

5. Community Engagement Process

This chapter gives an overview of the community engagement process used during the development of the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan. Additional information on this process, including a summary of comments received, can be found in Appendices A and B.

Steering Committee

Early in the planning process, a steering committee was chosen for the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan. The steering committee plays an important role in any small area planning process such as this one. This role includes:

- **Advisory on process.** The steering committee provides guidance to City staff and consultants on how to structure the planning process.
- **Communication with appointing organizations.** Steering committee members serve as a communication link between the study process and the entity they represent.
- **Public engagement.** Steering committee members may be asked to work with community organizations in getting the word out about public events related to this study.
- **Advisory on plan content.** Although the committee will have input in the plan, broader public input is essential in informing the plan. The steering committee may be asked to be a sounding board and offer preliminary feedback on plan options in preparation for broader public engagement.
- **Representative.** Steering committee members are representing the values of their appointing organization. They also have a responsibility to factor in the perspectives of other groups and individuals. They must consider: citywide policies and values, the satisfaction of multiple needs, and the feasibility of plan implementation.

The membership of the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan steering committee was carefully chosen to be representative of the neighborhood's demographics, organizational affiliations, and geographic distribution. Although not all of them were able to regularly attend steering committee meetings, all members were kept informed of the plan's progress via frequent informational updates.

Among their roles, the steering committee members helped advise as to the best way to reach out to the neighborhood as a whole. This is described below.

Public Outreach Strategy

Public involvement is a key component of any community planning process. In addition to providing valuable insight into neighborhood needs and



Korean flyer announcing small area plan meeting to community

preferences, it helps the public to become more informed about how City decisions are made, and hopefully increases public support for the plan once it is completed. Strong support from neighborhood stakeholders increases the likelihood of timely and effective plan implementation. Without good public involvement, the plan may present a vision for the neighborhood that is inconsistent with neighborhood priorities and lacks support.

It is the goal of a good planning process to reach and engage a representative sample of the area’s stakeholders, including residents, employees, businesses, and visitors. This is not always easy. At the start of the planning process, several public engagement challenges for Cedar Riverside were identified:

- *Culturally diverse and multilingual residents.* Cultural and language barriers increase the difficulty in communicating with a significant segment of the population. A brief review of area residents show multiple languages represented, including Somali, Korean, Vietnamese, Oromo, Eritrean, and Spanish. Many of the residents in Cedar Riverside are recent immigrants who are not yet fully fluent in English. Additionally, many come from cultures with very different governmental structures than the US, so they are not familiar with the model of participatory democracy embodied in a planning process like this. Even when neither of these are barriers, there are cultural differences. For instance, though it is common in the US for individuals to speak for themselves, some of the cultures represented typically defer to a designated spokesperson to speak on behalf of a group.
- *Largely low income population.* In addition to being recent immigrants, many of the neighborhood’s residents are low income. This means that much of their time is consumed with long hours dedicated to work, education, and family care. There is frequently not much time for discretionary activities, such as attending planning meetings. With pressing needs, involvement in a city planning process might not be a priority. This is compounded by the fact that many area families have young children, which makes attending meetings difficult.
- *Lack of central gathering place.* Due to the disconnected layout of the neighborhood and lack of community space, there are few places suitable for large-scale meetings. For those locations that do exist, they tend to be more accessible to some parts of the neighborhood than to others. It is not surprising that additional community space came up frequently during the outreach process as a priority for the neighborhood.
- *Role of neighborhood as research subject.* Largely as a result of being on the doorstep of two major institutions of higher education, Cedar Riverside is no stranger to the role of research subject. Numerous students, faculty, and other university affiliates have researched and surveyed this area and its people. While these efforts generated interesting results and informative reports, they were often not followed by any improvements or changes to identified issues.

This has led to a level of fatigue and impatience among some residents who are anxious to see things accomplished, rather than just discussed.

- *Transient student population.* In addition to more permanent residents, there is a significant student presence in Cedar Riverside – both residents and those who attend school on the area campuses. The student presence tends to be transient, since most are only at the school for a few years. Transient populations typically lack a sense of personal investment in an area and are less likely to see themselves as having a stake in its future.

To address these various challenges, a framework for public involvement was crafted. Three major stages of the public process were identified: general visioning and goals, research and analysis, and development of recommendations. The basic idea was to split each of these stages of public involvement into two major parts:

1. *Large public meeting.* A standard public meeting, open house style, which all neighborhood stakeholders are invited to attend. Accommodations would be made to ensure the meeting was well-advertised, and that translated meeting materials and interpreters would be available at the meeting. These meetings were all held at the Brian Coyle Center, the venue accessible to the largest concentration of population within the neighborhood: the residents of Riverside Plaza and The Cedars. Meetings were scheduled at a range of times outside normal work hours, and child care was offered as an option.
2. *Smaller follow-up meetings and interviews.* For the various groups that were underrepresented at the large meeting, a series of smaller meetings would be convened, with locations, styles, and times convenient and comfortable to the specific groups. Some groups would be targeted and approached directly, though the invitation would be open to any group with interest.



