



ENGAGEWINONA

City of Winona

**IMAGINING FUTURE USES FOR CENTRAL
ELEMENTARY**

FINAL REPORT

Presented January 2019

January 28, 2019

Carlos Espinosa

City Planner, City of Winona

Dear Carlos, city staff, the Winona Planning Commission, and the Winona City Council:

I'm pleased to submit the final Engage Winona report gathering community input on future reuses of the Central Elementary building and grounds. This report reflects comments from the public gathering in December, the followup public gathering in January, and the survey.

As you know, we recently completed a very similar reuse engagement process with Madison Elementary. The context, location, and recent uses of Madison and Central are so different that this report will generally avoid comparing the two processes, particularly related to the frequency of comments on uses, concerns and issues. Both the Central and Madison reports and details are available at engagewinona.org/portfolio/elementary-reuse-engagement.

Neighborhood and community participation in this project met our expectations, both in the numbers of participants and their investment in providing detailed and thoughtful comments. Neighbors are pleased to have been included in this step of the planning process.

The summary gives you a concise overview and list of top takeaways. I encourage you to spend time with the full report, which includes a deeper analysis of each potential use, as well as curated sets of participants' comments — neighbors' voices and opinions in their own words.

Thank you for the opportunity to do this work on the city's behalf! Engage Winona, as a mission-driven nonprofit, relies on projects like this to sustain its work of leading civic engagement and community-problem solving initiatives, and providing backbone support to changemaking individuals, groups and organizations transforming our community.

Please reach out with comments or questions.

Sincerely,



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SUMMARY

Results

Participants were asked for ideas on future uses of the Central building and grounds, and thoughts and concerns related to specific uses. **The most-discussed ideas and comments were:**

TOP TAKEAWAYS

- **Housing** — By far the most-discussed option, with a range of owner-occupied uses preferred, student rentals largely opposed, and significant concerns over density and design
- **Senior or multi-generational center** — The most popular and preferred single use, with ideas on combining housing and other uses
- **Retain or create play area, green space** — Important to neighborhood vitality; range of ideas on size, amenities
- **Strong desire for a public or community space** — Providing outdoor and indoor community space on a once-public property
- **Lots of creative ideas on mixed-use development;** combinations of housing, public-private partnerships, and other uses
- **Worries about commercial development** competing with downtown businesses
- **Reuse as a school, childcare or pre-K facility drew mixed reactions,** suggestions for a partnership with WSU if pursued
- **Preserving the historically designated building is important** — many were concerned about the potential for significant change, or demolition
- **Traffic is a big concern** regardless of future use, especially on neighborhood streets

The full report is sorted by use, and includes a description, analysis, and set of key comments for each. It also includes other themes that emerged in conversations. Here's a quick look at each use and theme:



Uses

- **Housing, rentals:** By far the most-discussed option, with a mix of openness, concern and resignation to reuse as housing. Owner-occupied options were supported almost without exception; rental options were widely debated, with preferences for senior and young professional housing; college rentals were almost unanimously opposed.
- **Play area, green space:** A strong desire to retain some outdoor space with playground equipment and/or an open public area for walking and playing.
- **Public, community space:** High levels of concern about a once-public property becoming private, combined with a desire to have some kind of community gathering space within a larger development.
- **Mixed-use, commercial:** Lots of excitement and concrete ideas that combined housing with other uses; concern about how significant commercial development could impact downtown businesses.
- **Senior, multi-generational center:** The most commented-on and preferred single use. Many participants wondered whether the developer had interest in a creative mixed-use development to serve many different ages. Some wondered whether the city could be re-engaged in discussions.
- **Pre-kindergarten, childcare:** Some interest, with participants noting a significant overall community need, but mostly came with concern about potential competition/overlap with WSU's Children's Center and soon-to-be Education Village nearby.
- **School:** Reuse as a school was rarely mentioned. A few comments suggested the location was strong for a charter; others suggested integrating a small school with other uses.
- **Other institutional:** Little discussion or interest.
- **Other uses:** A handful of creative suggestions, primarily related to living, working and exhibiting spaces for artists; no overall consensus on any specific idea.

Other themes

- **Traffic:** Significant and frequent concerns about traffic, especially parking and flow along Wabasha and access points on Market, Walnut and Broadway; many neighbors said they've adjusted to minimal daily traffic since the school closed.
- **Preserving historic building:** Also significant and frequent concerns about preserving the historically designated building. Many worried about substantial exterior changes, while others said they would hate to see the building demolished.
- **Pedestrian safety:** Lots of concerns and questions about the impact of high-density housing or other uses on pedestrians regularly crossing Broadway.
- **Concern about property left undeveloped:** Concerns are very high, overall between "quite a bit" and "extremely"; the average rank was above 4 on a 1-5 scale.
- **Play area amenities:** If a play area or green space were retained, the most-requested amenities would be those that serve both young and old; other ideas included natural play areas and open space.



Participants

Through the public gathering held December 11, Engage Winona collected nearly **600 unique comments** from **more than 50 individuals** representing primarily neighbors of Central, with input from Winona residents in other neighborhoods.

Through the use of hard-copy surveys provided at the event and digital surveys sent to neighborhood residents and marketed to the Winona community, Engage Winona collected **nearly 500 unique comments** and ranked responses from **59 complete sets of responses** from Winona residents. A majority of respondents reported living within a mile of Central; nearly every respondent reported living in the city of Winona (a few did not provide addresses).

Project overview and intent

Engage Winona's project with the City of Winona gathered input from neighbors of Central Elementary and community members on ideas, visions and concerns for redeveloping the building and site. The work was completed in November and December 2018. It included a public gathering attended by more than 50 neighbors and residents, and hard-copy and digital surveys completed by nearly 60 neighbors and residents. That work resulted in more than 1,100 comments. It concluded with a gathering in January 2019, where participants commented on the draft report.

