

**A Profile of Beth Broadway
Community Organizer
Syracuse, NY**

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The Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today project is a joint effort between city government – the neighborhood planning office of the city of Syracuse – and the people who live in the city. What we have done is to create eight geographic sections of the city, each of which now has a neighborhood planning council, which is staffed by a neighborhood planner from the city but is run – as far as the monthly meetings and subcommittees – by citizens – residents and business owners and people with some kind of a stake in the community, who are committed to the whole notion of neighborhood planning. We're going into our fourth year.

The councils are democratically elected bodies. There's a seat at each table for each of the neighborhood associations that have at least ten members in them. That includes everything from Neighborhood Watch groups to the large housing agencies and all kinds of grassroots groups in between. It's a real grassroots group of people who are coming together to look at neighborhood planning.

I've been a human service worker for most of my career, prior to doing the work that I'm doing now, and I did my social justice work on the side. I was the training director for the Chicago YMCA. I was a Head Start director and social worker. I worked for citywide day-care services in Chicago, all under the auspices of the Y. I did that for ten years. When I moved to Syracuse, I spent five years working for Literacy Volunteers of

America. I had a seventeen-state area in the Midwest that I was responsible for – supporting the program directors there or starting new programs in communities where there wasn't a Literacy Volunteers program.

Then I moved to Washington, D.C. and worked for the United Way of America doing a national literacy project. We created a twenty-year plan to end illiteracy and we did a lot of grant making and trying to encourage other United Ways to give money to adult literacy, because they didn't see adult literacy as human services. They saw it as something the education system should take care of.

When I moved back to Syracuse after a couple of years in D.C., I thought “What am I going to do next?” And I thought, “I'm tired of doing my social justice work on the side.” Because the way the funding streams work in human services, you're often getting corporate money and so you have to be a little more careful about how you craft your message. For example, you can say that literacy is about empowerment, but it's about individual empowerment rather than about social change. It's not about asking questions about why people didn't learn how to read. It's just making sure people get driver's licenses. I really wanted to do more of the direct social change work. So I decided that I wasn't going to look for a job in the human service industry. Instead I was going to make myself available to organizations who may, in fact, be social service agencies, but who were interested in the social change aspects of it.

That was in 1990. I started to put feelers out and let people know I was available to do board training, staff development, project development, that kind of thing. In 1993, the local community foundation here hired me to run what they call their Neighborhood

Leadership Training Program. This program provides small grants to very grassroots, mostly volunteer neighborhood organizations.

The foundation was getting grants from grassroots groups that were almost illegible. And they said, if people are going to really start to do some of the work they want to do in their neighborhoods, they've got to be able to write a decent grant. So they started the program just as a grant writing program. I went to them and I said, "It's not just about writing the grant. It's really about how do you develop your neighborhood organization and develop a program in it in order to make a grant work. You can give people money, but if they haven't figured out how to engage other neighborhood people, if they haven't figured out how to do a time-line, how to hold themselves to a budget, all that kind of stuff, then they just get one grant and they don't do as well."

They knew they needed technical assistance to the grant projects. So that's what I do, and I continue in that project. I design and then deliver the training. We – meaning the six groups or eight groups that are selected each year – meet for a period of six months, once every three to four weeks. And then I meet with them individually to give them a hand writing a grant. I've been doing that now since '93.

That led us to the TNT work. Peg, who is now the Director of Neighborhood Planning but was at a lower level in the planning department then, was on the advisory committee for the community foundation. She decided that she wanted to see what I was doing. She came to the first session, and she just got so engaged with it that she said, "Do you mind if I come every time?" So she became part of the deal, which was great, being connected to a city employee. She had resources that we didn't have. She had the

Community Development Block Grants. She had the police bus that we could get on and ride around and see everybody's neighborhood. She had access to maps.

And through that, she introduced me to the Commissioner of Community Development and said, "We've got to organize our city in the same way that we're doing with this small effort of the six little neighborhood associations every year. We need to do that city-wide." So that's how it came about. It wasn't exactly clear what it was going to look like at that point, but she knew that we needed a better way to capture residents' points of view on what needed to be built into the city's neighborhood planning effort. Typically, you have a major issue or a crisis, and tons of people come out and yell and scream, but don't get organized for the long-haul around these issues. It's more a scattershot sort of a thing. She was looking to do more long-term planning, to have a process and a way of building community. I don't think these would be her words, but I think this was what she was wanting. She really wanted to build a sense of ownership and coalition and community among people who have a stake in their neighborhoods.

So she introduced me to the Commissioner; his name is Vito. He was brand new. He called himself the "Big Shovel" because he made sure that the snow got shoveled and the trash got picked up and all of that. But he's a really, really smart guy. He reads extensively, and he really understands about democracy.

