



# Importance and Challenges of Planning for and Saving a Middle Neighborhood in Bethlehem



REINVESTMENT FUND



# KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Rethinking the traditional approach to neighborhood planning, from consultant/city responsibility to citizen ownership



Woo Kim,  
AICP, PP, LEED AP  
Principal  
WRT

Customizing engagement strategies to accommodate the fluid nature of community planning



Darlene Heller,  
AICP  
Planning Director  
City of Bethlehem

Complementing and integrating data driven Market Value Analysis with qualitative neighborhood planning

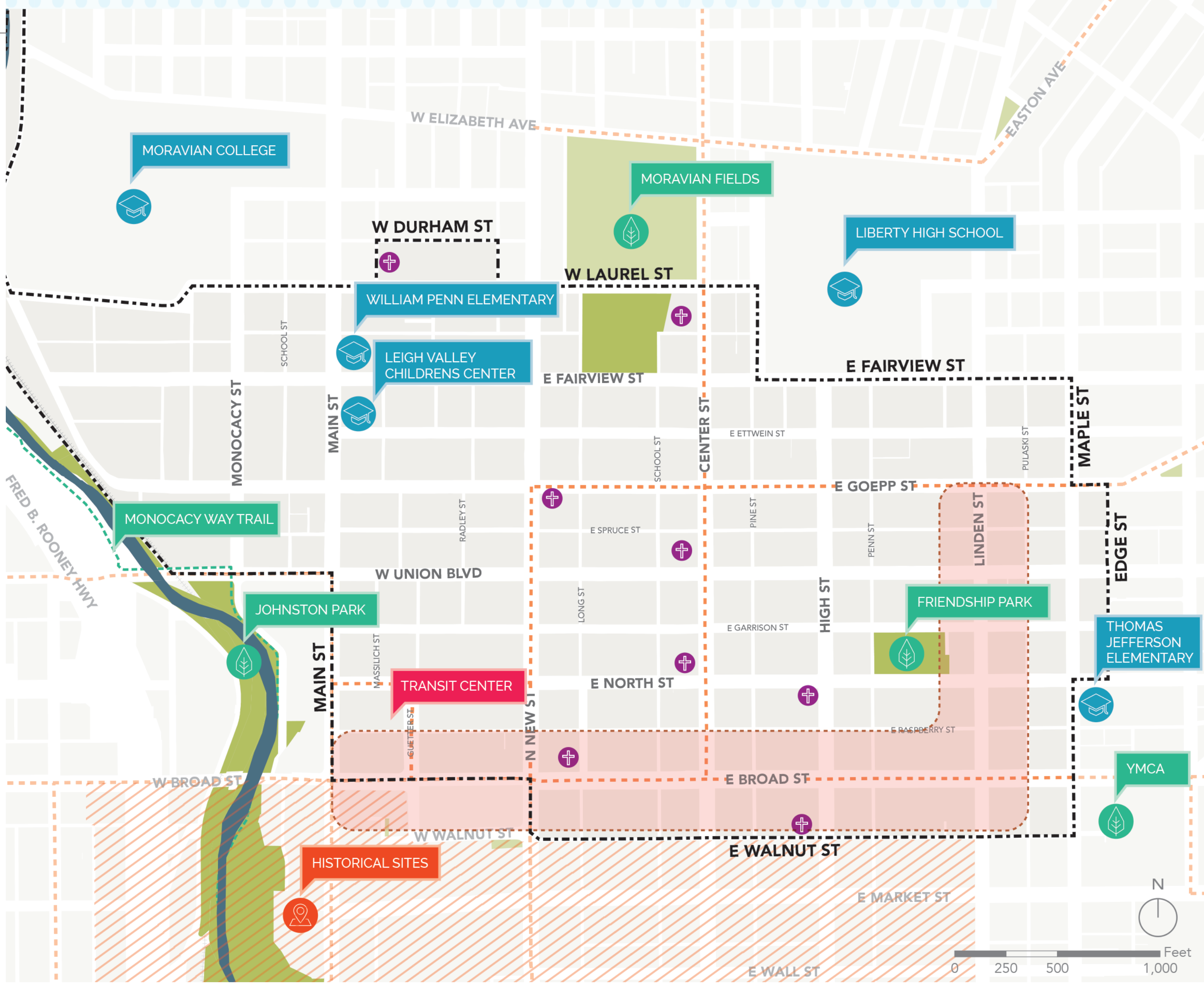
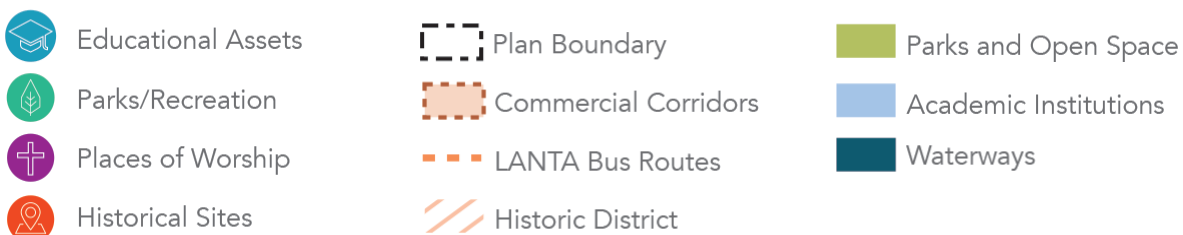


Emily Dowdall  
Policy Director  
Reinvestment Fund

# Introduction to the Northside

# A middle neighborhood in Bethlehem, PA

- Approximately 6,000 residents
- .4 square mile area
- 8.2% unemployment rate compared to 6.7% citywide
- 26% Hispanic population compared to 32% citywide
- \$44,182 Median income vs. \$51,536 citywide
- \$850 median rent vs. \$828 citywide





# Introduction to the Northside

What is a “middle neighborhood?”

Middle Neighborhoods are relatively stable, affordable, safe neighborhoods without extreme poverty or wealth. Additionally, most residents' incomes are above typical thresholds for assistance and therefore don't qualify for programs that are geared towards lower income residents. **There is a growing recognition nationwide of the importance of supporting and nurturing these neighborhoods and making sure they don't fall into disrepair.**





# Introduction to the Northside

## Key Strengths and Challenges

### STRENGTHS

- Strong neighborhood institutions (local schools, Moravian College)
- Both long-term residents and new diverse population
- Motivated residents eager to improve the community

### CHALLENGES

- Declining quality of housing stock and streetscapes
- Lack of neighborhood identity
- Public assets in need of investment (Friendship Park)

### STRENGTHS



*Moravian College*



*Motivated residents*



*Long-term residents and new diverse population*

### CHALLENGES



*Vacant Boyd Theater building*



*Existing seating at Friendship Park*



*Lack of sidewalk maintenance*



# Introduction to the Northside

## Plan Vision and Elements



1. Foster a safe and vibrant public realm
2. Foster economic activity
3. Support the housing market
4. Support residents through services, outreach, and community development
5. Building blocks of a neighborhood brand



Northside Bethlehem is a walkable, affordable, family-friendly neighborhood where community members are united to foster a culture of support and where family put down roots, grow, and thrive.





# What is the MVA?

## Market Value Analysis

- A process developed and carried out by Reinvestment Fund in Bethlehem and in cities around the country
- A tool to assist residents and policymakers identify and understand the elements of their local real estate markets
- An objective, data-driven, tool built on local administrative data and validated with local experts
- Can be executed longitudinally in order to see changes over time

	MARKET TYPE	HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS	INVESTMENT & DISTRESS
STRONG	A	» Highest sales price » Low owner occupancy	» Elevated levels of investment activities » Low levels of distress
	B	» High sales price » High owner occupancy » Lowest housing density	» Low levels of investment activities » Low levels of distress
TRANSITIONAL	C	» Sales price slightly higher than citywide median » Low owner occupancy	» Concentration of new construction » Low levels of distress
	D	» Sales price aligns with citywide median » Moderate owner occupancy » Low housing density	» Lower levels of investment activities » High levels of violations
	E	» Sales price slightly lower than median » Moderate owner occupancy	» High levels of investment purchases » High levels of financial distress
DISTRESSED	F	» Low sales price, lowest owner occupancy » Highest housing density » Concentration of subsidized rentals	» Highest levels of investment purchases » High levels of financial distress
	G	» Lowest sales price » Low owner occupancy » Highest variance in sales price	» High level of investment purchases » High levels of financial distress and violations