This was the first step of the City of Winona's process to work with a developer on reuse of Central Elementary. The turnout for the public gathering and number of residents who completed surveys met expectations, and comments were thoughtful and focused. **The overall process was well-supported and successful, which speaks to the investment residents have in the future of the Central Elementary site and the future of their neighborhood.**

The goal was to involve the neighborhood, and the larger Winona community, directly in the planning process early on by giving them a direct avenue to have their voices heard. As the city prepares to work with the new owner on redevelopment plans, the intent is for this report and all of the voices contained within to be integrated into the planning process — for the city and developer to see this report as the equivalent of having the opportunity to have in-depth, honest conversations with dozens of residents about their hopes and concerns for the future use of the site.

Participants expressed concern about the value their opinions and perspectives will have in the planning process going forward, given that the decision-making authority ultimately lies with the city and developer. Future work to engage the neighborhood — active communication and updates on the process, offerings to be involved — would be highly encouraged.

The ultimate hope for this work is for the community's voices to serve as a framework that the developer and city listen closely to, and **strive to create a plan for the future use of the Central Elementary building and grounds that meets all needs — those of the developer, the city, the neighborhood, and the community.**



USES

Introduction

All comments were sorted into primary themes based on use. Categories are listed in order of prevalence based on an *estimated* number of comments, to provide a general idea of how often each category was discussed.

Note: Not all comments related to specific uses; nearly 200 were focused on general concerns regardless of use, such as traffic, parking, and the historic elementary structure. Recording and sorting comments is complex, and in several cases longer comments are sorted into multiple categories, so response numbers should be understood as an *estimate* (hence the use of the tilde symbol, ~), not a hard and specific figure.

Each theme includes:

A **DESCRIPTION** of the specific use.

An **ANALYSIS** of the comments related to the specific use, both positive and negative, providing insight both on the comments and on direct observation of participants' conversations at the public gathering.

KEY COMMENTS, a hand-selected collection of the most prominent and compelling comments from participants. Responses represent the true voices and language of participants, and are selected to show range, not prevalence, of comments on a given use.



Housing, rentals (~425 comments)

Description

The reuse of the building and grounds for housing of any kind, particularly higher-density forms; the presence of rentals and what populations would be catered to; ways that housing could be designed to fit the neighborhood; concerns related to the overall number of buildings and units that could be constructed on the site; concerns about the number of people a development would house.

Analysis

Housing — higher-density forms of housing, not single-family homes — was resisted by many, while many others were open and said it would be an acceptable or even preferred use, given the proximity to downtown, as well as nearby properties with high-density uses like Watkins Manor and the Children’s Center. Other brought up housing because they were, in their words, “resigned to” to the use, or said that while it wasn’t their preferred idea, it “makes sense for the location.” Many commenters combined the idea of housing, both owner-occupied and rental, with other uses, such as a public senior center or private commercial development (more details in those sections).

Owner-occupied

There was widespread acceptance of reuse as owner-occupied condos or apartments. Several commenters suggested there may be a strong market, given the shifting and aging demographics in Winona. Many commenters combined the idea of owner-occupied housing with other uses, such as a public senior center or private commercial development.

Rentals

Participants broadly disagreed on rentals, with concerns primarily focused in two areas: College rentals (see below) and landlord presence/responsibility. Some noted that affordable rental housing is a big need in Winona and said they would welcome that use; others said they would oppose it. Some participants suggested a mix of costs and sizes to cater to different demographics. Others suggested workforce housing. A few encouraged the development of low-income housing.

Young professional, senior rentals

Several participants were enthusiastic about the idea of rental apartments marketed toward seniors, or young professionals — folks out of college and starting careers, folks moving to Winona for work, folks downsizing, or others simply looking for high-quality apartments.

College rentals

There was near-universal agreement on not wanting college rentals. Exceptions came from recent college graduates, who said there are responsible college-age renters, and a few neighbors who have, over time, appreciated getting to know college-age neighbors. Some wondered about the a market, given existing openings and enrollment trends. This use



came with high concern about property upkeep, traffic, noise, and other issues. Many noted the existing density of college rentals to the immediate west leading up to Winona State.

Density

The largest density concern was a fear of multiple buildings like rowhouses, small apartments (4-6 units), or similar developments.

Key comments

- Multi-generational housing of some kind, with green space
- Not dorms or any other student housing
- Good location for senior housing, active folks looking to downsize
- Young professionals need housing that isn't college housing - nice central location for them
- What kind of additional buildings could be built on the land? That would be awful to see the whole block taken up
- Winona doesn't have enough nice, affordable housing
- Great for senior housing - close to downtown and the grocery store
- Since we need more housing for low-income families, developer should accommodate that
- Properties nearby will be devalued if certain uses are pursued, like student rentals
- Concerned about ugliness factor - building that doesn't fit the old style of the neighborhood
- Needs to be maintained so it doesn't look run-down, doesn't go into disrepair
- Like Willowbrook - co-op investment, community rooms to entertain and cook
- Stay within the character of the neighborhood - density, noise, 30 percent rule
- If it has to be residential, Winona Middle School model - mixed-income, larger use
- Condos or owner-occupied for mixed ages or families
- I hear many of my neighbors talk about their fear that the space would turn into housing, but poorly managed housing. Many of them talk about housing that would cater to retired folks wanting to downsize and stay in the Central School neighborhood
- New housing at this location would not meet a significant community need and would create all of the issues - traffic, parking, effect on neighbors, etc. that such projects entail
- A mixture of housing types in the core of the city in walking distance from downtown is one of our greatest needs and would be perfect here. Getting the right mix of residential types, density, and design would be the biggest issues
- If it is college housing like the Huff-Lamberton mansion, then it is another terrible waste of the city's historic buildings
- Central School and the rest of the block could accommodate a fairly high density without negatively impacting the community if designed appropriately. Rentals should be a part of the housing mix on the block, not the sole housing type
- A green space, senior housing with better traffic control around the property
- Family housing is needed in Winona. It's why enrollment keeps going down
- Consider transition housing for part of housing - and with job training opportunities
- The use should add substantially to Winona's tax base. So much quality living space has been lost in the central part of town. The location next to the Watkins Home and Winona State as walkable destinations make this a perfect upper-end condo site



Play area, green space (~175 comments)

Description

The retention of the existing play area, or the creation of a new play area; space outside of a play area that would be available for public use, and may be open space created by removing asphalt or provide structured use (community gardens, etc.)

