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## Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Choice Neighborhoods Grantee:** Mt. Vernon Manor, Inc.

**Target Assisted Housing Project:** Mt. Vernon Manor Apartments

**Target Neighborhood:** Mantua

**Choice Neighborhoods Award Amount:** \$250,000

### Key Partners:

Diamond & Associates/Kitchen & Associates (Planning Coordinator); The Philadelphia Foundation; Drexel University; Philadelphia Housing Authority; LISC; One Economy Corporation

### Project Summary:

Mt. Vernon Manor, Inc. is a non-profit organization that owns Mt. Vernon Apartments, a nine-building assisted housing development in the Mantua neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Mantua neighborhood is characterized by high levels of crime and poverty. More than 44 percent of its residents are classified as living in poverty and the neighborhood vacancy rate is nearly three times the county vacancy rate. Mt. Vernon Manor, Inc. has partnered with its Planning Coordinator, the Diamond Team, to facilitate the creation of a Transformation Plan for the Mantua neighborhood where Mt. Vernon Manor Apartments is located. The Diamond Team blends two groups both with experience with planning and developing affordable housing projects. The planning team is assessing the already existing physical, socio-economic and educational assets currently present in the neighborhood and engaging residents and local community groups in a collaborative process to identify the areas where improvements to the neighborhood can be made. The planning process is supported by Philadelphia's Drexel University, LISC, the Philadelphia Foundation, the Philadelphia Housing Authority and local Head Start and Keystone Stars programs that focus on early childhood development.



### Recent Accomplishments:

- Task forces including local stakeholders and interested Mantua residents were established to address concerns raised by the community. The groups have held frequent meetings to identify issues, establishing priorities and initial recommendations (short and long term).
- With financial support from LISC Philadelphia, Mt. Vernon Manor Inc, engaged a community engagement specialist to work closely with neighborhood residents and local stakeholders to advance the planning process and, in the process, promote opportunities for community and capacity building.
- Created a Youth Leadership group to get young residents of Mantua involved in the planning process and have an active role in shaping the future of their community.

### Next Steps:

- Complete a resident survey with Mt. Vernon Manor to provide the basis for a plan for supportive services addressing the needs of residents in that development.
- Initiate a housing market study to evaluate development opportunities focused on affordable and mixed income housing in the neighborhood.
- Task forces are expected to finalize their planning effort in May. A final meeting will be held between all task forces and the planning team to coordinate recommendations and create a cohesive set of strategies informing the preparation of the Transformation Plan.
- A first critical outcome of the task forces is a list of early action items identified as initiatives to be accomplished during the planning process and which require minimal if any financial commitment. These “easy wins” should build capacity among residents, strengthen relationships with city agencies and organizations and keep resident interest through the planning process. Among early action initiatives, the establishment of a civic association was identified as a key priority for the Mantua community.