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HISTORIC NORTHWEST RISING



Phase 1 Community Engagement Report



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Table of Contents

1.	Project Background	4
2.	How did the Community Participate?	7
3.	Engagement Results at a Glance	11
4.	Who Participated?	14
5.	Thoughts on the Sunset	16
6.	Thoughts on the Open Space In Front of the Sunset Lounge	20
7.	Thoughts on the Neighborhood	25
8.	Next Steps	31

1

Project Background



What is Historic Northwest Rising?

HISTORIC NORTHWEST RISING (HNWR) is a bold initiative that will shape the revitalization of the Sunset Lounge and the surrounding community.

One of the main activities is the revitalization of the Sunset Lounge and improvements to the vacant lots across the street. The West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) recently acquired these properties and is leading the revitalization effort.

With more attention focused on the Historic Northwest neighborhood, the resources to address the concerns of the people who live and work there increases too. Long an icon of the neighborhood, the Sunset Lounge will serve as the anchor for neighborhood improvements.

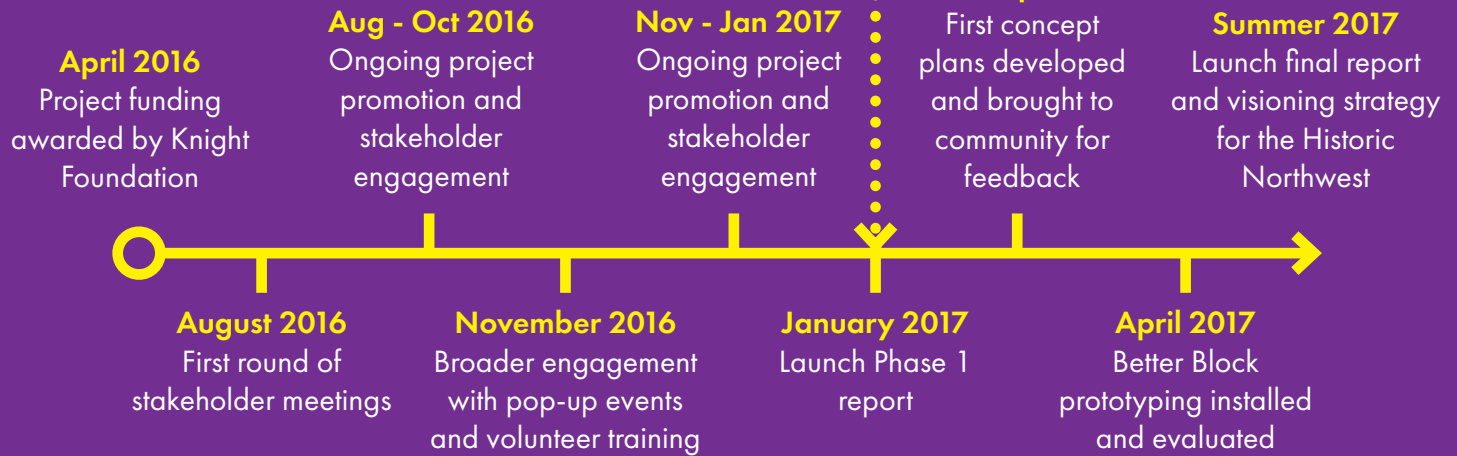
An ongoing series of community conversations is keeping the focus on community, people, and the issues that mean the most to them.

Project Timeline

PHASE 1

We are here

PHASE 2



Why the Sunset Lounge? Why now?

During segregation, Black entertainers toured a string of nightclubs known in the South as the “Chitlin Circuit.” Every town had its own. One of the largest ballrooms was the Sunset Cocktail Lounge in West Palm Beach, built in 1923. The Sunset Lounge attracted big name acts such as Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. Most of the clubs, some no more than shanties generally sited in the poorest quarters, have rotted away. The Sunset Lounge is one of the finest remaining examples of those cultural hotspots.

After desegregation, the Sunset Lounge no longer attracted those same big-name acts. Many middle and upper class Black families decided to relocate to other neighborhoods once it was legal to do so. Over the past fifty years, the neighborhood has undergone widespread

disinvestment and blight.

In 2016, the CRA took advantage of a unique opportunity to secure and begin restoration of the Sunset. However, it is not enough to merely save one old building if the lives of the community that surround it are not positively and sustainably impacted.