Analysis

Participants said retaining outdoor public space is the most critical need. Keeping the existing play area or creating a new one was also noted as a high need; some participants said they regularly use nearby Sinclair Park. Creating green space was most important to many participants, expressed most commonly as a desire for a multi-generational space welcoming to neighbors and nearby institutions like Watkins Manor and the Children's Center. Many said space was important because of a fear the entire block could be developed, increasing a need for green space. Ideas and visions for a play area and green space varied widely and were largely complementary. Some participants wondered whether a developer could lease or sell green space back to the city, so the city could maintain the space and potentially offer programming. Many participants requested the opportunity to provide input on the planning and design of any potential play area.

Key comments

- Open space and play area is important to the neighborhood
- Benches in an open area - serve folks from Watkins who walk over there
- Gardening - great to see community gardens or some kind of features there
- A playground for seniors, too!
- Green space would be great - especially if it replaced the concrete
- Green space, park-like playground for kids and seniors
- Create community greenspace and natural playground for multi-age public use
- Hoping that WSU Children's Center can still use the playground (unless they have other plans). This also allows residents of Watkins to watch and wave at the little kids. It's fun to watch the interactions. The Watkins family was supportive in the construction of Central, so this would also be within their mission
- A playground is important to our family because of our child and other children nearby
- Neighborhood is fine right now - no needs. Park is near (Sinclair), density is ideal
- We would have to walk 2+ blocks toward Franklin to the next-closest park
- I am less concerned with creating green space as I am with keeping the green space that exists on the east side of the block. More important is appropriate landscaping (trees, shrubs, etc. as opposed to just grass, which is what green space insinuates)
- Keep the play area if it can be open to the neighborhood/public. That park is used A LOT by neighborhood folks and others
- I would love a community garden or a park. I have grandchildren so I would be happy to use the play equipment



Public, community space (~160 comments)

Description

The use of all or part of the development for public or community gathering space for a wide variety of uses, from indoor meetings and classes to outdoor space.

Analysis

The desire for a redevelopment to offer some portion of space to the community to use was consistent and strong, in large part due to the loss of a public block to private development. Some participants, knowing the city had bid on the property, suggested the developer work closely with the city on a potential partnership. Many commenters suggested the idea of a multipurpose room or rooms that could be used as gathering spaces for volunteer groups, classes, and other uses — made available for any neighborhood or community resident to use, perhaps in space leased to and managed by the city. Other commenters appreciated the most recent uses, including WAPS Community Education and Miller Mentoring, and suggested the presence of similar programs. Some commenters suggested the entire development be public, though said they realized that would likely only happen if a public entity owned the building and land.

Key comments

- Building that provides a gathering space for the community
- Worried that there won't be any public use
- It's a public building and the public should have the final say in what happens there
- Partnerships with community organizations to serve larger populations in Winona
- Facilitate something like the Des Moines Social Club
- Neighbor-centric - a place that's congenial, where you can meet neighbors
- The City of Winona made a serious mistake by not pursuing acquisition of this property to a successful conclusion and the city should move promptly to correct that error
- Gym use for public fitness classes and afterschool sports
- Consider complementing Watkins and public programming availability
- The setup is ideal to fit in programs to meet the needs of many (community) groups
- Childcare and youth programming - providing a space for programs that support the growth of Winona area youth - especially at-risk youth- to grow and develop
- Daytime use for community purposes. Keep property public
- A community education site, partner with the YMCA
- Community labyrinth
- Community gathering area, space for instruction (ESL, job training) daycare, activity center
- Building partnerships with local organizations in need of facilities (the city, YMCA, etc.) to provide programming in the building/expand on what they provide to better serve low-income residents and the community at large - add more features for community benefit (playground, community garden, neighborhood services, etc.)
- Do not like it becoming residences. A community space would be better!



Mixed-use, commercial (~160 comments)

Description

Creating a mixed-use development on the site that could take a wide variety of forms, most particularly variations on a combination of commercial and residential space.

Analysis

Participants had several specific and creative ideas for mixed-use development (see comments). Many imagined main-floor commercial space, with upper levels devoted to housing; others imagined the entire development as commercial without housing. Participants were divided on the idea of commercial use. Many said they were open and interested, but were reluctant to offer comments and support without more details. Others were generally against the idea, saying the size of the site could lead to a redevelopment that substantially changed the neighborhood's character and created challenges like traffic, light, and nighttime activity. Some noted that the location would make it ideal for high-density mixed-use development. The largest single concern participants had was whether a commercial development wasn't with the use itself, but whether it would compete with downtown businesses.

Key comments

- Some kind of mixed-use that attracts different, diverse demographics
- Health, fitness, spiritual, healthy eating, garden - wellness center
- Worried about traffic if there's a lot more parking on Broadway, people pulling out and in
- Worried that cafes or retail would pull people from downtown
- Business/entrepreneur incubator
- Art galleries and workspaces added to mixed-use development
- A fun, nice restaurant in a school
- Multicultural place - restaurant, art gallery, coffee shop, mixed-use
- Concern if retail entity would compete with downtown
- Need a good mix of development (well thought-out, not piecemeal)
- Arts and culture space
- Entire block development: Senior center, residential, childcare, greenspace/garden, restaurant, artist space
- Not particularly needed and has all of the issues associated with housing alone
- Mixed-use - some housing, daycare, shops
- Multicultural center - art gallery, shops, performance space
- Multiuse. Extremely valuable property begging to be thoughtfully, fully developed
- Developer should create and lease to city room on first floor for senior center and a complex of related service/businesses. An annex of 55 and older owner-occupied condos with parking on ground level should be constructed. Annex should be 2-3 stories high. Businesses housed in central building could be variety: hair care, massage, health/exercise,



lawyer's office, coffee shop with drive-up window, one or two rooms for pop-up businesses, chapel or serenity room, rental conference room.

