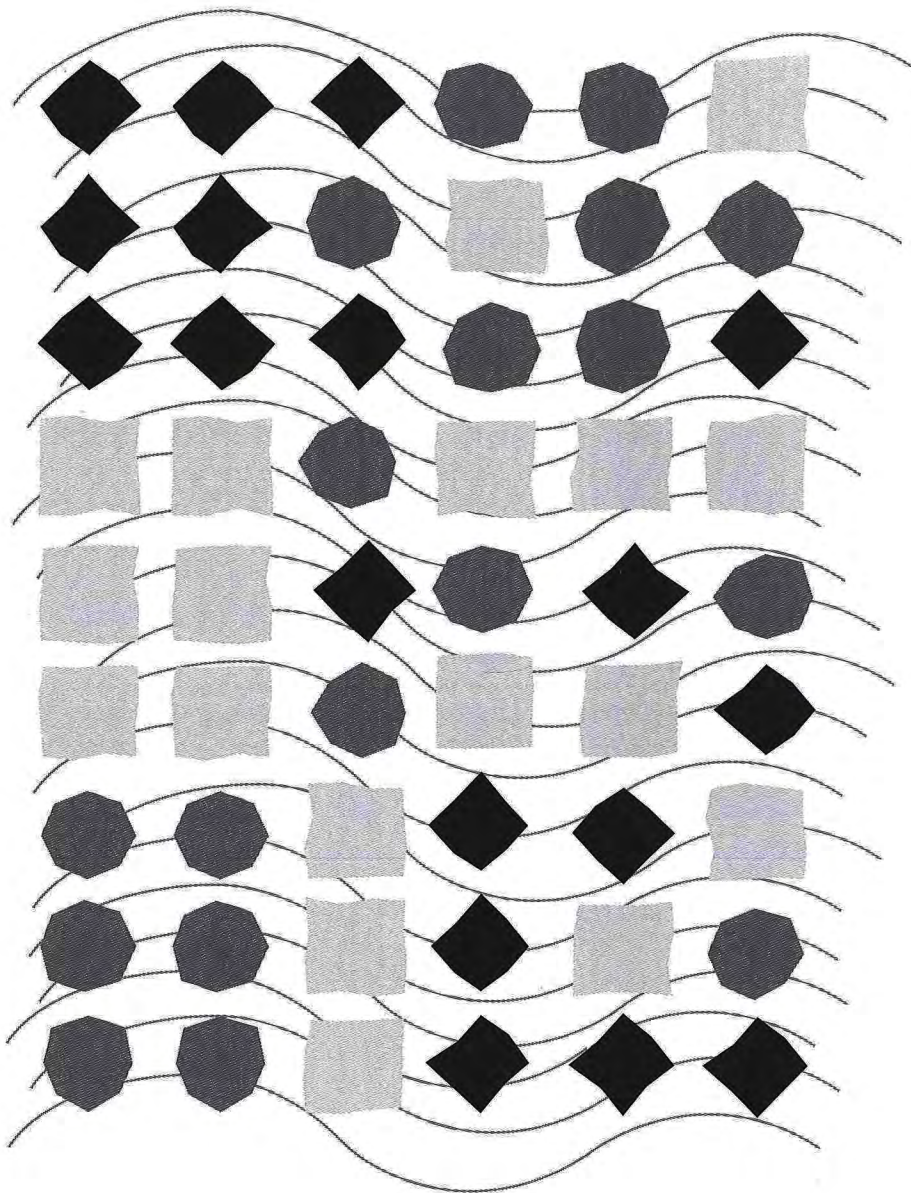


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1995  
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# BUILDING COALITIONS FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

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## DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE Boston, Massachusetts

### SUMMARY OF SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

#### Initial Reasons For Including This Project as a Finalist

- The project deals with some of the most critical urban problems: how to turn around an area that is very poor and extremely blighted. If Dudley Street is successful, its accomplishment will be great.
- The plan represents a large, ambitious, creative, and comprehensive vision for the area.
- Community ownership of the land is innovative and very unusual.
- Reclaiming an area that had been a dumping ground for trash and other pollutants is an important environmental achievement.
- The housing and park developments appear to have been done well and to have had significant community input.

#### Selection Committee Concerns and Questions

- What is the make-up of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative group?
- Was there real community participation? What were the roles? Was there real empowerment? Has community activism been sustained or expanded?
- What was the role of the city in this project? Was there a partnership?

- Did the demographics of the area change (has there been gentrification or are the original people still there; as people improve their situations, do they stay in the area or leave it)? What has happened to property values? Is there data to document changes in the community? Was there a survey of physical and social conditions before and after the project?
- What kind of leadership has emerged? What has been the impact on individuals' growth and development — what are their stories?
- What has been completed so far? Why did the project take ten years? Did it lead to other projects in the area?
- What is the quality of building design and site planning?

### THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

#### What It Is

- The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a community-based organization consisting of residents and representatives of social service agencies, business, youth and other constituencies. It is active in a large section of Roxbury and Dorchester near downtown Boston. One project, Winthrop Estates, 36 units of owner-occupied housing, was submitted as an example of the group's work.

### Who Made Submission

- The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI).

### Major Goals

- To provide a voice for community concerns leading to action addressing them.
- To stop the devastation of the neighborhood.
- To see that the neighborhood is rebuilt and provided with services and jobs (but, generally speaking, not to do this work itself).

