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HISTORIC NORTHWEST RISING



Historic Northwest Rising Final Report



Project Lead:

West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency
401 Clematis Street
West Palm Beach, FL, 33401
www.wpb.org/cra
561-822-2222

For more projection information, visit:
www.northwestrising.com

Table of Contents

1.	Executive Summary	4
2.	Project Background	7
3.	Community Engagement Process & Results	10
	Phase 1	11
	Phase 2	18
4.	The Vision	32
5.	Five Action Areas	34
6.	Next Steps	52

1

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

The Sunset Lounge is a beloved cultural institution located at the corner of Rosemary Avenue and 8th Street in the Historic Northwest District. During the Jim Crow era, the venue was the heart of social and cultural life in the district. In addition to attracting big name acts like Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, the Sunset Lounge also hosted fundraisers, high school dances, and a wide variety of other community events.

After desegregation, the neighborhood started on a steady decline. Upper and middle-class black families moved out, as did the once-thriving businesses. The Sunset no longer was a regional draw and instead started to function primarily as a neighborhood bar. While still a predominantly African American neighborhood, the community's context and needs have shifted dramatically over the past 70 years.

HISTORIC NORTHWEST RISING (HNWR) is a bold initiative shaping the revitalization of the Sunset Lounge and the surrounding areas. Led by the West Palm Beach

Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), the main activities include transforming the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot across from it into a resource for the community and spurring local economic development.

Community Engagement

From August 2016 to April 2017, the HNWR team spoke to over 800 community members about what changes they'd like to see in the Sunset Lounge and the open space across from it. Phase I focused on understanding the community's infrastructure and programming needs and preferences. In Phase II, we tested out some of the community's ideas in the open space in real time. Hundreds of people came out to experience the temporarily improved space and provided valuable feedback on which elements should be kept, improved, or done away with. Phase II also dug deeper into community members' values and how they would like to participate in the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge on an ongoing basis.

The Vision

The redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot will provide the Historic Northwest District with a new multi-purpose venue and public space focused on arts and entertainment for all ages. This project will bring together community partners to offer diverse programs that reflect the history, cultures, and needs of the area. By bringing activity and new job opportunities to these spaces, this redevelopment project will help create a safe and economically thriving community.

Action Areas

The CRA can take concrete steps towards achieving this vision by focusing on five key action areas:

Action Area #1: Keep up the momentum.

There is still roughly a year between now (June 2017) and the completion of the Sunset Lounge renovations (Fall 2018). During this time, it's critical for the CRA to maintain the momentum and excitement about the HNWR project by working with community partners to regularly activate and improve the lot across from the Sunset Lounge. This time can also be used to continue the conversation about the uses and role of the Sunset Lounge in the Historic Northwest District.

Action Area #2: Build a culture of engagement.

For the CRA, the key to building a culture of engagement in the Historic Northwest is to "meet people where they are". This involves not just holding community meetings at different times of day, but also attending programs and events that people normally go to anyway, and engaging them there. Community engagement should be regarded as an ongoing and ever-evolving process.

Action Area #3: Identify key elements for transforming the Sunset Lounge into a new multi-use community venue.

Today, community members are calling for the Sunset to return to being a multi-purpose community venue.

Community members were less supportive of the Sunset Lounge becoming a renovated, single-purpose music lounge. They expressed more enthusiasm about transforming it into a community space where people of all ages can socialize, enjoy arts and culture, access job training and job opportunities, and develop other skills.

Action Area #4: Design and program the open space as if it were a community center without walls.

Many community members were skeptical about transforming the lot across from the Sunset Lounge into a public space. Community members questioned whether it could ever serve as an appropriate place for children and families. Once people saw the transformation of the open space at the Better Block event, with new infrastructure and programming, the community's mindset shifted. They now see great potential in transforming the open space into a permanent, programmed public space.

Action Area #5: Provide safe connections.

The most common, recurring theme during community engagements was safety. 72 percent of community members would like to see the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands result in a safer community with less crime, making it the number one desired project outcome.

Next Steps

The CRA will use the findings and recommendations of this report to guide the planning and design of the Sunset Lounge and the open space. The Sunset will be under renovation from late Summer 2017 to Fall 2018. During this time, community partners will continue to play an important role in the project, whether it's by providing additional feedback on the development process and/or helping program the open space.

2

Project Background



What is Historic Northwest Rising?

HISTORIC NORTHWEST RISING (HNWR) is a bold initiative shaping the revitalization of the Sunset Lounge and the surrounding community.

The main activities include the revitalization of the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lots across from it. The West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)

recently acquired these properties and is leading the revitalization effort.

The final recommendations in this report are based directly on the input of over 800 community members between August 2016 and April 2017.

Project Timeline



Why the Sunset Lounge? Why now?

During segregation, Black entertainers toured a string of nightclubs known in the South as the “Chitlin Circuit.” Every town had its own. One of the largest ballrooms was the Sunset Cocktail Lounge in West Palm Beach, built in 1923. The Sunset Lounge attracted big name acts such as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. While most of these once-prominent jazz clubs no longer exist, the Sunset Lounge still stands.

After desegregation, the Sunset Lounge no longer attracted those same big-name acts. Many middle and upper class Black families moved to other neighborhoods once it was legal to do so. Over the past fifty years, the neighborhood has undergone widespread disinvestment and blight.

In 2016, the CRA took advantage of a unique opportunity to secure and begin restoration of the Sunset Lounge. Recognizing that the current neighborhood context is very different from the heyday of the Sunset, the HNWR team met with community members to understand: How can the transformation of the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot across from it best serve the surrounding community? What is the community’s vision for this space? Which of the Sunset Lounge’s forms and functions should remain the same and which should change?

The Team Behind Historic Northwest Rising

The HNWR project is led locally by the West Palm Beach CRA. The CRA recently purchased the Sunset Lounge and the vacant parcel of land opposite it.

The CRA has enlisted consultants 8 80 Cities, Better Block, Mosaic Group, Dr. Alisha Winn, and Surale

Phillips to conduct community outreach and engagement services.

HNWR is a recipient of a 2016 Knight Cities Challenge grant, generously provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

**Community
Engagement
Process & Results**

3





Summary of Phase 1 Results

591 people.
4261 ideas.



Phase 1: Community Brainstorming (August 2016 – March 2017)

From August 2016 to March 2017, the HNWR hosted a community-wide engagement campaign to collect ideas for improving the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot opposite it. Campaign activities included:

In-person interviews

We had conversations with 13 prominent community members to identify the main challenges, priorities, and opportunities within the neighborhood. These conversations helped form the content and format of the Ideas Festival and pop-up engagements.

Ideas Festival

The Ideas Festival took place from November 2-5, 2016. The CRA partnered with the Sunset Lounge to host a series of entertainment events, drawing crowds of over 100 people on each occasion. The HNWR team set up visually-engaging large-format surveys where community

members could vote for their favorite ideas using dots, suggest improvements for the neighborhood. Ideas Festival events included a crab boil, soul food theme night, concerts at the Sunset, and a block party.

Pop-Up Engagements

The HNWR team also held “pop-up engagements”, where we set up large colorful survey boards in places where community members typically pass through or gather. This method is great for capturing feedback from those who might not otherwise participate in a typical community consultation. The locations of the pop-up engagements included: YWCA Child Care center, E&M Wines & Spirits, Salvation Army Aftercare Program, West Palm Beach Tri Rail Station, D’Best BBQ, Northwest Community Consortium (NCCI) Health Fair, Salvation Army, Historic Northwest Tree Lighting Event, Payne Chapel, Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

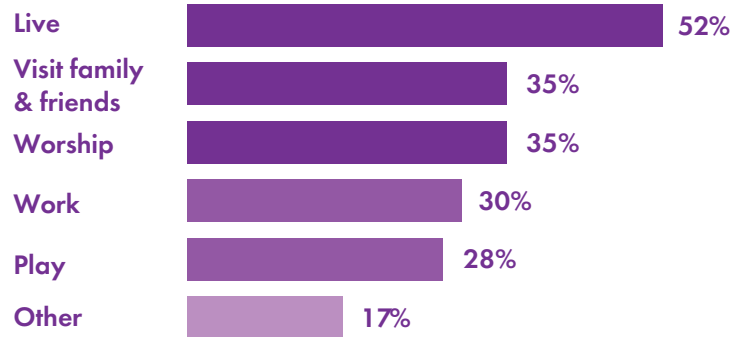
Pop-Up Engagement Locations:



Summary of Phase 1 Results

The majority of Phase 1 survey respondents **live** in the Historic Northwest District.

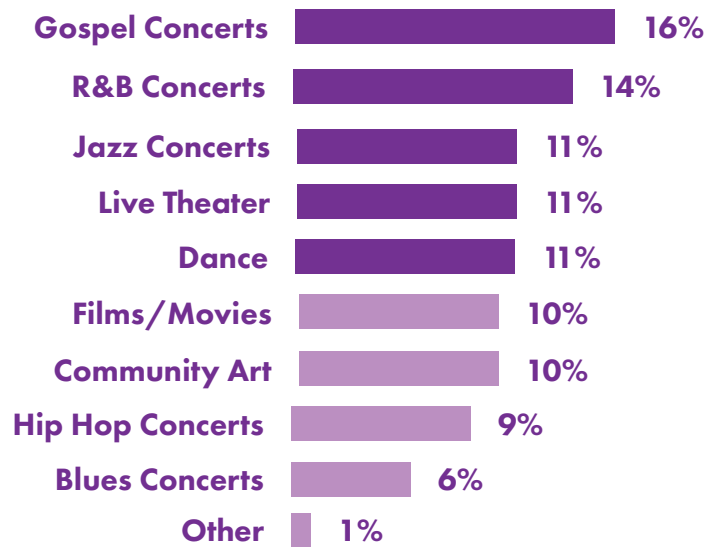
Q. What do you do in the Historic Northwest District?



