

Mason City's North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan

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NORTH END HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

MASON CITY, IOWA

FINAL REPORT

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OVERVIEW

The North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan assesses the living conditions of North End residents and suggests strategies for future development and improvements in the neighborhood. The North End, located just north of downtown, is one of Mason City's oldest neighborhoods. Most of the neighborhood, including residential streets and a commercial corridor on North Federal Avenue, developed around major industrial employers, such as the Lehigh and Holcim Cement Plants and the Armour/Decker Meatpacking Plant. The neighborhood has a history as a vibrant blue-collar neighborhood where many residents walked to their jobs at the plants and shopped, ate, and found entertainment in local businesses.

However, in the 1970s, most of the industrial employers closed or relocated, leading to loss of jobs in the neighborhood and the closure of many businesses on the North Federal corridor. The neighborhood has struggled with these changes and the City of Mason City has responded by placing more attention on the revitalization in this area. In 2015, they held a series of focus groups that lead to some aesthetic and infrastructural improvements on the North Federal corridor.

PURPOSE

A planning team made up of five Urban and Regional Planning Master's students from the University of Iowa developed the North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan. The plan identifies the key issues facing the North End neighborhood and proposes solutions to help the neighborhood become a vibrant and healthy place for residents and visitors, which allows people to live, work, and shop within the neighborhood and be involved in their community. The purpose of the plan is to present detailed information on current conditions in the neighborhood and provide recommendations

that will guide the City of Mason City and other organizations in revitalizing the neighborhood.

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The planning team identified issues and made recommendations in five categories: transportation, housing, economic development, community engagement and image, and health. Below is a brief summary of each topic. More detailed information can be found in Chapters 7-11 and the implementation table in Chapter 12.

Transportation

The main identified transportation issues include unsafe pedestrian crossings, uncontrolled and unsafe intersections, and limited bicycle infrastructure and lack of transit service information.

Housing

Housing issues in the North End neighborhood involve energy inefficiency in aging housing stock, quality of rental housing, and the presence of placarded/white tagged properties. Proposed solutions include incentives for energy efficiency improvements in renter- and owner-occupied housing, increased enforcement of nuisances and housing code, and rehabilitation or demolition of placarded properties.

Economic Development

The economic development issues in the North End primarily apply to the commercial corridor on North Federal Avenue. This area struggles with vacant and dilapidated storefronts, which impact both economic activity and the aesthetics of the corridor. Recommendations in this section focus on better leveraging existing economic development programs, improving

the streetscape of the area to provide a more attractive environment for customers and businesses, and developing the entrepreneurial support system.

Community Engagement and Image

Negative perceptions of the North End neighborhood as a drug- and crime-ridden area are a significant problem facing the neighborhood. The North End also does not have an active community organization in place to help implement improvements and advocate for the neighborhood. Residents have also reported low overall community engagement.

To address these issues, the planning team recommends the revival of the North End Partnership, a formerly active neighborhood organization. This group can help implement many of the recommendations made throughout the report. This organization could also take the lead on organizing social events for the community, which can help residents become more engaged in their community. Aesthetic improvements, such as public art, murals, or window displays, can also help improve outside perceptions of the neighborhood and will help combat the existing negative attitudes.

Health

This plan focused on the connection between the built environment and health, so the issues and recommendations in this section largely address conditions in the neighborhood that could lead to improved health. These include healthy food options, aging in place issues, pedestrian infrastructure, and the psychological impact of neighborhood stigma. The plan recommends increasing access to healthy foods, providing support for seniors in maintaining their homes and accessing necessary services, addressing the potential for lead contamination, repairing sidewalks and installing street lighting, and a promotional campaign to fight negative perceptions of the area.

PLANNING PROCESS

The first stage of the planning project involved gathering background information to develop a neighborhood profile. Publicly available data sources, such as the U.S. Census, were used to provide demographic and economic information, along with information from the Cerro Gordo Assessor, which gave more in depth information about housing and property values. At this stage, the planning team also investigated best practices for neighborhood planning.

A key part of the planning process was public engagement. The planning team participated in three events while developing this plan. At the first event, the planning team staffed a booth at Mason City's Great River City Festival in September 2017. They conducted an oral survey of people from all of Mason City and the broader region about their perceptions of the North End and what changes they would like to see in the neighborhood.

The second focused on getting input from North End residents. The planning team hosted the Taste of the North End in October 2017, a free progressive dinner for North End residents, which included three local business located on the North Federal corridor. At this event, the planning team learned more about the issues that are important to people who live in the neighborhood.

At the final event, North End Planning Event: Reorganizing the Partnership, the planning team presented their recommendations to the public and asked for feedback in the form of a dot exercise, in which participants prioritized the proposed recommendations. This event also served as a kick-off meeting for the revived North End Partnership and identified several potential members of the organizations core group.

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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PLANNING TEAM

The planning team consisted of five graduate students from the University of Iowa School of Urban and Regional Planning, all with varying specialties in planning, including public health, housing quality, transportation, and sustainability. The team was advised by two faculty members and worked in cooperation with the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities, the City of Mason City, and the Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health. The team also worked with residents and business owners of the North End neighborhood to ensure the plan reflects the priorities and preferences of stakeholders for today and the future.

1.2 HISTORY OF THE NORTH END NEIGHBORHOOD

The North End neighborhood played an important part in the development of Mason City. The area was first settled by Native Americans thousands of years ago who located close to Willow Creek and the Winnebago River located on the east and west sides of the North End. In spring 1853, western Europeans settled in what is now known as Mason City along the riverbank west of the neighborhood.

The development of the neighborhood was influenced by large employers such as the Armour/Decker Meatpacking Plant and the electric railroad station. In 1851, the first sawmill was built on Federal Ave. Then, in 1896, Decker's meatpacking plant was built in the northeast of the neighborhood. Other influential plants in the area included the Lehigh cement plant, built in 1911 just north of the neighborhood, and the Holcim Plant built in 1908, previously called the Northwestern States Portland Cement Co. In addition to the plants, the electric railroad that connected Mason City with Clear Lake was completed in 1898, and fostered more economic growth on the west side of the neighborhood.

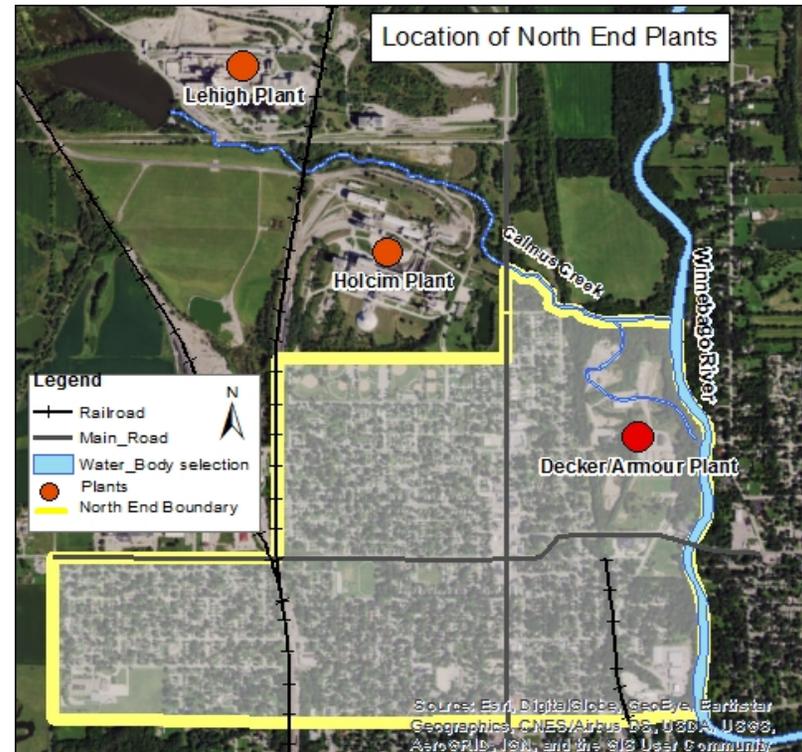


Figure 1.1. A map of the North End neighborhood and the location of important waterways and plants

Most of the residential development in the neighborhood occurred between 1896 and 1975 near the plants. The meatpacking plant influenced development on the east side of the neighborhood, between Federal Avenue and the Winnebago River and between 12th street and 18th street through the 1970's. The location of the Lehigh plant just north of the North End neighborhood helped to develop the west side of Federal Avenue in the early 1900s. As Mason City grew, the North End did as well.

In its prime between 1900 and 1975, the North End was a vibrant part of the city because of the attractive workplaces and businesses that served the local population. The area drew many immigrant populations in the early 20th century such as German, English, Swedish, Italian, Austrian, Bohemian, Irish, Norwegian, Danish, and Russian families who created a self-contained community. The North End had a reputation of being a nice, clean, middle-class neighborhood. In other words, the people who lived here could work, live and shop all within the neighborhood.

After the closing of the Armour meatpacking plant in 1975, the North End neighborhood's vibrancy took a turn for the worse with the loss of 1,300 jobs. According to the Globe Gazette, one of the reasons the plant closed was due to environmental controls in the Iowa Air Quality and Control Commissions.¹ Although the closing of the plant improved air quality in the neighborhood, many families moved out of the North End due to a lack of employment opportunities. This was exacerbated by the 160 layoffs from the Holcim cement plant in 2009 and resulted in the decrease in housing values and the closure of small businesses on the North Federal corridor. Additionally, development on the south and west side of Mason City and the growing number of big-box stores has negatively impacted redevelopment in the North End.

1.3 WHY HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS?

This project aims to identify and remedy specific issues within the North End Neighborhood that have negative health and well-being impacts. The planning team identified local issues and strategies through residents' input and data analysis. This plan addresses local issues through policy and program-specific recommendations to the city, and contributes to revitalizing community organizations in the North End. With active community organizations, the neighborhood can be its own best advocate, and work with the city to implement revitalization efforts to make the neighborhood a thriving and healthy place for residents and visitors alike.

1.4 HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS: DEFINITION AND SCOPE

The field of urban planning developed in tandem with public health, when early 20th century planners focused on unhealthy living conditions in urban slums. As the field has grown, it has often lost touch with its connection to health. However, in recent years, planning has brought its attention back to the connections between the built environment and physical and mental health. A study performed by the Virginia Commonwealth University shows that neighborhood characteristics are highly connected with life expectancy.² For example, residents of Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood have a life expectancy of 81 years, compared to 69 years in the Washington Park neighborhood. These differences can be explained by a variety of factors, such as income-based and racial segregation, but other conditions in the neighborhood, such as access to healthy food, safe housing, recreation, the opportunity for active transportation, and social cohesion, also play an important role.

In this plan for the North End of Mason City, the connection between health and neighborhood characteristics will be a key consideration. This plan for revitalization addresses transportation, housing, economic development, and community engagement and image. However, each topic includes issues that impact the health of neighborhood residents. An additional chapter on health describes these issues in more depth. Many of the solutions throughout the plan link several topics and show the connections between built environment, economic activity, social connection, and the physical and mental health of the neighborhood's residents.

1.5 VISION STATEMENT

The North End Neighborhood is a vibrant and healthy place for residents and visitors alike. The neighborhood is inclusive and allows for people to live, work, and shop within the neighborhood and be involved in their community.

The priority areas include:

Housing: The North End offers safe, healthy and affordable housing for all residents.

Health: The North End encourages healthy lifestyles and provide healthy food and recreational options to residents throughout their lifespans.

Transportation: The North End provides safe and efficient transportation choices, including walking, biking, transit, and driving.

Economic Development: The North End offers a revitalized commercial corridor to create an environment conducive to economic opportunities.

Community Development: The North End is a strong and active community, with community organizations that are active in improving the neighborhood. The reputation of the North End neighborhood matches the qualities of the area.

CHAPTER 2- NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

This section focuses on the North End neighborhood's location and current situation regarding demographic trends, age, race/ethnicity, household size, income, housing stock, poverty, and employment. The demographic data helps understand the challenges and issues prevalent in the neighborhood.

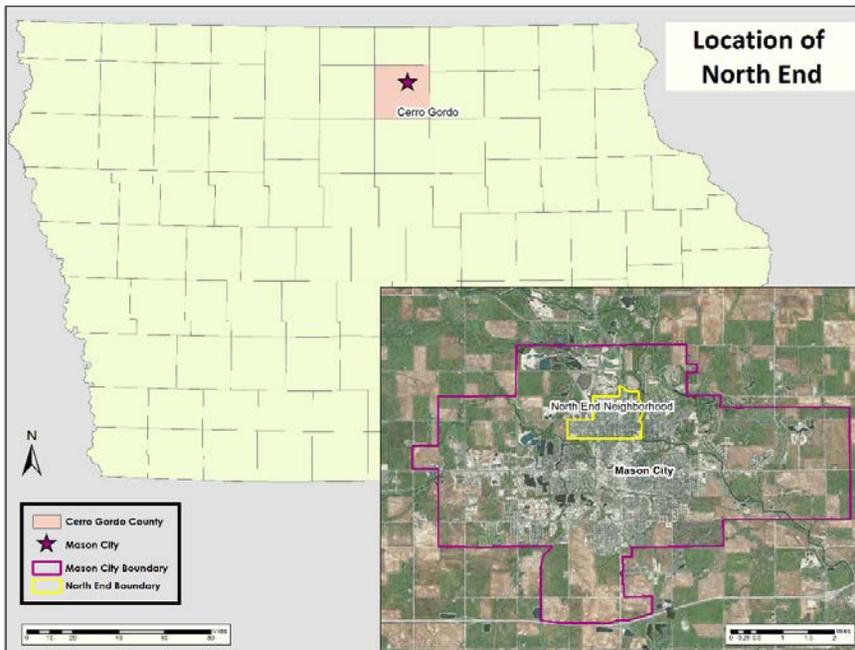


Figure 2.1 Location of North End Neighborhood (Source: Mason City, recreated by authors)

2.1 LOCATION

The North End neighborhood is located in the north of Mason City, in Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

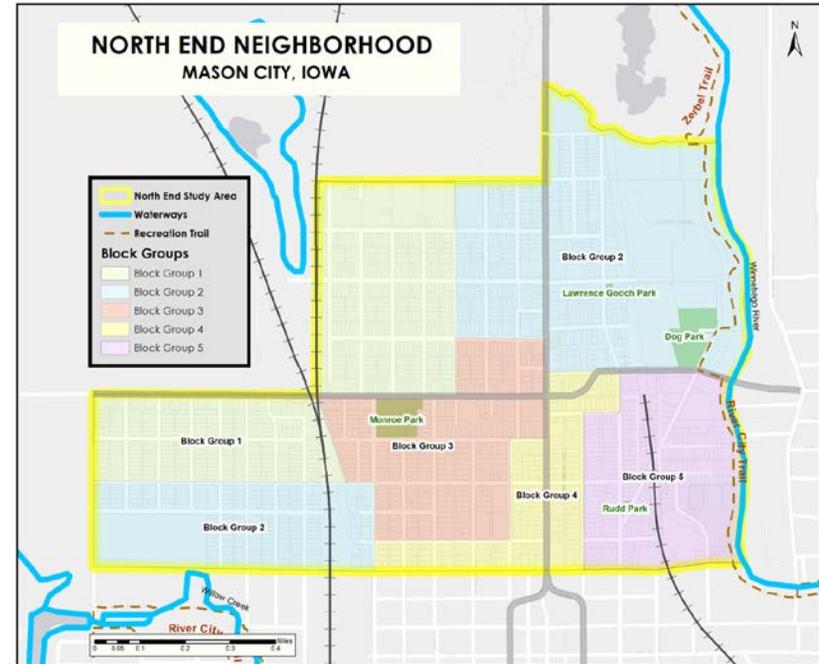


Figure 2.2 Boundaries and Details of the North End (Source: Authors)

State Highway, US 65 (North Federal Avenue) runs north-south through the neighborhood and acts as the main commercial corridor. The neighborhood consists of about 652 acres on the west bank of the Winnebago River. The boundary was decided based on guidance from the City of Mason City, along with comments from people in Mason City and North End participating in the first Planning event (Great River City Festival). The area comprises five block groups (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) in two

census tracts, 9502 and 9501.02. For data collection purposes, Block Group 2 in the southwest corner will not be analyzed, as it is part of a much larger Block Group outside the study area. Block Groups 1 (NW) and 2 (NE) are also portions of larger block groups; however, we use census data from these block groups because the remainder of the block groups is sparsely populated and has little impact on the data.

2.2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

POPULATION

Mason City is among the many Iowa communities that have experienced a population decline since the 1970s. The city's population has decreased since peaking at 30,642 residents in the 1960s. Although the city's population rebounded somewhat by 2000, it did not reach its 1960s level. As of ACS 2011-2015 5-year estimates, the city was home to 27,643 residents. Statewide outmigration patterns from smaller towns to larger ones, perhaps due to manufacturing job loss (possibly during the recessions of the 1980s and 2008) might have influenced this decline.

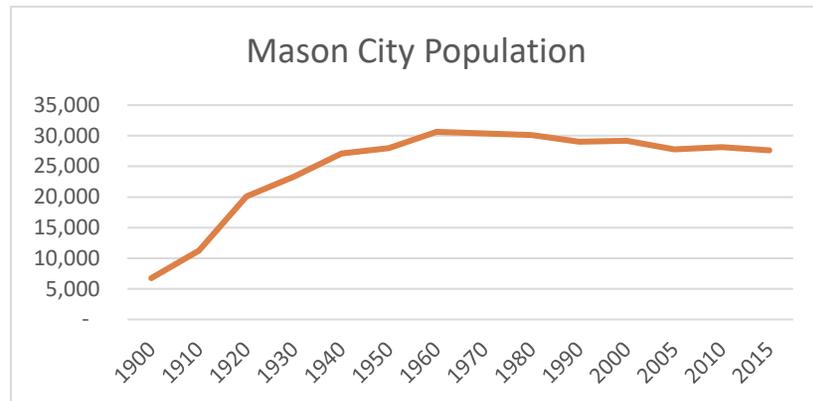


Figure 2.3 Mason City Population from 1900-2015 (Source: US Census)

Following these state and citywide trends, after the closing of meatpacking and cement plants in the 1970s, the North End neighborhood started losing jobs and population. Figure 2.4 shows that population was declining in 2010, but began to increase in 2014-2015. As of 2015, the neighborhood is home to 4,384 residents, which is approximately 16% of the city population, per Census estimates.

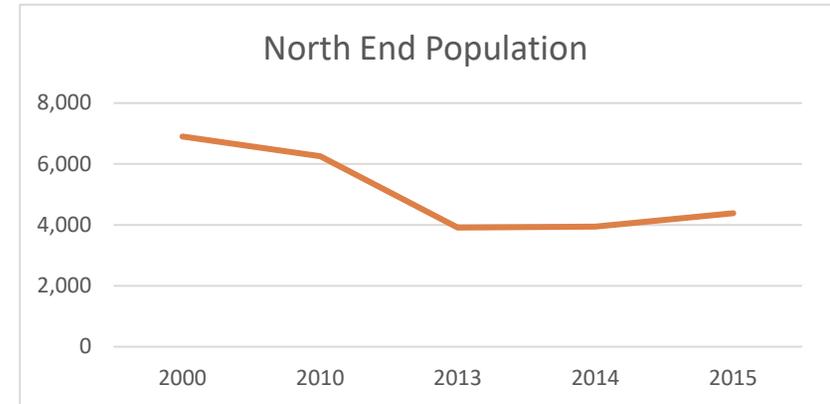


Figure 2.4 North End Population (2010-2015) (Source: American Community Survey)

Projecting the future population of the North End helps estimate potential demand for services. The percentage of population decline in Mason City was 1% per year during 2010-2014 and Iowa as a state experienced annual population growth of 0.5%. Using these rates as reference, Table 2.1 shows the estimated population change of the North End up to 2030. If this neighborhood continues to decline in population at the city's rate (1% per year), by 2030 we would expect 3,770 residents. On the contrary, if the neighborhood experiences growth higher than the state average (assuming at 1%), by 2030 the neighborhood could grow to a population of 5,090. However, following the previous trend, population decline or stabilization over the next years is the most likely the outcome.

Table 2.1: North End Populations Projections				
	2015 (Baseline population from Census Data)	2020 (Estimate)	2025 (Estimate)	2030 (Estimate)
1% Annual Growth	4,384	4,608	4,843	5,090
0.5% Annual Growth	4,384	4,495	4,608	4,725
Population Stabilization	4,384	4,384	4,384	4,384
0.5% Annual Decline	4,384	4,275	4,170	4,066
1% Annual Decline	4,384	4,169	3,965	3,770

Source: ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate

Like the rest of Mason City, North End residents are predominantly white, with a small share of other ethnicities such as African American, Native American, Asian, and Hispanic or Latino. There is a higher share of Hispanic/Latino residents (6.6%) living in the North End compared to Mason City (4.9%). Around 4.5% of North End residents identify as two or more races, which is also higher than the rest of Mason City (2.1%).

According to the 2015 ACS, 66.6% of the North End population was of working age (15-64 years), which is slightly higher than the City (65%). The percentage of people over 65 years is 9.8 percent, which is less than the city.

One of the two largest age cohorts of the population lies between the ages of 50-59 years for both males and females (30%). A significant trend in this

distribution is the high proportion (26%) of the population that is middle-aged (40-60 years). As this cohort ages, both the neighborhood and the city will have an increasingly older population. This factor will affect the ability of the North End to provide for aging in place, which will be discussed in Chapter 9. Data also shows that the percentage of older (65-84 years) and elderly population (85+ years) in the neighborhood is lower than the city. Another largest cohort is the 20-29 years, which means that young and active generation is also important to this plan as some of the strategies such as entrepreneurship and transportation focus both on younger and older populations. Details are discussed in later chapters such as Transportation, Housing, Economic Development, and Health.

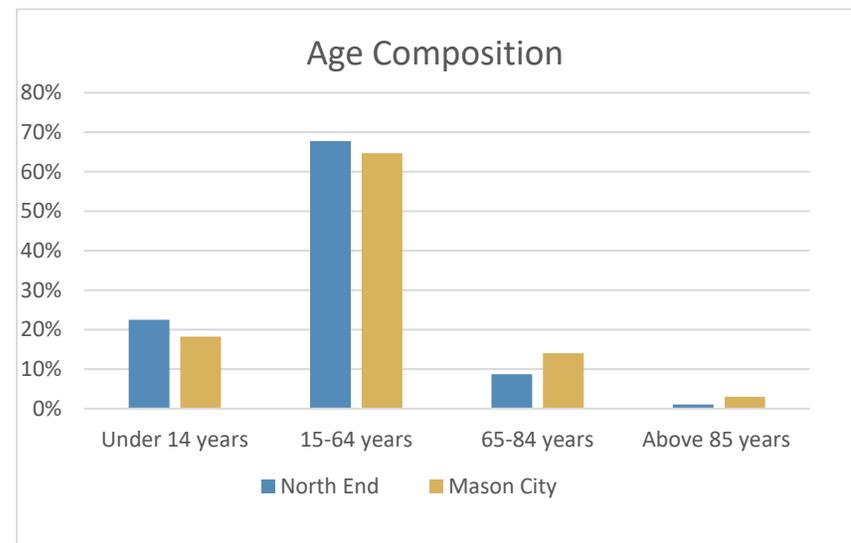


Figure 2.5 Age Composition (North End vs. Mason City) (Source: American Community Survey, 2015)

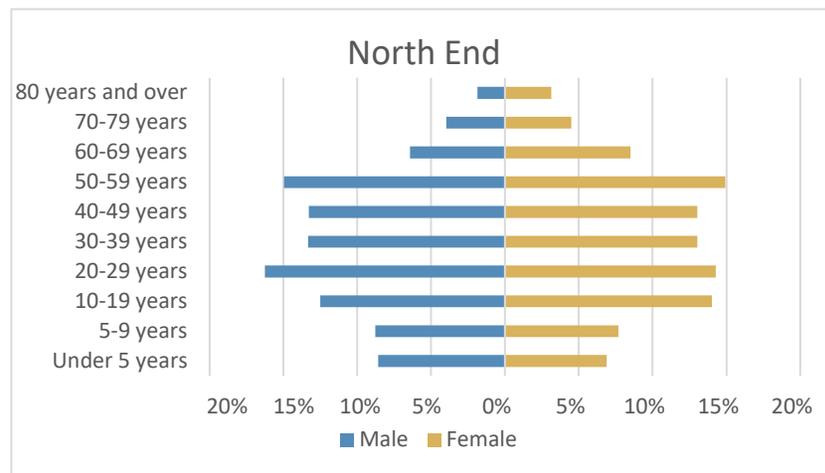
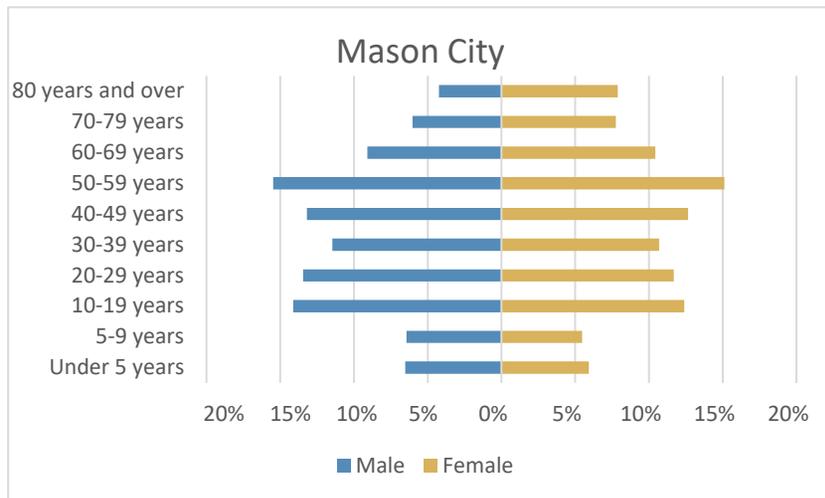


Figure 2.6 Population Pyramid comparing Mason City to the North End (Source: American Community Survey, 2015)

HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION

Household size and the distribution of different types of households is another important factor in understanding the makeup of the community. Household size distribution is helpful to understand the density of the neighborhood and the level of resources required per household. Table 2.2 shows the household size distribution of North End neighborhood in comparison with Mason City (based on US 2011-2015 ACS data). For Mason City as a whole, the majority of households are comprised of either 1 or 2 people, while in the North End neighborhood, there is a significant share of 4 or more-person households (about 27%). This indicates a significant share of more densely populated households, which needs to be accounted for when planning for adequate housing policies for future generations, as 30% of the total population is aged 20-29 years.

Table 2.2: Household size in North End vs. Mason City		
Household Size	North End Neighborhood	Mason City
Total Occupied Units	1,808	12,688
1 Person Household	40.54%	33.80%
2 Person Household	21.07%	33.10%
3 Person Household	10.79%	12.10%
4 or more Person Household	27.60%	16.10%

Source: ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate

Table 2.3 shows other housing characteristics of the North End Neighborhood. The share of vacant properties is higher in the North End compared with Mason City as a whole (11% vs. 6%). The proportion of homes that are owner- and renter-occupied are fairly comparable in the North End and for Mason City (38% and 34% respectively). However, the percent of the population who lives in rental units is higher in the North End (37% v 29% for Mason City).

Table 2.3 Housing Characteristics				
	North End		City of Mason City	
Vacancy Status				
Total Units	2,028		13,530	
Occupied	1,808	89.15%	12,688	93.78%
Vacant	220	10.85%	842	6.22%
Housing Units by Tenure				
Total Occupied Units	1,808		12,688	
Owner-Occupied	1,118	61.84%	8,345	65.77%
Renter-Occupied	690	38.16%	4,343	34.23%
Population in Occupied Housing Units by Tenure				
Total	4,379		26,804	
Owner-Occupied	2,779	63.46%	19,164	71.50%
Renter-Occupied	1,600	36.54%	7,640	28.50%
Source: ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate				

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment rates contribute to income, standard of living, and poverty levels. Comparing unemployment data from 2000 and 2015 shows that unemployment rates have declined since 2000 in Mason City (5.4% to 5%). In the North End, four block groups saw a decline in unemployment like the city from 2000 to 2015, except Block Group 1, in the northwestern part of the neighborhood. However, in two block groups, Block Groups 1 and 4, (see figure 2.2 for locations), the rate is still higher than the Mason City average of 5%.

Table 2.4 Unemployment Rate: 2015 and 2000		
Block Groups	Unemployment Rate (% of the total labor force)	
	2015	2000
Block Group 1	5.63	3.50
Block Group 2	1.80	8.01
Block Group 3	3.97	6.14
Block Group 4	6.17	10.94
Block Group 5	4.67	13.30
Source: ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate		

Businesses situated within or near North End include Kraft Foods, Lehigh Cement Company, Casey's, and Family Dollar. Of the North End residents who are employed, most work in the retail trade (22%) and manufacturing sector (19%). Health Care and Social Assistance and Accommodation and Food Services sectors employ another 27% of the North End population.

Industry	North End	Mason City
Retail Trade	22%	16%
Manufacturing	19%	17%
Health Care and Social Assistance	16%	19%
Accommodation and Food Services	11%	8%
Construction	7%	5%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management Services	6%	4%
Finance and Insurance	5%	5%
Educational Services	3%	6%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	3%	3%
Information	2%	2%
Source: ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate		

INCOME AND POVERTY

Income is another important factor to consider, as it impacts residents' quality of life. Table 2.6 shows the 2015 median household income in the North End at the Block Group level. Block Group 2 has the lowest median income at \$17,412, which is significantly lower than the median income of Mason City (\$43,525). The other concerning area is Block Group 4, with a median income of \$27,500. In 2000, Block Group 5 had the lowest median income, and it increased significantly over the last 15 years. In 2015, Block Groups 2, 3 and 4 saw decreases in the median incomes between 2000 and 2015.

Block Group	Median Household Income (Annual)		
	2015	2000	2000 Income inflation-adjusted to 2015
Block Group 1	\$45,858	\$29,871	\$41,115
Block Group 2	\$17,412	\$22,639	\$31,160
Block Group 3	\$47,250	\$40,847	\$56,222
Block Group 4	\$27,500	\$32,426	\$44,631
Block Group 5	\$52,401	\$21,154	\$29,116
Source: US Inflation Calculator and ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate			

Poverty is related to income and is another variable to consider when identifying issues residents may face. Poverty distribution at the Block Group level (Table 2.7) shows that high poverty rates are a concern for this neighborhood, particularly for Block Groups 2 and 4. In these areas, the poverty level is higher than the Mason City average (14.7%). All the block groups also saw an increase in poverty level since 2010.

	Households Under Poverty Level	
	2015	2000
Block Group 1	17.45%	11.81%
Block Group 2	35.61%	26.24%
Block Group 3	10.18%	3.13%
Block Group 4	33.66%	13.40%
Block Group 5	21.20%	16.41%
Source: ACS, 2011-2015 5-year estimate		

However, the poverty level, as defined by the Census, varies based on household size. For a 1-person household, it is \$12,060; for a 2-person household, it is \$16,240, and for a 4-person household it is \$24,600 (Wissman, 2017).

2.3 LAND USE

This section describes the current and future land use plan from the 2006 Mason City Comprehensive plan. It also includes the city’s zoning regulations that specify what use is currently allowed on each parcel, and outline design and development guidelines for those intended uses.

CURRENT LAND USE AND ZONING

Understanding land use is important for assessing resources, opportunities and constraints in the neighborhood, and for planning for future development. Land uses in Mason City can be divided into developed and undeveloped areas. Undeveloped areas consist of open spaces and vacant urban land. Developed areas include residential, commercial, industrial, civic uses and transportation sector (i.e., roads, sidewalks). In Mason City, residential areas make up about 34% of the total land, followed by the transportation sector, at 25.5%. The North End is a residential neighborhood, with residential land uses making up 70.4% of the land area. Single-family plots make up about 96.7% of residential lands. Industrial use makes up 15% of the North End land, about the same as the city’s share. Though North End has a smaller share of commercial area than Mason City as a whole, the commercial corridor is currently underutilized. Chapter 7 discusses potential opportunities for economic development within the designated commercial zones.

