

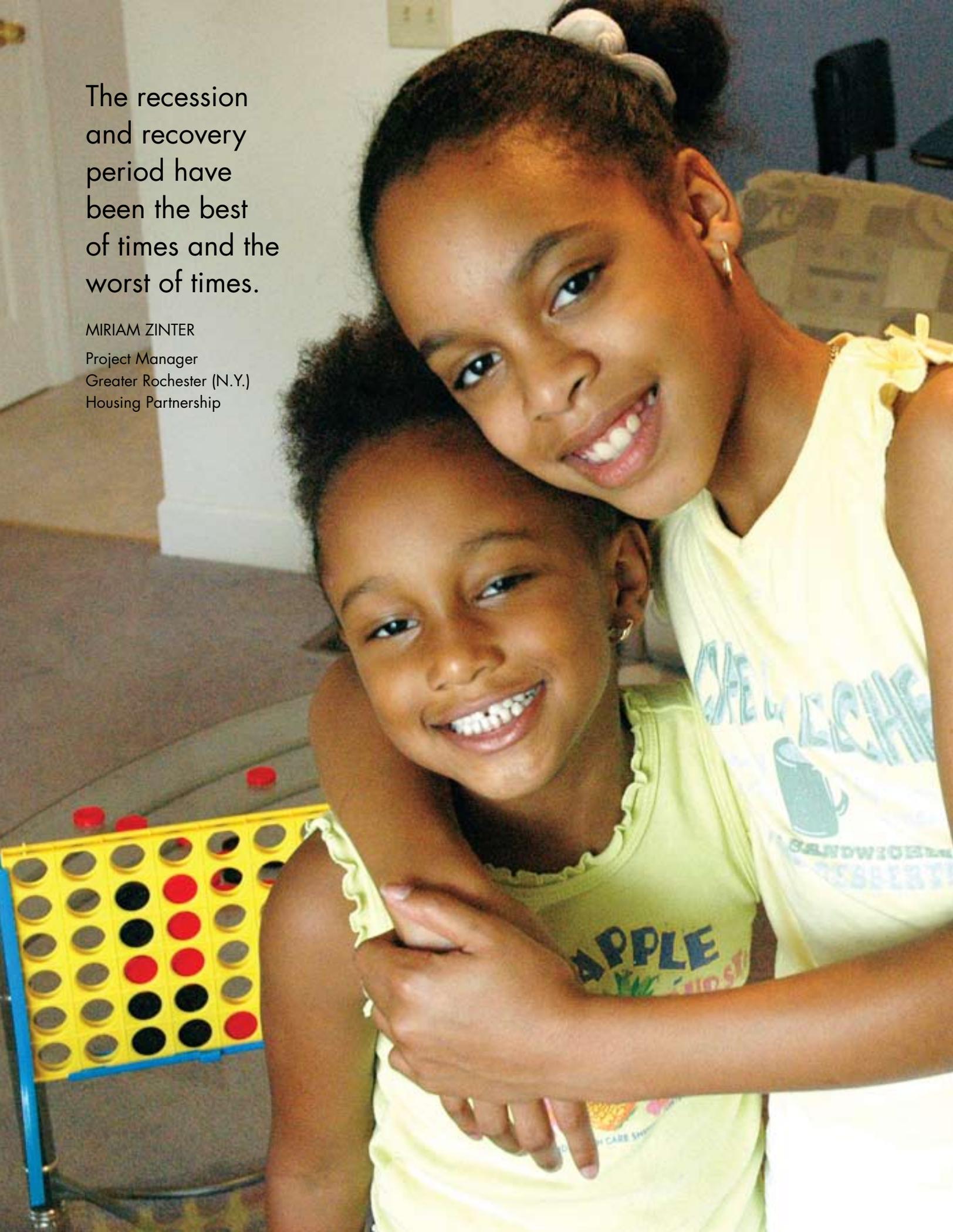
HOME Rochester's Green Acquisition-Rehabilitation Program

Lessons for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program

The recession
and recovery
period have
been the best
of times and the
worst of times.

MIRIAM ZINTER

Project Manager
Greater Rochester (N.Y.)
Housing Partnership



When the Great Recession occurred, Rochester's affordable housing leaders responded by charting a new course toward greening their acquisition-rehabilitation program. While the Greater Rochester Housing Partnership's efforts predate the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), the partnership's experience provides important lessons for NSP, one of the most ambitious community redevelopment and housing rehabilitation efforts.

'Inherently Green'

The Green Rehabilitation Opportunity launched its local acquisition-rehabilitation program, called HOME Rochester, in partnership with the Rochester Housing Development Fund Corporation (RHDFC) and Enterprise. Since its founding in 2001, HOME Rochester has acquired and rehabilitated nearly 450 single-family homes for the affordable housing market in the Rochester area. Jean Lowe, president of GRHP and HOME Rochester, says acquisition-rehabilitation is "an inherently green program" because it entails the active reuse of existing structures and neighborhoods.



The HOME Rochester team extended its green-building commitment by explicitly incorporating green methods and measures throughout the rehabilitation process. The team built its green rehabilitation program around national green building standards, while tailoring those standards to the local context and building types. The Enterprise Green Communities Criteria – the first national green building program developed specifically for affordable housing – provided the framework for this effort.

Armand Magnelli of Livable Housing, Inc., worked with HOME Rochester to develop customized green rehabilitation specifications based on the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria. The Criteria include consideration of local housing stock, climate, available materials and labor force. This approach enabled HOME Rochester to build on the experience of a national green building program, while addressing the unique aspects of the location as well as incorporating input from area stakeholders.

Tools and Training

The HOME Rochester team organized well-structured, substantive trainings addressing all stakeholders – from community leaders to contractors implementing the specifications. The multi-faceted education plan is important both at the program and project levels. Increased stakeholder education engendered greater community and political support. The education of local contractors was essential, not only to ensure proper implementation of the green initiative, but also to gain buy-in and active participation. The program managers responsible for the local acquisition-rehabilitation program also benefited from training and technical assistance to further incorporate the green initiative into their program design and infrastructure.

The following program management strategies were used:

- Requiring a blower door test at the completion of construction ensures that the green methods and measures are carried out correctly. If the test exceeded the maximum threshold,¹ additional air sealing techniques were implemented by the contractor. Blower door tests continued, at the contractor's expense, until the home passed inspection.
- Using bulk purchasing for windows, carpet and security systems standardizes the material selection process and reduces cost. It also supports the consistent use of green components and locally available materials.

The HOME Rochester team encouraged collaboration between stakeholders and learning from other national examples to enhance building performance. Additionally, the HOME Rochester team demonstrated effective marketing and homeowner education. Lowe and her staff successfully conveyed the qualitative and quantitative benefits of a green-rehabilitated home to potential residents. Homeowners all received a toolbox and a [homeowner's manual](#) during a detailed walk-through of their new home.

Residents who fully understand the green aspects of their new homes can sustain better home performance and accrue greater economic and health benefits.

To date, 45 of the original 50 green-rehabilitated houses have been purchased and residents value the new features. The HOME Rochester team's success with this first set of green rehabilitated homes has inspired the team to adopt the new specifications for future rehabilitation work across all their programs.

It's important to underscore that Rochester successfully implemented its green-rehabilitation program in the midst of a recession, and proved that green rehabilitation is a sustainable and cost-effective housing strategy.

Bret Garwood, director of business and housing development for the city of Rochester, N.Y., explained the value of HOME Rochester's efforts: "First, homeowners purchase a high-quality well within their means, which means they can afford to maintain their home and improve their quality of life. Second, green homes are healthier and more energy efficient, so that means lower costs for utilities, fewer medical expenses – and that ultimately increases people's ability to enjoy long-term, stable homeownership."

Green Rehabilitation and NSP Efforts

Like HOME Rochester, many organizations are demonstrating that affordable rehabilitation and green rehabilitation can be one and the same. The following measures – carried out by Home Rochester – are key to success:

- Base the acquisition-rehabilitation program on a national residential green building standard, such as the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria, but tailor these standards to the local context.
- Organize well-structured, substantive trainings that engage all stakeholders – from educating community leaders about green building and its benefits to providing detailed technical information for contractors, inspectors and developers.
- Encourage collaboration between stakeholders and learning from other national examples.
- Demonstrate effective marketing and homeowner education.

¹ Cubic feet per minute at 50 pascals is the current industry-accepted maximum threshold necessary to obtain a healthy indoor air quality for residents.

Extra Steps to Success

Some additional key steps are necessary to make green initiatives succeed for NSP grantees. First, all involved stakeholders must recognize the importance of incorporating green building measures into their program. Fully understanding the health, economic and environmental benefits of their work will yield greater efficiency and expand marketing and education opportunities.

For example, HOME Rochester reached out to as many involved parties as possible to create strong relationships and to educate these stakeholders on the benefits of green building. The study [Incremental Cost, Measurable Savings](#) by Enterprise provides an excellent analysis of the costs and benefits of incorporating the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria in a green building project.

In the current economic climate, all available economic resources need to be leveraged with maximum creativity. This means green development and rehabilitation strategies must be considered simultaneously. Many resources – the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#), [Community Development Block Grants](#), the [Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant](#) at the federal level and other funding sources at the state and local level – should be considered when seeking ways to advance green rehabilitation and increase the number of rehabbed units. Additionally, Enterprise Green Communities provides grants for resident education and for [charrettes](#)² to help teams incorporate an integrative design aspect to green development.

Conclusion

Building on over a decade of experience, a coalition of community groups came together in Rochester to meet an economic challenge and seize a green opportunity for an acquisition-rehabilitation program. The city's experience, approach and success provide powerful lessons for acquisition rehabilitation efforts under NSP programs in similar markets around the country.

² A charrette is the gathering of relevant stakeholders to discuss specific design and green-building aspects of a particular project or program, including the assignment of roles to certain stakeholders. Charrettes also help teams establish a plan to accomplish agreed-upon goals set forth in the charrette to ensure an integrative design approach is taken.



American City Building
10227 Wincopin Circle
Columbia, MD 21044
410.964.1230
www.enterprisecommunity.org
www.enterprisecommunity.com

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