

Wintermission Buffalo is led locally by the City of Buffalo’s Division of Citizen Services, GObike Buffalo, and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo. The program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. This report was prepared by 8 80 Cities in July 2019.

WINTERMISSION.ORG/BUFFALO
hello@wintermission.org



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	10
COMMUNITY RESPONSES	14
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND PILOT PROJECTS	18
NEXT STEPS	25



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT WINTERMISSION

Wintermission is an innovative program that aims to combat social isolation and increase levels of physical activity in winter for all residents, no matter their age, ability, socio-economic, or ethnocultural backgrounds.

Winter is a wonderful time of year, especially in communities like Buffalo where historic storms have contributed to the city's very identity. But we also know that winter is a challenging time of year. Cold weather, snow, and ice can make it difficult to get around and often prevent people from venturing outdoors. These challenges are exacerbated for people who may have limited mobility, including children and older adults, or who are new to winter and may not have the time, resources, or experience to adapt to the elements. As a result, winter leads many people to experience feelings of loneliness and social isolation which are known to have detrimental effects on our physical and mental health.

Wintermission will reduce social isolation by building on Buffalo's unique winter context and culture and addressing barriers that prevent people from getting the most out of the season.

The program is unfolding in three phases. In the first phase, residents and community leaders were invited to share ideas on winter life in Buffalo. This first step provided insight into what people love about winter in Buffalo, and what could be improved to make life easier,

bring people together, and encourage more outdoor physical activity.

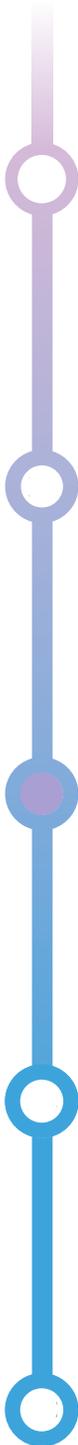
In the second phase, the Wintermission Buffalo team will work with local partners to implement a series of pilot projects, based on real ideas from the community, to live-test new winter programs, events, policies, and design interventions in Buffalo.

In phase three, the outcomes of the engagement and pilot projects will be used to develop a Winter City Strategy, which will provide a long-term road-map to continue improving winter life in Buffalo.

This report summarizes our key findings from the first round of engagement and sets a framework for the second phase of Wintermission which will bring the community's ideas to life.



TIMELINE



Wintermission Cities Selected

January 2019

Buffalo, NY, Eau Claire, WI, and Leadville, CO were selected through a national competition to participate in Wintermission

Community Engagement

March - April 2019

Wintermission teams started city-wide conversations about what people love about winter and what could be improved

Pilot Project Planning

May - September 2019

Wintermission teams will review community feedback and identify new ideas to improve life in winter

Pilot Project Implementation

October 2019 - March 2020

Wintermission teams will test a series of programs, activities, and events to animate public spaces in winter

Winter City Strategy Development

March - July 2020

Using lessons learned from the pilot projects, the Buffalo Winter City Strategy will provide recommendations to continue improving public life in winter



TEAM

Wintermission is led by 8 80 Cities, an international non-profit organization that works with communities to create safe and happy cities that prioritize people's wellbeing. The Wintermission program is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and CAF America. Program partners include the Children and Nature Network and the National League of Cities.

In November 2018, 8 80 Cities launched a call challenging American cities to assemble diverse teams that would advance the goals of Wintermission. The response was astounding, with 62 cities of all sizes submitting applications.

Three cities were selected: Buffalo, New York; Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and Leadville, Colorado. Representing diverse geographic locations and population sizes, these three cities will set new standards and precedents for winter-friendly cities in the United States.

All three cities assembled multidisciplinary teams of city leaders committed to reducing social isolation and improving public life in winter.

In Buffalo, the lead team includes the Mayor's Division of Citizen Services, GObike Buffalo, and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo. Members of the lead team are pictured above.

