



Our West Bayfront Community Plan Update

The Our West Bayfront Community Plan was completed in August of 2016; the result of an intensive planning process that brought together residents, stakeholders and community leaders to create a comprehensive vision for growth and change. The Our West Bayfront organization has undertaken a wide range of projects to make significant progress in implementing components of the plan. Five years into this effort, the organization took an opportunity to reconnect with the community and 'check in' to understand the priorities and set the groundwork for the next five years of growth.

To support this work, City Architecture assisted the Our West Bayfront staff and board to facilitate a series of conversations, work sessions and meetings to help chart the organization's course for the next several years. This document summarizes the involvement and main themes and directives that emerged.

Outreach

This is a community-driven plan, and as such it must reflect the goals and priorities of the community. To achieve a clear picture of how the community would like to see the neighborhoods of Our West Bayfront continue to evolve, an intensive outreach effort was undertaken. The organization recognized that a range of efforts would be required to engage as many voices as possible across the community. This work included the following efforts:

Community-wide survey

A 28-question survey that addressed a range of topics from neighborhood assets, safety, challenges and ideas for activities and involvement. Over 350 completed surveys have been received.

The highlights of the survey responses include:

- Top 3 identified assets: Parks, Proximity to Downtown, Walkable Neighborhood
- Top 3 identified challenges: Traffic (speeding), Absentee Landlords, Litter
- This is a very involved community, and one that takes pride in its history and diversity. Members want to be part of the change and positive growth.
- 83% believe neighborhood is either getting better or staying the same
- 66% of respondents know of OWB and are familiar with the organization's work

One-on-one conversations

The organization conducted one-on-one conversations with community members and leaders to gain a deeper understanding of priorities, direction and support.

Key takeaways and recommendations from these conversations address social, economic and city services topics as follows:

Social:

- Expanded inter-generational and multi-cultural events can help create connections between people. This is important to bridge existing cultural divides within the community.
- Positive activities & investments can continue improving OWB's perception (both internally and externally).

Economic:

- Landlords have large impact on the community and should be engaged to contribute more to OWB's healthy future.
- Attracting new homeowners is important – to bring new neighbors while balancing impact on existing homeowners (notably, retaining OWB's affordability and taking a proactive role to address potential gentrification).

- OWB's business community serves as an economic contributor. These businesses also provide important locations for interaction and are a source of considerable local pride.

City Services:

- Improved relationships are needed with the City of Erie Police Department – residents expressed frustration.
- Streets need to be improved – design to slow traffic & increase maintenance, as both impact perception & safety (roadway lighting was specifically mentioned).
- Improved trash collection is needed to reduce amount of litter left in streets.

Board member conversations & discussion

The planning team conducted one-on-one conversations with the members of the Our West Bayfront Board of Directors and followed this with a group discussion. While many individual ideas and goals were documented, some emerging themes from the interactions were as follows:

Three words about the community:

- Redeveloping
- Diverse
- Vibrant

What are the Board's GOALS for the community?

To make Our West Bayfront a great place to Live, Work, Play, Learn and Grow.

Live: Encourage homeownership and better connect the community by getting rid of one-way streets. Continue to address issues of safety and equity.

Work: Support local businesses at 8th Street Commercial Corridor.

Play: Continue to organize community events.

Learn: Utilize pre-college + community learning.

Grow: Undertake an internal growth plan for the organization that allows it to address identified community priorities with expanded capacity.

This process will be WILDLY SUCCESSFUL if it...
is inclusive and strengthens the Our West Bayfront community.

Community meeting

An online community meeting was conducted to provide an additional opportunity for community members to weigh in on priority issues to guide the organization's work for the next several years. Approximately 35 people participated. The meeting included a trivia game, online polls and group activities as well as smaller group discussions.

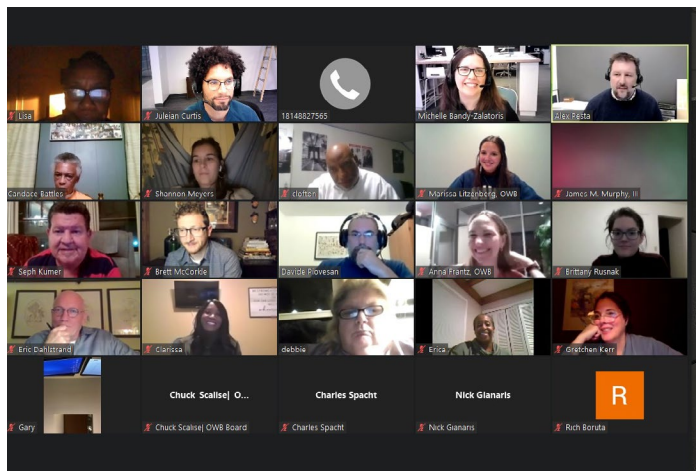
Small group conversations addressed the following questions, with answers summarized below each:

Q1: What is the best thing that has happened in the community in the last 4-5 years?

