



# Case Study: Neighborhood Planning in Rye, Indiana



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# Case Study: Neighborhood Planning in Rye, Indiana

A portrait of a community learning about area needs and using the consolidated planning process to develop specific priorities, strategies and actions.



Photo: Google Maps

Objective: This case study explores how a small city engaged community residents and stakeholders in neighborhood planning through the consolidated planning process. The case study highlights the use of CPD Maps, the eCon Plan Template, and the Maximizing Investments Toolkit to inform research and data analysis and shape the planning effort.

## Background

Rye is a small Indiana city with a population of 75,000. Traditionally, Rye's major industry was steel manufacturing. However, in the late 20th century most of the steel manufacturing jobs left Rye. Regionally, auto assembly plants have replaced steel mills as the top employer, but few Rye residents work in these jobs as many auto manufacturing jobs have been filled with employees from surrounding communities. As a result of the changes in local employment, several once thriving neighborhoods in Rye experienced dramatic declines in population. While the auto jobs are a source of stability for the broader region, the unemployment rate in Rye has remained higher than in the surrounding towns.



## Background

Walnut Corners is a neighborhood located in Rye, Indiana that has suffered from the decline of the local economy and resulting depopulation of the city. Community residents have approached the city government for help just as it prepares to launch its five-year consolidated planning process.

## Process

Community Development staff engaged the Walnut Corners residents and other stakeholders in a planning effort that sought to understand the needs in the community and how the city could work with partners to address them. First, the staff used data to understand the area dynamics, and listened to the community to learn more about their concerns. Second, city staff used CPD Maps and other planning tools to create a community profile, inventory assets, and assess the potential to address the community's needs through strategic investment in the neighborhood.

## Results

The City designated Walnut Corners as a target area for investment and engaged multiple city departments to work together to maximize the impacts of HUD investment through coordination and building on complementary activities.

Walnut Corners is one Rye neighborhood that seems to be particularly challenged. Walnut Corners was home to many of the steelworkers and had a population of approximately 1,900 during the peak of steel plant employment. The current population is estimated at about 855 people. Walnut Corners used to be a diverse and vibrant community whose residents enjoyed well-kept bungalows, ethnic businesses, and the cultural identity of a neighborhood that had close ties with the steel plants. As residents left Walnut Corners to pursue employment elsewhere, businesses closed, resulting in numerous vacant and abandoned properties. The remaining residents suffered this decline for many years, but recently, elected officials have become increasingly concerned as unemployment in the area continues to increase, home values decline further and vacant lots and buildings continue to be used for a variety of illegal activities.

Recently, the City of Rye relocated the passenger railroad terminal from downtown Rye to a location on the northern end of Walnut Corners Avenue, the main commercial street of the Walnut Corners neighborhood. The City chose Walnut Corners because the neighborhood had a large, inexpensive parcel of unused land and a new station could be constructed there for lower cost there than in other neighborhoods. Also, since Walnut Corners Avenue is a wide thoroughfare extending the length of the city, commuters and long distance train riders could easily access the new station.

In addition to increased noise, the train station brings more traffic as people come from other neighborhoods and towns to commute to jobs outside of Walnut Corners. Despite the increased traffic, local businesses have not seen any increase in sales or new customers. Passengers simply park in the large parking structure and board the train to go elsewhere. At the end of the day, they return to their cars and drive directly out of the neighborhood.

When the train station was relocated, Walnut Corners neighbors expressed their fears that a new train station would bring not only traffic congestion but also the possibility of gentrification. While some level of private investment would certainly be welcomed in Walnut Corners, many residents feared that given the location of the neighborhood near downtown and the “good bones” of the housing stock that they might be displaced by new, wealthier people moving in and driving up property values. Neighbors also expressed concerns that following the opening of the train station, there would be more criminal activity and the neighborhood wouldn’t feel as safe as it had before.



Photos: Google Maps

## Community Action

In recent years, as the City prepared its annual budget and capital improvements budget, Walnut Corners residents had made inquiries to the City representatives asking whether the City had a plan for improving both the physical and social conditions in their neighborhood. They shared images of Walnut Corners depicting vacant and abandoned properties and trash-strewn lots with City Officials to find out what the City could do to help improve the situation. The residents told City representatives that they were concerned about the vast number of vacant lots and vacant buildings that were being used for illegal activities. Residents also complained that children being raised in Walnut Corners lacked safe recreational facilities and many residents did not feel safe when they walked down Walnut Corners Avenue.