I looked at what was going on as far as how Community Development Block Grants were being spent, and I said to him that if we were going to really develop neighborhood plans that were citizen-based, people needed to be around a table over the long haul, that we needed a build a process by which people could have those longer- term relationships and hear from each other what their particular needs are and see how the viewpoints of a

variety of different people fit together into an overall plan. He said, “Well, alright. I’m going to send you out into three areas of the city, and I want you to do what you’re doing with the community foundation in these areas of the city. Have people develop plans for their neighborhoods.” It was like: “OK, go yea forth.”

So I initially developed these coalitions. Vito went with me to a couple of the organizing meetings, because people would come to a meeting if the Commissioner was there. I put these mailing lists together, along with Peg, and we mailed invitations to people in these three areas of the city. We did a wide sweep. I mailed to churches, the grassroots neighborhood groups, agencies, and some of the small businesses and asked people to come to an organizing meeting of these coalitions. And we got a pretty good showing. We got the major players in most cases, although I’ll talk to you a bit later about who doesn’t come to the table.

We began to meet. And we met from October until the spring to begin to build relationships and create ways that we were going to talk to each other that were not just yelling at each other or not just, “I’m going to tell you my needs and I don’t want to hear yours.” We had to create a process where people would listen to each other.

I ran the coalition meetings initially. I did a lot of introductions, having people make sure that they knew who the other people were in the room. A lot of times when you go to public meetings, there isn’t any of that. We also set up the room so that we were around a big table or sitting in a circle with a bunch of tables all around, so people could see each other. It wasn’t set up so there was a head of the room and people sitting in rows. And that seemed really important.

Then we established ground rules for how we were going to talk to each other. I asked people to think about meetings that they had been in where they had had a successful meeting, what had made it successful, and how would they like to be treated in these meetings. I posted the answers on a big sheet of paper, and every meeting we brought them back and hung them up, and we reviewed them quickly for anybody that was new and to make sure that we were still on the same page. Some people found that terminally boring. They didn't want to do it: "Let's get to the real issues here. Let's get to the real thing." I just insisted on it, and it seems to have helped a lot.

Then we began to talk about defining the area that we really were addressing. Who was at the table? Who had a good mind about what was going on in the area? Who were we missing? And we began to do some outreach to those people. I would call people. Peg would call people. We would invite them to the next meeting. It took us about four or five months to build the relationships and to get the right people to the table.

And then we started talking about where we needed to go as a community. What were the main issues that were facing the community? What were people struggling with? Where did people find barriers?

There were very big differences in the three neighborhoods. The Northside is a predominantly Italian neighborhood. It's been the place where most immigrant groups have entered into the city. These are the small little working-class homes, very tightly packed in together. Teeny places. Lots of small businesses where people have lived upstairs from their businesses historically. There's a growing Asian population in that neighborhood. About 10,000 people from Southeast Asia have come to Syracuse in the last eight or nine years under the Catholic Diocese. It's also been a place where urban

Native Americans are settling, people who have come off the reservation and want to live in the city or who for one reason or another are living in the city. So there were a lot of ethnic tensions between those groups on the Northside.

The Southside is a predominantly African-American neighborhood, and there were lots and lots of small neighborhood groups, made up of four or five people who were just their own block captains or something like that, rather than the larger agency-type grassroots groups. On the Eastside, it was a lot more agency-type groups. We only focused on the near Eastside which is an area that has most of the low-income housing and has some of the more deteriorated single- and duplex-family housing as well. A lot of the youth agencies decided to get engaged, because there are a lot of young people on the Eastside. It's the most populated part of the city.

So there are very, very big differences in each section of the city. And that became increasingly true as we moved into the eight planning areas, to really be mindful of the unique differences between the various neighborhoods and how I had to organize—and how we all had to organize—differently in each section of the city.

For example, it was very clear on the Northside that we weren't going to be able to move very far until we had some better understanding among the various cultures that were there. So concomitantly to the development of the neighborhood planning coalitions – the coalitions still continued to meet monthly – we identified implicit leaders from each of the various ethnic groups on the Northside. I met with the people at the Southeast Asian Center and together with them, I identified a leader from Cambodia, a leader from the Hmong people, a leader from Vietnam, and a leader from Laos. Then I met with and talked with people from the Northside neighbors' group, which is a predominantly Italian

group, and identified a couple leaders from the Italian-American community there. And then I met with people from the North American Indian project, which was based on the Northside, and identified a couple of Native American leaders.

So we had a group of about twelve people who came together and met once a month for a year. It took us six months to pull that group of people together. There was so much distrust, people didn't want to even come to the table. But I kept meeting with people, kept talking to people, kept connecting people. There was a blow-up at one meeting around the development of a small pool hall for Southeast Asian kids; the Italian families didn't want that. That made people realize that they really did have to talk to each other because it became racially tinged.

This group of twelve leaders and I met once a month for a year, basically to talk about racism. I facilitated that, and that work was critical to the coalition being able to survive. We set ground rules again. And then I had them notice that they really didn't know each other very well, even though they were all leaders. I asked them if they had questions for each other. What did they want to know about each other? What were they wondering about each other?

One of the elder Italian guys, Joe, a shoe salesman who's a very big leader in the Northside neighbors' group, and he's in everybody's business all the time (I mean, in a good way, he just knows everything about the Northside) said, "I want to know why you people came and moved in and took over my neighborhood." Well, we were off on a merry chase! It was like, "Oh my God!" But because he was so direct and is just a no-bullshit kind of a guy, people started to talk about how they ended up in Syracuse and how they did, in fact, come in to live on the Northside. We never really revisited "take

over my neighborhood,” because what emerged out of that was this whole story from each of the people around the effect of the Vietnam War on their people, the role that they played and their families played in the Vietnam War that made it impossible for them to stay in Southeast Asia.

A whole host of stories came out of that. Incredible stories of people journeying down the Ho Chi Minh trail on a bicycle non-stop for 72 hours, fleeing. Amazing stories of living in refugee camps. And the Italian people began to connect that story with the story of their own immigration. We got out a map, and people looked at the map and really saw where Vietnam was, where Cambodia was, started to talk about the Khmer Rouge.

And I kept facilitating. I would occasionally interject a question, “Well, does somebody else want to talk about that?” Or “How did your parents get here from Italy and what was the circumstance there?” One of the issues that the Italians kept raising was that people wanted to raise chickens in their backyards. And they started talking about their own grandmothers who were raising chickens in *their* yards on the Northside. And it was like these light bulbs kept going on for people around immigration and what is immigration and why people leave their homeland and what happens when people have to leave their homelands.

So I just kept gently asking questions, “Where are the tensions in the community that need to be solved?” And some of these things, like the chickens, were coming up. Or that people didn’t know that you wrap your garbage and put it outside. They were flushing chicken heads down toilets, and “they rented my building and then there were chicken heads in the toilets,” and all this kind of stuff. So we began to really talk about that. And it gave clues to these four Asian leaders of where the tension was, and what kind of work

needed to happen out of the Southeast Asian Center to help people figure out the sewer system in Syracuse, for example. There are just some basic sorts of things that weren't there.

At one point, Joe had been really quiet for a couple of meetings. It was like the third or fourth meeting that we'd had. And I said to him, "You know, you've been really quiet. I'm wondering what you're thinking." Because he had just been listening to this and watching the maps and looking at people's faces. And a lot of things came out, where he'd say, "I can't tell the difference between you and you," and then Kia would say, "Well, I'm a Hmong woman, and Jeffrey is Cambodian, and we're completely different. Look at our faces, our faces are so different." And he would just look at them and say, "Hmmm." I had people pair up, and look at each other. I said, "Just look at each other's faces and look at each other's hair" and I did this guided meditation on each other's faces. They were just incredible. I mean, it made them crazy. But they did it. And I didn't do it for a long time. It would be, "Just take a look." And then we would switch, and I'd say, "Find somebody else that you don't know well. Just look at their face." We just did some of that kind of connecting up with people.

So finally, at the fourth session or so that we'd spent together, I asked Joe what was going on, what he was thinking about. And he said, "You know, I don't want to offend you," and he was looking at the Asian people. He said, "But I just have to tell you that I went to Korea and I was told by my government that I was supposed to hate you people." And he said, "I was given a bayonet and I was given a big sandbag and I was told every morning for an hour and a half to jam that bayonet into a bag and say 'Kill the gook.' And I did it every day, every day, every day, every day for two and a half years." And he

said, “And then I sent my son to Vietnam. And my son was supposed to kill you people. And now I’m thinking, maybe I got brainwashed by my government.”

I just started to cry. It was just this very powerful, powerful group. And as a result of that, at every Northside neighbors’ event now – they do a Memorial Day celebration in the park where they got the soldiers to reenact a war scene and they do a lot of Italian festivals – and in the last couple of years, the Hmong dancers are there, the Chinese dragon is there. They figured out that they need to work together. And two of the leaders of the Northside neighbors group came into the Neighborhood Leadership Training program and decided that they needed to do a joint project with the Southeast Asians.

So it’s that kind of growing and building work that I feel like I’ve been able to contribute to this effort, and that’s very different than the kind of organizing work that we had to do on the Southside, which was predominantly African-American grassroots neighborhood groups who had a lot of mistrust of me as a white woman. We had to do quite a bit of time building trust: “Why is the city here? Why would the city care? Obviously if the city cared, things would be in better shape than they are.” And I think we’re still in that process.

