

EAST END/SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT



Bringing a neighborhood together to celebrate its history and imagine its future.

SUMMARY REPORT

Presented June 2019

The full version of the report can be found at engagewinona.org.



Overview

Introduction

The East End/Side Neighborhood Project brought together a full neighborhood to celebrate its history and imagine its future. Over the course of 4-5 months, we connected with diverse cross-sections of the community, built and strengthened relationships and networks, collected rich stories of the neighborhood's history and culture, and heard a wide array of ideas for change. We:

- Connected with nearly 400 people and collected more than 3,000 unique comments
- Held more than 50 interviews and small-group gatherings with small and large business owners, neighborhood leaders, community stakeholders
- Hosted several large public events and conversations that drew more than 250 people
- Provided online and in-person surveys, with more than 160 responses
- Engaged with dozens of unheard and marginalized voices using targeted outreach
- Provided interactive activities and creative engagement approaches — like East Side Bingo

Goals

- **Connect** diverse, representative groups of residents to build relationships and social capital
- **Facilitate conversations** to learn what neighbors value, seek to change, and dream big about creating in their neighborhood
- **Identify the current story and create a future vision** of the neighborhood
- **Create a report** that includes data and stories, top themes and priorities, and strategies
- **Assist city in aligning resources** to support projects and ideas
- **Empower neighbors** by training and guiding folks to take on changemaking projects

Outcomes

- **Created strong and lasting social bonds** among neighborhood residents
- **Identified the values, assets and resources** that make the neighborhood unique
- **Collected and curated the ideas and projects** neighbors want for their future
- **Connected the neighborhood to city resources**
- **Report created statement of need** to leverage grants and investments
- **Provided rich qualitative data to the city** on the neighborhood's values and future visions
- **Empowered neighbors with changemaking tools and resources**
- **Assisted neighborhood leaders** with strategies to carry the vision and projects forward
- **Strengthened a neighborhood's identity, story, and sense of place**

Participants+demographics

The project focused on connecting with East End and East Side residents, as well as neighborhood business owners and employees, and other stakeholders (former residents, landlords, etc.).



- About **75 percent** were neighborhood residents
- Other participants were **business owners (5 percent); employees (10 percent); and former residents (10 percent)**
- **Ages ranged from elementary-age students to seniors**, with a balance and range
- **Household income aligned with neighborhood demographics:** More than half had incomes between \$25-\$75,000
- **Education levels varied widely:** about 25 percent completed high school; 25 percent had a certificate or associate degree; and 25 percent had a four-year degree
- About **two-thirds of participants were female**
- **About 33 percent parents** or guardians of children
- **About 90 percent white**, with pockets of other ethnicities/backgrounds

East Side+East End

Participants chose to define two neighborhoods: The East Side, and the East End. The general consensus was the East Side is Franklin Street to Mankato Avenue, and the East End is along and east of Mankato Avenue.

The two-neighborhood approach wasn't planned! It arose because many initially said the East End starts at Franklin Street, but wanted to make a distinction for "the true East End."

Top overall projects

- East End dog park (and potentially walking park)
- Revitalize baseball culture at Gabrych Park
- Beautify the boulevards (flowers, gardens, etc.)
- Bytow Byway: Walking/driving tour of Polish East End sites
- Rental property cleanup, oversight
- Help with future of Athletic Club
- Address perception (and reality) of crime
- Branding signs, wayfinders for East End



- Activities for youth
- Host neighborhood block parties
- Programs, amenities at public parks
- Better infrastructure, support for pedestrians+bicyclists
- Share the story - East End is a great place to buy a home, live
- Help make St. Stan's a tourist destination and community hub
- Spruce Up Club - help neighbors in need with small projects
- Turn alleys into art, gathering places

Values+Visions

Values: What folks appreciate, like, and want to maintain.

Visions: What folks would like to change, and ideas for making it happen.

Businesses+institutions

What large businesses, small businesses, and institutions (schools, museums, etc.) value and seek to change about their relationship to the neighborhood; immediate and long-term challenges they face; how strong of a connection they feel to the neighborhood; interest in participating in and supporting neighborhood activities and change.

- Large businesses had few neighborhood-specific challenges or issues
- Small businesses face many challenges; few are neighborhood-specific. Successful owners attribute stability to building a community of supporters
- Institutions (St. Stan's Elementary, W-K, Polish Museum, East End Rec, etc.) are generally stable, with some concerns about fading support from the neighborhood and community
- Business owners and leaders are seeking to build stronger connections and collaborations with the neighborhood, but not sure how

Values

- Working-class neighborhood
- Industry-appropriate neighborhood
- Icons, especially St. Stan's Basilica
- Unique small and home-based businesses

Visions



- Better walking paths/sidewalks in industrial area
- Concerned about Athletic Club's future
- Desire for placemaking/wayfinding signs
- More homes, unique locations as businesses
- Creation of business associations - separate for large and small business owners
- Trains - still seeking Louisa Street overpass