Reinforcing the community's perception, monthly and yearly crime statistics provided by the Police Chief to the Rye City Council indicated that, in fact, while crime had actually declined since the opening of the train station, Walnut Corners had the highest crime rate in the city. Given the concerns from residents and evidence to support them and that the City was in the process of developing its five-year Consolidated Plan, the Mayor and City Council asked Community Development staff and Public Works staff to meet with neighborhood residents and stakeholders in order to better understand the problems and to hear any ideas they had for improving their neighborhood.

## Community Engagement

In response to the Mayor and City Council's request, Community Development and Public Works staff worked together to organize three listening sessions at local churches and the Senior Center. To prepare for the listening sessions, city staff asked themselves several questions (see text box) that would help them understand the Walnut Corners area dynamics and then sought answers through research and analysis. They used HUD's updated eCon Planning Suite, which provides data from the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) and the Census, including the American Community Survey (ACS). Specifically they used the Housing and Economic Development Data Toolkits in CPD Maps to analyze the dynamics at the census tract level. Furthermore, they used several of the tools in the Maximizing Investments Toolkit to help them organize their research, prepare comparisons, and analyze data for their discussion with the community. In addition, staff conducted a tour of the neighborhood to become more familiar with the physical environment.



### Questions staff asked themselves to prepare for neighborhood meetings:

- What is the population of the neighborhood? What is the percentage of elderly residents?
- Are there more renters than owners living in Walnut Corners?
- What are the median and average incomes for different types of households?
- What is the unemployment rate compared to other neighborhoods in Rye? Are a lot of people living on non-wage income such as public assistance, Social Security, or retirement income? What do people do for a living in Walnut Corners?
- How many households are there with children? How many persons have a disability? What is the average household size?
- What is the housing market like? Are housing values higher or lower than a few years ago? How do values compare with the rest of the city?
- What is the age of the housing stock? What are housing conditions?
- How many new businesses have opened or closed/failed in Walnut Corners over the last few years? How does this compare to other sections of the city?



Rye staff used the Housing and Economic Development Data Toolkits in CPD Maps to analyze the area dynamics in Walnut Corners compared to the City.

Housing Data Toolkit – CPD Maps

**Stage 1: Basic Issue Identification**

This stage examines CPD Maps data for the target jurisdiction compared to two other geographies (e.g., a similar jurisdiction and the state) and national statistics. This basic analysis allows the user to identify specific issues for analysis in Stages 2 and 3. The target jurisdiction is set on the Control Panel. You can choose the reference geography in the shaded box below. The reference geography is also shaded in the table. You can change the comparison jurisdictions by clicking on the table header and selecting from the list that appears.

<b>Define Comparison:</b>	<b>Target:</b> Walnut Corners	<b>Reference:</b> Rye
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KEY
Slightly Higher
Higher
Much Higher
Lower

	Result	Walnut Corners	Rye	Indiana	NATION
<b>Housing Issues</b>					
Substandard	Much Higher	10.90%	1.34%	0.86%	1.27%
Overcrowded	Higher	6.30%	3.11%	1.67%	3.17%
Hh Pay >30%		48.30%	45.63%	29.09%	36.14%
<b>Demographics and General Housing Characteristics</b>					
Poverty Rate	Lower	24.58%	35.59%	13.71%	13.94%
<80% HAFMI	Slightly Higher	73.15%	66.20%	39.12%	41.13%
Pop 65+	Slightly Higher	23.99%	14.64%	12.86%	12.92%
Pop <18	Lower	6.89%	27.07%	24.87%	24.15%
Renter Rate	Higher	56.91%	45.24%	28.90%	33.87%
Median Owner Value		37.00%	37.33%	66.22%	100.00%
Median Contract Rent		64.82%	73.27%	76.87%	100.00%
Median Hh Income	n/a	\$23,477	\$27,701	\$48,393	\$52,762

Rye staff used the Housing and Economic Development Data Toolkits in CPD Maps to analyze the area dynamics in Walnut Corners compared to the City.

Economic Development Data Toolkit – CPD Maps

**Stage 1: Basic Issue Identification**

This stage examines CPD Maps data for the target jurisdiction compared to two other geographies (e.g., a similar jurisdiction and the state) and national statistics. This basic analysis allows the user to identify specific issues for analysis in Stages 2 and 3. The target jurisdiction is set on the Control Panel. You can choose the reference geography in the shaded box below. The reference geography is also shaded in the table. You can change the comparison jurisdictions by clicking on the table header and selecting from the list that appears.

