

Nicollet Island East Bank

NRP Phase 1 Review

2001

Overview

Nicollet Island East Bank received \$240,780 total NRP funds. Six strategies were funded: \$155,780 for matching grants for storefront facade improvements emphasizing historic restoration, \$62,000 to complete a historic brick street paving project on Nicollet Island, \$10,000 for the multi-neighborhood Cops on Bikes program, \$7,000 for signs identifying the business district, \$5,000 for park beautification projects at "Central Park" on Nicollet Island, and \$1,000 for nests to attract Raptors (birds of prey) to make Nicollet Island their home.

This review was completed through use of a questionnaire to obtain results (attached) from both the residential and business communities. 30+ residents attending the NIEBPAC Annual Meeting in January responded to the questionnaire and held a discussion about the results of Phase 1 NRP. In a neighborhood with less than 1,000 residents this is a significant response.

15+ businesspeople at the February meeting of the Old St. Anthony Association (OSAA) also discussed the questionnaire and gave their responses. Both OSAA and NIEBPAC were actively involved in the implementation of Phase 1 NRP programs.

Impacts

The most significant achievement of NRP dollars was as seed money through the storefront matching grant program. 15 properties received matching grants totaling \$136,000, resulting in a crucial turnaround for several of these properties which had been vacant or blighted for years and are now cornerstones of the incredible renaissance of this area which is Minneapolis' birthplace.

In terms of leveraging, figures are unavailable for how much the 15 grant recipients invested in their buildings. Suffice it to say that the grants' matching requirement were met many times over.

In addition, millions of dollars in public and private funds are now being invested in substantial commercial and housing projects in the East Bank area. It has now become an important metro-wide destination as an entertainment district. This was not happening before NRP. NRP was an important catalyst of this activity along with another publicly-supported redevelopment project.

The \$62,000 historic brick paving project was part of \$820,000 of Park Board improvements made to the historic district on Nicollet Island. Without the NRP funds the street paving project would have been incomplete.

The Cops on Bikes allocation of \$10,000 was part of a \$50,500 10 year commitment made by Northeast neighborhoods to the \$178,000 overall cost of this program. The business district signs, Central Park improvements, and Raptor project were funded solely by NRP funds.

Conclusion

The #1 priority identified in the survey in Phase 1 planning was to improve the business district. This has been substantially accomplished. A key centrally-located area remains to be addressed. This is the Eastgate Shopping Center and the Old East High School, which was identified by both OSAA and NIEBPAC as a high priority. The immediately adjacent neighborhoods - Marcy Holmes, St. Anthony West, and St. Anthony East - have also identified it as a high priority. It seems like a clear priority for use of Phase 2 NRP funds given that business district improvements were the top priority in the original survey and that Eastgate continues to be a priority for so many key stakeholders in the immediate area. Nicollet Island East Bank's Phase 2 allocation is \$97,000.

Nicollet Island East Bank NRP Phase 1 Review Responses

The following are comments given by the 30+ residents attending the NIEBPAC Annual Meeting in January and 15+ business people attending the Old St. Anthony Association (OSAA) meeting on February 27, 2001. The groups were asked to comment on each of the strategies implemented through Phase 1 NRP funds. Those attending the meeting were asked to respond to the following questions about each strategy: Was this a good use of NRP funds? If so, why? If not, why not? Should funds be used for this strategy again? Attendees at both meetings were also asked for any new suggestions for NRP funds.

Strategy 1. Matching Grant Program for facade storefront improvements (\$160,000)

Resident Comments: The consensus was we should do this again, but if we do we should target properties. Fixing Eastgate and the old East High was a high priority. This previous program leveraged a lot of private funds and contributed to the significant improvement of the entire business district.

Business Comments: There was strong sentiment to do this program again, but weighting the funds towards the empty buildings. More flexibility in funding uses was desired. The blighted Old East High was a priority.

Strategy 2. Street pavers on Nicollet Island (\$62,000)

Resident Comments: These funds were significant in that they allowed completion of the street paving project, which was not completely funded through Mpls. Park Board funds. This work is now complete and there is no need for additional funding.

Business Comments: Don't know, they haven't seen it.

Strategy 3. Cops on Bikes (\$10,000)

Resident Comments: This was started as a 3 year demonstration project and will be evaluated by the City. People felt that it had been a good experience.

Business Comments: A great use of funds. Perhaps we could get the Cops mobile phones. We should extend the life of this program. We should use NRP to help with the police substation on University (between Hennepin & 1st).

Strategy 4. Neighborhood Identification Signs for Business District (\$7,000)

Resident Comments: The signs were well done, but the City's rules left the signs hanging too high above the street so that are not very visible. More funds are not needed for this strategy, unless we decide to do the matching decals for neighborhood business store windows.

Business Comments: A waste of money, the signs were too small and were hung too high. Another marketing effort for the area would be helpful, such as selecting key areas or the business to do seasonal banners.

Strategy 5. Central Park landscaping and planting (\$5,000)

Resident Comments: We did not get a good return on investment here because of problems with the landscaping contractor. However, there are other similar projects for other areas of greenspace that would benefit the area. (See new ideas below.)

Business Comments: If they (the residents) like it, we like it.

Strategy 6. Raptor nesting sites (\$1,000)

Resident Comments: This was a popular strategy and it appears raptors were attracted to the nesting sites. There was a strong sentiment in favor of strategies to attract wildlife to the area.

Business Comments: A redtail hawk has been seen and the employees like to watch it. Feathers and bones indicate the presence of raptors preying on other birds.

New ideas presented by residents and business people

The following new ideas were expressed by those present:

- Get the Grain Belt sign on Hennepin lit (*resident*)
 - There is an ownership conflict for the sign, Mike McMonigle knows someone who is trying to light it and it was very expensive (*business*)
- Improve the East Gate Shopping Center (*resident*)
 - We need a plan for the whole block (Eastgate and Melzer's properties), St. Anthony West might help (Mike Rainville), Marcy Holmes NRP \$\$ could help (Brian Beale) (*business*)
- Improve plantings at Ard Godfrey house, replace the sidewalk on University Ave. here, move the bus stops or make one stop on University (*resident*)
 - This is an OK idea (*business*)
- Make bridges over RR tracks on University and 2nd more appealing (*business*)
- Replace the sidewalk on E. Island Ave. (*resident*)
- Make the old stairways on Nicollet Island safe or replace them (*resident*)
- Improve visibility on the blind corner at Grove and E. Island Ave. (*resident*)
- Beautify the empty lots on the East Bank with plantings (*resident*)
- Improve the Rose Garden on W. Island Ave. (*resident*)
- Put up a tennis backboard on one of the tennis courts at De La Salle (*resident*)

This review and the questionnaire results were prepared by Vohs Consulting & Management Services. If you have questions or comments contact Kim Vohs at 952-975-9604.