



# CLC

COMMUNITY  
LAW CENTER

Lawyers for Neighborhoods

# COMMUNITY LAW CENTER, INC. STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2011



## **2009 Board of Directors**

John A Gephart, Esq., Chair and Strategic Planning Committee Chair (2007) \*

Danielle E. Howarth, Esq., Vice Chair and Nominating Committee Chair (2007)

William (Bill) Magruder, Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair (2004)

Brian S. Southard, Esq., Secretary (2008)

Kisha A. Brown, Esq. (2008)

Shirl R. Byron (2004)

Ann Cole, Esq. (2005)

Pauline M. Harris (2009)

Franklin N. McNeil, Jr., Former Chair and Events Committee Chair (2002)

Caroline G. Moore (2006)

Joanne Nathans, Esq., Program Committee Chair (2000)

Joshua E. Neiman (2008)

Marta J. Pola (2008)

Michael A. Pretl, Esq. (1988)

Jason C. Rose, Esq., Development Committee Chair (2008)

Andre R. Weitzman, Esq. (2004)

Dominic Wiker (2008)

## **2009 Staff**

Kristine J. Dunkerton, Esq., Executive Director (1998)

Danielle Deckard, Paralegal (2004)

Dorcas Gilmore, Esq., Skadden Fellow (2007)

Alyson Harkins, Pro Bono Outreach Coordinator (2008)

Ingrid Hitchens, Resource Manager & Senior Paralegal (1998)

Mark Hughes, Community Organizer (2002)

Susan Hughes, Esq., Staff Attorney (2002)

Fatima Jones, Administrative Assistant (2000)

Fran Gunther Minges, Development Director (2006)

Kelly Pfeifer, Esq., Supervising Attorney (2005)

Michelle Wirzberger Pierce, Esq., Staff Attorney (2006)

Robert Strupp, Esq., Director of Research & Policy (2006)

---

\* The year in parentheses indicates when each Board and staff member became affiliated with the Law Center.

# Community Law Center, Inc. 2009 – 2011 Strategic Plan

## Table of Contents:

2009 Board of Directors and Staff	2
Community Law Center (2006 to Date)	3
Strategic Planning Process	6
Strategic Plan Summary	7
Strategic Goals and Action Items	
Goal One: Community Law Center will become the leading resource for legal services to community organizations and nonprofits in Maryland	7
Goal Two: Community Law Center will implement the best practices in marketing to achieve name recognition throughout Maryland	9
Goal Three: Community Law Center will achieve financial stability that allows for sustained operations and opportunities for growth	10
Moving Forward	11
Appendix A: History of Community Law Center, Inc.	12
Appendix B: Marketing Plan	17

---

### Cover photos (from top):

(1) “Take Down the Signs Day” event and press conference (Michael Sarbanes, Ralph Moore, Robert Strupp, Mel Freeman, and Kristine Dunkerton); (2) Susan Hughes, Inez Robb, and Mario Dispenza discuss Mario’s pro bono representation of the Sandtown Winchester Condo Association; (3) Joanne Nathans and Shirl Byron explore the Upper Fells Point community garden on the Law Center’s bus tour of neighborhood accomplishments; (4) Michelle Wirzberger Pierce representing a community before the Liquor Board; (5) Kristine Dunkerton and the Brooklyn and Curtis Bay Communities seeking legislation in Annapolis; (6) Al Cordell protesting truck traffic on Dundalk Avenue; and (7) staff and clients protesting cuts to the Law Center’s funding at City Hall.

Community Law Center, Inc., 3355 Keswick Road, Suite 200, Baltimore, MD 21211 410-366-0922 [www.communitylaw.org](http://www.communitylaw.org)

## Community Law Center (2006 to Date)\*

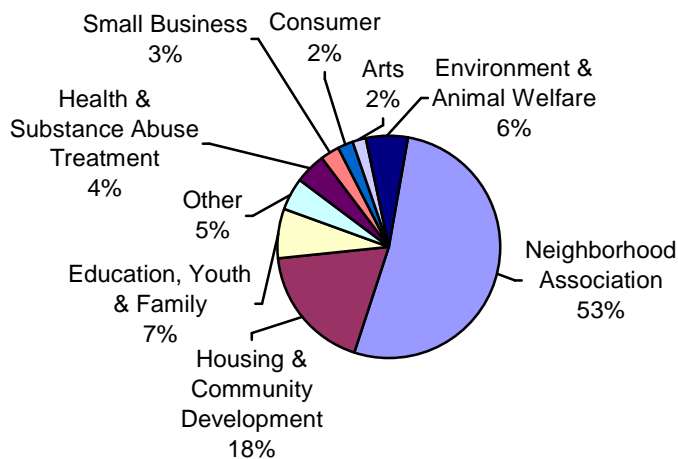
Since the last Strategic Plan (2005-2008), the Community Law Center (“Law Center”) maintained momentum for six program areas:

- 1 – Pro Bono Project
- 2 – Community Legal Services Project
- 3 – Project to End Predatory Real Estate Practices
- 4 – Real Estate Services Project
- 5 – Environmental Justice Project
- 6 – Small Business Legal Services Project

Throughout 2006 and 2007, the six projects grew in numbers of cases, clients, and issues addressed. However, in the fall 2008, the global financial crisis began to impact the Law Center’s ability to fundraise, particularly from individual and corporate donors. Foundations also began to tighten their focus and stop funding certain program or geographic areas. As a result, the Law Center lost most of its funding opportunities for Environmental Justice and Small Business Legal Services work.

