ENGAGING YOUTH IN PLANNING & DESIGN

A PILOT PROJECT WITH WESTERN MIDDLE SCHOOL
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our gratitude to the following individuals and organizations. This project would not be possible without their contributions.

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The work of urban planners and policy developers is often carried out with the input of various community stakeholders, but young people are rarely included. Decisions that are made today about shaping the landscape of a community will have a greater effect on the youth of the community than nearly any other demographic group. Urban planning literature and professional experiences overwhelmingly support the inclusion of youth in the planning process, providing evidence that it improves the quality of the projects being created and helps develop a new generation of community advocates and leaders.

The Louisville Metro Department of Housing and Community Development receives yearly funding from Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and allocated $50,000 of this year’s funds to be used for a youth-generated project in the Russell neighborhood. Leaders at Housing and Community Development asked us to collaborate with them as facilitators of the project’s youth engagement and design development, with the eighth-grade students at Western Middle School as our youth partners. Over a six-week engagement with the students we were able to discover the ideas most important to them when considering how to improve their community, and then integrate these ideas into a single conceptual site design.

We adapted our engagement process from the Participatory Budgeting model of community engagement, utilizing an asset-based approach. It was important to us that all the youth voices in the eighth-grade class be heard and not just a select few, and the Participatory Budgeting model allows all members of a group to participate and all ideas to be acknowledged. We structured our engagement to first encourage big ideas through what we called “visioning” activities and then refined those big ideas with input from every student, culminating in a final ranked vote of three different proposed site designs. Every week we analyzed student responses to inform our engagement activities for the next week, and the results of these analyses and the final ranked vote guided us to a single conceptual site design.

The first step in our site design was determining a potential site, and we considered a variety of factors before making a final decision. Our chosen site is a vacant lot owned by the Louisville Landbank Authority at the corner of West Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street, selected in part because it is close to Western Middle School and has virtually no environmental constraints. The data collected from student voices led us to design a community space with a central performance stage, a flexible exhibition wall, and improved green space. Several recommendations are also made for specific details to enhance the site, including a sheltered bus stop, a permanent commemoration of the students’ work, and a potential street redesign. While our collaborative site design is conceptual and may not be implemented exactly the way it was designed, we feel confident in the creative ideas that the students developed to improve their community.

Other recommendations are also included with those stated for the site design, including recommendations for the implementation process and potential stakeholders. We understand that we only executed the beginning of this project and must now pass on what we have learned and developed to our partners at Louisville Metro Housing and Community Development. Our partnership with the students at Western Middle School was enlightening and constructive, creating a space that will hopefully connect with all members of the Louisville community, and we hope that the information in this report will serve as both a history and a guide for the implementation of this project and future engagement with youth in the planning process.
Communities are diverse in their composition, and when designing a space for communities, planners seek to include the distinct interests and needs of those different groups within a community often through an engagement process. This project was designed for the purpose of highlighting youth voices in that design process by asking the eighth-grade students at Western Middle School to decide where and how to invest $50,000 of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, earmarked by the Louisville Metro Government Office of Housing and Community Development, in the Russell neighborhood of Louisville, KY.

The partners for this project include Louisville Metro Office of Housing and Community Development, Western Middle School and the Department of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Louisville. Graduate students from the University of Louisville’s Master of Urban Planning and Master of Sustainability programs led the collaboration as their culminating project, facilitating the engagement and design process with the students over a period of 5 weeks. During those weeks, we used the principles of collaborative planning, asset-based community development, and participatory budgeting as a guiding framework for our engagement to identify, prioritize, and design a CDBG eligible investment project with the Western Middle School student to be implemented by Louisville Metro’s department of Housing and Community Development in the Russell community.
The students were given nearly complete creative autonomy for the use and design of the site, with the major parameter of the project being that the project needed to satisfy the conditions of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

In 1974 U.S. President Gerald Ford signed a legislative bill into law that served to combine seven distinct federal grant programs into a single block grant, one which served to enable each of the States, counties, cities and their respective communities to determine how to best allocate awarded funds to address various community development-based needs (HUD Exchange, 2019). The resulting Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is approaching its 45th year and it is as important now, if not more so, than when it was established. With a broad scope of potential projects, CDBG dollars provide much-needed funding in low- and moderate-income communities, which often attract less private investment. Not only can CDBG money help underprivileged communities directly through neighborhood initiatives, but block grant projects can also serve to attract investment from the private sector as well. For instance, in Louisville, every dollar of CDBG leverages $3.65 of additional private and public investment (Fischer, 2017).

The goal of the CDBG program is to facilitate better access to decent housing, suitable living environment, as well as expanding economic opportunity for low- and moderate-income persons. Seventy percent of CDBG funds must be spent on areas considered to be low to moderate income and are used to fund a wide range of projects such as homeownership assistance, public infrastructure improvements, programs to assist the homeless, commercial development assistance, job training, employment assistance, home rehabilitation and neighborhood revitalization. The CDBG program has recently been targeted by conservative politicians who are keen to cut domestic social programs (Sherman, 2017). This recent threat has highlighted the importance of CDBG funding for cities across the country. A study in 2004 concluded that neighborhoods receiving $87,000 or greater annual CDBG funding saw significant improvements and research from 2006 determined that the threshold for significant improvement was $21,000 per year over a five-year period (Galster et al., 2004) (Galster et al., 2006). Despite the variations in spatial and temporal parameters, both studies showed that above average CDBG funding in neighborhoods that were most in need produced the most favorable results.
The inherent flexibility of the CDBG program that has provided much needed assistance to communities is also a source of criticism as well. The wide-ranging nature of the CDBG program means that measuring its effectiveness can be challenging. Some researchers conclude that there is no way to measure the impact of the CDBG program due to political factors influencing grant allocation and the potential for CDBG programs to contradict other programs (Iutcovich & Iutcovich, 1987) (Theodos, Plerhoples & Ho, 2017). Eligible projects for CDBG funding must meet one of the three national objectives, and this project meets the objective of “Benefiting Low- and Moderate-income persons.” This funding was earmarked to complement ongoing investments in the Russell neighborhood through the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative grant.

The intent of this project was to engage youth that live, play, and go to school in or near the Russell neighborhood. More broadly, this project is intended to begin developing the next generation of public sector leaders and prioritize the youth voices, which are generally excluded from decision-making processes. Western Middle School was a natural fit for this project not only because of its proximity to the Russell neighborhood, but as an Art Magnet School, the students seemed uniquely oriented to tackling such a practice design project. In addition, Western’s art focus also echoes the vibrant art-oriented history of the Russell neighborhood, which was and continues to be rich with artists of all kinds, including singers and visual artists.

