

# The Abell Report

*What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about*

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## ABELL SALUTES:

**Bridge Private Lending, for its role in helping to revive city neighborhoods: "Children walk along, feeling comfortable and safe."**

"Look out the window. See those kids walking down the street, laughing and having a good time together? Four years ago that could not have happened. Not in this neighborhood, anyway. It took a lot of creative ideas in marketing, rehabbing, financing, and social services to make it happen."

This is Lloyd Williams, president of the Verde Group and developer of the neighborhood, sitting in the living room of 1515 Bond Street, a row house characterized by modern, free-flowing architecture, dominated front to back, all 55 feet of it, by a rough-hewn classic Baltimore brick wall that connects a well-appointed living room, dining area, and huge kitchen area.

Mr. Williams goes on, "We have four houses on this block rehabbed and up for sale and seven more have recently sold. At the end of this rainbow there is going to be this whole block of houses, and other blocks in the Oliver area, here in the inner city, an East Baltimore neighborhood that

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## How Course Redesign at the University of Maryland is Improving Learning, Lowering Costs, and Increasing Graduation Rates

*Instructors and administrators give initiative high grades, making the University of Maryland a national leader in the program.*

Four years ago, the University of Maryland (UM) Board of Regents responded to the national crisis in the college experience—the high incidence of student failure and dropout, the cost of a college degree, and the number of years it was taking to earn one—by contracting with Dr. Carol A. Twigg, president of the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) and a nationally recognized expert in the field of university course redesign. Defined as the process of revamping entire courses to take advantage of information technology capabilities to achieve better learning outcomes, course redesign embraces modern methods of information dissemination and knowledge development, and rethinks the way instruction is delivered, especially in large-enrollment core classes.

Dr. Twigg formulated a pilot study of nine undergraduate courses with high dropout, withdrawal, or failure rates, or other measurable challenges, at nine universities within the UM system. Associate vice chancellors Dr. Nancy Shapiro and Dr. Donald Spicer directed the project, with the objective of taking the lead in the redesign

of selected courses to increase graduation rates, decrease failures, shorten the length of time it takes to earn a degree, and lower costs—to both the students and the university.

The results of these course-redesign initiatives were transformative, and get high praise from UM professors and administrators active in the adapting of course-redesign ideas.

### Success at University of Maryland Eastern Shore

Dr. Jennifer L. Hearne—an assistant professor of biochemistry in the Department of Natural Sciences at the School of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, University of Maryland Eastern Shore—became a believer back in the fall of 2006 when course redesign was put in place for her Chemistry 111 course. She recalls that UM Eastern Shore, along with all of the schools in the University System of Maryland (USM), was asked to participate in the course-redesign project. "I was not familiar with the process," says Dr. Hearne. "When I read it, I found it to be very interesting." So she approached Joseph M. Okoh, chairman of her department,

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earlier than most institutions, and has made course redesign a USM-wide priority, it is way ahead of other colleges and universities with redesign efforts, notes Dr. Kirwan. “My colleagues and I are asked to speak at national conferences on this topic because others want to learn from what we are doing.” Along with the NCAT, the USM recently co-sponsored a workshop at UMBC that attracted colleges and universities from across the country. “Demand was so high that we have scheduled a second session in January.”

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*“To indicate my enthusiasm for course redesign, I would say that in the disciplines where it works, it is the most exciting innovation to come into teaching and learning since the invention of the blackboard.”*

– Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan,  
chancellor at the University  
System of Maryland  
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It appears the sky’s the limit when it comes to what is on the horizon for course redesign. “To indicate my enthusiasm for course redesign, I would say that in the disciplines where it works, it is the most exciting innovation to come into teaching and learning since the invention of the blackboard,” says Dr. Kirwan. “We’ve clearly demonstrated the success of this approach, so much so that we have established the USM as a national leader in this area. For sure others will follow because no one can afford to ignore the impact of the redesign efforts: greater learning, lower costs.”

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was once drug and crime ridden and in total disrepair and abandonment—there will be a viable community of families living and playing in a safe and comfortable area.”

The area is bounded on the north by North Avenue, on the east by Broadway, on the south by Preston Street, and on the west by Greenmount Cemetery.

To get to the end of that rainbow, a lot of resources have to come together. There have to be houses for sale; builders in the business of rehabbing them; families interested in moving into them; community-service professionals to advocate for them; and from the beginning of the process to the end of it, the lenders—the entrepreneurs who put investment dollars to work moving the process along

until the day a family moves in. One of the lenders helping to make the Oliver Street neighborhood come into being is Bridge Private Lending.

Bridge Private Lending was started in 2006 by attorney David Borinsky, with a \$14 million loan pool of investor funding. Over the last four years, Bridge has granted hundreds of loans to small housing renovation contractors throughout Baltimore City, making new loans as houses are sold and existing loans are repaid.

