



# PROMOTING REGIONAL EQUITY

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A Framing Paper

Prepared by PolicyLink

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PolicyLink is a national nonprofit research, communications, capacity building, and advocacy organization, dedicated to advancing policies to achieve economic and social equity based on the wisdom, voice, and experience of local constituencies.

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The Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities works to inform and strengthen philanthropic funders' individual and collective abilities to support and connect organizations working to advance social equity, create better economies, build livable communities, and protect and preserve natural resources.

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# Promoting Regional Equity: A Framing Paper

Prepared by PolicyLink for  
Promoting Regional Equity: A National Summit  
On Equitable Development, Social Justice, and Smart Growth  
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## Preface

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In 1999, PolicyLink and the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities began a partnership to strengthen efforts to achieve economic and social equity, particularly in the context of the smart growth movement. A centerpiece of the partnership was the creation of a Learning Action Network (LAN)—community leaders and advocates, funders, policymakers, and researchers who met four times over the course of two years to develop strategies and relationships to advance regional equity. The LAN was premised on the recognition that the future of low-income/low-wealth communities is tied to regional social, political, and economic factors; and that improving the well-being of low-income neighborhoods requires regional analysis and action.

*Promoting Regional Equity: A Framing Paper* seeks to broaden and deepen the growing dialogue and action to promote regional equity. Through analysis and practical examples, the paper explores a number of key equity issues that challenge our nation today—from education to transportation to environmental justice—and situates these issues in a regional context. Further, the paper identifies opportunities for action and highlights examples of community actors evolving their strategies and

tactics to the “regional reality,” and successfully connecting their neighborhoods and communities to resources and opportunities throughout regions.

Much progress has been made, and there is much more to be done. *Promoting Regional Equity: A National Summit on Equitable Development, Social Justice, and Smart Growth* is intended to provide a venue to celebrate success, share, learn, and set strategic priorities for advancing regional equity. We hope that this framing document and the Summit will help build greater understanding in the field, and move us toward implementing an agenda for action.



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## Introduction

# 1

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### Sprawl and Inequity

Increasingly, people's life chances are determined by where they live. In many of our nation's metropolitan regions, the outer edges enjoy growth and prosperity, while central cities and inner suburbs experience overall population loss, a declining tax base, and increasing concentrated poverty. Residents of inner-city neighborhoods, for instance, are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than their suburban counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

Living in concentrated poverty is usually ruinous to people's life chances.<sup>2</sup> People in poor neighborhoods are typically cut off from access to livable wage jobs, quality education, adequate health services, or protection from criminal activities. Because of persistently high unemployment, conditions in poor communities are often self-reproducing. When most of one's neighbors have either no jobs or bad jobs, then the social networks in that community will not be helpful in connecting to available employment.<sup>3</sup>

Exacerbating the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities in metropolitan regions is suburban sprawl—defined as the continuous spread of businesses and housing beyond the boundaries of the central city and inner suburbs into more distant, once rural, areas. As critical services such as public schools in older communities erode because of declining tax bases, and employment opportunities, including entry-level jobs, move away from urban centers, low-income residents are increasingly challenged in gaining access. For example, the City of Cleveland contains 80 percent of the metropolitan area's African-American poor while 80 percent of the entry-level jobs are in the suburbs.<sup>4</sup>

As our nation and communities grow more ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse, both enhancing and complicating our social fabric, it becomes even more critical to build broad public commitment and engagement for equity and inclusion.<sup>5</sup> Shaping the development of our metropolitan regions in the 21st century will be a key arena for addressing this challenge.

## The Challenge: Forging More Equitable Regions

Many of the challenges families and communities face cannot adequately be addressed by traditional political boundaries and jurisdictions. Economic development, for example, extends beyond cities to regional economic clusters; environmental issues exist within bioregions; and social issues cut across neighborhoods within regions.<sup>6</sup> Those concerned about social and economic equity recognize that the future for residents of low-income neighborhoods is tied to regional social, political, and economic factors and thus require analysis, engagement, and impact at the regional level.

Sprawl, regional inequity, and the hardships they cause are not natural results of a free market economy. Rather, they are direct results of public policies that have provided incentives for suburban growth at the expense of central cities and older suburbs and their low-income residents. Federal laws, such as the National Housing Act of 1934, which insured low-interest mortgage loans to middle-class households making a new life in the suburbs, have served to undermine the health of central cities. Moreover, state and local practices have contributed to the problem as suburban governments, for example, committed public monies to attract businesses, and therefore jobs, out of the inner city and older suburbs.

Regional equity means giving children and families of all races and classes the best possible environment in which to live. Advancing regional equity thus involves reducing social and economic disparities among individuals, social groups, neighborhoods, and local jurisdictions within a metropolitan area.<sup>7</sup> Regions grow healthier economically when all communities in the region are strong. In essence, “the fate of the cities is linked with that of the suburbs, the fate of business with that of the workforce, and the fate of the middle class with that of the poor.”<sup>8</sup>

Reducing inequities within regions means providing economic opportunity and secure, living-wage jobs for all residents. It involves building healthy, mixed-income neighborhoods with sufficient affordable housing distributed throughout the region. It means fostering strong civic engagement and responsive institutions to ensure that all residents have a voice in the major decisions that affect their lives. It means providing low-income residents with the opportunity to build assets and become beneficiaries of reinvestment and positive change in their communities. Finally, regional equity involves greater cooperation to promote a broader tax base and to have a more fair distribution of resources for quality schools and other public services.

Regional equity comprises three basic premises:

- Regional health depends on the health of all the region’s sectors—public, economic, and civic;
- Central cities and declining suburbs cannot successfully confront the problems of concentrated poverty independently; that is, without a regional focus;
- A regional approach to equity supports rather than undermines the political power, social cohesion, and sense of place of all residents of the region, but particularly those communities who have long been denied effective voice as a result of regional forces.<sup>9</sup>

Tackling the system of regional disparities, however, involves particular challenges. The consequences of sprawl and disinvestment are regional in scope, but modes of government are typically not. Where regional governments exist, they usually have authority only over specific functions such as transportation, air and water quality, and sewers. Regional equity thus becomes a “moving target.”

Regional equity advocates must direct their efforts to a thicket of local jurisdictions, state governments, and special districts in order to make change. Community-based organizations pursuing social and economic equity find this particularly challenging. Many are

focused exclusively at the local level in addressing the symptoms of urban disinvestment. Local actors, especially those representing communities of color, often do not have the resources to maintain engagement in regional planning and policy discussions and campaigns, nor have they always been welcomed. Unsuccessful past attempts and oftentimes strained race relations can and do complicate these regional alliances.

This framing paper aims to expand the dialogue and action promoting regional equity. It highlights a number of key equity issues that are challenging our nation—from education to housing to environmental justice—and speaks to the regional dimensions and web of connections that weave them together. These connections and efforts accomplished to date offer promising opportunities to build synergies and make progress across issues. This paper closes by offering a framework from which to develop an action agenda.

## Towards Regional Equity: Community Based Regionalism

The emergence of the region—rather than the city—as the dominant economic and social geographic unit, as well as the decentralization of urban growth, has led advocates for social change to think and act regionally. This “community based regionalism” is premised on the understanding that the future of low-income communities is tied to broader regional, social, political, and economic factors; and that improving the well-being of low-income neighborhoods requires an understanding of the regional context and taking action beyond a neighborhood or community level. In this sense, community actors are evolving their strategies and tactics in pragmatic and strategic ways to meet the reality of community and economic development processes.

Community based regionalism promotes equitable development and seeks sustainable solutions to regional disparities and injustice. It has emerged as

a key pathway to regional equity by bringing the experience, wisdom, voice, and power of people in poor communities directly to bear on local and regional policy decisions. Community based regionalism is guided by the following principles of equitable development.<sup>10</sup>

- **Integrate People- and Place-Focused Strategies.** Community and regional development and revitalization policies and practices must integrate people-focused strategies—efforts that support community residents and families—with place-focused strategies—those that stabilize and improve the neighborhood environment. This integrated, community building approach is necessary to maximize community benefit and reduce unintended negative consequences—such as displacement—for low-income populations.
- **Reduce Local and Regional Disparities.** Win-win solutions must be crafted that simultaneously improve outcomes for low-income communities and build healthy metropolitan regions. Metropolitan areas that pay systematic attention to both regional growth *and* central city poverty issues are more likely to be competitive for national and international economic opportunities.
- **Promote Double Bottom Line Investments.** Public and private investments in low-income communities are key for revitalization, but to reduce poverty these investments must produce a double bottom line: (1) financial returns for investors and (2) community benefits for residents (e.g., jobs, homes, businesses).
- **Ensure Meaningful Community Participation, Leadership, and Ownership.** Participation of community residents and organizations in planning and development provides community members with a direct stake in ensuring the success of revitalization efforts. Community residents and organizations must also have access to the tools, knowledge, and resources that can guarantee meaningful participation in the development process.

