Data and Analysis Overcome Barriers to eTOD

CNT’s eTOD Social Impact Calculator has helped developers and advocates across Cook County advance affordable housing near transit. When CNT first set out to design the Calculator, we interviewed a dozen community development corporations (CDCs) and community development housing organizations (CDHOs) on the challenges of adding more affordable units near transit in Cook County. Though CDCs, CDHOs and others face many and varied obstacles to achieving eTOD in their projects, CNT identified the actions required to overcome three systemic barriers:

- **Education and communication of eTOD benefits to a variety of audiences:** While the neighborhood context for affordable housing projects can differ, securing community and political support are always key steps in the predevelopment process. A “Not In My Backyard” reaction can stymie project approval.
- **Identification and acquisition of key development parcels:** Affordable housing developers must compete in the private market for a limited supply of land near transit. It can be difficult to identify sites that affordable housing developers can finance while offering transit and a bundle of related benefits to residents.
- **Determination of “right size” parking requirements for TOD buildings:** While affordable projects that face tight budgets do not need to waste development costs on unnecessary parking, it can be difficult to set the “right size” for parking and justify it to gain public approvals through predevelopment.

Over the course of 2017, CNT helped community development corporations, affordable housing developers, and advocates use the Calculator to increase their capacity to address all three of these challenges. For example:

CNT helped **Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation** build support for a proposed eTOD in Logan Square on a parking lot adjacent to the Logan Square Blue Line station. Bickerdike and CNT met with low-income families at the Logan Square Neighborhood Association to discuss the project’s configuration, unit mix, and parking. The Bickerdike development proposed only 16 parking spaces. Low-income families in this conversation, several of whom work at locations other than downtown, initially feared that a lack of parking would limit their access to employment.

But as CNT noted in **Stalled Out**, a parking space eats up a significant amount of space and reduces the residential component of a project. Moreover, the number of parking spaces provided in multiunit buildings frequently exceeds actual need; so precious space and funds are expended on parking that goes unused by building residents. In the case of this Bickerdike building, any increase in parking spaces would come at the expense of affordable multibedroom units, which are scarce in the Logan Square community. Working through a translator, CNT and Bickerdike used the Calculator to help project an appropriate level of on-site parking. After thinking through the tradeoff of parking that is unlikely to be used against more units of affordable family housing, residents passionately supported any proposal that would maximize the number of affordable units in the building.
CNT helped **Chicago Housing Initiative** and **Neighbors for Affordable Housing** organize neighborhood support for an eTOD in Jefferson Park. In early 2017, Full Circle Communities proposed a development of 100 mixed-income units within a short distance of the Jefferson Park Transit Center, which is a major hub for CTA, Metra, and Pace service to several employment centers. The proposed development includes 80 affordable units, including 20 for Housing Choice Voucher holders on the Chicago Housing Authority wait list. The project met with an initial negative response from some community members, particularly online. A message of fear began circulating throughout the neighborhood.

CNT helped the coalition develop a supportive message for the project. As the eTOD Calculator makes clear, the proposed project site sat within a five-minute walk of 15 transit lines that provided access to nearly 750,000 jobs in the city and its northern and northwest suburbs. The coalition used this message to build support among Jefferson Park residents turned off by the emotional and divisive rhetoric of their neighbors when zoning changes were proposed. Whenever fear-based rhetoric fired up, fact-based messaging helped moderate the conversation. Though the project was not selected for state or city low income housing tax credits 2017, the effort demonstrates that good data can be used as an organizing tool against “Not in My Back Yard” sentiment.

To address the challenge of finding transit-served sites that CDCs and CHDOs can finance, CNT conducted training sessions with affordable housing development organizations on the functionalities of the Calculator. These include efficient access to such information as the levels of transit service, household housing and transportation costs, and retail amenities in transit station areas. An option, available under “Developer Resources” in the Calculator, can help users quickly determine whether a parcel qualifies for TOD designation under the City of Chicago ordinance and whether it is located within a Qualified Census Tract, Difficult Development Area, or Opportunity Area that affects its tax credit eligibility.

In these ways, the Social Impact Calculator can provide data and information resources to overcome systemic obstacles to better development around transit, whether it is setting parking levels, building community support, or financing sites. Every development is different, and the Social Impact Calculator can supply combinations of data and facilitate analyses to address these unique challenges.