

WEST SIDE VISION

Executive Summary

Dedicated to the residents of the West Side. Thank you for your insight, candor, and guidance!

Authors

Aislinn Droski and Avery Knese, University of Colorado Denver

Clients

Derek Teini, Joseph Shahidi, and Philip Gabathuler, City of Laramie Planning Department

Date

May 2024

This project was submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban and Regional Planning, College of Architecture and Planning, University of Colorado Denver.

Department of Urban and Regional Planning
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER



WEST SIDE

What is West Side Vision?



West Side Vision is a community visioning study initiated by the City of Laramie City Council and Planning Department. In partnership with two students from the University of Colorado Denver's Urban and Regional Planning Master's Program, this effort aimed to create and facilitate an engagement process for listening to residents and building on the existing strengths of Laramie's West Side neighborhood. The primary goal of this study was to showcase the dreams, concerns, and desires of the West Side residents in a document that could be delivered to decision makers in Laramie.

West Side Vision strives to provide a cohesive voice for residents. The desires expressed in West Side Vision will hopefully serve as a catalyst for future compatible development, community initiatives, and engagement work.

Glossary

We believe it is important to have a shared understanding of key words that may appear multiple times in this document. Below are our definitions of these terms, and what they will mean when they appear in West Side Vision.

Community

A dynamic social network interwoven with shared physical spaces, resources, and values, where residents feel a sense of belonging.

Residents

People who live in and shape the West Side neighborhood. Not just users of its built environment, but agents of change with valuable insights on the future. Their input shaped engagement activities and recommendations.

Stakeholders

Partners in shaping the built environment of the City of Laramie at large. Their input is largely *informational* and was not used to guide or inform recommendations.

Inclusivity

Creating equitable spaces and opportunities, actively engaging all residents to contribute and share in the community's future. An example of inclusive engagement includes having online and in-person ways to give input.

Visioning

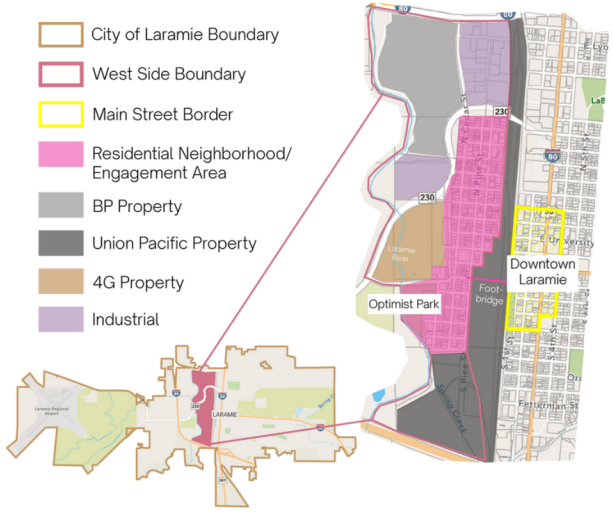
A collaborative process that imagines the community's desired future, including its physical form, social fabric, and economic prosperity.

Engagement Framework

A structured roadmap to empower residents, using diverse methods and transparent communication to collaboratively shape their community's future.

Where We Are

This study takes place in the West Side neighborhood in the City of Laramie, Wyoming. Just steps from downtown, the West Side neighborhood boundaries are formed by Union Pacific railroad tracks to the east, the Laramie River to the west, and major roads to the north and south. A newer bypass, Snowy Range Rd., limits car access to the neighborhood. The established residential area in the neighborhood is mostly surrounded by industrial properties, a few of which are vacant. For pedestrians and cyclists, a footbridge provides access over the tracks. Optimist Park and the Laramie River Greenbelt provide nearby recreational opportunities.



The West Side is one of Laramie's original neighborhoods, settled first in the 1860s by Union Pacific rail workers and immigrant families. Homes in this neighborhood are typically one to two stories and were built, maintained, and added on to by residents over the years, giving them an eclectic architectural style (Humstone, 2012).

These small-scale, 1-4 unit, housing types are likely the major reason for higher homeownership rates in the West Side. In Laramie overall, this housing type, called "missing middle" has been identified as a solution for housing needs. West Side residents are wary of new development, particularly when it comes to tearing down or overshadowing existing buildings. They have typically opposed new builds and input from West Side voices has been primarily heard in these reactive settings. This study was an opportunity to have a proactive listening process to understand what the West Side wants for its future - what they love, want to protect, and want to see improved.

West Side

722
population



368
households

$54,233
median household income

$267,000
median home price

City of Laramie

31,407
population



13,554
households

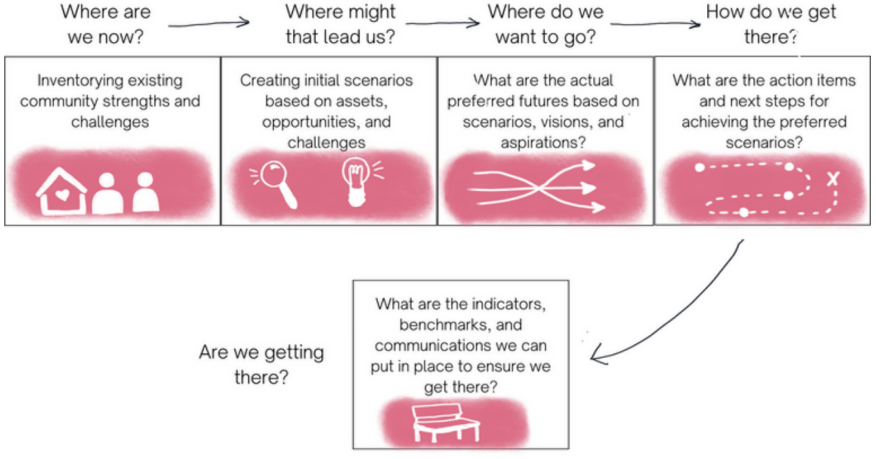
$50,339
median household income

$347,000
median home price

How We Listened

Our engagement framework and guiding principles provided the foundation for creating a process for engagement that would help us meet our goals of engaging with many and varied residents, envisioning future possibilities, and creating next steps.

Our Engagement Framework



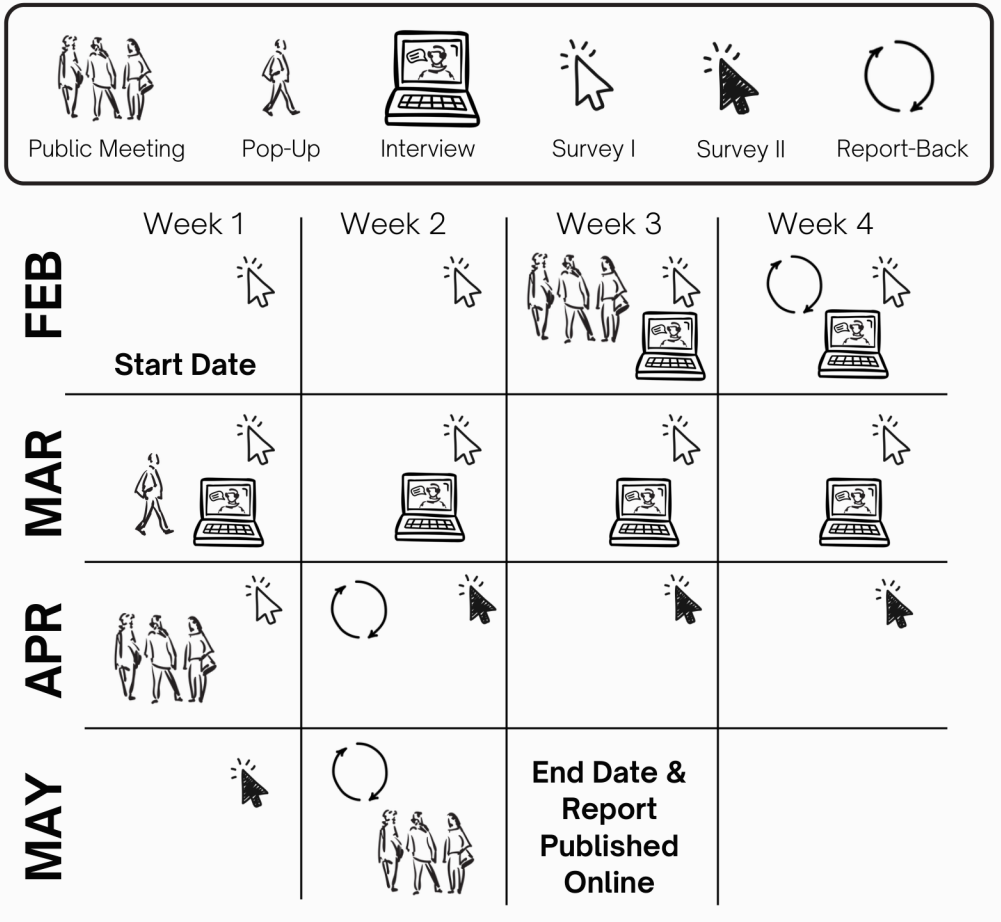
Guiding Principles

We will strive for meaningful engagement by:

- Inviting people to co-create change in their community.
- Including diverse voices and perspectives.
- Creating opportunities for wider engagement through various strategies.
- Clearly defining expectations and goals.
- Establishing a feedback loop to show how input is used.

Engagement Activities and Timeline

The chart below gives a brief overview of the engagement activities that we used to listen to residents throughout this study.



How We Listened cont.

Phase I

Framework

Where are we now?



What We Wanted to Know

- What do you love about the West Side?
- What do you want to see improved in the West Side?
- What would you invest in the West Side?

How We Answered Those Questions

A visioning session held in the West Side gathered over 60 residents to discuss the neighborhoods wants and needs. Additional outreach around these questions was done through surveys, stakeholder interviews, and a community hotline. This comprehensive approach directly informed the next phase of the study which expanded on residents ideas for their community.

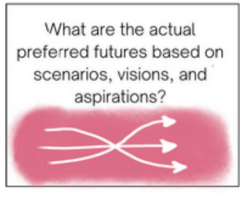
Phase II

Framework

Where might that lead us?



Where do we want to go?



What We Wanted to Know

What is your preferred scenario?

1. Preserving Historic Homes and Design
2. Preserving Small-Scale Housing
3. Exploring R1 Single-Family Zoning
4. Finding Compatible Housing
5. Effective Code Enforcement

How We Found Out Preferred Scenarios

A second visioning session was held with ~30 residents, including returning and new participants. This session, supported by a second version of the survey, aimed to refine previous ideas through 12 scenarios covering the 5 key topics identified to the left. Residents participated in rotating discussions at topic-specific tables, generating insightful feedback. The feedback from this event influenced the four recommendations of the study.

What We Heard

The West Side Vision study aimed to listen and learn from residents of this special neighborhood, to collect what they loved and wanted to see improved, and to uncover next steps for their community and the city. ‘What We Heard’ is an overview of the insights, ideas, and next steps learned from the participation, responses, and conversations with 160+ participants in the West Side Vision study.

162 **total people engaged in the West Side Vision study**

Our goal was to engage with 15% of the West Side, or 108 people.

In Phase I, we heard:

Phase I

Residents Love Their Neighborhood’s...

Sense of Community
Quiet and Isolation
Location and Access to Amenities
History
Eclectic and Small-Scale Homes

Character

Residents described their neighborhood’s character as: quirky, unique, eclectic, blue-collar, weird, artistic, down-to-earth, and real.

> It is a real neighborhood where people easily interact with each other. You can walk down the middle of the street and not fear for your life. I love the eclectic homes and neighbors.

> [I love the] quietness and safety of the neighborhood; great maintenance of the pedestrian bridge to get downtown on foot/bike; a neighborhood restaurant, bar, and community space (Lincoln).

In Phase I, we heard, cont.:

Phase I

Residents Want to See Improvement of...

Connectivity and Access to Amenities

- Improve sidewalks and connections, like at the footbridge
- Increase food access opportunities
- Provide public transportation to the neighborhood

Safety and Street Infrastructure

- Evaluate what is causing flooding and explore solutions
- Implement awareness and speed reduction tactics, such as stop signs, clear crosswalks, and signage on Clark + Pine Streets.

Access to Green Spaces

- Ensure snow maintenance on greenway
- Install crosswalk across Snowy Range. Rd. for safer access to the greenway
- Explore opportunities for more green space

Neighborhood Beautification

- Clean up Union Pacific property
- Better code enforcement for cars/junk
- Clean up homes in need of repairs
  - Provide education and funding help for owners of older homes

Residents Want to Protect...

Small-Scale and Unique Homes through:

- Design concepts to maintain authentic design and small-scale
- Re-zoning to decrease height or have an overlay ordinance
- Protections against tear downs

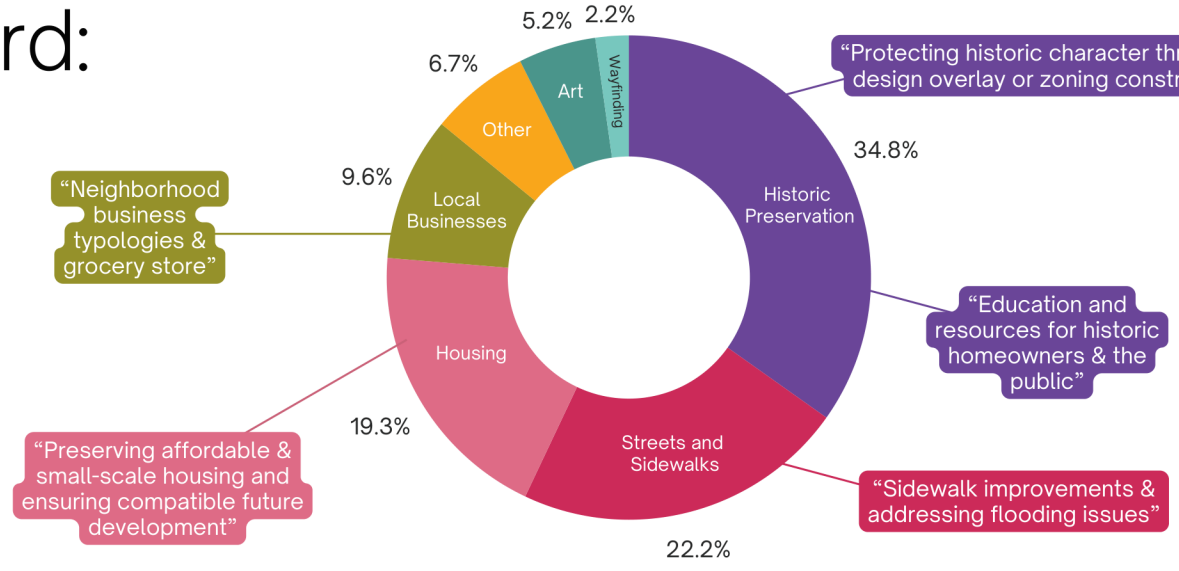
Neighborhood History through:

- A historic district overlay ordinance
- Education for historic home owners
- Public art, signage, and/or educational materials telling the West Side's story

In Phase I, we heard:

Phase I

West Siders want to see investment in historic preservation and streets & sidewalks.



Stakeholders see opportunities in...

Economic Development

Some believed the West Side is already well served by Downtown businesses. Others felt new opportunities existed for neighborhood scaled businesses, like a coffee shop or small grocer.

Public Art

Those interviewed was interested in incorporating public art installations on the footbridge, as well as on the pathway to Optimist Park and using crosswalk art for safer crossings throughout the neighborhood.

Affordable Housing

Some interviewees were interested in the potential for the brownfield on the community's periphery to expand housing options. Others saw the opportunity to create new housing in the existing West Side residential area, with a focus on affordability.

River + Land Conservation

A primary theme with these stakeholders was the desire to maintain and potentially expand the green spaces available to the community. Providing the river with the space to flex and flood was a priority for river conservation advocates.