“We want more **music programming** at the Sunset”

Survey respondents expressed great interest in increasing the overall quantity, quality, and variety of musical programming at the Sunset.

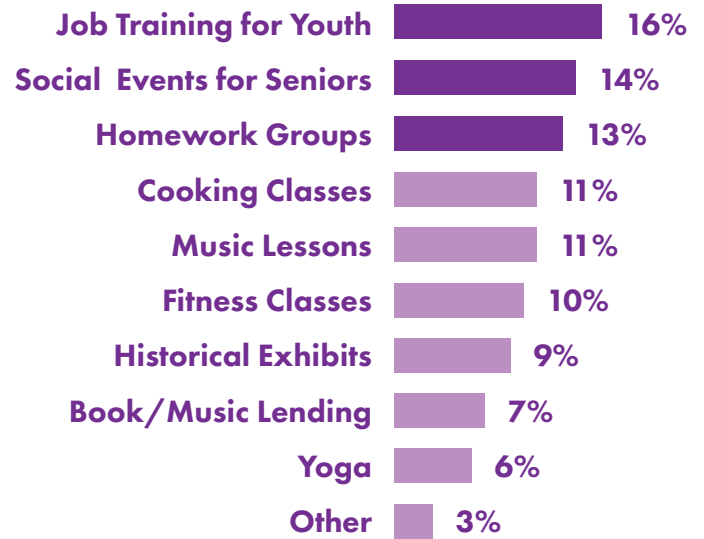
Q. What types of entertainment would you like to see at the Sunset Lounge?



“Provide skills-enhancing programs for residents of all ages, with a focus on youth”

Survey respondents feel that the revitalization of the Sunset and increased investment in the neighborhood presents a timely opportunity to provide new programs to enrich the future of residents of all ages.

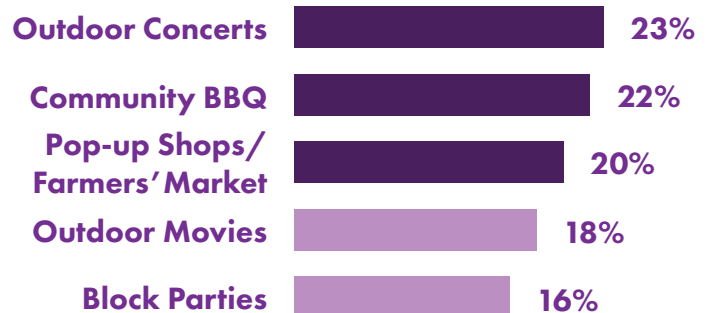
Q. What types of programs would you like to participate in at the Sunset Lounge?



“The open space across from the Sunset Lounge should be regularly activated”

Generally, community members want to see a diverse range of programs and events. There are few public spaces in the Historic Northwest District where community members feel like they can comfortably gather and spend time.

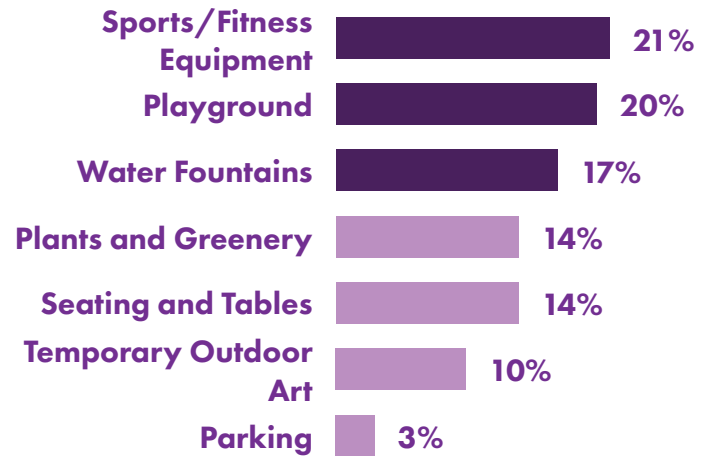
Q. What would you like to do in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge?



“The open space across from the Sunset Lounge should provide infrastructure for physical activity and play”

Community members voted for sports/fitness and play equipment as priorities for the space across from the Sunset Lounge. A water feature was also listed as a high priority, such as a splash pad or decorative fountain.

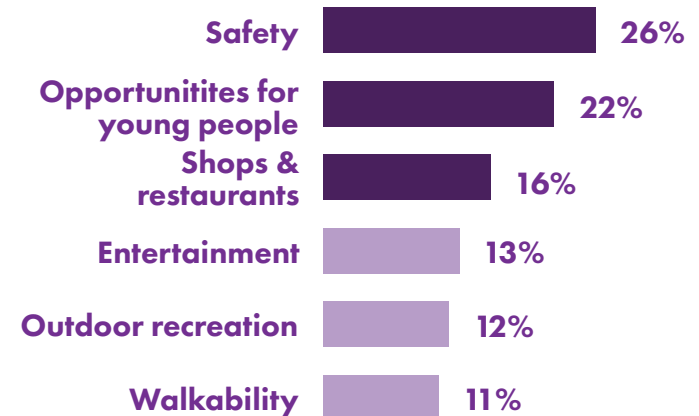
Q. What would you like to share in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge?



“Our main priority is to improve safety”

Nearly one third of all respondents listed safety as their main concern in the neighborhood, whereas “opportunities for young people” in second, garnering more than one fifth of the votes. Safety and youth programming go hand in hand. Community members believe that providing more things for young people to do is a key component of making the neighborhood safer.

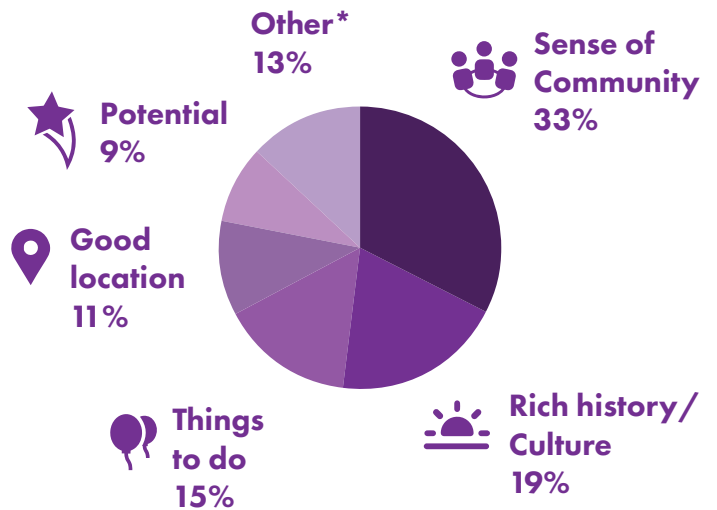
Q. What do you wish there was more of in the Historic Northwest



“There is a strong sense of community and history here”

Community members feel strongly rooted in the Historic Northwest and listed the sense of community and familiarity as the quality they love most about the area. Community members feel that the future of the Historic Northwest should respect and grow on its African American roots and that improvements to the Sunset Lounge should authentically reflect the history and culture of the neighborhood.

Q. What do you love the most about the Historic Northwest?



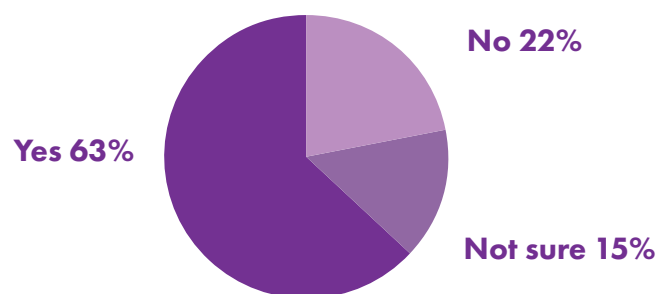
*Other responses include walkability, bike friendliness, quietness, and smallness of the neighborhood.

“A pedestrian/vehicular railway crossing at 7th Street, connecting the Northwest to Dixie Highway, is a good idea”

63 percent of survey respondents support creating a new crossing for cars and pedestrians at 7th street. Those who were concerned about this possibility felt that another access point would increase traffic congestion in the neighborhood and would accelerate the pace at which the Historic Northwest would become part of Downtown, and therefore gentrified.

* Important to note that there was some confusion about the wording of this question, which may have affected how people chose to answer it.

Q. Should there be a railroad crossing at 7th Street to connect the Historic Northwest with Dixie Highway?



For the full Phase I Community Engagement report, please visit: www.northwestrising.com

Summary of Phase 2

242 people.
3091 ideas.



Phase 2: Community Focus Groups

In April 2017, the HNWR kicked off the second phase of the project which included three core components: 1) Hosting community focus groups to build on the Phase 1 community engagement process, 2) Hosting a Better Block prototyping event where community members were able to test out temporary improvements to the open space, and 3) Conducting surveys and activity counts to assess the community's response to the prototyping event.

