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Message from the President

Greetings,

As one of the original co-founders and the current President of the Resident Association of Greater Englewood, it brings me great pleasure to share our five year impact report with you. In November of 2010, a dozen residents from Englewood and West Englewood felt it was time that the individuals who live here unite and become the voice of our community, instead of letting others speak on our behalf as it relates to the issues we face. With our aldermanic wards dividing us along senseless political boundaries, we felt it was important to align our efforts to work collectively regardless of where we lived in Greater Englewood because ultimately all of our issues are the same.

Once we were organized, one of our first actions was hosting several political forums to address the candidates running for aldermanic offices of Greater Englewood. These actions were rooted in civic engagement and served as empowerment tools for other residents in the community. Needless to say, this was a strong message to our elected officials, residents and other groups who felt that Englewood residents did not have an interest or desire to take ownership of the issues facing us.

With a name like R.A.G.E., based in Englewood and speaking the word of empowerment, we have been faced with many challenges on this journey. Our biggest challenge is the misconception of what others think about the residents of Englewood. Most feel we are incapable of addressing and solving our own issues. Therefore, we have had to be clear and sometimes provocative in our messaging in order to shift this narrative. While others talk negatively about our community, we have consistently shared the greatness that we observe on a daily basis in order to change this negative perception of our community.

Our work is essential because we understand that before any transformation can take place, we have to shift the mindset of the individuals who live here and share a sense of pride that will spark hope and value for a community that has endured decades of deprivation. The heartbeat of our work is based in civic empowerment, owning our narrative, and social connectivity.
As we continue our efforts, our membership continues to grow; year after year, Englewood residents are being activated block by block to join forces with others who want to see Englewood rise. Our only fear of growing at such a rapid rate from 13 co-founders to 223 members today is the capacity to keep members engaged and inspired to take action. We hope this impact report will show R.A.G.E. members and Englewood residents how far we’ve come since 2010, and our efforts that are still underway.

Our hope for the future is to continue to tackle the hard issues our community faces, remain focused on why we were founded and to provide residents of Englewood empowerment tools so that they too are inspired to examine issues and take action. There is much work to be done for a real transformation in Englewood, from Economic Development, Education, Public Safety—the list goes on. However, over the last five years we know that our consistent efforts in tackling some of these issues are contributing to this transformation.

As the president of this grassroots, resident-led association I am proud to have met so many individuals who share our same sentiments to see Englewood rise. Each member has contributed to the success of R.A.G.E. by sharing their gifts and talents to address the problems here in Englewood and this is a model that should be replicated throughout Chicago. Our work is led by passion and driven by a mission to create a community that we are proud to call home. Our approach can be summed up in this quote from David Allen....“Small things done consistently, in strategic places, create major impact.” Our deep desire to see positive change is what will keep R.A.G.E. moving and growing for years to come.

Sincerely,

Asiaha Butler
Co-Founder and President
Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E)
About R.A.G.E.

Greater Englewood, Chicago is our community. It’s home to our schools, our businesses, and our neighbors, family, and friends. Englewood is rich with heritage and history. For those of us who have spent our lives here, Englewood has helped shape who we are—resilient, vibrant, and creative individuals who love our community.

But we all know Englewood has seen hard times too. As opportunity and prosperity in the community declined, our city and representatives looked the other way, unwilling to stand up for Englewood and push for the change we need. Greater Englewood is now divided between five different city wards (6, 15, 16, 17, and 20) and until 2015, did not have a single Aldermanic office.

A need for change in Englewood is apparent and a voice for the community has been long overdue. In late 2010, several Greater Englewood residents decided to take matters into their own hands and through their fellowship, created R.A.G.E. In our first five years as an organization, our membership has grown to over 200 residents. Our members are homeowners, stakeholders, business owners, professionals, students, parents and grandparents fighting against the stereotypes that often stigmatize Englewood.

