

# SOUTH MEMPHIS

## REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN



A People's Blueprint  
for Building a More  
Vibrant, Sustainable  
and Just Community

### Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary



# South Memphis Revitalization Action Plan (SoMe RAP) Executive Summary

## Origins of the South Memphis Revitalization Action Plan (SoMe RAP)

Following a long period of disinvestment and decline, South Memphis has recently begun to experience the beginnings of an exciting and much needed renaissance. During the past five years, a number of civic associations and block clubs have been formed through the efforts of the South Memphis Alliance (SMA) to combat violent street crime and encourage resident participation in the neighborhood. Dozens of existing homes have been rehabilitated and scores of new homes constructed by The Works, Inc. and LeMoyné Owen CDC - two highly effective community development corporations active in the area. In addition, hundreds of area youth have gained access to high quality education by attending the Circles of Success Learning Academy, the Marcus Garvey Institute and Learning Academy, and the Soulsville Charter School. Currently, the area awaits the opening of Town Center, a new retail complex, being developed across the street from the STAX Museum of American Soul Music and the STAX Music Academy.

Seeking to build upon the momentum generated by these and other recent community development initiatives, representatives of St. Andrew African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, The Works, Inc., Self Tucker Architects, the Consilience Group, and The University of Memphis came together in the summer of 2008, with the support of the Hyde Family Foundations, to form the South Memphis Renaissance Collaborative (SMRC). The primary purpose of the South Memphis Renaissance Collaborative is to encourage the formation of public/private development partnerships that can significantly expand employment and entrepreneurial opportunities and visibly enhance the quality of life for local residents. Realizing that to successfully undertake the kind of ambitious local economic development projects required to rebirth this South Memphis neighborhood would necessitate the involvement of other public, private, and non-profit organizations, this newly-formed alliance invited others to form a steering committee to create and implement a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan designed to transform South Memphis into one of the region's premier neighborhoods of choice. In the fall of 2009, the South Memphis Revitalization Action Plan (SoMe RAP) Steering Committee, with membership from twenty-two area businesses, religious institutions, service organizations, and civic associations came together, and began their work. The SoMe RAP Steering Committee is chaired by Reverend Kenneth S. Robinson M.D., Pastor of St. Andrew AME Church.

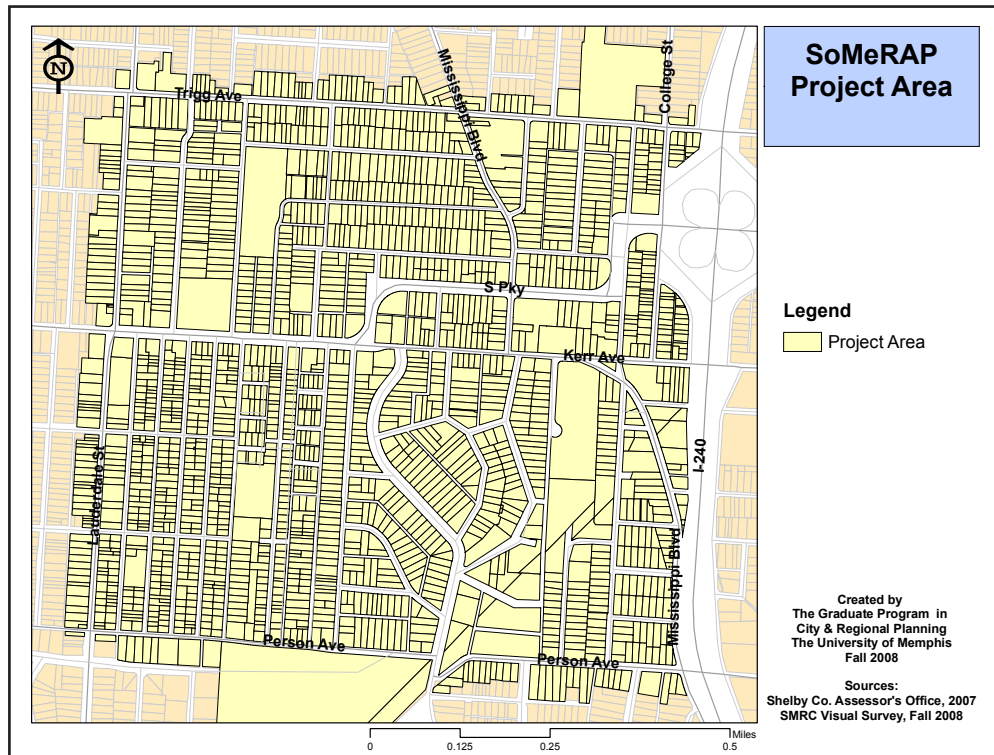
## The South Memphis Revitalization Action Project Study Area