<b>Define Comparison:</b>	<b>Target:</b> Walnut Corner	<b>Reference:</b> Rye
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KEY	
Higher	
Much Higher	
Lower	
Much Lower	

	Result	Walnut Corner	Rye	Indiana	NATION
<b>General Indicators</b>					
Unemployment Rate	Much Lower	12.21%	19.08%	8.97%	8.68%
Civilian Labor Force as % of Total Population	Lower	36.23%	40.38%	50.80%	50.66%
Average Commute Time (minutes)	n/a	24.2	25.2	23.1	2.5
Population	n/a	842	82,797	6,454,254	306,603,772
Median Hh Income	Much Lower	30.50%	52.50%	91.72%	100.00%
<b>Age and Education</b>					
Population Age 18–24		9.50%	9.04%	10.06%	9.95%
Population Age 25–64	Much Higher	59.62%	49.25%	52.21%	52.98%
HS equivalent or less		57.40%	56.75%	49.28%	43.73%
Some college	Much Lower	24.01%	31.96%	29.99%	30.56%
BA/BS or more		13.39%	11.29%	20.73%	25.71%

The staff scheduled the listening sessions at various times during the day and evening so that residents had multiple opportunities to attend. During the meeting, staff asked residents to describe the most pressing problems evident in the neighborhood and what changes they would like to see. They also asked residents questions about some of the issues that arose through their data analysis.

Collectively, the discussions and the data analysis identified the following issues:

- Lack of an adequate grocery store selling fresh food
- A shortage of standard rental units large enough to accommodate families with children
- Several empty buildings and trash-strewn vacant lots
- A large proportion of elderly residents who are unable to properly maintain their homes
- No daycare facility available in the neighborhood for working families
- Limited employment opportunities for residents
- Limited retail and service businesses available in the neighborhood
- Homeless people gathering in vacant lots and the neighborhood park
- Poor housing conditions and very few homes in decent shape that young families could buy
- Numerous break-ins, acts of vandalism, and illegal activities

Some of the changes residents wanted to see included:

- Improved safety and reduction in crimes
- A grocery store
- Street and sidewalk improvements and increased pedestrian activity in Walnut Corners
- Improvements to traffic patterns around the train station
- Programs to help homeowners maintain their properties
- Enforcement of City ordinances to force property owners to clean up lots and secure vacant buildings
- Newer rental housing suitable for families
- Job training programs
- A daycare facility with extended hours

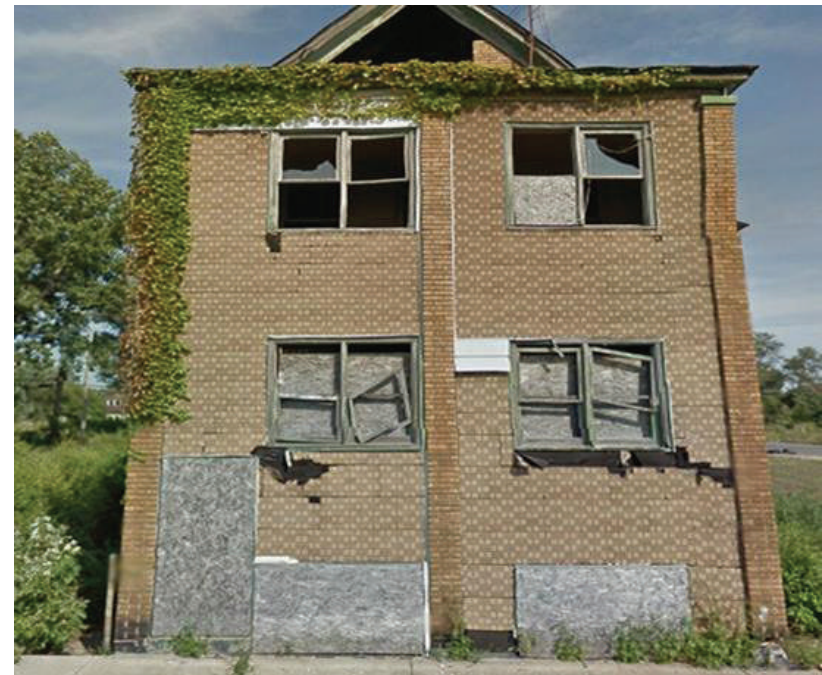


Photo: Google Maps



# Defining Community Need

The Rye staff knew that in order to justify a substantial investment of HUD and other funds in the neighborhood they would have to determine that Walnut Corners had a high level of need, had assets to build on, and specific opportunities for investment.