### Accomplishments

- DSNI has stopped the deterioration of the worst part of Roxbury and Dorchester and begun to turn around the neighborhood.
- The devastation of arson, neglect, disinvestment, and illegal dumping has been reversed. The area is much cleaner and safer than it was in even the recent past.
- A land trust has been organized, administered by Dudley Neighbors, Inc., which been granted eminent domain power over empty land in a 30 acre area. The use of these mechanisms to capture vacant and abandoned land for community benefit is innovative.
- 36 units of housing have been developed for sale by DSNI. At the time of the site visit, all units were completed and almost all had been sold and were occupied, with the last few expected to close escrow soon after the Selection Committee met in Spring 1995. Several other groups have built new housing (generally co-op apartments or houses offered for sale to owner occupiers) on land assembled by the land trust.
- The group is an extraordinary example of grassroots, bottom-up organizing and appears to have kept its close ties to residents and community/service organizations. It has grown greatly in capability and influence and is now viewed by the city as the legitimate voice of the community.

### Issues That Could Affect Selection As Winner

- The organization has grown to have about 2,000 members, 15 staff (about half minority) and an annual budget of over \$1 million — yet it is firmly committed to limit itself to planning and organizing, leaving service provision and project development to others. While DSNI's accomplishments are extensive, its million dollar budget could be considered to be high for such functions.
- The project put forward as an example of its work, Winthrop Estates, is not its most impressive accomplishment. Such development is not part of its mission and the project itself was rather expensive, required large subsidies to home buyers, and is of average design quality.

## PROCESS

### Chronology

- **1984.** Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative is started (see below for the interesting way in which this happened).
- **1986.** First clean-up campaign ("Don't Dump on Us"). DSNI gets the city to clean up some vacant land and annual neighborhood clean-ups begin. In 1987, DSNI successfully pressures the city to close three illegal trash transfer stations.
- **1987.** DSNI hires a consultant to facilitate resident involvement in developing the area master plan which is subsequently adopted by the city as the "official" plan.
- **1988.** "Take a Stand, Own the Land" campaign obtains eminent domain powers from the Boston Redevelopment Authority. A land trust, Dudley Neighbors, Inc. (DNI), is formed to exercise eminent domain powers and retain ownership of the parcels. In 1992, the Ford Foundation loaned DNI \$2 million for land acquisition.
- **1989.** Physical planning is undertaken for development of the Dudley Triangle (core area). In the next years, resources

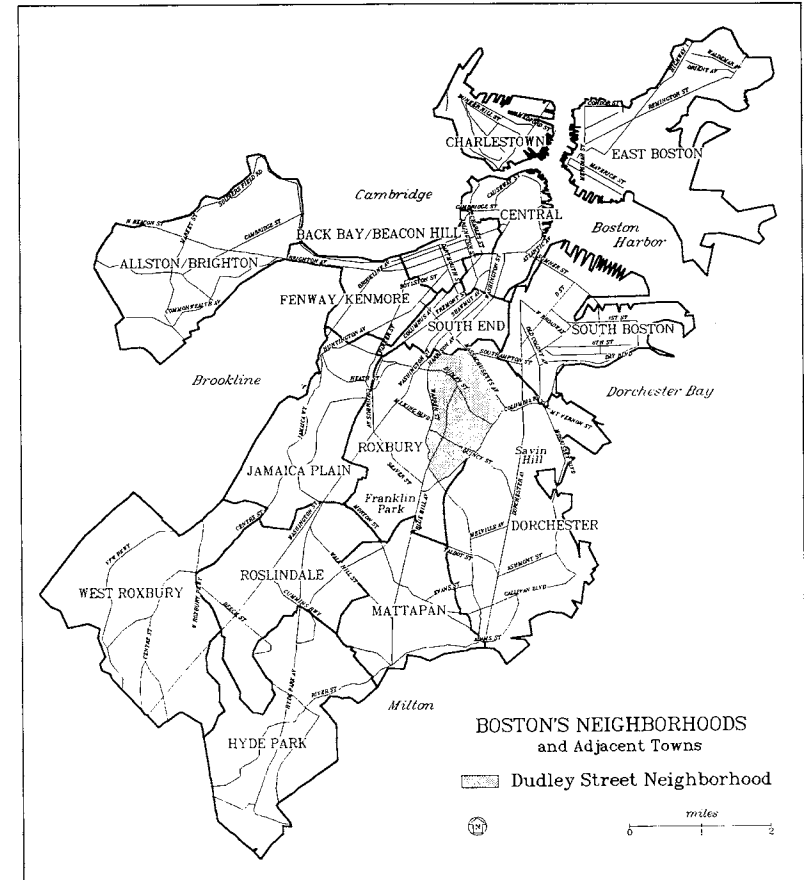
are assembled and legal and regulatory conflicts are resolved.

- 1990. Major emphasis is given to human and economic development programs (ongoing).
- 1992. Winthrop Estates construction is started.
- 1994. Third phase of Winthrop Estates is completed. At the time of the site visit, sales were essentially complete, with three units still to close escrow. DSNI is selected as a participant and grantee in the Annie Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities program.

### Key Participants

(people we interviewed are indicated with an asterisk \*)

- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)
  - Staff: Al Lovata\*, interim Executive Director; Tom McCullough\*, Development Director; Ros Everdel\*, Director of Organizing; Sue Beaton\*, Deputy Director (for development; managed Winthrop Estates project and currently manages rehab of furniture factory); David Medina\* (youth organizer). Prior executive directors include: Peter Medoff; Gus Newport (formerly mayor of Berkeley, CA); and Rogelio "Ro" Whittington.
  - Board of Directors (several also head community agencies): Che Madyun\*, President; Clayton Turnbull, Vice President; Bob Hass\* (Deputy Director of Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation); Debra Wilson\* (resident in Winthrop Estates); Sister Margaret Leonard\* (Executive Director of Project Hope); Jason Webb and Tchintcia Barrios (co-chairs of Nubian Roots youth group); Mary Gunn\* (executive director of Bird Street Community Center) and residents Paul Bothwell\* and Jacquie Cairo-Williams\*. The Board has 27 members with slots allocated to ethnic groups, local service organizations, business, and youth.
- Dudley Neighbors, Inc. (administers land trust): Paul Yelder\*, Executive Director.
- Nubian Roots youth group: Sunni Muhammad\* (see Board list for co-chairs).