Focus Groups

The HNWR team hosted several 60-90 minute focus groups that were attended by a total of 49 community members. Focus group participants included members of the YWCA Child Care Center parent group, Northwest Community Consortium (NCCI), Payne Chapel, and Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

We asked participants to:

- Review the results of the first round of engagements to see if we “got it right”.
- Provide any additional input they felt was missing from the team's understanding of the project.
- Identify desired outcomes and measures of success for the Sunset Lounge and open space.

Priorities from the Focus Groups

Sunset revitalization should focus on the current community's needs.

- “The Sunset will never be the same”. Some community members were skeptical about “restoring the Sunset to its former glory” when there are more pressing needs in the community.
- Sunset renovations should be done keeping in mind needs and opportunities of current residents.

Improve neighborhood safety

- Increase community policing efforts.
- Ensure that the open space is well-lit, well-maintained, and well-programmed at all times.

Improve transportation access to the Sunset Lounge area

- Work with nearby churches to provide event parking.
- Expand trolley service to the Northwest.

Design for multi-generational use

- Sunset and open space should offer a wide variety of programs that appeal to all age groups.
- Most important features of open space include: play and rest areas, a walking track, accessible paths, lighting, shade, and water feature.
- Accommodate local demand for affordable venues for birthday parties, reunions, and other events.

Measures of success

- High levels of participation/use by local community.
- Positive public response.
- Creation of local jobs.

Choose the right operator

- Future operator of the Sunset should be business-savvy and community-minded at the same time.
- Community should play a role in screening the operator and organization(s) that go in the Sunset.

Phase 2: Better Block Prototyping

Using the information collected from Phase I, the HNWR team tested out some of the community's ideas on the vacant site across from the Sunset Lounge. Led by Better Block and with the help of community volunteers, the temporary improvements were unveiled on April 22, 2016 on the northern half of the vacant lot, coinciding with the annual Heart and Soul Fest which took place on the southern half of the vacant lot. Hundreds of community members tested out and provided feedback on the temporary improvements, which included:

Play zone: Imagination Playground, tire swing

Sports zone: Multi-game sports courts

Community resources zone: Tent with information tables by various service agencies

Public art: Sidewalk art and mural paintings

Seating/rest area: Parklet, shade structures, bistro sets, benches, lighting, planters

Vendor zone: Mini-marketplace with five vendors

Most of the temporary furniture was constructed based on Better Block's Wikiblock designs. Wikiblock is an open-source toolkit of designs for street furniture that can be downloaded for free and taken to a makerspace where a CNC router (a computer-aided machine) can cut them out of a sheet of plywood. Most products can then be assembled without glue or nails, and used instantly to make a block better. Thank you also to Kaboom! for partnering with the HNWR team to provide the Imagination Playground.



Phase 2: Surveys & Activity Counts

We conducted surveys with event goers to get their feedback on the temporary improvements to the space. Which improvements worked and which didn't? Did the temporary improvements change the way they thought about the open space?

148 people completed paper surveys and 45 people participated in an in-person, interactive survey at the event. 30% of survey respondents are residents of the Historic Northwest District whereas the remaining 70% are either former residents or visitors to the area. The Phase 2 survey results are skewed towards non-residents because the Heart and Soul Fest is a big annual draw for the area.

We also conducted "activity counts" at peak hours (9am, 2pm, 5pm) on days before, during, and after the April 22 Better Block event. We counted two types of activities:

- 1) The number of pedestrians and cyclists passing through the intersections of 8th St. & Henrietta Ave. and 7th Street & Rosemary Ave.
- 2) The number of people spending time in the open space and what they were doing there e.g. playing, sitting, standing, etc.

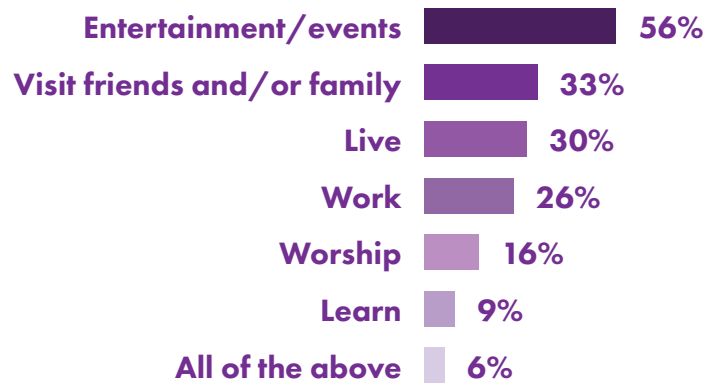
These counts give us a better understanding of how the space is being used at different times of the day, and on different types of days.



Connection to the Historic Northwest & Sunset Lounge

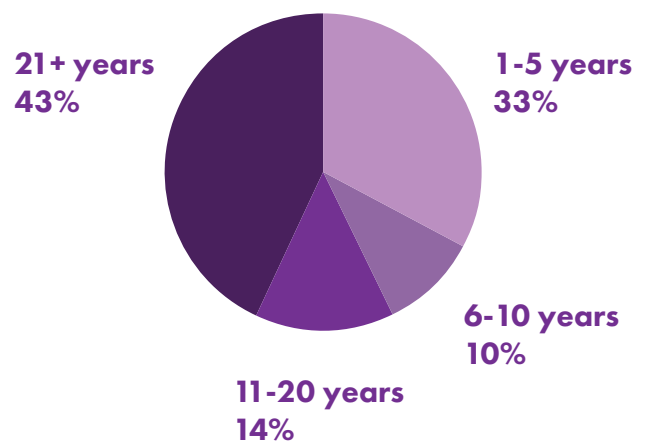
The majority of Phase 2 survey respondents primarily come to the Historic Northwest District for **entertainment and events**.

Q. What do you do in the Historic Northwest District?

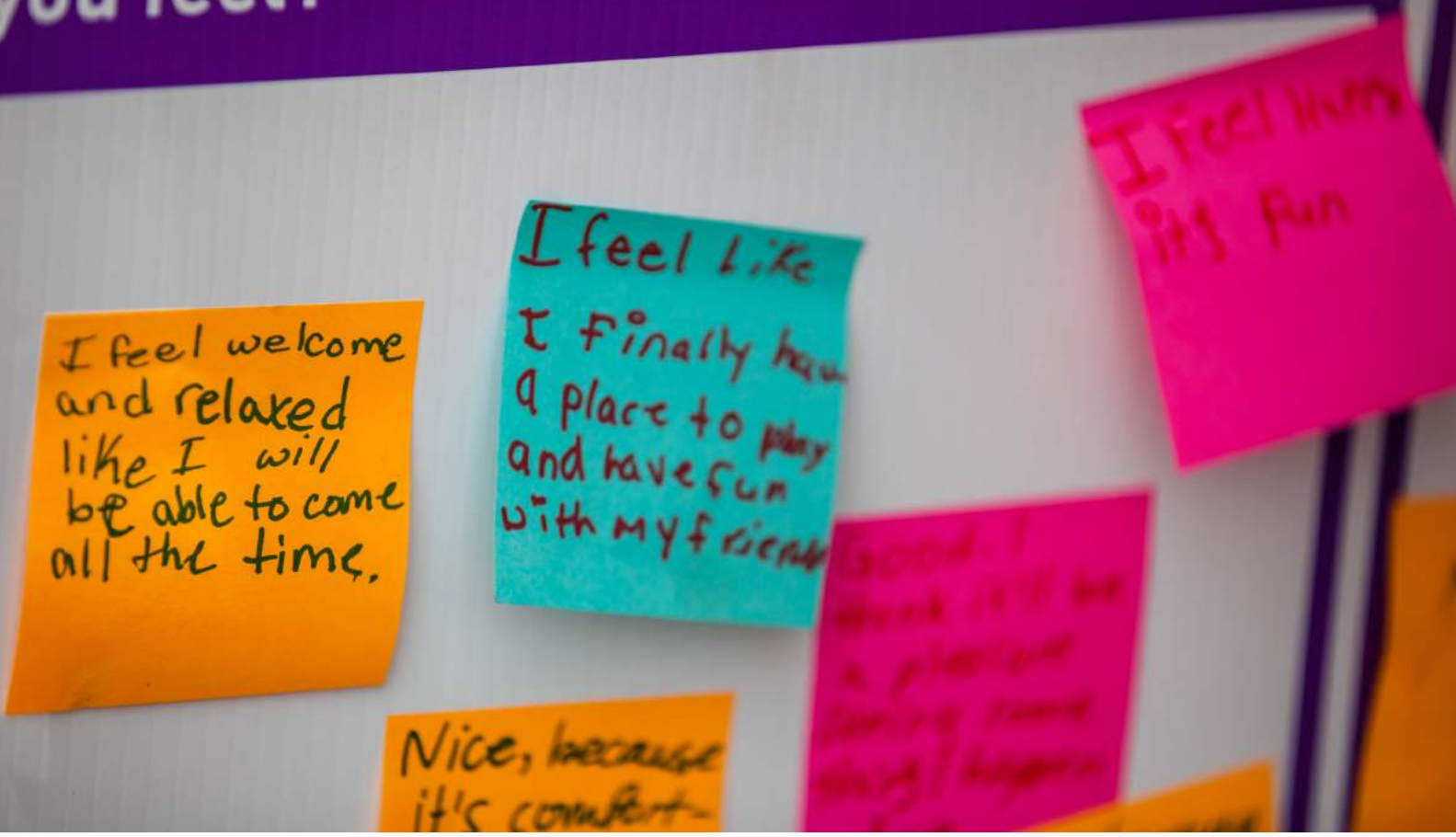


Nearly **half** of all respondents have been connected to the neighborhood for **more than 20 years**.