Public spaces+parks

The perception of, use of, and value provided by public spaces and parks: East End Rec and land, Sobieski Park, Gabrych Park, and Sinclair Park; the desire for programming, activities and amenities. East Side and East End residents love their public spaces and parks and were filled with practical ideas for improvements and changes

Values

- East End Rec - by far the most-mentioned, and most-favorited, with hundreds of comments; loved by multiple generations
- Historical baseball culture - once a showcase to the neighborhood and a way to bring the community together
- Sobieski Park Lodge - pleased with the neighborhood's grassroots effort to build a cornerstone facility
- East End Rec garden - would like to see more community gardens in other locations
- Sinclair Park - appreciated just as it is; no major changes suggested

Visions

- Dog park - by far the largest request for a public project in the East End
- Revitalized baseball culture at Gabrych Park - desire for tasteful redesign and upgrade, along with family-friendly programming, and a new name for the Chiefs
- More youth programming at East End Rec
- Sobieski Park - replace run-down tennis courts and reimagine use of green space
- A walking park near industrial area for lunchtime walks and walking meetings
- Connect Sobieski/Gabrych parks by removing Wabasha, adding green space, parking
- Opposition and questions about Friendship Center relocation to East End Rec - like the idea of the Center in the neighborhood, but not combined with the Rec

Housing+appearance

The condition and upkeep of neighborhood homes, owned and rentals; the desire to help people maintain their homes; thoughts on shotgun houses; and other housing issues and opportunities.

- Neighborhood seen as affordable housing by some, a neighborhood to avoid by others
- Residents have seen a transformation in the last 20-30 years, with many longtime residents and multi-generational families moving out, with many homes converted into rentals
- Transition has greatly diminished the once-dominant Polish culture and influence



- A cultural and social division between owners and renters

Values

- Neighborhood is a go-to for inexpensive homes for a variety of needs — single person, married couple, young family, retiree-age couple looking to downsize
- Residents appreciate the variety of unique home designs and styles
- One of the largest strengths is longtime neighbors and residents
- Shotgun houses: Residents have mixed feelings. Some have attachments to the homes, and see potential for unique affordable housing; others note many were cheaply built and are now rundown rentals

Visions

- Spruce Up Club: A grassroots group that volunteers across the neighborhood on small repairs for homeowners unable to do or afford to do them
- A coordinated effort to beautify the boulevards, especially in the East End
- Widespread desire to see rental property appearances improved
- Change the narrative around home buying - East End is attractive
- More awareness and promotion of home programs - city loans for income-eligible homeowners, Habitat's A Brush With Kindness
- Coordinated effort to buy rundown properties, then redevelop sections of blocks
- Placemaking/wayfinding signs for sense of place, make neighborhood a destination

Transportation+infrastructure

How neighborhood residents travel — by car, foot, or bike; what they appreciate about the infrastructure that exists; what they'd like to change or add.

- Love that the neighborhood is a destination, with little traffic passing through and no busy streets outside of Mankato Avenue
- Neighborhood is convenient and accessible to many other areas
- Biggest frustration is with train delays and backups
- Lack of consistent sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure

Values

- Convenient location
- Low traffic - feel safe and more comfortable biking and walking

Visions

- Interested in Louisa Street overpass, not optimistic; opposed to Mankato overpass
- Notification signal and signs for train switching at Mankato
- Bike path, lane connections from neighborhood to other areas, including Lake Park
- Convenient walking connections to retail area - walking bridge over Shives Creek
- Sidewalks, crosswalks in retail area and large parking lots to address safety concerns



- More consistent sidewalks in industrial area
- Address industrial area parking - some areas clogged during work hours

Cultural+social

The sense of belonging and place; whether residents feel welcome and accepted; how neighbors gather and come together; ideas to build closer connections.

- The neighborhood once had incredibly close bonds that they celebrated and worked hard to maintain, though many bonds have faded in the last few decades
- Older and younger residents both hungry to revitalize social connections, but most aren't sure of where to start
- Residents appreciate the communities already in place, like corner bars, bingo nights, and more, and are looking to build new ones

Values

- Neighborhood bars continue to be primary social centers of the neighborhood
- Residents (for the most part) appreciate the growing diversity, especially in the East Side, with younger couples, families, and people of color
- Neighborhood culture and design encourages face-to-face interactions
- East End historically known as a close-knit neighborhood where residents took care of each other and looked out for each other

Visions

- Informal neighborhood associations/councils
- Informal social events in comfortable public places
- More block parties, especially held on streets or in alleys
- More activities for youth, to serve kids and bring families together in culture and community-building
- Ways of welcoming homeowners and renters to the neighborhood
- Mankato (or Mankato Avenue) Days, a neighborhood festival

Safety

Residents' general feeling of safety; the amount and types of crime observed; ideas for organizing and community policing.

- Focused on the presence of drug houses and the desire to get rid of them
- Value in neighbors coming together to address safety issues
- Opinions on how safe the East Side and East End are vary widely; perspective matters

Values

- East End Neighborhood Watch has had a significant and lasting impact in empowering neighbors to address issues and turn around trends



Visions

- Combating the presence of apparent drug houses in rentals; residents have loosely organized to record and report activity, but aren't sure what else to do
- Increased police presence, not patrol cars but community police officers
- East End Neighborhood Watch founders hoping for renewed energy, new members

Heritage+preservation

The desire to maintain, preserve, share, and expand knowledge around the history and heritage of the neighborhood and its residents.

