

**Village of Brooklyn, Illinois  
Community and Economic Development Assessment**

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of DURP master's candidate, Leah Ostenberg. Her contacts with the St. Clair County Assessment Office allowed me to obtain complete Brooklyn parcel information which made it possible for me to better understand ownership and land usage in Brooklyn. Discussions with Leah regarding the project and her willingness to accompany me to the Brooklyn Village Hall made the project much more manageable.

Thanks to everyone—I could not have pulled this information together without your help!

## **Executive Summary**

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In the spring of 2006, as a master's candidate in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I began attending Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meetings to identify ways in which Brooklyn residents could be encouraged to participate in revitalization efforts. Revitalization meetings were held at the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority (SWIDA) headquarters in Collinsville, Illinois and were comprised of private and public officials. The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee was exploring economic development opportunities in response to the proposed New Mississippi River Bridge Project, which would traverse part of Brooklyn.

Senait Brown, a senior undergraduate planning student, and I attended meetings from April 2006 to March of 2007 to learn about the Revitalization Committee and their current projects, to meet Brooklyn contacts and to suggest ways in which residents could begin participating in redevelopment projects. We met with Brooklyn Mayor Nathaniel O'Bannon after meetings to speak with him about the community's past, its present condition and its future vision. Most importantly, we met with the Mayor to discover whether existing church groups or community based organizations were active in Brooklyn and whether they were privy to Revitalization Committee undertakings. Obtaining clear information from the Revitalization Committee and from the Mayor, however, was challenging and it was not until March 2007 that the Revitalization Committee revealed that it had been working with Brooklyn and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to produce a Brooklyn Waterfront Master Plan. The community and small-scale economic development measures that Senait and I developed from our conversations with the Revitalization Committee, the Mayor, and the few residents we were able to meet from a Brooklyn City Council meeting we attended as well as through Ms. Billie Turner, an East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) contact, compliment this plan.

This report documents the information that Senait and I learned from our attendance of Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meetings, discussions with the Brooklyn Mayor and City Council attendees, and various other Brooklyn contacts we were able to make between April 2006 and March 2007. The introduction summarizes how I became involved with Brooklyn and establishes project goals. In the first section of the report, Institutional Memory, I introduce the Village of Brooklyn and the Revitalization Committee. In the Economic Development Strategies section, I describe the current redevelopment efforts of the Committee and in the Role of the University section, I explain how the University could work with Brooklyn on small-scale community and economic development projects which may compliment and later build upon Revitalization Committee efforts. Finally, in the fourth section or appendices, I have collected documents and articles which pertain to the current or potential redevelopment projects in Brooklyn.

While this document is in no way exhaustive, the information may serve as a foundation upon which to build stronger University-Brooklyn relations and explore community and economic development strategies.

## **Introduction**

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I was first introduced to the Village of Brooklyn, Illinois in the spring of 2006 when speaking on the telephone with Rick Bonasch of the Regional Housing Community Development Alliance (RHCD) in St. Louis, Missouri. I had called Bonasch to ask him some questions about brownfield redevelopment and he informed me that Brooklyn, an economically distressed community located just outside of East St. Louis, was currently remediating brownfields using an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Pilot Grant. He explained that he and a group of public officials, developers and consultants had been meeting at the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority (SWIDA) headquarters in Collinsville, Illinois to explore Brooklyn economic redevelopment ideas. His concern was that Brooklyn residents were not attending these Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meetings and were not participating in redevelopment processes. As an Urban Planning graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign specializing in economic and community development, Bonasch wondered whether I would be interested in exploring ways in which to encourage Brooklyn participation. Under the direction of Professor Stacy Harwood in the Urban and Regional Planning Department, I began attending Brooklyn Revitalization meetings in April of 2006 with Urban Planning undergraduate senior Senait Brown.

Through our Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meeting attendance, we hoped to better understand how each entity became involved with the Revitalization Committee and what work or project that entity was accomplishing on behalf of Brooklyn. To follow conversations at the Revitalization meetings and learn about Brooklyn, I began researching the Village, learning about its history, development and present condition. In the fall of 2006, I was hired as a Research Assistant with the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In addition to my role as Research Assistant, I was to serve as a Community Liaison between the University and Brooklyn. I soon learned that although they presently did not have contacts in the Village, the University had previously worked with Brooklyn.

Senait and I established goals to learn about Brooklyn and the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee projects, to re-establish a relationship between the University and Brooklyn and begin organizing community and economic development projects with Brooklyn residents. From our initial Revitalization meeting attendance, it appeared that there were four possible types of projects on which the University could collaborate and explore with Brooklyn: physical and land use plans, housing market studies, development of a Brooklyn Community Development Corporation (CDC) and exploration of heritage tourism.

These preliminary goals, however, proved to be overly ambitious. Books and periodicals contained limited information about Brooklyn and Senait and I did not have Brooklyn contacts with which we could discuss Brooklyn redevelopment efforts. It was difficult to follow the projects discussed at Revitalization Meetings and participants were unwilling to fill in newcomers—Senait and I and those Brooklyn and East St. Louis residents whom we invited to attend meetings. Without existing University-Brooklyn contacts, we began

meeting with the Mayor of Brooklyn, Nathaniel O'Bannon to learn more about the community, meet City Council Members, learn of community-based organizations (CBOs) and meet residents. Establishing a good working relationship with the Mayor, however, was a slow process. We spoke with the Mayor in person and on the telephone for about six months before he began to discuss with us how Brooklyn might partner with the University on community and economic development projects. Despite our efforts to meet Brooklyn residents, we had still been unable to do so through the Mayor. Without contacts beyond the Mayor, it was difficult for us to pursue Brooklyn community and economic development projects.