Nevertheless, the Law Center continued to represent a wide variety of clients in 2008, with a particular focus on neighborhoods. As illustrated by the chart below, more than half of the clients represented by the Law Center are neighborhood associations. The remaining clients span the wide variety of the nonprofit sector. A large number of the Law Center’s clients are involved in housing and community development. We also represent a significant amount of groups focused on education, youth and family, environment and animal welfare, health and substance abuse, arts, and consumer issues. Finally, we do provide fee-for-service representation to a limited number of small businesses in Baltimore City.

**Types of Clients Represented by Community Law Center in 2008**



The Law Center helped groups that would otherwise have been unable to afford the legal assistance needed to get started, protect their legal rights, or achieve their missions. The Law Center remained the only legal services organization in Maryland providing direct legal services solely to organizational clients. In 2007, the Law Center handled 365 different cases. In 2008, that number increased to 404. From July - December 2008, opened cases increased 70% compared to the same time period in 2007.

\* Community Law Center’s prior history is detailed in Appendix A.

The Law Center generally served clients in three ways: 1) Brief advice, referral, and education; 2) Long term organizing assistance; and 3) Direct legal representation. *First*, staff provided referrals to other legal services, organizations, and agencies. Staff also provided brief advice, either over the phone or in person in the Law Center's office. In 2008, the Law Center handled more than three times the number of calls for brief advice or referrals than in 2007. In addition, in 2008, staff attended over 100 community meetings or board meetings of community and nonprofit organizations each year to provide presentations on the legal tools available to them or to give brief advice.

In the fall of 2008, the Law Center began a regular schedule of workshops on topics of interest to community and nonprofit organizations, such as *Stop Trashing My Community*; *How to Start and Maintain a Nonprofit Organization*; *How to Protest a Liquor License*; *Zoning 101*; *How to Spot a Real Estate Scam*; and *Cleaning and Greening Your Community*. These workshops, which received very positive feedback and were often filled to capacity, educated community and nonprofit organization leaders, volunteer attorneys, law students, and legislative staff. Additional sessions were added to accommodate demand.

Meanwhile, the Project to End Predatory and Deceptive Real Estate Practices continued its collaborative efforts with the Enforcement Committee of the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition and the Homeownership Preservation Coalition of Prince George's County to bring together policy experts, elected officials, government agencies, businesses, financial institutions, academic institutions, nonprofits, and neighborhood leaders to identify and examine the causes and consequences of real estate deception. The Enforcement Committee had great success in advancing the adoption and enforcement of stronger regulations, improved enforcement of existing laws, and coordination and cooperation among government agencies and advocates. Since February 2007, the Law Center led the Baltimore Homeownership Preservation Coalition's efforts in seeking enforcement of existing real estate laws and regulations through the creation and staffing of the Enforcement Committee. As a result, the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (DLLR), the Real Estate Commission, the Attorney General's Office, the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT), Baltimore City Housing officials, HUD, and other agencies responsible for enforcing real estate laws and regulations now participate in the Enforcement Committee and partner with the Law Center and other nonprofits to develop procedures for implementing enforcement of existing laws and regulations. The Committee has been extremely successful in bringing regulators and law enforcement together to coordinate efforts and share information.

*Second*, the Law Center's Pro Bono Outreach Coordinator worked with clients seeking legal assistance who were not yet ready to work with an attorney. For example, a community organization may be interested in pursuing a drug nuisance abatement lawsuit against the owners of a vacant property being used to distribute narcotics. The Law Center's staff will work with the organization to make sure that it is working cooperatively with the Police Department, that there is sufficient evidence to file a case, and that all of the necessary documentation to pursue the case is in hand before a volunteer attorney is sought. By way of further example, a nonprofit organization may wish to seek tax-exempt status but is unable to locate the articles of incorporation or bylaws that need to be revised. The Law Center's staff will help the organization get their documents in order before matching them with a volunteer attorney. In either of the preceding examples, this capacity-building work with the clients could take a week, a month, or a year, depending on the client's capabilities and the complexity of the issue.

*Third*, we provide direct representation to help organizations:

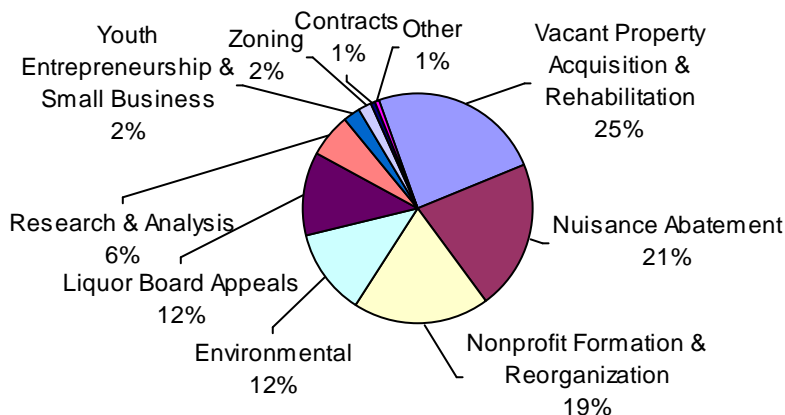
- Get started and become tax-exempt by creating bylaws and articles of incorporation; applying for 501(c)(3) status, and, if applicable, real property and sales and use tax exemption;
- Achieve their mission with access to all of the legal assistance needed, including:
  - Improving the health and safety of the community by representing and advising the organization in drug nuisance cases, Liquor Board hearings, and zoning hearings and appeals;
  - Creating a cleaner and greener neighborhood by helping the organization get permission to create

- community gardens, clean up vacant lots, and paint public murals;
- o Developing affordable housing by advising the organization on financing and construction contracts;
- Protect the organization with advice for intellectual property rights, employment issues, and contracts; and
- Reorganize or wind down the organization by restating Articles of Incorporation, revising bylaws, or dissolving the entity.