One strategic venue where community based regionalists are advancing regional equity is smart growth initiatives. Although smart growth principles recognize the interconnectedness among a healthy environment, a prosperous economy, and social equity, early efforts at implementation often neglected equity concerns. Now, those concerned with equity are increasingly building broad-based, equity-focused alliances pushing for regional agendas to explicitly address the lack of affordable housing, poor school quality, poor transportation, and other dimensions of inequity, in addition to preserving open space and reducing traffic congestion. As articulated by the mayor of Rochester, NY, William A. Johnson, Jr., "If smart growth is to flourish, it needs to be applied to the tangled issues of where people of different races and classes live, work, and go to school."<sup>11</sup>

development view any significant change as a threat to the existing balance of power that has favored their interests. They consider these initiatives as potentially eroding resources that they already have rather than a win-win. Others, including some leaders of low-income communities of color, worry that advancing regional equity is synonymous with a system of formal regional government that would dilute hard-won gains in the political representation of minority communities. Advocates must consistently demonstrate and give voice to the notion that regional equity is indeed in the interest of all.

## **The Road Ahead**

While low-income and communities of color suffer the most negative consequences of regional inequity, the impacts of uneven and unhealthy development patterns create widespread problems. Auto-oriented sprawl is causing people to drive more, leading to worsening air pollution. Growing commute distances among two-worker families are stealing parental time from children. In fast-developing areas on the metropolitan fringe, children must be driven to huge, anonymous schools that are often overcrowded when they open.<sup>12</sup>

While reversing unhealthy development patterns and building greater equity appear to be a win-win for all, these undertakings also face entrenched challenges. Today, there are few laws in place that explicitly promote regional equity. Some opponents of strategies focused on more equitable regional

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## Key Areas of Action for Regional Equity

# 2

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Through the exploration of seven key issue areas, this section highlights the regional disparities that confront many metropolitan areas, and illustrates the importance of addressing these disparities to promote equity and inclusion. The issue areas explored include:

- **Transportation**
- **Housing**
- **Economic Opportunity**
- **Land Use and Infrastructure**
- **Education**
- **Environmental Justice**
- **Health**

We present each of these areas from two focuses: a framing of the issue from a regional equity perspective and a description of several current approaches to address the issue. The local efforts in each of the action areas illustrate how advocates are gaining traction in advancing regional equity.

While each of these areas is treated separately, they are interrelated. Entrenched wealth disparities at the national level and sprawling regional development

patterns create racially concentrated poverty; social and economic isolation; disproportionate exposure to toxic waste and air emissions; lack of accessible jobs; lack of quality schools; and negative health consequences.

No single undertaking will alleviate these disparities. In the past decade, advocates for smart growth, affordable housing, civil rights, and the environment have begun working together so that improvement in one area can spur improvement in another.

For instance, better regional public transit can promote better access to jobs. Distributing affordable housing more equitably across regions can lead to better educational opportunities for low-income residents. More judicious use of a region's land—for example, building compact, walkable neighborhoods instead of auto-dependent developments on the urban fringe—would help reduce childhood obesity and improve health. These connections speak to the potential of multi-issue coalitions that bridge individual neighborhoods, constituencies, and concerns.

## Transportation

Transportation systems have a significant impact on the way a region develops and on the quality of life for its residents by determining access to housing locations, economic corridors, and employment opportunities. Therefore, transportation policy, planning, and investment can be a powerful vehicle for promoting regional equity.

Low-income communities of color have been adversely affected by our nation's transportation priorities in many ways. For decades, the vast majority of transportation dollars has gone to highway construction and repair, fueling suburban sprawl and the isolation and decline of central cities and older suburbs. Most metropolitan transit investment is geared towards benefiting suburban, white-collar commuters, while "reverse commute" routes—those that enable workers from inner cities and older suburbs to travel to entry-level jobs outside their neighborhoods—are nonexistent or severely underfunded.

Low-income communities of color disproportionately pay the price of regional transportation investment as "roads, freeways, and rail transit systems have divided, isolated, disrupted, and imposed different economic, environmental, and health burdens" on them.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, families earning less than \$12,000 per year spend *over one-third* of their income on transportation.<sup>14</sup> Residents of these communities of color have traditionally had little voice in metropolitan transportation decisions.

While low-income communities have not equally benefited from transportation and transit investments, these expenditures can be an engine for neighborhood revitalization and regional opportunity. However, such investments can be a double-edged sword. Building economic development projects around transit stops in low-income communities, for example, can provide a lifeline to opportunities across the region, but at the same time fuel gentrification

that eventually prices residents out of their neighborhood. If transportation investments are not included with awareness of the potential impacts on neighborhood affordability, and accompanied by mitigations and strategies to promote community benefit, existing low-income residents may be harmed.

An equitable transportation system is a cornerstone to achieving greater access and opportunity within regions. Transportation equity proponents affirm that an equitable transportation system would:

- Ensure opportunities for meaningful public involvement in the transportation planning process;
- Be answerable to standards of public accountability and financial transparency;
- Prioritize efforts to revitalize low-income people—particularly communities of color;
- Ensure benefits and burdens from transportation projects (e.g., jobs and pollution) are distributed across all income levels;
- Provide high-quality services to low-income minority communities.<sup>15</sup>

### *What's Being Done*

**National Efforts.** At the national level, an important transportation equity framework is being advanced through the Surface Transportation Policy Project's "new transportation charter." The charter calls for the reform of existing transportation governance structures, incentives, and investment policies in order to better promote public health, social equity, economic prosperity, and improved energy use and environmental protection.<sup>16</sup> The charter focuses on the reauthorization of important surface transportation legislation, the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21). Equity advocates are lobbying for more funding for access to jobs, public transit, system preservation, and programs that explicitly promote coordination between transportation and land use, including incentives for affordable housing close to transit.

**Local Efforts.** Complementary to broad national efforts, groups at the local and metropolitan levels are succeeding in having an impact on transportation policy and investment practices. They are prompting greater community involvement in regional transportation decisions; strengthening reverse commute options for workers from inner cities and older suburbs; developing community-driven, transit-oriented development projects at transit hubs; and advocating for equitable transit investment.

***On the Move: Greater Boston Transportation Justice Coalition***<sup>17</sup>

*Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE), an environmental justice organization based in Roxbury, MA, is spearheading a transportation justice coalition of over 50 groups to fight for greater equity in the Boston area's public transportation system. Members of the coalition, known as On the Move: Greater Boston Transportation Justice Coalition, include transit advocates, CDCs, affordable housing advocates, civil rights organizations, and environmental justice groups.*

*Organized in March 2002, On the Move maintains that the transit needs of low-income neighborhoods and communities of color have been systematically neglected by the state's transportation decision-makers. For example, the Boston-area metropolitan transit authority invests four times more in commuter rail than buses, even though there are four times as many bus riders. The bus fleet consists of 980 aging diesel vehicles that spew large quantities of particulate matter in bus-dependent, low-income neighborhoods. According to the American Lung Association, fragile lung tissue is easily damaged by pollutants in the air, resulting in increased risk of asthma and allergies, chronic bronchitis, lung cancer, and other respiratory diseases. On the Move has developed an agenda and action plan that calls for improvements in the service and environmental quality of the bus system; a fair share of transportation investment for low-income communities of color; greater community involvement*

*in transportation decisions; and linkages between transportation improvement and neighborhood affordability strategies. The coalition has been advocating for its goals with the governor in addition to the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization, which makes key decisions about transportation investment. The coalition has already secured almost \$40 million in the region's long-range transportation plan for adding 100 clean-fuel buses to the area's fleet.*

***Community-driven Transit-oriented Development in Chicago's West Garfield Park Neighborhood***<sup>18</sup>

*Bethel New Life, a faith-based community development corporation (CDC), has spearheaded the development of a \$4 million, 23,000-square-foot Transit Center in the low-income West Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago. The impetus for the Transit Center originated in 1992 when the Chicago Transit Authority announced plans to close the local station and the entire Green Line. Community leaders convinced the Authority to modernize the line instead; in 1993 the Authority introduced a \$300 million capital project to rebuild the Green Line. Since construction was completed, ridership has increased by 10 percent a year.*

*The Transit Center is designed to coordinate economic investment around the transit stop with the needs of the surrounding low-income community. It will include shops and restaurants, a day-care center (which will eventually include around-the-clock and weekend care for those families not working regular business hours), an employment office, and a walkway that connects the building to the Lake Pulaski station. It will produce some of its own energy with photovoltaic generators and is designed to serve the local neighborhood as well as commuter rail line. The project also calls for 65 units of affordable single and multifamily homes to be built one block from the rail station, which is also ten minutes from an elementary and a middle school.*

## Housing

The crisis in affordable housing—commonly defined as housing that costs no more than 30 percent of gross household income—is one of the most telling indicators of poverty and inequity in America.