Table 2.8: Land Use Classification

	Mason City		North End	
	Acres	Developed Land	Acres	Developed Land
Residential	2,886	34.1%	302	70.4%
Single-Family	2,654		292	
Multi-Family	221		6	
Mobile Homes	11		4	
Commercial	719	8.5%	17	4.0%
Financial/ Office	105		4	
Eating/ Entertainment	57		2	
Service	62		1	
Retail	300		7	
Automotive	52		3	
Commercial/ Recreational	43			
Mixed Use (Downtown)	100			
Industrial	1,267	15.0%	63	14.7%
General Industrial	1,010		62	
Light Industrial	257		1	
Civic	1,434	16.9%	47	11.0%
School	289		15	
Public/ Utilities	59		1	
Other Civic	233		2	
Parks/ Recreation	569		29	
Clinic/ Hospital	285			
Transportation	2,163	25.5%		

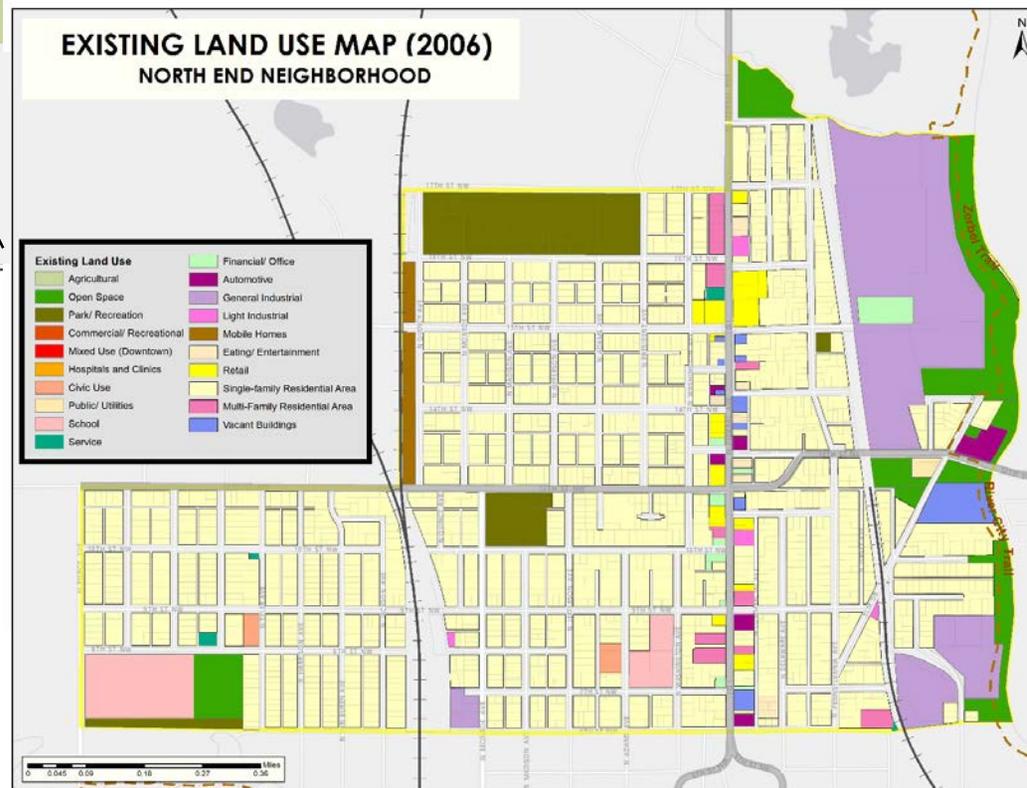
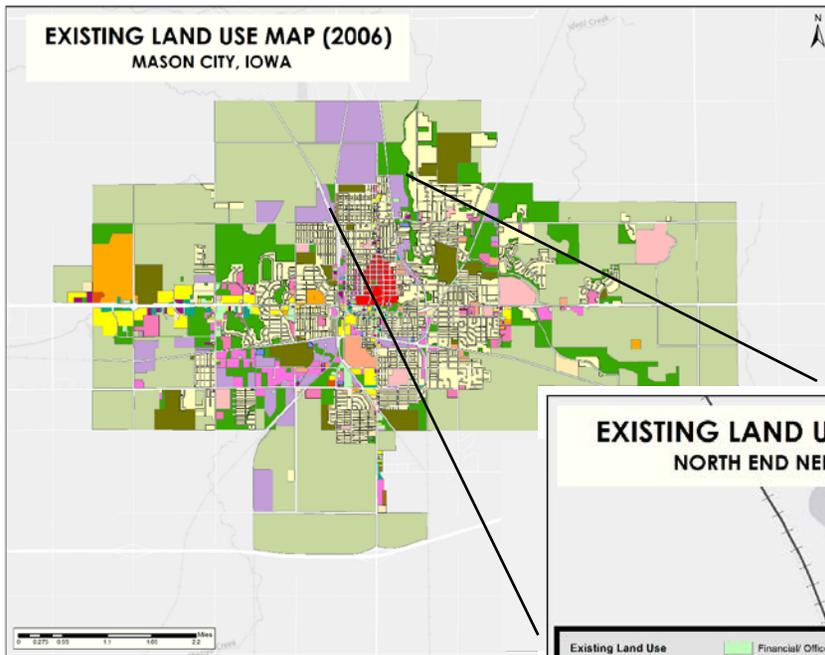


Figure 2.7 Existing Land Use Map of Mason City (Top).

Figure 2.8 Existing Land Use Map of the North End (Right).
(Land Use Key is the same for both maps)

(Source: City of Mason City)

The Mason City Zoning Ordinance was adopted to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community as required by the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act. It is under Title 12 of Mason City Code. Zoning designations determine how a parcel can be developed. The zoning ordinance incorporates form-based districts with regulations for each district that provide flexibility in the application of ordinance requirements. The regulations assist in establishing land use and preventing the incompatibility of uses.

Under the current zoning regulation, Mason City has seven zoning districts. The North End includes four zoning districts:

- Z2 Sub-Urban District: Consists of lower density development such as detached, single family residential, open lawns, occasional corner stores and/or corner offices, neighborhood and community parks, greenways, on and off-street trails, interconnected streets and multi-lane thoroughfares with sidewalks.
- Z3 General Urban District: Comprises a mix of urban houses, small retail establishments, home offices, neighborhood parks, parking lots and interconnected streets with sidewalks.
- Z4 Multi-Use District: Supports a combination of retail, personal and business service, office, lodging, automotive service, and medium to high-density residential services.
- Z6 Industrial District: Promotes management and preservation of existing industrial facilities and sustainable employment centers with interconnected streets and sidewalks. It is divided into two parts: Z6-O for open industry and Z6-R for restricted industry. Open industries are classified as those that have potential for nuisance or hazard generation from operation, manufacturing, or distribution. Restricted industries are those not creating appreciable nuisance or hazard and not detrimental to the surrounding area.

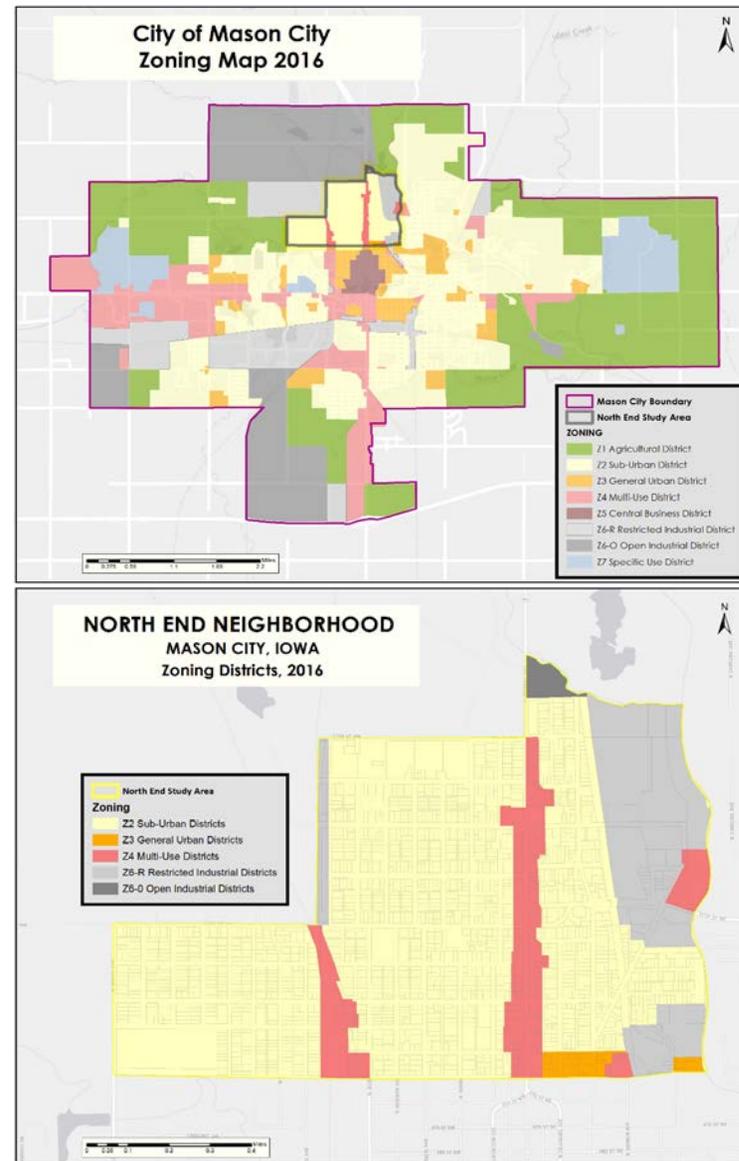


Figure 2.9 Zoning Map for Mason City (Top) and Zoning Map for the North End (Bottom). (Source: City of Mason City)

FUTURE LAND USE

The Future land use map envisions how the city should look in 10-15 years and is used to guide the development of the city, while keeping the vision in mind. The future land use categories in the City are slightly different from the current ones. It has more categories in residential development (low, medium, and high density), three divisions in mixed use areas, and more in urban land categories including reserve, estates, and

redevelopment. However, few of these categories fall within the North End's boundary. The future land use map shows the North End remaining mainly residential, with the commercial corridor shifting to Downtown Mixed-Use development and an expanded industrial area in the eastern edge of the neighborhood.

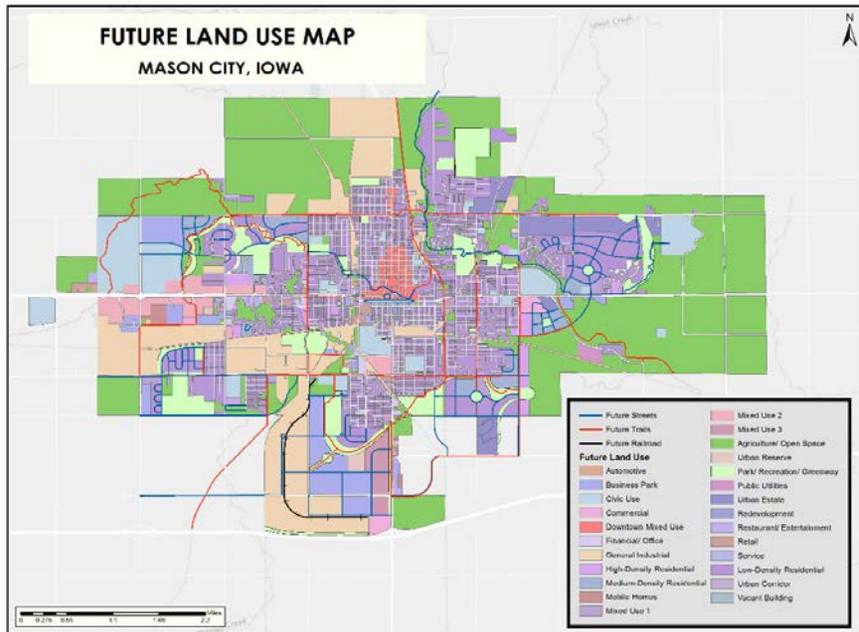


Figure 2.10 Future Land Use map of Mason City (Source: City of Mason City)



Figure 2.11 Future Land Use map of the North End (Source: City of Mason City)

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1 PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process behind this report began with gathering background information, both about the North End neighborhood and Mason City as a whole. The primary source for this information was the Census’s 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. As the project progressed, more information was provided by data from the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT), Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Cerro Gordo County Assessor, Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health, the City of Mason City, and the Mason City Police Department. The team also visited Mason City and learned some background information about the neighborhood from the Mason City project partners, then toured the neighborhood and spoke with some residents and local business owners.

From this data, the planning team identified preliminary issues to further explore in the neighborhood. These issues were presented to residents of the neighborhood through public engagement events, which are discussed further in the following section and chapter. Conversations with residents, along with data collected through surveys, helped to refine the identified issues for the neighborhood.

The next step of the planning process was developing recommendations for addressing the key issues in the neighborhood. One method that informed these recommendations was the use of case studies. Case studies look at how other communities have addressed similar issues and which solutions have been most successful. These case studies are included in this report along with the recommendations.

In addition to recommendations, this report provides details on implementation with steps for accomplishing the recommendations,

defines which agencies are responsible for each solution, and develops a timeline and metrics for assessing the success of these interventions.



Figure 3.1 The planning team meeting with Mason City partners (Top), and touring the North End Neighborhood (Bottom). (Source: IISC)

3.2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The planning team gathered data from the community by engaging the public in planning for their neighborhood through attending city events and hosting events for North End residents. Including public participation in planning is one of the American Planning Association's best practices and having a public who is engaged in the process typically results in a tailored plan that works better for the community. One of the goals of public engagement was to understand perceptions of the North End from Mason City residents who live both inside and outside of the neighborhood. To reach out to the entire community, the planning team staffed a booth at the Great River City Festival, an event that attracts participants from the broader community. However, our primary goal with public engagement was to better understand what residents of the North End neighborhood thought about the issues facing their community. To gather these perspectives, we held the Taste of the North End, a progressive dinner specifically for North End residents at which the planning team presented preliminary findings and held discussions with residents in October. In April the planning team held another event, Reorganizing the Partnership, to present solutions and gain public feedback as well as try to get residents to start reviving the North End Partnership. Both of these events will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter on public participation.

CHAPTER 4- PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 2015 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

In the summer of 2015, the City held two focus groups and a public workshop, attended by approximately 40 North End residents and business owners, with the purpose of obtaining stakeholder input on revitalization efforts and ideas for the North Federal Corridor. At this workshop, the city led a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.¹ Some of the strengths identified were: a high traffic commercial area, cheap available land and buildings, historical nature of buildings, proximity to downtown, locally owned businesses, and good neighbors. Some weaknesses identified were: lack of lighting, bad sidewalks, bad condition of buildings, vacant commercial buildings, many renters, lack of law enforcement, and a bad reputation.

Many of the strengths such as available rental and commercial properties and the historic reputation were identified as opportunities, as well as bike trails and the possibility of converting the old railroad track into bike trails. However, issues such as a lack of funding, the cost of revitalization, and the perception of the area being 'high crime' were identified as threats to progress and revitalization. Overall, the three most common improvements people wanted to see were:

- 1) Streetscape improvements
- 2) Aesthetic improvements on the Federal Corridor
- 3) Changing perceptions of the area.

Since the public input sessions, the city has paved a parking lot, added and improved lighting on North Federal, and made some efforts to improve streetscaping with increased signage.

4.2 GREAT RIVER CITY FESTIVAL

The annual Great River City Festival celebrates Mason City's heritage and commemorates the robbery of the First National Bank in 1934. On Friday September 18th and Saturday September 19th 2017, the planning team set up a booth at the festival to discuss people's perceptions about of the North End neighborhood. At the booth, a map with tentative a North End boundary was displayed, and festival attendees were asked how often they visit the North End and why, as well as their perceptions, favorite aspects of the neighborhood, and changes they would like to see. Overall, 32 people completed surveys and provided verbal comments (copy of survey in Appendix).



Figure 4.1. A member of the planning team speaking with a resident about the North End at the Great River City Festival (Source: Authors)

The most commonly mentioned favorite aspects of the North End were the restaurants and the friendliness of the neighborhood. People would like to see more local businesses such as a small grocery store, road improvements (including better sidewalks, safer crossings on Federal Ave, and fixing pavement), revitalization of commercial buildings, and improvements in rental properties.

4.3 THE TASTE OF THE NORTH END (TONE)

The planning team organized the Taste of the North End (TONE), a progressive dinner designed to receive input from North End residents, on October 26th, 2017. This event was free to North End residents and business owners, and was publicized through the IISC and Historic North End Facebook pages, as well as by flyers posted in participating restaurants and around the community. The event started at Burke's Bar and Grill for appetizers, then moved to Blue Heron Bar and Grill for salad, then Little Chicago for pizza, and ended at an empty commercial space next door for dessert donated by Northwestern Steakhouse. At each stop, a member of the planning group presented data about different topics: housing, transportation/connectivity, health, and community organization. While attendees were sharing food and discussing each topic, the planning group walked around to different groups to answer questions, discuss issues, and learn more about residents' visions for the future of the North End.

At the final stop, participants discussed community involvement and what role a community organization could have in helping revitalize the North End. There was discussion on what it would take to revive the North End Partnership, and attendees were asked what they would be willing to do to help their community. This was important to the process because the revival of a community organization is a major element to advocating for the community's best interest after the planning team's involvement ends. Residents were also asked to complete a written survey asking about many aspects of the neighborhood that were discussed during the event. Approximately 45 residents attended, although only 26 residents

responded to the survey. Many participants were local business owners wanting to help their community. Figures 4.3-4.5 on the following page break down demographic data of the community members who attended TONE and completed the survey, including age, gender, and how long they have lived in the neighborhood.



Figure 4.2. Residents and a member of the Planning Team eating pizza and discussing the future of the North End (Source: U Iowa Public Health)

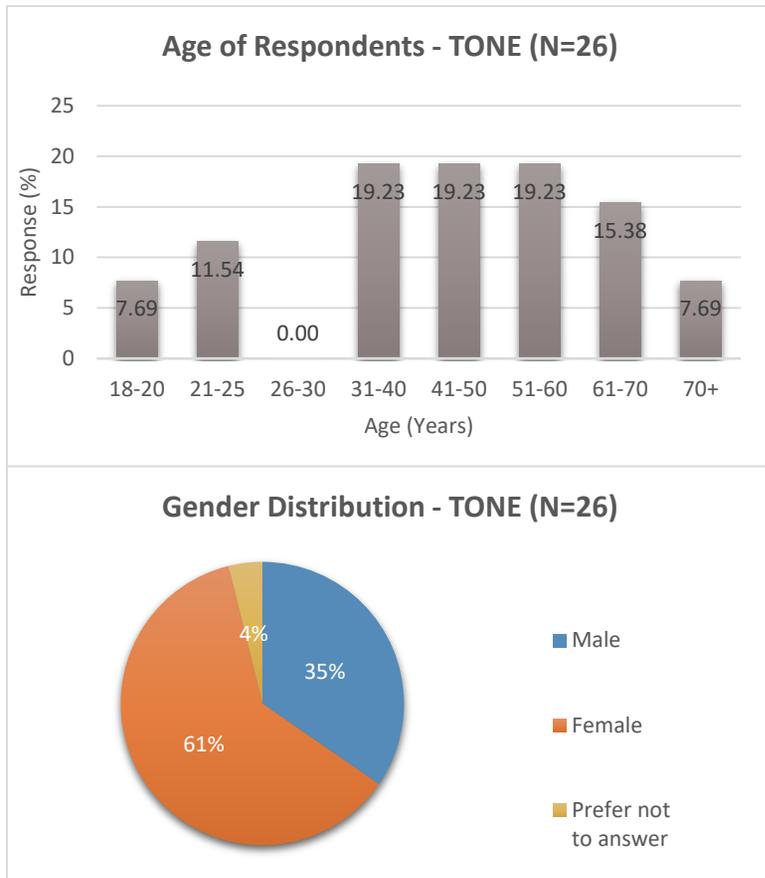


Figure 4.3 & Figure 4.4. Breakdown of demographics of Taste of the North End Attendees (Source: Authors)

Most people who attended the event were between 30 and 60 years old, which is the age group that makes up about 41% of North End residents overall. Additionally, at TONE 61% of attendees were female, which is higher than the North End. Finally, half of attendees had lived in the North End for over 10 years.

When asked about their favorite aspects of the North End, many respondents echoed comments from the Great River City Festival by mentioning the old building stock, historic aspects of the neighborhood, friendliness of neighbors, and restaurants in the area. Most people felt the quality of life in the North End was either average or good, but that the North End has a bad reputation.

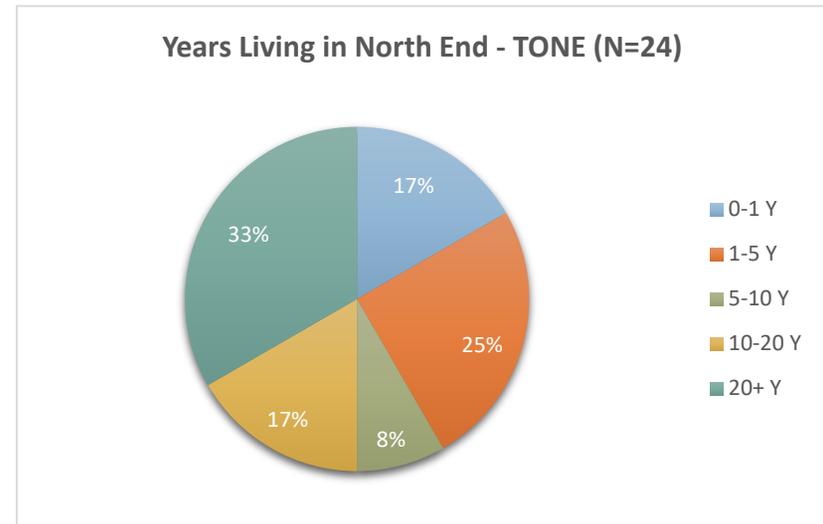


Figure 4.5. Breakdown of how long attendees have lived in the North End (Source: Authors)

Residents were also asked about their opinions on issues that the planning team had identified on the topics of housing, transportation, health, and community organization. Figure 4.6 shows that at least half of residents agree that housing quality and property values are low, the Federal Avenue Corridor is not safe to cross, the neighborhood lacks public transit options, there is a lack of food access in the neighborhood, that perceptions of the neighborhood are poor throughout Mason City, and that there is a need for a community organization for the North End. A copy of this survey can be found in the appendix.

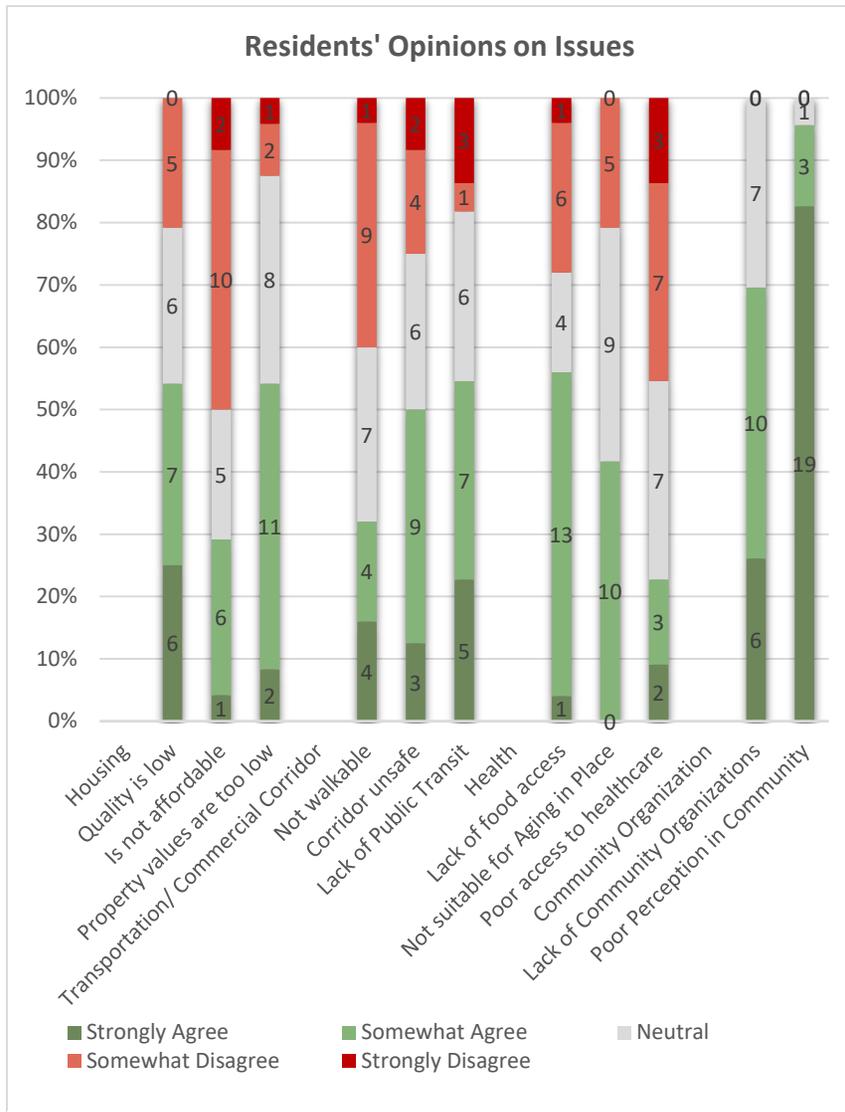


Figure 4.6. How residents' perceptions met up with the planning team's initial observations and data analysis (Source: Authors)

Other topics of concern that came up during the event were a lack of pride in housing ownership when it comes to taking care of properties, the poor quality of rental homes, the dilapidated, vacant look of some of the properties along the North Federal corridor and the north entrance to Mason City, high traffic speeds on North Federal and the close proximity of sidewalks to the streets, lack of controlled intersections in the neighborhood and pedestrian crossing points, lack of economic opportunities/incentives, and wanting more parks/recreation areas in the neighborhood.

Residents were not only asked what changes they would like to see in the neighborhood, but also how they would personally contribute to promoting these changes. Many people said they would like to see buildings updated and landlords held accountable for the state of their properties. Others reflected on the North End's past and wanted to see a grocery store and other businesses move in that would make the area more self-sufficient. Safety issues came up, such as better lighting, improved sidewalks, and more controlled intersections and pedestrian crossing points. Aesthetic and social aspects such as murals, benches, streetscape improvements, community gardens, and community organizations were also mentioned. Residents felt that they could contribute by being part of a community organization and getting their friends and families involved, volunteering for community events, and keeping their own yards and properties clean in an effort to influence their neighbors.

4.4 NORTH END PLANNING EVENT: REORGANIZING THE PARTNERSHIP

On April 9th, 2018, the team hosted another public input event with the goal of getting residents' feedback on proposed solutions. This was a virtual event hosted in conjunction with the Mason City Planning Department and Cerro Gordo Public County Health Department at the Grace United Methodist Church.

The goal of the event was to gain input on the solutions the team drafted using a dot exercise, as well as help from neighborhood residents in prioritizing which solutions they wanted to see accomplished first. Secondly, this event was to continue to engage community members in the process by reactivating the North End Partnership community organization.

The event started with Mason City Planning staff welcoming residents and giving an overview of the goals of this meeting. Then, attendees watched a short presentation by the planning team explaining each of the proposed solutions. The presentation also included instructions on how to do the dot exercise, where each attendee was given 8 green dots to place on solutions they liked and wanted to prioritize, 3 optional red dots to place on solutions they did not want to see implemented, and blue dots to place on the Community Organization portion of the poster to determine what direction residents wanted the North End Partnership to take. The approximately 25 residents who attended the event liked most of the solutions proposed, and only a few people did not like some of the solutions. Figures 4.7-4.11 display the results of the dot exercise.

After the dot exercise, there was some discussion time for residents to talk about issues in the neighborhood with planning officials and government members who attended the event, namely Mason City's mayor and a member of City Council. This discussion turned into a discussion of reviving the North End Partnership. Overall, 18 residents expressed interest in being a part of the revived community organization and wrote their information down on a contact sheet, with 8 of those people expressing interest in being part of the core leadership group. The residents who expressed interest were given a packet with guidelines on how to run a community organization, along with ideas for what the organization could do, and resources that Mason City already has in place for neighborhood community organizations.

For the transportation solutions, residents most want to prioritize adding pedestrian crossing points along North Federal, with 17 dots, but also thought the other three solutions were important with 9 dots each. For housing, residents most liked the solutions to increase rental re-inspections and demolish condemned properties, with 28 and 22 dots respectively. In the economic development solutions, residents want to make sure that building owners who receive grants fill their spaces within 2-3 years or must pay back the money, with 11 dots. Residents also want to see the North End Partnership revived, with 13 dots, and agree that the organization should host neighborhood cleanups, social events, and informational meetings. Finally, residents agreed with a wide variety of the health solutions proposed, but the most popular were: a community garden with 7 dots, partnering with NIACC and creating a youth program to help seniors age in place, with 8 dots each, and improving street lighting, with 9 dots.

Overall, the dot exercise helped to prioritize solutions and confirmed that the planning team was proposing solutions that met residents' wants and needs. There were a few solutions that residents did not think were as important as the planning team such as energy rebates, weatherization programs, the entrepreneurial support system, hosting community events, and repairing and installing sidewalks. The planning team heavily researched all of these issues and found them to be significant throughout the neighborhood, so has chosen to prioritize them nonetheless. Part of the reason there may be differences in priorities may not be due to a lack of interest by residents, but because each respondent had limited dots and had to choose between many potential solutions.



MASON CITY NORTH END HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Transportation Goal: Provide safe, diverse and efficient transportation choices

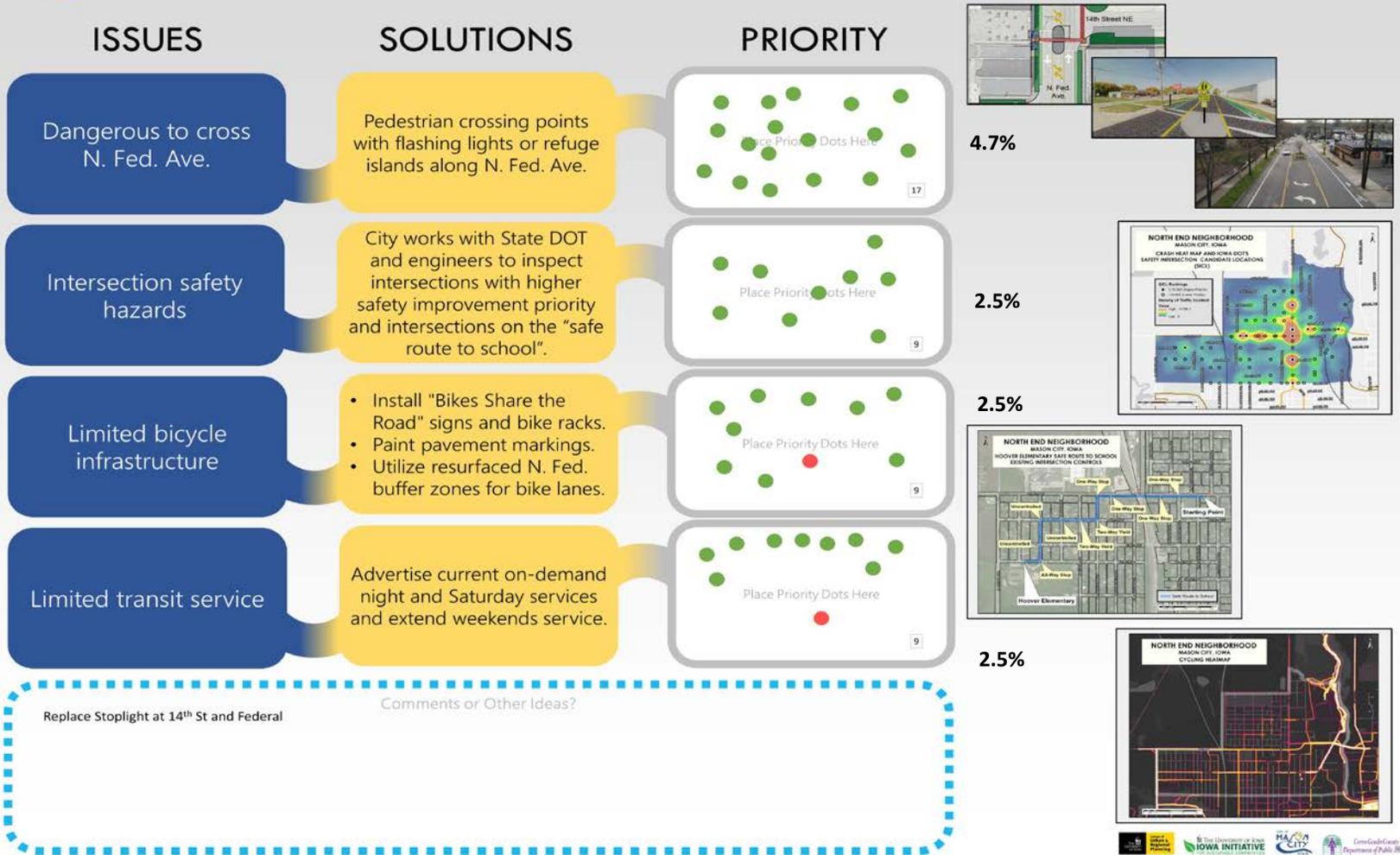


Figure 4.7. Results from the Transportation Dot Exercise. Adding pedestrian crossing points was the most popular solution with 17 dots.



MASON CITY NORTH END HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Housing Goal: Provide safe and affordable housing for all residents.