The level of community engagement can also determine the effectiveness of CDBG investment. As part of the CDBG Entitlement Program, communities are required to have a citizen participation component that includes the following: create strategies to minimize displacement, provide the public with information regarding funding and proposals, provide assistance to low and medium income groups who would like to make a proposal, allow for citizens to review and critique of plans, and hold at least two public hearings that allow for citizen input (Boyd, 2014). The significance of authentic community engagement that demonstrates the value of resident input is much more difficult and time consuming to achieve but has been shown to lead to the most favorable outcomes. For instance, research has shown that administrators who felt the most accountable to the community were able to create the most inclusive, interactive, and impactful community engagement (Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010). Engaging youth begins activating the voices of all members of a community and begins to develop the next generation of leaders.
The Russell Neighborhood has a rich, vibrant history as a center of culture for the black community in Louisville. The neighborhood was named after Harvey C Russell Sr., an author, educator, and trailblazer. As a dean of Kentucky State University, author, and founder of organizations, the neighborhood was dedicated in his honor for his dedication to improving the lives of people. Many black-owned businesses populated Walnut Street (now Muhammed Ali Boulevard), which buzzed with activity as people filled the banks and stores by day, and the clubs and restaurants by night. Additionally, jazz holds an important significance in Russell. Famous names such as Helen Humes got their start on Walnut Street.

However, as a predominantly African American neighborhood, Russell was adversely affected by government policies that resulted in long-term neighborhood disinvestment. Redlining maps created by The Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) during the 1930s were part of some of the earliest efforts to segregate cities by race and class. These Residential Security Maps categorized neighborhoods into four categories, and much of the Russell neighborhood received a D (red) grade, the lowest of the four, as did many neighborhoods that were home to predominantly non-white and lower income populations. Receiving a D grade limited access to home loans for residents. Without investment in these areas, redlined neighborhoods fell into disrepair, trapping residents in untouchable real estate markets.
Urban renewal, established by the Housing Act of 1949, included federally funded programs aiming to improve housing opportunities and attract investment to urban neighborhoods. However, the efforts to rebuild cities oftentimes displaced families, and disproportionately affected minority and low-income households, as cities attempted to spark development. In the neighborhoods west of downtown Louisville including Russell, approximately 1,100 families were displaced, most of which being families of color. Walnut street was once filled with over 150 homes and businesses, today is an empty shell as only one remains. In four years, 7 blocks of Walnut Street were leveled solely as a result of urban renewal. More than buildings felt the impacts as vibrant relationships were ruined.
Recently, many initiatives have focused redevelopment efforts on the Russell neighborhood with the intent of reversing the lasting impacts of redlining, urban renewal, and other types of disinvestment. Louisville was awarded a $30 million grant, the third in a series of grants from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) Grant Program in an effort to continue implementation of The Vision Russell Transformation Plan. The primary goals of the grant are the transformation of the public housing facilities at Beecher Terrace, located in the Russell neighborhood, into energy efficient, mixed-income living that is physical and financially stable, and the transformation of distressed communities into viable neighborhoods with access to high-quality amenities, such as education, housing, health and safety, and connectivity.
Choice Neighborhoods Initiative and Vision Russell Transformation Plan

In addition to the Beecher Terrace redevelopment, there are many large developments planned or currently under construction in the Russell neighborhood, including the Louisville Urban League’s planned track and field facility, Passport Health Plan’s Health and Well Being Campus, and the Louisville Central Community Center’s new community theater, among others.
The Choice Neighborhoods Grant provided funding for smaller investments scattered throughout the community called Action Activities, which are able to be completed quickly and have an immediate impact on the neighborhood’s residents. A number of Action Activities have been complete, with more in the early or middle stages of planning. Specific Action Activities include: improvements to Sheppard Park featuring a spray-ground, conga drums, restrooms, and updated facilities, Vacant Lot Projects including The Lily Pad at Sweet Peaches, and Opportunity Corner, Overpass Murals, and SmART Stop Bus Shelters.
While Louisville Metro Housing Authority is leading the redevelopment processes occurring through the Choice Neighborhoods Grant, there are also a significant number of non-profits investing in the community. These organizations working in the Russell neighborhood are vital to various pieces of the redevelopment puzzle; handling everything from community engagement to large-scale investment projects. While all selected influential organizations do not provide fiscal investment, their efforts in the community prove to be an investment in the future of Russell. This is not an exhaustive list of the recent community-based redevelopments in the Russell neighborhood.

**One West**- A nonprofit community development organization, One West envisions a revitalized 18th Street and West Broadway, including locally owned and operated restaurants focusing on fresh, healthy ingredients. Retail stores, commercial and mixed-use real estate investments, office space, safe and green transformation of streetscape, and gathering like-minded community partners. One West has developed plans for advocacy and development in West Louisville with the goal of connecting the West to the opportunities the rest of the city enjoys through purposeful investment.
COMMUNITY BASED INVESTMENTS

Russell: A Place of Promise- The initiative connects long-term residents and business who have served as the backbone of the neighborhood with opportunities to build long-term individual wealth and community wealth to prevent displacement due to the newly generated investment in Russell.

The Center for Neighborhoods- The Center for Neighborhoods focusses on aspects of Community Engagement, Education and Training, Planning and Design, and Data and Mapping. With large emphasis on engaging and building relationships within neighborhoods while educating residents and stakeholders, the CFN is able to bring groups together and plan for the future. One of the biggest investments in Russell by the CFN is community outreach in the form of surveys to gain community input for the action activities.

Louisville Urban League-“Assisting African Americans, other minority groups and the disadvantaged to attain social and economic equality and stability through direct services in Youth Development and Education, Health Education, Center for Workforce Development, and Center for Housing and Financial Empowerment and advocacy” The Louisville Urban League is spearheading the track and field facility development in the Russell neighborhood. Currently, the site is a 24-acre brownfield which has a proposal to be envisioned as a track and field facility costing $35million and estimated to spark $15.9million in revenue a year. Meeting the goals of the community for an immediate investment and providing healthful resources to the community.

Louisville Central Community Center, Inc- The Louisville Central Community Center’s mission is to advance self-reliance by building confidence and competence among all ages. Specifically; Early childhood education, youth development, arts education, and other after-school programs, employment services, and money management training for adults are just some of the services provided.
COMMUNITY BASED INVESTMENTS

Passport Health Plan - Passport Health Plan (above) is a nonprofit community-based health plan that administers Kentucky Medicaid benefits around Louisville since 1997. Passport envisions fostering innovation and collaboration to create talent, an economic engine for West Louisville, and improving the health and well-being of all Kentuckians. Doing their part to reverse the impacts of urban renewal, Passport Health Plan intends to build their new headquarters and health campus in Russell to serve the community in both health and economic opportunities; aiming to serve as a catalyst for continued investment.

Louisville Grows - Founded to assist communities and individuals on the journey towards sustainability, Louisville Grows now consists of 22 community gardens, four public orchards, refugee training farm and CSA, an urban reforestation initiative, and wellness education. Louisville Grows is partnering with other community organizations as part of Vision Russell’s Opportunity Corner. Gathering information from the community, Trees Louisville is aiming to work with Russell residents to “green up” their neighborhood through their vision.