We believe that the Sunset Lounge project will leverage the power of culture as a vehicle to re-establish the Historic Northwest neighborhood as a cross-cultural destination for the grandchildren of those who used to frequent the venue in its heyday. Outdoor space designs and Sunset Lounge building improvements will begin in 2017 with additional community input.

The Team Behind Historic Northwest Rising

The Historic Northwest Rising project is led locally by the West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). The CRA recently purchased the Sunset Lounge and the vacant parcel of land opposite it.

The CRA has enlisted consultants 8 80 Cities, Better Block, Mosaic Group, Dr. Alisha Winn, and Surale

Phillips to conduct a thorough community engagement process.

The Historic Northwest Rising is a recipient of a Knight Cities Challenge grant, generously provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

**How did the
community
participate?**

2



In-person Conversations

In August 2016, the Historic Northwest Rising team hosted individual meetings with 13 community members who were selected based on their strong attachment to and/or leadership in the Northwest neighborhood. These individuals ranged from prominent community leaders, to long-time residents, to local business owners, to frontline community workers.

The purpose of these meetings was to identify the main challenges, priorities, and opportunities of the neighborhood. These conversations also helped inform the content and format of the Ideas Festival, which took place later on in November 2016.



Ideas Festival

The Ideas Festival took place from Wednesday November 2nd to Saturday November 5th. The CRA partnered with the Sunset Lounge to host a series of events which drew crowds of over 100 people on each occasion. Upon arriving at the event, attendees had the opportunity to weigh in on the future of the Sunset Lounge and the surrounding vacant property.

The HNWR team set up visually-engaging large-format surveys where participants of all ages could vote for their favorite ideas using dots, suggest improvements for the neighborhood on sticky notes, or write a “postcard to the

future” describing their vision for the future of the Historic Northwest.

The Ideas Festival events included:

- November 2, 2016 - Crab Boil and Concert at the Sunset Lounge
- November 3, 2016 - Soul Food and Concert at the Sunset Lounge
- November 5, 2016 - Block Party on the property across from the Sunset Lounge



Pop-Up Engagements

The HNWR team also held “pop-up engagements” during and after the Ideas Festival. We set up our engagement booth in places where community members typically go, pass through, or gather. This method is great for capturing ideas and thoughts from those who might not have known about the initiative and would not have otherwise participated.

The locations of the pop-up engagements included: YWCA Child Care Center, E&M Wines and Spirits, Salvation Army Aftercare Program, West Palm Beach Train Station, D’Best BBQ, Northwest Community Consortium (NCCI) Health Fair, Salvation Army Thanksgiving Giveaway & the Historic Northwest Tree Lighting Event.

Engagement Results at a Glance

3



Historic Northwest Rising Survey Results

We talked to

497



people

including residents, business owners and
community leaders of the Historic
Northwest.



Thoughts on the Sunset

Top 3 entertainment people would like to see



Gospel, R&B, Jazz
Concerts



Dance



Live
Theater

Top 4 programs people would like to see



Homework
Groups



Job Training
for Youth



Cooking
Classes

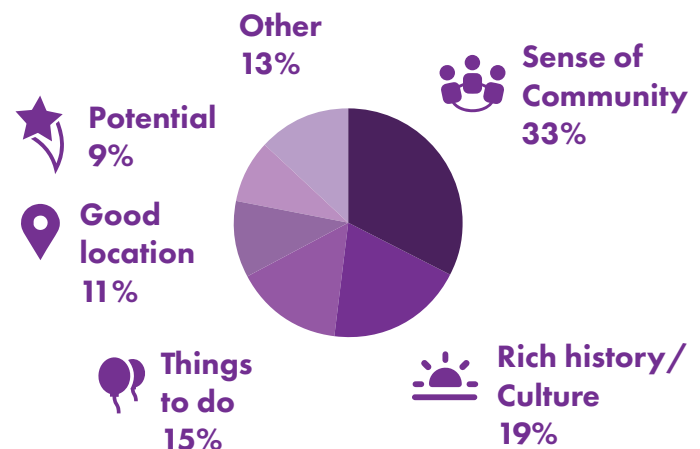


Social Events
for Seniors

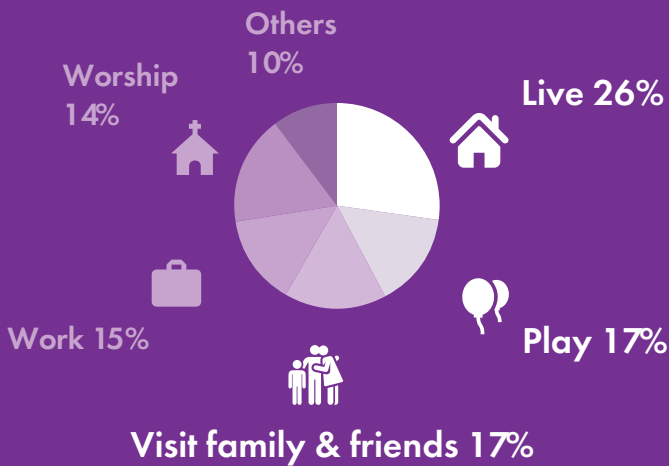


Thoughts on the Neighborhood

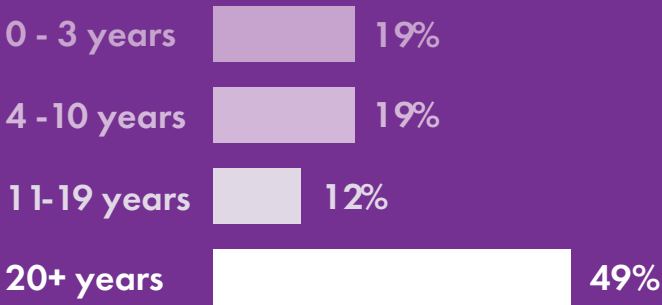
People love the Historic Northwest because



What people do in the Historic Northwest



Number of years people have been connected to the Historic Northwest



Thoughts on the Open Space

Top 4 things to do



Community BBQ



Block Parties



Outdoor Movies



Outdoor Concerts

Top 4 things to use



Sports/Fitness Equipment



Playground



Water Fountains



Plants and Greenery

People would like to see



What would make people feel safer?



More Police Presence



More Lighting



Cleaner Blocks and Buildings

Should there be a railroad crossing at 7th Street to connect the Historic Northwest with Dixie Highway?



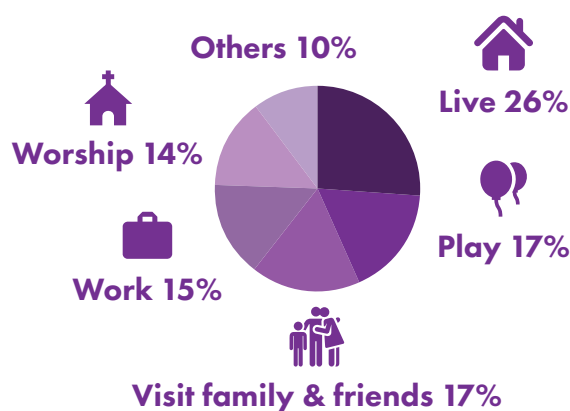
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Who participated?

497 people. 2673 ideas.

Survey respondents primarily **live** in the Historic Northwest.

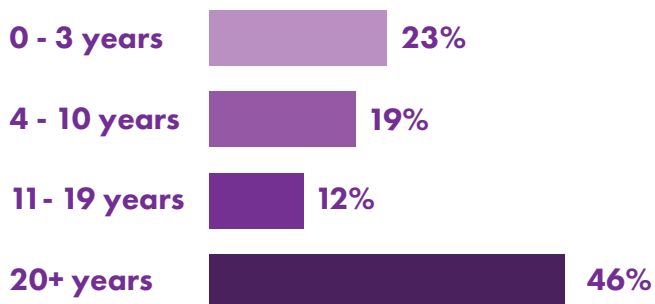
Q. What do you do in the Historic Northwest?



Nearly **half** of all respondents have been connected to the neighborhood for **20+ years**.

Our data set is skewed towards the ideas of those who have deep roots in the Historic Northwest. However, a quarter of all respondents are relatively new to the area, which also provides us with valuable insight regarding the needs of the current population, the majority of whom are renters and tend to be more transient.

Q. How many years have you been connected to the Historic Northwest?



5

Thoughts on the Sunset

“We want more music programming at the Sunset.”

