The District Councils: A snapshot of Saint Paul’s community engagement system

May 2017
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Introduction

Forty years after Saint Paul created its District Council system, the city faces structural budget challenges and evolving expectations about community engagement—trends that could be at odds. This reality makes it an appropriate time to investigate ideas on how the city can continue dedicating itself to vibrant community involvement—involvement that is more effective and more equitable, not only for a range of city initiatives, but also for a larger portion of the city’s residents.

This report documents the existing District Council system—its activities, its capacity, and some of its impacts. It is a snapshot and a baseline of the most prominent feature of this community engagement system in Saint Paul. This report does not attempt to chronicle the entire range of city engagement. Those efforts include advisory and regulatory boards and commissions; city-led public engagement activities around some high-profile projects; city department staff entirely or partially dedicated to community outreach; and city-initiated projects such as the recent Pop Up Meeting.

Historically and currently, District Council supplement the work that elected officials and city departments conduct but lack the capacity to do as consistently and deeply. And Saint Paul’s District Councils provide impressive bang for the buck.

Financially, the District Councils leverage every $1 they receive in direct funding from the city to deliver $3 in services that create stronger communities. In 2017, Saint Paul expects to provide about $1.1 million directly to the 17 District Councils through their community engagement contracts. Collectively, their annual budgets exceed $3.25 million. About $743,000 of the city funding comes from the city’s General Fund; about $345,000 is through federal Community Development Block Grants. Individual councils receive city funding ranging from $51,873 to $109,475, distributed through formulas based on demographics and other factors.

The District Councils employ 33 FTE staff members and directly engage more than 500 volunteers on their boards, committees and specific projects—results that would be nearly impossible to duplicate if efforts were based in City Hall rather than in the neighborhoods themselves.

The truth is, District Councils are woven into the fabric of their neighborhoods and the city at large.

- They are the spark behind community-building work that can be as fleeting as an open-mic night at a local library or as permanent as additional stations along the Green Line light rail transit service.
- They are the backbone of block clubs, crime prevention programs, and fundamental livability initiatives; a wide range of neighborhood environmental and beautification projects; and neighborhood planning that is incorporated into the city’s Comprehensive Plan.
- They take the lead in finding solutions to the impacts of institutions and development on their neighborhoods.
• They provide a hub for partnerships and cooperative efforts with city departments, other organizations in their neighborhoods and, sometimes, citywide initiatives. This report profiles a few of these efforts: partnerships in Dayton’s Bluff promoting economic development, and partnerships in on the East Side around the development of Phalen Boulevard.

• They push issues onto the table for citywide action, such as organized trash collection and organics recycling. This report goes into depth on district council work behind both of these issues.

• On a day-to-day basis, they provide a focal point for constructive neighborhood discussions and recommendations on zoning and licensing issues, whether that be a simple variance or liquor license, or larger-scale policy changes concerning accessory dwelling units, student housing, or tear-downs – which led to the Ward 3 design standards highlighted in this report.

• They play key roles in such positive, annual events as local National Night Out parties, neighborhood festivals, community gardens, Citywide Drop-off days, and the Neighborhood Honor Roll.

• They provide the conversation space and grass-roots energy for rolling out citywide initiatives such as the bicycle plan and Stop for Me pedestrian safety campaign.

• They routinely educate neighborhood residents about city initiatives, compile and communicate city news and outreach opportunities to their networks of neighborhood activists, and host community meetings on city topics.

• They increasingly focus on expanding equity in their organizations and in their neighborhoods. Equity initiatives expand not just who is involved in decision-making, but also which issues become priorities. This report includes deeper looks at the coalition work several councils did around the Central Corridor, District 1’s emphasis on youth engagement and cross-cultural dialogue, and Saint Anthony Park’s Equity Committee.

This report gives details and case studies of what District Councils accomplish.

Background

In 1975, the City of Saint Paul established the district council system to strengthen resident participation in civic affairs. The city’s website describes the system:

The district council system in Saint Paul is comprised of 17 autonomous 501(c)(3) nonprofit agencies that provide residents in each neighborhood...
an opportunity to become involved in city planning. The primary focus of most district councils is land use, community development and transportation. Other issues that district councils may focus on include parks and recreation centers, community gardens, environmental action, crime prevention and neighborhood beautification. District councils rely on community building activities and events as the basis for convening residents to become involved in their neighborhood.

Since their creation, the district councils have evolved significantly to become unique nonprofit organizations representing distinct neighborhoods within Saint Paul.

In 2016, the city indicated that it was evaluating its community engagement needs and the effectiveness of current practices in meeting those needs. To complement that effort, an Innovation Fund grant was awarded to investigate and document 1) how select other cities effectively meet their community engagement needs, and 2) how the District Councils currently conduct community engagement, and how they view their current capacities and value. This report focuses on the latter goal, while a companion report addresses the former.

Methodology

To document how district councils do community engagement, this project’s Steering Team used a variety of research tools. Specifically:

1. The team distributed a detailed survey to all district council executive directors. Twelve of 17 district councils completed the survey and those responses form the basis for most quantifiable data in this report.

2. Interviews with executive directors and other staff were conducted at meetings held in July and October 2016.

3. District councils were invited to participate in a board interview, usually held in conjunction with a regular board meeting. The following district council boards participated:
   a. Macalester Groveland Community Council (D14), July 14, 2016
   b. District 10 Como Community Council, August 16, 2016
   c. District 2 Community Council, September 21, 2016
   d. District 1 Community Council, September 26, 2016
   e. St. Anthony Park Community Council (D12), October 13, 2016
4. Two open interview sessions were held on September 21 (Rondo Community Outreach Library) and 22 (National Association of Letter Carriers office in D2) for board members from any district council board.

5. Research from district council websites and communication tools

How District Councils Operate

Each Saint Paul District Council is an autonomous 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency with its own bylaws, structure and financial operations. While all district councils receive foundational financial support from the City of Saint Paul, they also generate additional revenue through grants, donations, earned income and fundraising.

Staff

Every district council has at least one paid staff member who is responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the organization. In total, District Councils report that they employ over 33 FTE employees across the city. In addition to an executive director, many district councils have hired full- or part-time community organizers or project staff dedicated to executing specific work outlined in their annual work plans or grants.

While the responsibilities and functions of district council staff are extremely broad, they express a common dedication to serving residents as a voice of their community. They describe their organizations as responsive—not stagnant—to their communities’ needs. With in-depth knowledge of their communities, staff recognize that they are able to engage them in a way that the City and other organizations cannot. As one staff member stated:

We can do authentic community engagement with residents affected by projects.
We are in a unique position to do this.
And we can ask the City to be a partner in it,
and we can help break down barriers the City has with respect to this.

Staff generally also consider one of their core functions to be leadership development within the community. This work takes place by empowering neighborhood volunteers to lead committees, providing fiscal sponsorship to neighborhood groups, teaching people to conduct their own organizing, and much more.
Boards

District Council staff report to a board of directors whose membership is almost entirely drawn from the neighborhood served. The district council boards vary in size and structure. The smallest board has 11 seats while the largest has 35; the average size of a district council board is 20. Over 300 Saint Paul residents volunteer their time to serve on the board of directors for their district council.

The makeup of boards varies across the city. Many include representatives from defined, geographic zones within their district. Boards also frequently designate seats for key constituency groups within their neighborhood such as businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions and partner organizations.

During interviews, board members often expressed deep passion for their work. Many viewed their volunteer role on the district council as an essential form of grass roots democracy. For example, one board member observed that the role is “fundamental to democracy. Being involved in the civic life is part of what should be done.” Unsolicited, they shared eloquent explanations for the importance and value of participation in the life of their neighborhood and city. Another board member stated:

*I think it’s evident that one of the great services of the board... is providing really thoughtful consideration to where the neighborhood is and where it’s going. Having people choose to dedicate their time to that is more valuable than we often appreciate. The work from meeting to meeting may be incremental but we’re having long-term impacts.*

Committees

Most district councils have standing committees that help identify organizational priorities and conduct work of the organization. It is common for these committees to include membership beyond the board of directors, which extends the formal community engagement and participation of neighborhood residents. Well over 500 individuals are active participants in district council committees across Saint Paul.

While titles and specific roles and structures of committees vary by organization, there is some consistency in the topics addressed by district council committees. These committees help to identify ongoing priorities of the organizations. (Two district councils do not use a structure that includes formal, standing committees.) Common standing committees include:
Land use and development issues: 15 of 17 district councils

Environmental issues: 9 of 17 district councils

Executive, organizational, and finance issues: 9 of 17 district councils

Transportation and related issues: 8 of 17 district councils

Neighborhood involvement and similar issues: 7 of 17 district councils

Communication and marketing issues: 5 of 17 district councils

Some district councils also have standing committees that are unique to their own neighborhoods. For example, the Summit Hill Association (D16) maintains an “Historic Preservation” committee to support the historic nature of its neighborhood; Dayton’s Bluff Community Council (D4) maintains a “Radio” committee to oversee the operations of its radio station, WEQY; and St. Anthony Park Community Council (D12) has a standing “Equity” committee to help strengthen its organization’s commitment to issues of equity.

In addition to these standing committees, neighborhood volunteers also participate in a variety of district council task forces and work groups. These short-term structures are used to address specific needs and vary significantly from year to year.

**Partnerships**

All district councils that participated in surveys reported partnerships with key organizations and nonprofits within their neighborhoods. These partnerships help strengthen the social fabric in our communities and expand outreach and programming for residents. These district councils also reported regular interaction with other neighborhood groups and organizations. Ten out of 12 provide direct support (through fiscal agency, staff or volunteer time, or something else) to other organizations or volunteer groups. Nine of 12 work with other district councils on a regular basis.

District councils also create new partnerships and collaboratives. For example, the West Side Community Organization (D3) was instrumental in the development of Growing West Side, a “grassroots collaborative that cultivates opportunities to learn about gardening, to access locally grown food, and to build authentic connections with neighbors to create a vibrant, thriving West Side community.” The collaborative grew out of the West Side Farmers’ market, and now brings over 200 people together each weekend for affordable and fresh food. Through this project, the district council garnered support from the Neighborhood Development Alliance and secured a contract with Blue Cross Blue Shield to successfully address a significant community need.