The Rye Community Development staff used the data they had collected from CPD Maps and the input from the listening sessions to create a community profile to illustrate the conditions in the Walnut Corners area. To help contextualize these conditions, the staff compared data on Walnut Corners to other city neighborhoods and to the City of Rye as a whole.

City staff used a range of local data sources to create a clear picture of the needs and dynamics of the Walnut Corners neighborhood. Rye had good local data on employment, crime, housing problems, police calls, retail activity, and property conditions. Staff reviewed other plans and reports, including the train station feasibility report, to inform the profile and begin to understand other investment in the area.

Specifically, they analyzed the household characteristics of Walnut Corners residents, including the following types of households:

- small and large family households
- households that contain at least one person 62-74 years of age
- households that contain at least one person 75 years of age
- households with children

They also looked at the socioeconomic characteristics of different types of households, as well as physical housing conditions, such as:

- median incomes
- poverty rates
- education levels
- unemployment rates
- substandard housing conditions
- number of persons per room
- percent of income spent on housing costs



Photos: Google Maps



The analysis gave the staff a deeper understanding of the needs in Walnut Corners, and confirmed what they had heard at the listening sessions — that there were high levels of poverty and distress in Walnut Corners. There were more elderly households than in other Rye neighborhoods, and comparatively fewer children. Unemployment levels were high and education levels low. Many people, and especially renters, were living in substandard and overcrowded housing and often were paying more than they could afford for rent. While in many ways Walnut Corner’s demographics were similar to the city at large, there were signs that a younger, more affluent population was moving into the neighborhood. This presented both an opportunity and a threat.

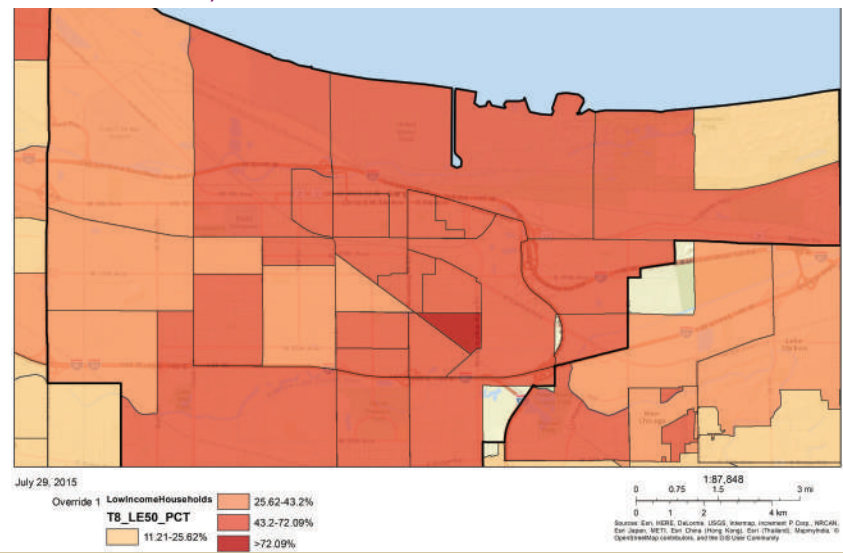
The Rye staff used CPD maps and their own internal GIS system to illustrate the convergence of need and opportunity in Walnut Corners. They also used maps to show that Walnut Corners had pockets of intense need, compared to other areas in the city. The staff used the data they gathered and the maps they had developed to begin to build a community profile that would help guide their discussion at future community meetings and would partially form the basis for the Needs Assessment (NA-10) of the City’s five-year Consolidated Plan.

The Maximizing Investments Toolkit’s Matching Priority Needs with Activities Tool (excerpt below) helped Community Development staff gain a holistic view of the deficient areas in the Walnut Corners neighborhood. They paired dominant issues such as its unaffordable, unsafe and unsuitable rental housing stock with activities to address them, like new rental housing development and rehabilitation of units. In addition to identifying housing needs, Walnut Corners staff used the Matching Priority Needs with Activities Tool to identify physical needs, such as infrastructure, and public service needs, such as childcare and employment.