- Mabel Louise Riley Foundation (original and continuing supporters of DSNI): Robert Holmes\*, Trustee and Newell Flather\*, Administrator.
- City of Boston, Public Facilities Department: Deborah Goddard\*, Deputy Director.
- Architect for Winthrop Estates: The Primary Group (Kirk Sykes\* and Steven Paradis\*).
- Neustra Comunidad Development Corporation: Evelyn Friedman-Vargas.



- Marketing consultant for Winthrop Estates: Sandy Bagley\*.
- Henry Thayer\* of Rackemann, Sawyer and Brewster; and David Abromowitz\* of Goulston and Storrs, pro bono lawyers from downtown firms who assisted DSNI.
- Marian Shark\*, Annie E. Casey Foundation; Ricardo Millett\*, former executive director of Roxbury Multi-Service Center and program officer at Kellogg Foundation. Melinda Marble\*, Philanthropic Initiatives (formerly with the Boston Foundation).

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### The Birth of DSNI

The birth of DSNI is a remarkable story (told in detail in *Streets of Hope* and recounted to us in several interviews). In the early 1980s, devastation of the area was increasing even though a variety of city, social service, and community organizations were active there. Their efforts were not particularly effective and the neighborhood was not well organized.

Meanwhile, the Riley Foundation had been making grants to some these organizations as well as in other parts of the city. Riley's trustees began to realize that their grants, by being dispersed, were not having a substantial impact and decided to search for an area to target for concentrated intervention.

Riley staff identified the portions of Roxbury and Dorchester which are now DSNI as the area in greatest need of help. Riley began by contacting agencies active in the area, inviting them to meetings, and discussing possible strategies for interventions Riley might support. After some months, this collection of agencies called a community meeting to inform residents about a planned program of support. The meeting turned out to be explosive, with some community members questioning the legitimacy of the agency representatives who, perhaps without thinking of the symbolic message, had placed themselves above the audience on a stage. One resident, Che Madyun (who became a key figure in DSNI and is currently the president of its board), asked whether any on the stage actually lived in the area they were proposing to help.

The Riley people and others got the message clearly that for an organization to work effectively in the community it had to include grassroots community members. At this meeting, it was decided to regroup and form committees from the neighborhood to recommend a more representative structure. These committees worked for several months before proposing a structure (which was accepted and is still followed) that included a complex formula for representation of residents from various ethnic groups, local agencies and other interest groups.

### The Riley Foundation as Partner

The relationship between DSNI and the Riley Foundation is highly unusual. As described above, Riley has been there since the beginning, helped the group find an appropriately representational organization, and has contributed almost \$1 million to it over the past 10 years. Despite this close relationship, Riley has never accepted, or even wanted, a seat on the Board and has never tried to dissuade DSNI from pursuing the directions it believed to be right, even if Riley wasn't convinced. Thus, Riley has been the most effective of patrons, encouraging DSNI to grow, find its own way, and solve its own problems. Riley says that it has an ongoing commitment to support DSNI "for the foreseeable future."

### Neighborhood Decline

DSNI represents an area with a population of about 24,000 people. In that area live some of the poorest, most ethnically diverse and most disadvantaged Bostonians. For DSNI's purposes, its overall area is divided into two parts: an inner core of about 60 acres and an outer area of about 1.5 square miles.

Only two miles from downtown, the inner core has been described as the most devastated part of Boston subject to population loss, redlining, illegal trash dumping, abandonment, and arson-for-profit.

At the time of the plan, about 1,300 parcels (30% of the total) were vacant, many as a result of arson carried out to claim insurance money or for other shady economic reasons. For years, it was the site of illegal dumping, which grew as the amount vacant land increased. There were three illegally operating trash transfer sites which brought noise and pollution to the area, and probably

dumped at least some of their loads on streets and empty lots. The area seemed to be trapped in a spiral of decline.

At the same time in the mid-1980s there was the potential for great speculative development pressure on the neighborhood. The Boston Redevelopment Agency published a plan for Dudley Station that included highrise hotels and offices. This threat may have contributed to the impetus for DSNI to organize the neighborhood, as many residents expressed concern that the displacement that urban renewal had brought to the South End could happen to them.

### Neighborhood Profile

The Dudley Street neighborhood is characterized by the following statistics:

Population	23,361
Race	
White	12%
African-American	63%
American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2%
Other (many of which are Cape Verdean)	23%
Hispanic Origin	23%
Unemployment Rate	15%
Poverty Rate	32%

(Source: General Accounting Office, "Community Development: Comprehensive Approaches Address Multiple Needs But are Challenging to Implement," February 8, 1995; page 20. Many statistics quoted from the 1990 Census.)

The core neighborhood (representing about two-thirds of the area described in the table above) had been almost entirely white (and about 5% African-American) in 1950. By 1960, it was about 20% African-American; and by 1970, it was over half African-American (53%). In 1980, it was only 14% white, still over half African-American (54%), and 29% "other". This was the first census that recorded Hispanic origin and the area reported 28%. The population of the core had declined from over 38,000 in 1950 to about 15,000 in 1980 (where it remained in 1990).



*Before DSNI: Illegal Dumping*

DSNI reports population shifts too recent to be reflected in the 1990 Census, including the arrival of significant numbers of Haitian Blacks. DSNI is considering revamping its board structure to represent this shift. It does not appear that the projects undertaken by DSNI (or others) have had an adverse impact on neighborhood demographics in the sense of gentrification or displacement.