Q. How long have you had ties to the Historic Northwest?

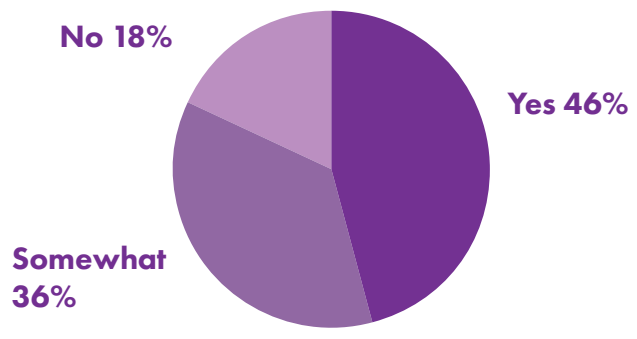


across from the Sunset Lounge you feel?



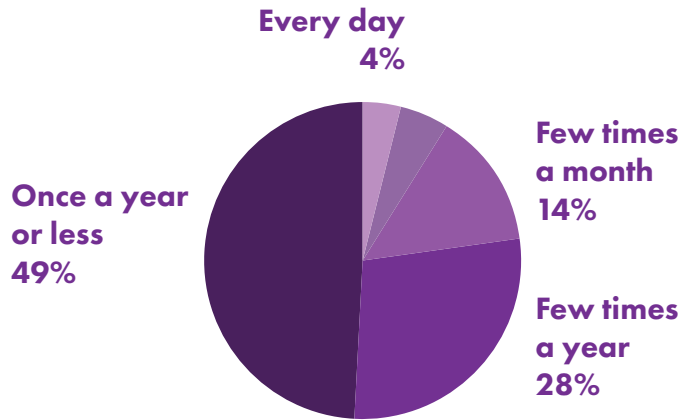
82 percent of respondents feel some level of belonging to the Historic Northwest.

Q. Do you feel like this neighborhood is 'your' place?



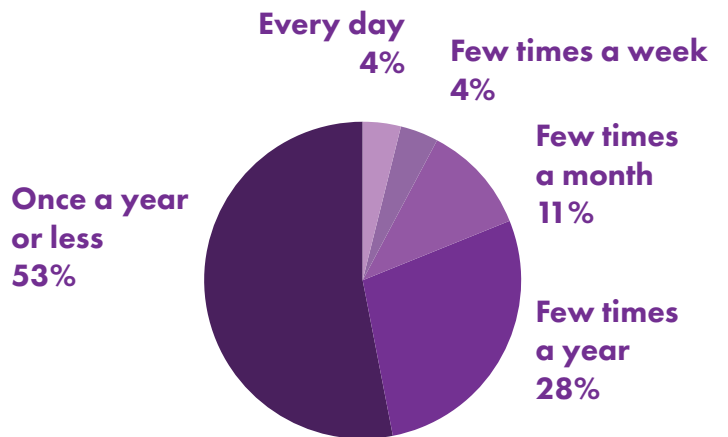
77 percent of respondents are infrequent visitors to the Sunset Lounge.

Q. How often do you come to the Sunset Lounge?



81 percent of respondents are infrequent visitors to the Open Space.

Q. How often do you come to the open space across from the Sunset Lounge?



There were apartment buildings in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge up until Fall 2016, which partially explains why there has been so little reported activity there.

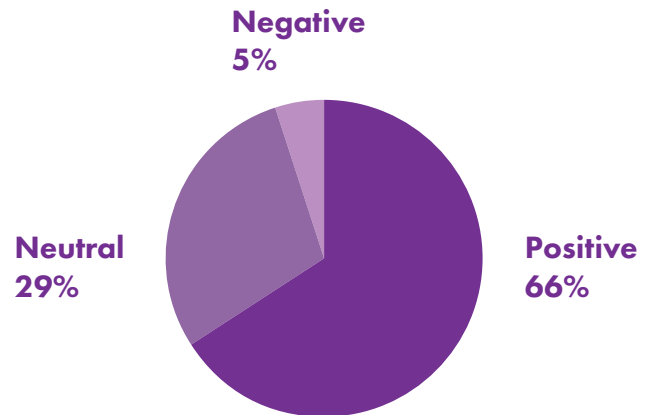
Perceptions of the Sunset Lounge & Open Space

66 percent of respondents feel positively about the Sunset Lounge.

Why?

- 43% of comments referred to the rich African American history of the Sunset Lounge and the neighborhood
- 32% of comments referred to the Sunset Lounge being a fun gathering place with good music and atmosphere.
- The remainder of the positive comments talked about the area being "home". Other concerns focused on crime and danger in the neighborhood, high noise levels, and feeling like the venue is safer with security or police presence.

Q. How do you feel about the Sunset Lounge?

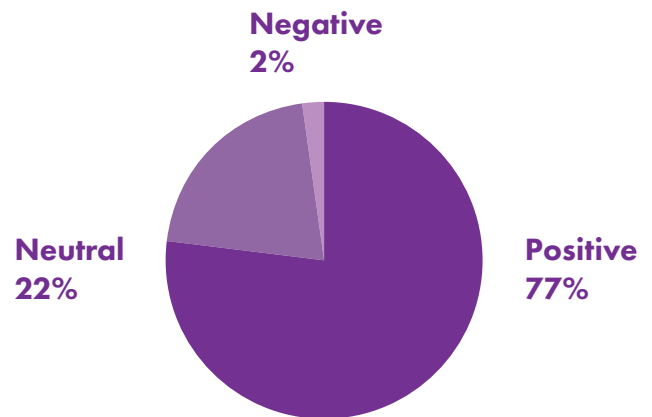


77 percent of respondents feel positively about the Open Space.

Why?

- 64% of comments talked about how the open space has the potential to be a great asset for the community.
- 20% of comments were about it being a good space for all ages, particularly children.
- Other comments talked about it being a much-needed green space, a spacious lot, and it feeling safer with police around.

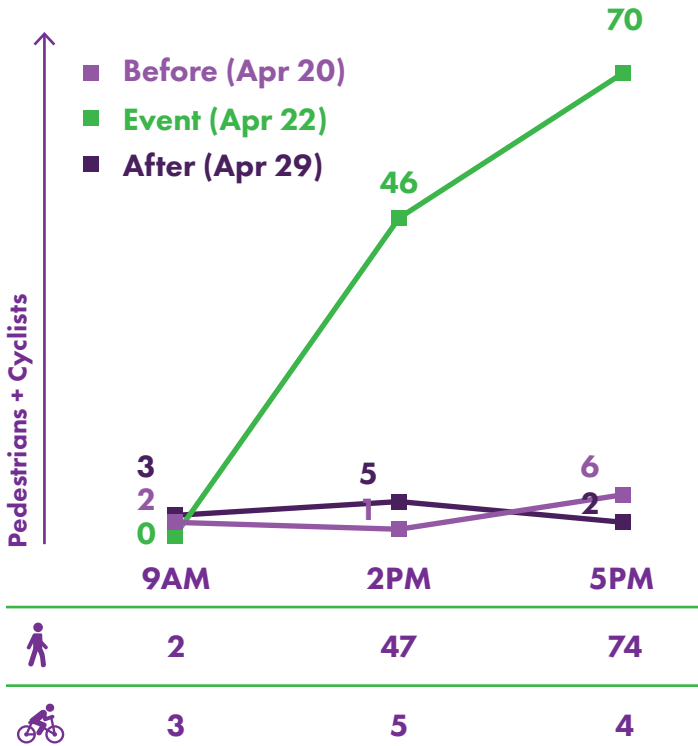
Q. How do you feel about the open space across from Sunset Lounge?



Open Space Usage and Activity

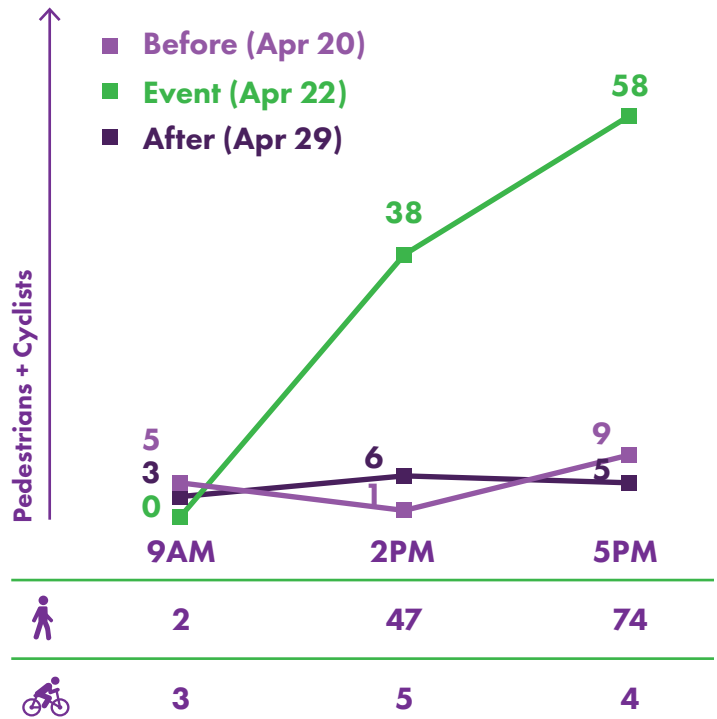
Pedestrians + Cyclists at 7th St & Rosemary Ave

We counted the number of pedestrians and cyclists crossing the intersection of 7th St. & Rosemary Ave. at peak hours before, during, and after the April 22 Better Block event.