New Directions Housing Corporation - The New Directions Housing corporation (NDHC) Offers direction in Real Estate Development, asset and property management, resident services, home ownership preservation, and community building and engagement. Providing affordable housing and support (educational, financial empowerment, healthcare, and sustainability) to over 2,000 residents in the tri-county area. Specifically, in Russell, the NDHC offers a variety of subsidized rental apartments; some of which being in the recently renovated Russell Junior High School.
Modern methods of community engagement in urban planning encourage an asset-based approach – building from the existing assets of the community rather than focusing on its weaknesses. This strategy for development allows members of the community to identify and champion existing assets as the foundation for redevelopment and economic growth. We rooted our approach for the youth engagement process in the theories of asset-based community development, using the methods of the Participatory Budgeting model to facilitate our weekly engagements. A practice which originated in the demographically dense municipalities of Brazil as a way for citizens to have input on the distribution of municipal funds (Wainwright 2003), Participatory Budgeting prioritizes community voices in the democratic decision-making process. The Participatory Budgeting Project, a non-profit organization based in Brooklyn, NY, is a world leader in developing and implementing Participatory Budgeting projects across a variety of cities and towns, with an emphasis on “giving people real power over real money.” Participatory Budgeting is designed to allow citizens to actively engage in a meaningful democratic process, effecting lasting civic change in both the participants and the community.
The Participatory Budgeting model is purposefully vague in conception, allowing the model to be utilized as a framework within a variety of different environments. We took the simple outline of the model set forth by the Participatory Budgeting Project and adapted it to the specific assets and desired outcomes of our engagement with the students at Western Middle School.

While the Participatory Budgeting model is relatively straightforward, it still requires significant planning and preparation to ensure success. The first step of the model, “Design the Process,” is arguably the most important and often the most time consuming. Engaging with the community is only effective when the process is transparent and easy to understand, with roles and desired outcomes stated from the beginning. We spent many hours brainstorming our engagement process, ensuring that we first had a solid academic foundation, reviewing literature on both the participatory budgeting and youth engagement (APA 2018) processes, before observing the real-world dynamics of the students in the classroom at Western Middle School. We combined the knowledge from the academic literature with our personal observations to design a creative and collaborative process that aimed to engage students of all backgrounds, abilities, and personalities (APA 2018).

The second step in the Participatory Budgeting model is “Brainstorm Ideas,” a directive which is clearly open to interpretation. Our process for brainstorming involved a variety of methods through which students were able to creatively express their ideas, with emphasis on the students’ strengths and interests (Bowen 2018). Western Middle School is an arts magnet school and we designed our visioning activities to connect with the students’ talents, both on an individual level and as a collective. No idea is too big during this conceptual stage of the process and students were encouraged to think broadly about ways to improve a space within their community (APA 2018).
All the ideas collected from the initial visioning stage cannot be realistically implemented, but the ones that can must be refined. This is where the third step in the Participatory Budgeting model, “Develop Proposals,” takes center stage. In many applications of the Participatory Budgeting model this is the stage where leaders from the community would assume responsibility for the development of a single idea, often called an “idea champion.” However, the specific conditions of our engagement were not conducive to this approach and we were required to design an alternative method of proposal development. Our priority on student voices and the tenants of asset-based community development led us to an iterative, data-driven approach, gathering students’ ideas through individual documentation in a workbook and assessing those ideas through quantitative analysis, eventually applying the results to specific proposal designs. The students were then able to provide critical feedback during each weekly phase of our facilitation, leading to three detailed and refined project proposals.

The final step in the Participatory Budgeting model is to hold a community vote to determine which project proposal will be funded. Projects can be vastly different from one another or may vary only in detail, depending upon the type of engagement. Because the goal of our partnership with the students was to develop a collaborative project based on the ideas and voices of youth, we drafted three designs for a single space that differed only in the details of the site design and included elements based on the design ideas imagined and refined by students throughout the engagement process. Students then used rank choice voting to prioritize which site design they preferred and provided additional critical feedback to explain their choices. The entire Participatory Budgeting process, from conception to final voting, took place in the short time frame of five weeks. Our partnership and engagement with the students at Western Middle School gave us a wealth of ideas and information that we assembled into a final site design, which we think reflects the creative design ideas of the eighth-graders.
We were privileged to have the opportunity to engage with approximately 100 students in Ms. Shewmaker’s eighth-grade science class at Western Middle School over the course of six weeks in the spring of 2019. Prior to our first week of engagement with the students we were given the opportunity to observe a full day in the classroom at Western Middle School. This allowed us to observe the style of the teaching that the students were accustomed to, the space in which we would be connecting with the students, and the various social and academic dynamics of the classroom. Our design of the engagement process was primarily based on this period of observation, working within the learning format of the classroom with things like primary learning targets and a daily bellringer and exit question.
WEEK 1: VISIONING

Utilizing the Participatory Budgeting model of engagement, our first two weeks with the students were spent introducing necessary concepts and encouraging students to think about how they interact with the living world and the built environment. The first week was the most content heavy, exploring the concept of urban planning and encouraging them to think critically about urban planning problems, with a primary learning target of “I can understand the concept of urban planning and how it affects my everyday life,” mimicking the learning format which was observed the previous week. As an introduction to the concepts of planning and design, we explored what planners do, and how they do it.

We presented the students with informational videos and call-and-response questions, making our first in-classroom experience interactive. Being teenagers, they engaged with the city in a different way than car-driving, commuting, working adults do, and their perspective from the beginning was incredibly insightful. Many students, for instance, noted the lack of community gathering space in their neighborhoods through comments as simple as “there’s no place for us to hang out together” or the wishful thinking of one student who wanted a space similar to a Boys and Girls Club. One of the most productive exercises from this day involved peer-to-peer collaboration to describe their neighborhood, both verbally and through creative expression. The students were observant about the characteristics of the places they live, especially with regard to how people their age interact with the community, and they were eager to share their answers and experiences with their classmates and us.
One of the most important components of our youth engagement was the design of an individual workbook that became our main avenue of communication with the students, as well as our primary source of data. The “visioning workbooks,” as we called them, are a data collecting tool that one of our group members was familiar with and had used in multiple community engagement activities. It was developed to promote self-awareness and discovery through writing, drawing, and idea creation, giving everyone, regardless of their background, an opportunity to express their voice. We spent much of our time during the engagement process working on the design of these workbooks, developing questions and activities that we hoped would spark thoughts and ideas about planning, design, and our specific project. We created the workbooks in the second week and utilized them as our main engagement tool for the following three weeks, collecting students’ ideas and answers that we were able to analyze each week and inform our engagement activities for the following weeks.
The first week laid a successful foundation that prepared us and the students for the following week’s activities. Our second engagement workshop with the students was as one group in Western Middle School’s auditorium. This session allowed us to bring in important figures of the community and the planning process, including Mayor Greg Fisher, to emphasize the scope and significance of this collaborative project. Additionally, the second week provided us with the opportunity for the students to make the workbooks that they would spend the following classroom sessions filling with notes, drawings, ideas, and suggestions. For the first entries into the workbooks we asked the students to explore some of the concepts that we touched on during the first week—what is urban planning? what are elements of a sustainable city? what would their ideal neighborhood look like, and why? These questions were placed in the workbooks to illicit individual responses before asking the students to collectively, in small groups facilitated by us, design a space on one of the three vacant lots under consideration. Students became personally invested in this activity as they began to explore their own ideas of how they could benefit the community. The students were responsive to the presentation of three different potential sites, with some even taking it upon themselves to champion the lot they liked best. A specific point of pride on this day, and throughout the engagement, was how the students were very focused on investing the $50,000 in practical ways that would produce broad benefits for the community. The students were overwhelmingly excited about their opportunity to enrich the lives of a group in their community, whether the elderly, the homeless, or even simply families. Their suggestions ranged from green space to community centers to art/performance space, or even the simple idea of a place where kids their age could safely and comfortably spend time with one another. There was, even from the first moments of design, a genuine urge and desire to contribute to the community that displayed a level of unselfishness, maturity and thoughtfulness that should be commended.
APPROACH TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

DESIGN YOUR IDEAL CITY

My Ideal City is a city that have a Park in each Community, a store within walking distance from every Community. Also I would want a safe place for teens to hangout at so kids won’t get in trouble.