#### **DSNI's Mission: Community Organizing — Not Providing Services or Development**

DSNI began as a focus for organizing the community and has continued with a variety of campaigns. It is recognized by the city as the legitimate voice of the community and has, thus, become effective at representing the community in efforts to get action in response to its problems.

Because the DSNI board includes many local agencies and service providers (as well as residents), it has generally not chosen to fill the role of service provider or project developer. The two CDCs active in the area, Neustra Comunidad Development Corporation and the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, have seats on the board and are thought of as the appropriate medium for such work.

Rather, DSNI has defined its function as community organizing and planning (see the section on Winthrop Estates for discussion of a major exception to this rule). Action projects and plans prepared by DSNI always include extensive resident involvement. An example of this is the so-called DAC neighborhood plan, described below.

DSNI also holds regular meetings of local agencies to improve coordination and collaboration. The Agency Collaborative, convened by DSNI, has 26 active members and almost 50 more on its mailing list. DSNI may also help agencies and CDCs to gain community (resident) input into their plans and projects. It fulfilled this role for Dorchester Bay EDC and has helped the Bird Street Youth Center resolve conflicts that arose over evening softball games in a local park. As one agency head who serves on the DSNI board put it, DSNI “challenges” them to be responsive to resident needs.

#### **The DAC Plan**

Following successful organizing around cleanup campaigns, DSNI recognized the need for a comprehensive strategy and plan for the area. They also wished to ensure that the plan would be controlled and developed by the community, not by a city entity — and they managed to convince the city Public Facilities Department to participate in their process (rather than vice versa).

DSNI hired their own consultant, DAC International, who provided professional and technical expertise as well as organizing a process of significant input from the board and community. Several subcommittees (involving 200 residents) did much of the work and a number of large community meetings were held.

The resulting plan is comprehensive in dealing with physical, social and economic conditions. It includes thirteen development strategies covering physical revitalization, human services, employment and training, and economic development.

The plan, completely owned by the community, gained acceptance by the city and was adopted as the “official” joint city-DSNI plan for the area — a precedent-setting collaboration in Boston. The main directions of the plan remain as guiding goals and principles, though many specifics have been changed in the intervening eight years.



### **The Land Trust and Eminent Domain: The Power to Acquire Vacant Land**

The “crazy quilt” pattern of land ownership was recognized as a major obstacle to effective rehabilitation. There were 1,300 vacant parcels in the core, but the City of Boston owned only about one-third of them. While those lots could have been made available, it was thought to be essential to assemble scattered lots into larger parcels so that redevelopment could proceed at a reasonable pace and projects could have greater impact.

DSNI recognized eminent domain as the appropriate mechanism to accomplish this and asked its *pro bono* attorneys to research how it could be exercised. They reported that this power could either be held by the city or delegated by the city to an acceptable entity. DSNI determined that it should have that power and, based on its track record in organizing and planning, eventually succeeded in convincing the city to delegate to it eminent domain rights over vacant land within the most devastated 30 acres of the inner core. According to *Streets of Hope*, DSNI became “the first community in the nation to win the right of eminent domain.” (page 119)

Dudley Neighbors, Inc. (DNI) was established in 1988 as the vehicle to exercise eminent domain and to retain ownership of the parcels in a land trust — rather than passing ownership through to developers. This somewhat complex arrangement allows the community to exercise on-going control of land use, limiting speculative (or even inflationary) profits in order to keep housing affordable. DNI provides long term leases on the land underlying projects (such as the houses described below) with covenants that limit transfer and profit.

Many legal and political conflicts had to be resolved before eminent domain and the land trust could be implemented. One milestone that helped greatly was agreement by the Ford Foundation to loan \$2,000,000 to DNI at a very low interest rate (1%) to pay acquisition costs. This would be repaid from development fees as projects were completed to form a revolving pool. In fact, none of the Ford money was ever used for acquisition because each development so far has been able to draw on other sources. DNI has been able to arbitrage these funds and is asking Ford to “reprogram” the loan to allow it to be used for other purposes.

### **DSNI as the Reluctant Developer: Winthrop Estates**

While several other projects have been built in the area by various community developers, DSNI had the most involvement in Winthrop Estates and featured it in its submission for the Bruner Award.

Winthrop Estates provides 36 units of owner occupied housing built on parcels acquired from the city and by eminent domain. While DSNI “instigated” the project and represented community interests in it, DSNI did not intend to serve as its developer. Rather, DSNI helped to select the development team that was designated to build it. However, when the community insisted that the project be owner occupied, rather than a typical tax credit syndicated rental project, the designated developer backed out. This was occurring as the Boston real estate bubble burst in 1990. Faced with the choice of seeing the project abandoned, DSNI stepped in to serve as developer of last resort.