Many district councils partner with local business associations and chambers of commerce to support special events in the neighborhood. Back to school nights, concerts in local parks, summer parades and block parties, and National Night Out events are just a few of the many partnerships that district councils actively support.
Profile: Partnerships in Dayton’s Bluff

Partnerships are so important to the Dayton’s Bluff Community Council (D4) that they are core to the organization’s mission statement. By partnering with other nonprofits, local businesses, and neighborhood artists, the community council has become an innovator in providing important services that otherwise would not be available in the neighborhood.

The centerpiece of this work is the East Side Enterprise Center. The community council purchased an historic building after partnering with another local nonprofit, the Latino Economic Development Center, that was looking a St. Paul location. Together, the two nonprofits secured the funding and infrastructure to redevelop a dilapidated site and create a new community center.

The Enterprise Center serves multiple roles. During the day, it houses council offices, provides meeting space for community groups, and serves as a hub for outreach and partnerships. In the evening, it hosts business development classes, GED courses, and community gatherings. “Programmatically, it’s a way for culturally-specific small businesses to work together to provide economic development resources to the East Side,” says Deanna Abbott-Foster, executive director of the community council. “There were no economic development agencies on the East Side prior to this.” The Enterprise Center also provides support for local food distribution and a farmers’ cooperative, including warehouse and refrigeration space for farmers to keep local produce fresh before distribution.

Another example of a unique partnership in Dayton’s Bluff is 7th Street LIVE. The community council surveyed and interviewed local businesses to identify unmet needs, and identified the need to create local business awareness and support. Simply put, many neighbors didn’t realize the local assets they had in their own commercial corridor along 7th Street. Leveraging STAR grant funding and partnering with local businesses, the council launched “Night Out on E. 7th Street.” Modeled after “National Night Out,” the event gave neighbors an opportunity to explore their own neighborhood; more than 1,000 residents came out to reacquaint themselves with the assets of 7th Street. Over time, the event grew and evolved to become 7th Street LIVE, an annual festival that brings people out to celebrate the many cultures of the East Side.

Most recently, the community council was instrumental in partnering with local artists to establish an arts corridor. In addition to supporting artists who live in the neighborhood, the strategy also specifically fosters positive interactions with local young people. The community council rented a separate building—which includes gallery, studio, and event space—and hired a neighborhood arts leader as director. The director has connected multiple cultural groups and helped expand the community council’s network and outreach. During the 2017 Saint Paul Art Crawl,
six sites on the East Side showcased works from dozens of local artists. Only Lowertown featured more sites for visitors to explore.

Collaborating with other organizations and community leaders also garners significant benefits for the council. The organization’s budget has grown, the council’s services have expanded, and the board’s membership has become more representative of the district—now comprised of 66% people of color, like its neighborhood.

Abbott-Foster says a more representative board is the result of investing strategically over several years in partnerships that helped make the district council’s work more relevant and meaningful to residents. “We went door to door to recruit people. We talked about issues in the neighborhood. We explained that Dayton’s Bluff Community Council has an Enterprise Center to provide business development services. We’re advocating for jobs and we have the radio station run by and for people of color and youth. We have assets that are valuable to people in our community. These assets made it more meaningful for them to run for a seat on the community council board.”

**Finances**

As noted earlier, each district council maintains its own finances. While a comprehensive financial overview of the district council system is beyond the scope of this report, it is worth noting that no district council operates solely based on the allocation approved by the City of Saint Paul. All district councils seek additional revenue to successfully achieve their mission and support their work through grants, donations, earned income and fundraising.

Based on federal 990 forms for the most recent year published (either 2014 and 2015 tax years), District councils generate roughly $3,250,000 in income annually. In 2014, the City of Saint Paul allocated $1,121,000 in direct support to district councils. Simply put, for each $1 the City of Saint Paul allocated to district council’s in 2014, they received $3 worth of services in return.

**Issues District Councils Address**

District Councils are involved in a host of issues facing the city and their neighborhoods. To gain a deeper understanding of the specific kinds of work they tackle, the Steering Team survey provides quantitative data that helps deepen our understanding of what, exactly, district councils do.

Survey participants were asked to estimate, “what issues dominate the resources (staff and volunteer time/effort) of the entire organization.” Averaging the results across all respondents
provides a rough estimate of the amount of resources district councils spend on specific topics across the system:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Average % of organizational resources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Use</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and Family</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Prevention</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks/Public Space/Placemaking</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural environment/Sustainability</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development and local business</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues/Topics</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While these averages do not reflect the priorities of any single district council, they do provide a perspective as to the depth and breadth of work undertaken across the city. All respondents identified community building, transportation and natural environment/sustainability as issues that use district council resources, and all but one respondent identified land use as an issue requiring their time and effort. (It is worth noting that many of these topics overlap and interact. It is likely that certain issues are defined differently across different district councils, so what one council may refer to as a “housing” issue, may be considered a “land use” issue elsewhere; and, what one organization thinks of as “crime prevention” may be counted as “community building” by another.)

Another way to understand what topics or issues are priorities for district councils is to analyze the projects that dominate their work. When asked to identify “the top 3-5 issues that demanded the attention of your district council between May 2015 and June 2016,” executive directors provided the following list of major topics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging community related to the ten-year community planning process</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing and hosting community events</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a unique, high quality, successful radio station operated by, with, and as communities of color</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executing a Cross Cultural Dialogue project</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in equity and inclusivity projects</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing community disputes (related to Hamline University)</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing impacts on neighborhood quality of life from activities at Como Regional Park and the State Fairgrounds</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing issues of equity and privilege that rose up in Board and committee deliberations</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing neighborhood livability issues (student rentals, sober houses, etc.)</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting neighborhood planning (making future plans for the neighborhood)</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with ongoing construction projects in Como Regional Park</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing the White Bear Avenue parade</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing community engagement systems</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing crime and safety concerns</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing skyway public safety related to the vertical connection</td>
<td>Crime Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing and addressing business concerns</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the impact of the East Side Enterprise Center for local residents and businesses</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing the lack of liquor licenses available for restaurants, which was a huge problem leading to the loss of interested investors</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating an “arts and organizing” model</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating the ”South Como” area into the district after being transferred from District 6</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting a bylaw review</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing fiscal oversight (fiscal agencies, sponsorships, etc.)</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing our budget</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving internal governance and board functioning issues around the expansion of organizational capacity</td>
<td>Internal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addressing Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)</td>
<td>Land use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing issues related to the brownfield site at Reaney &amp; Etna</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating construction impacts with county, city, state, water, etc.</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing development on Luther Seminary by Ecumen</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing development projects in downtown</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and addressing development: site plan applications, variance requests, licenses requests</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Ford site development, Riverview Corridor project, and Hwy 5 realignment</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Furness Parkway completion</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging community around housing tear downs/rebuilds/variances</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging community on issues related to the Major League Soccer stadium and associated Midway Center redevelopment</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing land use issues</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring the Snelling Midway redevelopment site</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing tear downs and large rebuilds and additions that change neighborhood character</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing vacant land and property</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging community around Ward 3 design standards</td>
<td>Land use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Count of Major Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Use</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and Family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Prevention</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks/Public Space/Placemaking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural environment/Sustainability</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development and local business</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal issues</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the analysis of resources invested in topics and the list of major issues addressed highlight the prominence of community building, land use and transportation issues as central to the work of district councils.

While the list of issues provides an understanding of topics district councils address, their community engagement work is defined by how they help residents actively participate in the future of their neighborhood.
Community Building

Community building is the most common topic that all district councils spend resources addressing. On average, district councils report they spend about 25% of their resources on community building activities. Community building is a broad topic area that includes a variety of goals, including giving neighbors a sense of agency, building connections between residents, and taking steps to improve and celebrate neighborhood livability. Some common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communicating to local neighbors issues, events, and activities affecting the neighborhood
- Hosting events, meetings, and opportunities for community gathering
- Sponsoring committees or work groups that address community needs

One district council board member described their work this way:

> It’s always about making the community a better place. If there wasn’t an organization like the district council, the changes would still happen but people might know less about it, feel more blindsided, feel disenfranchised. In the past few years, maybe starting five years ago, we starting posing the question—are we making the community better for everybody? We’re trying to address the equity question head on, so the whole community can benefit from what goes on here in the neighborhood. Hopefully we’ll get to the point where everyone feels they have a place and a stake in the neighborhood.

Specific projects and examples of community building by district councils abound. Daytons Bluff (D4) and the Frogtown Neighborhood Association (D7) have recently launched radio stations to build community in their neighborhoods. CapitolRiver Council (D17) supports Music in Mears Park through their fundraising efforts to build community in Downtown. Most district councils host annual events such as a summer get-together in a neighborhood park, or a garden tour (D9) or house tour (D16). Many district councils serve as the fiscal agent and coordinator for community gardens within their neighborhood. Taken together, these events connect neighbors and significantly strengthen Saint Paul’s neighborhoods.
When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed issues that were about community building. Other district councils shared examples of major community building accomplishments through the course of interviews and surveys. Many of these activities are directly and explicitly related to district councils’ efforts to achieve great equity and reach broader sets of communities in their work. For example:

- Worked specifically on equity, diversity, and inclusion, studying the demographics in our neighborhoods and their specific needs in order to help meet those needs, and working on a food justice program and ADA accessibility to transit to support low-income communities, disability communities, and communities of color in the neighborhood.
- Formed an Equity Committee committed to learning about the needs of historically underrepresented communities and working to better meet those needs.
- Held cross cultural dialogues with community and city departments.
- Increased meaningful participation from communities of color by focusing intentionally on staff of color and leadership opportunities across cultures.
- Increased representation to close to 60% people of color on our Board of Directors.
- Increased the number of residents that we engage by 100%.
- Updated our communications plan and created new outreach strategies that are working!
- Strengthened our outreach by meeting our goal to build partnerships and be more authentically engaged with other institutions within our district council boundaries and to collaborate with them.
- Advocated for the interests of the East Side of Saint Paul which has long been neglected in funding and completion of plans.
- Participated and completed the Cross Cultural Dialogue Project.
- Assumed a leadership role in Equity in Place, a diverse group of strategic partners from place-based, housing, and advocacy organizations facilitated by the University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

Other examples of significant accomplishments related to community building include:

- Conducted outreach related to the closure of Boys Totem Town and its future redevelopment.
- Launched WEQY-East Side Community Radio, and developed extensive local music and public affairs programming for 24/7 broadcast and streaming.
- Launched Creative Frogtown, which included multiple large events to help spotlight the creative community in our neighborhood.
- Held successful speaker series on numerous issues including citywide trash, recycling, bicycle initiatives, and neighborhood history.
- Moved the staging of the Back to 50s auto show off neighborhood streets to address neighborhood concerns.
- Held great community events including our Spring Festival, Pop-Up Shop and neighborhood garage sale.
- Addressed issues related to the relationship between Hamline University and the
community.

