Neighborhood Branding and Marketing
A series on redefining your neighborhood’s image

Defining the New Brand
This article is part of a series of publications by the NeighborWorks America Stable Communities Initiative that shares key concepts, strategies and tools to assist nonprofit community developers and other community-based organizations in repositioning perceptions of their target neighborhoods. The purpose of this series is to help these groups in creating community pride and attracting and retaining residents, businesses and investment. Visit www.StableCommunities.org to download the complete series and access additional resources to inform your community stabilization efforts.

NEIGHBORWORKS AMERICA

NeighborWorks America is one of the country’s preeminent leaders in affordable housing and community development. We work to create opportunities for lower-income people to live in affordable homes in safe, sustainable neighborhoods that are healthy places for families to grow. NeighborWorks delivers many of its community-focused programs and services through the national NeighborWorks network – more than 240 independent, community-based nonprofit organizations serving more than 4,500 communities nationwide.

THE STABLE COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

NeighborWorks America launched the Stable Communities Initiative in 2007 to support the efforts of local nonprofit organizations to mitigate the damaging effect of vacant and abandoned foreclosed homes on their communities. The vision of the Stable Communities Initiative is to promote comprehensive community stabilization strategies that produce new homeowners, quality rental housing, and sustainable revitalized communities. This vision is accomplished by facilitating partnerships at the national and local levels and by providing a host of resources including training, technical assistance, workshops and publications on issues related to community stabilization.

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Defining the New Brand

Defining the new brand means articulating the essence of the brand verbally or in writing to internal stakeholders who will seek ways to deliver on the promise inherent in the brand, as well as articulating it to members of the target markets who will experience it through marketing and through neighborhood visits.

CRAFTING THE BRAND PROMISE

The brand is a promise that you must make and keep in every message, every process, every organizational decision, every customer contact and every communication. Therefore, the most important step in defining the new brand is writing the “brand promise.” The brand promise is for internal use only; it captures the way you want your target markets to think and feel about you relative to competitors. This is the beacon that will guide all that you do when you market the neighborhood.

An example of a brand promise is the one for Downtown Great Falls, Montana. Downtown Great Falls encompasses both a retail center and a surrounding residential neighborhood. The essence of the brand is based on the attractive lifestyle of the city center. The Great Falls brand promise is as follows:

Downtown Great Falls provides workers, residents and visitors with a fulfilling urban experience in a small town setting, where the individuality of this historic river community can be felt. Downtown is the heart of the Great Falls community, where everyone is welcome to enjoy the unique shops and restaurants, take care of personal business, and enjoy the warm, friendly western Montana atmosphere. The downtown neighborhood is filled with character – tree-lined streets, restored homes from an earlier era and outdoor spaces that encourage neighbors to know one another. River’s Edge Park is a key recreational asset that serves residents and visitors.

Note that the promise offers a sense of the experience one can expect in the downtown neighborhood. It includes ambience, activities, amenities and other tangible benefits.

LIST YOUR BRAND EXAMPLES

Because delivering on the brand promise is crucial, it is important to identify a list of things in the neighborhood that reflect the brand promise. Is the list substantial enough to show that your brand promise is valid? In the last article (Deciding on the Core...
Elements of the New Neighborhood Brand, we discussed the process for deciding on the core elements of your neighborhood that are positive, are strong, performed well, and in some cases are unique to your neighborhood. Listing your brand examples is a way of checking to see if your brand is strong and credible.

List concrete evidence that each brand element can deliver real experiences every day in a meaningful way. Using the Great Falls brand promise as an example, the evidence of credibility includes the following:

- The walkable distance and sidewalk surfaces connecting the downtown neighborhood with the commercial district
- The intimacy of the downtown as evidenced by the limited setbacks of the commercial buildings on Central Street
- Presence of a downtown grocery store, drug store, important retail services and products in the commercial district
- Presence of unique stores not found in malls and other locations
- Presence of museums, a library, civic center and other cultural amenities
- Adjacent recreational opportunities like Gibson Park and River Walk
- Emerging urban loft living spaces in the commercial district
- Historic and solidly built residences on mature tree-lined streets
- Affordable real estate both for home-ownership and commercial rent
- Accessible public transportation system

Then compare the lists. As a team, decide which brand direction you are going to adopt. Be sure to give the consumer reasons to believe the brand.

**CORE MESSAGES AND KEY WORDS**

Before undertaking a marketing campaign, it is important to translate your brand promise into easily understood messages that can be integrated into promotional materials. These core messages and keywords will give residents and stakeholders the tools to communicate effectively with your target markets. Below are several different types of messages that you can integrate into your website, social media, publications, advertising, signage and other “touchpoints” (see below). After drafting these tools, test them with focus groups to ensure they resonate with your target audiences.