This paper documents the information Senait and I collected between April 2006 and March 2007 regarding the University of Illinois-Brooklyn relationship, Brooklyn's history, Brooklyn's existing conditions and Brooklyn Revitalization Committee projects. The document is broken into four sections: Institutional Memory: the History of the Project, Economic Development Strategies, The Role of the University and Appendices.

In the first section, Institutional Memory: the History of the Project, the Village of Brooklyn is introduced and the University's previous and current involvement with Brooklyn is recorded. Additionally, the formation of the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee is explained through the New Mississippi River Bridge Project. Members of the Committee are introduced and the projects on which each is working are briefly reviewed.

The Economic Development Strategies section reviews the Brooklyn Business Center Economic Development Plan prepared under the direction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and explains how that plan may be implemented. In light of weak public participation in planning processes, this section includes a discussion regarding the true purpose or intent of prepared economic development plans and briefly reviews previous Brooklyn comprehensive plans. Ultimately, whether the New Mississippi River Bridge is constructed affects Brooklyn's projected market demand.

The Role of the University section reiterates the absence of Brooklyn participation in planning processes and explains that this may result from poor communication during Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meetings and a disconnect between Brooklyn community based organizations and the Revitalization Committee. To promote collaboration between the Revitalization Committee and Brooklyn, it is necessary to build trust between the groups and establish working relationships. There are several small community and economic development projects on which the University may collaborate with Brooklyn regardless of the New Mississippi River Bridge Project. Proposed projects build on Brooklyn's historical assets and may potentially be integrated into regional contexts. The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee potentially could be called upon to support projects when it is possible to identify concrete funding needs.

The fourth and final section of the document, the Appendices, is comprised of supportive documentation. Maps, parcel data, brownfield information and prepared Brooklyn assessments and development plans were collected in this section. The final portion of the

Appendices includes information regarding proposed community and economic development projects introduced in The Role of the University section of this document.

While this document does not fully explain the formation and purpose of the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee or exhaust all possible community and economic development strategies, it provides a background on which ESLARP and Urban Planning classes at the University may build.

## **I. Institutional Memory: the History of the Project**

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In this section, I introduce the Village of Brooklyn, Illinois and explain how I began meeting with the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee at the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority (SWIDA) headquarters in Collinsville, Illinois. To better understand how the University could work with the Revitalization Committee to encourage Brooklyn's participation in economic development processes, I researched the University's previous relationships with Brooklyn, identified the public and private entities comprising the Revitalization Committee and noted on which Brooklyn projects these entities worked. Participants of the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee did not clearly indicate how they became involved with the group nor did they share all of the Brooklyn projects on which they were working. This section summarizes the information obtained about the Revitalization Committee and their plans based on meeting observations and telephone conversations held with Committee participants.

### **Introduction to Brooklyn**

The Village of Brooklyn is located on Route 3 in St. Clair County, Illinois. The village is bounded by Venice, in Madison County to the north, the former National City to the east, the City of East St. Louis to the south and the Mississippi River to the west. Brooklyn is located directly across the river from St. Louis, Missouri. (Appendix A: Location Map) Streets run southeast to northwest and southwest to northeast in a gridiron plan laid parallel and perpendicular to the river. Village blocks are bordered by railroad tracks to the east, south and west because railroad tracks converge south of Brooklyn. One levee borders the railroad tracks located west of Route 3 and another follows the Mississippi River shoreline. (Appendix A: St. Clair County Maps)

Brooklyn, also called Lovejoy in reference to abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy, was home to a large freedman village and contained stops on the Underground Railroad.<sup>1</sup> Brooklyn became one of the first incorporated Black towns in the nation in 1873. Residents were employed by railroads and industries in East St. Louis and the surrounding area as well as by business in town. In 1905, Brooklyn's building stock included several churches, a two-story brick schoolhouse, and a grocery store. In 1955, a dance hall, movie theater, restaurants, high school and community center stood in Brooklyn.<sup>2</sup> (Appendix A: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps)

Today, Brooklyn's population of approximately 600 is nearly nine-nine percent African American. Economically, Brooklyn has very little industry and lacks a strong business and housing market; the village has experienced increased unemployment and decreased

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<sup>1</sup> For information regarding early history of Brooklyn, Illinois, please see: Cha-Jua, Sundiata Keita. 2000. America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois 1830-1915. University of Illinois Press: Urbana. For additional information about Brooklyn, please see: Schoen, Elin. 1979. Tales of an All-Night Town. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York.

<sup>2</sup>Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. 1905 and 1950. Available online and in the Maps and Geography Library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

population with the decline of area industries.<sup>3</sup> For a while, the town lacked even basic services—most notably, an operating fire station. The town had a fairly large strip-club industry; however, with the large clubs located on I-64, the industry now consists of three establishments. The town has a lot of older residential buildings and is home to several churches. Much of the real estate is abandoned.

### **The University's First Involvement with Brooklyn**

The *Program and Park Development Considerations for Stites Township Park District* documents what may be the first collaboration between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Brooklyn.<sup>4</sup> Brooklyn and National City organized the Stites Township Park District in 1967. In 1968, the communities asked the University to assist them with the development of parks and programs for the district. Thomas Brown, a student majoring in recreation and park administration, worked with the communities to establish the district, develop a pilot program for the administration of public recreation programs and parks in Black communities, and establish a field instruction agency.<sup>5</sup> Mr. James Barker served as the first president of the park district.

