Chapter 7: Afterword

"This place was built in order to beautify the center of Lawrence. We should maintain it the best we can." – *resident, age 58*

Next Steps and Final Thoughts:

According to the Highlander Center for Research and Education,[47] "social concerns are best addressed when solutions come from the people who are experiencing the problem." This is the hope for Heritage Common. With the new Tenants' Committee and the burgeoning interest of the residents in community action, the goal of an organized community with a voice is becoming more of a reality. In order to keep working towards the goal, there are a series of next steps that are in place.

The first of those is a community meeting scheduled for the evening of May 18, 2000. The agenda for the meeting includes items that address the concerns of all parties involved. The agenda with the people presenting each item is as follows:

1. Introduce TCB staff and their roles – *Tom Stokes, Director of Human Services for the New England Region, TCB*
2. Introduce Tenants' Committee – *Rafael Morales, Resident Services Coordinator, Heritage Common*
3. Presentation of Survey Results – *Madeline Fraser, MIT graduate student, TCB intern*
    - Demographics of Heritage Common residents

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[47] The main focus of the Highlander Center for Research and Education is to work with grassroots leaders and community groups to help bring about social change through collective action. They are located in New Market, TN.

- Social Services Needed
- ESL and GED classes
- Homeownership workshops
- Family recreational activities
- Community Health and Safety workshops

4. TCB's Long Term Commitment to Heritage Common – *Joyce Rinaldi, Portfolio Manager, TCB*
5. TCB's Goals at Heritage Common – *Tony Decearse, Site Manager, Heritage Common*
6. Property Update, Progress on Maintenance Projects, Lighting - *Tony Decearse*
7. Commitment to Meet with Tenants' Committee Bi-monthly - *Tony Decearse*
8. Recommendation of a Team Building Project on Site for TCB and Residents to Work On – *Tom Stokes, Rafael Morales*
9. List of questions from the Residents to be Addressed by TCB Next Meeting – *Rafael Morales*
10. Date for the Next Meeting – *Joyce Rinaldi*

This agenda was agreed upon by all of the parties involved. The residents at Heritage Common are beginning to sense that TCB is serious about improving communications between the staff and the residents. The agenda touches on many issues that have been on the minds of residents for quite a while. It also gives TCB staff the opportunity to clarify issues that have been a source of confusion for many residents (e.g. TCB's long-term commitment to Heritage Common; some residents were concerned that it might be sold to the city of Lawrence and become a housing "project.") The item that inspires the most hope for starting a positive relationship is the "team building project between TCB and the residents." This is meant to be a small project somewhere on the property that is not terribly expensive to carry out, but that the residents really feel would improve Heritage Common. Some of the ideas for this project have included a new playground, a basketball court, and making sure all the lighting on the property is working.

This meeting is an important step in the process of organizing. It was originally meant as a forum to discuss the survey results, but because of resident input, it has evolved into a meeting where conversations that have been long overdue can take place. This is a small winnable for the residents. They have guarded optimism this is the beginning of positive change. The question now is how to get involvement in the meeting from the majority of the residents. The Tenants' Committee is planning to pass out pamphlets and go door to door to invite their neighbors. The turnout at the meeting will be an indicator of whether there organizing efforts are working.

Until then, the question on resident's minds is whether or not TCB will live up to the commitments that they make at the meeting. The concept of "cumplir con sus palabras" has often been repeated at the Tenants' Committee meetings. To "cumplir" translates to English as "to fulfill, honor, follow through, or to live up to." Residents have repeated that there have been many promises for change in the past that have not been lived up to. At the last meeting on person asked: "What makes this time different? Are they really going to follow through this time?" Another replied: "We'll just have to wait and see." So far, there have been steps taken by all parties to repair a long fractured relationship.

It will take persistence on the part of the Tenants' Committee to make participation in community activities grow, and it will take the best of communication skills on the part of TCB to keep the residents informed and happy. The Tenants' Committee is still at a very fragile stage and will need to use all of the resources it has inside and outside their networks to grow and become sustainable. Everyone will be convinced of the success of this effort when the bi-monthly meetings are a part of the

natural schedule of things at Heritage Common. Until then, the residents can celebrate small winnables, TCB can be happy that they are dealing with a community of residents that have a vested interest in the development, and everyone can look forward to continuing the process that has already begun.

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