

Summary of the application for posting on the IAP2 Website and for Promotional Use

The City of Flagstaff, AZ and Southside Community Association for Embracing Our Heritage; Enhancing Our Future: The Southside Community Specific Plan. The Southside is a culturally diverse and historic neighborhood in central Flagstaff that has been experiencing renewed development pressure. The City and community association built a process that leveraged partnerships and storytelling to address difficult historic topics, while helping the community look forward. Staff and volunteers focused on creating numerous meaningful small opportunities, many of them "on-the-street," to gain insight and understanding into the community's view of history and the City government. The suite of creative public participation methods and continual re-evaluation and adjustment of the process has rebuilt community trust and relationships. The Plan's adoption was delayed by the COVID-19 emergency.

Embracing Our Past; Enhancing Our Future:

Southside Community Specific Plan

IAP2 Core Values
Awards Submission
– May 2020



ORGANIZATION NAME:

City of Flagstaff, AZ and Southside
Community Association

NOMINEE'S NAME:

Southside Plan Project Team

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AWARD CATEGORY:

Respect for Diversity, Inclusion and
Culture Award



Title	Embracing Our Past; Enhancing Our Future: The Southside Community Specific Plan
Organizing Group	City of Flagstaff, AZ, Southside Community Association
Location	Southside Community, Flagstaff, AZ, USA
Key Question/Problem	Can a neighborhood retain its unique character/culture and meet the needs of long-time current residents while welcoming opportunities for economic reinvestment and improving town-gown relationships?
Sampling Methods	Meeting announcements and project updates were sent to 1,914 property owners and renters, door hangers placed on 600 residential doors, flyers posted in most commercial business, e-newsletter sent to 228 interested parties, updates sent to every household via a city-wide publication, and a large sign posted at the Murdoch Community Center and updated 2-3 times per year. These sampling methods ensured a representative sample of residents' and their diverse goals for the neighborhood were considered.
Results	The Southside Community Specific Plan has been delayed due to COVID-19's impact on government operations. However, the project team has already implemented the best ideas that had no policy or budgetary barriers. In addition, the community, while guarded with the City, has been more willing to engage, share stories, and call city staff with concerns.
Impact Level	New, collaborative relationships between the City, the community association, local non-profits, and Southside residents have been formed. Surveys improved understanding of key issues, and workshops and field trips allowed relationships to form between older, existing residents and younger, newer residents. This coming together has resulted in a thoughtful, reflective plan that is widely supported by diverse interests.
Time Frame	Beginning November 2017 to TBD (Council adoption pending return from COVID-19)
People Engaged	The project team knocked on over 800 doors; 167 community members attended over 20 public meetings and events; 187 residents and 36 businesses participated in surveys.
Web Link	www.flagstaff.az.gov/southsideplan

The Problem and Challenge

Historically, the Southside neighborhood in Flagstaff, Arizona, has best represented the ethnic diversity that evolved here during the first half of the 20th century. It contains the largest neighborhoods associated with the city's early Hispanic, Native American and African American residents. Until 1977, the Southside neighborhood was subjected to redlining and was, therefore, a place of formal and informal segregation, with the Anglo population to the north of the tracks, and Hispanic, Native American and African American communities to the south. Despite this history, the residents at that time, in the words of Dr. Ricardo Guthrie, “..turned segregation into congregation, they invited other people in to create this rich and lively space where Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans and Whites all can congregate.”

The historic neighborhood, adjacent to Northern Arizona University, used to be a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses, largely populated with working class families.



Flagstaff Timber workers, ca. 1960

Additionally, in the early 20th century, to protect the properties of White businessmen, the Rio de Flag was re-routed through the neighborhood in an undersized channel. Today, the Southside is under a different kind of pressure. A pressure to change due to the expanded college presence. While some change has brought positive improvements to create a lively, eclectic neighborhood; the success of growth has also brought the inevitable tension created between old and new.

“It used to be that no one cared about the Southside, and now developers are coming in with money and buying away family homes to tear down for students.” — Unidentified Southside resident

The Role of Public Participation

The public had two major roles during the creation of Southside Community Specific Plan. The first was to define their neighborhood's assets and issues, as well as a vision for the future. The second was to develop and refine the goals, policies, and strategies that guided the plan framework and outcomes.