According to the National Housing Conference, approximately 13 million families nationwide spend more than half of their income on housing or live in “severely substandard” conditions.<sup>19</sup>

The lack of sustained investment in the nation’s affordable housing stock is a key cause of this crisis. Money for federal low-income housing programs peaked in 1978, then declined precipitously in the early 1980s when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) terminated almost all public housing development.<sup>20</sup> The visibility of the relatively small portion of public housing concentrated in large high-rise projects obscures the fact that, in many communities, public housing is a primary source of decent, affordable housing.<sup>21</sup>

The uneven distribution of affordable housing within regions adds another dimension to the problem. In many metropolitan regions, for example, residents of central cities and older suburbs are isolated from entry-level employment opportunities at the periphery because they cannot afford to live near those jobs. The Millennial Housing Commission’s recently released report notes that “restrictive zoning practices” and “adoption of local regulations that discourage housing development” are key culprits behind this spatial mismatch.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, housing development that incorporates smart growth principles can actually improve choices and affordability.<sup>23</sup>

The revitalization of urban core areas can also have a detrimental impact on housing affordability. Local economic development plans that do not include an explicit affordable housing component can displace

residents by unleashing a process of rapidly escalating property values and rental conversions to for-sale properties. Low-income residents become at risk for displacement as revitalization occurs and property values rise.

Achieving housing equity rests on four principles:

- Increase the overall supply of affordable housing;
- Distribute affordable units across the region;
- Include affordable housing as a key component of any urban revitalization strategy so that low-income residents are not displaced;
- Develop mixed-income housing as a way to build diverse, inclusive communities.

### *What’s Being Done*

Advocacy groups and some local jurisdictions are pursuing a variety of housing strategies that contribute to regional equity. These efforts are helping to reduce racial segregation and concentrated poverty, stem polarization occurring among a region’s communities, and house workers closer to jobs.

**Inclusionary Zoning.** Inclusionary zoning distributes affordable housing throughout a region’s jurisdictions. It is a regulatory strategy that requires or encourages that a percentage of housing units in new residential developments be made available for low- and moderate-income households, thus fostering mixed-income communities.

Pioneered in Montgomery County, MD, through a 1974 ordinance, inclusionary zoning has been utilized successfully in communities throughout the country. Most effective in communities that are already growing, inclusionary zoning requires or encourages developers to contribute to affordable housing stock in exchange for benefits, such as zoning variances, development rights, and other permits.

### ***Inclusionary Zoning Around the Country***

*A number of variations on inclusionary zoning are being implemented across the United States. Inclusionary zoning can be pursued at both the state and local levels.*

*Statewide inclusionary policies are promising models for achieving greater scale in the production of affordable housing and greater equity among jurisdictions in the supply of affordable housing. Some states have mandatory provisions (e.g., New Jersey), while others have voluntary programs, such as in Minnesota. In California, statewide legislation requires inclusionary zoning in all redevelopment areas.*

*At the local level, Montgomery County, MD's ordinance requires developers of 50 units or more to set aside from 12.5 percent to 15 percent of units as affordable, in exchange for a density bonus of up to 22 percent. Inclusionary zoning in Boulder, CO, requires that at least 20 percent of total units must be affordable for all new residential developments. Developers may meet these requirements with off-site units, or land or cash donations. Santa Fe's inclusionary zoning law ties affordable housing requirements to the prices of market rate units. Areas with higher market rate housing face steeper affordable housing requirements.*

**Fair Share Housing.** Fair share housing programs promote more equitable distribution of affordable units throughout a region; they determine where low- and moderate-income units should be built. Implementing such programs are California, Oregon, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Fair share advocates in the San Francisco Bay Area—site of one of the most severe housing crises in the country—have launched an aggressive campaign to obtain enforceable commitments in cities' general plans.

**Housing Trust Funds.** Affordable housing financing strategies are critical components for increasing housing supply. Housing trust funds, for example, are

generally created by legislation or ordinance at the state or local level and are funded through a dedicated source of revenue. A recent survey of nearly 275 housing trust funds around the country found that the funds are now providing more than \$750 million each and every year for affordable housing. In this last year, it is estimated that housing trust funds supported more than 65,000 units of housing for lower income households. This conservative estimate does not account for numerous other activities supported through housing trust funds, such as: housing services, predevelopment activities, and organizational support. In recognition of the regional nature of the housing crisis, the Seattle-King County area of Washington State has established a regional housing trust fund.

### ***Regional Housing Trust Fund in Seattle-King County, WA<sup>24</sup>***

*In existence for ten years, A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) has committed more than \$16.6 million to creating and maintaining affordable housing in east King County. The ARCH housing trust fund is an innovative example of regional, cross-jurisdictional cooperation in addressing affordable housing needs.*

*ARCH brings together a network of 15 suburban cities that pool resources and undertake joint planning. Each participating jurisdiction contributes to the housing trust fund. In 1998, ARCH created a Parity Program to guide the level of contributions made by participating jurisdictions, ensuring that all members receive an equitable distribution of trust fund resources. ARCH considers this parity agreement a critical component to the ongoing success of the fund.*

*To date, 1,880 units have been built or preserved throughout the region. Of these, half are family housing, 27 percent are senior housing, 3.5 percent are homeless/transitional housing, and 8 percent support people with special needs.*

## Economic Opportunity

While many Americans benefit from our economy, countless others do not fare as well. Older neighborhoods have lost stable industry bases that once served as the livelihood for many low-income residents of color. Declining tax bases have forced budget cuts, with negative effects on the quality of schools, infrastructure, and services in urban areas. The result is a cycle of concentrated poverty and a growing gap between low-income residents of inner cities and older suburbs and broader regional employment and job training opportunities.

In some cities and regions, intensive reinvestment has taken place over the past decade. Public dollars have heavily subsidized private investment in low-wealth communities through direct subsidies, tax credits, loan guarantees, and other mechanisms. These subsidies rarely come with protections to ensure benefits for current residents. As a result, when urban reinvestment sparks neighborhood revitalization and property values appreciate, residents without assets are the first to be displaced.

Equalizing economic opportunity involves guiding public and private investment toward beneficial outcomes for low-income people. It means establishing economic development practices that result in “double bottom-line” outcomes—financial returns for investors coupled with community benefits for residents. Building economic opportunity within a regional equity context depends on:

- Redirecting economic investment to inner cities and older suburbs and providing concrete and tangible benefits to current residents;
- Ensuring access to the education and skills necessary for all individuals to participate fully in regional growth industries and the competitive economy;
- Linking workers to jobs throughout the region;
- Building the assets and stability of individuals, families, and communities through ownership and wealth-building opportunities.