SoMe RAP's participating leaders decided to focus their initial economic and community development efforts in an area of South Memphis bounded by I-240 on the east, Person Avenue on the south, Lauderdale Street on the west, and Trigg Avenue on the north. The South Memphis Revitalization Action Plan Study Area, which appears below, contains approximately 140 city blocks, 1,800 building lots, twenty-one churches, five schools, a city park, and is home to more than 6,800 individuals. Over time, the Project leaders expect the plan to have a positive impact

on the entire South Memphis Community and generate interest in comprehensive, resident-led neighborhood planning throughout the Greater Memphis Region.

### SoMe RAP Study Area

Map S.1



### An Asset-Based Community Development Model

Appreciating the neighborhood's many visible and invisible assets, SoMe RAP's leaders adopted the asset-based community development model developed by John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann. This increasingly popular approach to economic and community development seeks to mobilize the existing intellectual, spiritual, human, natural, financial, and organizational resources of a community to address its current economic and community development challenges. The asset-based community development model uses success on modest scale projects to attract additional community support and increasing levels of outside investment. Through this developmental approach to community development, this model has increasingly demonstrated its ability to enhance the community organizing, planning, development, and management capacity of community-based organizations within the most economically distressed and politically challenged communities.

## The Planning Process

With the assistance of students and faculty from The University of Memphis (U of M) Anthropology, Architecture, and City and Regional Planning Programs, the SoMe RAP Steering Committee developed a detailed strategy for collecting and analyzing the information required to develop a data-driven and community-supported revitalization plan to improve the overall quality of life for current and future residents of South Memphis. During the fall of 2008 and the spring of 2009, more than ninety U of M students worked with approximately four hundred residents and leaders to carry out the following research activities:

- Archival research on local social history;
- Analysis of recent population, education, employment, income, and housing trends;
- Evaluation of community land use, building conditions, and site maintenance levels;
- Interviews with local institutional leaders regarding their perceptions of existing neighborhood conditions and future development preferences;
- Organization of focus groups with local senior citizens and PTA members to elicit their perceptions of existing conditions and future development preferences;
- Interviews with local residents regarding their views, hopes, and preferences;
- Survey of best practices in the policy and planning areas of greatest interest to local residents.

