# Neighborhood Progress

## Administration aids business revitalization

By Vadi Omowale
AFRO Staff Writer

"You could say that the Neighborhood Progress Administration has three major thrusts in our commercial revitalization efforts: business organization, working with property owners, and monitoring development that must take place."

Speaking is Roy Adams, a project manager with the NPA. In his position, Adams is directly involved in the ongoing process of stimulating growth and development of community businesses.

The NPA formed in March 1984, a merging of Housing and Community Development and the mayor's Office of Manpower. The new agency handles anything that has to do with improving neighborhoods; including, job training and placement; market rate rental units and low - income housing; and the improvement of commercial districts.

The latter comes under the massive heading of commercial revitalization though it may appear new, commercial revitalization originated in 1974 as part of HCD programs.

The idea of commercial revitalization is to create a marriage between public and private resources to improve neighborhoods.

Adams says the NPA is directly involved in community businesses, such as re - activating a defunct business association, getting new officers, collecting dues, joint advertising, and promotion.

Appearances are important also. "We monitor the condition of the building in order to get them to go with design standards. That includes sidewalks and trees and we let them know if they must refurbish the facades," Adams explained.

"The NPA works with community merchants and residents to get them what they want," says Ms. Jacqueline Lampell, marketing coordinator with the NPA. "If they don't want ten fast food places, then we won't grant the ten fast food places a permit."

"We develop from the community on up what we call grassroots development. We sometimes have to work with the developer to find them a suitable neighborhood, because we make an effort not to lose developers. We need the tax revenue and the jobs."

"If merchants in a community want things like new sidewalks, signs, or even trees and shrubs, they must come to the NPA with two things. One they must be members of an organized business association, and secondly they should submit a development plan, listing what it is they want."

One of the services the agency can offer to the neighborhoods is a free architectural service to look at buildings and help the owners make changes. An example is when Howard Park merchants utilized the service to create the signs which dominate the business strip in that neighborhood.

In Howard Park there are also new sidewalks and trees, all a direct result of the joint efforts of commercial revitalization under the NPA and the Howard Park Merchant Association.

Lampell says, "At least two thirds of the retail district have to be members of the association. There are 39 commercial districts in the city and 18 of them are participating in Shop Neighborhoods Week."

Shop Neighborhoods Week is an effort by the mayor's office to encourage residents to shop the businesses in their community. Instead of going out to White Marsh or some other large commercial development, the mayor wants people to continue to go to the neighborhood shoe shop or tailor or restaurant.

"It is an uplifting program bringing merchants, residents and the city together in partnership. We want to bring people back to neighborhood shopping areas."

"It's a slow process; merchants tell us what they want and we help them. We do parking lots, banners and signs; we plant trees and shrubs, add all the touches to beautify communities and make people want to come back to neighborhoods."

# Howard Park merchants progress

By Eddie King
AFRO Staff Writer

The Howard Park Merchants Association has proven over and over again that a collective effort makes for rapid progress and improvement in business.

Within a community that is quite historic itself, merchants of Howard Park have almost served as modern pioneers for business owners in other residential communities such as theirs.

The success of their attempts to draw shoppers to their individual establishments and to attract community customers back who had transferred their buying habits to other areas has long established a precedent for other merchants.

These merchants at Howard Park experimented with all sorts of ideas to achieve immediate and long - range goals. Not all were successful or even good for that matter.

It was not long, however, before a formula that obviously worked was applied. Massive renovations to the area, partly encouraged by the store owners, and improvements in direct relationships with customers added to business tremendously.

And recently, the inclusion of a farmer's market, solely initiated by the joint efforts of the merchants, has even drawn the raves of the community itself.

"We pride ourselves in what we have to offer here," explained Ruth Binsky, owner of Sparky's Cleaners and president of the Howard Park Merchants Association.

"We offer the services found in any shopping mall. We'd like to expand the variety of businesses though. We just want different types of businesses to keep our community customers right here."

There is that sort of serious commitment to pleasing the residents of the community by the association. In an effort to hold community interest, many different businesses have been attracted to the area, many of which occupy the entire 4600 and 4700 block of Liberty Heights Ave.

There is Busby TV Service, Millers Barber Shop, Chesapeake Sales Company, A and W Shoes, Nearly New Shop, Montaldo's Beauty Shop, Dennison Plumbing Company, Etcetera Boutique, Union Trust Bank, Margaret's School of Music, Four G's Lounge, Freda's Carry Out and dozens of other businesses.

The effort the city has made on behalf of the merchants has improved the area's safety and walking policemen, repaired sidewalks, and more lighting.

"I have really seen progress in this business area," said Gene Johnson, vice president of the merchant association and owner of the Nearly New Shop.

"In my short time as a businessperson here, I have seen the group work together for the advantage of their patrons. It is a good place to have a business, and I think the community is satisfied with our efforts."

KEEPING THE AREA CLEAN is just one of the many efforts of the Howard Park Merchants' Association to keep their business district attractive to residential customers.

(AFRO Photos by Paul A. Greene)

A UNIFIED LOOK is the look of businesses in Howard Park. Many of the exteriors of local stores are similar.



# Howard Park Merchants' Association

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