

are elected. The group is now in existence. During the next month or so the organizing committee and the new officers get back in touch with promising doorknocking contacts who didn't show up at the first meeting or who didn't join, and the group gets to work dealing with its initial set of issues.

Case Study: CNA/ACORN

Local ACORN groups working on local issues are crucial to what ACORN is and does. It makes sense, therefore, to look in some detail at how a particular local group goes about working on an issue.

A couple residents of Little Rock's predominately black Centennial Neighborhood (which surrounds Central High School) concerned about neighborhood traffic problems, spent some time in early 1972 trying to get the City to put up a traffic light. Rebuffed by the bureaucracy, the residents decided that they might have more success if they invited ACORN into the neighborhood. One of the residents had been active in other ACORN activities, and he provided a natural link to ACORN. This initial group of residents, plus some of their friends, was developed by the ACORN organizer into the neighborhood organizing committee, and by August 1972 a meeting of 100 people founded a Centennial Neighborhood Association/ACORN.

Although the traffic light was the initial local issue, another issue came to the forefront during the first meeting. Several members had heard that the old Centennial School property in the neighborhood, then being razed, was going to be developed into either a grocery store or an apartment building. The group felt that either result would only add to the already deteriorating traffic situation in the area, as well as making their children's playground (the street) even more hazardous than it already was. Turning the property into a park would solve both problems at once, the group quickly realized, and a park committee was formed to see what could be done.

The group circulated a petition in the neighborhood, and then arranged a meeting with the owner of the property, the Little Rock School Board. They were told by the school superintendent that perhaps the city could be persuaded to buy the property and develop the park.

Armed with the four hundred signatures on the petition, thirty CNA members showed up at the next City Board of Directors. The group, having received help researching the issue from the organizer and from ACORN's research department, presented several arguments to the Board: (1) the Planning Commission's 1971 Master Park Plan called for several parks in the CNA area, all of which had homes on them; (2) the site ACORN proposed was within three blocks of two of the sites, and was the only feasible location; (3) the CNA neighborhood contained 400 children of age 14 or younger; (4) the park would be a safeguard against neighborhood deterioration, and (5) the site, without a park, would no doubt be zoned for residential or commercial use and thus add to the neighborhood's traffic problems.

The city was noticeably unsympathetic. One director suggested using a park a mile away. The City Manager claimed that the city had no money.

The group followed up on two fronts. First, they attended several school board meetings in order to convince the school board not to sell the land to a developer. Second, the group directed the organizer to find out whether the city actually did have the money, and, if it didn't, whether there was any federal or state money available to buy and develop the park. In November of 1972, the CNA members succeeded in forcing the City Directors into applying for a \$100,000 HUD 'Open Space Land Act' grant, and thereafter they were able to convince the school board to hold on to the land until the HUD grant came through.

With victory in sight, however, President Nixon impounded the HUD parks money. A CNA formed solely to win a park might have slowly fallen apart while waiting for new federal money to be made available, but CNA/ACORN had plenty of other issues to keep busy. The stop light still had to be won (it was soon thereafter), and various citywide campaigns were available for the group to become involved in: A fight against the Wilbur Mills Expressway, which was heading right through the old residential center of town; a campaign against a gas rate increase; and an attempt to ensure an equitable distribution of the new General Revenue Sharing funds. This last issue provided CNA with the handle it needed to finally win its parks; in March 1974 the group successfully pressured the city into appropriating \$85,000 of the GRS money for the acquisition and development of the park. Centennial Park now sits in the middle of the neighborhood, a real symbol to the residents of what organization can achieve.

Local ACORN groups join together with other local ACORN groups to work on city-wide or county issues; the citywide or regional organizations join together to work on statewide issues. We'll take a look at how that works by examining several key citywide and statewide issues:

