

**Final Report of the 2015**

# **From Dialogue to Action: Community & City Relations**

**A project funded by the City of Saint Paul's**

**Innovation Fund**

**and presented to Mayor Christopher Coleman,**

**the Saint Paul City Council,**

**and the participating City Departments**

**on behalf of the Saint Paul District Councils**

**Submitted by the District 1 Community Council**

**Chia Lor, project coordinator and**

**Betsy Leach, project manager**

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## **Executive Summary**

The City's Innovation Fund supported the work of its district councils as they conducted 3 series of community-led dialogues with City departments. The work was coordinated and managed by the District 1 Community Council with guidance from 5 additional district councils, and with participation by the Saint Paul Police, Parks, and Planning departments. The purpose of these dialogues was to address the inequitable racial dynamics that too often characterize residents' interactions with the City. Along with monthly community planning meetings throughout the year, ten 2-hour dialogues and one 6-hour workshop were held, with about 170 people participating. The result of these dialogues was a series of action steps for each of the three departments involved. The action steps consist of long-term recommendations to the Mayor's Office for improvements in the three departments, as well as steps for community members to take through their district councils. A shorter list of steps was selected at a subsequent Action Forum for immediate action by community members and departments. These steps are: 1) improve communication between Police and the community via changes to what is communicated, tone, and frequency; 2) reinvigorate the booster club concept at local parks, modifying it for each locality and supporting local efforts with recreation volunteer coordinators; and 3) improve communication of and demographic representativeness for both district-specific and city-wide planning efforts. A short history of district council work leading to this project is presented along with detailed summaries of the results, and a critique of the project. Finally, a list of recommendations for future Innovation Fund projects is provided.

The vision that these groups of residents outlined is summarized here:

Saint Paul is a city where everybody has equitable access to services, economic opportunities, and a healthy life, and is engaged in creating and maintaining this access through an open process. We live in a positive, safe, non-violent and productive city that is intercultural, not just diverse; that is without barriers limiting any group; that is composed of do-ers who see themselves as owners of the city and who work in a collaborative fashion; that cares for all its children; and that demonstrates strong relationships of mutual aid.

## Introduction

The *Dialogue to Action* project has been phase 2 of an on-going effort by Saint Paul's district councils to focus on assuring that our organizations have meaningful involvement by traditionally underrepresented portions of our community. It was funded by Saint Paul's Innovation Fund and managed by the District 1 Community Council, overseen by a steering committee of representatives from District 1, District 2, West Side Community Organization, Daytons Bluff Community Council, Payne-Phalen District 5 Planning Council, and the Summit-University Council. The project was an outgrowth of the neighborhood *Cross-Cultural Dialogue Project* that was funded by the Saint Paul Foundation in 2013-2014, and which included districts 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8. In total, eleven district councils participated in the *Dialogue to Action* project's phase 2 activities.

For over 5 years, Saint Paul's district councils, with assistance from and facilitated by the District Council Coordinator (DCC), have been meeting to discuss best practices in inclusive engagement. This earlier work resulted in several training sessions for council staff, board, and community members, coordinated by the DCC and highlighting efforts of individual councils. In 2012, however, the councils decided that more focused efforts were needed to expand active participation in all aspects of council work by communities of color.

A varying group of council staff worked with the DCC to submit a proposal to the Saint Paul Foundation to create dialogue groups that would provide safe spaces for open, honest discussion of race and racial dynamics among cross-cultural groups. After some fits, starts and restarts, the councils contracted with Everyday Democracy to train dialogue facilitators so that a series of dialogue sessions could be held at the neighborhood level. The focus of these sessions was to build trust among neighbors from varied backgrounds in order to come to agreement about joint actions they would take to address racism in our City and in our organizations. Five district councils were involved during the fall of 2014 in this phase 1.

The neighborhood action steps from these dialogues were brought to a city-wide Action Forum in November 2014 and from the list, several were chosen to carry forward at a city level. Among those action steps, the participants' highest priority was placed on conducting dialogues among community members and city departments, particularly among youth of color and Saint Paul Police.

This grass-roots process of selection was the basis for the *Dialogue to Action* Innovation Fund proposal. The District 1 Community Council began in late 2014 to reach out to the Police Department and to the Mayor's Office about the proposal on behalf of the previous district council partners. At an Action Planning Forum in January 2015, initial working groups were established for moving this action step forward. (Additional working groups were established for the other selected city-wide action steps, including one to increase voting participation by communities of color, one to establish dialogues between generations, and one to advocate for use of the dialogue process among other district councils. Separate funding was sought for these actions.)

From late February through September 2015, a varied group of community members from across the city, and city staffers met to select which departments, in addition to the Police, would be the focus of dialogues. Over 70 people participated in this planning. Special recognition should go to the Saint Paul Police Department, and the Black, Asian and Hispanic Officers' organizations for their support of and dedication to this planning effort. The two additional departments chosen for focus in 2015 were Parks and Recreation, and Planning and Economic Development. A total of about 170 people participated directly in planning or the dialogues themselves, with several people participating in both. Outreach efforts involved many more people. (These recruitment efforts will be discussed later in this report.)