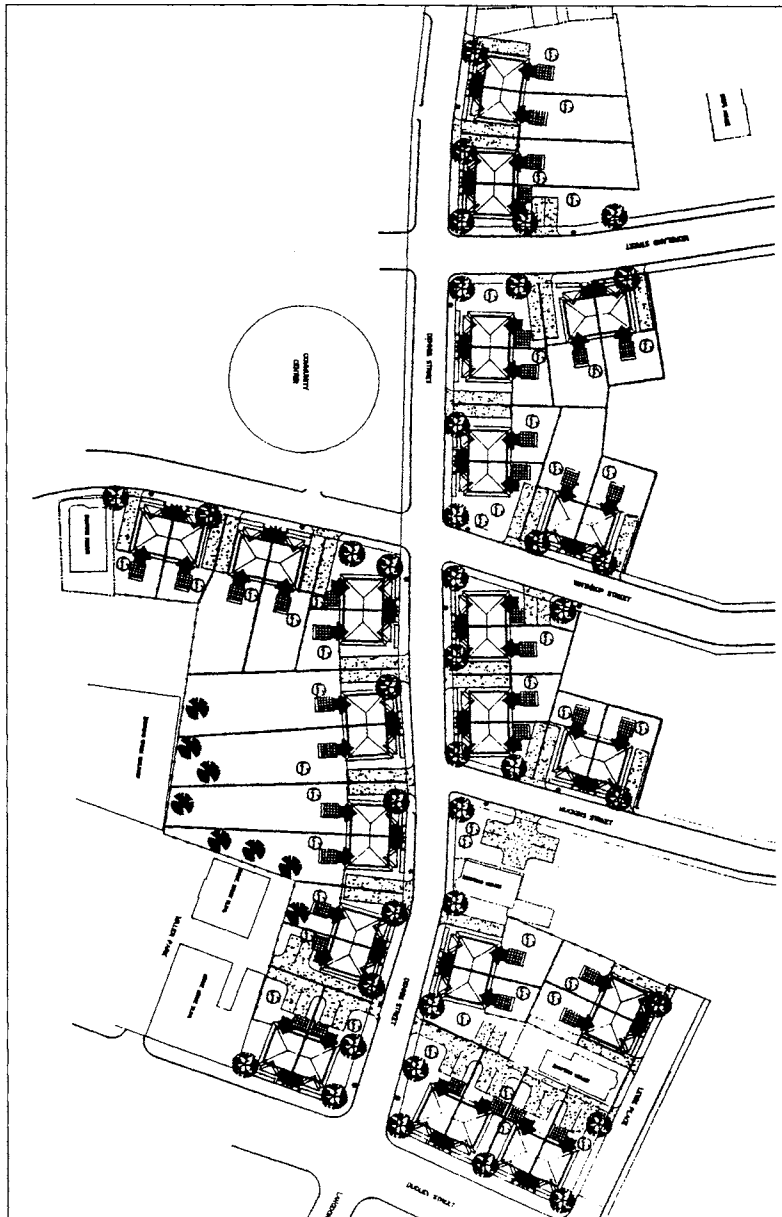
### **Why Owner Occupied Housing?**

It was extremely important to DSNI that the new housing be built for sale to owner occupiers. They felt that the neighborhood already had a great preponderance of rental housing and was in desperate need of the stability and commitment that owners would bring. This decision was controversial and seen by some as highly risky, since the sales market for new, low income housing was not established and could not be predicted. This commitment cost DSNI the involvement of the designated developer and, in effect, thrust them into that role.

### **Winthrop Estates Design**

The 36 units are made up of 18 duplexes (side by side units which share a common wall). Each unit contains 1,400 square feet with three bedrooms and one and one-half bathrooms on two stories over an unfinished full basement. Each has a yard and paved off-street parking. The units are dispersed along Dudley Street and a side street and border another community developer’s recently built project of mostly four-plexes.

The units are finished with wood siding and have a generally traditional appearance to help blend into the neighborhood. Many



Winthrop Estates Site Plan

features are included that contribute to quality and appearance (as well as cost) including a somewhat varied exterior (in terms of window sizes and “jogs” in the perimeter), basements with access and windows (so they can be finished for later occupancy), landscaping, and the provision of two handicapped accessible units (though there is no requirement that their buyers be selected from among those who need special accessibility features).

While these features add to overall quality and value, the units are only moderately attractive and do not “blend in” to the neighborhood as well as they might. This has to do with their spacing and massing. They are smaller and lower than the triplexes that make up most of the balance of the local housing stock and are spaced too far apart, leaving large gaps in the streetscape.

Costs

Acquisition	\$340,000
Construction (36 units)	3,436,000
Contingency	281,000
Soft Costs*	1,336,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,393,000</b>
<b>Cost per unit</b>	<b>\$149,800</b>

\* Soft costs include architecture, inspection, permits, project management and inspection, taxes, insurance, interest, legal, marketing, commissions, and developer’s overhead and fee.

Financing

Note that this table is based on a different estimate than the costs listed above, so that financing appears to be higher than costs, which was not the case.

Item	Total	Per Unit
Mortgages	\$2,137,500	59,380
Federal Home Loan Bank Board	250,000	6,940
Down payments	142,500	3,960
Nehemiah	570,000	15,830
City Permanent Subsidy (Public Facilities)*	1,430,000	39,720
DSNI Equity	50,000	1,390
GAP	907,000	25,190
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,487,000</b>	<b>\$152,420</b>

\* Actually higher (\$1,698,000), including an interest subsidy not shown above

Given the very low land cost, the total development cost of about \$150,000 per unit seems rather high for such single family units, though the City did not feel that this was out of line for a public sector project. There were comparable costs at Harbor Point (which, however, included some high rise buildings and had many extraordinary circumstances) and similar costs are reported for other housing projects in Boston. Certainly, if the project had been built for profit, it would have to have been brought in much more economically or it would have been infeasible.

