



LAWNDALE CDC CASE STUDY

Community Changemakers Level Up Their Impact with East Freedman & Main

We work for you. We respect your vision and your values for your community and we try to bring the right tools and resources so you can get it done quickly and at scale.

- Elisse Douglass, Founder and Managing Partner, East Freedman & Main

THE BIG PICTURE

The Lawndale Christian Development Corporation is a veteran in the world of faith-based, community impact work. However, even with 37 years of success, the organization had been looking to move from “surviving to thriving.”

Since starting their September 2022 partnership with East Freedman & Main, a community-serving real estate and economic development consulting firm, they are now achieving new levels of impact at scale without compromising their “for us, by us” ethos.

Today, their multifaceted plans for transformational change in the North Lawndale section of Chicago are well underway as they construct more affordable housing properties, finish plans for a local construction trade school and community athletic center, incubate local businesses and jobs, and secure capital resources for future development.



THE STAKEHOLDERS

THE COMMUNITY:

North Lawndale

In Chicago, as in many cities across the United States, Black families in low-income neighborhoods face unique challenges when it comes to access to community hubs due to historical divestment. In North Lawndale, there is a marked disparity in the provision of community-centered facilities such as arts, retail, education, and incubation spaces, in contrast to other neighborhoods. In addition, the community is under threat of displacement and gentrification due to its proximity to transit and creep from neighboring areas.

THE CHANGEMAKERS:

Lawndale Christian Development Corporation

Founded in 1987, the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation (LCDC) has been instrumental in revitalizing Chicago's West Side by providing affordable housing and fostering a supportive community network. LCDC has revitalized North Lawndale through substantial redevelopment initiatives, infusing over \$40 million into the area used towards broadening educational and employment programs. In addition, LCDC has championed the creation of significant residential developments, contributing over 360 units of affordable housing and over \$100 million in community investments.

"In order for us to do the work we do, we have to have trusted local partners... their communities trust them and they have a track record of navigating the complexities of neighborhoods. It's their superpower."

- Elisse Douglass

VISION FOR CHANGE

In 2021, LCDC launched the Reclaiming Chicago campaign, dedicated to catalyzing economic growth and wealth building for Westside communities through the construction of affordable for-sale homes and commercial development designed to incubate businesses and create high-paying jobs for residents. Additionally, significant work had been contributed toward a mixed-use housing and food court concept and the LCDC team also had their sights set on designing a local trade school.



AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEVEL UP

LCDC Deputy Director & Counsel, Whittney Smith, offers insight into the organization's partnership with East Freedman & Main:

Surviving vs. Thriving

“For us it was about pace, we had been doing this work for 35 years...but for the majority of that time we have been focusing on surviving for community residents...Now we’ve gotten to the point where we’re trying to move beyond that, to thriving, and true transformational, impact driven work. And so to do that, we wanted to get to scale.” - Whittney Smith

The LCDC team was introduced to EFM by Elizabeth Moriarty - a local faith leader with deep ties to the community supporting LCDC in their intentional growth. Trusting an outside entity with the future of their community was a gradual process but the EFM team, inspired by LCDC's multigenerational vision for their community, was up for the challenge. After several site visits, follow up meetings with constituents and staff, and a written proposal, the two organizations confirmed their partnership in September 2022.

“It was a gradual process, but I also think it was how selfless and approachable she is and at the same time super, super smart and experienced in the work.” - Whittney Smith

New Levels of Experience and Capacity

Prior to launching East Freedman & Main, Elisse held several senior roles at regional developers in California focusing on institutional scale development projects totaling over 3M square feet and \$2.5B in asset value for private equity, asset managers, and owner users. She also built a strong track record of designing and implementing creative financing for small, medium, and large Black-owned businesses that generated jobs through her development projects as well as impact investing roles in Oakland and New York. Elisse was awarded the 2020 Community Advocate Award by the Oakland African American Chamber of Commerce for her COVID relief efforts in service of the Black community in Oakland and was awarded the 2022 Bisnow Bay Area Power Women in Real Estate.

“The resources and scale you need to be really competitive in neighborhoods that are actively under threat are different... You need to plant the seeds so that in the next 5 years you make sure you have affordable housing and affordable space for small businesses. That informs the type of financing we go after.

Instead of looking at deal by deal financing, we look at portfolio-level financing. How can we move all six of these projects forward at once? In service of that mission of making sure that these communities have anchors in place as their neighborhood changes, that’s how we have to move.” - Elisse Douglass

While the LCDC team had already been in discussions with their lender about the need for an acquisition fund for future commercial development, bringing East Freedman & Main into the picture sealed the deal. The robust nature of the proposed projects and the competence of the team secured a much more substantial commitment from LCDC’s lender to acquire future properties in the community.

