



20+C+M+B+18

472

WHAT MAKES A HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTHY?

NEIGHBORHOOD RESEARCH PROJECT
PHASE 1 - PROJECT SUMMARY
2019

This initiative was funded
by an Inspire Grant from:



FOELLINGER
FOUNDATION

Investing in Excellence

PROJECT MOTIVATION

For the past 15 years, NeighborLink has met the needs of vulnerable homeowners with volunteer service. Just since November 2010, NeighborLink has completed over 7,554 projects in Fort Wayne. That means we've heard over 7,554 stories and accomplished over 7,554 acts of kindness. This also means NeighborLink has had an intimate glimpse into the inner-workings of neighborhoods through being a neighbor and connecting its neighbors.

This glimpse has exposed some questions:

- Why do neighborhoods differ so drastically from block to block?
- Why does the media seem to report negatively on some neighborhoods more often than others?
- Why does economic and community development seem to forget certain parts of the city?
- Why do the desires of the neighborhood residents often differ from the prescription of outside experts?

All of these questions have distilled down to one main question at NeighborLink:

What makes a neighborhood perceived to be and actually healthy?

Perceived 'healthy' neighborhoods are ones with positive attention, ones where economic development and community development is occurring, but how different are these neighborhoods really from other neighborhoods? We wanted to find out whether the neighborhoods many consider 'unhealthy' have the same characteristics that the 'healthy' neighborhoods have, and if not, why not. To accomplish this we have undertaken a two year study of five different neighborhoods in Fort Wayne.

We, at NeighborLink, are committed to increase our capacity to foster long-term change by equipping and empowering neighbors to know and help each other. The only way to accomplish this is to get to know these neighbors ourselves. We need to know more about their neighborhoods, what motivates them, what they think their assets are, and what they believe they really need from outside help.

THANK YOU

This project was made possible by a capacity building, Inspire Grant from the Foellinger Foundation. This report outlines the key results from phase one of a two part research project and this will inform the direction of phase two (to be announced in early 2020).



PROJECT OBJECTIVE

To gather insight from five neighborhoods to develop a general set of indicators that can be used to measure neighborhood health (in a non-medical sense), which then can be applied to the neighborhoods to inform their internally directed improvements and possible future partnerships with NeighborLink.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

NeighborLink hired Community Research Institute (CRI) of Purdue Fort Wayne for research assistance, collaborated with the leadership in the five neighborhoods to gather neighborhood feedback, recruited an AmeriCorps VISTA to assist in research, and implemented a homeowner incentive grant program (HIP) to develop relationships and gain more information.

METHOD

CRI used Esri, a proprietary database, to collect quantitative data on demographics and used the Wayne Township Assessor to collect housing stock information in each neighborhood. Then CRI facilitated a series of neighborhood conversations to gain qualitative insight into what the neighbors cared for, what they felt held their neighborhood back and what they felt benefitted their neighborhood. The AmeriCorps VISTA researched related studies and academic resources and facilitated the HIP grant in conjunction with a representative from each neighborhood association.

NEIGHBORHOODS

The neighborhoods were chosen strategically, to get an assortment of urban neighborhoods. We wanted urban neighborhoods that were well established with stability and growth, those that are emerging, and those that are either overlooked or viewed negatively. We also strove to study adjacent neighborhoods that could help each other and partner together in the future.

HOAGLAND MASTERSON - HM (46802)

- Located between West Central and Williams Woodland Park, HM has many socio-economic indicators that would communicate its need, and it is one of last remaining traditional neighborhoods in the downtown area. In the last two decades, HM has not experienced development. However, with increased downtown development and a resurgence of urban living, HM is starting to see home prices go up and community development plans happen around it. They have a solid, but small, neighborhood association and a desire to lead their development rather than passively receive it. Williams Woodland Park is attempting to collaborate with HM to spark development.

NORTH HIGHLANDS - NH (46808)

- By several metrics this neighborhood is the strongest of the five neighborhoods we studied, particularly when it comes to median income, homeownership rates, and infrastructure investments. NH is within two miles of downtown and often doesn't get much attention, but has been very stable and is very racially homogeneous. It also has a strong neighborhood association with established connections to city government and has petitioned for infrastructure improvements.

PETTIT-RUDISILL - PR (46806)

- PR has solid housing stock, diverse neighbors, and is poised for development if momentum continues in the 46807 area. It is reminiscent of North Highlands in terms of neighborhood layout, housing type, and potential. However, it has a very small and limited neighborhood association activity despite having the largest population of the five studied neighborhoods. PR also has limited community green space and no significant parks.