Buffalo's Winter City Coalition also includes: the Buffalo Board of Block Clubs, Inc.; Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy; Buffalo Place; Buffalo Rising; Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation; Explore Buffalo; HEAL International; Independent Health Foundation; Jericho Road; Jes Breathe Block Club Association; Niagara River Greenway; Project M.O.V.E.; PUSH Buffalo; Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation; SABAH, Inc.; The Tool Library; UB Center for Successful Aging; Visit Buffalo Niagara; and the Westminster Economic Development Initiative, among others.



WINTER IN BUFFALO



Population (2018 estimate): 256,304



Known as: The City of Good Neighbors



Average annual snowfall: 94.7 inches



Coldest time of year: From December 5 to March 13 (approximately 3.3 months), the average daily high temperature is below 40°F



Average temperature in January: 18.5°F (low) to 31.2°F (high)



Number of parks: 346 parks and public spaces

89

ParkScore: 89% of Buffalo residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, according to the Trust for Public Land. The national average is 54%.

Buffalo proudly self-identifies as a winter city. Memorable winter weather events such as “The October Surprise” and “Snowvember” are fundamental to Buffalo’s collective resilience. Since the iconic “Blizzard of ’77,” the city has experienced six severe winter storms, the most recent of which culminated in nearly eight feet of snow and required the dispatch of the National Guard.

However cold Buffalo winters might be, its citizens and mayor are committed to the challenge. Through Wintermission, Buffalo wants to facilitate equitable public activity that shows it to be a creative, inclusive, engaging, and fun place to live, work and visit during winter. The

city’s Wintermission plans include incorporating community into the developmental and implementation stages of winter programming, further cultivating social cohesion between residents and the institutions who serve them.

Beyond the city’s evolving efforts to address winter weather, the city has also committed to the World Health Organization’s standards of an “Age-Friendly City.” Through a multi-pronged approach, Buffalo plans to further its internationally renowned winter-wonderland status and transcend Wintermission and winter itself in order to become an even more engaged and connected “City of Good Neighbors.”



EXISTING WINTER RESOURCES

We began every conversation with Buffalonians by asking what they like about the season. Below is a summary of the existing assets that Wintermission Buffalo will leverage and build on.

Culture of service: When Buffalo experiences intense snowfall, residents join together to dig out friends and neighbors who need help. Some use shovels to clear pathways, while others use their own plows to clear whole blocks. During recent storms, individuals like Susan Cholewa and Seamus Gallivan organized crews of volunteers to offer support to communities and people across Buffalo that were inundated with snow, helping bring to life Buffalo's reputation as the City of Good Neighbors. Beyond these community-driven initiatives, Buffalo is home to a passionate group of AmeriCorps VISTAs (Volunteers in Service to America) who live and work directly with the communities they serve, supported and managed by the Division of Citizen Services.

History of transformation: The energy and fun of Canalside showcases Buffalo at its best as a winter city. It also demonstrates Buffalo's capacity to transform vacant or industrial zones into vibrant urban assets. Located on a formerly deserted stretch of the waterfront at the foot of Main Street, Canalside is now a major destination

year-round, with live music in the summer and unique activities in the winter. When temperatures dip, residents and visitors alike can try skating and curling on the frozen canal, go ice-biking (invented in Buffalo!), eat delicious food, and view a nightly light show. Canalside is an example of the potential that exists in underused parks and public spaces across the city.

Committed leadership: Buffalo has dozens of local leaders, organizations, and institutions that are highly engaged and committed to helping the community thrive. Within the municipal government, these leaders include Mayor Byron Brown and Buffalo's Division of Citizen Services, which manages 311 and the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Non-governmental stakeholders include GObike Buffalo and the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, both part of the Wintermission Buffalo lead team, as well as grassroots organizations, block clubs, business owners, and educational institutions across the city that provide vital leadership. Many city departments, community leaders, and organizations serving diverse needs gave hours of their time to provide input and ideas during the Wintermission Buffalo engagement process. This level of commitment will be critical to the long-term implementation and success of Buffalo's Winter City Strategy.



ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

WHAT WE DID

Wintermission Buffalo is led by 880 Cities but guided by everyone who lives, works, and plays in Buffalo.