The Police and Parks dialogues were facilitated by community members, including youth of color. These facilitators were trained by District 1 staff using a modification of the curriculum created by Everyday Democracy. A total of 8 facilitators were trained, although one dropped from the program prior to start of the dialogues because of work obligations. Of these eight, 3 were African American, 4 were African immigrants, and one was white. Four were youth. In addition, District 1 staff assisted with documentation of dialogue sessions and they, along with Dayton's Bluff staff, stepped in to cover for facilitators when they were unable to attend sessions. Of these staff members, one was Hmong, one was African American and one was white. Participants in the dialogues were about 50% people of color.

Each of these sets of dialogues consisted of five 2-hour sessions on consecutive Mondays between September 14, 2015 and November 16, 2015. The Police dialogues took place at the Wellstone Center on the West Side. The Parks dialogues took place at Arlington Community Center on the East Side.

The Planning and Economic Development (PED) workshop took a different format than the Police and Parks sessions. This workshop was a 6 hour session on October 14, held at the Arlington Community Center. The workshop was planned by two PED staff members and a committee of district council staff, and was based on the Everyday Democracy curriculum, but modified to accommodate a large-group format and a shorter time frame. The session was co-facilitated by PED and district council staff. The planning group used this modified format and curriculum because of the distinct relationship between PED and the district councils, and to accommodate the large numbers of PED staff interested in participating.

The objective of all three of these departmental/community mini-projects was to examine the racial dynamics in our interactions and to specify practical actions we can take to improve those dynamics and create a more equitable Saint Paul.

At an Action Forum held January 23 at the Wellstone Center, the following short-term action steps were prioritized to carry forward in 2016:

- 1) Parks and Rec - Reinvigorate/re-jazz booster clubs – this may involve renaming along a “Friends of XXX Rec Center” model (joint community and department action); complete the affiliated groups manual (a listing of all the groups that are associated with recreation services – an internal departmental action); re-organize rec staff to have a volunteer coordinator at each center (an internal departmental action); contact current booster clubs to see how they can be

reinvigorated and supported, but have a goal of adding 1 new club per council ward (joint community and department action).

2) Police - Focus on improving communication so that there is mutual education and a building of trust between police and community (joint community and department action – details in the summary to follow). Community is largely unaware of what the department is doing now, and the department is not informed of community events that they could be participating in.

3) PED - focus on communication using multiple modes including city website and Early Notification System with the city so that neighbors understand what is happening in their own district councils but also city-wide (joint community and department action); look at ways to assure representation on district council boards of the diverse communities they serve (district council action with support from the department).

All action steps were evaluated using the **IDEAS** assessment tool. Does the action step address the **Issue**? Is the action step **Do-able** or practical? Will the action step be **Effective** given the issue? Do we have or can we get the **Assets** to take the action step? Does the action step fit the **Situation** or context we are operating in? This assessment tool is intended to assure that unrealistic expectations are not set as we take on the hard work of moving forward with our goals.

In addition to the action steps listed above, the District 1 Community Council has committed to continuing with the Police/Youth dialogues on a quarterly basis through 2016. To date, our affiliated partner, the Young Mentors Group, has held one additional dialogue session with the predominantly African American youth of their group and a Saint Paul police officer, an officer who had not previously participated in the dialogues. This session was facilitated by one of the youth facilitators trained through the *Dialogue to Action* project.

We also note here that three of our trained facilitators acted as facilitators for the City and County's dialogue sessions resulting from the Audit of the Saint Paul Police Civilian Review Board by the Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking. Included were 2 youth facilitators.

## **Police/Youth Dialogue Summary and Complete List of Action Steps**

There were about 45 people involved in these dialogues between September 14 and October 12, 2015. Although most participants were from East Side district councils, community members from at least 5 district councils were included. Recruitment efforts included outreach to all district councils, to faith organizations throughout the city, at recreation centers and libraries, and at youth and ethnic-based organizations.

At the final dialogue session for Police and Youth, participants discussed various types of actions that could be taken at the individual level and at the systemic or community level. (Please note that the final dialogue took place prior to the shooting in Minneapolis of Jamar Clark...) The objective was to build solid relationships between the community and police so that everyone

could work better (and safely) together as we create a safe and healthy community. The following suggestions were brought up:

Continue with these types of dialogues where police and youth meet to get to know each other and learn about each other's experiences and perspectives.

Police should get out of their cars more and simply address youth on a friendly, positive basis.

The Police Athletic League should continue and expand.

There should be opportunities for youth to learn about the law enforcement system, and the consequences of a variety of behaviors.

There must be more community involvement in positive police activities (Safe Summer Nights bbqs, bike riding, fishing opportunities, chances for ride-alongs), but also for police involvement in community activities (police should be informed of community gatherings so they can participate as fellow community members – be present at the gatherings in a social capacity even when on duty).

Data about disparities (or not...) in treatment of individuals based on race should be made available to the public regularly (we understand that the NAACP tracks this data – it should be widely available).

