



Supporting Equitable Development on Austin's Oakland Avenue

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Austin, Minnesota
Next Steps Memorandum

January 2025

INTRODUCTION

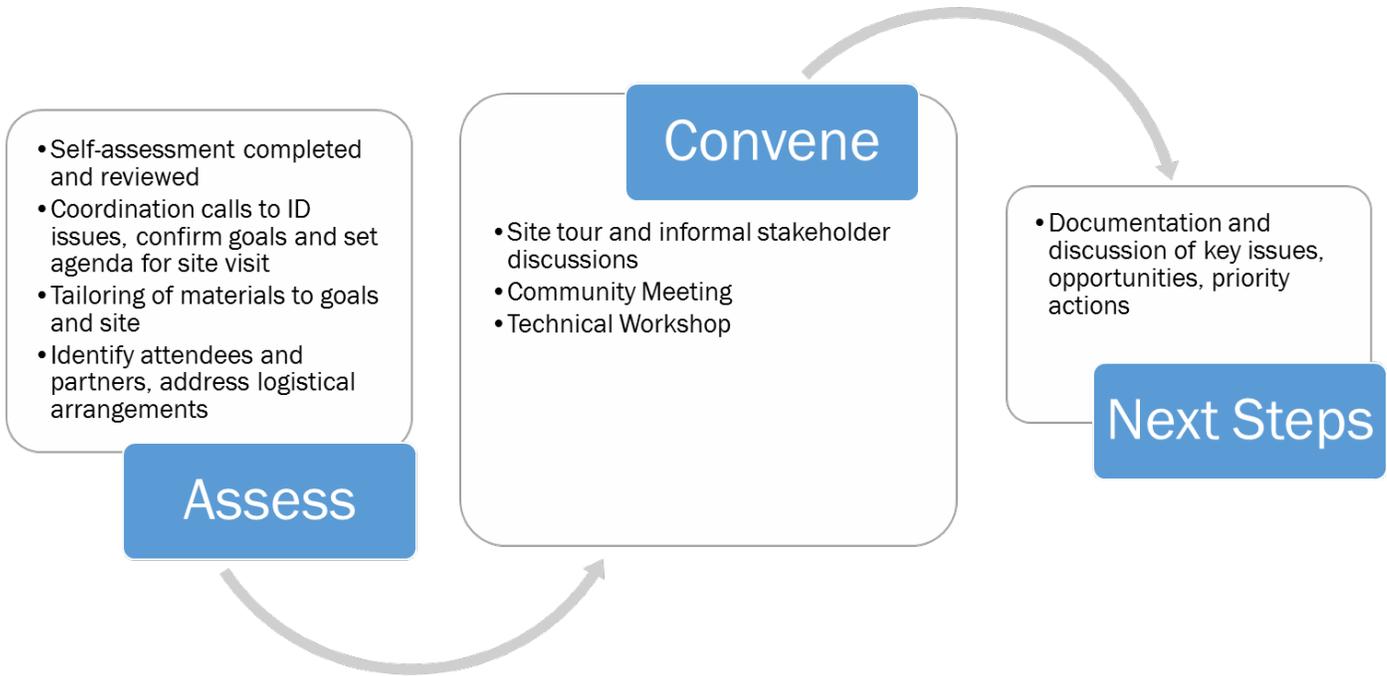
In late 2023, the City of Austin submitted a letter of interest to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requesting planning assistance on the topic of equitable development through its Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program. Austin was one of ten communities nationwide selected for the 2024 round of the program, and in the spring, summer, and fall of that year, received planning assistance focused on the Oakland Avenue corridor. With the support of a team of consultants and federal partners, a local Steering Committee and other community stakeholders explored strategies to revitalize the corridor and make it a safe, welcoming, and inclusive place for residents and businesses.

The core mission of the EPA is to protect human health and the environment. EPA's Office of Community Revitalization (OCR) supports this mission by working with communities to reach development goals that create positive impacts on air, water, public health, economic vitality, and quality of life for residents. OCR created the Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program to provide quick, targeted technical assistance on specific smart growth development topics by bringing subject matter experts to communities.

Building Blocks assistance is designed to move partner communities through a process of assessment, convening, and action planning—helping them learn about a given smart growth topic and create a plan to move forward on implementation. The capstone of the program is the community workshop, an interactive two-day event where participants discuss challenges and opportunities and develop specific actions that will help them advance their goals. The program also includes the convening of a Steering Committee made up of community members, a series of pre-and post-workshop coordination calls, a self-assessment, and networking with federal and state partners, and concludes with the development of a next steps memo documenting the process and summarizing the action plan. The diagram below outlines the typical flow of Building Blocks planning assistance.