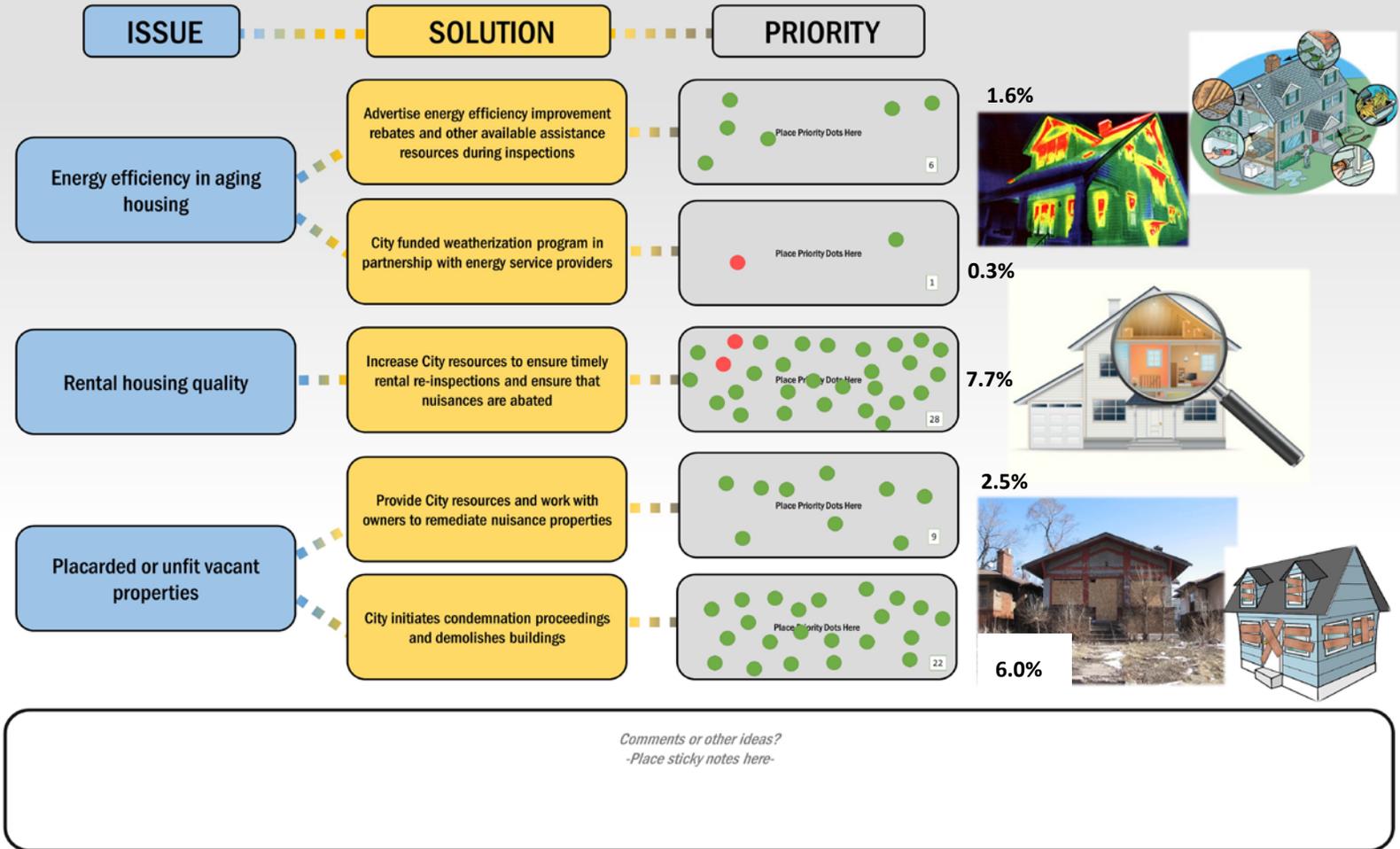


Figure 4.8. Most residents want to increase rental inspections and demolish condemned properties



MASON CITY NORTH END HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Economic Goal: Revitalize commercial corridor so that it provides for neighborhood needs

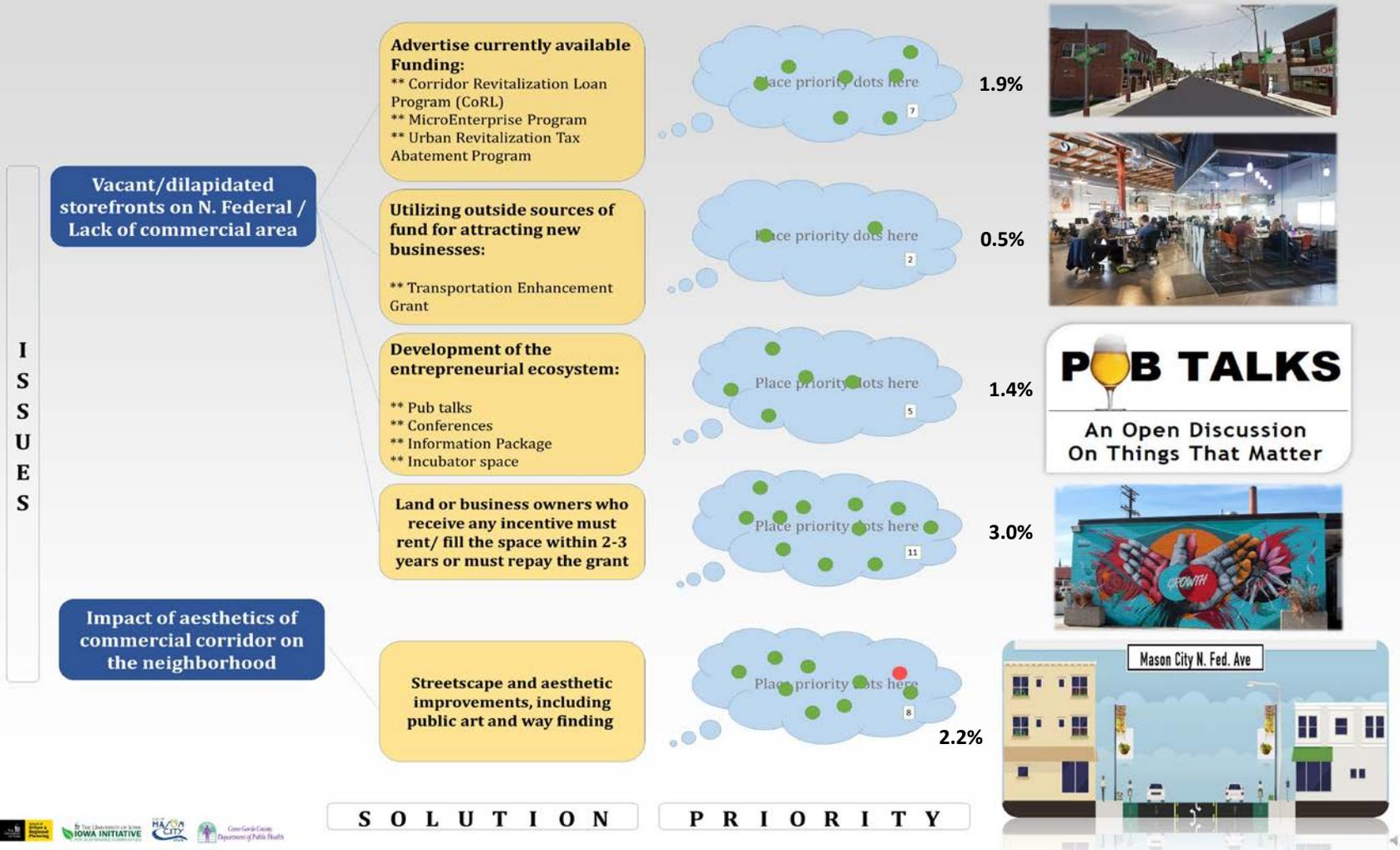


Figure 4.9. Residents most liked the idea that business owners receiving incentives must fill their space within a few year or repay their grant



MASON CITY NORTH END HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Community Organization Goal: Build a strong community that is active in improving their neighborhood.

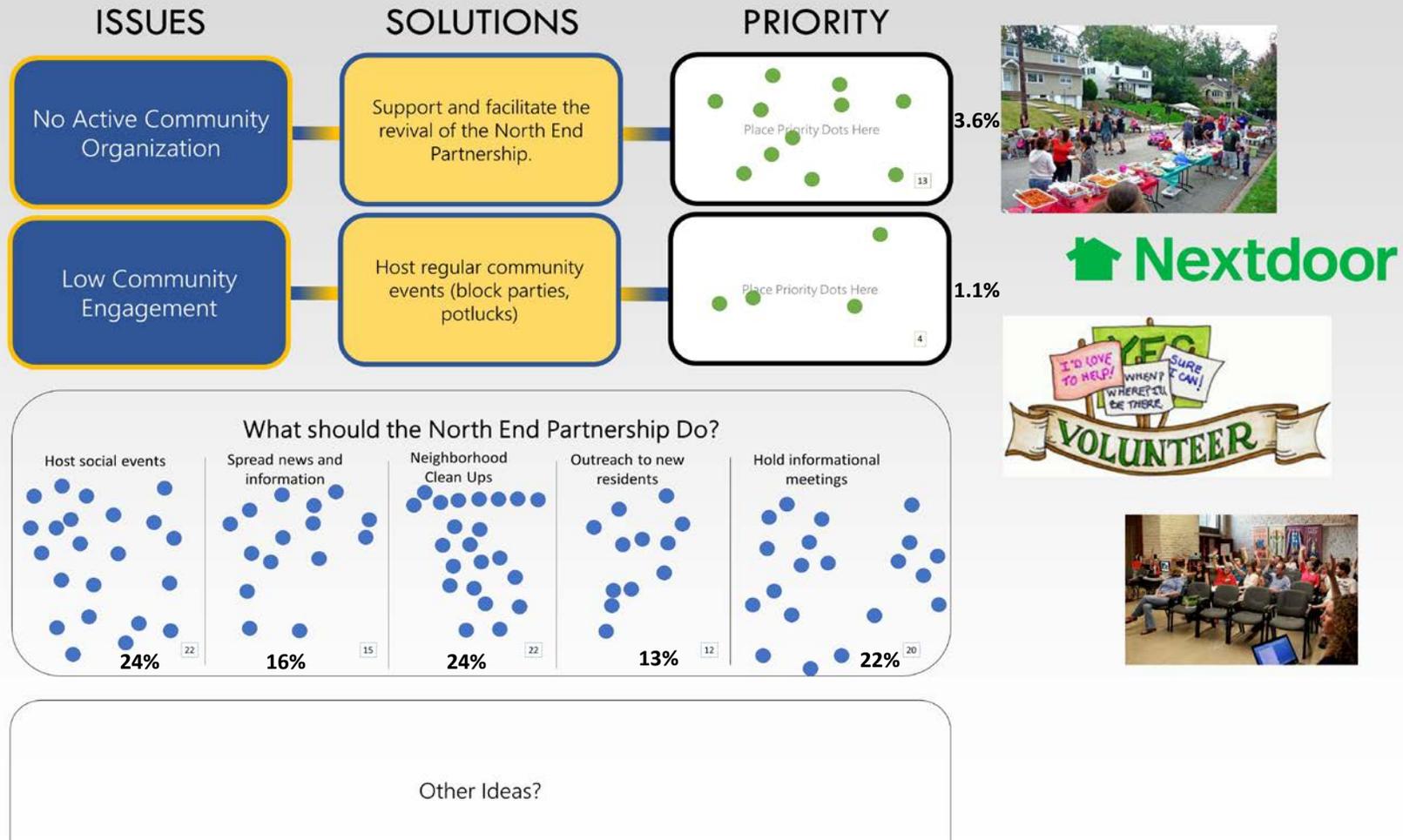


Figure 4.10. Reviving the North End Partnership was popular, and people want to see the organization active.



MASON CITY NORTH END HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Health Goal: Encourage a healthy lifestyle and provide healthy options

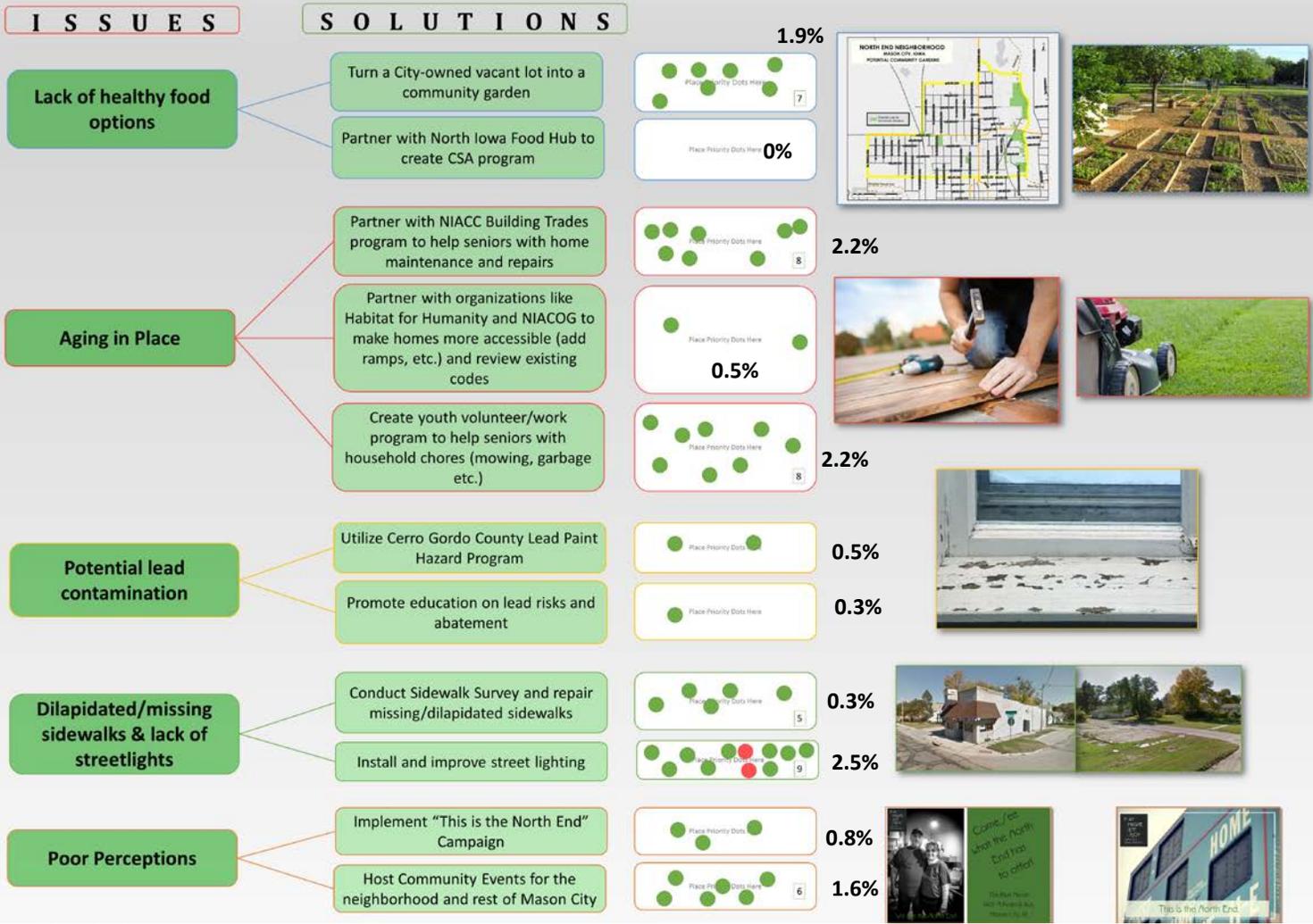


Figure 4.11. Residents agreed with a wide variety of the health solutions proposed.

CHAPTER 5 TRANSPORTATION

The goal of transportation planning is to provide safe, diverse, and efficient transportation choices. An optimized and safe transportation network is essential for improving the North End's prosperity and quality of life. Improved connections are vital to increase residents' access to jobs, shopping, services, and recreational facilities, as well as to facilitate business owners' access to new markets within Mason City. Multi-modal transportation, including car, public transit, bike, and walking supports the connectivity and public health of the neighborhood.

5.1 TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

CURRENT CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

Though the North End has a grid-like street pattern overall which is typically good for safety and connectivity, street lights are absent on most roads, except at intersections. Also, the numerous outlets and offset intersections along North Federal Avenue and 12th Street reduce connectivity and cause potential safety hazards. Most important, 46 intersections in the neighborhood are uncontrolled – lacking stop or yield signs (Figure 5.1).

Though the traffic volume in main arterials are high, most streets in the North End lack pedestrian crossing infrastructure. 12th Street NW, 13th Street NE, and North Monroe Avenue have higher average annual daily traffic (AADT) compared to other streets in the neighborhood (Figure 5.2). Only two intersections, one between N. Fed. and 9th Street and another between North Federal And 12th Street, are signal-controlled and with marked crosswalks. At all other intersections along North Federal Avenue and 12th Street, fast-moving traffic and high traffic volume make it extremely difficult and dangerous to cross the road.

There were 579 crashes in the last 10 years (2006 -October 2016). Figure 5.3 presents is a crash heat map showing places, notably intersections, where traffic incidents are highly concentrated. Iowa DOT has identified more than 40,000 intersection safety improvement candidate locations (SICL) across the state in 2014. To develop this list, all crashes in Iowa are used to determine an initial cut of intersections that meet the criteria of at least one crash. The intersections identified are then ranked according to the number of crashes, the severity of the crashes, and the rate at which crashes occur. A copy of the locations in the North End is located in the Appendix

Among crashes in the neighborhood, broadside crashes are the most common type of collision with 189 incidents, closely followed by 180 rear-end incidents. Fortunately, none of these accidents caused fatalities; however, 124 of these crashes involved major injuries, and 12 traffic incidents involved a collision with a non-motorist (Figure 5.4). Two thirds of the 12 collisions with non-motorists occurred on the two major roads (North Federal and 12th/13th Street), and two of them caused major injuries. The roadway crash rate in the neighborhood is generally high. Figure 5.5 shows the road sections with higher-than-average crash rates.



Figure 5.1. An uncontrolled intersection at N. Polk Ave. and 10th St. NW, where crash rate is also higher. (Source: Google Earth)

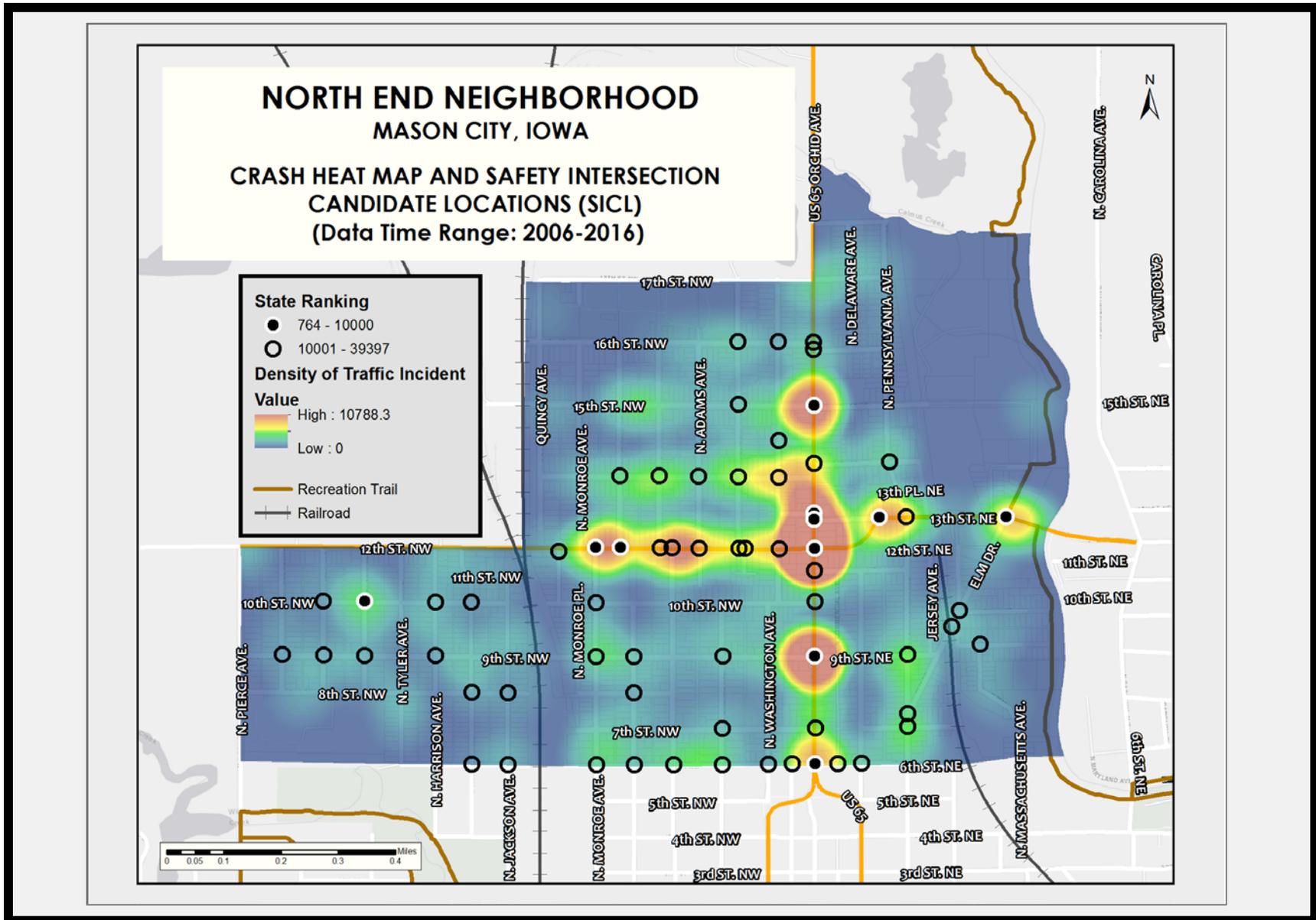


Figure 5.3. Crash Heat Map and Safety Intersection Candidate Locations (Source: IowaDOT)

SOLUTIONS

To facilitate pedestrian crossing, crosswalks should be painted on roadways where traffic volumes are high, such as North Federal Avenue and 12th/13th Street. Priority should be given to the intersections public facilities (such as parking lots and schools) and corridor business district are in close proximity and where non-motorists crashes occurred. Also, priority should be given to the intersections where non-pedestrian traffic is high. Figure 5.6 shows a potential pedestrian refuge island on North Federal Avenue for people to cross the arterial street more easily and safely, and Figure 5.7 shows potential crosswalks at North Federal Avenue and 14th Street NW. Those intersections are right next to a parking lot, restaurants or convenience stores. The city could consider paving crosswalks on 13th Street NE & North Pennsylvania Avenue and 13th Street NE & Elm Drive, because those intersections are close to commercial zone or trails.

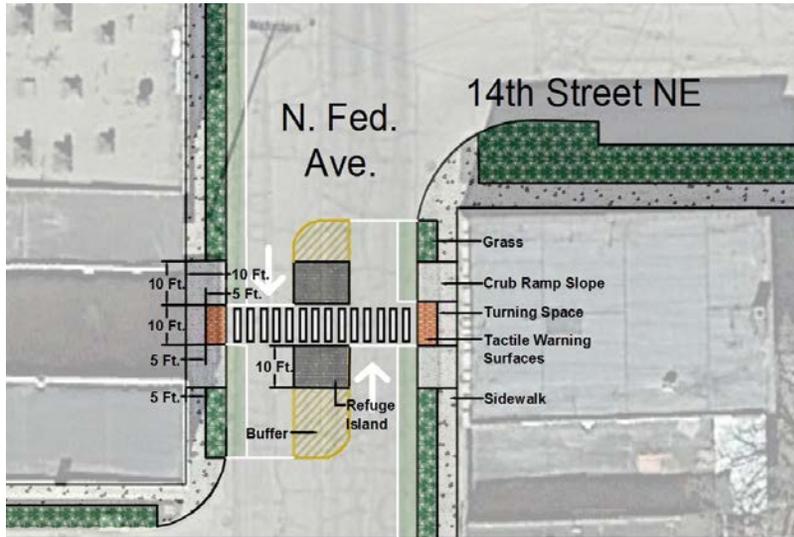


Figure 5.6. Potential pedestrian refuge island for people to access the public parking lot on N. Fed. Ave. and 14th St. NW



Figure 5.7. Potential crosswalks for people to access the restaurants and convenience stores on N. Fed. Ave. and 14th St. NW

The City of Mason City should work with Iowa DOT to inspect all the intersections in the neighborhood and determine if all intersections are given appropriate control based on traffic volume, speed, visibility and crash history. The priority should be given to the intersections that are highly ranked on Iowa DOT'S SICL (see Appendix) and are on the "Safe Route to School" designated route (Figure 5.8).

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Using some available funding sources listed in Chapter 10, the City should work with State DOT for intersection inspection, evaluation and reengineering and installation, or for pedestrian crossing facilities installment.

The City should use crash rate to evaluate the performance after implementation. The success indicator is that the annual crash rate should be reduced by 50%.

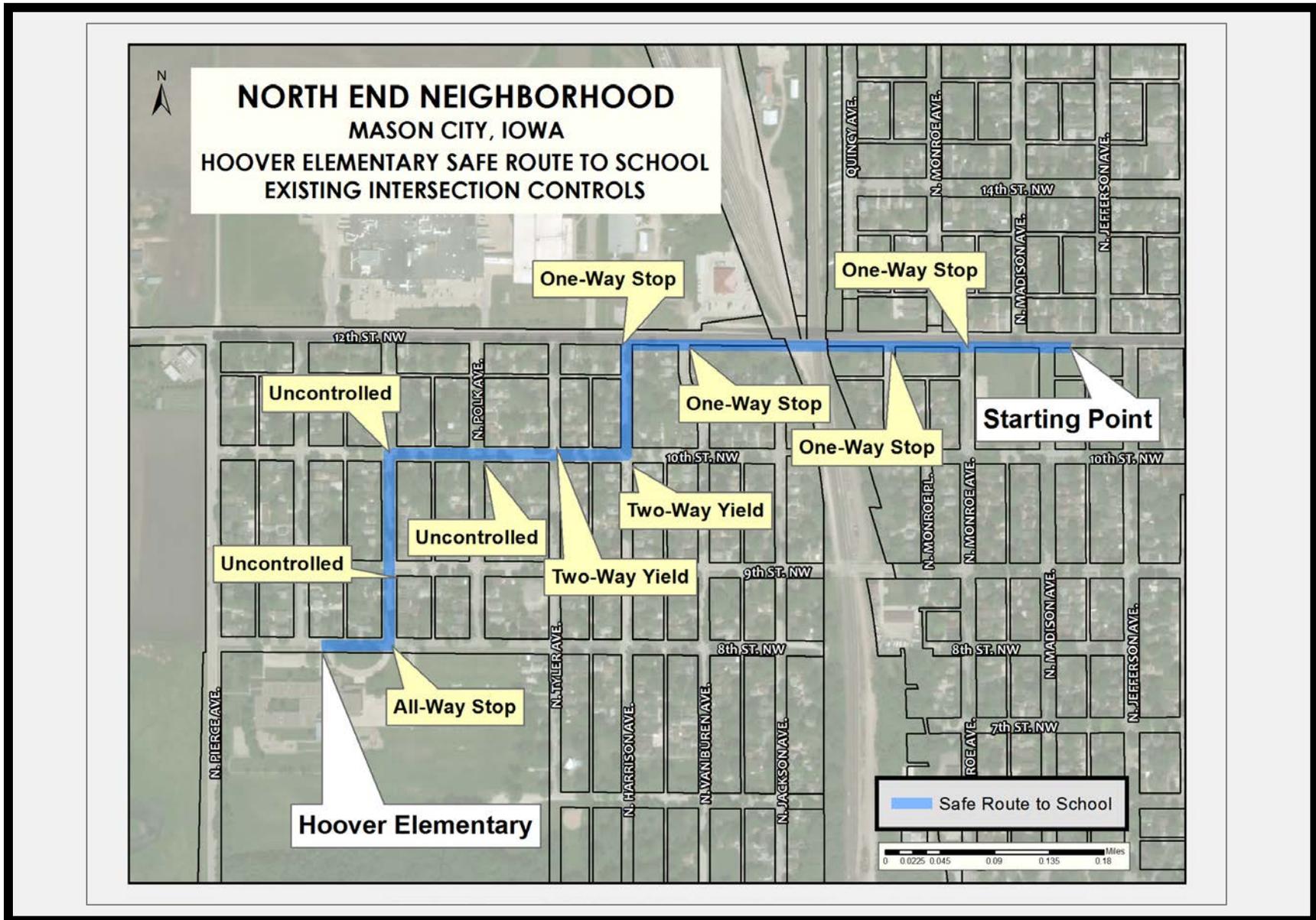


Figure 5.8. Safe Route to School for Hoover Elementary and current intersection controls (Source: Cerro Gordo Public Health Department)

5.2 BIKE FACILITIES

CURRENT CONDITIONS AND ISSUES

Enhancing the neighborhood's livability by improving or adding bike infrastructure is an important part of developing the road and trail network. Active transportation is gaining attention because it increases physical activity and reduces pollution. According to Mason City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Survey that received 373 responses citywide in 2013, about 40% of the survey participants reported riding their bikes at least twice a week. However, 48.3% of respondents are interested in bicycling and using low-traffic streets but are concerned about the safety of riding in mixed automobile traffic. More trails and bike lanes and routes would help increase the number of trips by making cyclists feel more safe on the streets.

The North End provides quite a few cycling facilities (Figure 5.9). There are four city-designated on-street bike routes crossing through the neighborhood, connecting Monroe Park, Mason City Little League Playground, and the Dog Park. Two off-street bike trails, Zerbel Trail and River City Trail, are right next to neighborhood's eastern border and the MacNider Woods Trail to the South. These trails provide cyclists access to Lime Creek Nature Center to the north, East Park to the east, and MacNider Woods to the south.

Many North End residents at our public events expressed their concerns about the lack of bicycle infrastructures in the neighborhood. Figure 5.10 shows the neighborhood's cycling heat map, which illustrates which roads are frequently being used by cyclists who chose to include their travel data on STRAVA. From this map, we can see that a large number of cyclists use 9th Street, 12th Street, North Pierce Avenue and Elm Drive. The automobile traffic volume of 9th Street is low (Figure 5.5), but the traffic volume of the latter three streets is high. It is important to provide on-street bicycle facilities to make riding a bike safer and more enjoyable.

In addition, even though North Federal Avenue currently does not have a high cyclist volume, the planning team counted 6 cyclists on this arterial road between 2pm to 4 pm on a Friday. Moreover, with the implementation of economic revitalization strategies for the commercial area of the neighborhood, more cyclists would use N. Federal Avenue. Finally, poor sidewalk conditions and lack of bike racks may limit current and future bicycling traffic.

SOLUTIONS

The City of Mason City could reconfiguration 12th Street, North Pierce Avenue and Elm Drive with 11-foot travel lanes and 4-foot painted shoulders functioning as bike lanes (Figure 5.11 and Figure 5.12). Behavioral studies prepared for the Federal Highway Administration and the City of San Francisco have shown that streets with shared lane arrows increase separation between motor vehicles and cyclists, encourage cyclists to ride outside of the door zone, and may reduce wrong way cycling and sidewalk cycling, which are associated with increased crash risk. However, North Pierce Avenue and Elm Drive currently allow on-street parking.

The City should also work with the Iowa DOT to transform the 5-foot buffer zones along N. Federal Avenue into bike lanes after the resurfacing project (Figure 5.13). In addition, the City should install public bike racks on North Federal Avenue commercial corridor.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The City of Mason City should work with the Iowa DOT to provide more bicycle facilities. Available funding sources are listed in Chapter 10. The City should conduct another biking survey after the plan is implemented to see if the bike ridership increased compared to 2013 survey.

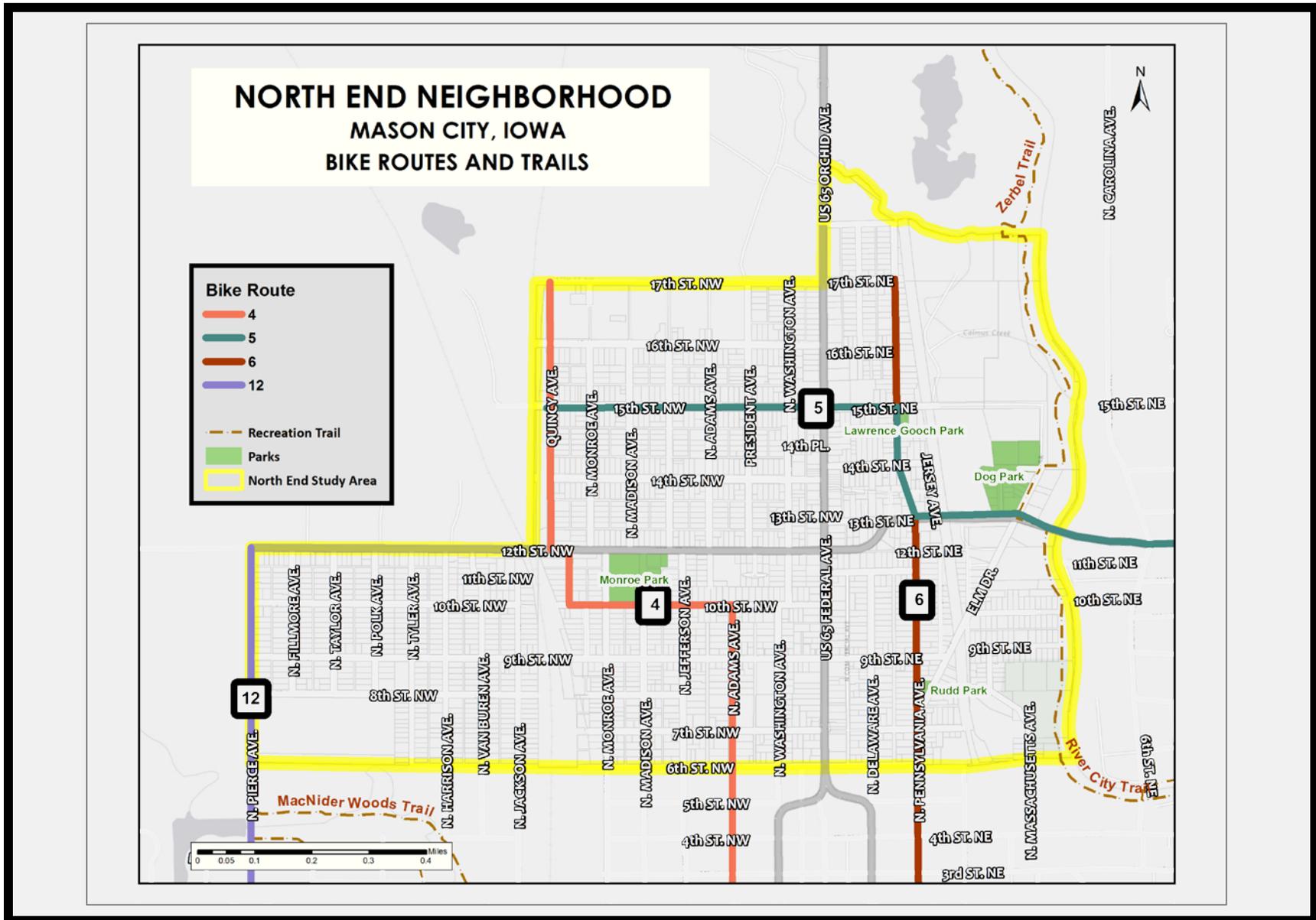


Figure 5.9. City designated Bike routes and trails in the North End (Source: City of Mason City, Iowa DOT)

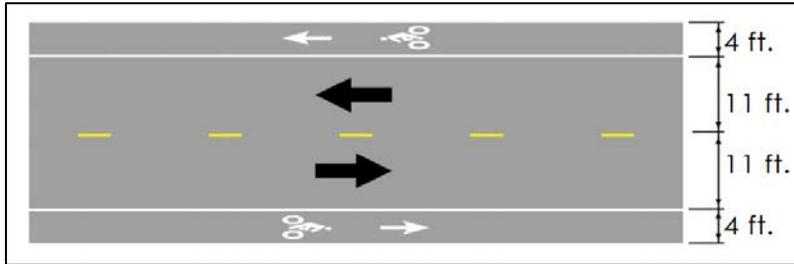


Figure 5.12. 12th Street Reconfiguration for bike lanes.



Figure 5.13. N. Fed. Ave. after resurfacing. This image shows those 5 feet wide clear zones transformed into bike lanes.

5.3 TRANSIT SERVICE

SOLUTION

The City of Mason City should make on-demand service information available online and advertise them by including information on transit in newspapers and social media. The city and county should conduct a transit need analysis and decide if it would be feasible to extend weekend service.

CURRENT CONDITIONS AND ISSUES

A considerable percentage of North End residents living in the central part of the neighborhood commute to work by bus (Figure 5.14), which shows

that it is important to provide convenient transit service. Transportation issues are especially important when considering vehicle ownership. More than 10% of the households in 4 out of the 5 block groups in the neighborhood do not have access to a personal vehicle. More than 30% of the households in the block group closest to downtown and 22% of those in the northeast block group do not own any vehicles (Figure 5.15).

