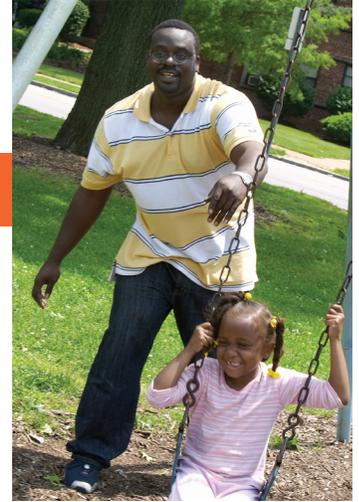


## DISCUSSION GUIDE:

OCTOBER 2015

# Investing in quality neighborhoods for all in St. Louis



## PURPOSE

This *Discussion Guide* focuses on the recommendation to “invest in quality neighborhoods for all in St. Louis.” It is designed to provide you with a better understanding of the issues involved and the barriers standing in the way of this goal. We encourage you to use the [Action Toolkit](#) that accompanies this *Discussion Guide* to identify ways to bring this conversation to your community and take steps to invest in quality neighborhoods for all in St. Louis. A digital version of both the *Discussion Guide* and the *Action Toolkit*, with additional resources, is available at <http://forthesakeofall.org/take-action/>.



## BACKGROUND

Healthy food options, quality schools, clean air to breathe, and services and amenities like banks and parks are just some of the neighborhood factors that can shape health throughout life. All people should have the opportunity to live in a quality neighborhood. However, policies and informal practices throughout the nation and in our region have divided neighborhoods based on race, social class, or both. This division, or segregation, in neighborhoods often affects the opportunity for all residents to live healthy, productive

lives. In addition, living in areas of concentrated poverty isolated from job opportunities can prevent people from climbing the economic ladder. In St. Louis, and around the nation, this segregation can actually be deadly. The good news is that there are solutions for investing in quality neighborhoods for all.

### The history and impact of segregation in St. Louis<sup>1,2</sup>

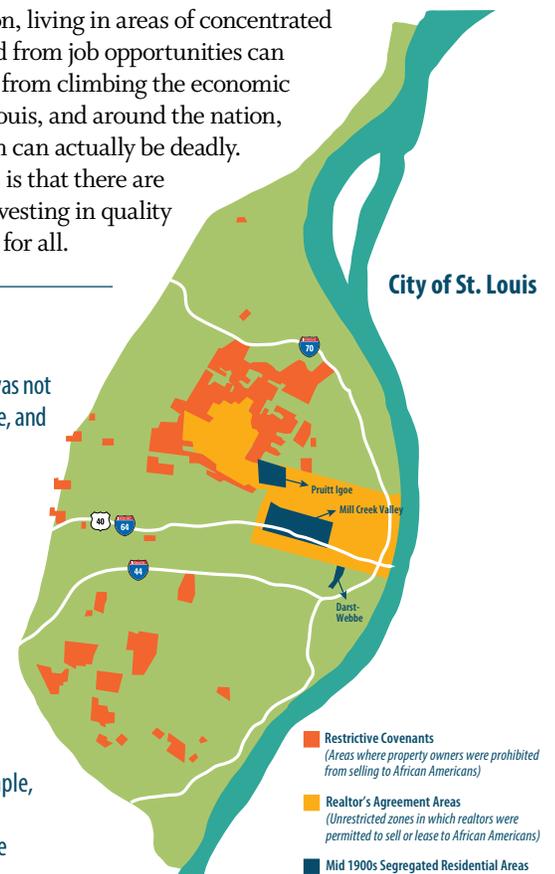
Like many cities across the United States, St. Louis has a long history of racial segregation. This segregation was not just the result of individual choice, but was shaped by public policies and private practices at the federal, state, and local levels.

In St. Louis, such policies and practices have included:

- Restrictive deed covenants making it illegal for African Americans to live in certain neighborhoods
- Segregated and underfunded public housing projects, such as Pruitt-Igoue
- Urban renewal projects that demolished neighborhoods and displaced residents
- Preferential lending under the Federal Housing Administration

Policies such as these, and many others, fueled housing discrimination against African Americans and supported the movement of white families from city centers into suburban areas, a phenomenon known as “white flight.”

Even as some of these policies have been outlawed or abandoned, others have replaced them. For example, present-day zoning laws that exclude multi-family homes are types of policies that lead to segregation. This segregation, over time, has led to areas of “concentrated poverty,” defined as neighborhoods where 40% of families or more live at or below the poverty level. Moreover, neighborhoods with concentrated poverty where the majority of families are non-white are called “racially concentrated areas of poverty.”