R.A.G.E. now represents new leadership within Greater Englewood. We are a resident-driven grassroots organization dedicated to representing the good in our community. We strategize to address community problems, create tangible solutions, and actively seek ways to keep fellow residents informed about the latest news in Englewood. We build relationships between residents and Englewood’s public officials, business owners and local organizations.

R.A.G.E. is the voice speaking out to empower, educate, uplift and motivate fellow residents and stakeholders. Where others see problems, R.A.G.E. sees opportunity. It is our turn to shape Englewood.

Greater Englewood, at a glance:

Consists of Chicago’s Englewood and West Englewood community areas.

Bounded by 55th/Garfield to the north, 75th to the south, the Dan Ryan Expressway to the east, and Hamilton to the west.

Home to over 70,000 residents, 31% of which reside in owner-occupied homes.

Has 51,938 registered voters within 118 precincts, as of the 2010 census.

Home to over 250 churches.
Why the R.A.G.E.?

R.A.G.E. stands for the Resident Association of Greater Englewood. This acronym rightly implies that we are not your typical resident association. Residents in Englewood feel enraged: We are upset about the ways our community is portrayed in the media and we are frustrated with the current condition of our neighborhood, despite the abundant presence of churches, non-profits, and social service agencies. But more importantly, we have intense passion and pride for the community, and are determined to make positive change all the rage in Englewood.

Our Focus Areas

R.A.G.E.’s activism is currently focused in four different areas of impact:

Civic Engagement & Empowerment
R.A.G.E. works to give the community a voice in local government by educating voters about issues affecting Englewood, reaching out to our elected officials to join our push for change, and promoting our progressive message throughout Englewood.

Education & Youth Development
R.A.G.E. advocates for quality education in Greater Englewood and creates parent and youth leadership opportunities, programs, campaigns, and projects.

Economic Development
R.A.G.E. assists with strengthening the economic empowerment of the Greater Englewood community by supporting the stabilization of existing businesses, promoting the development of resident owned businesses and working with internal and external sources to identify and attract more businesses in our community.

Arts Activism
R.A.G.E. fosters arts and culture in the community as a means to engage residents and youth with our spirit of activism and inspire a sense of pride in Englewood.

“Every story of success is a story of community.”
— Jeff Goins
5 Years, by the Numbers

In R.A.G.E.’s first five years as an organization, we have led far too many events and programs to list them all here. To give you an idea of the variety and volume of impact we have in Greater Englewood, we’ve compiled a summary of some of our most successful initiatives:

**held 30 village meetings**

R.A.G.E. has held bi-monthly village meetings to discuss current events in the community, share information, fellowship, and establish concrete plans and actions steps to ensure we are always working towards tangible goals that benefit Greater Englewood.

**hosted 6 political forums**

R.A.G.E. has hosted aldermanic and mayoral candidate forums before every major election. The forums gave residents the opportunity to learn more about the candidates, who in-turn share their goals for Englewood.

**registered 150 voters**

R.A.G.E. is a founding member of the “Englewood Votes” coalition which works to support voter registration drives, make residents aware of their voting rights, and train residents to be Deputy Registrars.

**held 15 workshops**

R.A.G.E. has organized free educational workshops addressing a variety of special interest topics designed to engage residents and youth.
R.A.G.E. has held our So Fresh Saturday “edu-tainment” series for three summers as part of the Chicago Park District’s Night Out in the Parks. We showcase diverse artistic expressions and workshops using music, film, and art.

R.A.G.E. donated backpacks of school supplies to 1000 local families at each of three So Fresh Saturday finales to help children in our community get ready for the new school year.

R.A.G.E. has organized regular community cleanup events, where residents come together to volunteer their time cleaning up and beautifying neglected sites throughout Englewood and inspire pride in our community.

R.A.G.E. has made weekly appearances on CAN-TV channel 21 to take your calls and discuss local news and issues. We have also made regular appearances and interviews in wider news outlets to advocate for Englewood.