Now this was an interesting part of the organizing. After a little less than a year, the coalitions started to be very successful. People actually did start to work together. And right about that time, the Commissioner decided that he didn’t want me to do the work any more. Ostensibly, he said he didn’t have any more money to pay me. I think he was getting some pressure internally from some of the neighborhood planning staff who were not neighborhood planners, nor were they community organizers. They were political appointees of the Mayor. And they were not real thrilled about having to do night

meetings. They really didn't want to do this work. And I thought about it, and I thought about the relationships that were being developed and I made what I wasn't sure was a really good decision at the time. But I told him that I would continue to do the work until he found the money. I said, "I can't just abandon this effort. I think we're too far down the road here for us to just pull back, and I think it would be a mistake to do that." He said, "Well, do whatever you want to do." So for four months, I continued to do the community organizing work unpaid.

There was always this tension – and there continues to be this tension – around "Shouldn't the grassroots groups be organizing themselves? Why is the city providing the mailings and the staff support and all of that for this effort?" There's some real legitimacy to those concerns, because can you really challenge a city government to do better if you're being supported by city government? But deciding to do the work as a volunteer somehow gave me a level of legitimacy in my own mind, as well as in the minds of other people.

At that point, the director of neighborhood planning was let go, and Peg was appointed to become the Neighborhood Planning Director. She met with Vito and said, "We have to do this. We have to do this citywide. And we have to do this officially." I was out there with nothing from the city at this point. No maps. No statistics. No support. No GIS. No nothing. I was just meeting with people and just continuing to have people meet with each other and facilitating these meetings. And Vito kept saying, "Well, when are the people going to facilitate themselves?" And I said, "Well, you're right. We need to do that. We need to have official leaders. We need to select a training process for them, so that they get trained in how to run these meetings. You can't just throw people up in

front of a group of angry citizens and say, ‘Run a meeting.’” So I said, “There’s a whole lot that needs to go into this if we’re going to make this work.”

This was now in the spring, and the Mayor was running for re-election that fall. So Vito said, “Alright. Put a proposal together and we’ll go meet with the Mayor.” So that’s what I did. I wrote up my vision of what these neighborhood planning councils would look like. Obviously, I did it in consultation with a lot of other people; none of this work ever gets done alone. But I’m the person who sat down and conceptualized it, and wrote it up. People commented on it and offered ways to do it a little differently. We brought in the county planning director to help us look at how the city might be divided up into eight sectors. In retrospect, we probably should have had more than eight sectors, because they’re really huge. But we just didn’t have the planning staff to staff more than eight. We only have four planning staff, so they’re each staffing two of these sectors. It’s like thirty distinctly different neighborhoods within eight sectors. It’s just this huge organizing effort. So I wrote this all up. We met with a lot of the people who could provide technical support and technical advice. And we made some modifications and drew up some boundaries on some maps.

I pushed for the sectors to be divided in such a way that they weren’t just the outer circle of the city all meeting in its own sector and then the inner circle of the city meeting in its own sector, because the inner circle is a donut right around the downtown area, with the poorest neighborhoods, the neighborhoods that have mostly people of color, and the less-nice parks, and that kind of thing. And the outer circle of the city is where all of the pretty houses are, and the big lawns, and the nice parks. I was saying, “Let’s cut the city in wedges so that you go from downtown out in a wedge kind of way.” The idea was that

we would have communities of color with predominantly white communities, communities that have a higher socioeconomic ability with those communities that are used to struggling and used to organizing and pushing for what they're getting, so that they would learn from each other and would see themselves as part of a larger picture of bringing this city back.

And to a large extent, that was accepted. The Mayor made a few modifications in the wedges, specifically in a part of our city called Eastwood and another part of our city called the Valley. They are both predominantly European-American, more middle-class neighborhoods. And he said, "They really are villages unto themselves within the city." In fact, they used to both be villages and then were consumed by the city, and to try to do neighborhood planning across, in one case, a highway, and in another case, across this kind of invisible line just didn't make sense. And I think he was right, actually, in terms of where the relationships lie.

So Peg, Vito and I met with the Mayor. I pitched this to the Mayor. The Mayor decided this was a good idea, politically for him, as well as good for the city. We started a round of meetings where we went out to launch TNT, and the Mayor was the launching pad for that. People were very skeptical of it because it was a mayoral election time. I went with the Mayor to all of those meetings, presented the vision for TNT and asked people if they would be willing to constitute a neighborhood planning council in their section of the city. People offered suggestions and offered doubts and offered interest, and then I went around a second time, a month later. We called a second meeting, and I led those meetings where we identified a core team of people to serve as the facilitators for each of the planning councils for the first year. People put their names forward at the

second meeting, and then we did elections at the third meeting, and began working on the vision at the fourth meeting.

