



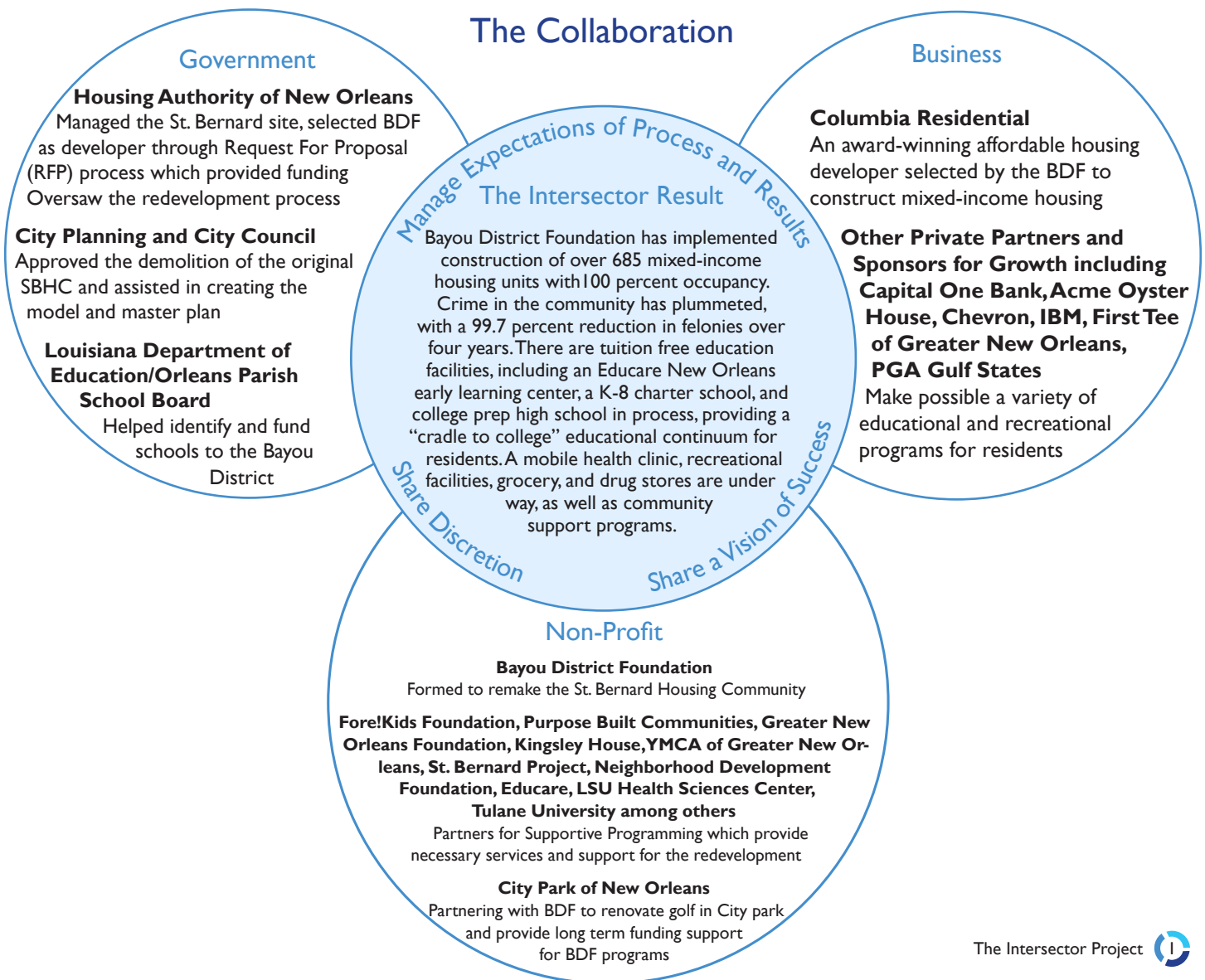
Transforming the Largest Public Housing Development in New Orleans

Issue: Community Revitalization | Location: Louisiana, United States

The Story

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed St. Bernard’s Housing Community (SBHC), the largest public housing development in New Orleans. Prior to the storm, SBHC was plagued with overcrowding, failing schools and violent crime. In the wake of Katrina, a small group of civic leaders were invited by a friend in Atlanta to learn about a redevelopment project in East Lake, Atlanta which used a holistic community revitalization model: providing residents safe mixed-income housing and access to quality education, public services, community programming, healthcare and neighborhood businesses like banks and grocery stores. After visiting the East Lake community and seeing its successful transformation firsthand, these civic leaders decided to form the Bayou District Foundation (BDF), with the goal of replicating the East Lake Model at the former SBHC site and surrounding neighborhood. As a founding member of BDF, Gerard Barousse, a native New Orleans real estate developer, was chosen as the organization’s leader. BDF decided that the model could be a good fit for the SBHC, and a “game changer” for the neighborhood and the City of New Orleans. The BDF was selected to oversee the redevelopment by the Housing Authority of New Orleans through the Request for Proposal process. Working closely with government agencies, the BDF brought together numerous private and non-profit partners to carry out their mission. The redevelopment of the SBHC is one of the largest urban transformation projects currently underway in the United States and has already dramatically reduced crime in the area.