People need to understand that if they feel mistreated during a stop, they should comply, ask for the officer's card and then report the treatment later to his/her supervisor (if the officer does not have cards, this should be reported because it is mandatory that they provide id when asked). (Police officers offered to hold workshops in "how to interact with police during stops.")

Police should be invited to youth groups across the city, as well as other community meetings.

Police and community organizations should be continually looking for opportunities to collaborate.

From the topics listed above, the following action steps for individuals were listed:

- 1) Police inform community members about what they are doing in one-on-one conversations
- 2) Live what you say.
- 3) Extend invitations door-to-door to events with police
- 4) Use flyers and newsletters to keep people informed.
- 5) Stay positive – look for the good that is happening and keep an open mind when bad things happen.
- 6) Police should operate on the assumption that "you will see me again" – become a part of the community; the community will remember that the (positive) presence will continue.
- 7) Listen to people's stories to support them in their experiences.

- 8) Smile at people when you meet them.
- 9) Verbalize your experience when you witness something positive (in social media, in groups).
- 10) Police should talk about the positive things they are doing – push it out, don't expect that the community will know what is happening.
- 11) Community members should commit to researching issues themselves and evaluate the sources of information presented.
- 12) Community members should get to know their neighbors.
- 13) Community members and organizations should invite police to all community meetings.
- 14) Everyone should work on better communication.
- 15) Hold community organizations accountable for what they do, what they say and how they act – set high expectations.
- 16) Keep conversations and activities focused on diversity and inclusion.

At a more systemic level, the following goals were outlined by participants;

- 1) Build trust and relationships
- 2) Hold “both sides” accountable
- 3) Change perceptions
- 4) Police should take criticism, learn from it and not get mad or take it personally
- 5) People need opportunities to live through others' experiences
- 6) Increased frequency, amount and kind of communication
- 7) Youth mentorships should be established
- 8) Communities should be empowered to care for themselves.

From these the selected action steps identified for future work were (in priority order – by vote):

- 1) Expand the PAL (Police Athletic League) program
- 1) Increase marketing/communication of police perspectives and activities
- 2) Expand the Police Explorer program for 15-20 year olds
- 3) Provide scenario training/experiences for community members (what it is like to be in policing situations)
- 4) Provide ride-along opportunities for more community members
- 5) District 1 Community Council will continue to hold police/youth conversations through the coming year

### **Commentary on these action steps**

The participants were clearly trying to find ways to address the primary issues of distrust, lack of communication, and the stress inherent in police/community interactions that they had control over. Because most of the officers involved were street-level cops or had personal investment in certain existing programs, they had difficulty thinking beyond their own experiences. As a result, none of the action steps selected for future work really address

**systemic issues** with police and community relations. However, our earlier discussions outlined some potential possibilities, as does an examination of recent events in light of our earlier discussions. The two primary issues that are not addressed by these steps are police system/law enforcement communication, and how mental health issues are dealt with.

Relating to communication, recent events have demonstrated how poorly police departments (and city offices generally) communicate with the community when bad things happen. Lack of communication around incidents is clearly interpreted as withholding information, an opportunity for manipulation of evidence, and a cover-up of police “misconduct” – there is a fundamental lack of trust. Statements by Police unions seem to belie the City statements that investigations will be jeopardized with release of information. Potential action steps to address this are these:

- 1) Prior to any incident, police and prosecutors should provide on-going public education about how investigations work, the role of witnesses and how their reliability is assessed, the pros and cons of body and squad cams, and how investigations integrate with prosecution (and defense).
- 2) Policies and procedures around privacy and what can be conveyed as investigations proceed need to be evaluated in terms of what ACTUALLY interferes with or jeopardizes investigations. Saint Paul’s policies seem to be unusually strict.
- 3) Data around potential racial disparities in stops, arrests, and bringing charges should be openly presented by the Police Department so that the community can see that the Department is not afraid to confront potential systemic problems.
- 4) Statements by Police union representatives around specific incidents should be restricted to the greatest degree possible. They have a strong tendency to be inflammatory and incredibly unhelpful from a community perspective. The role of the union should be to support the involved officers behind the scenes. These incidents should never be taken as opportunities to make political statements.
- 5) Statements by city officials should be as neutral as possible. Policies should be in place to assure that police involved in incidents get a fair and unbiased investigation, but there should be no appearance that “innocent until proven guilty” is equated with “what happened is normal procedure” until the latter is shown to be true. City officials represent the interest of the city, not the interests of the police department – they need to publicly acknowledge that mistakes can be made, procedures can be shown to be inadequate or wrong – we need an atmosphere in city government and within the police department that focuses on self-critique and “continual improvement”.
- 6) There needs to be clear and on-going communication about how disciplinary action against officers takes place – what types of actions result in what kinds of discipline? When are criminal charges justified against officers? Who is in charge of these disciplinary investigations and determinations?



- 7) There needs to be an independent Community Review Board of Police that is identifiable to community members, understood by community members, and accessible to community members. The goal of this Board should be assuring that we have the best Police Department in the country.
- 8) On a more positive note, the Police Department needs to take every opportunity available to promote its community liaison work and to talk about the good work that individual officers and groups of officers are doing. This would also be an opportunity for the Police Union to have a positive impact on the image of its members and itself.