We had a county-wide visioning exercise, much like Chattanooga, Tennessee, had done. I went to the people running that effort and asked them to supply volunteers for us to do a brainstorming vision night for each of the new Neighborhood Planning Councils. They did that, and people began to identify what they wanted for their neighborhood. We asked people to think in terms of work, play, people, and government. Out of that, along with the neighborhood planning staff, I crafted a vision statement for each of the Neighborhood Planning Councils, which we then brought back to them. I began to work with each of the small teams of facilitators for each of these eight groups. Peg and I hired a training company to come in and do some training with them on how to run meetings, and how to facilitate and how to do planning. They were not so great. I wish I'd done it myself.

People had a lot of high hopes at the beginning. It was like, "Well, we know the Mayor's doing this because he's going to get re-elected, but *[tape ended, complete sentence]* ... The more complex issues started to emerge a little later.

There were groups who chose not to come to the table because they won't get involved in anything the government itself is running. I was a consultant to the government and paid by the government, so obviously we had our own agenda. There are people who use an Alinsky-style of organizing, which to me is not antithetical to what we're trying to do with TNT, but it is seen as antithetical by the purist Alinsky groups. There's one group on the Southside that is an Alinsky-style group, and they have never come to the TNT table. Interestingly, they're not an African-American group; their staff

is completely white, although they do organizing in the African-American community, But they represent the people and we don't, and so they wouldn't ever come to the table. That was tricky.

Also, the Southside went through this incredible three- or four-month process to find a place to meet in the community where the white people and the Black people felt like they were on neutral ground. They finally figured out that everybody felt comfortable meeting at one of the schools. So that's where they meet now. But they danced around. They went to the library, which is in the African-American community. And then they went to Most Holy Church, and that was in the white community. And when you went to Most Holy, only the white people came. And when you went to the library, only Black people came.

Some of these issues have just been incredible, and sometimes people have just chosen not to play. That's been hard, because you want people there at the table if things are being decided about their neighborhoods. They consider themselves to be the voice of the neighborhood association representing that neighborhood, but they don't want to come because the meeting's in the wrong place, or they don't feel safe, or that kind of stuff.

One of the things we did last year for the Southside is that we identified sixteen people who we thought were key to continuing the success of TNT. We divided it along racial lines and tried to recruit eight people from the white community and eight people from the African-American community. And we used the Community-wide Dialogue for Racial Healing process with them, which is one of my other projects. That's a six-session dialogue that is specifically on ending racism and promoting racial healing. We

use volunteers who have been trained through that process to come in and work with some of the leadership of that neighborhood planning council. So they have done that, and I think it was useful, and we need to continue to do that. We continue to bump along on these issues. It's massive.

One of the things that has galvanized us is that our Congressman, Congressman Walsh, became the chair of the Appropriations Committee for HUD. Two years ago, he secured \$5 million to do some revitalization and demolish a bunch of buildings that have needed to come down for a long time. Last year, he secured \$10 million. The TNT Neighborhood Planning Councils were able to pull out the plans that they did three years ago, and to say, out of those plans, how do we want to use this money? And they were able to advance forward a whole set of projects that they wanted to use this money for.

\$10 million is a lot of money, so a lot of people started coming to the table. That's good and bad, because are they really going to hang in there for the long haul with each other, or they just there to try to get their piece of the \$10 million and you won't see them anymore? Our whole intent is to build a sense of community and build a sense of working on these plans together.

I no longer facilitate all the meetings. My role now is to support of the leadership of the planning councils. So I call leaders regularly. I have an every-other-month meeting with them city-wide. I do a lot of work with the neighborhood planning staff, supporting them. They call me a lot and say, "How do I handle this situation?" Or "What should we do here?" I meet with them individually as well as as a group, and we brainstorm. I nudge and push for continued leadership growth and for new leadership in the planning councils. I design experiences for the leadership.

For example, people didn't understand the process of getting a building demolished and allowing something to be built. There's an historic building on a site where the Rite Aid wanted to put a drugstore, and people didn't want the building demolished. Dunkin' Donuts wanted to demolish an old-timey bowling alley in another one of the neighborhoods, and the neighbors didn't want the bowling alley demolished. So how do you prevent that from happening? How do you make sure that your neighborhood character doesn't become a Dunkin' Donut strip?

I designed a role play that we did over the course of an evening where everybody took on a different role, the various roles that you would have to play in order to understand how to get a bowling alley demolished in order for a Dunkin' Donut to go in there. Some people were the Dunkin' Donut developers. Some people were the City Planning Commission. We looked at how do you prevent that? Who are the decision makers?

I design training experiences or educational experiences for facilitators. I do a lot of trouble-shooting with facilitator teams. I have tried to move that as much as possible into the hands of the neighborhood planning staff because I'm on an annual contract every year. It's always at the whim of the commissioner whether he wants to continue to hire me, or at the whim of the Common Council whether they want to approve my contract.