Excerpt of student workbook from Week 2

Collected data from Week 2 showing major themes found in students’ work

Visioning site plan created by a group of students during Week 2
After Week 2 (and each subsequent classroom session), we analyzed each of the workbooks and reviewed small group designs. We then aggregated this data and identified three common themes: a green space, a clean space, and a hangout space. A fourth theme of “art space” was also added based on our observations and conversations with the students, most of whom are involved in the arts magnet at Western Middle School and continuously championed the idea of art exhibition and performance. For the third week we encouraged them to develop these themes in their workbooks through written answers to questions like, “What are the three most important elements of a green space to you?” and opportunities for creative expression (e.g. drawing and sketching) of their ideas. We also wanted to introduce some basic concepts of design, encouraging them to think about the way things fit together in a single space. Utilizing the design software SketchUp, we created a drawing of one of our potential sites with a series of options for each element (trees and plants, recycling bins, shelters, etc.). The refinement exercise in the workbooks generated many productive ideas, providing us with valuable data. Additionally, the students became incredibly engaged in the SketchUp activity. It provided an opportunity for the students to debate with one another and from these debates we were able to gain a sense of why they valued one specific element over another. This activity lead to even richer documentation of their ideas in their workbooks, as individuals were inspired by the validation they received from us and their peers.
Data collected from student workbooks during Week 3

Elements of a Clean Space

Elements of a Green Space
Data collected from student workbooks during Week 3

How Should Art Be Implemented in the Site?
In between Week 3 and Week 4 we determined that we had to make a decision for our site location in order to present cohesive and reasonable ideas to the students. We had originally presented three different site options to the students in Week 2 with the hope that the students would aid us in the decision-making process, but they showed a much greater interest in the design of the site than its location. Because of this and because of the time and budget constraints of our project, our group made a decision to move forward with a single site at the northeast corner of W Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street. Making this decision allowed the students to focus on the elements of the site design without the added confusion of choosing a location, and when the decision was explained to the students in Week 4 they were understanding and excited to move forward.
WEEK 4: REFINEMENT

For the fourth week we wanted to have the students participate in a traditional activity from the Participatory Budgeting model, collectively criticizing their own ideas. We brought large printed sheets with site design examples gleaned directly from the data in their workbooks for each of the major themes: green space, clean space, exhibition/performance space, and the inclusion of a fourth element of seating. Each of these four posters had 6 or more diverse examples, and the students selected their two favorite elements from each board with a post-it note.

In addition, they wrote in their workbooks the reasoning behind their choice and how they thought the elements they chose would fit in the space they were designing. Again, the nature of the activity allowed and encouraged debate as to why one bench was a better fit than the other, or why one hangout space was too complicated or just right. Building from the principles of the Participatory Budgeting model, we encouraged students to be champions for their individual choices and explain their reasoning to their peers. This activity was one of the most successful of the entire engagement, providing us with an invaluable amount of data and fostering excitement within the students for project design and development.
After reviewing the data that we had collected over five weeks, we combined a number of their preferred site design elements into three distinctly different proposals on the same site: one focusing on green space, one on a hangout space, and one on an open performance space. Showcasing these three proposals to students allowed them to observe, ask questions, and talk amongst themselves about which designs they preferred, the reasoning behind that choice, and the elements of each that were positive or needed improvement. We asked the students to rank the three designs in order of their preference, and to give us as much feedback as they could as to what modifications they would make to each design. The relationships that we had developed with the students allowed them to be blunt, clear and direct about what they liked and did not like, which in turn produced abundant discussions and documentation in their workbooks.
In addition to the final ranking of site designs, we asked the students to reflect on their collaboration with us, specifically asking them to tell us something that they learned or enjoyed during the process. We received an overwhelming number of positive responses, with most students commenting that they learned about how the environments they interact with everyday get built and how planning helps design these environments. Many also mentioned how much they enjoyed the design process and appreciated the opportunity to be able to design something with a purpose. In general, the students were grateful for our partnership and our commitment to prioritizing their voices in the planning process, understanding the importance of our project with very little prior knowledge of planning or design.

Excerpt of student reflection from Week 5

I’ve learned a lot about urban planning and this project makes me feel like I want to pursue urban planning as my future career.

It was a very fun project, and I’m glad I’ve gotten to be part of this amazing project.
After five weeks of engagement with the eighth-grade students at Western Middle School, we were confident in the creative ideas and design elements that they had suggested. Our primary goal was to facilitate a process which would highlight the collective voice of young people in our community, and our final site design aimed to incorporate their ideas and suggestions into a feasible and flexible community space.
SITE SELECTION

During the early planning stages of our engagement, there were various possibilities for the final project type and location that met CDBG guidelines, including improving an existing park, a vacant lot, or scattered in various locations across the Russell neighborhood. While we wanted to allow the students to give us feedback and share ideas that would help us choose a final site, we also consulted existing planning documents including the Vision Russell Transformation Plan and the Action Activities from the Choice Neighborhood Initiative. We received additional input from our partners at Louisville Metro Offices of Housing and Community Development and Vacant and Public Property Administration. Through these processes, we decided vacant lot redevelopment generally aligned with the ideas from the students, addressed a stated goal in the Vision Russell Transformation Plan (B. Improve health and safety of residents), and was feasible within the time parameters of this project. While most vacant lots are privately owned and maintained, Louisville Metro Government owns a number of vacant lots in Jefferson County through the Louisville Landbank Authority. These lots were available to us at no cost and any development on them would complement the wide variety of other vacant lot projects in the Russell neighborhood, from the Action Activities of the Choice Neighborhood Initiative to the targeted sales programs of Louisville Metro Vacant & Public Property Administration (VPPA).

Louisville Metro VPPA provided us with a list of their available vacant Landbank lots, which we narrowed to a list of approximately thirty sites within the Russell neighborhood. Because Western Middle School is a key stakeholder in this project, the sites were further narrowed down to include places within a five-block radius of the school. An initial series of site observations provided insight into the strengths and weaknesses of each lot, which eliminated sites presenting environmental (e.g. a site that was significantly elevated from the street) or financial obstacles (e.g. sites that would require significant tree removal). The three vacant lots with the largest number of assets were included in our Week 2 presentation to the students.