The East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP), a program encouraging participatory action research in East St. Louis and the surrounding area was formed when Wyvetter Younge, chairperson of the Illinois House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Education Appropriations requested the development of a University of Illinois program capable of responding to the distressed City of East St. Louis.<sup>6</sup> In the 1990s, a Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) was established in East St. Louis. During an ESLARP-organized alternative spring break in 1999, University of Illinois students painted interior and exterior window frames and the interior stairs and basement floor of the Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church and University of Tennessee students cleaned lots and an alley near the Southern Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Brooklyn. Interim NTAC director Craig Miller later met with Brooklyn Mayor Ruby Cook and Stites Township Supervisor Juanita Clemmons to discuss future community development projects.<sup>7</sup> In 2002, Miller worked with the Lovejoy Alumni Association, an alumni organization for the Lovejoy School in Brooklyn, to explore the development of an indoor recreation center.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance. 2005. Housing Development Analysis and Recommendations for the Village of Brooklyn, Illinois. September 16.

<sup>4</sup> University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Office of Recreation and Park Resources. 1969. *Stites Township Park District: Community Recreation and Park Project*. Champaign.

<sup>5</sup> "Stites Park District Formed." 1970. *Illinois Parks*. Vol. 53. March/April. Available through Illinois Periodicals Online (IPO).

<sup>6</sup> Reardon, Kenneth M. 1998. "Enhancing the Capacity of Community-Based Organizations in East St. Louis," *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 17 pp. 323-333.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, Craig. 1999. Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC): A Collaborative Project of the East St. Louis Enterprise Community (EC) and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. March.

<sup>8</sup> A 3-ring binder in the ESLARP library contains information documenting Craig Miller's work with Brooklyn from 1999 to 2003. Projects described include plans the Lovejoy Alumni Association prepared for a recreation center and Craig Miller's correspondence with Professor Eric Robinson (not affiliated with UIUC) who planned to work with Brooklyn school children to conduct oral history interviews.

### **The University's Re-Introduction to Brooklyn**

In April of 2006, I contacted Rick Bonasch of the Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance (RHCD) in St. Louis to ask him some questions about brownfield redevelopment. In our conversation, he mentioned that he was working with the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority (SWIDA), St. Clair County public officials, St. Louis environmental consulting firm Environmental Operations, Inc. and developers to remediate brownfields and explore redevelopment opportunities in Brooklyn, Illinois. The East St. Louis Community Fund had recently invested a lot of money in Brooklyn to create the East-West Gateway Park (approximately one million dollars) and in turn had asked RHCD to prepare a housing market analysis for Brooklyn. Meanwhile, in response to the Department of Transportation's proposed New Mississippi River Bridge project, SWIDA applied for an Illinois EPA Brownfield Assessment Pilot grant and was awarded \$200,000 in 2002 to identify and remediate brownfields in the Brooklyn.<sup>9</sup> (Appendix B: Brownfield Assessment Pilots) Brooklyn was simultaneously working with St. Clair County officials to use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money to demolish abandoned and deteriorating properties on twenty-five lots within the area and to build more residences.<sup>10</sup> Environmental Operations, Inc. was remediating the brownfields in Brooklyn and CDC developer Don Johnson was exploring the construction of housing on remediated lots.

Bonasch indicated that it had been difficult involving Brooklyn residents in the planning process. He was concerned that, without community participation, redevelopment efforts would not be supported. Bonasch contacted Professor Stacy Harwood from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Department of Urban and Regional Planning and asked if she and her students would be interested in working with the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee to facilitate increased Brooklyn participation in the planning process.

### **The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee**

I attended my first Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meeting in Collinsville, Illinois in April of 2006. SWIDA introduced the attendees and explained that the group began meeting in response to the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) plans for the New Mississippi River Bridge. The new bridge would re-align Route 3, changing the direction from which the Village of Brooklyn is accessed. SWIDA saw the realignment as an opportunity for economic revitalization in Brooklyn. Attendees shared information at the meeting regarding the work they were conducting in Brooklyn: Ronda Latina of Environmental Operations, Inc. updated the group regarding the remediation of brownfields, Rick Bonasch of RHCD shared a housing market analysis, Don Johnson provided information regarding housing

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<sup>9</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. 2002. *Brownfields Assessment Pilots: Southwestern Illinois Development Authority, IL*. May. Available: <http://www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf/html-doc/asouthil.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Generally, brownfields are remediated by private developers who wish to develop contaminated sites; remediation costs are compensated through the revenue generated by the new development. Rather than requiring a private developer to initiate remediation, assuming those additional costs on land that is not in high demand, the county proposed to remediate properties. It is unusual for a county to remediate brownfield sites, especially without a clear redevelopment plan.

development, and La Mar Gentry of the Gentry Group<sup>11</sup> produced information regarding community needs. Additionally, the progress of the demolition work was noted. (Appendix C: Brooklyn Demolition)

I continued to attend the monthly Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meetings, sometimes alone and other times accompanied by Professor Harwood or another University student.<sup>12</sup> Senait Brown, a senior undergraduate urban planning student, was interested in potentially working with Brooklyn and began attending meetings with me on a regular basis that summer. Through the meetings, we identified four potential strategies for community and economic development through the creation of: a community development corporation, incentives for new single family housing development, land-use and physical improvements responding to the Route 3 realignment, and historic/cultural tourism possibilities. These goals would be achieved through public outreach via Brooklyn churches and door to door engagement, as well as through informational interviews with community leaders. Research would also be conducted to explore community and development strategies employed by communities with similar challenges.

### **The New Mississippi River Bridge**

In 2000, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) determined that the Dr. Martin Luther King, McKinley, and Eads Bridges were no longer capable of supporting the level of traffic traversing the Mississippi River between Illinois and Missouri and, collaborating with the Missouri Departments of Transportation (MoDot), proposed the New Mississippi River Bridge Project. The project proposes the realignment of Illinois Route 70 and Route 3, the construction of a connector to Route 64, the reconstruction of the Route 55/70/64 interchange, the reconstruction of the Poplar Street Bridge interchange in Missouri, and the realignment of Missouri Route 70. The initial bridge design was selected in July of 2001, but was later determined to be too costly to construct. In 2005, the URS Corporation was hired to re-evaluate the costs of the project and propose a more economic concept for the project. The Illinois and Missouri Departments of Transportation project that all of the proposed improvements will be complete and operational in the year 2013.<sup>13</sup>

The proposed New Mississippi River Bridge would traverse the southernmost riverfront parcel in the Brooklyn incorporated limits and an exit would connect the bridge to the relocated Illinois Route 3 at a location just south of Big Bend Road in Brooklyn. (Appendix A: New Mississippi River Bridge Project: Affected Properties)

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<sup>11</sup> The Village of Brooklyn hired La Mar Gentry to consult them regarding the creation of a Tax-Increment Finance or TIF district.

<sup>12</sup> Senait Brown, Cherry Dabney, Lauren Good and Leah Ostenberg occasionally attended meetings in the spring and summer of 2006.

<sup>13</sup> The Illinois and Missouri Departments of Transportation. 2006. The New Mississippi River Bridge Project. Available: <http://www.newriverbridge.org/default.asp>

### **Grant Endeavors**

SWIDA has primarily served as the administrative director of the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee and has assisted with the group's grant-writing endeavors. In the fall of 2006, SWIDA and Environmental Operations, Inc., contacted Ameren, the electrical utility company located in Brooklyn, regarding their Charitable Contributions and Grants.<sup>14</sup> They were unable to apply for the funds because the giving guidelines indicated that the grants were only available to non-profit community-based organizations with 501c3 tax-exempt status. The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee was unable to establish community partnerships and was unaware of existing community-based organizations in Brooklyn, so the group was unable to apply for the grant.<sup>15</sup> A partnership between ESLARP, a 501c3 organization and Brooklyn could potentially allow the pursuit of these grants.

### **Riverfront Property Emphasis**

The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee, Brooklyn City Council and Brooklyn residents have indicated that they would like the village to obtain and develop the three large parcels within the incorporated town limits, bordering the Mississippi River. Currently, these parcels are owned by Ameren and the Terminal Railroad Association. It is unclear whether these are active, inactive, vacant or abandoned properties. The waterfront properties are desirable because they are attractive because they could potentially attract a variety of development types whether based on the site's proximity to St. Louis, its environmental qualities, or its access to transportation systems.

The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee conversed with Ameren and the Terminal Railroad Association regarding the acquisition of the parcels, but the owners were not interested in selling the land. It is possible that the owners were unwilling to part with their property because they did not want to be held liable for the environmental remediation of the parcels. The history of the parcels indicates that they qualify as brownfields.

Using parcel information obtained from the St. Clair County Assessment Office, I created a map showing levels of private, governmental and industrial ownership in Brooklyn. (Appendix A: Village of Brooklyn: Government, Industry, and Private Ownership) The map was a variation of the map St. Clair County officials prepared in which railroad properties were identified, but further distinguished which properties were owned by private individuals, church organizations, commercial businesses, local, county or state entities, the railroads, utilities or other industries. (Appendix C: Properties Owned by Railroad Companies in Stites Township) One of the three riverfront properties is currently "owned" by the St. Clair County Trustee, possibly because of tax defaults or other legal reasons. This is also the parcel on which the proposed New Mississippi River

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<sup>14</sup> Ameren. 2007. Grants for Nonprofit Organizations. Available: [http://www.ameren.com/community/ADC\\_CM\\_NonProfitGrants.asp](http://www.ameren.com/community/ADC_CM_NonProfitGrants.asp)

<sup>15</sup>To successfully apply for grants, community based organizations must develop concrete plans for which they need the money; if it is unclear how grant money will be utilized, funds will not be awarded.

Bridge will stand, so it is possible that there are negotiations regarding its ownership in relation to the transportation plan.

## **II. Economic Development Strategies**

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Whereas the previous section reviewed Brooklyn Revitalization Committee projects shared at meetings, this section summarizes information revealed at the last (March 2007) meeting I attended: most significantly, that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had prepared a Brooklyn economic development plan between 2002 and 2007. The omission of any discussion of the Brooklyn Waterfront Master Plan at Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meetings is perplexing because several meeting attendees worked integrally on the plan. The plan gives context to the Brooklyn projects they discussed at meetings, but not all meeting participants were aware of that the plan existed. The secretive nature of the plan combined with the failure to involve Brooklyn residents in the planning process makes the proposed economic development strategies suspicious. Initially prompted by the New Mississippi River Bridge, it may not be possible to implement the Master Plan if the bridge is not constructed. Regardless of whether the bridge is built, the Master Plan seems infeasible because of its heavy reliance on the purchase of railroad property. The Illinois Department of Transportation has unsuccessfully negotiated with the railroads to obtain property since 2000.