Helping the public reach these goals required a significant amount of teamwork. The City partnered with the Southside Community Association (SCA) before the official kick off of the project, Matrix Design Group provided consultant services surrounding creating the neighborhood's vision, and a local non-profit, Friends of the Rio, provided invaluable help with public participation around the neighborhood's longstanding flooding issues. These partnerships helped initiate and sustain dialog with and among community residents that, over time, defined the direction of the Plan.



Longtime resident helps students identify neighborhood assets.

“Developing a Southside Community Plan presented challenges that the City of Flagstaff and the entire project team embraced with persistence, flexibility and creativity. For me, this effort represented a remarkable shift in attitude away from the carelessness of the past and toward recognition and support for the best parts of our community.” — Marie Jones, Southside resident and community activist

Public Participation Methods

The selection of public participation methods appropriate to the Southside community's identity, history, values, and goals was based on a four-part framework (summarized below) and the regular evaluation of participation outcomes. The framework integrated key questions that needed to be answered before moving on to the next stage. For example, project partners asked, "Were the right people here and did they participate?" and if more collaboration was needed before moving forward with the next phase of engagement and participation goals.



The first two phases of the public participation element, *Community Visioning* and *Needs and Solutions* were about listening to stakeholder input. The first round included 15 stakeholder interviews and a visioning workshop that was poorly attended. When the team gathered to evaluate outcomes, community members felt that we had not heard from enough residents and that visioning was incomplete. The team decided to develop more dispersed and informal strategies and knocked on over 800 doors in the community to survey residents about neighborhood assets and issues and their visions for the Southside. Adjusting our methods allowed us to reach 187 residents, with a large percentage of respondents from African American, Native American and Hispanic families that had lived and worked in the neighborhood for generations.

During the *Community Visioning* and *Needs and Solutions* phases, the team created a variety of meeting formats that are detailed in the [Public Participation Plan](#) and in a variety of locations to ensure the diversity that characterizes the Southside was appropriately captured. The different opportunities for public participation are listed below.

- Two online and in-person surveys
- Six ArcGIS web maps
- One storytelling and visioning workshop
- Three topical workshops
- Open hours at the community center
- Six topical bus and walking tours
- One information booth at Juneteenth,
- Five on-the-street meetings

The project partners were confident with the breadth and depth of input from the community and transitioned to the *Polycymaking and Partnership* phase in Fall 2018. While partners began to develop a draft of the plan, another part of the City staff moved into a *Rapid Response* strategy. Stormwater, Traffic Engineering and Park Flag set up quick wins and community driven success that was critical to building trust in the plan.

The planning document itself was mostly developed through open houses, workshops, and a stakeholder group formed by the SCA. The group’s objective was to evaluate the public input received and to assess potential policies. Over the course of 14 meetings, the group was able to evaluate all materials and endorse a draft plan for public review.

“The commitment of the stakeholder’s group was the best part of the process for me. People were engaged and did not hold back. People were honest in their opinions and concerns. The group was like minded in understanding the importance of the process and of coming to an agreement that considered everyone.” — Deb Harris, Executive Director, SCA



Deb Harris pitching in to help with community center improvements.

A 60-day public review and comment period was the first step in the *Prepare and Adopt a Plan* phase. Digital and hard copies were made available in several places and three public workshops were held. The plan was presented to 15 city and county boards and commissions. During the review, concern was expressed regarding a connector segment of local trail system. To address this emerging issue and gain trust, a design professional and staff member went door to door take design input. During this effort the project team learned more through residents’ memories of having been marginalized by the City in years past. This impromptu input continues to inform the project approach and outcomes.

Uniqueness of the Project

The Southside Community Specific Plan manifests community-driven ideas and stakeholder consensus, achieved through a suite of unique planning approaches. Many were adopted at the suggestion of project partners and the public:

Storytelling — The Southside Community Specific Plan brought together local government, non-profits, university faculty, long-term residents, and new residents to discuss the past, present, and future of the community. The process was remarkable because it did not shy away from learning about the hardships, discrimination, mistrust, and fear many families had experienced as minorities and Southside residents.

Community Association leadership — The Southside Community Association (SCA) began working with the City a year before the first public meeting. The organization helped evaluate contractors, develop branding, and conduct stakeholder interviews before there was ever a public announcement or mailing. During the “Summer of Southside,” SCA hosted get-to-know-you dinners for neighborhood property owners and facilitated conversations about the questions, concerns, and needs they thought people would be reluctant to talk about with the City.



