

2005 Year in Review
North – Central Elm Street Report
Lancaster, PA
Administered by the James Street Improvement District

In January 2005, the City of Lancaster and the James Street Improvement District were awarded Elm Street designation for a compact neighborhood just north of Lancaster's Downtown. Over the past year, substantial progress has been made toward achieving the vision and goals of the Commonwealth's Elm Street program. The initiative has provided the impetus to engage a diverse, unorganized community and already has demonstrated the value of property and community investment. This neighborhood has begun its transformation into a vibrant mixed – use neighborhood and a primary connection to downtown.

Following is a summary of the James Street Improvement District's (JSID) activities in the areas of planning/neighborhood organizing, residential reinvestment activity (façade improvement and streetscape enhancements) and administration.

Planning/Neighborhood Organizing

JSID initiated a cohesive, grassroots neighborhood leadership team (Elm Street Advisory Council) with the following charges: 1) Serve as a resource to the JSID, 2) Provide input and feedback on the façade improvement program and on streetscape enhancements, 3) Serve as neighborhood ambassadors, 4) Ensure effective neighborhood communication. The Advisory Council meets regularly and the Project Manager engages individual members on various neighborhood issues.

Prior to the formation of the Council, no neighborhood organization existed. A few individuals attempted to take leadership roles in the past but with limited success. In developing the Council and bringing a diverse mix of individuals together, the JSID hired a strategic planning consultant who helped shape the Council as a cohesive group. With a solid team-oriented foundation, the Council has become engaged and committed to the long-term success of the community. It has been involved in several specific initiatives as well as some planning efforts that include:

- Assisting with the development of program guidelines for a Façade Improvement Program. The Council has been helpful in promoting the program by talking with neighbors and friends. Members have been instrumental in making connections with landlords and property managers. (Spring 2005)



- Initiated and planned a neighborhood block party in conjunction with the Lancaster Barnstormers (owners of Lancaster's new minor-league baseball franchise) with the goal of introducing the team to the neighborhood and giving neighbors the opportunity to meet members of the management team and ask questions. More than 300 residents attended this successful event. (February 2005)



- Served as a liaison between the Barnstormers and the neighborhood on numerous neighborhood issues related to the inaugural season at Clipper Magazine Stadium. The JSID worked with the Council and the Barnstormers to coordinate a community meeting at the Stadium to hear neighborhood feedback on Stadium operations. (Fall 2005)
- The JSID worked closely with the Elm Street Advisory Council to engage the neighborhood in a planning process that is resulting in a five year plan and implementation strategy. Two public meetings, five focus groups and over twenty individual interviews were conducted by the consultant team to gain feedback from a wide range of residents and neighborhood stakeholders. **The finalized plan is enclosed.** (August-December 2005)

Looking ahead, the JSID has three primary goals for the Council in the next year. First is to continue efforts to make the Council function independently so that the neighborhood organizational structure is sustainable long-term. The JSID will provide considerable staff assistance, guidance and resources; however, Council members will be encouraged to take on more of a leadership role. Second, the Council has expressed a strong desire to implement several community activities, such as another block party, a neighborhood yard sale, and a flower-box contest. These activities will provide a tremendous opportunity to promote the Elm Street program and to build a stronger sense of community. Third, the Council will be responsible, along with the JSID and the City, to ensure the five-year plan and strategy becomes a working document and measurable progress occurs in achieving the plan's goals.

Residential Reinvestment Activity

As part of its Elm Street contract, the JSID and the City allocated \$70,000 of funds to support a façade improvement grant program and \$175,000 toward streetscape enhancements.

Façade Improvement Program (FIP)

The Façade Improvement Program has been a tremendous success in the Elm Street neighborhood both in its intent to enhance the look of the neighborhood and as a tool to reach out to residents and property owners. The Project Manager invested considerable up-front time meeting with City officials (code enforcement, housing, historic preservation), contractors and financial and legal advisors to understand the challenges of the program prior to finalizing the guidelines and materials. Time was also spent drafting applications and instructions that

were appropriate for the residents so that information was conveyed accurately and succinctly. The JSID also worked with its accountants to ensure that sufficient record keeping was in place to track the financial transactions required for the program and to respect the confidentiality of property owner's information.