Pedestrians + Cyclists at 8th St & Henrietta Ave

We counted the number of pedestrians and cyclists crossing the intersection of 8th St. and Henrietta Ave. at peak hours before, during, and after the April 22 Better Block event.

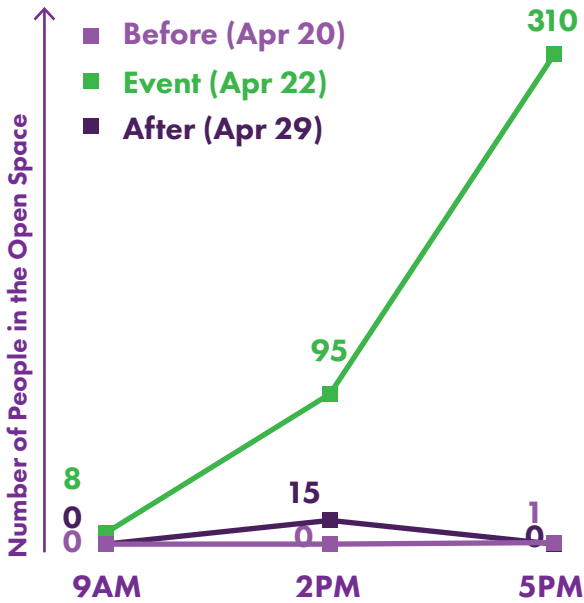


Note

Each count was recorded within a 15-minute segment.

Level of Activity in the Open Space

We counted the number of people engaging in various activities in the open space. These counts were conducted at peak hours before, during, and after the April 22 Better Block event.



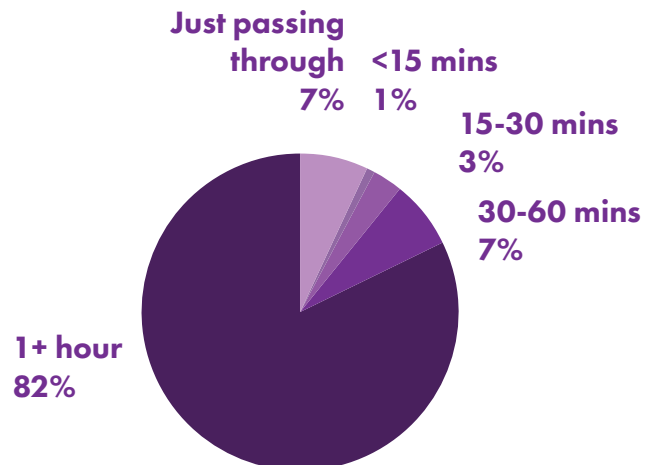
	9AM	2PM	5PM
Children Playing	0/6/0	0/44/15	1/272/0
Physical Activity	0/1/0	0/0/0	0/0/0
Standing	0/0/0	0/37/0	0/19/0
Sitting	0/1/0	0/7/0	0/13/0
Commercial Activity	0/0/0	0/7/0	0/6/0

Note

Each count was recorded within a 15-minute segment.

82 percent of respondents planned to spend **at least an hour** in the open space.

Q. How much time do you plan to spend here today?



Open Space Usage and Activity

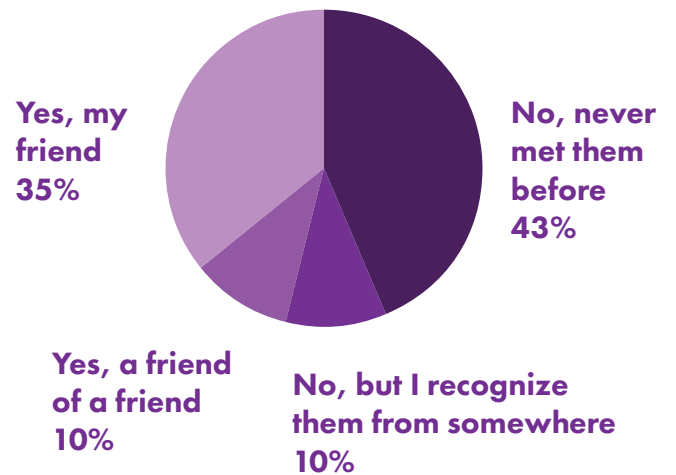
The Better Block event and Heart and Soul Fest created a very social atmosphere.

81 percent of respondents interacted with someone who they did not come with. 43% of those interactions were between complete strangers.

Q. Did you interact with someone here today who you did not come with?

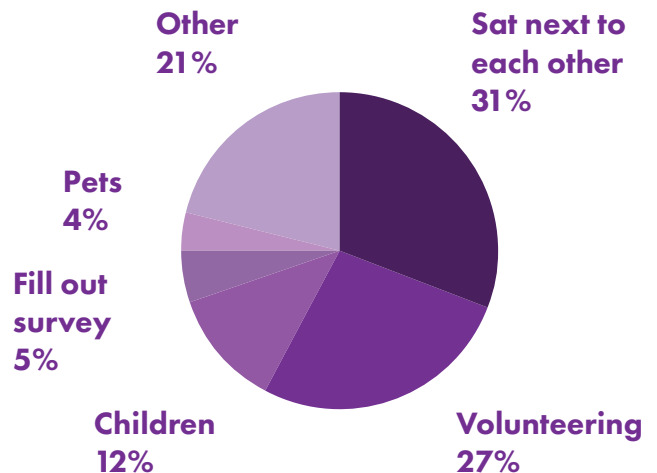


Q. If yes, did you know them before today?



Of all the interactions between strangers, the most common reason for interaction was brought about by sitting next to one another.

Q. What brought about your interaction(s)?

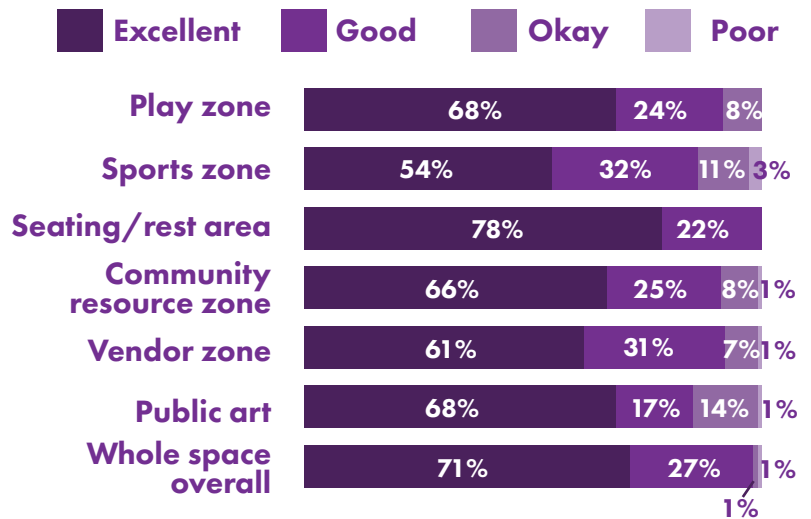


Feedback About Prototypes

Most people rated each improvement as “excellent”. Overall, the **seating/rest area** received the highest ratings.

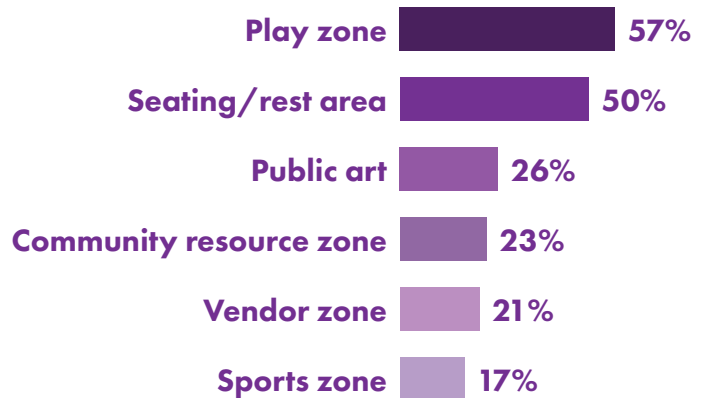
Suggestions for improving on the prototypes included: adding more trees and plant life, using rubber playground flooring instead of mulch, increasing the amount of seating, increasing the amount of parking on the premises, having more resources at the resource tent, etc.

Q. How would you rate the temporary changes to the open space?



Of all the improvements to make permanent, the majority of respondents would choose to keep the **play zone and the seating/rest area**.

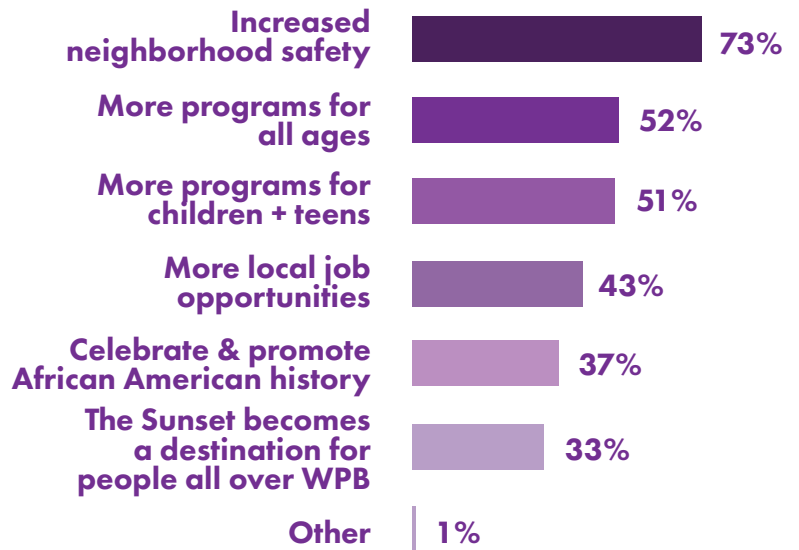
Q. If you had to pick two areas to make permanent, which ones would they be?