Murdoch Community Center.

Shared engagement — The planning effort leveraged many sources of funding and community resources. The City Council jump started the project with money for a consultant, Matrix Design. A local non-profit, Friends of the Rio, was launching watershed planning, and the City partnered with this local non-profit organization to combine efforts and apply for an EPA Environmental Justice Small Grant based on the intertwined nature of past discrimination, future growth and change, and flooding in the Southside. The first two phases of the project were built on shared responsibility and decision-making among the City, the Southside Community Association, and the Friends of the Rio.



New residents pitching in for neighborhood cleanup.

Honest and open evaluation — Because partners had a stake in the process, they were not afraid to say that someone or something had been missed. Likewise, those managing the project were able to show sustained progress over a longer-than-expected project timeline without major project budget overruns. The project philosophy was to listen to criticism openly and to keep the door open for as long as possible. Even if the community members weren't ready to address issues or answer questions when first prompted by team members, every effort was made to keep communication channels and the participation process open and transparent.

“Community trust is an effort that takes more than one outreach and engagement campaign. It takes an open door, willingness to listen, and shared decision-making power in order to rebuild trust in a shared governance process. We have started down that path with this effort and are excited to continue rebuilding together.” — Matt Muchna, former Southside resident and facilitator

Project Results

Adoption of the Southside plan has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a strong desire to make use of community space for the required public hearing and offer residents the opportunity to participate in the adoption process in-person. However, the team is evaluating alternatives that are equally inclusive and meet all legal requirements for formalizing the plan. Telephone town halls, streaming services and managed in-person engagement are all being considered.

As of this submission, the Southside Community Specific Plan is undergoing a required legal review. Legal review occurs between the public draft review and comment period and the public draft hearing that we will occur in the summer of 2020 and result in the Flagstaff City Council adopting the plan. We have nevertheless capitalized on the momentum of the planning process and proceeded with smaller neighborhood improvements. Some of the largest hurdles to larger, longer-term goals have already been cleared.

The *Rapid Response* strategy, which was not part of the original public participation plan, is resulting in real-time improvements in the neighborhood, particularly in helping to solve parking issues. Eight new blocks in the Southside were brought into the managed parking system, which provides parking options and supply for residents and limits non-residents' use at all times. All community members, old and new, are happier with their parking situation.

Southside neighborhood planning momentum and goals are further influencing City decision-making in early consideration of park locations as stormwater and transportation improvements are being designed. Historically, the Southside neighborhood has lacked active outdoor open space, a problem that continues to this day. Through the outreach process residents, staff and

volunteers worked collaboratively to identify a suitable location for new active open space. As one can imagine, this was difficult given the built-out condition of the neighborhood. A City infrastructure project was identified where an active park can easily be incorporated. As a result, the park concept is now being incorporated in the early stages of the design and budgeting process of a City infrastructure project. This underscores the value of the public input process throughout this project from issue, to idea, to vision, to implementation. Importantly, this is being implemented prior to plan adoption.

Alignment with IAP2 Core Values



Neighborhood bus tour helping to educate on community assets.

Involving those most affected by the decision — Outreach for the Southside Community Plan has touched every door and business in the Southside neighborhood. When issues were particularly difficult, long standing, or complex, city staff met with residents “on their turf,” two to three times. When rapid response issues were identified, residents most directly impacted were strongly encouraged to help design proposed work.

Influence of the public’s contributions on the outcome — The team restrained from forcing solutions and instead built trust through a sustain public engagement process. This restraint created space for hopeful ideas from a community that was weary of outside forces. The community’s ideas about public improvements were reflected in the *Rapid Response* strategy as well as in actual plan content such as, concept plan illustrations for parks, parking, transportation, and floodproofing. The proposed growth policies and subarea delineations are also based on the community’s input.

Promoting sustainable decisions and the needs and interests of all participants — In order to ensure that the goals and policies of the draft plan were sustainable, the plan includes policies on research, partnerships and support for community organizations in the Southside. Sustainability is also reflected in the plan’s approach to future planning and design with the inclusion of alternative scenarios, ensuring that the plan remains flexible and implementable through future uncertainty. Initial community feedback showed a distrust of professional certainty and frustration with the yes/ no swings of past project planning, especially related to flooding. As a result, the plan approached a pending flood control project with scenarios. This approach will allow the Southside Plan to be a more durable decision making tool and the sharing of uncertainty with the community helped diminish the impression that the City was “changing its story” or trying to go around the community when project parameters change.