“When we got Elisse in the room, it’s the numbers, the figures, the national data and perspective she brings to the table. She’s actually working with the same organization we’re working with here in Chicago in a different state and had that experience under her belt to say: this is what that office did, yours can do it too, and this is how we can set that up.” - Whitney Smith

Connecting on a Human Level



“It’s truly a relationship of both professional sweet spots and melding, but also personal and cultural understanding and kinship.” – Whitney Smith

Whitney notes that a major turning point for her was acquiring their 1600 South Lawndale property. At that time, LCDC’s development efforts had not been focused on North Lawndale’s main street, South Lawndale Avenue. Shortly after confirming the East Freedman & Main partnership, a 13,000 sq. ft. building that had previously been a neighborhood grocery store went on sale on South Lawndale. Whitney thought this would be a perfect location to center the organization’s presence in the neighborhood as well as to highlight what the space meant to generations of community residents. After speaking to Executive Director Richard Townsell, her next call was Elisse, who jumped on the opportunity to start setting up meetings. After that phone call, it only took 3 months for financing to be secured and for LCDC to acquire the property.

Richard, who had grown up in North Lawndale at the same time Martin Luther King, Jr. resided there, had always wanted to build a sports amenity space in the community. The EFM team provided so much competent and reliable extra capacity that he decided it was the right time to pull the trigger on his dream and sketched out his initial vision for the athletic center on a napkin at a lunch meeting.

**IF YOU HAND ME A SKETCH ON A NAPKIN,
I’M NOT AFRAID OF THAT.**

We know what that is. Now that napkin is the MLK Campus. It’s 250,000 sq. ft. that we’ve raised several million dollars for, that’s actively in pre-development, that will go into construction at the end of next year.

– Elisse Douglass



SUSTAINABLE, THRIVING FUTURES

“At the end of the day, we are fighting displacement. So we gotta move quickly, we gotta move at scale, and we gotta be able to move a lot of stuff at the same time.” – Elisse Douglass

Working hand-in-hand, LCDC and East Freedman & Main have created a comprehensive commercial real estate strategy that will protect the neighborhood from an increasingly speculative real estate market and anticipated oncoming gentrification. The main components of this strategic path forward include:

1

Acquisition Fund

Secured: investment from Illinois Facilities Fund to purchase lots for future commercial development

2

Reclaiming Chicago: Affordable Single-Family For-Sale Home Construction

23 homes built to date.

LCDC will continue the development of a total of 1,000 affordable single-family for-sale homes on vacant lots, which began with the launch of their 2021 Reclaiming Chicago campaign. **This initiative is managed independently by LCDC.*

3

ReConstruction West: Trade School

Construction to begin in late 2024.

The ReConstruction West Trade School will create a pathway to stable high-skilled, high-income jobs through training and apprenticeships for west side residents ages 18-24 and mid-career job changers. Each training program will include job placement assistance and a micro-loan program for work-related purchases such as trade-specific tools or work-ready vehicles. Because graduates will have the immediate opportunity to apprentice at LCDC construction projects, the Trade school will alleviate the labor shortage that is increasing the cost and time required to build affordable housing in the community. These opportunities will pay nearly 10 times the current average hourly rate paid to most neighborhood residents.

4

1600 South Lawndale: Arts, Retail, and Production Space

Property acquired July 2023. Construction to begin in 2025.

The 1600 South Lawndale project will provide space for community-serving arts, retail, and productions, anchored by Lifting Lawndale Co-op – a worker-owned cooperative incubated by LCDC and the Art West Gallery, a community-owned, designed, and operated art space. In addition to the anchor tenants, the space will be home to offices, production for its planned chocolate business, and retail for chocolate and holistic health for locally owned businesses. The project will allow Lifting Lawndale and other North Lawndale entrepreneurs access to affordable retail and office space in the neighborhood at below-market rent until they can afford to pay market rates. Tenants will also have access to LCDC's other business support and incubation services including back-office bookkeeping, administration, and other forms of technical assistance.

5

Martin Luther King Legacy Campus Extension: Sports Facility

Construction to begin in 2025.

The MLK Legacy Campus Extension, a pivotal community development project in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood, is set to include remarkable facilities designed to cater to a wide range of needs and interests in the community. Central to this project is a 160,000 sq. ft. sports facility, which promises to be a hub of athletic and recreational activity for community members, particularly youth. On its ground floor, the facility will house six basketball courts, adaptable for various sports, ensuring a versatile space for community engagement and physical activity. Elevating the athletic experience, the upper level of this sports complex will feature a 200-meter competition-standard running track and a turf field, accommodating a variety of sports and fitness activities.

6

New Tapestry: Mixed-Use Housing and Food Court Concept

Construction to begin in 2025.

The Tapestry project revolves around redesigning a previously designed mixed-use housing and food court concept to a new project site. It encompasses the construction of 70 apartment homes, funded through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), to provide high-quality, affordable housing for the local residents. Simultaneously, the food court will feature a blend of locally-owned restaurants that celebrate the rich cultural heritage of North Lawndale.