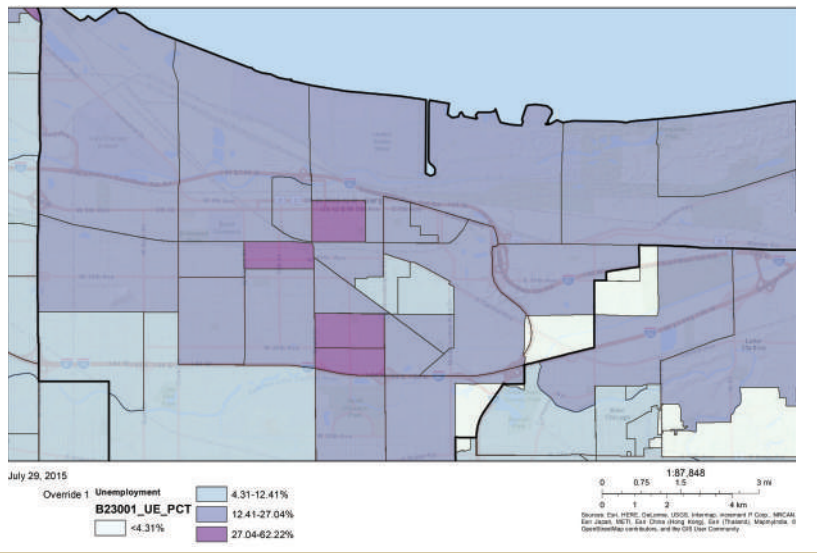
The staff found that many of the needs were related. If they could increase residents’ incomes by providing employment supports such as job training and child care, provide decent and suitable housing through rehabilitation, then they could begin to stabilize the community and encourage private investment that could in turn address other needs, such as a grocery store and reductions in crime.

DATA ENTRY	HIGH PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	INSTRUCTIONS									
Needs Description				Identify Needs Priority Level	New Affordable Rental Development	Acquisition/ Rehabilitation of Rental Units	Affordable Rental Rehabilitation	ACCESSIBLE Rental Development / HIV/AIDS housing units/ Special Needs Housing	Homeowner Rehabilitation	New Homebuyer Assistance	Construction Units for Sale	
<b>Housing Problems (IDIS Screen NA-10)</b>												
Lack of Complete Kitchen or Plumbing Facilities - Data Driven Toolkit indicates high incidence				High	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	
Renter Cost Burden >30 or 50% - significant				High	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Owner Cost Burden >30 or 50% - significant				Low	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Renter Overcrowding - significant				High	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Owner Overcrowding significant				Low	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	
Renters doubled up or multiple households in one unit				High	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Owners doubled up or multiple households in one unit				Low	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	
<b>Housing Costs (IDIS Screen MA-15)</b>												
Significant increases in rents / rents unaffordable to 80% or less AMI				Low	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Households nearing end of rapid re-housing assistance				Low	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Subsidized rental units coming to the end of their affordability period				High	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Greater number of low income renters than affordable rentals				Low	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	
Median home prices unaffordable to 80% AMI, low inventory at 80% AMI				Low	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	
Low homeownership rates in certain income, household size/type, or age ranges				Low	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	
<b>Housing Conditions (IDIS Screen MA-20)</b>												

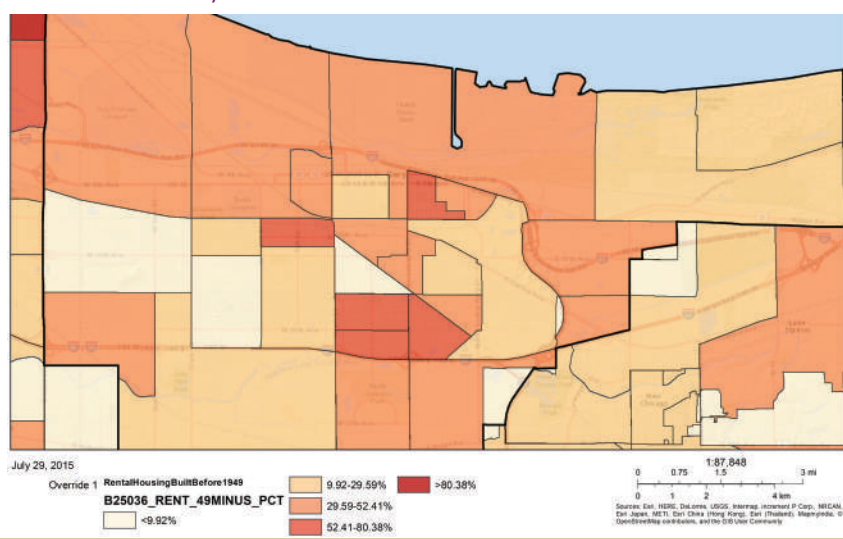
Walnut Corners - Percentage of Low Income Households - Rye Five Year Consolidated Plan



