

Blake Road Corridor Assessment

Conclusions and recommendations

The Blake Road Corridor is a highly concentrated neighborhood in Hopkins, Minnesota. This one mile by one-half mile is bound by busy roadways and contains approximately 1,350 housing units (primarily rental), but relatively few services or community facilities. In 2005, due to concerns about safety and a lack of youth programming, the Hopkins Chief of Police, the Hopkins School District, the Hennepin County Strategic Initiative and Community Engagement Department, and other partners began discussing strategies to revitalize the community. Now known as the Blake Road Corridor Stakeholders Collaborative, the group includes a wide range of representatives, including residents, business leaders, faith community leaders, and school, city, and county staff.

Description of the assessment

In 2006, the Collaborative initiated a study to guide their community revitalization efforts. The goals of this assessment were to: (1) clarify community members' concerns; (2) identify long-term solutions that promote community livability, safety, growth, and development; and (3) inform a plan to address issues, engage stakeholders, and empower residents.

The assessment included multiple data collection approaches, including:

- Interviews with 383 Corridor residents, conducted in English, Spanish, and Somali.
- An online survey completed by 40 of 56 (71%) Collaborative members, including city employees, school staff, youth program leaders, social service employees, and others.
- A series of five focus groups conducted with a total of 43 participants, including Somali and Hispanic/Latino residents, renters, homeowners, and business owners/landlords.
- A review of data submitted by the Hopkins Police Department and School District.
- A review of other local and national community revitalization efforts

Variation in perceptions

This summary highlights common themes and recommendations based on the opinions of a diverse array of community stakeholders. It is important to note that there was not a single common perception of the Corridor. In general, Collaborative members expressed more concerns about the community than did residents. For example, they were more likely to rate the quality of life in the Corridor as “poor” or “very poor” (81%, compared to 16 percent of the residents).

Within residents, there was also disagreement. Residents who were White, owned their homes, or lived in the community for a long time, tended to rate their community more negatively than did other residents. As the community moves forward with planning, it will be important to recognize and address these inconsistencies and to engage a diverse array of partners representing different perspectives.

Community strengths

Schools. Despite the relatively poor performance of Corridor students on standardized tests (compared to students district-wide), community members and parents generally rated Hopkins schools positively. Eight in ten Collaborative members, and nine in ten parents and youth, felt that the schools provide a good educational experience, have high academic expectations for students, and adequately serve students of all cultural/racial backgrounds.

Police. Residents and Collaborative members had positive perceptions of the Hopkins police. At least nine in ten respondents felt that police responded promptly and appropriately to incidents and adequately served all residents. However, some Collaborative members and residents (i.e., those who were White and long-time residents) felt there was not enough police presence in the Corridor.

Areas of concern

Crime and safety. Perceptions of crime and safety were mixed. City data reflects a decrease in crime since 2005, and most Collaborative members and residents feel safe in the Corridor during the day. On the other hand, at least half of the stakeholders (52% of Collaborative members, 58% of residents) feel that crime has gotten worse. Seventy-three percent of the Collaborative members, and 33 percent of the residents feel unsafe in the neighborhood at night.

Limited recreational programming. At least three-quarters of the Collaborative members rated the availability of after-school programs for teens and recreational programs for young children as “poor” or “very poor.” Resident ratings were more positive, with two-thirds expressing satisfaction with after-school activities for teens and three-quarters satisfied with programs for young children. Perhaps as a result of limited activities, many individuals (94% of Collaborative members, 60% of residents) expressed concerns related to unsupervised or unoccupied youth.

Absence of an accessible, high-quality community center or park. Almost all Collaborative members (94%) rated the availability of a community center as “poor” or “very poor;” two-thirds rated the quality as poor. Residents did not necessarily share these concerns, with one-quarter identifying the quality and availability of recreational facilities as a problem and one-third identifying availability of a community center as a problem. Relatively few residents (19%-30%) use existing parks or resource centers, most often due to a lack of knowledge about them.

Limited screening and monitoring of renters. Rental management issues were of concern. Collaborative members and some residents felt that the lack of thorough tenant screening, as well as absentee landlords who failed to maintain their properties, were significant problems in the Corridor.

Poor lighting and unsafe walking areas. Nine in ten Collaborative members rated sidewalks as poor; almost half rated street lighting as poor. Almost half of the residents (44% to 46%) also expressed concerns with lighting and pedestrian safety. When asked for suggestions for improving quality of life in the Corridor, residents most often mentioned traffic management and lighting.

Limited access to social services. Approximately two-thirds of the Collaborative members rated the availability of social service agencies, health clinics, child care services, and programs for the elderly as “poor” or “very poor.” Concerns about social services ranked among residents’ most prevalent concerns, though only approximately one-quarter expressed dissatisfaction with services.

Recommendations

- Create a group of external and internal stakeholders to prioritize and guide revitalization efforts, either as a continuation of the existing Collaborative or as a new committee.
- Increase access to social services and recreation programs, especially for teenagers, by:
 - Conducting promotion and outreach activities to increase use of existing services.
 - Reducing access barriers, by providing transportation to services outside of the Corridor or co-locating services in community settings.
 - Creating a community center to serve as a hub for recreational and service programs within the Corridor.
- Improve lighting and sidewalks to make areas more pedestrian friendly.
- Increase landlord accountability for screening and monitoring their tenants.

**Wilder
Research**

www.wilderresearch.org

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700; FAX 651-280-3700



For more information

For more information about this report, contact Cheryl Holm-Hansen at Wilder Research, 651-280-2708.

Authors: Cheryl Holm-Hansen and Monica Idzulis
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