- Sponsored annual events including *Mac-Grove Fest* and the *Home Improvement Fair*.
- Implemented neighborhood programming including an organics drop-off site, business roundtables, alley garden awards, native garden awards, and pedestrian/bike/transit incentive programs.
- Strengthened and created partnerships with community groups that have led to multiple events and programs, including the *Highland Park Photo Contest*, *Music in the Parks*, *Movies in the Parks*, new resident welcome gatherings, and *Tour de Highland* (a bike and eat event that is enjoyed by many).
- Secured and started holding beverage sales fundraisers at *Music in Mears*.
- Balanced interests in the downtown area related to business and economic development; residents’ family, youth, livability and housing issue; and the unique complexity of the Skyway as an additional public realm.
- Successfully held our 2016 Annual Meeting without any argument or controversy.
- Advocated and received funding for Tot Lot Mural integration in a larger renovation project.
- Co-sponsored *Heroes and Helpers* Event to provide holiday meals for forty East Side families.
- Co-sponsored the annual *White Bear Avenue Parade*.
- Held the first Annual *7th Street LIVE* community festival with 2000 participants!
- Sponsored 7 houses in the district for the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Home Tour, and organized a vacant home tour that brought over 300 neighbors through vacant homes in our historic district.
- Increased communications through social media and improved branding.
- Created a new Community Building committee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Building Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity Utilized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media, or other means) events or activities in your district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored an annual fair or event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting specifically to discuss or plan community or livability topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address community building or livability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing community building/livability activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to community building or livability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s community building/livability activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses community building/livability strategies | 42%
---|---
Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding community building or livability | 33%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about community building or livability issues | 25%
Financially supported another organization's community building or livability activities | 25%
Other community building strategies or tactics not addressed in the list above | 25%

Land Use

Land use issues are central to the work of nearly all district councils. The district councils are formally part of the city’s process for many land use instruments and changes. On average, district councils report they spend almost 15% of their resources on land use activities. Land use issues range from building or permit changes affecting one city block to major redevelopment projects that have regional or statewide impact. District councils are the official voice of their neighborhoods and strive to represent their communities effectively as projects large and small are planned. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their land use work include:

- Formally communicating to the City staff and City Council the view of residents impacted by land use changes
- Hosting meetings and developing communications to inform neighbors of proposed land use changes and educate them on City processes
- Meeting with City staff and developers regarding potential and active development projects to ensure that the projects best meet neighborhood needs
- Reaching out proactively to developers to promote projects in their neighborhoods that align with the community vision

Here’s how one board member described the work of district councils as it relates to land use:

> When people want to build or expand something, this is where they come to get the neighborhood’s perspective. The City Council would be unable to process all the input the district councils receive. We’re the steam valve for some issues. Neighbors learn that there are some issues that can be addressed at this level rather than at City Hall and... sometimes we identify issues that a developer hasn’t thought about.

In addition to responding to specific land use and development issues, district councils have also engaged in policy debates regarding issues such as sober houses and student housing. One executive director described the process of their board’s engagement in a recent issue:
We had quite a few neighbors who were activated by other residents. The staff took a lot of phone calls and questions. So, we asked city council to slow down as we felt there was a need for more input and resident participation. We fliered the neighborhood, and the city provided interns to help with that. We hosted some heated meetings.

People were calling us as a point organization to be connected to the reports and the information provided by the city. The board wrote a letter to support the community response and concern. The neighborhood wasn’t comfortable yet with the change. It wasn’t what individual board members believed, but it represented what we were hearing from our neighbors. We made a lot of connections with people in the process. We take the topics where people are stirred up and try to make positive contacts. I say, bring on the times when we take heat!

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed land use issues. Other district councils shared examples of significant land use activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Completed our community plan.
- Created guidelines to help proactively shape development in our neighborhood and offer a framework for developers who want to work with us to build community with a shared vision.
- Facilitated an incredibly contentious neighborhood conversation about accessory dwelling units, and providing a structure for all residents to be heard and for a resolution to be reached.
- Created an extensive report summarizing issues of community concern related to the major league soccer stadium and Midway Center Redevelopment, which was shared with numerous stakeholders.
- Completed our ten-year long range plan.
- Completed residential design standards for Ward 3 to help address neighborhood concerns about tear downs and new construction.
- Explored the balance between historic preservation and how redevelopment occurs in an already built-out neighborhood when there is more demand for space than there is space available.
- Successfully advocated against land use activities that were potentially biased against people of color.
- Actively participated in the long-range planning process for the Saxon Ford Site.
- Facilitated the rehabilitation and sale of two vacant properties.
- Engaged the neighborhood to gather perspectives and provide education regarding the Victoria Theater redevelopment project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use Activities</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding land use requests</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address land use issues</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to land use</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about development projects or land use changes in the district</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific (re) development project in the district</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) in the district</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information to a targeted neighborhood regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit etc.)</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding land use issues and regulations</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses land use strategies</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to land use</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about land use issues</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual organization addressing land use issues</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities regarding land use not addressed in the list above?</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Profile: Influencing City-wide Policy**

District Councils have played a critical role in identifying, cultivating, and advancing policy changes at the city level. Councils can be proving grounds for innovative policy ideas—as well as a sorting grounds for ill-conceived ideas. Through thoughtful engagement processes, strategic partnerships, and broad volunteer bases, District Councils are well-positioned to influence city-wide policy.

**Organized Trash Collection**

Long considered the “third rail” of politics in the City of Saint Paul, organized trash collection has arguably seen more fits and starts than any other public policy
change. Under the long-standing “open” system, each property owner is responsible for contracting with a private hauler—resulting in multiple trucks crisscrossing the City on a daily basis. When the Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) was gathering input for its Long Range Plan in 2013-2014, a frequent comment it heard was: “Please, DO SOMETHING about trash!” Undeterred by the history of failures on this policy issue, D14 successfully sought funding from the MN Pollution Control Agency to work on organized trash collection.

D14 conducted a year-long engagement effort across the City to gather input on the topic from community members, trash haulers, elected officials, public employees, and subject matter experts. Through a partnership with Macalester College, D14 staff and Macalester students produced a comprehensive, thoroughly-researched report replete with recommendations for next steps to achieve organized trash collection. Largely as a result of this work, the City of Saint Paul allocated $330,000 in its 2016 budget to begin implementation of organized trash collection.

Central Corridor Influence
The District Councils Collaborative—a coalition of more than a dozen Saint Paul district councils and Minneapolis neighborhood organizations—had a profound effect on reshaping policy, results, and investment in neighborhoods adjacent to Metro Transit’s Green Line. Most visibly, the Collaborative led the charge to build light-rail stations at the Corridor’s intersections with Western, Victoria, and Hamline. As a result, station spacing in core neighborhoods of Saint Paul is similar to spacing along other parts of the Green Line, increasing opportunities for nearby residents—to not only benefit more directly from additional transportation options, but also from the economic development that light rail is expected to generate.

Stations were not the only issue of equity the Collaborative raised about the light-rail corridor. It also brought into the public discussion the need to help businesses—many of them owned by minorities or immigrants—to survive revenue losses during light-rail construction. The Collaborative also advocated for preserving affordable housing (especially for low-income residents, seniors and people with disabilities), and for preserving diversity, both among businesses and residents, in the face of the gentrification that light-rail could spur.

Finally, the Collaborative examined and forced changes in the quality of sidewalks, landscaping, and design to make pedestrian travel safer and more pleasant. Its fight against “hostile pedestrian environments” can be seen throughout the corridor and adjacent neighborhoods, including along Snelling Avenue south of Interstate 94. And although the Collaborative has disbanded, its impact will continue to be felt—including in 2018, when the Minnesota Department of Transportation rebuilds the Dale St. bridge over I-94. The design will include pedestrian plazas and other ideas generated by the Collaborative.
Ward 3 Design Standards
For several years, culminating in 2014, there had been increasing concern over new housing construction and significant remodeling throughout the neighborhoods represented by the Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) and Highland District Council (D15), which constitute Ward 3. Although in conformance with City code, there was significant concern that this construction was inconsistent with the scale and character of the existing residential neighborhoods. In August 2014, the City Council passed a resolution, with the support of D14 and D15, initiating a zoning study to review current design standards in Ward 3 as they relate to the construction and remodeling of single-family homes in residential zoning districts.

The Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED) was asked to prepare recommendations to guide future construction toward consistency with the existing character of these residential areas. PED, D14, and D15 actively partnered to gather community input through standing committees, focused events, and outreach. According to PED staffer Mike Richardson, “The District Councils played a key role in gathering constructive input and guiding active residents through the process.” The result was a set of zoning code changes—some specific to Ward 3 and some implemented City-wide—that have led to higher quality, more appropriate development.