Participants write notes at a small area plan public meeting

To combat “research fatigue,” planning staff reviewed and summarized results from previous planning processes and presented this information at the first public meeting, to assure residents that this planning process would build on past efforts rather than duplicate them. Particularly since the neighborhood had very recently completed an extensive visioning process for its NRP First Step Plan, the small area plan was able to bypass some of this work and move more quickly on to formation of neighborhood priorities.

Outreach Prior to Meetings

Getting the word out about meetings is always an important part of community outreach. People cannot attend something they are not aware is happening. A number of approaches were used throughout the plan development process to let people know about upcoming events and opportunities. These included:

- *Neighborhood contact list.* Email addresses were collected from a variety of sources. The small area plan built on already existing lists of key stakeholders and interested participants put together by the neighborhood's NRP staff and the Cedar Riverside Business Association. All together, well over 200 people were reached via email.
- *Press releases and media advisory.* A media list was developed early in the process and used consistently. It included local and regional media sources (including newspaper, radio, and television) serving the area. Ethnic publications targeting certain populations in the neighborhood, such as those serving African immigrants, were included in the list.
- *Contacts with key groups and individuals.* Personal contacts were made with key contacts, including representatives of area institutions and immigrant groups.
- *Attending community events.* Whenever possible, staff had information about the small area planning process available at other community events, meetings, and gatherings, so that participants could learn how to get involved.
- *Flyers.* Flyers (translated into several languages) were distributed throughout the neighborhood, including the major multi-family residential buildings. Contacts were made with building representatives to ensure the flyers were posted appropriately.
- *Website.* The Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan website was regularly updated throughout the planning process. It contained information about upcoming events, meeting summaries and materials from previous presentations.
- *Steering committee.* The steering committee performed the valuable service of reaching out to their own contact networks to let them know about upcoming community outreach opportunities.

When reaching out to immigrant communities, the availability of translated materials and interpreters at the meeting itself was emphasized. This was moderately successful in that some immigrants attended all the public meetings and made use of the translations and interpreters. However, as predicted, more input was received from immigrant communities at subsequent follow-up meetings.

Kickoff Meetings

Prior to the larger scale neighborhood meetings, there were several smaller meetings to gather input from key stakeholders. This series of meetings was held from May – July 2006. This included guidance on the most effective way to reach out to the neighborhood as a whole as well as the scope of the plan content. Input from these meetings provided direction for the entire planning process. The groups represented at these meetings were regularly engaged as the plan progressed.

Community Representatives

The community organizations added valuable guidance in what should be priority issues for the plan to tackle. In addition to content, neighborhood stakeholders offered insight into the best methods for community engagement. These groups included:

- *West Bank Community Coalition*
- *Cedar Riverside Business Association*
- *West Bank CDC*
- *NRP steering committee*
- *Community leaders* - a group representing key neighborhood organizations, including nonprofit and social service groups as well as immigrant groups
- *Riverside Plaza Tenants' Association*

Neighborhood Institutions

With intentions to stay in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood for a long time to come, the large institutions provided insight into the issues of their constituents, their own capital planning, and how they can be better neighbors. Conversations with the major institutions included:

- *Fairview Hospital*
- *University of Minnesota*
- *Augsburg College*

City of Minneapolis

While the small area planning was being conducted by the Planning Division, all City staff and policymakers will participate in its implementation. Additionally, many staff provided insight into current city projects in the neighborhood as well as methods for outreach. Staff and policymaker input came from:

- *Public Works Transportation*
- *Community Engagement*
- *CPED Business Development*
- *Ward 2 Council Office*
- *Planning Commission*

Phase #1: Neighborhood Priorities

The first phase of outreach kicked off in December 2006. The main purpose of this meeting was to inform the public about the small area planning process, and to gather input on key priorities and issues.

A public meeting was held at the Brian Coyle Center in December. The format was an introductory presentation followed by three interactive stations where people could get information and provide input. Materials and summaries from this meeting are included in Appendix B.