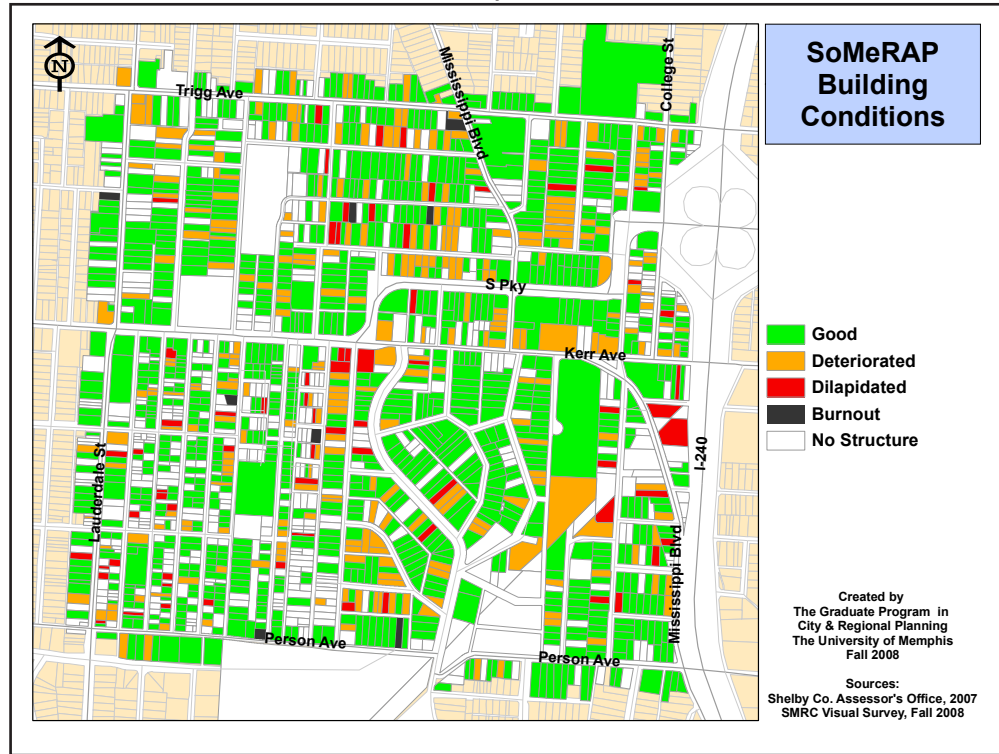
## Major Research Findings

Among the most important data reviewed by the SoMe RAP Planning Team were basic population trends.

	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Percent change</b>
<b>SoMe RAP Area</b>	8,656	6,998	-19.2%
<b>Uptown</b>	7,295	5,193	-28.8%
<b>Binghampton</b>	7,575	6,444	-14.9%
<b>Fairgrounds</b>	9,153	7,576	-17.2%
<b>Memphis City</b>	610,337	649,845	6.5%
<b>Shelby County</b>	826,330	897,472	8.6%
<b>Tennessee</b>	4,877,185	5,689,283	16.7%

As Table S.1 illustrates, the SoMe RAP Study Area lost nearly 20% of its total population between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, nearly 90% of the area's total population was African American. The median household income was \$34,000 as compared to more than \$54,000 for the State, with more than 40% of the area's families living on incomes below the poverty line.

Map S.2

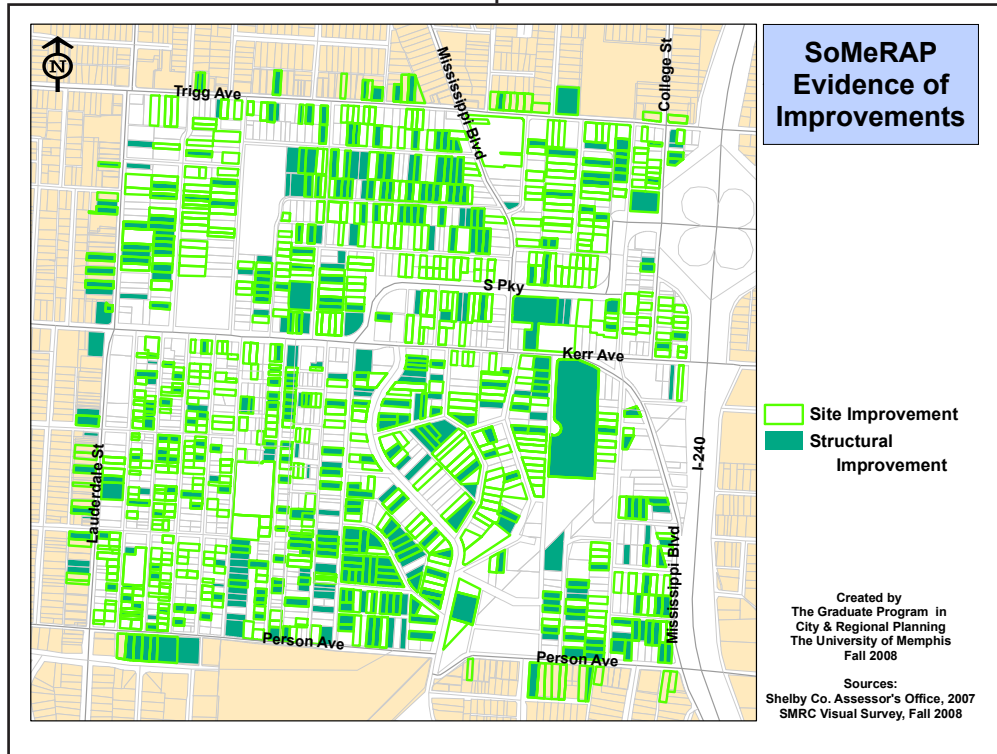


Despite these distressing income and poverty statistics, the majority of the area's residential housing stock was in fair to good shape, due in part to the quality of its original design and construction. This finding also reflects the effort local homeowners and tenants have made to maintain their housing often in spite of area lenders' reluctance to lend in South Memphis due to perceived high levels of risk.