Participants in Austin's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities workshop engaged in a series of activities to chart a path forward for Oakland Avenue. (Photo credit: Megan McConville, EPR PC)



THREE STAGES OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (CREDIT: RENAISSANCE PLANNING)

This memo documents the key outcomes of the planning assistance process in Austin with the Equitable Development tool, and identifies key community issues, prioritized goals, and specific actions to support inclusive revitalization of the Oakland Avenue corridor.

- Building Blocks Local Steering Committee**
- Holly Wallace, City of Austin
 - Craig Clark, City of Austin
 - Jason Duffy, Planning Commission/BP Gas Station, Oakland Ave
 - Miguel Garate, Riverland Community College
 - John Garry, Development Corporation of Austin
 - Nick Novotny, Impact Austin
 - Trish Harren Gjersvik, Mower County
 - Joyce Poshusta, City Council
 - Chaunce Stanton, Chamber of Commerce
 - Matthew Verdick, Mower County

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The city of Austin, which has a population of approximately 26,000, is located in Mower County in south-central Minnesota, about 100 miles south of the Twin Cities. The area was formerly inhabited by the Dakota people.¹ Austin is named for Austin Nichols, a fur trapper and the area's first European settler, who arrived in 1853. With the arrival of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad in the 1860s, Austin became a center of rail transportation. Today, it is located where US 218, which runs to the north and south, meets the east-west bound Interstate 90, which provides access to the city from all directions.

The city is notable for being the home of Hormel Foods, the multinational food processing company. Hormel's influence in Austin is multidimensional. The company employs many local residents. The Hormel Foundation, which supports local organizations, approved \$25.6 million in grants in Austin and Mower County for 2024.² Hormel also supports the Hormel Institute, which conducts biomedical research. The Spam Museum, located on Main Street, draws well over 100,000 visitors per year and has contributed to a revitalization of the Main Street corridor.³

Austin boasts sizeable numbers of immigrant and refugee groups, including Mexican, Central American, Karen, Karenni, West African, Sudanese, Ethiopian, Kenyan, Vietnamese, and Laotian people. As of 2022, about 16% of the population was foreign born, and 26.5% of residents spoke a language other than English at home.⁴



Austin is home to a thriving Main Street anchored by the SPAM Museum and a variety of small businesses. (Photo credit: Megan McConville, EPR PC)



Austin's 4th Avenue Festival showcases its vibrant and diverse culture. (Photo credit: Old Barn Photography)

¹ <https://www.myaustinminnesota.com/mower-county-historical-society-receives-large-grant-for-archaeological-site/>

² <http://www.thehormelfoundation.com>

³ <https://www.hormelfoods.com/newsroom/news/spam-museum-in-austin-draws-visitors-from-all-over-the-world/>

⁴ 2022 American Community Survey data for Austin, MN.

The needs of workers in the meat packing plants have contributed to high demand for affordable workforce housing and supportive social services. Local organizations such as The Welcome Center provide services for immigrants and refugees. While Austin maintains a small-town feel and culture, it also celebrates its international influences. For example, in July 2024, the city hosted World Refugee Day to highlight the contributions of refugee residents.⁵

As part of the Building Blocks program, the community hopes to develop a vision for revitalizing Oakland Avenue, an arterial street which connects downtown Austin to the city's main north-south thoroughfares, 4th Street and 14th Street, as well as to Interstate 90. Oakland Avenue features a diverse mix of housing and commercial uses as well as a varied built environment of single-family homes, many of which have been converted to small businesses, strip mall development, and other commercial development. This route also connects Austin High School to the high school athletic field, making it a commonly traveled route for students and underscoring concerns about pedestrian safety.

Hoping to build off the success seen on Main Street, the community aims to beautify the Oakland Ave. corridor while telling the story of Austin's history and diverse populations. Promoting active transportation (biking and walking) was also identified as a priority, particularly for students, as Austin has a lively bike culture, including a well-known local bike shop and bike museum, Rydjour Bikes. Additionally, community members identified a desire to ease the path to develop affordable, multifamily housing.

The City of Austin has had recent success in applying for federal grants. In 2022, it received an EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant of \$500,000 to conduct environmental site assessments, update an inventory of brownfield sites, and conduct community engagement activities.⁶

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

EPA and its consultants from EPR PC and Livable Cities facilitated an on-site workshop in Austin on July 10-11, 2024. The workshop brought together key local stakeholders and other partners to identify approaches to bring attention to and revitalize the Oakland Avenue corridor.

⁵ https://www.kimt.com/news/austin-celebrates-world-refugee-day/article_ac2fbf30-4eea-11ef-9183-e3cec1c5ec40.html

⁶ Brownfields 2022 Assessment Grant Fact Sheet.