R.A.G.E. has touched the lives of an estimated 5000 Englewood residents through our diversity of programs, events, and community outreach.
Activism Highlights

R.A.G.E.’s outstanding assortment of community events may be our most visible impact on Englewood, but we also tackle big-picture issues that have a profound influence on the community. In a city like Chicago, we recognize that many of the issues affecting Englewood are bigger than ourselves. A thousand community cleanups will not offset the blight of our countless vacant lots. A thousand school supply donations will not undo the damage of six closed schools. A thousand village meetings will not bring investment into the community.

So R.A.G.E. is thinking big. We are working to holistically empower the community. We provide leadership in innovative programs, we develop strategic partnerships, and we persevere through long-term initiatives. For this 5-year anniversary report, we’d like to highlight some of R.A.G.E.’s proudest achievements and what we’re working towards for the future.

Large Lots, Big Benefits

Greater Englewood was once booming. Folks came from all over to live, work, and raise families, filling our bungalows and brownstones to capacity. This was before we were hit with the plagues of drugs, gangs, and violence. As the neighborhood fell into decline, many residents lost their homes due to job loss, unemployment and foreclosure. Vacant buildings, unable to attract new buyers, are eventually demolished by the city leaving only an empty lot. These lots are a scar on the neighborhood, accumulating garbage and weeds, and serving as a constant reminder of the problems facing our community.

In 2011, R.A.G.E. began developing a vision to repurpose these vacant lots. Over 30% of Englewood residents own their homes and many of these home owners live next to or near empty lots. We imagined some residents might like to take ownership over these pieces of land as an addition to their property, if only there were a sensible system to sell these lots at a fair price.

The City of Chicago and several urban planning groups had also begun developing the Green Healthy Neighborhoods Land Use Plan, exploring possibilities for these vacant lots in Englewood and several of our neighboring communities. Recognizing this opportunity, R.A.G.E. reached out to the city Department of Planning and developed a critical partnership. We then mobilized the community to take an active role in the planning process. Through neighborhood surveys

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”
– Henry Ford
and countless conversations with residents, we were able to develop and submit detailed recommendations to the city. The resulting plan was the first of its kind in Chicago, allowing residents to purchase up to two city-owned lots on their block for $1 each.

R.A.G.E. was thrilled with this result, but there was still more work to be done to ensure residents could take advantage of this opportunity. For one, the existing website for buying city-owned properties was hard to find, hard to navigate, and hard to use. We provided input to Teamwork Englewood, a local non-profit organization, who partnered with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to develop a new, streamlined website, largelots.org.

Next, we needed to get the word out! We told R.A.G.E. members at our village meetings. We conducted door-to-door outreach. We went on CAN-TV. We advertised on social media. We gave out fact sheets. We told everyone who would listen about this unique opportunity, and succeeded at inspiring over 400 residents to apply for lots, with 276 of these residents ultimately purchasing their lots in January of 2015.

As R.A.G.E. continues to move through the lot acquisition process with our new lot owners, we provide ongoing support by meeting to discuss compliance with city property rules and regulations, and connecting residents with local students to help clean up and maintain the spaces. We are also supporting residents who are interested in developing their lots into community gardens or other communal points of interest and beauty in the neighborhood. Even though the lots themselves are still a work in progress, every lot owner has bright hopes and dreams for transforming their new space, and transforming Englewood.

Since Large Lots was first rolled out in Englewood, our success has been used as a model to expand the program into three other Chicago communities. The program has been an excellent tool to give our residents greater control over land in their neighborhood, and raise home values by creating more neighborhood-level investment. As the city works to improve the application process of the program for future lot sales in Englewood, we invite interested residents to visit the newly created website largelots.org for more information.

“A large lot is a great investment. It allows us to tell our own story and it is a story so unlike the ones being told about Englewood. This is about history making for Englewood, and it’s time for us to take ownership of our community.”

