

# Community Benefits

## Leveraging Partnerships for Successful Development

*You've found what looks like a perfect opportunity to redevelop a derelict property that's a blight to the surrounding neighborhood. You know a mixed-use project would give the community a much-needed facelift by bringing in more upscale retail and apartments. The City is supportive and the price is right — it seems like a sure bet.*



*But as the design review is underway, you find yourself faced with a community marching around with picket signs saying this project will destroy their neighborhood, push them out of their homes, and make traffic and parking a nightmare.*

*The City is hesitating, investors are worried... **What can you do?***

**A**cross the country, developers facing this challenge are looking to community benefits partnerships as a way to get large, multi-use urban projects off the ground. Forming a partnership with a project's stakeholders is an innovative, pragmatic approach for developers to create a mutually beneficial relationship with the community.

Community benefits are part of a win-win development strategy: meaningful, up-front communication between the developer and a broad community coalition decreases developers' risk while maximizing the positive impact of development on local residents and economies. The developer benefits from active community support of the project, and community members gain when the project responds to their needs.

Understanding how and why community benefits partnerships work can open the door to more productive, predictable relationships with project stakeholders.

### Community Benefits Fundamentals

A community benefits agreement (CBA) is a tool that enables you to leverage your partnership with the community into a valuable asset. A CBA is a legally binding, negotiated agreement between a developer and a broad community coalition that outlines a specific project's contributions to the community and provides legally binding assurance that the community will support the project.

Like any other important development agreement, the understanding reached by the developer and the community must be official and enforceable. Documenting the contributions made by all stakeholders demonstrates a commitment to accountability and mutual respect.

Community benefits coalitions are long-term, broad-based groups with deep roots in the community. Coalitions typically represent a broad array of stakeholders, such as local residents across the income spectrum, people of all colors,

representatives from labor, environmental, and faith groups, and affordable housing advocates.

Community benefits coalitions recognize that high-quality new development is critical for expanding prosperity. Coalitions seek a role in shaping that development and know that no one wins if the project fails.

CBAs enable developers to leverage their contributions to the community into support for the project. Public advocacy for the development from a broad community coalition often leads to a faster, smoother entitlement process and generates good PR for the project.

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## The Principles of Partnership

Development doesn't happen in a vacuum, it happens in a neighborhood. The community has a vested interest in its future, and developers can gain from respecting that fact.

### Developers and communities need each other.

Without a great project customized to their needs, neighborhoods can be left with snarled traffic, poverty-wage jobs, overpriced housing, and a diminished quality of life. Without the backing of an engaged community, a developer can face delays, litigation, protests, bad press, and an imperiled project. Forming a partnership with the community upfront makes their participation a more predictable and useful part of the development process.

from a win-win perspective, with both sides flexible and trying to accomplish something, it won't be adversarial. That doesn't mean that every answer has to be yes." CBA negotiation takes community groups out of damage-control mode and helps them understand how the project can create new opportunities.

### Communication is the key to success.

Community benefits coalitions may need to be educated about development, and may have unrealistic expectations. Nonetheless, these coalitions want to see new projects built in their neighborhood, and they want that development to improve their community. Sandra Moore of Urban Strategies values the process of reaching consensus with community partners and suggests, "Tell the community: 'We've been hired to build this project, and we're going to build it. But we want to do it in partnership with you.' You have to have conversations that create trust and open lines of communication, and you must allow the community to set the priorities. If the developer sets the priorities, the project won't necessarily yield the greatest good."



*"Especially in urban areas, if you're doing development, you have to deal with transportation, infrastructure, the environment... Whether or not you have a formal agreement, you are really in partnership with the community. It's just a matter of deciding whether to leverage that partnership. If you ignore it, you won't know you needed that partnership with the community until you need it."*

— EGBERT PERRY, *Integral Group*

### They're your neighbors, not your enemies.

When an outsider comes into a neighborhood, residents want to be treated with respect. Understandably, they expect that the changes development brings will be positive, and the investment of their tax dollars will ultimately improve the quality of their lives. Cliff Goldstein of J.H. Snyder learned that open-mindedness is critical in a successful community benefits partnership. "If you enter negotiations

### Putting promises in writing shows mutual respect.

The responsibilities and contributions from all of a project's stakeholders—the government, the community coalition, and the developer—should be clearly articulated and incorporated into all development documents. Writing down everyone's obligations creates more public trust, allows projects to be honestly assessed, and ensures that stated goals are met.