- Bayview Park improvements
- Increased feeling of safety
- Beautification neighborhood-wide
- Presence of OWB organization to champion this work
- Welcoming environment / community events

Q2: What will success look like here?

- Mixed-income neighborhood
- More/new local businesses
- Increased access to fresh food
- Improved walkability
- Affordable housing / homeownership
- Access to the Water



Advisory Committee meeting

Our West Bayfront has a citizen's Advisory Committee that helps to guide the organization's work. Following the Community Meeting, the Advisory Committee was asked to weigh in on a compiled list of recommendations from the full range of outreach to identify a focused set of priority initiatives.

These initiatives were grouped into three primary categories: Housing, Commercial and Infrastructure & Service. The initiatives were further categorized by whether they are OWB led (shown in blue on the chart below) or OWB influenced (shown in yellow on the chart below). Each initiative was considered in relation to four plan goals:

1. Serve OWB residents equitably through strategic investments
2. Improve internal & external perceptions of OWB neighborhoods
3. Emphasize safety through intentional design
4. Celebrate the unique nature of the community

	Recommended Initiatives	Goal 1: Serve OWB residents equitably through strategic investments	Goal 2: Improve internal & external perceptions of OWB neighborhoods	Goal 3: Emphasize safety through intentional design	Goal 4: Celebrate the unique nature of this community	Priority Initiatives - Phase 1, 2 & 3 on your top three areas
	OWB LEADS INITIATIVE					
	OWB INFLUENCES INITIATIVE TO OCCUR					
HOUSING	Homeowner Maintenance Assistance Examples: Porch repair program, exterior paint program	✓	✓			
	Property Assessment Property assessment to identify focused and clustered investment around assets (parks, schools, corridors)		✓			
	Build Homeownership Establish a partnership with lending agency / philanthropic organization for low-interest loans; Examples: Heritage Home Loan Program, rent-to-own programs	✓	✓		✓	
	New Zoning Policies Partner with City of Erie to introduce new zoning policies that retain single-family, establish criteria for multi-family conversions, and create property evaluation schedules	✓	✓			
	Code Enforcement Address nuisance properties and problematic landlords based on property conditions	✓	✓	✓		
	Resident Education Programs Develop classes and how-to programs for maintenance, upkeep, financing, etc.; create library of rental tools	✓			✓	
	Maintain Affordability Incorporate approaches that maintain availability of affordable homes - a mixed-income approach that proactively addresses gentrification issues	✓	✓		✓	
	Conduct a micro-neighborhood plan that focuses along the 8th Street corridor Identify vacant properties; Develop small-scale placemaking investments that demonstrate organized and recognizable effort; Create a marketing strategy and 8th Street branding that's reflected in public investments (banners, signage bike racks, waste receptacles, etc.)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
COMMERCIAL	Storefront Renovations Create a linked property-owner consortium that incentivizes renovations through an ongoing partnership to provide stable rents, and quality building services for business tenants		✓		✓	
	Business Mentorship Business support / economic development / local incubator programs that connect new businesses with friendly property owners / landlords, successful businesses, and business development resources	✓	✓		✓	
	Create a Special Improvement District Convene property owners / business operators into a special improvement district (or similar model) where combined funds could support the district (marketing, amenities, sidewalk snow removal, landscaping, programming, etc.)		✓	✓	✓	
INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICE	Improve Traffic Operations Work with the City of Erie to transition 8th Street from one-way street to two-way travel by incorporating traffic calming measures	✓	✓	✓		
	Sidewalk Repair Focused considerations in targeted areas (routes to schools, senior population, accessible / mobility challenged residents)	✓	✓	✓		
	Beautification of Public Realm City maintenance of street trees & landscaping; expansion of street light program & future upgrade; additional updates to community parks	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Expansion of Neighborhood Trash Receptacle Program Provision and maintenance of trash receptacles in key public areas and along neighborhood pedestrian routes. Add community branding to these elements		✓			
	Community Signage Develop OWB-wide signage plan, indicating various signage types, locations, design concepts, potential budgets, etc.		✓		✓	
	Waterfront Connections Physical connection(s) across Bayfront Parkway for safe waterfront access, landscape maintenance to open views to the water, branding/identity materials to reinforce waterfront connectivity	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Overall Themes: Moving Forward with Clarity

The conversations conducted through this work have helped to confirm areas of focus moving forward, as well as the goals that this work should achieve through its implementation. Further direction is provided through the identification of first tier and second tier priority initiatives. The Our West Bayfront organization and Board will work to identify specific actions to undertake and support these initiatives.