The North End neighborhood has only one bus route, the North Central Route, serving the area. Instead of having set stops, it stops at any intersection along the route to allow passengers to get on and off (Figure 5.16). Defined as the air distance within 0.25 mile of the bus route, most of the neighborhood is covered by transit service. However, the bus only operates every 30 minutes from 6:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Region 2 Transit, funded by the North Iowa Area Council of Governments, provides door-to-door, on-demand transit service to anyone in the neighborhood from 6:30 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. on weekdays and 6:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. on Saturday. In July 2017, City Council approved purchasing five new buses and authorized Mason City Transit Director to apply for state assistance for the "Midnight Special" bus service between 6pm to midnight. The problem is that none of the public event participants knew about the on-demand night service and weekend service because of lack of information distribution. The current low-frequency transit service on weekends also causes inconvenience to the transit-dependent population, especially those who are disabled or have no access to a car.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The City of Mason City should provide sufficient transit information to the public and should use some available funding sources (listed in Chapter 10) for transit study and extension of transit services. Through the study, the City should reevaluate the transit need across the city and could change the schedule, route or fleet to provide better service.

CHAPTER 6 HOUSING

The majority of area in the North End neighborhood is residential and consists of single family housing, whose characteristics are described in this chapter, which identifies issues and recommends solutions and implementation strategies. The following analysis, as well as public input and visioning, provide the basis for the goals, objectives, and action steps for guiding future policy interventions and developments related to housing in the North End Neighborhood.

Housing is inextricably linked to both mental and physical health. Poor housing conditions can contribute to a wide range of health conditions, including respiratory infections, asthma, lead poisoning, injuries, and other issues. In the 19th century, health officials targeted poor sanitation, crowding, and inadequate ventilation to reduce infectious diseases as well as fire hazards to decrease injuries. Today, public health departments can employ multiple strategies to improve housing, such as developing and enforcing housing guidelines and codes, implementing “Healthy Homes” programs to improve indoor environmental quality, assessing housing conditions, and advocating for healthy, affordable housing.¹ Housing is also directly linked to financial wellbeing. For most households, housing is the largest expense and is most homeowners’ most valuable asset.

6.1 HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS AND PROFILE

The housing analysis is based on data from the 2015 American Community Survey for the five census block groups falling within the North End Neighborhood. Mason City Assessor data was also used for research regarding current assessed values, total square feet of living area, and age of homes/residential structures. Comparisons will be drawn between the North End Neighborhood and Mason City as a whole to determine potential areas of strengths and weaknesses in order to develop a well-informed process for implementing improvements to the Neighborhood. Vacancy rates are also indicative of the economic health of an area.

The North End has a vacancy rate of 11%, higher than the 6% vacancy rate for all of Mason City (Figure 6.1). Through public input and surveys conducted in 2015 and 2017, residents of Mason City and the North End identified an excess of rental properties in the North End as an issue facing the neighborhood. Currently, an estimated 690 rental properties are located in the North End. Using American Community Survey data, renter-occupied housing units for 38% of total occupied units. This is only 4% higher than for the City as a whole (34%). The proportion of the population living in renter-occupied housing is greater in the North End than in Mason City (36.5% v. 28.5% respectively). This means that renter-occupied units tend to house larger households than rental units in the rest of Mason City.

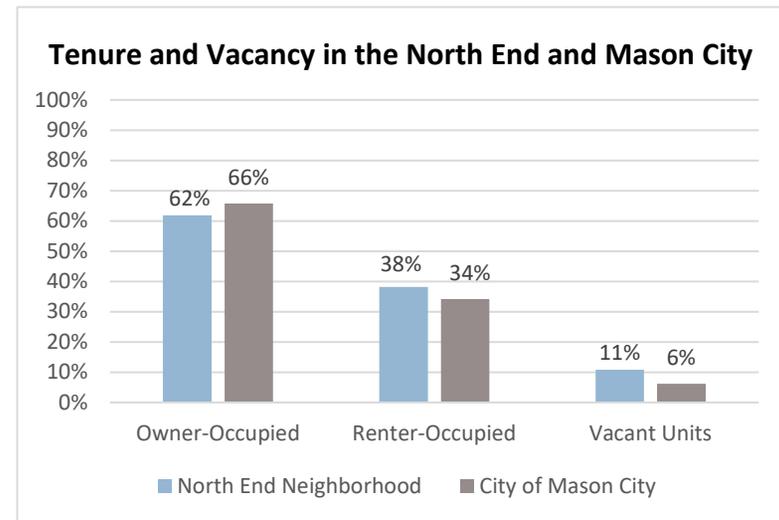


Figure 6.1. Owner, renter and vacancy rates for the North End and Mason City.

	North End	City of Mason City
Median Assessed Value	\$55,710	\$81,405
Median Year Built	1921	1950
Median Age (years)	96	67
Median Square Footage	1,808	1,960
Source: City of Mason City Assessor (2017)		

6.2 HOUSING VALUES

Based on Mason City Assessor 2017 data, the median assessed value for the North End is \$55,710, which is about \$25,000 less than the median for Mason City (\$81,405). The overall housing stock in the North End is much older and smaller in square footage than the city as a whole. Over 56% of housing units in the North End are currently assessed at or below \$60,000, compared to only 29% of housing units for the City. Within the North End, 33 homes are valued at \$120,000 or more, which is only 2% of the housing units in the neighborhood, compared to over 26% of housing units in Mason City. This figure confirms that the housing stock in the North End is valued less than the overall housing stock in Mason City.

The median year built for the North End is 1921. This is 29 years older than the median for Mason City and represents the historic nature of the North End in the development of the city. The total median square footage for housing units in the North End is 1,808 square feet, just below the average for Mason City as a whole, which is 1,960 square feet.

	North End		City of Mason City	
	Units	%	Units	%
< \$20,000	25	1.6%	90	0.9%
\$20,000 - \$40,000	336	20.9%	978	9.3%
\$40,000 - \$60,000	552	34.3%	1,979	18.9%
\$60,001 - \$80,000	423	26.3%	2,049	19.6%
\$80,001 - \$100,000	171	10.6%	1,634	15.6%
\$100,001 - \$120,000	69	4.3%	939	9.0%
> \$120,000	33	2.1%	2,805	26.8%
Total Units	1,609	100%	10,474	100%
Source: City of Mason City Assessor (2017)				

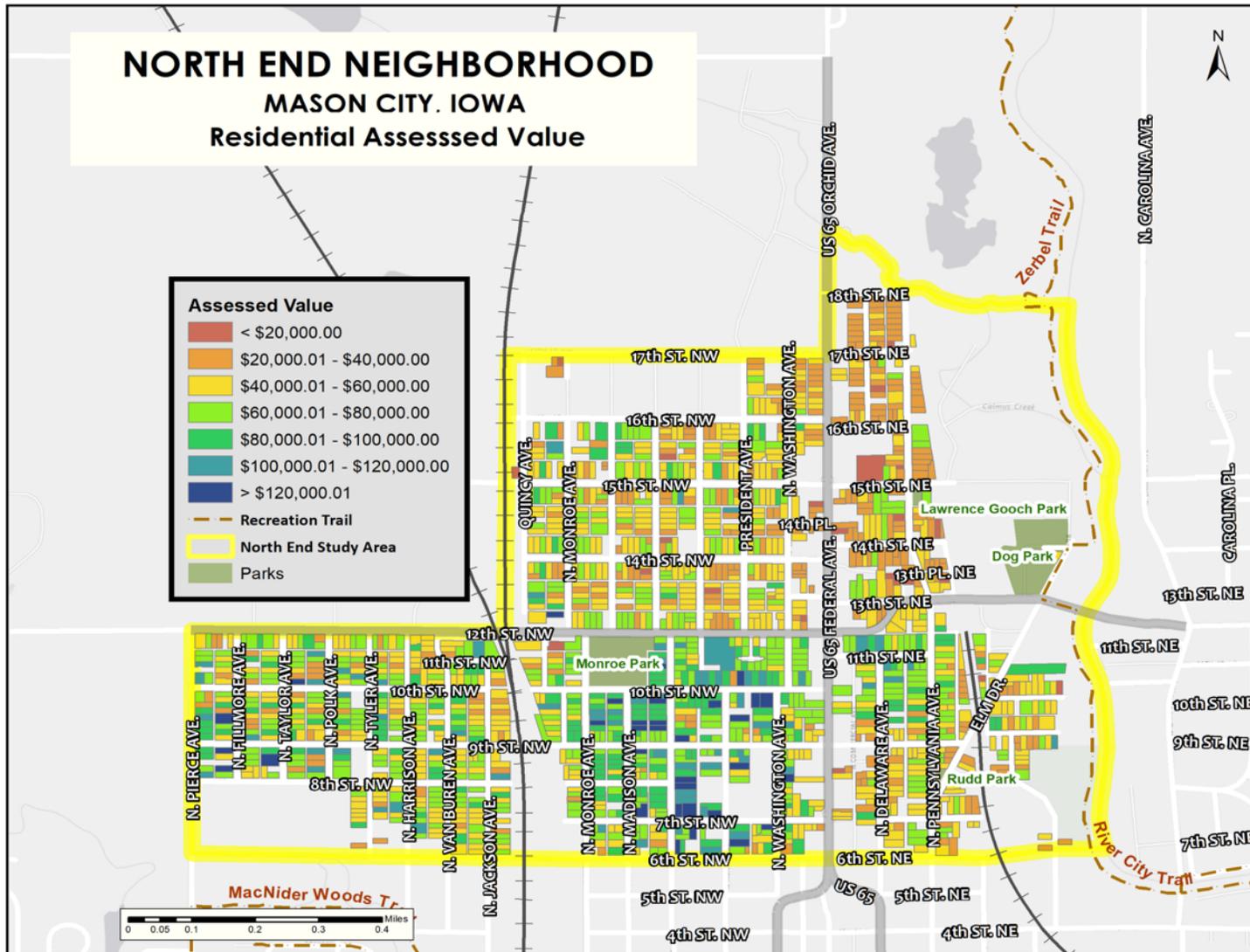


Figure 6.2. The residential assessed value map provides a spatial context to housing values in the North End (Source: Assessor)

6.3 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The affordability of housing in the North End Neighborhood was cited by neighborhood residents as one of its strengths during interviews at the Great River City Festival and in survey responses from the Taste of the North End, but many residents may still struggle with housing costs. Housing affordability is defined as not spending more than 30% of one’s annual income on housing, including utilities. If a renter or homeowner is paying more than 30% of annual income on housing, they are considered housing cost-burdened. If more than 50% of annual income is spent on housing, the household is defined as extremely cost-burdened.

For owner-occupied housing, the North End Neighborhood has a similar total percentage of cost-burdened and extremely cost-burdened households (18.9% and 16.8% for the North End and the city, respectively). Renter households have similar percentage of cost-burdened households, but a larger percentage of extremely cost-burdened households than Mason City as a whole. Overall, the North End Neighborhood has 31% of households that are cost-burdened or extremely cost-burdened, compared to 26% of cost-burdened or extremely cost-burdened households for the City.

The median monthly gross rent is variable across the North End Neighborhood. The lowest monthly gross rent per Block Group is \$600 and the most expensive Block Group has an average monthly gross rent of \$793. The American Community Survey defines gross rent as the contract rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities (electricity, gas, and water and sewer) and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.) if these are paid for by the renter.¹ The most expensive median monthly gross rent block group is located in the northeastern portion of the neighborhood, which is also the block group with the lowest median income. Block Group 2 has an estimated median annual household income of \$17,412. The median monthly gross rent for the City of Mason City is \$622. Low housing

quality and energy inefficiency may lead to higher utility costs in the North End, raising the cost of housing and decreasing affordability.

Cost-Burdened Households		North End		City of Mason City	
		Units	%	Units	%
Owner-Occupied	Total	1,118	100%	8,345	100%
	>30% to 50%	120	10.7%	920	11.0%
	>50%	91	8.1%	483	5.8%
	Total	211	18.9%	1,403	16.8%
Renter-Occupied	Total	690	100%	4,343	100%
	>30% to 50%	138	20.0%	921	21.2%
	>50%	209	30.3%	926	21.3%
	Total	347	50.3%	1,847	42.5%
Total Cost-Burdened Households		558	30.9%	3,250	25.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

As with the large variability of rental housing costs, homeownership costs vary within the North End neighborhood. Monthly owner costs are calculated from the sum of payment for mortgages, real estate taxes, various insurances and utilities.² The lowest median monthly owner-occupied housing costs by block group is \$426. This is Block Group 2, which was previously identified as the most expensive rental block group. The block group with the highest owner cost is \$799, and the median for the City of Mason City is \$714 comparatively.

	Renters	Owners
Block Group 1	\$600	\$634
Block Group 2	\$793	\$426
Block Group 3	\$617	\$733
Block Group 4	\$741	\$757
Block Group 5	\$742	\$799
City of Mason City	\$622	\$714

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

6.4 ENERGY EFFICIENCY

CHALLENGES

Data was collected and analyzed for ten randomly selected owner-occupied housing units in the North End and for ten renter-occupied housing units. Using assessor attributes and utility costs for each property from Alliant Energy, some conclusions were made. The median year built

Median Values	Owner	Renter	Combined
Year Built	1911	1920	1916
Square Feet	1,843	1,652	1,787
Monthly Costs	\$135	\$151	\$141
Yearly Costs	\$1,626	\$1,818	\$1,696
Cost Per Square Foot	\$0.76	\$1.27	\$0.85

Source: Alliant Energy Use Tool

for the selected owner-occupied units is 1911, which is nine years older than the median of 1920 for renter-occupied units. The median square footages for owner units is 1,843 and for renter units it is 1,652 square feet. The overall cost per square foot also varied greatly when compared, for owner-occupied units, the cost is 76 cents per square foot and for renter-occupied units the costs is \$1.27 per square foot. This is 51 cents greater, and means renters pay \$69.88 more per month or \$838.51 more annually on energy costs. The sample may not fully represent the neighborhood, but it further enforces what the planning group has heard during personal interviews and read in case studies.

SOLUTIONS

By advertising energy efficiency rebates, weatherization rebates and other programs and resources during inspections/re-inspections of rental housing, a decrease in utility costs could be achieved. As housing increases in age, the likelihood of greater expenditures for utilities (heating, cooling etc.) increases. Because renters may not have the means or the authorization to make improvements to rental units, it is important to involve the landlord in this process. Alliant Energy offers energy audits and rebates for landlords and homeowners for improvements that decrease

energy consumption. These rebates vary in amount and cover items like new attic insulation, floor joist insulation, caulking and sealing windows and new furnace and air conditioning units. These rebates range in terms of the amount or percent of a purchase that can be covered.

The City should also promote and partner with energy providers (Alliant Energy) and provide gap funding for weatherization improvement efforts. The Department of Energy states that the average costs of residential weatherization improvements are \$5,000. The average annual savings for this investment is \$283.³ As this is an average figure, much of the oldest and most inefficient housing units in the North End are likely to see a greater return on investment. The City should provide funding at varying amounts to be used to supplement the costs remaining after other programs are used for housing weatherization efforts.

IMPLEMENTATION

By providing information and advertising resources for energy efficiency improvements to landlords and tenants during rental inspections and re-inspections, awareness of currently available opportunities and programs will increase. If a funding source program is created, additional administrative personnel and costs will be required, along with the capital used to support the program.

6.5 RENTAL QUALITY

CHALLENGES

Rental quality can be influenced by many factors including age of the housing unit, energy efficiency, size, building materials used, and maintenance schedules. As the housing in the North End ages, improvements are necessary to ensure the quality of the rental housing is sufficient. The analysis on housing affordability, age, and energy costs, along with anecdotal evidence through personal interviews and surveys,

has shown that the quality of rental housing in the North End is degrading. Currently, the City inspects rental units once every 5-years, to ensure improvements are made. However, significant changes can occur on a property in 5 years and more frequent rental inspections will increase housing quality for tenants and ensure tenants are not damaging or using the rental unit irresponsibly.

SOLUTION

To ensure timely inspections, the City should increase the availability of resources to ensure rental inspections occur at least every 5-years, but preferably more frequently. When housing units are found to be in non-compliance or are nuisance properties, timely abatement of these nuisances will provide the tenant with a housing unit that is fit for habitation and will result in a property that the landlord can continue to rent. If re-inspections are not done in a timely or efficient manner, multiple non-compliances or nuisances may develop, requiring a larger investment when they are found during inspections. This influx may lead to an increase in rent to offset the costs incurred. By being proactive, the costs are distributed more incrementally and improvements are made over time, rather than all at once.

IMPLEMENTATION

The City should provide sufficient resources to ensure rental inspections and re-inspections are done in a timely and efficient manner. By increasing the efficiency of the administrative process, savings can be incurred by landlords and renters. These inspections can also provide an opportunity to assess overall conditions of housing and create an internal reference of conditions.

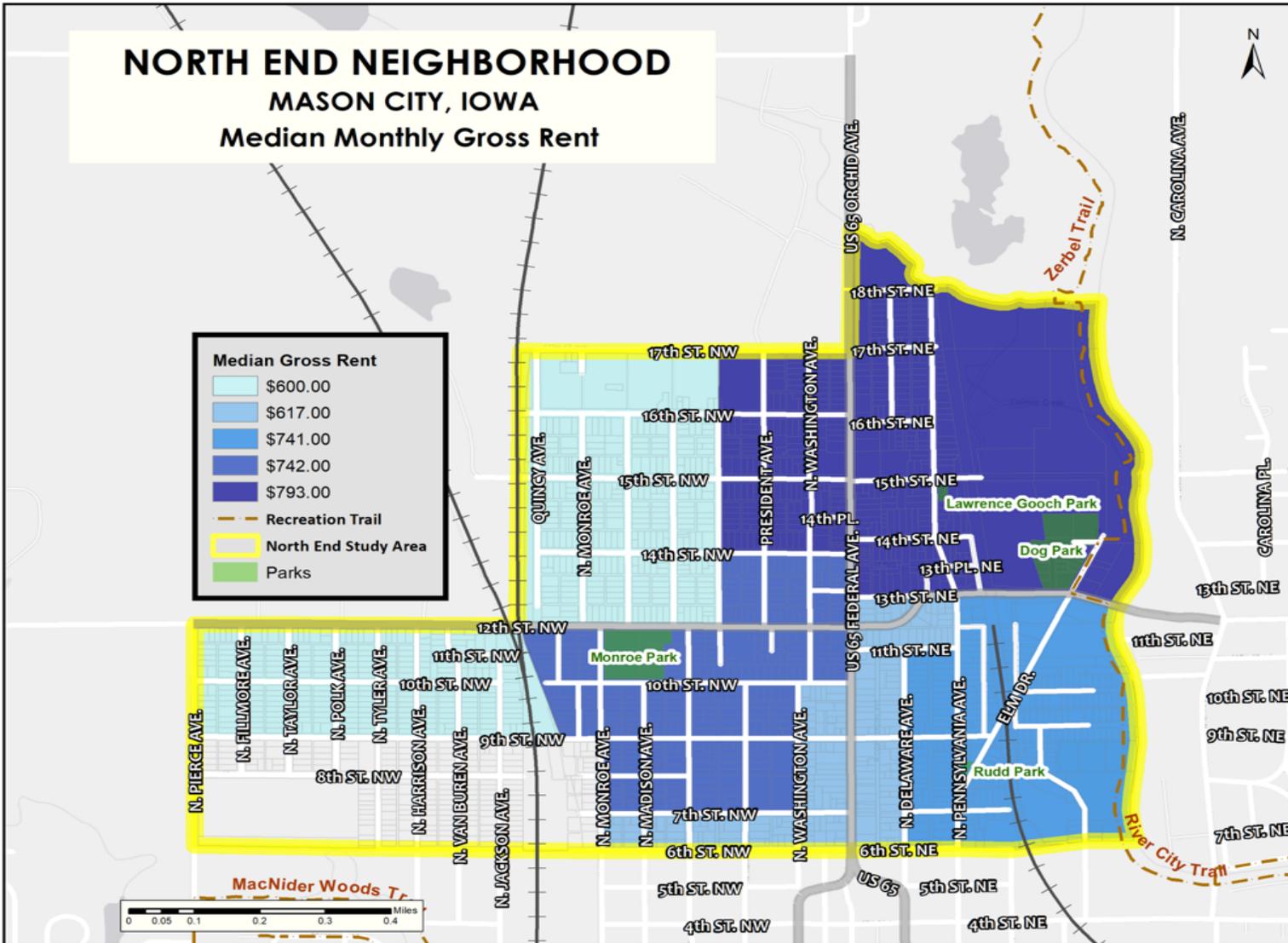


Figure 6.4. Median Gross Monthly Rent in the North End. Note that many are higher than the rest of Mason City

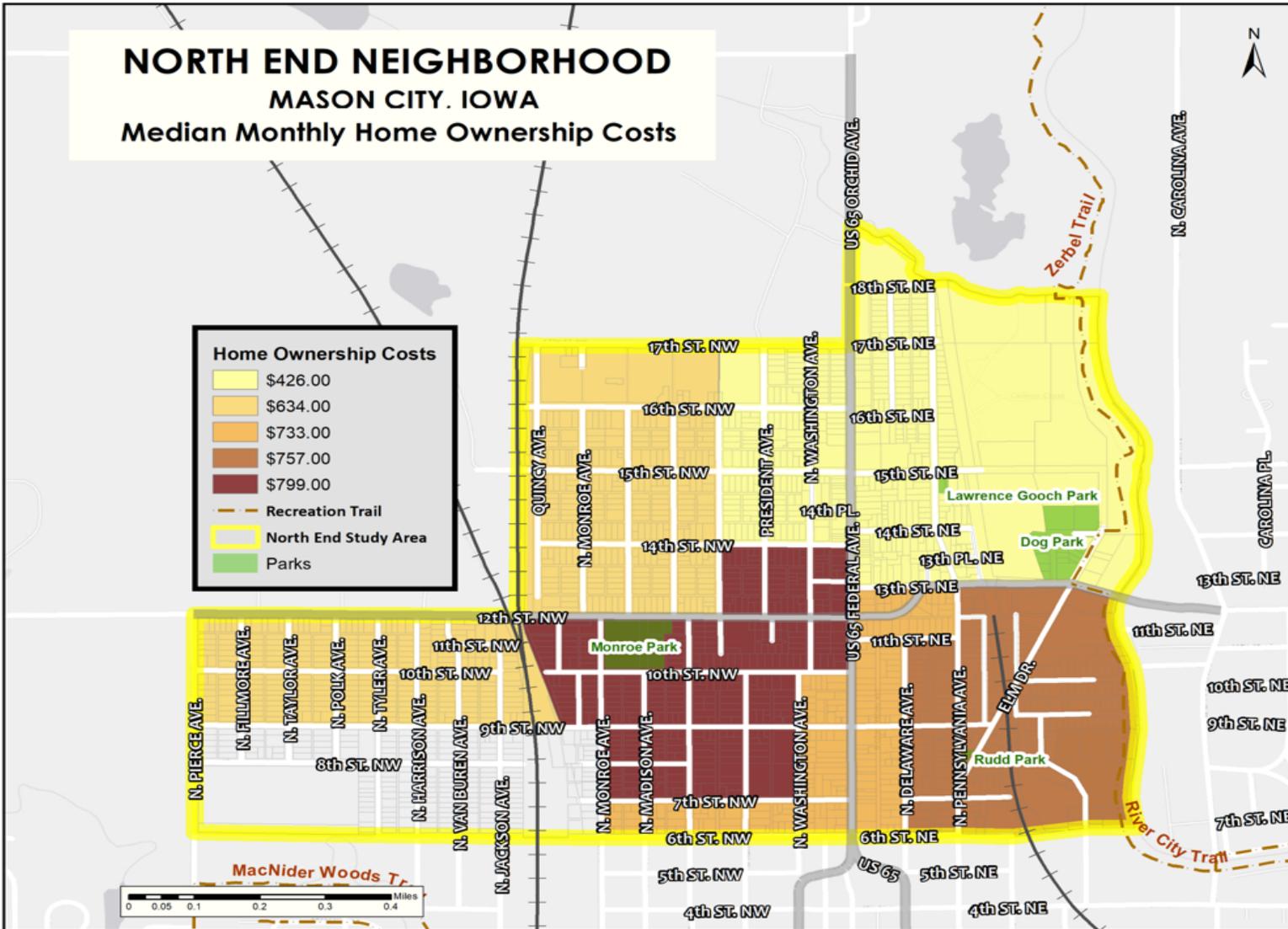


Figure 6.5. While it is more expensive to rent in the North East area of the North End, it is the least expensive area to own a house.

6.6 PLACARDED/ “WHITE-TAGGED” PROPERTIES

CHALLENGES

The City of Mason City has a housing code and a process for determining if housing units are unsuitable or unfit for habitation. Properties that are deemed unfit for human habitation include any unit which is found to be so damaged, decayed, dilapidated, unsanitary, unsafe or vermin-infested that it creates a serious hazard to the health or safety of the occupants or of the public. These properties are designated by the Housing Official and placarded or “white-tagged.” As of October 2017, the North End neighborhood had 15 white-tagged properties within its boundary. A total of 65 white-tagged properties fall outside of the North End boundary, bringing the total amount of white-tagged properties in Mason City to 80. The properties in the North End represent nearly 20% of all white-tagged properties in the city. Remediation efforts can make these units habitable again, based on the Housing Official’s recommendation and thorough evaluation.

SOLUTIONS

Placarded or white-tagged properties are typically nuisance properties that decrease the aesthetics and housing values of surrounding properties. The City should continue to work with white-tagged property owners and provide resources to remediate and abate these properties.

An alternative to mediation with white-tagged property owners is to condemn and take over these properties. Through these proceedings, the nuisance properties can be demolished. This reduces the overall housing stock of the neighborhood, but improves the aesthetics and appearances for the neighborhood. As nuisance properties continue to degrade overtime without interventions, demolition of the property can improve the overall look, health and vitality of the neighborhood. Iowa State Code

657A- Abandoned or Unsafe Buildings provides the fundamental framework and authorization for municipalities to initiate these proceedings.

IMPLEMENTATION

Through the rehabilitation or removal of severely dilapidated and unsightly buildings in the North End, the aesthetics of the neighborhood will improve. These efforts will increase livability of the neighborhood and improve the perception of the neighborhood. The City should work with the property owners in the North End who own white-tagged properties and provide them with guidance on available resources to remediate and abate their properties. If these efforts are unsuccessful, condemnation of nuisance properties should be enforced and utilized. As these proceedings require monetary and administrative resources, all other possibilities and avenues should be exhausted first. When demolition of a building occurs, the parcel can be sold for new development, used for a community garden, or left as a vacant parcel covered with grass.

CHAPTER 7 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The North End neighborhood has experienced economic decline and 12 buildings now sit vacant and exhibit less economic activity than in the past. This currently has negative impacts on the community, but also presents opportunities for the future.

Recently, some new businesses have opened in the North End. In April 2017, Little Chicago Pizza moved from its previous downtown location to the North Federal Avenue Corridor and Blue Heron Bar and Grill opened its doors in September 2017. Other businesses could become new fixtures of the neighborhood. Because the North End neighborhood has many vacant storefronts, they have the opportunity to provide commercial spaces for new and expanded commercial operations. Specifically, the area along the North Federal Avenue Corridor has the potential to become a more active commercial area, as it is located near Mason's City downtown. The existing infrastructure lends itself as an asset that is ready to be revitalized and rehabilitated to support increased commercial activities. The City has created funding programs to encourage these possibilities for the North End. This chapter examines past City efforts to improve this area and provides recommendation for continuing revitalization.

7.1 CURRENT STATUS

The North End neighborhood is home to 6 restaurants, 1 bar, 11 auto oriented businesses, 3 gas stations, 6 retail establishments (including two liquor stores), Family Dollar, a tobacco store, an antique store, an appliance store, and 11 other businesses, including a photographer, karate studio, hair salon, lumber distributor, and self-storage facility.

There are several major employers located in or near the North End. Kraft-Heinz has a food manufacturing facility located just outside the neighborhood boundary, at 1022 12th St. NW. Although there is no

available data on how many Kraft-Heinz employees reside in the North End, the presence of this employer presents the opportunity for North End residents to work near their homes. Lehigh Cement, which is located approximately 1.5 miles north of the North End neighborhood boundary, is another major employer in the area. Cement plants have historically been a major part of the North End economy.

In addition to industrial and manufacturing employers, the North End is home to several successful restaurants. Two restaurants, Little Chicago Pizza and Blue Heron Bar and Grill, have opened in the North End in the past year. Both restaurants have reported success in their new locations. Little Chicago has reported serving about 40 customers on an average Friday night, with weekends typically being the busiest time for the restaurant. The Blue Heron renovated an existing commercial space on North Federal Avenue and opened for business in August 2017. The owners of the Blue Heron, Mike and Vickie Lau, are experienced in the restaurant industry. Mike Lau is a culinary school graduate and the couple previously worked together in another family-owned restaurant¹.

Another notable business located in the North End is the Northwestern Steakhouse. In March 2017, Northwestern Steakhouse was named the "most iconic" steakhouse in Iowa by Thrillist, an online travel and food magazine. It was established in 1920 by Pete Maduras and Tony Papouchis and is still family-owned and operated today. The restaurant has been in its current North End location, at 304 16th St NW, since 1954. Northwestern Steakhouse draws customers from throughout the region.²

However, the commercial corridor on Federal Avenue has 12 vacant storefronts. Not only does this limit the economic activity in the area, it also impacts the aesthetics of the corridor, which acts as an entrance to the community from the north. This creates a negative impression for those entering the city and the neighborhood.

7.2 EXISTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The City of Mason City offers a program called Corridor Revitalization Loan Program (CoRL), which assists businesses in older commercial areas to make improvements to their properties through matching forgivable loans of up to \$30,000 for exterior improvements and up to \$20,000 for interior improvements. This program began in 2015 as a pilot program for businesses located in the North Federal Corridor. Because of its success, it was expanded to apply to the South Federal Corridor as well. All owners of businesses, mixed-use, or duplex/multi-family properties that are located in Z4 zones are eligible for this program. The applicant must match the amount given through the loan, but the loan is forgivable after a period of 7 years, provided that the applicant maintains the improvements over that period. This program has been used to update and improve seven North End businesses, for a total of \$120,000 loaned so far.³

Mason City's Urban Revitalization Tax Abatement Program provides tax abatement for new construction and improvements to existing properties. Urban Revitalization is a statewide program that can be adopted by cities or counties to help improve properties within an identified "revitalization zone" in which a predominance of buildings are in need of improvement. Because the entirety of the North End neighborhood is included in the Mason City Urban Revitalization Area, this program could benefit many property owners in the study area. Owners of single-family or two-family residential properties qualify for 5 years of abatement of 100% of the added value after they make improvements to their properties. For newer homes, this abatement is limited to the first \$75,000 of increased value; however, for historic homes (any home over 50 years old), there is no limit on the tax abatement, as long as the improvements increase the property value by at least 10%.⁴

Urban Revitalization can also benefit owners of multi-family housing. Assisted living developments, such as senior care, nursing homes, or group

homes, are eligible for tax abatement when improvements raise the assessed value by at least 10%. Other multi-family dwelling must perform improvements that raise the assessed value by 15% to qualify. Multi-family housing can either receive 100% abatement of the improved value for 3-years, or receive tax abatement on a declining scale (i.e. 80% of improved value in year one, 70% of improved value in year 2, etc.) Business owners can also take advantage of Urban Revitalization's tax abatement when improvement increase the assessed value by 15% or more. Business owners can choose from the same abatement schedules as owners of multi-family housing. In general, tax abatement programs are beneficial to those who would be able to make improvements without the incentive. Because the benefits from tax abatement come after the initial investment has been made, they typically cannot assist those who would be unable to make improvements without the program.⁴

Mason City's Micro-Enterprise Program assists small businesses that are looking to grow. The program offers small businesses reimbursement for specific goods and services purchased in Mason City for a total value of up to 50% of their annual property taxes. To qualify, the business must own or lease commercial space in Mason City, employ less than 9 full-time employees, and have been in business for less than 5 years or have under \$500,000 in annual revenue. In exchange for this reimbursement, the participant must complete an approved entrepreneurial training program and meet with a counselor from the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center or the Small Business Development Center once every 90 days to review financial records and provide updates on their business progress. This program could be beneficial to many of the small businesses in the area; however, perhaps due to the requirements of the training program and counseling sessions, there have been few applicants for this program.⁵

Finally, resulting from a 2015 focus group aimed at enhancing the economic viability of the North End, recommendations were made for public infrastructure improvements. One of the recommendations that

was completed was a parking lot improvement project. This project is located at the SW corner of North Federal and 14th Street NW. This lot was previously unpaved and less aesthetically appealing. The City paved the lot and put signage up to signify the lot was a public parking lot. This paving project improved the overall character of the block and provided parking to the surrounding businesses. However, anecdotal evidence has shown that improved pedestrian crossings are needed to make this parking lot more accessible; people have reported reluctance to park here due to difficulty crossing North Federal Ave.

7.3 STRATEGIC SOLUTION

To attract businesses to the North End neighborhood, the plan identifies the best practices available for community economic development strategies. The Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a guideline to build place-based strategy for small cities and communities.⁶ Rather than seeking to attract major employers to replace lost jobs, several cities have tried a different method to overcome economic challenges by emphasizing existing assets and distinctive resources. Some successful tactics that communities have used for economic development are as follows:

- Identify and build on existing assets
- Engage all members of the community to plan for the future
- Take advantage of outside funding
- Create incentives for redevelopment, and encourage investment in the community
- Encourage cooperation within the community and across the region
- Support a clean and healthy environment

This plan explores some of these strategies to overcome the prevailing barriers for economic growth in the commercial corridor.

PROBLEM 1: VACANT STOREFRONTS ON NORTH FEDERAL

Solution 1: Advertise Currently Available Funding:

The public participation events showed that some people do not know about the existing grants and thus they are underutilized by North End residents and business owners. The City should advertise these grants through local newspapers and social media so that people can take advantages of existing opportunities.

Solution 2: Utilize Outside Funding Sources to Attract New Businesses

A small amount of outside money (federal or state) can help support a community's vision and can help increase local interest and commitment in the area and spur private investment. Mount Morris, New York, used a grant from the state's Main Street program to help restore downtown buildings, which spurred additional private investment.⁷

Case Study⁷:

Douglas, Georgia, helped renovate 40 façades in its downtown by offering small façade improvement grants to businesses spending an equal amount of their own money. Downtown Douglas had a high vacancy rate in late 1980s and people from the community rarely visited. In 1987, a Main Street program was formed and one of its first activities was to restore storefronts. The City and the Economic Development Authority provided \$10,000 as matching grant for 20 façade improvements and 20 more were improved a decade later. Now the downtown is a gathering place for the community with a downtown market with local vendors, artists, and farmers.

Solution 3: Development of Entrepreneurial Support System

Many communities reinvent their economies by making it easier for interested businesses and developers to invest in the community in ways that support the community's long-term priorities. Tactics to facilitate private-sector investment include streamlining the development process, providing technical assistance, and creating informational guides. Bend, Oregon arranges pub talks where growing companies can network and pitch ideas and has hosted an annual Bend Venture Conference since 2004, which attracts several hundred investors, entrepreneurs, and business leaders each year.⁷ To help small businesses, Douglas, Georgia created a guide for starting and growing a business that outlines local resources, permitting and zoning processes, tax policies, and steps to get business loans.

The North End Partnership, which is discussed further in Chapter 8, should adopt some of these ideas, such as monthly pub talks where they can listen to entrepreneurs and share business ideas, arrange business idea sharing conferences for young people, and create and advertise a business information package containing information on local resources, permitting processes, incentives, and information on vacant commercial buildings.

Solution 4: Land/Business Owners who receive any Grant or Incentive Must Rent/Fill the Space within a set time period or Repay Grant

In the past, some recipients of City grant have improved their properties, but failed to find or retain a tenant for their storefront. This decreases the effectiveness of the City's investment and fails to achieve the desired outcome. Because vacant storefronts detract from the environment of the commercial corridor, property owners who receive grants or other incentives from the City should be required to find a tenant for their property within a set period of time, or must repay the grant to the City if they fail to do so. This incentivizes property owners to fill their vacant

storefronts, even if they must lower rents or do more to advertise their property.

PROBLEM 2: IMPACT OF AESTHETICS ALONG THE COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Solution 1: Streetscape and Aesthetic Improvements

This recommendation was also made in the 2015 focus groups held by the City. Improving aesthetic has impact on the local community as it draws people and also businesses. Douglas, Georgia jumpstarted its downtown revitalization through a streetscape project funded by a Transportation Enhancement Grant. After completion, the downtown vacancy rate fell from its high of 25 percent in 1995 to 6 percent in 2012.⁷

The North End should improve North Federal Avenue by adding trees, patterned brickwork sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, and landscaping.

Examples of proposed streetscape improvements include adding light post banners and hanging flower pots on North Federal Avenue, as shown in Figure 7.1. In addition, public art adds aesthetic appeals, which can improve economic attractiveness. Murals have proven to be a great and low-cost way to attract people to places.⁸ Figure 7.2 and 7.3 show examples of murals and possible location for murals on North Federal Avenue.

Case Study⁷:

Dubuque, Iowa had taken a public art project bring an urban experience to the area. So far, about eighteen murals are complete. The organizer is called Voices Productions and they brought artists from all around the country. They are being funded through a state grant and support by local businesses.





Figure 7.1 Streetscape Improvement in N. Federal Ave.



Figure 7.2 Examples of Murals in Detroit, MI (Murals in the Market)



Figure 7.3 Possible Location for Murals in N. Federal Ave.

7.4 IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Mason City already has some funding sources for revitalizing North End and advertising these would not be requiring high cost. They can consult with North End Partnership to find out and prioritize properties that needs to be revitalize through funding. This could be done within the short term. However, exploring state and federal funding should be done in the short to long term as city has used some of the outside funding recently.

The city should take some time to create an entrepreneurial support system. The City, Development Services Department, John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center and North End Partnership should work together to find potential entrepreneurs and promote business ideas through providing information packages, arranging business conferences and training workshops. In deciding the type of business that should come to the area, the City should think about the required threshold population for the business to survive and range of that business (maximum distance consumers are prepared to travel to acquire that good).

The City should update the requirements for loans and grants to restrict underutilization of the properties by enforcing that property or business owners who received a grant must rent or fill the space within a set period of time. Otherwise, they should have to repay the grant. This could be implemented in the short term, as it is a change to an existing policy.

One of the ways to fund streetscape improvement could be forming a Self-Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID). SSMID funds are created through an additional tax placed on property owners in the defined district. A SSMID may only be established after enough property owners initiate their support through a voluntary petition process. The City should make a checklist where the improvement is needed by working with the residents, business owners, or the North End Partnership.

After implementation, evaluation of the plan is needed to check the success of the plan. Some of the parameters that can be used as evaluating economic development strategies:

- 50% Reduction of vacant store within 5 years
- Number of new businesses within 3 years
- 8-10 entrepreneurs in 5 years
- Increasing number of customers
- Number of users of business information packages
- Number of murals in the area
- Improved streetscape (number of banners, flower pots, trees, etc.)
- Positive perception of the North End by Mason City residents within 5 years.

CHAPTER 8 COMMUNITY IMAGE AND ENGAGEMENT

The community itself is an important aspect of the North End neighborhood that should not be overlooked. This includes residents' relationships with their community and neighbors, along with their perceptions about and feelings toward the place that they live. However, perceptions from the broader community can also have significant impacts on the community itself.

Many communities are shaped by locally led community organizations. These can include neighborhood associations, homeowners associations, or any other active group that takes on neighborhood issues or projects. Currently, the North End has no such organization; however, in the past the active North End Partnership played a significant role in the community.

8.1 IMAGE

CHALLENGES

The negative opinions held by many Mason City's residents about the North End neighborhood are a challenge facing the neighborhood. Many residents of Mason City hold negative opinions about the North End neighborhood and believe that it is a dangerous area with high crime and drug rates. Analysis of crime data over the past 6 months has shown that crime rates in the North End are actually slightly lower than the overall crime rates in Mason City. The North End neighborhood had 44 incidents of crime per 1,000 people, while Mason City has 53 incidents per 1,000 people. The only types of crimes that had higher rates in the North End were assault and breaking & entering; however, the North End had lower rates of property crime, theft, and drug and liquor violations than the rest of Mason City. A member of the planning team also conducted a more in

Table 8.1: Crime Comparison from March 2017 – September 2018

Type of Incident	North End Study Area		Mason City	
	Number of incidents	Incidents per 1,000 people	Number of incidents	Incidents per 1,000 people
Total	193	44	1476	53
Among Which:				
Assault	20	4.56	104	3.76
Breaking & Entering	27	6.16	102	3.69
Property Crime	36	8.21	343	12.4
Theft	74	16.88	646	23.37
Drug	7	1.6	95	3.44
Liquor	18	4.11	121	4.38

Source: Mason City Police Department, CrimeReports.com

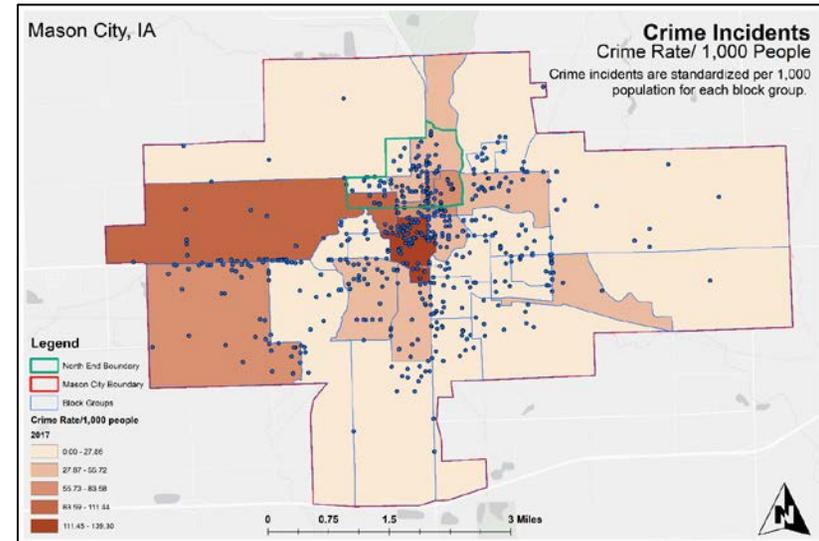


Figure 8.1. Crime Incidents per 1,000 people (Sadya Islam, data from Mason City Police Department)

depth analysis on crime data from 2015-2017 using spatial analysis and statistical techniques. This analysis showed that North End crime rates were overall comparable or lower than other areas in Mason City. A hot-spot analysis showed that only one block group that lies partially within the North End is a statistically significant hot spot for crime.

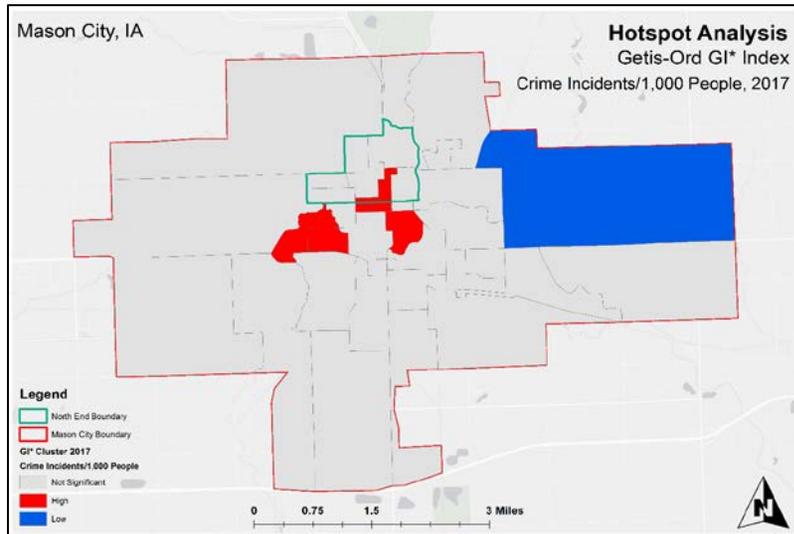


Figure 8.2. Hotspot Analysis-Crime incidents per 1000 people (Sadya Islam, data from Mason City Police Department)

Despite the actual crime rates in the North End neighborhood, many people who do not live in the neighborhood have a negative perception of the area and advise against spending time there. At the Great River City Festival, approximately 35% of people surveyed mentioned crime or drugs when asked about their general perceptions of the North End neighborhood. Though these ideas are not based in fact, they can still be harmful to the North End neighborhood because they create a stigma against the area and discourage investment in the neighborhood. These

negative perceptions may discourage people from buying a home in the neighborhood or frequenting businesses in the area. The stigma against the neighborhood could also have a negative psychological impact on the residents of the neighborhood.

Participants in the Taste of the North End event spoke about the poor perception of their neighborhood in the rest of the community. In the exit survey, nearly all respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the poor perception in the community was a major issue facing their neighborhood. However, this survey also revealed that 77% of the respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in the neighborhood. Historic architecture, local restaurants, access to parks and recreation areas, affordability, and friendly neighbors were some of the respondents' favorite things in their neighborhood. This response shows that the neighborhood has significant positive assets. Despite the issues facing the area, many residents are happy with their quality of life and are committed to improving their neighborhood.

SOLUTIONS

IMPLEMENT MARKETING CAMPAIGNS: In Fall 2017, a group of Public Health Master's students from the University of Iowa developed a destigmatization campaign designed to improve perceptions of the North End neighborhood.¹ This campaign includes installing light post banners, displaying fliers around Mason City, and distributing postcards with coupons for North End businesses. The media for this campaign includes photographs of neighborhood residents and business owners, along with the phrase "We are the North End." The goal of this campaign is to showcase the positive aspects of the North End, such as the new businesses in the area, the historic character, and the people who live in the neighborhood. A report prepared by the Public Health students, found in the appendix, provides more detail on implementation of this campaign.

Successful implementation of this campaign could help raise awareness of the positive characteristics and bring more people to the neighborhood to shop or dine at local businesses.

In Spring 2018, four groups of students from the University of Iowa Marketing Institute participated in a competition to develop a marketing campaign for the North End. Students analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the neighborhood and considered a target demographic to develop media campaigns, including print, posters, stickers, video, and social media, to promote the North End neighborhood. The winner of this competition will be announced in May 2018. The winning marketing campaign should be implemented and the city should contribute funding to produce the necessary materials, along with staff time to update social media.

These campaigns offer the City of Mason City two options for materials to promote the North End neighborhood. Implementation can focus on just one campaign, or can include elements from both plans to create materials and a message that best fits the neighborhood.



Figure 8.3. Materials from one of the UI Marketing Institute’s campaigns. Source: University of Iowa Marketing Institute.



Figure 8.4. The “We are the North End” campaign features images of North End residents and business owners. Source: Kloft et al.

AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENTS: As mentioned in the Chapter 8, aesthetic improvements can also be an effective way to shift perceptions of the North End neighborhood. Currently, the North Federal corridor is not a very attractive entrance to the neighborhood and may be many Mason City residents’ main association with the neighborhood. Streetscape improvements, such as light pole banners and hanging flower baskets, will provide a more attractive image for the area and can help counteract some negative impressions of the area. Public art, such as mural, sculptures, or window displays can also be used to improve the image of the North Federal corridor.



Figure 8.5. Iowa City artist Tim Tabor stands next to his North End windows installation. Source: Lucie Laurian.

An art show has already been successfully installed in several windows of vacant storefronts on the North Federal Corridor. Prior to the Taste of the North End event, the planning team coordinated the installation of art in the windows, with assistance from the property owner in cleaning up the storefront windows and providing access for installation. The art show, entitled North End Windows, featured art by three Iowa artists: “Meditated Moons,” by Vero Rose Smith of Iowa City, “Mr. Berger’s Original Shell and Mr. Berger’s Suit,” by Jonathan Berger of Cedar Rapids, and “Three-totems” and “Together we stand Strong,” by Tim Tabor of Iowa City.



Figure 8.6. Vero Rose Smith’s “Meditated Moons” was displayed inside the Blue Heron, along with a North Federal storefront. Source: Lucie Laurian.

The artwork was displayed from mid-October through Thanksgiving and many of the windows were lit at night. This art showcase was a successful, low-cost method of improving the aesthetics of the commercial corridor by encouraging clean-up of vacant storefronts and by utilizing this space to

display artwork. This event could be repeated in the future by working with the NIACC Art Gallery, NIACC’s Arts, A/V Technology and Communications Department, or the Charles H. MacNider Art Museum to provide pieces to display in temporary storefront exhibits.

However, as vacant storefronts are filled by new businesses, the installation of outdoor public art can provide another option for improving the aesthetics of the North Federal Corridor. A mural on one of the buildings would be a low cost way to create a significant visual impact and could incorporate themes related to the neighborhood’s history or residents. Mason City’s downtown includes public art provided by Sculptures on Parade, a non-profit organization. The City of Mason City could coordinate with this organization to extend the reach of the public art to include the North End. Along with improving the image of the North End, this could also enhance the connection between downtown Mason City and the North End.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Implementation of these solutions to improve the image of the North End neighborhood should be led by the City of Mason City, but can involve other partners, such as local businesses or a community organization.

Estimated cost varies significantly depending on which improvements are implemented. Estimated cost for the “This is the North End” campaign is approximately \$9,700.

Estimated costs for streetscape improvements are detailed further in the Economic Development chapter. The estimated cost for a mural is \$10-\$20 per square foot depending on the level of detail. For a 10’x20’ mural, the cost could be between \$2,000 and \$4,000.

By forming a partnership between property owners and community college art programs, art could be displayed in vacant storefronts for a very low cost.

To evaluate the success of these solutions, attention should be paid to media coverage pertaining to the North End neighborhood. To get a more concrete idea of residents' perceptions, a survey of Mason City residents could be conducted online or in person.

8.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHALLENGES

Currently, the North End neighborhood does not have any active community organizations that focus on improving the neighborhood. Community organizations, such as neighborhood associations, can be a powerful tool that gives residents a way to get involved in their community. According to the City of Mason City's guide to organizing neighborhood associations, benefits of organization include building relationships in the neighborhood, having a unified voice in City decision making, and establishing a dedicated group to bring about neighborhood improvements.² In addition, neighborhood associations can also be an effective way to spread information about events or issues in the neighborhood. A neighborhood association could also host events that will receive positive press, which may help reduce the negative perceptions of the area.

In the past, the North End Partnership was an active 501(c)(3) that involved residents, property owners, and business owners in the North End. When the organization was founded in 2001, approximately 100 people attended the first meeting. The North End Partnership took on a variety of responsibilities to improve the North End neighborhood,

including communicating with City staff about changes in the neighborhood, hosted annual clean-ups in the neighborhood, and released a newsletter for North End residents. They also hosted social events, such as a North End Community Festival and a Cinco de Mayo dinner, which provided a sense of community to the neighborhood. The North End Partnership raised money for many of these projects through the purchase and renovation of a house on the North End, which they were able to sell for a considerable profit. However, over time participation in the organization dwindled. Leadership became concentrated in a small number of individuals, who eventually were unable to sustain the organization. Currently, the North End Partnership is inactive, but it has maintained its 501(c)(3) status. This could be an opportunity for residents of the neighborhood to identify new leadership and revive this organization. Its active 501(c)(3) status would make the process simpler and allow the group to operate as a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization.

SOLUTIONS

REVIVE THE NORTH END PARTNERSHIP: During public events, many residents have expressed interest in reviving a neighborhood organization for the North End. At the final public event on April 9, the planning team will encourage residents to take leadership in this organization and provide them with resources to help them get started. This packet, included in the appendix, includes information on NextDoor, a social media service specifically for neighborhoods. This can be a helpful tool to foster connection between residents of the neighborhood and spread information about issues or events of interest. The planning team also recommends hosting social events, such as block parties, as a way to foster connections between residents of the neighborhood.

In addition to these resources provided by the planning team, the City of Mason City should provide support to the North End Partnership. The City

of Mason City currently offers a matching grant for neighborhood associations of up to \$3,000 per year for neighborhood improvements and enrichment projects. City representatives should work with the North End Partnership to identify and fund projects in the neighborhood that could utilize these funds.

HOST REGULAR COMMUNITY EVENTS: Because social connection is strongly linked with mental and physical health,³ events that encourage community engagement and connection can improve the quality of life for residents of the neighborhood.

These events could include the broader community of Mason City. One idea for a future event is a Taste of the North End, based on the success of the planning team's October 2017 event. Rather than a free event sponsored by the Cerro Gordo Department of Public Health open only to North End residents, a future Taste of the North End event could be open to the general public and could be funded by the sale of tickets. Smaller scale events, such as block parties, potlucks, or community nights at local restaurants, could also be effective ways to increase community engagement and social connections between residents of the North End.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Reviving the North End Partnership will be carried out primarily by residents of the neighborhood, who will take initiative and determine the goals and activities of their organization. The City of Mason City should act as a supportive partner in providing information and resources. This solution should begin in the short term, with the publication of this

neighborhood plan serving as a potential starting point for the group, and should continue through the medium and long term. The organization should spread leadership responsibilities between several people and continually reach out to new members to prevent burn-out and the dissolution of the group.

Events could be planned and hosted by the City of Mason City, the North End Partnership, North End business owners, or any partnership between these groups. Funding for events can be provided through ticket sales, sponsorship from local businesses, or fundraising. Depending on the type of event, cost can vary widely. A citywide event with vendors, music, and activities will cost much more than a block party for neighborhood residents, at which most of the necessary materials can be provided by attendees.

For the North End Partnership, indicators of success include how many members are active in the organization and the types of projects carried out by the group. These indicators will need to be developed by the revived neighborhood organization to reflect the goals of the members.

The success indicators for events include how many events are held per year and how many people attend each event. As an initial goal, the neighborhood should aim to hold 1-2 events per year. Media coverage of the events is another key indicator. Media coverage will help leverage these events as tools to help shift perceptions of the neighborhood, even among those who do not attend the events themselves. Positive press can help shift attitudes towards the positive event happening in the North End.

CHAPTER 9 HEALTH

As a Healthy Neighborhoods Plan, addressing the health effects of the built environment within the neighborhood is critical. While transportation, housing, economic development, and community image all address some aspects of health both directly and indirectly, this chapter ties them all together and addresses additional health-related issues.

9.1 NUTRITION AND FOOD ACCESS

The USDA defines food deserts as “parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers.”¹ While most North End residents have the Fareway Grocery Store within one mile of their home, some North End households are outside of this one-mile range. Aside from Fareway, a few other places in the North End such as gas stations and Family Dollar sell dry goods, but most do not sell fresh produce, dairy, or meat.

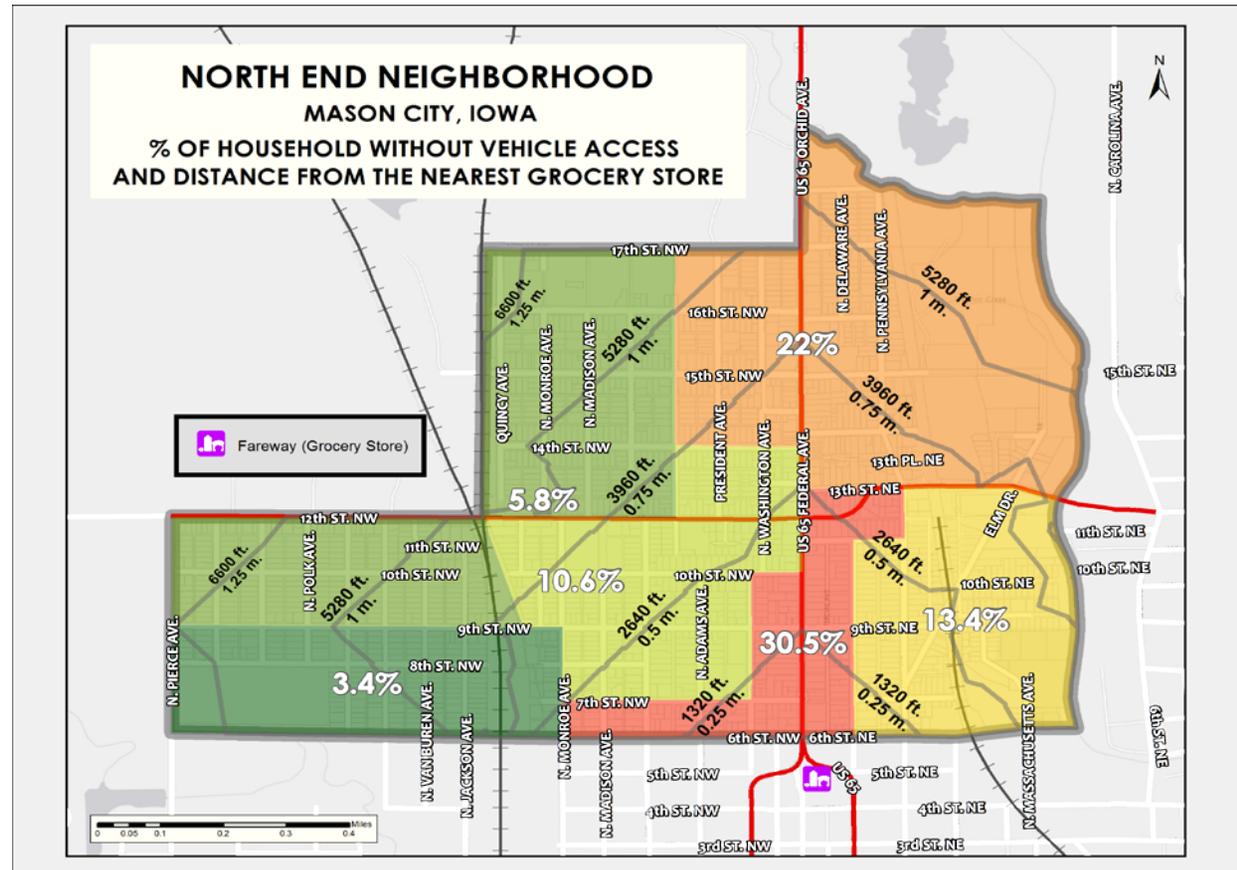


Figure 9.1. Map of walking distance to Fareway. Distance is calculated by roadway for accuracy (Source: Authors).

CHALLENGES

Having the Fareway close to the North End is helpful for most residents, however there are some issues. First, it is closed on Sunday, which reduces grocery shopping timing options for residents who work during the week.

Additionally, 14.4% of North End households lack access to private vehicles, which is higher than the rest of Mason City. Given that regular transit service is not available on the weekends, grocery shopping is more difficult for transit-dependent residents. Figure 9.1 shows percentages of households without vehicle access and distance to Fareway.

SOLUTIONS

A long-term solution would be to work with the North Iowa Fresh out of Storm Lake, whose mission is to connect local farmers with buyers. In 2018, they plan to pilot a CSA program, and based off of communications with our Public Health partner, they may be interested in expanding into the North End and working with a church or other community-centered group to sponsor a CSA pickup location.

In addition, the city could implement a community garden in the North End to help residents supplement their diets with fresh produce. Currently, the city sponsors two other gardens, one on the east side of Mason City, and one just south of Willow Creek, and neither are very accessible to North End residents. While community gardens cannot address food access on a large scale, they provide other health benefits such as exercise, mental health benefits, and can aid in community development. Figure 9.2 shows potential plots for a community garden. These plots are all vacant and 37 are owned by the City of Mason City, with the other 15 plots being owned by other organizations (churches, shelters, etc.) that may be interested in hosting a community garden. In conjunction, the city could offer gardening and/or cooking classes to residents who are interested in learning new skills or healthier ways to prepare their food.

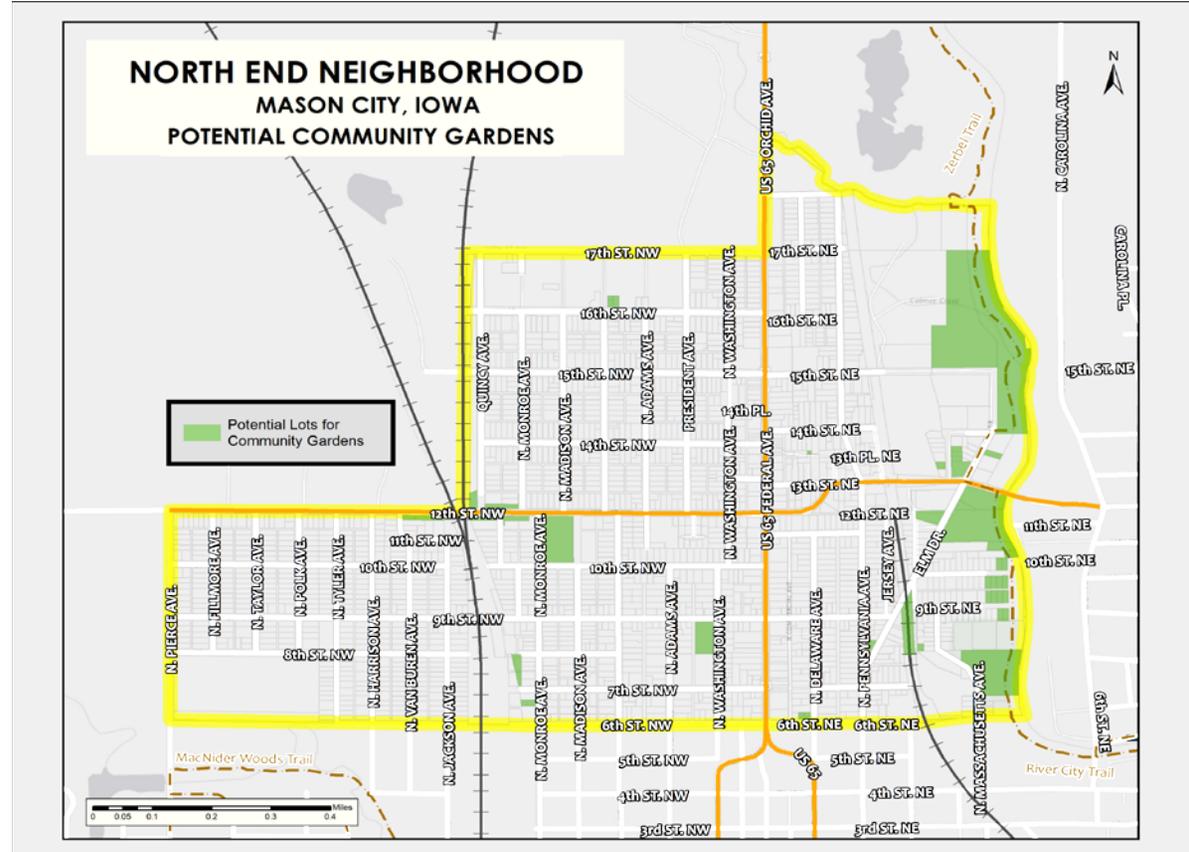


Figure 9.2. Potential sites for a community garden (Source: Author)

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

As Mason City already has a Community Garden program and owns many vacant lots in the neighborhood, the cost of adding another community garden should be fairly low, especially if there is a readily available water source. There are also grants available through CDBG, and local or chain gardening/home improvement stores such as the Hyvee or Walmart Gardening Centers or Menards and Home Depot may be willing to partner to provide starter seeds, equipment, or sponsorship. Residents with

gardening experience and local restaurants may be able to help coordinate and run gardening and cooking classes, especially if there is support from the Public Health and Recreation departments.

A Community Garden and the classes that could go along with would also be a good project for the North End Partnership. By partnering with the City and the current Community Garden group, the North End Partnership could work on structuring the organization while having some guidance from existing organizations to make the process easier.

Keeping in contact with North Iowa Fresh and showing continued interest is one way to move forward with a partnership that could benefit the North End. Finding centralized pick-up venues such as churches in the neighborhood and getting more local farmers involved could help expand the program more quickly.

To monitor how well these solutions are working, the city should keep track of the number of residents who use community garden plots, participate in cooking and gardening classes, and how many residents benefit from the CSA program.

9.2 WALKABILITY AND SAFETY

CHALLENGES

As discussed in the Transportation section, making neighborhoods walkable and providing public recreation facilities creates opportunities for residents to exercise regularly and conveniently. This helps to add physical activity in day-to-day life and helps to make people living in the neighborhood healthier overall. Currently, there are many areas of the North End with either missing or dilapidated sidewalks, such as where sidewalks are missing along 12th St west of the railroad tracks.

Another challenge with making the neighborhood more walkable is making sure there is adequate street and pedestrian lighting. If there is not enough

light, people do not feel safe walking after dark, and on streets with high traffic volumes, low lighting can be dangerous for vehicles as well. As shown in the Transportation section, 12th St is another road with high traffic volumes in the neighborhood, but still only has streetlights at intersections, with nothing mid-block and nothing in stretches where there are no businesses and cross streets.

SOLUTIONS

To help improve the walkability of the North End, the city should make sure there are complete sidewalks and connectivity throughout the neighborhood. This entails repairing damaged sidewalks, and making sure the sidewalk network is connected where there are currently gaps. There is a range of costs for sidewalk repairs, but putting in a new sidewalk costs about \$20 per foot.²

There are no set standards for street lighting distance according to the Iowa DOT because of the many types of lighting available, so street and pedestrian lighting is left to jurisdictions. However, the city should work with engineers and conduct a survey to make sure higher-traffic areas such as 12th street have safe levels of lighting for both pedestrians and vehicles.

IMPLEMENTATION

The city should conduct a survey of areas where sidewalks are missing or need repairs, and where lighting in the neighborhood needs improvements for both traffic and pedestrian safety. Depending on the results of the survey, the city should implement the necessary changes. To determine the success of this intervention, the city should measure improvements made based on the surveys done.

9.3 AGING IN PLACE

CHALLENGES

Mason City as a whole will face challenges that come with an aging population in the coming decades. The North End is no different, and although there is a large population of young adults, the neighborhood also has a significant portion of the population above age 55 who need a plan in place to continue to make their homes and neighborhood a safe and successful place to live. This is referred to as aging in place, or the ability of communities to allow people to remain in their homes and neighborhoods as long as possible. Since people typically prefer to live in their homes as long as they are able, addressing issues that seniors face, such as changing healthcare needs, a decrease in mobility, decrease in income, decreased socialization, and issues performing home maintenance is a challenge that the North End must address in the future, and should start preparing for now.

The two main challenges of Aging in Place are environmental and healthcare related. The systems currently in place do not account for older residents. Housing issues with aging in place include stairs both outside and within houses, the width of doorways, the location of necessary appliances, such as ovens, and day-to-day tasks like taking out the garbage. Outside of the home, there are issues with sidewalk quality, lack of pedestrian crosswalks, public transit that does not necessarily account for citizens with mobility issues, and the distances to necessary facilities such as grocery stores, pharmacies, health clinics, and banks. In the North End specifically, many homes are older and multi-story, designed with living on the ground floor and sleeping on the top floor, which can be difficult for those who deal with decreased mobility.

When considering healthcare, it is important to realize that healthcare and housing are a circular relationship. As healthcare costs rise for seniors, they have less money to spend on fixing housing issues such as leaky roofs and

failing heating systems. This is a similar issue that many low-income families face, and in the North End, may present problems for some households. On the other hand, as housing quality declines, it can lead to health problems for residents. According to the WHO, some common housing-related health risks include cardiovascular and respiratory disease from indoor air pollution and dampness, illnesses and death from temperature extremes, and household injuries, which are common among the elderly and those with mobility issues.

Currently, there are a few options that address some of the social and care-taking needs for older residents in the city. Mason City has a Senior Activity Center located just south of the neighborhood boundary that operates Monday through Friday, 8am – 4:30 pm, and offers social activities and low cost meals. Additionally, there is a Salvation Army Adult Day Health Center open Monday – Friday 7am-5:30pm that arranges for pick-up of clients and provides assistance services in addition to meals and social activities for aging residents.

SOLUTIONS

In order to solve many of the problems seniors face, it is important to coordinate healthcare and other support services with housing. This means providing a continuum of care as adults' age. Another aspect to consider when incorporating aging in place with community planning is providing services outside the normal realm of home delivery meals and personal care services. Older adults face issues with household tasks such as mowing the lawn and cleaning hard-to-reach areas as well as grocery shopping, both because of lack of mobility and transportation options.

To help keep seniors in their homes as long as possible, Mason City should support the accessible transport options already in place such as the Region 2 Transit discussed in the Transportation chapter, and also encourage seniors to sign up for meal delivery services like meals on wheels.