Relating to mental health issues, the following actions should be considered:

- 1) Officers should work in tandem with trained mental health professionals on ALL calls, including those where the person or the community is thought to be in danger. Dispatchers should have procedures in place to assess involving county mental health professionals. Community members need to be educated in when to call county mental health crisis lines (and about their existence) instead of relying on police to deal with family incidents. Ways in which these professionals can help de-escalate situations need to be found that keep everyone safe, including the mentally ill individual. Collaboration between law enforcement and mental health professionals could help lower the likelihood of a negative outcome when police respond to calls, given the high correlation between alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, and criminal activity.
- 2) Officers should be continually monitored for stress-related mental health issues, and assisted to seek help without stigma.

## **Parks/Community Dialogue Summary and Complete List of Action Steps**

There were about 45 people total who participated in these dialogues between October 19 and November 16, 2015. Although most community attendees were from East Side district councils, there were representatives from seven district councils total. Parks staff represented the entire city system. Recruitment efforts included the whole city via district councils and other geographically based organizations, media, personal outreach, and the Parks system.

**OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE** – We live in a positive, safe, non-violent and productive city that is intercultural, not just diverse; that is without barriers limiting any group; that is composed of do-ers who see themselves as owners of the city and who work in a collaborative fashion; that cares for all its children; and that demonstrates strong relationships of mutual aid. The Parks and Recreation system in our city has high levels of integrity and provides opportunities for new experiences to all of us; communicates both formally and informally with community members; partners with community members in decision-making and program development; and provides safe and inviting places and spaces that support the social health and well-being of us all.

**THE SUMMARY** – Throughout the dialogues, key ground rules were emphasized to guarantee openness, confidentiality, and trust-building. Striking in the early dialogues were the similarities of responses among Parks staff and community members around the Parks’ issues we face as a city. By the final session, there was unanimity in our recommendations for action. The nature of the discussion and the resulting action steps are presented below.

Feelings expressed by participants

**Parks Staff**

**Community members**

**Pride** in work and accomplishments

**Support** of local parks staff reflective of cmty

**Desire** for more “qualified staff”

**Desire** for stability and relationships with local staff, for high quality facilities in each neighborhood

**Frustration** with a) lack of cmty knowledge about what is available and being done, b) continued defunding of department, c) lack of flexibility and nimbleness in response to neighborhood changes/needs, d) poorly maintained facilities, e) family involvement, f) lack of participation by teens in what is already offered

**Frustration** with a) sense of disparate allocation of resources, b) disparate rates of closures, c) safety concerns and how dealt with, c) selective focus on certain group needs (kids vs adults, wealthy vs poor), d) lack of access (hours open, transportation, cost), e) poorly maintained facilities, f) community and family involvement, g) lack of opportunities for teens

**How Parks are used** – The discussion outlined a huge range of roles that the park system plays in the city’s life. The rec centers often act or see themselves in the role as second homes for youth, and staff as mentors for youth. They are community centers with the ability to connect people to other resources, act as civic centers (meetings and voting), and places where physical activity and intellectual opportunities can be available and combined. They can be a refuge, a place to have a first job, a place for interest groups to meet “like-minded” people (building a sense of community), and an affordable place for individuals to socialize (first date sites, zoo access to all, etc.). Parks serve as environmental refuges, showcases of natural resources, and provide other environmental benefits.

**Issues that prevent Parks reaching full potential** – We focused on two primary issues that prevent reaching Parks’ potential: 1) lack of effective communication of what is already available locally and city-wide, and 2) lack of resources.

Regarding the first of these issues, there seems to be a relationship between the size and complexity of Parks bureaucracy and the ability to effectively communicate what Parks does in local neighborhoods and city-wide. There seems to be over-reliance on old modes of communication about what is available, but there also seems to be reluctance on the part of community members to seek out information. This would seem to imply that we need to work jointly to create a better communication system within Parks and between Parks and community members. Because we identified that different communities (neighborhoods and/or ethnic groups) use Parks in different ways and for different reasons, a one-size-fits-all approach to communication is likely to leave selective groups out of the information loop. Lack of communication also leads to conflict over decision-making. The lack of effective communication makes the lack of resources an even greater problem than the resource issue is on its own.

Regarding lack of resources, we identified several different areas where this has negative impact on Parks use by all residents. We identified that Parks bureaucracy and decision-making lacks the flexibility to respond quickly to changes in neighborhood needs, so that available resources are not allocated where actually needed. The decision to consolidate resources in fewer, larger centers means that transportation needs prevent people from participating, and leads to disengagement from and dissatisfaction with Parks. Consolidation also means heavier programming at these centers and less flexibility for “free play,” as well as loss of a sense of neighborhood identity with local centers.

Fewer open hours, particularly on weekends, means that oversight of activities at parks is lacking for long periods of time, leading to a sense of them being places that are unsafe. Money for facility upkeep seems to be focused on the larger, newer, centralized centers, also leading to a sense of local facilities as unsafe and unwelcoming.