<https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyNET.exe/P101B420.TXT?ZyActionD=ZyDocument&Client=EPA&Index=2016+Thru+2020&Docs=&Query=&Time=&EndTime=&SearchMethod=1&TocRestrict=n&Toc=&TocEntry=&QField=&QFieldYear=&QFieldMonth=&QFieldDay=&IntQFieldOp=0&ExtQFieldOp=0&XmlQuery=&File=D%3A%5Czyfiles%5CIndex%20Data%5C16thru20%5Ctxt%5C00000046%5CP101B420.txt&User=ANONYMOUS&Password=anonymous&SortMethod=h%7C-&MaximumDocuments=1&FuzzyDegree=0&ImageQuality=r75g8/r75g8/x150y150g16/i425&Display=hpfr&DefSeeKPage=x&SearchBack=ZyActionL&Back=ZyActionS&BackDesc=Results%20page&MaximumPages=1&ZyEntry=1&SeekPage=x&ZyPURL>

Site Tour

The workshop began with a tour of Austin and Oakland Avenue that helped to familiarize the project team with the broader community as well as the specific study area. Local leaders presented brief historical information and current topics along the way. Highlights of the tour included:

- Downtown Austin, where the team viewed community destinations such as Main Street and its collection of local businesses, the Cedar River and Mill Pond, the 4th Avenue Cultural Corridor, bike paths, and the SPAM Museum.
- The Hormel Plant and surrounding areas.
- Oakland Avenue, where the team saw popular businesses such as Kenny's Oak Grill, Apollo Liquors and Superette, McDonald's, Dairy Queen, Kwik Trip, and Berg's Nursery; examples of attractive landscaping and greenery; properties ripe for redevelopment or improvement; opportunity spots for public art; examples of distinctive business signage; businesses in former single-family homes; and streetscape problems and opportunities for improvement.



The site tour included informational stops throughout the downtown and Oakland Avenue area. (Photo credit: Megan McConville, EPR PC)

Community Meeting

The next workshop event was a community meeting on the evening of Wednesday, July 10. About 20 people attended, including city and county officials, nonprofit leaders, federal partners, and interested residents. Spanish interpretation was provided. The full participant list is available in the appendix, along with the results of all the interactive exercises from the two-day workshop.

The meeting featured a presentation on equitable development and a facilitated discussion about Oakland Avenue's challenges, opportunities, and participants' visions for its future. Attendees refined a set of goals for Oakland Avenue that had been developed by the local Steering Committee prior



Community workshop participants discussed challenges and opportunities along Oakland Avenue. (Photo credit: Megan McConville, EPR PC)

to the workshop. The final versions of these goals, which would guide the action planning the following day, were:

- **Improve the experience of people walking, biking, and taking transit on Oakland Avenue, including by beautifying and greening the street.**
- **Incentivize well maintained, attractive, pedestrian-scale commercial development along the Oakland Avenue corridor.**
- **Develop a cohesive identity and brand for the Oakland Avenue corridor that is rooted in its assets and celebrates the diversity and history of the community.**
- **Engage Austin High School students in reimagining Oakland Avenue.**
- **Encourage high-quality affordable and multifamily housing along Oakland Avenue.**

Action Planning Work Session

The all-day action planning work session on Thursday, July 11 allowed for more in-depth discussions of challenges and opportunities related to redevelopment, neighborhood identity, transportation and the streetscape, and other issues on Oakland Avenue. It was attended by a smaller group of key stakeholders involved in local decision-making, along with the consultants and federal partners.

The project team recapped the conversations had at the community meeting and presented a set of case studies from around the country highlighting approaches that might be inspirational for Austin. Participants then engaged in an asset mapping activity; brainstormed actions that could support the aforementioned goals for Oakland Avenue; prioritized those actions; and added important implementation details to the highest-priority actions.

As part of the workshop exercises and conversations the group reprioritized and chose to move forward with four of the five initial goals, opting to defer discussion of the housing goal. Additionally, following the workshop, the Steering Committee decided to gather additional community input on the actions that were brainstormed in order to ensure that work undertaken to revitalize Oakland Avenue truly aligns with resident priorities. The project team created an online input form for the Steering Committee, which explained the Building Blocks planning process and asked respondents to vote for their top actions and write in any new desired actions to consider. The form, which is available in the appendix, was translated into Spanish and the Steering Committee shared it on social media as well as through the outreach they were doing for the City/County Comprehensive Plan update. 134

Supporting Equitable Development on Austin's Oakland Avenue

What do you think we should do?

Austin is working to revitalize the Oakland Avenue corridor and make it a safe, welcoming, and inclusive place for residents and businesses. We need your ideas to improve this important community corridor!

This process started with a public workshop on July 10-11, 2024, when Austin residents learned about steps other communities are taking to encourage equitable development, shared their visions and goals for Oakland Avenue, and brainstormed specific actions that could be undertaken to make the corridor more vibrant, attractive, welcoming, and safe.

Now, we are seeking to gather more community feedback on these actions, and to add any key actions that are missing.

