

# 3. KEY MESSAGES FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## OVERVIEW

From April of 2013 through February of 2014, Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, and Metro Transit were actively engaged with the Penn Avenue Corridor community to learn about challenges and opportunities related to housing, jobs, transportation, public safety and other issues. Information was gathered through individual and small group meetings, interviews, and informal conversations. ***Penn: 2013 to early 2014 Community Ideas and Input by Category*** is a document that contains a summary of information received. Sample comments include:

*“Make Penn welcoming, green and friendly.”*

*“Celebrate the African American culture by making this an African American cultural corridor through public art and design.”*

*“Make Penn more like it was: A neighborhood street with commercial nodes...like pearls on a string.”*

*“The area needs amenities, access to fresh food and other goods.”*

*“We need reasons for people to stop on Penn in our community not just speed through.”*

*“Increasing access to jobs is important, as is growing local businesses.”*

*“No racism, less violence, kids in school.”*

*“I want my daughter to grow up on a neighborhood where she feels safe and experiences the beauty of nature and diversity.”*

The complete document can be viewed at:

<http://www.hennepin.us/residents/transportation/penn-avenue-community-works>



*The Penn Avenue “field crew” collected survey responses from community members along the corridor*

Since March of 2013, the consultant team has been gathering additional community input to better understand community priorities and to learn more about specific topics. Outreach efforts, coordinated by the overall Community Engagement Plan, have sought to:

- Reach people who haven’t provided comments to date
- Learn more about detailed preferences and priorities for economic development, housing, streetscaping, open space, transit, placemaking, parking, safety, etc.
- Hear more about existing conditions; what’s working well and what’s not

Techniques used to reach Penn area residents and businesspersons include individual interviews, small group sessions, doorknocking, short surveys, and online input. To date, over 550 surveys have been tabulated and additional information continues to be gathered. This additional community input combined with input received earlier in the project adds to the “layers” of technical information that will be used as the project moves into the next phase where specific improvement alternatives are assembled and presented to the public for review and feedback.

**Community input is summarized in this document in three ways:**

- (1) A general recap of comments that have emerged from recent survey outreach efforts is included on the following pages. It is important to note that the information summarized in this chapter does not yet capture the results of the full spectrum of community engagement for this project. It includes information gained through doorknocking and short surveys only. Additional information from small group discussions, meetings, and other outreach efforts will be added.
- (2) Topic-specific summaries of survey input can be found in the Transportation, Housing, Economic Development, and Community Character chapters of this report.
- (3) A summary of survey responses is included in the Appendix of this report.

## SUMMARY OF GENERAL SURVEY COMMENTS

**LIVABILITY** - Residents want a vibrant, active community that offers places and spaces where adults and children want to be together, connecting with friends and family, participating in events and activities, activating community centers, and patronizing local parks, restaurants, and businesses. Residents want their neighborhoods to be safe, clean, attractive, interesting – as well as accessible and affordable. The day-to-day and specialized needs of residents should be supported within the neighborhood with more variety, choice, and opportunities of all kinds.

**SAFETY** - There are major concerns about personal safety and security across all age groups and neighborhoods. These are most pronounced among immigrant families and teens, many of whom shared their personal stories and perceptions of safety. Families report a reluctance to let their children play outside even in their own yards, or walk or bike in the neighborhood. These immigrant families say they frequently shop and recreate outside the community, and prefer to travel by car.

**MOBILITY** - Cars are the dominant mode of transport for shopping and travel to work among residents and individuals surveyed at business nodes in the corridor. Residents use cars for shopping, errands, and travel to work; residents use the bus primarily for travel to work. Crime and safety concerns are cited as the primary barriers to people walking and biking along Penn. Suggested improvements include more patrols, better lighting, sidewalks, and bike lanes. Transit users want safer, cleaner, less expensive, and more frequent buses, and safer bus stops with better lighting and the full range of transit station amenities.

**HOUSING** - There is consistent support for higher quality and better maintained housing, and concerns about poorly kept rental properties as well as the number of vacant lots and abandoned properties. People want housing and rents that they can afford, as well as sizes and locations that meet their family needs. A number of the immigrant families cite property damage, crimes against them and their families, and harassment as reasons they stay inside their homes, places of work, and faith centers; travel by car; and spend time in neighborhoods in other parts of Minneapolis or surrounding suburbs as much as possible.

**SHOPPING** - Residents are attracted to local stores, restaurants, and services such as gas stations, where they are available. Residents were more likely to describe local shopping and service options as convenient

and close by, rather than highly desirable and appealing. There is a strong interest in a greater number and wider variety of places to go and things to do in the neighborhood, and especially distributed throughout the corridor. All groups surveyed raised concerns about safety, racism, or harassment that affected where they shopped, and suggested solutions such as more active and visible police patrols and security, better lighting, stopping loitering and public intoxication, and fewer liquor stores.

**GATHERING PLACES** - Residents frequently asked for more informal and formal gathering places for both youth and adults (community centers, movie theaters, arts performance spaces, clubs, music venues, patios, and parks), cleaner commercial areas with more attractive landscaping, and more programming opportunities for youth and families.

**SOCIAL LOCATIONS** - In their free time, both youth and adults say they spent time with friends and family most often at each other's homes or at restaurants. Immigrant families and youth frequently go to restaurants and the homes of friends and relatives in the near suburbs, Northeast Minneapolis, or South Minneapolis. Other respondents want to see movie theaters, arts and entertainment venues, more and better local restaurants, fitness clubs and classes, and specialty shops in the area.

**PARKS** - Park and green spaces in the corridor would be more appealing if playgrounds, fields, equipment, and facilities were updated and better maintained. Park users like the programs, recreational opportunities for children, and indoor and outdoor sports options. Many people asked for more recreational opportunities and programs for youth in the summer and year-round, as well as more playgrounds for children. Teens asked for community gardens, flower gardens, cleaner parks, and better security. There is a great deal of concern that it is not safe to travel to parks in this neighborhood, nor are the parks themselves safe for youth or many adults. As a result, many of the people interviewed say they don't use the parks at all. A number of park users cited the need for better lighting, more security and safety patrols, and more staff and better supervision.

**PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY** - Residents want their neighborhoods to be safer, friendlier, cleaner, and stronger. Less violence, "no bad people on the streets," and safe places to be with others are critical. Many people mentioned needing to change the negative perception of North Minneapolis while recognizing that the reality many residents experience has to change first.