Participants in a small area plan community meeting

- **Guiding principles.** As mentioned above, a number of other plans have been done for the Cedar Riverside neighborhood over the years. This information was used to formulate a list of common themes brought up by neighborhood participants. At this station in the meeting, participants ranked their top priorities from a list of themes and added important items missing from the list. The prioritized issues list helped in formulating the guiding principles for the entire plan.
- **Problem areas.** Concerns about the perception and reality of public safety in the neighborhood came up very early in the planning process. However, the focus of this plan is largely on land use and development, rather than increasing law enforcement efforts. A strategy was needed to determine how land use intervention could be used to help create safer, more secure areas. This exercise allowed people to identify areas in the neighborhood where such interventions were needed. These areas were mapped and recommendations were formulated. See Chapter 6 for a summary of how exercise determined recommendations for the public realm.
- **General survey.** As a general information-gathering tool, participants took a survey. It included questions about how residents travel around the neighborhood, where they shop, and what they do in the neighborhood, as well as open-ended questions about what are top priorities for the area. This survey was also available online for stakeholders who did not attend the meeting. The information was summarized and used to determine both current neighborhood characteristics and future priorities.

To cast a broad net, this meeting had the most extensive translation services available of all the meetings. Translated materials and interpreters were available for Somali, Oromo, Korean, and Vietnamese. Later meetings focused primarily on Somali and Korean, since there was much more response to these resources from participants.

A series of follow-up meetings included the Riverview Tower Condominium Association meeting, Riverside Plaza Tenants' Association meeting, two tenant's meetings at The Cedars, and a meeting at the Korean Service Center. The Cedars and Korean Service Center meetings were bilingual, with an interpreter assisting staff presenters. Input from these meetings was added to that which was received at the

main public meeting, and generally served to reinforce already identified themes.

The survey was also part of the follow-up to the meeting, and notification of its availability was emailed out to many in the community, including students. Over 180 responses were received and compiled. Results are summarized in Appendix B.

Phase #2: Research and Analysis

After the major priorities were determined, staff assessed what issues needed more in-depth analysis to assist in providing meaningful recommendations. Public input was needed to affirm the findings and direction of this work. It was in this context that the second phase of public outreach was formulated.

The second major public meeting was held in May 2007. Instead of a set time for people to participate, which was the case with the first meeting, there was a broader window and an open house format. Participants chose which stations to visit and how they wanted to provide input. A wide variety of information was made available at four separate stations:

- **Orientation.** A general station gave an overview of the small area planning process for people not already familiar with it. It also included a demographic overview of the community and a review of its historic resources.
- **Land use.** Information provided insight into existing and potential future land use and zoning. An exercise allowed participants to determine where they would like to see new development in the neighborhood, and what type of development would be most appropriate.
- **Transportation.** This station had three main focus areas: a traffic analysis for Riverside Avenue with draft recommendations, an analysis of parking alternatives for the neighborhood, and an introduction to the Central Corridor LRT station area planning process. The latter was just being integrated into the small area plan, as discussed in the Transportation Plan chapter.
- **Case studies.** This section reviewed three different development case studies in various parts of the neighborhood. A market-driven one looked at potential development around the Dania Hall site. An urban design-oriented one looked at development options along Riverside Avenue. The last case study focused on the public realm and connectivity to seek ways to build connections throughout the area.



Participants providing input on urban design characteristics.

Participant comments helped to provide input and structure to the three major components of the plan: land use/design, transportation, and economic development.

Another, more focused, public meeting was held as part of this phase as well. In April 2007, market analysis results were presented to a group of neighborhood businesses and other interested individuals. Participants

provided feedback on businesses needs within the neighborhood. As part of the market study, numerous other interviews and smaller meetings were held with property owners, arts and cultural groups, and major institutions.

As with the previous public meeting, a series of follow-up meetings were scheduled. Venues included two bilingual meetings at The Cedars, a meeting with Greystone condominium residents (also inviting others from the surrounding neighborhood area), and the NRP Economic Development Committee.

Phase #3: Draft Recommendations

After the second phase of public involvement, staff began drafting recommendations for the plan based on the input received to date and the research and analysis conducted. The third phase presented these draft recommendations to the public and asked for their opinions.

In an open house format, an initial presentation and three stations encouraged people to learn more and provide input. Participants identified whether they supported or opposed the proposed recommendations in a survey and with written comments. These were organized by the three major sections of the plan: land use/design, transportation, and economic development:

- **Land use and design.** The recommendations focused on future land use, urban design, and public realm improvements.
- **Transportation.** Recommendations focused on general transportation improvements, Cedar Avenue, Riverside Avenue, and the Central Corridor LRT station. Central Corridor was treated a little differently since the focus was on identifying priorities for station design, so participants ranked criteria for the station design based on their preferences.
- **Economic development.** Recommendations were organized primarily by market area in the neighborhood, including Seven Corners, Cedar-Riverside, South Cedar, and Riverside Avenue.

The general response to the proposed recommendations was largely positive; almost all received a clear “support” majority. Input provided important guidance as to fine tuning the language and clarifying key points.

Staff used this feedback, along with technical information from the various consultant reports (Appendices D-H), to write the first draft of the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan. Once steering committee input was incorporated, the plan became available for the formal 45-day public review period beginning on January 4, 2008.



Community members discussing the merits of a Central Corridor station design