– Large Lot Owner
School Repurposing: A Vision for the Future

In 2013, Chicago Public Schools made the controversial and unprecedented decision to close nearly 50 elementary schools across the city. Greater Englewood was one of the hardest hit communities, as we lost six of our schools: Bontemps, Earle, Mays, Wentworth (pictured at right, bottom), Woods, and Yale (pictured at right, top). While a few of the school buildings in other areas of the city were quickly sold or repurposed by CPS, all of our closed schools were simply vacated with no plans for future use.

As the closings were being finalized, R.A.G.E. immediately stepped up and started a conversation with community members, elected officials, and other stakeholders about the possibility of repurposing these schools. For years, residents had been expressing a desire for a public space to foster community connectedness and communication, as well as to provide a space for education, entrepreneurship, and entertainment. What if we could create such a space out of one of our vacant schools? What if we could breathe life back into one of these buildings, repurposing it for the benefit of the entire Greater Englewood community?

R.A.G.E. then took this hazy idea and launched a partnership with IIT to flesh out specific ways the community would like to develop and use such a public space. The team reached out to residents and conducted in-depth interviews to learn about the community’s collective vision for a repurposed public space. From this, we then identified features that would be of greatest value to the community, such as culture and arts, technology, and social services.

The final vision document that came out of this project gave R.A.G.E. a valuable tool for directing policy and pushing for the best possible school repurposing outcomes in Englewood.

R.A.G.E. has since continued the push by organizing walk-throughs of the school buildings with community members, elected officials, city planners, potential developers, and anyone else we can bring to the table. Through these tours, we demonstrate the potential the facilities hold, and share Englewood’s vision for rebirth. We are presently continuing to drive the process to secure tenants for the schools, and are hopeful that the buildings will find a second life as valuable public spaces or economic engines for the benefit of Greater Englewood.
**Exposing the Truth About TIF**

Tax Increment Financing, or TIF, isn’t the most glamorous issue R.A.G.E. could tackle. It’s complex, it’s hard to understand, and it frankly sounds quite boring on the surface. While the basic idea of TIF is simple enough—a city program that uses tax revenue to promote economic development in blighted areas—we questioned why Englewood did not appear to be benefiting from our two local TIF districts. Since the founding of R.A.G.E. in 2010, we have been on a mission to get to the bottom of TIF, researching the spending in the Englewood Neighborhood TIF, trying to make sense of the expenditures, and questioning the lack of transparency and community involvement.

We began by engaging with our aldermen, hoping they could enlighten us about the issue. As it turned out, TIF was a mystery to many of our elected officials as well, and they were unable to provide us with the clarity and understanding we were looking for. While we were disturbed by this discovery, we were not deterred.

R.A.G.E. then reached out to experts with the non-profit research group CivicLab and DePaul University to see if they could shed some light on TIF in Englewood. They investigated our TIF districts and then joined us for a series of village meetings and workshops, presenting the complete story of TIF in Chicago. What the community learned through this public information campaign was stunning. We learned that our initial efforts at trying to account for TIF spending in Englewood had failed because there is no accountability in TIF spending, by and large. Our fears that our TIF district tax dollars could be spent outside of Englewood were confirmed, as we learned porting of funds to wealthier neighborhoods across the city is common.

**TIF in a Nutshell:**

Typically, your property tax dollars go into the large collective pot of money that is used for city services—paying for schools, parks, social services, and so on.

If you live in a TIF district, a portion of your tax dollars goes into a different pot of money (along with additional revenues gained from a beneficial accounting arrangement), set aside for TIF projects.

Theoretically this money should also be used to fund our schools and other positive local developments.

In reality, there is nothing stopping our TIF dollars from flowing out of Englewood to fund projects in TIFs throughout Chicago, or to fund local developments the community does not want or need.
practice in TIF. We also learned that although TIF has a noble goal of alleviating blight in poor communities, gentrification is a more common result of TIF districting.