Lack of a system to identify and use volunteers to bring in a variety of activities to rec centers limits effective use of Parks staffing to diversify programming, and to combine physical and intellectual activities. This is also connected to the issue of how communication happens. It is also connected to the issue of lack of stability in staffing at local centers. We identified relationship-building as essential to the vitality of local rec centers. Volunteers are less likely to come forward if they do not know or cannot sustain a relationship with local staff.

When parks resources are diverted to deal with safety, they are not available to programming and positive outreach and communication. When parks resources are decreased or limited, focus is on preventing further loss rather than on taking risks to innovate around how things are done or what is offered. When resources are decreased or limited, taking staff time to build relationships is not prioritized.

When the focus is on partnering with other organizations, is less time and are fewer resources focused on partnering with the community? What is the most effective way to not simply use existing resources but to increase available resources? How does the approach used by Parks to

deal with resource availability feed into pitting neighborhoods against each other as those neighborhoods try to state their local needs?

**Prioritized Action Steps** – Small groups identified a variety of potential action steps. These were presented to and discussed among the large group, and consolidated by themes, assessed for feasibility and then voted on. The action steps, their total vote counts, and final discussion points for each are presented here.

- 1) Stabilize staff and support transitions among staff for both the community and staff (18) – This step was seen to require an internal policy change rather than an increase in budget. Specific suggestions toward implementation included getting the tests and their results out for new positions earlier/faster; allowing staff to determine where his/her own career path lies; survey previously transferred employees about their experience (assure anonymity); define what IS policy and what IS procedure and who is responsible; address issues of grief and loss within communities around staffing changes; understand the situational context at each rec center. The objective is to support building relationships among community members and their local park and recreation staff. This step recognizes that parks staff often serve as important adult mentors and role models for our youth.
- 2) A) THERE WAS A 3-WAY TIE FOR 2<sup>nd</sup> PLACE VOTES (each with 16 votes) – Add a \$0.50 fee to every professional and semi-pro sports ticket to support local recreation services – There was a recognition of the long-term and continuing loss of resources designated for Parks and Recreation. This step was an attempt to address the decline through a relevant user fee. This fee could be either local or state-wide. We suggest that current discussions with Major League Soccer play a role in finding additional resources for recreation services. This step would require support from legislators, city council members, and tax payers. We need to research the amount that would actually be generated. There would need to be some guidelines for how the revenue would be used (e.g., restrict use to non-capital projects, define relation to staffing, etc.). We need to examine what works and what doesn't work currently with the process for distributing charitable gambling revenue.  
  
B) Institute an independent (elected) Park Board (that includes a youth presence) – This step would allow the board to focus on raising funds specifically for Parks without it being a competitive process with other city departments (modeled after Friends of SPPL and/or Mpls Parks Board). This step might require change of the City Charter and we are unsure whether a change in state law would be required. We wondered if an intermediate step might exist such as creating a broad-based advisory group and one that actually addresses the community engagement line on the current Parks Commission agenda. We felt it was particularly important that the users of parks, including youth, people of color, and low-income users, be included in this Board. The objective of this step was to assure funding and prioritization of parks activities with meaningful input and understanding by those who actually use the parks.

C) Redefine, reconfigure and re-invigorate local booster clubs – This step recognizes that, in certain areas, booster clubs have been fundamental in creating parks-community relationships, a sense of identity for local centers, and community-appropriate programming. Although sports-focused booster clubs have been important in developing targeted financial resources, the older model does not speak to the broader community and these clubs' potential use and support of local recreation centers. This step addresses our concerns about both relationships and programming (volunteer support) at our recreation centers. There is a need to provide training and support for potential community leaders, managing volunteers, and collaborative work in order to have this action succeed. Defining these local “clubs” as a leadership building program within Parks would help identify potential funding sources for developing the new model.

5) Provide culturally/ethnically relevant programming (15 votes) – This step recognizes the diversity that defines us, but within the segregated nature of our city (the latter which we do not support). It focuses on the need for our recreation centers to be aware of, and to incorporate into their work, the situational context of these facilities. We need to identify community assets in each neighborhood for local centers. We suggest that Parks develop intentional partnerships with culturally specific groups already working in the city to provide varied programming. We suggest that Parks staff be trained to basic cultural competency. We need to identify community experts locally and support them as volunteers in our centers. We also need to identify cross-cultural interests to foster communication and interaction among our ethnic communities. We need to identify places where activities can take place in addition to recreation centers, but coordinate those activities through Parks and collaborate in communicating about all these activities with other organizations. This step focuses on guaranteeing that all people, regardless of background, age, gender or residence, has access to high-quality recreation services.