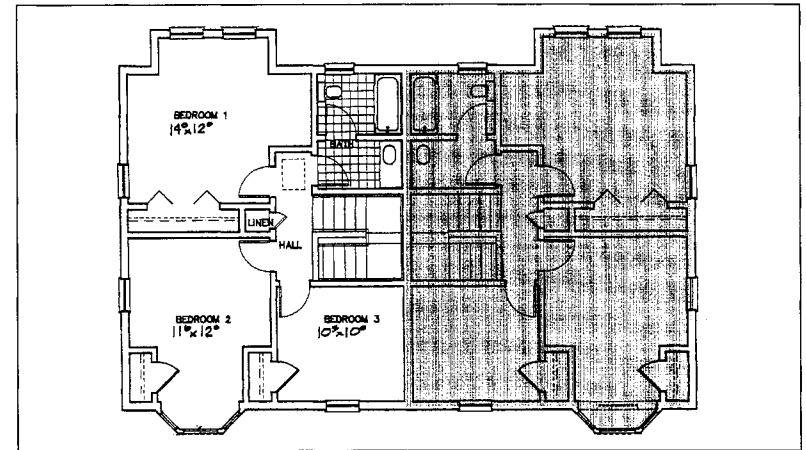
### Sales Price and Subsidies

There was a considerable debate between DSNI and the City about the sales price. The City felt that the price should be kept as low as possible in order to fit into the market and be affordable at the lowest possible income levels — and it was prepared to provide the further subsidies that would be required to cover the difference. The City felt that a selling price of \$80,000 to \$85,000 would be appropriate, while DSNI believed it should be \$90,000, arguing that lower appraisals were based on a bottomless foreclosure market. DSNI defended the need to keep the sales prices up in order to protect the value of surrounding properties and project the perception that the houses were of greater value. Adding to the complexity of the discussion, the higher selling price was of economic benefit to the City (which was arguing against it), lowering the amount of subsidy needed. In the end, DSNI prevailed and proved to be correct about the market being able to absorb the units at the higher price.

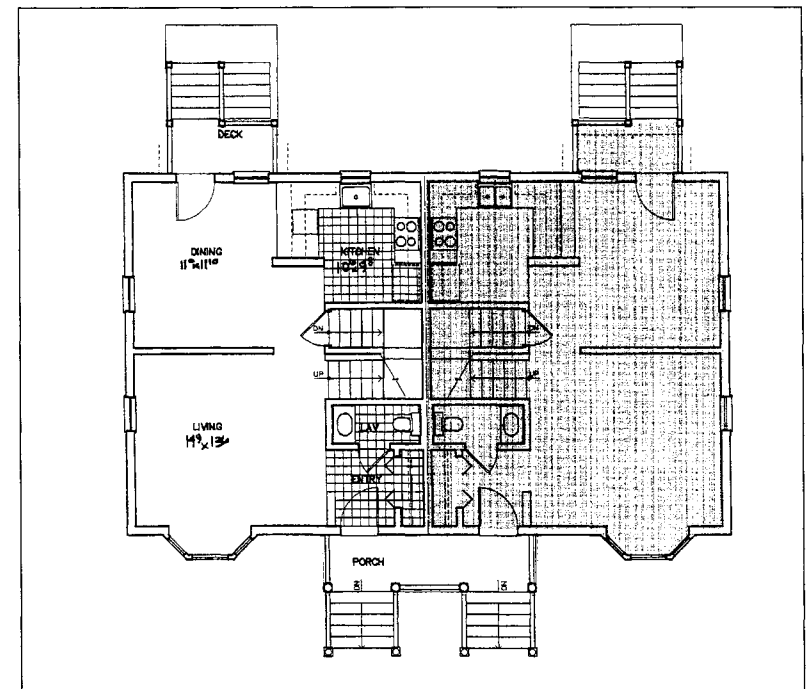
Selling the units for \$90,000 entails a public subsidy to each purchaser of an average of about \$60,000. While the unit's appreciation is limited by covenants to help keep them affordable at resale, the initial subsidy mostly flows to the buyer, rather than being captured in perpetuity as would be the case for rental housing.

### Limits on Resale Profits

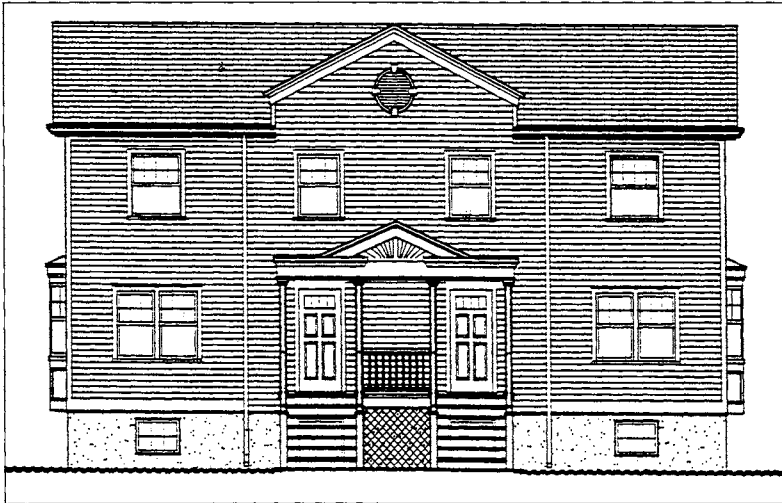
Controlled by covenants, the resale price is allowed to escalate no more than a sliding scale that starts at one-half percent the first year and gradually goes up to five percent per year at the tenth year. This could create a total increase of \$45,000 in ten years — a relatively modest amount of money, but a handsome return of 100% per year on the \$4,500 down payment.



Second Floor



First Floor



*Elevation*



*Winthrop Estates*

**Role of the Public Facilities Department**

In order to allow the project move ahead, the Boston Public Facilities Department, which typically would have provided limited technical and financial assistance, proved willing to become, in effect, the construction lender. This tied up more money than they would otherwise have provided and required services they were not used to performing. Because of this role, they also imposed a variety of requirements, such as construction in three phases (to limit their exposure and “recycle” sales proceeds into construction of later phases).

While Public Facilities saw the project as very risky (inexperienced developer, unproven market, unusual land lease restrictions, devastated neighborhood), it was willing to bear that risk. As Deborah Goddard said, the City felt that it had to do something and that the risk of doing nothing while watching the neighborhood continue to decline was worse than the risk that this project might fail. In the end, it didn’t fail: it was completed on time, the product was high quality, and it sold out in a reasonable period of time.

**Marketing**

Given the concerns described above, a strong marketing effort was seen as essential and a professional marketer was hired. Because of the intent to market to all segments of this diverse community, the sales brochure was printed in four languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Cape Verdean).