In March 2019, the Wintermission team began a comprehensive and inclusive community engagement process to ensure that we heard from a wide range of voices and experiences.

This engagement process included a neighborhood party in MLK Park, public pop-ups in busy locations across the city, focus groups with priority groups, stakeholder workshops, and an online survey.

The following section describes our engagement methods and summarizes our findings.



600+
People Engaged



32
Public Pop-Ups,
Focus Groups,
and Workshops



5000+
Individual
Pieces of
Feedback





PRINT & ONLINE SURVEY

In concert with the other engagement methods described in this section, we created an online survey to hear from those unable to participate in-person. The survey was available in print and online in both English and Spanish. The questions asked in the survey were consistent with the questions we asked in-person. We received 246 responses between March 10 and May 10, 2019. A summary of survey responses can be found on pages 15-18.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY

We kicked off our engagement process with a free Sunday afternoon neighborhood party in MLK Park, featuring a live DJ, hot chocolate, and s'mores around portable fire pits (see photo).

It was important for us to hear from the MLK Park community, and this party was a fun way to get input from people who might not have attended a formal public meeting. At the party, community members chatted with Mayor Byron Brown, took selfies with firefighters, and told us what they like and dislike about winter in Buffalo.

POP-UP ENGAGEMENTS

We held "pop-up" engagements across the city, showing up in busy places at different times of day. Locations we appeared at included the Broadway Market, the West Side Bazaar, college campuses, the downtown public library, and numerous festivals and public events.

People who attend townhall meetings or complete online surveys tend to already be engaged and interested in community initiatives. Pop-ups balance that effect, using a "go-to-them" approach to meet people in places they already visit as part of their daily routines. This style of engagement allowed a broad spectrum of Buffalo residents and visitors to contribute their ideas to Wintermission.

At the pop-up engagements, passers-by were invited to share their perspectives by having short, informal conversations with us, writing their thoughts on sticky notes, or adding colorful dots to our large question boards (see photo on opposite page), indicating what improvements they would like to see for winter in the city. We thanked participants for their input with small tokens of appreciation like coffee or hot chocolate, donuts, or Wintermission stickers.



FOCUS GROUPS

We set up focus groups with specific priority groups, including older adults, children, people with disabilities, refugees and recent immigrants, Black and Latinx communities, and frontline workers serving these groups.

We know that online surveys and even pop-up engagements aren't always representative of the greater population (as noted on page 15). These focus groups allowed us to hear from under-represented perspectives and have deeper discussions in order to gain a more fulsome understanding of how to help all Buffalonians enjoy winter in the city.

Focus groups were held at the Broadway Market Senior Drop-In Center, the Belle Center, Frederick Law Olmsted Middle & High School, Western New York Independent Living Center, Journey's End Refugee Services, Hope Refugee Drop-In Center, Richmond-Summer Senior Center, REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) Community Action Team, and more. We ensured translation support as needed, used more playful methods when meeting with young children, and provided snacks and Wintermission stickers to thank everyone for their time.

WORKSHOPS

We held multiple workshops in which city staff and community leaders collaborated to identify winter challenges, map existing resources, generate pilot project ideas, and develop potential action plans for us to bring to the wider community in the next phase of Wintermission.

In a workshop at Buffalo City Hall, participants included municipal government representatives from the Division of Citizen Services, the Department of Community Services and Recreational Programming, the Department of Public Works, Parks & Streets, the Buffalo Fire Department, and the Buffalo Police Department, as well as members of Buffalo's Winter City Coalition (see page 7) and interested individuals from the community.

We also led workshops and generated ideas with the Buffalo Urban League, the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation, the Board of Block Clubs, and individual block clubs and neighborhood organizations.

Many of the ideas discussed in these workshops evolved into the potential pilot projects listed on pages 21-24.

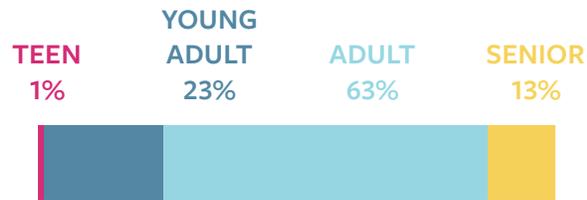
COMMUNITY RESPONSES



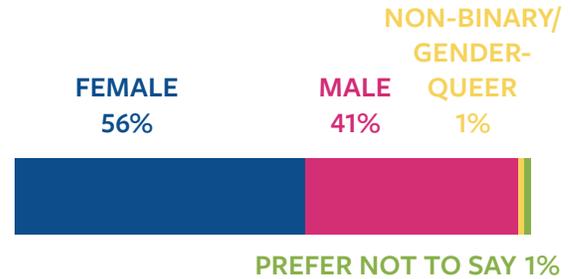
SURVEY RESPONSES

DEMOGRAPHICS

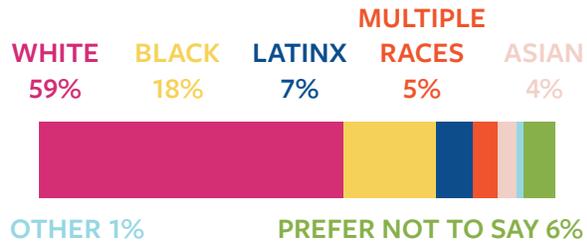
AGE



GENDER



ETHNIC BACKGROUND



This question revealed that the survey was not representative of Buffalo's population, which is 48% white and 37% Black.

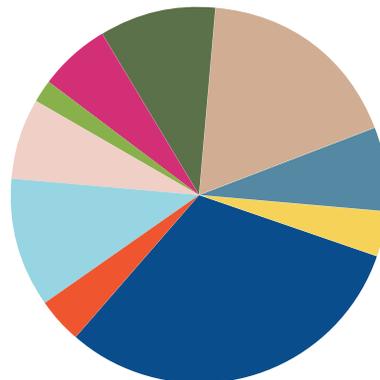
EXPERIENCE WITH WINTER



This question showed that the survey lacked input from immigrants without winter experience.

DISTRICT

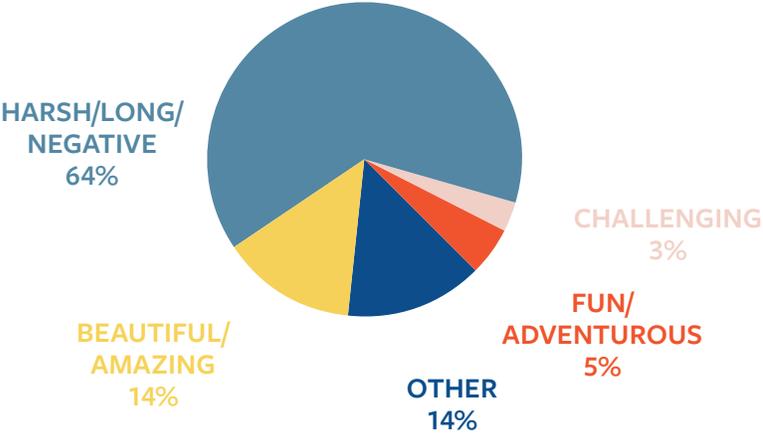
- DELAWARE 4%
- ELLICOTT 11%
- FILLMORE 7%
- LOVEJOY 2%
- MASTEN 6%



- NIAGARA 10%
- NORTH 18%
- SOUTH 7%
- UNIVERSITY 4%
- OUTSIDE CITY / ERIE COUNTY 31%

RELATIONSHIP WITH WINTER

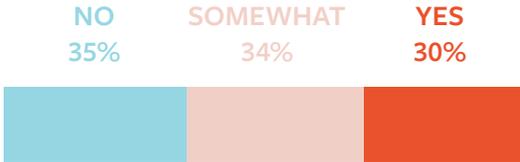
WINTER IN BUFFALO IS...



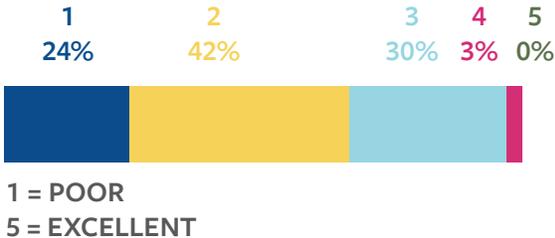
HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND OUTDOORS DURING THE WINTER COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE YEAR?



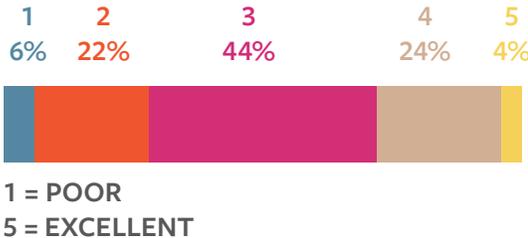
DO YOU EXPERIENCE FEELINGS OF ISOLATION OR A LACK OF CONTACT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY IN THE WINTER?



HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SIDEWALKS IN THE WINTER?



HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE MAINTENANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF PARKS IN THE WINTER?



POP-UP, FOCUS GROUP, AND WORKSHOP RESPONSES



We spoke with hundreds of Buffalo residents and visitors over the course of our engagement process, and the overwhelming response to the concept of Wintermission was positive. Community members agreed that Buffalo is a winter city, and though most had negative things to say about the cold, they were eager to see solutions to make it easier to get outdoors, meet people, and enjoy the season.

The children we spoke with were most interested in imaginative ideas to improve their local parks, but they were not alone; some older adults also wanted to be able to play their favorite games through the winter, like outdoor curling, as long as there is a place to warm up midway through.

For most adults, especially older adults and people with disabilities, the greatest concern in winter is uncleared sidewalks. Many with mobility needs rely on their children or other caregivers to transport them by car to appointments and to see friends. When rides are not available, ice,

snow, and inaccessibility make it dangerous to travel independently, and therefore contribute to social isolation. Concentrating more activities in local parks has the dual benefit of creating a sense of community and improving access for local residents with disabilities, who find it difficult to make longer trips to distant destinations.

A sense of community would help support recent immigrants, who spoke of their fears around winter, and lack of knowledge about resources like local organizations that provide boots and winter gear. Frontline workers indicated the need for a centralized communications system, guide, and/or social program to introduce new Americans to their new winter city.

We learned in all our engagements that for the Wintermission pilot projects to be successful for everyone in the city, they will need to be designed with an intersectional lens in mind. They will need to be as accessible and equitable as possible, for the broadest community possible.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND PILOT PROJECTS

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

We analyzed the feedback from all Wintermission Buffalo surveys, the neighborhood party, the pop-ups, focus groups, and workshops, and distilled them into four priority areas.

● WINTER SNOW CLEARANCE

Buffalonians made it clear in no uncertain terms that their number one concern is the need for better snow clearing on streets and sidewalks. During heavy storms, streets can remain unplowed for days as municipal snow removal teams struggle to cover the whole city. Even in milder conditions, snowy or icy sidewalks can become hazardous for pedestrians when property owners are unable or unwilling to clear them quickly enough. A doctor told us that she discourages her older patients from walking in the winter, despite the reduction in their physical activity, because the risk of injury is too high on dangerous sidewalks.

The majority of survey respondents gave the safety and accessibility of sidewalks in winter a failing grade of 2 out of 5. This negative perception was consistent among participants of all ages, genders, neighborhoods, and backgrounds in the survey and during the pop-ups, focus groups, and workshops. Many people suggested finding more ways for government and community members to work together to improve ice and snow clearance throughout the city.

● WINTER WARMTH

Moving is difficult in the snow, but staying still is difficult in the cold. We heard from transit and park users that they would be more likely to spend time outside if there were warm respites from the bitter winds, freezing temperatures, and early darkness we associate with winter. In fact, the single most popular idea we received across all the pop-ups was “heated bus stops” (usually with multiple exclamation marks!).

● WINTER PROGRAMMING

Respondents have an overwhelming desire for more winter activities in local parks. Buffalo has some excellent winter destinations, from Canalside on the waterfront to the big sledding hill in Delaware Park, but community members told us that they would be thrilled to see more events, activities, and winter fun extending into their own neighborhood parks, whether through city-led or community-led initiatives.

● WINTER INCLUSIVITY

In a callback to Buffalo’s reputation as the City of Good Neighbors, many people want to make winter better for those who lack the experience or the money to truly enjoy it. Winter can be difficult and expensive, especially for vulnerable communities, but we see the opportunity to create new connections through acts of service, reducing social isolation among different Buffalo communities and empowering everyone to be active in winter.

In the next few pages, each priority area is addressed with a list of recommended pilot projects that the Wintermission Buffalo team could implement in the winter of 2019-2020.

The list of pilot projects is based on case studies and best practices from around the world, as well as made-in-Buffalo proposals that emerged during the engagement process. The list is not meant to be exhaustive; it simply demonstrates a range of approaches that can be used to respond to the issues and opportunities that we heard most often.

These pilot projects and Buffalo’s forthcoming Winter City Strategy will be guided by the vision statement on the following page, created by the Wintermission Buffalo lead team.

A group of people, including children and adults, are ice skating on a frozen pond in a snowy park. The background shows bare trees and a building under a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

VISION STATEMENT

BUFFALO IS A CITY WHERE PEOPLE CELEBRATE AND EMBRACE WINTER AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT ACROSS GENERATIONS, LANGUAGES, CLASSES, AND CULTURES.

WE ENVISION A FUTURE IN WHICH BUFFALO'S CITY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS ALIKE GENERATE AND PARTICIPATE IN WINTER INITIATIVES THAT EMPOWER OUR MOST VULNERABLE RESIDENTS TO BE ACTIVE IN WINTER. ULTIMATELY, OUR HOPE IS THAT BUFFALO WILL BE SEEN AS A WELCOMING DESTINATION TO LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY YEAR-ROUND.

WINTER SNOW CLEARANCE

PILOT PROJECT 1.1: VOLUNTEER SIDEWALK SHOVELING INITIATIVE

Building on past ad-hoc volunteer initiatives, launch a formal program that connects individuals and communities that need sidewalk shoveling support with willing volunteers. Manage volunteers centrally within the city government, and prioritize specific streets and neighborhoods based on requests made to 311 and the forthcoming 311 app.

PILOT PROJECT 1.2: HIRE COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO SHOVEL THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD SIDEWALKS

Rather than pay a large company to clear the whole city's sidewalks, pay small groups of people who apply and get selected to manage their own neighborhood or street. This would encourage micro entrepreneurship and keeps taxpayer dollars in the community.

PILOT PROJECT 1.3: PROVIDE COMMUNITY-OWNED SNOW CLEARING EQUIPMENT

Create a neighborhood repositories of shovels and plow equipment for anyone to access. In the past, similar programs suffered from a lack of assigned leadership. Ensure that a neighborhood organization or group of individuals is responsible for loan management.

PILOT PROJECT 1.4: RETHINK SNOW-CLEARING PRIORITIES

Consider shoveling sidewalks and areas around transit stops before shoveling smaller side streets.



WINTER WARMTH

PILOT PROJECT 2.1: WINTER-PROOF TRANSIT SHELTERS

Consider installing transit shelters that provide better wind protection, insulation, or even electric heating.

PILOT PROJECT 2.2: BUILD WARMING HUTS IN LOCAL PARKS

Construct shelters to offer respite during long bouts of outdoor play. These would double as shade protection in the summer. They could be created through a design competition for university students.



PILOT PROJECT 2.3: ALLOW FIRE PITS IN LOCAL PARKS

There is currently a city policy against open flames. Consider rewriting it to allow firepits in more local parks, or lend out portable firepits. Additional policies could reduce fire risk and promote social connections between neighbors, following in the model of Toronto's Dufferin Grove Park (pictured).

PILOT PROJECT 2.4: LIGHT UP THE DARK

Add more lighting in public spaces to create sense of warmth when the sun sets early.

WINTER PROGRAMMING

PILOT PROJECT 3.1: BRING ENERGY OF CANALSIDE TO LOCAL PARKS

Have the city bring winter programming from Canalside and major festivals to different local parks each week, on a rotating basis. Some ideas include live music performances and outdoor movies (with free handwarmers provided), winter markets for local goods, and social nights with a DJ.

PILOT PROJECT 3.2: WINTER COMMUNITY PLACEMAKING FUND

Establish a microgrant program to fund community-led initiatives that encourage people to socialize, get outdoors, and be physically active in winter. Grants could range anywhere from \$50 to \$500. The municipal infrastructure to support this fund exists through Buffalo's other community grant programs. An essential component of the program would be ensuring promotion and access to everyone, including communities and individuals who might not normally apply.

PILOT PROJECT 3.3: GET CREATIVE WITH UNDERUSED SPACE

Add winter programming opportunities by transforming existing spaces so that they can be used year-round. Flood unused basketball courts and freeze splashpads in the winter to create ice rinks for skating, hockey, or even curling. Paint pavement with murals, or hopscotch games or labyrinths, for fun and interest no matter the temperature. Gather freshly plowed snow to create sledding hills in flat neighborhood parks.

PILOT PROJECT 3.4: WINTER ART INSTALLATION

Attract people to parts of the city that don't see much activity in the winter by installing large, interactive, temporary sculptures (see photo). Run a design competition and make the results into a tourist attraction during the coldest months of the year.



WINTER INCLUSIVITY



PILOT PROJECT 4.1: SENIORS IN SERVICE: WINTER FRIENDSHIP PROGRAM

Engage members of Senior Corps to build friendships with refugees and recent immigrants during their first winters in Buffalo, serving the dual benefit of increasing winter access and reducing social isolation. Based on the AmeriCorps VISTA program, Senior Corps are older adults who assist underserved populations and empower communities through civic engagement. Senior Corps volunteers could teach their new friends how to brave the cold, introduce them to winter activities and resources, lead winter walking groups, and maybe even invite them over for Thanksgiving and Christmas. This program could be managed by the Mayor's Division of Citizen Services.

PILOT PROJECT 4.2: WINTER GEAR SHARE OR RENTAL PROGRAM

Share or rent out a neighborhood collections of winter skis, skates, and other gear and equipment for anyone to use, to help increase access to expensive winter activities. As with Pilot Project 1.3, a neighborhood organization or group would need to be assigned responsibility for loan or rental management.

PILOT PROJECT 4.3: WINTER CITY GUIDEBOOK

Create a guidebook for all Buffalonians that lists every winter event, resources available (including information about any implemented Wintermission pilot projects!), and tips for making the most out of winter. Publish a new book each year and make it available online and in print, with translated versions available.



NEXT STEPS

IDEAS TO ACTION

This report marks the official end of the first phase of community engagement. It summarizes the collective vision that Buffalo residents and visitors have for winter in the city, as well as their responses to our three key questions:

- What do you like about winter in Buffalo?
- What needs to be improved?
- What ideas or suggestions do you have to reduce social isolation and increase public life in winter?

The Wintermission Buffalo team will continue to host meetings with stakeholders and community members in the lead-up to the pilot project phase. These meetings will provide an opportunity for the community to review the results of the first phase of engagement to ensure we interpreted the findings correctly, and didn't miss anything important.

The next phase of Wintermission Buffalo, will focus on how Buffalo residents would like to see their collective vision for winter brought to life in the long term. In this next phase, we'll be evaluating the success and impact of our temporary interventions and asking residents and local stakeholders how they would like to be involved in sustaining a vibrant winter culture in Buffalo.

The team will collect user data and feedback for each pilot project and program we implement in the upcoming winter season. We will examine what changes worked well, which didn't, and why. The results of this evaluation process will inform the recommendations that go into Buffalo's Winter City Strategy. This strategy will shape future winter projects, programs, and policies and set out a clear plan of action to ensure that residents' collective vision for Buffalo as a leading winter city is realized.



Photo credits

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