

MEETING NOTES

DATE	13 February 2025
VENUE	Revive Center
MEETING TITLE	North Freeway Visioning Workshop
ATTENDEES	<p><i>Buey R. Tut (Spark); Mark McLaughlin (City of Omaha); Court Barber (MAPA); Brenda Council; Manuel Cook (Lamp Rynearson); Derek Miller (City of Omaha); Carlos Morales (MAPA); Clarice Dombeck (The Redress Movement); Ryan ZimmerMas (Spark); David Pollock (Code Black Tech); Alisha Davis Huggies; Jarrod Walker (NDOT); Anthony K. Rogers – Wright (M4BL); Virginia Smith (Next Vizion Salon); Cheryl Weston; Dalamar Lee McTizic; Veta Jeffery; Myriah Johnson (I Be Black Girl); Kelechi Chibuikem (Metro Transit); Keith Station (City of Omaha);</i></p> <p><i>WSP: Timothy Adams; Kevin Carder; Isabel Gunderson; Bryan Robinson; Sam Jones; Jennifer Pangborn</i></p>

NOTES:

General Comments:

- The main themes identified in the workshop include Access & Connectivity; Health & Wellness; Economic Development & Opportunity; Diversifying Housing; and Community Involvement
- Overall community members were optimistic about the future opportunities this project can offer. However, some participants were skeptical of the feasibility of completely taking away the Freeway, along with some of the other tools presented. Participants made it clear that they would like to see this be a North Omaha community-led effort.
- When asked about what concerns people have regarding a potential North Freeway project, participants expressed concerns about gentrification, displacement, and potential for a major project to inflict further trauma on people in the community.
- A common goal throughout the day was how to inspire and create spaces for young people to want to stay in North Omaha

MENTI Discussion:

- Overall, the MENTI discussion facilitated conversations amongst participants about the current and past impacts of the North freeway. It also stimulated the ideation of future goals for the North Omaha freeway and community.
- The North Freeways Impact on the Community: Participants brought up the multiple challenges and implications the North Freeway has had on their community. Mainly the limited access to essential resources, lack of community control, health and well-being concerns, economic disparity, and overall lack of accessibility and opportunity.
 - Accessibility meant more than transportation to the group, accessibility also meant access to jobs, housing options, retail, and grocery stores.
 - Connectivity included the physical barrier of transportation, impacting opportunities for increased economic development, and safe access to bike & ped trail connections to resources and amenities.
 - Urban Alchemy – a term used from the Urban Alchemy Academy – was used to remind participants to keep the whole community in mind when thinking about the project

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- Participants discussed how they would like to see a lot of public engagement to ensure that the people in the community are being seen and heard for their needs and wants.
- Things to be reimagined and or improved for the project to improve the surrounding community: Reoccurring themes that need improvement in North Omaha: Health and wellness; community welcoming and aesthetics: connectivity and accessibility: equitable development and community investment: and holistic planning for community needs
 - Health and Wellness: overall to focus on improving infrastructure for bikes & peds, adding more urban forestry, and to de-prioritize cars during this process
 - Community Welcoming and Aesthetics: Beautification of the area as well as improving wayfinding and promoting awareness of destinations off the freeway to draw people in (locals and tourists).
 - Connectivity and Accessibility: crossing the freeway is currently dangerous - would like to see wider sidewalks, designated bike lanes, and improved transit stops
 - Equitable Development and Community investment: Participants want to ensure that investments in the corridor benefit the entire community. The study should also consider the current needs for the freeway and the function it plays in moving people in goods in the surrounding community.
 - Holistic planning and Community Needs: Considering the needs of the elderly and future generations to be able to thrive in a well-designed community, in addition to diversifying housing needs with mixed use and mixed income opportunities.

Mapping Activity

- Attendees split into two groups and used sticker dots and cut-outs of different types of freeway remediation tools to identify where they see the different tools working on different portions of the freeway.
- Both groups identified that their ideal vision for the North Freeway is to completely remove it.
- If the entire freeway can't be or won't be removed, common suggested locations and types of improvements included:
 - removing and infilling the freeway toward the North end
 - Using freeway caps/lids throughout the corridor
 - Participants generally suggested adding open space lids in areas near schools and near existing parks to create greenway connections.
 - Development lids were encouraged to go in areas that already have strong East to West connections like Ames Avenue and Lake Street.
 - The "Trench and Fill" tool was favored for wherever there wasn't an added lid in order to increase the usable/developable space along the freeway.
 - Adding additional connections and enhancing existing bridges to enhance connections from east to west for all modes of transportation: cars, buses, pedestrians, and bicyclist

Participant Ideas:

- Resources the community would like to see: Green Spaces & more Trees; Grocery Stores & Access to Healthy food; Health and Wellness integrated into the landscape; Safe Spaces for Children; Retail spaces for local business owners, and big box stores; mixed use commercial spaces; affordable office spaces; and a diverse housing stock with mixed use & mixed price ranges
- Conversations about local policies regarding landlords, renting, owning, zoning, etc need to start happening now, to prepare for the changing conditions of North Omaha. This includes holding absentee landlords accountable for property upkeep, coordinating development with other community investments, and addressing the root causes of issues like neglected common spaces.
- Connect North Omaha to the Missouri River, and create outdoor nature and recreational opportunities for the area

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- Create spaces for the North Omaha community to be able to produce their own food through local gardening programs, and vertical farming
- There should be more bus connections that reach out West areas like Costco, and other job opportunities
- Prioritize health and wellness, specifically for pregnant women
- Financial literacy programs for locals to learn how to best set themselves financially
- Community ownership and empowerment
- Recognizing and addressing the current civic and infrastructure problems: piping, old trees, trash clean up, upkeeping parks, etc