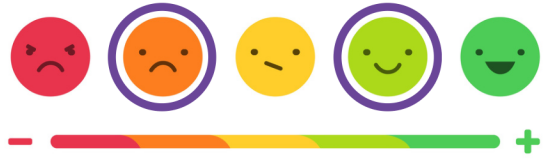
In Phase II, we heard:

Below summarizes what we heard in reaction to scenarios presented in five main topic areas during Phase II of engagement.

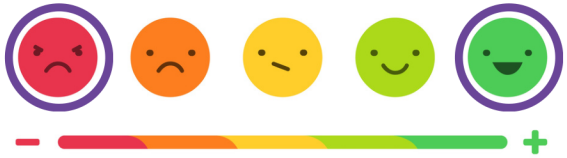
Phase II

(1) Preserving Historic Homes and Design

How do you feel about someone making changes to a historic home that do not match its current character/materials?



How do you feel about a historic preservation ordinance being enacted in your neighborhood?

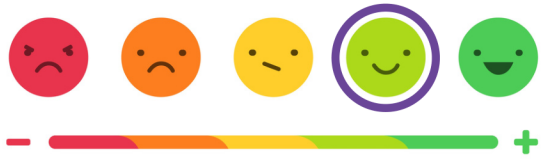


Key Insight

There is a strong interest in preserving the old homes, the eclectic designs of homes, and in providing input on the design of future homes built in the West Side. However, most residents seem to be aware of the cost consequences of preservation and design requirements and are torn on how best to protect those properties.

(2) Preserving Small-Scale Housing

What would be your reaction to an ordinance that regulates heights and footprints to ensure the continuation of small-scale housing in the West Side?



Key Insight

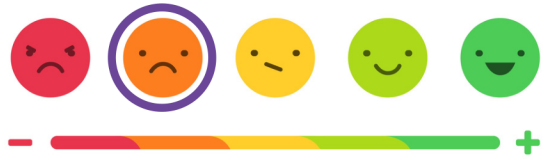
The current zoning regulations are insufficient in preserving the character of the West Side neighborhood, which residents are passionate about safeguarding. Implementing measures to reduce the permissible height of new homes, while still fostering diversity in architectural styles and maintaining the area's affordability, would address concerns over the preservation of existing residences and the overall neighborhood character.

In Phase II, we heard:

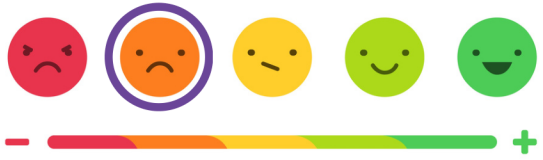
Phase II

(3) Exploring R1 Single-Family Zoning

How do you feel about someone building a single-family home to the maximum R-1 allowances of 40ft tall, a 30ft wide lot, and two-stories?



How would you react to a neighbor, under R1 zoning, not being able to add an additional unit to their home for to house their mother?



Key Insight

The community's primary concern is preserving the existing neighborhood scale, character, and building heights, even if it restricts new construction or development. Maintaining the established aesthetic and scale of older, historic homes takes precedence over accommodating larger, taller new residences that could potentially disrupt the embraced neighborhood character.

(4) Finding Compatible Housing

Participants were asked to identify what housing types they liked from three categories (1) single-unit, (2) duplexes, and (3) multi-family, and why.

Design Choices West Side Residents Like:

- Recessed garage or no visible garage from front
- Matching the general style of the neighborhood - Craftsman
- Single story or unassuming two-stories



In Phase II, we heard:

Phase II

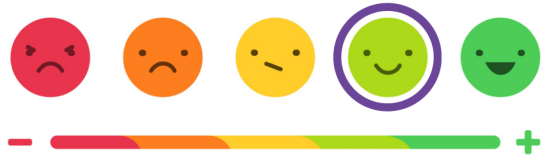
(4) Finding Compatible Housing cont.

