CAPSTONE REPORT



WEST SIDE VISION

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Client: City of Laramie Planning Department
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Dedicated to the residents of the West Side.
Thank you for your insight, candor, and guidance.

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How to Read this Document

Read **Executive Summary** to find... 007

...an overview of the entire West Side Vision study project.

Read **Where We Are** to find... 017

...an overview of the state of Wyoming and the City of Laramie.
...a description of the West Side neighborhood, including a demographic comparison to the larger city.

Read **Why We're Listening** to find... 025

...how development pressures and history are influencing the West Side.
...the purpose of the West Side Vision study and engagement.

Read **How We Planned to Listen** to find... 029

...research on engagement methodologies, frameworks, and plans.
...our framework, guiding principles, and goals for the engagement process.
...who we planned to engage with.
...the description and timeline for the engagement strategies we selected.

Read **How We Listened** to find... 048

...a summary of how each engagement strategy went, including who we talked to, a measure of success, and how we reported back.
...how engagement participation met our initial goals.

Read **What We Heard (West Side Vision)** to find... 061

...an overview of the comments, ideas, and dreams we heard.
...a set of preferred scenarios and visuals chosen by residents.
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A Shared Vocabulary

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.

Stakeholders

Partners in shaping the built environment of the City of Laramie at large. Stakeholders hold diverse perspectives and expertise crucial for making decisions and achieving shared goals.

Inclusivity

Creating equitable spaces and opportunities, actively engaging all residents to contribute and share in the community's future.

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.

Executive Summary



What is West Side Vision?

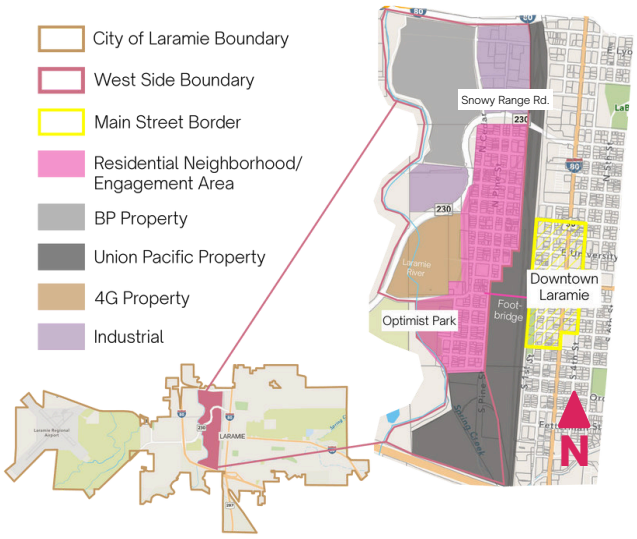
West Side Vision is a community visioning study initiated by the City of Laramie City Council and Planning Department. In partnership with two students from the University of Colorado Denver's Urban and Regional Planning Master's Program, this effort aimed to create and facilitate an engagement process 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.



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).

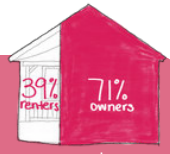


Row of Homes built by Union Pacific (Source: Mary Humstone)

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.

In the West Side, however, residents are wary of new development, particularly when it comes to tearing down or overshadowing existing buildings. They have typically opposed new builds. The City has primarily heard West Side voices 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
tenure
$54,233 median household income
$267,000 median home price

City of Laramie

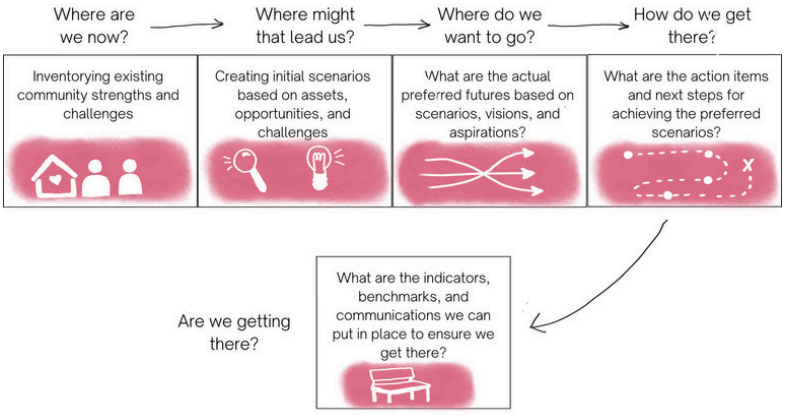


31,407 population
13,554 households
tenure
$50,339 median household income
$347,000 median home price

Demographics Information - pg. 023
Information on Housing Pressures & Neighborhood Change - pg. 026

How We Listened

Our Engagement Framework



Meaningful Engagement

Guiding Principle

- Invite people to co-create change in their community.
- Include diverse voices and perspectives.
- Create opportunities for wider engagement through various strategies.
- Clearly define expectations and goals.
- Establish a feedback loop to show how input is used

Phase I

Where are we now? Where might that lead us?

At the beginning of the process we asked the residents of the West Side these questions:

- 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?

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

Scenarios to answer "Where do we want to go?"

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

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. Residents participated in rotating discussions at topic-specific tables, generating insightful feedback. The feedback from this event influenced the four recommendations of the 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.

What 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

> 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).

Character

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

Learn more on page 063.

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 greenspace

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

Learn more on page 067.

Residents Want to Protect...

Small-Scale and Unique Homes

- 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

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

Learn more on page 069.

Phase II

(1) Preserving Historic Homes and Design

It's clear that 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. Learn more on page 075.

(2) Preserving Existing Housing

A key realization emerged from this scenario: 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. Learn more on page 076.

(3) Exploring R1 Single-Family Zoning

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 if there were to be a switch to R1 zoning. Learn more on page 077.

(4) Finding Compatible Housing

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. Learn more on page 078.

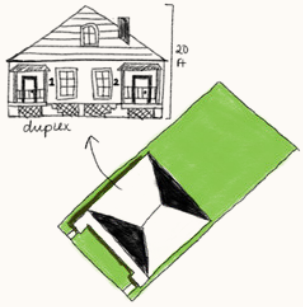
Design Choices West Side Residents Like:

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

(5) Effective Code Enforcement

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. Learn more on page 080.

Recommendations



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.

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

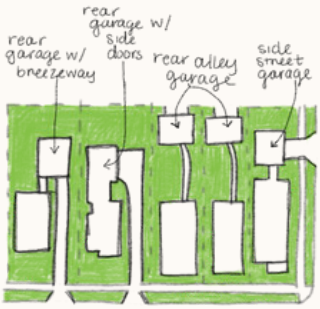
As a first step in co-creating this ordinance, we recommend that West Side residents and Laramie Planning Department staff join for a walking tour, to take photos and catalog the existing height and style of homes in the neighborhood. This will help to set a baseline for the heights, sizes, and key design elements that are typical of the West Side and could provide the parameters for the overlay ordinance. Further engagement and involvement of residents are key for developing this overlay ordinance.

Learn more on page 084.

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

#1

Recommendations



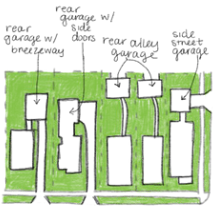
Create a Design Guidebook for the West Side

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:

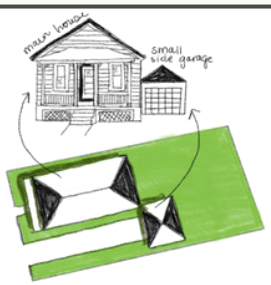
- Co-create a photo album of West Side homes
- Support a West Side resident-led design committee to weigh in on the guidebook

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

Learn more on page 087.

Recommendations



Implement Traffic Calming and Safety Infrastructure at Community- Chosen Locations

Learn more on page 089.

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. This process must proactively solicit diverse input across the West Side. Grounding it in residents' experiences can optimally direct investments to reduce vehicle speeds and improve safety.



Create a Flooding Report and Education about Where and Why It Floods in the West Side

Learn more on page 090.

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.

Engagement Report



Where We Are



The State of Wyoming

Wyoming is the 44th state in the United States Union and was incorporated in 1890 (Figure 1). It is the 10th largest state by land area and the lowest populated state in the US. The state has remained small in population over the years, something researchers identify as being associated with the state's inability to retain its residents, likely due to economic opportunities elsewhere (Growth Lab, 2023). Agriculture, particularly ranching, and mining are, and have been, the economic mainstays of the state. There is also a growing tourism industry, with access to outdoor recreation spaces, such as the Wind River Range. Growth is tied to these industries and is occurring mainly in its biggest cities of Cheyenne, Casper, and Laramie. Even still, these cities are considered small compared to metropolitan areas throughout the US, with the largest of the three, Cheyenne's, population coming in under 70,000 as of 2022 (Webster et.al., 2024).



Figure 1. The State of Wyoming

Wyoming is generally considered a "property-rights state" where "planning takes a second seat to the property rights of individuals" (Kurtz, 2009). For instance, while counties are required to adopt master plans, local municipalities are given the option to create a planning commission, and many choose not to. Additionally, while municipalities have the authority to zone, zoning ordinances are optional (Gribb & Hammerlinck, 2018). Only about half of the 23 counties in the Cowboy State have zoning for all jurisdictions in their boundaries, while others have only parts zoned, and others have no zoning at all (Thuermeur Jr., 2021). While this can pose issues for the enforcement of master plans, it is often a major draw for people looking to live in states with stronger property rights.

The City of Laramie

The City of Laramie, in Albany County, is the third highest populated city in the state with a population of 31,735 (2022 ACS) (Figure 2). Settled four years before the founding of Wyoming, the small city sits between the Snowy and Laramie Mountain Ranges. It is located 25 miles from the state's southern border at the intersection of Route 287 and Interstate 80 and sits just west of Cheyenne, the state's capital. Laramie is home to several higher education institutions, the University of Wyoming, WyoTech, and the Albany County Campus of Laramie Community College. The University of Wyoming alone has a student population of 11,100, with all three institutions contributing to a transient population that can put stress on the availability of local housing.

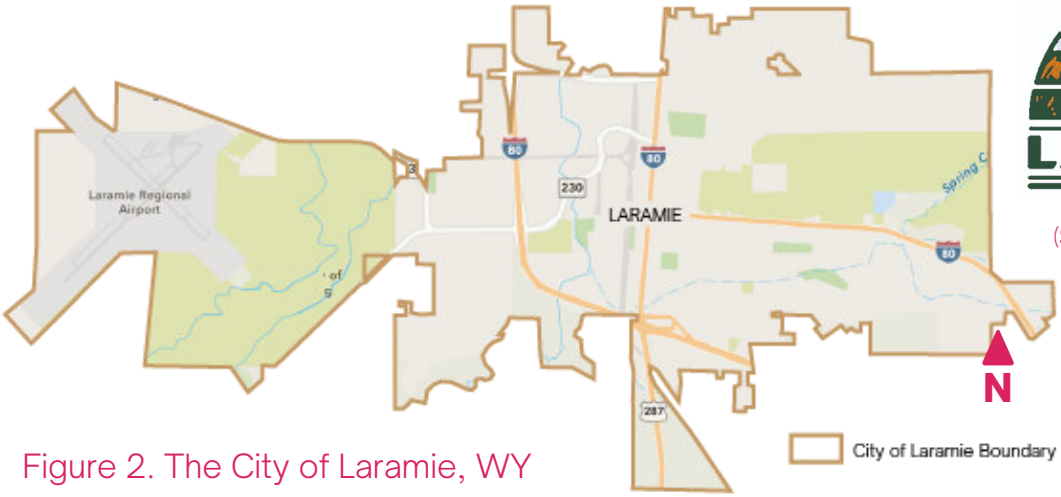


Figure 2. The City of Laramie, WY

Laramie City Logo
(Source: City of Laramie)

Likely due to the presence of a robust secondary and higher education system, Laramie is a well-educated city, with 56.1% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to Wyoming's 29% overall (American Community Survey, 2022). However, the city is seeing troubles with retaining people in the 25-44 age range, with people at the beginning of their careers leaving for economic opportunities elsewhere (Thrive Laramie, 2020). This is likely due to the lower median household income in Laramie, particularly for this group, and the higher costs of living.

The median household income for Laramie is $50,539, about $22,000 less than the state's median household income of $72,495 (American Community Survey, 2022). Many Laramie households are cost-burdened (spending more than 30% of their income on housing). Residents of Laramie state that housing is contributing to their rising costs of living and is likely contributing to the city's inability to retain graduates and a mid-level workforce (Thrive Laramie, 2020).

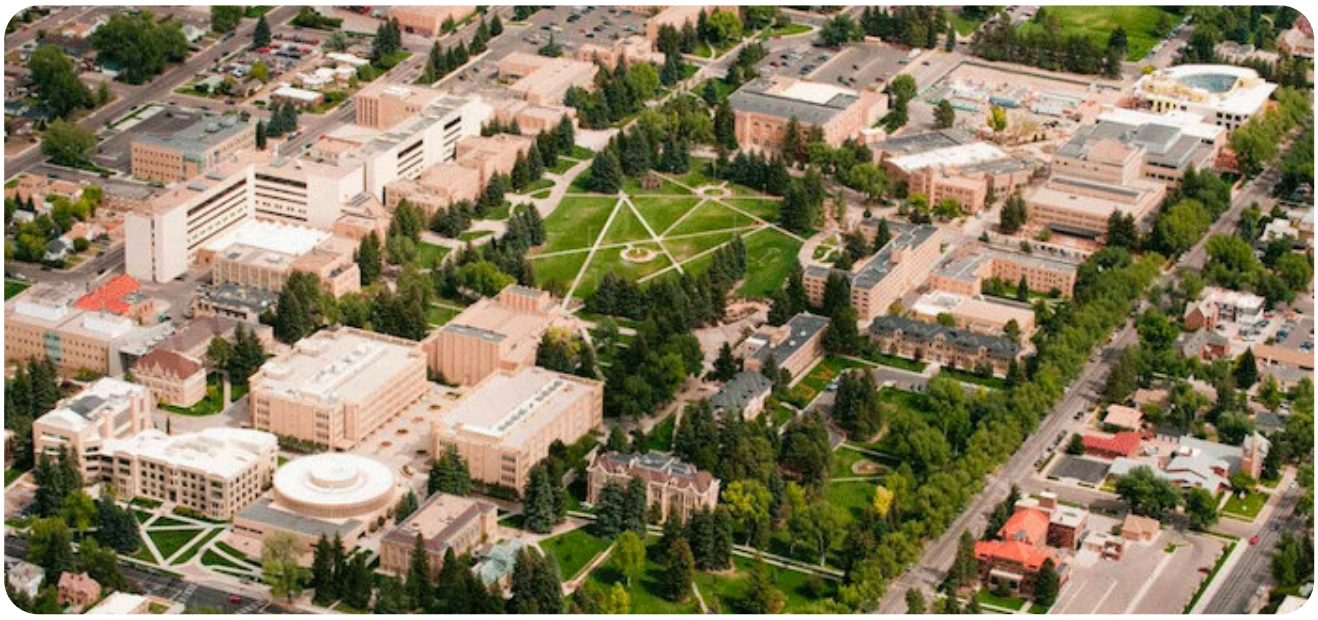
The City of Laramie cont.

Educational services are the leading industry in Laramie, showing higher educational institutions' role not only in educating Laramie, but employing them. Other economic and cultural drivers include the Laramie Regional Airport, tourism, and hospitality-related businesses (Thrive Laramie, 2020). Economic development is occurring in the recruitment of agricultural technology businesses, government offices, and larger retail opportunities (Anonymous Stakeholder Interview, 2024). Companies in talks to move to Laramie are worried about where to house their workers, and existing employers cite housing as one of the top factors limiting their ability to recruit new workers (Anonymous Stakeholder Interview, 2024, and Thrive Laramie, 2020).

To learn more about identified housing challenges in Laramie, see page 026.



The University of Wyoming is an important source of connectivity throughout Laramie, providing the main sources of public transportation. In addition to an on-call SafeRide program, which can be used by residents, UW provides an Express, Link, and Evening shuttle bus. The 'Link' bus runs between downtown, at 1st and Grand, and East Laramie, at the Walmart on Boulder Drive. The city does not provide its own public transportation, so the university provides critical and free transportation to Laramie residents and students.



University of Wyoming (Source: T2 Systems)

The West Side Neighborhood

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 (Figure 3). The West Side is one of Laramie's original neighborhoods, settled first in the 1860s, though much of the land was owned by Union Pacific at the time. The land was sold in 1874 for residential use and platted soon after. Because it was platted before zoning, lot sizes vary greatly, and setbacks are irregular (Humstone, 2012). The West Side was originally three homesteads, platted, and argued over, by Michael Carroll, Henry D. Hodgeman, and Thomas Fee (Knight, 2023).

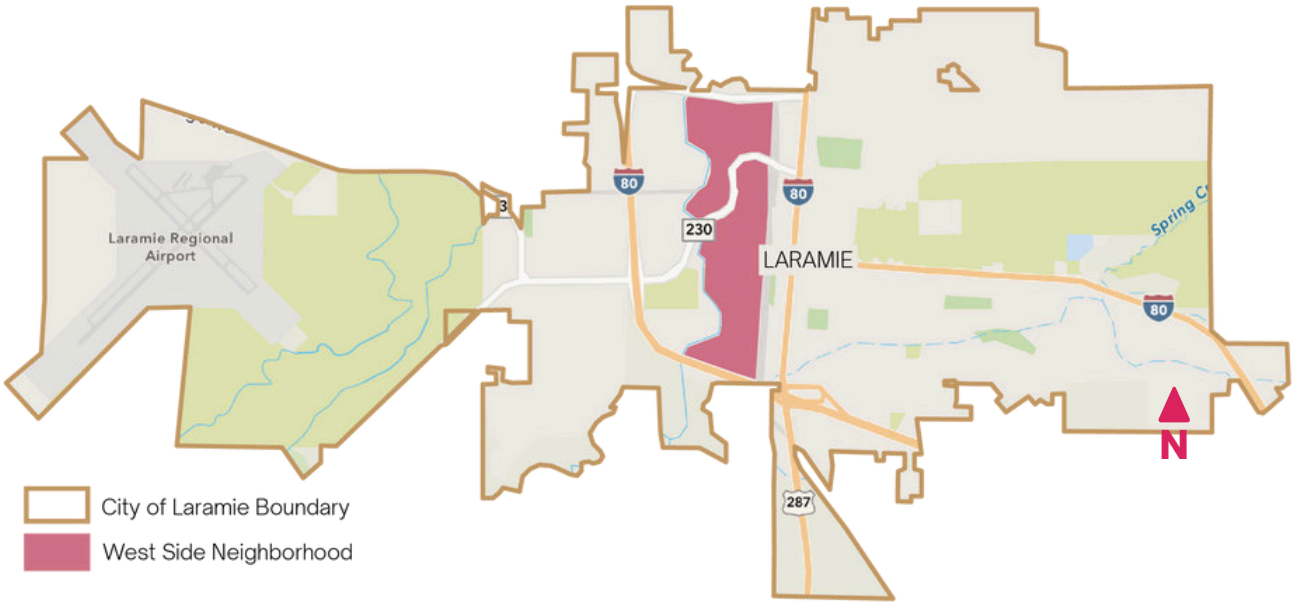


Figure 3. The West Side Neighborhood in Laramie

The West Side was an important source of housing for rail and industrial workers and their 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). Other houses in the neighborhood were constructed by the Spiegelbergs, originally from Prussia, who settled in the West Side in 1888 and created a construction company. The neighborhood has maintained a working-class and multicultural character throughout its history and remains an important source of smaller, generally affordable housing.

The West Side Neighborhood cont.



Lincoln Community Center
(Source: Visit Laramie)

Though it remains mostly residential, the West Side also has a few industrial sites, mainly on the periphery, as well as a few small, local businesses. The Lincoln Community Center is the central space for community activities, churches, and services. It is housed in a school that was built c. 1924, which was preserved through a community initiative in 2003 and renovated in 2012. The community center is the only building in the neighborhood on the National Register for Historic Places.

Until a few years ago, the neighborhood was connected to Downtown and East Laramie through the Clark Street Bridge. Due to failing conditions, this bridge was removed, and the decision was made to build a new road around the West Side to minimize disturbance in the neighborhood. The bypass, called Snowy Range Road (WY-203), limits car access to the neighborhood. No cars can pass through Downtown into the West Side, or vice versa. This leads to relatively quiet streets, with most car activity being local. Sidewalks are typically small or non-existent, but many residents remark that they feel safe walking in the street due to the low traffic. Access to downtown for pedestrians and cyclists is achieved by a footbridge over the Union Pacific tracks, which connects East and West Garfield Street (Figure 4). Optimist Park, the neighborhood park, also provides access to the Laramie River Greenbelt, a multi-use path along the river. Many residents utilize these amenities to commute and/or for recreation.

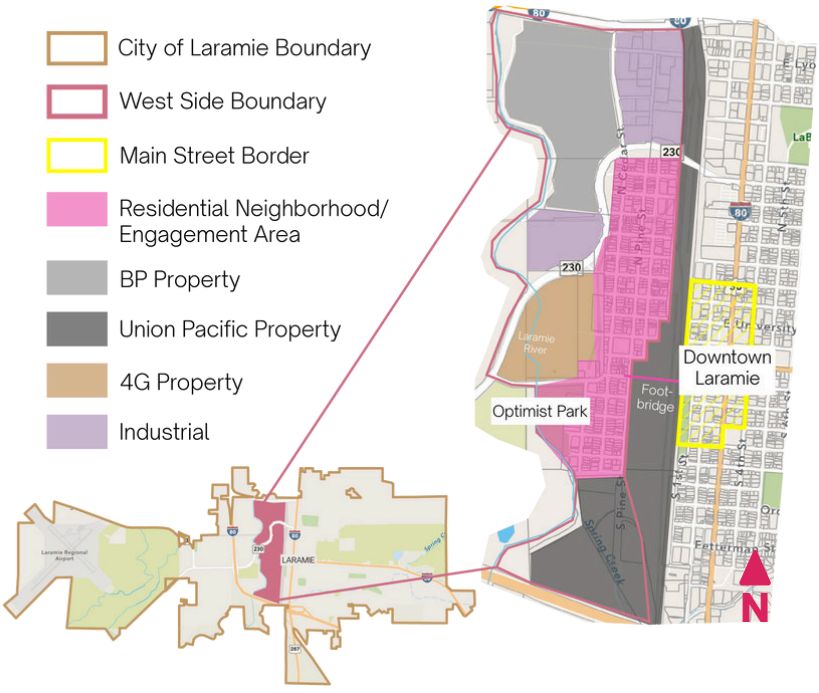


Figure 4. Land Uses and Details of the West Side

Demographics in Laramie & The West Side

Examining the demographics related to population, housing, and income helps explain some of the dynamics of the West Side. To find this demographic data for the West Side, we utilized Block Group 2 in Census Tract 9629 in Albany County (US Census Bureau), which has an identical boundary to the neighborhood boundary established above in Figure 4. Each point of data will be compared to the City of Laramie at large, to understand how the neighborhood may be different or similar to its surrounding city. The West Side will be represented in pink, while Laramie will be in purple.

Population & Households

Figure 5.1 - Source: Decennial Census, 2020



West Side

722 total population

383 households

2.06 average household size



Laramie

31,407 total population

13,554 households

2.10 average household size

Household Tenure

Figure 5.2 - Source: Decennial Census, 2020



Median Home Price

Figure 5.3 - Source: Realator.com, 2024

$267,000

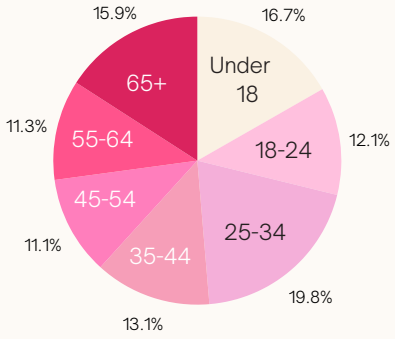
$347,000

→ Demographics in Laramie & The West Side cont.

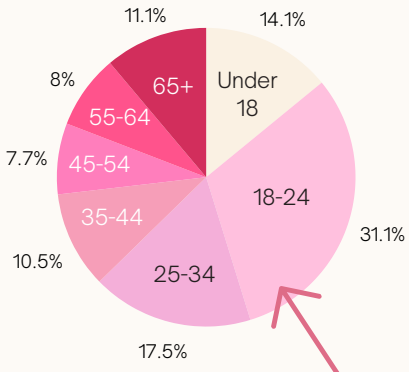
Ages

Figure 5.4 - Source: Decennial Census, 2020





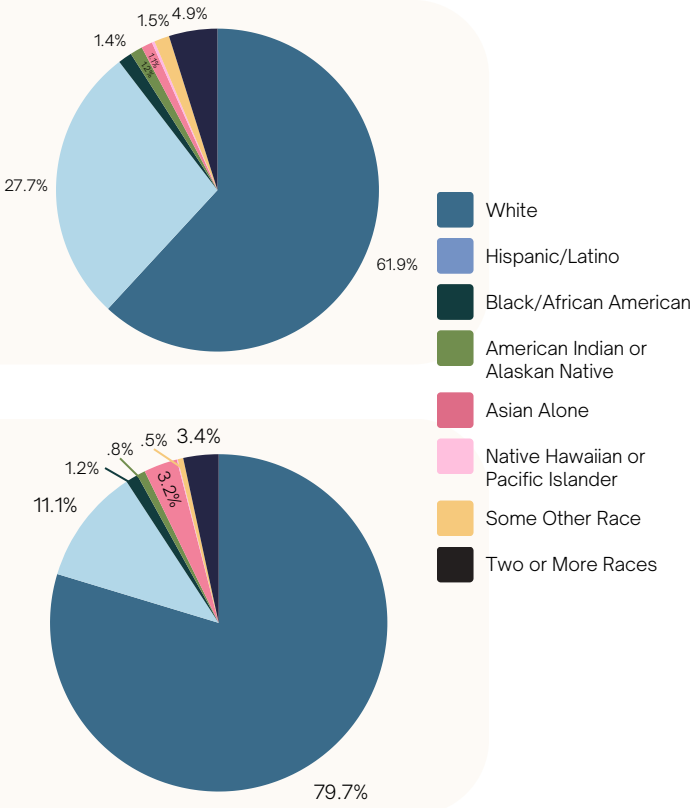




Remember the large student population?

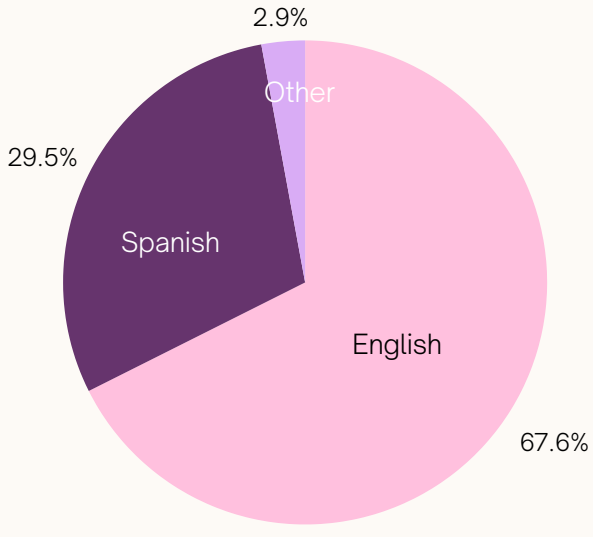
Race and Ethnicity

Figure 5.5 - Source: Decennial Census, 2020



Languages Spoken at Home in the West Side

Figure 5.6 - Source: Decennial Census, 2020



Why We're Listening



Housing Pressures

Growth in Laramie is happening, though slowly. Between 2010 and 2022, the population in Laramie grew from 29,671 to 31,735, for a growth rate of 6.9%. This is about 8% lower than the national small city median growth rate of 15.1% (Raetz, 2021). Despite this slow growth, Laramie is facing noteworthy challenges to housing and development. In 2020, the city published Laramie Housing Strategy, which outlines the three main challenges to attainable (affordable) housing:

(1) Laramie has overall a lower income, but higher housing costs, creating an affordability gap.
(2) There is a lack of housing choices available.
(3) High land and construction costs make it challenging to produce lower priced housing.

This report identifies that one of the best ways to address these challenges is to increase smaller scale housing types, such cottages, bungalows, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes. Currently, in the West Side, many of the homes already reflect this important housing type. There is a growing worry that, due to the zoning in the neighborhood, new homes would not reflect this character. There are three different zoning types in the established West Side neighborhood and five within the total boundary. The zoning in the established neighborhood is medium-density multi-family (R2), limited business (B1), and business (B2) (Figure 6).

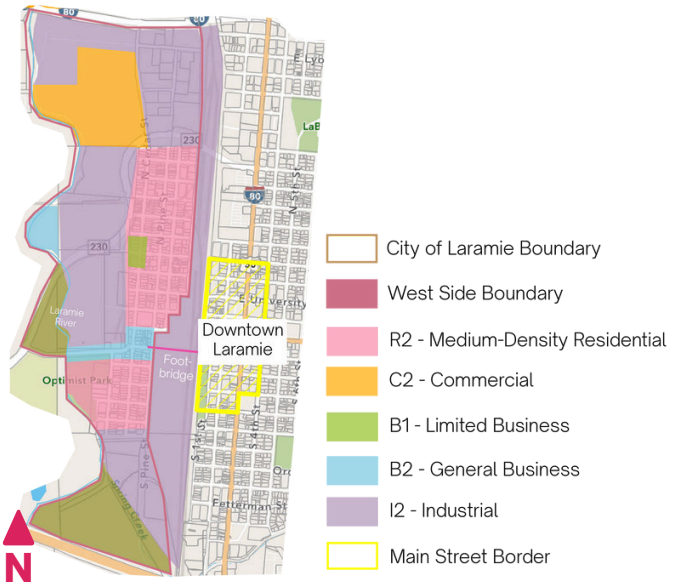


Figure 6. Zoning in the West Side

These zoning types, as well as the existing small lot sizes, do allow for the small-scale housing types that Laramie has expressed they want to see more of. However, the zoning categories in the established residential neighborhood, as well as potential re-zonings in the industrial areas, also allow buildings to be built to a larger scale than many of the existing homes in the West Side. For instance, R2 zoning allows for a 40ft high building. B1 and B2 would allow for 50ft and 65ft high buildings respectively, though only a small portion of the neighborhood is zoned these categories.

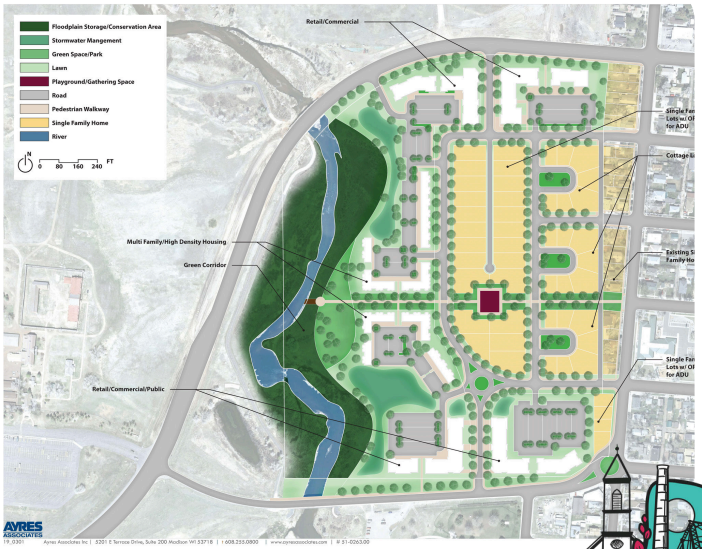
Development Attention

More development attention has shifted to the West Side in the past few years (personal correspondence, 2024). There are still a few vacant infill sites in the neighborhood, as well as large industrial-zoned sites on the periphery. The availability of land and the West Side's proximity to downtown make the West Side a potentially optimal location in Laramie for new development.

One of the largest, and most controversial, vacant industrial sites is the 4G Site. This property was part of a $1M EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant awarded to Laramie in 2017. Through this grant, which ran until 2022, the city conducted environmental analyses, public engagement, and visioning for this industrially zoned site and two others, though most of the visioning occurred on the large 4G site.

The process produced a land use concept of the 4G site, which included single-family homes, multi-family buildings, and retail/commercial development (Figure 7). Today, we have heard that quite a few residents disagree with this concept, reflecting that there may have been a lack of comprehensive participation due to the bulk of engagement occurring during COVID-19.

Figure 7. Land Use Concept for the 4G Site



In addition to final grant deliverables, this project created branding for the West Side, including a logo co-created with the community that will be used in this project (Figure 8).



Figure 8. West Side Logo

Neighborhood Change

The West Side Neighborhood could be considered historically neglected by the politicians and planners in Laramie. This sentiment is something that we have learned from our interactions with residents and local public officials, as well as through our own research of articles and the area's history. One such article that illuminates this sentiment is titled, "West Side Residents Remain 'Neglected Stepchild' of Laramie Family" (Halbsgut, 2022). This article was written after the recent City Council re-districting, which cut the West Side down the middle into two different wards. The neighborhood also faced redlining, with lenders viewing the neighborhood as run down and mortgages risky, and discrimination by realtors, who often refused to show West Siders homes in other parts of Laramie (Knight, 2022).

Many residents remark that the city has historically "left them alone," and that while that's part of the reason they enjoy the neighborhood, it also makes them fearful of the city and developer attention they may receive today. The root of this fear is largely neighborhood change and its impact on current residents, such as through displacement and changing the neighborhood's unique character. With a history of neglect from the city overall, residents are now a bit distrustful of government efforts to "improve", as well as being distrustful of new development. For instance, some proposed housing projects in the neighborhood have seen major pushback or even been rejected due to petitioning from West Side residents.

The Purpose of Engaging with the West Side

The West Side Vision study began with a desire from the Laramie City Council to hear from West Side residents about their future. This desire largely comes from the historical lack of attention paid to the West Side, which has also led to a lack of comprehensive neighborhood engagement. As changes have come to the West Side, input from residents has been limited to those who can attend a Planning Commission meeting or who are interested in the future of a specific vacant property. This had led to only a limited number of voices being heard, on the record, by decision makers in Laramie. The purpose of this engagement process is to bring together a broader set of resident voices and create a document that will record this voice to be heard by decision makers, developers, and residents. Understanding the historical neglect and current distrust of the Laramie government, we aim to approach engagement with transparency and genuine curiosity to build trust.

How We Planned to Listen



Planning to Listen

To shape the engagement process and our guiding principles, it was important for us to first draw from research and case studies of community engagement methodologies and engagement plans. We will present the three guiding methodologies for community engagement: 1) community visioning, (2) asset-based community development, and (3) inclusive engagement. For each methodology, we will provide a definition and a model or framework for utilizing it, as well as any relevant benefits. Then, we will present three case studies of engagement plans, from cities in Canada, Minnesota, and Arizona.

This research shaped our framework and guiding principles for the West Side Vision study. The framework and guiding principles then served to The framework and guiding principles are detailed on page 33, while the engagement plan begins on page 35.

Guiding Engagement Methodologies

I. Envisioning a Community's Future

Community visioning is defined as a citizen-based planning process in which diverse members of a community collaborate to identify community assets and determine a desired course of action for the future (Lachapelle, Emery, & Hays, 2010). In simplest terms, community visioning is a process to bring together residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to envision a shared future. A visioning process will typically include the following five aspects (Steiner & Butler, 2007):

(1) Understanding the Whole Community - Engage the entire community and its stakeholders, seeking a full understanding of the range of aspects shaping the community's future.

(2) Reflecting Core Community Values - Uncover commonly held core beliefs and values of the community.

(3) Addressing Emerging Trends and Issues - Explore trends and potential future conditions, attempting to see what could shape the neighborhood in the future. .

I. Envisioning a Community's Future cont.

(4) Envisioning a Preferred Future - Produce a statement or a document articulating a shared path forward for the community.

(5) Promoting Local Action - Produce action items or an action plan, based on what arose during visioning.

There are several approaches and frameworks for community visioning that a community and/or a facilitator can follow. One such model is The New Oregon Model, by Steven Ames (2006). This model is a chronological path through the visioning process, as seen in Figure 9, starting with the now, moving to the future, creating goals to get there, and checking in on the progress of said goals.



Figure 9. The Oregon Model

The community visioning framework is a key piece of a successful visioning process and ensuring its benefits. Those benefits could include (Steiner & Butler, 2007):

- Enriching public involvement and social ties.
- Creating a shared sense of direction and a framework for future community decisions.
- Produces a process that results in concrete goals and strategies for action.
- Promoting active partnerships among government, business, civic, and non-profit organizations.
- Provide an informed and supportive context for future planning efforts.

II. Building on Existing Strengths

Discovering and building upon a community's existing strengths is at the core of an engagement method called Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Developed by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann in 1988, this approach uses the existing strengths, or "gifts," in a community's ecosystem to support its future. Where traditional engagement may have a goal of identifying issues to solve, the ABCD process facilitates engagement techniques that are solution-oriented and rooted in seeing residents as empowered and knowledgeable (Garcia, 2019).

II. Building on Existing Strengths cont.

In 2018, John McKnight and Cormac Russel published a guide detailing the four essential elements of asset-based community development. They are:

Resources - There are six types of assets that can be leveraged locally to enhance wellbeing and prosperity. They are: (1) residents [skills, passions, and knowledge of residents], (2) associations [formal and informal clubs, groups, and networks], (3) local institutions [institutionally or community-oriented organizations], (4) local places [the built and natural environment], (5) exchange [the local circulation of intangibles, tangibles, and currency], and (6) stories [community narratives, history, and sharing].

Methods - Methods are the ways in which communities use their resources. ABCD suggests beginning with what residents can do for themselves, and then looking at what could be done with external help. Methods are intended to connect and mobilize resources, and there are many ways to approach this. McKnight and Russell included examples of methods such as discovering local connectors and convening them, sharing time with neighbors, and/or creating a collective vision of priorities and possibilities.

Functions - This step answers the question: “what essential functions are citizens able to perform that create greater wellbeing?” (Mcknight & Russell, 2018).

There are seven community functions: (1) enabling health [our neighbors and places can be a primary source of health, (2) assuring security [knowing neighbors and feeling a community presence can determine local safety], (3) stewarding ecology [local responsibility for the earth], (4) shaping local economies [local power to capture savings and circulate money], (5) contributing to local food production [local support for food producers and markets], (6) raising our children [a ‘village’s’ responsibility to share knowledge with children and care for them], and (7) co-creating care [care for the earth, children, and neighbors freely given and created through new connections and relationships].

These seven elements are fundamental to and created by our neighborhoods and cannot be supplied by an institution or government. However, planners and ABCD facilitators can help neighborhoods to identify and leverage these opportunities.

II. Building on Existing Strengths cont.

Evaluation - Evaluation is the fourth essential element. It is not about auditing, but rather course correcting and learning. It serves to look at how communities are engaging with the other three essential elements through looking at how the “gift exchange” is occurring, how relationships and associations might have been developed or deepened, and the number of participating residents and the increase in their citizen power, with a focus on inclusion of marginalized people.

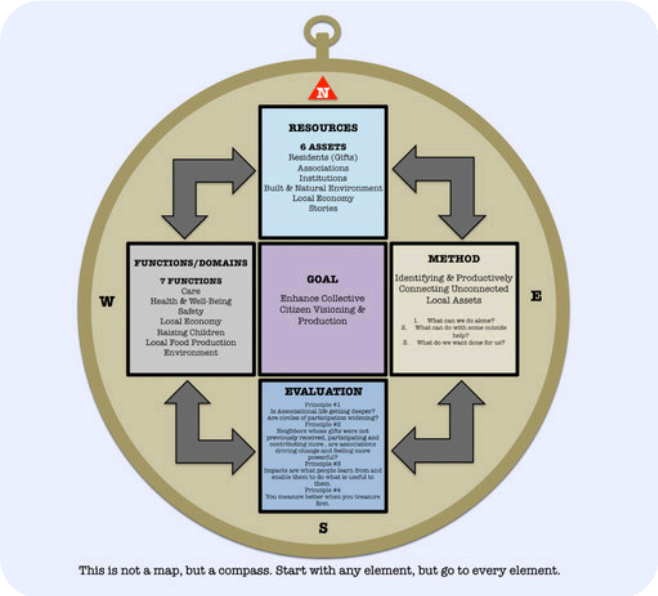


Figure 10. Asset-Based Community Development Compass

Each of these elements is brought together in the compass- shaped diagram shown in Figure 10. McKnight and Russell note that the ABCD process is neither a sequence of events nor a hierarchy, and each process relates to each other dynamically. If at some point throughout your engagement process, you engage with each aspect of the ABCD compass, it is considered asset-based community development.

III. Hearing Everyone's Voices, and Not Just A Few

Inclusive and true community engagement amplifies all voices. It goes beyond active listening and prioritizes seeking out marginalized perspectives. In the process of inclusive engagement, trust-building is key. When diverse voices translate into real change, everyone feels valued, invested, and ready to build a thriving community together. Inform, consult, collaborate, and empower are steps one can take to be able to gather these voices and ensure inclusive engagement (University of Utah, 2019).

Engagement begins with informed listening and consulting with residents. Consultation can occur through processes like diverse citizen panels that inform decisions through collaboration, not just consultation. Finally, empowerment becomes the culmination of the process. Citizen committees, chosen by the community, become agents of change, advising, advocating, and even lobbying for new policies. This process won't dictate the happenings of the community but draws out the best from each voice, creating a powerful collective, guiding it towards a future where everyone feels heard and valued.

Inclusivity within engagement strategies involves considerations for those typically left out of the engagement process. This can range from accessibility considerations with regards to space and outreach materials, to ensuring meetings are accessible to the populations you're trying to reach, to promoting language justice with translated materials and in-person translators (City of Woodbury, 2022).



Laramie River Greenway

Engagement Plan Case Studies

Mississauga, Ontario, Canada | Our Engagement Strategy



Source: City of Missauga

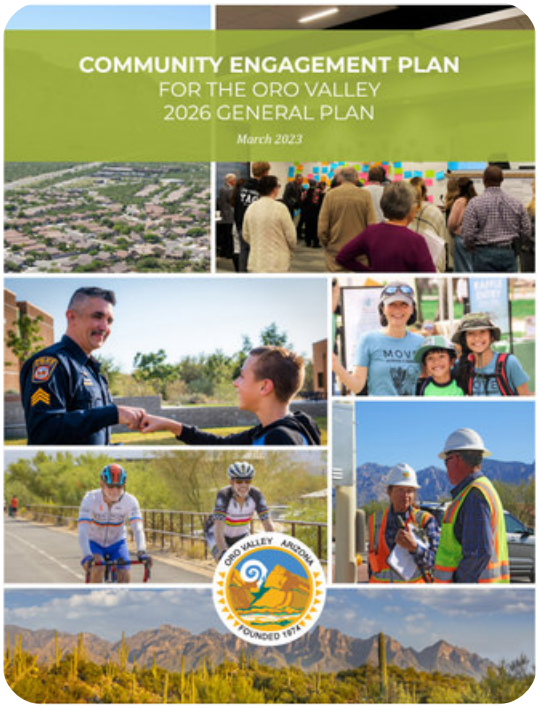
In 2012, the City of Mississauga, in Ontario, Canada, committed to more engaged citizenship and began the process of creating their Community Engagement Strategy. The final document, released in 2017 and updated in 2019, was created by an interdepartmental working group, who completed best practices research and consulted with 380 community members and 250 City staff.

Mississauga's Principles of Community Engagement

1. Accessible and Inclusive
2. Transparent
3. Trust
4. Understand the Community
5. Informed

Mississauga's strategy is centered around creating meaningful engagement, which they define as an ongoing process where all voices, not just a few, have a chance to shape and define the city's future. To hold engagement processes accountable to this definition of meaningful engagement, the strategy provides measurable goals and building blocks for engagement. The building blocks for meaningful engagement are (1) plan, (2) design, (3) implement, and (4) close the loop. Critical insights from these building blocks, in addition to their sequence, include going into the community where people are already gathering, being mindful of accessibility in locations, pre-test activities, and building in steps to report back what was heard and how it was used.

Oro Valley, Arizona | Community Engagement Plan



The Oro Valley Community Engagement Plan is designed as part of a General Plan process, which is the community's 10-year policy document. The Engagement Plan is not only intended to engage with residents of Oro Valley but was itself designed through an engagement process. Through a Community Engagement Advisory Group (CEAG) and public survey, the community engagement process took shape. This group and the survey influenced key areas of focus, helped determine communications strategies and levels, and achieved consensus on the plan.

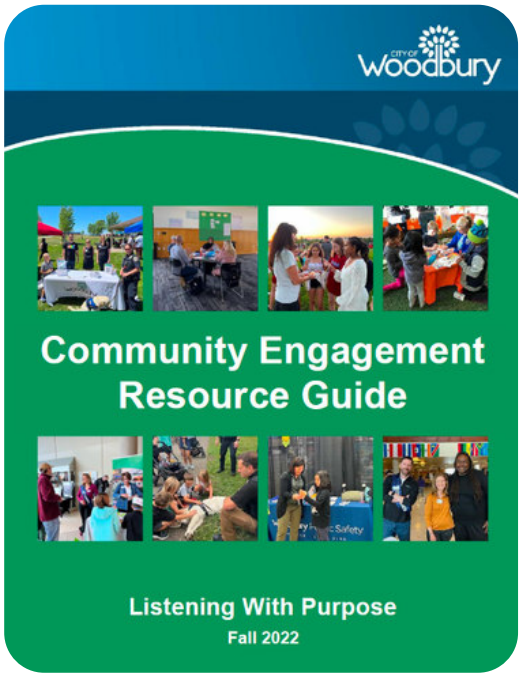
Source: Oro Valley General Plan

Oro Valley's Principles of Community Engagement

1. Be Inclusive and Prioritize Community Input
2. Be Engaging and Effective
3. Be Organized, Efficient, and Timely
4. Be Fair and Open
5. Provide Understandable and Accessible Information

The engagement plan itself identifies key stakeholders with three different priorities and types of engagement, placing consensus with residents as the number one priority. The plan notes that a one-size fits all approach will not work for engaging a broad group. They instead opt for multiple in-person, online, and outreach techniques to reach residents and stakeholders. Oro Valley's engagement plan makes a point of making specific promises for accessibility and accountability with these engagement techniques, such as ensuring meetings are in accessible locations and spaces and summaries to show outcomes.

City of Woodbury, Minnesota | Community Engagement Resources Guide; Listening with Purpose



The ‘Listening with Purpose’ guide was created by the City of Woodbury and professional consultants and shaped by residents. It is a resource intended to contribute to building community engagement plans that listen with purpose and understanding, as well as to foster equitable and innovative engagement.

Source: City of Woodbury

Woodbury‘s Guiding Values and Principles

1. Equity
2. Trust
3. Informed Community
4. Openness & Accessibility

Each component of the guide includes a “Why is it important,” “What is it?” and “Using this guide element” explainer. This helps to ground the reader in the purpose of the section and how to use it. The guide outlines the critical steps in an inclusive engagement as identifying: (1) the purpose of the engagement effort, (2) the level of engagement, (3) the interested parties, (4) the engagement activities, (5) considerations for inclusive community engagement, (6) communication planning, and (7) training and support. One interesting aspect of the inclusive engagement considerations was the note that it is important to proactively engage community members, which involves staying open to new ideas and connecting before needing input on a specific project.

West Side Vision Study Framework

The framework for West Side Vision was created by combining insights from the methodologies of community visioning and asset-based community development described above (Figure 11). Some of the "steps" shown in Figure X below may happen concurrently. The overall goal of this framework was to start the process with strengths, allow these to also illuminate some concerns, and build off both elements to create future scenarios and find preferred actions.

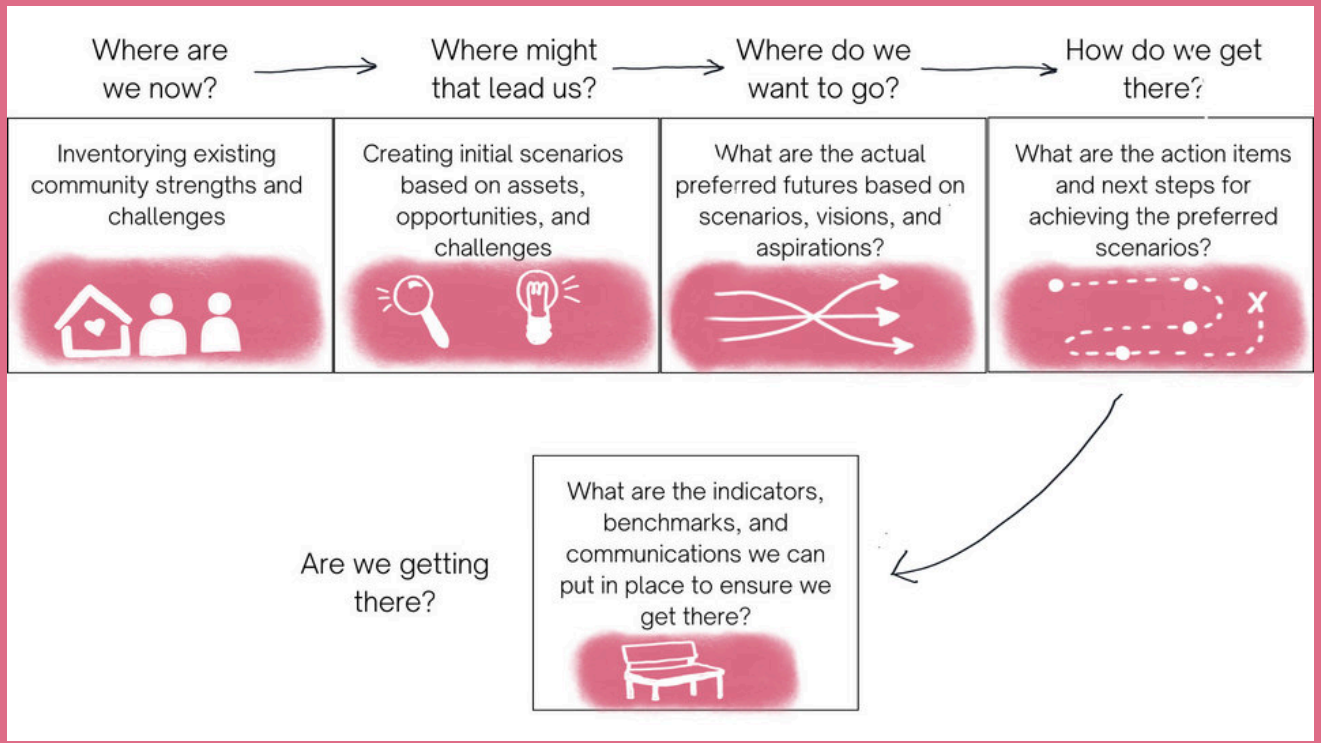


Figure 11. West Side Vision Study Framework

Our Principles of Meaningful Engagement

We have established a set of guiding principles for this project under the umbrella of meaningful engagement. As seen in the engagement plan case studies, guiding principles for meaningful engagement provide a solid foundation for engagement processes. The principles in those plans informed many of the definitions presented here.

We believe meaningful engagement means...

Inviting people to co-create change in their community.

Having representation from the whole community, hearing a diverse set of voices and not just a few.

Creating opportunities for more diverse engagement through targeted and varied engagement strategies, accessibility in both physical spaces and engagement materials, and providing incentives for people's valuable time.

Clearly defining expectations, goals, and relevancy of engagement activities.

Establishing a feedback loop, in which the project team reports back to the community about what they heard and how it will be incorporated into the final vision.

The Engagement Plan

We designed the engagement plan to guide how we heard from and reported back to the residents of the West Side. The engagement plan includes the following:

- Engagement Goals
- West Side Vision Engagement Area
- Inclusive Outreach and Engagement Materials
- Engagement Strategies and Timeline
- Reporting Back to the Community
- Measuring Success

To learn how the engagement process really went, read ‘How We Listened and Who We Talked To’ on page X and What We Heard on page X.

Engagement Goals

Engage with a minimum of 15% of the residents of the West Side Neighborhood.

15% of the West Side population is 108 people

Facilitate a meaningful engagement process, with a variety of ways to engage.

Engage with residents who are diverse across age, gender, and race.

Utilize best practices in inclusive engagement, both in strategies selected and communication.

Provide clear information about what the West Side Vision process is and how public input will be used by reporting back consistently and clearly.



Engagement Area

The neighborhood study boundary gives an idea of the properties and amenities that influence the West Side Neighborhood (Figure 12). In speaking with residents, we found that many agreed with these boundaries, but included many outside/nearby influences in Downtown and West Laramie in their discussion of the neighborhood. The residential area, in pink, is where the engagement process for West Side Vision took place.

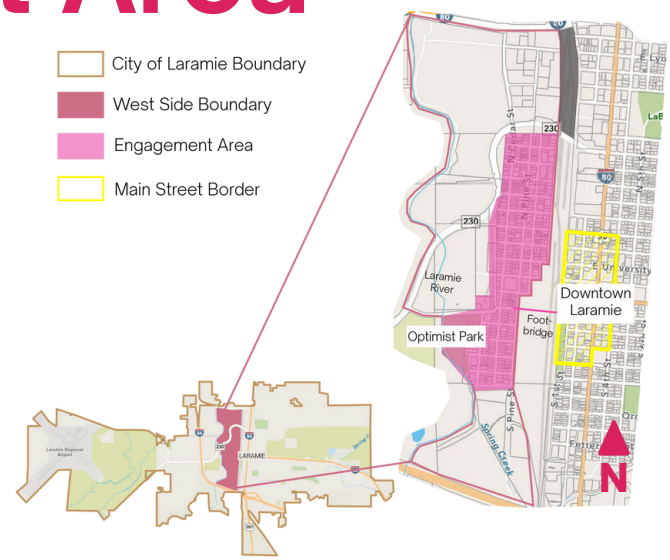


Figure 12. Engagement Area

This boundary centers and prioritizes the residents of Laramie's West Side. While we interviewed public officials, economic development experts, and historians that live outside of this neighborhood, their information will be used only to inform our understanding of the dynamics of the West Side in Laramie. Information from outside stakeholders will not be used as part of the summary of what we heard from residents.

Inclusive Outreach + Engagement Materials

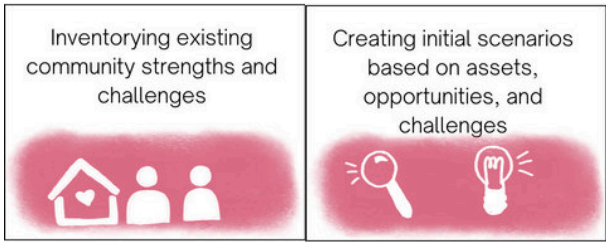
It is important to be as inclusive as possible in our messaging and materials during the engagement process. The current census indicates that 71% of West Side residents are Caucasian. Notably, Hispanic residents comprise 29.5% of the West Side neighborhood. Community stakeholders and anecdotal research has informed us that Spanish language materials were not an immediate necessity. Nonetheless, Spanish materials were prepared for Hispanic residents.

Furthermore, acknowledging the elder population active in local government, we offered online and physical ways to engage. This multi-generational approach included printed surveys, diverse interview options, and an active community hotline accessible through calls and texts.

Engagement Strategies

Below is a brief description of the strategies we selected to facilitate engagement with a diverse group of residents and stakeholders in the West Side. The West Side Vision framework guided these strategies by helping us to create phases of engagement based on what we wanted to learn from residents.

Where are we now? Where might that lead us?



Beginning with two key questions: "where are we now?" and "where might that lead us?" gave us a good base for understanding and shaping future scenarios and actions for residents to respond to later. The following engagement strategies were intended to start conversations with various stakeholders about how they saw their community currently and what ideas they had about its future.

Planning Commission and City Council Workshops

To begin the engagement process, we planned to conduct workshops with the City of Laramie Planning Commission and City Council. These sessions were intended to educate decision makers in Laramie on the project's goals and provide a valuable opportunity to gather their insights and feedback. Their perspective, as leaders in the community, is crucial for refining the framework and ensuring it aligns with the City's priorities.

Online Survey - Version I

To ensure everyone had a chance to contribute, whether or not they could attend in-person events, we created two versions of an online survey. Version I of this survey focused on discovering what people loved and wanted to see improved in the West Side. The valuable input collected from this survey would also provide a basis for creating scenarios for residents to respond to later in the engagement process.



QR Code Cards Passed Out At Events

Engagement Strategies cont.

Community Hotline

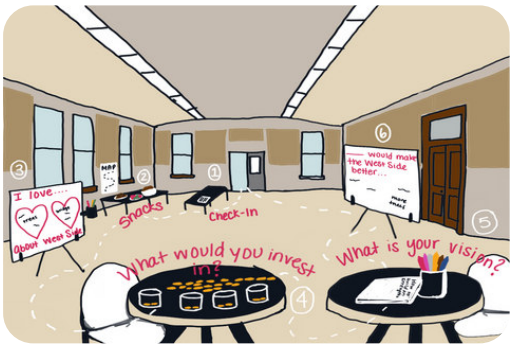
In an effort to make participation accessible, a dedicated phone line was made available. This was intended to allow residents to voice their opinions, give input on the project, and ask questions. Calls to this phone number were forwarded directly to us, the students facilitating the project, with conversation notes to be recorded in an online call log we created.

Stakeholder Interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of the West Side neighborhood and its inner workings, we planned to conduct one-on-one, or small group, interviews with a diverse group of community stakeholders. The Laramie Planning Department identified key individuals with expertise on various topics, such as housing, public art, and other community needs. Additionally, we planned to open these interviews to any residents interested in sharing their perspective. This strategy was selected because stakeholder interviews allow for in-depth discussions about the neighborhood's strengths, challenges, and aspirations.

Vision Session I

The first of two visioning sessions was planned to delve into the heart of the West Side's strengths. We created activities that would prompt residents with questions like “What do you love about the West Side?" and “What could be improved about the West Side?”.. By actively engaging in this session, residents would contribute valuable insights that illuminate the neighborhood's unique character, what they worry about, and what they want to protect. This foundational session was intended to pave the way for future discussions about the neighborhood’s vision and build initial trust with the community.



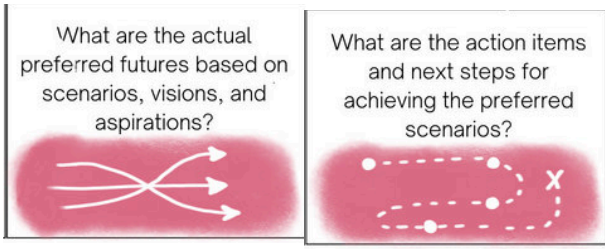
Planned Spatial Set-Up for Vision Session I

Pop-Up Engagement I and II

In an effort to meet people where they are, we planned to host two pop-up engagements, in partnership with a United Way tax preparation session. We created a posterboard, based on prompts from Vision Session I, where people could participate quickly after or while waiting for their tax prep sessions.

Engagement Strategies cont.

Where do we want to go? How might we get there?



In the second phase of our engagement process we planned to take the data and information gathered in phase one to answer these two questions: “Where do we want to go?” and “How do we get there?” The following activities were selected to facilitate community members’ answers to these questions.

Online Survey - Version II

Building on the responses of our initial online survey and other collected feedback, we created a second version of the survey. This enhanced survey offered a more scenario-based line of questioning, allowing residents to contribute their insights on more specific topics such as housing types and zoning ordinances. By receiving answers to Version 2 of the survey, we hoped to be provided with even richer data to solidify the next steps arising from the engagement process.

Vision Session II

For the second vision session, we built upon the insights gathered from residents during the first visioning session and created a series of five scenarios. These scenarios explored different possibilities for the West Side's future, focusing on topics identified as crucial by the community. Examples of scenarios included exploring various housing options or potential protective ordinances. We selected a scenario strategy because it would allow us to refine and enhance our articulation of the West Side's unique character, while uncovering the community's priorities.

Are we getting there?

The process of indicating benchmarks and indicators to ensure that the city and the neighborhood are meeting their goals for the West Side Vision will be established by the neighborhood, based on what arises from the engagement process.



Engagement Timeline

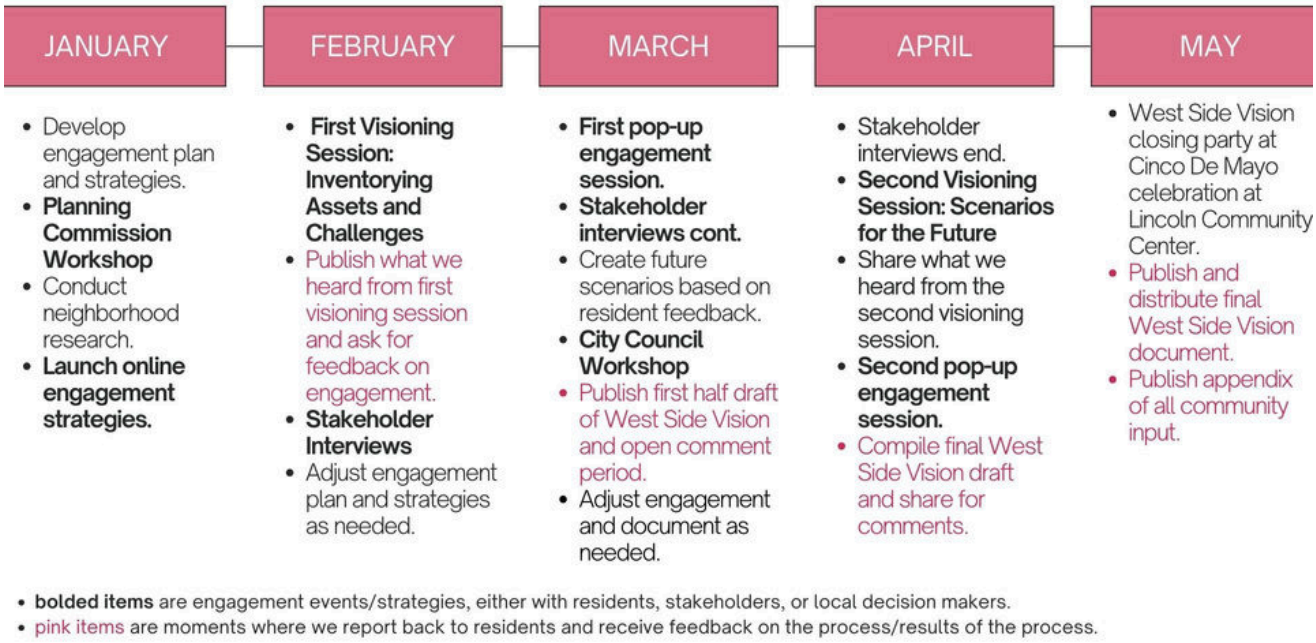
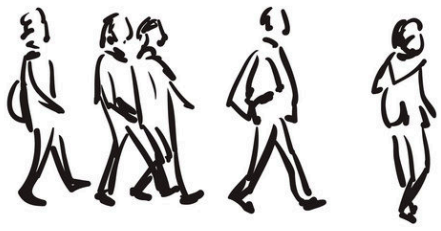


Figure 13. Engagement Timeline

Reporting Back

Resident voices are the driving force behind the West Side's future. We are committed to closing the loop through providing clear reports and feedback to residents throughout the engagement process.

To do this, we provided comprehensive reports summarizing key themes, priorities, and suggestions, which were shared on the project website and with our participant contact sheet. As the final vision document took shape, we provided clear updates to residents, through email, the website, and mailers, highlighting how community input directly created each section and asking for comments.



Analyzing Data

The following are the methodologies we used to analyze the data we have received from engagement events and activities.

Narrative

We coded the comments, suggestions, and phrases that were written down in conversations and received from engagement activities using best practices for narrative (also known as qualitative) data management and analysis. We tracked themes and concerns and avoided purely quantifying responses, instead focusing on using this data to tell a story about support for ideas (Learning for Action). Identifying a theme was based on the language used in responses. Major themes, as included in the 'What We Heard' section of this document, were based on both numerical and anecdotal evidence of support for that theme. See Figure 14 for an example of how narrative data will be organized and analyzed.

In a sentence or two, describe what you currently love about the West Side:	Great Quote	Community	Homes	History	Quiet	Character (Unique, Un-Pretentious, Eclectic, Quirky)	Location/Amenities
It is mostly individual home owners, some having been here their entire lives. Small homes and quiet living.		1	1		1		
It's a quiet hidden gem neighborhood that anyone who lives here lives it. It's a nice quiet neighborhood .	1				1	1	
Quiet streets, friendly neighbors		1			1		
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)	1				1		1

Figure 14. Example of Narrative Data Analysis

Numerical

The survey and some engagement activities provided numerical data, such as a count of people in different age groups. See Figure 15 for an example of how this type of data was organized. Analyzing numerical data was contextual depending on the question. For instance, data on resident's relationship to the West Side was compared to our goals for engaging with residents. However, numerical data from an investment activity, where we ask people to invest fake money into different topic areas, contributed to our analysis of community priorities.

Relationship to the West Side	#	%
Resident	29	81%
Property Owner	4	11%
Employed in West Side	2	6%
Laramie Resident	1	3%

Figure 15. Example of Numerical Data Analysis

Measuring Success

As we gathered invaluable input from these pop-up events, visioning sessions, surveys, and community hotline, ensuring everyone's voice was heard was our top priority. Success in a community engagement process like this isn't just about a final decision or product. It's about building trust with the community and creating a flow of ideas.

A successful process means clear communication, accessible participation methods, and a genuine consideration of community needs and ideas. When residents feel heard and their input shapes the future of the community, even if compromises are made, the outcome is more likely to be embraced and supported by the community in the long run.

To measure success, we wanted to go beyond counting the number of voices heard through participation metrics. We created a set of metrics aimed at evaluating the inclusivity and reach of the engagement strategies, using numerical and narrative measures. Results for each can be found in What We Heard, on page 061.

Narrative Measures

- Depth: Quality of discussions, unique perspectives, insightful solutions.
- Diversity: Inclusivity of methods, representativeness of participants, diverse voices heard.
- Ownership: Sense of community responsibility, investment in project success, motivation to act.
- Outcomes: Increased collaboration, metrics aligned with goals, feedback from participants on effectiveness.

Numerical Measures

- Reach: Number of website visits, survey responses, event attendance.
- Engagement: Open-ended question responses, forum comments, hotline questions, engaged answers in-person.

How We Listened



Engagement Activities Summary

The graphic below summarizes the engagement activities and moments of feedback completed during the West Side Vision study process. The following pages will provide more detail on each engagement strategy.

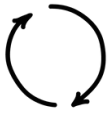

Public Meeting

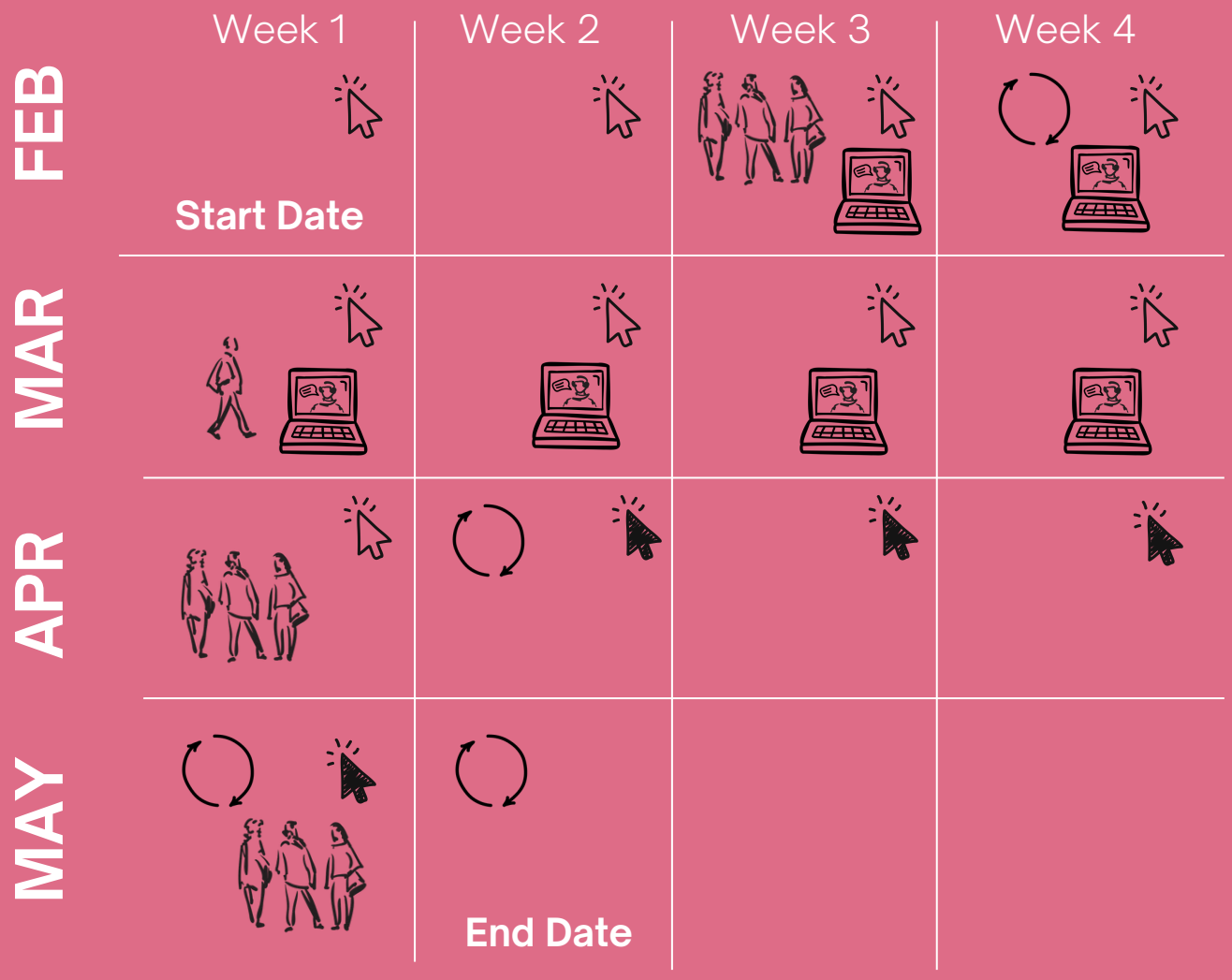

Pop-Up


Interview


Survey I


Survey II


Report-Back



Planning Commission and City Council Workshops

Summary

On January 22, 2024, we joined a Planning Commission workshop session to introduce the West Side Vision study and gain feedback. The planning commission had overall positive feedback for the study's structure and intent. This was a valuable session to introduce the goals of the study and to ensure everyone understands the information that will be contained within it.

On March 12, 2024, we attended a City Council workshop session to introduce what we had heard from the visioning process so far, and to explain what was upcoming in the process. As a City Council project, many reiterated that they were very interested in the results of this work and how residents were interacting with the project. The City Council will be receiving a copy of the final West Side Vision document, as they will be one of the primary decision makers regarding much of its content.



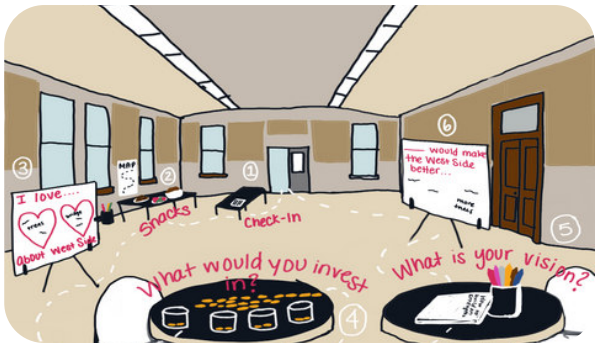
Presentation for City Council and Planning Commission



Vision Session I

Summary

Vision Session I, hosted at the Lincoln Community Center, drew around 60 people total between its morning and evening sessions. This event was intended to have an open format to create conversations about what residents love, want to protect, and want to improve in the West Side. We initially planned to have four activities, with attendees able to move throughout the room at their own pace.



Planned Setup

However, as we were setting up the morning session, residents arrived early and self-organized into a “town-hall” format. We maintained this format for the evening session, as it was clear there was skepticism in the group about the study that was assuaged by being able to hear from each other.



Setup at the Actual Event (Source: Aislinn Droski)

Pivoting from our original plan, we facilitated three activities (below) with the whole group and did our best to ensure everyone’s voices were still heard despite the larger discussion. For more insights on the major themes that arose during this vision session, see page X.

I. What do you love about the West Side?

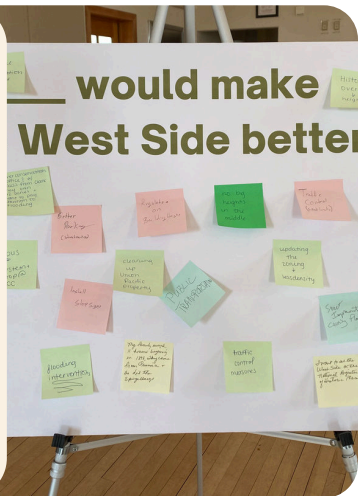
- How many people use the greenway daily?

II. What do you want to see improved in the West Side?

- How many people patron the businesses in the West Side?

III. What would you invest in the West Side?

- Participants were given $3 of ‘West Side fun money’ to vote for investments in housing, businesses, preservation, art, streets, community wayfinding, or other.



Measuring Success

Reach and Engagement

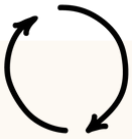
Participants at Vision Session I ranged in age from 30 to 65+ (observed based on personal knowledge of residents) and the group consisted almost entirely of residents. A few community stakeholders, such as a community land trust, river conservation non-profit, and a council member were in attendance as well. The success of turn-out was likely due to sending invitation postcards to all addresses in the West Side about a week before the event. Many residents told us they had received them and that this practice should be maintained for all engagement events in their neighborhood. However, another contributor to attendance was that it was clear there was skepticism about whether there is an upcoming development project this information is intended for. Many showed up thinking they were going to speak to a governmental body. The lack of knowledge about the study's intent was a failure on our part. During the event, we made it clear that this was a proactive engagement process, but we will also do more to be clear about the intentions for this project in future materials.

During the session, participants provided over 100 comments on what they love and what they would like to see improved in the West Side. For the investment activity, ~45 people invested $135 of the "West Side fun money" into various sectors, mainly focused on historic preservation and sidewalk maintenance. Residents were actively engaged and were eager to provide their insights and ideas and to tell us the history of their neighborhood.

Depth, Diversity, Ownership, and Outcomes

While many people provided comments, the "town hall" format of the room led to some folks not speaking up. As facilitators, we did our best to provide spaces for other people to speak, but the format did not lend itself to all voices being heard. This is something we adjusted with the next visioning session. However, there was still a high-quality discussion in this session - many unique ideas and concepts came to the surface and were supported or challenged by other neighbors in the room. We observed many neighbors hanging around to talk about topics and next steps that came up during discussion. To us, this showed that this process was building on existing relationships to enhance collaboration. Additionally, a few people came up to us and expressed appreciation for the facilitation of this process and document, hoping it would provide them with more political power

See Appendix Item A for the report back we sent to residents for feedback.



Vision Session II



Summary

Vision Session II, held again at the Lincoln Community Center, attracted a diverse crowd of approximately 30 residents across both morning and evening sessions. The event welcomed back participants from the February 20th session, along with new residents who weren't able to attend the previous event but were eager to contribute.

This session aimed to refine the ideas gathered at the first event. We presented 12 scenarios, developed from resident input from the previous event and other engagement activities. From that engagement, the community identified five key topics:

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



Graphic Created for Scenario 4

Measuring Success

Reach and Engagement

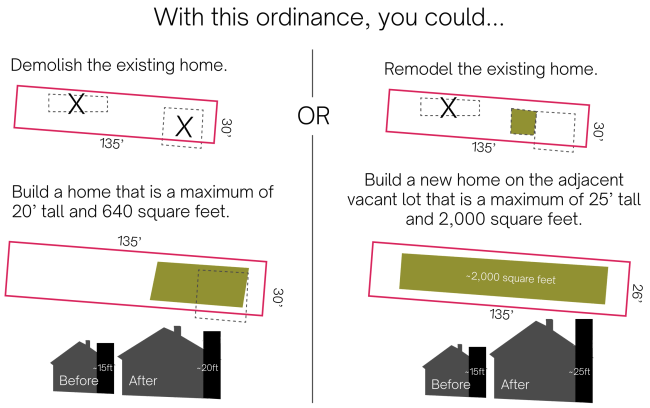
Participants again ranged in ages from 30 to 65+ (observed and based on personal knowledge of residents). We repeated the sending of mailers to all addresses in the West Side to reach as many residents as we could. Unlike the first event, Vision Session II was entirely attended by West Side residents. The intent behind this event was to be more specific to the West Side community and collect specific reactions. While the first event had a broader context, this could be a cause for the decrease in participation.



Source: Aislinn Droski

Measuring Success cont.

To facilitate focused discussion, we organized five topic-specific tables, each staffed by either a member of the Laramie Planning staff or ourselves. The topics covered included: preserving historic homes and design, preserving the home sizes, exploring R1 single-family zoning, housing that fits the West Side's character, and effective code enforcement. To prompt discussion around each topic, each table featured multiple scenarios we had created using the comments from the first visioning session and our other engagement.



Graphic for Scenario 2 - Preserving Existing Housing Scale

Depth, Diversity, Ownership, and Outcomes

The facilitated table discussions with timed rotations generated insightful feedback on each scenario. While a small group of residents expressed a preference for the more open "townhall" format, the majority found value in the structure. Presenting scenarios in smaller groups allowed for deeper explanations of each option's impact on the community. This facilitated a shift in perspectives on certain topics, revealing valuable insights we might have missed in a larger setting.

The project team created another report, like after the first engagement meeting, to send out to all participants in the April 1st Open House/Vision Session II. The 8-page report includes a project description and results from each of the ten scenarios created for the five topic subjects. The report and the email also asked participants to provide feedback on the engagement process and to share this information with their neighbors.

See Appendix Item B for the full report we sent to residents. The results are also summarized in What We Heard, on page 061.

Pop-Up Engagements

Summary



Unfortunately, scheduling conflicts and travel to Laramie prevented us from hosting any in-person pop-up events in the West Side neighborhood. However, a member of the Laramie Planning staff attended a tax preparation session at the Lincoln Community Center. They set up a table with some engagement materials but were unsuccessful in engaging with attendees.



While the tax preparation session attracted some West Side residents, most attendees came from outside the neighborhood. The session was not limited to those who lived in the neighborhood but was open to all Laramie residents. Some who attended were from other parts of Wyoming all together. This resulted in limited engagement at the event, as most attendees weren't directly impacted by our project. Due to the low neighborhood participation, we opted not to repeat this format. In the future, it would be advantageous to set up pop-in sessions in locations that are frequently used or trafficked by neighborhood residents, on days where the weather is pleasant.

Online Strategies

Survey Summary

Throughout the West Side Vision study, two iterations of an online survey were published which aligned with the topics of each vision session. The first online survey was open from February 8 to April 4, 2024. This survey focused on understanding residents' vision for the West Side, including what they love about it and their priorities for improving. **A total of 36 respondents answered questions like:**

- Compared to other parts of Laramie, what makes the West Side special and unique to you?
- In a sentence or two, describe your dream for the future of the West Side.

Online Strategies cont.

The second online survey was open from April 4 to May 5, 2024. This survey aligned with Vision Session II, and focused on a variety of scenarios. The survey allowed those not in attendance at the event to walk through the scenarios and provide reactions and feedback. This will help to inform us of residents' preferred planning interventions/next steps. **A total of 33 respondents responded to scenarios like:**

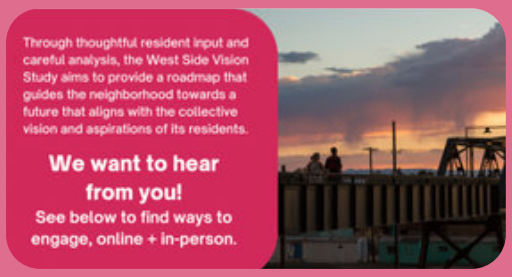
- Imagine...a new developer is building small apartments on the industrial land nearby. Of the following buildings, which is compatible with the West Side?
- Imagine...a new couple is building a 40', single-family house next door, as allowed by zoning. How would you react to this?

Measuring Success

The number of responses to both versions of the survey, **69, 66 of which were unique responses and 46 of which were residents,** indicates that the survey was a successful tool for gaining input on the West Side Vision process. We had several comments that people who were unable to attend events were appreciative of the survey to provide feedback. Most respondents engaged with every aspect of the survey and answered all questions. In the future, we believe it would be helpful to have provided a Spanish version of the survey and to simplify instructions to increase inclusivity.

West Side Vision Homepage Summary

The West Side Vision study had a homepage on the City of Laramie website. This allowed us, as the facilitators, to have an online platform to direct people to and find report-backs, updates, an explanation of the project, ways to get in touch, and the link to the survey.



Many remarked that they had used it to access the reports from vision sessions. A drawback of this homepage was that it had limited ways to interact on the website, requiring folks to visit the survey or call us.

Stakeholder Interviews

Summary

We conducted one-on-one interviews with stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of the West Side community. To achieve this, we collaborated with the Laramie planning staff. They provided a comprehensive list of potential stakeholders, including both long-term residents and interested developers. We then individually contacted each person, requesting a one-hour meeting to discuss their thoughts on the West Side's potential and improvement opportunities. We conducted interviews on Wednesday mornings and Thursday afternoons, with participants able to sign up in-person, online, or over the phone.

Measuring Success

Reach and Engagement

To ensure wider outreach for these interviews, we went beyond the City-provided list and welcomed interview requests from any West Side resident. This approach ensured we captured a diverse range of perspectives from the community. In total, we spoke with ten individuals, four of whom were residents and six of whom were stakeholders in the broader Laramie community (lived outside of the West Side). The following is a summary of the stakeholders we spoke with. To maintain anonymity, individuals' names were left off this list.

Stakeholder Interviews		
Date Interviewed	**Stakeholder**	**Topic of Discussion**
2/20/24	Resident	Ability to make minor changes and repairs to improve livability/ Concerned about taking business from downtown
2/28/24	Laramie Chamber of Business Alliance	Expanding current housing stock in Laramie
2/28/24	Resident	History of the West Side
3/6/24	Laramie River Conservation District	Development of new offices/ Maintaining and protecting the Laramie River
3/6/24	Planning Commission/ Property Owner	Enjoys the quiet, the history and historic homes, and the isolated nature of the neighborhood
3/13/24	Resident/ Albany County Historic Preservation Board	Preserving historic homes in the community
3/13/24	Laramie Public Art Commission	Bringing art and wayfinding to the West Side
3/14/24	Resident	Maintaining the isolated character of the neighborhood
3/14/24	Community Land Trust	Bringing affordable housing through financial literacy to the West Side
3/21/24	Property Owner	Making the West Side visible to the rest of Laramie/ Opportunities for small businesses

Figure 16. Stakeholder Interviews Overview

Measuring Success cont.

Depth, Diversity, Ownership, and Outcomes

We employed this virtual engagement method for interviews for a few reasons, including the distance to Laramie and stakeholders and the frequency of which the interviews took place. Given the circumstances this method seemed to be the most effective for scheduling with stakeholders and speaking with interested residents. This ensured that all who wished to be interviewed could be heard by us without having to heavily restrict availability and increase the frequency of our visits to Laramie. This format was key in allowing us to build relationships with residents through longer conversations. Outcomes from this discussion contributed to our community ideas section and provided a critical foundation for our knowledge of the West Side and the broader Laramie community.

Community Hotline

Summary

The hotline was intended to be a way for residents of the West Side, as well as stakeholders, to have a direct line to us. They could reach out with questions or feedback. This engagement activity was marginally successful in that we did get some interest at the beginning of the project but that quickly fizzled out as it progressed. The initial interest was partly due to the confusion we encountered at the beginning of the project concerning whether this was a precursor to a development. After the first visioning meeting held on February 20th calls to the hotline slowly began to decline as residents were aware of the project and better understood what we were doing in the community.

The hotline was open from February 12th to May 5th. It received a total of four callers that covered a variety of topics such as:

- Terms used in our engagement materials
- General inquiries about engagement opportunities
- Suggestions on stakeholders to speak with
- Questions about who we are and what we're studying

Who's Participating

In total, the West Side Vision study interacted with about 162 residents, or 22% of the total population of the neighborhood. Our goal for engagement was 15%, or 108 people, meaning that we were able to reach our goal for engagement.

Demographic data about who was participating in the West Side Vision study was collected via the online survey, which had 66 unique respondents. The data displayed below is not comprehensive of all study participants. However, as many of the people who took the survey also took part in other aspects of the study, it is useful as a representation of who we talked to during this process.

Relationship to the West Side

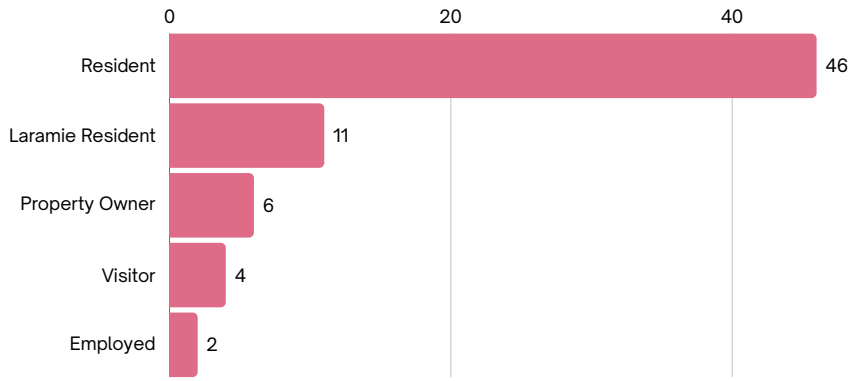


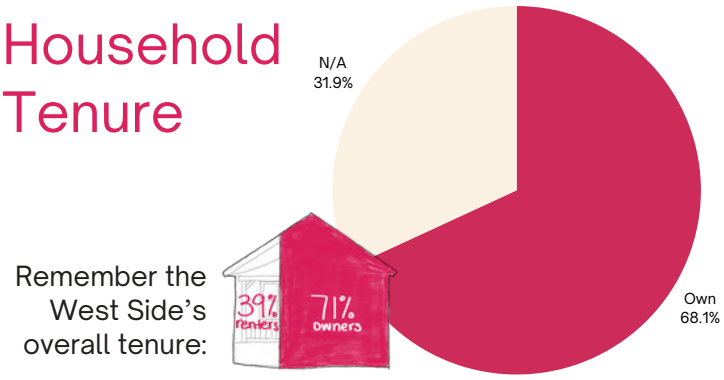
Figure 17. Relationship to the West Side from Survey

Goal Check-In

A goal of this engagement process was to engage with **primarily West Side residents.**

The survey data, combined with our knowledge and records of who attended in-person events makes us confident we engaged with almost entirely residents throughout this process.

Household Tenure



Remember the West Side's overall tenure:

Figure 5.2

Figure 18. Tenure from Survey

Reflection

We failed to reach renters during this process, with all West Side residents from the survey being owners. This is likely due to the sending of mailers only to property owners. In hindsight, we should have done more to incorporate renter voices.

Who's Participating cont.

Ages

Remember the West Side's age breakdown:

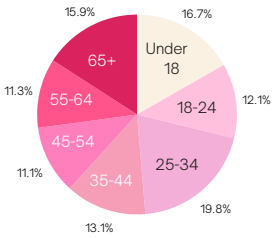


Figure 5.3

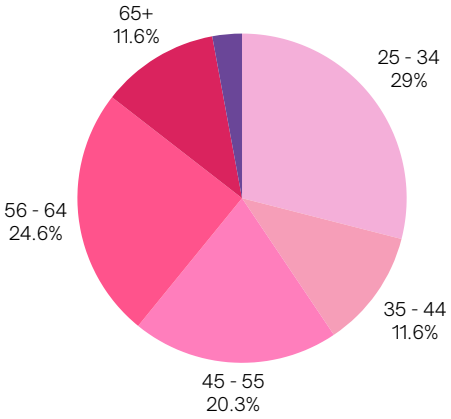


Figure 19. Ages from Survey

Gender

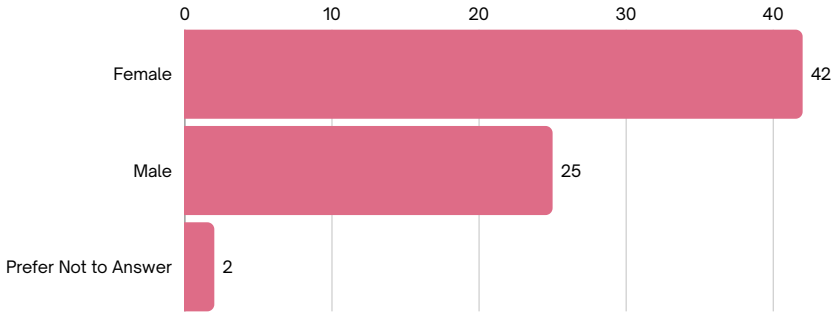


Figure 20. Gender from Survey

Race/Ethnicity

Remember the West Side's race/ethnicity breakdown

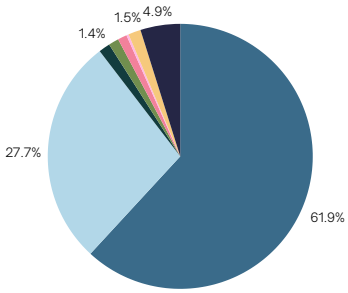




Figure 5.4

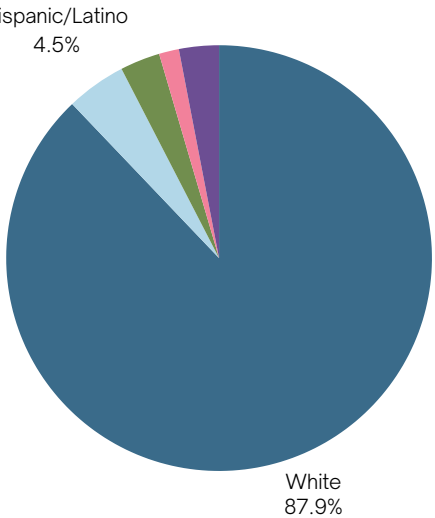


Figure 21. Race/Ethnicity from Survey

Reflection

In terms of ages and gender, we reached a wide variety of people. A majority of our respondents were female identifying, and this felt consistent with the in-person events as well. Ages were spread across the board, although we did not speak with anyone under 25 years old. We could have leveraged connections with local schools to talk to more young people.

Goal Check-In

A goal of this process was to engage with residents who were **diverse across age, gender, and race.**

We do not feel this goal was entirely met when it comes to race. We should have done more to reach Hispanic residents in the West Side. Otherwise, this process was inclusive of many different residents across age and gender, though there is always room for improvement.



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.



Laramie Footbridge (Source: City of Laramie)

Phase I

Phase I of the engagement process aimed to inventory existing community strengths and challenges, as well as create initial scenarios based on the opportunities and challenges uncovered. The following is a summary of the themes that emerged during Phase I. They will be grouped under the broad topics we covered during Vision Session I, Survey I, and Stakeholder Interviews. To see our methodology for evaluating what is considered a theme, see page 046.

What West Side Residents Love about Their Neighborhood

This section will cover what we heard people say in the survey and vision session about what they love about their neighborhood. This information was used to uncover opportunities, understand what needs to be protected, and get an idea of the character of the neighborhood.

Character

The character of the West Side is something we consistently heard from residents as being at the heart of this community, and something they want to fiercely protect. Neighborhood character can be difficult to define and pinpoint. For the West Side, residents described its character with many of the same words, even if they referred to a variety of topics (housing, history, location, etc).

> I love that the west side is historic and has maintained its character, charm, and quirks

In defining the character of their neighborhood, residents used words like:

Unique	Un-Pretentious
Eclectic	Weird (in a good way)
Blue-Collar*	Artistic
Quirky	Down-to-earth

Character Cont.

*It's important to note that some residents were sensitive to ‘blue-collar’ as a descriptor for the West Side. While others readily and proudly used it to describe both the historical and current socio-economic/employment character, the historical relationship of this neighborhood to its surrounding city likely contributes to the skepticism around certain labels that have to do with class. We want to be clear that this list does not determine the West Side’s character, but we found it important to include the array of terms we heard.

Homes

> “[I love the] Variety of homes and lot sizes, very eclectic.”

Homes were a subject for much of the discussion around the character of the neighborhood. Residents would often use houses around their neighborhood to reference what they thought worked and what they thought didn’t. The small sizes of existing homes, as well as their eclectic designs, are loved by many in the community. These small homes were often described as generational, affordable, and unique.

> Feels like a real neighborhood that is not full of rentals like so many other places in Laramie.

The size of the homes was the most prominent feature people talked about appreciating in their neighborhood. Many indicated that they moved to the West Side specifically for the smaller housing, which was more affordable to own than the rest of Laramie. This likely contributes to the sense of pride in being a community with many homeowners. Currently, about 71% of the neighborhood are homeowners, compared to Laramie’s 54% home ownership (Figure 5.2). Quite a few residents explicitly stated they would like to see homeownership continue to be the focus in the West Side.



Homes in the West Side
(Source: Aislinn Droski)



History

> The history [of the West Side] is interesting and important to the city and the region.

The history of the West Side was one of the most prominent points of pride for the West Side community. Long-time residents would often start any conversation with us with the history of the three homesteads, the development of the railroad, and/or the immigrant families that first called the West Side home. A few residents have taken on the task of being a local historian, tracking and recording the West Side's history. There is a general sense of pride in the unique history of the neighborhood, especially as it relates to the railroad. In our online survey, most comments about what makes the West Side unique mentioned the area's history and the railroad.

> [I love] the West Side's unique social history of working-class people in Laramie.

Community

The West Side's sense of community also rose to the top of the list for residents when asked what they love about their neighborhood. In the online survey, sense of community was tied with quiet for the most prominent theme in the answers given. In both the survey, vision session, and interviews, community was described as friendly neighbors, kids playing outside, down-to-earth people, and knowing who your neighbors are. The people are a special piece of the West Side neighborhood, and many appreciate that younger people are moving in and adding to their community. Many also expressed appreciation for the multi-generational aspect of their community, where parents move back to be with their children or vice versa and homes get passed down.

> 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 sounds of my neighborhood. The church bells, kids playing, the train.

Quiet

> 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).

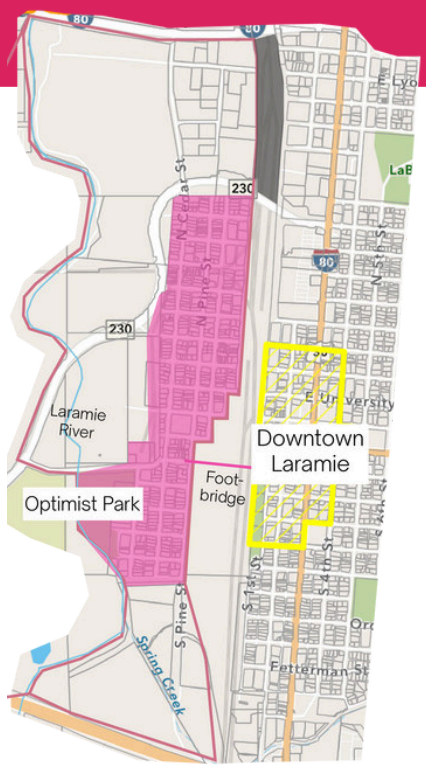
> Very quiet neighborhood. I like that it feels separated from the rest of town. Feels like it's own little place

While many residents love the sounds of their neighborhood, from the train to kids playing, most also emphasized that they love the quiet of their neighborhood. The quiet can often serve to make sounds more prominent, sounds that many West Siders associate with their neighborhood. Much of this sense of quiet is due to the isolated nature of the West Side. Between the railroad and Snowy Range Road, the neighborhood "feels like an island" and residents love that. Many remark that they feel safe in their neighborhood, likely because cars cannot drive through.

Location

> [I love] the Laramie River trail and the dog park. I love the easy walking access to downtown.

Despite this isolated nature, many residents also remarked that the location, and the amenities that the location provides, are what make the West Side a great place to live. Many indicated that the footbridge was a tremendous amenity in their neighborhood, that connects them to all that downtown Laramie provides. The Laramie River Greenway and Optimist Park were also identified as well-loved and well-used amenities. When asked, almost all people in attendance at the evening vision session indicated they use the greenway practically every day.



What the West Side Wants to See Improved & Protected

West Side residents were encouraged, in the survey and the vision sessions, to think about what they love and use that information to think about what they would like to see improved. Based on the responses we received, we have divided this into two categories: what they want to see improved and what they want to see protected. Improvement implies that while the condition may exist, there is something lacking that needs to be fixed or changed, while protection indicates something that already exists in the West Side that they want to stay or be enhanced.

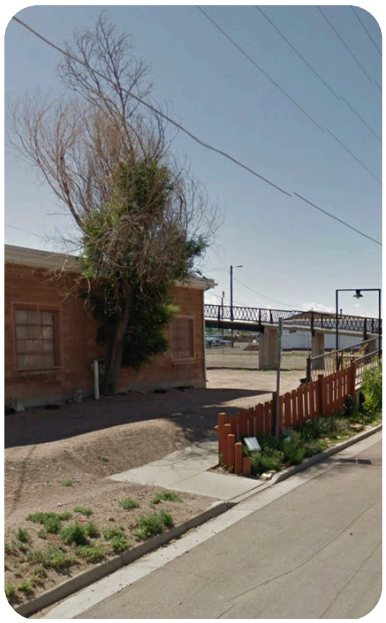
They want to see improvement of...

...Connectivity and Access to Amenities

While many West Side residents commented that access to amenities and the neighborhood's connectivity was one of its strengths, it also came up as something that needs improvement.

We heard that residents want to see improvements in this area through:

- Improving sidewalk connections to and throughout the neighborhood, such as:
  - At the footbridge's entrance into the West Side.
  - To Optimist Park.
- Increasing food access opportunities, with ideas like:
  - A small neighborhood grocer or market.
  - Restarting the weekend farmers market in Optimist Park.
  - Inviting food trucks into Optimist Park.
  - Exploring partnerships with local food providers, like the food co-op, to have a satellite or pop-up grocery event.
- Public transportation to the neighborhood, with a stop at the Lincoln Community Center.
- More community events.



End of Footbridge in the West Side (Source: Google Maps)

...Access to Green Spaces

We heard that many residents love and use the green spaces in the West Side neighborhood. Optimist Park and the Laramie River Greenway are tremendous amenities. However, residents suggested that there could be improvements in access to the outdoors and green space through:

- Ensuring there is maintenance beneath the bridge on the greenway, to remove snow – it is unusable when this happens.
- Providing a protective crosswalk across Snowy Range Road for the greenway.
- Exploring opportunities for more greenspace on vacant lots.

...Safety and Street Infrastructure

The isolated nature of the West Side contributes to its feeling of safety for residents. However, many residents identified that there are still issues with speeding and safety in their neighborhood. Additionally, many commented that the lack of infrastructure in the history of the West Side has led to recurrent flooding issues in many streets and homes. They see the improvements needed in this area as being:

- Evaluating what exactly is causing the flooding and;
  - Creating more places for water to go other than their homes, i.e. drainage points, green infrastructure.
  - Address the flooding of basements and first floors.
  - Fix the West Side's infrastructure first before thinking about development.
- Improving safety infrastructure, with ideas like:
  - Awareness and speed reduction tactics, particularly on Clark and Pine Streets.
  - Installing stop-signs every other block (they are currently none on a few streets).
  - Installing a 4-way stop at Garfield.



Source: Google Maps

...Neighborhood Beautification

In this first phase of engagement, many residents indicated that in their vision for the West Side, they would like to see home repairs, beautification of the Union Pacific property, and better code enforcement to clean up yards and "junk" cars. It's important to note that in many of the comments about wanting to see home repairs or vacant lots cleaned up, residents noted they would like financial and educational support for homeowners for home specific beautification.

Overall, residents would like to:

- Work with Union Pacific to clean up their property or allow community access to make it nicer.
- Have better code enforcement to clean up yards and cars.
- Clean up and improve homes in need of repairs.
- Have the ability to make minor repairs/changes to their homes without it triggering other requirements.
- Have education and resources available for historic and affordable homeowners.

They want to see protection of...

...Small-Scale and Unique Homes

Small-scale homes were one of the main things that West Side residents loved and was often the biggest topic of discussion for protecting. Ideas for protecting this asset in the West Side were:

- Design concepts and regulations aimed at maintaining authentic and small-scale development.
- Re-zoning to decrease height and/or density.
- Protections against tear downs.
- Limiting the number of lots a single developer can purchase.



...Neighborhood History

Most neighbors in the West Side indicated that the history of the area was important to its character and to the current community. Ideas that West Side residents had to protect their history and neighborhood character were:

- A historic district overlay.
- Educating property owners of historic buildings about resources.
- Public art and/or signage that tells the West Side story.
- Education materials about the neighborhood's history.

Many residents, in this first phase of engagement, were very interested in a historic district overlay ordinance and/or finding some way to regulate and protect old buildings in their neighborhood.

> "A continuation of the unusualness of the neighborhood that feels like people can just be who they are."
> *Response when asked 'What is your dream for the future of the West Side?'*



Rendering of Restored Neighborhood Church, an important historic building in the West Side (Source: City of Laramie Planning Department)

What the West Side Wants to See Invested In

During Vision Session I, we gave each participant $3 'West Side dollars' and asked them to distribute these investment funds into one or more of six topics. They were also asked to write details on the back of the dollars. For example, if they wanted to use $2 to invest in historic preservation, they might write "for an ordinance" on the back to indicate what they would like to see resources used towards. Figure 22 shows a summary of these investments, along with examples of the major comment(s) we heard in each category.

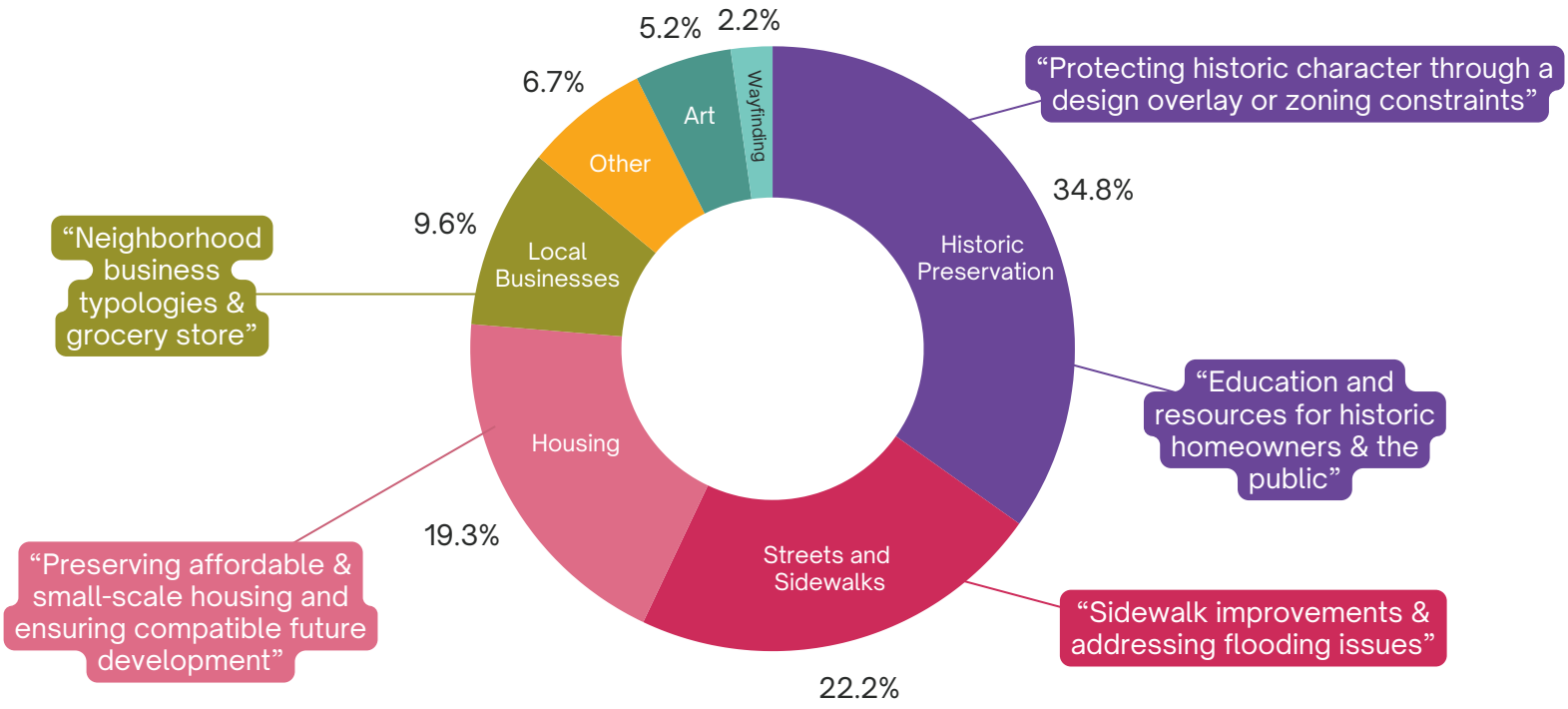
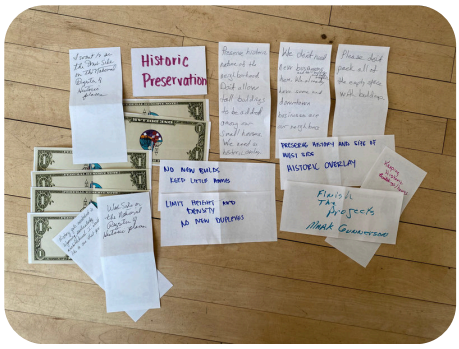
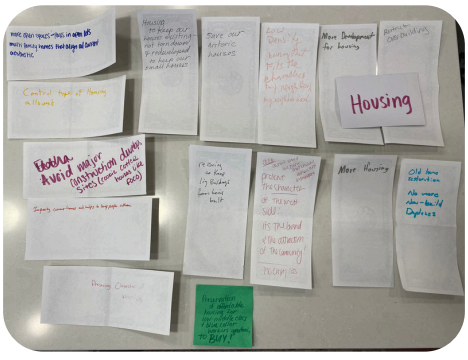
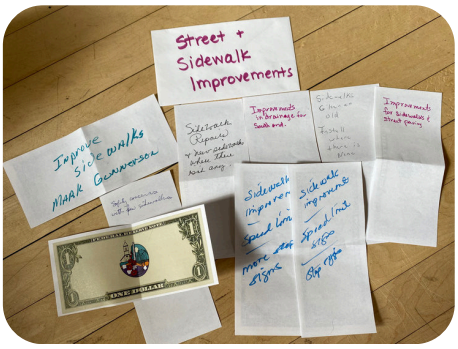


Figure 22. West Side Investments







What Stakeholders See as Opportunities in the West Side

The following are the perspectives that stakeholders had about topics such as economic development, public art, community land trusts/affordable housing, and river and land conservation. These only reflect the views of stakeholders interviewed by the project team and not from other forms of engagement. Those interviewed consisted of both residents and those who live outside the community but have an invested interest.

Economic Development

There were mixed feelings about this topic. Some interviewees thought there was opportunity for small businesses in the West Side while others believed they were already served well by existing businesses and the downtown. Ideas for neighborhood business opportunities included coffee shops, local grocers, or cafes. There was also a sentiment given that more business in the community would be nice but there were concerns about it taking away from downtown businesses.

Public Art

Those interviewed thought that there is an opportunity for public art installations. One of those interviewed was interested in incorporating public art installations on the footbridge to take advantage of the residents of Laramie that already use it to attract them to the businesses on the West Side. It is worth noting that there is a public art installation near the West Side along Snowy Range Rd that is a large head sculpture. Our stakeholder indicated this installation was not initially received warmly by community residents. Additional opportunities for public art include Optimist Park, and utilizing crosswalk art for safer crossings throughout the neighborhood.



Big Head Sculpture

Affordable Housing

There were a few interviewees that were acutely aware of the need for affordable housing in Laramie. Some 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. For example, there was discussion of infill housing near the railroad property that would be single-family affordable housing backed by a community land trust. This would ensure the properties would remain affordable.

River and Land Conservation

A common theme in the interviews was a desire to maintain and potentially expand the green spaces available to the community. The West Side is near the Laramie River and a greenbelt that the community utilizes often. Providing the river with the space to flex and flood was a priority for river conservation advocates. Additionally, cleaning and preserving these amenities were a priority for many stakeholders across interviews.



Laramie River (Source: City of Laramie)

Phase II

Phase II of the project involved expanding the thoughts and ideas presented to us in Phase I and expanding them. This phase was intended to refine ideas like “changing zoning” or a “historic overlay” and educate the community on what processes like that really entail. To achieve this goal, we created scenarios that were representative of the major topics that had come up to that point and we redesigned the community survey to match those scenarios.

Where do we want to go?

Using Scenarios to Answer This Question

In Phase II of the engagement process, we created scenarios that would help us understand what interventions from the city the neighborhood is interested in pursuing. Using what we learned people wanted improved and protected from Phase I, we created scenarios involving interventions in the following five topics:

1. Preserving Historic Homes and Design
2. Preserving the Home Sizes
3. Exploring R1 Single-Family Zoning
4. Finding Compatible Housing Designs
5. Effective Code Enforcement

The following is a summary of the comments and reactions to each of these intervention topics. For a more in-depth representation of the scenarios contained in each summary, see Appendix Item C.

1 - Preserving Historic Homes & Design

During Phase I there was a unanimous sentiment that the community wanted to preserve the historic housing in the neighborhood with an historic overlay. To better understand what exactly they wanted to preserve we present two main scenarios:

Scenario 1: A couple buys a home in the West Side and constructs a rear addition and changes out windows. They use materials not consistent with the original materials and widen original window openings.

Participants were split on whether they were concerned about not using "appropriate" materials for an addition and new windows. A few indicated they would definitely prefer an "in-kind" replacement or a compatible material, but many admitted they were worried about the cost burdens if that was a requirement. Others were completely in favor of these renovations and liked that they had the freedom to make improvements and make things more efficient, spacious, and nice.

Scenario 2: A historic preservation ordinance is put in place that requires a Certificate of Appropriateness review for renovations and new construction. The ordinance requires historically appropriate materials.

Many participants in the Vision Session II expressed concern about the cost burden of a COA process, as well as it being too subjective. Some were very interested in the idea still but wanted it to be more relaxed and ensure there was an appeal process. However, in the second version of the online survey, 9 of the 11 respondents voted favorably to a historic preservation ordinance and 4 people voted it as their second choice for ideal outcome in this process.

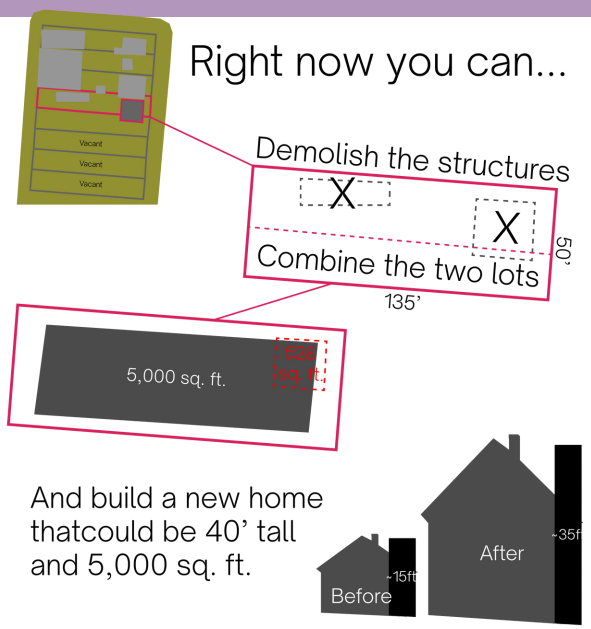
This scenario also sparked an interesting conversation about a design board/committee in the neighborhood. This hypothetically would be a collection of residents that would agree on certain styles for new homes and then approve reviews and approves new buildings. Many participants indicated that they would be interested in a design book and/or design guidelines. In the online survey, most respondents indicated that they would prefer these guidelines to be enforceable.

key insight!

It's clear that 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 Homes Sizes

Maintaining a human scale for the neighborhood was the major theme for this topic. The current zoning allows for 40ft high structures, which was the main concern for most of those participating. There was a nearly unanimous thought that the maximum height for structures in the neighborhood should be capped at 25ft, a drastic difference to the current standard. This brought up the conversation of a unique standard being applied to the West Side.



This conversation had two sides; one that called for light regulation to allow for architectural diversity in terms of design and maintain the eclectic feel of the community and the other that called for regulation that preserves the historical fabric of the neighborhood.

Another argument in favor of the height cap and the regulations on the home's size was the neighborhood's preservation of affordability. The sentiment being that using a new ordinance to cap the size of new homes, those with lower incomes have more opportunity to build a new home. A participant said that they would be in favor of an ordinance that regulated height "...because people of lower income levels have the freedom to build a home within their financial means. And the height of the new smaller house will not block sun for neighboring houses."

key insight!

A key realization has emerged: 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.

3 - Exploring R1 Single-Family Zoning

Many were in favor of this change in zoning during Phase I. But after learning the minimum standards for this zoning type, many people changed their minds. Many thought that the lot sizes were too large, and it still did nothing about the community's biggest concern, building height. New homes that could be two stories would be an imposition on the community, but the current older stock of two-story homes is accepted and protected by the community.

The sentiment we heard about preserving 'historic' homes likely stems from concerns over maintaining the neighborhood's existing scale and character. Currently, two-story residences in the area occupy small, narrow lots, with some even having their first floors partially underground, reducing the overall building height. However, within the R1 zoning district, the requirement for a minimum lot size of 4,000 square feet gave many homeowners pause when considering the construction of similar type of residences. The apprehension was that larger homes would disrupt the established scale and aesthetic that the community has collectively embraced.

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 if there were a switch to R1 zoning.

4 - Finding Compatible Housing Designs

Participants were presented with three different scenarios for three different housing types and shown images that would push the conversation. The following are the images shown to participants and some comments about the most popular choices.



Finding Compatible Housing Designs cont.

Single-Unit Homes



Figure 23. Single-Unit Home Designs

In the scenario all the homes shown were relatively the same height and scale. The most popular choice was C. This was a favorite among participants because it felt familiar to many because there are currently bungalow style homes in the neighborhood. Size wasn't an issue if it fit the perceived aesthetic.

Key Design Choices West Siders Liked:

- No front-facing garage
- Matching the style of the neighborhood
- Single story

Duplexes



Figure 24. Duplex Home Designs

The next set of photos were of smaller scale multifamily housing like duplexes. Here B was the most chosen and was considered the least disruptive of the three. Many picked this off personal style choice, though a few admitted the others would likely not be very disruptive either.

Key Design Choices West Siders Liked:

- Craftsman style.
- Looks closest to what is there now.
- No front-facing garage

Finding Compatible Housing Designs cont.

Multi-Unit Homes



Figure 25. Multi-Unit Home Designs

In this scenario, participants were told that the housing would be built on vacant industrial parcels on the periphery of the neighborhood. Since this wouldn't directly affect the homes of many who were participating, many chose based on what currently existed in the West Side.

The overall popular choice between the housing designs was B, however the most survey responses were actually for 'none of the above'. While many didn't take into account the further location from the neighborhood, this was a key detail for others. One respondent said "...since the [industrial] area is set apart and distinct,...B is an old fashioned style that might not be developable..." while others said "I'm not in favor of building on the brownfield." Some, while commenting on the design, also said they'd be more comfortable with small-scale multi-family like those shown if they were affordable.

Key Design Choices West Siders Liked:

- The brick
- Two-stories were preferred over three-stories
- B is a more classic look

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. Many participants chose based off this alone without really taking the scenario or feasibility into account. This trend continued when considering multifamily housing. Even when thinking about apartments that could be 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

Based on comments from the first vision session, we learned that residents wanted there to be an emphasis on upkeep and repairs in their community. To understand how they see this operating in the West Side, participants at Vision Session II were given three different scenarios that looked at stricter enforcement in three areas: overgrown lawns, junked cars, and home repairs.

The first two scenarios were about imposing fines and letters of violation for overgrowth and "junked" vehicles. A "junked" vehicle is described in the Laramie code as "any motor vehicle and tow-behind trailer which is wrecked, junked, dismantled, partially dismantled, inoperative, abandoned, unregistered or discarded or is unable to perform the function or purpose for which it was originally constructed." This code enforcement could mean fines up to $750 for overgrown lawns and a fine of $150 for a junked car – these fines would recur daily until the issue is resolved.

Responses to these two scenarios varied widely. Some were in favor of this strict enforcement, believing it needed to be done to make the West Side nicer. Others, however, thought that code enforcement should be on a case-by-case basis. It is possible that the fictional resident used in the scenario, who was elderly and unable to care for her property as much anymore, could have made some residents more lenient and led to the preference for case-by-case enforcement.

The third scenario proposed stricter enforcement of broken windows, siding, and painting. Many thought that it was an overstep to enforce fines for these items and thought that it took away from real issues neighborhood safety, like sections of broken sidewalks, broken or dead trees, or dilapidated buildings.
eight of the new smaller house will not block sun for neighboring houses."

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.

The West Side's Ideal Outcome

To get feedback about what residents wanted to see come out of this process, we asked the following question in Version II of the online survey:

"What are your first and second choices for the next steps to come out of the West Side Vision study process?"

We provided the following options, based on what we'd heard throughout the engagement process:

1. Creating a design guidebook for new housing through a community process.
2. Pursuing a regulatory overlay district focused on limiting height and size.
3. Re-zoning the neighborhood to R-1.
4. Working with local historic preservation groups to create a local historic district overlay ordinance based on a historic survey.
5. Having a session with Laramie River Conservation District and Public Works to understand flooding, and what can be done, in the West Side.
6. Creating a design guideline ordinance for the West Side and a committee to review design.
7. Working with the city towards installing safety tools for streets and sidewalks (stop signs, crosswalks, etc.)
8. The neighborhood should be left as is.

First Choices - Next Steps

Implement an overlay ordinance focused on regulating height and size

Create a design guidebook for new housing through a community process

These two answers tied for the most selected first priority outcome. While respondents to the survey were a smaller selection of our overall engagement group, many residents at the April 1st Vision Session II indicated that they were interested in pursuing an overlay district for their neighborhood that regulated height as well.

Ideal Outcomes cont.

It's important to note that we had a higher proportion of non-West Side residents take Version II of the survey. To ensure West Side residents' desires were reflected we gave them a higher weight when considering the top selections. Other selections for top priority included more education about flooding in the neighborhood, rezoning to R-1, and and working to create a historic overlay district.

Second Choices - Next Steps

Working with preservation groups to implement a historic preservation overlay ordinance.

Create a design guidebook for new housing through a community process

For their second priority, most respondents selected working with local preservation groups to create an overlay district for their neighborhood. The second most answered was creating a design guidebook for the neighborhood, showing more overall support for this next step. The height overlay ordinance was also selected third most overall, also indicating that this is a popular next step.

Understanding the Character of the West Side

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.

→ Character of the West Side cont.

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 here.

How do we get there?

Building on what we learned from the West Side Vision engagement process, we have created the following four recommendations. These recommendations are not only based on the desires of West Side residents, but also what we, as urban planners, believe are reasonable and actionable next steps to maintain a vibrant West Side neighborhood.



#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. This ordinance should include requirements focused on restricting the height of future infill developments in the established West Side neighborhood. Small homes are a key part of this neighborhood's character and provide important opportunities for affordable home ownership.

Why We're Not Recommending an R1 Rezoning

While some residents expressed a desire to re-zone the neighborhood to R-1 (only single-unit homes allowed), we are not recommending this be pursued. There are many 2–4-unit buildings already in the West Side that provide essential housing and contribute to its character. Re-zoning to R-1 would not allow for the reproduction of these types of homes. We believe that it is important to the preservation of this neighborhood's character, and the spirit of its independence, that property owners are allowed to develop these types of buildings.

Sample Ordinance

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. The following sample ordinance is intended to serve as a jumping off point for conversations around the appropriate standards in an overlay district for the West Side

Intent

The West Side neighborhood provides an important existing stock of and future opportunity for small-scale residential products that are one to four units. In recognition that this type of housing is often not reproduced in new development situations, an overlay district was created to restrict maximum heights and size further than currently allowed by R-1 and R-2.

Applicability

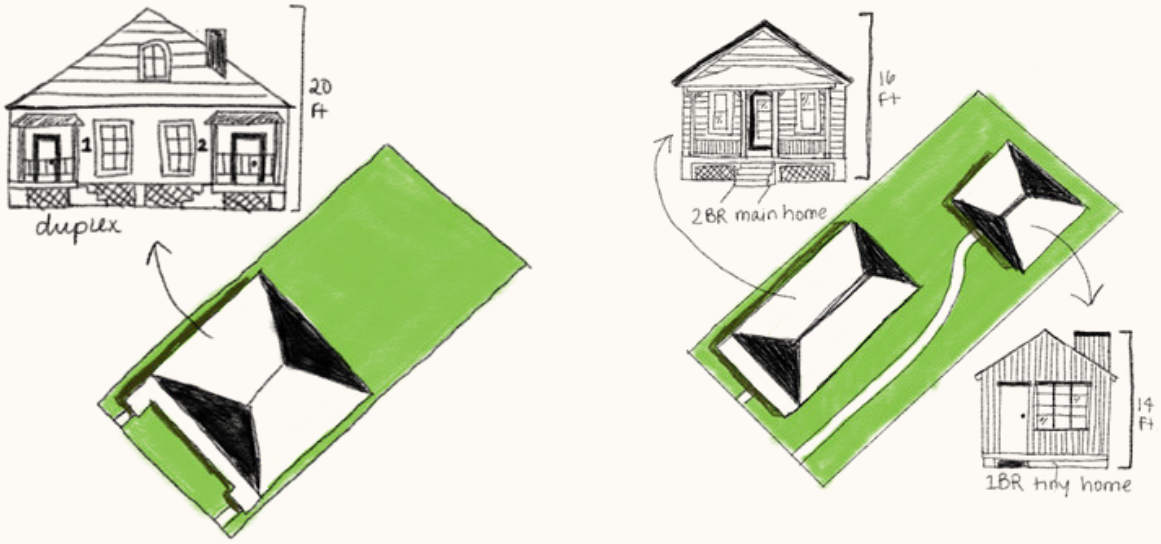
This overlay ordinance shall apply to the residential area south of Snowy Range Road, east of the Laramie River, west of the Union Pacific tracks, and north of I-80. It shall apply to all properties within this area.

Sample Ordinance cont.

District Specific 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.

The following are examples of developments that meet the standards of this overlay ordinance*:



*For illustrative purposes only. There is no guarantee that these properties meet all other standards of the zoning ordinance.

How Residents Can Co-Create the Ordinance

The sample ordinance above is intended to provide a jumping off point for discussions around the overlay district in the West Side. The information learned from this report should not replace further engagement with West Side residents and other stakeholders. The following is a recommendation for an activity that could facilitate the conversations around this overlay further.

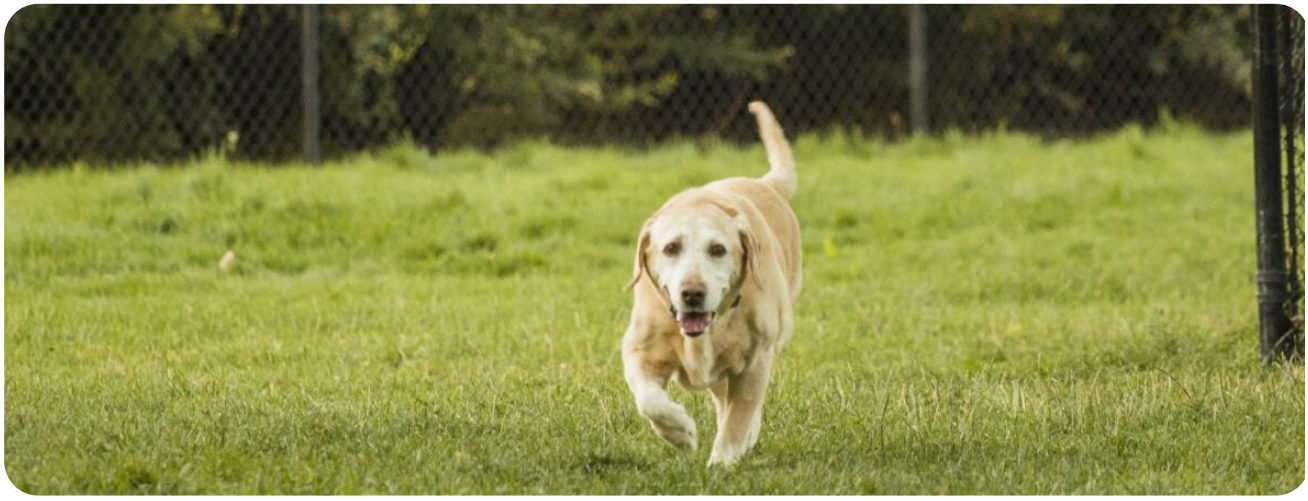
West Side Walking Tour

We recommend that West Side residents and Laramie Planning Department staff join for a walking tour, to take photos and catalog the existing height and style of homes in the neighborhood. This will help to set a baseline for the heights, sizes, and key design elements that are typical of the West Side and could provide the parameters for the overlay ordinance.

Based on the conversations during this walking tour, the planning department should create a draft overlay ordinance. Residents are also encouraged to draft their own versions and submit these to staff. Resident input should be considered alongside best practices in urban planning to determine an appropriate height and footprint restriction that will encourage small homes to continue to be built on the West Side. Residents should be mailed a copy of the draft ordinance with several methods for providing feedback and an ample amount of time before the ordinance goes to council. City Council will be the final decision maker of amending the zoning ordinance to implement an overlay district in the West Side.

Partners Needed to Achieve this Recommendation

West Side Residents – Co-Creator of Ordinance
City of Laramie Planning Department - Co-Creator of Ordinance
City of Laramie City Council - Decision Makers
Development Community – Consultants



#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 the 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.

From what we learned during this engagement process, it appears that residents do not expect homes to mimic or replicate the older houses that are already in the West Side. However, many residents expressed that they do want new homes to take inspiration from what is there and create visually interesting, non-cookie cutter homes. Residents are not interested in suburban-style homes, with garage doors visible from the front façade, and tend to prefer homes that emulate a Craftsman style in some way, though that is not the only housing style that seems acceptable.

A design guidebook would be a comprehensive way to home in on what was learned during West Side Vision and catalog examples and guidance of the variety of building types that could fit in with the West Side. Through conversations with people in the development community, we learned that there is an interest in this kind of guidebook, and that they want to create buildings that attempt to fit in with the character. The following are methods that the planning staff and West Side residents could use to co-create this design guidebook:

West Side Photo Tour

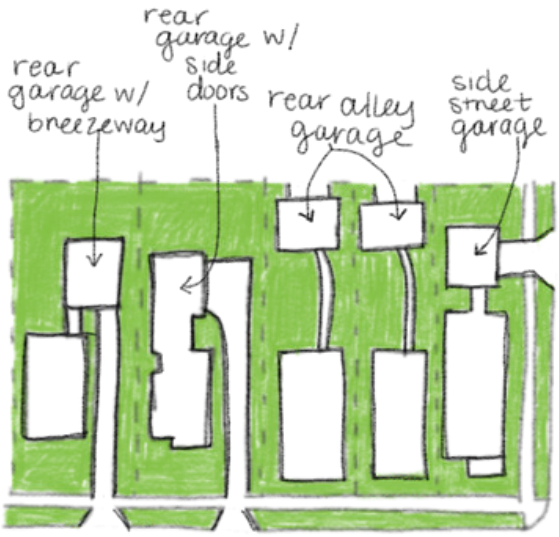
In addition to paying attention to home sizes, the walking tour mentioned above would be a tremendous opportunity for residents to also select homes that fit into the character of the West Side and submit them to Laramie Planning Staff. This would help staff to catalog what is considered compatible and group it into major themes.

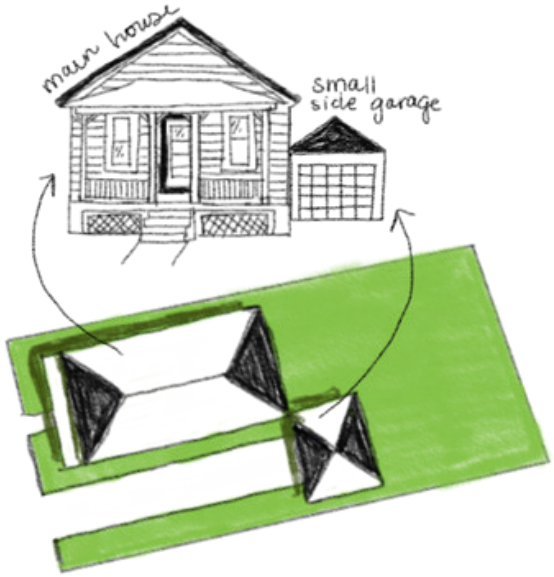
West Side Design Committee

If residents would prefer the process for the design guidebook to be driven by the community, we recommend forming a design committee. The committee could be facilitated by the planning department but should otherwise operate relatively independently. This committee should oversee creating a catalog of homes that are considered compatible, as well as creating an overall vision for

West Side Design Guidebook

Finally, 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:





Partners Needed to Achieve this Recommendation

West Side Residents – Co-Creator of Guidebook
City of Laramie Planning Department - Co-Creator of Guidebook
Development Community – Consultants

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

We recommend initiating a collaborative community-driven process where residents of the West Side neighborhood partner directly with the Laramie Public Works Department to identify priority locations for implementing traffic calming measures and safety enhancements. Through the engagement process, it was brought to our attention that certain areas within the established West Side have experienced an influx of higher-speed vehicular traffic since the completion of the Snowy Range Road corridor.

The proposed solution empowers the residents, who know the neighborhood streets best, to pinpoint the intersections, roadway segments, and other areas where interventions like, curb extensions, speed humps, chicanes, lighting improvements and other traffic calming infrastructure are most needed. Residents' first-hand experience and hyper-local knowledge can optimally direct these investments to maximize their impact on reducing vehicle speeds and improving safety for all road users.



To facilitate this collaborative process, we recommend the city host a series of neighborhood workshops, walking audits and design charrettes where West Side residents can directly voice their concerns, identify problematic hot-spots, and work together with traffic engineers to develop customized, context-sensitive solutions tailored to the unique needs of their community. It is imperative that this process is grounded in proactively soliciting input from a diverse representation of voices from across all areas of the West Side neighborhood.

Partners Needed to Achieve this Recommendation

West Side Residents
City of Laramie Planning Department
Public Works

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

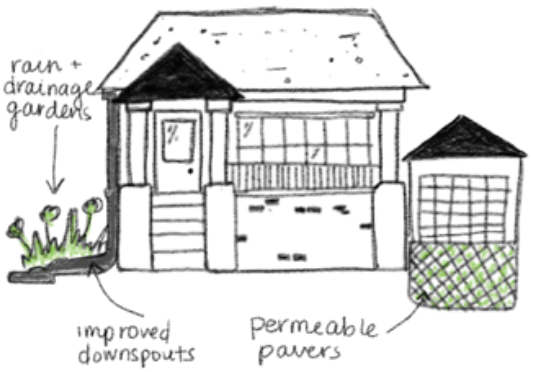
We recommend launching a multi-partner effort to comprehensively document flooding risks in the West Side neighborhood and promote community education around where and why inundation events occur. This initiative should be a joint endeavor between neighborhood residents, the City of Laramie Public Works Utility Division, and the Laramie River Conservation District.

This would involve hosting community workshops and walking tours to gather resident input on historical flooding hot spots, problem areas and anecdotal experiences with high water events. Public Works would overlay this qualitative local knowledge with quantitative hydrological data and modeling to produce a definitive "Flooding in the West Side" report.

This report would synthesize the causes of flooding stemming from the neighborhood's proximity to waterways, topography, aging stormwater infrastructure and more. It would highlight specific areas of high risk and identify potential mitigation projects. Critically, it would be co-created with residents to reflect their lived experiences.

Once the technical flooding assessment is complete, the partnership would transition to an educational awareness campaign tailored to West Side households. Potential components include:

- Workshops explaining flooding risks, preparedness and prevention
- Videos, mailings and social media content with visualizations
- Pamphlets with action checklists for homeowners
- Educational signage at flooding hot spots



By combining municipal resources with the Laramie River Conservation District's expertise and community outreach capabilities, this initiative can comprehensively enhance flood literacy and resilience. Residents will gain deeper understanding of their exposure, while the city benefits from fuller documentation of drainage issues.

This pathway empowers residents, conveys critical public safety information, and strengthens partnerships between the neighborhood, city and local conservation organizations. We believe it represents a forward-thinking and replicable model for proactive flood risk education and engagement.

Partners Needed to Achieve this Recommendation

West Side Residents
City of Laramie Planning Department
Public Works
Laramie River Conservation District





What We Learned

During this engagement process, we gained valuable insights into the West Side community, their identity, and how they perceive themselves within the larger Laramie area. The Laramie City Council initiated this project with planning staff to document the wants and needs of the West Side residents. Maintaining neighborhood character and ensuring buildings are at a human scale emerged as consistent topics throughout the process.

We developed and implemented an intentional outreach strategy. This strategy included two public engagement events, two online community surveys, 10 interviews with identified stakeholders, and the operation of a community hotline. In total, the engagement process drew 162 participants from the community.

We notified residents about events and engagement opportunities through mailers, which were greatly appreciated for reaching a significant portion of the community. The most successful engagement type was the in-person events, held at a central neighborhood location at different times of day to accommodate various schedules and abilities. While these events garnered the highest participation, many residents were eager to contribute through stakeholder interviews.



The stakeholder interviews reached a diverse range of residents, from newcomers to long-time community members, highlighting the effectiveness of one-on-one interactions in engaging various segments of the population.

To maintain accountability and transparency, we prepared and shared "What We Heard" reports, summarizing the main topics discussed during engagement events. These reports received positive feedback from residents, who appreciated having their thoughts and ideas acknowledged and validated.

Key takeaways from the outcomes and successes of this engagement process include:

- Prior notification of engagement opportunities was crucial for the West Side community.
- Transparency through reports and acknowledgment of needs fostered trust.
- Open communication between residents during engagement activities was valuable.
- One-on-one interactions were effective in reaching a wide range of participants.

The future outcomes of this project will be shaped by the West Side residents themselves. The recommendations in this document are based on the input gathered during this process, keeping residents' needs and perspectives at the forefront of considerations for next steps.





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