**Brand essence** – The shorthand phrase that captures the brand’s core message. This is not a tag line. It is an internal compass. The brand essence is a succinct, one-line statement. For example, your neighborhood may be described as a “laid-back, natural beach community,” or “a place where diverse
cultures are celebrated,” or “a family-focused neighborhood.”

Positioning statement – A paragraph that matches a particular target market’s needs with specific strengths of the neighborhood brand. An example of a real estate and investor positioning statement is as follows:

For those who see the future and want to be part of it, Downtown Great Falls offers exceptional buys in commercial and residential real estate. Innovators have already begun establishing themselves with renovated commercial district loft space, and restorable and sturdy residences. Early adopters are the next wave, including friends and family of existing residents, people who work nearby and want a shorter commute, and people without children.

Key messages – Messages that express your neighborhood brand to specific target markets are critical to the brand’s success. Use these to communicate and deliver the brand in ways that will be most potent for specific audiences. This customer-focused approach activates the brand relevantly and meaningfully for each audience. It demonstrates how brand elements should be woven into your messages, processes and experiences to connect with customers and motivate them to prefer the neighborhood to alternate choices. Examples of key messages that could be integrated into advertising and marketing copy aimed at real estate agents and investors include the following:

- Low-cost commercial real estate and housing
- Quality community lifestyle – walkability, recreation, proximity of services
- Growing retail and dining district
- Early examples of potential
- Early value opportunities
- Attractiveness of neighborhood to residents

Tangible benefits – Each target market will look for benefits that meet their specific needs. Tangible benefits are those that can be seen and felt. Here is an example list of tangible benefits for potential Great Falls homeowners and renters:

- Walkability
- Nearby Gibson Park and open spaces
- Electric City Water Park
- River’s Edge Trail
- Unique shops
- Ambiance through historical architecture
- Easy access to work downtown
- Mansfield Center for Performing Arts

Emotional benefits – Logic is not the only basis for decision-making by potential homeowners. For

Tips

- When deciding on a brand direction, think about which target market is most important for you. Does the brand direction address their needs?
- If a brand direction is missing a critical element that would make it work, consider whether or not it can be produced in reality before you go “live” with the brand.
- If a brand direction is limited by some underperforming element, can it be improved before you introduce the brand?
- Once you have developed the list of brand evidence, share it with other stakeholders so that they are aware of these important attributes and can continue to improve and deliver on the brand promise.

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some, the need to make an emotional connection with the neighborhood is equally important. Be sure to include examples of the emotional benefits of the brand like these:

- Sense of community with neighbors and local businesses
- Ease of access to retail and services
- Healthy lifestyle through use of parks and River’s Edge Trail
- Connection to the history and essence of Great Falls

**Key words** – Over time, many brochures, press releases, newspaper articles, interviews and other forms of communication about the neighborhood will be written. Develop a list of key words that can be used in composing these messages. Each target audience may have its own special list. Here is an example of key words directed at the homeowner and rental market for Great Falls, Montana.

- Accessible
- Adventure
- Affordable
- Atmosphere
- Attractive
- Central
- Community
- Convenient
- Downtown
- Engaging
- Enjoyable
- Entertaining
- Family friendly
- Fun
- Helpful
- History/historical
- Independent
- Neighborly
- Outdoor lifestyle
- Productive
- Quality of life
- River’s Edge Park
- Safe
- Shopping
- Successful Together
- Value for money
- Walkable
- Western

**TRAINING OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ON THE BRAND**

Successful brands are led from the top and owned at the grassroots by residents and stakeholders. In the final analysis, however, it is the target market’s acceptance of the brand that will make it a success. Residents and stakeholders will likely require training to understand the brand promise and integrate it into their actions and words. Below are several ways that the branding team might train residents and stakeholders to assume ownership of the brand.

**Brand knowledge** – Advance the general understanding and support for the brand by residents, businesses and community leaders through public relations, online activity and publications, as well as briefings and workshops. Periodic updates on the branding team’s progress and successes should be communicated to help maintain freshness, enthusiasm and commitment.

**Elected representatives** – Conduct briefings and one-on-one discussions with elected officials to develop their understanding of the neighborhood brand, its rationale, its benefits and ways they can contribute toward its success. This action should be revisited when new officers are elected or appointed to ensure that all players remain in the loop. After awareness of brand importance has been established, the policies adopted and decisions made by elected officials should be consistent with the brand to aid its development.