The marketing program had to find qualified buyers, help potential buyers assess their eligibility, and educate them about the many unique aspects of the project including financing and assistance. Incomes could be as low as \$18,000 per year and payments could range from about \$500 to \$800 per month including principal, interest, taxes, insurance and land lease.

**Concerns about Winthrop Estates**

DSNI featured Winthrop Estates in their application for the Bruner Award as an example of their work in the neighborhood. However, it is not really representative of their primary targeted activities or the ones that they see themselves pursuing in the future. They took on the project because of the great need for affordable housing in the area and because there was no other party willing and able to provide it at that time. DSNI was essentially forced to become the

*Winthrop Estates*

developer or see the project evaporate after their partners experienced major organizational change and then decided they would not assume the risk of building units for sale to owner occupiers. To allow the project to go ahead, DSNI became the developer and the city took the unusual risk of being construction lender, a role they do not play for other projects.

Because of these circumstances, this project was developed in a manner that few groups could emulate. DSNI was entirely inexperienced in the developer role, lacking experience in design, construction, negotiating with builders, building codes, financing, and marketing. They did, however, hire a person with some of this experience and also made use of consultants. While they were able to complete the project, there were some compromises in cost and design quality. It was an opportunity for growth and learning for them, but they have since decided not to do more development — they will shun implementation and stick to planning and organizing.

#### **DSNI Today and Tomorrow**

DSNI is a thriving organization. It has over 2,000 members, 15 staff and an annual budget of about \$1 million, most of which comes from grants and contracts.

*Winthrop Estates*

One of its major projects entails participation in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's "Rebuilding Communities" program which provides funding for planning (both organizational and community) and capacity building (it will bring DSNI about \$3 million over six years). Three agendas have been developed under this program: physical, economic, and human resources. The human services agenda was based on a "treasure hunt" to identify community resources as well as needs, including skills available from residents and businesses. DSNI also has a grant from the Kellogg Foundation for developing resident-driven human services. In addition, it is working on a "Leadership Training Institute" for local residents.

It is clear that DSNI maintains its essential commitment to the community, putting residents first, and basing all decisions on the broadest possible input. But DSNI also faces a number of growth-related issues and tensions. It fired its last executive director (who came from the community and rose up with the organization) and at the time of our visit had an interim executive director who sees his main function as defining the role of the board and the relationship between board and staff. DSNI has had an extremely active and hands-on board but, as the organization grows and hires more professional staff, it will be difficult to sustain that level of engagement. Can the board comfortably assume more of a policy-setting



*Site for Youth Build Cabinet Shop*

role? Can the staff be directed effectively? These issues remain to be resolved. The board had commissioned an organizational assessment that it chose not to share with us, perhaps because the membership had not yet seen it.

In the meantime, DSNI is pursuing many exciting projects. One is called "Youth Build" and entails creation of a cabinet and furniture manufacturing shop that will train and employ neighborhood youth. This will be installed in an abandoned building on Dudley Street across from DSNI's offices. It appears likely that it will be set up or assisted by Asian Neighborhood Design from San Francisco (a Bruner Award finalist in 1993).

## **THEMES AND LESSONS**

### **Bringing An Area Back from Devastation**

The experience at Dudley Street shows that even the most devastated area can be restored to health. With strong community organizing and participation, dumping, arson, decay and disinvestment can be reversed.

### **Early Foundation Commitment Was Crucial**

While some programs had been tried with little effect, the commitment from the Riley Foundation (once it was understood that they would not try to take over) generated hope and interest within the community. Riley support made early, and continuing, action possible, allowing DSNI to show tangible results and gain momentum.

### **The Foundation Focused Its Resources but Stayed in the Background**

The Foundation had realized that dispersing a number of small grants to many organizations around the city was not having much long term effect. It decided to focus its efforts in one area and selected Dudley Street as the one in greatest need. While it wanted to encourage improvement, it never tried to lead residents or neighborhood organizations. It's presence may have catalyzed action at the start, but it soon stepped back and let the process evolve in the direction locals took it.

### **Insistence on Grassroots Representation and Participation**

DSNI is a paragon of grassroots, participatory organization and action. From the first meeting, local residents insisted on real involvement and got it, creating an organization and process that allows and encourages all legitimate interests to be aired in a consensus decision process. If consensus has not been reached, DSNI will hold off on action and continue debate until all have agreed. This can be very time consuming, but it has proven to develop great strength behind a decision once it is taken.

### **Early Success at Cleanup**

It is important to demonstrate an early success in order to gain visibility, credibility, and support. DSNI was able to get dumping sites closed and empty lots cleaned up, showing that it was possible to make positive changes in the area.

### **The Treasure Hunt: Finding Community Assets**

Many needs assessments focus on the problems and deficits an area faces. While painfully aware of the problems, DSNI also conducted a "treasure hunt", looking for the assets and resources offered by people, agencies, and businesses in the neighborhood.

### The Land Trust

DSNI was perhaps the first neighborhood organization to gain eminent domain power and bank land on behalf of their community, capturing the value of the parcels in perpetuity. This unique arrangement may be replicable in other devastated areas, if an organization exists or is built which can gain enough trust and strength to act as a steward.

### Coordination of Community Resources

One important function of DSNI is to provide linkages among, and a forum for, the many governmental and private agencies that work within its boundaries. Too often, agencies are ineffective or inefficient because they do not know what services others are providing — or even what services are really needed. DSNI provides the understanding of needs and coordination of services.

### Organizing Versus Providing Services

DSNI has chosen to focus on organizing and planning rather than actually providing services. They feel that, by limiting their role to being the voice of the community, they remain in touch with their constituents, able to help articulate their needs. If DSNI were to provide services, they might put themselves in the position of not being able to satisfy needs, alienating the people they try to represent. So, they limit themselves to defining needs and getting (with pressure if necessary) other agencies to meet them.