The effort local residents have made to maintain their homes and community during a time of neighborhood disinvestment by lenders and government is depicted by the map that appears below. This map highlights those building parcels where residents have made substantial recent investments either to their homes or landscaping.

Map S.3



Data collected by community and campus volunteers was reviewed and a number of recurring themes emerged during our interviews with local residents and leaders. Among the many positive qualities respondents attributed to the neighborhood were its:

- Excellent location close to downtown and many of the region's most important employment, educational, and cultural centers;
- Elegant "City Beautiful"-inspired urban design scheme highlighted by George Kessler's South Parkway;
- Generous collection of beautifully designed and well-maintained Craftsman Bungalows;
- Presence of a large number of community-minded and engaged religious institutions serving the community;
- Many health and human services organizations offering a wide range of children and family services;
- Five public schools, one charter school, and one private academy;
- Locally-owned and operated businesses offering both important goods and services, and living wage jobs;
- Strong sense of community pride.

Among the current challenges identified by local stakeholders during interviews, focus groups, and community meetings were the neighborhood's:

- Low secondary school completion rate;
- High unemployment and poverty rate;
- Elevated crime rate;
- Many vacant residential and commercial structures;
- Lack of local primary care physicians;
- Weak public transportation links to other neighborhoods and regional centers;
- Lack of city and county investment in basic infrastructure.

During a series of neighborhood meetings during the fall and winter of 2008 and spring of 2009, more than four hundred community residents and leaders discussed these and other current community conditions. Reflecting upon the community's many strengths, they developed the following overall neighborhood improvement goal to guide their future economic and community development activities.

## SoMe RAP Overall Neighborhood Improvement Goal

To transform South Memphis into one of our region's premier urban neighborhoods of choice by mobilizing local residents, institutions and their allies to implement a comprehensive economic and community development strategy promoting healthy living, lifelong-learning, local entrepreneurship, job training, innovative youth and family services, green building and design, cooperative problem-solving, alternative transportation, excellence in urban design, and public and private partnerships.

Those who participated in the neighborhood planning process further identified the following seven development objectives as necessary milestones South Memphis would have to achieve to succeed in reaching its overall neighborhood improvement goal.

## SoMe RAP Planning Objectives

1. Improve *public safety* through implementation of a community-based and resident-led crime prevention program;
2. Enhance the sense of place through the execution of an *urban design* plan that builds upon the community's City Beautiful and Craftsman design legacy;
3. Expand *employment and entrepreneurship* opportunities for current and future residents through the pursuit of an ambitious workforce and small business initiative;
4. Provide local residents, business owners, and institutional leaders with greater access to high quality, affordable and culturally appropriate retail goods and services through an "*import substitution*" development strategy;
5. Redesign *educational services* for middle school, high school and young adult learners to increase the percentage of residents completing high school and higher education programs, strengthening their competitive position in our global economy;
6. Address the critical health challenges facing local residents by developing an *ambitious health and wellness education and action* campaign;
7. Expand *quality affordable housing* opportunities available to all current and future residents;
8. Reduce South Memphis' carbon footprint by implementing a serious *energy conservation* program; and
9. Guarantee South Memphis residents the full benefits of their favored location within the Tri-State Region by exploiting meaningful *alternatives to auto-based transportation*.

## SoMe RAP's Detailed Revitalization Action Plan

Local residents and leaders initially generated more than two hundred specific economic and community development projects to assist South Memphis in achieving these objectives. Working together in seven policy teams, South Memphis residents and leaders were able to reduce this list to approximately sixty high impact initiatives. Subsequent to this winnowing down process, local residents and leaders formulated a phasing scheme through which twenty projects were

recommended for implementation within the next two years, an additional twenty projects were recommended for implementation within the next five years while the balance of the projects were recommended for implementation during the next seven years.

