

# Albany, NY

## Mayor Gerald D. Jennings

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### ***C-1 Neighborhood Commercial District Revitalization Program***

C-1 is a zoning designation that describes a commercial neighborhood. Adjacent to residential areas, C-1 neighborhood characteristics include retail stores, offices, churches, restaurants, taverns, banks, and theaters. The City of Albany has 21 major C-1 districts.

Faced with competition from suburban malls, many neighborhood C-1 businesses have struggled to maintain their economic viability. Commercial success is crucial to the stability of neighborhoods adjacent to C-1 districts.

The C-1 Program is a multi-agency effort to provide public improvements, to encourage owner investment in commercial properties, and to create jobs. City agencies involved include Economic Development, Planning, Housing and Community Development, General Services, Police, and Code Enforcement. The program is aimed at facilitating the creation of partnerships between residents, businesses, property owners, and City government agencies to foster neighborhood stability and growth. It is an economic development approach to neighborhood revitalization to increase business, jobs, home ownership, and property values.

#### **Advisory Committee**

In January 1999, Mayor Gerald D. Jennings appointed the C-1 Advisory Committee, composed of representatives of the business community, neighborhood associations, and the City Council. The Committee was formed in order to establish goals, objectives, and program guidelines, to establish district priority and a program budget, to approve district-specific plans, and to identify funding mechanisms.

#### **Strategic Planning**

Through a competitive application process, target districts are selected using a number of criteria, including extent of organized neighborhood commitment, degree of need, level of investment potential, and project readiness. Once selected, the stakeholders of a target district are convened to discuss the area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and limitations. A draft plan is produced by

a team of City planners and development specialists and presented to the district stakeholders at a follow-up meeting.

Once agreement is reached among district stakeholders, an implementation agenda is tailored to the district's needs. Public realm improvements, financial assistance to commercial property owners, small business development and financing, signage and beautification are some examples of services provided either directly by the City or through the not-for-profit Albany Local Development Corporation. Other enhanced public services include code and law enforcement. Funding sources include federal Community Development Block Grant funds, a City bond issue for public improvements, the Albany Local Development Corporation, and the City of Albany Industrial Development Agency.

A bond issue totaling \$2 million was approved by the City Council in May, 2000, aimed at providing necessary public improvements identified in the strategic planning process. Dollar amounts awarded were based on a formula that accounted for the lineal footage of City streets within the district, along with consideration of whether a district fell within an established business improvement district, the City's Economic Development Zone, or a CDBG-eligible area.

#### **Program Activities**

Two pilot districts, Delaware Avenue and Townsend Park, were selected as the first two target districts in March 1999. Following the strategic planning process, an action agenda was defined. As these plans were being implemented, five more districts were selected. Total spending for public improvements in all seven districts amounts to \$678,249. An application has been submitted for \$300,000 in matching funds for public improvements through the community revitalization fund of the New York State Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act for the Delaware and Townsend districts.

Architectural and financial assistance is offered to the owners of commercial and



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***"The C-1 Program is an economic development approach to neighborhood revitalization to increase business, jobs, home ownership, and property values. One of the primary reasons the C-1 Program has been successful is due to our ability to tailor the program to address the needs identified by the stakeholders of each C-1 district. Neighborhood stakeholders are partners in the City's revitalization efforts".***

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Program has been running two years

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mixed-use properties in all C-1 districts for building façade improvements. Commercial tenants can also receive grants and loans for signage. With a required minimum owner investment of \$2,000, matching grants are available up to \$10,000 and low interest loans up to \$5,000. A program architect will design a project within the owner's budget constraints free of charge. Currently, 70 facade improvement projects in seven districts are part of the program, with 20 projects either at or near completion. The architectural consultant is a local architecture and urban design firm that also advises the City on district design standards as well as on specific improvements to public spaces such as parks and key road intersections.

The City's Department of Development and Planning is working on a collaborative arrangement with the local chapter of the American Marketing Association to assist small business with advertising and promotional needs.

In January 2001, another 4 districts will be selected to enter the program, and the strategic planning effort will begin again. By spring of 2001, half of the City's C-1 districts will be the target of focused neighborhood commercial revitalization efforts.