Chapter 13

A COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

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Cities across the nation face enormous challenges in our urban neighborhoods. Inner-city communities plagued by decades of disinvestment and decline demand innovative, big picture strategies. In Louisville, Kentucky the Park DuValle Neighborhood Revitalization is creating a vibrant, stable mixed-income community with unprecedented homeownership opportunities for people over a range of income levels, in which public housing residents are integrated as neighbors and full citizens into the population of property owners and other renters. The $185 million Park DuValle Neighborhood Revitalization is nothing less than the full-scale, community-driven transformation of a “lost” neighborhood.

As a result, where row upon row of barracks-like public housing once stood, 130 acres of land were cleared. Where street after street of “The Bricks” once dominated, attractive new homes, duplexes, and small apartment buildings are under construction, often dozens at a time. Where public housing once isolated very low-income families, neighbors who earn well above the median are building homes down the street and next door to families with incomes in the middle, at the bottom, and all around the median.

The basic concept is simple: Where large public housing projects dominate a neighborhood, use public housing land and capital as an equity base for mixed-income development. The components of the plan are:

- Urban design, based on the principles of New Urbanism, which creates a coherent, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood with homes that are closely integrated with recreation, retail and civic spaces. Homes with yards and porches encourage a sense of community and responsibility; activity and interaction is
directed to the front of the home. Neighborhood residents, no matter their income level, will have access to the goods and services that make a neighborhood attractive.

- Increased homeownership opportunities for families of all income levels.
- Community participation in goal setting and planning.
- A community building strategy that integrates social services targeted to the public housing population as well as to residents of the mixed-income neighborhood.
- A partnership between the Housing Authority of Louisville (HAL) and the City of Louisville in which public housing families are fully supported and complemented by City efforts to build a new neighborhood that appeals to those with housing choices.
- A partnership between the Housing Authority of Louisville and private developers that maximizes the expertise and entrepreneurship of the private sector to produce and manage a quality product.
- The effective leveraging of resources that combines federal funds with private debt and equity to make the neighborhood’s recovery feasible.
- The integration of modern telecommunications technology to ensure that the Park DuValle neighborhood is a neighborhood of the 21st century.
- The recovery of commercial activity in the neighborhood through the development of a town center and the redevelopment of existing commercial outlets.
- A collaboration with the Louisville Community Development Bank, to leverage innovative business incubation and entrepreneurship.

A Neighborhood in Distress

Park DuValle occupies an important niche both in the cultural history of Louisville’s African-American community and in its hope for the future. Five years ago, Park DuValle represented the worst of Louisville’s inner-city: a densely populated area, dominated by public housing, with the City’s highest concentration of poverty and an extraordinarily high crime rate. Because of its importance in the history of the community, and its level of distress and isolation, the neighborhood’s successful transformation to a healthy, mixed-income community served as an important symbol for the City’s urban areas.