Feedback About Prototypes

The most important impacts of the HNWR project should be to **increase community safety and access to programs.**

Q. What are the top three impacts you'd like to see as a result of the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and open space?



The biggest perceived threat to the redevelopment of the Sunset and open space is **lack of existing safety in the neighborhood.**

Q. What concerns do you have about the redevelopment of the Sunset and open space across from it?

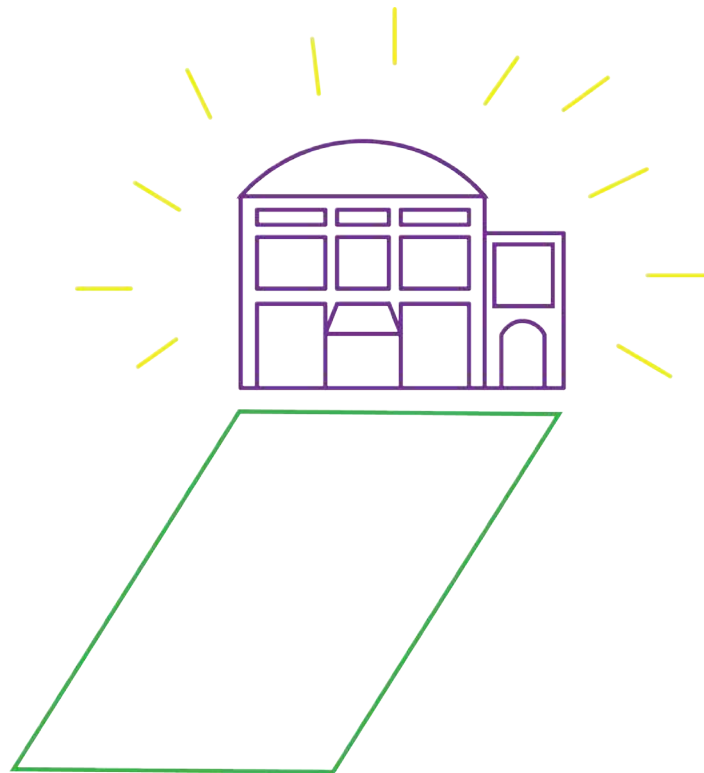
- 31 percent of comments were concerned with safety issues in the neighborhood.
- 17 percent of comments pertained to the importance of ensuring the final redevelopment reflects the community's vision.
- 14 percent of comments had to do with the fear of neighborhood gentrification.
- 33 percent of the remaining concerns were a mix of issues, include: ensuring adequate parking on the premises, providing shade in the open space, and improving the landscaping.



4

The Vision

The Vision



The redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot will provide the Historic Northwest District with a new multi-purpose venue and public space focused on arts and entertainment for all ages. This project will bring together community partners to offer diverse programs that reflect the history, cultures, and needs of the area. By bringing activity and new job opportunities to these spaces, this redevelopment project will help create a safe and economically thriving community.

Community members identified five key ways to measure the success of this project:

1. Increased safety and decreased crime in the neighborhood.
2. Diverse program and event offerings that reflect local cultures and needs.
3. High levels of usage of the Sunset Lounge and public space by community members of all ages.
4. Positive feedback from local community members.
5. Increased job and economic opportunities for community members.

5

Five Action Areas



Action Area #1: Keep up the momentum

The more the HNWR team has done to activate the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot across from it, the more community members have developed faith in the HNWR project process. There is still roughly a year between now (June 2017) and the completion of the Sunset Lounge renovations (Fall 2018). During this time, it's critical for the CRA to maintain the momentum and excitement about the HNWR project by working with community partners to regularly activate and improve the lot across from the Sunset Lounge. This time can also be used to continue the conversation about the uses and role of the Sunset Lounge in the Historic Northwest District.

Action Area #1 Recommendations

1a. Develop a schedule of incremental improvements and other “quick wins”.

Based on the community’s feedback to the improvements that were tested out on April 22, it is recommended that the CRA take steps to activate the site over the next 12 months. Whereas the Better Block event built momentum for the project by testing out improvements over the course of one day, we recommend that the following improvements be “semi-permanent” in nature, piloting uses on the site for a period of 12 months.

Some of the images that follow are examples from other cities that have successfully implemented certain design and programming elements. These can be adapted to the unique context of the Sunset Lounge and open space across from it.

Shade structures

Community members frequently emphasized the importance of providing shade. Some light, low-cost shade solutions include fastening sail shades to poles, patio umbrellas, or more artistic/temporary shading created from stringing together objects such as umbrellas or plastic life savers. The benefit of pursuing the latter option is that it is low cost, temporary, and can involve the help of local community volunteers.

Estimated cost: \$2,000 and up

Picnic tables

Community members identified the seating and rest area as one of the top two improvements that they would like to make permanent. Instead of light bistro sets which can easily go missing, an affordable option is to provide picnic tables that are anchored to the ground. The CRA can invite community members to come out to build and paint the picnic tables. This picnic table building event can be held on its own or in conjunction with something more celebratory, like a community BBQ or picnic.

Estimated cost: \$200 per picnic table



“Umbrella Sky” in Agueda, Portugal. Photo by Marilyn Marques.



Shade sails at Singer Island, Palm Beach County. Photo by Gentile Glas Holloway O’Mahoney & Associates, Inc.

Tire swings

The cheapest and most popular activation at the April 22 Better Block event was the tire swing, constructed from a tire found on the side of the road and a \$20 steel chain. The tire swing had the additional effect of inviting kids to sit and climb in the large tree, located in the center of the site. Unfortunately, the clasp supporting the chain and tire broke after a day's use. Given the popularity of the swing and how it was able to activate the entire area around the tree, we recommend replacing this tire swing with a new one, along with more durable chain and clasp.

Estimated cost: \$50

Play equipment

The play area was one of the most highly-rated areas in the open space. In the days following the Better Block event, we had a team member bring the Imagination Playground out to the site during after-school hours. Between four and twelve children would be there at any given time, playing with the Imagination Playground.

During the lead up to the reconstruction of the open space, consider partnering with Parks and Recreation or a local youth organization to bring out play equipment to the site several times a week.

Estimated cost: \$6,000 and up

Tree lighting

The CRA hosted a holiday tree lighting event in December 2016 which was a great success. The Better Block event again highlighted the tree and its role as an attractive, visual focal point in the open space. Providing year-round creative lighting for the tree can have the effect of transforming it into an iconic beacon of the neighborhood.

Estimated cost: \$3,000 and up



Children play on the tire swing at the Better Block event.



Tree lighting ceremony in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge in December 2016. Students from UB Kinsey Elementary School created original ornaments for the tree.

Community Planters

The Urban Grower’s Community Farm plant giveaway was a huge hit at the Better Block event. Invite community volunteers to come out for a day of gardening and installing planters on the site.

Estimated cost: \$1,000 and up

Third party events

Invite local organizations, churches, and schools to host some of their programs and events in the open space. As incentive, the CRA can help cover the cost of basic services, such as additional police patrol and portable bathrooms.

Estimated cost: N/A

Naming competition

Create buzz around the launch of the public space by hosting a naming competition. Ask community members to vote for their favorite name online or by using the “pop up engagement” method at community events.

Estimated cost: N/A

Public art: The Better Block prototyping event brought some local, talented artists out of the woodwork. To keep them engaged in the Sunset project, invite them to continue participating in developing unique artwork for the site. Hire them to facilitate a community art project, where residents can participate in producing public art for the site.

Estimated cost: \$1,000 and up



Bamboo planters in a galvanized metal tub. Photo by Kelley Macdonald.



Kids from the neighborhood help with painting the sidewalk art at the HNWR Better Block event.

Action Area #2: Build a Culture of Engagement

There are many barriers that prevent people from giving their time or input towards a neighborhood initiative. The key to building a culture of engagement in the Historic Northwest is to “meet people where they are”. This involves holding community meetings at different times of day, engaging people at programs/places they normally go to anyway, and hosting fun community events where the task of providing feedback is secondary to the main event.



Action Area #2 Recommendations

2a. Continue collecting feedback at public events.

Setting up large, colorful, oversized survey boards at events has proven to be a successful way to capture feedback from community members and other eventgoers. These “pop up engagements” were a friendly and inviting way for people of all ages to participate in a conversation about the Sunset Lounge and the wider Historic Northwest District. This tactic should be used to collect feedback and have conversations about the changes to the neighborhood.

2b. Hire dedicated community outreach staff.

The CRA would benefit from having dedicated outreach staff whose primary responsibilities are to build relationships, engage the community in local projects, and serve as a direct link between neighborhood residents and the City of West Palm Beach. E-mail correspondence and conventional marketing strategies failed to attract partners and volunteers for the HNWR project. Instead, the most effective method was having face-to-face conversations and building relationships with community members/organizations.

Ideally, the community outreach staff person(s) will have an office in the neighborhood with dedicated hours where people can have conversations and engage in the CRA's ongoing work in the Historic Northwest.