Source: OneSTL, The Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing and Opportunity Council, East-West Gateway Council of Governments. Fair Housing Equity Assessment. St. Louis, MO; 2013.

## What are the components of a quality neighborhood?

Jobs and economic opportunity are core components of a quality neighborhood. However, anchor institutions (e.g., hospitals, colleges, and business centers) that can serve as hubs for providing jobs and promoting economic development in the surrounding community are often missing in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has created a tool that helps define access to quality neighborhoods by ranking neighborhoods on the availability and proximity to community assets and determining who lives there.<sup>4</sup> In this tool, called the [Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool](#), higher scores indicate better access to high-quality, high-opportunity neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> According to this tool, in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, the average white resident lives in a neighborhood that ranks 2 times higher in school quality and labor market strength compared with the average African American resident. This difference remains even between whites and African Americans with lower incomes.<sup>5</sup>

Concentrated poverty and high unemployment in neighborhoods are often among the underlying causes of crime. Violent crime and other forms of violence affect the quality of neighborhoods and the health of their residents. The violent crime rate in the St. Louis region is 432 crimes per 100,000 people, but crime is not distributed equally across neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup> Violence is often more concentrated in low-income and African American neighborhoods. Homicide was the 5th leading cause of death for African Americans in the region between 2009 and 2013, and the number 1 cause of death among African Americans between 15 and 44.<sup>7</sup> All people, regardless of race, should have the opportunity to live in a safe neighborhood that is free of violence.



Even among the poorest residents in the region, white families are less likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty than African American families.

Source (orange box): American Community Survey 2009-2013 5-year estimates  
 Source (blue box): U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool

Violent injuries, accidents, and suicides are all public health concerns that impact families. However, violence has far-reaching health impacts beyond its immediate victims. Being exposed to violence in neighborhoods can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), toxic stress, and other mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.<sup>8</sup> These mental health concerns are related to chronic conditions like heart disease and to birth



problems for mothers and infants.<sup>9</sup> Violence has an especially powerful impact on children, who are at increased risk of mental and physical health problems as a result.<sup>10</sup>

The built environment, such as buildings and sidewalks, can also impact residents' perception of safety. Safety concerns can make it difficult to live a healthy lifestyle. For example, fewer safe spaces for outdoor recreation may make it more difficult to be physically active.<sup>11</sup> Only 39% of African Americans in the City of St. Louis rate their neighborhood as safe, compared with 65% of whites. In St. Louis County, 62% of African Americans rate their neighborhood as safe, compared with 87% of whites.<sup>12</sup> All people, regardless of race, should have the opportunity to live in a safe neighborhood.

Quality neighborhoods that promote health should also have access to fresh, high quality foods. However, fewer African Americans (66%) in the City of St. Louis report that it is easy to buy healthy food in their neighborhood compared with whites (86%). A gap also exists between African Americans (73%) and whites (91%) in St. Louis County.<sup>12</sup> All neighborhood environments should also be safe from harmful chemicals (e.g., lead, pollutants, and industrial waste). However, low-income and racial-minority neighborhoods often have higher rates of environmental health hazards like poor air quality<sup>13</sup> and related diseases like cancer.<sup>14</sup>



## STRATEGIES

### Ensure equitable housing for all residents

Enforcing existing laws is one way to ensure that fair and equitable housing and neighborhood development practices are safeguarded for all residents. The opportunity for residents to relocate to, or remain in, quality neighborhoods should be protected. Tax, zoning, and other housing policies can help ensure that residents have choice and voice in housing and neighborhood development, without resulting in displacement. Specific examples include community land trusts, affordable housing development, non-profit owned housing, and down-payment assistance.

#### Local examples include:

- In September 2015, the [Ferguson Commission](#) released 189 calls-to-action, many of which aligned with the *For the Sake of All* recommendations. The Commission urged government to use inclusionary zoning ordinances to include a certain portion of affordable housing units for all new or rehabilitated projects. The Commission also supports the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, which provides tax credits to developments of affordable rental housing specifically in high-opportunity neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup>
- [Voices of Women \(VOW\) STL](#) is a community development corporation in the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood that brings together long-time residents to ensure they have voice and choice in the development of their areas. They work with local developers to ensure long-time residents can afford to stay in their homes. They also support home repairs, advocate for fair housing policies, and promote racial and economic diversity in the community.