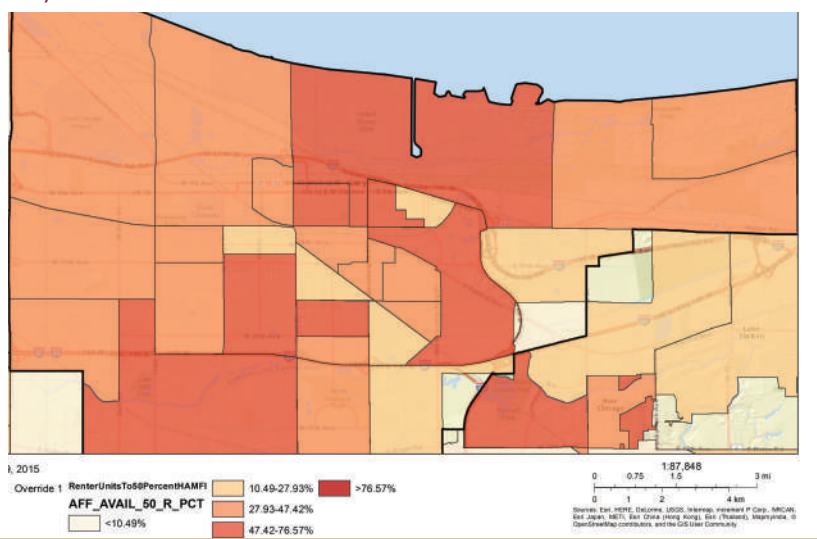
Walnut Corners - Unemployment - Rye Five Year Consolidated Plan



Walnut Corners - Percentage of Rental Housing Built Before 1949 - Rye Five Year Consolidated Plan



Walnut Corners - Renter Units Affordable to 50% HAMFI - Rye Five Year Consolidated Plan



# Assessing Geographic Priorities

As they continued to prepare the City's Consolidated Plan, Community Development staff evaluated whether the City should designate Walnut Corners as a geographic priority area. Although the area clearly had significant needs based on poverty levels, unemployment statistics, and housing and infrastructure conditions, staff wanted to ensure that investment in the area would leverage other assets and generate the desired impacts.

To assess the potential effectiveness of additional investment, the staff tried to get a sense of the "big picture." City staff identified Walnut Corners' assets, such as transit, commercial areas, institutions, prior city investments, and community organizations. They also reviewed local plans, including the City's Housing Plan and its Comprehensive Plan, as well as feasibility studies previously conducted for other development projects, to get a sense of other potential investments in the area and plans for development. Once they inventoried this information, they considered the community investments the city might leverage and the potential for building local partnerships.

The City staff used this information to complete the SP10 screen from the eCon Planning Suite

SP-10 Geographic Priorities



# Partners, Assets, and Opportunities

Recognizing that the new train station had the potential to rejuvenate the Walnut Corners community, the Community Development staff reached out to the public works and planning staff to discuss how city and HUD investments could stimulate revitalization around the train station. For example, the City’s Department of Public Works could prioritize sidewalk and traffic improvements along Walnut Corners Avenue, while the Community Development department could devote a larger proportion of its CDBG funds to economic development activities in order to encourage small business development in the area. Understanding the residents’ concerns that investment might prompt gentrification, Community Development staff agreed to designate Walnut Corners as a target area for its housing rehabilitation program to help elderly and low-income owners afford to stay in their homes. They also agreed to meet with the Rye Housing Authority and local nonprofit developers to discuss their willingness to invest in the area in order to preserve and create affordable housing opportunities.