I also set up and facilitate meetings annually – and recently, it has been more than annually – with the entire Common Council and our TNT leadership, so that the Common Councilors and the leadership are not feeling threatened by one another. There was a lot of threat of that at first. The Common Councilors said very directly to me, “Look, we have a representative democracy, not a direct democracy. And you're trying to

set up a direct democracy here, where people have a direct say in how, for example, this \$10 million gets funded. You're trying to create a way for people's voices to be bigger than their voices need to be, because they've elected us to do this kind of work." So we've had to straddle that and not to have the Councilors feel like the citizens who have a vested interest in their own streets or own neighborhoods are trying to take over the job they were elected to do.

I dealt with that by talking to the Councilors one-on-one and asking them to please come to their neighborhood planning meetings, to see that the neighborhood planning meetings were actually an asset, rather than a liability, to them. Most of them now come to their monthly meetings pretty regularly, whenever they can fit it into their schedules. So they are there, and it gives them some direct access to the representatives to all of the various neighborhood and agency associations in the area from which they've been elected. Now, unfortunately, the planning districts that were set up are different than the election districts. That means the Councilors have to attend two, or even three, planning council meetings each month. So that's been hard for them, but they actually have become quite supportive of TNT.

In December of '98, I had some of our very savvy neighborhood organizers tell me that they were unwilling to come to TNT meetings until the neighborhood planning idea and the neighborhood planning councils was written into law as the way that the city was going to do neighborhood planning. They said, "What's the point of investing our energy in this when two years from now, we're going to have a new mayor and a new system of neighborhood planning?" That's exactly what has happened in our city, years ago. When

Mayor Young left, the neighborhood planning effort that he put in place was scrapped. There was nothing for a while until TNT come into place.

So I said, “Let’s get an ordinance.” I convened a group of people over the course of about six months to write the ordinance. I researched other cities who have done an ordinance of this nature, got copies of their ordinance, and then after listening to everybody and reading other people’s legislation, I wrote a piece of legislation. Our small subcommittee worked it over and redid it a little bit, and then I rewrote it. We took it to what we call the Facilitator Coordinating Council, which is the group of people who lead the individual neighborhood councils. They looked at it. Then we submitted it to Corporation Council and they made some minor changes in it. And then a champion on Common Council, Nancy McCarty, brought it forward and Vito supported it, and they passed it unanimously. So they’re very supportive of TNT now as a process. But I’m sure the stronger TNT gets, the more people will question it. Whenever anything gets powerful, people start to question, “Was this a good idea?” And that’s OK. I think it’s fine to keep questioning that and for us to keep getting powerful.

We decided this last year to have an annual neighborhood summit, and I built that into the legislation. So in the fall, we’re going to have training and a big speaker and we’re initiating what we’re calling “Good Neighbor Awards” for people who are keeping up their properties, people who are helping out in the neighborhood in ways that are needed, people who work in agencies that are providing service to the neighborhood above and beyond the call of duty, things like that. We really are trying to be a force for positive change in the neighborhoods. So I’m facilitating the planning for that neighborhood summit as well. And I also do some grant writing.

There's way too much work for anybody to do, and I don't often feel a whole lot of support from anybody. I often feel like that person of four years ago, when the Commissioner said "I don't want to do this any more." Even though we have this whole process, we have brochures, we have maps, we have a relationship with the university, we have an ordinance, we have all this great neighborhood planning going on, I often feel like it's a house of cards and it could drop any minute. And I think that's actually true. If you don't keep paying attention to something, it will fail. And I think there are enough people who would like it to fail, because they don't want to see this level of citizen participation and they don't like going to meetings. The Mayor requires that every operating city department has somebody at these monthly meetings, so somebody from Public Works is supposed to be at the meeting, somebody from Code Enforcement ... They hate it. Well, I shouldn't say everybody hates it. A lot of people see the value of it. But for a lot more people, there's just this kind of negativity: "Let's kill it."

It has been hard to be a consultant. In some ways, I think it would be better if my role were on staff. For one thing, there would be a full-time person devoted to this, where right now, it's supposed to be twenty hours a month, which is ridiculous. In a low month, I probably put 45-50 hours into it. So I think having somebody full time working on it and pushing on it could be useful. Peg does do that, and her staff do do that. They're a very hardworking group of neighborhood planners. But this isn't their only job.

It's also hard for me because I do believe in the Alinsky style of organizing. So there is a bit of a dance that I'm still doing along the fence of working from the inside versus working from the outside. When I *read* Alinsky, I don't see Alinsky as being confused about when you need to work on the inside. But when I listen to people who think that

they're doing Alinsky organizing, it's always "Up against the system. Up against the system." If you have to "pin" the Mayor around a particular issue, how can you do that if the Mayor's people are sending out your mailings?

I think that there's some truth to that. I think that there's some deeper work, some more radical work, that needs to be done in this arena that can't be done by city government, and won't be done by city government, given the politics of this particular city. Some cities are more progressive, but in this city, that's hard. That's really hard for me.