### *What’s Being Done*

**Linking Economic Investment to Community Benefits.** Efforts are emerging across the country to create stronger links between economic development and community benefits. As large-scale public investments subsidize the redevelopment of disinvested communities, both regulation and community action can ensure that public expenditures result in benefits such as jobs and affordable housing for local residents. Residents are affirming their right to make public subsidies accountable to the community, arguing it is their tax dollars that provide these subsidies. A recent example of a successful community campaign to make public subsidies accountable is the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

#### ***Figueroa Corridor Coalition Wins Landmark Community Benefits Package***

*On March 31, 2001, the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice in Los Angeles came to a historic agreement with the development company owned by Rupert Murdoch and Phillip Anschutz. As part of the four-million-square-foot “Sports and Entertainment District” expansion of the Staples Center, the developers agreed to provide a comprehensive community benefits package. The negotiations involved more than 300 local residents, almost 30 diverse organizations (including environmental justice groups, block clubs, and churches), and five unions that supported the Coalition’s efforts. Through this unprecedented agreement, low-income urban residents will be able to share in the benefits of a major regional destination project. The package includes:*

- *Living Wage Jobs: A goal was set for 70 percent of the 5,500 permanent jobs at the development to pay at least the living wage or be union.*

- **Local Hiring:** *Local residents will be notified of jobs through a first-source hiring program set up by the coalition with \$100,000 seed money. Fifty percent of the approximately 5,500 permanent jobs is targeted for local hiring.*
- **Affordable Housing:** *Twenty percent of the housing units in the development will be affordable. A no-interest predevelopment loan fund of \$650,000 will also aid local nonprofits in developing between 130 and 325 additional affordable units.*
- **Parks and Recreation:** *One million dollars to build and/or rehabilitate parks and recreation facilities within a one-mile radius of the project. The developer also agreed to support a community needs assessment process (at a cost of \$50,000 to \$75,000) to inform the design and location of the parks.*

**Asset Building and Ownership.** Efforts to close the persistent wealth gap are gaining momentum and are critical in expanding long-term economic opportunity. Successful strategies are emerging that help low-income and low-wealth individuals and families accrue financial assets. These various forms of ownership—Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), limited equity co-ops, community land trusts, employee stock ownership, and others—provide low-income residents with a direct equity stake in homes, businesses and real estate.<sup>25</sup> The overall goal of these resident ownership mechanisms is to expand access to wealth-building tools and furnish low-wealth households with opportunities for economic stability and advancement.

**Workforce Development.** Workforce development programs specifically geared to regional growth industries are key to reducing poverty and promoting economic opportunity. These “sectoral” employment strategies target occupations and industries that have the potential to provide decent jobs to residents of low-income neighborhoods. By specializing in a

particular occupation, sectoral employment programs amass expertise in preparing persons for jobs in that occupation and getting them hired.<sup>26</sup>

Sector-based workforce development programs are underway in many metropolitan areas. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is implementing a six-site demonstration project to improve access to family-supporting jobs for disadvantaged young adults residing in inner-city communities.

### ***The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Jobs Initiative<sup>27</sup>***

*In 1995, The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) launched the Jobs Initiative, an eight-year, six-site demonstration project. The Jobs Initiative seeks to link welfare recipients and other low-income job seekers to jobs that pay good wages and offer opportunities for career advancement.*

*The six sites’ regional economies range from robust to stagnant. Common to each Jobs Initiative site is the fact that employment growth has been increasingly concentrated within the suburbs, making job access a pressing issue for inner-city residents. All six sites have close working partnerships with employers and are building case management systems to assist low-income workers once they become employed.*

*Between 1997 and 2000, the participating sites served almost 10,000 job seekers and placed nearly half into jobs averaging \$9.15 per hour. More than half of those placed into jobs were still working 12 months later. Sites include Denver, New Orleans, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Milwaukee.*

Complementary strategies for connecting low-income residents to regional employment opportunities include reverse commute programs, economic investment in the urban core that promotes job growth, employment linkage programs, living wage ordinances, and first-source hiring agreements.

## Land Use And Infrastructure<sup>28</sup>

Regional development has often used land inefficiently for separate, low-density purposes. This pattern has yielded suburban communities that are auto dependent; urban communities with diminished resource bases; a mismatch between where low-income workers live and where entry-level jobs are located; the loss of agricultural lands and open space to highways; increased commuting times; and pollution. Poor land use choices destroy more than one million acres of parks, farms, and open space each year, threatening America's productive farmland and turning parks and open spaces into strip malls and freeways. Each year more than 100,000 acres of wetlands are also destroyed, in large part, to build sprawling new developments. Since wetlands can remove up to 90 percent of the pollutants in water, wetlands destruction leads directly to more polluted water.<sup>29</sup>

Existing land use regulations and infrastructure arrangements are interrelated and contribute in many cases to regional inequity, realized as follows.

- **Suburban jurisdictions use land use regulations for exclusionary purposes.** Through their zoning codes, suburban jurisdictions can establish minimum lot sizes ("large lot zoning"), effectively rendering property unaffordable for low-income families. Jurisdictions also thwart affordable housing development by requiring special permits and fees and sometimes by banning multifamily developments.<sup>30</sup> The result is the de facto residential segregation of metropolitan regions.
- **Cities and older suburbs face deteriorating infrastructure in their own jurisdictions, yet must subsidize infrastructure development in new suburbs.** Many older communities have deteriorating streets, parks, sewers, water systems, and other infrastructure, but they cannot meet basic maintenance and rehabilitation needs. As Myron Orfield has shown, city residents subsidize the infrastructure costs of the suburbs. In the case

of Minnesota's Twin Cities, "sewer operations and capital costs are financed on a uniform regional basis, with all regional sewer users paying the same basic fee. This pricing system means that fully developed older communities subsidize the developing communities where new sewer capacity is introduced."<sup>31</sup>

- **"Fiscalization of land use" is a common practice.** Fiscalization of land use is defined as the tendency of jurisdictions to prioritize development projects that can contribute most to local sales tax revenues. This practice results in zoning large tracts of land on the urban fringe as commercial to attract major retailers. Fiscalization of land use exacerbates sprawl, weakens the retail and tax base of central cities and older suburbs, and reduces available land for open space and housing. Fiscal zoning also promotes costly competition among neighboring jurisdictions to attract corporations through subsidies. The result is often a decision to locate on "greenfield" sites in wealthy suburban jurisdictions over sites in poorer urban jurisdictions.

Better land use and infrastructure arrangements have tremendous potential to create more equitable regions and are guided by the following principles:

- Encourage investment in the urban core, ending the cycle of decline in older communities;
- Promote compact growth patterns that form balanced and integrated communities and reduce the need for costly new infrastructure;
- Insulate open space and farmland from the pressure to convert to other uses and protect air and water quality.

### *What's Being Done*

More equitable land use patterns and infrastructure investments are a function of both state and local governments. While most state governments have not met this challenge, several have begun promising initiatives.

**Smart Growth Initiatives.** Best known is Maryland's smart growth program. Enacted in 1997, several initiatives direct state resources to revitalize cities and towns, conserve natural resources and open space, and discourage sprawl development. A key feature is the "Smart Growth Areas Act," which establishes "Priority Funding Areas." This law limits the provision of state funding for infrastructure, economic development, housing, and other programs to "Smart Growth Areas" designated by local governments.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, areas that do not meet minimum performance standards for efficient land use and land conservation are ineligible for state infrastructure funds.

**Tax Revenue Sharing.** Another important and groundbreaking equity strategy is tax revenue sharing. The Minnesota Fiscal Disparities Plan, enacted by the Minnesota State legislature in the early 1970s, is a regional revenue sharing arrangement that has succeeded in significantly reducing disparities among the jurisdictions within the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region. The ratio between the richest and poorest community within the region is currently 4:1 and without the plan would have been 17:1.<sup>33</sup>

**Zoning.** Municipal zoning codes are key for implementing land use regulations. While many codes are outmoded and may directly or indirectly produce sprawl, some jurisdictions have adopted smart growth provisions explicitly designed to reduce sprawl and regional inequity. Such zoning codes encourage development that is more physically compact; located on urban "infill" sites rather than on undeveloped land in the suburbs; more heterogeneous with regard to income; and containing more plentiful affordable housing.

**Commercial Linkage.** Commercial linkage strategies established by legislation or ordinance tie new economic development to the construction and maintenance of affordable housing or other community needs. Enacted as part of local land use regulations, most linkage programs do this by requiring developers of new commercial properties to pay fees (usually assessed per square foot of development) to support affordable housing. In exchange for compliance, developers receive building permits. Boston has a linkage program that charges developers \$7.18 per square foot for affordable housing. Between 1986 and 2000, this program generated over \$45 million that has been used to construct over 5,000 affordable housing units.

Other states are also making progress. For example, in California, State Treasurer Phil Angelides, through his Smart Investments initiative, has directed that state infrastructure investments support both sustainable development and sound environmental practices and has called for increased investment in low-income communities. Tennessee, Maine, and Wisconsin reward communities that meet their regional housing needs and achieve more compact, balanced land uses by giving them priority access to transportation, school, open space, and other infrastructure grants.<sup>34</sup>

## Education

Educational inequity for a segment of our nation's children is one of the most appalling consequences of sprawl. Reversing some of the gains of the '50s and '60s, white flight to the suburbs continues to entrench segregation of public education. According to a recent study released by Harvard University's Civil Rights Project, public school students are becoming increasingly isolated by race, not only in central cities, but in many suburbs as well.<sup>35</sup>

A parallel trend is the significant disparities that separate the highest-spending and lowest-spending school districts in many states and the resulting differences in educational quality. School districts that educate the greatest number of low-income students of color receive substantially less state and local money per student than districts with wealthier, white students.<sup>36</sup> Thus, in a single metropolitan area, major differences in per-pupil spending depend on where the school is located and which students are being served. The principal factor driving these disparities is school districts' dependence on local property tax revenue. The disparities are most pronounced in those states where local property taxes form the basis for most school funding. In those situations, central cities, older suburbs, and many rural towns suffering disinvestment and a declining property tax base have fewer local resources to dedicate to schools. In states where, as a result of lawsuits on behalf of children in low-wealth districts, dependence on local funding has been replaced by greater state support, the amounts spent per child are relatively more equal.<sup>37</sup>

According to the nonprofit Education Trust, funding gaps have real consequences for the quality of education low-income and minority children can receive. In New York, the state with the largest funding gaps, the difference between high- and low-wealth districts is \$2,152 per student, which translates into a difference of \$860,800 annually between elementary schools of the same size (400 students).