# Best Practices

Experienced developers offer suggestions for minimizing the challenges and maximizing the beneficial outcomes of community benefits negotiations.



Dan Rosenfeld



Brandon Mitchell  
Full Spectrum of New York



Mtamanika Youngblood  
Atlanta Civic Site

## Work with a broad coalition that represents the whole community.

At a minimum, the CBA coalition should include neighborhood, faith-based, labor, and environmental groups. The greater the breadth of the coalition, the better its ability to parlay its efforts into elected and appointed officials' support for the project. Coalition members can rally support from key stakeholders and give you inside information about local retail and service needs.

## Include the community early and often.

Start working with the community coalition at the beginning of the entitlement process. Early involvement allows you to creatively address the community's needs at a practical time in project planning, and generate community buy-in. "The time up front is well worth the time you'd spend later on trying to clean up an onerous project that the community is not happy with," urges Mtamanika Youngblood of the Atlanta Civic Site project.

**Cultivate trust.** Many underserved communities are excited at the prospect of redevelopment, but wary of the outcomes because of past bad experiences. "Don't erroneously assume that people in poor neighborhoods are grateful for the development," notes Dan Rosenfeld. "They have pride in their neighborhood, and fears about getting priced out. CBAs in these neighborhoods are more difficult, but more important: they're a peace treaty." CBAs are a show of good faith because they put the responsibilities and contributions from all of the project's stakeholders into writing. Documentation creates more public trust, allows projects to be honestly assessed, and ensures that stated goals are met.

**Think long-term.** For developers with local ties and aspirations, developing a reputation as "the good guys" is invaluable — and productive, notes Cliff Goldstein.

"The support that the developer can garner in partnership with the community goes beyond the initial construction and is ongoing. Operations down the road often need adjustments, and the owner/developer must go back to the City for variances or changes.

If you have the good will of the community and have lived up to your promises, the process goes much more smoothly."

**Be creative.** Involving the community opens the door to creative solutions and attractive, responsive projects. Working thoughtfully with community partners has gained Full Spectrum of New York a reputation as innovative problem-solvers — which has helped the company get selected for new projects. "We work closely with communities because we want to build what they like and what addresses their needs," says Brandon Mitchell. "For example, in our project in the Bronx, we're working to include a greenhouse on the roof so residents can grow food year-round. We're redefining how to build projects in ways that build the community."

**Think like a politician.** Polls show that voters believe projects with community benefits improve their cities, and local officials look good when they respond to the community's demands. And increasingly, local governments contributing public resources to development projects expect the positive returns on their investment to be quantifiable. Jeff Cohen considers this fact strategically. "If you're getting public money, the City's going to make you do certain things anyway." Putting your contributions in writing in a CBA gives you the opportunity to bolster your case with the City and make sure the public is aware of your efforts.

## Why Community Benefits Partnerships Work

Developers across the country have found that community benefits partnerships are smart business, reducing risk while using community input to create thriving projects and gain public — and official — support.

Community benefits can reduce your risk and boost your bottom line.

■ **Time is money.** Experienced developers have found that their projects with CBAs enjoyed faster, smoother entitlement processes. With a signed agreement, these developers showed they had real community support for their project, a proven asset when seeking public approvals.

■ **Local officials value community benefits.** Community benefits tools leverage public investment of resources to meet the needs that taxpayers have prioritized. Officials know that when local governments invest in private development projects, a CBA is a clear and specific mechanism for distributing the returns on that investment throughout the community.



*“The community is the linchpin for getting entitlements from the city. Every time you go to a public hearing, you want 10 or 20 people to stand up on your side. And with a complex project, you’ve got to keep people on your side a long time.”*

— JEFF COHEN, Gatehouse Capital

■ **Public input results in projects that attract local customers.** “You can learn a lot of useful information from working with the community,” Dan Rosenfeld of Urban Partners has found. “I always ask questions like, ‘what do you have to leave the neighborhood to buy? What hours do you go out in the evening?’” Development that responds to real community needs inspires creative design and attracts retail and residential tenants, as well as a high-quality workforce.

■ **Many community benefits produce a lot of bang for the buck.** Experienced developers confess that they initially feared the cost of community benefits. However, many benefits are low- or no-cost, and often, helping the community means a bottom-line gain as well. AEG’s Ted Tanner, for example, found that despite a challenging negotiation process, the job training and local hiring included in the CBA for his LA Live! project was win-win.

**Developers may fear being taken to the cleaners by a community coalition, but many important benefits are low- or no-cost, such as:**

- ▶ *Information (e.g., about environmental remediation progress)*
- ▶ *The chance to meaningfully participate in decisions as they’re being made*
- ▶ *Family-friendly employment policies for new permanent jobs*
- ▶ *Setting a living-wage goal for employers*
- ▶ *Including spaces for micro-business tenants*

*“Having access to a trained labor pool was important for attracting a hotel operator to the [LA Live!] project. At the same time, the hotel created about 1,000 quality jobs for local residents.”*

— TED TANNER, AEG





*“If public money is put into a project, the resulting public benefit should be quantifiable. The purpose of a CBA is to define what the public is getting out of the deal. Spelling the terms of the agreement out clearly is simply a principle of good negotiating.”*

— JEANNE FAATZ, *Denver City Council*

- ▶ *Worker retention policies*
- ▶ *First source hiring*
- ▶ *Apprenticeship utilization*

■ **Community benefits can make development incentives available.** Public subsidies and investments—like density bonuses for affordable housing, and infrastructure contributions for community amenities—are often connected to the degree of resident engagement in and benefit from a project. Egbert Perry of Atlanta’s Integral Group has seen how making the community a priority works to his advantage. “The local government believes we’re committed to doing the right thing. When, say, infrastructure dollars are on the table and they’re deciding who to give them to, all things being equal, Integral will get the nod.”

■ **CBA negotiations take place in private.** Instead of being carried out in the glare of the media, CBA negotiations are a private forum in which the developer and their community benefits partner can speak openly.

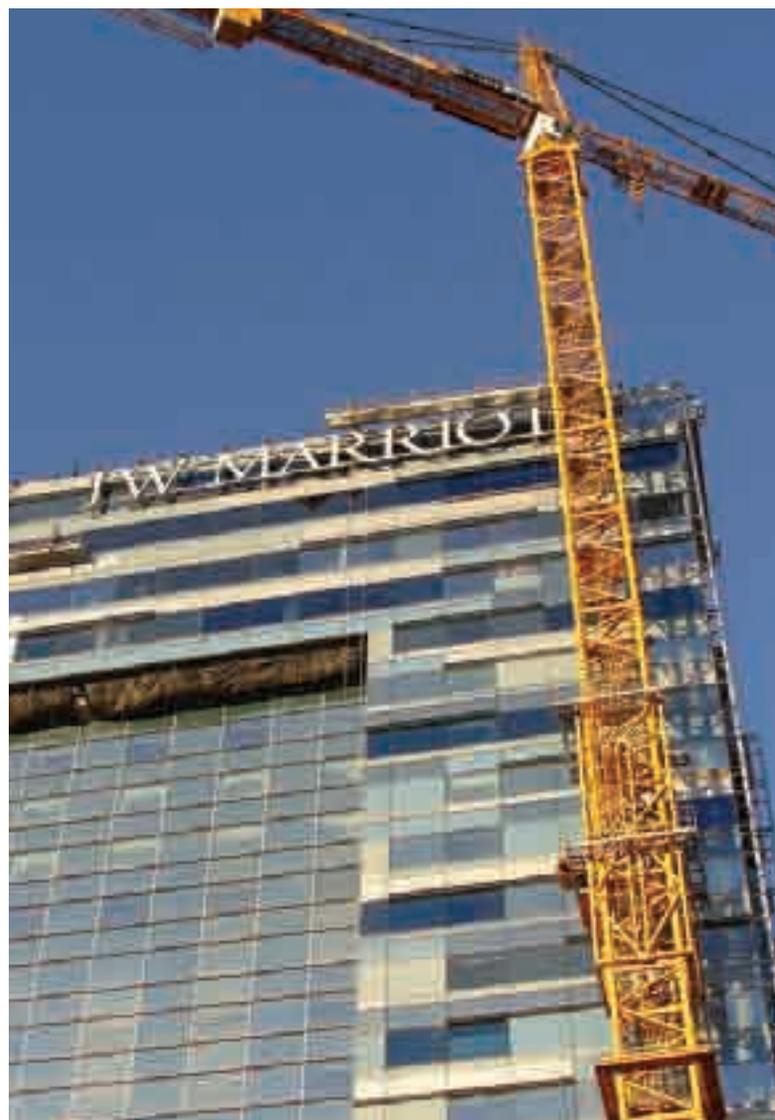
Beyond these immediate interests, there are broader motivations to enter into community benefits partnerships as well.

■ **Community benefits foster a deeper relationship with the community.** When a project prioritizes community values, the resulting development is a welcome addition to the neighborhood. Community benefits coalition members will vocally support the project to public officials and in the media. But beyond the entitlement process, a community benefits

partnership is a long-term relationship between the developer and the community that can be a valuable future asset.

■ **Community benefits are part of a sustainable development agenda.** Projects with community benefits can enjoy a triple bottom line: opening real opportunities for residents and healing the environment, as well as generating profits, tax revenues, and further investment in urban development.

■ **Community benefits help developers build great cities through stronger, more equitable economies.** Developers committed to community benefits are proud that their projects bring family-sustaining jobs to the urban core and multiply the impact of private investment in underserved areas. Of course, improving the quality of life for local residents also means creating a more stable and attractive neighborhood for new development.





## Forms of Community Benefits

The community benefits approach to development includes both project-specific agreements and broadly applicable standards.

### Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs)

A CBA is a project-specific, negotiated agreement between a developer and a community coalition that outlines the project's contributions to the community and documents the community's support of the project. Covering a broad range of issues, CBAs are legally binding and are commonly incorporated into the City's developer agreements.

### Community Benefits Standards

Many cities are demonstrating that they expect projects to contribute to the long-term growth and vitality of their city by enacting community benefits standards that apply to a wide range of development. Living wage ordinances, local hiring requirements, and mixed-income housing requirements are examples of community standards

policies. Local governments may apply community benefits guidelines to large parcels of land slated for development (such as Atlanta's Beltline project and Milwaukee's Park East Corridor). Officials may also incorporate community benefits into their request for proposals criteria for development of government-owned land.

Having these standards in place city-wide or attached to an entire developable area allows developers to incorporate these requirements in both their preliminary proformas and physical plans. Because all project proposals in the jurisdiction must meet these same requirements, they level the playing field for developers and add an important measure of predictability to the entitlement process.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION** visit The Partnership for Working Families: [www.communitybenefits.org](http://www.communitybenefits.org)

# Frequently Asked Questions About Community Benefits

Community benefits partnerships are a new way of thinking about development. But are they useful for innovative, entrepreneurial developers?

Here are some answers that can help you move forward.

## **How can a CBA reduce my risks?**

- **CBA**s make it more attractive for City officials to give projects the green light. When a developer and a community coalition walk in partnership to city council, the project is far more likely to gain the City's support.
- **The CBA process** allows the developer to gain the trust of the community. To leverage your contributions to the community into public support for the project, the coalition needs to feel completely confident in the deal. By enabling the coalition to have input in the process, a CBA creates community buy-in to the project, rather than a feeling that the project is being done to them. Also, by setting forth the developer's community benefits commitments in a legal document, a CBA gives the community confidence that all parties will follow through on their commitments.
- **CBA**s make the community's commitment to support the project legally enforceable. In exchange for a developer's legally binding commitments in a CBA, community groups make legally binding commitments as well: to actively support the project in public hearings, to refrain from lobbying against the project behind the scenes, and to drop any legal or administrative claims or appeals.
- **Providing community benefits can generate both immediate and long-term returns.** Experienced developers have seen a bottom-line gain from the faster, more predictable entitlements process likely made available by negotiating a CBA. Using the community coalition's input can make the project more attractive to the neighborhood clientele, drawing customers, retailers and residential tenants. CBAs generate great PR, and gaining a stand-up reputation in the community is invaluable.

***Why would I involve the community in my project if I don't have to? Isn't that just stirring up a hornets' nest?***

**Community benefits can make your relationship with the neighborhood mutually beneficial.** Meeting with your community partners allows you to explain the parameters of the project, as well as learn from the community what their retail and service needs are. CBA negotiation allows you to make decisions and deal with problems up front, rather than risk lengthy and disorganized resistance or litigation after development plans have been finalized. Opening dialogue with the community can save money, time and headaches all around.

***Isn't a CBA coalition just another NIMBY group that wants to kill the project?***

**CBA coalitions seek win-win solutions that get projects built and the community's needs met.** Coalitions recognize that economic development done right can lift up the entire community. Poverty-wage jobs, higher rents, and bad traffic aren't good for anybody. Instead, working to strengthen the neighborhood you're building in is better for the community — and better for the project.

***I've tried to work with the community before and it was disorganized and confusing. Will a CBA negotiation process be the same?***

**No — a community benefits coalition is a committed, structured group with a clear agenda.** Although CBA coalitions are broad-based, they typically have a designated anchor group with a permanent staff, a clear point of contact, and legal support. Most CBA coalitions have a stated procedure for making decisions and ratifying negotiated agreements. Working with a CBA coalition is a more straightforward process than having to field scattershot demands.

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### ***Isn't it illegal for a city government to ask developers to enter into CBAs?***

**Local governments and community coalitions have the right to ask for community benefits when public resources are used.** According to the Community Benefits Law Center, the City should not require you to enter into a CBA with a particular organization in order to have a project approved. But, when the local government puts resources into a project, it is perfectly legitimate for officials to:

- Make clear that the degree of community support will be a factor in deciding whether to grant approvals for a project;
- Require community benefits in the development agreement and other official documents that are part of the land use approval process;
- Inform the developer, government staff, and the public of factors that the City will consider relevant in voting on discretionary approvals for the project;
- Encourage CBA negotiations between the developer and coalition members.

### ***Can't I just pull together a community focus group?***

**A community benefits partnership gives the CBA coalition a seat at the table.** Whereas a focus group simply allows people to comment on the project, during a CBA negotiation the developer and their community benefits partners make decisions together about how the project is going to affect the community. Once an agreement is achieved, developers can feel confident that they have real, committed support for the project from all of the project's stakeholders.

### ***When should community benefits negotiations begin?***

**The sooner the better.** By entering into a community benefits partnership early in the development process, you are best able to defuse stakeholders' concerns and get useful feedback that can be incorporated into the final project design with minimal expense and headache.

### ***What is the role of lawyers in CBA negotiations?***

**Lawyers help make community benefits partnerships productive.** To have a meaningful community benefits partnership, there must be direct communication between the developer and the community coalition. However, because everyone involved needs the agreement to be completely legal and enforceable, it is important to have attorneys involved in crafting the details of the CBA.

### ***How does a CBA relate to the other government documents required for my project?***

**CBAs are stand-alone, legally enforceable agreements between the developer and their community benefits partners.** At a minimum, the CBA has to be consistent with the project's other official documents. Optimally, the other official documents associated with the project specifically reference the agreements memorialized in the CBA.

# Community Benefits Partnerships at Work Across the Nation

Across the country, community benefits partnerships are shaping major redevelopment projects, helping developers and communities both realize the potential of urban investment. The developers who oversaw the projects described here saw first-hand how community benefits partnerships could expedite and enhance the final product.

## Community Benefits Agreement Gives Life to a Catalytic Project Hollywood and Vine | Los Angeles, California

The corner of Hollywood and Vine in Los Angeles is arguably the most famous intersection in the world. Today it is the site of a landmark \$326 million, mixed-use, transit-oriented development. The 4.6-acre project includes a 300-room W hotel, about 400 housing units, 67,000 square feet of retail, and more than 1,000 parking spaces. Undertaking a CBA process helped this project to get off the ground — and enabled it to rejuvenate a neighborhood.



*“You don’t know whether you’ll get the variances and other things you’re asking for, but you know for sure you won’t without community support. Politicians will run for cover without the community.”*

— JEFF COHEN

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“Of course,” Cohen notes, “you want to minimize the amount of money you’re putting out versus what you’re getting back. This CBA was expensive. Spending \$3.5 million on public art is not something you have to do everyday. But as a result, we were able to get stuff we wouldn’t have otherwise.”

Thanks to the CBA at Hollywood and Vine, the community will enjoy a rebirth of opportunity, and Gatehouse Capital has the opportunity to capitalize on its successful community benefits partnership: “We wouldn’t have anything in Hollywood without the community.”

When a broad coalition of neighborhood, environmental, labor, and faith-based groups formed to make sure the project was going to make a positive contribution to the community, developer Jeff Cohen of Gatehouse Capital saw the group not as the opposition, but as a potential partner. Together, they negotiated a community benefits agreement under which Gatehouse agreed — among other things — to institute a local hiring program, mitigate traffic problems, make 20 percent of the housing affordable, contribute to job training programs and the local high school, and display major works of public art. The community benefits coalition, meanwhile, went to bat for the project with the City government.

Cohen saw two reasons to negotiate a CBA: getting community buy-in, and improving the overall community. “We wanted people from the community to say this project is the greatest thing since sliced bread. If you make enough people happy, you become practically infallible. But you’re not just greasing politicians’ hands. You are energizing and empowering the community, completely and fully.”

“We knew from the start that it was a very complex project and that we needed all the support we could get,” says Cohen. The developer had to ask the City for density bonuses, zoning variances, parking reduction, and eminent domain. “You don’t know whether you’ll get

# “It’s been a bottom-line benefit” Doing Well by Doing Good

NoHo Commons | Los Angeles, California

Thanks to a determined partnership between J.H. Snyder, the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles, and a broad community benefits coalition, NoHo Commons is a reality — the first new major retail project to be built in downtown North Hollywood in over 20 years.

Built around a subway terminal, the \$375 million, 16.7 acre NoHo Commons includes 62,000 square feet of grocery-anchored retail, 730 apartments and loft units, 182,000 square feet of office space, a theater and a 700-space parking garage.

Cliff Goldstein, now at Emaar, oversaw the NoHo Commons project while at J.H. Snyder. The CBA process taught him that “community benefits packages must be unique for each specific project. It’s important that the package be negotiated with local stakeholders because a uniform set of community benefits won’t speak to the local needs and interests.”

A local hire system, one of the most important elements of the CBA negotiated between the developer and the coalition, will enable NoHo Commons to really spark a renaissance of North Hollywood. The coalition reports that 80% of the project’s tenants are using the system.

Goldstein recognizes the value of having a comprehensive local hiring process. “It’s been a bottom-line benefit. Providing a qualified labor pool has been very attractive to retail tenants.” Goldstein attributes the project’s smooth approvals process to having a signed CBA in hand. “Time is an enemy of development — and it can be an expensive enemy. With community benefits, there is less opposition to the project and therefore less delay from government officials because they see that there is wide support for the project. Obviously, if there is opposition, it’s a slower entitlement process.” He adds, “Putting aside the altruistic aspect, it doesn’t really matter whether the developer believes in the objectives of the community benefits.”

“From a tactical standpoint, a developer is always better off dealing with the community than politicians or the City. Politicians seem to find the most difficult road to get things done. If the City puts up unreasonable obstacles, community partnering often allows you to steamroll over them. At the end of the day, most politicians listen to their constituents,” says Goldstein.

The CBA negotiated for NoHo Commons is helping the project create real opportunities for the residents of North Hollywood. Not coincidentally, the CBA also helped to secure unanimous approval for the project from City Council.



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— CLIFF GOLDSTEIN

# Community Benefits Projects Promise Opportunities for Developers and Cities

Rivianna | Milwaukee, Wisconsin



*“Community benefits are a set of tools that help developers accomplish their triple-bottom-line objectives.”*

— BOB SCHULTZ

**D**eveloper Bob Schultz has plans that will change the face of Milwaukee’s distressed 5th Ward. His \$100 million Rivianna project will feature three 11-story condominium towers, an 80-room boutique hotel, 10,000 square feet of retail, a 470-vehicle parking structure, and access to the Milwaukee River. Construction should get under way in the summer of 2009, and property values in the neighborhood are expected to rise. Because the project provides specific community benefits, both the community and the developer stand to realize important gains.

Schultz is not seeking a city subsidy on the project, but is committed to providing community benefits with the development. Some of the benefits include:

- **environmental sustainability**— silver LEED certification;
- **job quality** — the project will be entirely built with union labor;
- **job opportunities** — at least 25% of the onsite workforce will be women or minority workers, and all construction companies onsite will participate in union apprenticeship programs; and
- **housing access** — a significant number of units will be below-market, and 75% will be available for ownership via a lease-purchase program.

Some of the project’s more unique contributions to the community include space for an artists’ co-op and

gallery, opening public access to the Milwaukee River, a \$5,000 rebate to veterans and union members on condo purchases, and providing a rent-free unit to one college student every year who is committed to studying socially responsible real estate.

Next on Schultz’s agenda for Milwaukee is the Eco-Square at Park East project, developed under his new venture, Fair Market Development, LLC. The project will be built on land covered by the Park East Redevelopment Compact (PERC), community benefits legislation under which all developers pay prevailing wages and develop a targeted hiring plan, among other things. Eco-Square at Park East promises to be even larger and greener than Rivianna, and will provide more extensive community benefits, including more low-income affordable housing, local hiring, and paying permanent workers a living wage.

Truly sustainable development is a mission for Schultz, and he sees community benefits as a critical tool. “After all,” he notes, “what good does it do to produce a sustainable project if people in the community where the project is constructed are unable to sustain themselves?”

Schultz urges that the time is ripe for developers to help guide U.S. cities toward a more sustainable and equitable future.

“The market today abounds with opportunities for new, emerging developers to get into the game of triple-bottom-line projects, to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Today there are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for companies that are trying to do things a better way.”

# Community Benefits Negotiations Win Support from Residents and Local Officials

## Gates Cherokee Redevelopment | Denver, Colorado

**C**herokee Denver, LLC took up the challenge of redeveloping the Gates Rubber Company manufacturing plant in west Denver — 50 acres of environmentally contaminated land. Even though the community welcomed the prospect of the plant being redeveloped and its environmental hazards mitigated, residents still felt apprehensive about what the project might become.

A community benefits coalition formed, representing more than 50 neighborhood, faith-based, disability, and labor groups. Carmen Rhodes, a key coalition member recalls, “It became clear as we engaged in the process that the developer acknowledged the needs we were presenting, and that they were willing and interested in doing something about them.”



*“CBAs allow us to make sure that private development happens in a way that has maximum benefits for the city. To bring about what we want for our city, we must be open to public-private partnerships and leverage projects to achieve other goals.”*

— CHRIS NEVITT,  
Denver City Council

Partnering with the community was not a new concept for Cherokee. In a published account of the process, Ferd Belz, the company’s president, explained that forming a community benefits partnership was central to Cherokee’s approach to the project. “Our mission is a little bit different than that of a typical real estate developer. We take infill and environmentally challenged sites and convert them back into productive use, not only for standard real estate, but for sustainability. Sustainability includes equity. It includes mixed-income and mixed-use. The first thing we do on a project is meet with community organizations and businesses. We don’t come in with a plan, we seek community input first.”

The developer was also seeking \$126 million in subsidies from the city, and public support for the project was vital. For Denver city councilman Chris Nevitt, the project’s long-term contribution to the community was a key deciding factor. From his perspective, “CBAs allow us to make sure that private development happens in a way that has maximum benefits for the city. To bring about what we want for our city, we must be open to public-private partnerships and leverage projects to achieve other goals.”

Negotiations around the project prioritized the community’s values. For example, the project will include 350 very low-income affordable housing units (exceeding the City’s inclusionary zoning mandate) and a first-source hiring system for new jobs. The developer agreed to ban big-box grocery stores — which tend to depress wages for grocery store workers city-wide — from the site. Also showing its commitment to creating higher quality jobs, Cherokee agreed to use best value contracting in

selecting its subcontractors, and to pay prevailing wage on about 1,000 project-related construction jobs. To help build the trust necessary for a fruitful long-term relationship, Cherokee formed the Voluntary Cleanup Advisory Board and made all documents related to the environmental testing and remediation at the site readily available to neighborhood residents.

Cherokee’s efforts generated public support for the project. The community benefits coalition spoke out in favor of the redevelopment throughout the entitlement process, beginning with testifying in support of Cherokee’s rezoning application. Later, the coalition announced its support of Cherokee’s subsidy request at the City Council hearing. Recounts Rhodes, “at the hearing, one by one we got up and talked about why we as a neighborhood resident, or as a union member, or as a community organization were supporting this project.”

Construction of the massive project is underway, and the community knows that the jobs the project is creating and the environmental cleanup it is undertaking are going to bring long-term benefits to west Denver



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