

# MCCD PANEL FEATURES NORTHWAY SUPPORTED ORGANIZATIONS

“Jesus calls Nathaniel and asks can anything good come out of Nazareth?-- This is where our salvation will rise, out of North Minneapolis,” Chad Schwitters of Urban Homeworks has been called to preach in the suburbs, but on Dec. 13 he was conversing with fellow community development workers about “Facing the Challenge: Our Unfinished Work in North Minneapolis.”

Schwitters held up a 1935 “social delineation map” which identified a part of North Minneapolis as the Slum Negro Section. And now with half the foreclosures in the city in North, and 60 percent of those foreclosures landlords walking away; with 79.2 percent of the population receiving some kind of Hennepin County support, “it’s an interesting political landscape,” to say the least. “Pain is political,” Schwitters said.

He talked about wanting to “scale” everything but cautioned his colleagues not to lose sight of the one-on-one nature of service. “Focus on equity, not equality. Equality would be giving everyone a size 8 shoe. Equity is you get a size shoe that fits you.”

To explain the Nazareth quote, other community developers echoed that if problems can be solved in North Minneapolis, it will improve all of Minneapolis, and as Schwitters said “the energy for change is on the curb, in the neighborhood. We are a tool of the people.” The challenge, from a summit held last year, was to build power to affect positive change by garnering the people, and the tools, capital and other resources. “We will partner.”

How do we know we’re all headed in the same direction, focus? Someone asked. Schwitters said, “there are a lot of tables to be at, and they’re all good tables, but there’s limited time to be there. This phenomenon was exacerbated this summer by the tornado’s aftermath, and countless hours spent trying to manage the recovery such that it would also bring benefit to the local economy.

Attendees traded information about who’s behind the numbers of blue tarps remaining on roofs, and

what lessons are coming out of the tornado recovery. Schwitters said, “one should be that if you pull a rental license, you should have to prove you’re insured.”

The conversation, sponsored by the Minneapolis Consortium of Community Developers brought together a panel of four. Some of the speakers referred to successful models of community economic redevelopment, “there is hope, precedents,” Katya Pilling of Catalyst Community Partners, said, citing Franklin Avenue and Lake Street. There are great opportunities coming with the school district headquarters, the possibility of a way that local people can pool financial investments toward change, she said.

Barb McCormick of Project for Pride in Living said she thinks the biggest barrier to change is the requirement that in impacted areas, most resources can’t go into new construction.

Grover Jones of NEON, Northside Economic Opportunity Network, helps small businesses get started. “In North Minneapolis, for many, the only option is to start a business. But you have to feed it before it feeds you.” It’s like having another baby.

Mike Wynne of Emerge Community Development said North Minneapolis is “characterized as infighting, but we collaborate more than anywhere. The biggest challenge is overcoming cynicism” because with all the work, poverty hasn’t been ended.

Emerge is beginning renovation soon on the former North Branch library for a center where people can access job information and get training in technology, and have operated various job training programs for many years.

Asked what the economic drivers are going to be, Jones said small business has to be the economic driver. McCormick said “artists – are an interesting driver, they create destinations. The driver will come out of the community itself. The tough part is the odds against any business making it.” The suggestion was made



*Katya Pilling of Catalyst Community Partners makes a point as Chad Schwitters of Urban Homeworks, Barb McCormick of Project for Pride in Living, Grover Jones of NEON--Northside Economic Opportunity Network, Mike Wynne of Emerge Community Development, and MCCD Executive Director Jim Roth listen intently.*

that subsidy investment be put into stabilizing people. Answering questions, panelists acknowledged work being done in the arts and with locally grown healthy food and food processing.

From the audience, Nancy Pomplou of Asian Economic Development Association offered that the Asian community is “a strong influence” in North Minneapolis, “but you wouldn’t know it driving through.”

The Minneapolis Consortium of Community Developers website is [mccdmn.org](http://mccdmn.org), phone 612-789-7337. On the website are links to various resources provided by member organizations, such as entrepreneur and small business development, training, loans. Many of the member organizations rehab or build homes available for purchase, also linked through the site.

*Photography by Pat Carney for Northway Community Trust. Reporting by Margo Ashmore.*