### Persistence Pays Off

Turning around a devastated area requires a long term commitment. DSNI has demonstrated the persistence and staying power that have allowed it to make significant progress toward this goal over its ten year history.

### Evolution of a Community Organization

Over the years, in a series of campaigns and projects, DSNI has evolved, grown, and changed. While maintaining its core commitment to community participation, it has passed through stages of clean up, gaining recognition, inventing a way to own the land, and completing projects. With growth in local membership and recognition, as well as big increases in funding and staff, it faces the problems classically associated with rapid change. Will it be able to



*Che Madyun*

keep its grass roots character and commitment as it grows? DSNI is well aware of these dilemmas and is attempting to rise to their challenges.

### ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS...

#### ...BY ITS GOALS

#### To stop the devastation of the neighborhood

DSNI has made tremendous strides in turning around the most devastated area in Boston. Dumping and arson have been stopped and the neighborhood has been cleaned up.

#### To see that the neighborhood is rebuilt and provided with services and jobs

Rebuilding is a slow process, but a considerable number of projects have been completed (housing, parks, community facilities), some are in process, and many more are planned. Generally DSNI has worked to define needs and catalyze action, not to do the projects itself.



*Community Mural*

**To provide a voice for community concerns and action**

This is the main role that DSNI has defined for itself and it appears to play it very well. The organization is broadly representative and takes great care to ensure that needs are articulated, options explored, and actions selected which reflect and have the support of the neighborhood. Because of its history, DSNI is now recognized by the City as the proper voice of this community.

**...BY SELECTION COMMITTEE CONCERNS**

**Are the original people still there or has there been gentrification?**

While there have continued to be demographic changes in the area (e.g., more Cape Verdeans and now Haitians), there is no evidence that original residents have had to move if they wanted to stay; and there are no signs of gentrification.

**Was there real community participation and empowerment?**

Yes, this enterprise is an outstanding example of the commitment to grass roots democracy, where every legitimate voice is encouraged and heard.

**What kind of leadership has emerged?**

DSNI has nurtured a number of leaders and helped them to develop skills, including marketable ones. Participation in this organization and some of its projects has provided several residents with opportunities that are probably beyond what they otherwise might have found. Che Madyun, long time president of the board, is a prominent example of how increased organizational skills and abilities can lead to expanded career opportunities.

**What has been completed so far? Why did the project take ten years?**

DSNI has completed many initiatives, not all of which are concrete projects. Neighborhood cleanups, stimulation of city action, planning, coordinating services, developing the mechanism for eminent domain and land banking, and building a housing project are substantial accomplishments, even spread over ten years. The Winthrop Estates project did not occupy this entire period, but was delayed by financial and organizational problems, extended time to acquire the land (partly by foreclosure), long negotiation and review processes, and other factors. Given the circumstances, it is not difficult to understand the length of time required for the project.

**What is the design quality of the project?**

While including many thoughtful features, the project is not exceptional in design quality and misses some important urban design opportunities.

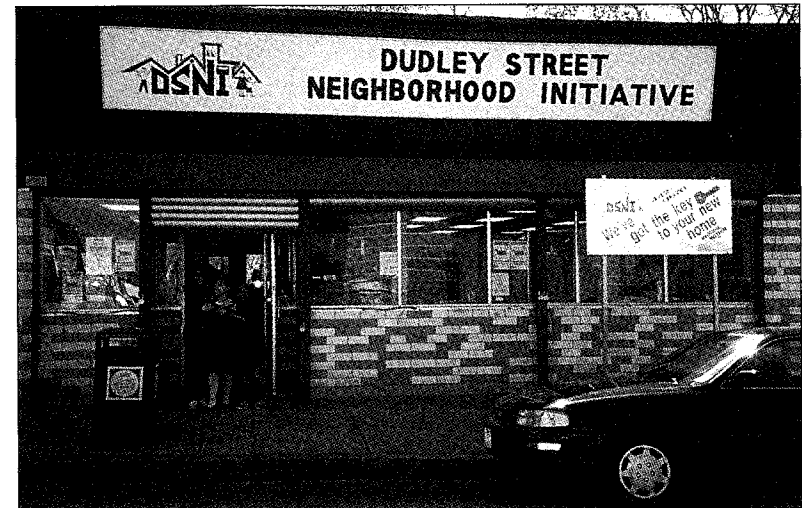


## SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Selection Committee was tremendously impressed with several aspects of DSNI. They felt that, as a grassroots organizing effort, DSNI exhibits an “extraordinary level of participation”. DSNI’s accomplishments in stopping the decline of one of the most abused and neglected urban areas in the country were felt to be highly praiseworthy. Thanks to DSNI, this poor and blighted area was reclaimed by and for the residents who created an ambitious, comprehensive plan for their community. They were actually able to gain community ownership of some of the land through the innovative mechanism of a land trust — something very few neighborhoods have been able to do — though it affects only a small percentage of the land.

While very impressed with the success of DSNI’s organizing work, the Selection Committee was concerned about its sustainability now that it attracts \$1 million each year in support. The committee wondered what would happen if the “outside” money evaporated — would the initiative be able to return to its earlier, smaller scale ways of working? The committee was also somewhat concerned about organizational changes and DSNI’s commitment to limit activities to organizing rather than providing services or constructing projects. Finally, the Selection Committee found the submitted project, Winthrop Estates, to be pleasant looking and a valuable contribution to the housing stock, but only of an average quality of design.

The committee was hopeful that newly planned activities, such as the Youth Build woodworking venture, would be effective in addressing issues of training and employment and that the innovative land bank model would be widely emulated.



### For More Information...

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### Reference

Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar: *Streets of Hope*, Boston, South End Press, 1994. First co-author was original executive director of DSNI.