The Collaboration



The Leadership

Gerard's 25 years of real estate development experience and background in civic work gave him the tools he needed to lead the BDF's project. As a real estate developer, he was adept at navigating complex third party relationships with lawyers, governmental agencies and interest groups. As a lifetime New Orleans resident, Gerard knew the inner workings of the local real estate industry and felt a personal stake in the redevelopment of the city after Katrina.



Balanced Motivations

A lifetime resident of New Orleans, Gerard had many personal and business interests tied up in the city's recovery. Gerard and his family were temporarily displaced to Baton Rouge in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He, his friends and family wondered if the city could come back from the damage and he worried it would not be a safe place to raise his children. He began to think long-term; if New Orleans was to be a safe place for future generations, a major renaissance must occur. He began to think of Katrina as an opportunity rather than a disaster – an opportunity to rebuild, and to make the city better and stronger than ever.



Transferable Skills

Gerard's banking experience and 25 years as a real estate investor/developer made him a seasoned convener and negotiator. As proprietor of his own real estate company, he became adept at navigating contracts and agreements between multiple third parties including lawyers, governmental agencies, private entities and foundations, as well as community interest groups. These skills allowed him to lead the contract negotiations when the BDF selected Columbia Residential as the developer for the project. Gerard's experience in New Orleans commercial real estate and property development further allowed him to envision and plan a large-scale redevelopment project. Having run numerous private development projects, Gerard learned the ins and outs of the overall process, including planning, requesting bids, applying for permits and overseeing construction. This construction management expertise helped the BDF navigate the complex landscape of government projects.



Contextual Intelligence

Gerard's work as a private real estate developer and philanthropist gave him experience in each sector, and allowed him to understand and work collaboratively with various partners. As the longtime president of Monarch Real Estate Advisors, he understood firsthand the interests and motivations of private for-profit companies. Also through his real estate development work, Gerard interfaced with different governmental agencies through the permit and approval processes. This gave him some context in working with City Council and City Planning on development projects. Prior to the formation of the BDF, Gerard was involved in various nonprofits and foundations in New Orleans. He sat on the board at Tulane University Hospital for Children and volunteered with the New Orleans Recreational Department, as well as lending his time and mentorship to various funds, events and educational institutions. His civic work helped him identify areas of need in New Orleans and understand the complex social considerations implicated in the city's recovery from Hurricane Katrina.



Integrated Networks

Gerard's networks across sectors helped connect him to important BDF partners. It was a longtime friend who first introduced him to the East Lake Foundation, an organization that would become a mentor and integral partner for the BDF's success. The BDF came together as a small five-person board of like-minded business leaders and philanthropists with collaborative cross-sector experience and a passion for seeing New Orleans come back. Together, these well-connected civic leaders established partnerships by utilizing their networks and building out, while keeping the core group small. Their local business and foundation contacts helped cultivate the core of their philanthropic support. Gerard and the board's networks also connected the BDF to the majority of their public partners, including City Council, the Mayor of New Orleans, the State of Louisiana, the Housing Authority of New Orleans, HUD, Orleans Parish School Board, and others. Additionally, nonprofit partnerships with City Park, Tulane University, Kingsley House, YMCA and others were facilitated through prior network contacts. These partnerships proved integral to the success of the BDF, each one providing a crucial component to the holistic community revitalization model that the BDF could not have achieved on its own.

The Toolkit



Share discretion

The BDF kept their project running smoothly by instating a small decision-making board of five members, and identifying and engaging partners and creating a structure among them. They sought out the best possible partners across sectors: mixed-income real estate development, education, recreation, community support programming, and private business. To allow adaptability and to keep the project moving, major decision-making was left to the BDF board. However, their partners' crucial input and expertise was consistently taken into account through regular meetings and open communication. Many of the BDF's strategies were considered pilot approaches to community redevelopment. By being open to new approaches and ideas from partners, they were able to adjust and improve upon the East Lake model and adapt it to the unique needs of New Orleans. For example, they developed a stronger emphasis on early education, healthcare, and community assets through their ongoing conversations with partners. The BDF viewed their role as a balance between holding partners accountable and letting them contribute by doing what they do best. A combination of keeping a small core group at the center and working closely with highly qualified partners gave them the flexibility to successfully achieve outcomes.