### **The Brooklyn Business Center Economic Development Plan**

On behalf of the Village of Brooklyn, the Michael Jones Foundation asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to create a development plan for Brooklyn under their Planning Assistance to the States program.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers retained the firm of Horner & Shifrin, Inc. and subcontractor Environmental Operations, Inc. to produce a Waterfront Master Plan for the Village of Brooklyn.<sup>17</sup> (Appendix B: The Role of the U.S. Army Corps in Brownfield Redevelopment) In 2002, the Army Corps completed an existing conditions report for Brooklyn. (Appendix D: Village of Brooklyn Waterfront Master Development Plan: Existing Conditions) Utilizing the information in the report, the Army Corps created three economic development scenarios for Brooklyn, which were then presented to the Village. The Brooklyn Business Center was selected over the Brooklyn Speak-Easy and Brooklyn Motorsports alternative development plans. The City Council adopted the Brooklyn Business Center economic development plan in 2003.<sup>18</sup> (Appendix D: Plan Formulation: Brooklyn Business Center)

### **Implementation of the Adopted Plan**

Attainment of riverfront property is important to the adopted economic development plan, which features a riverfront boardwalk as well as light industries. Plan implementation steps outline procedures for property attainment—specifically negotiation with the railroads concerning the purchase of their property. The proposed industrial center, office park and housing in the development plan explain the need for

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<sup>16</sup> Note the article regarding the Michael Jones Foundation in Appendix C. Mike Jones previously funded demolition work in Brooklyn.

<sup>17</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers subcontracted Environmental Operations, Inc. because the Corps does not remediate brownfields.

<sup>18</sup> Horner & Shifrin, Inc. 2007. Waterfront Development Master Plan for the Village of Brooklyn, Illinois. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District. January.

large areas on which to develop, particularly in the areas outside of Brooklyn's existing gridiron. (Appendix D: Plan Implementation, Maps)

### **Economic Development Plan or Modern-Day Urban Renewal**

The U.S. Army Corps received eight responses from a development preferences survey and it is unclear how many public meetings they held or how many residents attended or participated in each.

Each group attending the SWIDA meetings has expressed that they would like to improve the quality of life for Brooklyn residents, but the Waterfront Master Plan was not designed by residents. The Master Plan indicates that instead of infill development, new development will occur on parcels outside of the existing Brooklyn gridiron, separated from this core area by active railroad tracks and roadways. From the placement of the development, it appears that the plan is targeting new residents commuting into St. Louis. This idea is further supported because current market conditions do not indicate that there is a demand for development or an ability to sustain it. (Appendix C: RHCDA: Housing Development Analysis & Recommendations)

According to IDOT maps, one of the largest Brooklyn waterfront parcels would accommodate the New Mississippi River Bridge. Various other railroad properties within the Brooklyn limits would be acquired by IDOT for the rerouting of roads. (Appendix A: New Mississippi River Bridge Project: Affected Properties)

### **Previous Comprehensive Plans**

In 1960, Evert Kincaid and Associates, Inc. prepared a Brooklyn comprehensive plan for the Illinois State Housing Board Official State Planning Agency.<sup>19</sup> The report was financed by an urban planning grant from the Housing and Home Finance Agency under the provisions of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954. At the conclusion of the existing conditions analyses, Brooklyn was described as, "a little community tucked away in an industrial complex (27)." Although development solutions were rather extreme, several elements of the development plan were implemented: physical infrastructure was updated, streets were paved, and the St. Clair Housing Authority constructed public housing units.<sup>20</sup> Other suggested improvements, such as the development of housing in the area southeast of the existing Lovejoy School, are still in discussion today.

### **The New Mississippi River Bridge may not happen.**

Although the New Mississippi River Bridge Project website indicates that work is progressing, the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee has mentioned that the bridge may no longer be constructed. Notes in the margin of the IDOT presentation to SWIDA show

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<sup>19</sup> Evert Kincaid & Associates, Inc. 1960. Comprehensive Village Plan: Brooklyn, Illinois. July

<sup>20</sup> "From a long-term planning point of view, there are only two possible approaches to solving the problem of Brooklyn: 1. An urban renewal project wherein all but a few structures would be removed and replaced with modern housing and municipal facilities. This would include the redesign of the pattern of streets, utilities, and land use. 2. Complete abnegation of the future of Brooklyn, wherein no improvements are expended, leaving the village to decline and the land to be put to another use (27)."

that they have been negotiating unsuccessfully with the railroads since 2000; IDOT has not been able to obtain parcels from the railroad that are necessary for the relocation of the roads. (Appendix C: Relocated Illinois 3 Presentation for SWIDA)

### **III. The Role of the University**

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In this section, I briefly assess problems hindering collaboration between Brooklyn residents and Brooklyn Revitalization Committee planning processes and suggest community and economic development projects on which the University may work with Brooklyn. With the exception of the community charrette, community land trust and regional ideas suggested, the projects in this section were proposed by area residents. Pursuing community and economic development projects noted by Brooklyn residents ensures a certain level of local support for the project as well as more active participation. Once local projects become concrete, the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee could be contacted for additional support. Although not very effective at supporting or developing undefined concepts, the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee was adept at responding to specific financial requests and suggesting regional professional resource contacts.

