

## **Blake Road Corridor Assessment**

### **Phase I findings and recommendations**

The Blake Road Corridor is a highly concentrated neighborhood in Hopkins, Minnesota. In 2005, a group now known as the Blake Road Corridor Stakeholders Collaborative began discussing strategies to revitalize the area. The group includes a wide range of representatives, including residents, business and faith community leaders, and school, city, and county officials.

#### ***Description of assessment***

In 2006, the Collaborative decided to conduct a study to guide their efforts. The purpose of this assessment was to identify the concerns of residents and other stakeholders and propose solutions to promote community livability, safety. The following strategies were used:

- An online survey completed by 40 of 56 (71%) Collaborative members.
- 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.

#### ***Community strengths***

**Schools were seen as high-quality.** Stakeholders typically agreed that school facilities are well-maintained and that the schools provide a good educational experience, have high academic expectations, and adequately serve students of all cultural and language backgrounds. The few focus group participants who were parents expressed high satisfaction with their children's teachers, safety at school, and education overall.

**The Stakeholder Collaborative was seen as a strong partnership.** Almost all survey respondents agreed that the group is targeting the right issues, has strong leadership, and considers input from all stakeholders. Many said that the group represents a diverse set of stakeholders committed to revitalizing the Corridor.

Some people suggested increasing representation from residents and local businesses.

**Most city services received positive ratings.** All stakeholders rated the following services as "good" or better: police/law enforcement, fire protection, and emergency medical services/ ambulance.

#### ***Areas of concern***

Overall, stakeholders are concerned about quality of life in the Corridor, with eight in ten survey respondents rating quality of life as poor, and seven in ten saying that the quality of life had worsened over the past three years. Three quarters were dissatisfied with the Corridor as a place to live and work. The following issues emerged as concerns:

#### **Concerns about crime and safety in the Corridor.**

Most stakeholders (73%) feel at least "somewhat unsafe" at night and half feel that crime has gotten worse. Respondents are especially concerned about drug dealing, gangs, domestic violence, and assaults. Focus group participants voiced similar concerns.

**Limited recreational programming and services for children and youth.** Most survey respondents (74% - 80%) rated availability of recreational programs for young children and after-school programs/activities for teens as poor. Throughout the survey and focus groups, participants highlighted the importance of safe, supervised programs for youth as critical for reducing crime and enhancing the community.

**The absence of an accessible, high-quality park or community center.** Most survey respondents (74%-94%) rated availability of a community center and a park as poor. Participants often mentioned the need to improve the quality and accessibility of the current park and to have a service/activity hub.

**Poorly maintained properties.** Four in ten survey respondents disagreed that single family homes and

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apartment buildings are well-maintained. Survey respondents and focus group participants frequently mentioned poorly maintained rental properties. They also described concerns about businesses, such as litter and rundown appearances.

#### **Limited screening and monitoring of renters.**

Participants frequently mentioned concerns related to tenant management. Landlords were described as failing to appropriately screen or monitor tenants, especially when they do not live in the community.

**Lack of resident and business involvement in the community.** Almost all survey respondents (96%) rated the sense of community among residents as poor. While some focus group participants expressed a sense of community, others wanted more involvement. Some noted challenges such as the number of renters and the diversity of languages/ cultures in the area. Businesses were also described as uninvolved in community revitalization efforts.

**Poor lighting and unsafe walking areas.** Nine in ten survey respondents rated pedestrian safety as poor, while almost half rated street lighting as poor. These issues were frequently described as contributing to the general lack of safety in the Corridor.

**Limited police presence/responsiveness.** While feedback about police was generally positive, nearly four in ten survey respondents disagreed that there are enough officers serving the Corridor. Some focus group participants were dissatisfied with their responsiveness, especially when interacting with residents of color.

**Failure of current businesses to meet community needs.** Almost half of those surveyed disagreed that businesses meet the needs of residents. Participants provided a range of other suggestions, including health care facilities, restaurants, and grocery stores.

## ***Recommendations***

Survey respondents and focus group participants provided the following recommendations for improving the Blake Road Corridor:

- Increasing availability of programming, especially programs for youth, but also parent support and adult education programs.
- Improving access to or quality of the local park or creating a community center.
- Increasing landlord accountability for screening and monitoring their tenants.
- Conducting more frequent and rigorous inspections of rental properties.
- Improving lighting and sidewalks to make areas more pedestrian friendly.
- Increasing parental and community involvement in community improvement efforts.
- Increasing the visibility of police officers, including bicycle, foot, and canine patrols.

Residents who participated in the focus groups provided other suggestions, such as access to transportation, services for Hispanic/Latino and Somali families, and child care. While these issues did not emerge in the survey, they should be considered due to the underrepresentation of residents among the respondents.

## ***Next steps***

It is not possible to determine whether these results reflect the perceptions of all residents or to prioritize recommendations based on the likelihood that they will successfully transform the community. The results will be used to guide a second phase, which will involve gathering feedback from more residents, and comparing the recommendations to results of other local and national community revitalization efforts.

#### **For more information**

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