[Para ver la encuesta en español, clic aquí.](#)

Background:

This planning process is supported by the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program](#). Austin is one of 10 communities selected

The input form created to gather additional community feedback on the brainstormed actions following the workshop.

responses were received to the English survey and two to the Spanish survey. Based on that feedback, the Steering Committee selected the highest-priority actions and added implementation details to each.

KEY COMMUNITY ISSUES

Throughout the workshop, the visual character of Oakland Avenue, the community's diversity, and the desire for revitalization along the corridor surfaced as key issues for the neighborhood and community. This section covers some of the highlights of the workshop conversations, starting with a summary of the city and corridor's strengths.

Strengths

Austin residents enjoy their city because of its diversity, small-town character, sense of community and generally affordable cost of living. Some of the city's greatest strengths are:

- **Vibrant community:** Austin has an historic and charming downtown and a strong ecosystem of institutions and nonprofits, such as Riverland Community College, the Welcome Center of Austin, and the Hormel Foundation.
- **Diverse population:** Austin residents are proud of their city's diversity, with immigrants and refugees from around the world settling there. Popular events such as Taste of Nations, which celebrates the foods of Austin's diverse population, signal this pride.
- **Downtown momentum:** The historic downtown features attractions such the Spam Museum, which attracts more than 100,000 visitors per year, plus charming shops and restaurants. The successes of downtown may be leveraged for nearby Oakland Avenue.

Challenges

The City of Austin faces several challenges related to Oakland Avenue and larger community needs.

- **Lack of visual appeal, green space, and cohesive identity along Oakland Avenue:** The corridor features environments that are unappealing visually and for the safety and comfort of pedestrians and cyclists who travel along the route. Parking lots, curb cuts, traffic during rush hour, and lack of greenery along much of the route make for a visually undesirable landscape. Community members noted the route lacks identity.
- **Lack of investment in properties along the Oakland Avenue route:** Some of the businesses and homes along the route are poorly maintained and in need of investment.
- **Small lots along Oakland that are not easily redeveloped:** Small lots make large developments impractical (but open the door to creative solutions for smaller lots).
- **Lack of housing inventory, particularly affordable multifamily housing:** There is a need for quality housing for Austin's population, particularly at the lower end of the income spectrum.

- **Community members face barriers to thriving:** Community members need economic opportunity for upward mobility as well as social supports to ensure they can thrive.

The City of Austin faces challenges requiring careful consideration and strategic action. By reconsidering the built environment along Oakland Avenue and the opportunity to improve connections with other neighborhoods, the city can help to create better alternatives for pedestrians and cyclists, all while telling Austin's story and promoting economic opportunity along the corridor.

Opportunities

Austin is well-positioned to capitalize on several promising opportunities that can drive its future growth and development. The community's established network of partners across various levels of government offers a strong foundation for collaborative initiatives. The city's thriving downtown creates opportunities to leverage tourism and pedestrian activity along Main Street to benefit Oakland Avenue, and vice versa.

- **Valued Oakland Avenue establishments:** Many Oakland Avenue businesses such as Kenny's Oak Grill, Jenny Le's Nails, and McDonald's are valued by the community. Visual features such as the Apollo Liquors sign give the area character.
- **Proximity to downtown,** to leverage downtown activity to benefit Oakland Avenue and vice versa.
- **Improving access to key destinations along Oakland Avenue,** including local businesses and the high school athletic field.
- **Calm side streets parallel to Oakland Avenue,** which create opportunities for safe active transportation routes for students.
- **Network of local, county, state, and federal partners,** including a number of local institutions.
- **Existing plans and projects:** A project to rebuild Oakland Avenue with wider sidewalks has been approved and is planned to be implemented in the near term. Additionally, a downtown master plan and ongoing update of the comprehensive plan provide structure for positive change.

NEXT STEPS

As described above, the workshop and follow-up outreach produced a set of high-priority, near-term actions that will make measurable progress towards the community's goals for Oakland Avenue. Those actions are listed below and detailed in the following tables. Additional actions that were brainstormed are included below the tables for each goal. These actions are a starting point; they can evolve as they are accomplished, more momentum is created and more partners become involved, and new ideas arise.

- **Goal #1: Improve the experience of people walking, biking, and taking transit on Oakland Avenue, including by beautifying and greening the street.**
 - Encourage plantings of trees and native plants in the public right-of-way along Oakland Ave.
 - Replace street trees removed during the Oakland Ave street redesign project as feasible.
 - Install multi use decorative lighting as part of the Oakland Ave street redesign project.
 - Promote and install bike boulevards on 1st Ave NW and 2nd Ave SW.
- **Goal #2: Incentivize well maintained, attractive, pedestrian-scale commercial development along the Oakland Avenue corridor.**
 - Update the zoning for the Oakland Ave corridor to support a more pedestrian-friendly built environment, including by encouraging or requiring parking in the rear of buildings where feasible.
 - Provide financial and technical assistance to improve small business building facades along the corridor.
- **Goal #3: Develop a cohesive identity and brand for the Oakland Avenue corridor that is rooted in its assets and celebrates the diversity and history of the community.**
 - Support immigrant and refugee-owned businesses along the corridor, emphasizing food, culture, and their role in the future of Austin.
 - Fund/crowdfund art and sculpture projects on public property along the corridor, activating local artists as well as high school students.
- **Goal #4: Engage Austin High School students in reimagining Oakland Avenue.**
 - Engage high school students in creating art installations, gardens and landscaping, and other beautification projects on Oakland Ave.

Goal #1: Improve the experience of people walking, biking, and taking transit on Oakland Avenue, including by beautifying and greening the street.

Oakland Avenue is currently a high-traffic thoroughfare designed more for motorists than for people on foot, riding bicycles, or taking transit. However, given the corridor's connectivity to Main Street, its role as a gateway to the city, and the fact that it is home to a number of important businesses and community destinations - including the high school - a critical opportunity exists to make it into a safer, more beautiful, greener place to spend time. The Steering Committee and workshop participants envisioned a vibrant corridor lined with trees and plants, where all Austin residents can safely walk, bike, or bus to local businesses at any time of the day or evening, and where businesses thrive with frequent foot traffic.

Specific Actions or Initiatives	Why is this important?	Immediate Next Steps and Deadlines (0-3 years)	How will we measure success?	Lead Role	Supporting Cast	Potential Needs and Resources
Encourage plantings of trees and native plants in the public right-of-way along Oakland Ave.	Oakland Ave is one of Austin's primary corridors. It is heavily traveled and is a gateway to the community for many, providing their first impressions of the city. Currently, the street lacks greenery, decreasing its attractiveness. Adding street trees and native plantings to the public right-of-way will transform the avenue, making it a much more appealing place to spend time, catalyzing development, increasing property values, providing shade and cooling to people on the street, capturing and	-Implement and learn from the smaller scale project that is underway as part of the reconstruction of Oakland/1 st Ave. -Explore policy options to encourage greenery at a broader scale along the corridor. -Explore options for native plantings in the new boulevard areas that require minimal upkeep. Assess what is in the boulevards in other parts of the city.	-The initial pilot project is completed. -Feedback and lessons learned are gathered for future work/expansion. -Green areas in the boulevards are preserved and can't be paved over. -Boulevards are beautiful and uniform.	-City of Austin Engineering Department -Berg's Nursery	-Oakland Ave corridor businesses and residents -Bonnie Rietz, former mayor -Spruce Up Austin -EPA Green Infrastructure program -Mower County Watershed District -Impact Austin -Austin Area Chamber of Commerce -University of Minnesota	-Pilot project is already funded, but need resources to do this on other parts of Oakland Ave - EPA Green Infrastructure Funding and Technical Assistance Opportunities - CN America in Bloom Grant - Minnesota Green Step Cities

	<p>filtering stormwater runoff, creating habitat for pollinators, and offering educational opportunities on native plants and stormwater management. Additionally, the grass in the boulevard areas (the strips between the sidewalks and the street), which some property owners have paved over, will be replaced with the street design project. Preserving and enhancing these small vegetated spaces will make a difference on a street that otherwise lacks greenery.</p>				<p>Extension Master Gardeners -Hormel Nature Center -University of Minnesota Great Lakes Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center</p>	<p>-Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources Lawn to Legumes Program -Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Climate Pollution Reduction Grants -National Garden Clubs Youth Pollinator Gardens Grant -TMobile Hometown Grants -Clean Water Fund -National Wildlife Federation Native Plant Habitats informational resources -USDA information on native plants -Minnesota Department of Transportation grants</p>
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<p>Replace street trees removed during the Oakland Ave street redesign project as feasible.</p>	<p>See above.</p>	<p>-Replace trees removed during the project.</p>	<p>-Street trees removed are replaced.</p>	<p>-City of Austin Engineering Department</p>		<p>Already funded.</p>
<p>Install multi use decorative lighting as part of the Oakland Ave street redesign project.</p>	<p>Oakland Avenue needs to be better lit to make it safer, more attractive, and to activate the corridor in the evening. Multi use light posts can accommodate flags, banners, and flowers, creating a beautiful, uniform look that is continuous with downtown. This element can be added to the current street redesign project if it is acted on quickly.</p>	<p>-Talk with Mitch Wenum. -Seek funding sources. -Incorporate into current project design. -Explore the possibility of using LED/solar lighting (could also help to attract funding).</p>	<p>-Lighting is included in the Oakland Ave street redesign project/plan.</p>	<p>-City of Austin</p>		<p>Already funded.</p>
<p>Promote and install bike boulevards on 1st Ave NW and 2nd Ave SW.</p>	<p>The city of Austin needs a safe and well-marked east-west bike connection in the Oakland Ave neighborhood, where there is currently a gap in safe and appealing bike infrastructure. 1st Ave NW and 2nd Ave SW provide safer bicycling alternatives to Oakland Ave. Bridging this gap with bike boulevards – which</p>	<p>-Define the potential design of the bike boulevards. -Explore semi-permanent bike infrastructure options (i.e. lane delineators) that could lead to permanent. -Make an engagement plan to involve the</p>	<p>-There is broad community support for the concept. -The bike boulevards are created using semi-permanent infrastructure.</p>	<p>-City of Austin Planning & Zoning and Engineering Departments -Impact Austin</p>	<p>-Local bike advocates -High School students -Rydjor Bikes - Minnesota Department of Transportation -Booster programs -Mower County</p>	<p>-Minnesota Department of Transportation Active Transportation Program Grants -Minnesota Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School</p>

	are simply streets that already have low car traffic and speeds and that are enhanced with signs, pavement markings, and other design treatments to support bicycling – will make a direct biking connection to the High School. It will encourage more Austin residents to bicycle, providing an affordable transportation option, increasing mobility for those without cars, and enabling healthy living.	community and refine the design. -Apply for implementation funding, starting with 1 st Ave NW.	-More bicyclists use 1 st Ave NW and 2 nd Ave SW. -More students bike to the high school.		-Hormel Foundation -Austin Area Foundation -Austin Public School Foundation -Austin Aspires -Austin School Board -Riverland Foundation -Austin Area Chamber of Commerce -Development Corporation of Austin -Mayo Clinic	-National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program
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Additional actions brainstormed:

- Host an event/celebration to kick off the street redesign project and bring attention to Oakland Avenue.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to property owners for landscaping.
- Launch an awards program recognizing beautiful business landscaping/facades/green space.
- Identify property owners who may be interested in hosting parklets, benches, etc.
- Create more green spaces and spaces for recreation along the Oakland Ave corridor.
- Provide technical and financial assistance for business lighting and street lighting.
- Identify ways to integrate art into the streetscape, such as poem imprints in the sidewalk and using the planned sidewalk bump outs as opportunities for art.
- Activate the space at the corner of Oakland and Main to encourage pedestrians to continue walking from Main to Oakland and vice versa.

- Install a bike rack on the high school green space to encourage bike use.
- Cultivate an Austin bike culture.
- Create a bike bus to school.

Goal #2: Incentivize well maintained, attractive, pedestrian-scale commercial development along the Oakland Avenue corridor.

Creating the conditions to support well maintained, attractive, pedestrian-scale commercial development along Oakland Avenue will result in a more vibrant, walkable, bikeable, and safe corridor. Updating the zoning code and providing support to businesses to improve building facades will make visible changes in the built environment, demonstrating that the corridor attracts healthy levels of investment and that businesses are thriving. These actions will make the street a more appealing place to walk, bike, and spend time, increasing foot traffic and property values and attracting more redevelopment activity.

Specific Actions or Initiatives	Why is this important?	Immediate Next Steps and Deadlines (0-3 years)	How will we measure success?	Lead Role	Supporting Cast	Potential Needs and Resources
Update the zoning for the Oakland Ave corridor to support a more pedestrian-friendly built environment, including by encouraging or requiring parking in the rear of buildings where feasible.	Locating parking in the rear of buildings along the corridor, rather than in the front, will transform the streetscape over time. More buildings closer to the street will create a pedestrian friendly environment, instead of compelling pedestrians to walk through an expanse of asphalt. It will also be safer to walk and bicycle along the corridor, with fewer vehicles turning into and out of	-Use the ongoing comprehensive planning process to update the zoning for the Oakland Ave corridor. -Investigate and decide whether to do a zoning overlay or a new code, considering factors such as the speed of implementation and user-friendliness.	-The zoning code update is passed.	-Holly Wallace, City of Austin Planning & Zoning Department -Comprehensive Plan Update consultants	-Oakland Ave businesses -Other City consultants -Austin Planning Commission	-Funding and technical assistance to support more extensive zoning code updates, including in other commercial areas -Informational resources to inform this work: USDA Rural Development

	<p>parking lots and fewer needs to cross parking lots on foot. Creating this pedestrian scale environment can also have additional benefits, such as slowing traffic and attracting redevelopment activity. This action can be incorporated into the ongoing comprehensive planning and zoning update effort.</p>				<p>Smart Growth America Center for Zoning Solutions Form Based Code Institute League of Minnesota Cities Strong Towns Main Street America Urban Land Institute</p>
<p>Provide financial and technical assistance to improve small business building facades along the corridor.</p>	<p>Supporting reinvestment in the small business buildings along Oakland Ave will contribute greatly to the attractiveness of the corridor. There are a number of buildings in need of repair or improvement, but business owners may not have the financial or technical resources to make these investments. Façade improvement assistance will increase foot traffic and sales at businesses, help to preserve buildings and property values, and visibly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identify resources that can support financial and technical assistance for façade improvements, including grants and low-interest loans. -Use code enforcement as proactive encouragement to make improvements. Work with code enforcement officer (a new one is starting in January) to identify candidates for assistance and connect them with resources. -Connect building owners with resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Existing Main Street program is expanded to Oakland Ave. -Oakland Ave businesses have utilized this assistance to improve their facades. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Port Authority -Housing and Redevelopment Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Oakland Avenue businesses -City of Austin -Chamber of Commerce -Impact Austin -Development Corporation of Austin <p>-TMobile Hometown Grants -Hormel Foundation -Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) that serve the Austin area -HUD Community Development Block Grants -USDA Rural Development -Example of low or no interest loans for property</p>

	strengthen the appeal and identity of Oakland Ave.	and celebrate the improvements made.				improvements from the City of Philadelphia
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Additional actions brainstormed:

- Adopt expanded zoning on the entire blocks on the north and south sides of the corridor to facilitate more commercial development.
- Improve business and street name signage.
- Update the sign code to encourage unique business signage and contribute to a more cohesive "vibe" of the area.
- Create more uniform signage requirements for private businesses.
- Select 1-3 top opportunity spots (i.e. between 8th and 9th) for retail enhancement.
- Market vacant lots/storefronts to businesses that fill community gaps (i.e. thrift shop, etc.)
- Host "small business bootcamp" training for business owners.
- Host fun after-hours pop-up market near Berg's nursery.
- Turn the alley between Oakland and 1st Ave SW into a pedestrian way with food truck capabilities.
- Enforce non-conforming uses.
- Promote a childcare facility along the corridor.

Goal #3: Develop a cohesive identity and brand for the Oakland Avenue corridor that is rooted in its assets and celebrates the diversity and history of the community.

During the planning process, participants identified what they love about Oakland Ave, including a number of long-standing, popular, and diverse local businesses; unique business signage along the corridor; and places where business landscaping contributes to an appealing street environment. At the same time, participants observed that the corridor lacks a cohesive identity and "vibe" that can be promoted and attract interest and that is true to Austin's diversity and history. Two key ways of developing and sharing that identity are to support and strengthen immigrant and refugee-owned businesses along Oakland Ave and to integrate art into the streetscape and built environment.

Specific Actions or Initiatives	Why is this important?	Immediate Next Steps and Deadlines (0-3 years)	How will we measure success?	Lead Role	Supporting Cast	Potential Needs and Resources
<p>Support immigrant and refugee-owned businesses along the corridor, emphasizing food, culture, and their role in the future of Austin.</p>	<p>Providing targeted support to Oakland Ave's immigrant and refugee-owned businesses will strengthen these important community resources and build the local economy. It will create a welcoming environment in the community and on Oakland Ave specifically, ensure that the corridor is and continues to be representative of Austin's diverse population, and strengthen the identity of Oakland Ave as a unique international neighborhood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expand the Main Street facade program to Oakland (see above). -Identify the existing immigrant and refugee-owned businesses along the corridor. -Collaborate with the business owners to design a promotional/marketing campaign highlighting specific businesses as well as Oakland Ave as a place people can go to find unique businesses. -Design and install signage and wayfinding pointing to the corridor and key destinations. -Do an inventory of available commercial space on the corridor in order to match aspiring entrepreneurs with storefronts there. 	<p>-Immigrant and refugee-owned businesses are identified, relationships are established, and promotion/marketing is underway.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -City of Austin - Development Corporation of Austin -Small Business Development Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Welcome Center -COSA -Minnesota APEX Accelerator -Human Rights Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hormel Foundation -Development Corporation of Austin has some data on available space, needs to be kept current.

<p>Fund/crowdfund art and sculpture projects on public property along the corridor, activating local artists as well as high school students.</p>	<p>Incorporating works of art and sculpture into the Oakland Ave environment will bring new interest, energy, and character into the neighborhood. These projects will make the street a more appealing place to be, attract renewed interest and investment, and engage the community – including students – in the corridor’s revitalization. They will boost feelings of ownership, pride, and excitement about the neighborhood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A \$10K Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council grant application was already submitted for art on electrical boxes. The outcome will be known by the end of the year. Some of these works could be done on Oakland Ave. -Submit another grant application to the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council in 2026, and possibly one to the Hormel Foundation. -Explore creative ways of using the additional public right-of-way being created where Main and Oakland meet, and the gateway spaces being discussed in the new comprehensive plan. -Explore ways of encouraging unique signage along the corridor to support a style with elements in common, such as collaborating with sign installers. 	<p>-Some projects are completed by December 2025.</p>	<p>-Austin Culture and Arts Commission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Austin Public Schools -Latino high school students -Miguel Garate, Riverland Community College, and Austin High School Spanish teacher (will work with Latino students to explore and share ideas about the corridor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Southeast Minnesota Arts Council -Culture and Arts Commission -Hormel Foundation -National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant
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Additional actions brainstormed:

- Determine Oakland Ave's brand/identity (and make cute merchandise!).
- Get historical information from the local historical society.
- Create multilingual wayfinding signage along Oakland Ave and linking it to downtown.
- Reach continuously the voices that are not at the table to have input and true inclusion and equity.