To address housing issues seniors face, the city should create a volunteer or work program for youth in the neighborhood to help seniors around their homes with small tasks like taking out the garbage and other miscellaneous household chores that are difficult for many seniors. There are many studies that address the benefits to both older and younger generations of intergenerational relationship, and this type of program could not only help seniors with day-to-day needs, but also help youth develop relationships that can enhance communication skills, develop self-management skills, receive life advice that is associated with interaction with seniors.³ Another way to get the local community involved and keep seniors in their homes longer would be to partner with Northern Iowa Community College Building Trades and Heat and Air Conditioning Technology programs to help seniors with home maintenance and repairs. These students could gain practical, hands-on knowledge of how to retrofit older homes, while providing a service to the community at little-to-no cost to residents. Partner with organizations like Habitat for Humanity and NIACOG to make homes more accessible (add ramps, etc.) and review existing codes.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Most of the implementation aspect of these programs involves creating partnerships with existing organizations. One funding source the city should consider is HUD’s Healthy Homes Program, which provides funding for low-income and income-restricted to improve their housing stock in areas such as mold, dampness, pests, indoor injury hazards, and poor indoor air quality.

To evaluate whether these interventions are successful, the city could see how many residents are taking advantage of these programs. This could be done either through surveys of citizens, or by having the coordinating organizations keep track of this data. To see how successful these interventions are over time, the city should look at how many residents continue to live in their own homes after age 65, and again after age 75,

because most seniors move into assisted living facilities between 75-84. This can be done either through surveys or even using Census data. Quality of life indicators should also be evaluated, with surveys of how well seniors are living and their satisfaction and happiness with their situations.

9.4 LEAD HAZARD AND SAFETY

CHALLENGES

Because the housing stock in the North End is older and over 98% was constructed prior to 1978, the risk and potential for lead hazard is high. Lead-contaminated dust from lead-based paint is the primary cause of lead exposure in homes. Lead causes a variety of health problems in young children, including reduced IQ, developmental delays, learning disabilities, impaired hearing, and more. The effects from lead are permanent, but preventable.⁴

This is important because according to the Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health, blood testing for lead has decreased since 2008, from approximately 1,400 children being tested to approximately 400 tested in 2014, which is less than recommended. Again, this is county-wide data, with neighborhood data unavailable due to HIPA privacy issues.

Table 9.1: Lead Hazard Housing Units

	North End Neighborhood		City of Mason City	
Median Year Built	1921		1950	
Built Before 1978	1,578	98.07%	8,708	83.14%
Built in 1978 or After	31	1.93%	1,767	16.87%

Source: City of Mason City Assessor

SOLUTIONS

Currently, the Cerro Gordo County Lead Paint Hazard Program provides funding to reduce lead exposure and lead poisoning among residents. To qualify for the funding, owner-occupied housing applicants must have a gross household income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). For rental properties, at least 50% of the eligible units assisted with program funds must be occupied by families with incomes at or below 50% AMI with the remaining assisted units at or below 80% of the AMI. Income limits are based on the AMI and the household size. Other requirements to apply and qualify for the program are that the housing unit must have been built prior to 1978 and must have at least one child 5 years of age or under living in the home or visiting a significant amount of time (3 hours on two separate days of the week, 60 hours per year total), or have a pregnant woman living in the home.⁴

While this program already provides options for many residents, it could be expanded and better advertised. Unfortunately, information about how many people have applied and utilized this program is not readily available due to privacy issues, in the North End there have been 15 properties inspected through this program and 7 that have been remediated. Additionally, the City could partner with the Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health to expand available information about not only the existing program, but lead hazards in general, and how to avoid them.



Figure 9.3 Example of lead-based paint inside of a home (Buckfire Law Firm).

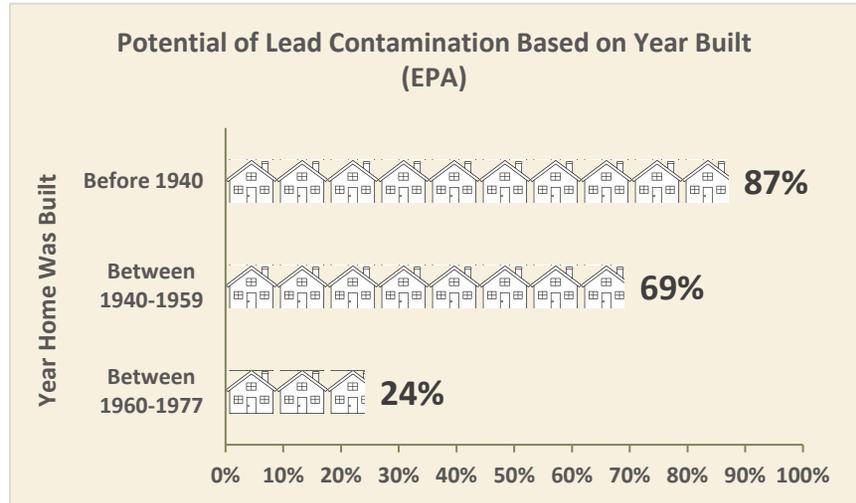


Figure 9.4 Likelihood for residential units to contain lead building products (EPA)



Figure 9.5 Before and After results of a house rehabilitated by the Cerro Gordo County Lead Paint Hazard Program (Cerro Gordo Department of Public Health)

9.5. POOR PERCEPTIONS

CHALLENGES

The North End has had a reputation of being a bad, crime filled neighborhood for years, and however, the crime data does not support this. Spatial analysis of all crime data from 2015-2017 revealed that only a small portion of the North End was a hot spot for crime. More information on this study is included in the appendix. Although in most of the North End, crime rates are similar to the rest of Mason City, living in an area with poor perceptions is detrimental to mental health, as the Public Health Team showed in their report, a copy of which is available in the appendix.⁵

SOLUTIONS

In order to combat this bad image and improve mental health in the neighborhood, the city should implement the “This is the North End” Campaign developed by the Public Health team, which depicts positive aspects of the North End and the people who live there. There have also been other marketing campaigns developed by other University teams that the city can make use of. Between “This is the North End” and the other options, there are postcards, brochures, coupons for local businesses, ideas for resident and business owner profiles, and much more to give people outside the North End a chance to experience the good things about the neighborhood to try to change perceptions. Another way to improve perceptions throughout Mason City is to host community events in the neighborhood for residents and the rest of the city such as block parties, pop-up events, food fairs, and an annual Taste of the North End.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Since the Public Health Team already provided the city with materials and a cost schedule, the city should implement the campaign they developed to whatever capacity possible, depending on budget constraints and

timing. The city can also take the lead on hosting community events in the neighborhood, but should encourage community organizations such as the North End Partnership and businesses in the area to put together their own events. The city should also make sure to advertise available funding options for community events (block party funds, Public Health, etc.)

To evaluate, the city could conduct surveys at city-wide events such as the River City Festival to get individual perceptions about the neighborhood, and compare them to results gathered in 2017. Another way to judge changes in perception would be to keep track of how the neighborhood is portrayed in local media.

Transportation				
Challenges	Solution	Leading organization	Implementation timeframe (short, medium, or long)	Estimated Cost and Funding sources
High crash rate and potential intersection hazards	Work with State DOT to inspect SICLS and intersection on “safe route to school”	City of Mason City, Development Services Department Iowa DOT	Medium **	\$20,000 Traffic Engineering Assistance Program (TEAP) and Traffic Safety Improvement Program (TSIP)
Dangerous to cross busy streets	Pave crosswalk, install “pedestrian crossing” signs and pedestrian refuge island at 14 th St NW & N. Fed Ave Pave crosswalk, install “ pedestrian crossing ” signs at 15 th St & N. Fed Ave, 13 th St NE & N. Pennsylvania Ave, and 13 th St NE & Elm Dr.	City of Mason City, Development Services Department	Medium **	Midblock ADA Curb Ramp: \$800 * 3 = \$2,400 Signs: \$150 * 12 = \$1,800 Crosswalks: \$3,000 * 7 = \$21,000 Refuge Island: \$20,000 Pedestrian Curb Ramp Construction Program Traffic Safety Improvement Program
Limited bike infrastructures	Utilize the 5 feet buffer zones on N. Fed. Ave. after resurfacing as bike lanes	City of Mason City, Development Services Department Iowa DOT	Long ***	Bike Sign Markings: \$250 * 18 = \$4,500 Line and Surface Markings: \$100,000 * 1.8 mile = \$180,000 Signs: \$200 * 38 = \$7,600 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

				Living Roadway Trust Fund
	Reconfigure 12th Street, North Pierce Avenue and Elm Drive with 4-foot painted shoulder functioning as bike lanes	City of Mason City, Development Services Department	Medium/Long **	Bike Sign Markings: \$250 * 80 = \$20,000 Line Marking: \$11,000 * 3.8 mile = \$41,800 Signs: \$200 * 80 = \$16,000 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Living Roadway Trust Fund
	Install bike racks near commercial zone	City of Mason City, Development Services Department	Short/Medium **	\$1500 City funding
Limited Transit Service	Advertise the current night and weekend service	City of Mason City, Development Services Department Iowa Region 2 Transit System	Short **	\$0 -\$100 Post information online (City website, social media, etc.) or on newspaper, and provide free handout on bus fleet.
	Conduct a weekend transit demand analysis	City of Mason City, Development Services Department Iowa Region 2 Transit System	Medium/Long *	\$2,500 State Transit Assistance, Public Transit Infrastructure Grant (PTIG) Program, Urbanized Area Formula Program, Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Program, Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities and Intercity Bus Assistance

Housing

Challenges	Solution	Leading organization	Implementation time frame (short, medium, or long) & Prioritization (1-3 stars)	Estimated Cost and Funding Sources
Energy Efficiency in Aging Housing	Advertise energy efficiency improvement rebates and other available assistance resources during inspections	City of Mason City and Alliant Energy	Short **	Limited resources other than advertisement and providing information during rental inspections
	City funded weatherization program in partnership with energy service providers	City of Mason City and Alliant Energy	Medium/Long **	Cost is variable dependent upon structure of program and availability of resources, can use bonding at city level
Rental Housing Quality	Increase City resources to ensure timely rental re-inspections and ensure that nuisances are abated	City of Mason City, Building Inspection Division	Medium/Long ***	Administrative costs and possibly additional personnel
Placarded “White Tagged” or Unfit Vacant Properties	Provide City resources/work with owners to remediate nuisance properties	City of Mason City, Development Services Department Building Inspection Division	Short **	Administrative costs
	City initiates condemnation proceedings and demolishes buildings	City of Mason City, Development Services Department Building Inspection Division	Short/Medium ***	Administrative, demolition and maintenance costs

Economic Development

Challenges	Solution	Leading organization	Implementation time frame (short, medium, or long)	Estimated Cost and Funding sources
Vacant storefronts on the N. Federal / Lack of commercial area	Advertising currently available funds	Development Services Department, Mason City North End Partnership	Short **	
	Utilizing outside sources of fund for attracting new businesses	City of Mason City	Medium/Long **	State of Iowa Federal Organizations
	Development of the entrepreneurial support system	Development Services Department, Mason City John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center North End Partnership	Medium/Long **	
	Land of business owners who receive any grant or incentive must rent/fill the space within 2-3 years or must repay the grant	City of Mason City, Development Services Department	Medium/Long ***	
Impact of aesthetics of commercial corridor on the neighborhood	Streetscape Improvements	City of Mason City Development Services Department SSMID	Medium/Long **	Concrete walkways, new curbing: \$10-\$50 ¹ Banner poles: \$275-\$500

¹ <https://www.dover.nh.gov/Assets/government/city-operations/2document/planning/outreach/Transportation/Dover%20Access%20and%20Streetscape%20Study%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

Community Engagement and Image

Challenges	Solution	Leading organization	Implementation Time Frame (short/medium/long) & Prioritization (1-3 stars)	Estimated Cost and Funding sources
Negative image of the North End in broader community	Implement the “This is the North End” campaign	City of Mason City, Development Services Department	Short/Medium * * *	Up to \$9,700
	Streetscape improvements	City of Mason City, Development Services Department	Medium * * *	Banner poles: \$275-\$500
	Public Art	City of Mason City, Sculptures on Parade, and/or the North End Partnership	Short/Medium * *	\$10-\$20 per square foot ² \$2,000+
Lack of community engagement	Revive and maintain the North End Partnership	Neighborhood residents or business owners	Short/Medium/Long * * *	Funds raised by organization and supplemented by the City of Mason City’s Neighborhood Matching Grant Program
	Host regular community events	City of Mason City, Development Services or Parks and Recreation, the North End Partnership, North End business owners, or partnerships between these groups	Short/Medium/Long * *	Approximately \$500 per event, depending on needed supplies or materials

² <http://www.davisimages.com/murals/prices.html>

Health				
Challenges	Solution	Leading Organization	Implementation Time Frame (short/medium/long) & Prioritization (1-3 stars)	Estimated Cost and Funding Sources
Lack of food access for households without vehicles	Add a Community Garden in one of the empty plots in the North End	City of Mason City	Short/Medium/Long * *	Depends on water access CBDG Block Grants
	Partner with North Iowa Fresh to start a CSA/Food Hub in the Neighborhood	North Iowa Fresh City of Mason City	Medium/Long * *	*Need space with refrigerated storage
Walkability	Repair/install sidewalks	City of Mason City	Short/Medium * *	~\$20 per square-foot ³
	Add pedestrian scale lighting where survey determines it is needed	City of Mason City	Medium * *	\$2,000-\$3,000 per light ⁴ City Funding, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program
Aging in Place	Partner with NIACC's Building Trades Program to help seniors with home repair and maintenance	City of Mason City North Iowa Area Community College	Short/Medium * *	Depends on repairs done. City should work with NIACC to develop cost sheet for repairs needed

³ How Much. "Concrete Sidewalk Costs." <https://howmuch.net/costs/sidewalk-concrete-install-build>

⁴ Safe Routes to School Guide. "Streetlighting." http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/street_lighting.cfm

	Partner with existing organizations such as Habitat for Humanity to install Universal Design features in homes	City of Mason City Habitat for Humanity	Medium/Long **	Grab Bars \$20+ Wood ramps \$500+ Widen Doorways \$75-500 Full Remodel Average \$6,500 ⁵ Grant - Veterans Housing Rehabilitation and Modification Pilot Program (HUD)
	Create a youth work/volunteer program to help seniors with household chores	City of Mason City North End Partnership	Short/Medium **	
Potential Lead Contamination⁶	Utilize Cerro Gordo County's Lead Hazard Paint Program	City of Mason City Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health	Short/Medium/Long **	The Cerro Gordo County Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control (LBPHC) funds
	Promote education about lead risks and abatement	City of Mason City Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health	Short/Medium/Long **	
Poor Community Perception	Implement Marketing Campaign	City of Mason City	Short **	
	Host Community Events to change perceptions	City of Mason City North End Partnership	Short/Medium/Long **	Manage the Neighborhood Matching Grant Program (up to \$3,000)

⁵ Gerring and Wozniak "Universal Design/Aging in Place" <http://www.phrc.psu.edu/assets/docs/Publications/2016RBDCCPresentations/Gerring2-2016-RBDCC-Presentation.pdf>

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Survey for “Planning For Healthy Neighborhood” Project

North End Neighborhood, Mason City, Iowa

Age Range: 10-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 70+

- Where Do You Live:**
- i. North End area
 - ii. Mason City
 - iii. Outside of Mason City
 - iv. Used to live in North End Area

For Non-North End 1. How often do you come to North End neighborhood?

Residents:

- 2. _____
When was the last time you visited North End?

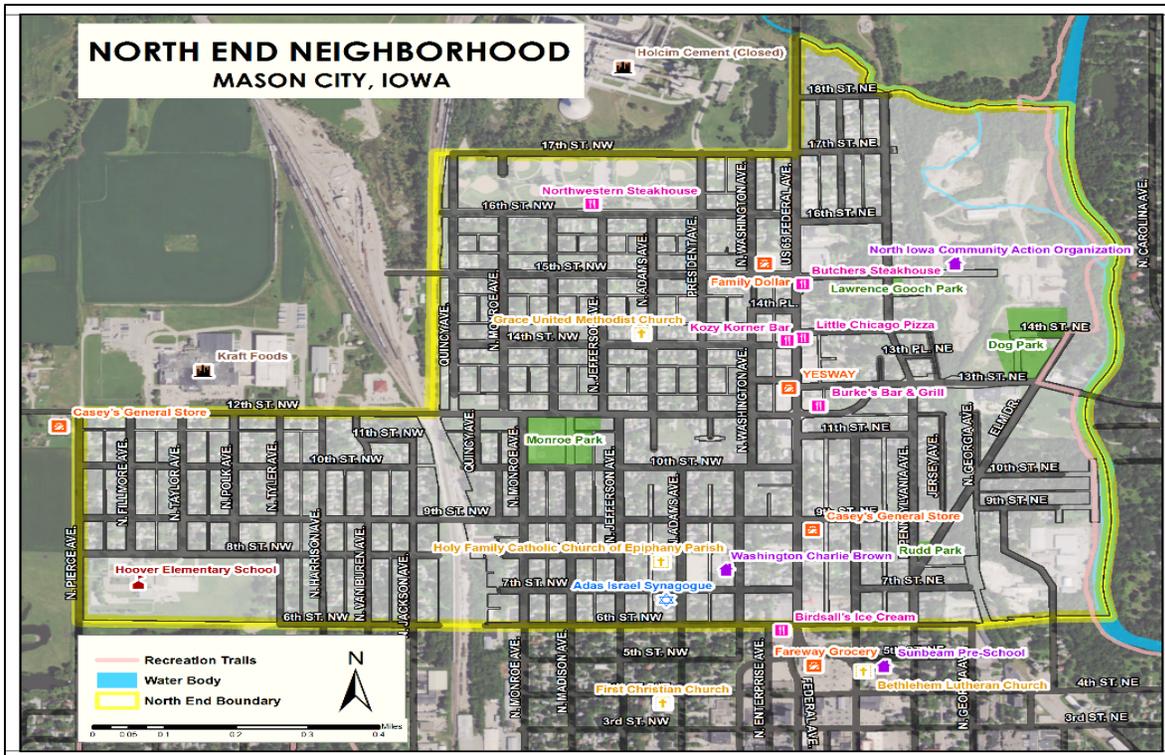
- 3. Where did you go?

About North End

General Perceptions:

Favorite Things:

Changes You Would Like to See:



****If you would like to be contacted about this project in the future, please leave contact information on the back****

Survey for Taste of the North End Event

- ❖ Age: 18-20 Y 21-25 Y 26-30 Y 31-40 Y 41-50 Y 51-60 Y 61-70 Y 70+ Y
- ❖ Gender: Male Female Other Prefer not to answer
- ❖ How long have you been living in North End? 0-1 year 1-5 years 5-10 years 10-20 years 20+ years
- ❖ What are your favorite things in/about North End? _____

- ❖ How would you categorize the quality of life in North End?
 Very Good Good Average Below Average Poor No Comment

❖ Do you agree with the following issues?

<u>Housing</u>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Somewhat Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Quality is low					
Is not affordable					
Property values are too low					
<u>Transportation/ Commercial Corridor</u>					
Not walkable					
Corridor unsafe					
Lack of Public Transit					
<u>Health</u>					
Lack of food access					
Not suitable for Aging in Place					
Poor access to healthcare					

Community Organization					
Lack of Community Organizations					
Poor Perception in Community					

❖ Any other issues you want to address? _____

What changes would you like to see in North End? _____

❖ How can you contribute to make these changes? _____

❖ How would you rate community engagement in the North End?

Highly engaged *Moderately engaged* *Minimum engagement* *No engagement*

❖ Would you like to revive North End Partnership Association? Yes No

❖ Would you like to see a new Community Organization in the North End? Yes No

❖ Do you think it should operate through:

Owning/renting community space *Facebook* *Other options (Specify):* _____

❖ What role can a community organization/ North End Partnership play for the improvement of North End?

❖ What role would you like to play in the Community organization/ North End Partnership?

❖ How satisfied are you with living in North End?

Very Satisfied *Satisfied* *Dissatisfied* *Very Dissatisfied* *No Opinion*



* If you would like to be contacted about this project in the future, please leave contact information:

Name: _____

Contact no: _____

E-mail: _____

Thank You!!!

SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF CRIME IN MASON CITY, IOWA

SPATIAL ANALYSIS IN PLANNING

Submitted To:

Haifeng Qian, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
School Of Urban And Regional Planning
University Of Iowa

Submitted By:

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School Of Urban And Regional Planning
University Of Iowa

Date: May 7, 2018

Executive Summary

Spatial distribution of criminal activity is always helpful to identify target areas and plan distribution of safety measures. In this study, spatial techniques are used to assist North End Neighborhood within Mason City, IA as the neighborhood is struggling with bad reputation as a crime-prone area for a long time. This study is meant to help the “North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan” to improve perception of the neighborhood by identifying hotspot for crimes within North End and Mason City. Getis-Ord (G_i^*) Hot Spot Analysis has been done to identify the hotspots for crime and it is found that there is one block group within North End and some surrounding block groups that are crime-infested area.

This study also focused on identifying demographic and socio-economic factors that are affecting crime rate in Mason City. Using spatial regression, two socio-economic factors are identified: poverty and unemployment rate, whereas no demographic factors were found significant.

With this study result, it is our hope that the “North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan” can use the results to guide its perception increasing campaigns. The Mason City Authority also needs to focus on the crime-infested block groups to provide additional safety measures. The study also indicates that the City needs to focus on reducing poverty rates and increasing employment opportunities to reduce criminal activities in the city scale.

Introduction

The presence of crime activities varies across different geographic scale of community and city. In some places, the concentration of such activities might be higher while in other places it can be low. An understanding and assessment of the spatial distribution of criminal activity can help plan distribution of safety measures. The spatial analysis can also reveal whether certain social, economic, or demographic characteristics are related to crime hotspots.

North End (NE) Neighborhood lies in the north side of Mason City, Iowa (figure 1). The decaying neighborhood suffering from many issues and bad reputation is one of them. People living outside of the area has this perception that this area is infected with crime. Due to this negative perception, people do not want to buy property in the neighborhood or do not want to come to the restaurants, thus hampering economic benefits. However, a 6 months crime data reports that it is not higher than the rest of the Mason City (figure 2). Thus, this project focuses on identifying crime hotspots within the Mason City to check whether NE falls within the hotspot range. The goal of the project is to contribute to the “North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan” addressing the crime issues in bringing the positive reputation of the area. The study will also look at the demographic and socio-economic factors that are related to the crime in Mason City. To achieve the goal, this study tried to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identifying hotspot of crime, and
2. Exploring contributing socio-economic and demographic factors to crime.

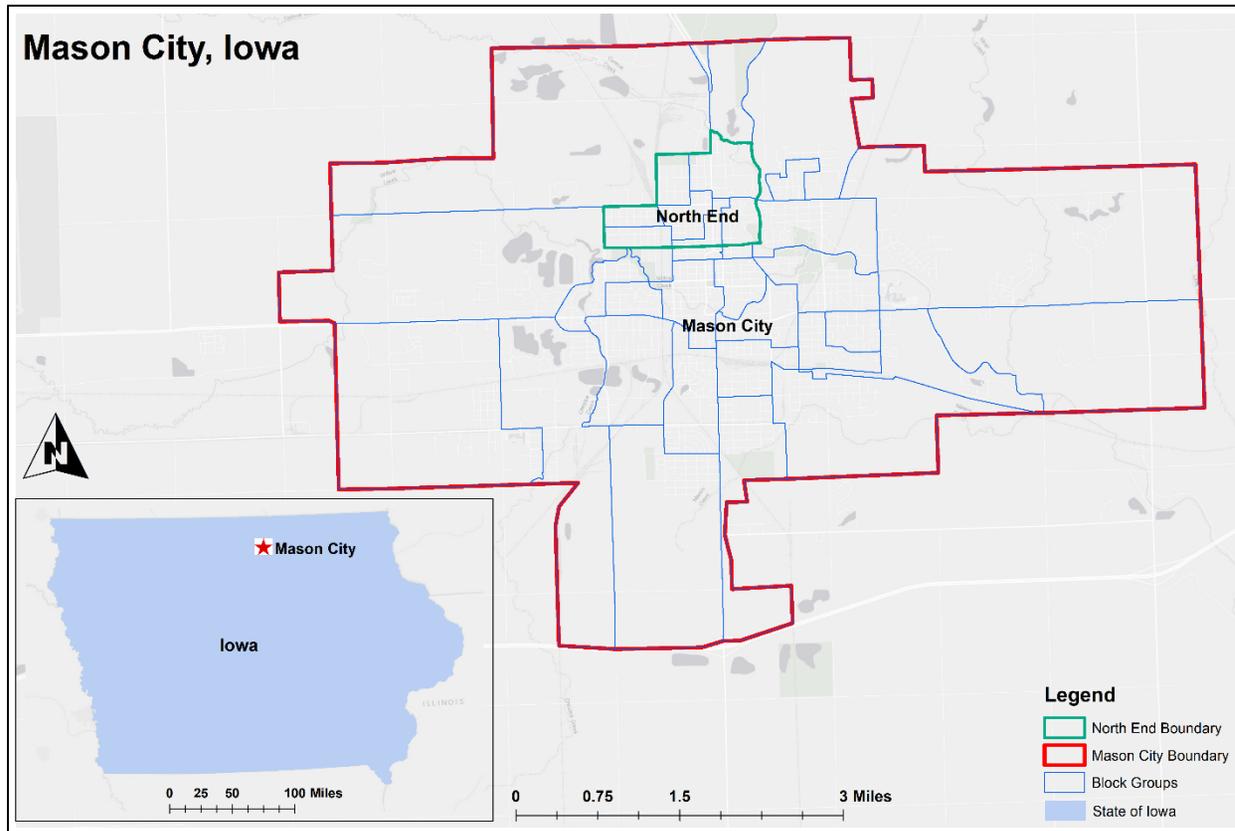


Figure 1: Location of Mason City and North End Neighborhood

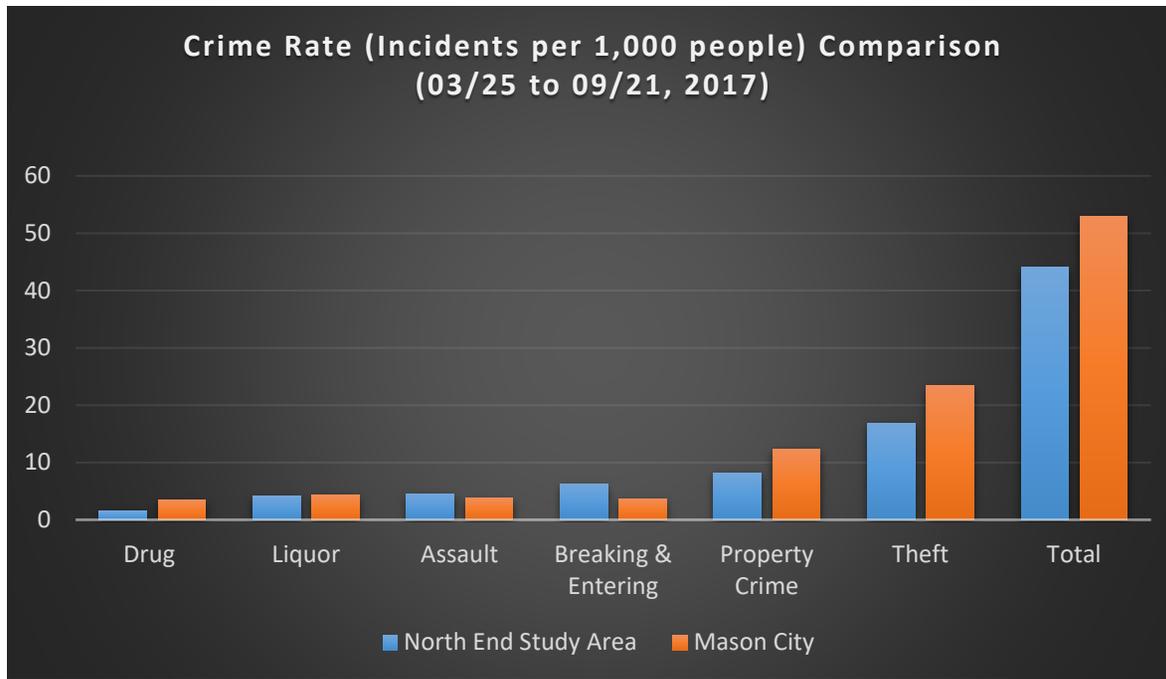


Figure 2: Comparison of crime rate between Mason City and North End

Literature Review

The literature review section is aligned with these two concepts: the spatial distribution of crime or criminal activity and the relation between socio-economic characteristics and criminal activity.

Spatial Distribution of Crime:

One of the key components of crime analysis is to see where crime occurs. Criminal incidents have an inherent geographical quality (Chainey and Ratcliffe, 2013) which means crime takes place at a particular point or location. In addition, criminal activity does not occur in random. In most cases, it does tend to concentrate in certain locations due to several characteristics of the offender, victim and the surrounding. This particular locations where criminal activity clusters are known as hotspots (Chainey et al., 2008). This information regarding hotspots can be very useful for law enforcement agencies, local government and public in order make an informed decision about their activity.

Socio-economic Factor and Crime:

Several research in criminology reveals that some social and economic characteristics are linked with criminal activity. For example, Sacco and Kennedy, (2010), through their research in urban Canada found that most of the offenders tend to be young and disadvantaged male. Their study also revealed around three fourth of youth offenders are male and there is a significant correlation between offenders and minority group (for example African American population, and other minorities).

Crime rate can also be related with poverty and unemployment. In their illustrative review of social and demographic relationship with crime, South and Messner (2000) talked about commonality between criminal activity and several characteristics of population which explain criminal behavior. Poverty and unemployment can force a group of individual to social marginalization, which can

associate them with criminal activity. Empirical evidence of such relations are found in Romania (Lobonț et al., 2017), Canada (Kitchen, 2006), and UK (Bowers, 1999). Other factor of social exclusion such as low education attainment can also contribute to criminal activity (Lobonț et al., 2017).

Data and Methods

Description of Data

Crime data used in this study has been collected from the Mason City Police Department and the time period for the data is 2015-2017. The crime data are given in single events with address of where they happened by each year. They were then geocoded to point shapefile to make them compatible to use in ArcGIS. The shapefiles for Iowa census block groups, Mason City and North End boundary were given by the Mason City Development Department Services. Crime data has been aggregated and standardized per 1,000 population for each block group to make it usable for spatial analysis. The demographic and socio-economic data were taken from the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2012-2016) for using in regression analysis. Variables used in regression model are taken from various literatures and are as follows:

Table 1: Regression variables

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables
Crime incident per 1,000 people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• % of Male (18-30 year)• % of Minority• Unemployment rate• Low education attainment (less than 12th grade)• Poverty level

Methods

The methods used to analyze data are described in the following section:

Average Nearest Neighbor: this method calculates a nearest neighbor index based on the average distance from each feature to its nearest neighboring feature and shows clustering at the point level.

Global Moran's I: this method is used to identify spatial autocorrelation or clustering by assuming there is an underlying geographic clustering of the data based on both location and value.

Getis-Ord GI Index:* this method helps to pinpoint the location of clustering pattern through hot spots (clustering of high values) and cold spots (clustering of low values).

Regression Methods: Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression was used first to analyze the impact of independent variables on crime rate. The equation of OLS Model is:

$$y = X\beta + \varepsilon$$

Where, y is the dependent variable, here as crime rate/1,000 people, X is the independent variables, β is the coefficient for each of the independent variables and ε is the stochastic error term. However, OLS assumes that there is no spatial autocorrelation among the variables. But, Anselin (1988) have suggested that observations are not spatially independent, thus violating the rule of OLS. To address the problem of spatial dependence, two spatial econometric models the spatial lag model and the spatial error model was run. These two statistics have power against each other, and the one with a higher value should be considered as the correct specification in determining whether to use the spatial lag model or the spatial error model. Following this decision rule, we used the spatial lag model with maximum likelihood estimation. Queen continuity highlighting a shared border or vertex is used to construct the spatial weights matrix. The Spatial lag Model adds a spatial lag (WY) in the model to control for spatial autocorrelation.

$$Y = \alpha + \rho WY + \beta X + \varepsilon$$

W is a standardized spatial weight matrix, and therefore, WY represents the weighted average of neighbors' values of attribute Y .

Analytic Tools

Average Nearest Neighbor Index analysis was conducted using ArcMap geographical information software. Global Moran's I, Getis-Ord GI* Index, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Spatial Lag regression analyses were conducted using GeoDa, a free software used for spatial data analysis. Finally, All maps were created using ArcMap as well.

Results

Figure 3 shows the spatial distribution of individual crime events in Mason City for consecutive three years (2015-17). Visually it is noticeable that crimes are concentrated centrally, where North End Neighborhood is also located. The types of crimes that are predominant in the area are: assault, burglary, vandalism, disturbance, domestic violence, harassment, sex offence, theft, motor vehicle theft and robbery.

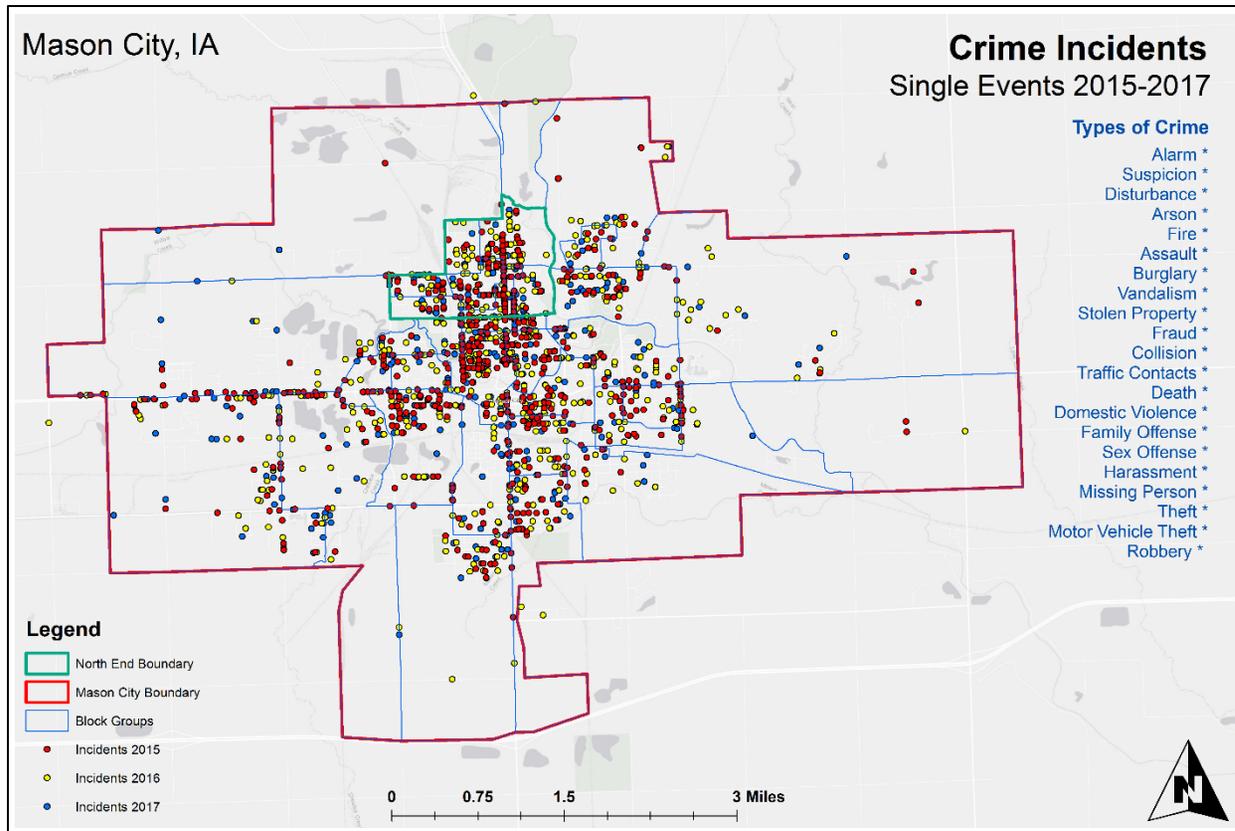


Figure 3: Spatial distribution of crime incidents (single events) from 2015-17

To check if there is any clustering for the point incidents, average nearest neighbor indices has been identified for the three year dataset (figure 4).

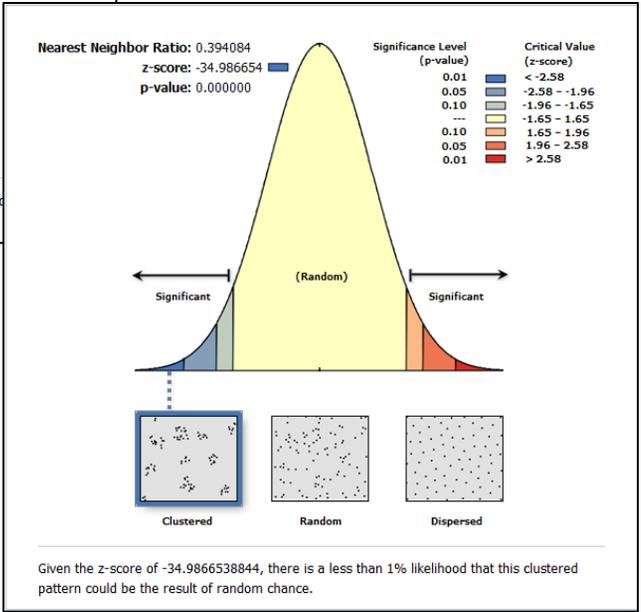
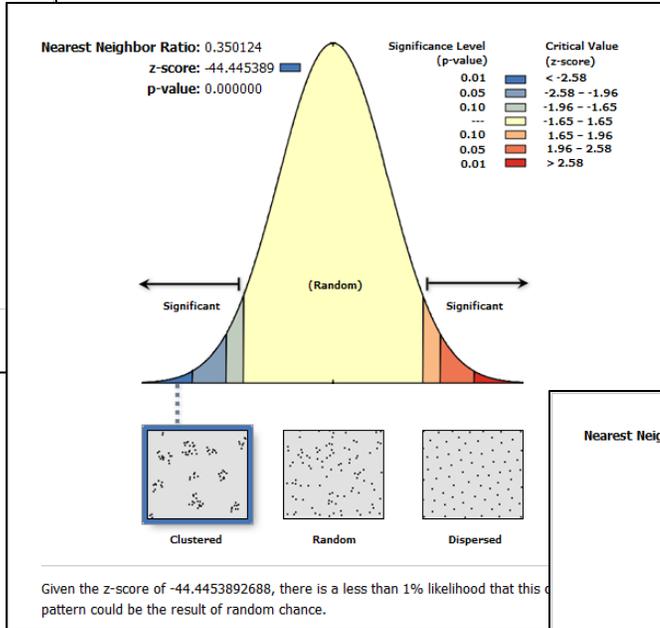
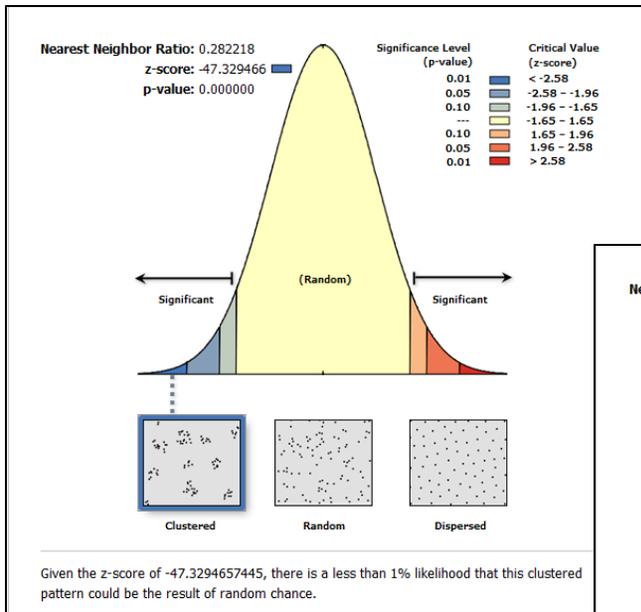


Figure 4: Average Nearest Neighbor Index values

All of the indices indicates that there is a less than 1% likelihood that this clustered pattern could be the result of random chance.

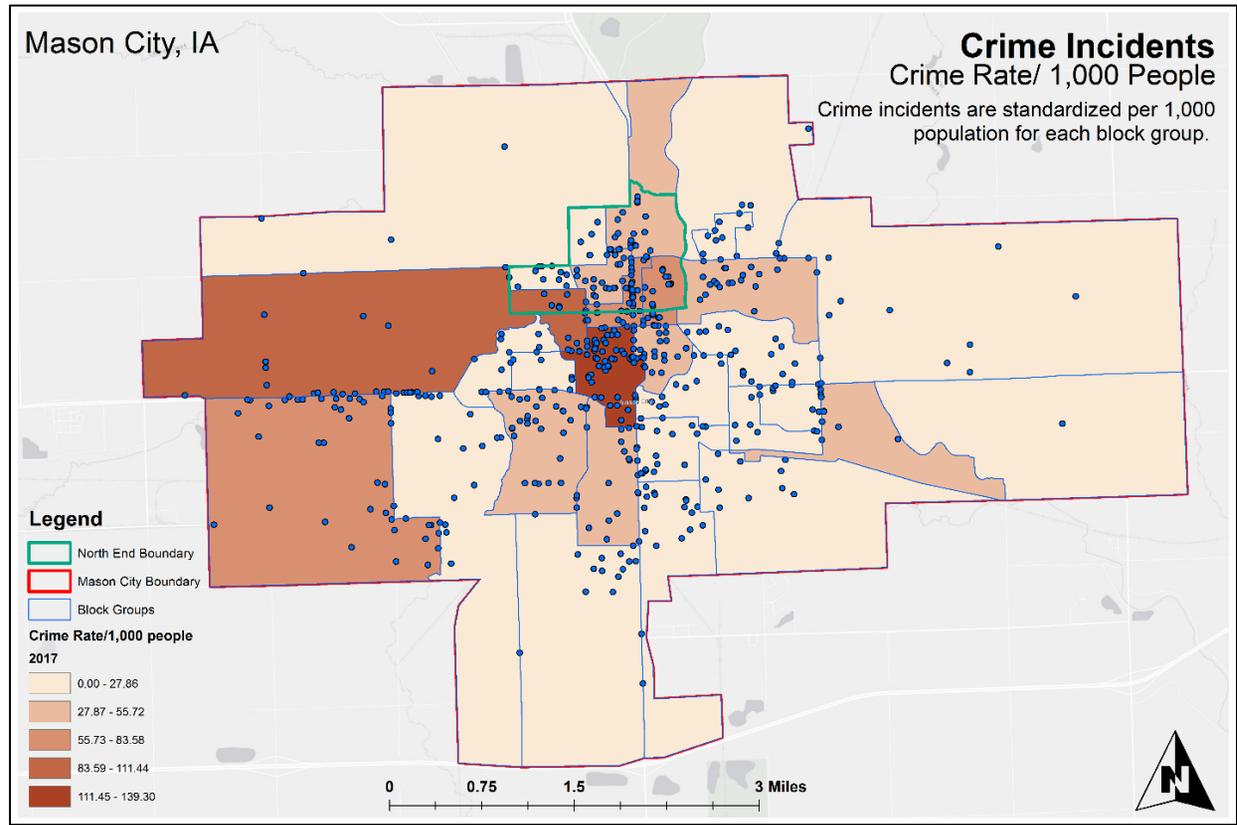


Figure 5: Spatial distribution of standardized crime incidents, Mason City

That means, the spatial distribution shows a clustering among the crime incidents. However, as the study was interested in finding locations with many incidents (hot spots) and/or locations with very few incidents (cold spots), aggregating and standardizing incident data was needed prior to analysis.

The standardization has been done by crime rate per 1,000 people for each block groups. Figure 5 shows the single events and standardized crime incidents for 2017. Clearly, there are differences among two types of data. After standardization, left block

groups falls in the higher rate region whereas the point distribution was showing low crime events in those block groups. Block groups comprising North End showing a moderate to low rate of crimes.

However, to identify spatial autocorrelation among the block groups, Global Moran's I was used. The index values for all three years shown that there are no significant clustering among the block groups. But, as the Moran's I value is not 0, that means there are some clustering of crime incidents (may be not significant for the total area) happening in Mason City.

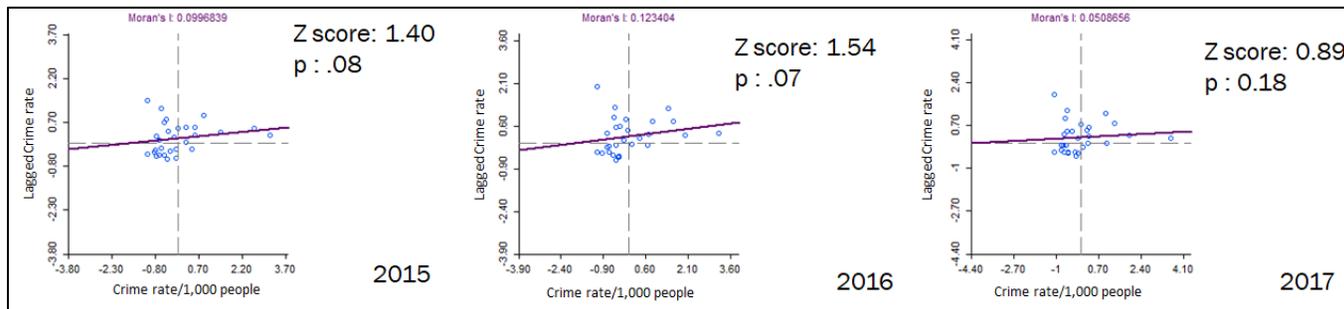


Figure 6: Global Moran's I values

To pinpoint the location of clustering pattern and also to identify hot spots (clustering of high values) and cold spots (clustering of low values) of incidents, Getis-Ord GI* Index value has been calculated for each of the dataset. Figure 7, 8 and 9 are the hotspot map of crime incidents for 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively. The maps shows the presence of hotspots around the downtown (central) of Mason City and those are surrounding the NE neighborhood. All three maps shows that one hot spot block group is within the

boundary of North End. That means when analyzing as a whole area, no significant clustering was found. But, analysis to find neighbor interactions revealed that significant crime hotspots are present within the City. However, the study also identifies one block groups significant for cold spot that means crime incidents are lower here.

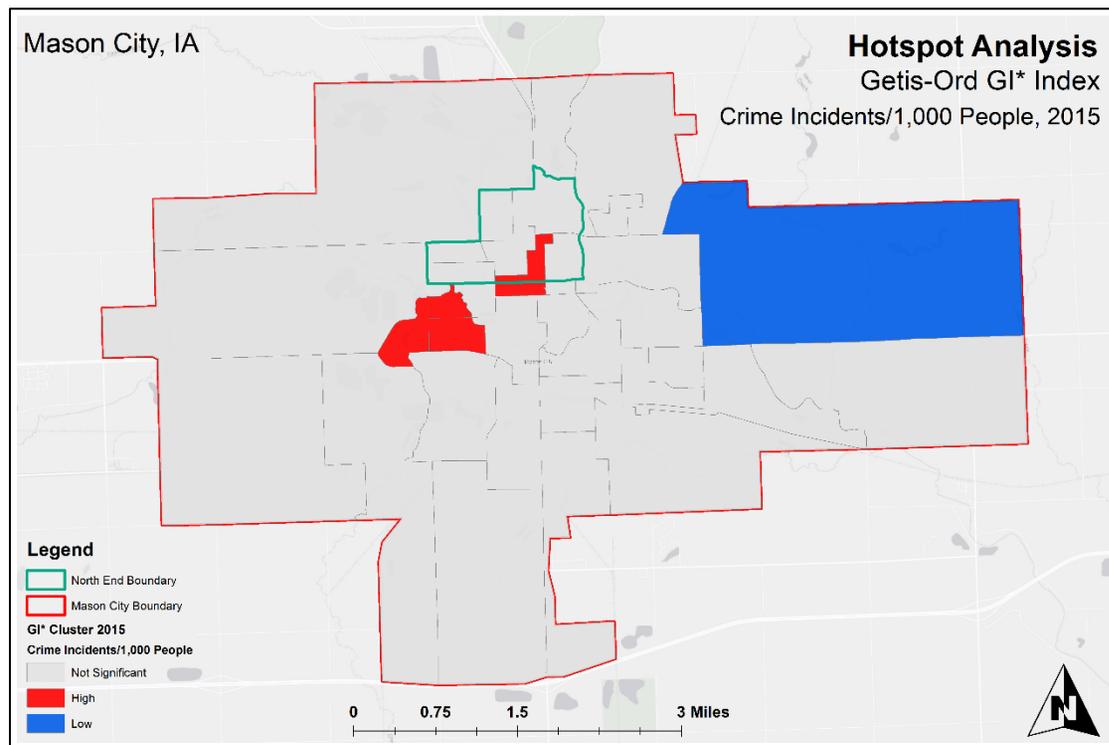


Figure 7: Hotspots of crime in 2015

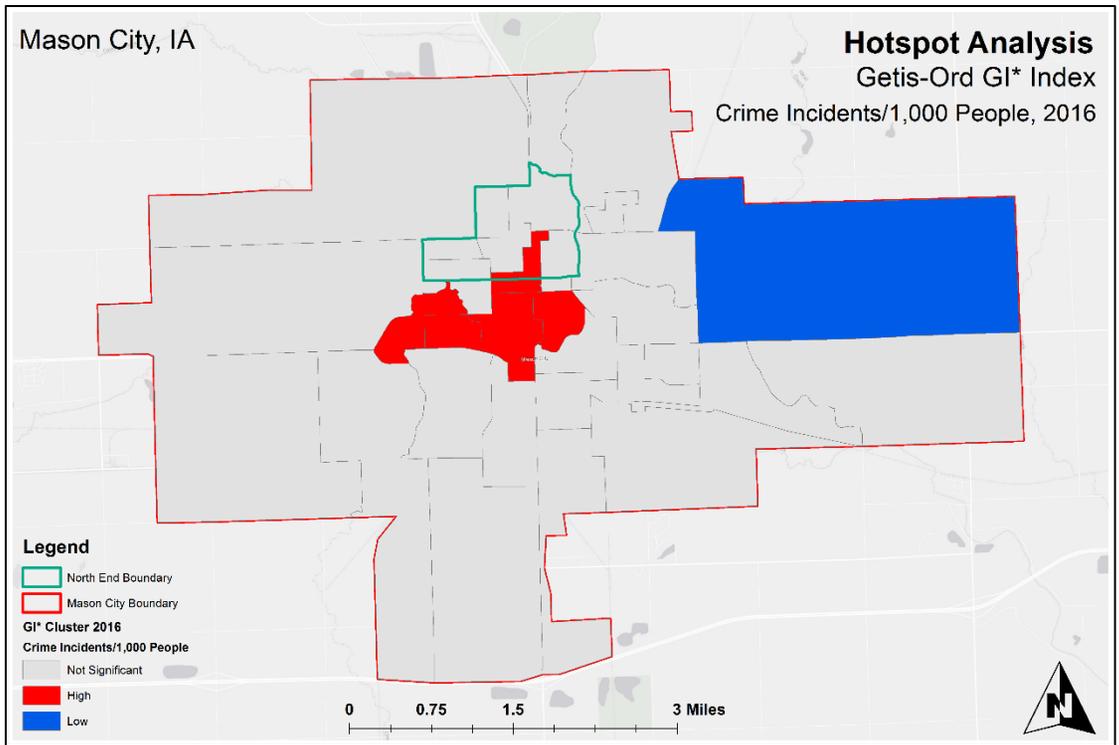


Figure 8: Hotspots of crime in 2016

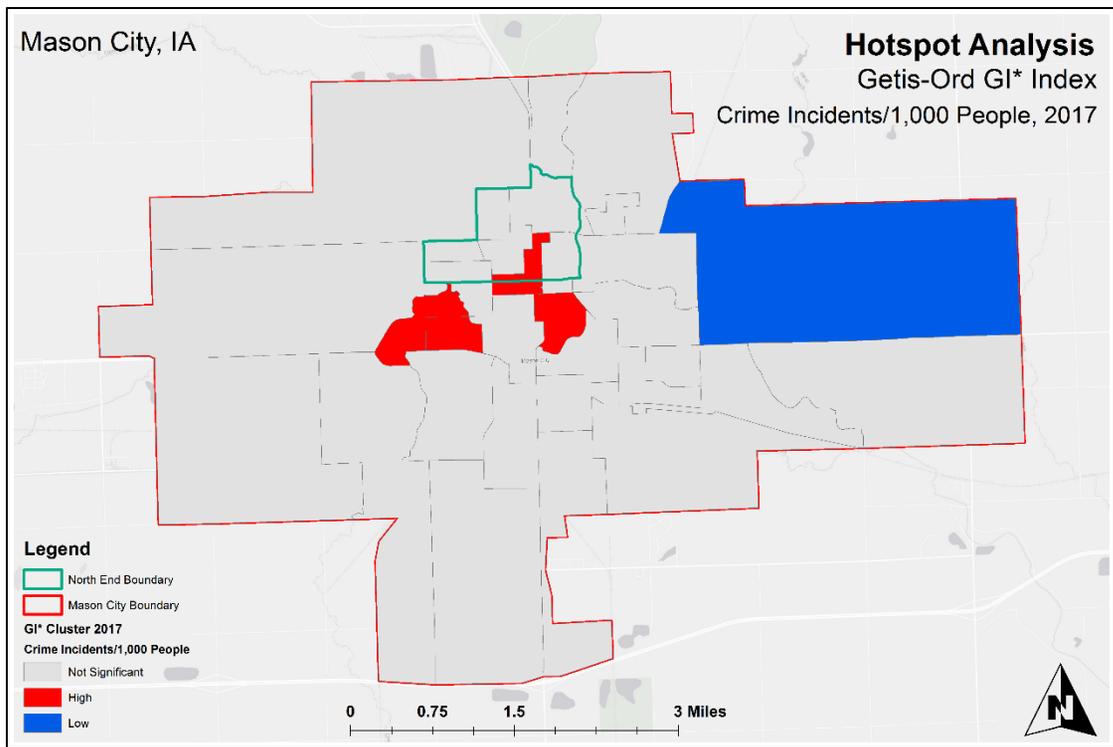


Figure 9: Hotspots of crime in 2017

Spatial Regression

OLS Regression analysis have been done for this study to check the relationship of the dependent variable, crime rate with the independent variables (table 1). The analysis has been done using the 2016 data as demographic and socio-economic data is available till 2016. To address the problem of spatial dependence two spatial econometric models: spatial lag model and spatial

error model has also been run. Table 2 presents the regression results. The Lagrange Multiplier tests for spatial lag (LM-LAG) and spatial error (LM-ERROR) suggest the existences of both spatial lag dependence and spatial error dependence. Following the decision rule that the one with the high value should be used, the study used spatial lag model and its results are shown table. The OLS regression and spatial lag model both suggest that the variable significantly related to crime rate is poverty rate. Lag model also adds unemployment rate as another significant explanatory variable. The spatial lag term of W_ratecrime appeared as an additional indicator. Its coefficient parameter (Rho) reflects the spatial dependence inherent in our data, measuring the average influence on observations by their neighboring observations. It has a positive effect and it is significant. As a result, the general model fit improved slightly, as indicated in higher values of R-squared.

Table 2: Regression results

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: CRIME RATE PER 1,000 PEOPLE		
	Model 1: OLS	Model 2: Spatial Lag
W_RATECRIME (RHO)		0.523*
YOUNG MALE	-114.72	-118.48
MINORITY	45.51	67.15
LOWEDU	70.25	66.37
POVERTY	172.18***	167.06***
UNEMP	461.231	409.42*
R²	0.53	0.54

LM-LAG	0.9172
ROBUST LM-LAG	5.1392 **
LM-ERROR	0.0743
ROBUST LM-ERROR	4.2962**
***SIGNIFICANT AT 0.01	**SIGNIFICANT AT 0.05
	*SIGNIFICANT AT 0.10

Summary and Policy Discussion

The study examines the hotspot of crimes and identifies the demographic and socio-economic factors related to crime in Mason City, Iowa. It is motivated by improving the poor perception of North End Neighborhood in Mason City. Using spatial analysis techniques, we found hotspot for crime in Mason City as well as within North End. The study sheds light on identifying underlying causes behind the bad reputation of the neighborhood. Though only one block group within North End is hotspot for crime, however, several surrounding block groups are also found to be as hotspots. Therefore, the geographical association to the neighbors is causing the neighborhood to face this reputation issue. This result implies that the policy makers need to focus on the crime infected areas as well as the “North End Healthy Neighborhood Plan” should address this issue to guide its solution to bring positive perception for the area. The marketing campaign for North End need to focus on that the NE is not totally a crime-prone area, rather a particular block group and surrounding other block groups are hampering its image. However, the City should also

explore successful block groups or “cold spots” to identify what are the inherent factors helping them to have reduced crime incidents.

The study also identified significant socio-economic factors that are impacting the crime rate using spatial regression, which are poverty and unemployment rate. One important finding is that, this study did not find any demographic variable that are impacting the crime incidents. Policy implication of this finding is that, instead of focusing on minority population (typical conception related to crime), the authority needs to focus on alleviating poverty rates and unemployment rates. They are both related as increasing job opportunity will help in reducing poverty.

However, the one limitation to the study are that, in block group level the study did not find any significant clustering pattern, which could be related to the block group. Smaller census scale could have shown better results. Also, this study did not consider types of crime in any analysis as it was not in the scope of this study. Further studies are encouraged to do analysis among crime types.

To conclude, this study provides proofs to Mason City Authority about locations they need to enforce security measures and also, socio-economic factors they need to look at for fighting criminal activities. These results would help to reinforce perception increasing campaign for North End Neighborhood.

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Why a Community Organization?

A Community/Neighborhood Organization could benefit the North End by bringing neighbors together, encouraging communication and cooperation, and promoting neighborhood goals and ideals. This can be done both within the neighborhood, and by working with the Mason City government and City Council to make the North End a better, healthier place for all individuals to live.

This packet contains tips about communication, what needs to be done about funding with the 501(c)(3) status, a guide on how to start an organization (or revive the existing one), a guide to developing strategic and action plans,

COMMUNICATION

- Nextdoor is a free private social network for use only within your neighborhood. It can be used to spread word about neighborhood meetings or events, share news, or connect neighbors. Anyone living in the neighborhood can join for free and make posts about neighborhood issues.
- After starting presence on Nextdoor, the account should be advertised to get more residents involved. Advertising could be through posters or fliers posted in schools, churches, and businesses, bus posters, or yard signs.
- Other social media outlets, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, can also be used to post about neighborhood issues and events. The advantage of Nextdoor though, is that posts about the neighborhood don't get buried by other posts.
- If you plan an event or meeting, reach out to the Mason City Gazette to see if you can get an article published about what you're doing

TIPS:

- To help people get involved, draft a list of specific roles that have a set time commitment. For example, one person could be responsible for checking City Council/Planning and Zoning agendas and posting on Nextdoor when there's an item that impacts the neighborhood.
- Identify a "first issue" that the neighborhood organization wants to address.

- If there are other active organizations, such as a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), try to partner with people who are involved in those groups
- The organization does not have to be formal, with monthly structured meetings. Using the 501(c)(3) will require more organization, but a few people can take the lead on this. To get more people involved social events will be easier and more effective.

These communication tools and tips can be used whether or not the organization takes over the existing 501(c)(3). However, if the group wants to take tax-deductible donations, get City funding, or apply for grants, they will need to manage the 501(c)(3). This requires:

- A mission statement
- Keep records of all Board documents including meeting minutes and financial statements
- Work with an accountant and attorney
- Draft bylaws, or rules of how the organization operates
- Form a Board of Directors (1 or more people)

The City of Mason City support neighborhood organizations with a matching grant of up to \$3,000 per year for neighborhood improvements, such as neighborhood clean-ups, lighting improvements, enhancements to the right-of-way, or the construction of welcome signs. Contact Steven Van Steenhuyse (641-421-3626) for more information on this grant.

The following are resources from other communities that include useful guides on starting neighborhood associations and developing strategic and action plans. Because they were developed for other cities, not everything will apply to Mason City, but the general concepts may be helpful as you get started.

A Guide for Starting a Successful Neighborhood Association

Adapted from a publication of the same name produced by the City of Fayetteville, Arkansas*

Block by Block

Congratulations on taking the first steps in starting a neighborhood association. A neighborhood association is a group of homeowners, renters, apartment dwellers, and representatives from neighborhood businesses, churches, and schools who organize to improve conditions in the neighborhood. When you start a neighborhood association, the people in your neighborhood get a chance to decide what needs to be done and work together to make it happen. A group that represents the community will have the stability, credibility, and political clout to be an effective force for a better neighborhood.

This **Neighborhood Association Toolbox** is a guide to assist you in starting a neighborhood association. It is by no means a complete set of rules that must be followed. It is merely a starting point with helpful hints and proven methods to effectively organize your group.

Organizing a neighborhood association is a big job. The material in this kit breaks down the job into clear steps so that it will be less overwhelming. While it may seem difficult at first, developing your association will be enormously exciting as people come together to address common concerns and learn to work together as a group. Keep in mind some important guidelines as you begin to organize:

1. Building an organization is a process. It can't be done overnight. Be patient. Identify your priorities and build them step-by-step.
2. . Set realistic goals. Start small and build upward. As your organizational capacity grows, start setting your goals higher.
3. How you treat people is crucial to your success. By treating people with respect and honesty, people will be more likely to get involved in the organization.
4. . Adapt the ideas and strategies outlined in this kit to the specific needs and circumstances of your community and your organization.
5. People join neighborhood groups for a variety of reasons. One of them is to get to know their neighbors better and to feel a sense of community. So, as you build your organization, be sure to have fun.

Neighborhood Projects

One of the best ways to attract attention and form group unity is to focus on an important issue in your neighborhood. Neighbors do not attend meetings or become interested in your association unless you are doing worthwhile projects for their benefit or the benefit of their area. It's important that you determine the needs of your neighborhood and focus on those needs until you demonstrate success.

Determine the needs of your neighborhood through meetings and personal discussions with neighbors

during a walk - through. After you construct a list of possible needs, discuss them in reasonable depth to identify the issues. When you have identified the issues, discuss each one and agree on the priority of each issue. Sort the issues into short - term or long - term projects and begin to evaluate how your association would like to approach each issue.

In developing your neighborhood projects, focus on a specific issue that will demonstrate action and results and that will be visible in the neighborhood. Get the whole community behind the project by promoting the issue as much as possible. This will provide lots of participation for you to establish a large membership base. If you are successful in achieving your goals or effecting change on a single issue, it demonstrates that your association is an effective group. This establishes the credibility and worthiness of your association, characteristics which are important to long-term survival. Unfortunately, one problem with concentrating on a single issue is that when that problem is solved, everyone leaves. Therefore, it is important to introduce other issues at the same time and get people to work on them in addition to the main issue. As each issue is resolved, focus on new, short-and long-term projects.

In planning projects, keep the ball rolling with a list of projects and activities that will maintain participation and interest. This requires a lot of anticipation and organization by association members. The best approach is to plan around a calendar. Do not suffocate your members with more projects than time will allow. Choose a pace and stay consistent. Slow progress is often better than no progress at all, but keep in mind that one large gap in activity could cost you the participation of a large majority of your membership because of lack of interest. Be careful how you plan and coordinate all projects. Keep people involved in all levels and give people specific jobs (with specific time frames) to do. Everyone is willing to contribute a little bit of time. Do not give too much responsibility to one person when it can be easily delegated to several.

Project Ideas

The following is a list of possible short- and long-term projects:

- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Community Garden, tree planting, flower planting
- Back-to-school party and school supply drive
- Murals or neighborhood art project
- Neighborhood scrapbook or video
- Crime watch program
- Scholarship exchange (Example: Ex-boxer in the neighborhood sets up an afternoon boxing program for neighborhood kids. The kids mow and care for his yard).
- Block party or festival

- Neighborhood entrance signs
- Security lighting
- Tool lending libraries
- Tutoring program for youth
- Home tours
- Neighborhood cook-out, picnic, or potluck
- National night out celebration
- Holiday celebration
- Neighborhood t-shirts
- Yard of the month award
- Neighborhood newsletter, web site, directory, or telephone/email tree
- Paint up/fix up projects
- Paint swap
- Speakers on topics of interest to the neighborhood
- Representative to attend city council, school board, and planning commission meetings
- Philanthropic projects, such as "adopting" a family who needs help with Christmas dinner

Keeping Interest in the Association

Once you have tackled a few projects, how do you keep people interested? This by far is the biggest challenge for any neighborhood association. In general, members will participate if following are present:

- Business and social events in which to participate.
- Issues of importance to discuss
- Clean and visible accomplishments
- Organized, competent leaders
- Events to recognize participants

Effective Meetings

The way that meetings are run will affect how members become and stay involved in the association. If meetings rarely start on time or are dominated by a few people, members will become frustrated and will stop coming to meetings. When meetings are well run, people's opinions are respected, and the agenda is followed, members will feel more willing to participate in other activities of the association.

Meeting Arrangements

The best arrangement for a community meeting is a circle of chairs. People sitting in a circle can communicate better. Tables often form barriers and are easy to hide behind. Avoid using tables unless they are needed for maps or handouts. Choose a neutral room that will just barely accommodate everyone. This will allow the energy of the group to stay within the group and add to your feelings of enthusiasm. Meeting locations could include a neighborhood church or community center, a member's home, or a favorite local restaurant.

Agendas

Every meeting must have an agenda or purpose. Spend time before the meeting deciding not only what to discuss, but also how long and in what order you will discuss the items. It is sometimes useful to put emotional or controversial issues at the end of the agenda. This will allow you to take care of small, but necessary decisions early in the meeting. When listing agenda items, it's always good to list a time limit. It's possible that you'll go over or under the limit on some items, but will tend to keep the meeting on track. Do not overload the agenda. Try to stay within 1 – 1.5 hours and allow some time for refreshments and mingling.

Running a Meeting

Start the meeting on time. Don't penalize those on time by making them wait for latecomers. Go ahead and start the meeting with less important agenda items. By doing this, you will reinforce the behavior of those who arrive on time without excluding those who are late.

Make sure someone takes the minutes and records the meeting so that those who were unable to attend can still keep up with the activities of the association. If you do not have a secretary, rotate this task.

Dealing with Difficult People

When a point is being discussed too long:

- Summarize; or
- Suggest tabling the question for a later time.

When two members get into a heated discussion:

- Summarize points made by each and turn the discussion back to the group and/or
- Invite the two to stay after the meeting when the three of you can talk it over.

When coping with the "one-man" show:

- Interrupt with a statement giving the speaker credit for his contribution but politely asking him to hold his other points until later; and/or
- Interrupt with "You have brought up many points that will keep us busy for a long time. Would anyone like to take up one of these points?"

When a speaker drifts from the subject:

- Interrupt, give her credit for her idea but explain that she is departing from the main point; or
- Propose to the group the question of whether it wants to stray from the outline or follow it; or
- Bring the discussion back to the topic by using the related idea as the transition.

When a member has difficulty expressing herself:

- Build up her confidence by expressing appreciation for what she has said and then rephrase her material with a preface such as "is this what you mean, Ms. Jones?"

Participation

Set realistic expectations about attendance. You may not need large attendance at every meeting. Do not focus on what you consider poor attendance. Concentrate on coming up with techniques to increase attendance. Set a tone at meetings where everyone's ideas are welcome and respected and no one is put down. Consider establishing a Membership Committee to focus on recruiting new members. Be realistic about what people can do given their other responsibilities. Respect all contributions, no matter how small.

Ending the Meeting

It is surprising how many meetings are allowed to just fizzle out. Meetings should end with a plan of action. Ask committees to research an issue and report back to the group. Summarize what has been decided. Then, decide on the date, time and place of the next meeting before members leave.

And, most importantly, in addition to addressing concerns in the neighborhood, plan enjoyable neighborhood activities that will bring the neighborhood together, such as a block party, neighborhood garden, or card club. If those in the neighborhood see the exciting activities happening around them, they will be more likely to want to participate in your neighborhood association.

Communications

The establishment of a good communications and publicity network is absolutely essential to any group. Whether it is a simple flyer, newspaper announcement advertising a meeting, a short telephone call, or an email, groups must take advantage of all media (including word of mouth) to make people aware of activities.