WEST CENTRAL - WC (46802)

- WC is touted as the progressive model neighborhood for downtown living. It is worth noting that WC includes portions of the central business district that contain residential properties. It has a history of socioeconomic diversity, and due to its large geographic space, over time the neighborhood has split into segments. For this study, WC was split into two different breakdowns, West Central and West Central CDAP (Community Development Area Plan), but ultimately they proved statistically similar. West Central CDAP modified the boundaries of the neighborhood to exclude the central business district; more information about CDAPs can be found at <http://www.fwcommunitydevelopment.org/area-plans>.

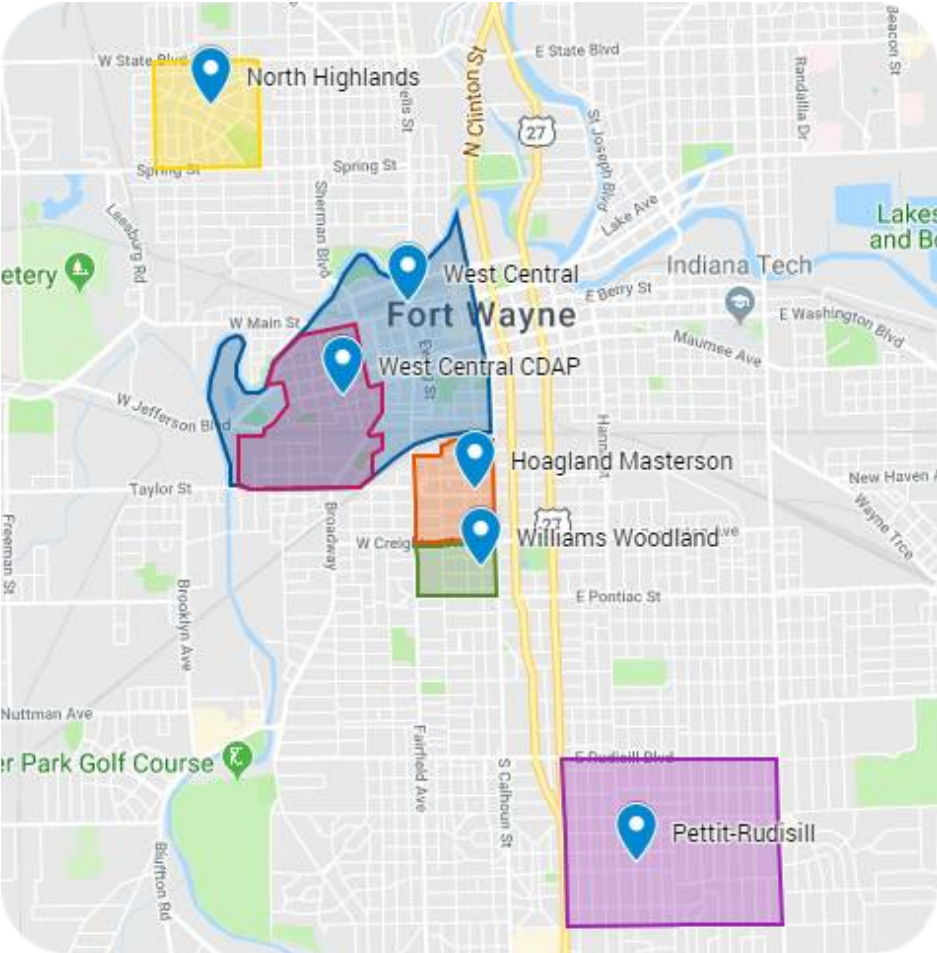
- Some areas have grand homes and some with row housing consistent with neighborhoods at the time of development. While some remain dilapidated, it has seen rapid growth of housing re-development. The development has jumped from one side of the neighborhood to the other over a major roadway that has traditionally divided the neighborhood. It seemed to be the most logical choice as our “healthy neighborhood” to study.

WILLIAMS-WOODLAND PARK - WWP (46807)

- WWP is a small, stable and growing neighborhood full of remodeled historic homes that is surrounded by lower-income and less developed neighborhoods. It has one of the most active neighborhood associations in Fort Wayne, has seen significant development, and is full of neighbors looking towards the future growth of the neighborhood. It is the smallest neighborhood we studied in both population and geography. Neighbors believe that its small nature is a benefit to their efforts and identity.

