

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) ABOUT

NORTHEAST FUTURES

WHAT IS *NORTHEAST FUTURES*? (NE FUTURES)

Northeast Futures is a Community Visioning Project for Northeast (NE) Minneapolis that began two years ago.

The purpose of the Northeast Futures project is to help Northeasters foster a greater sense of community by identifying common community values, creating and promoting a common community vision, establishing principles and setting goals to improve the Northeast community and sustain it.

We want to unify as much of the Northeast community as possible behind a *common vision for the future*. Northeast residents created the **Northeast Community Vision Statement** (NE CVS or CVS) from extensive community outreach and analysis of community responses. The CVS is based on **Common Community Values**. The **Principles and Goals for Future Community Development in Northeast** serves as a map of community building for the future of Northeast Minneapolis.

The Northeast Community Development Corporation (NE CDC) manages Northeast Futures. Our project partners are the Northeast Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association.

WHERE DID THE IDEA TO DO THIS PROJECT COME FROM?

Many other communities throughout the world – including Midwestern cities with neighborhoods similar to Northeast - have done community visioning projects and gotten results. The results come from the community being able to unite behind its own goals.

TELL US ABOUT THE *COMMUNITY CANVASS*

To learn the values and visions of Northeast residents for Northeast, NE CDC embarked on a Northeast-wide door to door canvass with the goal of interviewing a resident on every block. Most residents seemed to appreciate the project, but most were unavailable to talk. A common refrain I made at people's front doors was, "I don't want your money, just your story."

We asked the following questions:

- ➔ How did you first get to Northeast?
- ➔ What were your first impressions?

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- ➔ What do you like about Northeast?
- ➔ Tell me a story about your best experience in Northeast, when you felt best about the community?
- ➔ What is your favorite street corner, or area in Northeast?
- ➔ Imagine it is 10 years from now and you have a magic wand. Make 3 wishes for your community!

According to the Minnesota Center for Survey Research we needed to complete 385 surveys to achieve a representative sample of +/- 5%. We completed more than 400 surveys. These community responses were analyzed to identify common value themes (quantified) and common vision themes (qualitatively analyzed).

WHAT IS APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY?

Consider the following definitions of these two words:

Appreciative:

- ➔ Having or showing a just or ready appreciation or perception
(Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary)

Inquiry:

- ➔ A close examination of a matter in a search for information or truth
(The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a study or exploration of what works in a human system, such as an organization or a community, when it is at its best. AI redirects attention from problem analysis to a focus on favorable possibilities, or imagining and proposing the greatest potential reality. Who would oppose that?

Appreciative Inquiry is a method of systems change based on the assumption that inquiring of the people who live or work in a system (an organization or community) is the best way to learn what works there. We appreciate what Northeast residents value about and want for their community, so we've inquired!

Northeast Futures = Community Engagement

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WHAT IS THE *NORTHEAST FUTURES COUNCIL*?

A group of local residents convened to review the results of the interviews and focus groups and to extract what the community is saying out of the information the community is giving them. Their charge was to develop the Northeast Community Vision Statement and to present it at the Community Convention.

WHO ARE THE NE FUTURES COUNCIL MEMBERS?

Originally, we called this group of Northeast residents the *Council of Wise Elders*, but after they began meeting they didn't like the "elder" part and didn't want to lay claim to any particular wisdom! So, they became the Northeast Futures Council.

We intentionally recruited for the following:

- About half being veterans of civic participation in NE
- About half being relatively new to civic participation in NE
- The ability to be both as objective as possible, but to also apply their knowledge of NE in order to analyze the information
- The belief that NE needs to get on the same page somehow

We should all thank:

Mike Fahey

- ➔ Jean Rarick
- ➔ William Smith
- ➔ Margo Ashmore
- ➔ Marty Schirber
- ➔ Sarah Reilly
- ➔ Casey Perkins
- ➔ Joseph Landry

HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT THE *NORTHEAST COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT (NE CVS)*?

The Northeast Futures Council members were given transcribed copies of the surveys and assigned to read them. We met many times over lunch to discuss Northeast (past, present and future), the emerging themes from the community responses to the survey, focus group meeting notes, the purpose of, and how to produce a viable Community Vision Statement, and how to present the NE CVS to the community convincingly.

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In analyzing the surveys we quantified commonality indicators - value themes - and based the community priorities on this and their remarks about their hopes and dreams for the future of Northeast. The Northeast Futures Council members wrote individuals drafts of the NE CVS which were compiled as one brief document we hope will live with a fruitful legacy.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE NE CVS?

The NE CVS is meant to be a simple tool to help Northeast neighbors, community leaders, elected officials, developers, businesses and community organizations recognize community priorities, identify shared interests and increase opportunities for community members and stakeholders to contribute to improving the community by collaborating on the establishment of sound community principles and achieving authentic community goals.

WHAT CHALLENGES NE?

Working together on a NE-wide basis is a significant challenge.
Having 13 individual neighborhoods is a systems barrier to finding common ground for the entire community. Each of the 13 neighborhood associations are completely independent and can in no way whatsoever be compelled to collaborate with anyone.