Nationally, districts that educate the greatest number of low-income students receive \$966 less per student than wealthier districts.<sup>38</sup> Consistent with these disparities, John A. Powell has shown that attending a racially isolated, high-poverty school adversely affects student achievement levels.<sup>39</sup> While equalizing spending is a necessary step toward full educational equity, schools in lower socio-economic areas also face a set of other challenges, as a result of historical patterns of discrimination and the socio-economic related needs of their students.

Operating budgets are not the only aspect of public education that can be made less equitable by sprawl. The siting of schools, which is a product of larger development patterns, can also contribute to these negative trends. The growing phenomenon of building large regional schools in outlying areas reinforces suburban expansion and regional disparities. A new suburban school can act as a magnet, influencing population shifts away from the urban core. Similarly, under-performing schools in older neighborhoods can push families to leave.

Most state funding formulas promote "school sprawl" by favoring construction over rehabilitation of older schools in the central city and older suburbs. Also, state regulations often stipulate a minimum lot size for schools; to satisfy huge acreage standards, school districts must either destroy nearby homes, parks, and neighborhoods or build in outlying areas.

Growing evidence suggests that the new "mega-schools" built in suburban areas may not be optimal for meeting student needs. Students attending smaller schools, on average, have lower dropout rates and score better on standardized tests.<sup>40</sup> Schools that are large and distant from where students live have lower rates of parental involvement, are isolated from the community fabric, and underutilized as community resources.

To improve educational equity in metropolitan regions:

- Reduce the racial segregation among regions' communities and schools;
- Equalize the per-pupil spending across school districts in each state;
- Build smaller schools that are anchored in neighborhoods and can serve a variety of neighborhood needs.

### *What's Being Done*

**State Efforts.** States establish the systems that fund public schools; closing funding disparities thus depends in large part on state action. The most common approaches are for states to reduce reliance on local property taxes by assuming a greater share of overall school funding and to target poorer districts when distributing those state tax revenues. Most states now do some version of both of these things, but they often do not provide sufficient resources to make up what can be huge resource differences between poor and wealthy communities.<sup>41</sup>

With no single federal principle guiding the state courts and different constitutional provisions among the states, state litigation has resulted in a wide range of judicial decisions. Several state courts have found that educational funding disparities violate the state's constitution and that dollar-for-dollar spending equity is needed.<sup>42</sup> However, the solutions have varied in how close to equalization they have come or how swiftly the reforms have been implemented. Recent lawsuits, which have not yet been resolved, go beyond the funding equalization strategy and are aimed at holding the state government directly accountable for failing to provide all students with an adequate education.<sup>43</sup>

Some promising collaborative efforts have emerged around the need to stop "school sprawl"; these efforts are advancing alternatives to minimum site size requirements and to the funding formulas that favor construction over rehabilitation. In Maryland, under the state's smart growth program, the state gives preference to reinvestment in existing schools over school construction in sprawl locations. Eighty percent of Maryland's school dollars were slated for renovation in 2001, compared to just 25 percent in the mid-1990s.<sup>44</sup> Massachusetts has adopted financial incentives that reward school districts for excellence in maintaining existing schools and for renovating schools.

**Local Efforts.** A consensus is also emerging about the role that schools can play in resettling and strengthening older neighborhoods and in creating more livable communities. The reemergence of support for the concept of "schools as centers of community" affirms that schools and their associated grounds can serve as important community anchors and resources. One initiative in particular, New Schools/Better Neighborhoods in Los Angeles, underscores how small neighborhood schools and anti-sprawl/regional equity practices can reinforce one another.

#### ***New Schools/Better Neighborhoods<sup>45</sup>***

*New Schools/Better Neighborhoods (NSBN) promotes a vision of public schools serving as centers of their neighborhoods and likewise, neighborhoods and communities serving as centers of learning. This California-based civic organization, with offices in Los Angeles, advocates for state and local funding and regulatory reform to help provide incentives for better school siting and collaborative community planning that does not fuel sprawl and suburban migration.*

*These issues are taking on increased urgency as the state of California prepares to build hundreds of new schools to relieve overcrowded classrooms. According to NSBN, new school facilities should be smaller, mixed use community-centered schools providing a range of services that can be accessed and utilized by all residents and community stakeholders. NSBN also advocates for preservation of green space and providing teachers and other school workers with affordable housing options nearby.*

*NSBN, with foundation and First 5 Commission seed funding, is working now with school districts and cities in southern and northern California to collaboratively plan a portfolio of mixed-use, neighborhood centered schools to serve as models for statewide replication.*

Stopping school sprawl and focusing on schools as anchors of strong, cohesive neighborhoods can play key roles in improving educational opportunity and advancing regional equity. Achieving these goals will require collaboration among education, civil rights, community development, and smart growth advocates, as well as among neighborhood residents, leaders, and parents.

## Environmental Justice

It is well documented that low-income communities of color are disproportionately affected by toxic materials used in the workplace and discharged into the air, land, and water. In response, the environmental justice movement advocates for the right to clean and healthy environments for all communities. Environmental justice refers to the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Environmental justice and regional equity are linked. Both are based on the understanding that governmental policy and regional development patterns have placed disproportionate economic and environmental burdens on low-income communities of color and afforded them few of the benefits of development. These burdens include:

**Proximity to Toxic Facilities.** Low-income communities of color are more likely to be close to hazardous waste facilities and toxic dumps. A Commission for Racial Justice report showed that the most significant factor associated with the siting of hazardous waste facilities was race. For example, African Americans were heavily over-represented in the populations of metropolitan areas with the greatest number of uncontrolled toxic waste sites.<sup>46</sup>

**Poor Air Quality.** Because they possess less political and economic clout than wealthier communities, low-income communities are more likely to be near freeways, industrial installations, and diesel traffic and facilities. As a result, residents breathe poor-quality air. The Harlem/Northern Manhattan area is home to six diesel bus depots, for example, and parked buses idle on city streets throughout the night, causing around-the-clock exhaust.

Metropolitan residents of color are suffering the health consequences of poor environmental practices. Although African Americans represent 12.8 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 23.7 percent of asthma deaths. Acidic air particles, sulfur dioxide, and overexposure to ozone—all forms of air pollution that are far more prevalent in minority communities—have been linked to increases in patients' emergency room visits and hospital admissions. A study published in 1999 indicates that hospitalization rates for asthma in New York City are as much as 21 times higher in low-income neighborhoods of color than those where the population is predominantly white.<sup>47</sup>

A number of regional factors make minority populations vulnerable to environmental injustices, among them:

**Lack of Mobility.** The unequal distribution of affordable housing in metropolitan regions and lack of wealth mean that residents of low-income communities do not have the means to buy their way out of polluted neighborhoods.

**Land Use Disparities.** Communities of color are often victims of land use decisions that place them at greater risk for the effects of unregulated growth. They are less able to influence broader land use and environmental decision-making processes, resulting in ineffective regulation of industrial toxins and the placement of industrial facilities in their midst.

**Urban Disinvestment.** Industry flight from central cities and older suburbs has left behind a deteriorating urban infrastructure, poverty, and pollution. Economically depressed communities have less employment choice and workers are forced to take jobs that may result in risks to their health, their family's health, and the health of their community.<sup>48</sup>

Environmental justice is a cornerstone of regional equity. The following principles are among those that guide the efforts of environmental justice advocates:

- Require that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias;
- Mandate the right to ethical, balanced, and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things;
- Insist on the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making—needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation;
- Affirm the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment;
- Protect the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.<sup>49</sup>

### *What's Being Done*

Some 250 environmental justice organizations are challenging the current environmental protection standards and offer a framework for addressing environmental inequities, disparate impact, and unequal protection.