MAP OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Visual representation of the size and location of each neighborhood in relationship to one another.



- Hoagland Masterson
- North Highlands
- Pettit Rudisill
- West Central
- West Central CDAP
- Williams Woodland

NEIGHBORHOOD POPULATIONS

Neighborhood	Population
Hoagland Masterson	1,002
North Highlands	1,548
Pettit-Rudisill	5,254
West Central	3,589
West Central CDAP (CDAP definition at end of charts)	2,250
Williams-Woodland	710

MEDIAN AGE

Neighborhood	Median Age
Hoagland Masterson	30
North Highlands	37
Pettit-Rudisill	28.1
West Central	35
West Central CDAP	32.7
Williams-Woodland	31.4

RACE & ETHNICITY

Neighborhood	White Alone	Black Alone	Two or More Races	Hispanic Origin
Hoagland Masterson	45.3%	21.9%	6.4%	30.8%
North Highlands	91.2%	1.3%	3.4%	6.0%
Pettit-Rudisill	20.3%	57.3%	6.8%	21.0%
West Central	74.6%	14.0%	4.8%	10.3%
West Central CDAP	76.8%	11.5%	5.0%	10.9%
Williams-Woodland	59.1%	21.3%	7.3%	14.2%
Fort Wayne	70.1%	15.5%	4.3%	9.5%

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES

Neighborhood	Number of Households	Number of Families	% of Households That Are Families
Hoagland Masterson	398	208	52.3%
North Highlands	646	383	59.3%
Pettit-Rudisill	1,840	1,251	68%
West Central	1,894	461	24.3%
West Central CDAP	1,119	360	32.2%
Williams-Woodland	299	145	48.5%

HOUSING TENURE

Neighborhood	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied	Vacant Housing Units
Hoagland Masterson	24.9%	50.7%	24.5%
North Highlands	78.4%	15.2%	6.2%
Pettit-Rudisill	29.6%	47.1%	23.4%
West Central	16.0%	63.1%	21.0%
West Central CDAP	18.8%	55.9%	25.3%
Williams-Woodland	28.7%	54.6%	16.7%
Fort Wayne	54.7%	35.4%	9.8%

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Neighborhood	Median Income	Percent of Fort Wayne Median of \$48,764
Hoagland Masterson	\$30,240	62.0%
North Highlands	\$49,693	101.9%
Pettit-Rudisill	\$26,169	53.7%
West Central	\$26,877	55.1%
West Central CDAP	\$32,777	67.2%
Williams-Woodland	\$31,213	64.0%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Neighborhood	Less Than HS	HS Diploma or Equiv	Bachelors Or Higher
Hoagland Masterson	20.9%	44.7%	8.4%
North Highlands	9.8%	25.2%	22.8%
Pettit-Rudisill	31.7%	38.6%	4.5%
West Central	17.4%	25.2%	24.0%
West Central CDAP	16.1%	25.1%	26.0%
Williams-Woodland	21.2%	18.4%	27.7%
Fort Wayne	11.7%	28.0%	27.9%

NUMBER OF PARCELS & TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE

Neighborhood	Number of Parcels	Total Assessed Value
North Highlands	691	\$54,224,600
Hoagland Masterson	392	\$10,916,600
Pettit-Rudisill	2,298	\$64,609,900
West Central	1,046	\$82,335,700
Williams-Woodland	191	\$14,106,900

The data reported here is a summarized version of key data sets. To review our full report for a more extensive look at all the quantitative data, email us at admin@nlfw.org.

KEY NEIGHBORHOOD FACTS

- All neighborhoods were below Fort Wayne rate of bachelor's degree attainment.
- All neighborhoods except North Highlands:
 - Have over 20% of their housing stock vacant.
 - Have a rental population of greater than 47% of total residents, with the maximum rental rate of 63.1% represented.
 - Have a majority of their residents below 60% of Area Median Income (AMI being \$61,312). This is key to note because residents below 80% of AMI (for a family of 4) are eligible for housing assistance.
 - Have a median age lower than Fort Wayne's 36 years of age.
 - Have fewer married residents than the Fort Wayne rate of 45.2%.
- Hoagland Masterson has over 30% of residents identifying as being of Hispanic origin, with under half of the residents being white.
- Pettit-Rudisill was the only minority majority neighborhood with 57.3% being black, 21% being of Hispanic origin, and only 20.3% being white.
- Over 30% of residents in West Central and Pettit-Rudisill earn less than \$15,000 per year, which puts them well below the \$24,100 "Very Low Income" designation of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development fact sheet for Indiana.
 - https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/HOME_IncomeLmts_State_IN_2019.pdf
- 11.4% of West Central's residents are under 10 years old while each of the other 4 neighborhoods are around 20%.