In the past year, Bridge has increasingly focused lending in the Oliver neighborhood, concentrating loan investment within a two-block area along Bond Street where vacant houses that are fully renovated are receiving appraisals of \$140,000-180,000, and where interest and demand from homebuyers has resulted in eight homeowner sales and eight homeowner contracts to purchase.

Bridge has worked with eight different contractors, providing loans toward renovation of the houses in the Oliver neighborhood. Most of the contractors are local residents who have ties to the neighborhood, employ local resident labor, and do not have access to conventional bank financing because of their need to pay subcontractors and labor weekly.

Each contractor commits to a quality standard of construction as determined by Bridge, which includes high-end kitchens and bathrooms, and energy-saving features such as added insulation, high-efficiency heating and air conditioning systems, energy-efficient appliances, and tankless water heaters.

Bridge offers the contractors a marketing and sales plan through a single real estate agent and website, which serves to “brand” the energy-

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** A copy of the report, *How Course Redesign at the University of Maryland is Improving Learning, Lowering Costs, and Increasing Graduation Rates*, is available in “Publications” on the Abell website, [www.abell.org](http://www.abell.org).

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efficient, “green” features of the homes. Buyers of the completed houses include a married couple with two small children, a former resident and retiree returning to the neighborhood, and a buyer relocating from the East Baltimore Development Initiative (EBDI) area. The homes’ sales prices have ranged from \$140,000 to \$187,000, all without public subsidy.

Recognizing that crime and safety are major considerations for potential purchasers and existing residents, security cameras with live feed to the Baltimore City Police Department have been effective in deterring drug activity in the several-block area. In addition, Bridge is working with the city’s Weatherization Office within the Department of Housing and Community Development to make federal funding for energy-efficient improvements available to existing residents to increase the level of investment in the target blocks.

Kevin Kelvin had been living in a neighborhood that he felt was going down, and he wanted out. To find a house and neighborhood that better suited his expectations, he went online to search for houses in his price range of \$155,000, and up popped 1439 North Bond Street. “I could not believe my eyes,” says Mr. Kelvin. He immediately contacted real estate agent Martin Richardson.

“I told the agent that I wanted to see the neighborhood before I toured the model, and so one day I drove over to North Bond Street, and again I couldn’t believe my eyes—the street was wide and clean, and people were out walking. I saw the cameras up, and that arrangement at work made

me feel very comfortable, very safe. And as I pulled in front of 1439, a truck pulled up right behind me, and the driver got out and approached me, and asked if I wanted to see the house. He appeared to be one of the construction workers.”

Lloyd Williams explains why the worker was so interested in the potential buyer. “That worker lives in the neighborhood. So like our other workers who live in the neighborhood and are helping to rehab those houses, he has a large stake in who buys the houses. In his heart of hearts, he knows he has an interest in the buyer, not only as a customer but as a neighbor.”

“So together,” Mr. Kelvin continues, “we went through the model. Things worked out well.”

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***“It was Mr. David Borinsky  
and his Bridge Private  
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arranged for  
the financing... .”***

***– Lloyd Williams, developer***

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But the process would not have worked so well, or worked at all, were it not for the financing of the project. Mr. Williams explains, “It was Mr. David Borinsky and his Bridge Private Lending group who arranged for the financing of the purchase of the house, one of a group of eight, that the Verde Group bought from the city.”

Mr. Borinsky adds, “Lloyd’s successful sale of a renovated house to a middle-income buyer impressed me and we agreed to combine his knowledge of the neighborhood and his inspired design choices with my

loan fund and my relationship with other builders.

“And we agreed that it would only work if we took into account the social and economic dynamics of the neighborhood. Our approach is to ask organizations interested in job training, weatherization, education, aging in place, and so on to consider whether their mission can be enhanced by joining us in Oliver, and the response has been intense. And the Oliver Community Association and its executive director, Nina Harper, have been instrumental in bringing together the stakeholders. This self-organizing collaboration has propelled everyone’s thinking beyond the traditional approaches to urban development. That, combined with our ‘Come Home Baltimore’ sales theme, is catching the attention of people in outlying areas for whom Oliver would not otherwise be on the radar.”

Mr. Kelvin says, “I fell in love with that house and that neighborhood—it was everything we were looking for. I got a mortgage through Wells Fargo and we moved in September 24. Life’s good here.”

“This is succeeding beyond what any of us dared hope when we started,” Mr. Borinsky says. “The goal is an economically integrated neighborhood with no displacement of existing residents, no gentrification, and it looks like we’re getting there.”

The Abell Foundation salutes Bridge Private Lending and its president, David Borinsky, for helping to revive the Oliver neighborhood in Baltimore City—where a neighbor can look out of a window of a house in a once-abandoned inner-city neighborhood and see children walking along, feeling comfortable and safe.