

Mattapan Reporter

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CDC convenes stakeholders for breakfast meeting

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The Mattapan Community Development Corporation (CDC) convened the second in a series of breakfast conferences on Tuesday morning. The event drew more than 100 Mattapan residents, merchants and stakeholders, who chatted over eggs and coffee at the Foley Senior Residences on River Street before settling in for an hour-and-a-half presentation on the CDC's latest initiatives.

The non-profit CDC discussed its various projects, including new and emerging collaborations with other community agencies aimed at reaching out to neighborhood youth and struggling homeowners. The centerpiece of the morning session was a discussion of how the modernization and expansion of the MBTA's Fairmount commuter rail could trigger new development across Mattapan's mid-section.

The goal of the Mattapan CDC breakfast series, said executive director Spencer DeShields, is to engage residents and stakeholders in developing a vision for the community's continued growth.

"It is the CDC's commitment and it is my commitment to make sure that the community is in lockstep with our progress in improving our Mattapan neighborhoods," DeShields said.

Like CDCs across the city, Mattapan CDC is primarily focused on redevelopment and housing-related projects, including its proposal to create Morton Street Homes, a new construction of 48 affordable rental units on Morton Street that is now slated to begin in spring 2009. The CDC is also finalizing a proposal to develop a new mixed-use building on what is presently an MBTA parking lot adjacent to Mattapan Square's trolley and bus depot. Mattapan CDC is partnering with Dedham-based Economic Development Finance Corp. According to DeShields, the five-story building will include commercial space on the first floor with roughly 150 units of rental units above. The Residences at Neponset Crossing — as the project is dubbed — will be the largest development undertaken by the CDC since its foundation in 1996. The redevelopment is fueled in part by an MBTA push to lease land around its stations to raise revenues and spur economic development in places like Mattapan Square and Ashmont, where a new "transit-oriented development" project has resulted in The Carruth, a just-completed, six-story building along Dorchester Avenue.

But the CDC's focus goes beyond traditional bricks and mortar projects.

At Tuesday's meeting, the organization announced collaborations with other Mattapan-based organizations such as the Morton Street Board of Commerce, the B-3 police and the Haitian American Public Health Initiative.

One key feature of the morning's presentation was the CDC's move to address the increasing rate of foreclosures in Mattapan. There have been approximately 195 foreclosed homes in Mattapan in the last two years, according to Karen Ricketts, director of community relations for Mattapan CDC. The CDC announced Tuesday that it will partner with the Haitian American Public Health Initiative in Mattapan Square to launch a new initiative dubbed the Greater Mattapan Foreclosure Education Center.

"It hurts to see so many boarded-up homes as you drive through the city,"



Over 100 residents and stakeholders turned out for Mattapan CDC's community breakfast on Tuesday morning at the Foley Senior Residences on River Street. Pictured above (l-r) are Larry DosSantos, John Judge, Lillie Searcy, Spencer DeShields and Steve Howard. Story, page 2. Photo by Rich Moore/SuperStar Photography.

said Ricketts. "I have been there and it is a difficult painful road, but I came back from it. We may not be able to help the city but we can do something about Mattapan."

Ricketts and DeShields described the emerging project as one that "will merge the foreclosure prevention and intervention efforts of the Mattapan Community Development Corporation and the foreclosure prevention and 1st Time Homebuyers counseling/advocacy efforts of the Haitian American Public Health Initiative under one broad foreclosure intervention, education and prevention strategy." The initiative would seek to create a task force of neighborhood residents, lenders, banks and city agencies to "battle against an emerging effort of 'land seizures' by developers outside of the Mattapan community."

Lillie Searcy, executive director of the ABCD Mattapan Family Service Center on River Street, noted that her organization has been actively counseling local homeowners in crisis for the last year-and-a-half.

Danny Hardaway, director of the Morton Street Board of Commerce, joined Larry DosSantos, owner of 912 Auto Body, in a presentation on a new job training program that DosSantos intends to launch for neighborhood teens and young adults.

"There is a gap amongst the young adults we serve," said Hardaway. "Many community centers work with

kids to the age of 15 or 16, but what about the youth ages seventeen to 21? We are leaving them out. There are trade schools out there but they are not here [in Mattapan]. I want to bring this into our community."

DosSantos, who serves as the vice president of MSBC, will said that the 912 Automotive Technology Training Center will open in the fall of 2008. Its mission, he said, will be to work to increase opportunities for employment training and job placement in trades such as auto body, technology and retail. DosSantos has been training and mentoring neighborhood youth in an informal way for years.

"I want to give my whole heart to the youth of our community," said DosSantos. "This is a holistic approach to engaging youth in critical thinking and to build up the community."

The CDC also discussed its plans to partner with the Boston Police Department Area B3 Community Services office to counsel young students on seeking admission to colleges and universities. Police officer Patrice Bennett said that the police and the CDC would seek to connect promising students to campus tours and admission officers.

A significant portion of the morning's meeting was devoted to a presentation by employees of SAS Designs, an urban planning and architectural firm contracted by a consortium of four CDCs—including Mattapan's—to study

the potential redevelopment impacts of the Fairmount commuter rail line, which slices through the center of the neighborhood. The MBTA has recently completed work to upgrade the Morton Street station of the line and has begun discussions with community residents aimed at siting a new station between Cummins Highway and Blue Hill Avenue.

In the second of three presentations in Mattapan, consultants from SAS Designs showed maps and renderings of the neighborhood — and pointed to the commuter rail corridor as a prime area of potential growth in the future.

After watching the presentation on the Fairmount Line's potential impacts to the neighborhood, one local resident — Mary Burks — expressed concern that Mattapan residents be included in any emerging plans for how to shape new developments along the line.

"We do not need another organization coming to us with their plans already decided and presenting to us what they will be doing to our neighborhoods," said Burks. "All that leads to is constant shuffling back and forth and in the end nothing is getting done. The input of residents should be heard. Let us tell you what we need."

The Mattapan CDC office, currently located at 1514 Blue Hill Ave, is scheduled to move onto the Foley Campus on River Street this April. For more information on the breakfast series contact Michele Scott at 617-296-2000.



More than 100 Mattapan residents and stakeholders turned out for Tuesday morning's breakfast and meeting sponsored by Mattapan CDC. It was the second in a series of breakfasts planned by the non-profit organization. Photo by Rich Moore/SuperStar Photography