Key Insight

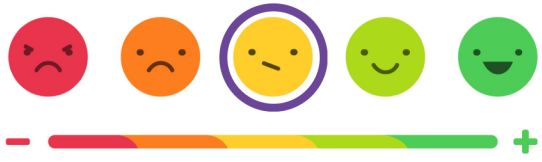
The prevailing sentiment from these scenarios was that the community has a distaste for a modern suburban façade. The words “fit in” were used often when considering different housing styles. This trend continued when considering multifamily housing; even on the periphery of the residential core of the West Side, how the construction would fit in was the primary concern.

(5) Effective Code Enforcement

How do you feel about the City issuing fines and violation letters for “junked” cars in your neighborhood?



How would you feel about Code Enforcement being more strict overall about home repairs, overgrowth of front yards, and other maintenance issues?



Key Insight

Overall, residents were split on their reactions to the code enforcement scenarios. Many indicated a sentiment that people should be “good neighbors” and assist in cleaning up or with repairs. There were also some participants that thought that the creation of volunteers or civic groups was desired. However, some admitted that this would likely not be a long-term solution, and there was more interest in strict code enforcement for cars than other maintenance issues.

What We Learned

The West Side is a unique and special place to live for many reasons – the people, the green spaces, the location, the history, and the homes. While each of these came up repeatedly during the engagement process, we overwhelmingly heard from residents that the small, eclectic homes are one of the most important and distinguishing features of the West Side. As we moved throughout the engagement process, homes were the central feature of many conversations. Most residents care deeply about continuing opportunities for home ownership, fixing up homes, preserving existing homes, and ensuring any new homes are in scale and compatible in design with the existing neighborhood.

We also heard that neighbors are open to and desire some government intervention to protect this element of their neighborhood's character. While some neighbors hesitated with government intervention for things like code enforcement or historic preservation, most residents we spoke with agreed that an overlay district was needed to regulate height and size of new buildings.



An overlay district is a zoning tool, where an additional set of regulations is layered onto a geographic area, in addition to the underlying zoning. For instance, an overlay district focused on an environmentally sensitive area could require more landscaping than the zoning ordinance requires. Properties developed in the overlay district's geographic area would have to adhere to those standards and all other standards in the underlying zoning district. Learn more about overlay districts at https://planningforhazards.com/overlay-zoning#dd-contents-729.

Recommendations

#1 ▶ Create an Overlay District to Preserve Existing and Encourage New Small-Scale Housing

We're recommending that the City of Laramie Planning Department begin the engagement and development process for a new overlay district ordinance for the West Side neighborhood. With the right type of regulation, the West Side can maintain its stock of a desirable and needed housing type, small, 1-4-unit homes, while also allowing them to be constructed again in the future.Small homes are a key part of this neighborhood's character and provide important opportunities for affordable home ownership.

This recommendation tied for first, with 'design guidebook' for surveyed West Side residents' first priority. **#1**

Sample Standards

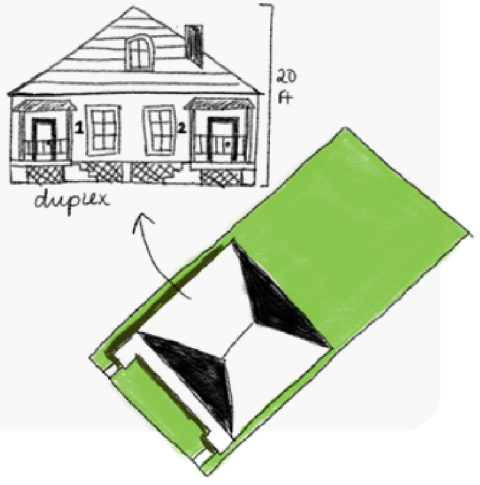
New construction buildings within the overlay district shall not be built higher than 25 feet tall. The maximum footprint for a new structure shall be 2,000 square feet. The maximum allowable expansion of an existing building is 20% of the original footprint, every five years. Where there is access to an alley, garages must be built only with alley access. Where there is no access to an alley, a property may have a side-loading garage or a front-loading garage that is setback a minimum of 40% of the length of the building or 40 feet from the property line, whichever is greater.

West Side Walking Tour

As a first step in co-creating this ordinance, we recommend that West Side residents and Laramie Planning Department staff join for a walking tour, to take photos and set a baseline for the heights, sizes, and key design elements that are typical of the West Side.