2c. Share information.

Provide community members with a centralized place to access information about initiatives or activities in the Historic Northwest. This could be in the form of a physical/digital newsletter. The CRA can mail out physical copies of the newsletter to residents and make them available at key locations throughout the community, e.g. restaurants, churches, schools, etc. Residents and local organizations should be encouraged to submit content.

2d. Form a community steering group for the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands.

Community members want to continue having a say in what happens in their neighborhood. 32 percent of survey respondents are interested in joining a committee that provides City staff with input about the Sunset Lounge. 30 percent of respondents said they are interested in joining a committee that provides City staff with input about the vacant lot across from the Sunset Lounge. A steering group consisting of local leaders and dedicated residents can help the CRA stay accountable to those who are going to be most affected by the revitalization process.

2e. Involve the community in the design and maintenance of the open space.

23 percent of survey respondents indicated that they would be interested in helping clean and maintain the open space across from the Sunset Lounge. Many local organizations, including service providers, churches, and schools, host 'days of service/volunteering'. In fact, 57 percent of survey respondents say they "sometimes" or "often" participate in activities to maintain or improve the neighborhood. Given that there is an appetite for volunteering opportunities, it's important to continue collecting community contact information whenever possible, and advertising volunteer opportunities. Volunteers can help with maintaining the open space, as well as with planting trees and gardens, building and painting furniture, and creating public art.

2f. Reduce administrative barriers to hosting activities in the Sunset Lounge and open space.

28 percent of respondents are interested in hosting an event at the Sunset Lounge. 25 percent of respondents are interested in hosting an event in the open spaces. In our focus groups, we also heard that local organizations are also interested in having space to host events in, provided that there are few administrative or legal barriers. It's important to provide a streamlined process for applying and booking the Sunset Lounge and open space for both public and private events. The public should have access to a calendar to keep track of what's going on in the space.

Action Area #3: Identify key elements for transforming the Sunset Lounge into a new, multi-use community venue.

During its heyday, the Sunset hosted a wide variety of causes and events, including high school dances, fashion shows, fundraisers, social gatherings, and more. More than just a jazz lounge, it was also one of the main centers of community life in the Historic Northwest. For the past thirty years however, it has primarily functioned as a bar and for entertainment.

Today, community members are calling for the Sunset to return to being a multi-purpose community venue. Community members were less supportive of the Sunset Lounge becoming a renovated, single-purpose music lounge. They expressed more enthusiasm about transforming it into a community space where people of all ages can socialize, enjoy arts and culture, access job training and job opportunities, and develop other skills.



Action Area #3 Recommendations

3a. Provide programming for all ages throughout the day.

When we asked community members what are the top three impacts they'd like to see as a result of the revitalization of the Sunset and surrounding sites. The second and third most popular answers were "more programs for people of all ages" (52 percent) and "more programs for children and teens" (51 percent). In general, the community placed a much greater emphasis on the "software" (events and programs) than on the "hardware" (hard infrastructure). The most important thing when it comes to infrastructure design is that it should be flexible enough to support a diversity of uses.

Proposed daytime uses include: senior programs, art and music classes for kids, homework groups, office space for local organizations, job fairs, job training, rotating art/historical exhibitions, etc

Proposed evening uses include: concerts, dance/theater performances, affordable rental space for private meetings or parties, drop-in programs for teens, skills enhancing programs for adults, etc.

Case Study: Daniels Spectrum

Location: Toronto, Canada | Est. 2012

Lead Organizations: Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Daniels Corporation, Artscape

Description: Daniels Spectrum is a cultural hub in Toronto's Regent Park neighborhood. A public housing project plagued by decades of poverty, Regent Park underwent a redevelopment process that began in the mid-2000s. Through community engagement, area residents identified the need for a dedicated cultural space in the neighborhood. The facility was built as part of a mixed-use complex. It includes event and performance spaces, office and learning spaces, a restaurant, a café, and community gathering spaces open to the public. Daniels Spectrum is now operated by Artscape, a not-for-profit urban development organization with an arts and community focus. Artscape programs the spaces in the facility.

Funding Model: The project was managed and funded through a public private partnership model. The federal and provincial governments provided infrastructure funding, the City donated the land, while the developer and other donors contributed to the rest of the funding.



Lessons that can be adapted to Sunset Lounge:

- The project architects custom-designed the spaces to cater to the specific needs of the founding tenants. There is an opportunity for the architects to do the same with the renovation of the Sunset Lounge if there are organizations that are committed as future tenants
- The building tenants serve many different needs of the neighborhood: food, academic and arts education, event space, and affordable co-working space for businesses and non-profits.
- The dedicated social gathering spaces are open to the public, complete with seating, tables, and pianos.
- Community members are engaged as decision makers throughout the process as members of boards and advisory committees.

Case Study: Stony Island Arts Bank

Location: Chicago, Illinois | Est. 2015

Lead Organizations: Theaster Gates, Rebuild Foundation

Description: The Stony Island Arts Bank is a hybrid gallery, media archive, library, and community center in South Side Chicago. The bank that previously occupied the 17,000-square-foot building had closed in the 80s, and since then the building was abandoned and deteriorating significantly. As the South Side neighborhood had experienced economic disinvestment for decades, the project was a bold transformation. The building is now restored and serves as a space for residents to preserve, access, reimagine, and share their heritage. It is a world-class destination for artists, scholars, curators, and collectors to research and engage with South Side history.

Funding Model: Theaster Gates, the artist behind the project, bought the building from the City of Chicago for \$1. He salvaged marble components from the structure and crafted them into 100 rectangular blocks, known as “bank bonds”, and sold them for \$5,000 a piece. The Rebuild Foundation also hosted fundraising events for the project.



Lessons that can be adapted to Sunset Lounge:

- Design spaces for multiple uses that can serve different stakeholders: residents, artists and non-profit organizations
- Partner with local cultural institutions (e.g. universities, museums, libraries, publishers, record stores, etc.) to acquire historical artifacts and records for education and display.
- Preserve architectural elements that celebrate the story of the building.
- Use art and music as creative media to help fundraise for the project.

Case Study: Third Street Center

Location: Carbondale, Colorado | Est. 2010

Lead Organizations: Town of Carbondale, Manus Fund, Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation

Description: The Third Street Center is a multi-use, multi-tenant, 45,100-square-foot community center in Carbondale, Colorado. The building was an elementary school before it was decommissioned in 2006. The Town’s economic development plan identified the site as a potential community space and incubator for non-profit organizations in Carbondale. The facility provides affordable rental space and shared resources for over 30 non-profit organizations, artists, and small businesses. It is a regular venue for school drama productions, music performances, and outdoor film screenings.

Funding Model: The Town acquired the site through a land swap with the School District. The Town, the Manus Fund and the Roaring Fork Community Development Corporation funded the project. The Town leases the space to the Center.

Lessons that can be adapted to Sunset Lounge:

- The Town of Carbondale organized a strong group of local partners to push this project forward. Similarly, the CRA should form an alliance of organizations across public, private, and non-profit sector.
- By providing affordable long-term rental space and bringing together a diverse pool of tenants, the Sunset Lounge building can be a place where community organizations can collaborate and thrive.
- Third Street Center is still an ongoing project where building upgrades and programming changes are constantly taking place to reflect evolving community needs.

3b. Find an operator that is “in touch” with the community.

Focus groups called for the future operator of the Sunset Lounge to be in touch with the community, with a strong ability to build partnerships with other local organizations and institutions. Moreover, the operator should be both business savvy and community minded, balancing profits and the needs of neighborhood residents. Community leaders would like the operator to be vetted by a community steering group to ensure that future programs and policies of the Sunset Lounge reflect community values and priorities.

3c. Hire locally.

43 percent of community members would like to see the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands result in more job opportunities for neighborhood residents, making it the fourth most desired outcome of the redevelopment project. The future operator of the Sunset Lounge should prioritize hiring local residents to staff, program, and maintain the venue.





Action Area #4: Design and program the open space as if it were a community center without walls.

Many community members were skeptical about transforming the lot across from the Sunset Lounge into a public space. Community members questioned whether it could ever serve as an appropriate place for children and families. Once people saw the transformation of the open space at the Better Block event, with new infrastructure and programming, their mindsets had shifted. As evidenced in the activity counts, there is virtually no activity in the open space when it isn't programmed or furnished.

When asked how they felt about the open space, 76 percent felt "positive", 21 percent felt "neutral", and only 1 percent felt "negative". When asked to explain their answers, 64 percent of responses had to do with the space feeling like it had a lot of potential for the community.

Action Area #4 Recommendations

4a. Create a multi-generational space for active and passive recreation.

Community members emphasized that the open space should be accommodating to people of all ages. According to the results of the community engagements and feedback on the prototypes, the most important elements to include in the final design of the open space are:

A play area for kids



Harrison Recreation Center in Washington, DC has a jazz-themed playground. Image by: Landscape Structures Inc.

There were as many as 272 children observed playing in the open space during peak hours at the Better Block event. Throughout the event, on average children playing made up 88 percent of the activity on the site.

The future play area should try to accommodate younger kids as well as teens by including both a playground and an open area that is more conducive to sports and free-form play.

To build a sense of local ownership over the playground, consider consulting kids in the neighborhood about the design of the playground including themes, colors, and functions they'd like to see.

Comfortable and shaded seating (and eating) area



Picnic Grove at Brooklyn Bridge Park in Brooklyn, New York City. Photo by Etienne Frossard.