The other thing that's hard for me, as an organizer, is I'm very opinionated, and as a facilitator, I have to remain neutral a lot of the time. I'm not sure that I do that successfully all the time, nor should I. For example, we're in the middle of a mayoral race right now, and there are two candidates that I think would actually be very good for mayor. I'd like to support them and help them figure out their primary. But I can't take a stand on that right now. Because if I say I'm going to support this particular candidate and somebody else wins, they could decimate our neighborhood planning effort. They could take the ordinance and do as little as possible instead of really supporting it. So that's really tricky for me. It stops me from doing some of my own political organizing work.

And maybe I stop myself; I'm not sure. I do think it's true around the candidates. But the Citizen Review Board has not been as successful here as lot of us would have liked. I participated in a rally about that, and it was on the steps of City Hall. Peg was watching from her window, and when I saw her later that day for a meeting, she said, "You'd better watch whether you decide to participate in those kinds of rallies or not." And I said,

“Wow! I’m a citizen first. You think that would jeopardize our neighborhood planning work that I’m pro-Citizen Review Board?” ... “Well, you have to be really careful.” That kind of thing – that’s hard.

Also, I don’t feel like I have enough access to Vito, who’s really a good thinker on these issues. He’s so busy. I would really like to have more access to his thinking about democracy in our city. I feel like I’m doing that a lot on my own.

I’m most proud of the leadership development side of it. It has been so great to see people who didn’t think they were leaders be leaders. Or people who had a smaller life now have a much bigger life. To see that people do understand how to prevent their bowling alley from getting destroyed. That people do understand how to get a house torn down in their neighborhood if they need to. That people do understand much more about the politics and the dynamics of the politics in the city – politics with a small “p.” And I’m really, really proud of the anti-racism component of this. I think that’s been one of the greatest parts of it. We’re a long, long, long way from finishing that. But it has been central to what we’re doing and I’m really proud of that.

A lot of the leadership development has been straight-out training. I’ve done a lot of training for people on how to run meetings, how to set ground-rules, how to handle themselves when things get sticky in a group. I’ve done a lot of leadership training around how do you organize your committee structures, how do you recruit new people, how do you orient people, how do you take the work seriously? I’ve done some straight-up training around that and then I’ve done a lot, lot, lot of one-on-ones with people around that kind of thing.

I received training in doing the one-on-ones from the Gamaliel Foundation, an organization based in Chicago using an Alinsky-style method of organizing. They talk about the one-on-ones as having three primary purposes. The first is to give people a chance to tell their story. One of the things that Alinsky always talked about – and I totally agree with him – is that unless people get a chance to tell their story, they don't get a chance to evaluate their lives in the context of those stories and to see how their story fits into the larger story or myth of the society as a whole.

A big part of the one-on-ones is just listening to people, finding out what are the stories that have made them the person that they are. What have been the high points and low points of their lives? You only have a half an hour to do your initial one-on-one with somebody, and so, as an organizer, you have to be willing to be brave around asking hard questions. For example, I just did a one-on-one with an African-American man who's part of our leadership training. Willie's working in the African-American community out of a small chapel to try to provide counseling and other kinds of recreational support services to about fifteen young men. Here I am, a white woman, trying to understand what makes him tick. So I asked him what it's like for him to have grown up African-American in Syracuse. It just opened this whole floodgate. He talked about having gone to the Million Man March, what the experience of being with all those men was like for him, and how it motivated him to come back and try to give back to his community.

Giving people the opportunity to have somebody listen to them really well about their story can be profound for people. It's very much in concert with the thinking of Re-evaluation Counseling, in which I've also been trained. Not only do people get to have somebody listen to them, but they get to hear their own story. And then they get to have

that reflected back to them in a way that's like "Oh, my life is bigger than the little life I think I'm living. And the oppression that I'm suffering isn't just directed at me." When I took the Gamaliel training, we were supposed to meet one-on-one with at least twenty people over the course of the week; I just cried a lot that week. I was really aware of how my work was and wasn't moving the city forward, and where I was selling out, and where I was not really taking the bold stance that needed to be taken, and how that was connected to feeling bullied by my sister. To me, if people are able to tell some of those early stories, they get to see how that early story is connected to how they are today.

In the story telling, people get clarity about where they've suffered and where they have made it, where their life struggles have been and where they have overcome their the things that have been placed before them. And I think the other piece of clarity that people get is about connection, that they're not doing this struggle alone. So many times, when I'm working with neighborhood leaders, people say, "I thought I was alone in this. I thought I was the only one who cared that things were deteriorating, that the kids didn't have anything to do. I thought I was struggling by myself." And when they begin to see their connection with other people who are doing the work, it's very empowering. It's like this "aha." The scales fall away from the eyes and people get going, feeling better about their work. It's that kind of thing that happens in the storytelling.