In 2008, the Law Center continued to handle a wide variety of legal issues on behalf of its clients. As the chart illustrates below, vacant property acquisition and rehabilitation cases encompassed 25% of the Law Center’s workload in 2008. Just over 20% of the Law Center’s cases involved nuisance abatement, in which a community organization decided to address nuisance activity at a property, such as illegal drug distribution, a vacant lot with trash or rat infestation or a building that needs to be boarded up to prevent casual entry. Nearly 20% of the Law Center’s cases involved legal assistance to help the organization with its legal structure.

The Law Center also handled a significant number of Liquor Board appeals and environmental cases in 2008. A successful appeal before the Board of Liquor License Commissioners of Baltimore City can be the linchpin to saving a neighborhood from a downward spiral. The environmental cases can also greatly influence the health of a neighborhood, as residents band together to clean up a vacant lot or to seek assurances that an industry is not polluting their air, water or land. We provide the legal tools necessary to instill communities with the confidence and capacity to build safer, healthier, and stronger neighborhoods.

**Types of Cases Handled by Community Law Center in 2008**



As the Law Center implements its strategic plan for 2009-2011, it needs to focus on strengthening its three core services, namely: (1) matching volunteer attorneys with nonprofits across the state (our Pro Bono Program); 2) providing direct legal services to community-based organizations in Baltimore City (our Community Legal Services Program); and 3) providing research and policy guidance to address predatory and deceptive real estate practices (our Project to End Predatory and Deceptive Real Estate Practices). To this end, the Law Center is discontinuing its Small Business Legal Services Project and Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative, consolidating its Real Estate Services Project with its Project to End Predatory Real Estate Practices, and rolling its Environmental Justice Project into its Community Legal Services Project. The Law Center also needs to become more widely known as the legal services organization to contact for representation of nonprofits and community organizations in Maryland. Finally, the Law Center must achieve financial stability both to support its current services and allow it to pursue opportunities for growth.

This three-year Strategic Plan provides the initial direction, goals and action steps for the Law Center to pursue its mission with the full understanding that it is also intended to be a continuously-evolving document that steers the organization on the proper path as circumstances and opportunities change over time.

## Strategic Planning Process

The Board of Directors began the process for devising this three-year Strategic Plan during the summer of 2008, the final year of the previous Strategic Plan. John Gephart, Vice Chair of the Board at the time, agreed to chair the Strategic Planning Committee. He encouraged all Board and staff members to participate in the strategic planning process to maximize the enthusiasm for, commitment to, and the ultimate success of the resulting plan.

### Step 1: Review the Law Center's Current Status and Its Progress Related to Its Prior Strategic Plan

Before considering the Law Center's goals for the future, the Strategic Planning Committee first needed to thoroughly evaluate the Law Center's current program environment. At the Committee's request, the staff reviewed the Law Center's six program areas, which as previously noted, ultimately were focused into three, core service areas, namely (1) matching volunteer attorneys with nonprofits across the state; (2) providing direct legal services to community-based organizations in Baltimore City; and (3) providing research and policy guidance to address predatory and deceptive real estate practices.

The Strategic Planning Committee next reviewed the 2005 to 2008 Strategic Plan to determine what goals remained outstanding for the Law Center to consider pursuing. The Committee reached the following conclusions:

- Goal 1: *Expand Financial Support* and Goal 2: *Expand Visibility and Name Recognition* remain priorities and are the focus of the 2009-2011 plan. The Law Center was unable to implement the Marketing Plan attached to its 2005 to 2008 Strategic Plan because the marketing firm that was volunteering its services to the Law Center went bankrupt shortly after producing the Law Center's Marketing Plan.
- Goal 3: *Expand the Role and Function of the Board of Directors* is a work in progress. While the current Board of Directors is highly active and offers a diversity of professional skills, the Law Center continues to seek experienced fundraisers to serve on the Board and to help the entire Board become more active and proficient in fundraising.
- Goal 4: *Expand the Project to End Predatory Real Estate Practices Beyond Baltimore* and Goal 5: *Expand the Pro Bono Project Across Maryland* constitute two of the Law Center's three core program areas. While these two programs have successfully expanded geographically, additional opportunities exist to increase the client base and name recognition beyond Baltimore and are being explored in the following plan.

### Step 2: Engage the Board and Staff in a Conversation on Future Goals

The Strategic Planning Committee next convened a one-day Board and staff retreat on Saturday, October 19, 2008, to identify the key future issues facing the Community Law Center and to establish action priorities. The Committee hired Greg Conderacci, the Founder of Good Ground Consulting LLC and an Adjunct Professor of Marketing at the Johns Hopkins University Carey Business School, to facilitate the Retreat because, among facilitator applicants interviewed by the Committee, he demonstrated the most proficiency in marketing, which the Committee viewed as a major priority.