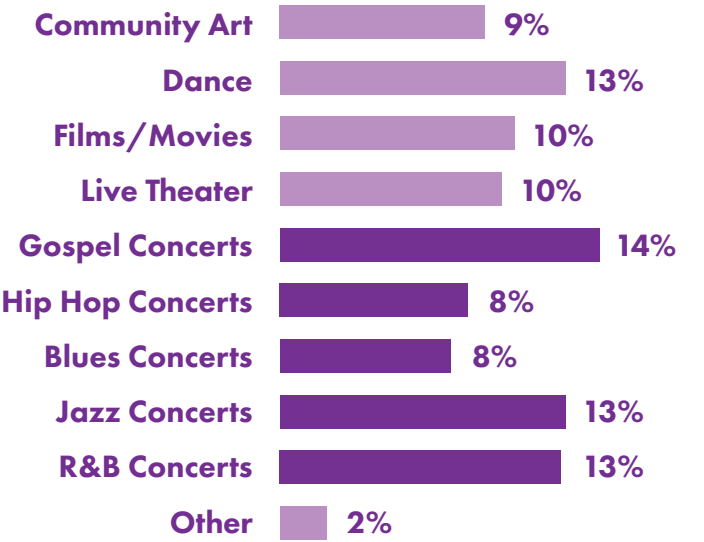
The Sunset Lounge is iconic for its music history and community members are in strong support of keeping that history alive. While gospel, R&B, jazz, and dance were the most preferred programs among survey respondents, community members expressed great interest in increasing the overall quantity, quality, and variety of musical programming at the Sunset.

“I am 68 years old. My mother, family, as well as myself attended many social events and concerts. To me this is history and memories that I would not like to lose.”

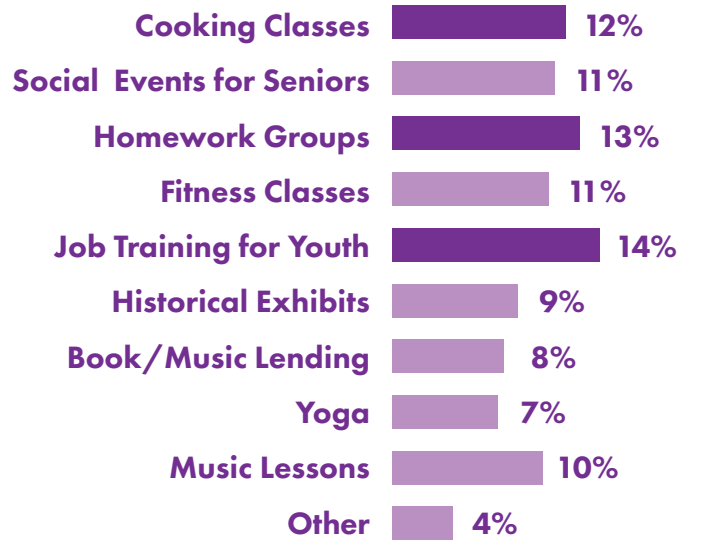
“Provide skills-enhancing programs for residents of all ages, with a focus on youth.”

Community members see music as being central to the programming at the Sunset Lounge, but they also think that the venue should be versatile, catering to the changing needs and tastes of the surrounding neighborhood. Currently, the Sunset Lounge operates as a bar and does not allow anyone under the age of 21 inside its premises. Meanwhile, respondents expressed that the neighborhood is in need of skills-enhancing programs, such as cooking classes, homework groups, and job training for youth. They feel that the revitalization of the Sunset and increased investment in the neighborhood presents a timely opportunity to provide new programs to enrich the future of its young residents.

Q. What types of entertainment would you like to see at the Sunset Lounge?



Q. What types of programs would you like to participate in at the Sunset Lounge?



“Have more different and new experiences and activities for kids. Field trips to more places where we can enjoy ourselves...”



Recommendations for the Sunset Lounge

Revive the Sunset Lounge as a musical destination for all of West Palm Beach while ensuring accessibility to local residents.

Community members largely support efforts to increase the quality and quantity of musical and cultural programming at the Sunset Lounge. Shows should reflect the history of the Sunset as well as changing local tastes. As the quality of the programming at the Sunset Lounge increases, it is likely that admission prices will as well.



Transform the Sunset Lounge into a multipurpose community hub that is activated at all times of day.

The Sunset Lounge has historically been a nightclub. However, community members were very vocal that the revitalization of the Sunset should not just result in a better entertainment venue, but that it should also serve as a community hub where residents, particularly youth, can gain useful skills, knowledge, and services. Given the changing needs of the Historic Northwest, it is recommended that the renovation of the Sunset Lounge include space in the building where businesses, service providers, or non-profit organizations can run these programs. This sort of activation would help increase vibrancy and foot traffic within the building and the surrounding area throughout the day.

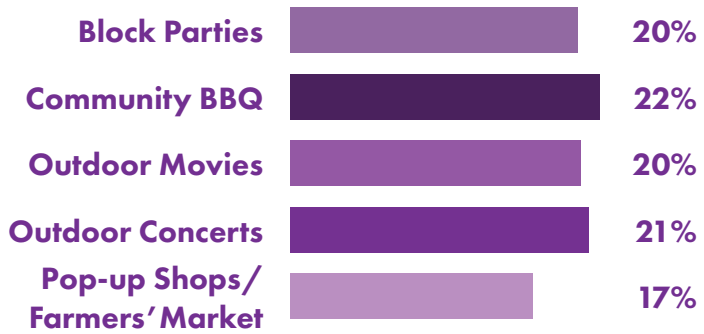
6

Thoughts on the Open Space in Front of the Sunset Lounge

“The open space across from the Sunset Lounge should be regularly activated.”

Block parties, community barbecues, outdoor movies, and outdoor concerts all received similar numbers of votes, with pop-up shops (temporary retail stores or markets) and farmers markets receiving a slightly smaller portion of the votes. Altogether, community members value and appreciate a diverse range of programs and events. There are few public spaces in the Historic Northwest where residents feel like they can comfortably gather and spend time. Community members see the revitalization of the Sunset and surrounding lands as a prime opportunity to fill this gap.

Q. What would you like to do in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge?

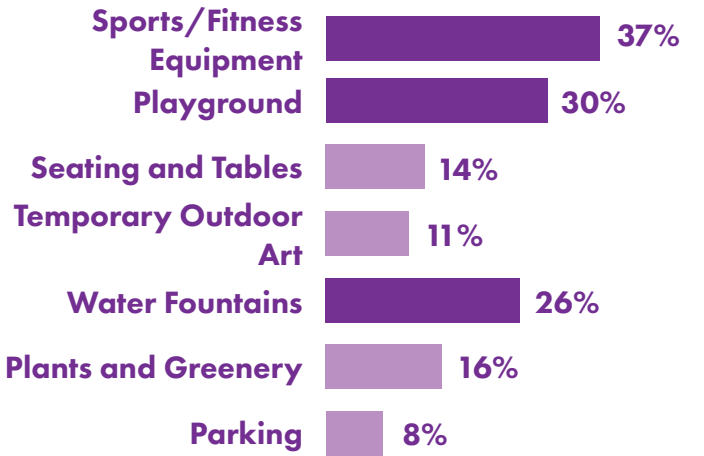


“More parks and rec centers. Spaces for different events. More cookouts. More places where they give out stuff to families in need. Have more therapy groups for ppl struggling at school/home. Places to sell stuff.”

“The open space across from the Sunset Lounge should provide infrastructure for physical activity and play.”

There are few opportunities for outdoor sports and play in the Historic Northwest neighborhood. We heard many comments from community members of all ages wishing for “more things for young people to do”. As a result, community members voted for sports/fitness and play equipment as priorities for the space across from the Sunset Lounge. A water feature was also high on the list of community preferences, such as a splash pad or a decorative fountain similar to the one in nearby CityPlace.

Q. What would you like to share in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge?





Recommendations for the Open Space

Design the open space for versatility.

Community members are calling for a new open space that offers diverse programming as well as infrastructure that encourages play, interaction, and physical activity.

The design of the open space across from the Sunset Lounge should therefore be flexible enough to accommodate a diversity of programming and events, including daily uses (e.g. a splash pad and multi-game court) as well as large-scale public events (e.g. open space and electrical outlets).

A mix of activities creates for a more dynamic space, inviting people of all ages and social backgrounds to mix, interact, and enjoy the space. Transforming the open space into a single-use destination (e.g. a massive playground or one big community garden) would likely result in an underused space that is unable to adapt to changing community needs and tastes.



Invite and engage local partners to program the space.

The City of West Palm Beach does not have the capacity to provide all the programming that is necessary to keep the open space across from the Sunset activated and vibrant. Instead, it is recommended that the City partner with local churches, non-profit organizations, schools, and other community groups that might be interested in hosting programs in this open space.

Small grants or the provision of equipment from the City can go a long way when it comes to enabling or incentivizing organizations to activate the space.

Regular, scheduled programming in the open space is integral to providing a more welcoming atmosphere for community members.



Design the edges to increase “natural surveillance”.

During the engagements, some community members expressed some reservations about building a passive park across the street from the Sunset Lounge, fearing that it could become a hot spot for anti-social activity. Given the current safety issues in the neighborhood, this is a very realistic concern that must be addressed at all stages of planning, design, management, and maintenance.

There are a few design considerations that would increase “natural surveillance” of the open space and surrounding area. For instance, lining the edges of the park with commercial/public buildings with active frontages and upper floor balconies can increase the number of eyes overlooking the open space.

In particular, by making structural changes to the Sunset Lounge building to have areas where people outside the building can see inside, and those inside the building can see out, would have a positive effect on natural surveillance.

Better and more consistent lighting throughout the neighborhood is another strategy that residents already greatly support. Residents will not feel safe using the open space or accessing the Sunset Lounge if they perceive the process of getting there to be unsafe.

Overall, in designing this open space, it is just as important to consider the edges and connections to the open space as it is to consider what might go inside of the open space itself.

Thoughts on the Neighborhood

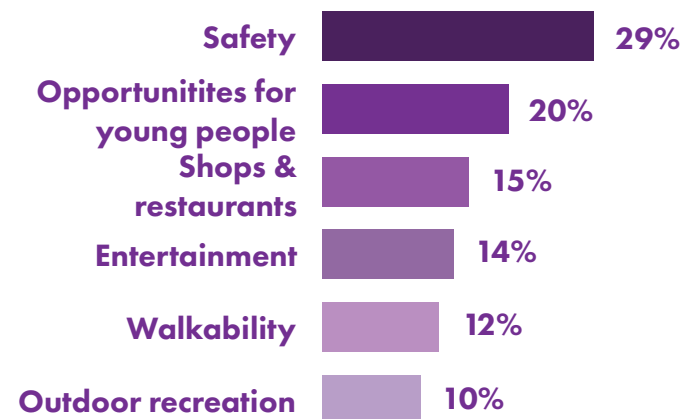
7

"Our main priority is to improve **safety**."

Nearly one third of all respondents listed safety as their main concern in the neighborhood. Many residents reported feeling unsafe leaving their homes at night. Children said that they mostly stay at home or go to a neighbor's house in their spare time. There was a sense that there were few public spaces where children in the community could play and gather.

"Opportunities for young people" came in as the second most important priority, garnering nearly one fifth of votes. Safety and youth programming go hand in hand. Community members believe that providing more programs and opportunities for young people is a key component of increasing safety in the neighborhood.

Q. What do you wish there was more of in the Historic Northwest



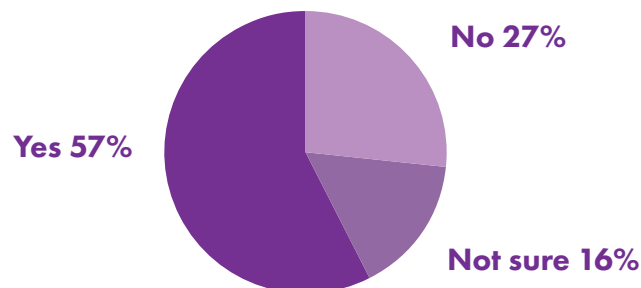
"I would love for it to look more organized and have safe streets to walk on. I also hope there wouldn't be so much gang violence."

"A pedestrian/vehicular railway crossing at 7th Street, connecting the Northwest to Dixie Highway, is a good idea."

A majority (57 percent) of community members support creating a new railroad crossing for cars and pedestrians at 7th Street. Those who were in favor felt that this would improve pedestrian and vehicular access between Downtown and the Historic Northwest.

Opposition to this idea was primarily rooted in a couple of beliefs of the respondents: 1) another access point is unnecessary and would increase traffic and congestion in the neighborhood, and 2) paving a connection between the Historic Northwest and Dixie Highway would accelerate the pace at which the Historic Northwest would become connected to Downtown and therefore gentrified.

Q. Should there be a railroad crossing at 7th Street to connect the Historic Northwest with Dixie Highway?



"There are many accidents caused and confusion without [the crossing]."

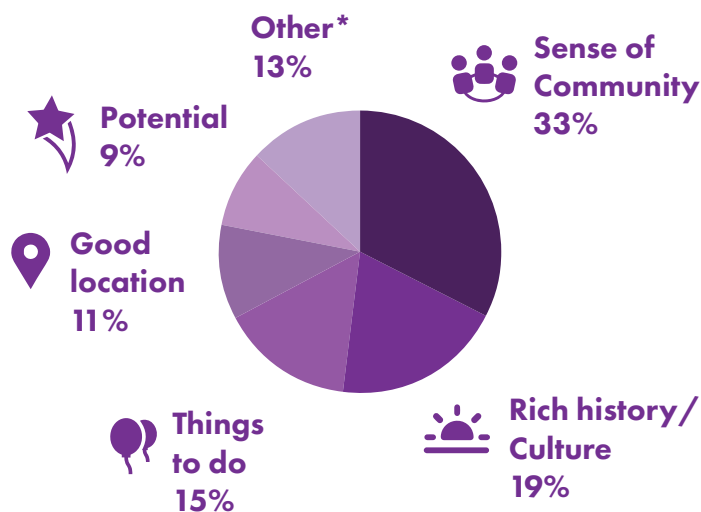


“There is a strong sense of community and history here.”

Residents feel strongly rooted in the Historic Northwest neighborhood and listed the sense of community and the familiarity as the quality they love most about the area. Even former residents who visit friends and family in the Historic Northwest still feel connected to and invested in the area. Whatever improvements are made to the Sunset Lounge and surrounding areas, community members would like to preserve and enhance this sense of kinship and familiarity.

Beyond this sense of community, current and former residents also value the rich cultural history of the Historic Northwest. The Northwest District is strongly rooted in African American histories and experiences. Community members feel that the future of the Historic Northwest should respect and grow on its African American roots. Community members want to see the improvements to the Sunset Lounge authentically reflect the history of the venue and the culture of the neighborhood, in addition to increasing the safety and quality of life for residents in the area.

Q. What do you love the most about the Historic Northwest?



* Other responses include walkability, bike friendliness, quietness, and smallness of the neighborhood.

“I love the sense of community. If you listen to the media, you will be misguided. Northwest community is a great place to live.”



Recommendations for the Neighborhood

Plan for a future **mixed-use community.**

During segregation, the Historic Northwest operated as its own ecosystem. African Americans lived, worked, shopped, dined, worshipped, studied, played, saw entertainment, and accessed key services in the neighborhood. Today, the Historic Northwest is a primarily residential area, with a small but growing business community.

Through the community engagement process, it was clear that community members wanted more “to do” in the neighborhood. Beyond living in the Historic Northwest, they want to be able to access a variety of programs, goods, and services without having to stray too far out of the area.

“Live work environment where locals can work, shop and entertain themselves in a low crime environment.”

The revitalization of the Sunset Lounge is anticipated to catalyze increased investment in the neighborhood. In anticipation of this, it is recommended that the City of West Palm Beach coordinate zoning, land use policies, and development incentives to help guide the Historic Northwest District towards becoming a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood once again.



Bring history to the forefront.

The Historic Northwest was designated a US Historic District in 1992. Aside from the preservation of architecturally significant buildings, there are few other obvious indications of the historic significance of the neighborhood. Much of the history and knowledge of the area rests with individuals and families who have long been connected to the area.

Community members have expressed interest in having a museum or visitor's center in the Historic Northwest. This would allow visitors and locals alike to have a central place to learn about and celebrate the district's history.

Less capital-intensive ways to highlight the history of the district include commemorative plaques outside of historically significant sites, public art, temporary exhibitions, and community-led walking tours.

"Rich history. African American culture. Maintain entertainment offering. Grew up here."



Increase **accessibility** to and from the area.

Even though segregation was abolished over sixty years ago, the Historic Northwest is bound by railroad tracks on its eastern and western borders. The area therefore remains partially physically segregated from other neighborhoods, particularly the wealthier downtown core.

Trolley Service

Trolley service currently stops at the southernmost edge of Historic Northwest. Bringing the trolley service northwards, throughout the Historic Northwest, would increase accessibility for residents to the downtown as well as for visitors to the Historic Northwest. Residents value the quietness and quaintness of the neighborhood. Providing better public transit to and from the neighborhood can help reduce future vehicular traffic and congestion, especially once the Sunset Lounge becomes more of a destination.

Parking

Visitors to the Sunset Lounge, especially women, have expressed concerns with walking from their car to the venue at night. In anticipation of increased visitors to the Sunset Lounge and surrounding area, it is necessary to develop a parking plan for the area that accommodates a rush of nighttime visitors while also avoiding the creation of daytime “dead zones” in the neighborhood.

Railroad Crossing at 7th Street

The majority of community members support adding a pedestrian and vehicular crossing over the railroad tracks at 7th street, connecting Rosemary to Dixie Highway. This access point would increase the connectivity between the Historic Northwest and the downtown core.

8

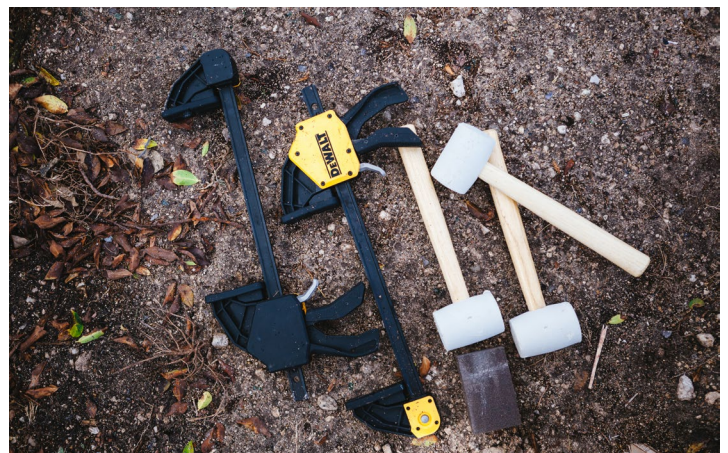
Next Steps



Better Block and community members in Akron, Ohio transformed a vacant space into a temporary Italian-style public square where people could comfortably sit and socialize. Using cheap and light materials such as hay bales and small plants, the community's vision came to life. The Historic Northwest Rising project will test solutions for the open space across from the Sunset Lounge using similar methods.

Better Block Event

In April 2017, the Historic Northwest Rising team will lead a series of "buildshops", where Historic Northwest community members will build prototypes of some of the ideas that came out of the community engagement process. These improvements will be installed in and around the open space located across from the Sunset Lounge, as part of a two-day "Better Block" event. The Better Block event will coincide with the Heart and Soul Festival taking place on the weekend of Saturday, April 22nd. Residents and visitors will be able to see, touch, and experience the improvements to the space and provide their feedback to the team.



The Better Block event will be a chance for community members to test-drive ideas in the open space in front of the Sunset Lounge.



Continued Engagement

In the lead up to the Better Block event, the Historic Northwest Rising team will host focus groups with community members. This will be an opportunity to review the results of the first round of community engagements and to ask, “Did we interpret the results correctly? What else are we missing?”

Whereas the first phase of the engagement focused on what the community would like to see, the second phase of engagement will focus on how the community will like to move forward to the revitalization process. How would local community members and organizations like to be engaged in the long term? From the community’s point of view, what are the measures of success for the project?

Final Report

The Historic Northwest Rising team will be collecting user data and feedback about the Better Block event. We will examine which prototypes worked well, which didn’t, and why? The results of the Better Block event will

inform the recommendations that go in the final Historic Northwest Rising report, which will in turn shape the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and its surrounding lands.

Thank you

to everyone who provided ideas, support, and volunteer hours as part of the Historic Northwest Rising project.

Historic Northwest Rising was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Knight Foundation.



To stay updated on this project, please visit
www.northwestrising.com