Facilitating the involvement of those most affected — In addition to the extensive outreach throughout the process, the team paused the process for the stakeholder group several meetings in, when there was a realization that perspectives important to the decision were missing from the conversation. The SCA formed the long-term stakeholder group in May 2019; membership includes local residents, a property manager, a commercial property owner and church representative, a developer, a realtor, a representative of NAU and a professor from NAU who had been working with the community. The breadth of the group’s experiences and their commitment to understanding ensured that any bias or status quo thinking on the part of City staff and the public was tested and questioned in the development of the Plan.

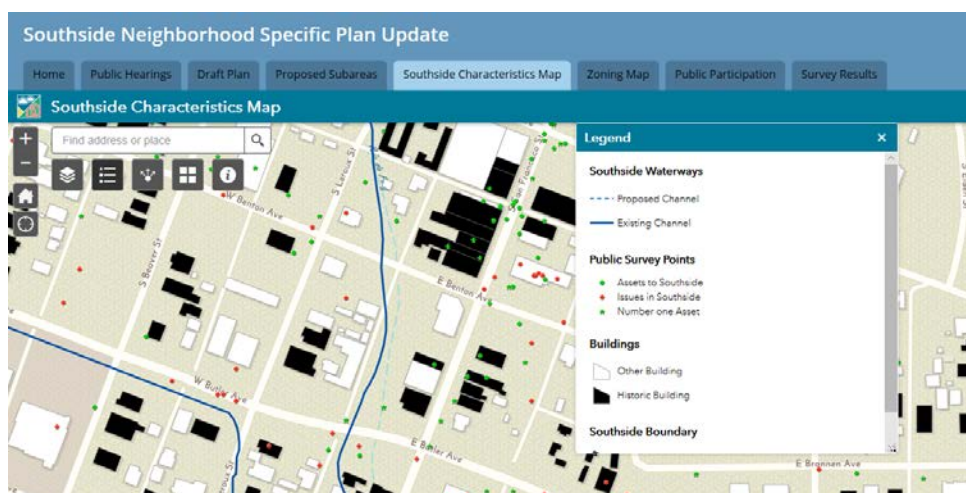
Seeking input from participants on how they wished to participate — When community members indicated they were not interested in attending meetings because past meetings and workshops failed to generate meaningful results, the team added online and in-person surveys, on-site meetings and site tours. Likewise, when a community member commented that businesses were underrepresented in a summary of stakeholder feedback, the team conducted a business survey. Thirty-six of the 68 businesses that were contacted responded. A 53% response rate.

I especially liked the field trips when the city folks and community members went out and looked at the sites under discussion. I felt like a number of good insights came from those trips that never would have come up if we had just sat around a table. — **Rick Miller Friends of the Rio**

Supporting meaningful participation with information — The feedback loop between technical experts and the community was key to successful engagement with the Southside. An example that stands out occurred during a walking trip to discuss a flooding issue. Two community members who were retired from utilities and construction work talked to staff about the way the City used to maintain a channel and remove brush from the Rio de Flag, which had since ceased. After consulting with staff, it was determined that maintenance ceased in 1986, the same year the Army Corps of Engineers began requiring permits for dredging and filling the channel and the City had ceased maintenance. A shared understanding on this kind of information allowed the City and the community to choose together the path forward. This 30-year-old missed communication had been a source of frustration for residents for years.

“I have learned a lot from the meetings I have participated in and, was happy to give a lot of my ideas to help the Southside.” — **David Rodriguez, Southside resident and business owner**

Communicating how public input affected decisions — In the beginning, community members believed the City was creating a plan, not for them, but for an outside interest like the university or a developer. To help dispel this perception a



Interactive Community Asset Map

project website was developed, www.flagstaff.az.gov/southsideplan, an on-going, interactive communication tool that allows for interactive web mapping, and communicates meetings notices and summaries. The frequent incorporation of the public comments on the website, in presentations and in the stakeholder meeting packets also reassured participant that their time and opinions were valued. The rapid response actions were also highlighted by many participants as a reason they started coming to later meetings when they had been uninterested in the earlier events.