### Step 3: Strategic Planning Committee Retreat Follow-Up Meetings

After the Retreat, the Strategic Planning Committee held several meetings that were open to all Law Center Board and staff members to continue the Retreat discussion regarding:

- a) the Law Center's mission statement, vision statement and tag line;
- b) short "elevator stories" to tell interested parties about the Law Center's fine work;
- c) the Law Center's market position, including its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; and
- d) goals for the next three years, as well as action steps to achieve these goals and metrics to measure the Law Center's progress in achieving these goals.

The Strategic Planning Committee ultimately decided to keep the Strategic Plan simple by focusing the Law Center on three goals, which are fully detailed below, pertaining to the Law Center's legal expertise, marketing, and fundraising. The Committee then assigned the Program, Development, and ad hoc Marketing Committees the task of developing the action plans and appropriate metrics related to achieving these three goals.

### Step 4: Circulation, Feedback, and Approval

The first complete draft of the 2009 – 2011 Strategic Plan was compiled by the Development Director, edited by the Executive Director and Board/Strategic Planning Committee Chair, and circulated to the Board and staff, on Monday, June 8, 2009. Suggested revisions were submitted to the Strategic Planning Committee by June 16<sup>th</sup>, so that this final draft of the Law Center's 2009 – 2011 Strategic Plan was presented to and approved by the Board at its June 18, 2009 meeting.

## **Strategic Plan Summary**

### Mission Statement

Community Law Center, Inc., a nonprofit law firm, represents community organizations and nonprofits to achieve safe and sustainable neighborhoods.

### Tag Line

Lawyers for Neighborhoods

### Three Strategic Goals

1. Community Law Center will become the leading resource for legal services to community organizations and nonprofits in Maryland.
2. Community Law Center will implement the best practices in marketing to achieve name recognition throughout Maryland.
3. Community Law Center will achieve financial stability that allows for sustained operations and opportunities for growth.

## **Strategic Goals and Action Items**

**Goal One: Community Law Center will become the leading resource for legal services to community organizations and nonprofits in Maryland.**

The Law Center has provided legal services to community organizations and nonprofits for over twenty years. However, the Law Center's focus on low-income neighborhood associations in Baltimore City has resulted in a public perception that we only represent low-income neighborhood associations in Baltimore City. To reach more potential clients of various types and incomes, the Law Center will use its resources to pursue opportunities to introduce ourselves to groups both inside and outside Baltimore.



### Outreach to Potential Clients

Inside Baltimore City, the Law Center's program with University of Maryland law students has shown great promise. This program matches law students with the Community Relations Councils in various police districts. The students go to their monthly meetings and represent the Law Center, giving out applications for services, and reporting back to us on the needs of the groups attending the meetings. This program will be continued and ways to expand it will be explored. Specifically, we will explore ways to get the students more involved (have students attend community meetings in addition to the police meetings either on their own or with a staff attorney). Also, Law Center staff will continue their direct outreach efforts throughout the City (attending community meetings, calling organizations, etc.).

Outside Baltimore City, the focus of the Law Center's direct outreach will be the communities on the perimeter of Baltimore. The Law Center's staff person in charge of outreach will explore specific opportunities with the Executive Director's guidance. One goal will be to work with staff and Board members with specific geographic connections.

To determine the effectiveness of the strategies described above, at the beginning of the plan year and each year thereafter, Law Center staff will report how many cases are coming from groups in each Maryland county. Based on the results, the Program Committee will devise realistic goals for growth for each succeeding year.

### Outreach to Professional Venues and Publications

The Law Center also wants to identify specific speaking opportunities and nonprofit publications through which to share the Law Center's expertise. To accomplish this, the Board's Vice Chair will hold a meeting with interested Board members and staff. The goal will be two-fold: 1) to identify specific conferences and meetings at which Law Center staff could speak, and 2) identify particular publications in which to publish articles/target press releases. The audiences for these speaking appearances and publications should be the Law Center's clients and/or funders. We will ask Board members with marketing experience to participate in this meeting. Once potential speaking venues and publications are identified, Board members and staff will be tasked with contacting the sponsoring organizations.

To determine the effectiveness of the strategy described above, at the beginning of the plan year and each year thereafter, Law Center staff will determine how many publications and news stories were published and how many speaking engagements Law Center staff participated in for the preceding year. Based on the initial numbers, the Program Committee will formulate realistic goals for each succeeding year.

### Improved Marketing Materials

Finally, the Law Center finds a need to clarify its scope and distinguish it from other organizations that represent nonprofits. The Executive Director and Chair of the Program Committee will rewrite existing marketing materials with an eye toward clarifying the Law Center's scope and distinguishing the Law Center from other organizations that do similar work (e.g., the Law Center helps nonprofits with their 501(c)(3) applications). Once the new language is identified, this language will be used in all of the Law Center's new marketing materials.

To determine the effectiveness of the strategy described above, at the beginning of the plan year and as needed thereafter, Law Center staff will survey a representative group of clients and funders to assess how they heard of the Law Center and to determine whether they understand how the Law Center's services differ from similar providers.