Transportation

District councils also spend significant resources addressing issues related to transportation. On average, district councils report they spend about 11% of their resources on transportation-related activities. Transportation issues often involve responding to public agencies (City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County, Metro Transit, MnDOT, etc.) as changes or investments are made to the transportation infrastructure. Some district councils are actively engaged in advocating for changes for investments to enhance services to their neighborhood. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their transportation work include:

- Hosting events about specific transportation issues
- Advocating for transportation policy that serves community interests (pedestrian safety, Complete Streets, multi-modal transit options, etc.)
- Communicating information to residents and businesses regarding transportation issues
- Engaging with public officials to discuss issues and advocate for the neighborhood

When asked to share examples of the district council’s involvement in transportation issues, staff and board members were frequently able to identify projects that have evolved over many years. For example, a board member from the Payne-Phalen (D5) Planning Council spoke of the long-term commitment the council has had to the redevelopment of Phalen Boulevard. “The district council wrote the Phalen plan before the official planning document. We wrote the corridor plan in 1989
and the road got built 15 years later.” A staff member also spoke of the engagement of multiple district councils in the building of the Green Line LRT. “Our district council was instrumental in getting extra stops on the Green Line. That has been incredibly important for the neighborhood.”

District councils remain active participants in long-range transportation issues such as the proposed Riverview Corridor (D9) and the future Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) / Gateway Corridor (D1).

Additionally, district councils are actively involved in relatively routine (but often contentious) transportation issues such as parking, signal changes, re-striping roads and the creation of new bicycle facilities.

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed transportation issues. Other district councils shared examples of significant transportation activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Supported and partnered on several citywide transportation initiatives including Better Bus Stops, Saint Paul Healthy Transportation for All, and Stop for Me campaign.
- Sponsored transportation Initiatives and pedestrian safety events.
- Actively participated in a variety of transit project commissions and advisory groups.
- Co-sponsored the grand opening celebration of Furness Parkway, a 16-block linear park following a former street-car line in our neighborhood.
- Led numerous transportation initiatives including: completed a walkability study of Phalen Village; met with District 5, 6 and 10 to discuss Maryland Avenue transportation issues; met several times with Metro Transit to discuss resident requested increase of service; and participated on the Healthy Transportation For All task force.
- Secured a contract for organizing on the entire East Side for the Met Council in relation to Better Bus Stops.
- Advocated for and engaged community on bike lanes on Upper Afton and other CIB projects.
- Promoted a “Drive 25” campaign.

### Transportation Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Utilized</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting to address a specific transportation issue (bus line change, bike lanes, traffic, etc.)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage safety (for pedestrians, bikers, drivers or others)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding transportation issues and regulations</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting pedestrians and/or bicycles</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Profile: Phalen Corridor Project

The Phalen Corridor Project (Phalen Boulevard) redeveloped 2.5 miles of former rail corridor connecting the East Side of Saint Paul (geographically one-third of the City and one-third of its population) to downtown Saint Paul, winding through the Dayton’s Bluff (D4) and Payne-Phalen (D5) neighborhoods and ending in the Greater Eastside (D2). Expectations were high for this community redevelopment plan, which was considered to pose great potential to re-energize neighborhoods challenged with unemployment, retail flight, increasingly-distressed housing, and a general lack of investment.

Work originally began on this project in the 1990s, when a coalition of district councils, business associations, community leaders, City staff and residents began working together to envision a link from the East Side to downtown. The former rail corridor was the perfect passage for this link, but was flanked by urban brownfields and differing—and sometimes competing—visions of what truly could be accomplished by this project. Further hindering progress was a difficulty securing
funds for clean-up and construction of the boulevard itself, and a difficulty securing commitments from developers and new companies to build along the boulevard once construction was complete.

The coalition served as project champions. It assuaged resident and business owner concerns about the need for the project, the uncertainty of future investment in the area, and the corridor plans themselves. Working toward compromises that sometimes took several months to develop, the coalition engaged residents and businesses—sometimes in quite heated meetings—to agree on a plan that would truly benefit the area. Many coalition members also lobbied at the State Capitol for the project, and spent many hours with City staff and Councilmembers to bring the plans to fruition.

At least one book has been written on this process and project, “The Phalen Corridor: Rebuilding the Pride of the East Side,” by Curt Milburn. The author notes that: “On October 15, 2005 Phalen Boulevard was finally completed and open to the public. Rather than a traditional ribbon cutting one might find at the opening of a road, a ribbon-tying activity was organized symbolizing the ways in which Phalen Boulevard has linked East Side residents to businesses, jobs, restored green spaces, and downtown Saint Paul.”

Today, Phalen Boulevard is a critical part of the East Side environment. It has exceeded expectations for use, and continues to bring new development, new businesses, and new jobs to the East Side.

**Youth and Family**

Issues directly addressing the needs of youth and family are tightly aligned to the goals that many district councils share of building strong neighborhoods and communities. On average, nearly 10% of district council resources are invested in youth and family issues. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communicating to local neighbors on issues, events and activities affecting youth and family
- Partnering with other organizations and individuals to meet the needs of youth and families

In order to address the needs of youth in their district, the District 1 Community Council has made youth issues a high priority. District 1 has created the *D1 Youth Council* which provides programming for students and the *Youth Task Force*, made up of adults to mentor Youth Council members. These initiatives provide an opportunity to formally engage youth in the work of the community council and their neighborhood. Staff described the project this way:

_We made a decision to move out of crime prevention directly and into youth work. We were doing that by partnering with other small groups_
and neighborhood volunteer groups. From that, we created police and youth conversations, a voting project with youth, and a monthly open mic night. Now we are formalizing a relationship with local young mentoring group so we will have multi-pronged supports. We have our youth council which will have civic education and our mentors will support the social development of the council. Long term, we want to support kids getting jobs and careers in the neighborhood.

For other district councils, addressing youth and family issues is focused on the immediate desire to make neighborhoods as livable and welcoming as possible.

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed issues focused on youth and families. Other district councils shared examples of significant youth and family activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Created a Youth Council.
- Sponsored the annual *Heroes and Helpers Event* with Target providing holiday meals for low income families in district.
- Sponsored Youth Outreach Committee who provide volunteer hours as well as feedback and guidance from youth perspective on district issues.
- Formally engaged youth in the operations of WEQY community radio.
- Created bylaws that require at least three seats on the Board be youth.
- Employed youth to assist with engagement work through the City’s Right Track program.
- Advocated for CIB funds for youth soccer fields.
- Served as the fiscal agent for the North End booster club.

### Youth and Family Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Utilized</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about youth and family issues in the district</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education as requested by local schools regarding youth/school topics</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing youth and family issues</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s youth and family activities</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially supported another organization's youth and family activities</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding youth and family issues in the district</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address youth or family issues</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly identifies the needs of youth and family</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to youth and family issues</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about youth and family issues</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding youth and family issues</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities regarding youth and family issues in addition to the list above</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profile: Youth Engagement

The District 1 Community Council looked at the demographic shift occurring in its area and realized two things that led to its dedication of a significant portion of its resources on youth. First, its youth population is a greater portion of its demographic makeup than that of the city as a whole. As a result, if the Community Council was not engaging youth, it would miss a significant portion of its population as it made decisions about the future of the district.

Second, the population of youth represented, in greater proportion, communities of color. That is, the populations of color in the district were growing faster than the white population, simply as a result of more children being born among these groups, in addition to increases arising from families of color moving to the district. Focusing on youth helps D1 meet its commitment to include the traditionally underrepresented voices of those most affected by decisions being made related to social and physical infrastructure. It also helps its organization to grow increasingly representative of the people who live there. As they connect with youth, they also connect with their families, building knowledge of and trust in our organization.

District 1’s youth work includes a broad reach to large numbers of youth through the Young Mentors Group (YMG). YMG focuses on the personal and social development of youth, especially African-American and African immigrant youth. YMG is a youth-run program guided by adult volunteers that brings in speakers and connects youth to programming opportunities around the city. Connections to Freedom School, the Natural Leaders environmental program, J-shop (journalism shop), and community service projects have been made. This group has partnerships
with both the local library and a local business, where YMG members have also secured jobs.

The community council also achieves in-depth work with smaller numbers of youth through specific projects. For example, it completed a voter education drive that focused on the importance of voting in local elections—resulting in a video that aired on SPNN for two weeks prior to the 2015 election. It also initiated a community art project that involved working with community members and an artist to create a mural representative of community stories. In addition, it sponsors a Youth Council, which works with the support of an adult Youth Task Force to identify projects it wants to implement on behalf of the community, while developing civic leadership skills and learning about the civic realm.

Through all of these approaches, District 1 staff feels it is helping develop resilient adults who understand the importance of positively engaging with the communities of which they are a part. They are committed to having youth understand their role as valued members of the community who have contributions to make to our shared future.

Crime Prevention

Historically, crime prevention was an important part of the work district councils provided to the City of Saint Paul to receive financial support. Over time, that expectation has evolved and many district councils view their work addressing community building and youth and family issues as long-term strategies to reduce crime in the neighborhood. Explicit crime prevention strategies remain for some district councils and now account for roughly 8.5% of the time and financial resources of district councils. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their crime prevention work include:

- Working with police and neighbors to address issues related to crime
- Communicate timely information and crime prevention strategies to neighbors

Both National Night Out activities and supporting block clubs are often viewed as key strategies district councils actively support. Both strategies emphasize relationships within neighborhoods and help to create a sense of community and well-being. Many staff also attend meetings with police to monitor crime statistics in their neighborhood. One executive director described their crime prevention strategies as tightly aligned to their community building activities: “We strive to support activities that create a sense of pride and ownership in the neighborhood. This includes youth events, clean ups and block clubs.”

District councils shared examples of significant crime prevention activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:
• Supported a network of block clubs in the neighborhood to build community and support crime prevention by sharing neighborhood watch strategies.
• Worked toward a crime prevention strategy that is not racially charged or divisive in a very diverse community.
• Addressed Crime Prevention through our community building strategies.
• Convened meetings with neighbors and law enforcement to address specific concerns around criminal behavior and safety issues.
• Fostered a Crime Prevention committee to address neighborhood safety issues.