Goal #4: Engage Austin High School students in reimagining Oakland Avenue.

Oakland Ave is a home to a vital community asset - Austin High School. Engaging high school students and faculty in revitalizing the corridor will inject projects with new creativity and enthusiasm, offer valuable place-based and community-driven learning opportunities, ensure that the neighborhood meets student and faculty needs, and nurture a sense of ownership and pride among Austin's youth. The chances for student involvement in planning and implementation are limitless; the below action is a place to start.

Specific Actions or Initiatives	Why is this important?	Immediate Next Steps and Deadlines (0-3 years)	How will we measure success?	Lead Role	Supporting Cast	Potential Needs and Resources
Engage high school students in creating art installations, gardens and landscaping, and other beautification projects on Oakland Ave.	Despite Austin High School's location on Oakland Ave, limited efforts have been made to seek student input on the revitalization of the corridor. There is a tremendous opportunity to include and benefit from the ideas, creativity, and energy of the student body, which encapsulates the overall community's	-Identify a list of projects or issues ripe for youth engagement. For example, a high school class could conduct a walking audit, document baseline conditions along the corridor, and brainstorm solutions to challenges. Students could also provide feedback on the types of businesses they'd like to see near the high school.	-At least one installation is completed with student involvement/leadership over the next three years. -Other metrics of success: -Number of students engaged -Number of contributions they make -Number of outreach events -Student sentiment about Oakland Ave	-Austin Culture and Arts Commission -Austin Area Arts	-High school teachers and students -Miguel Garate, Riverland Community College -United Way -Austin Scarlet Cord -Counseling Staff	-Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council -Hormel Foundation - Donors in the community -National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant

	<p>diversity. Specific subgroups may also be able to provide input, such as students seeking volume hours. This will not only improve the aesthetics of Oakland Ave, but will also lead to feelings of ownership and pride among Austin's young people and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coordinate with high school art teachers, other school personnel, and arts organizations that work with students to make a plan for student engagement. -Schedule a meeting with Superintendent Joey Page and High School Principal Matt Schmidt. -Reach out to CEO and Austin Assurance. -Seek out students participating in the Scarlet Cord Program and others who need volunteer hours. -Create an input survey/form to disseminate online/via social media. -Visit and talk with the Human Geography class. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Emily Howland, CEO, Austin Aspires -Austin Assurance Scholarship -Johanna Rayes -Jacque Ruiz -Jorge Sandoval, Success Coach at the high school -Jane Carlson, Volunteer hours -Mower County Historical Society -Mower County Belong Committee - Human Rights Commission 	
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Additional actions brainstormed:

- Solicit input from students on what businesses they'd like to see near the high school.
- Match students with local businesses to identify needed improvements and make innovative changes.
- Create spaces where high school students can spend time.
- Implement "student-oriented placemaking" on Oakland Avenue and 4th Street, possibly in partnership with Anderson Memorial.
- Hold a student design competition to create the look of signage and wayfinding along Oakland Avenue.
- Partner with high school students to produce a drawn map that highlights unique spots in Austin for folks leaving the SPAM Museum.

APPENDICES

Included with this memo as separate documents are a set of appendices that provide additional detail on the Building Blocks workshop process and results as well as implementation resources. These appendices are as follows:

- **Appendix A. Resource List:** This appendix lists and describes a number of programs and resources from federal agencies, foundations, and nonprofit organizations that can help to support equitable development. These are organized by seven focus areas (i.e. Facilitate Meaningful Community Engagement in Planning and Land Use Decisions, Promote a Healthy Environment, etc.), and within each, are broken out as reports, toolkits, case studies, and funding opportunities.
- **Appendix B. Workshop Participant List:** This document lists the names and affiliations of the workshop participants.
- **Appendix C. Workshop Exercise Results:** This appendix documents the results of the interactive exercises the attendees participated in over the course of the two-day workshop.
- **Appendix D. Action Input Forms:** This appendix contains the two online forms – in English and Spanish – used to gather additional community feedback on the actions brainstormed at the workshop.
- **Appendix E. Case Studies:** These are the case study slides presented at the workshop to share relevant ideas from peer communities.
- **Appendix F. Community Self-Assessment:** This community self-assessment was filled out by the Steering Committee as part of the planning process.