





*chapter 2*

# engagement & planning process

Our engagement and planning process was broken into three phases: data collection, City-led public outreach, and production. During the data collection phase, we gathered information from existing plans, priority projects, and the Community Advisory Committee. Beginning in 2015, in partnership with the Gary Sanitary District, the Gary Redevelopment Commission worked to create a system, the Gary Space-Time Analytic Data System (G-STADS), to analyze City data across geographic space and time. After three hard years of work, G-STADS was created. We utilized this tool to access neighborhood and block-level information for land use analysis. We also used G-STADS to create data that we shared with residents while conducting neighborhood workshops, to empower citizens by allowing them access to the same information City leaders use.

Along with data analysis, we analyzed current plans within the city. We looked at the most recent 2008 Comprehensive Plan, a robust inventory of neighborhood demographics, property characteristics, and community profiles. We reviewed smaller-scale plans like the East Lakefront District Plan and Livable Centers projects done as recently as five years ago. We also reviewed recent neighborhood initiative reports from Miller Spotlight, Emerson Spotlight, and the University Park East Blueprint for Change. We asked ourselves: 1.) What works and what doesn't?; 2.) What ideas have been actively implemented and what ideas stay ideas? Why?

Through the earlier planning projects, there had been a lot of community input. We wanted to honor those efforts by incorporating old ideas, while eliciting new ones through

**FIGURE 2-1. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROCESS**



comprehensive plan community engagement. We empowered volunteer community leaders to ask questions and talk about the city's future on their own terms. The Community Advisory Committee (or CAC, as we came to know it) led the very early engagement efforts, absent participation from City officials. We wanted to ensure community members felt comfortable being honest and forthright without the presence of an official City staff person to alter the conversation. Broken into topic-specific groups, the CAC held meetings and focus groups at their churches, community centers, and parks and with community members in their existing networks. CAC members would periodically check-in with City staff and each other and provide insight, informing some of the foundational elements on which this plan is built. After almost a year, the CAC reported their findings to the City Team. We developed a common language to take to our communities and established key imperatives, as we proceeded to City-led neighborhood workshops. At the conclusion of those meetings, we synthesized community input and created a plan that draws from the new data and ideas.

The G-STADS system is currently housed at the Gary Sanitary District and most data is publicly available at: [www.garycounts.org](http://www.garycounts.org)

# THE COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC)

Consisting of two dozen community leaders, the CAC met periodically from February to November of 2018 to inform key elements of the plan and to report back on what they were hearing in the community. Due to the strong culture of volunteerism already present in Gary, the CAC drew on knowledge of existing networks and tapped into conversations that were already taking place throughout our city. The CAC helped the City Team define our priorities around issues such as small business, arts and culture, and public safety and informed recommendations about land uses – the focus of neighborhood-level meetings held in the Spring of 2019. The CAC focused on five areas as described in the following section.



*CAC meeting*

## LIVING MAYORS ROUNDTABLE

In January of 2019, each of Gary's five living mayors gathered at Indiana University Northwest, as part of the public engagement process for the Comprehensive Plan. Mayors Richard Gordon Hatcher, Thomas V. Barnes, Scott King, Dozier Allen, Jr., and Karen Freeman-Wilson discussed Gary from their unique perspectives as the City's CEO over the course of a 90-minute forum.

Mayor Hatcher, the nation's first black mayor, described the very divided city he inherited and the climate of change that was occurring when he took office in the late 1960s. Mayor Hatcher talked of bringing Gary to the national stage and his ability to receive federal attention, through connections he made as a leader in the civil rights movement.

Mayor Barnes discussed the opening of two casinos in Gary, the State of Indiana's first two. He mentioned the role the State had in choosing Donald Trump to operate one of the casino boats despite strong local objection from the City selection committee who recommended another operator.

Mayor King discussed the perception of public safety and how it was his highest priority to project the image of a safe, clean city during his time in office. He discussed meeting with Attorney General Janet Reno to identify resources to Gary's benefit.

Mayor Allen, the senior statesmen, described a long career in public service and how Gary had changed over the course of his sixty-plus years as an elected official, beginning when he met Mayor Hatcher, who was the only other black student at Valparaiso University.

Mayor Freeman-Wilson moderated and each of the past mayors acknowledged the progress made during her tenure.

The well attended event served as the first official Comprehensive Plan outreach event, directly preceding neighborhood workshops held citywide over the weeks that followed.



## FOCUS AREA I: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The subcommittee on civics discussed the disconnect between City government and the broader community, looking for ways to actively bridge the gap between decision makers and everyday residents. Focusing largely on millennials and young people, they defined civic engagement as “citizens actively participating in city decision making.” They met several times, mostly at City Life Center in Downtown Gary, and discussed ways to ensure the people of Gary could be better integrated in municipal decision making and government life. They identified a perception that an existing network of City leadership creates a barrier to a new generation of leadership. The civics team recognized a sense of resentment had developed due to a lack of consistent communication and teamwork across City institutions and neighborhood groups. Overall, the civics team acknowledged a lack of understanding in how decisions are made and how to get involved if interested.

The recommendations that came from those meetings included more one-one-one interactions between citizens and elected or appointed officials, better utilization of social media and modern means of communication, and information sharing, a common theme in nearly all CAC subcommittees. They suggested “lanes” of engagement, essentially highlighting the need of the City’s existing institutions to train and include the next generation of leadership through mentorships, fellowship programs, and deliberate inclusion of young people.