### SoMe RAP Community Development Strategy

This asset-based developmental approach to community development initially focuses on smaller-scale projects requiring modest numbers of community volunteers, no paid staff support, and little internal or external funding. Success on these immediate term projects is expected to broaden local community support, produce new organizational allies and supporters, and generate new interest among community development funding agencies located outside of South Memphis. Over time, these stepping stones will enable the community, to successfully undertake increasingly complex and challenging projects. The creators of this plan believe this process will significantly enhance the ability of community-based development organizations, such as The Works, Inc. to pursue projects that are ambitious and capable of producing the kind of transformational change that South Memphis residents so desperately desire.

### Project Proposal Schedule and Required Resources

	<b>Immediate-Term (Years 1-2)</b>	<b>Short-Term (Years 3-5)</b>	<b>Long-Term (Years 6-7)</b>
<b>Needed Staff</b>	Current Volunteers	Part-time staff required	Full-time staff required
<b>Funding Requirement</b>	Less than \$25,000 per project	Less than \$200,000 per project	Less than \$1 million per project
<b>Outside Technical Assistance</b>	None	Modest level of planning and program development assistance	Ongoing technical assistance required from an experienced national TA provider, such as LISC or Enterprise

### The SoMe RAP Project Proposals

The specific development proposals contained within each of the plan’s seven elements are presented in the following table. Interested readers are strongly encouraged to call: Curtis Thomas, Deputy Executive Director, The Works, Inc., Telephone Number: (901) 846-9675; Kenneth Reardon, Director, Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning, University of Memphis, Telephone Number: (901) 679-2161; Katherine Lambert Pennington, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Memphis, Telephone Number: (901) 678-3328.

## Summary of the SoMe RAP Project Proposals

	<b>Immediate-Term (Years 1-2)</b>	<b>Short-Term (Years 3-5)</b>	<b>Long-Term (Years 6-7)</b>
Enhancing the Environment	Renew South Memphis	South Parkway Restoration	Parkway Pioneers Retail Center
	South Memphis Walks	Unified Development Code Rezoning	
	Beautify South Memphis		
Community Based Crime Prevention	South Memphis Lights	Fire and Security Surveys	South Memphis Community Policing Pilot
	South Memphis Neighborhood Watch	Community Dispute Resolution	
Housing Improvement	Homeownership Information Program	Kick it at Kerr: SoMe Music Legacy Lab	Helping Homes II
	Vacant Property Inventory and Intervention	Helping Homes Initiative	Workforce Green Training Academy
	Foreclosed Property Preservation	South Memphis Homeless Initiative	
		Energy Conservation	
Economic Development	Smart Money Institute	Café Reconcile Comes to Memphis	Parkway Pioneers Retail Center
	South Memphis Farmers Market	South Memphis Medical Tech Training Institute	SoMe Business Incubator
		SoMe Fashions	SoMe Arts and Cultural Festival
Public Health and Family Wellness	Human Services Directory	Substance Abuse Intervention	Cooperative Primary Care Clinic
	Community-based Health and Wellness Program	South Memphis on the Move	
		Consumer Health Insurance	
Child and Family Development	Parents Day Out	South Memphis Baby College	Middle College Program
	SoMe Youth Mentorship	South Memphis Adult Education Initiative	Boy's and Girl's Club Returns
	UN Growing Up in Cities	Garvey Institute and School Upgrade	Ruth E. Tate Center Expansion
	Ernestine Rivers Child Care Construction		
Public Transportation	South Memphis Lights	Bus Stop Design Project	Mississippi/Gaither Street Closing
	South Memphis Walks	Memphis Quick Trip Jitney	

## Signature Projects

Space does not allow us to describe all of the projects contained in the SoMe RAP plan; however, this section offers very brief summaries of five of the plan's signature projects.