As the project took shape around us through student voices and ideas, it was clear choosing a site close to Western Middle School could allow the school to continue to be a key stakeholder and potential user of the site once it was completed. This led us to the Landbank-owned vacant lot at the corner of West Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street, only two blocks from Western Middle School and on the northern edge of the Russell neighborhood.
While its proximity to the school is a driving factor, the site has a number of other assets that make it desirable – it is at a notable and busy intersection; it is a relatively flat site that would require no extra environmental work; and its smaller size allows us to maximize our constrained budget. This site selection is not inflexible and the ensuing site design has the ability to be transcribed to other locations, but based on our research of available properties, concurrent vacant lot investments in other parts of the neighborhood, and the results of our youth engagement, we believe that the site at the corner of West Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street is an ideal location for our proposed project.
SITE SELECTION

The selected site is on the northwest corner of the intersection of West Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street. According to the recorded deed, the property is 30 feet wide and 89 feet long, with the short side parallel to W. Market St and the long side parallel to Dr. W J Hodge St. Within the context of the Russell neighborhood, the site is located near the middle and on the northern edge, only two blocks south and east from Western Middle School.
**SITE CONDITIONS**

**Land Development Information**

The site is zoned C-2 Commercial and is in the Traditional Marketplace Corridor form district, under the zoning jurisdiction of Louisville Metro Government. It has no previous history of land use changes or relevant Louisville Metro Planning & Design cases. It is one parcel (Parcel ID: 003M00010000) with multiple addresses (127 Dr. W J Hodge Street and 2033 W Market Street). It is not located within a local overlay or historic preservation district, meaning there are no extra design limitations, but it is located within the Lower West Market National Register District. It is not located in a FEMA floodplain or in a local floodplain area, and does not contain any protected waterways. Unlike many parts of Jefferson County, this urban site is not located on Karst terrain and is not at great risk for sinkholes or geologic shifts. There is no Metropolitan Sewer District connection on site and any plumbing related construction would require connection to the combined sewer system. The site is within the urban service boundary and is located in Metro Council District 4. Overall, the selected site is small and urban, with very few land barriers to our proposed project.

Urban land is generally unclassified or unrated by NRCS due to its unlikelihood of agricultural productivity. The underlying or subclass soil type may provide indication to the benefits or restrictions of the soil. The subclass at this site is composed of loamy type soil, which ranges from 7-27% clay, 28-50% silt and less than 52% sand with minimal slope. Considering the subclass when performing analysis of usefulness of the site, there are some limitations in areas of parks, paths, and playgrounds. Due to the composition of the soil, slow water movement may cause concern for the potential development of the site for the proposed uses. Additionally, the chemical make-up of the soil poses some concern in corroding untreated steel and concrete, with a high and moderate risk respectively. Because of this risk, our site design will not utilize any untreated metal, wood, or concrete materials.

Furthermore, the soil types do not appear to limit potential building development, especially as this project is concerned. Dwellings with and without basements do not appear to be limited, which would suggest the stage and outdoor gathering structure would not be restricted. Primarily a class 8 soil with a 7 subcategory, the site has limitations regarding commercial development. According to the web soil survey, the site is not suited for commercial plant production as related to agriculture. Due to shallow and stony soils, the site would not support agricultural development. The suggested use for the site is recreational, grazing, forestland, watershed or aesthetic purposes. In regard to the proposed use, these capability classifications do not appear to narrow or constrain the scope of our project.

**Soils Information**

The proposed site at the corner of W. Market and Dr. W J Hodge is classified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as UbC. This designation is composed primarily of the Urban land and Alfic-Udarents soil types. Urban land accounts for 60% of the soil type while Alfic-udarents accounts for 40%.
The site is located at a busy intersection which, based on land use classifications, is intended to be a mixed-use residential and commercial corner. Both of the non-street-facing edges of the property are bordered by residential structures, with the property north of the selected site appearing vacant and the property to the east appearing at least partially occupied. The properties across W. Market Street to the south are occupied residential structures, and the property across Dr. W J Hodge Street to the west is a vacant commercial building. Development of this vacant lot has the potential to spark investment in the surrounding vacant properties, especially the two-story brick residential structure which shares the eastern property line with the selected site.
Part of our research of the site involved behavioral observations on different days and at different times to gather information about how people interact with the site and the spaces around it. Our two site observations aimed to help us better understand the selected site and the surrounding community. The first observation took place on Wednesday, March 27th, for an hour between 3pm and 4pm and the second observation took place on Saturday, March 30th from 3:15pm to 4:45pm. The results of the observations manifested themes in movement and human activity, with the primary takeaways noting the unusually high speed of traffic and the utilization of the area by a diverse array of individuals.

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Site Observations – March 30th, 2019

Arrival Time: 2:51pm  
Observation Start Time: 3:15pm  
Observation End Time: 4:45pm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traffic Observations</th>
<th>Northbound</th>
<th>Southbound</th>
<th>Eastbound</th>
<th>Westbound</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicular Traffic</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>(N/A)</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Miscellaneous observations include 3 TARC buses, one LMPD sedan (non-emergency), and one ladder truck (emergency). Eight of the eighteen pedestrian crossings occurred by four people.
Both West Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street are classified as Major Arterial roadways, indicating heavy automobile traffic use. At the intersection of these roads where our selected site is located, W Market Street is a two-way, east-west street with one driving lane and one bike lane in each direction and a full width of approximately 60 feet. In addition, there are also spaces for on-street parking located on both the north and south side of W. Market Street. Oriented north-south, Dr. W J Hodge street is a two-lane, one-way road with a width of approximately 35 feet. There is enough space for on-street parking but it appears that it is rarely used that way, and there are no bike lanes or “sharrow” indicators.

There is a westbound bus stop for the TARC Line 15 at the northeast corner of the intersection, directly south of our selected site on the connected sidewalk. There is an existing bench and a trashcan, but no bus shelter. TARC Line 15 ranges from Old Whipps Mill Road in the east to Shawnee Park in the west, passing through the Veteran’s Hospital and downtown Louisville. A second, northbound bus stop exists on the southeast corner of the intersection along Dr. W J Hodge Street, serving TARC Line 22. This route ranges from Bells Lane in the south to Northwestern Parkway in the north, passing through much of western Louisville. The buses provided by TARC are a major form of transit for the surrounding community, and the location of our site at the intersection of two major routes is an invaluable asset.
Our engagement with the students at Western Middle School and an understanding of the assets of our selected site led to a single recommended site design within the constraints of the $50,000 budget and CDBG eligible activities.
The engagement process with the Western students led to a series of key takeaways regarding site design and the major elements that students envisioned in their final project proposal. Because Western Middle School is an arts magnet school, the two major elements that strongly resonated were a stage or performance space and some form of art exhibition space. The students championed these ideas from day one and we wanted them to be the focal point of our design. Our limited space on the site, the existing soil, and the student’s responses to our Participatory Budgeting activities led us to a simple stage design: a semi-circle concrete structure centered along the eastern boundary of the site, parallel to Dr. W J Hodge Street, which measures 30 feet long, 15 feet wide at its widest point, and 18 inches tall. The back of the stage is parallel to the existing residential structure and its blank brick wall. When considering at this wall was viewed as an asset and, even though it is not a part of the selected property and is not owned by the Landbank, it is included as part of our site design. Many students mentioned the idea of a mural created and implemented by students at Western Middle School. Including a mural on the brick wall will create depth for the simple concrete stage and could potentially serve as a permanent backdrop. The mural included in the site design depicts Dr. W J Hodge, an important figure in Louisville's African American community, as an attempt to honor the history and legacy of the Russell neighborhood, which again was an idea with roots in the youth engagement process. As with everything in this conceptual design, the stage is designed as a flexible element that could be used for a variety of purposes, including as a performance space, and more generally for community gatherings or simply utilizing it as a place to sit and relax.

View of stage from Dr. W J Hodge Street
Students expressed strong interest in being able to display their art and other creative works at the site. Towards this end, the site design includes a flexible art exhibition space, with the potential to serve a variety of purposes. The “art wall” space at the northeast corner of the lot is composed of wooden slat material that many students were excited about because of its modern and simple aesthetics. This wall is 8 feet tall and spans the entire northern border of the property, with a 9-inch metal roof protecting the wall and a connected, continuous wooden bench that is 20 inches in height. Another element designed with flexibility in mind, the space can be used for the exhibition of art or history, or can be left blank and used simply as an area of shaded seating.
After the two primary focal points of the space were created, we contemplated ways in which we could integrate other design elements and ideas that were based in student ideas and suggestions. One of the major themes from our visioning weeks was green space and we worked to refine this concept in later weeks, determining that most students’ vision of green spaces involved an abundance of trees and organized plantings. After some collaboration with a professional landscape architect, we determined that the best location for trees would be the southwest corner of the site, placing a trio of shade trees to mitigate the negative effects of incoming wind patterns and provide the maximum amount of shade for the site. We purposefully left space in the northern portion of the site as blank green space for people to choose how to enjoy, and we framed this green space with two large raised planting beds. The raised planters were designed at a height of 18 inches and an edge width of 1.5 feet, making them flexible spaces that could be utilized for seating as well as aesthetic improvements. Instead of restricting the site with a fence, we felt that the space could be better contained with a barrier of ground cover on the southwest corner that would delineate the space between the sidewalk and the site but would still feel inviting. Green space and opportunities for art exhibition were the two main themes that came from our engagement process with the students, and we attempted to join the two together in a flexible community space which can be utilized by everyone.
The site can be entered from both W. Market Street and Dr. W J Hodge Street, and a curved pathway that mirrors the shape of the stage connects the two entry points. The stage includes an ADA compliant ramp connecting it to the sidewalk on W. Market Street, and the remainder of the site is flat to allow accessible navigation. Currently, there is an uncovered bench at the bus stop along W. Market. To help connect the site to the public realm and other reinvestment projects in the Russell neighborhood, we redesigned the bus stop and integrated it as an element of the site. The solution was a mirror of the art wall at the northern edge of the site with a metal roof covering two benches, on either side of the entrance to the site. Not only does this connect the site to the community, it also creates a signature entryway into the space which grabs people’s attention and encourages them to enter and explore. A final added touch is a recommended name of “Dr. W J Hodge Community Space” to augment the mural and the recognition of the neighborhood’s history of strong leadership and civic responsibility.
The final piece of our site design is a recommendation for the public space on Dr. W J Hodge Street. While this work is outside the scope of Community Development Block Grant funding, it is a design feature that we think would greatly benefit the site and its surrounding neighbors. One of the primary findings from the site observation was the speed of traffic on Dr. W J Hodge Street, often exceeding the speed limit and posing danger to pedestrians. Our solution to this problem is a proposed “street diet,” dedicating a portion of the street to parking and landscaped verge. The sidewalk running parallel to Dr. W J Hodge Street is 12 feet wide and the street is 35 feet wide, both of which are too large for the area and the level of traffic observed. Shrinking the sidewalk to 6 feet and dedicating the remaining 6 feet, plus a 9 foot section of the road, to green space verge would improve the walkability of the area and connect to the newly created green space in our site to the east. Implementing an additional 20 foot long and 24 foot wide green space bump out into the roadway would decrease the width of the road to approximately 20 feet of usable driving space, still more than enough room for two automobiles but less prone to speeding or reckless driving. Landscaping and small flowering trees should be included within this 20x24 foot green space to further separate the road from public pedestrian spaces, and to provide additional shading and environmental protection to the site. Between these green spaces, we recommend on-street parking, clearly designated as such by the new verge and the landscaped bump outs, encouraging people to utilize parking on the street and creating another layer between the site, pedestrians, and the busy road. All of these changes are within the public right-of-way, ineligible for CDBG funding and controlled by a variety of different public entities. However, they would vastly improve the urban walkability of the area and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment for community members and visitors of the project site.
SITE DESIGN

Recommended street re-design
Our budget identifies a wide range of possibility. Providing reasonable estimation for both CDBG eligible items and non-CDBG eligible allows the budget to be more realistic and applicable to our site design recommendation. Additionally, costs reflect both the potential for partnership funding or donations and volunteer labor. This allows for a more realistic cost comparison of the site and potential projects that can be executed.
Our project is one of many that are currently planned or underway within and around the Russell neighborhood, and our initial background research of the current investments in the community helped guide us in our design of the engagement process and our project proposal. Awareness and understanding of the other development in the neighborhood allowed us to create a complementary project with the potential for long-term success. For instance, we considered the location of existing Action Activities carried out under the Choice Neighborhood Initiative and the proposed/implemented design components of these sites. The location of this site is in an area of Russell that had not received investment through the Action Activities. In addition, our site design suggests a marquee bus stop as a main component of the design, which from the SmART Stops initiative.

Another related investment in the Russell neighborhood is the theater project led by the Louisville Central Community Center. Not yet under construction, this project hopes to create a community-based performing arts facility for the residents of Russell and other West Louisville neighborhoods. The integration of the outdoor performance and art exhibition spaces into our final site design could be a partner to this investment, be it through tangible collaboration or a broader designation of an area of community-based art. The site that the students designed naturally relates to and complements several ongoing investments in the neighborhood, which were developed with broader community-wide engagement.
As the design began to take shape, we discovered key components that would ensure successful implementation of the students' goals.
SITE DESIGN

Through developing the design, we found there were specific elements of the students’ design that were critical. Site Design recommendations identify suggestions to the specific site and design, as well as minimum requirements.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Implementation process recommendations consist of programatic and general suggestions to Louisville Metro. We found several elements that we were limited on due to our scope. Additionally, we suggest opportunities for Louisville Metro to continue to develop the project and program.

STAKEHOLDERS

In an interest to prolong the longevity and useful life of this proposed site, identification of stakeholder partnerships is critical. We have listed several community organizations and Louisville businesses that have a natural tie to this project.
SITE DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Road Diet and Street Redesign
Dr. W J Hodge Street is a relatively wide, northbound one-way street. From the behavioral observations of the site, there is a large amount of high-speed traffic on this street. All types of traffic disobey the speed limit (35 mph), increasing the risk for pedestrians and users of surrounding sites. Research has shown that in the event of a vehicle/pedestrian collision, the likelihood of severe injury or death increases exponentially when the impact speed exceeds 40 mph (Peden et al., 2004). Based on our observations and the proposed site design, we recommend street redesigns that will improve safety and create a space that is conducive to pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-vehicular users, including narrowed lanes, reduced speeds, bike lanes, on-street parking, and conversion to two-way. Currently, Dr. W J Hodge Street is 38 feet wide with no edge lines delineating travel lanes from parking areas, which effectively results in two 19-foot-wide travel lanes that encourage excessive speed. This proposal calls for reducing the travel lanes to 10 feet and adding more substantial markings (both paint and signage) and creating dedicated on-street parking. An in-depth traffic study could help determine which of these safety improvements are most feasible for the site.