With confidence that the city had started to create partnerships that would support its CPD investments, the Community Development staff recommended that Walnut Corners be designated a geographic priority area in its Consolidated Plan. In the strategic planning that followed, staff worked with these partners to identify exactly how they would build on the neighborhood’s existing assets while leveraging other planned investment and financial resources.

As City officials began the process of consulting with the community, they used the Tool for Using Stakeholder Input in Consolidated Planning of the MIT to help organize their public outreach and participation process and to catalogue the comments they received. In the example below, you can see a the group of stakeholders that identified to participate in the consultation process, details about the event they participated in, and comments they made.

## Using Stakeholder Input in Consolidated Planning

TRACKING EVENTS AND COMMENTS			
EVENT	AGENCY	AGENCY COMMENTS	RESPONSE TO COMMENTS (OPTIONAL)
March Survey	Walnut Corners Neighborhood Council	Walnut Corners has experience disinvestment from local businesses, owners, and government. Investments in infrastructure and housing are critically needed. Job training and greater police patrols to keep the youth off the street.	Met personally with Neighborhood Council and asked for their input on designating Walnut Corners a target area and proposed investments. Will continue to work with
March Survey	Candidos Market	Local business on Walnut Corners Avenue. Has been in operation for 35 years. Concerns about safety of workers and customers. Has had to call the police several times to report loitering and suspected drug dealing outside the store.	Asked business owner to participate in focus group on stimulating private investment along Walnut Corners Avenue.
January Focus Group	Just a Start	Children growing up in Walnut Corners lack decent housing, have high levels of lead paint exposure and do not get a head start in school. We work to provide children with a safe and healthy pre-school environment to help them excel in kindergarten and in their school	Asked Just a Start staff to participate in a focus group to discuss the needs of children living in Walnut Corners. Will continue to work with Just a Start during the strategic planning.
January Focus Group	St. Christopher’s Parish	Parishoners run a food pantry and clothing donation center for homeless individuals, youth, and children. One hot meal is provided each week to homeless neighborhood residents. Continued funding for these programs is essential.	Will work with St. Christopher’s to identify other community partners providing critical services in Walnut Corners. Will look at programs to explore possibility of

# Strategic Place-Based Planning

Understanding that true strategic investment in the Walnut Corners neighborhood would require more than HUD and City investment, the Community Development staff with the planning department launched an intensive neighborhood planning effort to develop specific goals and actions for the Walnut Corners target area. Referring to the list of agencies that the city had consulted with for the five-year Consolidated Plan, City staff began to reach out to potential partners and interested parties to include in the planning process.

They also continued to use tools such as CPD Maps to support this work and augmented their research by completing field surveys that inventoried vacant lots, property and infrastructure conditions, local businesses and city-owned land.

Later, Rye officials would use the maps and their analysis to engage residents, business owners, civic leaders, service providers, the transit authority, housing developers, and local institutions in a data-driven planning effort to develop a plan to address the needs in the Walnut Corners area.

The goals of the planning process were to:

- Develop strategies to address the identified needs of Walnut Corners residents, the deteriorated physical conditions and related safety issues.
- Identify specific projects and programs that would allow the City to carry out the strategies.
- Identify and establish partners within the community who could implement programs, whose efforts would support or complement the city's strategies, and/or who might have resources the City could leverage.
- Set annual goals for implementation over the next five years, including those to be included in the City's first-year Annual Action Plan.

Walnut Corners - Rye Five Year Consolidated Plan



Photo: produced with CPD Maps and PowerPoint

## Conclusion

After an extensive and inclusive strategic planning process, the City focused its redevelopment efforts in Walnut Corners by identifying four strategic goals:

- Increase quality affordable housing
- Encourage business development
- Support residents with job training and child care subsidies
- Continue public investment in infrastructure

The City then incorporated these specific strategies into its Strategic Plan and Annual Plan Goals and Objectives.

In the years that followed, the City, with its partners, was able to:

- produce 48 units of affordable rental housing in Walnut Corners
- create new commercial space for additional local businesses and services, including a childcare facility
- reconstruct sidewalks along Walnut Corners Avenue
- work with nonprofits to provide technical assistance to small business owners and create jobs

By working with the community and organizational partners, and leveraging other financial resources, the City of Rye was able to design an investment plan that addressed many of the priority needs in Walnut Corners, and improve the quality of life for its residents. Using a holistic planning approach, the City was able to extend the reach of its HUD investments and coordinate activities across agencies that resulted in greater impact than the sum of its parts.