- South Memphis Farmers Market- The plan proposes the conversion of an abandoned car wash, long an eyesore on South Parkway East, into a seasonal food market offering high quality, low cost, and culturally appropriate fresh fruits, vegetables, breads, desserts and other prepared foods. The market will provide South Memphis residents with a much needed healthy foods outlet. A unique aspect of the market would be an area reserved for health vans from the region's major health centers. While doing their weekly shopping families will be able to take advantage of health screening, education, and primary care services offered by these mobile facilities.
- Café Reconcile Comes to Memphis- Representatives of the area's fine dining establishments and hotels will join with The University of Memphis Hospitality School and Business College in forming a non-profit organization that will operate a sit-down restaurant and catering service employing recently released offenders. During the course of an eight-week training cycle these individuals will be trained, with the assistance of the area's finest chefs and restaurateurs, for the full range of serving, hostessing, and food preparation positions found in today's eateries. This program is based upon the Café Reconcile model of ex-offender training pioneered in the Mid-City section of New Orleans.
- South Parkway Restoration Project- One of South Memphis's most distinctive physical feature is this "CityBeautiful"-inspired boulevard designed by George Kessler, one of the iconic figures in American landscape architecture and planning. The plan proposes the restoration of the parkway which moves through the heart of South Memphis. The

Image S.1 and S.2  
South Parkway Restoration  
Staff Photo: April 4, 2009



greenway that formerly ran down the middle of the parkway will be restored by planting similar species of the elegant shade trees that once-lined the parkway, providing much needed shade for walkers, bikers, and runners. Missing and broken sidewalks and curbs will be repaired and curb cuts installed, allowing those with physical limitations to take advantage of the new parkway. Craftsman-inspired lighting fixtures, bus stops, benches,

- and trash receptacles will be installed along the length of the corridor to re-enforce the original sense of place intended by its designers.
- Kick it at Kerr: South Memphis Music Legacy Laboratory- One of the community's most dilapidated multi-family housing complexes is the Chateau-Kerr Housing Complex located on Kerr Avenue, directly behind St. Andrew AME Church. The plan recommends the transformation of Chateau Kerr into an artists housing and recording space. Chateau Kerr was once home to many of STAX's record label artists. Currently, there is a severe shortage of housing close to affordable rehearsal and production space. Initiators of the Memphis Music Magnet hope to accelerate the rebirth of the region's music performance industry, in part, by creating residential communities where artists, composers, graphic designers, and set designers can live in close proximity to one another allowing for an easy exchange of musical ideas and inspiration. The location of the STAX Museum of Soul Music, Royal Recording Studio, as well as homes of many of the nation's most important performers, including Aretha Franklin and Memphis Slim, have prompted significant interest in the production of artists' housing in this area. In return for subsidized housing, rehearsal space, and production facilities, local artists will provide master classes for local youth interested in pursuing a musical career.

Image S.3  
Chateau Kerr Transformation Rendering  
Staff Photo: April 4, 2009



- South Memphis Pioneers' Plaza- Currently, South Memphis lacks a full-service grocery store. Income data for the area suggest that it could, in fact, support a retail store, several sit down restaurants, a pharmacy, and additional commercial office space. The plan features a 26,000 square foot retail center at the corner of South Parkway East and Lauderdale Street. This new shopping center would include a 17,000 square foot food store, two 2,000 square foot restaurants, and a 1,000 square foot sandwich shop. A key design feature of the retail center would be an area featuring sculptural elements and exhibition panels celebrating the lives of those individuals, organizations, and institutions

that have made a significant contribution to the establishment and development of South Memphis. For example, the life and art of Aretha Franklin, Memphis Slim, and Isaac Hayes might be celebrated as well as the journalism and advocacy efforts of Ida Tarbell who worked in the area and the civil rights career of Reverend Billy Kyles who still serves as the pastor of Monumental Baptist Church.

### **Implementing the Plan**

In the coming weeks, local residents, business persons, and institutional leaders will have the opportunity to review and comment on this plan at various community organizing meetings. Once residents and leaders have offered their final comments on the plan, it will be submitted to the Memphis/Shelby Land Use Control Board for their review, comment, and recommendation.

Following recommendation of the plan by the Memphis and Shelby County Land Use Control Board (LUCB), it will be submitted to Memphis City Council and the Shelby County Board of Commissioners for review and approval. When their approvals have been secured, The SoMe RAP Steering Committee will work with students and faculty from the University of Memphis in pursuing the human, financial, and physical resources required to implement the plan beginning in January 2010.



## Securing SoMe RAP's Implementation

Those interested in getting involved in the implementation of the SoMe RAP are encouraged to contact Curtis Thomas, Deputy Director of The Works; Katherine Lambert-Pennington, Assistant Professor of Anthropology; or Kenneth Reardon, Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning. Their contact information is as follows:

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