## **Goal Two: The Law Center will implement the best practices in marketing to achieve name recognition throughout Maryland.**

Despite dedicating over twenty years to providing legal services to improve Baltimore area neighborhoods, the Law Center remains surprisingly unknown to a large segment of funders (corporations, foundations, and individuals), pro bono legal service providers (one-person to multinational law firms) and clients (community organizations and nonprofits in the Baltimore region). Thus, this second goal of the Strategic Plan is focused on making the Law Center a “household name” throughout the Baltimore metropolitan region and, ultimately, extending to Maryland’s eastern and western boundaries by the Law Center’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012. As the Law Center’s marketing improves, so will its network of funders, pro bono attorneys and neighborhood clients.

The Law Center has pursued the best practices in marketing by recruiting several Board members with educational and professional experience in marketing. The Law Center’s newest Board member, Pauline Harris, has generously offered the services of her Baltimore marketing firm, SPIN LLC, to plan the Law Center’s marketing strategy. The Law Center’s marketing program (see Appendix B) is divided into three major topics: (1) corporate identity program; (2) public relations; and (3) special events. The program only extends for nine months to the close of 2009 because, in most cases, these marketing actions will repeat themselves and, in some cases, be refined based on the results of prior periods.

### Corporate Identity Program

First, the corporate identity program is designed to communicate the Law Center’s unique identity, purpose and value (collectively, the Law Center’s “brand”) to the Law Center’s three distinct audiences: the Law Center’s funders, pro bono attorneys, and community clients. Having chosen the Law Center’s mission statement, vision statement, and tag line, we will spend the next two months working with wordsmiths, graphic designers, and printers to produce an eye-catching brochure. During this same period, we also will update the Law Center’s website to capture the Law Center’s brand in its message, as well as leverage several social and professional networks, including FaceBook and LinkedIn, to spread the word.

### Public Relations Campaign

Second, the public relations campaign is designed to maximize the spread of the Law Center’s new corporate identity using both old and new technologies. Employing traditional marketing techniques, we will write articles for print media, as well as volunteer for radio and TV interviews. Meanwhile, we will leverage the modern techniques of eblasts and podcasts to catch the attention of the more computer literate population.

### Special Events

Finally, we will conduct special events. To start, the Law Center is hosting “Cocktails for Communities,” which is designed as a “friend-raiser” on June 10<sup>th</sup>, the Law Center’s annual “Legal Briefs” fundraising event on October 9<sup>th</sup>, and the bus tour of neighborhoods represented by the Law Center on September 17<sup>th</sup>. We anticipate that each of these events will be repeated annually. Other special events will be undertaken as opportunities arise and resources are available.

The Board and staff assigned to implement Law Center’s marketing program will be constantly repeating and, where necessary, revising the steps involved in its three-prong campaign (corporate identity, public relations and special events). They also should regularly circulate surveys to the Law Center’s three distinct audiences (funders, pro bono network, and clients) to determine both the quantity and quality of response to the Law Center’s marketing campaign. Once annual numbers are obtained, the Board can set reasonably higher goals for the following year’s marketing efforts.

**Goal Three: Community Law Center will achieve financial stability that allows for sustained operations and opportunities for growth.**

Historically, the Law Center has experienced annual cash flow shortages and periodic budgetary contractions. The Law Center's inability to maintain and predict cash flow for more than three months at a time hinders planning and forces staff to continuously seek new funding sources just to meet expenses. The Board and staff are committed to developing funding sources for the Law Center so that resources are in place to sustain and build the strength of the Law Center.

Existing operations are currently funded by the following sources:

- 52% Private Foundations
- 28% Government Grants and Maryland Legal Services Corporation
- 12% Corporations and Law Firms
- 4% Directors, Clients & Individuals
- 4% Earned Income

The Law Center does not believe that this division of funding is sustainable over the long term. Foundations change their funding priorities and government funds are frequently redirected to other areas. In difficult economic times, these funds can dry up entirely. It is very important to the credibility and market saturation of the Law Center to have broad-based community support, and that requires the participation of corporations, law firms, and individuals as major players in the Law Center's funding.

The Development Committee has identified the following four priorities over the coming three years to achieve sustainable funding for the Law Center: 1) strong Board leadership; 2) strong list of individual donors; 3) strong list of corporate donors; and 4) a substantial reserve fund.

**Strong Board Leadership**

First, the Board needs to develop fundraising skills to provide strong Board leadership in fund development. The Law Center has been extremely fortunate to have 100% board giving for the annual fund each year for many years. Going forward, the Board must also commit to:

- 100% Board participation in contributing to Reserve Fund;
- 100% Board participation in selling special event tickets; and
- 100% Board participation in identifying donor prospects.

It is only with this strong and serious level of Board commitment as donors and fundraisers that the Law Center will be able to achieve financial stability. The Board also needs to recruit a Board member with extensive fundraising experience to chair the Development Committee.

**Strong List of Individual Donors**

Second, the Law Center needs to develop a strong list of individual donors. The current list of approximately 150 donors has been stable for many years. In order to grow this list, the strategies to be employed each year are as follows:

- Recruit Board members with extensive connections to potential individual donors;
- Annual fundraising (Legal Briefs) and friend raising (Community Cocktails and bus tours) events to expand the Law Center's mailing list and the Law Center's profile among individuals; and
- Board-driven fundraising and friend-raising opportunities (such as one-on-one meetings or other events scheduled by board members for Law Center introductions).

With these strategies in place, the Law Center seeks to increase individual donors by 25% annually.

### Strong List of Corporate Donors

Third, the Law Center needs to develop a strong list of corporate donors. The current list of approximately 24 corporate donors has grown in recent years, but still leaves a great deal of room for growth. To accomplish this, the Law Center will seek to:

- Recruit Board members with connections to businesses that would donate;
- Provide presentations:
  - At business forums such as the Greater Baltimore Committee, Rotary, etc.;
  - For local business owners;
  - For individual businesses at which Board members schedule one-on-one meetings.

With these strategies in place, the Law Center seeks to increase corporate donors by 25% annually.

### Substantial Reserve Fund

Finally, the Law Center needs to establish a substantial reserve fund to help the Law Center smooth cash flow throughout the year. The Law Center has struggled over the past several years to establish a sufficient reserve fund. However, despite the efforts of several dedicated and enthusiastic present and former Board members, the current balance of the reserve fund has been steady at about \$45,000. In addition to achieving the 100% Board participation in contributing to the reserve fund as described above, the Law Center will pursue the following potential sources of reserve fund contributions:

- Operating surplus (if ever available);
- Annual solicitations for combined gifts (“Last year, you gave the Law Center \$250. This year, we ask you to renew that gift, and add an additional amount which will be placed in a reserve fund for the operations of the Law Center. Please consider a gift of \$275, with \$250 for the annual fund, and \$25 for the reserve fund.”);
- Grants from funders interested in sustainability;
- Dedicated contributions, perhaps contributions of Honorary Board members;
- Proceeds from annual event, when possible: 50% current operations, 50% reserve fund; and
- Planned giving in which any testamentary gifts will go to the reserve fund.

With these strategies in place, the Law Center hopes to increase the reserve fund 25% annually, eventually establishing a reserve fund of \$300,000 (approximately five months of operating expenses).

## **Moving Forward**

The Law Center has identified three critical goals to pursue over the next three years, and this Strategic Plan provides a focused action plan to achieve those goals. However, as Mark Twain once quipped, “life is what happens while we’re busy making other plans.” Accordingly, we view this Strategic Plan as an ever-evolving document, allowing flexibility in its action plans to adapt to changes in circumstances.

## **History of Community Law Center, Inc.**

### **1983 - 1986**

Community Law Center (“Law Center”) was incorporated in December 1983 by a group of community organizers and lawyers who were active in community-based organizations. Their concerns were the lack of legal services on two fronts: the lack of affordable, usually meaning free, legal services available to community-based organizations (not individuals) and the lack of expertise in the private law firms on issues specifically relevant to the needs of community institutions in low income neighborhoods.

The Law Center was formed at the height of the federal program budget cuts and had no institutional sponsor or financial support. The Law Center started as five volunteers with a vision. Between 1983 and 1986, the Law Center provided a few workshops and conferences. And, the groundwork was laid to do fundraising to “get started.”

### **1987- 1989**

By the end of 1986, there was enough money raised or committed for a director's salary for about six months. The Law Center hired Anne Blumenberg, who served as the Executive Director until December 31, 2004. By 1988, there was funding to hire a half-time assistant. The focus was on recruiting pro bono attorneys and developing self-help manuals for communities and nonprofit organizations serving low-income people.

During these years, the Law Center published:

- X A directory of agencies providing free legal services in the metropolitan Baltimore area and then a statewide directory;
- X A self-help manual on starting a nonprofit organization, including information on incorporation, state and federal agencies, and tax exempt status (this manual is currently in its 6th edition); and,
- X A manual on the legal issues for organizations serving persons who are homeless.

The Maryland Institute of Continuing Professional Education of Lawyers (MICPEL) used the latter two publications as a basis for training seminars.

During this period, the Law Center sponsored or co-sponsored workshops on topics such as using the Freedom of Information Act and the Maryland Public Information Act, as well as the use of Urban Development Action Grants (UDAGs) and UDAG repayments in Baltimore City.

Finally, the Law Center also provided legal counsel and representation, either directly or through pro bono attorneys, to 83 nonprofit, community-based organizations.

### **1990 -1992**

By 1990, the Law Center was able to add a litigation attorney to the staff. This enabled the organization to start developing aggressive litigation strategies to address the specific needs of low-income urban neighborhoods. The basic legal foundation for most of this work is nuisance law, the legal principle that activities or conditions on or emanating from one property should not unreasonably interfere with the neighbors' use of their property. By way of example, a rat-infested, crumbling vacant building is a real threat, and a legal nuisance, to the neighbors. The Law Center started this initiative in 1989 with pro bono attorneys filing common law nuisance

actions against the owners of eight vacant properties. As part of a very successful citywide organizing effort, the Law Center filed suit against a company that had approximately 1300 illegal billboards, mostly advertising alcohol and tobacco, in low income, residential communities. The effort successfully brought about the removal of illegal billboards and laid the foundation for significant changes regulating the content of billboards.

In 1992, the Law Center proposed legislation to enable community organizations to address nuisance properties directly, as community organizations rather than individuals, and in a much shorter time frame, by being able to file suit in district court rather than circuit court. The Law Center developed the vacant house receivership and drug nuisance abatement legal remedies. Law Center attorneys then spent at least a year putting all the many pieces in place to make these new and untested remedies work efficiently and on a large scale.

In the fall of 1992, the Law Center expanded its staff with the addition of the first Skadden Fellow to be placed in Maryland. And, it began to work intensively with communities to develop legal interventions and the necessary supporting infrastructure to have a strong, positive impact in those communities under siege from drug dealing. The Law Center developed Save A Neighborhood, Inc. (SAN) to be the receiver in the vacant house receivership actions. Originally, the Law Center filed receivership cases with the potential developer being the receiver. The Law Center and its clients saw a need for SAN because it became apparent that the potential developer often was simply using the legal procedure as a land banking tool.

SAN also added the 'boarding fund' and community service crews to the services available. Communities used the boarding fund for self help nuisance abatement. The funds were used to board vacant houses, if the owner did not do so after having been given notice of the nuisance.

During this period, the Law Center expanded its inventory of self-help manuals by adding: *Liquor Licenses: All You Ever Wanted to Know*, and *Finding the Rascals or How to Locate Missing Property Owners*. The Law Center also made the housing manual used by City Housing Inspectors available to communities.

### **1993 - 1996**

During this period, the Law Center wove together all of these tools and remedies into a comprehensive legal program to address the totality of blight in client neighborhoods. Law Center attorneys were able to use the law in a problem solving manner with the Law Center's clients. In 1993, the Law Center contracted with the City to undertake a massive use of the vacant house receivership action, 370 cases to be done in 18 months, in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. As a result, the Law Center developed an efficient internal system for moving cases along expeditiously and to significantly expand its staff.

In essence, by this time, the Law Center became a law firm, with the administrative requirements that entails. The organization's structure was designed to best utilize staff attorneys with community organizing skills and to best utilize volunteer attorneys. The Law Center developed the training materials and attorney's desk reference manuals for vacant house receivership cases, drug nuisance abatement cases and other common law nuisance cases. In the fall of 1996, the Law Center published *Revitalizing Baltimore's Neighborhoods*, a manual on the use of legal remedies by community organizations in their comprehensive planning strategy for community problem solving.

In a totally different vein, we became very active, at the behest of the Law Center's clients, in a variety of alternative youth justice and restorative justice models. In particular, the Law Center assisted in the development of a citywide "community conferencing" program (now known as the Community Conferencing Center) as an alternative to the Juvenile Justice system for those young people engaged in "nuisance crimes" and school truancy. Community conferencing is an effective process that deals with the causes and effects of harmful behavior.

## 1997-1999

By the end of 1998, the Law Center had grown to a staff of sixteen people and a budget of \$950,000. The staff included: five attorney/paralegal teams; a Pro Bono Project Director; a PeoplesLaw Project Director; an Urban Youth Law Advocacy Director; an Executive Director; a Deputy Director; and a Receptionist. The scope of services provided remained the same, but the number of communities served expanded significantly.

Staff attorney/paralegal teams worked in 11 communities representing 40 or more community-based organizations. The clients served included community organizations, youth groups, and housing developers or economic development corporations. In each of these communities, we worked closely with the Citizens Planning and Housing Association's (CPHA) community organizers, and the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC) which provided technical assistance to the Law Center's clients. We also developed a very real working relationship with Parole and Probation and the Baltimore City Police Department in assisting the Law Center's clients in their crime and grime reduction activities. The community services police officers in each district were very much part of the staff attorney/paralegal teams. All of the partners in this work were funded by the HotSpots program.

In mid-1999, before cell phones were common, the Law Center tackled the issue of illegally installed payphones. These were payphones installed without the proper permits by companies and individuals seeking to make a profit off of people hanging out on the busy drug corners. The Law Center's advocacy on this topic was the first time the issue had been raised (although the Law Center was not cited, the payphones issue was memorialized in the first season of the HBO series "The Wire"). It resulted in new legislation, new permitting procedures by the City and State, and the removal of hundreds of illegal phones. Most importantly, this action enabled the police to clean off many corners of drug dealers who were loitering because they could no longer say they were, "waiting for a call."

Back in 1996, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Community Bill of Rights, significant impact legislation conceived by the Law Center, which grants Baltimore City community organizations legal standing – the right to go to court – to seek direct enforcement of housing, building, zoning, and health codes to remedy public nuisances. In October 1999, an amendment to the Community Bill of Rights went into effect which eased the eligibility requirements for community organizations to actually utilize the law. At the close of 1999, the Law Center created a new publication, *The Community Bill of Rights: A Tool to Help Communities*. We also offered workshops to instruct communities on the use and availability of the law. The Law Center's cases under this law, which require pre-notice to the City agency responsible for the particular law's enforcement, has resulted in rapid code enforcement action by the City, resolving the case before ever going to court.

## 2000-2002

The new millennium was marked at the Law Center by the creation of a new program, the Project to End Predatory Real Estate Practices. After participating in the Coalition to End Predatory Real Estate Practices and convening a meeting of "legal types", the Law Center took on the role of coordinating activities, learning what others are doing, examining the capacity of existing legal resources, and discussing legal strategies in response to illegal property flipping.

The Law Center decided to seek funding to coordinate community groups, non-profit organizations, and government agencies in a concerted effort to end unethical and illegal real estate practices. Over the past five years, the Baltimore City housing market had been undermined by a plague of mortgage scams, flipping schemes, and predatory real estate practices. Families had been sold houses that are overvalued, under-repaired, and with mortgage terms they could not afford and often knew nothing about. Investors and lending institutions were defrauded in flipping schemes where houses were bought and sold quickly, sometimes on the same day, at dramatically higher and greatly inflated values. Seniors and long-time homeowners were losing the value of

their homes to re-financing companies, some of whom trained their employees in equity stripping techniques. These practices wreaked havoc on families, turning dreams of home ownership into nightmares. They undermined all of the efforts of government and community efforts to promote home ownership and neighborhood stability. Neighborhoods and communities suffered with more abandoned and vacant properties. A concerted effort was needed to bring them to an end.