6) Keep local/small recreation centers open (12) – This step is seen to be fundamental to livability and we suggest that Parks and the City use standards of measuring social health and well-being in all its decision-making, as well as evaluating the social impact on low-income communities and communities of color. We suggest that a city ordinance be passed that local centers (similar to libraries) will be kept open and, as resources increase, those that have been closed be re-opened. This ordinance should signal a clear intention to support, and to acknowledge, the importance of local centers to the health and well-being of all residents. We should use circulators to provide access to underserved portions of our city in order to highlight what is available. Finally, there should be early, thorough, and participatory communication with respect to decision-making around local centers. This step focuses on relationship building and guaranteeing that all people, regardless of background, age, gender, or residence, has access to recreation services.

**Questions remaining – (Parking lot questions not incorporated in summary)**

- 1) How do the County and the City work together to maximize distribution of resources where they are needed?
- 2) How does Parks work with other city departments, particularly SP Police, to meet youth needs?
- 3) How will Parks Equity Plan address these issues and what role does the community play in building that plan?
- 4) How do other Parks departments (e.g., Forestry) address community involvement and meet needs?

(NOTE: Additional information about the reasoning used in this dialogue is provided in the Addendum at the conclusion of this report.)

## **Planning and Economic Development (PED)/Community Dialogue Summary and Total List of Action Steps**

**Introduction** – There were about 45 people total who participated in the PED and district council dialogue on October 14, 2015.

This dialogue was different than the other two in this project in that this discussion occurred among staff members of both PED and the district councils, along with some community members who previously have been involved in land use and zoning issues in their neighborhoods. Another difference was the timeframe for the dialogue: a one-day event rather than a series of five meetings over five weeks. The focus, however, was similar: to address the racial inequities in involvement and outcomes that, in this case, characterize land use and zoning decision-making.

Organizers presented the participants with a framework for understanding the distribution of cultural groups, ages and income levels across the city. The organizers also tried to establish a level of empathy among the participants for their fellow residents who are unfamiliar with city processes and land use issues. The bulk of the gathering involved discussion around our collective vision for an equitable Saint Paul and how we can realize that vision over time. The goal, as in the other dialogues, was to identify action steps we can take in the near term towards that vision.

**Action Themes** – Participants were invited to write on post-it notes what an equitable, livable Saint Paul looks like. These notes were grouped into several themes that were voted on for further refinement. In order of their support by participants they were:

- 1) Economic Development
- 2) Diverse representation in district councils and PED
- 3) Building awareness of district councils and PED

#### 4) Creative engagement strategies

Participants were then divided into groups around these themes to identify action ideas and strategies. Because of time limitations and decreasing numbers of participants over the course of the day, the action steps around these themes were not completely developed and were not evaluated using the assessment tool – **IDEAS** – do they address the key **I**ssues? Are they **D**o-able or practical? Will they be **E**ffective in creating the desired change? Are the **A**ssets or resources available to follow through? Does the action make sense for the **S**ituation in Saint Paul? They also were not evaluated in terms of what is already being done or planned.

We note that, for example, PED is in the process of finalizing an official document of its Economic Development Strategy that will have a major focus on equity. In addition, there is an easy-to-use, Equitable Development Scorecard that has been created by a diverse coalition of organizations. It is currently available for assessing the impact of transportation and land use projects on historically marginalized populations. Finally, there is also a vast array of creative engagement strategies currently being used by organizations, including by staff of PED, upon which we can draw and to which we can add.

Given this situation of incomplete, on-site analysis of the October 14<sup>th</sup> work, we returned to the extensive list of participant input from initial stages of this dialogue regarding our visions for an equitable Saint Paul. From this list, we have derived the following framework to help guide our future work. We have done this in large part because of the greater number of participants from this stage of the discussion and the increased diversity of opinion and insight that was represented by the input.

#### **Our Vision for Saint Paul**

Saint Paul is a city where everybody has equitable access to services, economic opportunities, and a healthy life, and is engaged in creating and maintaining this access through an open process.

#### **Issues to Address in Reaching this Vision**

- 1) representative engagement
- 2) understanding (and defining) the land use and zoning processes
- 3) assuring equitable outcomes

For each of these issues, a goal emerged from participant input. Suggested strategies for each goal also emerged.

- 1) Authentic engagement of all affected residents will take place. Authentic engagement requires that we define different scales of effect, and that engagement take place for both unifying and divisive issues. Authentic engagement requires:

- a) shared responsibility between the city and district councils for engagement
  - b) defining constraints and opportunities within the decision-making process
  - c) being honest about whether a decision has already been made
  - d) going to where people are – recognizing that different groups may be in different places
  - e) timely involvement – there are different stages in the process with multiple opportunities for engagement
  - f) culturally appropriate engagement – finding partners to assist who see the significance of what is happening/going to happen
  - g) translating what is happening/going to happen so that it is relevant to people’s lives/experience
  - h) multiple types of engagement – one size does not fit all
  - i) exhibiting reciprocity – recognize the importance of food and providing other benefits for participation – being welcoming
  - j) defining how or whether or what parts of the old methods of engagement still apply – ultimate deadlines for notification should not define the timeline for engagement; is the final presentation of input to decision makers the only thing that needs to be retained?
  - k) civility in discussion/presentation – proper facilitation of discussions is paramount.
- 2) Everyone will understand the process. Education is a three-way street – residents need to understand the policies, procedures and limitations, the City needs to understand cultural relevancies and impacts, and developers need to understand how they benefit from engaging with residents. We all need to define what is both necessary and sufficient to have legally binding and effective decisions – everything else should be flexible. Open up the process as much as possible in terms of timelines. Education will need to:
- a) be a shared responsibility of the city and the district councils
  - b) provide understanding of both the general process and the specific case/process (“life-long” learning...) – “You are here...” maps
  - c) provide context for giving input and making decisions
  - d) take multiple forms – find partners
  - e) consider the scale in time and impact of specific projects
  - f) translate to people’s lives
  - g) be authentic – don’t oversell what is known and what is possible
  - h) be tied to engagement.
- 3) Outcomes will address historic inequities and promote on-going equity. We need to understand the historic and cultural context of projects as well as be thinking of their future impacts. In order to assess the outcomes, we need to:
- a) use data – both historic, current, and going forward
  - b) provide context
  - c) employ equitable development assessment tools
  - d) report back to the community about impacts.



**Next Steps** – We need to explore how these three goals and their strategies are interwoven. We need to outline what action steps can be taken by individuals, by organizations (including city departments), and by the community at large. For example, developing a list of engagement tools that communities/organizations can afford to use, identifying and cultivating relationships with partner organizations in Saint Paul’s ethnic communities, using the Equitable Development Scorecard for district council land use decisions, discussing with and listening to neighbors about the significance (or lack of relevance) of specific projects, exploring how this work relates to the city’s Economic Strategy document...

## **Critique of Project including Recruitment Efforts**

We entered this project recognizing that, in order to be successful and effective in including communities within our City who are not always a part of district council work, we had to have 3 things present in our work:

- 1) a dedicated staff member overseeing the project who was committed to equity work;
- 2) support by community members, City department management and district councils in the planning and recruitment; and
- 3) an understanding of how collaborative partnerships worked.

In reviewing the processes followed, comments by participants throughout the project, and the outcomes, we can report some successes, but want to focus here on a critique of problems and limitations we encountered.

First the successes – We were fortunate to have a project coordinator – Chia Lor – deeply committed to the work. In addition, the District 1 staff involved, especially after August, worked well together and understood our common focus and goals, demonstrating flexibility in the face of constant change (Chia, Clara Ware and Betsy Leach). The discussions in the fall were robust, honest, open, and heart-felt, and the action steps that came from these discussions are important and demand implementation. Our partnerships with the Police, Parks and PED staff involved in both the planning and the dialogues themselves were incredibly solid and supportive. Support from the Mayor’s Office was critical at certain points in the project. We want to recognize in particular Commanders Lozoya, Hallstrom and Bandemer from SPPD, Deputy Director Kathy Korum from SPP&R, and Planners Jake Reilly and Bill Dermody from SPPED. In addition, from the Mayor’s Office, Jane Eastwood and Pa Vang Goldbeck (prior to their departures) and Nancy Homans each provided critical support to both the project coordinator and manager, and in navigating relations with City departments (and district councils!). The community facilitators brought energy, experience, and a willingness to confront each other, the management of the project, and participants.

As far as what was less successful, the list is quite long.

- 1) Despite dedicated staff, the half-time position was clearly insufficient for the work. We calculate that the equivalent of 2 FTEs was actually used through the course of the year to carry out this project. This means that 1.5FTEs was supported by the District 1 Community Council out of its general budget. Needless to say, this meant that many things in our regular daily work went uncompleted.
- 2) We confronted several problems with recruitment efforts.
  - a) Due to staffing difficulties prior to September, recruitment efforts were not started early enough to ensure adequate coverage across the City. In fact, there were concerted efforts from a variety of sectors that were actively undermining these efforts that we had to overcome.
  - b) There was a lack of support from other district councils in recruiting participants. In part, we feel that this is a result of the limited amount of money offered to district councils to cover their staffing costs. We have to recognize, however, that some of this lack of support derived from the belief that these equity issues were not applicable in some parts of the City.
  - c) Recruitment clearly benefits from personal relationships previously established or given enough time to develop. Because of our late start with focused recruiting (2a), we were unable to fully develop those relationships.
  - d) Among some of those involved in recruitment efforts, there was an expectation that, simply because the dialogues were a good idea, people would automatically want to participate. Among these partners, there was a lack of understanding about the recruitment funnel – the large number of people who need to be contacted in order to reach the desired number of participants (at least 5 times the number of participants).
- 3) Problems associated with establishing collaborative partnerships
  - a) Lack of time to spend on finding the mutual benefits to derive from partnerships. The time allocated to the project did not factor in this need for time. In part, we assumed that after years of discussion about equity issues among potential partners, there would be less of a need to outline mutual benefits. This was not the case.
  - b) Potential partners seemed to have a basic problem with giving up total control of the project and therefore would not participate at all. “You are getting all that money... YOU do the work.” (see 1 above).
  - c) Partnerships require focused, on-going efforts to maintain them. In the short timeframe of this project, there was not time to make these efforts. As partners (particularly district councils) ran into unforeseen issues in their own neighborhoods and organizations, those issues (naturally) took precedence. Some of this may have been alleviated by larger stipends for partnering district councils, but not entirely. Staffing (and commitment), rather than funding is at the base of this problem.
- 4) Problems associated with including a broad base of community members in the planning stages of the project. Although we fundamentally support the full participation of community members in all stages of the project, the “sausage-making” aspects of much

