



History of the Weinland Park Collaborative

The Weinland Park Collaborative (WPC) grew from partnerships created in the mid-1990s by The Ohio State University and the City of Columbus to improve the appearance and quality of life in the urban neighborhoods around the university campus. (For a more complete WPC history, see the *Weinland Park Collaborative Progress Report 2013*.)

One of those neighborhoods is Weinland Park. Among its amenities are a central location, solid housing stock, and access to public transportation and expressways. But in the mid-1990s, Weinland Park also had among the city's highest rates of violent crime, poorly managed government-subsidized housing, and growing neighborhood blight.

In 1995, the university, with cooperation from the city, established Campus Partners, a non-profit community redevelopment corporation focused on neighborhood planning, economic development, and quality-of-life issues. One of Campus Partners' most significant achievements was building public support and creating a plan in the early 2000s to acquire and renovate the large portfolio of severely distressed low-income housing in Weinland Park. This action became the basis for the revitalization of Weinland Park.

In 2003, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing (OCCH), a statewide nonprofit financier of affordable housing, formally acquired the housing portfolio. OCCH established Community Properties of Ohio (CPO) to provide non-profit ownership and effective management. Between 2004 and 2009, OCCH invested more than \$30 million in the renovation of these apartments, which offer housing with affordable rents for the lowest-income families.



The old Columbus Coated Fabrics site along the eastern edge of Weinland Park in 2006.



Demolition of the Columbus Coated Fabrics buildings in 2007.



In 2014, two neighbors erected a Weinland Park sign on the large mound of dirt on a portion of the former Columbus Coated Fabrics site, bringing a touch of humor to the neighborhood work.



New house construction in 2015 on remediated Columbus Coated Fabrics site.

With the prospect for renewal in Weinland Park, the city in 2004 launched a community-based planning effort to develop the *Weinland Park Neighborhood Plan*. As adopted by city council in 2006, the plan provides the blueprint for the physical rehabilitation of the neighborhood with its primary goal of creating a mixed-income community.

In concert with the CPO initiative and the neighborhood plan, Campus Partners recruited the city and Wagenbrenner Development to undertake redevelopment of a 21.5-acre “brownfield” property along the eastern edge of Weinland Park. The century-old industrial plant had closed in 2001. The site was abandoned to questionable salvaging operations, graffiti and arson. After several years of legal work, environmental assessments, and demolition of dilapidated and burned-out buildings, the city received \$3 million in 2007 from the state’s Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund for remediation of the site. The city subsequently made infrastructure improvements to the site that permitted Wagenbrenner to implement its proposal to build new housing.

The CPO initiative and the “brownfield” redevelopment were ventures with significant risk that required public-private partnerships to succeed. Other transformative projects were the construction of the new Weinland Park Elementary School and Ohio State’s Schoenbaum Family Center, which opened in 2007 co-located on the same site, and the city’s Neighborhood Pride Center and police substation, which opened in 2008.

The momentum for private-sector renewal of the housing market, however, slowed in 2007 and 2008 with the mortgage foreclosure crisis and recession. Like many urban neighborhoods, Weinland Park was plagued with vacant and foreclosed properties. With its low owner-occupancy rate, however, few Weinland Park homeowners lost their houses, but many of the rental properties were worth less than their mortgages, while many others were vacant and distressed.



Development of Weinland Park Collaborative

Based on the framework of emerging public-private partnerships in Weinland Park, the JPMorgan Chase Foundation and The Columbus Foundation in mid-2008 jointly awarded a grant to Campus Partners to prepare an investment proposal for the neighborhood. The investment proposal presented by Campus Partners in late 2008 recommended a bold, comprehensive, and market-centered framework with a holistic strategy of investing in housing, employment, education, public safety, and civic engagement and capacity-building of residents.

The two foundations convened a meeting in early 2009 to consider the investment proposal's recommendations. Attending the meeting were representatives of the city's Department of Development, Campus Partners, United Way of Central Ohio, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, and the Columbus and Franklin County Affordable Housing Trust. Intrigued by the opportunities in Weinland Park and the possibilities for partnerships, the meetings continued and more stakeholders came to the table, including the leadership of the Weinland Park Community Civic Association (WPCCA).