*The Civics subcommittee was chaired by Ken Barry, Executive Director of City Life Center, and Rachelle Morgan Ceaser, Gary’s Deputy Director of Public Works.*

## FOCUS AREA II: HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLNESS

The health, safety, and wellness subcommittee covered a wide breadth of topics. Through over 100 surveys, and several small meetings, the team honed in on a common theme: communication. Better communication was identified as a tool needed to access healthy food, share news on community events, or distribute information on accessibility initiatives. The team wanted the city to be accessible to all generations. There were concerns about emergency preparedness and management of public safety funds, and questions about how to access public safety information. Many recent construction projects, some private some public, did not include universal design standards, essentially precluding participation from all residents, particularly the elderly or disabled. Finally, the group identified a need for better water safety, in light of problems with beach safety that occurred over the summer of 2018.

Recommendations focused on information sharing. Better utilization of social media, follow-through via email from City workers, and more public meetings were all suggested. The team recommended a quality control mechanism to ensure communication delivery systems are ADA compliant. One suggestion was to hire a full-time City employee to focus on issues of accessibility and ADA compliance, and holding contractors accountable for work done improperly in that regard. The subcommittee suggested a greater focus on public safety training and the need for “Gary police, fire and first responders...to collaborate with community advocates to help collectively address public safety concerns and pursue funding impacting” Gary.

*The Health, Safety, and Wellness subcommittee was chaired by Jessica Renslow, Community Builder.*

## FOCUS AREA III: ARTS AND CULTURE

Gary's robust artist community and tradition led to a substantive contribution from the subcommittee on arts and culture. Often working in concert with the parks subcommittee, the arts and culture team identified "a great diversity of interests and talents" yet a lack of full understanding of Gary's artistic legacy. A tension exists "around the perceptions of 'outsourcing' arts opportunities" perceived at the expense of local artists. Cuts to the school system's arts programs were mentioned and a lack of communication was cited as a barrier to a better functioning arts community. The arts and culture subcommittee reported that Downtown arts programming, namely murals, were very popular among young people but older residents had mixed opinions.

The arts and culture team expressed a need for help with permitting and navigating bureaucracy. They suggested "centralization" of information for guests to learn about upcoming events or even the creation of an arts district museum. Each neighborhood's unique culture was cited as a benefit, and it was suggested that the City could help facilitate communication among them. The team saw the City's role as hosting more events and connecting artists with opportunities, helping artists gain greater exposure in the process.

*The Arts and Culture subcommittee was chaired by Sam Love, former secretary of the Calumet Artist Residency.*

## FOCUS AREA IV: SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Through a series of progressively more involved workshops and surveys, the small business subcommittee looked at what made Gary's business climate special, and where it could improve. They recognized Gary's location as a key attribute and saw the high vacancy as a potential benefit and opportunity to add new businesses, especially Downtown. They acknowledged that a lot of Gary's small business infrastructure is outdated and the support system among the business community needs significant improvement. Perception of Gary, particularly in light of so much blight, makes it hard to start a business and, despite the vacant properties, there are few move-in ready commercial spaces in the city.

The small business group suggested more relaxed zoning laws and regulation to better facilitate entrepreneurship and repurposing of older properties. They cited a need for better communication and the development of a peer network to match opportunities with activities in the business sector. They suggested a revamped chamber of commerce to help support new businesses and foster new leadership in the city. Finally, they recommended City-led programs to fund businesses that show they can sustain themselves with just a little assistance from City government.

*The Small Business and Entrepreneurship subcommittee was chaired by Gretchen Sipp, BAB, and Cynthia Williams, Chief Idea Instigator at Ideation Zone.*

## FOCUS AREA V: PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The parks team honed in on a fundamental paradox: there are plenty of public spaces for residents, but simply not enough resources to maintain them all. “Dirty,” “depressing,” and “unsafe” were frequently mentioned and conditions vary from park to park. “A frequent complaint is the lack of open swimming pools and dangerous conditions caused by unused pools,” the team reported. They mentioned litter and even that recent park renovations received “mixed results.” Residents are tending to parks themselves, and many suggested parks privatization might be a consideration. Exercise and sports were cited as the most popular activities, though many residents also appreciated quiet, ecologically-significant areas as well.

The parks team suggested local artists may be good partners for programming and park improvements. They also suggested continuing partnerships with ecological groups could help preserve open space and build on natural assets. The term “back to nature” evoked weeds and unkempt playgrounds, though “urban forests” and “natural preserves” evoked Gary’s rich natural legacy. The team suggested an opportunity also exists for centralized communication by the City and local groups to better foster collective impact and manage the overburdened parks system. The Parks Department was cited as an excellent resource and a huge asset to making positive change, despite years of underfunding and disinvestment.

*The Parks and Open Space subcommittee was chaired by Sam Love, former secretary of the Calumet Artist Residency and Nate George, City of Gary Parks Superintendent.*

## NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOPS

Over the winter and spring of 2019, the City of Gary Department of Planning & Redevelopment held workshops across the city, covering each of Gary’s 14 neighborhood planning areas. We reviewed map data collected via the G-STADS, discussed recommendations made in previous plans, and held open forums to discuss each neighborhood’s future. Workshops ranged from small groups of a dozen people in Brunswick Park to over 50 people packing Marquette Park Pavilion in Miller and the Midtown YWCA. Residents, business owners, and elected officials drew on maps, discussed characteristics unique to their respective neighborhoods, and voices both concerns and opportunities. After the neighborhood workshops, the data collected from the nearly 300 residents who participated was incorporated into the land use and transportation frameworks found in Chapter 6 of this document.



*Gary residents provide input at a neighborhood workshop*

Thank you to our City Councilmembers for their attendance and support throughout the community engagement process.