**Marketing partners** – Conduct briefings and workshops for key marketing partners to aid their understanding of the neighborhood brand, its benefits, and how they can accurately and consistently communicate the brand and align their own actions with it. During the workshops, brainstorm how the brand can be integrated into their own marketing efforts. Using the brand’s core messages, invite them to adopt the brand and incorporate branded messages.
into their own communications. Examples of potential marketing partners may include the following:

- Major employers and anchor institutions (hospitals, universities, etc.)
- Local business associations
- The historic preservation commission
- Neighborhood associations or block clubs
- Parent-teacher associations

Keep in mind that the idea of a branded neighborhood will be new to many and possibly even threatening to some. Your neighborhood probably has several existing organizations and programs that have been around a long time and are doing their best to make local improvements. It is important that they understand that the branding initiative is not a threat to their status, or a critique of their efforts, but rather a way to harmonize the various messages that are being communicated about the neighborhood.

**BRAND ALIGNMENT**

As a result of your training, residents, stakeholders and key partners will understand the rationale for the brand and will be motivated to pursue collaborative efforts to align their individual messages under the brand umbrella. These collaborative efforts will

- Contact existing neighborhood organizations early in the process of developing a neighborhood brand. Let them know what the branding team is doing and why. Invite their participation and address their concerns regarding the effort and its impact on their programs.
- Create a matrix of the training items and different stakeholder groups, and check them off when the branding team has completed training for them.
- Employ a PowerPoint to outline the branding process, the rationale for the brand, its benefits and how individuals and organizations can be actively involved.

- Community development corporations and other nonprofit groups
- City departments (housing, neighborhood improvement, transportation, etc.)
- Local real estate board
- Organizers of major neighborhood events (farmers markets, street festivals, etc.)
foster greater unity and reveal additional opportunities to integrate evidence of the brand into neighborhood programs, activities and other “brand touchpoints.”

**Brand touchpoints** – Touchpoints are interactions between the neighborhood brand and residents, visitors, real estate agents, investors and other target markets. Each touchpoint offers the possibility of a positive or negative impact on consumers that will affect how they feel about the neighborhood. Some touchpoints are media, where brand promises are announced; others are in the neighborhood where first impressions might become lasting impressions. All neighborhood organizations should consider touchpoints as vehicles for delivery of the brand message. Work with each organization and program to conduct an audit of touchpoints and assess whether the messages being received are positive or negative. Here are examples of neighborhood brand touchpoints:

- Advertising
- Photography of the neighborhood
- Retail signs including temporary tent signs
- Telephone pole fliers and posters
- Bus stops
- Billboard signs
- Storefronts
- Sidewalk merchandising
- Street signs
- Neighborhood gateway signs
- Trash bins
- Local realtor offices
- Local chamber offices
- Street lighting
- Building colors
- Parking signs
- Public art
- Street banners
- Trees, landscapes
- Benches
- Public restrooms
- Newspaper stands

In this article, you’ve learned how to create and articulate the brand verbally and through the written word. Now that you have an understanding of your brand and the tools to communicate with internal and external audiences, you are ready to undertake actions to reinforce and promote the brand.
This appendix defines branding terms used in this document.

**Neighborhood brand** – what people think of your neighborhood.

**Brand promise** – a statement of positive neighborhood experiences that target audiences can expect to be consistently delivered. It captures the way you want customers to think and feel about you relative to competitors.

**Core brand elements** – attributes of the neighborhood that are important to target audiences and are performing well. These are strengths that can become the foundation of your brand because the neighborhood can consistently deliver them through branded experiences.

**Brand direction** – theming a brand so that its core elements are similar or complementary to one another and lend themselves to a single brand concept.

**Brand touchpoints** – media and physical points of interaction between the neighborhood brand and its residents, visitors and other target markets.

**Brand essence** – the shorthand phrase that captures the brand’s core message. This is not a tag line; it is an internal compass.

**Positioning statement** – a paragraph that matches the needs of a target market with specific strengths of the neighborhood brand. Positioning makes your brand relevant to a specific market.

**Audience alignment** – another term for positioning statement. This is a customer-focused message about the brand.

**Key messages** – bullet point examples of ideas that should be integrated into advertising and marketing copy.

**Key words** – a list of words that should be included in brochures, press releases and other media because they are evocative of the brand promise. Different lists can be developed for different target audiences.

**Tangible benefits** – brand attributes that can be seen and felt.

**Emotional benefits** – internalized benefits acquired from the brand experience.

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**Photo Credit**

The images in this article are courtesy of NeighborWorks Waco. As part of the Neighborhood Marketing Program, NeighborWorks Waco has been promoting the East Waco neighborhood in Waco, TX as vibrant residential community with a strong arts-oriented commercial corridor. To learn more about NeighborWorks Waco visit [http://www.nw-waco.org/](http://www.nw-waco.org/). For information on the annual Art on Elm Avenue festival in East Waco (featured in many of the photographs in this article), visit [http://artonelmavenue.com/](http://artonelmavenue.com/).