INDICATORS OF NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH

These five indicators of neighborhood health came from neighborhood discussions and research.

NEIGHBORHOOD PRIDE

This seemed like the most logical indicator of neighborhood health, since an area that is unwelcoming, unlivable and depressed is also unlikely to have a strong sense of neighborhood pride. This indicator encompasses a lot of varied factors that can determine neighborhood health. Pride is on one side of a continuum of sentiments with the concept of stigma or negative perceptions on the opposite side. This general indicator is also beneficial because it encompasses each neighbor's many different priorities. If residents are not proud of their neighborhood or happy to live there, it is unlikely they will be willing to contribute to it or invest in it, and won't have the same level of loyalty to the neighborhood as those that are proud. In some cases, neighbors may choose to leave the neighborhood if they are able to.

Although the five neighborhoods are different, all the neighborhood residents expressed happiness with where they lived and liked their neighborhood and what it offered to them. Neighbors related location, community, family heritage ties, amenities, large trees, walkability, and affordability as being factors in their choice to live where they live. However, many neighbors commented that they have experienced negative perceptions and stigma towards their neighborhood particularly from people who live outside the neighborhood. Studies have shown that these negative perceptions are powerful and have actually been seen to negatively impact the trajectory of the neighborhood itself, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, rather than just a comment on the current state of affairs¹.

An additional insight that came out was residents wanted more people to commit to the neighborhood by becoming homeowners rather than renters, since renters are perceived by many owners to be less invested or engaged. Homeowners are perceived in neighborhoods of having more to gain or lose by how they maintain their property. Additionally, taking good care of a property is often viewed as an illustration of pride.

The next three indicators (Social Connectivity, Safety, and Beautification) are all concepts that have been shown to directly impact resident happiness and quality of life in academic studies².

¹ <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2012/04/enduring-effect-neighborhoods/1368/>

² <https://www.citylab.com/design/2012/02/why-places-we-live-make-us-happy/1122/> & <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1078087411403120>

SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

“Social connectivity” is a term intended to encompass several academic concepts, while being phrased intuitively. Social connectivity is a crucial indicator to neighborhood health because its absence causes neighborhood distress. Through research, neighborhood conversations, and the experience of NeighborLink, we have seen repeatedly that social isolation is not good for anyone. In fact, many NeighborLink projects come because people are not connected to their neighbors or resources; NeighborLink is a social connector for people and places that do not have natural connectedness.

One piece of social connectivity is the idea of social capital, which is that social connections and interactions bring value through information sharing, mutual aid, collective action, and solidarity³. An additional piece of social connectivity is social cohesion, which most generally represents the concept of inclusion in a social network. For the purpose of this research, we are going to use the definition of social cohesion as “an emotional and social investment in a neighborhood and sense of shared destiny among residents”⁴. Social connectivity encompasses both the sense of belonging and connection and the functional aspects of social capital.

Each neighborhood emphasized the value of connection by prioritizing both formal organization ties, like the neighborhood association, and informal ties, such as knowing each other’s faces or names. For some neighborhoods, social connectivity took the shape by having a community Facebook page, website, or a newsletter. For others, this looked like having a yearly signature event with committees and task meetings such as a holiday home tour. Some neighborhoods that know there are multiple ethnic and language groups in their boundaries work to have their newsletters translated, such as Hoagland Masterson. While it can take many shapes, healthy neighborhoods must have some mechanism for connection, and all of the neighborhoods analyzed here also utilized face to face association meetings, although they held them at different intervals.

SAFETY

The indicator safety encompasses more than just the crime statistics. It also encompasses the elements that influence a person’s feeling of safety, such as vacant lots⁵. Vacant land is often a blight that diminishes neighborhood pride and inhibits a sense of connection because it is a possible spot for crime, vermin, or dumping⁶. The concept of neighborhood disorder is included in this indicator of safety and it explains all that neighbors want to avoid, such as the lack of

³ <http://robertdputnam.com/bowling-alone/social-capital-primer/>

⁴ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/245407.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3665973/>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3665973/>

safety, peace, social control, and observance of law⁷. Neighborhood disorder is one that should not be present, or present in very small amounts in a healthy neighborhood.