#### **Community Participation Absent**

The University was invited to attend the SWIDA meetings because the group did not know if Brooklyn-based community organizations existed or how to engage these organizations and residents in the planning process. Community participation was of particular importance because without support from Brooklyn residents, the implementation of plans would be difficult and new development may not be sustained. Brooklyn Revitalization Committee projects were not well supported by the community largely because residents were unaware of what work was being done in Brooklyn. At one Revitalization Committee meeting, there were complaints that residents had accosted workers conducting demolition work in Brooklyn. The negative response workers received reflects the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee's poor notification of their projects in the community and failure to involve residents in the decision-making or planning processes.

#### **Communication**

Information was not conveyed within the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee. I was unaware that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was preparing the Waterfront Development Master Plan until SWIDA lent me the final document at their March 2007 meeting. Although I had not seen the document, I was vaguely aware that the Army Corps had completed an existing conditions report in 2002; I did not know, however, that they had continued working with the Village or that Brooklyn had adopted their development plan in 2003. A subsequent conversation with another Brooklyn Revitalization Committee meeting attendee revealed that they, too, were unaware that a development plan had been created.

Although it may not be possible or useful for each organization working with Brooklyn to share every update with the other meeting attendees, it would be helpful for larger projects to be known. Sharing information regarding community and economic development efforts could prevent organizations from duplicating efforts and could enable them to better assist or support the efforts.

### **Linkage: Between CBOs and the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee**

Residents know their neighborhood best; they know what establishments previously stood in Brooklyn and they know establishments they would like to see now. Several residents mentioned that the Chinese Restaurant identified in the U.S. Army Corps plans had since then burned down and relocated in Madison County. Brooklyn had also been home to a grocery store at one time and residents indicated that they would like one to locate in Brooklyn again.

Mayor O'Bannon, individuals who work for the Village of Brooklyn, attendees of City Council meetings, and residents involved in the Stites Park District, local churches, and the Lovejoy Alumni Association have ideas about how Brooklyn should develop. For example, the Lovejoy Association has been discussing the construction of a new indoor recreation or community center for the last five years.<sup>21</sup> Communication between the Brooklyn Revitalization Committee and Brooklyn community-based organizations could enable these plans to be realized.

### **Starting Small: Establishing Working Relationships**

The Brooklyn Revitalization Committee needs to establish trust with Brooklyn residents so that they can form productive, working relationships with the community. Collaboration between the Revitalization Committee and the village on small, visible projects would allow residents to see the "success" of the partnership through physical results. Although these may begin as small-scale community-based projects, many could potentially develop into larger projects with greater economic implications.

### **Summer Jazz Festival**

Musician Hamiet Bluiett, the baritonist famous for reinventing the role of the horn in jazz, was born in Brooklyn, Illinois in 1940.<sup>22</sup> Bluiett began playing jazz with Eddie Fisher in St. Louis, but is most famous for the music he produced while playing with the World Saxophone Quartet in New York (1974-1975).<sup>23</sup> In 2001, Bluiett's *Village of Brooklyn* was included on a Smithsonian Folkways Recording which "features an assembly of voices in music, oratory, poetry, and prose by famous African-American musicians, writers, and activists."<sup>24</sup> (Appendix E: Brooklyn's Proud Past)

A Bluiett performance in Brooklyn could bring together current and past residents and bring jazz fans to the area. Initially, it may be possible to hold the event in the Civic Center in Brooklyn. The performance might begin as a one-time show and then develop into an annual event, possibly paired with the Miles Davis Tribute Concert that Anne

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<sup>21</sup> Plans indicating the desired type of recreation center are located in the Lovejoy Binder in the ESLARP office.

<sup>22</sup> Allen, Clifford. 2004. *Hamiet Bluiett*. All About Jazz. April 17. Available: <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=1866>

<sup>23</sup> Cristina and Eddie Fisher operate the Village Theater just outside of East St. Louis and have previously worked with ESLARP.

<sup>24</sup> Cataliotti, Robert H. 2001. *Every Tone a Testimony*. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings: Washington, D.C.

Walker organized in East St. Louis in 2006.<sup>25</sup> If the event is successful, it could become a new venue for Brooklyn, potentially raising funds for the construction of a music hall and/or supporting restaurant. Regardless of how small or large the event, a music and culture emphasis in Brooklyn could alter its image as a strip club destination.

A small group of University music students work with ESLARP, teaching jazz to students in East St. Louis. It may be possible for this group to work with Brooklyn students for local performances.

### **Lovejoy Alumni Association Reunion/Family Reunions**

The Lovejoy Alumni Association presents another opportunity to bring past and current Brooklyn residents together through the promotion of a school and/or family reunion event. From the Association information collected thus far, it is unclear whether Lovejoy holds an annual reunion, where it might be hosted or what it entails. Professor Bruce Wicks has been exploring the idea of family reunions in Jones Park in East St. Louis and may be interested in developing a similar program in Brooklyn. The school/family reunion project could be explored in an ESLARP class. The event could be held in the Metro-East Park by the Lovejoy School, which has a shelter, grills, playground equipment and basketball courts.

### **Spring Bling**

The Lovejoy School currently has an annual event in which they partner with the Scott Air Force Base to clean the school grounds and perform maintenance work inside and outside the school. The Base was unable to work with the school in the spring of 2007. In response, Senait Brown organized an ESLARP work weekend with University students to carry out the event. The cleanup introduced school workers, residents, parents and students to University students and professors. It is unclear whether the Base will resume their partnership with the Lovejoy School for next year's Spring Bling or if the University co-host the event; regardless, it was a good way for ESLARP to gain visibility in the community and to build trust.

