

Community Engagement Chat: Engaging Residents in Housing Development Plans and More

Group discussion centered on the challenge of doing community engagement work in a neighborhood where two-thirds of the parcels are vacant lots. Starting next fall, one suburban neighborhood in Cleveland will undergo a major transformation as 250 new homes are built in a small area involving five streets where most existing residents are older adults. In this scenario, gaining input from the current residents is key, but not enough. Once homes are built, the neighborhood will be transformed, and most of the community will have moved into the area from elsewhere.

So, how *do* we gather input from residents who don't live in the neighborhood yet? Engagement Chat participants helped brainstorm solutions including:

- Start early by engaging existing residents at monthly drop-in sessions for information sharing.
- Build connections between existing residents so that they do not feel isolated as the transformation occurs.
- Provide opportunities for existing residents to share their stories about the neighborhood.
- Use prominent local celebrities/church leaders as a draw to engage residents.
- Connect with nearby businesses, schools, and other anchor institutions like hospitals.
- Build an interactive marketing strategy that allows potential homebuyers to engage with the community such as neighborhood history walks, 5k runs, bike tours, a mural tour, pop-up art shows, chalk fests, outdoor concerts, storytelling events, etc.

The group discussed other topics related to building a neighborhood-based approach in middle neighborhoods, and conversations and connections are continuing. The Middle Neighborhoods Community of Practice hosts drop-in 'engagement chats,' where practitioners, residents, government officials, etc. can discuss community engagement strategies and build a supportive network to support this vital work.