Neighborhoods that have an intentional way to deal with neighborhood disorder, such as petitioning to have a police officer liaison, have organized neighborhood cleanups, or developed traffic calming plans and dealt with dilapidated/blighted buildings are healthier and working to improve safety. An additional way to understand the safety indicator in neighborhoods is to analyze how the neighborhoods are dealing with their vacant land lots or if they have plans for the spaces.

All of the neighbors in the study recognized safety or the perception of safety in the neighborhood as crucial to neighborhood health and to feeling welcome to interact. They also stated it is a determinant for resident retention and attraction.⁸ Most of the neighbors also felt that their neighborhoods were safer than outsiders believed them to be. Additionally, several neighborhoods had active relationships with police liaisons and had a forum for discussing neighborhood safety concerns either at meetings or online.

CLEANLINESS & BEAUTIFICATION

Recent studies have shown that when people believe their neighborhood is safe, clean and beautiful, then residents are happier⁹. The concept of neighborhood maintenance and cleanliness came up in all neighborhood discussions, showing that it was critical that public-facing spaces like home exteriors, alleys, and sidewalks were addressed in the areas we studied. These were partially improved through our Homeowner Incentive Program that incentivized investment in home exteriors through mini-split cost grants.

One critical element of neighborhood beauty is the greenery present in and around the neighborhood. The World Health Organization has recognized that having green spaces are a “fundamental component of any urban ecosystem,” because they encourage physical activity, relaxation, pollution reduction and they cool down the city or neighborhood¹⁰. Walkability was something neighbors in each location valued, and in green spaces like parks, it usually provides safe routes to bike or walk,¹¹ plus neighborhoods that are not clean and beautiful will discourage walking in general.

⁷<https://stresscenter.ucsf.edu/measures/neighborhood-safety-cohesion>

⁸ See Middle Neighborhoods in Full Healthy Neighborhoods Report

⁹<https://www.citylab.com/design/2012/02/why-places-we-live-make-us-happy/1122/>

¹⁰ <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/health-risks/urban-green-space/en/>

¹¹<https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/health-risks/urban-green-space/en/>

All neighborhoods wanted to see less trash and better maintained houses. Some want more inviting common spaces, more trees, and possibly funded cleanup crews despite most neighborhoods already had a history of organized neighborhood cleanups led by neighbors. An interesting point of information is that neighbors did not directly state they cared about property values, rather they were quick to say they cared about how their neighborhood was maintained. They want to see people tending to their own property as well as the common spaces not necessarily to increase values but to increase satisfaction with their neighborhood.

COLLABORATION WITH CITY GOVERNMENT & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

City government has had a historically large impact on aiding or inhibiting neighborhood development and growth¹². Outside organizations such as NeighborLink, have also been shown to partner with neighborhoods to advance neighborhoods by obtaining public funding for infrastructure, such as improved public parks, sidewalks and alleys. These infrastructure improvements can have a key impact on the future growth of the neighborhood and the satisfaction with the neighborhood by residents.

While neighborhoods need to direct their own growth and improvements, most of them can benefit from outside partners to help them fill their needs, provided that they can effectively discern and communicate their needs. Moreover, the neighborhood can act most effectively with outside groups if they have built up their collective efficacy (i.e. mutual trust and expectations to intervene on one another's behalf to advance the common good¹³). Neighborhoods that have a shared vision for their neighborhood are better able to petition for their needs coherently.

North Highlands was most vocal about partnering with the City of FW for making improvements to infrastructure and to deal with public issues. Several other neighborhoods also experienced investment from the City in their infrastructure and physical capital, but none were quick to highlight that as a partnership or a key asset, like North Highlands did. Most neighborhoods placed an emphasis on desiring to feel more recognized and provided for by the city government and agencies and wanting more infrastructure improvements.

¹² <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/51666/311218-City-Government-s-Role-in-the-Community-Development-System.PDF>

¹³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3665973/>

RESULTS AND INDICATORS NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH

None of the neighborhoods were perfectly healthy, nor could they have been, but some neighborhoods had much more of an identity and engagement than others, which are listed below. These are only the highlights and is not a comprehensive list of all assets in a given neighborhood, but it does give a quick snapshot of neighborhood health.