Grassroots activists and community leaders have utilized the data developed by researchers and advocates to confront corporate entities and state and federal agencies over unwanted sitings. Another leverage point is Executive Order 12898, signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton, which mandated each federal agency to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission.” In addition, advocates are pursuing relief through civil rights litigation in combination with community organizing strategies.

### **West Harlem Environmental Action (WE-ACT) Files Civil Rights Complaint<sup>50</sup>**

*In New York, concerned citizens, along with West Harlem Environmental Action (WE-ACT), demanded that diesel buses stop using their neighborhood as a bus depot and as a diesel dumping ground. For years WE-ACT and community residents had organized, advocated, and litigated to reduce the disproportionate burden of diesel buses on northern Manhattan communities, to little avail. Finally, in the fall of 2000, following a Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) announcement that it was planning to add another parking lot to one of the depots, the group filed a Title VI Civil Rights Act complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation.*

*The complaint contends that the expansion of the six diesel bus depots located in Manhattan's low-income communities is a form of racial discrimination. It argues that the number of depots in northern Manhattan is already excessive and unfair, and the expansion of these depots unfairly targets low-income residents. The complaint cites a wealth of scientific literature demonstrating the adverse respiratory health impacts of diesel exhaust. In a follow-up statistical analysis submitted by WE-ACT in early 2002, the group demonstrates that people of color, in all five boroughs of New York, disproportionately live near a bus depot. WE-ACT calls for a moratorium on new depots; improved pollution monitoring and enforcement of current emissions standards; and an investigation by the Federal Department of Transportation with an eye on cutting off the \$5 billion in federal funding that is planned for the MTA over the next four years. Additionally, WE-ACT convinced the EPA to test air quality and found that the existence of small particulates in the air exceeded US standards by over 200%. As of October 2002, WE-ACT is considering entering into alternative dispute resolution, or non-legal mediation, with the MTA.*

## Health

Much of the innovative work around health and regional equity is occurring at the intersection between health and other areas such as transportation, housing, and economic opportunity. While lack of access to health care contributes to explaining why low-income people suffer from more diseases and die at earlier ages than wealthier people, research is showing that other factors are equally or even more important. These key influences on health include social and economic factors, environmental conditions, and health behaviors.<sup>51</sup>

The preceding sections have outlined the ways in which regional development patterns have detrimental effects on low-income communities of color. These effects include health consequences. For example, inadequate public transportation, substandard housing, limited economic opportunities, and undesirable land uses make it difficult for people living in lower-income communities of color to be healthy and to raise healthy children. A few specific examples of how development patterns in these communities affect health follow:

- **Being poor and living in a neighborhood of concentrated poverty contributes to poor health.** Being low-income has been linked to having more health problems and dying at an earlier age than the rest of the population. This is particularly the case for people with the least economic resources. Similarly, living in a poor neighborhood has been linked to an increased risk of poor health, even for people who are not poor themselves.
- **The location or absence of stores and services influences health behaviors like eating healthy foods and drinking alcohol.** Community residents who do not have a local market where they have access to affordable, nutritious foods are less likely to be able to eat healthy foods. This situation can contribute to poor nutrition and obesity—which in turn can lead to higher rates of poor health. An abundance of bars and liquor stores has been linked

to higher levels of pedestrian accidents and may also be linked to higher drinking rates within a community.

- **Poor quality construction and poor maintenance of low-income housing developments can harm the health of adults and children living there.** Many older houses in urban neighborhoods have lead paint on walls and windowsills inside the home. Children in these homes can become ill from lead exposure if they eat flaking paint chips. In addition, poor construction in low-income housing developments can lead to mold growth, which can trigger asthma attacks.
- **Land use patterns and transportation systems make it easier—or harder—to engage in health-promoting activities.** Regional development patterns affect the ability of residents of low-income communities to reap the health benefits of physical activity.<sup>52</sup> People with lower-incomes and people of color tend to be less physically active than other people, suffer from more of the diseases and conditions associated with low levels of physical activity, and have less access to both local recreational opportunities and to walkable neighborhoods that are safe. In addition, poor quality transit systems limit low-income residents' abilities to get to supermarkets where they can buy healthy foods and to health care facilities where they can access preventive services and be treated for illnesses and injuries.<sup>53</sup>
- **Land use and transportation system decisions affect exposure to toxic facilities and poor air quality, and these exposures have health consequences.** Low-income people of color face higher exposures to air pollution, and suffer from higher rates of respiratory conditions like asthma. Similarly, people living in these communities are more likely than others to live near toxic sites, and this too can be detrimental to health. Exposure to industrial dumps and contaminated water supplies have been linked to respiratory conditions, birth defects, low birth-weight, and other health problems.

Regional policies and investment can contribute to improving neighborhood conditions and the health of residents. Neighborhood revitalization projects, urban and roadway design, transportation development, economic development, and land use planning that consider the particular challenges that low-income people and communities of color face can improve the lives and health of people living in those communities.

### *What's Being Done*

*"We must integrate our concepts of 'public health issues' and 'urban planning issues.' Urban planners, engineers, and architects must begin to see that they have a critical role in public health. Similarly, public health professionals need to appreciate that the built environment influences public health as much as vaccines or water quality."<sup>54</sup>*

The perspectives of regional equity advocates and professionals in public health, community development, urban planning, and public policy can complement one another. There is increasing interest in this collaborative approach, as health professionals look toward broader, "upstream" interventions that address regional inequities and as equity advocates from non-health sectors look for new ways to advocate for equitable public policies.

Health professionals are increasingly redefining health promotion strategies to include advocating for increased investment in employment programs and creating job opportunities, higher wages for low-paid workers, and more attention to asset development. Public health professionals also maintain that better transportation, land use, housing, and other public policies can lead to improvements in health. For example, health professionals have developed

analyses pointing out the health benefits of living wage ordinances. Large-scale government health initiatives have been launched in Minnesota, England, and Canada recommending strategies, programs, and policies for improving social, economic, and environmental conditions to improve the public's health.

Similarly, professionals in urban planning and related areas understand better how actions within their fields will affect health outcomes. This appreciation allows them to advocate more forcefully for equitable policies by showing how a proposal would be beneficial or detrimental to the health of particular communities.

Community-based strategies are also improving health. People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO), for example, initiated a wide reaching grassroots public awareness campaign about the danger of lead paint that ultimately resulted in state legislation requiring environmental abatement to reduce childhood lead exposure. Residents and advocates are also mobilizing to demand accountability for pollution levels that affect public health.

### **Community Mobilization in California's San Joaquin Valley<sup>55</sup>**

*In the San Joaquin Valley, a coalition that includes medical, community, and environmental groups is addressing the problem of extreme levels of air pollution affecting the region. According to a report by the American Lung Association, three of the most smog-polluted areas in the country are located in the San Joaquin Valley. Farmworker and other low-income communities with high proportions of residents without health insurance coverage are particularly affected.*

*The coalition— Earthjustice, the Latino Issues Forum, the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment, the Medical Alliance for Healthy Air, and the Sierra Club— has already garnered some success. Because of its activism, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated the Valley a “severe” ozone region. The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District has also agreed to adopt new measures to reduce emissions of ozone-forming chemicals. In 2001, the coalition filed suit against the EPA for failing to address air pollution problems in the Valley. Most recently, the coalition launched the California Clean Air Campaign to educate residents in the region about the Clean Air Act and how they can help ensure the law is enforced. According to the Latino Issues Forum, “this is an extremely serious health crisis with an obvious solution: strict enforcement of the laws and access to health care for all.”<sup>56</sup>*

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## Building on the Lessons: A Framework for Action

# 3

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Advancing regional equity requires considering a core question: will future generations inherit healthy, vibrant, diverse, and environmentally sound neighborhoods, cities, and regions?

As highlighted in this paper, efforts to affirmatively answer this core question are gaining traction in communities across America. Growing weariness with sprawl and inequitable growth is broadening the base of support for more just development patterns and access to resources. New alliances are being formed across old divides. Efforts today build on the foundations of equity-oriented smart growth put in place in the 1990s, as well as the creative and innovative work of local practitioners addressing a myriad of issues that have regional dimensions.

This framing paper was written to expand dialogue and action to advance regional equity. It highlights key equity issues and many promising efforts worth learning from and emulating. This final section offers examples of potential policy and organizing opportunities and ideas for ongoing capacity building activities that can be the basis for further discussions and collective action.

### **Potential Policy and Organizing Opportunities**

There are specific challenges to promoting regional equity from a policy perspective. To be effective, advocates must act creatively and strategically on multiple governmental levels to influence the policy decisions that ultimately affect the lives of the people and communities they represent. To build greater power, advocates must cross jurisdictions and organize and build alliances and connections to constituencies in suburban communities, as well as urban neighborhoods. They must work across sectors and find partners among environmental, business, civil rights and other equity advocates. They must develop and test models of equitable development and take those promising efforts to scale. They must be able to use data strategically to inform their analysis and their advocacy. And, finally, they must find ways to build public will for equity and inclusion and for policies that advance these goals. The following are some examples of available opportunities and approaches at the local, state, and national levels that can help achieve regional equity:

1. Create pathways for residents of low-income/low-wealth neighborhoods to directly benefit from regional development.

Healthy, engaged, prosperous neighborhoods are the building blocks for equitable and robust regions. The following are just a few strategies that have been employed to help build stronger communities.

- **Negotiate with developers of major commercial real estate projects to secure community benefits and institutionalize these community benefits into policy.** Specific benefits will correspond to local conditions and opportunities but critical elements involve quality jobs, community services, first source/local hiring and job training, affordable housing, and resident ownership and asset building opportunities in connection with developments. Success in individual negotiations will provide the needed building blocks for advocating for public policies that mandate certain community benefits in developments.
- **Build coalitions to pass local living wage ordinances.** Most living wage ordinances cover employers who hold large city or county service contracts or receive substantial financial assistance from the city in the form of grants, loans, bond financing, tax abatements, or other economic development subsidies. Community, labor, and religious coalitions have fought for and won ordinances in cities such as St. Louis, Boston, Los Angeles, Tucson, San Jose, Portland (OR), Milwaukee, Detroit, Minneapolis, and Oakland (CA).
- **Undertake campaigns to ban toxic facilities from low-income communities of color.** Strategies might include advocacy for land use and planning reforms and the relocation of hazardous industries to industrial zones.

2. Seize opportunities at the state and regional levels to reduce disparities arising from sprawl and inequitable development patterns.

Influencing development policies and practices that can exacerbate disparities among residents, neighborhoods, and jurisdictions within a region requires engagement at various levels—local, regional and state. A few strategies that achieve this include:

- **Enact state legislation to hold publicly subsidized economic development projects accountable.** An example: Minnesota's 1999 Corporate Welfare Reform Act requires corporate subsidies to provide a certain standard of public benefits. Other strategies include holding proposed public subsidies to a greater degree of public input and accountability accompanied by detailed reporting and strong enforcement.
- **Promote "fix-it-first" state transportation policies rather than policies to build roads and highways.** Fix-it-first policies, adopted by state legislatures and highway commissions, can help reorient transportation priorities in more equitable directions. Rather than spending scarce resources on building costly new roads and highways, fix-it-first policies dedicate state and federal highway funds to repair and rehabilitate existing infrastructure and services.
- **Promote state formulas for more equitable siting of new schools to reduce sprawl, strengthen neighborhoods, and enhance equal educational opportunity.** Too often, requirements for receiving state funds for new school construction favor outer ring suburban areas with large tracts of easily obtainable land.

- **Aggressively pursue establishment of inclusionary housing laws and other fair share and mixed-income housing strategies.**

Implementing these strategies will reduce the concentration of poverty, put low-income workers closer to new jobs, and reduce racial segregation.

- **Explore regional tax base sharing and regional governance options.** Different tax-base sharing arrangements have the potential to reduce fiscal inequities among a region's jurisdictions. Regional governance structures, such as those in Portland, OR and the Twin Cities, can also serve to reduce regional disparities. However, local conditions, opportunities, and actors must determine the viability and appropriateness of these options.

### 3. Leverage National Legislation to Promote Regional Equity.

Several pieces of national legislation, some already passed into law, have enormous potential to contribute to regional equity. Advocates must seek to shape their content, assure that there are opportunities for meaningful community involvement and oversight, mobilize their constituencies to engage in the planning and implementation process wherever applicable, and monitor their outcomes. A few promising pieces of legislation include:

- **Reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.** At stake is transportation funding for public transit, access to jobs, system preservation, and programs that explicitly promote coordination between transportation and land use. The reauthorization involves hundreds of billions of dollars for transportation-related investments.

- **New Markets Tax Credit.** Created by the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000, it will stimulate \$15 billion of equity investments in the economic development of low-income communities. The tax credits are intended to make lower-cost capital available to viable businesses in low-income areas and generate jobs, services, and physical revitalization.

- **National Housing Trust Fund.** The proposal, which did not pass the Congress in 2002, but likely to be reintroduced, would have established a national housing trust fund that would build and preserve 1.5 million units of rental housing for the lowest-income families over the next 10 years.

**Issues for Discussion:**

- ✓ **What current opportunities exist to advance regional equity through local organizing efforts?**
- ✓ **How can local efforts addressing different issues in a given region enhance and build on one another?**
- ✓ **What alliances and organizing efforts are needed to best capitalize on these opportunities?**
- ✓ **What other state and regional opportunities exist that can be leveraged across country?**
- ✓ **What other national legislation offers strong potential to make inroads towards regional equity?**

## Capacity Building Opportunities

Enabling practitioners to “tool up” for regional engagement involves support and resources on a number of fronts. Previous meetings organized by PolicyLink and the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities have identified several areas to move regional equity efforts forward. These provide a starting point for practitioners to strategize about ways to maximize their effectiveness in their region:

### **Enhance Local Organizational Capacity and Constituency.**

Local groups need support to build a base around regional equity issues within their neighborhoods and to reach out to new and diverse allies at the local and regional levels. Achieving change at the regional level requires alliances across jurisdictional lines and the engagement of new partners.

- **Develop and Support Leadership.** Leadership with vision, talent, and constituency is required from all sectors—community, business, and government—particularly at the city and regional levels. Leaders are needed to bridge traditional boundaries of race, class, jurisdictions, and sectors to succeed.
- **Build a National Support Network.** While the work of practitioners committed to regional equity is growing and producing impressive results, greater support for local leaders is needed to spread promising efforts. Practitioners have consistently identified the need for greater connection to each other; strong information networks; dissemination of model programs and strategies; and policy support and development.
- **Strengthen Applied Research and Data Analysis.** Practitioners need to enhance their capacity to gather and understand data to make the case for greater equity in their regions. For example, the development of “regional equity indicators” would help advocates document and

disseminate differences from one jurisdiction to another on a number of critical fronts, including environmental quality, racial segregation, housing affordability, and displacement and gentrification. Organizations and communities must learn how to use information in a way that supports agenda development, advocacy, base building, and alliance building.

- **Confront Issues of Race.** Practitioners must have a sound and strong analysis about race and how racial issues and disparities manifest within regions and neighborhoods. They must have greater comfort and skill in confronting and speaking about these issues.
- **Include Immigrant Communities.** Practitioners need to frame strategies that will engage new immigrants. For example, practitioners could explore opportunities to build linkages between immigrant communities in the inner city and suburban areas.
- **Build Public Will for Regional Equity.** Building public will is tied to strategic communications activities that expand the conversation in important policy issues, explore solutions, and motivate policymakers, media, researchers, and other key constituencies to pursue change. Efforts that could help build public will for regional equity include: coordinated message development; development of media kits and information materials; communications training of local and national principals; use of technology to enhance and develop fast and effective outreach to constituencies; and development of interactive teaching materials that can be used by community based organizations, schools, activists, and nonprofit organizations.

### **Issues for Discussion:**

✓ **Do these capacity building needs still resonate in today’s environment?**

✓ **Are there issues that are missing?**

✓ **Which needs represent the highest priorities?**

## Conclusion

The opportunities outlined in this paper are designed to stimulate a strategic conversation among advocates concerned with a range of issues who, in placing their issues in a regional context, will discover new points of convergence, collaboration and success.

Advancing regional equity requires both vision and political struggle. It requires diverse interests within regions to work together to improve the quality of life for all residents, and a genuine commitment to addressing the disadvantages that racism and unjust public policies have created. Public policy changes will be required at the federal, state, and local levels and a “‘bottom-up’ approach that builds consensus one neighbor and one region at a time.”<sup>57</sup>

The equity-oriented strategies and practices presented in this document are promising, and priority must be given to implementing them, as well as to developing additional approaches. Time is of the essence, for decisions are being made every day that shape our regions and communities. Pursuing a regional equity agenda requires seizing every opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children, families, and the broader society.

