

Transformative Equitable Development for Healthy Communities

COMMUNITY-LED COLLABORATIONS

In nearly every corner of our region, the public sector, private businesses, organizations, and residents are doing strong transformative equitable development (TED) work, which ensures that infrastructure investments bring tangible benefits to the community. The most effective of these endeavors utilize the skill sets, expertise, and commitment of many diverse partners.

The values of TED require community-led partnerships. TED emphasizes the need for people committed to creating healthy, sustainable outcomes in communities to link arms with other partners working to secure the same goals. It lifts up community-led initiatives and prioritizes the expertise of communities of color and indigenous communities on the ground.

In the third session of the Alliance's TED series, we highlighted four unique, community-led collaborations from the Twin Cities: the Victoria Theatre Arts Initiative in St. Paul, the Northside Greenway Project in Minneapolis, the North Market in Minneapolis, and the Commons at Penn development in Minneapolis.

VICTORIA THEATRE ARTS INITIATIVE:

When you get off the Green Line at the Victoria Street station, you can't help but notice the historic Victoria Theatre. Built in 1915 as a silent movie theatre, it also functioned as a cabaret and a light repair store. It almost became a parking lot in 2009.



The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability is a coalition comprised of 34 members working to advance racial, economic, and environmental equity in the way growth and development occurs in the Twin Cities region. We work at the intersection of these issues, understanding that a holistic approach to equity will lead to a more vibrant region. Our integrated approach has secured major victories for transformative equitable development.

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Understanding its value, Frogtown residents rallied together to save the site from demolition. They successfully advocated for it to become a designated historic site. Now residents and community organizations are envisioning how to turn the site into a community-owned arts center.

They started the Victoria Theatre Arts Initiative, a coalition of residents and organizations including Frogtown Neighborhood Association, the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent, Historic St. Paul, and Dangerous Productions.

“We are intentional about having participatory processes to include as many people as possible in the leadership and decision-making around the theatre, including residents from the neighborhood. Their history, knowledge, and experience has greatly influenced this work,” said community organizer MK Nguyen.

The group sees the theater as a potential beacon for arts in the community. A center for the arts could provide community gathering space, offer accessible theatre and art classes, and uplift a new, asset-based narrative about a place often seen from a deficit mindset.

NORTHSIDE GREENWAY PROJECT:

In 2008, residents of North Minneapolis began to imagine what it would be like to have a space dedicated to biking and walking in their community. Spearheaded by Twin Cities Greenways, advocates began to talk to community members about the possibility of converting low-traffic streets to a greenway, a park-like trail that could be used for biking and walking. A greenway would provide users with a safe place to ride free from car traffic and it could increase active living in the community.

The Minneapolis Health Department gathered additional community input on the greenway route and design options in 2012 and 2013. City staff noticed that people who were participating in the project visioning did not reflect the diverse racial makeup of North Minneapolis.

To address this gap, the city partnered with the Alliance, the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council, and the Jordan Area Community Council to design an outreach process that ensured more inclusive participation from community residents. They engaged 13 place-based and culturally diverse organizations in reaching out to community members to get their ideas about the project. Together, those organizations collected more than 2,600 survey responses.

The city of Minneapolis recently passed a complete streets policy calling for walkers, cyclists, and drivers to be considered in street design. The policy will apply to all city transportation projects and will guide capital spending. The greenway is one way the city could test the new policy. “This project is a new way to think about bike infrastructure and city streets,” said Alexis Pennie of the Northside Greenway Council.

NORTH MARKET:

Pillsbury United Communities works to increase the resilience and self-sufficiency of the Minneapolis residents living in underserved communities. In North Minneapolis, the organization is supporting social enterprises that are owned and operated by the community. One of its enterprises is North Market, a grocery store that will house a health care clinic.

North Market was created to address food access challenges and health disparities in North Minneapolis. This venture will combine three essential elements in one entity: affordable nutritious food, health care, and community wellness. Slated to open in 2017, North Memorial Health Care, the Northside Funders Group, General Mills, Twin Cities LISC, and the Greater Twin Cities United Way have committed to investing in the market.

The idea for this unique enterprise came from the community through a series of listening sessions. “We started by asking residents what they valued and what mattered to them,” said Vanan Murugesan, North Market’s Manager of New Ventures. “Overwhelmingly, across income, race, and geography, people said that they just wanted to feel normal and be treated with respect.”

The North Market will contribute to that goal by creating jobs, improving health, and changing the destructive narrative about North Minneapolis.

COMMONS AT PENN:

Another development that is adding value to North Minneapolis is the Commons at Penn. It is a four-story, block-long development that will house 45 units of workforce housing and additional community amenities like fitness rooms, meeting space, and a satellite office of NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center. Designed by Building Blocks, a North Minneapolis nonprofit run by former NBA star Devean George, the goal of this development is to enable residents to avoid displacement and stay in the neighborhood they love.

The Commons at Penn will feature the long-awaited Wirth Cooperative Grocery Store, an idea offered by residents who wanted to improve food access, create economic opportunities, and increase community livability in North Minneapolis. Residents wanted more quality food options in the community—a lack of natural and organic options led many people to shop outside of the community to feed their families. Wirth Co-op will provide the healthy options that residents want and will keep dollars circulating in North Minneapolis.

This project showcases people of color coming together with their ideas, leadership, and resources to make things happen in their community. It takes an asset-based approach to development by drawing from the community’s skills and resources and prioritizing the retention of residents.

“We have the opportunity to provide families with good food, jobs, affordable housing, and luxury living,” said project architect Jamil Ford from Mobilize Design & Architecture. “These opportunities allow people to stay in their communities.”