### Crime Prevention Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Utilized</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff participated in standing police/city meetings to address issues related to crime</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting specifically to address crime prevention</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convened a meeting with police and/or city official(s) to discuss issues related to crime prevention</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) events and activities in your district explicitly focused on crime prevention</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) crime prevention strategies or tips</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed crime statistics from the police/city</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing crime prevention activities</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s crime prevention activities</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses crime prevention strategies</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding crime prevention</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address crime prevention</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially supported another organization’s crime prevention activities</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about crime prevention issues</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crime prevention strategies or tactics not addressed in the list above</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parks, Public Space, and Placemaking

Parks and public spaces are another key element to making Saint Paul neighborhoods strong and vital. District councils support their parks and public spaces through a variety of strategies. On average, district councils report they spend about 7% of their resources on activities related to parks, public spaces, and placemaking. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communication with neighbors regarding park/public space activities and events
- Hosting events, meetings, and opportunities regarding parks and public spaces

Some district councils have significant park and public realms within their boundaries. For example, District 10 Como Community Council includes all of Como Regional Park, which is a large and unique asset within their district. The CapitolRiver Council appoints the Skyway Governance Advisory Committee as an advisory body to the City of Saint Paul and the City Council on issues and policies overseeing the operations and maintenance of the downtown Saint Paul skyway system. Other district councils have city, regional and even parts of national parks within their boundaries.

Union Park District Council (D13) recently played an instrumental role in the creation of a new park on Griggs Street. The Executive Director described some highlights of that process:

> A long-standing project in our district has been the Park at Griggs, which started with collaboration with Lex-Ham Community Council and other stakeholders including Gordon Parks High School and the resident association of Skyline Tower. Collectively, we succeeded in bringing the mayor up to the top of Skyline Tower to demonstrate the lack of green space along the Green Line. Eventually, this led to the dedication of city funding to purchase vacant parcels for the park through the 8 80 Vitality Fund. Trust for Public Land has also been a crucial partner, and we’re working with them now to reach out to the diverse communities in the area and get their input on the vision of the park. When it’s developed, the park will have a significant lasting impact on the city.

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, some executive directors listed issues related to parks, public space and placemaking. Other district councils shared examples of significant activities addressing parks, public spaces and placemaking through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:
• Sponsored several public space initiatives including Midway Murals, Pierce Butler Meadows, Boulevard, Rain Garden Project, and Hamline Park events.
• Influenced infrastructure changes at the Snelling Avenue bridge over I-94 and advanced plans for a pocket park in the area.
• Worked with partners to advance groundbreaking placemaking efforts including the city's first parklet and artistic crosswalk.
• Hosted several park clean ups through the year.
• Collaborated with the City’s Parks department for repair of some park amenities.
• Worked with Recreation Center managers and department to increase programming and hold events in the neighborhood.

### Parks, Public Space and Placemaking Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Utilized</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about local parks or public spaces</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored or cosponsored an event designed to encourage awareness and use of local parks</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific issue regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking within the district</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking generally</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s activities related to parks or public spaces</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to park or public space issues</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking strategies</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing issues related to parks or public spaces</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address parks, public spaces or placemaking issues</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses parks and public spaces</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about parks, public space or placemaking strategies</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially supported another organization’s activities related to parks or public spaces</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking not addressed in the list above?</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Issues related to the natural environment and sustainability are central to the work of many district councils. On average, district councils report they spend almost 7% of their resources on activities related to environmental and sustainability issues. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their community building work include:

- Communication issues and events related to the natural environment or sustainability to their constituents
- Hosting events, meetings, and opportunities regarding the natural environment and sustainability

Examples of engaging with issues of the natural environment are available from many district councils. District councils have, until recently, been significantly involved in the City’s efforts to expand recycling. And, the Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) has been instrumental in studying the city’s existing decentralized approach to waste collection:

*During 2015, with the support of the MN Pollution Control Agency, the Macalester-Groveland Community Council completed a comprehensive examination of organized trash collection. We researched the issue, interviewed other communities that have organized, talked to trash haulers currently working in Saint Paul, held community conversations with residents city-wide and received 2,000 responses to an online survey. We compiled everything we learned into an easy-to-read report.*

Board members and staff from other district councils reported other topics of interest in their neighborhoods. One board member proudly recalled providing educational resources to neighbors about oil trains. “It was a hot topic during the legislative session. We played an educational role and a facilitator and organizer role.” Another staff member in a different district council helped a concerned local neighbor:

*A resident had noticed a chemical company was looking to get a variance on some safety measures for their business. Many committee members were very concerned. We facilitated conversations with the company and neighbors. The difficult part was figuring out what’s overreaction and what’s important and not hyperbole. Residents got a promise from city council*
member to look at that part of the city. That hasn’t happened yet, but the city has agreed to look at potential traffic and pollution issues.

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, several executive directors listed issues pertaining to the natural environment and sustainability. Other district councils shared examples of significant activities regarding the natural environment and sustainability through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Established a new community garden.
- Opened an organics recycling drop-off site in the neighborhood that will be available 24/7 and will be far more convenient than existing county sites, through an initiative made possible with a grant from the Solid Waste Coordinating Board and the cooperative efforts of Ramsey County, Saint Paul, and Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.
- Developed a GIS mapping program of the environmental hazards in the neighborhood overlaid by demographic and socioeconomic data to help us better understand our neighborhood.
- Opened a food waste reduction library with resources available to public for check-out.
- Researched and wrote a citizen-friendly report and advocated for a review of organized trash collection in the City, elevating the topic to the City Council level and resulting in significant dialogue about this issue city-wide.
- Supported local neighbors concerned about a nearby brownfield through meetings and advocacy, including researching the history of the site and speaking to sources to collect information on site.
- Participated in the Urban Oasis sponsored edible streetscape featuring edible plantings along 7th Street.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Environment and Sustainability Activities</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding a specific environmental issue (recycling, city regulations, etc.)</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about environmental issues or changes in the district</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting focused on natural environment or sustainability issues</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to environmental issues</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address natural</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Profile: Organics Recycling – Grassroots Environmental Stewardship

Saint Paul’s District Councils have a long history of environmental activism. In addition to countless grassroots efforts in their own neighborhoods, councils were the driving force behind ground-breaking initiatives that continue to deliver long-term benefits for all of Saint Paul and its residents.

- District councils created the Neighborhood Energy Consortium in 1985. This nonprofit partners with utilities, the city, and others to provide affordable counseling about energy-efficiency improvements for homeowners and renters. For 14 years, NEC also organized the Saint Paul Classic Bike Tour. Now in its 23rd year, the one-day tour is the largest bicycle ride in the state. *(NEC changed its name to Neighborhood Energy Connection in 2005, and intends to merge with the Center for Energy and Environment in 2017.)*

- The Como Community Council pushed the State of Minnesota to create the Capitol Region Watershed District in 1998. The District is charged with protecting water quality in nearly all of Saint Paul – a 40-square-mile watershed that includes Como Lake, Loeb Lake, Crosby Lake, and the Mississippi River.

- Every year, district councils are the lead organizers and main source of volunteers for Saint Paul’s Citywide Drop-offs. These one-day events provide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations,</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>addressing natural environment or sustainability issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>another organization’s environmental activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific environmental issue</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(garbage collection, pollution, recycling, etc.) in the district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses natural</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment or sustainability strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environmental issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about natural</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment or sustainability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially supported another organization’s environmental activities</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarding the natural environment or sustainability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues related to the natural environment or sustainability</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not addressed in the list above?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
centralized locations so residents can properly and safely dispose of, recycle, and reuse electronics, appliances, power equipment, furniture, mattresses, demolition and construction material, and other bulky items that otherwise might be dumped illegally. Residents can dispose of these items for fees that are far more affordable than at commercial transfer stations.

- Until 2017, district councils were the front line in Saint Paul’s curbside recycling program. Councils were the primary source of recycling information in their neighborhoods, and the sole source of the program’s ubiquitous blue bins. Each council distributed hundreds of bins each year to residents committed to diverting paper, plastics, glass, and cans from the waste stream.

District councils are now on the cutting edge of the next big push in recycling: organic waste. Kitchen scraps, unused food, and other household organics make up about one-third of the total trash a typical household generates. Eliminating organic material from the waste stream saves money, frees up space in landfills, and reduces the climate-altering methane and carbon dioxide emissions that landfills generate. Community drop-off sites opened by district councils provide an eco-conscious option -- especially for residents who can’t maintain their own backyard compost bin, including renters and students. Plus, because the waste is recycled commercially, these community sites can accept items that cannot be composted in backyard bins.

The Macalester-Groveland Community Council (D14) and Como Community Council (D10) both manage organics recycling drop-off sites that are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – all year long. Both sites demonstrate the power of vision, citizen initiative, and partnership. These community sites also have become a model for other jurisdictions. Ramsey County, for example, began recycling household organics at its yard waste sites in April 2014 – two years after Mac-Groveland opened its site. However, the county sites operate on limited hours, especially during winter. Overall, the convenience of the community sites makes them easier to use and makes organics recycling a viable alternative for more residents.

After a volunteer-led community planning process, Mac-Groveland launched the first community site in 2012, in a parking lot off Grand Ave. It partnered with the City of Saint Paul, Macalester College, and the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board for start-up costs. Initially, hauling fees were covered by an annual user fee. Mac-Groveland staff and volunteers conducted home visits and training workshops, and produced educational material to raise awareness about organics recycling. After the first year of operation, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul picked up the hauling costs; the site is now free for anyone who lives or works in St. Paul. To date, more than 950 households have signed up to use the neighborhood-scale site, which collects more than 34 tons of
organics waste annually. Community Council volunteers continue to maintain it with support from Mac-Groveland staff.

The Como Community Council took the idea further. For more than a year, council volunteers held workshops to teach residents about home composting and organics recycling. In the meantime, the council’s environment committee developed plans for a large-scale site, working with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, Saint Paul Public Works, the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board, and Ramsey County, which contracts with a private hauler to service the site.

The site opened in July 2016 on land in Como Regional Park. It has grown to a capacity of over twice the Mac-Groveland site; this past winter, it was the second-busiest organics recycling site in the county. The Como site attracts more than 300 users a week and is on track to divert more than 75 tons of waste annually. As in Mac-Groveland, community volunteers and staff maintain the site.

The City of Saint Paul has plans to add organics to its weekly household recycling program, but the timetable continues being pushed further into the future. District councils are not waiting; they are proving that residents are willing and eager to participate in this next community-wide phase of environmental activism and stewardship.

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**Housing**

Most district councils report overlap between their work on housing issues and land use issues. On average, district councils report they spend just over 6% of their resources on activities directly related to housing. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their housing work include:

- Communicating to local neighbors on issues, events and activities related to housing
- Provided recommendations to the City of Saint Paul regarding housing changes or requests

Like other land use issues, housing topics range from small changes that impact individual nodes within neighborhoods to major development projects. District councils report collaborating with organizations including NeighborWorks and Habitat for Humanity on housing initiatives, and meeting with developers to advance community interests with respect to housing projects.

They also address specific housing issues including landlord responsibilities to neighborhoods, student housing in residential neighborhoods near higher education institutions, tear-downs and
mixed-use developments that may place new pressures on existing neighborhoods. One board member described their role in addressing these tensions:

What I have seen the board do is to channel energy and passion productively. Sometimes those passions and energy can be viewed negativity and could be very divisive in the community. But I feel we’ve helped create positive outcomes. . . . There is so much transformation happening. We have 1500-2000 housing units going in. This neighborhood is transforming. I feel called by the community and the people who helped bring me here to be here for relationships and collaboration so this can be a stronger community, to serve the community, the poor and the over looked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Activities</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) to housing in the district</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information to a targeted area regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit etc.) to housing in the district</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about housing projects or changes in the district</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding housing requests</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to housing</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address housing issues</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses housing strategies</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to housing</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding housing construction (such as a new housing project) in the district</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting regarding housing issues in the District</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing housing issues | 42%
Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about housing issues | 25%
Other activities regarding housing not addressed in the list above? | 25%

Economic Development

On average, district councils report they spend about 5% of their resources on issues related to economic development and supporting local businesses. Some of the common functions that district councils undertake in their housing work include:

- Sponsored events or provided communication materials to support existing local businesses
- Communicated to city staff to address economic development and local business needs

District councils address economic development issues through a variety of tactics. Several councils sponsor or co-sponsor events that help support local businesses. For example, Dayton’s Bluff (D4) has a formal partnership with the East Side Area Business Association (ESABA). The district council is directly responsible to support locally owned businesses through informed community review, advocacy and promotion; and chair the Equity and Economic Development Committee of ESABA, promoting business growth on the East Side through strategic partnerships with key business owner and developers (e.g. Flat Earth Brewery, Urban Organics, Dellwood Gardens, etc.), the Saint Paul Port Authority and other public, private and nonprofit partners.

The West Side Community Organization (D3) leveraged their community planning process (a part of the City of Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan) to develop the West Side Initiative, a coordinated effort among community and institutional leaders to bring to life the objectives and strategies outlined in the West Side plan. The plan specifically identifies a strategy of “Community Economic Development: Build local resilience through business development, local energy, local food and using the arts as an economic driver.”

When asked to identify major accomplishments between May 2015 and June 2016, some executive directors listed economic development issues. Other district councils shared examples of significant economic development activities through the course of interviews and surveys. Examples include:

- Participated with local business association meetings and chamber meetings, and interacted with other business groups to support our neighborhood businesses.
- Held highly successful community-building events in partnership with the local business association and city parks department.
- Advocated for change to the City’s Charter to redefine a restaurant, partnering with the City’s Department of Safety and Inspection as well as many other groups to help our neighborhood restaurants be better able to compete with the rest of the City.
- Sponsored loan and grant program and provided organizing in community to connect local residents to job opportunities resulting in a majority of local hires and significant numbers of people of color hires.
- Brought more technical assistance and loans and grants to local minority owned businesses.
- Managed a corridor capital investment STAR fund that improved local businesses on 7th Street, including building acquisition by with minority owners.

### Economic Development Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Utilized</th>
<th>Percent of District Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting existing local businesses</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address economic development</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting to address issues facing existing local businesses in the district</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage support of existing local businesses</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding economic development issues and regulations</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses economic development strategies</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to economic development</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding economic development issues or proposals</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an existing or potential business owner as they interface with city staff/regulations</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to economic development</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted a community meeting to address economic development strategies</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about economic development and/or local businesses</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing economic development issues</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other economic development or local business issues not addressed in the list above?</strong></td>
<td><strong>25%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39
In the course of surveying district council staff, meeting with district council boards, and meeting with district council executive directors, many themes emerged regarding the work district councils pursue to engage their neighborhoods.

**Equity**

District councils across the city are striving to address issues of equity throughout their work. For some, equity is embedded in their work and central to their mission. These district councils are working to make sure their advocacy work and programming is consistently serving residents who are often absent from other aspects of the public sphere. The District 1 Community Council articulates their beliefs in their mission statement: “The mission of the District 1 Community Council is to share knowledge and power, to organize and to advocate for the people who live and work in our neighborhoods. We build leadership to seize opportunities and work for social and racial justice.” The District 2 Community Council has launched their Equity Planning Project which will strive to “ensure equity for all in everything the council does from administrative to programming.”

District councils also make concerted efforts to support and empower traditionally underrepresented communities. Examples include providing fiscal sponsorship to a Somali community group, supporting apartment building managers to activate their tenants and host National Night Out activities, participating in a collaborative project to get Karen refugees into homeownership, supporting the development of a Hmong community garden, and providing technical assistance to minority-owned businesses.

For many district councils, equity work centers on how their own organizations can become more representative of their neighborhoods. Board members, particularly in whiter, wealthier neighborhoods, are quick to recognize that the makeup of many district councils does not match neighborhood demographics—in factors including race, income, home-ownership and age. In response to this, some district councils have established equity committees, endorsed diversity policies, worked to change their volunteer recruitment strategies, and changed their bylaws to allow or require greater diversity among their board and committee memberships.

**Profile: Equitable Community Engagement**

St. Anthony Park’s Equity Committee has made great strides in working towards more equitable engagement and access to resources. After a 2015 strategic planning process, its Equity Committee began to explore disparities in the neighborhood by connecting with local residents who had not been traditionally engaged in the Community Council. By beginning to change the paradigm of community outreach (going out and meeting people where they are, not expecting them to come to us on our terms) and genuinely connecting with people around their needs, the
Committee identified a serious deficit in the neighborhood: access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate food.

With the help of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, the Committee gathered qualitative and quantitative data to study this deficit and locate the sources of the problem. Transportation (and access more broadly) and financial difficulties topped the list of reasons that low income and racially diverse communities were not getting the food they needed in St. Anthony Park. The Committee is now implementing discrete action steps to address the disparity. For example, instead of sending produce from a local community garden out of the neighborhood, where local residents could not access it, last summer they sent 1500 pounds of fresh produce to a Section 8 building in the neighborhood. The Committee has also forged a partnership with a local CSA that will begin to provide food at a deeply discounted rate to neighbors in need, and convinced the Wilder Foundation to route its truck to St. Anthony Park to offer produce at cost to low income residents to the neighborhood.

This program has grown to include other efforts at connectivity and access, including work on ADA accessibility for areas in need of better sidewalks to connect Section 8 and other low income residents throughout the neighborhood to amenities and transit sources. The Equity Committee has also served as a sounding board for mediating issues in access and transparency throughout the neighborhood, and has educated and supported other groups on equitable engagement techniques and equitable community process.

The work of the Equity Committee operates internally as well, working to change the culture of the organization itself. The Committee sponsored board member training on diversity and inclusion, in an effort to weave equity into all of the organization’s work. And, it created an Equity Framework and Equitable Engagement Process for its ten-year district planning work, required by the City of Saint Paul of all district councils. This process included training the organization’s committees on how to incorporate equity into each component of the plan. Now, the groups working on transportation, land use, and the environment must address each of those areas in an equitable way, pulling in diverse voices, and giving power to those not traditionally represented in planning processes like these.
Relationship to the City of Saint Paul

A common theme throughout the work of district councils is working closely with the City of Saint Paul. District Councils have a unique relationship with the departments and staff of the City. At times they are partners, at other times they are in conflict.

All district councils consistently provide communication and education to residents regarding projects and upcoming decisions by the City that may impact their neighborhoods. As noted throughout the issues above, district councils use a variety of outreach strategies to help keep their neighborhoods informed. City staff often rely upon district councils to help sponsor and facilitate community meetings and forums.

District council staff also meet individually with property owners, business owners, developers, and tenants to educate these constituents about how the City operates. District councils are on the front-line of educating their residents about how to work with the City to accomplish shared goals. During interviews, board members consistently point to the role the councils play in helping residents navigate through City staff and offices. One board member described this:

> For me the things that I find valuable are the contacts that I can make. Neighbors come to me and ask who should we contact or how could we influence this. Being able to meet with people who own businesses has meant a lot. I know who’s in the space and what their plans are. I am a walker, I walk pretty much everywhere. I contacted the city about a dangerous intersection and now that intersection has a marked crosswalk.

Conflicts between the district councils and City plans also occur. The desires of the neighborhood may not always align to the City’s plans or resources, or the understanding that City staff may have about the desires of a neighborhood. District councils advocate for their neighborhoods even if the local position is in conflict with the decisions or plans of politicians or City staff. At the time, these conflicts can strain the relationship between district councils and the City. But, such conflicts can also have positive outcomes. One executive director described a challenge facing their district:

> The city closed the local rec center that was serving 400+ kids—largely kids of color and immigrants. We identified the demographic change that occurred, and we worked to create a local task force that worked with Parks and Rec and City Council. Those efforts resulted in mobile programming brought to the site. They also identified the fact that more up-front community conversation was necessary.
We facilitated conversations with the African-American community and immigrant community, which improved relationships with Parks and Rec.

Survey data indicates that district councils interact with multiple city offices. All district councils reported that they interact with City Council staff and Public Works. Nearly all district councils also reported working regularly with Parks and Recreation, Planning and Economic Development, the Police, and Safety and Inspections.

![City Departments Worked With, District Councils](chart.png)

Community Outreach and Communication

As noted earlier, district councils spend the majority of their time engaged in community building activities. Nearly every issue the district council address from Land Use to Youth and Family programming requires ongoing communication and outreach to neighborhoods.

