

BENTON HARBOR, MICHIGAN

In June of 1998 in Benton Harbor, Michigan, the United State Attorney, Michael H. Dettmer in conjunction with federal, state and local public and private decision makers convened an economic summit. It provided various senior officials an opportunity to learn firsthand the problems, needs and related resource issues as well as the restoration and revitalization activities being planned and implemented in the greater Benton Harbor community. The local public and private officials clearly and succinctly articulated the community's economic development efforts and related plans pertaining to job creation, infrastructure enhancement, and strategies to strengthen education, employment readiness, law enforcement, and the development of a community organizational structure. The efforts and plans incorporate specific recommendations regarding the public and private resources they may wish to consider in developing and implementing their efforts.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was drafted following the summit. It detailed nine specific areas of effort which became identified as the community's "Agenda for Action." One of the most important components of the MOU was the dedication and ongoing technical support by the University of Western Michigan through its Center for Community Asset Building which became a "center for continuous capacity" in assisting the City in achieving its many agenda items. **Since the development of the "Agenda for Action" approximately, \$32,560,000.00 worth of new resources came to the community addressing most of their initial and many of their subsequent needs:**

- C The **Federal Building** located in Benton Harbor was transferred at no cost by the General Service Administration. The transfer was executed on August 7, 2000 (**estimated value \$14,000,000.00**) and the building is now serving as the City Hall.
- C The City received a **Brownfields Award** from the Environmental Protection Agency to plan for the clean-up of the industrial areas within the town that are currently being developing to attract new industrial and business ventures (**approximate grant amount, \$200,000.00**). The industrial areas have now become residential and commercial areas.
- C The City, through the efforts of Lake Michigan College, the Whirlpool Corporation, and others, received approximately \$6,000,000 from the state to establish a **Regional Technical Training Center** for the unemployed and under-employed young adult population in the city and immediate area (**approximate grant amount, \$6,000,000.00**);
- C The City restored its **drinking and waste water infrastructure system**. This project was designated as a first priority, because of its importance in the development of new housing and economic development initiatives (**approximate expenditure amount, \$4,000,000.00**);
- C Through a public/private funding package, the City demolished approximately 120 homes and other structures deemed to be public nuisances that contribute to the criminal

activities in the town (**estimated amount of the package is \$250,000**). Habitat for Humanity is building homes throughout the city.

- C The City, in cooperation with Cornerstone Alliance, a private, non-profit development organization funded by the Whirlpool Foundation, is in the initial planning for the subsequent development of up to 200 affordable private homes for the residents of the City on the above noted demolition sites (**estimated amount unknown**);
- The State Office of Drug Control Policy and Western Michigan University in conjunction with a variety of local agencies (i.e. United Way of Berrien County, Benton Harbor Community Schools, Benton Harbor Housing Authority, Cornerstone Alliance, the City of Benton Harbor, and the Upton Foundation among others) finalized with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and the local Boys and Girls Club a plan to restructure and reorganize the existing Club. The plan will guide the development and management of its board and staff; design a broad array of year round athletic, family, and youth support programs, (e.g. mentoring, after school care, tutorial services, and a center for multi-service provision); and develop a financial plan for becoming a self-sustaining, independent, non profit organization (**approximately, \$800,000.00 in initial contributions**);
 - The public and private health systems in Benton Harbor, in cooperation with area and state health, social, and education agencies, as well as Western Michigan University are funding a Prenatal and Early Childhood Nurse Home Visitation Program that replicates the nationally acclaimed program developed by Dr. David Olds of the University of Colorado. It will provide 12 visiting registered nurses over a two-and-a-half year period to serve 300 young teenage girls who are pregnant for the first time. To date the effort has secured private foundation funds for the initial round of activity for the program (i.e. two registered nurses) and anticipates that funding for the balance of the program will be forthcoming in the immediate future from the State health and welfare agencies (**initial contributions amount to approximately \$410,000**). This program has become a model for the state.
 - The City, in cooperation with the State Police, Department of Justice, and Western Michigan University, has reprogrammed three national discretionary grants from the Department of Justice to assist in the overall **reorganization of the City Police Department** and to incorporate community policing as a primary function of the organization (**approximate funding amount \$400,000.00**);

- WMU in cooperation with the City and Lake Michigan Community College (LMCC) built a 40,000 sq. ft. **Regional Campus** on the grounds of the LMCC at Benton Harbor to provide immediate proximity to graduate and under graduate degree programs for the residents in Benton Harbor and the surrounding area. In addition, it will provide expeditious access to the training and technical assistance that will be provided by the Center for Community Asset Building (**estimated value is approximately \$6,000,000.00**).
 - The Benton Harbor area public and private athletic organizations, in cooperation with Western Michigan University, the local school corporation, and other entities are organizing a Benton Harbor Area Athletic Association that will design plans and secure funding for the creation of a broad variety of athletic efforts for boys and girls in grades K through 12. It is also intended that the program will provide tutorial and mentoring activities and encourage the involvement of parents in coaching and related support activities (**no funding contributions defined to date**);
- C The Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in cooperation with the City of Benton Harbor and the University of Western Michigan, completed a memorandum of understanding that will guide the deployment of financial and technical resources to accomplish the activities noted and future efforts.

CONCLUSION

As delineated above, considerable progress has been made in many significant areas to revitalize this City and there are other efforts that are and will continue to be the focus of activities throughout the coming year, particularly in the areas of public safety, housing, and education. While not explained in this document, the Cornerstone Alliance, a private not for profit development corporation located in the community, has accomplished numerous successes in upgrading the economic development status of the community by encouraging new and existing business expansion in the City and most importantly the employment of the residents.

There is considerable support among the various public and private organizations within the City to implement and sustain these specific ventures. Significant trust and communication barriers exist, however, and are complicated by the continuous change in the elected and appointed officials which hampers progress and effective program development. Hopefully, by proceeding with those issues and corresponding efforts that the community has identified and initiated as its most significant concerns, the current policy members will effectively, if slowly, reverse the deterioration that the City has experienced over the last 30 years and correspondingly continue to raise the quality of life within Benton Harbor.