Share a vision of success

After visiting East Lake, Atlanta and familiarizing themselves with the holistic community revitalization model, the five board members of the BDF had a collective vision for the project. After showing renderings to potential partners and the community, they were met with unease. Because the model was new, some partners were not familiar with how it would look and function, and remained skeptical about trying something “unestablished.” Committed to their mission, the BDF realized they would need to show their partners firsthand how effective the model had been in Atlanta. They organized multiple trips to East Lake to see the model in action and included the New Orleans Housing Authority and City Council, as well as members of the community. At the time, East Lake's redevelopment had been in operation for 12 years, so the results were evident: their community had seen a dramatic drop in crime, impressive educational, and economic achievement, and a stable environment for families. The East Lake model gave the BDF the successful example they needed to win over their partners and community.



Communicate the interdependency of each sector

The BDF worked hard to help their partners understand why they needed to work together to implement the holistic community revitalization model. To successfully generate a healthy and constructive living environment, mixed-income housing must include a set of rules for residents to live by, coupled with access to education and recreation. This meant integrating quality schools, an early education center, recreational facilities, healthcare facilities, neighborhood businesses, and community programming to support residents. Reaching all of these goals required cooperation and contribution across sectors. The New Orleans Housing Authority was unfamiliar with mixed-income housing, and initially did not understand the merits of the mixed income model or the need for establishing a set of rules for residents or keeping education at the core of the model. The BDF and Columbia Residential came together to help their partners understand that housing alone wouldn't change the community's environment or help families better position themselves. Those goals can only be accomplished through programming and access coupled with safe quality workforce housing. The BDF was both persistent and patient in developing this understanding among partners.



Manage expectations of process and results

The BDF was relentless in building understanding between the community and among partners. Since the redevelopment project was primarily government-funded and large-scale, progress was slow at times. Turnover at government agencies caused delays and frustration, but the BDF maintained patience among partners through open communication. The board was responsive and constructive, employing a two-pronged approach: group meetings to bring everyone together and individual meetings to address issues that came up throughout the process. They held monthly meetings with the Housing Authority and Columbia Residential, and regular meetings with community support service organizations and other partners. BDF also meet frequently with the public; they held 60 public meetings that covered important issues about the project, explained to the community how they were working with government agencies and partners to redevelop the SBHC, established the rules within the housing community, and served as a way to openly share ideas and discuss issues. Each public meeting included a presentation by one of the project partners to address a specific area of the redevelopment project. The BDF collaborated with partners in preparing for these presentations, setting aside ample time for meaningful feedback and to address specific concerns. Through patience and open communication, the BDF and its partners were able to garner strong community support.

The Intersector Result

The Bayou District Foundation is one of the largest urban transformation projects currently underway in the United States. They have overseen construction of a new housing community, Columbia Parc at the Bayou District, which includes over 685 mixed-income housing units, met with 100 percent occupancy and waiting lists. Crime in the community has plummeted, with a 99.7 percent reduction in felonies over a four-year period. Accessible quality education is now becoming a reality for residents, with schools moving into the neighborhood. An Educare Early Learning Center is available to residents, with a K-8 charter school and college prep high school under way. Additionally, a mobile health clinic, recreational facilities, retail support services and various community support programs are in process. The most telling result, however, is the change in the residents, who now take great pride in their community. By being open to new ideas and approaches, BDF has improved the East Lake model. Their focus on early education in low-income housing communities is now being touted by Purpose Built Communities, informing similar models across the country. Continuing successes include:

- Educare of New Orleans, a world-class early education center, opened its first facility in the southern U.S. at Columbia Parc. Replication of a high performing K-8 tuition-free charter school is opening adjacent to the Educare facility to form an 'education block' in the center of the community. Nearby a new McDonogh 35 College Preparatory High School facility is under construction and will also be relocated to the site. Kingsley House, an established Head Start provider and social service organization in New Orleans, serves as the on-site community support services provider for residents and Educare operating partner.
- An estimated 100 permanent and 700 temporary jobs were created through the redevelopment. The BDF has also partnered in the rebuilding of the neighboring City Park golf courses, driving range and practice facilities and will use revenue-sharing to generate a sustainable funding stream for community programs within the Bayou District.
- A mobile health clinic was installed on site at Columbia Parc. Wellness is a priority, with a swimming pool, three playgrounds, playfield, community garden and fitness center in use, and plans for a both a permanent health clinic and new YMCA to offer recreational and community programs and serve as the charter school's physical education partner.

"In private sector development, it's a whole different approach than when you're dealing with multiple governmental agencies. This is less about the things you can control and more about working with people to get things done. I had been in private business and done civic work prior to Katrina, but this was a major shift in approach. Patience was the virtue that best prepared me to be successful with this project."

— Gerard Barousse, Chairman of the Bayou District Foundation