Notch out Parking and Reduce Traffic Lane Width- As part of the traffic study, we recommend creating designated parking for the site. In doing so, creation of landscaped buffer areas would be necessary as well as reducing the traffic lane width to from 12 to 10 feet. Creating landscape buffer areas, notched out of the site in a consistent pattern will provide designated parking areas for site users and community members. It also connects the site to surrounding uses through the borrowed landscape concept described below. Additionally, designing the buffer areas will also protect the users experiencing the site. Should a vehicle leave the street realm, they have more terrain to overcome before accessing a majority of site users.

Borrowed Landscape Concept- Borrowed landscape refers to the idea of using a remote scene as a way of extending the perceived viewing area of the immediate space (Nute, 2003). Due to the small size of the lot, the additional greenspace created by narrowing the sidewalk along Dr. W J Hodge Street and extending the parking bump-out serves not only to increase safety but also to make the space appear larger than it actually is. Utilizing themes from the borrowed landscape concept, we suggest the parking buffers connect to surrounding uses. This will ultimately connect our site to the surrounding uses, while creating a more expansive feel to the currently narrow lot.

Reduce Sidewalk Width- As part of the updates to the parking, street, and public realm, we propose reducing the sidewalk width along Dr. W J Hodge from 12 feet to 6 feet. In doing so, we create more space for the site to expand into the borrowed landscape, creating buffers and allowing for parking. Reducing the sidewalk will make the site more approachable and create more of an experience for the users as opposed to the wide strip of blank concrete.
SITE DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

TARC Stop
We recommend renovation to the current TARC stop on the site. Current conditions contain a bench with no shelter. We propose integrating the TARC stop into the site, with a shelter space as part of the W. Market entrance. The shelter will be made of the materials utilized in our site design and contain two covered benches, framing the entrance to the site along W. Market.

Adjacent Site Use
Directly to the east of the site, there is a single-family home that appears vacant, but from site observations, it currently has some activity. While the property remains privately owned, there are existing code violations and liens, which may allow for the extension of the proposed development. If possible, we propose the west-facing wall of the current structure house a mural, showcasing the life of Dr. W J Hodge. In addition, the structure at 2031 could become a storage space and multi-purpose space for the stage as well once under possession of Metro.

Honor Prominent or Historic Individuals and Relevant Art
One important aspect the youth at Western Middle emphasized was the ability to showcase art and potentially host an exhibit of significant Russell residents. Utilizing this space to honor prominent individuals will create a connection of the modern livelihood of the site to the important history of the neighborhood. This could be implemented through the multi-purpose space under the structure along the north and west borders. The flexible design of the wood slatted wall allows multiple types of items to be showcased.

Meeting Minimum Site Design Requirements
Through our youth engagement process at Western Middle, many features stood out, however, two elements were prominently highlighted and requested by the students: the elements of a green space and an art/creative space. We recommend that regardless of the site chosen or final design, in order to honor the engagement process and desires of the student’s dedicated work on this project, at a minimum these two elements should be implemented.
Continued Engagement with Neighborhood Residents
We strongly recommend continued emphasis on community engagement as this project moves towards implementation, specifically with youth and other residents that live in the neighborhood. Because of limited time and capacity, this process did not engage directly with Russell neighborhood residents. We recommend that the proposed site designs be further workshopped with local residents through the Russell Neighborhood Association. The aspect of youth engagement during this process was extremely valuable as they highlighted suggestions as well as constraints that adults may not imagine, and we suggest additional input from youth that live nearby the proposed site. This could be accomplished by connecting with groups like the Teen Leadership Council through the Louisville Central Community Center. Encouraging additional community involvement in decision-making will intensify support and strengthen implementation of this project.

Volunteer Construction and Material Donation
In an effort to extend the use of the CDBG funding ($50,000) for this project, we propose seeking volunteer labor and material donations for some elements of the site. While there are specific components such as electrical or structural work that may need to be performed by licensed and insured individuals, volunteers could reduce the costs and increase the efficiency in site development in other areas. Projects such as tree planting and other landscaping, painting, and cleaning could easily be accomplished by volunteer efforts, as they have been for similar vacant lot improvement projects. Materials such as trees and other landscaping materials, benches, and waste receptacles are examples of items that could be donated by private or nonprofit entities. Some organizations that might serve as potential partners include Trees Louisville and Brightside, among others.

After-School Program Asset with Western
Considering the proximity of the proposed site to Western Middle School, we suggest the site be available with priority access given to Western Middle School during early afternoon hours. This will provide the school and its many different programs, such as the theatre, band, and other groups’ access to a safe, updated, and defined space off site from Western for things like practices, shows, or other uses. This could also potentially facilitate greater engagement between Western and nearby residents, as the site could be used for performances or exhibits that showcase the talents of the Western students at a space within the neighborhood.
IMPLEMENTATION

PROCESS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Student Dedication
As youth engagement was a guiding principal in the framework of this experience, we advocate that the site contain an element of dedication to the students at Western Middle School, as shown on the conceptual design. Through their dedication, enthusiasm, and creativity, the students at Western Middle School were instrumental in creating the proposed site design. We recommend the marker briefly describe the project and include the names of all eighth-graders that participated, along with the teacher, principal, and other partners.

Alternative Sites
In the event that the proposed design is unable to be implemented on the selected site located at 127 Dr. W J Hodge Street (intersection of W. Market and Dr. W J Hodge Streets) we suggest two other lots owned by the Vacant and Public Property Administration (VPPA) - 405 South 26th Street and 30th and Eddy Street. The lot at 26th street offers a corner lot with alley access, relatively level terrain, is approximately six blocks from Western Middle School, and the potential to expand the design into neighboring private parcels. The site at 30th Street was once Produce Park. This site is appealing due to its current condition as an already established community site as well as having water and electric service which means that investment to prepare the site would be relatively minimal. Its proximity (1.1 miles) to Western Middle School is undesirable though, however it is directly across the street from the site of Louisville Urban League’s proposed track and field facility.