On October 1, 2000, Ken Strong joined the staff of the Law Center in the newly created position of Director of Research and Policy, to coordinate various efforts of community groups and government agencies involved in trying to curb predatory real estate practices. Previously Mr. Strong served for four years as the Executive Director of South East Community Organization (SECO), founded the Coalition to End Predatory Real Estate Practices, and was appointed by HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo to serve on the National Task Force on Predatory Lending.

Endeavoring to end unethical real estate practices was, and continues to be, a complex challenge for the Law Center. Over the next two years, we successfully helped to bridge community groups and law enforcement agencies, promoted greater involvement of civil law attorneys, co-sponsored consumer education activities, provided policy support for legislative and regulatory reform, maintained a media spotlight on the issues, and staffed and coordinated the City's Flipping and Predatory Lending Task Force.

During this time, we also continued to set precedents and achieve victories in other areas in response to the priorities of community organizations in Baltimore. At the end of 2001, the Law Center's community clients had reached their tolerance levels with neighborhood "grocery" stores that sold expired food (often at highly inflated prices) that was intentionally mislabeled, including rotten meat, and food stored in moth infested boxes and cans rusted from rodent urine. Frustrated with a lack of Health Department enforcement, the Law Center took the communities' concerns to the press and the City Council. As a result, legislation was passed making it illegal to sell expired foods unless clearly labeled as such. Several food establishments were permanently closed as a result of a failure to comply with the new law.

## **2003 – 2005**

Since 2002, the Law Center had to adapt to diminishing funding from government sources and gradually moved from a "geographic-based" structure to a "project-based" structure. The reduction in staff also included the retirement of the founding Executive Director, Anne Blumenberg, Esq. Then Deputy Director, Kristine Dunkerton, Esq., was asked to step in as Interim Director during the search for an Executive Director. After a seven-month search, Ms. Dunkerton was offered the position of Executive Director in July 2005.

In spite of the total reductions of 11 staff people, the Law Center maintained momentum for each of the six Projects which evolved over time from the geographically-based work:

**1 – Pro Bono Project:** This Project had now represented well over 500 community-based organizations and nonprofits as clients. Through this Project the Law Center drafted the fifth edition of the *How to Start a Nonprofit in Maryland* manual.

**2 – Community Legal Services Project:** Due to the loss of funding, the Law Center decided to only dedicate attorneys to communities in which we had dedicated funding. For all other communities, we sought representation for them through the Pro Bono Project. In 2005, this Project won a substantial victory with revisions to the drug nuisance law that improved the ability for the Law Center to obtain police reports and clarifying that this law provides remedies against owner-occupied drug nuisance houses. Also, in 2005, we obtained the Law Center's first drug nuisance order to have an owner-occupied house sold as the remedy to the drug nuisance.



**3 – Project to End Predatory Real Estate Practices:** In February 2005, the contract with the City of Baltimore to staff the Baltimore City Flipping and Predatory Lending Task Force ended, positioning the Project to expand both its scope and influence. The Task Force was a great step in coordinating efforts and making the Law Center a clear leader in the fight against Predatory Real Estate Practices. In 2004, the Law Center held its first conference with Senator Sarbanes as the keynote speaker and approximately 200 attendees from the mid-Atlantic region.

**4 – Real Estate Services Project:** In 2004, the Law Center determined that the work being done for real estate acquisition should be consolidated in this Project. In 2005, with new staff and a new process, the Law Center represented a great deal of new clients and developers interested in rehabilitating property, particularly for affordable housing, in some of Baltimore's most distressed communities.

**5 – Environmental Justice Project:** In 2004, the Environmental Justice Project began as an effort to expand the work of the Community Legal Services Project, but to focus on the land use and environmental issues of certain communities. In 2005, we received funding to conduct this work, do outreach, and develop program brochures and marketing materials. The program has expanded to representing double the number of communities anticipated in the first year.

**6 – Small Business Legal Services Project:** This Project took off in late 2004 after the Small Business Development Center became a consistent referral source for reduced-rate legal services for small businesses in distressed communities, by low-income individuals, or by non-profit organizations. The Project represented a consistent stream of small businesses, primarily startups, in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

## **2006 to Date**

The Law Center's most recent history is detailed in the preceding Strategic Plan.





FY '09 Community Law Center, Inc.  
Marketing Plan (continued)

	Staff	Board	SPIN	Other	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Podcast on Website</b>													
Interviews of Key CLC staff members	x												
e-blast links	x												
<b>Advertising (Dates to be determined)</b>													
Daily Record	x		x										
WYPR radio spots	x		x										
WEAA radio spots	x												
<b>Special Events</b>													
<b>Cocktails for Communities: June 10 5:30-9:00</b>	x	x											
Capture video for website	x												
Add link to all board member email signatures	x	x											
<b>Judge Smart t and American Casino Movie screenings (Under Consideration)</b>	x		x										
<b>Board/Donor Bus Tour (Sept. 17)</b>	x	x											
<b>Legal Briefs Party (Oct. 9)</b>	x	x	x	x									
Complete Mailing List	x	x											
PR program about event	x		x										
Graphic Design of Save the Date and Invitation	x		x										
Printing	x			x									
Distribution of Invitations	x	x											
<b>Community Seminars</b>													
Workshops	x												