The second thing that the one-on-ones do is to help us, as organizers, figure out who people are connected to. The story that I tell a lot is around my own mother. People would look at my mother and think, "Well, she's just a retired secretary. She lived her life working for some guy in a bank, making her \$15,000 a year and then getting a raise to \$18,000. Whoop-de-doo." But because my mother was the secretary to the bank

president, she was the person that everybody came to when they needed money from the bank. If you were going to take the Boy Scouts on a trip and you needed somebody to pay for a bus, you came to my mother to get the money for the bus. My mother was also on the racial justice committee for her church, and she was one of the initial people to integrate the schools in our community. And on and on and on. My mother has these incredible stories, but if you just *looked* at my mother and thought of her just as a secretary, you would miss all the relationships and connections that she has.

So the second thing you do in a one-on-one is figure out who comes to the table with this person and how that connection is going to help us when we have an action that we need to take or when we have to strategize about how to make something change. I was laughing with Willie yesterday about the fact that when he comes to the table, he brings a million men with him.

The third thing that you're looking for in the one-on-one is "What is it that is this person's self-interest?" And by that I mean, "What is it that makes them really get going?" Because that's how they're going to plug into or not plug into your neighborhood or other kind of community organizing. So, for example, if you're trying to clean up a neighborhood and you go in to do a one-on-one with the local grocery store that's allowing a lot of kids to hang out front, you can talk about the self-interest of that owner, saying, "If you allow this to continue, the people in the neighborhood aren't going to keep supporting your store." That's his self-interest: making sure that his store is well-patronized. So you turn him into becoming a good neighbor rather than a bad neighbor by hearing his story, by figuring out connections, and importantly, by figuring out what his self-interest is. A lot of times I've found people who have incredible stories to tell and

have lots of good connections, but they really aren't plugged into what we're trying to do in the neighborhood. So that's been fun and tricky, helping people figure out how their self-interest gets served by what we're trying to do.

I think the job of a community organizer is to identify the issues and then to identify leadership and grow that leadership to address those issues. I love this one story that I heard about Saul Alinsky where he went into a community where he'd sent an organizer. The guy had organized this huge meeting, and there were tons of people in the room. He was upfront, and the people were inspired, and he was leading the people. And Saul was standing in the back of the room with another organizer watching this whole thing, everybody all pumped up. And Saul says, "I'm going to fire that guy Monday." And the second guy says, "Why?" And Saul said, "Because a good organizer is not upfront of his people. And a great organizer isn't even at the hall the night of a meeting."

To me, a good organizer helps to strengthen the skills of other people to take on the work. And to me, that's what TNT has done. TNT is running without me. TNT is going great guns – in variable ways. It's greater in some parts of the city than in others. But it's going to run whether I'm there or not. And I'm really, really pleased about that.

So that's the core skill for a community organizer: how to develop leaders. One of the things that I've brought to this work is my adult education background. I have a masters' in adult education. I've read Myles. I've read Paulo. I've read Malcolm—all these people who've done so much around how do you help people take charge of their lives. I think the theoretical background of all of that has been invaluable to me.

I also have lots and lots of training and experience in group facilitation, so that has been a very important skill: how to run a meeting, how to make sense out of chaos, how

to help people take the million ideas rumbling around and to get clear about what's really the focus here, where we really need to go. And I've got a lot of skills in listening to people and helping people talk through their own confusion to their own clarity. I'd like to do more of that. I'd like to do lots more of the one-to-one stuff because I think that that's where it is. It's the friendships, it's the personal relationships, that build the movement.

I've been amazed at how hard people are willing to work and how much they want to give of themselves if the work is meaningful. People will only stay at the table if they're able to see that their efforts are actually advancing the common good.

I think the other thing I've noticed in this work is that people's lives are really, really hard. People are up against incredible odds economically. They're up against incredible odds around workaholicism. They're up against really hard lives trying to do jobs and raise children and be good community workers, to be out there doing the work of changing their little part of the planet. People take a lot of beating, not necessarily physical beating, although sometimes that's going on too. But there's just the grind of trying to keep changing things so that it's better for themselves and better for their families and better for their communities. It makes people really crazy. People get urgent about stuff. People get disconnected from each other. A lot of the work of a community organizer ends up really helping people continue to work toward clarity for themselves.

It seems to me that our major job is to help people get clear about what they want, because then people will figure out how to get it. I do believe that power only concedes to power. People can't have power given to them; power has to be taken. I've invented this game that we play at the Neighborhood Leadership Training Program. I give people

power cards and then I throw power cards all around the room. And then I ask them to get up and trade for the power that they want. Invariably, they don't pick up the power that's lying around in the room. And what I've noticed, doing the TNT organizing, is there's tons of power laying around on the floor that nobody's picking up. I'm really about helping people pick up the power that's laying around on the floor *and* then stand up against the power that is not on the floor, that's in the hands of other people inappropriately.

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