At the same time, NE has a strong community-wide identity and challenges big enough for the entire community to embrace – revitalizing Central and maxing out the potential of the Arts District – to name two.

EXPLAIN NE FUTURES IN THE SIMPLEST TERMS

Communities that are able to find common ground have a better chance of succeeding at accomplishing their shared goals.

WHY DID WE CONVENE THE NE FUTURES *COMMUNITY CONVENTION*?

After all of the community outreach and analysis of community responses to our appreciative inquiry, Northeasters produced the NE CVS. We held the community convention to present the CVS to community members, to see if the document we produced accurately reflects their hopes and dreams of the community. With the approval of Northeast community members at the

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Community Convention we are able to move forward in promoting a Common Vision with goals for Northeast and enlisting partners and friends to implement it.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE COMMUNITY CONVENTION?

Over 100 people attended the Community Convention, including residents who live in all 13 (formal) NE neighborhoods, representatives from a variety of Northeast based nonprofits, businesses, churches, many artists, and elected officials representing Northeast at the City, County, State and Federal levels.

During the late morning Community Vision plenary session, we presented a proposed Community Vision Statement for Northeast. We had an open and rich floor discussion, which included a few important additions that were suggested by community members there and approved of by most of the others. This was a diverse, civil, and hopeful meeting that encouraged community members to not overly depend on the government, but to instead work together as a community to make improvements happen through cooperative, proactive and consistent action.

When I called for a "show of hands" vote to approve of the NE CVS the vast majority of attendees raised their hands!

We had a great Taste of Northeast lunch! Thanks to the following Northeast restaurants, supermarket and church for participating and serving delicious food:

- *Holyland*
- *Marino's*
- *Elsie's*
- *Psycho Suzi's*
- *Durango Bakery*
- *Sentryz*
- *St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral*

During the lunch we featured the music of Northeast-based Trio Tipo, an Acoustic Fusion band, comprised of Northeast residents.

After lunch we had concurrent workshops:

- *The Artists Whirling Through Your Neighborhood*
- *Northeast Minneapolis Houses of Worship*
- *Northeast Voices: Futures Choices for Restaurants, Retail and Recreation*

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- *How to Improve Your Neighborhood Without Attending Meetings*
- *Go-Time Northeast*

We concluded the Community Convention with a Community Art-making Activity called “the Mug Project.” It involved a themed recitation before a collection of people present with coffee mugs. Participants filled out a half letter sized form that recorded their expressions of community and our commitment to the “new art of neighborly” and community building for the future of Northeast. Additional Mug Project ceremonies in the future will gradually increase the collection of coffee mugs with their accompanying community pledges. The mug collection will eventually be smashed to pieces that will be transformed into a future public art mosaic.

WHERE DID WE GET THE MONEY TO DO NE FUTURES?

The Otto Bremer Foundation and the McKnight Foundation generously funded Northeast Futures.

DOES THE NE CVS HAVE ANY FORMAL STANDING?

No, the NE CVS is not a legally binding document, meaning it is unenforceable. The CVS is a good faith effort to promote active and effective community building in Northeast, in terms of getting people who live and work in the community to work together in relative unity – communal unity – based on common values and a common vision with concrete principles and goals.

The NE CVS is meant to be a simple tool to help Northeast neighbors, community leaders, elected officials, developers, businesses and community organizations recognize community priorities, identify shared interests and increase opportunities for community members and stakeholders to contribute to improving the community by collaborating on the establishment of sound community principles and achieving authentic community goals.

Northeast Futures is using the NE CVS as an organizing tool to facilitate community action.

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WHAT DOES THE NE CVS MEAN FOR NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS?

Only what they want it to. However, Northeast neighborhood associations should consider the degree of diligence involved in developing the CVS and the fact that the information was gathered in a way that meets the statistical credibility threshold of + or - 5%. This is what the community is saying about itself. You can be sure of that.

Northeast neighborhoods and their associations should work together cooperatively, proactively and consistently when dealing with community development issues.

WHERE ARE WE GOING WITH NE FUTURES FROM HERE?

During the winter months of 2009 we will meet with a variety of Northeast based organizations and businesses. We will make presentations explaining the purpose and process of Northeast Futures and seek organizational endorsements and feedback. Although we'll be taking thorough notes of every recommended addition or omission, we'll inform everyone that we will not alter the NE CVS for individual organizations or people. The CVS is based on a solid representative sample of hundreds of Northeasters. *Do you support the Community Vision that has emerged from community members?*

During the summer months of 2009 we'll coordinate a Northeast-wide residential door to door canvass, distributing the NE CVS and seeking as many endorsements as possible. This effort will be massive and we'll seek volunteers from all of our organizational Partners and many other sources.

We'll recruit Northeast Futures Friends and Partners during both the organizational and residential endorsement campaigns. Friends will be moral supporters of the NE CVS. Partners will be NE CVS supporters who commit to supporting the Community Vision through action.

After we've thoroughly promoted the NE CVS throughout Northeast, we'll call on all Partners and Friends to help us select an issue to organize around that will move the community towards realizing a goal or multiple goals of the community vision. Such a victory will hopefully inspire the kind of ongoing action that will significantly improve the community and sustain it!