Like most public and nonprofit organizations, this work has become increasingly complex and multifaceted with the advent of social media and evolution in the ways residents receive critical information about their neighborhood. Posters, fliers, electronic communication, social media, newsletters, neighborhood newspapers and word of mouth are used frequently by district councils to inform their neighborhood of pertinent issues.

District councils employ a number of communication vehicles to meet the needs of their neighbors.
To support their work, district councils frequently author and commission reports, and write guiding documents that address specific challenges or plans for their neighborhood. One of the cornerstones of district council responsibilities is the development of Neighborhood Plans that eventually become part of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. These documents, written about once every ten years, often take significant resources over many months to develop and become key planning documents for both the City and the district councils. One board member described how these large planning documents drive the work of their council: “We adopted a comprehensive neighborhood plan that came from surveys and town hall meetings. Now our committees are working through the projects that are in the plan. We’ve divvied up the work to each responsible committee.”

Other important works address issues of priority to the neighborhood. When asked to identify reports or studies written since May 2015 related to specific topics of interest in the district, staff provided a lengthy list of important guiding documents that help inform their work:

- CURA Organizational Evaluation Study
- Report on Cross Cultural Dialogues
- Kasota Ponds Report (regarding wetlands)
- Transportation study (transportation uses in the neighborhood and areas that need more access)
• Food Justice report (to understand food needs and options to solve them)
• Common Grounds study to report on promoting public transit use at the future soccer stadium
• CURA study on the feasibility of an African Market in Saint Paul
• Youth and Police interactions
• Park and community interactions
• PED and community interactions
• Voting in local elections
• Boys Totem Town redevelopment plan
• Organized Trash Collection report
• Food Waste Reduction report
• Organizational Long Range Plan
• Study of the uses of Historic Highland Pool House
• Survey and design/map of Safe Routes to School with local schools
• Grant submitted to conduct a Historic Survey of the neighborhood
• Visioning Survey report (partnering with the Downtown Alliance)

**Challenges Facing District Councils**

For this report, the Steering Team did not explicitly seek out details regarding challenges facing district councils. However, interviews of both staff and board members identified some consistent themes regarding uncertainty and the future. Many of these are inherently a part of small nonprofit organizations. These issues—along with the challenge to achieve more equitable engagement identified above, and other challenges to be identified—will be the focus of a companion Innovation Fund project in 2017.

**Financial Sustainability**

Over time, many district councils are receiving smaller contracts from the City of Saint Paul, resulting in a challenging financial picture. As the City continues to evaluate its investment in the district council system, many councils are concerned about the long-term sustainability of their budget. Resources within neighborhoods vary greatly, and some councils are nervous about how they can generate resources to meet their core obligations.

Board members also mentioned that their ability to recruit skilled staff is hampered by limited financial resources. Many district councils have benefited from highly skilled staff members who are mission-driven and deeply committed to the work of their organization. But, board members are not confident that relying on staff “good-will” will continue to be viable long-term. Board members also shared the challenge they face providing benefits such as health insurance and retirement benefits to staff members.
Institutional Memory

Key volunteers and individual staff members are often the sole sources of institutional memory and historic perspective within district councils. When these individuals leave the organization, a gap is created in continuity and wisdom that can delay or derail organizational priorities. As small, lean organizations, many district councils do not have robust procedures and records to guide them effectively through personnel transitions.

Healthy Politics

Board members and directors worry about societal rancor impacting the work of district councils. District councils are often at the center of facilitating emotional and heated conversations in neighborhoods. They rely upon residents to hear multiple perspectives and seek common understanding in order to effectively support their neighborhoods. Board members referenced the nation’s current political environment, as well as their own experiences, when expressing concerns about how neighbors face controversial plans in the future. As one board member stated, “This board has been collegial. We are all pulling together. But I came from a neighborhood where things are not currently collegial. Neighborhood groups can be the white home owner’s association. I saw a lot of that.”

Relationship with the City

How district councils work with the City of Saint Paul is a source of tension for some district councils. They do not always feel their work is appreciated, or that community input in general is valued. Many board members expressed their opinion that City staff and leadership are not doing enough to reach out and listen to neighborhoods.

Relationship with other District Councils

As autonomous organizations, district councils are charged to work specifically with the issues impacting their defined geographic region. District councils are proud of their own unique culture and distinct priorities. At the same time, staff and board members understand that working with other district councils is often essential to their success. This is particularly pronounced along district council borders, which are often major corridors such as University Avenue or Phalen Boulevard. While executive directors meet regularly as a group to address topics of common interest, participation varies and interest in aligning priorities across district council boundaries is limited. How district councils address their shared interests while maintaining their autonomous priorities is a challenge for the future.
Appendices

Survey
   Survey Questions

Board interviews
   Board interview guides

Executive Director meetings
   Roundtable I Discussion Guide
   Roundtable II Worksheet
INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the breadth and depth of activities that the Saint Paul District Councils are involved in, we are requesting your participation in a survey. This survey is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the issues and activities that district council’s support. There is also space at the end of the survey to provide more information about activities or issues not listed here. The survey may take you 20-30 minutes to complete. We greatly appreciate your accurate, thorough responses.

PART ONE: THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ITS WORK

1 Which District Council are you representing?
2 How many FTE (Full-time equivalent) staff work for your district council (i.e. 1.0 = 1 full time person, 1.5 = 1 full time and one half time, etc.)
3 How many seats are currently open?
4 Please list the names of your standing committees or work groups and your best estimate of the number of active, involved members in that committee/work group since May of 2015. (Example: Neighborhood concerns committee, 8; Land use committee, 10):
   Describe
5 Please list the names of any short-term or temporary task forces or committees formed since May, 2015 and your best estimate of the number of active, involved members in that group. (Example: Trash removal task force, 12; STAR grant committee, 4):
   Describe
6 Which of the following communication tools have you used since May, 2015: (check all that apply)
   - Email newsletter
   - Facebook organizational page
   - Print/postal newsletter
   - Direct mailing to residents
   - Twitter
   - Website
   - Instagram/Snapchat
   - Nextdoor/eDemocracy posts or other neighborhood groups’ facebook pages/groups
   - Bulletin board or notification space at a library, community center or other public space
   - Community newspaper column or other posting
   - Fliers delivered to residents
   - Fliers posted at local businesses
   - Other (please describe)
7 If you had to take a BEST GUESS at what issues dominate the RESOURCES (staff and volunteer time/effort) OF THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION, what percent of the district council’s resources are spent on the following issues. (Your total must add to 100%)
   x Community Building/Livability
   x Crime Prevention
   x Housing
   x Land Use
   x Economic development and local business
   x Natural environment/Sustainability
   x Parks/Public Space/Placemaking
   x Transportation
   x Youth and Family
   x Other issue/topic:  (please describe)
   100 MUST ADD TO 100
8 Since May, 2015 did your district council sponsor or organize a report or study related to specific topics of interest in the district? (These could be written by consultants, student groups, committees, staff etc.)
   If yes, please describe the study or report(s) you supported
9 Since May, 2015 with which city departments has your staff regularly engaged?
   - City Attorney
   - City Clerk
   - City Council
   - Emergency Management
   - Financial Services
   - Fire & Paramedics
   - Human Resources
   - Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity
   - Library
   - Mayor’s Office
   - Parks & Recreation
   - Planning & Economic Development
   - Police
   - Public Works
   - Safety & Inspections
   - Technology & Communications
   - Water Service
   - Other:
10 Since May, 2015 did your district council provide support (such as fiscal agency, staff time, volunteer time etc.) to another organization or community group in their efforts to strengthen the community?
   If yes, please describe the project(s) you supported
11 Since May, 2015 what were the top 3-5 accomplishments of your district council?
13 Since May, 2015 what were the top 3-5 issues that demanded the attention of your district council?
Describe

14 What other neighborhood organizations/community groups within your district do you regularly interact with (ex. Local business association, independent neighborhood group, school booster group, etc.)
Describe

15 Do you regularly partner with other district councils? If so please list:
Describe

16 Do you have current guiding documents (such as work plans, strategic plans or community plans) that guide your work in the any of the following areas
(check all that apply)
- Community Building/Livability
- Crime Prevention
- Housing
- Land Use
- Economic development and local business
- Natural environment/Sustainability
- Parks/Public Space/Placemaking
- Transportation
- Youth and Family
- Other guiding topic: (please describe)

17 Is there anything about the structure of your district council that you feel makes it unique?
Describe

PART TWO: THE ISSUES DISTRICT COUNCILS ADDRESS

In this section of the survey, we'd like you to think about some of the common issues that district councils work on. For each question, you will be asked about a series of potential activities that you may be involved with. Please note: while similar, each list is slightly different based on the issue discussed. Please be sure to review each list of activities carefully. For these activities, we are interested in the work of your district council as a whole which includes staff and volunteers.

Community Building/Livability
Some district councils support their neighborhoods through community building and livability activities. These might include an annual fair/event, promoting neighborhood events or developing plans to strengthen community in your district.

18 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to support community building.
(Check all that apply)
- Sponsored an annual fair/event
- Hosted a community meeting specifically to discuss/plan community or livability topics
- Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to community building/livability
- Publicized (through email, social media or other means) events or activities in your district
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address community building/livability
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses community building/livability strategies
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding community building/livability
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about community building/livability issues
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing community building/livability activities
- Financially supported another organization’s community building/livability activities
- Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s community building/livability activities

19 Are there other community building/livability strategies or tactics your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?
If so, please describe:

Crime Prevention
All district council’s support their neighborhoods through crime prevention activities. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

20 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to support crime prevention.
(Check all that apply)
- Hosted a community meeting specifically to address crime prevention
- Staff participated in standing police/city meetings to address issues related to crime
- Convened a meeting with police and/or city official(s) to discuss issues related to crime prevention
- Distributed crime statistics from the police/city

Publicized (through email, social media or other means) events and activities in your district explicitly focused on crime prevention
- Publicized (through email, social media or other means) crime prevention strategies or tips
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address crime prevention
- Financially supported another organization’s crime prevention activities
- Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s crime prevention activities
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses crime prevention strategies
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding crime prevention
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about crime prevention issues
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization pursuing crime prevention activities

21 Are there other crime prevention strategies or tactics your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?
If so, please describe:

Housing
Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with housing issues.

22 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address housing issues.

(Choice all that apply)
- Hosted a community meeting regarding housing construction (such as a new housing project) in the district
- Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) to housing in the district
- Hosted a community meeting regarding housing issues in the district
- Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to housing
- Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to housing
- Distributed information to a targeted neighborhood regarding a specific request (zoning, change, variance, permit and etc.) to housing in the district
- Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about housing projects or changes in the district
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address housing issues
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses housing strategies
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding housing requests
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about housing issues
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing housing issues

23 Are there other activities regarding housing your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

Land Use

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with land use issues.

22 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address land use issues.

(Choice all that apply)
- Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific (re)development project in the district
- Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit, etc.) in the district
- Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to land use
- Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to land use
- Distributed information to a targeted neighborhood regarding a specific request (zoning change, variance, permit and etc.)
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding land use issues and regulations
- Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about development projects or land use changes in the district
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address land use issues
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses land use strategies
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding land use requests
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about land use issues
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing land use issues

23 Are there other activities regarding land use your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

Economic Development and Local Businesses

Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with economic development or local business issues. These might include publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address economic development or local business issues.

27 (Check all that apply)
- Hosted a community meeting to address economic development strategies
- Hosted a community meeting to address issues facing existing local businesses in the district
- Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to economic development
- Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to economic development
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding economic development issues and regulations
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting existing local businesses
- Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage support of existing local businesses
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding economic development and/or local businesses
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about economic development and/or local businesses
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an existing or potential business owner as they interface with city staff/regulations

28 Are there other activities regarding economic development or local businesses your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

29 Does your district have a local chamber of commerce or neighborhood businesses association(s) that advocate for economic development and local businesses?

If so, what are the name(s) of the organization(s):
Natural Environment/Sustainability
Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with environmental and sustainability issues. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities. Please note: this section refers to the natural environment and sustainability issues across the district. In the next section we will specifically address parks and public spaces.

Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address natural environment or sustainability issues.

(Check all that apply)

- Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific environmental issue (garbage collection, pollution, recycling, etc.) in the district
- Hosted a community meeting focused on natural environment or sustainability issues
- Convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to environmental issues
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding a specific environmental issue (recycling, city regulations, etc.)
- Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about environmental issues or changes in the district
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address natural environment or sustainability issues
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses natural environment or sustainability strategies
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding environmental issues
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about natural environment or sustainability
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing natural environment or sustainability issues
- Financially supported another organization’s environmental activities
- Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s environmental activities

Are there other activities regarding the natural environment or sustainability your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

Parks/Public Space/Placemaking
Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with parks, public space and placemaking. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address park and public space issues.

(Check all that apply)

- Hosted a community meeting regarding a specific issue regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking within the district
- Hosted a community meeting regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking generally
- Sponsored or co-sponsored an event designed to encourage awareness and use of local parks
- Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to park or public space issues
- Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about local parks or public spaces
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address parks, public spaces or placemaking issues
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses parks and public spaces
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking strategies
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about parks, public space or placemaking strategies
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing issues related to parks or public spaces
- Financially supported another organization’s activities related to parks or public spaces
- Provided in-kind support (donated supplies, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s activities related to parks or public spaces

Are there other activities regarding parks, public spaces or placemaking your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?

If so, please describe

Transportation
Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with transportation issues. These might include working directly with the city, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address transportation issues.

(Check all that apply)

- Hosted a community meeting to address a specific transportation issue (bus line change, bike lanes, traffic, etc.)
- Hosted a community meeting to address transportation issues generally (not related to an immediate, specific issue)
- Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to transportation
- Staff participated in standing city meetings to address issues related to transportation
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners regarding transportation issues and regulations
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting pedestrians and/or bicycles
- Distributed information/education to residents or business owners supporting use of mass transit
- Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address transportation
- Created a plan or working document that explicitly addresses transportation issues
- Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding transportation issues or proposals
- Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about transportation issues in the district
- Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing transportation issues
- Financially supported another organization’s activities related to transportation
- Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s activities related to transportation

Are there other activities regarding transportation your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?
Youth and Family
Many district councils support their neighborhoods through active engagement with youth and family issues. These might include education, publicity, hosting events or other unique activities.

36 Since May, 2015 which of the following activities (if any) has your district council undertaken specifically to address youth and family issues.
(Check all that apply)

☐ Hosted a community meeting regarding youth and family issues in the district
☐ Staff or volunteers convened a meeting with city official(s) to discuss issues related to youth and family issues
☐ Distributed information/education as requested by local schools regarding youth/school topics
☐ Publicized (through email, social media or other means) information about youth and family issues in the district
☐ Sponsored a committee or working group specifically to address youth or family issues
☐ Created a plan or working document that explicitly identifies the needs of youth and families
☐ Made a formal recommendation to the City explicitly regarding youth and family issues
☐ Sponsored a project, report or study explicitly about youth and family issues
☐ Provided technical support (grant writing, strategy recommendations, connection to city staff, etc.) to an individual or organization addressing youth and family issues
☐ Financially supported another organization’s youth and family activities
☐ Provided in-kind support (staff time, volunteers, etc.) to another organization’s youth and family activities

37 Are there other activities regarding youth and family activities your district council provides that are not addressed in the list above?
If so, please describe

38 Please describe any other unique topics or issues your district council addresses that are not reflected above.
Describe

39 Is there anything else you’d like to share about your district council?
Describe

THANKS FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!
Board Members Focus Group
Discussion Guide (20-30 min)

Thank you for your time this evening. We are exploring how district councils across the city support civic engagement and go about their work. I will be taking notes and we may use one of your quotes in our final report. I will work with the executive director in case we need to follow up with anyone for more detail.

1. For this first question, I’d like to hear from everyone here. Could you take a moment and introduce yourself and how you got involved in the district council?
   Now for the remainder of these questions we will have more of a discussion, so please feel free to participate as you wish.
2. When you share with your neighbors or friends that you are involved in the district council, what do you tell them? In other words, how do you explain what district council’s do?
3. What do you think we SHOULD BE DOING?
4. Why do you participate?
5. If this was the universe of activities board are involved with, how do you think your current organization is prioritizing its work?
6. How do you think things SHOULD be prioritized.
1. **Background**
   a. As you know, the City of Saint Paul is evaluating its community engagement needs and the effectiveness of the District Council system to meet those needs. To complement that effort, a group of district councils were awarded an Innovation Project grant to investigate and document 1) how the District Councils currently do community engagement, and how they view their current capacities and value, and 2) how other cities effectively meet their community engagement needs. We wanted to talk with you today specifically around the first topic.

   Recently you completed a rather lengthy survey which was designed to help us understand the depth and breadth of the activities that district councils are involved with. This provided some very helpful data around the many different topics that our district councils address throughout the city.

   For our conversation today, we want to try to get more detail about some of the information you shared. We want to hear about the context and the stories behind your answers.

   Before we begin, here are a few ground rules:
   i. We will be recording today’s session and taking notes, however, we will not identify you or quote you directly without asking your permission. We want to be as open and honest as possible during this conversation.
   ii. So that we are all on the same page, we should consider our conversation in this room confidential. Please do not repeat or share information you hear today outside of this room.
   iii. Our goal is to learn more about what district councils are actually doing. We are not making recommendations or suggesting changes to the city.
   iv. We have a limited amount of time today. I may need to cut you off simply to stay on schedule. Please do not be upset if I need to move our conversation along.

   b. Any questions before we begin?

2. **Introductions**
   a. I’d like us to begin by introducing ourselves. Please share your name, the geographic area of your district council and something you’re really proud that your district council has done.

3. **Resource Allocation**
   a. Now I want to share with you some of the information you submitted in the survey. You might remember a question where we asked you to give your BEST GUESS at what issues dominate the RESOURCES (staff and volunteer time/effort) OF THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION. This is a very difficult question to answer and we would really like to hear more from you about your answers. Take just a minute to reacquaint yourself with the data you submitted. In a minute, I’m going to ask you to describe what, specifically,
you were thinking of when you answered this questions. What specific tasks or projects came to mind as you thought about how much time you spent on these areas. We’ll record those on the easel paper. For example, if you said you spent 25% of your time on land use issues . . . what, exactly did you mean?

- Go around the room
- Record tasks/projects on easel paper
- IF large group, break into groups of three and then report out.

b. Okay, so now we have a little deeper understanding of what you believe you are spending a lot of your time on. Thank you for that. For the next part of our conversation, I’d like you to continue looking at this same question seven, but just think about the top three areas—the three topics where you spend the most time. Why do you think these are the areas that dominate your work?

Questions to probe:
- Are these topics more important or more time consuming?
- How well do these topics align to your mission?
- Do these topics have a strong impact on strengthening your neighborhood?

4. Key Topics/Issues
   a. Thank you so much for that conversation! Next I’d like you to take a look at the answers you gave to another difficult question—specifically question 13 where we asked you to identify the “top 3-5 issues that demanded the attention of your district council?” The question I’d like each of you to address is similar to what we just talked about. Specifically, I’d like to hear why did these issues dominate your work last year? Was this mission-driven? Based on your strategic plan? Reactive based on changes in your neighborhood? Why did these things surface to the top? You may also need to tell us very briefly what the specific issue is so we can understand a bit more about what you are referring to.

   - Go around the room
   - Record tasks/projects on easel paper
   - IF large group, break into groups of three and then report out.

5. Equity/outreach
   a. Finally, before going leaving today, We’d like to hear a bit more from each of you about how you are reaching out to the breadth of constituencies that make up your district council. You all serve diverse populations and we’d like to hear what you are doing to help reach out to populations that may be hard to connect with. This could include different ethnic or racial groups, it might include specific constituencies like business owners or a targeted group of residents such as renters. What are you doing to help engage all constituents of your district?
1. An example of when you have brought an issue or issues to the city’s attention and helped resolved them

2. An example of ways in which you have taken the heat for city issues preemptively

3. An example of a successful partnership with another organization or group

4. One way that you have influenced change / had a lasting impact on your neighborhood or the city

5. Other ways you impact relationships and livability

6. Ways in which you’ve leveraged the city’s investment through foundation support