of the planning clearly frustrated many community members (and some department members). Community members were ready to start immediately into dialogues without fully understanding the amount of pre-work that was needed to establish effective dialogues. With greater assistance in recruiting community members, we could have allowed those members to focus on the aspects of the project that their skills and interests were best suited for. We lost several community members who would have been important contributors to the Police dialogues because of their frustration with planning the dialogues, establishing departmental relationships, dealing with logistics and the training required for success.

## **Recommendations for Future Innovation Fund Projects**

- 1) District councils should have professional development opportunities around various levels of collaborative partnerships.
- 2) Innovation projects should require extensive pre-proposal work to guarantee buy-in by a significant number of district councils.
- 3) A single innovation project should be funded each year with the bulk of the funding going to this single project, allowing for dedicated staffing to manage and coordinate the project and to provide significant stipends to participating district councils that will also support dedicated staffing.
- 4) If this is a City-funded project, City support should be provided for public relations, for finding connections with other projects happening in the City.
- 5) The Innovation Fund committee should look at longer-term projects that have a potential to impact the City or the district council system as a whole.
- 6) Innovation Funds must find a way to support purchase of food for community events. We ask a lot of participants in this work often without providing much of an incentive for doing so.

## **Acknowledgements**

In addition to the supporters mentioned above, the project coordinator and manager wish to thank the District 1 Community Council Board of Directors for their support of and commitment to this work. But special thanks go to our fantastic community facilitators: Myra Smiley, Nahome Zakerias, Andrew Parker, Hafsa and Aisha Mohammad, Clara Ware, and John Slade.

**ADDENDUM TO PARKS DIALOGUE** – In the course of our discussions, we developed the following suggestions for action steps. They provide some context for the final steps agreed upon and listed above.

**Notes from section 4: SUGGESTED ACTION STEPS** – (Based on the different approaches to change model)

Steps for legal/legislative change – 1) institute an independent Parks Board (similar to Mpls) that can focus on funding and increasing support for Parks; 2) pass a state law that adds \$0.50 to every sports ticket sold in the state with revenue going back to recreation services across the state; 3) study creating 2-4 at-large city council seats in order to get a city-wide lens on issues the city faces

Steps for institutional change – 1) Parks and Recreation steps back and looks at where issues are and adjusts hours and staffing to address those issues (deals with concerns about flexibility and responsiveness of the system) (EXAMPLE: homeless living in Swede Hollow – do outreach to provide social service and job search assistance and hire them to collect litter that results from their camps)

Steps for building and adjusting leadership – 1) give area supervisors permission to be creative and find context-based solutions (deals with concerns about flexibility and responsiveness of the system); 2) provide systematic and on-going training for staff (expand the tool-box of Parks staff); 3) provide anchors at each center (stabilize staffing)

Steps for building and supporting relationships – (this focus for change relates to communication issues and is felt to be the basis of everything possible) 1) support localized door-to-door discussions between Parks staff and community members (increase face-to-face communication); 2) find multiple, varied ways to develop 2-way communication and identify allies; 3) stabilize staffing at local recreation centers

Steps to have the greatest community impact – 1) give local people a reason to come in to local centers through programming, communication, and hiring staff from the community (EXAMPLES: Scheffer and Duluth & Case); 2) develop and maintain better facilities with more options for programming where the need is greatest

Steps for impacting economics – 1) increase resources to be able to hire more Right Track participants (2015 – 611 hired from 2200 applications); 2) provide bus passes or circulators to transport people to the fewer centers that are staffed and programmed; 3) increase outreach around opportunities; 4) increase fee assistance and communication about this opportunity – release supervisors to localize how this happens

Steps to impact self-reliance – 1) develop a sense of neighborhood around local rec centers and re-envision booster clubs (EXAMPLE: Duluth & Case); 2) develop working relationships between Parks and Rec staff and community/neighbors; 3) extend the concept of self-reliance to the local centers themselves

**PRIORITIES AND PRINCIPLES TO PRIORITIZE (from 11/9/15. Out of the different approaches to change, these were listed as the steps participants liked best)**

- 1) Institute the “rec tax” on sports tickets
- 2) Institute an independent Parks Board

- 3) Re-envision and support local booster clubs
- 4) Increase outreach and 2-way communication – (Get away from the “Field of Dreams” approach – community is unlikely to come to built solutions if they had no part in their development)
- 5) Stabilize, support and empower staff – train staff in terms of inequities that exist, in youth development, in relationship-building, and in understanding social/economic context of neighborhoods; address transitions of staffing with both staff and community especially as these relate to relationships (grief and loss); support localized innovation and responsiveness
- 6) Collaborate with other organizations, especially the Saint Paul Public School system, for resources, programming, and staffing