One of the most effective ways to establish a manageable and affordable network is using the following forms of communication:

Flyers—Any activity, project, or goal of the group can be announced in a flyer. When designing a flyer, be sure the wording is bold enough to be read from a distance of 10 feet. Use colorful paper. If possible, arrange for the use of a church or school copying machine. Or better still, have them quickly copied as a donation by a local print shop. Contact the Community Affairs Department if you need help designing and/or copying flyers. Post flyers in markets, laundromats, schools, beauty shops, and other places frequented by the people you want to reach.

Newspaper announcements—The Northwest Arkansas Times, the Morning News and the Free Weekly have announcement sections and allow neighborhood associations to advertise their local meetings at no charge.

Neighborhood walk-through—This is one of the most effective ways to begin a relationship with your neighbors and get them interested in your association. Organize a group of at least four to six people to cover a specific region of your neighborhood. Assign pairs to go door - to - door and introduce the association and its goals. Ask them about their concerns and respond with how your association can help them effect a change in their situation. Ask them to attend the next meeting to voice their concerns. Also, ask them to bring some of their neighbors. Be sure to leave a flyer with the information about the next meeting. If no one is home, leave a flyer in a visible, but secure location (do not place flyers in mailboxes as it is against federal law).

Surveys—Surveys are a key way to bring new members into the association. Use a survey when you are just getting started. At your first general meeting, distribute a survey to residents to find out what issues are important to them and what direction they want the group to take. When developing a survey, keep in mind the information you want to get from community residents:

- What are the most important issues in the neighborhood?
- What are the issues people are willing to work on?
- What kinds of skills do people have?

- What are the best meeting times and locations?
- What are people's work schedules?
- What is the age, racial, and economic make-up of the neighborhood?

These are just suggested questions. Brainstorm and come up with questions that fit your neighborhood.

Telephone tree/email list—Individuals who want to contribute but have little time may volunteer to be on a telephone tree or email list. Give each person at least six people to contact by phone with a short message. Or, place a neighborhood member in charge of setting up an email database. Information may then be sent out as the need arises. These are easy ways to establish a communication network that is fast and very effective.

Block representatives—Establish one or two individuals from each side of a street or block to serve as a liaison with your association. They can inform neighbors about what your association is doing and how to get involved. They can also recruit neighbors to support your association and communicate with them by word-of-mouth or telephone. This is a big help when your neighborhood association covers a large area.

Newsletters—A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be an effective tool in communicating with your members. Short, informative articles that are of interest to the entire neighborhood will keep neighbors up-to-date. Newsletters can be paid for through association dues or by advertising dollars and can be produced fairly inexpensively.

A good newsletter might contain the following information:

- Notices of important meeting dates and group events.
- Information about city services
- Recent accomplishments of your group
- Notification of special events
- Recognition of volunteers
- Information about the schools in the neighborhood
- Profiles of neighbors
- Crime/safety information
- Birth/death announcements
- Graduation announcements
- Anniversaries
- A welcome to new neighbors
- Articles of community interest

- Advertising

The newsletter editor will write articles, review articles submitted by others and set deadlines. The newsletter committee should assist with typing, soliciting advertising, and arranging for printing. Decisions will need to be made regarding the title of the newsletter, the number of pages, paper stock, and the arrangement of copy. Consider asking a local printer to donate printing services. Decide how to distribute the newsletter. Newsletters can be sent home with students. Also, consider utilizing boy or girl scout troops or block captains to deliver the newsletters. If you decide to mail the newsletter, call the US Post Office regarding a bulk mail permit.

Website

There are a number of free web site and listserv resources available for non - profit groups like neighborhood organizations.

- Among the most popular free listerv services, Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com/>) and Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com/>) offer services like message archives, shared photo storage, group calendars, polls, and links storage.
- Designed specifically as a neighborhood organization resource, Neighborhood Link (www.neighborhoodlink.com) is an Internet - based community network that enables every neighborhood in participating metropolitan areas to create their own free, interactive Web sites.
- Several neighborhood organizations in Athens-Clarke County have opted to develop their own independent web sites with the purchase of a domain name through commercial web-hosting companies. While this option incurs annual costs, the rates are often affordable and frequently covered by neighborhood membership dues. Greater storage capacity for online resources and documents is among the advantages of an independent site.

Incorporation and Nonprofit Status

Steps for Filing Articles of Incorporation

If your neighborhood association plans to apply for nonprofit status, you must first file Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. Here are the steps to consider when incorporating:

- Call the Secretary of State Corporations Division at 404 - 656 - 2817 to check on the availability of your corporate name. The state does not allow duplication of corporate names, and your proposed name may already be in use.
- Write your Articles of Incorporation. If possible, have an attorney check your Articles of Incorporation before submitting them to the State.

- The forms must be notarized. All the officers of the corporation must sign two copies of the Articles of Incorporation in front of a Notary Public.
- For more information about the incorporation process, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at <http://www.sos.state.ga.us/corporations/>.

Applying for Nonprofit Status

Articles of Incorporation do not make an association a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit status is given by the Internal Revenue Service. The decision to apply for nonprofit or 501(c)3 status with the IRS is a big step for a neighborhood association and should be considered carefully. Applying for and maintaining nonprofit status requires a great deal of paperwork and record keeping.

The following are benefits of nonprofit status:

- Enables your neighborhood association to accept tax-deductible donations.
- Allows you to avoid paying sales tax on your purchases.
- Allows you to avoid paying income tax on interest earned in the association's bank account and on qualified non-profit income.

A neighborhood association is eligible for nonprofit status if:

- It is incorporated by the state as a non-profit corporation.
- It is organized solely for charitable purposes.

To apply for non-profit status, you must file IRS Form 1023 seeking tax-exempt status and charitable organization status. IRS Publication 557 explains how to complete Form 1023. The IRS requires the submittal of a filing fee along with Form 1023. To determine the appropriate filing fee for your organization, complete Form 8718 User Fee for Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request. Many organizations find that professional assistance in filing these forms is necessary.

Volunteers

Recruit people to events and activities—not to business meetings. Sign - in sheets, nametags, and follow-up recruitment calls should be standard procedure in your organization. Give new members a chance to participate through activities such as passing out information at meetings, working on a neighborhood project, delivering the newsletter, stuffing envelopes, or contacting their friends to come to the next event. These activities should make the volunteer feel useful and productive. When recruiting to an activity, try to consider the volunteer's needs. Try to provide child care, transportation, or a mentor if the volunteer needs it.

When recruiting volunteers, enthusiasm is important. Show confidence by knowing what you would like the volunteer to do and be enthusiastic about the task at hand. Practice explaining your request in a concise, up-beat fashion. In just a few sentences, you should be able to convey the essence of the organization, the purpose of the task, and how the task will enhance the organization and the neighborhood. Here are the six steps to successful recruitment.

1. Be prepared

Have in mind a mini - strategy consisting of how you will explain your goal and what you want the person to do. Review what you know about the person, such as interests, experience, and family. Look and listen for clues as to what interests this person.

2. Legitimize yourself

You need to gain quick credibility. Find a common background or a mutual friend. Explain that you have the same problem that they do. Mention people that they might know. Explain why the person's participation will make a difference.

3. Listen, listen, listen

Draw people out. Listening is more important than just not talking. It is asking good questions, providing encouraging remarks, and using body language that says you are interested. Be sure to listen to for special skills, useful contacts, and organizational networks that can be useful to your organization.

4. Challenge

Encourage people to produce change. Challenge people to care about the organization's goals.

5. Get a commitment

Never leave a conversation open-ended. Get a commitment with a firm deadline. Write it down, make a note for follow-up and clarify exactly what should happen next.

6. Follow-up

There is nothing worse than making a big fuss over people while recruiting them and then ignoring them once they show up. Have greeters or a welcoming committee at meetings, introduce new people to experienced volunteers, and keep the lines of communication between you and your volunteers open at all times.

Keeping volunteers is just as important as recruiting them. Recruitment has to be backed up by an organizational plan with clear goals and expectations of what volunteers will do. Have a committee or program designed especially for volunteer and membership issues. This program should include training, supervision, recognition, and leadership development. Always explain the organizational importance of each task and assign tasks to fit the time that the volunteer is able to give. Recognize volunteers and make them feel a part of the team.

Recruiting and keeping volunteers is something that is learned through practice and experience. Have fact sheets for each recruiter addressing such things as how to overcome objections to volunteering, the purpose of the task they are recruiting for, organizational information, and a brief description of the task. Growing, thriving organizations must train leaders on how to recruit others and build recruitment strategies into their on-going program work.

Political Action at the Local Level

Staff

Administrative support to executive branches of government, (i.e., agency personnel, committee staff, etc.) is a source of information, advice, and opinion. They can make small decisions within the scope of their procedures. As a rule, they have no authority for policy changes.

Elected Officials

Elected officials are a source of information, advocates for policy changes, intermediaries for citizen groups or citizens.

Committee

Standing, ad hoc, citizens, or subcommittees are typically advisors of government. Recommendations are prepared for higher levels of government. This is where the work leading up to decisions is conducted. They are characterized by greater informality, more candid and detailed staff reviews, airing of positions of all interested parties, and possibly brokering and negotiating of trade-offs between interest groups.

Councils/Boards/Commissions

These are the final action, decision-making levels for cities, counties, districts, and other planning bodies. They are characterized by more formal procedures and presentations. In many cases, decisions ratify committee recommendations. However, the policy body may weigh a recommendation against other priorities and override the recommendation or request additional information before making a decision. Likelihood of action without prior committee recommendation or referral is remote. This is the most visible arena of the policy making process. Therefore, conflict resolution is difficult and the PR value of confrontation is highest at this stage. Compromises are better worked out ahead of time.

Voters

Voters have direct access to legislative power through the initiative/referendum process. This applies to legislative action only (contrast: administrative or quasi-judicial) in state, home rule county, or city with appropriate charter provisions. It can either propose grass roots legislation or challenge a decision by policy makers in referring their action to popular vote.

Media

Mass media is relevant to any discussion of the political process, although in itself not a bona fide category of political action. Letters to the editor, feature stories, radio talk shows on current events, and editorial board support are desirable, no - cost strategies for influencing public officials and contributing to the public debate.

How to Influence Decision-Making

Action Check List

- Learn the decision-making process.
- Meet your elected officials as early as possible.
- Let your elected officials know about you.
- Concentrate and coordinate your efforts.
- Inform yourself—research the issue.
- Inform the members and the public of the issues.
- Attend meetings.
- Assist your elected officials.
- Know and support your allies.
- Always provide completely accurate information to elected officials; never deliberately provide misleading or false information.
- Focus on the preliminary stages of policy making.
- Never threaten elected officials.
- Form coalitions.
- Identify "swing votes."
- Be discreet.
- Be realistic. You may not win every fight, and at times, compromises will have to be made.
- Thank elected officials for their help.
- Inform your members about which officials helped and supported your cause.
- Evaluate your efforts.
- Monitor the implementation of decisions.
- Involve as many members as possible in different roles.

Tradition

"We always do it this way." Examine the traditional framework in your community. Does your project fit comfortably? Does it make minor changes? Or is it radically different? A project that differs a great deal from the way "we always do it" will require more explanation to the community before it will be accepted.

Power Clusters

Organizations and individuals who are all interested in the same thing form power clusters. For example, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the state Fish and Game Commission might all focus on wildlife issues. When these groups join efforts, they form a power cluster, sometimes called a coalition.

Networks that may relate to neighborhood associations include the Federation of Neighborhoods and other individual neighborhood associations, city - county committees primarily made up of citizens, and other volunteer organizations with similar interests.

Working With Local Government

Since a large part of a neighborhood association's time may be spent advocating for change at the local level, it is important to know how to work with local government. The next few sections give ideas for how groups like neighborhood associations can effectively work with local government to influence decision making. These sections deal with general principles, such as how to choose the best channel to go through, how to give public testimony, and how to be politically effective as a group.

Set Your Goals

What is most important for your neighborhood association to accomplish in order to maintain livability? If you have a neighborhood plan, some goals have likely been set. If not, set aside some time for your Board to set its direction. Prepare needs statements for the City budget process and prioritize issues for Board involvement.

Know Your Issues

Do your homework. Find out who is affected, to what degree, and the consequences of no action. On a long-range issue, document your process, dates of events, who was involved, and correspondence. Determine which issues will need to be addressed by a local government agency and which will need to be addressed by the neighborhood itself. Only neighbors working together and along with government can solve short- and long-term neighborhood problems.

Know the Structure and Purpose of City Government

Contact the City Clerk's Office at 575-8323 or access the website for information regarding City of Fayetteville Departments and structure.

Become Acquainted with Procedure

Visit a few meetings of your public officials (e.g., City Council, boards, commissions, etc.). Understand how they operate, discover the guidelines they have to follow, and realize the pressures they are under. Have someone explain to you the procedure if it isn't otherwise clear.

Work Personally

Allow your officials to get to know you. The best form of contact is on the personal level: (1) personal appearance, (2) phone call, (3) letter, (4) e - mail. See www.accessfayetteville.org on ways to contact city officials.

Keep Your Public Officials Informed

Do not surprise your officials with unexpected actions. Bring written copies of your concern when meeting with them, and follow up your concern and action with letters. (Keep copies of everything you do!) Make reference to things you have sent. Keep up an ongoing relationship. Show your appreciation as well as dissatisfaction. Send carbon copies to other individuals or agencies involved (citizens, City staff, others).

Work on all Levels

Try the chain of command first by going to the person most directly responsible for your concern. Then work on all levels by going to your appointed and elected officials. If you don't know whom to talk to, do not hesitate to go to the top. Be sure to keep your City Councilors informed. If necessary, address the Council as a whole to be sure you are heard.

Make it Clear if You Represent a Group

Identify the name of your group and its purpose. Use appointed contact persons to establish continuity and identity. Document attendance at general meetings and votes taken. Ensure that you have the group's approval/authorization before acting.

Get Solid Answers

Don't be satisfied with vague answers. Talk to informed people and solicit answers you can rely on. Ask for and remind your officials of specific information—dates, places, times, etc.

Be Open to Suggestions

Take the suggestions of your officials seriously and follow up on them. Progress occurs when everyone pushes in the same direction.

Follow Up

Follow up on a discussion with a memo summarizing the discussion and its outcome. Check back to see if whatever has been agreed to is being done or to see if decisions are being made. After the decision has been made, check back with the appropriate staff or government official to be certain it is carried out.

Keep the Neighborhood Informed

Use your neighborhood association's meetings and annual newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed. Talk with neighbors and businesses about what is happening. Contact the neighbors and friends about what is happening. Contact the newspapers to let them know your concerns. You may wish to issue a press release. Make your written information interesting.

Increasing Your Group's Effectiveness

The following are a collection of ideas to make your citizen's group more effective. Pick and choose, selecting those that are most appropriate for your situation.

Analysis

- Develop an independent understanding of the causes of social problems.
- Discuss social problems and their political and economic roots.
- Understand national trends (especially those which concern many people) and show your program's relationship to them.
- Identify and challenge decision-makers' assumptions about problems.
- Identify who else is concerned with the issue. Talk with them, form an alliance, share information, work together.
- Understand concerns, viewpoints, and priorities of your opponents and allies.

Vision

- Define your ideas, your vision of a society where problems which concern you have been resolved.

Structure

- Assign one citizen group member to each relevant decision-maker to lobby, to research (voting record, interest, etc.)
- Develop new ways of solving a problem which by-passes uncooperative decision-makers.

Image

- Get listed or featured in other groups' newsletters.
- Start or improve your own newsletter and send it to as many influential people as possible.
- Become better known (a "household word").
- Launch a public education campaign.
- Get radio and TV stations to help you develop your own public service announcements.
- Use CAT (Cable Access Television).
- Raise the consciousness of the general public on what it means to be an active, effective citizen.

Strategies and forms of involvement

- Neighborhood
 - Choose "win-able" issues.
 - Set up a demonstration project which shows how a problem should be dealt with; form partnerships; get funding if needed.
 - Canvass neighborhoods to gather opinions and build support.
 - Support community issues and concerns.
 - Celebrate community events (holidays, local history, successes).
 - Hold block parties.
- Resources and Assistance
 - Assess organizational history and strengths; they are among your most important resources.
 - Make a budget for your citizen involvement activities and get funding without strings.
 - Use community resources such as school buildings for space.
 - Draw on technical experts for advice and testimony.
 - Enlist the support of people with clout.
 - Use process consultants and facilitators when appropriate.
 - Seek in-kind services (free printing, auditing, legal assistance, etc.)
- Organizational Development
 - Set long-range goals and allocate time in accordance with them.
 - Initiate plans and policies rather than reacting to those of some government agency or other organization.
 - Manage time carefully and realistically (within a single meeting and during implementation of plans).
 - Develop leadership and membership skills. Make training an on-going part of your activities.

- Evaluate your progress regularly.

How to Give Public Testimony

Giving public testimony before Boards and Commissions can be frightening if you have never done it before. There are several things you can do to make your thoughts and presentation clear and successful. You may not always have the time to follow the outline listed below. However, whenever you can, it is beneficial to spend as much time as possible preparing your testimony. Carefully prepared testimony may influence action. Also, testimony becomes part of the public record and may be referred to later on.

How to Prepare Public Testimony

- Know your time frame
Find out when, where, and before whom (Mayor & Commission, Planning Commission, Hearings Board, etc.) the issue will appear. This will let you know how much time you have to prepare—there is a big difference between having one day and one month to prepare.
- Know your issue
Support opinions with as many facts as possible. Do your homework: information is power. Read newspapers, magazines, etc., to find out about the issue. Talk to local government officials, when possible, and other citizens. Be knowledgeable of the opposition's arguments and be prepared to counter those arguments. Also, draw on your own knowledge and experience.
- Start writing down main points
Construct a rough outline from scattered thoughts, research, plus any additional brainstorming. Begin thinking about any extra visual aids that might be important (posters, charts, fact sheets, flyers, cartoons, brochures, etc.).
- Know how much time is allowed for the testimony
Typical time limits range between three and ten minutes. However, effective testimony can generally be held to three minutes. If your ideas are well-organized, three minutes should be ample time to make your point effectively.
- Write a draft statement and include the following when possible:
 - Address the governmental body (example: "Mr./Ms. Mayor, Members of the Council"). State your name and address for the record.
 - Say if you are testifying for yourself or a group, and give a brief description of why you or your group is testifying on the issue.
 - Explain how support for your testimony was solicited from your group (by petitions, vote at meeting, surveys, letters, etc.).
 - Bring with you documentation of that support (copies of petitions, surveys, minutes of meetings, etc.) whenever possible.
 - Be specific about how many people were involved in making the decision. State whether this is a majority or minority opinion.

- Keep the statement as short as possible (two pages is about right). State the problem, the reasons why you or your group support or oppose, and then summarize.
- Get others to read and make comments on the draft. If you need the approval of a group, use the rough draft so people will feel comfortable making corrections or suggestions on the copy.
- Let the statement sit for a day or so, if you have the time, and then go back and read it again and revise if necessary.
- Write up final copy. Type and double space the final copy, if possible (easier to read, looks neater, etc.). Be careful to check spelling.
- Start anticipating questions from the commission, board, etc.
- Practice giving testimony before friends and get hints on improving the presentation.

How to Give the Testimony

- Be Familiar with the Group's Process— Attend one or more meetings of the group before you testify to get an idea of the room layout and the procedures used.
- Know Your Audience—Try to stress what you have in common with and that you respect the differences of the people you are talking to. The more you can find out about their biases and sympathies, the more chance you have to relate to them.
- Be aware of how you present yourself when you make a statement to the decision - making body. Think about what image you want to project. Most of what we communicate is nonverbal. Be aware of your body language.
- Try to keep your feelings in check while you are testifying. It is all right to have strong feelings on the subject, but you do not want them to overshadow the content and reason of your message.
- Use notes rather than written manuscript so you can develop good eye contact.
- Define What You Want— Make it perfectly clear what action you want the group to take.
- Summarize your written message to emphasize the important points.
- Provide copies of your written testimony for each member of the body, appropriate staff, and the media.
- If you are testifying for a group, make sure different people cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitious.

*http://accessfayetteville.org/neighborhood_resources/neighborhood_associations/a_guide_for_starting_a_successful_neighborhood_association.html

Developing Strategic and Action Plans

The following steps for developing action plans was taken from the site [Community Toolbox \(ctb.ku.edu/en\)](http://ctb.ku.edu/en). This site is a great resource for how to accomplish goals within communities

1. Convene a planning group made up of individuals from the community affected by the problem or issue and others who are in a position to address it. Identify additional partners and invite them into your strategic planning process.
2. Describe the vision for the community or initiative (their dreams for how things should be).
 - a. In a workshop, retreat, or dialogue about the group's vision, capture:
 - i. Dreams for the community or initiative (e.g., safe neighborhoods)
 - ii. What success would look like (e.g., healthy youth)
 - iii. How things ought to be (e.g., caring communities)
 - iv. What people and conditions would look like if things were consistent with that picture (e.g., health for all)
 - b. Review the multiple vision statements.

List all vision statements proposed.

- c. Choose one or several vision statements with particular power to communicate, and consider whether they are: 1) concise, 2) positive, 3) acceptable, 4) a clear expression of why the group has come together.
 - i. Choose visions that are embraced by the group
 - ii. (As appropriate) Select/edit the several that are particularly effective
 - iii. Check to see that everyone's voice is heard in the final selections

Top three statements, and why.

- d. Select one statement that concisely expresses why the group has come to together and is acceptable to all group members.

What is your group's vision?

3. State the mission (the what and why).

- a. Develop (or refine) a mission statement that includes what is to be done and why it is to be done (e.g., "Creating caring communities through education and opportunities to serve."). To do so:
 - i. Describe the essential "what" of the organization or initiative by reviewing its core functions and current programs and activities (e.g., training, advocacy, support, partnerships)
 - ii. Explain the essential "why" of the organization or initiative by reviewing the vision statements (e.g., safe neighborhoods, healthy children)
 - iii. Frame the mission statement as a single sentence that captures the common purpose (essential what and why) (e.g., "Promoting health families [the why] through parent training and community support [the what]")

What is your drafted mission statement?

b. Review the mission statement, making sure it is:

- i. Clear regarding what is to be done and why
- ii. Concise (often one sentence)
- iii. Outcome oriented
- iv. Robust - it leaves open a variety of possible means
- v. Inclusive - reflects the voices of all people who are involved

What is your final mission statement?

4. State the objectives (how much of what the group hopes to accomplish by when).

a. To develop (or refine) objectives, clearly describe:

- i. Benchmarks that would help us assess where we are now (baseline or pre-intervention) and where we would be if the initiative were successful (objectives).

What baseline markers could we access and how would we hope they would change if success were attained?

- ii. Behavioral objectives: the changes in behaviors we would see if the group's efforts were successful (What would people be saying and doing differently?) (e.g., For preventing adolescent pregnancy - "By 2012, to increase by 40% the reported level of knowledge of birth control and safe sex among 12-15 year olds.")
 - iii. Population-level objectives: the changes in community-level indicators we would see if the group's objectives were met (How would changes in individual's behaviors add up to outcomes for all those in the community?) (e.g., For adolescent pregnancy - "By 2015, the estimated pregnancy rate among 12-15 year olds will be reduced by 30%")
- b. Review the objectives to determine if they are: (SMART+C)
- i. Specific
 - ii. Measurable (at least potentially)
 - iii. Achievable
 - iv. Relevant (to the mission)
 - v. Timed (date for attainment)
 - vi. Challenging (requiring extraordinary effort)
- c. Be flexible with deadlines in creating objectives. Defining objectives is time consuming and may require second and third considerations for completeness.

5. Identify the strategies (how things will be accomplished).

- a. To develop (or refine) strategies, clearly describe how the effort will bring about the mission and objectives. Identify for each:
 - i. The levels to be targeted (i.e., individuals, families and kinship groups, organizations and sectors, and/or broader systems.)

What different levels of your problem or goal will you target?

- ii. For each strategy, consider if it will be universal (i.e., includes all of those who may be at risk or may benefit; e.g. all children and youth) or targeted (i.e., targets those who may be at greater risk for the problem; e.g., youth with a history of violence)
- iii. The personal and environmental factors to be addressed by the initiative
 - 1. Personal factors may include: knowledge, beliefs, skills, education and training, experience, cultural norms and practices, social status, cognitive or physical abilities, gender, age, genetic predisposition
 - 2. Environmental factors may include: social support, available resources and services, barriers (including financial, physical, and communication), social approval, policies, environmental hazards, living conditions, poverty, and disparity in status

What personal factors related to your vision and mission are common among those affected by the problem and those maintaining it?

What environmental factors related to your vision and mission are common within your targeted community?

- iv. Those who can most benefit and contribute and how they can be reached or involved in the effort
 - 1. Targets of change: those who may at particular risk for the issue or whose actions are critical for success. For you, who would this include?
 - 2. Agents of change: those who may be in a position to contribute to the initiative, including targets of change. Who would this include?
 - 3. Community sectors: through which targets and agents of change can be reached or involved
- v. Behavioral strategies to be used. Approaches may include:
 - 1. Providing information and enhancing skills (e.g., conducting a social marketing campaign to educate people about the problem or goal and how to address it)
 - 2. Modifying barriers, access, exposures, and opportunities (e.g., increase availability of affordable childcare for those entering work force)

3. Changing the consequences (e.g., encourage housing developers to create green spaces and mixed income development)
 4. Enhancing services and supports (e.g., increase the number of public health centers that provide dental care)
 5. Modifying policies and broader systems (e.g., change business policies so that employees can get time off to care for their sick children)
- vi. Review the strategies and comment on their appropriateness to the situation and sufficiency in addressing the mission and objectives. Review the strategies for:
1. Consistency with the overall vision, mission, and objectives
 2. Goodness of fit with the resources and opportunities available
 3. Anticipated resistance and barriers and how they can be minimized
 4. Whether those who are affected are reached
 5. Whether those who can contribute are involved

Any changes?

6. Develop (or refine) the action plan by stating the specific community/system changes to be sought that will result in the accomplishment of your goals and objectives
 - a. For each strategy, identify specific community and system changes (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, and practices) to be sought.
 - b. After compiling a list of potential changes, review each candidate community or system change and rate it on two dimensions:
 - i. Importance to the mission (1=not at all, 5=very); and
 - ii. Feasibility (1=not at all, 5=very)
 - c. Secure a formal decision from the group on what community or system changes (intervention components and elements) will be sought (or implemented), with priority given to those changes with high importance and high feasibility

7. Identify action steps for one key community/system change in the action plan (who is going to do what by when). Describe:
 - a. What specific change (e.g., in program or policy) or aspect of the intervention that will occur?
 - b. Who will carry it out?
 - c. When the intervention will be completed or for how long it will be maintained?
 - d. Resources (money and staff) needed/available?
 - e. Communication - who should know what about this?

8. Evaluate critically the appropriateness of the action plan (i.e., the activities or community/system changes to be implemented). Use the criteria that follow:
 - a. Completeness - Are all the intended activities or community/system changes included in your plan? Are a wide variety of strategies and sectors utilized?
 - b. Clarity - Is it apparent what will be done and who will do what by when, to bring about change?
 - c. Sufficiency - If all that is proposed were accomplished, would it meet the group's mission and objectives? If not, what additional changes need to be planned and implemented?
 - d. Resources (money/staff) needed/available?
 - e. Currency - Does the action plan reflect the current work and situation?
 - f. Flexibility - As the plan unfolds, is it flexible enough to respond to new opportunities, barriers, and changes in the community? Can it be modified as objectives are accomplished or goals adjusted?

Modify your proposed community and system changes and action plans based on your answers (if necessary).

9. Indicate how you will use the strategic and action plans. Consider the following potential uses:
 - a. Communicate the initiative's purpose to others.
 - i. Indicate who should know about the group's vision, mission, objectives, strategic and action plans.
 - ii. Describe how the initiative will communicate this new framing of what it does and why.
 - b. Check the organization's core functions.

- i. Indicate who should know about the group's vision, mission, objectives, and the core functions of the organization represented (e.g., advocacy, training).
 - ii. What adjustments might be appropriate to the vision, mission, and action plan?
 - c. Find common ground and anticipate potential conflict.
 - i. Identify potential disagreements about ends and means that the group is facing.
 - ii. Indicate how you might use this new framing of the problem or goal to build consensus.
 - d. Plan how to detect or discern opportunity
 - i. Identify the criteria that will be used to judge an "opportunity". These might include qualities such as:
 - ii. Consistency with the vision
 - iii. Consistency with the mission
 - iv. Contributes to the action plan
 - v. In light of the vision, mission, and action plan, pinpoint new or emerging opportunities for the community initiative or organization.

What steps will you take to better detect or discern new or emerging opportunities?

- e. Identify potential partners
 - i. Indicate who is out there who can help the group achieve its vision and mission. List organizations that share this common work.
 - ii. In light of the vision, mission, and action plan, identify some potential partners that the community initiative or organization should collaborate with.

Who or what organizations in your community would be good partners, based on your vision and mission?

10. Begin implementing action planning steps. Choose the order by considering:

- a. Which changes need to be completed before others can? Some changes may require other changes and relationships to be established.

- b. Which changes are easier or quicker to bring about? Could completing them give the organization's membership a sense of success and provide the organization with much needed media exposure?
- c. Which changes are the most important or key to the initiative's objectives?
- d. Which changes would inspire and encourage participants and build credibility within the community?

Using the list from Step 6, prioritize implementation considering the previous considerations (e.g., ease or quickness of accomplishing, importance to meeting objectives, etc.)

11. Review the action plan at regular intervals. As your coalition grows and the objectives are accomplished or conditions change, members may revise the plan.

2016 SAFETY IMPROVEMENT CANDIDATE LOCATIONS (SICL) IN THE NORTH END.

INTERSECTION ID	NORTH END RANK	STATE RANK	LOCATION
91085	1	764	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 12TH ST NW & 12TH PL
637249	2	1411	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 9TH ST NW & 9TH ST NE
94123	3	2414	13TH ST NE & 12TH ST NE & ELM DR
638002	4	6666	12TH ST NW & N MADISON AVE
637246	5	7243	US 65/5TH ST NE/5TH ST NW/N FEDERAL AVE & 6TH ST NW & 6TH ST NE
637257	6	7257	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 15TH ST NW & 15TH ST NE
5002965	7	7479	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 13TH ST NW & 13TH ST NE
637253	8	7479	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 13TH ST NW & 13TH ST NE
94119	9	8384	12TH PL & 13TH ST NE & CHARLES PL
94113	10	8774	12TH ST NW & N MONROE AVE
638162	11	8959	10TH ST NW & N POLK AVE
638005	12	10349	12TH ST NW & N ADAMS AVE
638026	13	12237	14TH ST NW & N JEFFERSON AVE
638159	14	13900	10TH ST NW & N TAYLOR AVE
638150	15	14175	9TH ST NW & N FILMORE AVE
93973	16	14305	6TH ST NW & N WASHINGTON AVE
638003	17	15203	12TH ST NW & N JEFFERSON AVE
638004	18	15207	12TH ST NW & N JEFFERSON AVE
638184	19	16115	6TH ST NW & N JACKSON AVE
637248	20	16157	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 7TH ST NW
638028	21	16168	14TH ST NW & N ADAMS AVE
638214	22	16907	9TH ST NW & N MONROE AVE
638030	23	17375	14TH ST NW & N PRESIDENT AVE
637922	24	17380	6TH ST NW & N ADAMS AVE
638209	25	17562	6TH ST NW & N MONROE AVE
637921	26	19704	6TH ST NW & N JEFFERSON AVE
637920	27	19744	6TH ST NW & N MADISON AVE
638032	28	20232	14TH ST NW & N WASHINGTON AVE

INTERSECTION ID	NORTH END RANK	STATE RANK	LOCATION
638054	29	20949	16TH ST NW & N WASHINGTON AVE
637963	30	23009	9TH ST NW & N ADAMS AVE
94121	31	25237	13TH ST NE & N PENNSYLVANIA AVE
637974	33	27154	10TH ST NW & N VAN BUREN AVE
638025	34	27590	14TH ST NW & N MADISON AVE
94153	35	28232	14TH ST NE & N PENNSYLVANIA AVE
637968	36	28814	9TH ST NE & N CONNECTICUT AVE
5002949	37	29584	N GEORGIA AVE & ELM DR
638052	38	29824	16TH ST NW & N PRESIDENT AVE
637918	39	29930	6TH ST NW & N VAN BUREN AVE
94047	40	29988	9TH ST NW & N TAYLOR AVE
638311	41	30467	N PENNSYLVANIA AVE & ELM DR
637925	42	30529	6TH ST NE & N DELAWARE AVE
637973	43	30921	10TH ST NW & N HARRISON AVE
94166	44	31352	14TH PL & N WASHINGTON AVE
637924	45	31352	6TH ST NE & N COMMERCIAL AVE
638044	46	31528	15TH ST NW & N PRESIDENT AVE
638000	47	32177	12TH ST NW & N QUINCY AVE
637950	48	33268	8TH ST NW & N MADISON AVE
637957	49	33989	9TH ST NW & N HARRISON AVE
637949	50	34297	8TH ST NW & N VAN BUREN AVE
637923	51	34455	6TH ST NW & N ENTERPRISE AVE
637941	52	34747	7TH ST NW & N ADAMS AVE
638186	53	34749	8TH ST NW & N JACKSON AVE
637961	54	34982	9TH ST NW & N MADISON AVE
638327	55	36011	10TH ST NE & N GEORGIA AVE & ELM DR
94049	56	36313	9TH ST NW & N POLK AVE
637943	57	36599	7TH ST NE & N PENNSYLVANIA AVE
638216	58	38609	10TH ST NW & N MONROE AVE

INTERSECTION ID	NORTH END RANK	STATE RANK	LOCATION
638308	59	39002	9TH ST NE & N PENNSYLVANIA AVE
637251	60	39217	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 10TH ST NW
637255	61	39229	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 14TH ST NE
637252	62	39237	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 11TH ST NE
638007	63	39243	12TH ST NW & N PRESIDENT AVE & PRESIDENT CT
5002952	64	39243	12TH ST NW & N PRESIDENT AVE & PRESIDENT CT
637259	65	39377	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 16TH ST NW & 16TH ST NE
637260	66	39377	US 65/N FEDERAL AVE & 16TH ST NW & 16TH ST NE
638009	67	39397	12TH ST NW & N WASHINGTON AVE