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Alan Berube and William H. Frey, *A Decade of Mixed Blessings: Urban and Suburban Poverty in Census 2000* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Powell, "Race and Space," *Brookings Review* (Fall 1998): 20.

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Pastor, Jr., Peter Dreier, Eugene Grigsby III, and Marta Lopez-Garza, *Regions that Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> William A. Johnson, Jr., "Sprawl as a Civil Rights Issue: A Mayor's Reflections," George Washington University Center on Sustainable Growth Discussion Paper, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Prewitt, "Demography, Diversity and Democracy," *Brookings Review* (Winter 2002): 3.

<sup>6</sup> See Alliance for Regional Stewardship, *Regional Stewardship: A Commitment to Place*, Monograph Series, 2000, p. 3. Retrieved from <http://www.regionalstewardship.org/Documents/Monograph1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> For an elaboration of the concept of regional equity, or "equity-oriented regionalism," see Manuel Pastor et al., *Regions That Work*, pp. 155–182.

<sup>8</sup> Pastor et al., p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> These three premises were adapted from the Institute on Race and Poverty's Regional Equity Project. For more information, see <http://www.instituteonraceandpoverty.org/rjrewhatis.html>.

<sup>10</sup> PolicyLink has placed the quest to achieve full societal participation and inclusion—equity—in a broad context throughout its work. In particular, PolicyLink has framed the concept of equitable development to move equity concerns more to the center of regional growth and development decisions.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> "Children, Youth and Families, and Smart Growth: Building Family Friendly Communities," Funders' Network for Smart Growth Translation Paper Number Nine, 2002, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Bullard, "Just Transportation: "New Solutions for Old Problems," *Environmental Action* (Spring/Summer 1996), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> "Driven to Spend," STPP/Center for Neighborhood Technology Report, 2000. Retrieved from the website of the Surface Transportation Policy Project at <http://www.transact.org/ANTC/ifyoucareabout.htm#4>.

<sup>15</sup> Rick Stolz, "Race, Poverty and Transportation." *Poverty and Race*, Mar/April 2000. Retrieved from <http://communitychange.org/transportation/raceandtransportation.asp>.

<sup>16</sup> For details, see <http://www.transact.org/ANTC/joinup.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> This description was based on a May 2002 phone interview with Penn Loh, Executive Director of Alternatives for Community

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& Environment (ACE). Additional information is available at <http://www.ace-ej.org>, or by calling ACE at (617) 442-3343.

<sup>18</sup> For more information, visit the Bethel New Life website at <http://www.bethelnewlife.org>, or call (773) 473-7870.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph M. Harkness, Sandra J. Newman, and Barbara J. Lipman, *Housing America's Working Families: A Further Exploration* (Washington, DC: Center for Housing Policy, 2000), p. v.

<sup>20</sup> Cushing N. Dolbeare, *Changing Priorities: The Federal Budget and Housing Assistance, 1976–2002*, National Low-Income Housing Coalition: Washington, DC, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.nlihc.org/pubs/changingpriorities.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Meeting Our Nation's Housing Challenges* (Washington, DC: Report of the Bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> See Arthur C. Nelson, Rolf Pendell, Casey J. Dawkins, and Gerrit Knapp, *The Link Between Growth Management and Affordable Housing: The Academic Evidence* (The Brookings Institution Discussion Paper, 2002). Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/es/urban/publications/growthmang.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> For more information, visit the ARCH website at <http://www.archhousing.org>

<sup>25</sup> Heather McCulloch with Lisa Robinson, *Sharing the Wealth: Resident Ownership Mechanisms*, PolicyLink, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> The preceding was adapted from the Center for Community Change website at <http://www.communitychange.org/sectoral.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see The Annie E. Casey Foundation website at <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative/>.

<sup>28</sup> A number of elements in this discussion were drawn from an unpublished briefing paper, "Land Use Planning and Infrastructure," prepared in June 2002 for the Conference Committee on AB 857 and SB 741 in the California State Legislature.

<sup>29</sup> Sierra Club, "Sprawl Fact Sheet," undated. Retrieved from <http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/factsheet.asp>.

<sup>30</sup> David Bollier, *How Smart Growth Can Stop Sprawl: A Briefing Guide for Funders* (Washington, DC: Essential Books, 1998), pp. 16–17.

<sup>31</sup> Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 1997), p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see the State of Maryland Office of Planning website, <http://www.op.state.md.us/smartgrowth>.

<sup>33</sup> The plan specified that 40 percent of the increase in commercial and industrial property tax valuation goes into a regional pool and 60 percent remains with the local jurisdiction in which the development occurs. The pool is redistributed annually by formula based on population and tax capacity.

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<sup>34</sup> "Land Use Planning and Infrastructure," prepared in June 2002 for the Conference Committee on AB 857 and SB 741 in the California State Legislature, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Ed Hayward, "Study Finds Segregation Rising in Public Schools," *Boston Globe*, August 10, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *The Funding Gap* (Washington, DC: Education Trust, 2002), p. 1. Retrieved from <http://www.edtrust.org/main/documents/investment.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Lawsuits on behalf of children in low property wealth school districts have been brought on state constitutional grounds for the last thirty years. Perhaps the best known was the original case in California, *Serrano v. Priest*. Partly as a result of the litigation and partly as a consequence of Proposition 13's limit on property tax rates, California now relies on local funding for only approximately 10 percent of school costs.

<sup>38</sup> *The Funding Gap*, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> "Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation," Institute on Race and Poverty, Report to the McKnight Foundation, 1997, pp. 33–35. Retrieved from <http://www1.umn.edu/irp/publications/McKnightfinal.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Craig Howley et al., "Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities," *ERIC Digest*, December 2000. Cited in "Education and Smart Growth: Reversing School Sprawl for Better Schools and Communities," Funders' Network for Smart Growth Translation Paper Number Eight, 2002, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *The Funding Gap*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan D. Weiss, "Education Equity and Smart Growth," George Washington University Center on Sustainable Growth, 2002, work in progress.

<sup>43</sup> *Williams vs. California* is a class action suit brought by the ACLU and other civil rights organizations and private law firms. As a result, the state of California has counter-sued its own school districts demanding that they be held responsible for fixing problems in their own schools. ([www.aclu.org/StudentsRights](http://www.aclu.org/StudentsRights))

<sup>44</sup> Daniel LeDuc, "Prince George's, Montgomery Schools Get \$91 million," *Washington Post*, May 8, 2001, p. B3. Cited in "Education and Smart Growth: Reversing School Sprawl for Better Schools and Communities," Funders' Network for Smart Growth Translation Paper Number Eight, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> This description was drawn from "Children, Youth and Families and Smart Growth: Building Family Friendly Communities," Funders' Network for Smart Growth Translation paper Number Nine, 2002 as well as from the New Schools Better Neighborhoods website at <http://www.nsbno.org>

<sup>46</sup> Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* (New York: United Church of Christ, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> See the American Lung Association website at [http://www.lungusa.org/pub/minority/asthma\\_00.html#discrimnates](http://www.lungusa.org/pub/minority/asthma_00.html#discrimnates) for more information about disproportionate rates of asthma among people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

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<sup>48</sup> The preceding section was excerpted from Robert D. Bullard, "Environmental Justice in the 21st Century," retrieved from the website of the Center for Environmental Justice at <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/ejinthe21century.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> These principles are extracted from a set of seventeen principles adopted by the multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in 1991 in Washington, DC. The full text can be retrieved at <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/princej.html>.

<sup>50</sup> For more information, please see the website of West Harlem Environmental Action (WE-ACT) at <http://www.weact.org>

<sup>51</sup> See forthcoming paper, *Reducing Health Disparities Through a Focus on Communities: A Concept Paper*, PolicyLink 2002.

<sup>52</sup> See *Regional Development and Physical Activity: Issues and Strategies for Promoting Health Equity*, PolicyLink 2002.

<sup>53</sup> Transportation and Land Use Coalition, Center for Third World Organizing, and People United for a Better Oakland. *Roadblocks to Health: Transportation Barriers to Healthy Communities*. 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Jackson and Chris Kochtitzky, *Creating a Healthy Environment: The Impact of the Built Environment on Public Health* (Washington, DC: Sprawlwatch Clearinghouse, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> For more information, see [http://www.calcleanair.org/legal\\_actions.htm#bigpicture](http://www.calcleanair.org/legal_actions.htm#bigpicture).

<sup>56</sup> "San Joaquin Valley Medical, Community and Environmental Groups Launch Clean Air Campaign," Earthjustice Press Release, August 20, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Pastor et al., p. 182.