#### National examples include:

- [Section 3](#) of the HUD Act of 1968 ensures that HUD-funded jobs training is provided to low-income residents. It also ensures that HUD-funded contracts are provided to businesses that employ low-income residents. A new law ensures that Public Housing Authorities and other grantees are compliant with Section 3. Publicizing this new law will support its enforcement, which may help foster economic development in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup>

### Address violence as a public health problem in neighborhoods

Violence is a public health problem that impacts the quality of neighborhoods. In St. Louis, homicide is a leading cause of death for young African Americans, and violence is a source of trauma and stress for people living in affected neighborhoods. Interventions that have been explored or implemented in St. Louis such as focused deterrence, violence interruption, and hospital-based violence intervention programs are examples of public health approaches to addressing gun violence in the region.

#### Local examples include:

- The [Gun Violence Initiative at Washington University in St. Louis](#) is an institutional response to the February 2015 call-to-action for a public health approach to firearm-related violence by leading health and legal or law enforcement organizations. Across University departments and in collaboration with other university and community partners, the initiative focuses on three key areas: *What We Know*, *What We Need to Know*, and *What to Do*. The University has also worked to convene key leaders to develop a coordinated approach to gun violence in St. Louis.

### Invest in a regional economic development system and a range of public health solutions

Strategic community partnerships and regional economic integration are key strategies for improving the quality of neighborhoods.

#### Local examples include:

- [Invest STL](#) is a regional community economic development system in St. Louis. The goal is to efficiently pool local and national resources to invest in sustained community revitalization. Invest STL was developed by a group of organizations, including Community Builders Network, Metro St. Louis CRA Association, Greater St. Louis Community Foundation, United Way of Greater St. Louis, and IFF.
- The [OneSTL](#) plan for sustainable regional development was created to better coordinate policies and spending related to housing, transportation, and environmental concerns. The OneSTL network promotes collaboration on regional goals by offering strategies, toolkits and a web-based resource for sharing data across the region.

Successful models of community partnerships that support quality neighborhoods should also be promoted. One strategy is to market the benefits of racially and economically diverse neighborhoods with strong civic associations.

- [City Garden Montessori School's](#) mission is to provide quality education to children from all backgrounds. Since students must live in the surrounding community, its success depends on the racial and economic diversity of these neighborhoods. Through an academic-community partnership, the school's Affordable Housing Task Force assessed neighborhood change and recommended strategies to sustain diversity in [The Right to Stay Put](#).<sup>17</sup>

A public health approach should also address a range of neighborhood components, including safe, walkable streets and sidewalks, access to fresh, high quality foods, green space for recreation, and environments free of harmful chemicals. Schools, universities, hospitals, and businesses are examples of institutions that can partner to implement public health solutions in neighborhoods.



## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Where you live can affect your health in many ways. The physical and social environment, services, and opportunities available in neighborhoods can either enhance or limit an individual's choices affecting health and well-being.
- All people, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, should have the opportunity to live in a quality neighborhood. This is not always the case due to past and current policies and practices that lead to segregation and inequity among neighborhoods.
- Investing in policies and initiatives that increase racial and socioeconomic diversity in neighborhoods, supporting access to equal housing, and encouraging community member involvement can help improve the health of communities and their residents.
- Violence, and particularly gun violence, represents a public health issue, affecting not only the individuals involved, but also neighborhoods and the region as a whole.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What does a quality neighborhood look like to you? Who lives there? What features, services, or conditions are present?
- 2 Based on the factors discussed in this guide, how would you rate the current quality of your neighborhood? How does your neighborhood limit or expand healthy choices for residents?
- 3 What opportunities do you see for improvement in your neighborhood?
- 4 What do you feel is the greatest barrier to improving diversity and inclusion in St. Louis neighborhoods? Are there policies or initiatives that could help overcome this barrier?
- 5 Who in the St. Louis community is currently working to improve the health, stability, and diversity of neighborhoods?
- 6 How can we turn an "unhealthy" neighborhood into one that is "healthy"?
- 7 What do you think the top priority(ies) should be in community design and development?
- 8 How have you seen violence affect your neighborhood or the community at large?
- 9 What strategies do you think would be effective in reducing violence in our community?
- 10 What would you be willing to do help improve the quality of neighborhoods for all in St. Louis?
- 11 Who are you willing to talk with about the importance of quality neighborhoods?

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