HOAGLAND MASTERSON

HM has an intentional core of neighbors engaged in meetings. There are quarterly meetings, with some additional meetings for special events and cleanups. Their association is involved in larger partnerships such as the Packard Area Planning Alliance and its area partnership.

NORTH HIGHLANDS

NH has a yearly block party and uses it to engage their residents and other neighborhoods around them to foster momentum and mutual benefit. They have successfully petitioned the city for improvements to parks, infrastructure, streets, etc. They formerly produced a physical newsletter, but have stopped that since they now have active Facebook group to share community information. They formerly met in person for meetings, but many meetings happen online now instead, while they occasionally meet in person.

PETTIT-RUDISILL

PR was the only neighborhood with no online presence, but it does have a yearly newsletter. Association leadership is in flux and meetings are not on a regular schedule.

WEST CENTRAL

WC has worked to motivate and engage neighbors while developing a strong brand identity for the neighborhood. For example, it has a neighborhood logo, neighborhood emblems on light posts, monthly meetings, leverages its neighborhood attributes in their profitable annual home tour and arts festival, has local and national historic district designation, and an active Facebook page with frequent updates to name a few. Many residents proudly identify as a West Central resident as part of their personal identity. They coordinate yard sales, neighborhood “porch” parties, cleanups, and tv and tire disposal days. However, high populations of renters and vacant houses can cause tension with the neighbors investing significantly in their properties near by.

WILLIAMS-WOODLAND PARK

WWP is a small, but active neighborhood. WWP has a neighborhood logo, monthly meetings, a revenue generating holiday home tour, historic designation, a website, socials, two highly active Facebook groups (one for internal dialogue among residents and another for those outside the neighborhood). WWP is active with events like Fort 4 Fitness and is also part of the Packard Area Planning Alliance.

LIMITATIONS

The neighborhood responses have selection bias because people had to choose to attend the neighborhood research meetings, and in all neighborhoods, the responses only constitute a small segment of the neighborhood population.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- Is there a way to measure the presence of each indicator in a given neighborhood?
- What are the priorities in each neighborhood?
- Can NeighborLink partner with them to accomplish these goals?
- Is there any opportunity for neighborhoods to partner with each other?
- What can neighborhoods do regarding vacant homes?
- Is there room/need for innovative efforts to incentivize rental property owners to invest more in their properties?
- What can facilitate conversations between renters and homeowners? We observed that regardless of the homeownership rates in a neighborhood, the attitudes towards the situation was the same among concerned neighbors.
- Should there be an increase in renter education on rights and their ability to participate in the neighborhood association?

NEXT STEPS

- Present findings to neighborhoods
- Continue research and collaboration with neighborhoods
- Wrap up and report on HIP grants program

CRI RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a list of recommendations from CRI, based on their research, for more full explanation of their recommendations, refer to your full neighborhood report

- Use the concept of Middle Neighborhoods as a framework for revitalization efforts.
 - Definition: *“Middle neighborhoods are a category of neighborhoods that are neither clearly healthy and thriving, nor overtly distressed; they are nearly adequately serviced by the market and supportive public policies, nor are they beneficiaries of large-scale philanthropic support.”* - <http://middleneighborhoods.org/>
- Address curb appeal through beautification, cleanliness, and improvement projects.
- Recognize the dual challenges of aging structures and income constrained households.
- Leverage location but understand the forces of gentrification and possible displacement.
- Scale projects and initiatives per neighborhood size and association involvement level.
- Build on existing neighborhood strengths.

CONCLUSION

This research revealed five key indicators of health across five unique neighborhoods and gave NeighborLink more understanding to where the neighborhoods can target their work toward prosperity and social connectivity. We saw how data and information helped affirm and challenge many preconceived notions held by neighborhood association leadership and members. Most neighborhoods have a strong gut feeling of the assets, current issues, and have a good sense of their space. Therefore, this research has brought clarity to the things neighbors anecdotally knew and gained insight on things they were missing. It solidified those gut feelings with quantitative data and qualitative data from their neighbors collected by an unbiased third party.

NeighborLink has only just begun its work as a partner and advocate for the needs of neighborhoods. This preliminary research has taught us how to better come alongside neighborhoods, leaving behind preconceived notions, and allowing them to share their experiences and needs. This research process will ultimately lead us to serve in more impactful, intentional and strategic ways with the goal of increasing social connectivity and improving neighborhood health to make a more vibrant and healthy Fort Wayne community.