- East End (and East Side) one of the richest cultural and historical neighborhoods of Winona
- The history and culture is fairly well-known, both by long-time and newer residents; it also may be the best-known neighborhood history among the larger Winona community
- Most can point to the large influence and presence of Polish (and German) immigrants, the large working-class families, the prevalence of industry and manufacturing, “the hog line,” the shotgun houses, and other elements

Values

- Most well-known history is the prominence of Polish immigrants and their work to build the neighborhood, provide labor, and create the iconic St. Stan’s Basilica
- Working-class culture that started with immigrant families is still dominant
- The Catholic heritage of the neighborhood also a strong part of residents' identity

Visions

- Widespread desire among residents and the Polish Heritage Museum to celebrate Polish heritage and culture with a series of coordinated community events
- St. Stan’s Basilica is exploring ways to create more interest and tourism

Storytelling+placemaking

Ways to increase a sense of place and identity through infrastructure, storytelling, or other projects.

- Most prominent idea: placemaking and wayfinding signs for the East End neighborhood
- Some East End residents find the “hog line” phrase mildly insulting, a way for outsiders to perpetuate tired stereotypes about the neighborhood’s cleanliness, safety and quality

Visions

- Wayfinding, “Welcome To” signs for the East End, to strengthen place and increase pride; some suggested an arch or gateway at a main intersection
- Similar signage or other elements to brand the East Side
- The Polish Museum has long been interested in establishing an alleyway art program



- The Polish Museum's vision of Bytow Byway, a walking/biking/driving tour of the East End, could serve as a significant attraction for tourists and locals
- A neighborhood newsletter, either digital or a printed handout delivered to doors
- Imprinting poetry or designs, created by neighborhood residents, into sidewalks

Mankato Avenue—a future vision

This project included working with residents, business owners, and neighborhood leaders to imagine a future for the Mankato Avenue corridor. The general consensus was:

- Individual bright spots, but lacking an overall vision and the kind of structures and support that would lead to a critical mass of diverse businesses
- Many stable service and retail businesses have built a community of regular supporters
- Small business owners highly supportive of creating a new vision for Mankato, especially if there's an advisory group they can participate in

Values

- Businesses are, with few exceptions, locally owned and operated and cater to local needs
- Multiple businesses operate out of unique buildings, including converted homes
- Many businesses build strong community among customers and supporters

Challenges

- Design of and heavy traffic on Mankato Avenue presents a significant barrier
- The experience of getting stuck waiting for a train is a detriment to daytime, lunchtime visits
- Individual businesses are destinations, but little reason to visit Mankato Avenue as a whole

Visions

- Biggest desire for Mankato Avenue was for a restaurant - a sit-down restaurant that wasn't a chain, a coffee shop with space for gathering, and other suggestions
- Participants enthusiastic about unique, locally owned stores, especially kid- and family-friendly, an artist-run store and gallery featuring neighborhood artists, and others
- Any number of redesigns for Mankato, including traffic calming measures, a landscaped median, crosswalks with flashing signals, dedicated bike lanes, and other elements
- A widely expressed need for a focus on pedestrians and bicyclists, with well-labeled crosswalks and striped or dedicated bike lanes
- Concern that new businesses could fundamentally change the character of Mankato Avenue, with a desire to maintain the uniqueness, including turning homes into businesses



Social+engagement outcomes

The process of bringing people together in lively and challenging conversations, and then engaging them in bringing to life the projects and ideas that emerge. Successes included:

- Neighbors overcame or set aside political differences to focus on shared interests
- Strengthened social and neighborhood bonds to combat social isolation and loneliness and contribute to building a thriving, healthy, connected community
- Collected opinions, projects and ideas in a way that both allows the city to prioritize its future investments and empowers neighbors to drive their own change
- Bringing together diverse cross-sections of the neighborhood in energizing and fun ways
- Hundreds of neighbors got to know each other, with many never having met each other
- On multiple occasions, people at the same table discovered they lived next to each other

East End Bingo

We debuted East Side/End Bingo as a creative and accessible way to bring neighbors together. The game featured images of East Side and East End icons and places, and provided trivia. It was so popular at a May event that several dozen residents played at once, with many others waiting, and children jumped in to be callers and card-holders. The games continued for two hours straight until all of the prizes were gone!

Next steps

- Prioritize and focus the wealth of ideas into manageable projects and steps
- Seek quick wins with projects that will require focused efforts, but not substantial resources
- Focus on small, incremental change
- Focus on one project or one issue, in collaboration with the neighborhood
- Share what's already happening with a gathering, or reaching out to neighborhood leaders
- Communicate regularly with the neighborhood going forward
- Provide guidance to folks launching some of the projects and ideas they've imagined
- Create a project tracker that documents all of the ongoing efforts in the neighborhood
- Convene a leadership group, and check in on progress, feedback, and ideas

