

CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

FOCUS GROUP REPORT



PREPARED BY SOUTHSIDE REDEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, The City of Omaha, Omaha Housing Authority and Southside Redevelopment Corporation were awarded a \$ 1.3M Choice Neighborhood Planning and Action Grant.

With this grant, the City, Omaha Housing Authority, and Southside Redevelopment Corp. will work with our Engagement Team partners - Heartland Workers Center, The Simple Foundation, Spark CDI, and Omaha by Design to create a comprehensive Transformation Plan for the Southside Terrace - Indian Hills neighborhood.

Throughout this process there will be a strong emphasis on meaningful and authentic community engagement to ensure the plan is developed by residents, for residents.

In addition to small in person engagements, Southside Redevelopment Corp. hosted online focus groups from May - July 2020 to gain a deeper understanding of the community. Over 30 local nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and businesses participated in the Focus Groups.

THE PROCESS

As part of the CNP process, 8 indicators have been identified as primary focus areas: Arts + Culture, Civic Engagement, Education, Health + Wellness, Neighborhood, Safety, Transportation, and Workforce + Economic Development. Stakeholders were identified for each topic with each group meeting a total of three times. The first session provided information regarding the CNP Grant and the overall process of the focus groups. The second session consisted of identifying assets and challenges as they relate to each topic. The third session consisted of evaluating preferences, opportunities, and overall vision. **This report is a summary of the common themes identified by participants.**

THE VISION

Although some of the tactics and strategies for neighborhood improvements differed slightly, there was a strong consensus on the vision for the neighborhood. Participants would like to see a thriving, safe, diverse and walkable neighborhood, that has access to health care and healthy foods, educational opportunities, jobs, entertainment, greenspace, and meaningful community engagement opportunities. The ideal community would be family-friendly, with affordable housing that accommodates all ages, abilities, and incomes. The neighborhood should feel safe day and night and have wide-sidewalks, slow traffic, treelined streets, and an affordable community center.

ARTS + CULTURE

A celebration of history and diversity, through the beautification of public spaces and organic development of creative networks.

WHAT WE HEARD

South Omaha is home to a diverse population.

Many cultures are represented in this community, some of which do not identify as an "artist," but should have the opportunity to express their creativity and learn about other cultures and history.

Art can be used to help improve safety in the neighborhood.

Whether art can be used to enhance lighting, parks, or slow down traffic - art can also leverage existing neighborhood assets that would help create a sense of place throughout the neighborhood.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Equitable art opportunities for community residents.

To help cultivate and develop local talent, we must provide accessible studio space, residency opportunities, and more training opportunities for the community to explore their interests, talents and creative side.

Authentic community engagement from a grassroots approach.

By bringing art to the people and not expecting people to seek out the arts, we can collaborate in a more meaningful way. This will allow for community buy-in and result in projects that have been identified by the people who live in the area.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Grassroots advocacy for policy and problem-solving, which benefits residents of all backgrounds.

WHAT WE HEARD

There are strong community leaders, but there is a need for more residents to get involved in local and general elections.

Additional educational opportunities regarding civic engagement is needed for the general community to understand the importance of their voice and their vote.

Meet the community where they are at.

Understanding barriers the community faces is imperative to help address and remove obstacles to civic participation. Barriers can include childcare, internet access, language + communication divides, transportation, etc.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

The creation of a leadership pipeline.

Engagement strategies and leadership development must be created by residents for residents. Additionally, engaging with youth at a younger age, will help build a pipeline of future neighborhood ambassadors.

Bridges built and community trust increased.

Allow for more informal interactions between residents that helps build trust with one another. This may mean more investment in the public space where these informal interactions and relationship building can occur organically.

EDUCATION

Link education opportunities with learners of all ages and interests, by employing a variety of avenues for engagement.

WHAT WE HEARD

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on education.

Distance learning has presented challenges for both educators and families alike. Families are faced with the struggle of coordinating work schedules, childcare, and distance learning. With high cases of COVID-19 in 68107, many families are experiencing additional hardships and stress.

There are many programs and resources available, but some students and family are not aware of these services.

There are many educational assets that provide services and support to the neighborhood, however the challenge is getting the word out and providing families with a clear path to utilize those programs.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Meaningful mentorship opportunities.

Mentoring creates a positive impact in youth's lives. Youth with mentors typically have higher rates of high school graduation and are less likely to drop out of school. This can also help build self-confidence, self-esteem, and close the socioeconomic opportunity gap.

Investment in adult and senior educational opportunities.

Affordable and accessible continuing adult education is desired. Topics identified include financial literacy, life skills, parenting classes, computer/technology classes, healthy eating, and English as a second language.

HEALTH + WELLNESS

Address the social and economic determinants of health to generate thriving communities.

WHAT WE HEARD

There is a cultural stigma related to utilizing behavioral and mental health services.

Many residents and families could benefit from proactive behavioral and mental health support, however many individuals do not seek support due to cultural stigmas.

The overall health of the community could be improved.

Many youth within the community struggle with childhood obesity, while some adults struggle with domestic abuse and chronic illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, and substance abuse. Time and money were identified as two significant barriers for seeking healthcare treatment.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Community-based health centers and community health navigators.

By bringing healthcare to the community, more residents would have convenient and approachable healthcare. Additionally, community health navigators can act as a liaison between community members and healthcare providers. They can also spread information and help with language and cultural barriers.

Investment in infrastructure to encourage a healthy lifestyle.

The built environment directly affects the way people use the space. Participants would like to see investment in parks, greenspace, sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, public art, community gardens, and public transportation.

NEIGHBORHOOD

Build safe, sustainable, and healthy housing accessible to all essential neighborhood amenities.

WHAT WE HEARD

The neighborhood is home to a diverse population.

Southside Terrace - Indian Hill is home to a broad mix of Latino, White, Black racial groups, with Myanmar and African refugees. The overall population is significantly younger in comparison to the City and is home to larger households.

Affordable housing is a top priority.

Maintaining existing housing that is affordable as well as building additional affordable housing is strongly desired. Educational opportunities regarding homeownership, financing, and home maintenance is needed in several languages.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Affordable housing for all stages of life.

Any additional housing built in the future should consider young adults transitioning out of their family home, young couples, families, seniors, and intergenerational families. This could be an array of apartments, condos, townhomes, single family houses, and accessory dwelling units. Participants do not want to see high rise buildings.

Additional public spaces with seating, shade, and shelter.

Participants would like to have additional opportunities to interact with neighbors. Maintaining and utilizing front porches, investing in additional public seating, and bus shelters were indicated as a good starting point.

SAFETY

Cultivate community trust and prioritize safety in design, to promote secure and protected spaces.

WHAT WE HEARD

Neighborhood engagement can play a strong role in improving safety.

There was consistent feedback around the importance of keeping both Southside Terrace and the neighborhood clean and tidy. Participants frequently shared that they would like to see a decrease in the amount of trash on their streets, vandalism, and more neighbors actively involved in helping to beautify the neighborhood - both in its public areas, individual streets, and homes.

Enhancing the built environment can improve the sense of safety.

Participants would like to see more investment in the built environment. An affordable community center that provides programs and other services is ideal. Some participants suggested other improvements such as crosswalks, landscaping, public art, trash + recycling receptacles, additional streetlights, and sidewalk repairs.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Safety improved with more preventative support.

The sense of safety changes drastically depending on the day, time and location. Many participants expressed concerns regarding an increase in violent crimes and vandalism. Some individuals suggested having more on foot security presence overnight to help prevent additional crimes. Other participants would prefer a community-led approach where residents keep each other accountable. Participants would like to see additional activities for youth and young adults to stay engaged in positive activities around the neighborhood.

WORKFORCE

Generate local wealth, support entrepreneurs, and bridge the divide between workforce and opportunity.

WHAT WE HEARD

Underemployment is a significant challenge for this community.

Many individuals have multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. Other people find themselves unable to get a job in their desired field due to transferable skills and find themselves working a job that is not commensurate with their skill set and, in most cases, pays much below their industry standards.

Access to technology and Wi-Fi make job applications, continuing education, and filing for unemployment extremely difficult.

Access to devices as well as reliable affordable internet has been an ongoing barrier, but COVID-19 magnified this issue for many residents in the community.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Attract businesses and employers to the area.

In addition to providing support and programs to help individuals get to and from work, we should focus our efforts on attracting businesses to the area to help with employment and economic development.

Create a cradle to career pipeline. Invest in education for all ages.

Education is the foundation to a thriving workforce. Youth could benefit from an earlier introduction to career options that might spark their interest. With technology changing the workforce, more emphasis on technology and trades would be beneficial for all ages.

ASSETS

Community assets are any resources that improve the overall quality of life for residents. These can include people, places, organizations, social services, physical attributes, etc.

- **Community Centers:** Boys & Girls Club South, The Kroc Center, former YMCA on 30th & Q
- **Community Leaders:** Kimara Snipe, Ms. Jackson, Anita Rojas
- **Diversity, culture and rich history**
- **Educational Assets:** Educare, Omaha Public Library South, Metro Community College South, College Possible, Avenue Scholars
- **Health:** OneWorld, UNMC, CHI Health
- **Neighborhood Associations:** Highland South-Indian Hill Neighborhood Association, South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance, Southside Terrace Tenant Association
- **Nonprofits:** A Mid Summer's Mural, Heartland Workers Center, Girls Inc., Juan Diego Center, Latino Center of the Midlands, Lutheran Family Services, ONE Omaha, Southside Redevelopment Corporation, Spark CDI
- **Omaha Public Schools:** Bryan High School, Indian Hill Elementary School, Omaha South High Magnet School
- **People:** current residents and local artists
- **Physical Assets:** Small businesses, churches, grocery stores
- **Sense of community**
- **Sports:** PACE, The Simple Foundation, Victory Boxing

CHALLENGES

Community challenges are any barriers or issues that detract from the overall quality of life for residents. These can include physical, economic, social, institutional, etc.

- **Access to:**
 - technology and Wi-Fi, healthcare, jobs, resources, healthy food, education, job opportunities, and other supportive services
- **Awareness of available programs, services and resources**
- **Access to affordable housing options for all**
- **Built environment:**
 - lighting, sidewalks, lack of benches and crosswalks, etc.
- **Educational attainment**
 - parent engagement and support
- **Car ownership and reliable public transportation**
- **Community trust**
- **Legal status of residents**
- **Language barriers**
- **Sense of safety**
 - crime, vandalism, gang activity, etc.
- **Socioeconomic status**
- **Underemployment**
- **Youth engagement**

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

A Mid Summer's Mural

Amplify Arts

Boys and Girls Club

CHI Health

City of Omaha

City Sprouts South

Community Artists

Do Space

Girls Inc.

Habitat for Humanity

Heartland Workers Center

Heartland Workforce Solutions

inCOMMON

Indian Hill Elementary School

Kroc Center

Latino Center of the Midlands

Learning Community Center

Lending Link

Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition

Metropolitan Community College

Omaha Housing Authority

Omaha Public Schools

Omaha South High Magnet School

ONE Omaha

OneWorld

Peter Kiewit Foundation

Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance

Nebraska Children's Home Society

Nebraska Civic Engagement Table

SOVIP

Spark CDI

Turner Construction

University of Nebraska Medical Center