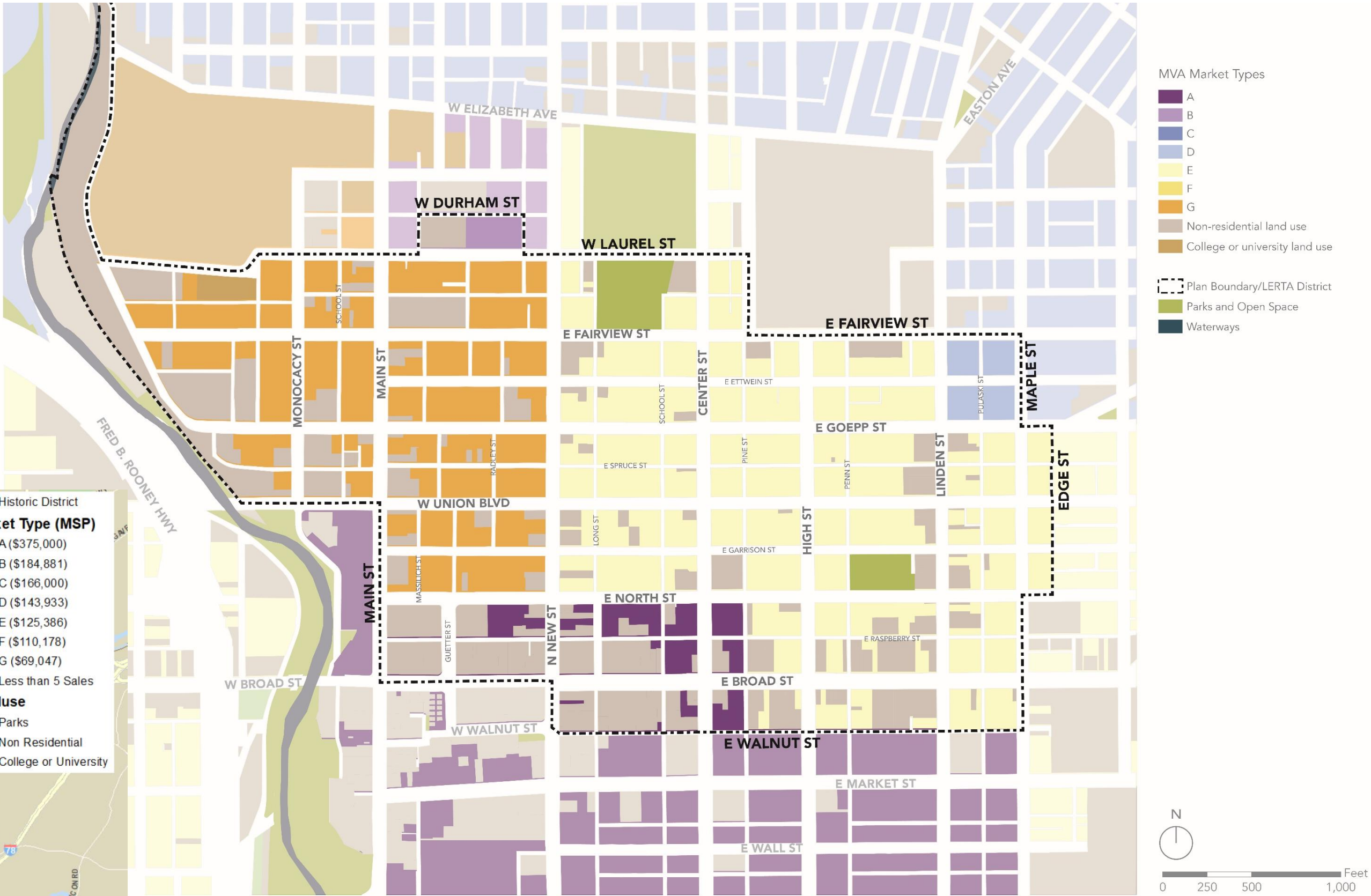
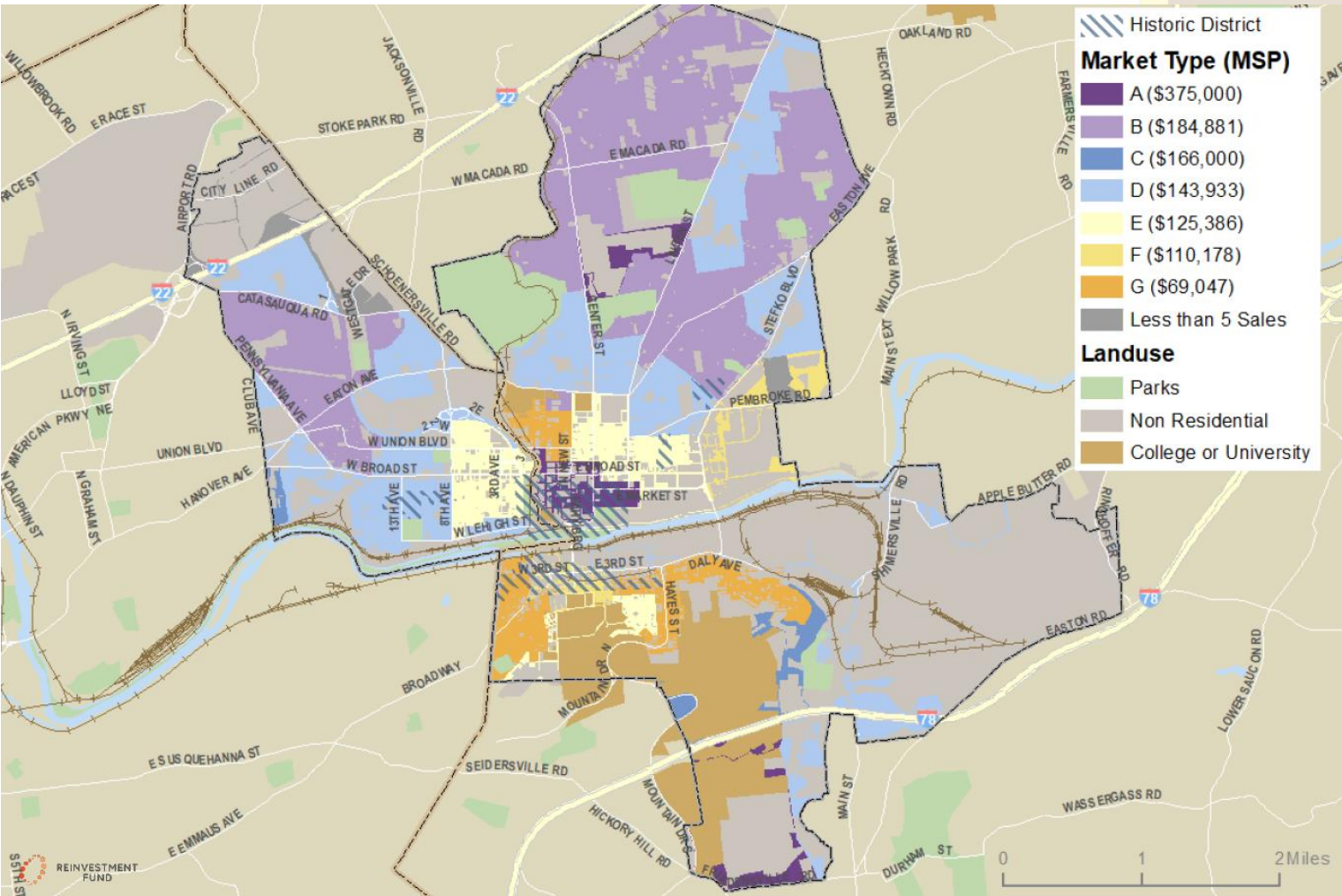
Market types identified for Bethlehem, PA



# What is the MVA?

## Market Value Analysis

Citywide MVA for Bethlehem



MVA detail for Northside neighborhood

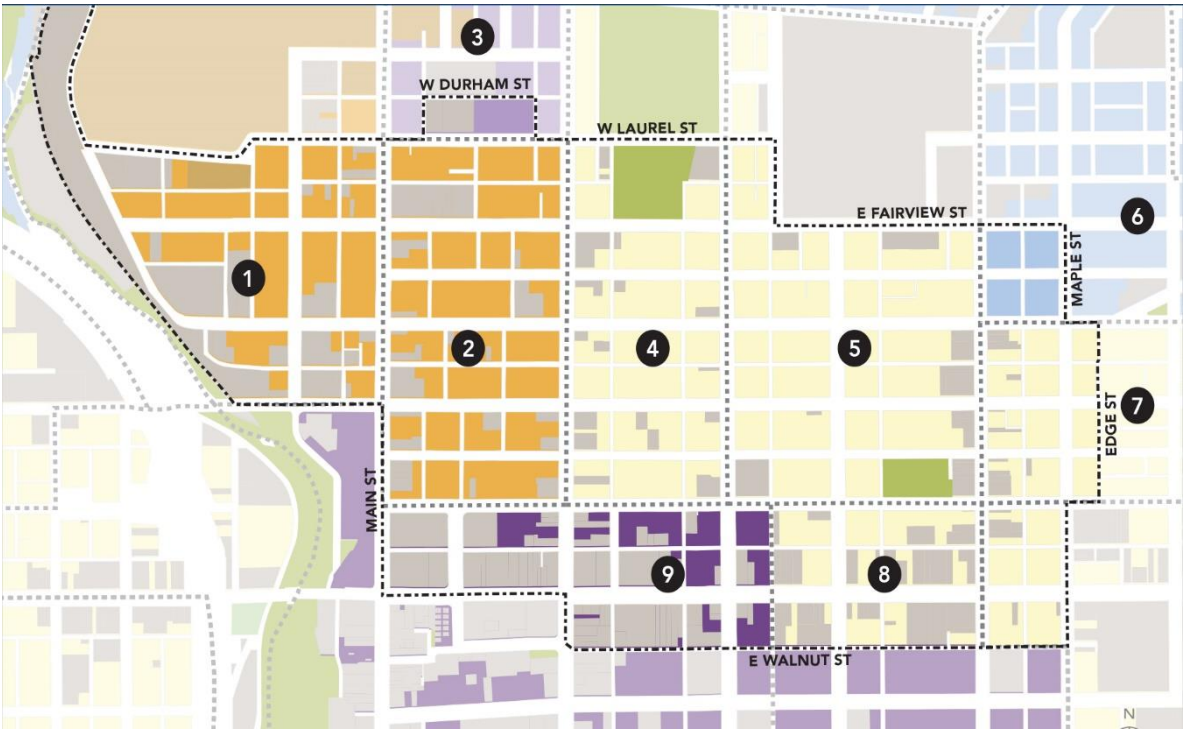
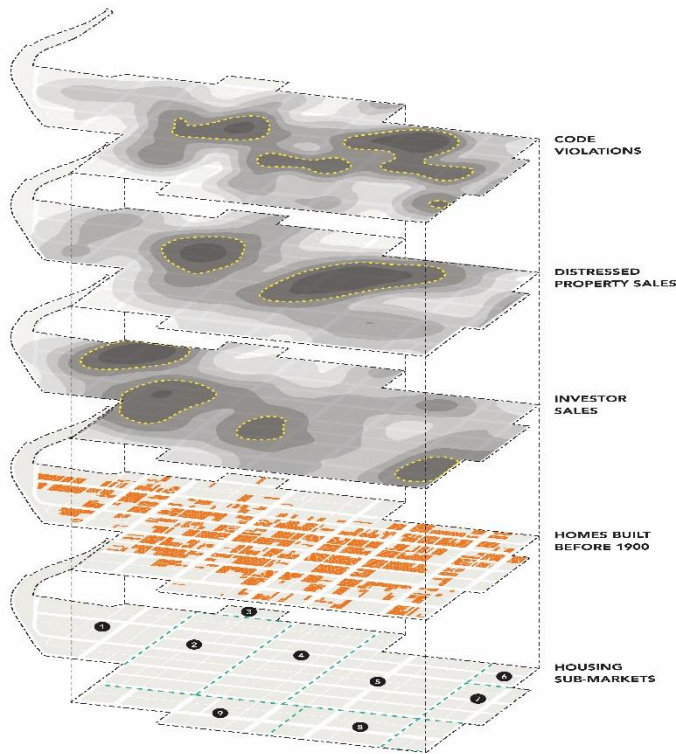




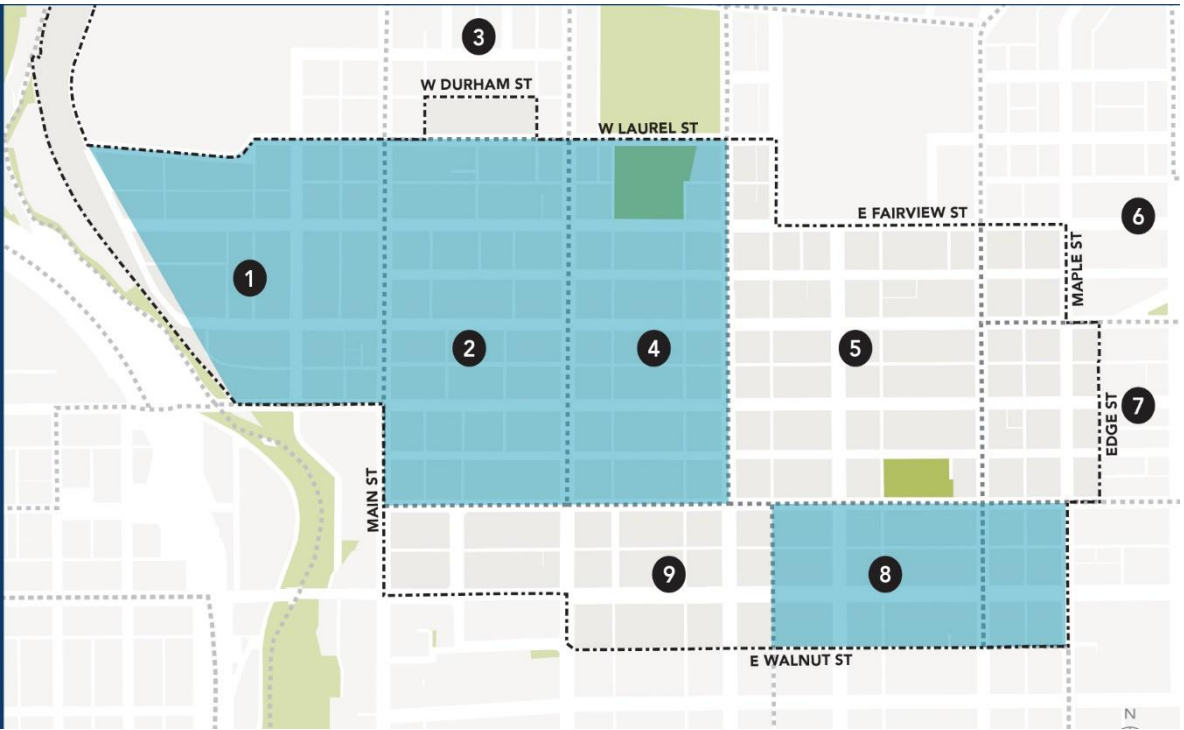
# How the MVA informed plan strategies

Targeted housing interventions at the Census block group level

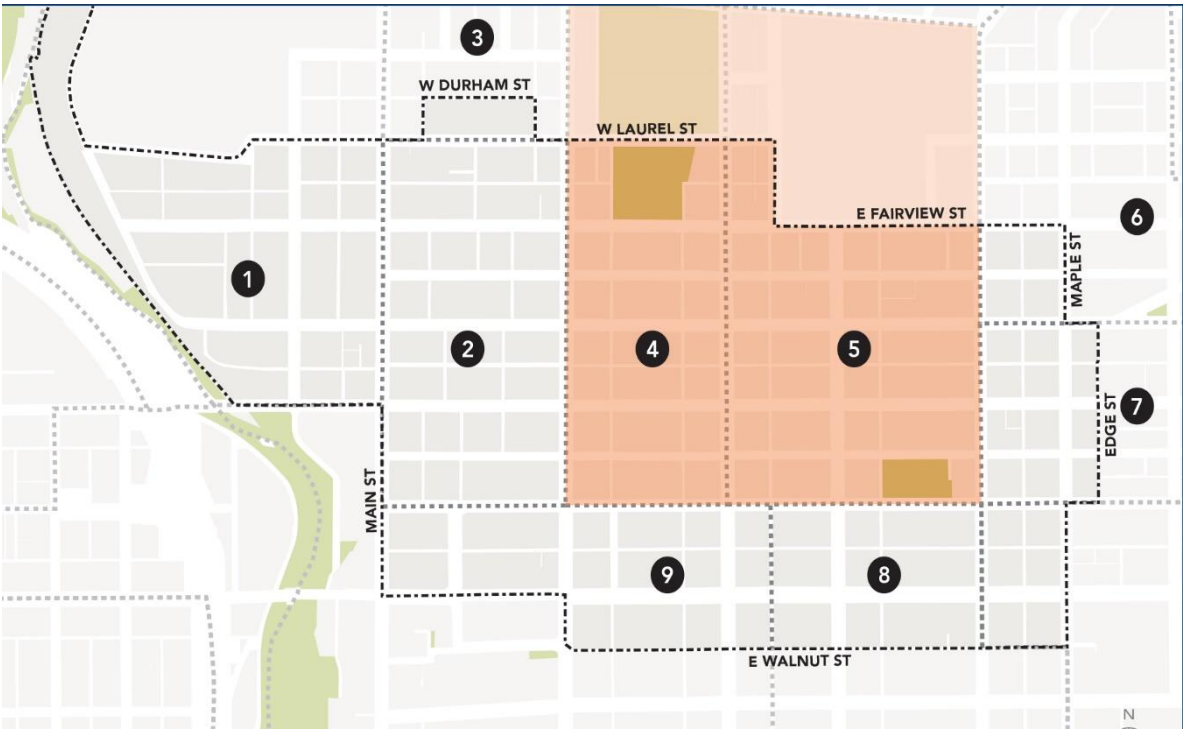
- MVA MARKET TYPES
- TARGETED CODE ENFORCEMENT
- HOMEBUYER ASSISTANCE
- HOMEOWNER REPAIR AND REHAB



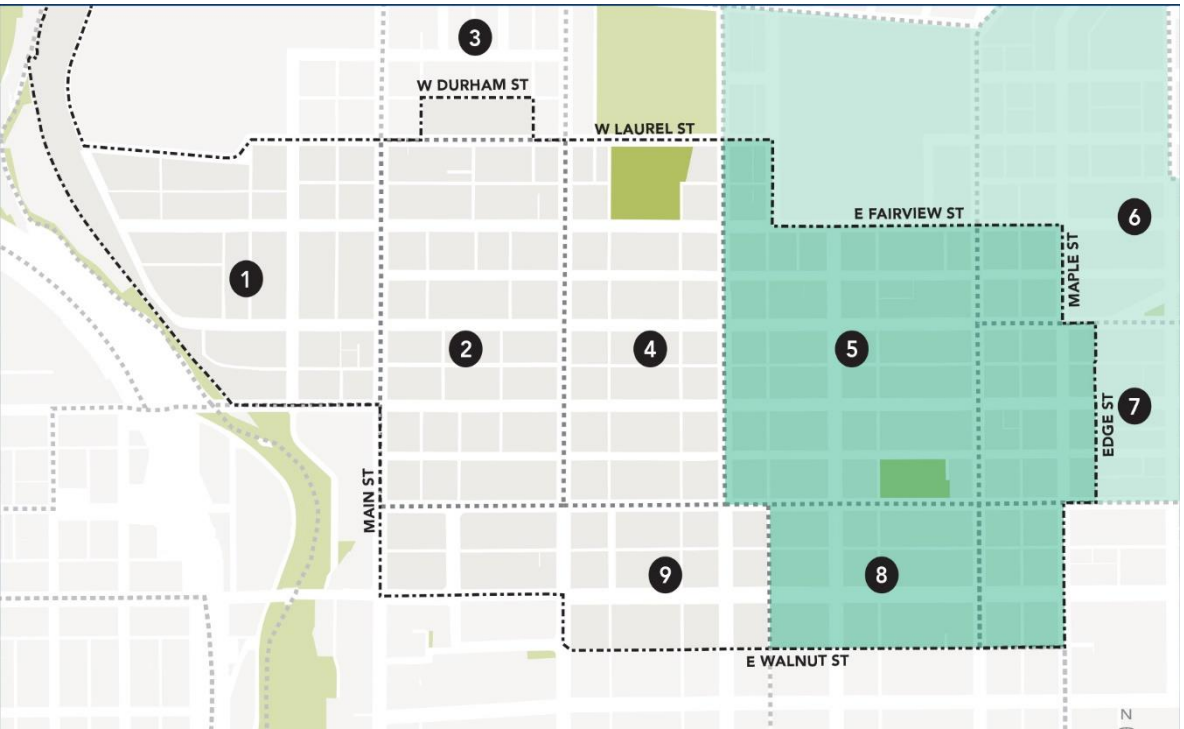
MVA MARKET TYPES



TARGETED CODE ENFORCEMENT



HOMEBUYER ASSISTANCE



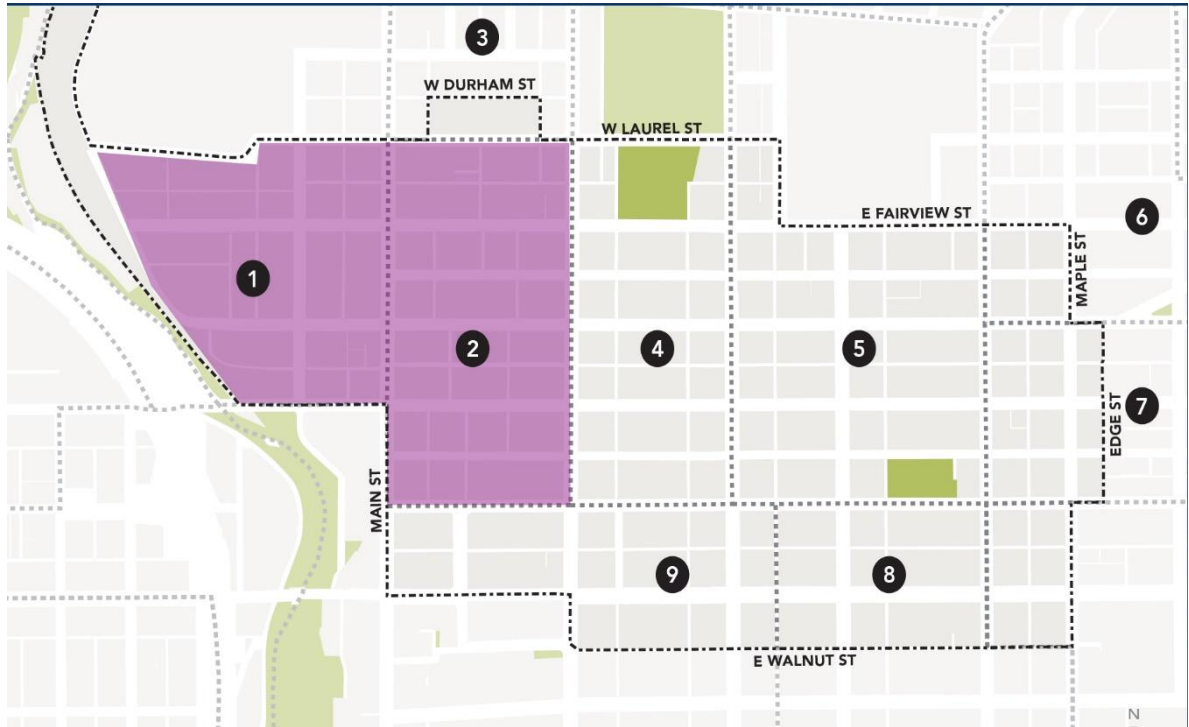
HOMEOWNER REPAIR AND REHAB



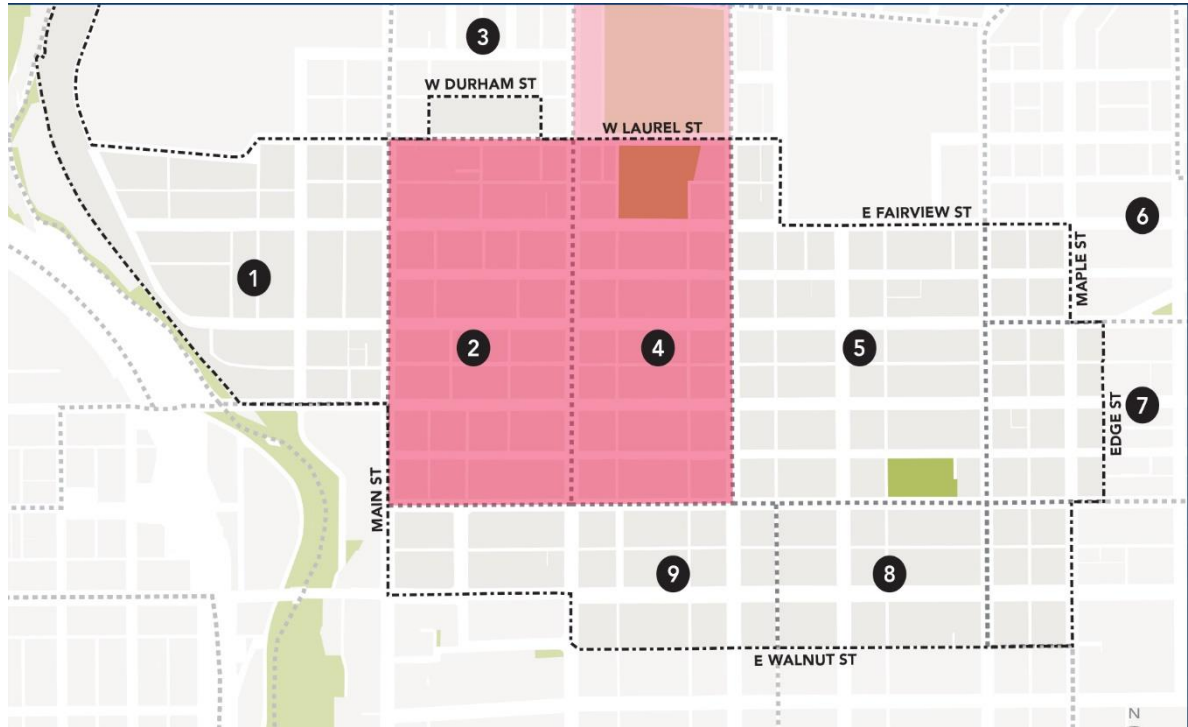
# How the MVA informed plan strategies

Targeted housing interventions at the Census block group level

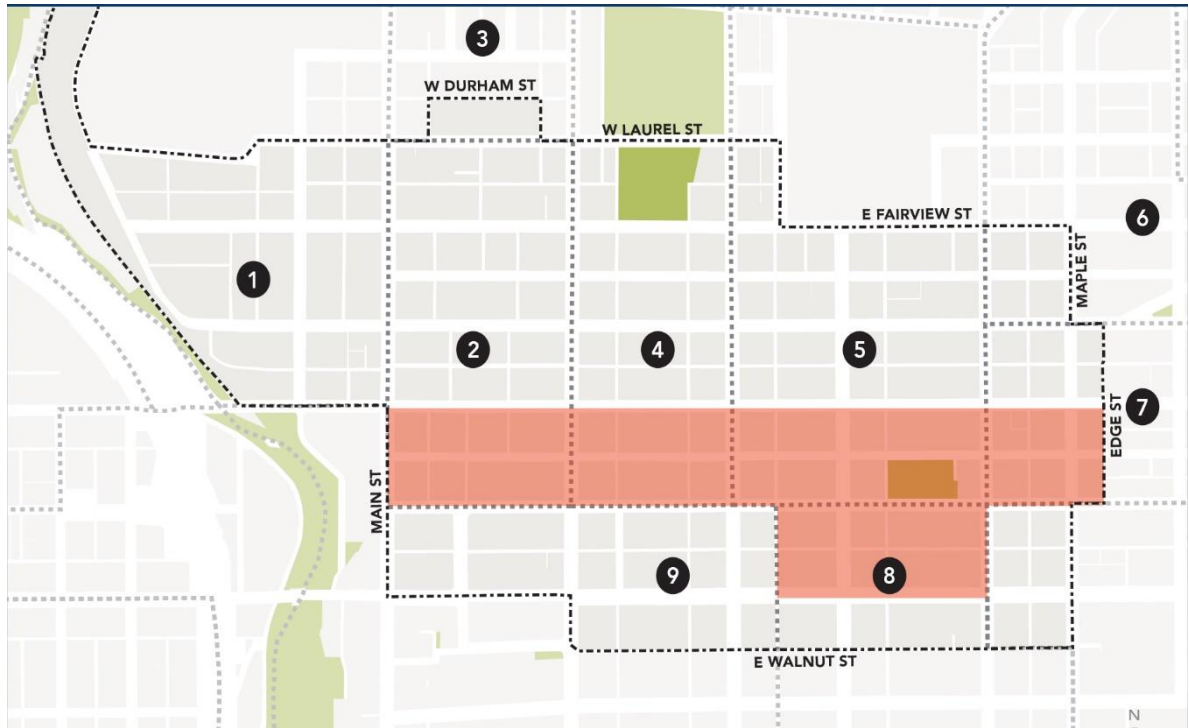
- TARGETED LANDLORD REPAIR LOANS
- RESPONSIBLE LANDLORD ASSISTANCE
- HOME REPAIR TAX INCENTIVES
- FORECLOSURE PREVENTION



TARGETED LANDLORD REPAIR LOANS



RESPONSIBLE LANDLORD ASSISTANCE



HOME REPAIR TAX INCENTIVES



FORECLOSURE PREVENTION



# Our engagement strategy

## Overview

- Resident driven planning
- Fewer more impactful meetings
- Inclusive strategy

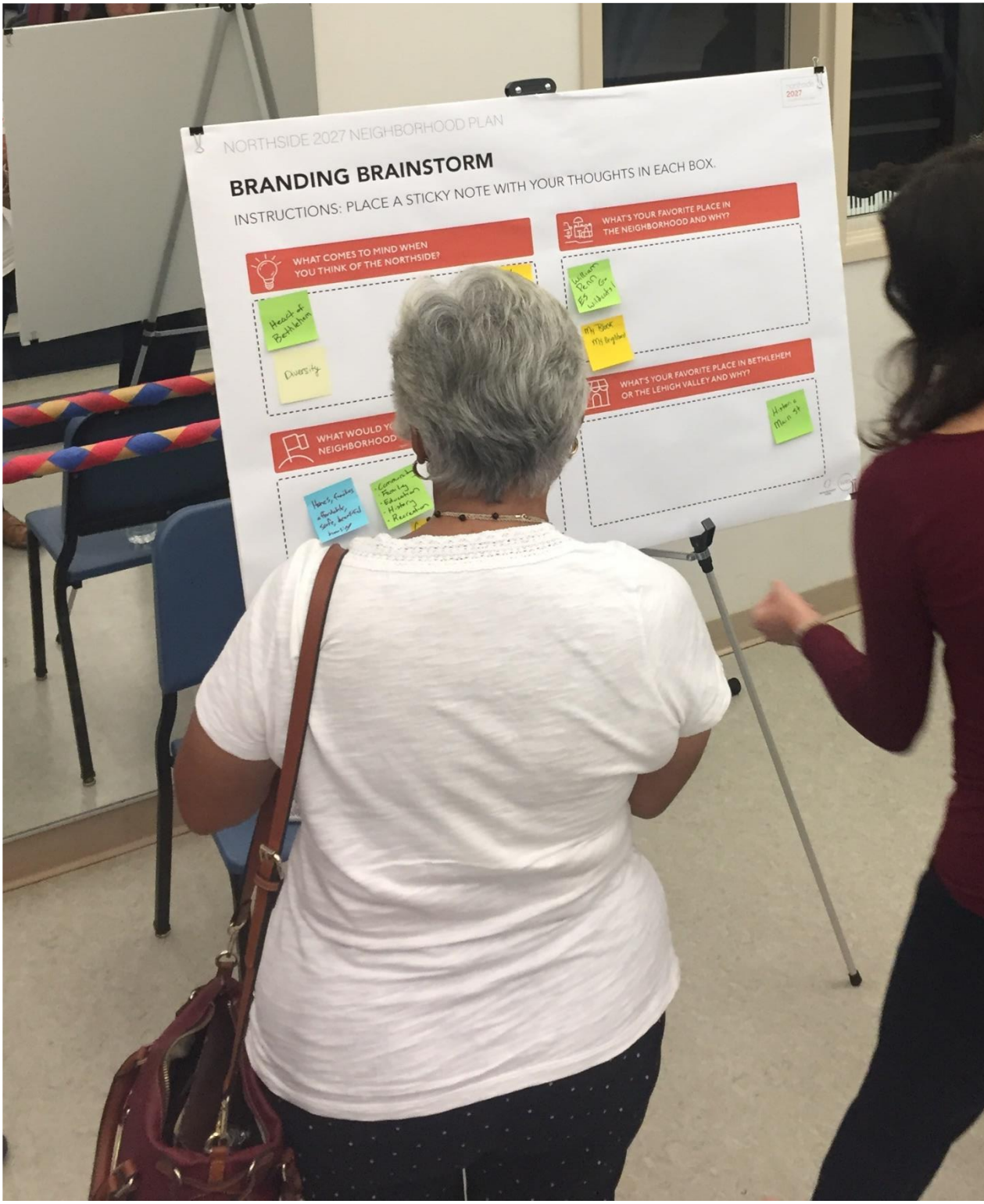
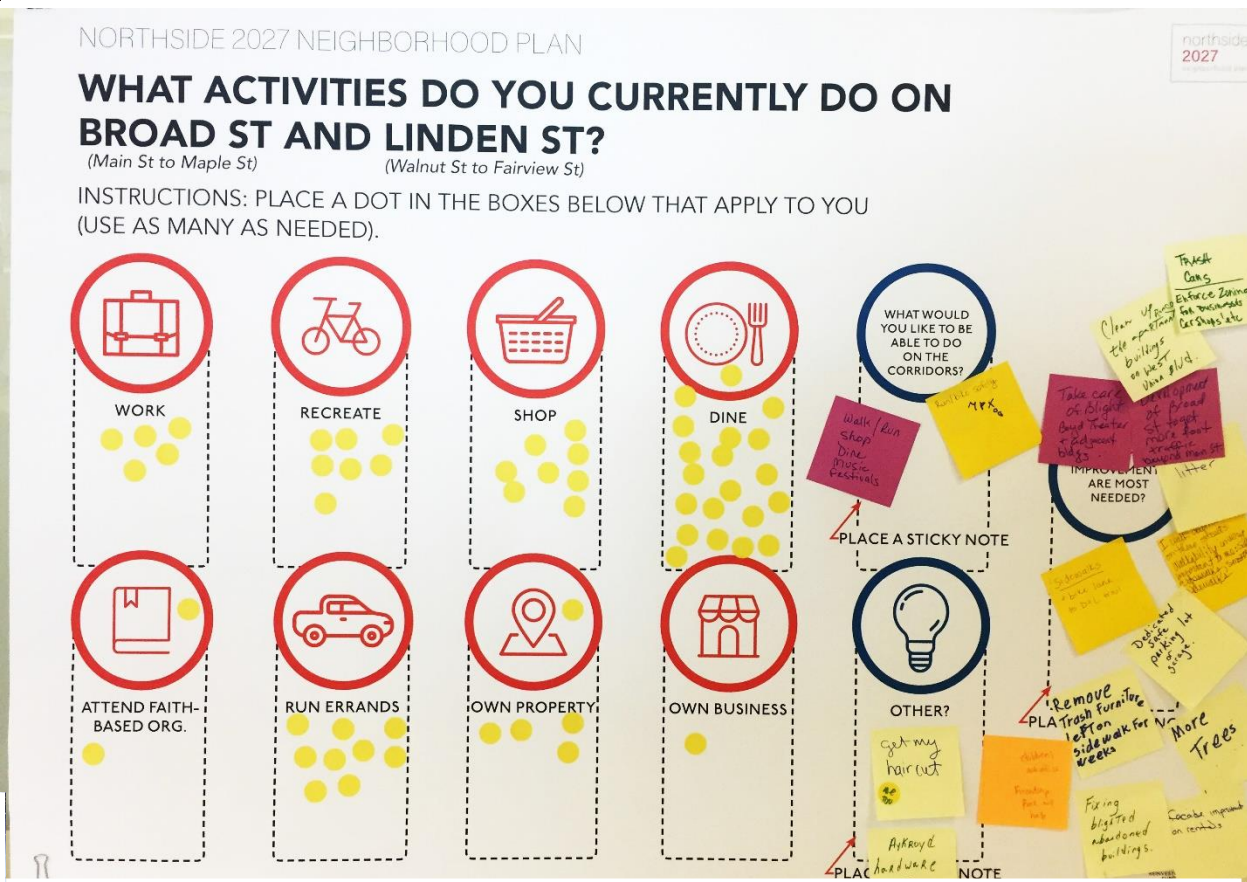




# Our engagement strategy

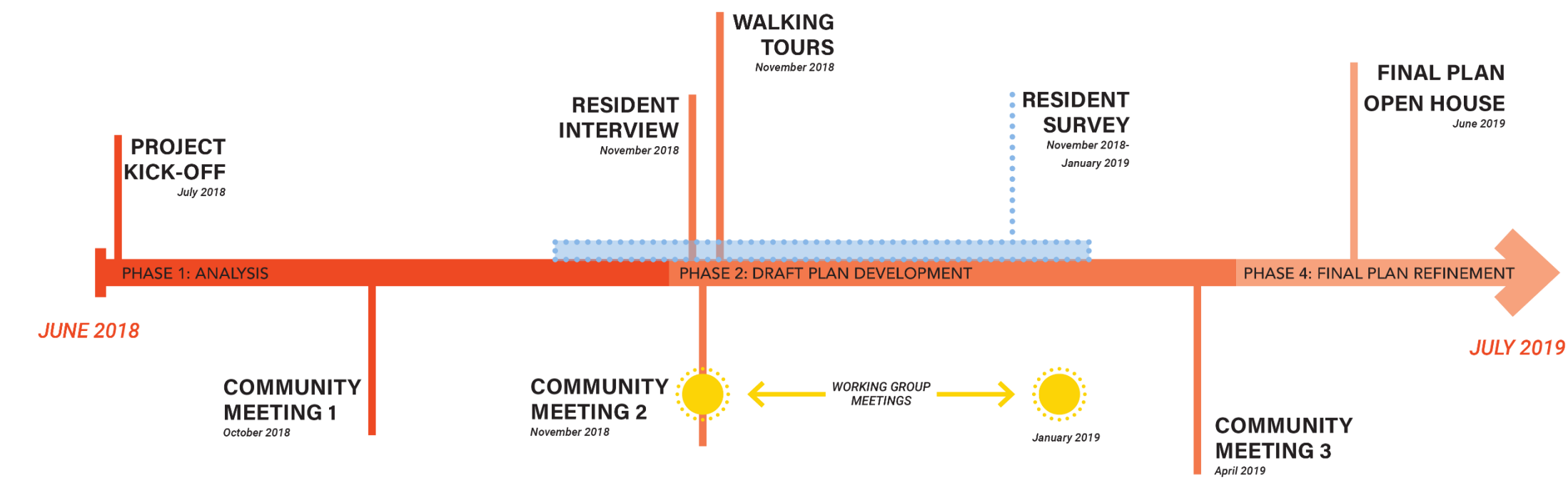
## Resident-driven Planning

- Listen
- Citizen planners
- Meet people where they are
- Create momentum for implementation

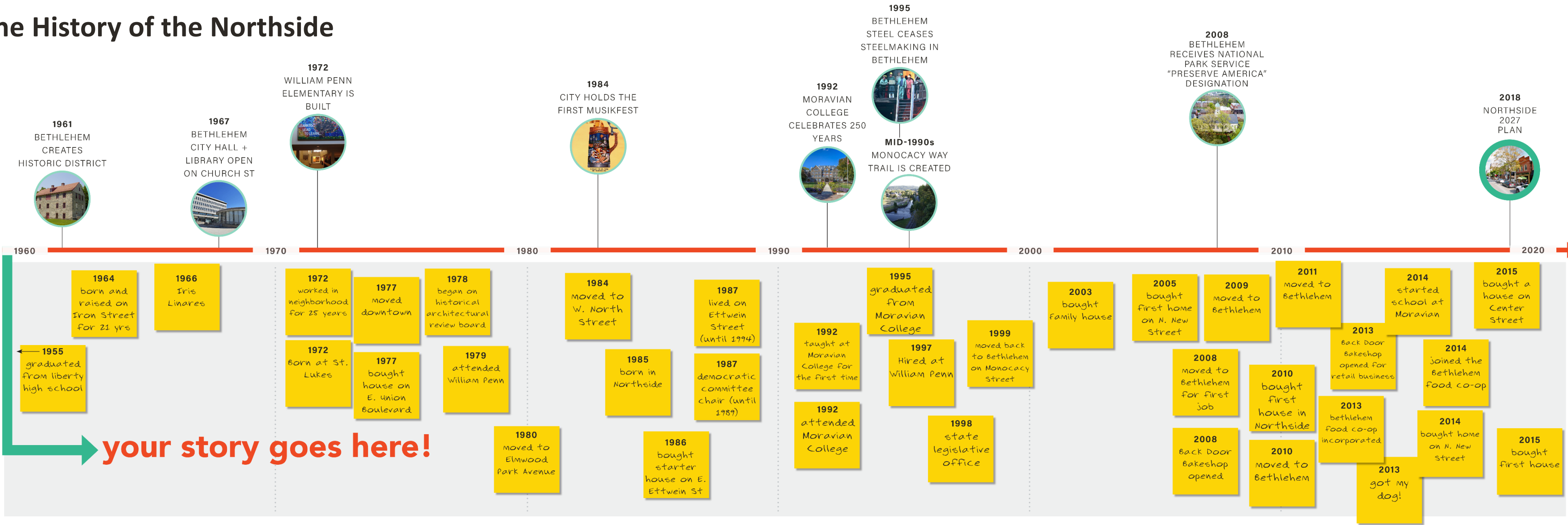




Community Engagement Timeline

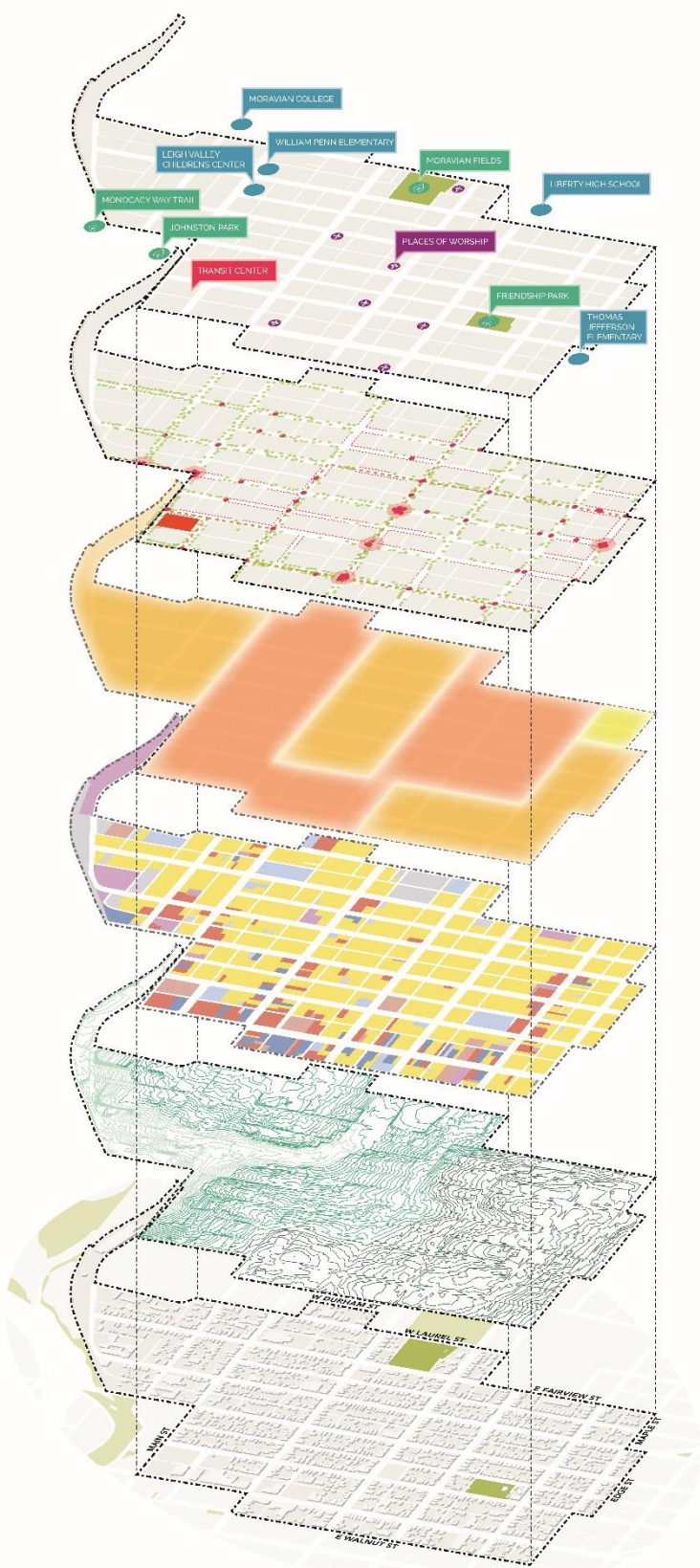


The History of the Northside





Analysis



ASSETS

TRANSPORTATION

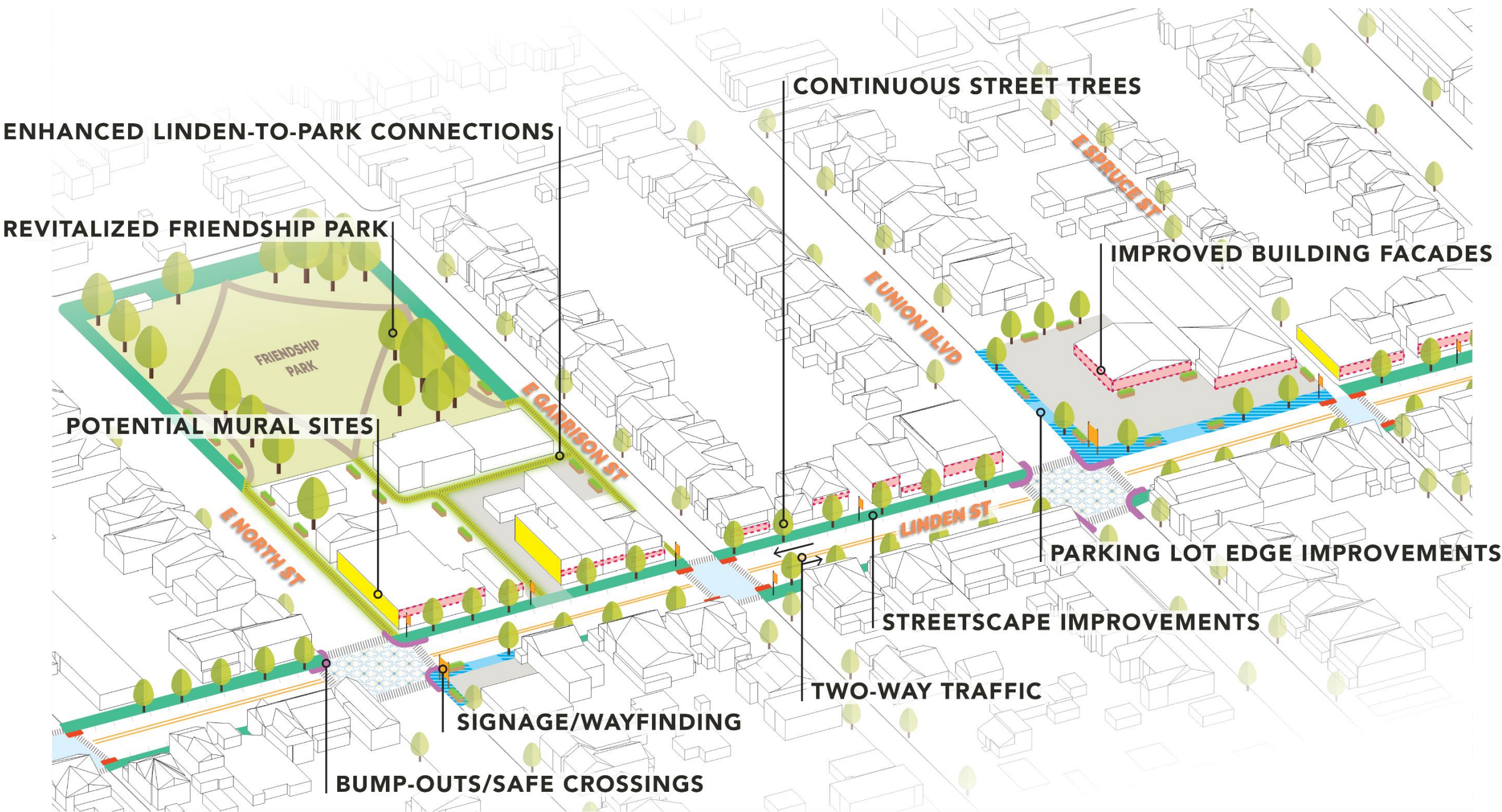
HOUSING DENSITY

LAND USE

ELEVATION

THE NORTHSIDE

Recommended improvements to Linden Street



Recommended improvements to Linden Street, including potential mural sites, two-way traffic, improved business facades, and stronger connections to Friendship Park.





# SUPPORT RESIDENTS THROUGH SERVICES, OUTREACH, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

TOPIC 4

As a “middle neighborhood,” the Northside is sometimes overlooked when it comes to supportive services. Northside residents expressed the need for more access to services such as child care and mental health resources in recognition that their neighbors sometimes need support in order to improve their lives. They also felt it will make the Northside a more convenient place to settle down, with more amenities and services within close proximity.

A number of key resources already exist in the neighborhood, such as William Penn Elementary, which functions as a community school with a suite of services available to all residents (see page 62). Additionally, nearby institutions such as Moravian College have been actively engaging and supporting residents, particularly children, through mentoring and other partnerships. These key anchors are willing and able to expand their work in the neighborhood to create a culture of support.

This set of strategies aims to enable the City and its partners to expand the availability and awareness of services that can help residents thrive and create a culture of support, neighborliness, and volunteerism.

60

GOAL 1

## LEVERAGE EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS TO EXPAND AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES

1. Expand high quality early education options in the neighborhood.

*Bethlehem Area School District offers pre-K in a number of elementary schools throughout the city, but it is currently not offered at the Northside’s local schools. Exploring the options for expanded early education programs with BASD as well as private providers will help create another amenity that young families look for in a neighborhood.*
2. Expand availability of high quality before and after school programs in coordination with partner organizations.

*Respondents to the neighborhood services survey ranked this need as one of their top priorities. By building off of local resources such as William Penn and Thomas Jefferson Elementary Schools and the YMCA, and exploring collaboration with additional partners in the region, enriching before and after school programs can be expanded to serve a larger segment of the neighborhood’s school children.*
3. Expand programs to enrich youth and help them prepare their post-high school plans.

*Northside residents are concerned with the support and future career exposure available to the neighborhood’s youth, especially as the area seeks to become more well known as a great place for families to stay long-term. Expanding upon existing partnerships, such as that between Liberty High School and Moravian College, as well as building new partnerships with organizations from around the region will ensure Northside youth are poised for a bright future.*
4. Expand availability of affordable childcare options during work hours.

*Access to childcare is often cited as a challenge for working families; in the Northside, it was the top choice for employment needs in the neighborhood services survey. Expanding child care resources in the neighborhood—particularly beyond the typical 9-5 work day schedule—will help families thrive and will attract new families to put down roots.*

## happening locally MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

The City of Bethlehem offers access to mental health resources and services to residents and surrounding communities through mental health facilities and mobile health clinics. The mental health facilities are associated with local hospital systems such as St. Luke’s Hospital and Lehigh Valley Hospital- Muhlenberg. In addition, mobile health clinic initiatives by Highmark Health Care (“Healthcare on the Go”) and Evangelical Community Hospital (Mobile Health of Evangelical”) serve the Lehigh Valley by increasing patient access in areas with low patient-to-doctor catchment areas.



5. Expand access to mental health resources and services.

*While the city of Bethlehem has a number of mental health providers (see callout), residents have expressed a need for better access and support. Working with existing providers and mobile health clinics to expand or adjust their outreach and availability will ensure better coverage of the Northside population.*
6. Expand community resources to help families experiencing homelessness.

*As transiency has increased in the Northside, so has the risk of families and individuals becoming homeless. While there are many reasons for homelessness, a common one in this area is an inability to keep up with rent or mortgage payments. Existing programs include rental assistance offered by Salvation Army, Lehigh Valley Conference of Churches, and Catholic Charities. In addition, Community Action Financial Services assists homeowners in communicating with their lenders in the case of missed or late payments. To improve quality of life for vulnerable citizens the City should expand its strategic support for residents and families at risk of losing their home or who have already done so.*
7. Explore implementation of public Wi-Fi anchored by neighborhood assets.

*Public Wi-Fi throughout the neighborhood can be a useful amenity for residents as well as an economic development tool. Providing internet access at key neighborhood hubs, such as the school buildings, will further cement the Northside’s vision as a great and convenient place for residents to live, work, and play.*

ACCESSIBLE  
CHILDCARE

*Enabling residents to easily find convenient, affordable childcare options that fit with their work schedule will make the Northside a more attractive place for families.*





AVAILABLE SERVICES AND  
RESOURCES AT WILLIAM PENN  
ELEMENTARY

William Penn is a community school, which means it offers a variety of resources to the neighborhood in addition to being a school during daytime hours. Be sure you know about all they have to offer and spread the word to neighbors who could benefit from these services.



FAMILY SERVICES

In-School Counseling  
Via Valley Youth House and Pinebrook Family Services

Family Support Services  
Job search, resume writing, housing/homelessness prevention, legal services



HEALTH/WellNESS/FOOD

St. Luke's Vision Van  
Vision care vouchers

Clothing Closet  
Free clothing open to anyone in need

Toiletries & School Supplies Pantry  
Open to anyone in need

Food Pantry  
Open to anyone in need

Backpack Buddies  
Backpacks with food sent home on Fridays



ENRICHMENT

Mentoring Program  
Mentoring with Moravian College students and retired teachers

Summer Programs  
Academic, sports, and creative programming to engage students and prevent the "summer slide"

After-School Programs  
Partial list: homework help, yoga, cooking, gardening, run club, technology, strengthening families, art, sports, reading



STUDENT  
MENTORING

RAISING FUNDS  
AND AWARENESS

happening locally  
VOLUNTEERING&MENTORSHIP  
Moravian College


One of the Northside neighborhood's major assets is a strong existing network of volunteering and partnerships between local anchors. One example of this is Moravian College's commitment to volunteering and mentorship programs in local schools, including William Penn Elementary and Liberty High School.

The school-based mentoring program places Moravian students with individual mentees at William Penn Elementary, with weekly meetings for the entirety of the academic year.

These partnerships form the foundation of the enhanced sense of neighborliness and community cohesion that Northside residents hope to build.



GOAL 2 BUILD COMMUNITY COHESION

- 

1. Create a volunteer-based Northside neighborhood organization to organize residents around issues and assist the city in implementing the plan.
- 

2. Establish a volunteer block captain or block watch program to be a channel for resident concerns, organize community events, and represent the neighborhood at citywide meetings.
3. Explore the creation of a "neighborhood improvement district" or a housekeeping and house repair co-op model to enable residents to help each other improve and maintain their homes, and consider creating a competitive block challenge mini-grant program.
4. Expand ongoing volunteer programs involving local grade-school and college students.

One of the biggest priorities expressed by Northside residents is to create a greater level of community cohesion, activity, and neighborliness. In addition to providing an opportunity for neighbors to meet each other, a neighborhood organization can become a vehicle for residents to become involved in the implementation of the strategies in this plan.

Block captains are used in many communities to elevate their neighbor's concerns and ideas and improve quality of life on a hyper-local level. Creating a block captain program also has the power to become part of a neighborhood's identity over time.

Many residents may want to keep up their properties, but are either financially unable or feel overwhelmed by the task. This program, which could be run in partnership with local housing organizations and hardware stores, would also help build a culture of neighborliness and support in the Northside.

Many of the existing volunteer opportunities involve mentoring and academic support. Additional volunteer opportunities could create broader involvement beyond students and contribute to a culture of neighbors helping each other enrich and improve their lives.



# BUILDING BLOCKS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD BRAND

**TOPIC 5** One consistent and overarching theme echoed by residents and stakeholders throughout the planning process was the need for an identity for the Northside neighborhood. It stems from a frustration that despite all it has going for it, the Northside neighborhood is relatively undervalued as an excellent place to live. Residents are proud of where they live and want the neighborhood's reputation to match that pride.

A neighborhood brand identity is valuable for multiple reasons. It can spur new development and economic activity as people seek interesting places to invest in; it can attract new residents when they become aware of all that a neighborhood has to offer; and most importantly, it can generate enthusiasm and a sense of shared community among those who work, live, and play in the neighborhood.

While the comprehensive development of a neighborhood brand identity is best undertaken through its own separate process, the building blocks have been identified in this plan. It is recommended that the City take steps to engage a dedicated branding consultant and then implement the new brand through physical and digital methods.

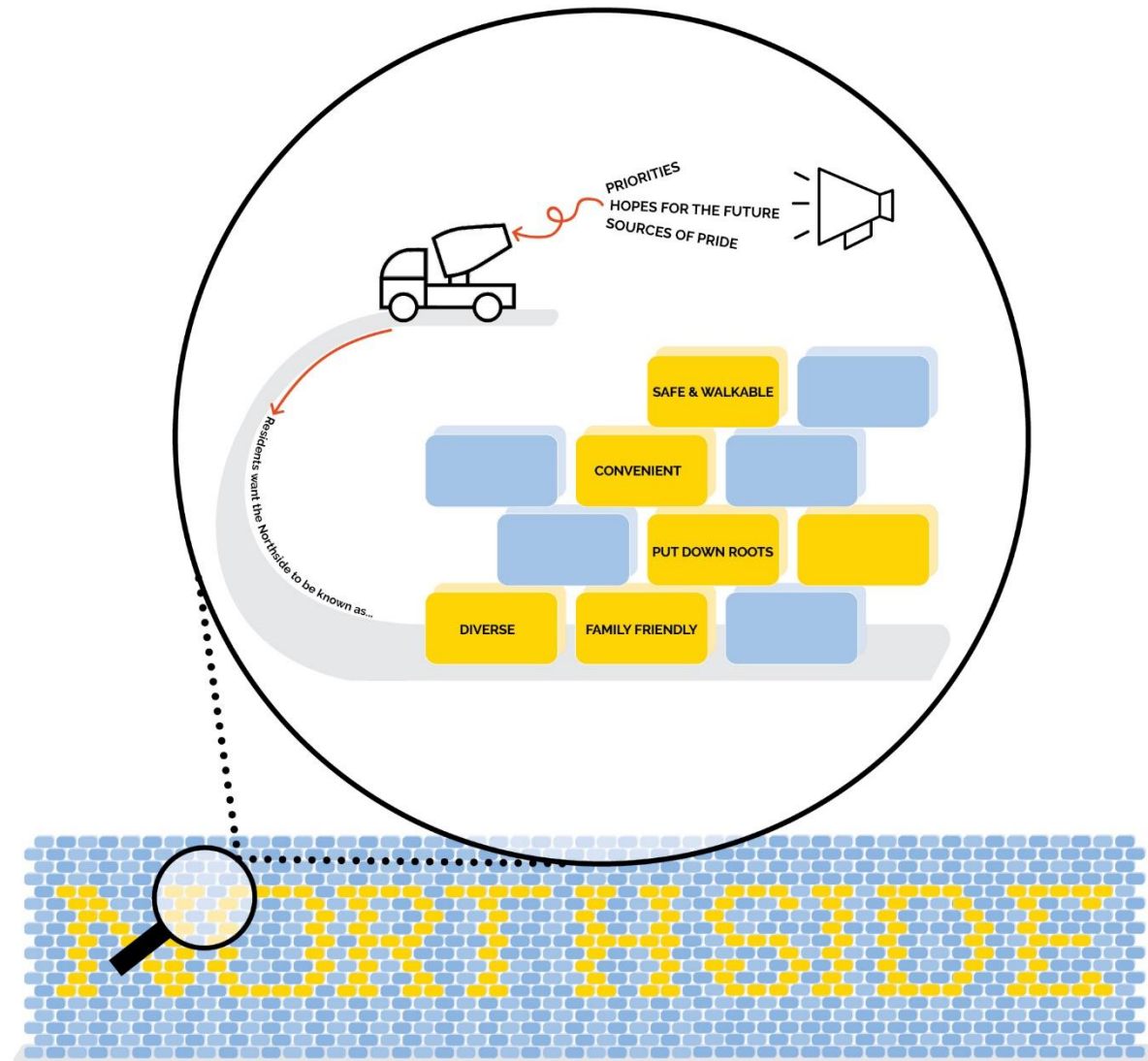


Figure 19. These “building blocks” represent the most commonly cited descriptors that residents used during community engagement for how they would like the Northside to be described. For more information about community input on a neighborhood brand, see Appendix A.

## happening locally NEIGHBORHOOD BRANDING

SouthSide Arts District

The SouthSide Arts District (SSAD) is a downtown revitalization program that works to improve economic conditions for businesses and institutions located in the core business district of south Bethlehem, PA. Following the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Main Street Four Point Approach"®, SSAD staff and volunteers are focused on the four points of Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality.

Initial activities and successes include the installation of 48 sidewalk planters; the establishment of quarterly merchant socials; the creation of a SSAD website ([www.southsideartsdistrict.com](http://www.southsideartsdistrict.com)) and social media platforms; and the reinvigoration of regular events such as First Fridays and Spring on the SouthSide.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### NEXT STEPS TO BUILD A NEIGHBORHOOD BRAND FOR THE NORTHSIDE

1. Seek services from a dedicated branding agency to create a neighborhood brand based on foundations created in this plan.
2. Communicate the new brand via physical improvements (banners, signage, public art, etc.) and virtual methods (website, social media, e-newsletter, etc.)





## Executive Summary Brochure in Spanish

### PARTICIPACION DE LA COMUNIDAD:

Con el fin de obtener una mejor variedad de respuestas y comentarios por parte de la comunidad de Northside, se emplearon diferentes técnicas de participación pública a lo largo del desarrollo del proceso de planificación. Las técnicas abarcan desde preguntas generales, a preguntas más específicas a grupos de interés, hasta caminatas por el vecindario. Los residentes y grupos de interés ayudaron a clasificar y priorizar las estrategias del plan. A través de este proceso se logró que la comunidad respaldar cada una de las ideas y estrategias, que se implementaran en el futuro.



## LINDEN STREET REIMAGINADO COMO NUEVO CORREDOR

**PARA MÁS INFORMACIÓN:**  
City of Bethlehem  
Dept of Community & Economic Development  
610.865.7085  
[northside2027.org](http://northside2027.org)



**NORTHSIDE 2027  
NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN**  
*una comunidad familiar y dinámica*

Northside en Bethlehem es un lugar **transitable, asequible y familiar**, donde los miembros de su comunidad se unen para fomentar **una cultura de apoyo**. Es un lugar donde familias deciden establecerse, crecer y **prosperar**.

El vecindario de Northside es compacto y transit-able, con buenos lugares y beneficios existentes e instituciones bien establecidas. Con la combinación de inversiones específicas, desarrollo de capacidad, y servicios de apoyos, Northside estará preparado para tener un futuro brillante como uno de los vecindarios de Bethlehem más atractivos, asequibles para familias y residentes de todas las edades. La visión del vecindario de Northside, se construye en base al entendimiento de sus fortalezas, ideas realistas, con a la esperanza de los residentes de poder llamar Northside su hogar.

## OBJETIVOS DEL PLAN

- » Creación de un sentido de lugar y pertenencia
- » Fomento de la vitalidad económica
- » Apoyo al mercado de la vivienda
- » Servicio a la comunidad

## PRIORIDADES DE LOS RESIDENTES

- » Difundir la fortaleza de la vecindad a las familias
- » Crear un sentido de comunidad
- » Mejorar la seguridad y la estética

PRINCIPIOS  
GUIADORES

- » Construir sobre los bienes y beneficios existentes
- » Involucrar a los residentes en la formación del plan
- » Construir capacidad local

### CAPITULOS Y METAS DEL PLAN:

## 1 FOMENTAR ESPACIOS PUBLICOS SEGUROS Y DINAMICOS

*El objetivo de este capítulo es promover la mejora de todos los medios de transporte (carro, autobús, bicicleta y peatón) para que sean más seguros, para así convertir el vecindario en un lugar seguro y caminable. Al mismo tiempo se propone mejorar la calidad de la estética de las calles y parques.*

**META:**

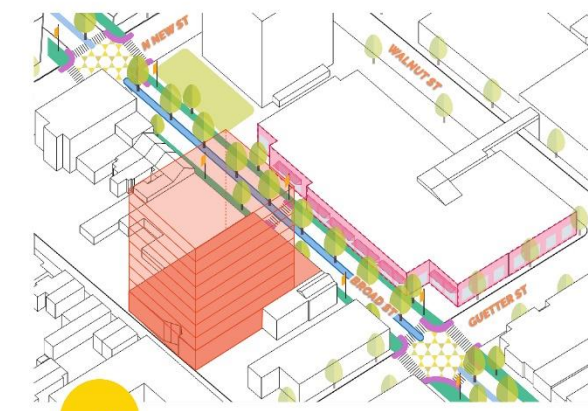
1. Priorizar la seguridad de todos los medios de transporte (carro, autobús, bicicleta y peatón) y la conexiones entre lugares y destinos que traen beneficios a la comunidad
2. Mejorar y embellecer los espacios públicos para crear un mejor sentido de pertenencia y lugar

## 2 FOMENTAR LA VITALIDAD ECONOMICA

*El objetivo de este capítulo es el de revitalizar los corredores comerciales del vecindario y atraer nuevos negocios a través de la incorporación de nuevas actividades y programas, y el mejoramiento estético y físico del lugar.*

**META:**

1. Implementar mejoras físicas en Broad Street
2. Implementar mejoras físicas en Linden Street
3. Apoyo y atracción de negocios



## BROAD STREET REIMAGINADO COMO NUEVO CORREDOR

### 3 SOPORTAR EL MERCADO DE LA VIVIENDA

Este capítulo pretende apoyar tanto a los inquilinos como a los propietarios de viviendas, en la mejora de las viviendas existentes, preservación de la asequibilidad, y mejorando los problemas que afectan la calidad de vida de los residentes.

**META:**

1. Proveer incentivos, apoyo y cumplimiento de las reglas, a los propietarios de las viviendas e inquilinos
2. **Mejorar la calidad de vida de todos los residentes**

#### 4 APOYO A LOS RESIDENTES A TRAVES DE SERVICIOS, DESARROLLO Y ALCANCE COMUNITARIO

Ampliación de la disponibilidad y el conocimiento de los diferentes servicios que pueden ayudar a los residentes a prosperar, creando una cultura de vecindad, apoyo y voluntariado.

**META:**

1. Aprovechar los beneficios existentes de la comunidad para ampliar la disponibilidad de servicios
2. Construir cohesión comunitaria

**5 CREAR UNA MARCA DE IDENTIDAD PARA EL VECINDARIO BASADA EN LA VISION DE LOS RESIDENTES DE NORTHSIDE**

Aunque el desarrollo de una marca (identidad gráfica) de un vecindario, es mejor hacerla a través de un proceso separado, los componentes básicos del proceso se han identificado en este plan. Una vez que se haya establecido una identidad de marca para el vecindario, esta será incorporada en nuevos elementos propuestos como pancartas, carteles, y arte. También se propone incorporar la marca en medios de comunicación virtuales e impresos como páginas webs, redes sociales, y boletines.



# Q&A