The program was piloted in late spring 2005 with five property owners, including one commercial property to test the guidelines and flow of paperwork. Once these projects were underway and almost complete, the program was promoted to the neighborhood through word of mouth, the JSID's quarterly newsletter and façade banners hung on participating properties. Additionally, the Project Manager spent time at each property to inspect the work and coordinate with the contractor and the property owner and utilized the opportunity to talk to neighboring property owners about the program.



The Project Manager worked closely with the Elm Street Advisory Council to develop the general guidelines for the program and a neighborhood promotion strategy. A Façade Sub-committee was appointed engaging two Council members, City officials and home improvement experts. The Sub-Committee is charged with approving projects from a historic preservation perspective and as a control to ensure that proposed project elements are eligible expenses. As new applications are submitted, the Project Manager discusses each project with the Façade Sub-Committee.

The JSID's Façade Program requires active involvement by the Project Manager, who works closely with property owners and contractors to ensure appropriate materials are being used. The Project Manager worked closely with the Lancaster City's Historic Preservation Specialist to write the design guidelines and to provide examples of appropriate styles for materials such as doors, porch lights, handrails and windows. The Secretary of the Interior Standards are also a guide for project elements. The Project Manager engages additional architectural expertise for unique projects such as carriage houses or storefront properties converted into a residential unit.



The Project Manager also worked with City staff to select a handful of contractors for the program. Eligible contractors must show proof of registering with the City for a Home Improvement License, proof of Workman's Compensation/Liability Insurance, two references and proof of Lead Safe Work Practice Certification to ensure

lead paint is being handled and disposed of safely. Working with a small group of contractors has allowed the Project Manager to shape the program to fit both the needs of the program –such as the payment schedule, and work closely with contractors to find solutions that balance the need for minor repairs with close attention to maintaining the historical integrity of each property.

BEFORE



AFTER

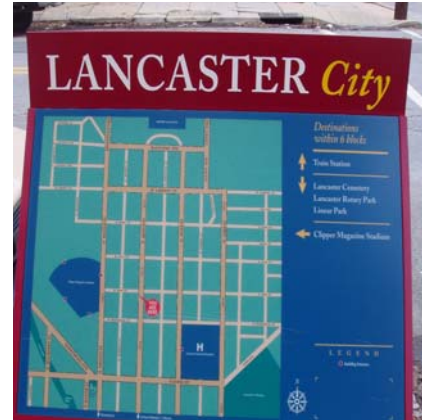


Through December 2005, 17 projects, reflecting a total investment of \$63,215, of which about \$40,000 was Elm Street grant funds, have been completed or initiated. There are 15 projects that have been approved by the sub-committee that will be started in 2006. The Committee will review 7 additional applications in January. Combined, this reflects **a total of 39 properties and \$126,210 in improvements as a direct result of the Elm Street Initiative.**

Streetscape Enhancements

In January 2005, JSID retained a local transportation engineering firm, HRG, Inc. to develop cost estimates and preliminary plans for both first year enhancements and an overall five year plan. The one year plan included curb cuts, pedestrian cross walks, trash receptacles and pedestrian signage. The five year plan has a heavy emphasis on pedestrian lighting. Streetscape enhancements are consistent with the City's draft Streetscape Design Guidelines. First year improvements that have already been completed include:

- A 1000' brick band installed along the stadium sidewalk that sets the standard for commercial development in the corridor leading into downtown
- Ten trash receptacles installed
- 48 curb cuts installed
- Tiger-striping of major pedestrian crossings
- Installation of pedestrian way finding signs as part of larger effort



HRG's five year plan will be incorporated into the recently completed vision plan so that both planning efforts are coordinated. It is anticipated that in the next twelve months, the JSID and the Elm Street Advisory Council will collaborate on several new streetscape initiatives, including the installation of significant flower urns, possible tree plantings in existing wells, installation of additional trash receptacles and possibly benches, and the development of technical specifications for the implementation of pedestrian lights along primary corridors within the target area.

The JSID is proud of its early accomplishments with the Elm Street program, strongly believing that its efforts reflect the vision and guidelines put forth by the Commonwealth for this initiative. While the direct investment of funds in private property through the facade program and in the public realm by the streetscape activities has made a visible difference in the community, the heart of the North-Central Lancaster Elm Street program is the emergence of an increasingly cohesive neighborhood organizational structure led by a diverse group of residents and small business interests. The JSID will maintain its clear focus on supporting the Elm Street Advisory Council so that a sustainable neighborhood infrastructure exists into the future.