- Senior housing with yoga center and coffee shop
- Martial arts and workout space
- High-end cafe, in-town dog park, high-end residential rental units
- I think our neighborhood is uniquely located and largely residential - it would be great if that space could encompass some kind of trendy housing, retail, restaurant/cafe, or creative office space that would compliment the fact that you can walk to downtown attractions while still living in a 'neighborhood'
- A multipurpose complex. This would include a 3-4 story annex of condos with garage parking on ground level. The first floor of Central should be leased by the city and used as senior citizen center. Other uses of space should provide potential office/business space for a lawyer, a unisex hair styling center, a massage service, exercise center that provides service for Silver Sneakers, a coffee shop with drive through window, a room to allow "pop-up" short-term sales rooms for artists, etc.
- I see a lot of spaces in larger cities having mixed-use buildings. It helps provide steady income while also being able to encourage much-needed programs
- We have a lot of commercial space in town including the Highway 61 corridor, downtown, and neighborhood commercial nodes that are more appropriate locations to redevelop or add to. Doing so in this location would be unnecessary given the proximity of downtown and out of character with the neighborhood
- Our downtown has so many open retail spaces now, I don't know why there would be more
- Benefits: increasing "cool factor" of our neighborhood to attract new residents to Winona.
Issues: parking
- Commercial space would ruin this neighborhood in my opinion
- Room for pop-up retail. Yoga, exercise, hair care, legal service, massage, coffee shop with drive-up window, etc.
- Cafes on the bottom floor, high-end apartments on second floor, big playground, green space, dog park, resurfaced area for nice parking, nice landscaping, improved aesthetics
- Partnerships could be big here - there are lots of organizations that could come together to provide services to Winona that residents truly need



Senior, multi-generational center (~150 comments)

Description

The use of a portion or all of the building and site for a center that serves folks generally ages 55 and older; the future home of the Winona Friendship Center; the creation of a multi-generational center and space that could include all of the Friendship Center's current programming as well as a daycare, pre-K education, youth programming, or other features; uses that include or exclude a housing component.

Analysis

The majority of comments focused on the idea of a multigenerational space that included housing. Many participants were highly enthusiastic about the idea as a way to potentially meet multiple needs: provide a future home for the Winona Friendship Center, create space for childcare and/or pre-K education, make the development financially viable through upper-floor housing, and see an innovative approach to multi-generational community-building. Other participants were focused solely in the idea of a center serving folks generally ages 55 and older, in part, they said, because they were disappointed in the city's unsuccessful bid to purchase Central.

Key comments

- A shared community space for seniors and children interacting together with a focus on wellness, perhaps renting space to practitioners such as massage therapists, acupuncturists, artisans, nutritionists etc. ... to work with the intergenerational clientele
- Senior center would be complementary to Watkins next door
- The biggest need is to foster child development along with providing stimulation for our elderly community. Those two groups are critical, in our need to take care of and securing a humanized future
- Combine a daycare and a senior center in the same building
- A block is a big space - some kind of mixed-use covering several needs, including childcare, seniors, affordable housing
- Would be an ideal location for active seniors - able to walk and bike places
- Facility that serves seniors and youth
- Intergenerational facility - childcare, partnerships, green space
- Strongly would like it to be the senior center
- Mixed generational facility for elderly, youth (afterschool care/childcare/youth services)
- We are in more need of room for our elderly, adult parents and children. Programs and space to accommodate each of those demographics would be a great idea
- Would love to see it used for the seniors. It'd be a good mix of multi-generational use as it's closely located to Education Village
- A Senior Center location. It would be a great location, with adequate parking



- Ideally, the building would be demolished. In its place would be a new community center that housed a senior center and community center. Most of Walnut and Market Streets between Broadway and Wabasha would be used for this purpose as well
- The most pressing community need, and a particularly appropriate one for the building, is as a home for the senior center
- New senior center with facilities for exercising, meeting, films, children-senior activities, small and large groups, workshops for wood, jewelry, painting, lapidary
- A new Friendship Center with pool, kitchen and gym that can be divided by accordion walls for smaller events and wide open for large gatherings; offices and meeting rooms for service organizations to hold everyday business as well as places to hold special events possibly at night combining age groups and the people they serve
- Multifunctional spaces. Senior center on first floor of Central using as much room as needed. Then consider how to incorporate the related businesses that seniors are apt to use and enjoy. The second floor can have owner-occupied condos; in addition figure out a way to creatively attach a walkway to annex of condos behind Central



Pre-kindergarten, childcare (~100 comments)

Description

Using all or a portion of the existing building for public or private pre-kindergarten or childcare.

Analysis

This use came up most frequently in the context of combining childcare or early education with a senior or multigenerational center. It also arose in the context of Central previously serving as an elementary school, with participants noting the design would already be well-suited for the use. Beyond that, there were not a large number of comments considering or supporting this use. Participants noted the large need for childcare in the Winona area. But they also were concerned about whether a facility would compete or overlap with the nearby WSU Children's Center and potentially Education Village when it opens (and suggested potential collaborations), as well as about other issues, like the location along Broadway creating potential safety problems. Childcare and pre-kindergarten are presented together because they are regularly combined as uses, were combined in the survey requesting feedback, and because participants combined them in discussions. Many noted a primary challenge is the stipulation the district put on the sale of the building — that it cannot be used for a school.

Key comments

- Pre-K, childcare - something to complement the nearby Children's Center
- College students at Education Village - connection with new facility if it has early childhood program
- Combine a daycare and a senior center in the same building
- Intergenerational facility - childcare, partnerships, green space
- A daycare center (that takes infants) is definitely needed. The infant need is HUGE
- Pre-K and childcare and perhaps Friendship Center
- There is a need for space and resources for childcare and afterschool programs in the community. Especially in this area of town and for the demographic
- We need more opportunities in town that provide enrichment to youth - and there are very few pre-K childcare options to begin with. This will help provide a service lots of families currently need
- This is a critical need throughout the community and the property is well-suited to this use
- Excellent. Close to WSU's Ed Village - could leverage resources. Much needed in community
- There does seem to be a shortage of childcare in Winona. Another option would be great. Downside is this is easier said than done. You need someone with a passion and a vision, not just the space.
- A collaboration with Watkins Manor to have its use combined with pre-K, community center
- It'd be a community center where there would be a variety of activities. During the day there would be daycare for babies in one area. There would be areas for seniors. And there could be classes held at night



School (~40 comments)

Description

The use of the building and site as a school.