### **Janey B. Goode Site**

The Illinois Transportation Archaeological Research Program (ITARP) has been conducting excavation work in preparation for the rerouting of the railroad tracks and roads in the southeast part of Brooklyn. Work at the Janey B. Goode Site (11S1232) in Brooklyn began in 2002 and continues today.<sup>26</sup> Artifacts indicate that the Janey B. Goode Site pre-dates the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, which has been listed as a World Heritage Site. (Appendix E: Archaeology)

Regardless of whether the New Mississippi River Bridge project is built, the Janey B. Goode Site presents a unique cultural heritage opportunity for Brooklyn. It may be

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<sup>25</sup> Seymour, David. 2006. Miles Davis 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. Available: <http://www.jazzreview.com/article/review-4781.html>

<sup>26</sup> Illinois Transportation Archaeology Research Project. 2007. Available: <http://www.itarp.uiuc.edu/research/>

possible to create signage or produce informational material about the found artifacts. The age and quantity of found artifacts may encourage the development of an interpretive center in the area where tourists could learn about the indigenous people who lived near Horseshoe Lake. Because ITARP is a joint project between the University of Illinois and the Illinois Department of Transportation and the University, it may be possible for Brooklyn residents to work with University to develop projects related to the excavation.

### **Underground Railroad History/Legacies of Hope/Confluence Trails**

As noted by residents and in Cha-Jua's book, several Underground Railroad (UGRR) stations were located in Brooklyn. Although it can be difficult to identify sites of the UGRR because information was passed down orally or because structures are no longer extant, the National Register of Historic Places offers guidance for the how to research and interpret sites.<sup>27</sup> (Appendix E: Underground Railroad)

Currently, UGRR history is being explored in the Freedom Trails and Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing projects. Former Brooklyn resident Ann Walker is the project director of Freedom Trails, Legacies of Hope, a program devoted to the exploration of African-American history, specifically as related to the Underground Railroad movement.<sup>28</sup> The Trails project was designated as a six-year state supported heritage project in 2001. The National Park Service (NPS) designated the Mary Meachum crossing location as a historic site in 2001. The Confluence Greenway, Great Rivers Greenway District, and several other area trail programs are supporting partners of the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing project. Design schematics of the Crossing are featured on the Confluence Greenway website.<sup>29</sup> Anne Walker serves on the Mary Meachum Board as a representative of the State of Illinois. (Appendix E: Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing)

UGRR research could lead to the identification and designation of historic sites in Brooklyn. These sites could easily be incorporated into the growing trails and African-American history projects in the region. The University of Illinois could also explore the creation of a program similar to their cooperative project with the University of Maryland to research the former Black Town of New Philadelphia, Illinois.<sup>30</sup> Professor Christopher Fennell, of the Anthropology Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign could be contacted for further information regarding the University's role in

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<sup>27</sup> National Park Service, National Register, History and Education. *Underground Railroad Resources in the United States: Theme Study*. 1992. Available:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/thhome.htm>. National Park Service, "Links to History." *Exploring a Common Past: Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad*. Available: [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/ugrr/exugrr1.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/ugrr/exugrr1.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Freedom Trails, Legacies of Hope: African-American Heritage Tourism Development. 2007. Available: <http://www.freedomtrails2legacies.org/index.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Available: <http://www.confluencegreenway.org/>

<sup>30</sup> University of Maryland. 2007. Center for Heritage Resource Studies: Bringing scholars and practitioners together to support a comprehensive approach to the study of heritage. Available: <http://heritage.umd.edu/CHRSWeb/New%20Philadelphia/NewPhiladelphia.htm>

the New Philadelphia project. Professor Fennell specializes in historical archaeology and his projects address aspects of African-American cultural heritage.<sup>31</sup>

### **Signage for Historic Sites**

Many of Brooklyn's historic buildings are no longer standing and it has not been determined if historic buildings that remain in the village would be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The sites of the most significant local buildings, events, and/or people could instead, be denoted through signage. The two-story, brick schoolhouse, built circa 1875 was demolished and the Stites Park District owns the parcel on which it stood. The original site of the Quinn Chapel, which may be owned by the Lovejoy Alumni Association, is another important local landmark that could be recognized. (Appendix A: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps) Brooklyn could contact the State Historic Preservation Agency regarding signage for sites or the town could create their own signs explaining the history and significance of local sites. Signage could potentially include imagery, oral histories or other layered information from Brooklyn residents. Alternatively, signage could be modeled on the types of signs the Landscape Architecture Students created for parks in East St. Louis, which were placed in the parks during the March 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> ESLARP Work Weekend.

### **Brooklyn Cemetery**

The Brooklyn Cemetery is located on Big Bend Road in the southeast portion of the town and the Village of Brooklyn owns the cemetery parcels. In the spring of 2007, the Latter Day Saints, East St. Louis Chapter removed the brush and tall grass from the cemetery, recorded information from the stones and made rubbings of the markers. The group plans to include information from the Brooklyn Cemetery on their genealogy website.<sup>32</sup>

In 1999, ESLARP worked with Better Days, Inc. to clear the Brooklyn Cemetery of brush. Until the Latter Day Saints worked in the cemetery in the spring of 2007, ESLARP had planned to conduct another cleanup during their March 30/31<sup>st</sup> work weekend. While the cleanups are visible, achievable projects, unless there is an organization capable of maintaining the grounds after the cemetery has been cleared, the brush will return again quickly. Adding signage or edging along the roadway could mark the presence of the cemetery, but the history of the cemetery is largely unknown.

