We want to use advocacy and education along with cleanup projects.

**The Principles that Shape this Theme:**

- Education is important for building agreement on what cleanliness means for us.
- Partnerships across the community are necessary.

**The Major Ideas for Action: (Themes with longer lists of ideas are in larger letters.)**

- Use a variety of tools and projects to clean the streets and the neighborhoods.
  - Projects include watching and stopping illegal dumping, adopt-a-block programs, more litter cans that are uniform, trimming obstructing greenery, edible landscaping, and plantings along the railroad.
- Create more education and awareness through the local media and instruction.
  - Teach cleanliness and hygiene, use religious leaders, and advertise on the local media with PSAs, e.g. the radio stations.
- Develop different groups or coalitions to advocate for a clean community.

- Provide refugees with additional ways to speak out, hold online forums, engage the leaders in each of the communities cultural and language groups, partner with the business association, and with the city government.
- Upgrade the look of buildings and signage.
  - Remove signs on business windows

**3. The Educated Community:** The major challenges are that we still have cultural and language barriers that have an impact, especially the parents as they interact with the school system.

**The Schools and the Community**

We want a community where the schools effectively honor and work with our many diverse cultures and language groups. It is important that the teachers and the administrators in the public have understanding and supportive relationships with students and parents.

**The Principles that Shape this Theme:**

- Honor our diversity
- Find ways to meet, to strengthen connections for students and families.

**The Major Ideas for Action: (Themes with longer lists of ideas are in larger letters.)**

- Create greater advocacy opportunities to communicate with and to create changes with the school board and the schools.
- Organize task forces to organize representatives of the refugee communities as well as community parents.
- Initiate a student-supported effort to build trust among students and teachers.
- Create ways to get information to parents but also to have parent-to-parent mentors who help parents trying to assist their own children with their educations.
- Consider single-gender schools.

**Wrap Up and Next Steps:**

The community meeting on January 18, like the other meetings CDF has sponsored and will sponsor in the future, was meant to further the work all are accomplishing in and for Clarkston. We hope that many of the thoughtful proposals that came out of the small-group meetings on the 18th will be developed into strategic plans for improvements in our lives together in Clarkston. We urge you and your organizations to seize opportunities for making changes that will positively affect the community.

CDF will continue to develop the four major initiatives around which it is focused in the areas of early childhood education, medical services, family advocacy and urban

agriculture, and CDF appreciates the support and commitment that organizations and individuals continue to make toward the work in these areas.

If you have any questions or suggestions for CDF, please contact them at [info@clarkstondevelopmentfoundation.org](mailto:info@clarkstondevelopmentfoundation.org) or 404.736-6602. Working together we can further the good ideas and the hard work that so many of you have given to the Clarkston community.

We look forward to our next large group meeting with you sometime in late June or early July 2012.