With this new insight into the ways TIF money is being misused, R.A.G.E. started identifying steps we could take to address the problem. In February of 2015, we started by putting a referendum on the ballot which asked if residents of the 16th Ward (30th Precinct) would be in favor of a resident advisory council to oversee Englewood Neighborhood TIF spending. Leading up to the election, we worked hard to educate voters about the measure by going door-to-door and handing out literature. In the end, our efforts paid off—the referendum passed by an overwhelming 89% of voters!

Although this referendum is non-binding, we have sent a powerful message to the city that TIF reform is an important issue to voters and it must be taken seriously. We are now working with our local alderman to establish a resident based TIF advisory council to monitor the spending of these funds. R.A.G.E. is extremely proud of the progress we have made in demystifying TIF for residents and bringing this issue to the forefront of political dialog in Englewood, and we will continue to lead this push for TIF reform into the future.
Help R.A.G.E. Grow

R.A.G.E.’s members are our greatest asset! With every new member, we expand our diversity of talents and perspectives, we benefit from your ideas, hopes, and dreams for Englewood, and our voice grows stronger as we unite to demand change. Become a member of R.A.G.E. to help us shape the future of Englewood!

Join

We offer three levels of membership designed to suit your level of involvement, with dues starting at $10 per year. Membership is open to all residents and non-resident individuals who have an interest in the betterment of Greater Englewood. Visit our website at ragenglewood.org and click on the Membership Application tab to join or learn more.

Share

Help us spread our message of unity and progress in Englewood. Tell your friends, family, and neighbors, and visit us on social media to share R.A.G.E. with your circle!

Donate

As an organization made up of residents and led by residents, it is perhaps fitting that R.A.G.E. is also primarily funded by residents! So far, we have operated without any outside funding from foundations, grants, or large donors. We keep our expenses to a minimum, but we rely on your annual membership dues and donations for:

- Accessories and shirts to distribute around the community and promote R.A.G.E.
- Employing our high school interns in door-to-door marketing and outreach campaigns
- School supplies to distribute at community Back to School events
- Food and refreshments at R.A.G.E. meetings
- Website, phone and other operating expenses

Please visit our website at ragenglewood.org to make a donation!

Contact R.A.G.E.
866.845.1032
joinrage@gmail.com
ragenglewood.org
Special Thanks

R.A.G.E. is deeply grateful for the support and partnership of every organization, institution, and individual that has supported our efforts and worked with us to transform Greater Englewood. We would especially like to thank those who have been most instrumental these past five years:

Teamwork Englewood
Imagine Englewood IF
Grow Greater Englewood
M.U.R.A.L.
Forever Fitness Chicago, LLC
IIT Institute of Design
Englewood Community Cultural Planning Council
CivicLab
Depaul University College of Law
D.S. Wentworth Elementary and Principal Dina Everage
Team Englewood H.S.
Lindblom Math and Science Academy
Urban Prep – Englewood Campus
Chicago Park District
Columbia College Chicago - Center for Community Arts Partnerships (CCAP)
Egan Office of Urban Education at DePaul University
Children’s Home and Aid
Englewood Community Action Council
Dream Café and Grille
Southwest Federation Block Clubs of Greater Englewood
Englewood Votes Coalition
Canaan Community Church
Voices of West Englewood
Acts of Love
City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development
Chicago Public Library
Alderman Roderick Sawyer of the 6th Ward
Alderman Toni Foulkes of the 16th Ward
Alderman David Moore of the 17th Ward
Alderman Willie Cochran of the 20th Ward
The Office of State Senator Mattie Hunter of the 3rd District
State Representative, 32nd District IL - Andre Thapedi
Sixth Ward Blog
Bulletin Newspaper
C.R.O.E.
DNAInfo Chicago
Chicago Access Network Television