In Phase I of the community engagements, community members placed less importance on providing seating areas. After the community tested out the seating prototypes, seating ended up being one of the top two improvements that community members wanted to make permanent on the site.

In light of community members calling for more community BBQs and more local party venues, consider providing public grills or designating certain areas of the public space as BBQ/picnic areas. These areas should be well shaded, with trees or umbrellas, to provide maximum comfort.

Public art



Aerial photo of sidewalk muralists at the HNWR Better Block event.

Public art was the third highest-rated improvement to the area. Locally-based artists painted sidewalk art and murals at the Better Block event. It's important to continue engaging and nurturing local creative talent in the development of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands.

Infrastructure for older adults



Rubber jogging track in Victoria Park, Hong Kong. Photo by Decoflex.

The heat in West Palm Beach can deter older adults from wanting to spend time outdoors. We heard from community members that if the outdoor spaces had more senior-friendly amenities such as shaded, passive recreation areas (e.g. chess and domino tables), a walking/jogging track (with distances marked), and public bathrooms, seniors may be compelled to enjoy the outdoors. Special attention should be paid to ensuring pathways in the park are wheelchair accessible.

Open Space



Friday night films at The Oval on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia, PA. Photo by M. Fischetti for Visit Philadelphia.

Part of the site plan should also include some open space, to accommodate various types of events and programs such as outdoor concerts, outdoor movies, markets, sports, etc.

Interactive Water Feature



Interactive water fountains on Clematis Street in West Palm Beach. Photo by Waterfront Properties and Club Communities.

Despite being a popular idea among community members, there wasn't an opportunity to test out a water feature at the Better Block event. Given the scale of the open space across from the Sunset, the best options for incorporating water into the park would be in the form of an interactive fountain or small spray/splash pad. A fountain similar to the one on Clematis Street (pictured above) is ideal because the water can be turned off during major events, and the fountain area can instead function as open space.

4b. Staff the open space.

During the Better Block event, a volunteer from the YWCA hosted some games and activities for kids, such as tug of war and a three-legged race. She rallied dozens of kids to participate, using low cost items such as rope and balloons for the games. This was a good preview of what might be possible if there were staff on site at the open space. Parents and children alike might feel more compelled to go to a park, knowing that there are qualified staff on site to provide some supervision and informal activities. During the school year, staff would be most effective during after-school hours and on the weekends. During the summer however, staff would likely need to be there for longer hours throughout the day.

Case Study: Copenhagen's Staffed Playgrounds

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark | Est. 1940s
Lead Organizations: City of Copenhagen

Description: 26 out of 125 playgrounds in the City of Copenhagen are staffed by qualified childcare specialists. Each playground has two staff members on site to offer activities for children such as sports tournaments and treasure hunts. Loose game parts such as bats and balls are available while staff lend out go-karts, buggies, bicycles, scooters. At many playgrounds, the staff also offer help with homework, arrange playgroups, sewing workshops, rhythmic classes for babies and many other activities.

Funding Model: The staff and equipment are funded by the City of Copenhagen.

Lessons that can be adapted to Sunset Lounge:

- Work with the Parks and Recreation department or other youth-oriented organizations to provide supervision and programming at the open space.
- The programming of the space can be geared towards specific skill training for children and youth according to the needs of the community.

4c. Increase public access to equipment to activate the open space.

25 percent of survey respondents were interested in hosting an event in the open space. In order to make it easier and more attractive for third parties to activate the open space, consider partnering with Parks and Recreation to provide an "equipment lending" service. This service would allow the public to rent items, for a small fee, like an inflatable movie screen, extra seating, games, and other equipment that could help bring life to the space. This would require working with Parks and Recreation to provide a clear and simple way to book, pay, pick up, and return the equipment.

4d. Activate the space at night.

Some community members were concerned that a park would be "taken over" by anti-social behavior, especially at night, making it unsafe. Those attending the Heart and Soul Fest in the open space reported generally feeling safe, even at night, because there were so many people around. Given the particular location and context of the open space, it is critical to "program out" any antisocial behavior. It is recommended that the CRA partner with other city departments and organizations to provide night time programming. Programs could include outdoor fitness classes, organized games/tournaments, outdoor movies, etc. Inviting the police to participate in these programs, in addition to patrolling the area, will make community members feel more at ease about using the space after dark.

Case Study: Parks After Dark

Location: Los Angeles, California | Est. 2010
Lead Organizations: County of Los Angeles (Parks and Recreation, Public Health)

Description: The Parks After Dark program was designed to keep parks open during summer evening hours to offer residents of all ages to participate in outdoor activities in a safe environment. In some neighborhoods, the presence of violence and crime often prevent residents from enjoying the use of their local parks. During summer, youth have fewer social and recreational opportunities because schools are closed and youth programming is limited. Originally intended to be a violence-prevention strategy, the program has also become a public health initiative. Residents can participate in recreational activities (e.g. sports and fitness classes), enjoy entertainment offerings (e.g. concerts and movies), join educational programs (e.g. cooking, computer classes), and have access to community resources (e.g. health, legal, social services). Serious and violent crimes dropped 32% in the communities where Parks After Dark was run, while 97% of the survey respondents felt safe when they were at the parks.

Funding Model: The program is led by the County in collaboration with participating City governments. Funding sources vary between cities but the program is generally funded by government agencies, corporate sponsors, individual donors, and grants.

Lessons that can be adapted to Sunset Lounge:

- The Parks After Dark program involves a coalition of many government agencies and organizations, including the Arts Commission, Community and Senior Services, District Attorney, Human Relations Commission, Probation, the Public Defender, Public Health, the Public Library, Public Works, local law enforcement, fire departments, radio stations, community- and faith-based organizations, local businesses, elected officials, and professional sports teams.
- During Parks After Dark events, County Deputy Sheriffs not only patrol the parks, but also participate in activities alongside community members. Their involvement sends a strong message that crime and



Photos by City of Los Angeles

violence are not tolerated and provides opportunities for youth, community members and law enforcement to interact in a positive context. Gang involved community members are encouraged to attend and participate in activities as long as they do so with their families.

- Similar to the resources tent at the Heart and Soul Festival, the open space in front of the Sunset Lounge can become a centralized, low-cost venue for public health and social services agencies to provide services and outreach.



Action Area #5: Provide safe connections

Throughout the community engagements, safety was by far the most common recurring theme. 72 percent of community members would like to see the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands result in a safer community with less crime, making it the number one desired project outcome.

5a. Increase community policing.

Community members called for increased community policing, where police officers regularly patrol the streets and develop a sense of personal familiarity with residents and business owners. Ensuring police presence at evening events also encourages community members of all ages to participate in public life at all hours of the day. The CRA should also partner with other city and county departments, such as the Palm Beach County Gang Unit & Gang Task Force, local police department, and other such agencies to provide programming in the open space and to build positive relationships between the community and police.

Action Area #5 Recommendations

5b. Provide consistent pedestrian lighting.

Many community members and visitors to the Historic Northwest do not feel comfortable walking in the neighborhood at night. Some visitors, especially women, are even uncomfortable making the short walk between their parked cars and the Sunset Lounge. In addition, the existing lighting in the neighborhood is inconsistent and primarily focused on illuminating the road instead of the sidewalks. Providing consistent pedestrian-oriented street lighting along the corridors that connect to the Sunset Lounge is critical to supporting both neighborhood safety and programming at the Sunset.

5c. Activate the edges.



The open space is bordered by the Sunset on the northern side, low-density housing on the southern and western sides, and the railroad tracks on the eastern side. There are few “eyes on the street” that would otherwise provide some form of informal surveillance. This creates safety issues for both those travelling to/from the Sunset area as well as for those using the space. The CRA should explore ways to activate the lots around the Sunset with businesses and other active uses, to increase the number of “eyes on the street” throughout the day. Community members have called for more restaurants, shops, grocery stores, and job service centers in the neighborhood, all of which would complement the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge area.

5d. Provide secure transportation and parking options.

Community members would like to see the trolley service extend from Downtown West Palm Beach through the Historic Northwest. This would activate the area around the Sunset Lounge and provide community members with better access to downtown businesses and services (e.g. Publix grocery store).

In addition to building a parking garage in the rear of the Sunset Lounge, the CRA should work with local churches to provide secure event parking options for visitors to the Sunset Lounge. Doing so would provide local churches with income, in addition to making efficient use of the otherwise empty church parking lots in the evening hours. Payne Chapel, Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, Church of God, Juliana’s Catholic Church, and Peaceful Zion Baptist Church are the five closest churches to the Sunset Lounge, and combine for over 125 surface parking spots.

6

Next Steps



Next Steps

The CRA will use the findings and recommendations of this report to guide the planning and design of the Sunset Lounge and the open space. The Sunset will be under renovation from late Summer 2017 to Fall 2018. During this time, community partners will continue to play an important role in the project, whether it's by providing additional feedback and/or helping program the open space.

There is no standard blueprint for a project as unique as Historic Northwest Rising. Now that the CRA has experience with prototyping various types of infrastructure and programs, it should continue using this iterative, experimental approach until achieving the right mix of uses and activities in the space.

Thank you

to everyone who provided ideas, support, and volunteer hours as part of the Historic Northwest Rising project. A special thanks to Terre Rybovich for her volunteer efforts.

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All Historic Northwest Rising event photos are courtesy of Gyorgy Papp Photography.

To stay updated on this project, please visit www.northwestrising.com