How to Implement an Overlay Ordinance

This study was a great first step. Residents should continue to work with Laramie Planning Staff to set community accepted components of the ordinance and to amend the zoning ordinance to implement the overlay, which requires majority community support and approval by City Council.



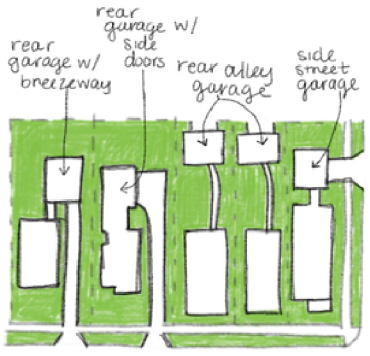
#2 ▶ Create a Design Guidebook for the West Side

We're recommending that the residents of the West Side and the Laramie Planning Department staff create a design guidebook for new homes in the West Side. While an overlay ordinance could contain some elements of design control, we believe it is important to give specific guidance to those looking to build in the West Side. We recommend the following activities to involve West Side resident's in this process:

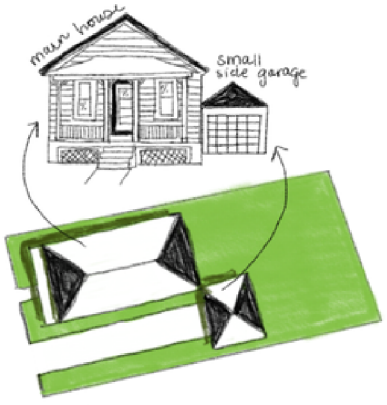
- Co-create a photo album of West Side homes
- Support a West Side resident-led design committee to weigh in on the guidebook

The Laramie Planning Department should utilize the information and images gained from the activities above to create the design guidebook. Residents should be given an opportunity to review the draft of the design guidebook and provide feedback. The guidebook should be provided to any developer interested in working in the West Side and should provide general guidance and example imagery without being too prescriptive about the style of buildings. Below is an example of how example graphics regarding low-impact garages might look:

Designing Low-Impact Garages



Property Options



View from Front

#3 ▶ Implement Traffic Calming and Safety Infrastructure at Community- Chosen Locations

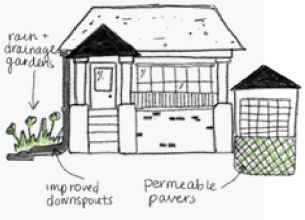
We recommend initiating a collaborative, community-driven process where West Side residents partner with Laramie Public Works to identify priority locations for traffic calming measures and safety enhancements. Engagement revealed areas experiencing increased higher-speed traffic since the Snowy Range Road corridor's completion. The proposed solution empowers residents to leverage their local knowledge to pinpoint areas needing interventions like curb extensions, speed humps, chicanes, and lighting. Through neighborhood workshops, walking audits, and design charrettes, residents can voice concerns, identify hot-spots, and work with engineers to develop tailored, context-sensitive solutions. Grounding it in residents' experiences can optimally direct investments to reduce vehicle speeds and improve safety.



#4 ▶ Create a Flooding Report & Education about Where and Why It Floods in the West Side

The proposed solution involves hosting community workshops and walking tours to gather resident input on historical flooding hotspots, problem areas, and anecdotal experiences. Public Works would overlay this qualitative local knowledge with quantitative hydrological data and modeling to co-create with residents a definitive "Flooding in the West Side" report. This report would synthesize the causes of flooding from the neighborhood's proximity to waterways, topography, aging infrastructure and more, identifying high-risk areas and potential mitigation projects.

Once the technical assessment is complete, the partnership would transition to an educational awareness campaign tailored to West Side households. Potential components include workshops explaining risks, preparedness and prevention; visualizations through videos, mailings and social media; homeowner checklists; and educational signage at flooding hotspots. Reflecting residents' lived experiences through co-creation and tailored educational outreach allows optimal mitigation planning and ensures the community is informed and empowered.





Thank you!

Visit **cityoflaramie.org/1401/WestSide-Vision-Study** to read the full report and appendix.