Analysis

Comments related to use as a school emerged only occasionally, and primarily in the context of the building being well-suited already for the use. Other comments focused on pre-K (included in the previous section). Some participants suggested a charter or small alternative school as a portion of a redevelopment that also included housing, services and programming for families. Most participants who suggested the use also noted the school board's stipulation in selling the building that it not be used as a school.

Key comments

- Education-related (near WSU), schools, pre-K, public partnership, childcare, multigenerational use. Use mainly during the day (this fits the traditional neighborhood around it and would reduce parking concerns). This block may be needed in the next 10 years for a school, when busing costs get to be too much
- Return of children - maybe a school
- An elementary school designed to serve neighborhood children and families
- A school. A renovated, environmentally friendly modern school with appropriate class sizes
- Montessori school, charter school
- The site would remain a school, pre-K hub center of education for multi-generations. Possibly a partnership with higher education. Redo the school, with a green roof, completely energy efficient, a model for all communities in Minnesota. it would attract people from all over the Midwest to see a model school - integrated into the community and completely sustainable, while reducing busing costs
- An elementary school was a great need. If you want the downtown vibrant, bring families in (and give them great schools)
- Put a school of some kind back on that spot. Central Elementary was a very successful single-section school that helped rebuild the core of Winona for young families
- The clearest demand is for accessible elementary education
- It could be a premier magnet or charter school
- The best way to support community is to keep schooling in the neighborhood
- For God's sake . . . an accessible public elementary school!



Other institutional (~30 comments)

Description

A redevelopment involving other institutional space, such as a church or other use.

Analysis

Participants offered few comments on this use. Most said they couldn't imagine institutional uses. A few others focused on the use of the word church as a suggestion, noting that multiple religious spaces in Winona are already struggling with too much space. A few participants suggested a partnership with Winona State, given the proximity to campus buildings, including the Children's Center and Education Village; others said they would be resistant to the university's presence, and noted that WSU did not attempt publicly to purchase the property.

Key comments

- We have enough churches. I'd be open to a beautiful mosque or Buddhist temple though, if they were at least as beautiful as the churches in the neighborhood
- No. We have so many religious institutions currently, how can they be re-purposed?
- I like this because it would be occasionally occupied
- Traffic again a concern. Religious spaces would be used more at night and weekends, so safety not as concerning. Parking can already be tight in the neighborhood, especially in winter
- I do not think any institution should be told they should not be able to use this space, but I do think the potential uses should have a common thread



Other uses (~75 comments)

Description

A collection of comments on specific uses for the property that did not fall into any of the above categories.

Analysis

Comments in this category focus on specific ideas that did not sort into other primary uses. Some related to redevelopment as a mixed-use space supporting art and artists, with housing, working and exhibiting space, community programming, and other uses. Most comments sorted into this category also fell primarily into other categories, particularly mixed-use and commercial, and are included there.

Key comments

- Business/entrepreneur incubator
- Public art center
- Mixed-use space like Des Moines Social Club
- Mixed-use - artistic spaces
- No jail in that location
- Partnerships with community organizations to serve larger populations in Winona
- Artist space



OTHER THEMES

Traffic, parking, pedestrian safety

Description

Concerns about increased traffic, both driving and parking, with any redevelopment; concerns about parking, both on-site and off-site; concerns about pedestrian safety related to increased use.

Analysis

Traffic was the largest concern related to general reuse. There was a consistently high level of concern about traffic related to any redevelopment, and in particular housing or mixed-use development. Many participants mentioned traffic issues in combination with uses. Pedestrian safety, especially along Wabasha Street, was also a large concern.

Several participants suggested narrowing the surrounding streets, especially Wabasha but also Market and Walnut, or using traffic calming measures like bumpouts. Some suggested turn lanes from Broadway into the property. Several participants called for pedestrian safety features for crossing Broadway, with many mentioning flashing signs passerby can activate, and others suggesting a pedestrian bridge. Some suggested closing the streets to traffic entirely outside of intentionally designed flows into and out of the property, and creating pedestrian and green space opportunities, or features similar to the off-street parking at the apartments in the former Winona Middle School along Broadway.

Key comments

- Pedestrian crossings are not currently safe
- Don't want there to be too much traffic
- Hard area for more cars - would need to look at traffic flow
- Watkins, little kids at Children's Center, Education Village - lots going on in the future in that little area
- Adjustments to on-site parking would be needed - in addition to off-street
- Close the road between the school and Watkins
- Traffic calming on Wabasha for safety, especially of elderly
- Narrow Wabasha to help pedestrians, especially older folks crossing the street
- Concerns with traffic - need to look at traffic flow through Broadway
- Think about people leaving downtown and crossing streets - will make Broadway unsafe
- Whatever the use, parking needs to be adequate
- Parking spaces if apartments or community center - needs more parking, angle parking
- Dual-level parking on part of lot
- Safety - traffic issues for young and old



- Close Wabasha Street between Watkins and Franklin - green space pedestrian walkway
- Safer streetscapes - planters narrowing streets
- Close down (Wabasha Street) in front of Watkins (keep parking lot entry to Watkins) - create green space in this area and combine with west side of block up to Broadway
- East Wabasha is not a thoroughfare like Sanborn is; traffic is a concern
- Broadway can be busy - limit access to property from Broadway
- Traffic has been a problem, need traffic lights, not signs
- Traffic calming measures would be needed. Bump-outs at crosswalks and flashing walk signs would be needed
- I'm concerned about parking - there is a parking lot (at Central) but when the building was used for district offices, many folks parked on the street. I live very close to this building and do not have a driveway or garage - sometimes this would prevent me from parking at my house, especially in winter months

Preserving historic building

Description

Opportunity to redevelop the existing school building; concerns about changes to the exterior and appearance of the existing buildings; concerns that the building could be torn down.

Analysis

There was a high level of concern related to maintaining the historically designated school building. Concerns were related to the overall appearance and its influence on the neighborhood, as well as the existence and preservation of historic features, and any items the Watkins family donated to the reconstruction of Central in the early 1930s. Some participants feared that the building could be demolished, clearing the way for a more substantial overhaul of the block with a redevelopment.

Key comments

- The building itself needs to stay - historic importance
- Do not destroy the building - historic features would be lost
- Maintain what's feasible with the interior of the building as well
- Don't destroy history by changing/tearing down historic building
- Beautiful historic building - keep the story of Central alive
- Retain gift from Watkins family that reflects Winona's history
- Concerned about demolishing the building (do not!!)
- Need to maintain as much as possible to protect the historical nature of building
- Historic building creates profit - keep it
- Please don't tear it down! But if you do, try to harvest as much of the maple floors, and tile work, the copper, the bricks and Biesanz stone, and sell it!
- The gym floor is brand new. Otherwise the building is old and in need of updating. It seems to have good bones and should be put to good use



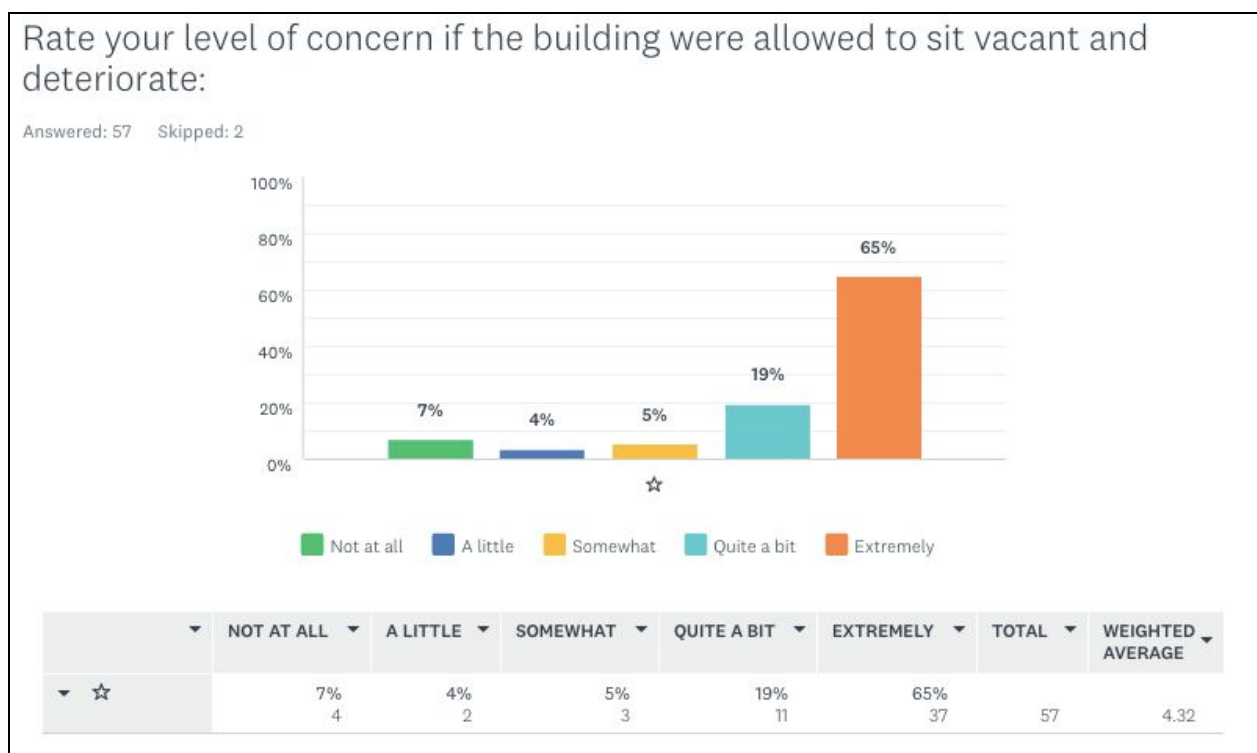
Concern about property left undeveloped

Description

One survey question specifically asked participants to rate their level of concern if the Central Elementary building and grounds “were allowed to sit vacant and deteriorate.” This question was offered as a way to assess general opinions about the possibility.

Analysis

Participants were highly concerned — on a five-star scale, with 1 “not at all” and 5 “extremely,” neighbors’ collective level of concern was above 4, between “quite a bit” and “extremely.”



Key comments

- Don’t let the building sit idle - great to see that it’s been used since it closed
- If it falls through and the developer goes bankrupt, what happens - will it be abandoned?
- Big concern about the property being abandoned, left unused
- I said I'm not concerned about the building sitting vacant and deteriorating because I believe that question is manipulative and disingenuous. Providing that owner(s)/the city/the community in general are not all utterly delinquent in civic responsibility and not actively working against self-interest, that result is exceedingly unlikely
- I mostly don’t want to see it sit empty and deteriorate



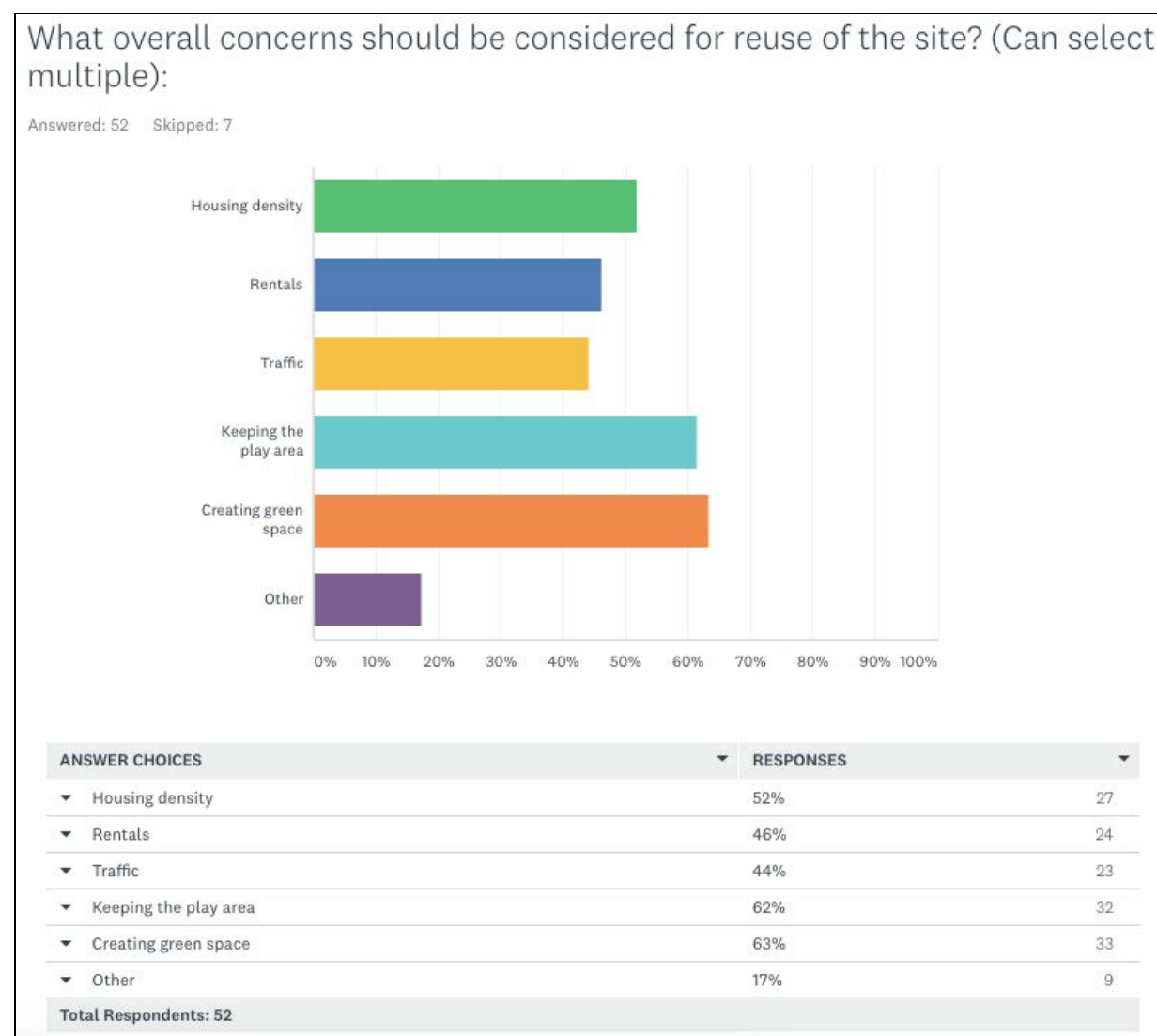
General concerns for reuse

Description

Survey participants were asked specifically what reuses they were most concerned about.

Analysis

Responses show what's reflected in detail in other sections, particularly related to: Retaining or creating a play area and green space; concerns and conflict over housing density and type, especially related to rentals; and the impact any redevelopment will have on traffic.



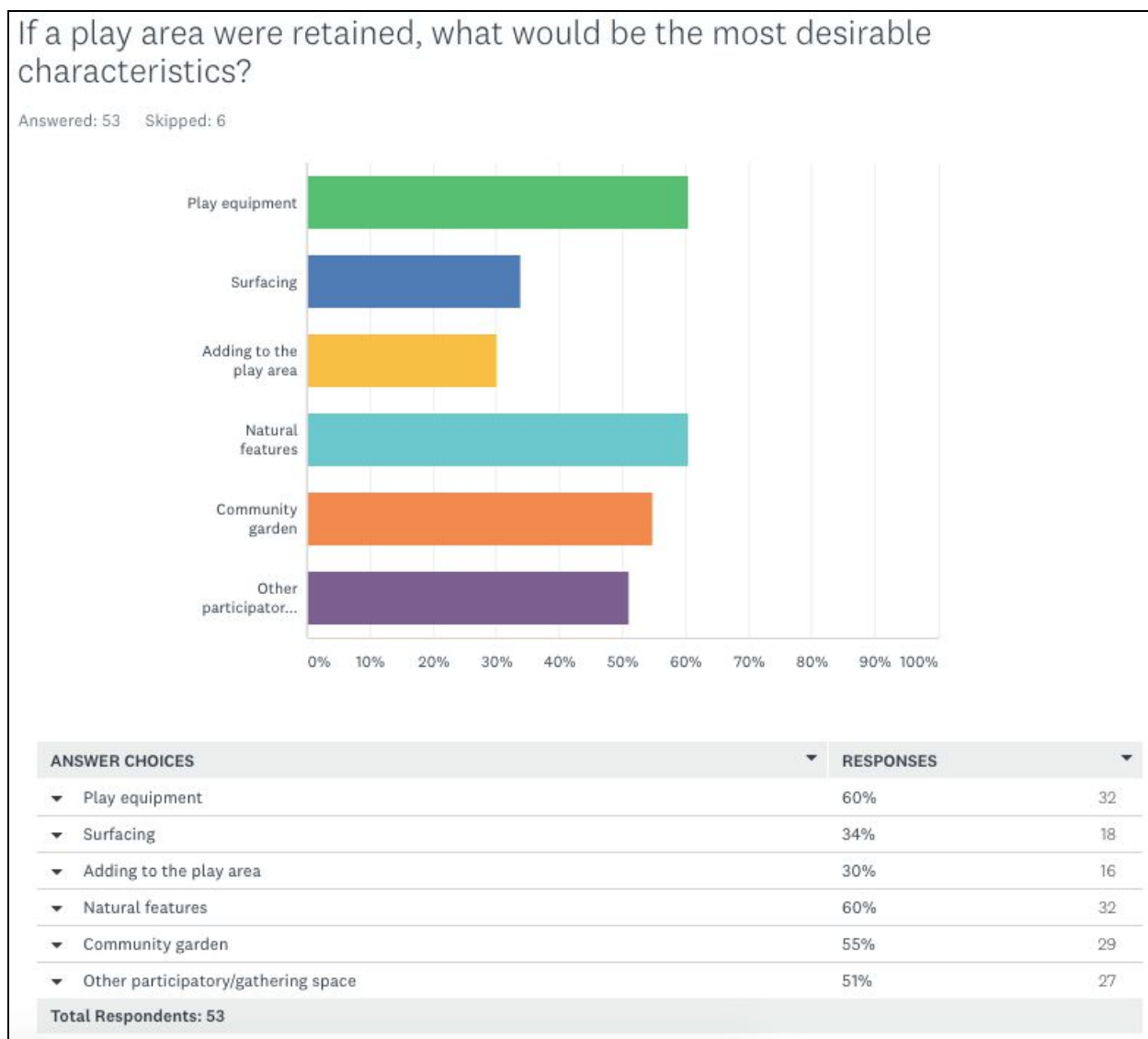
Key comments

- None - all sorted into individual categories.

Play area amenities

Description

Survey participants were asked about most-desired amenities if a play area were preserved or created:



Key comments

- Play equipment for young and old
- Pollinator garden, meditation garden, bird-attractive
- Space for young and old....NOT a hangout for college or secondary age people



- Play equipment and surfacing is important if daycare is included; otherwise, there is a city park two blocks away and the WSU campus within a block that has outdoor classroom and green space
- I wish someone would plant a nice tree at the center, like it used to have before Dutch Elm disease got it. I think in 1976 we had a time capsule buried and named the tree Elmer A. Elm
- Space for dogs to run would be great for city dwellers
- The fence is important to keep little ones from running into the street.
- It's pretty good as it is
- Gazebo for outdoor gathering
- Pollinator friendly landscaping. Not all grass, don't use pesticides



CRITIQUES, CONCERNS, CHANGES

Introduction

A key part of this process was creating a draft report that captures the feedback from the public gathering and the survey, then checking with participants about whether the report accurately reflected their words. **Nearly 20 neighborhood and community residents gathered January 22 to review and critique the draft report.** An online comment form was created, marketed publicly, and also sent directly to the participant list; no comments were received.

Participants said they appreciated the process, and raised no substantial concerns or changes related to the draft report.

Changes

No changes were made to the draft report.

Other concerns

Participants raised a few general concerns about the process and the city's involvement:

Influence of neighbors' voices on the redevelopment: One close neighbor of Central expressed concern that because the owner has ultimate authority over how to redevelop the building and property, with power also held by the city related to zoning and other issues, neighbors' voices and this report would not be taken seriously. City staff and officials said that the ideas and concerns raised would frame the main portion of the reuse study, and would be used as a primary guide when working with the developer.

Developer participation: Participants asked whether the developer had been invited to the meeting; it was noted that the meeting was public and open to all. City staff said they will encourage the developer to continue engaging the neighbors throughout the process, and that the developer will likely be present at city meetings when discussions begin on considering approval of the redevelopment.

Senior Friendship Center location: Some participants expressed frustration that the conversations did not focus more on potential reuse as a new location for the city's senior center. The city had bid on the property but was unsuccessful. Participants were encouraged to continue advocating by contacting their council members.

Closing, modifying Wabasha Street: One participant asked about the possibility of narrowing, modifying or closing Wabasha Street to traffic, noting it was a common theme in conversations because of pedestrian safety concerns. City staff said it was a possibility and could be looked at.



APPENDIX: PROJECT SUMMARY AND DESIGN

Participants

Through a public gathering held December 11, Engage Winona collected nearly **600 unique comments** from **nearly 50 individuals** representing primarily neighbors of Central, with some input from Winona residents in other neighborhoods.

Through the use of hard-copy surveys provided at the event and digital surveys sent to neighborhood residents and offered to the Winona community, Engage Winona collected **nearly 500 unique comments** plus ranked responses from **59 complete sets of responses** from Winona residents.

A large majority of respondents reported living near Central; nearly every single respondent reported living in the city of Winona (only a few did not provide addresses). More specific demographic information was not collected, given that the only key demographic factor to determine success was having a high percentage of participants from the neighborhood.

Event design and questions

At the public gathering, Engage Winona facilitated a World Cafe-style conversation. Participants were invited through mailed invitations to immediate neighbors, and through a variety of promotion using traditional and social media. Additionally, followup email invitations were sent to neighbors. Priority was placed on inviting neighbors, and ensuring their voices were heard at the event, by giving them special NEIGHBOR nametags.

Participants were asked three questions and given about 15 minutes to respond to each, with groups of 6-10 participants convened in circles. With each new question some participants switched groups, giving them the ability to interact with other participants. Facilitators guided each group and took detailed notes on comments. Additionally, some group participants chose to take notes on available whitepads. All notes were broken down into individual comments and sorted.

The three questions asked were:



1. What types of new uses for Central would best enhance or complement the neighborhood and improve the overall community?
2. What are your biggest concerns about the redevelopment of the building and grounds, and why?
3. Dream big: What would be an ideal plan for Central that meets the needs of the developer, neighborhood, and community?

Survey design and questions

Engage Winona collected **59 complete and unique sets of survey responses**. Two identical surveys were designed and provided: One was given to all participants at the public gathering; the other was provided and marketed digitally to Central neighbors and Winona community members.

Most questions were open-ended and asked for written answers; all of those comments were sorted and integrated into the themes above. Others asked for multiple-choice responses.

The survey collected basic demographic and contact information — name, address, and email — and asked participants about various uses and concerns.

The survey questions were:

1. What types of new uses for Central would best enhance or complement the neighborhood and improve the overall community?

2. What is the biggest need in the neighborhood the space and site could fulfill?

3. These potential uses have been mentioned. Circle those you see having the largest potential benefits and issues, and describe:

- Pre-kindergarten, childcare:
- Housing:
- Mixed-use (commercial and residential, live-work setup):
- Other institutional (religious space, etc.):
- Other (describe):

4. What overall concerns should be considered for reuse of the site, and why? (Circle and explain)



- Certain kinds of housing (explain):
- Rentals:
- Traffic:
- Keeping the play area:
- Creating green space:
- Other (explain):

5. Rate your level of concern if the building were allowed to sit vacant and deteriorate:

1 (Not at all) 2 (A little) 3 (Somewhat) 4 (Quite a bit) 5 (Extremely)

6. If a play area were retained, what would be the most desirable characteristics? (Can select multiple):

Play equipment ___ Surfacing ___ Adding to the play area ___ Natural features ___ Community garden
 ___ Other participatory/gathering space ___ Other (explain) _____

7. Dream big: If money and resources were no object, what would you want to see happen with the building and site?

8. Any other information, comments, or concerns regarding reuse of the site?