Through the remainder of 2009 and throughout 2010, the stakeholders made early investments in the acquisition of vacant and foreclosed residential properties and, in consultation with the WPCCA's Housing Committee, made plans for housing renovation, new construction, and an exterior home repair program. Other early investments were made in serving residents through programs in employment, education, health, public safety and civic engagement. One of the most significant resident engagement initiatives was an extensive neighborhood survey conducted in the spring and summer of 2010. The survey laid the foundation for tracking changes in the neighborhood over time and for understanding residents' needs and aspirations to guide program development.

In late spring 2010, the stakeholders chose to name their partnership as the Weinland Park Collaborative. The WPC subsequently worked with the WPCCA to publicly announce the launching of the collaborative and the commitment to neighborhood revitalization in August 2010.

Strategic, transformative ideas

As an outgrowth of a planning process, the WPC in 2011 established seven task forces to identify strategic, transformative ideas that could be funded to create sustainable, positive change in the neighborhood. Each task force was composed of representatives of WPC members, neighborhood residents, and local experts on specific issues. The task forces and their specific goals were:

- Education – To support the creation of a high-quality learning system for children in Weinland Park.
- Health – To support healthy lifestyles, including efforts to improve nutrition and increase physical activity.
- Housing and Land-Use – To stabilize the housing market and promote homeownership.
- Public Safety – To reduce crime and the perception of insecurity.
- Resident Engagement – To build the capacity of the civic association and other voluntary associations to engage residents.
- Employment and Workforce Development – To employ young adults and discouraged workers and those otherwise marginally employed with living-wage jobs.
- Youth Development – To develop a full continuum of learning resources and opportunities for productive youth engagement.



The task forces first turned to neighborhood residents for suggestions and direction. At the WPCCA's monthly meeting in May 2011, some 125 residents and stakeholders participated in small-group discussions with each of the task forces. Working throughout 2011, the task forces reported back periodically at the WPC's monthly meetings and, where appropriate, to the existing committees of the WPCCA.

In early 2012, the task forces brought 14 potential strategic, transformation ideas to WPCCA's monthly meeting for discussion and refinement. By mid-2013, funding was approved and programs initiated to implement a significant number of the ideas. (See the *Weinland Park Collaborative Progress Report 2010-2013* and the *Weinland Park Collaborative Progress Report 2013-2015* for details on these programs.)

Annie E. Casey Foundation joins WPC

Intrigued by the WPC's unusual collaboration of agencies, residents, and funders in placed-based investment, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) in mid-2012 invited the WPC to submit a proposal for participation in the foundation's new Family-Centered Community Change (FCCC) initiative. AECF, based in Baltimore, strives to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Through its FCCC initiative, AECF sought to join an already existing community change effort as a strategic co-investor and to bring its funding, technical assistance and expertise to sites that are interested in exploring new, more effective ways to achieve better outcomes for children and families. FCCC proposes a two-generation approach to working with families in poverty. The approach uses a more intentional alignment and integration of supports and services for both young children and their parents or other caregivers.

The members of the WPC agreed that a partnership with AECF involving FCCC's two-generation approach would be a great match. In late 2012, AECF announced that it had chosen to partner with the Weinland Park neighborhood and with neighborhoods in Buffalo, New York, and San Antonio, Texas. AECF subsequently joined the WPC as an active member with representatives of the foundation regularly attending WPC meetings.

Following a visioning process in 2013, the WPC's FCCC initiative identified four "anchor" organizations that would formulate and implement the key elements of the two-generation approach: The Ohio State University and its Schoenbaum Family Center, Columbus City Schools and its Weinland Park Elementary School, Community Properties of Ohio, and Godman Guild Association (the largest social services agency in Weinland Park). More recently, CPO has emerged as the "backbone" organization for WPC's FCCC initiative.

The FCCC initiative in 2014 launched its Next Doors pilot and in 2017 greatly expanded its recruitment of families.



Example of boarded-up housing in Weinland Park at the beginning of the WPC's work.



Weinland Park Elementary School, which opened in 2007, is an example of public investment in Weinland Park.



The Weinland Park Collaborative supported a neighborhood dialogue process in 2012 and 2013 that helped residents develop a vision for their neighborhood. One resident crafted a visual representation of that vision.