It may be possible to nominate the cemetery to the National Register of Historic Places, but it would be difficult because the cemetery has experienced disturbances over the years that may make it impossible to determine its original layout without maps or records. Cemetery historic preservation and archaeology guidelines are available in technical bulletins on the National Trust for Historic Preservation website.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Department of Anthropology. 2007. Available: <http://www.anthro.uiuc.edu/faculty/cfennell/>

<sup>32</sup> The Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, East St. Louis Chapter (618) 293-6645; 5101 Lake Dr East St Louis, IL 62203

<sup>33</sup> National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places. 2007. Available: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/>

University students could continue to research the cemetery, using St. Clair County Historical Society records and through interviews with elderly Brooklyn residents. Additionally, students could determine whether Brooklyn church or other community based groups would be interested in adopting the property and regularly maintaining its ground coverage.

### **Stites Park District**

As noted in the Institutional Memory section of this report, the University of Illinois worked with Brooklyn to create programs for the Stites Township Park District in 1970. The District currently owns a few parcels in Brooklyn as well as the Civic Center and (possibly) another, boarded up, brick building. Phyllis Wells-Robinson currently serves as the Stites Park District President.<sup>34</sup>

The University could potentially work with the Stites District to evaluate the current conditions of the park and could explore ways to connect the District with other trail and greenway projects in the vicinity.

### **Placing Brooklyn into a Larger Context: Regional Planning**

There are several other concurrent planning initiatives in the East St. Louis vicinity, many of which overlap the Brooklyn area. One such project is the Riverfront Initiative program, a riverfront redevelopment pilot program targeting the Illinois cities of Aurora, Rockford and East St. Louis. East St. Louis Mayor Officer spoke briefly about the state pilot program in an article on the city's website. (Appendix E: City of St. Louis)

The Illinois General Assembly passed the Local Legacy Act in January of 2004 to encourage the protection of agricultural, environmental, historic and natural resources. (Appendix E: LEAM) In response to the Local Legacy Act, the Land Use Evolution and Impact Assessment Model (LEAM) program at the University of Illinois layered local, county and regional resource information into a single Geographic Information System (GIS) map. LEAM partnered with the Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development organization, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the East-West Gateway Council of Governments to create a legacy plan for the St. Louis Metro East region. The Village of Brooklyn and its 2004 Waterfront Master Plan were included in this plan. (Appendix E: Southwestern Illinois Resource Plan, 2005)

### **Identifying Community Values**

The Village of Brooklyn has been the subject of many development, redevelopment and comprehensive plans, but it is unclear whether the town has generated their own community plan. A plan produced by and not for residents would best ensure that the community develops in a way supported by the people who live there.

### **Creating a Community Land Trust**

Rather than relying upon state or federal entities to redevelop peripheral parcels along the Brooklyn boundary, the Village of Brooklyn could work with residents to create a

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<sup>34</sup> Phyllis Wells-Robinson, telephone (home): 618-271-1709; (work) 618-271-1014 ext. 165

community land trust for the vacant, abandoned or brownfield parcels within the core, gridiron portion of Brooklyn. Several of the parcels on or within the vicinity of the intersection of Madison Avenue and Route 3 have been obtained by the U.S. Marshall or other levels of government. Many of the parcels neighboring these properties are owned by one or two organizations and there are records which indicate that these organizations are involved in legal proceedings regarding the property. (Appendix A: Parcel Information and Legal Proceedings) If Brooklyn was able to create a community land trust, it would be possible to redevelop the land for affordable housing or commercial businesses desired by Village residents.

### **Further Research: Boundaries, Riverfront, Case Studies**

Additional Brooklyn research may include a study documenting Brooklyn's incorporated limits over time, proposing appropriate riverfront development schemes, evaluating development with current transportation patterns, and exploring the community and economic development strategies used in other Black historic towns.

The Mayor and various residents have indicated that Brooklyn has been losing land. According to the St. Clair County Records and Deeds Office, the Brooklyn's incorporated town boundaries were last changed in 1907, when the company town of National City was formed.<sup>35</sup> When the Mayor and residents note the loss of land, it is possible that they are referring to the dissolution of National City in the late 1990s; the Fairmont Mayor was able to obtain the unincorporated parcels, but Brooklyn did not have the legal knowledge to do so.<sup>36</sup>

Anne Walker mentioned on several occasions that houses and other buildings once stood on the parcels bordering the river. Unfortunately, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps only document areas of dense, urban development and their Brooklyn maps terminate at the railroad tracks that parallel Route 3; it is unclear if buildings were located closer to the river. A construction dates for the two levees bordering the river were also undetermined. These two pieces of information could better indicate what type of development is appropriate for the riverfront parcels. The kind of riverfront development implemented may also be impacted if the New Mississippi River Bridge is not built. It may be necessary to reevaluate the Waterfront Master Plan to determine if the proposed designs are feasible without the bridge.

Lastly, Bronzeville and Kansas City community and economic development initiatives could be researched to determine whether similar strategies could be employed in Brooklyn.

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<sup>35</sup>Eros, Mark. 2007. Office of Deeds and Records, St. Clair County. February 28.

<sup>36</sup> Conversation with Ken Hise, St. Clair County. 2007. SWIDA meeting. March 21.

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