Common & shared themes:

Live, Work, Play, Learn & Grow

- A thriving OWB community includes all people
- Great housing is key to maintaining OWB's diversity
- Business community needs support to grow & strengthen
- Improvements to public spaces (parks & streets) must continue

VISION: Our West Bayfront is an inclusive and thriving community where neighbors look out for neighbors, partners work together to preserve and enhance the West Bayfront's unique assets, and mobilized residents are shaping the future of our neighborhoods and our city.

Goals for plan implementation work:

External

1. Serve OWB residents equitably through strategic investments
2. Improve internal & external perceptions of OWB neighborhoods
3. Emphasize safety through intentional design
4. Celebrate the unique nature of this community
5. Communicate & celebrate OWB's work to clearly demonstrate how we are helping the neighborhood & raise awareness of OWB

Internal

1. OWB organizational capacity assessment to determine how to grow (hire / partner / etc.)
2. Set direction for next steps / action area / objectives / programming / events
3. Strategic growth plan for OWB (operational / staffing / partnerships / etc.)

Priority Initiatives: Setting direction for community improvements

First and second tier priorities were identified through the input of the Advisory Committee and confirmed by the Board.

First Tier Priorities

Housing:

- Build Homeownership – OWB Leads
Establish a partnership with lending agency / philanthropic organization for low-interest loans, rent-to-own programs, land bank / land trust coordination
- Homeowner Maintenance Assistance – OWB Leads
Assistance with porch repair, exterior paint, etc.; Continuation of successful assistance programs (Ex. Heritage Home Loan program)

Commercial:

- Conduct a micro-neighborhood plan that focuses along the 8th Street Corridor – OWB Leads
Identify vacant properties; develop small-scale placemaking that demonstrate organized and recognizable effort; create a marketing strategy and 8th Street branding that's reflected in public investments (banners, signage bike racks, waste receptacles, etc.)

Infrastructure & Service:

- Waterfront Connections – OWB Influences
Physical connections across Bayfront Parkway for safe waterfront access; landscape maintenance to open views to the water; branding/identity materials to reinforce waterfront connectivity

Second Tier Priorities

Housing:

- Maintain Affordability – OWB Influences
Incorporate approaches that maintain availability of affordable options – a mixed income approach that proactively addresses gentrification issues

- Code Enforcement– OWB Influences
Address nuisance properties and problematic landlords based on property conditions

Infrastructure & Service:

- Improve Traffic Operations – OWB Influences
Work with the City of Erie to transition 8th Street from one-way street to two-way; incorporate traffic-calming measures
- Beautification of Public Realm– OWB Influences
City maintenance of street trees & landscaping; expansion of streetlight program and & future upgrade, additional updates to community parks

Next Steps:

- Identify actions to support priority initiatives
- Pair actions / initiatives with potential funding sources or partners
- Consider best options for organizational growth to build capacity in a manner that supports priority initiative work

PROCESS FRAMEWORK: How it works...together

VISION:

Our West Bayfront is an inclusive and thriving community where neighbors look out for neighbors, partners work together to preserve and enhance the West Bayfront's unique assets, and mobilized residents are shaping the future of our neighborhoods and our city.

AREAS OF FOCUS:

EXTERNAL

INTERNAL

HOUSING

1. Home ownership programs and support
2. Home maintenance programs
3. Initiatives that maintain affordability
4. Code enforcement

ECONOMIC DEV

1. 8th Street Corridor Plan
2. Local business support and marketing

INFRAST. / SERVICES

1. Waterfront connections
2. Improve traffic operations (8th Street)
3. Beautification and maintenance of public realm

SOCIAL / EVENTS

1. Community-building activities
2. Safety-focused activities

ORG. STRUCTURE

1. Staffing
2. Funding
3. Long-term organizational sustainability
4. Measuring success