Legacy Element
We recommend that this project serves as a pilot project, and that the Office of Housing and Community Development continue to program CDBG funds specifically for engaging youth in planning and design projects in Louisville. Engaging youth in planning while creating tangible enhancements to neighborhoods ignites the potential for community involvement and future leadership at an early age. We believe the benefits of this individual project will be compounded with the addition of each future project following this model; engaging not just one set of students but rather enabling an entire generation and making the voices of these future leaders heard in the decisions of today. Additionally, continuing this program would set an example for other cities to follow in the implementation of similar engagement practices, making Louisville a leader in the practice of inclusion and contributing to our initiative of being a compassionate city. Considering resources are available, we recommend that projects similar in scope be executed on an annual basis.
Identify Site Stakeholders
A critical implementation component of this project is the identification and ultimate commitment of community stakeholders, which is critical to the long-term success of the site. The site needs to be maintained, continually invested in, and welcome programs and uses to give it useful life for the community. An ideal stakeholder would be welcoming to and actively seeking opportunities to showcase and use the site, examples of which might include: seeking new artists to feature both in the art gallery and on the stage; hosting community events and gatherings; partnering with local organizations to make regular use of the site (e.g. host regular club weeding, updates/repairs to structures, tree and landscaping care, weekly mowing, and oversight of waste receptacles). Without a lead organization for maintenance, the site has a greater chance of falling into disrepair or neglect. Additionally, because the site is owned by the Landbank, a primary stakeholder would need to sign a lease for the property. Below, we identify potential stakeholders and recommend how their organization could buy in to the site and how the relationship between this project and their organization will be beneficial to the site, the organization, and the community as a whole.

Western Middle School - Joining us at the beginning of the project and serving as the main collaborator, Western Middle School is a clear potential site stakeholder. The proposed site design was created by and meant to serve students of Western along with the broader community. The site has the potential to become a performing space for the community, practice and flexible-use space for the school and school-sponsored organizations, ultimately providing the potential to better connect the school with its neighbors and vice versa. Additionally, the site provides the opportunity for continual maintenance, support, and programing for Western Middle School students. Western could continually foster simple maintenance education programs that could, for instance, help prepare the students for things like future home ownership. Furthermore, from a programmatic standpoint, Western could use the space to feature student artwork, present theatre shows, or showcase other creative work, again with an eye towards connecting to nearby residents, businesses, and other community members.

One West - Two of the community objectives for One West are ‘Community Restoration,’ and ‘Special Improvements in Street Transformation and Neighborhood Beautification to Attract Business’. This proposed site design would contribute two both of those goals, as we include a recommendation for a street redesign in addition to our proposed site design which contributes to the beautification of the neighborhood, honoring important historic figures and prioritizing public access to art. This project also contributes to the restoration of the community (in the benefits mentioned above as well as) by providing a space for communities to gather, host events, with prospects for economic activity (ex. food trucks, organized events/festivals/fairs, etc.).
**Simmons College** - We recommend approaching Simmons College as a stakeholder and collaborator for implementation of this site. Dr. W J Hodge served as the president of Simmons College. Simmons strives to create the change agents of tomorrow, much how Hodge made a positive impact on the lives of many through his civil rights leadership. Simmons could represent a stakeholder to collaborate with on the site implementation components.

**LG&E** - LG&E is a potential stakeholder that could prove to be an important partner in this project. Located on the southeastern edge of Russell at 820 West Broadway, LG&E is committed to serving the Louisville community through organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and the American Red Cross as well as employee volunteer activities. LG&E could contribute to the site by donating to implement upgrades to the street lighting surrounding the site. Additionally, LG&E could add landscape and path lighting to enhance the safety of the space. The company’s commitment to community service combined with their technical expertise make LG&E a valuable potential asset.

**Brown Forman** - Brown Forman is a proud lifelong resident of Louisville, in an effort to show just how much they value their home the company invests heavily and broadly in the city. Brown Forman places an emphasis on supporting communities and sustaining healthy and livable communities. Currently, Brown Forman has invested nearly $11 million in local neighborhoods by the way of healthy and sustainable living, basic living standards, and intellectual and cultural living. Brown Forman could contribute to the site by donating to implement upgrades to the sidewalk pattern as well as the stage. Both of these items provide opportunities for healthful, sustainable, and cultural outcomes, which Brown Forman values.

**TARC** - TARC is another natural stakeholder of the proposed development, which includes the improvements to the existing TARC stop on the site. TARC should be consulted prior to project implementation to understand how these proposed changes align with their existing plans for this stop. As a stakeholder, TARC would be responsible for maintenance of the shelter, but additionally may utilize the site to provide various trainings or community service activities. TARC strives to support the economic, social, and environmental well-being of Louisville, investing in the community will provide greater access to residents.
Humana Foundation- Humana is an organization rooted in Louisville and focused on every aspect of health. Specifically, the Humana Foundation aims to create communities that sustain health outcomes through asset and financial security, food security, and social connections. Our site embodies the concept of social connections, and has the flexibility to provide outlets to offer food security (e.g., raised beds could support food production). The site could offer space for farmers markets, gardening educational sessions, a public art showcases, and performances of all artistic varieties. The site has the potential to create countless opportunities for the neighborhood and improve the overall health of the community. Potential investments Humana could make on the site include donations to implement the street redesign, specifically the verge so it may support traveling farmers markets as well as purchasing the raised bed planter/bench combinations and materials for the exhibition space. Humana may also invest in the development by providing volunteers during construction.

University of Louisville Department of Theatre Arts- University of Louisville Department of Theatre Arts is very involved with engaging the community with art and storytelling. This site could create a dialogue between the students at Western and the Russell community. Collaborating on long term programing, to invest in the narrative and stories near and in the West End of Louisville. From bringing their touring Repertory company to perform at the site. As well as developing plays and performance pieces sharing the full spectrum of the life and times of the area. Faculty, Staff and students in Theatre Arts could utilize tools in the theatre such as props, puppets, and other devises to explore social justice initiatives with students at Western Middle as a means of bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to create art with a mission.
Our engagement process with youth at Western Middle School allowed us to connect with a commonly overlooked demographic in urban planning processes to create a project that will hopefully become a long-term asset to the community. However, because of the time constraints of the project, there were limitations to what we could accomplish. We had approximately four months to complete this project from start to finish, which limited our engagement to only six weeks with youth in the classroom. While we learned a lot and heard many different perspectives, our engagement was confined to the eighth-grade students at Western Middle School and did not involve the input of other students or youth in the community. In addition, while all of the students at Western Middle School go to school in West Louisville, we estimate that only 30% actually reside in the surrounding communities. As the project moves toward implementation, we recommend that Louisville Metro Government make an effort to engage with Russell community members, including young people, through the Russell Neighborhood Association and other neighborhood stakeholder groups. The large scope and limited time frame of the project prevented us from engaging directly with other residents of the community, but efforts should be made to engage all those that will be affected by this investment in order to ensure its long-term success.
The experiences of youth are often different from those making the decisions for the community. Overall, this engagement process provides evidence that youth deserve more opportunities to participate in planning and other community engagement processes. They were extremely connected to the social, economic, and sustainable realities of their neighborhoods, and their perspectives and suggestions were diverse, selfless, and long-ranging. We were privileged to have the opportunity to partner with these students and hoped that we would be able to develop a project from their ideas, but the end result was more successful than we could have imagined. Every aspect of the final site design proposal was informed by student ideas and critiques, from the major components of the stage and green space to the detailed aesthetics of the exhibition wall. Our role as urban planners is to create a built environment that is designed for the community and by the community, facilitating citizens’ opportunity for input and translating that input into reality. As our engagement with Western Middle School students has shown, young people must be included in this process to offer a different set of perspectives and to encourage long-term success.
REFERENCES


Participatory Budgeting Project. (ND). What is PB?. Retrieved from https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/


For additional information on the project, please visit the Story Map available here: