



# West End Resident Engagement

Summary and Findings

APRIL 2019



# BACKGROUND

In summer 2018, the City of Cincinnati announced that FC Cincinnati, the city's soccer team recently designated as an MLS team, was building a major soccer stadium in the West End, a historic neighborhood located just west of downtown Cincinnati.

This large entertainment venue will be built in the heart of a dense residential district. The stadium is expected to attract thousands of tourists and millions of dollars in investment.

As part of this anticipated development, The Port and Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses (SHNH) formed a partnership to revitalize and redevelop the West End neighborhood in ways that are inclusive of all residents.

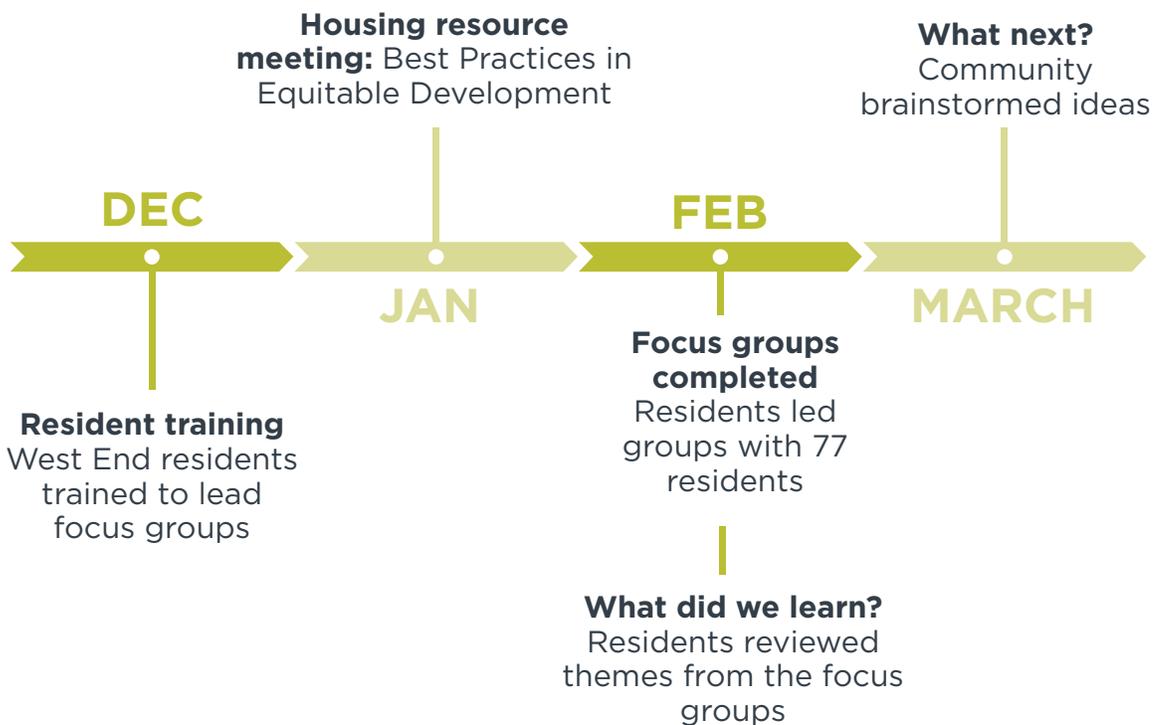
# SUMMARY

Between fall 2018 and spring 2019, SHNH and the Port launched a community engagement process to inform their neighborhood development strategies. The organizations hired nonprofit Design Impact to design and implement the process.

West End residents led and co-designed the community engagement process from beginning to end. The community engagement process was based on strategies and actions from the 2016 *WE Speaks* plan, the quality of life plan developed with community and adopted by the City of Cincinnati.

- A core team of West End residents and stakeholders provided guidance and made key decisions throughout the process.
- Following a community-wide invitation for participation, Design Impact trained 15 residents to lead focus groups with their neighbors.
- In two months, over 10 residents hosted conversations to learn about people’s hopes and concerns for the future of the neighborhood leading up to and following the development of the FC stadium.
- Through community meetings, residents reviewed the themes from the community conversations and generated ideas in response to those themes.

# TIMELINE



# FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

77 West End residents participated in focus groups.



## GENDER

Female: 37 (48%)  
Male: 40 (52%)



## AGE

Under 18: 4 (5%)  
20 - 39: 15 (19%)  
40 - 59: 21 (27%)  
60+: 30 (39%)  
Unreported: 7 (10%)



## HOUSING

Owner: 36 (47%)  
Renter: 26 (34%)  
Unreported: 15 (19%)



# OPPORTUNITY AREAS

The core team looked at the common themes heard among focus groups and identified a few key themes or topics with high potential for impactful solutions. Residents prioritized the following three “opportunity areas,” which were shared with residents to brainstorm ideas.

## 1. CHANGE FOR WHOM?

How can we ensure that residents who are at the greatest risk for displacement **have the opportunity to stay?**

## 2. WHO IS SAFE?

How can we **increase the safety** West End residents feel in their neighborhood?

## 3. WHO DECIDES?

How can we ensure that **residents share power and influence with leaders** and organizations that are making decisions about the neighborhood’s future?



# 1. CHANGE FOR WHOM?

*How can we ensure that residents who are at the greatest risk for displacement **have the opportunity to stay?***

## SUMMARY

West End residents want their neighborhood to be safe and thriving. They know change is coming but they fear that the changes coming with the FC stadium development will repeat a painful history of discrimination and displacement.

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## PERSPECTIVES

*Resident focus group leaders shared the following recommendations, observations, and quotes from their focus groups.*

- The neighborhood could just become a drive thru to get to the stadium. Best case scenario: black children still get to live and play in their yards. Worst case scenario is a West End with only white people.
- Some residents are concerned that there may be a high concentration of subsidized housing in the West End and that to add more would hinder revitalization.
- “I don’t want to help participate building a stadium that’s tearing my hood apart.”
- There was a feeling in some focus groups that it seems like “non-residents” are driving the future development in our community.
- “It feels like a plot to erase black people.”
- Tell the story of a mostly black owned community that was destroyed by I-75.
- “I work in a black-owned store so I would hate if they took away the black-owned businesses.”
- If people get displaced, the history of the community will be forgotten.
- “Will we be successful at helping residents fix their homes and stay to pass down family wealth?”
- “Someone left a note on our garage - wants to buy our garage. They offered to move our stuff to a storage facility and pay our monthly bill in order to buy our garage.”
- “I wonder if residents will ever feel good about the changes coming to the West End.”

# 2. WHO IS SAFE?

*How can we **increase the safety** West End residents feel in their neighborhood?*

## SUMMARY

While many West End residents report trust and comfort with their neighbors, the neighborhood also poses there are also real threats to people's safety, which vary among West End residents. There is concern the stadium and the accompanying development will increase these safety threats.

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## PERSPECTIVES

*Resident focus group leaders shared the following recommendations, observations, and quotes from their focus groups:*

- I'm just ready to run when I see the police.
- "I feel like I want to wear black so they [the police] don't see me."
- "Was visiting my mother, I signed in, she came down for me - I left back out to go to the store across the street. When I came back I got arrested for trespassing"
- "I don't want to conversate friendly with officers anymore."
- "I'm tired of creasing up my shoes and jumping over fences to get away from them [police]."
- Every time I've been stopped I've been arrested. Went to jail for "failure to identify."
- I just started wearing camouflage so I wouldn't be mistaken for somebody else.
- "It's misunderstood that we are all low income, that we are all uneducated. There are homeowners vested in the community. I am comfortable in the community with my children."
- One resident is concerned harassment and rape could increase once the stadium is built.
- "I was recently in a shoot-out, I thought I was shot myself."
- Misconception that the West End is a bad neighborhood. There are more community aspects and engagement than is perceived.
- People think that it is all bad people in the West End. But there are good people that care and work hard to help other people.
- "After a shooting they didn't clean up the blood, eventually his friend came to clean it up. Can you imagine cleaning up the blood of your dead friend? Nobody acted like they cared."
- Kids are being killed and no one is doing anything about it.
- "I've witnessed a homicide. I'll never be able to unsee it. My mom held my step-dad while he died. My mom burned \$2,500 because it had his blood on it."
- If police are stopping and frisking innocent young black men on their way home from school, what will they do when the neighborhood is full of white game attendees.
- FC fans will be drunk. This can lead to increased littering, harassment, public urination and vomiting.

# 3. WHO DECIDES?

*How can we ensure that **residents share power and influence with leaders** and organizations that are making decisions about the neighborhood's future?*

## SUMMARY

Residents feel disconnected from the leaders, organizations and institutions making decisions about the future of the neighborhood. They want to see themselves reflected in groups and leadership who have power to impact the West End and want to see their perspectives and realities driving decisions that will impact their lives.

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## PERSPECTIVES:

*Resident focus group leaders shared the following recommendations, observations, and quotes from their focus groups:*

- Residents are concerned they won't have an option to be part of the decision making process.
- Resident says she is disappointed she doesn't see African-Americans working on the stadium. Why is this the case?
- "I wonder if gentrifiers care for their adopted neighborhood or if in the end it is all about property values?"
- "They want me to lay concrete where my friend's house used to be just so they can park to watch soccer."
- Some residents believe this community engagement process is a check in the box to appease residents.
- One resident admits she didn't trust the process in the beginning but she came to the first session and is now 'all in.'
- "I hope they don't take the black-owned businesses."
- "If they were concerned about helping us they wouldn't have put a stadium of mostly white people in a neighborhood of mostly black people."
- It seems like "non-residents" are driving the future development in our community.
- Some residents feel that affordable housing is a threat to home ownership. They're concerned that Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses/The Port will focus too narrowly on subsidized housing.
- "I want to see black home ownership"
- Residents want West End neighbors to financially benefit from new investments.
- There are residents who look to Seven Hills as an anchor in the community. "The Neighborhood house is my safe house."
- "I wonder if residents will ever feel good about the changes coming to the West End."

# WEST END COMMUNITY CONCEPTS

In small groups, West End residents generated potential solutions or approaches from the opportunity areas. While residents came up with dozens of ideas, they prioritized the following 11 concepts.

These concepts are preliminary and need to be fleshed out in greater detail. They all require more research, vetting, leadership and resources. SHNH may decide to move a concept forward but it also possible that other West End organizations or residents want to make an idea a reality.

In addition to the 11 concepts below, the other ideas generated by community can be found in Appendix B.

## CONCEPT 1

### CONSCIENTIOUS RENTALS

#### THE CONCEPT

Conscientious Rentals are a socially conscious alternative to Airbnb for travelers who want to create an impact in the neighborhood they're visiting. Tourists, visiting fans, and out-of-towners can stay at these short-term rentals located close to the stadium. These multi-unit properties could be owned and operated by Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses. Profits could fund future affordable housing or the Housing Improvement Fund, which help to offset West End residents' rising property taxes, housing costs, and rent.

#### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Airbnb is replacing hotels as the preferred platform for overnight accommodations and neighborhoods with major public attractions typically see a rise in short term rentals. Many individual property owners opt to rent out their units through Airbnb rather than open it up as a rental property since the income from short term rentals can exceed what a property owner could recover from long term rent payments. While these short term rentals benefit property owners, there has been some evidence that a critical mass of short term rentals can artificially inflate rent. Conscious Rentals provides an opportunity for community-based organizations to benefit from an influx of visitors while mitigating negative impacts.

## CONCEPT 2

# SENIOR LIVING CENTER

## THE CONCEPT

The West End Senior Living Center is an affordable, high-quality housing facility for West End's Legacy residents. This senior living facility is for homeowners who are eager to leave the burden of home maintenance and repairs but aren't ready to leave their community. Additionally, once seniors sell their homes, the houses could come under community control and ultimately provide future affordable housing.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Elderly long-time residents are likely to sell their property when they can no longer manage repairs, especially if they are on a fixed income. Without quality senior living facilities, these residents who have built their lives in their neighborhood will be forced to leave, fracturing crucial social ties and threatening their sense of belonging.

## CONCEPT 3

# WEST END RESIDENT PARKING PROGRAM

## THE CONCEPT

The West End Neighbors Parking program designates residential streets near the stadium as Residential Parking Only. Residents with special car decals are the only individuals who can park on those streets. Decals are provided at no cost by the City to any West End resident with proof of residency in those "Residential Parking Only" zones.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

West End residents will inevitably experience new parking limitations as stadium fans search for low-cost parking spots around the stadium. These parking limitations could bring an increase in parking citations and parking costs to neighbors. Without clear and simple parking regulations, West End neighbors could find themselves with parking tickets and fines. For neighbors on a fixed or limited income, these parking tickets and fines create financial hardships. The West End Neighbors Parking program places the burden of parking on those visiting the neighborhood for a game or an event instead of on residents.

## WEST END ENGAGEMENT BLITZ

### THE CONCEPT

The West End Engagement Blitz is a deliberate, concentrated, and creative effort led by residents to increase civic engagement among West End neighbors. The engagement strategy focuses on engaging residents and businesses who aren't traditionally able to participate in neighborhood meetings or events. Over 60 days, the West End Community Council and the West End Business Alliance would collaboratively deploy a number of strategies such as hosting community meals, basketball games, and door-knocking campaigns

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

As the West End experiences change over the coming years, it will be important that local decision-making represent multiple perspectives. This engagement blitz will tap into different community leaders and create new connection points for residents.

## BUILDING REPAIR CITATION AMNESTY

### THE CONCEPT

West End homeowners with fixed or limited income who purchased their property before 2018 are granted amnesty from citations or fines on their properties. While the city can still issue violations, residents would receive a pardon from paying fines during this time frame so long as they are actively engaging in efforts to remedy code violations. This grace period offers residents time to use city and community resources to support repairs without having to sell their equity in the neighborhood.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When neighborhoods receive an influx of development investment, they may also see an increase in city property citations. Residents on a fixed or limited income are concerned they could be forced to sell their properties if they don't have the resources and/or the time to make the necessary repairs to avoid citations. If residents can instead have more time to make repairs and hold on to their property, their opportunity to benefit financial from neighborhood changes increases.

## CONCEPT 6

# WE POLICE TASK FORCE

## THE CONCEPT

The WE Police Task Force is comprised of district police officers, West End residents and businesses, the NAACP, the Collaborative Agreement Refresh Committee, and FC representatives. The task force looks specifically at game day dynamics and the potential impacts on the safety of West End residents. This group proactively anticipates public safety concerns and creates plans for how the community can address them through deep and trusting relationships between FC, the police, and residents.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

This large entertainment venue is the heart of a dense residential district. For venues like this, the safety team (police, fire, security) is typically most concerned about protecting and monitoring the safety of game attendees. However, increased traffic, large crowds, public intoxication, and racial profiling may pose threats to residents and visitors. Because the stadium will affect residents and businesses the most day-to-day and because residents have invested the most into the community, this task force will first and foremost prioritize those perspectives.

## CONCEPT 7

# BUILDING BRIDGES

## THE CONCEPT

Building Bridges is a series of youth activities and events co-hosted by the Cincinnati Police Department and West End community organizations. CPD officers and West End youth can use these experiences to get to know each other as an opportunity to build mutual trust and understanding. These activities, events, and experiences are designed collaboratively by the police and participants. FC funds the projects and activities.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Young people in the West End report a strained relationship with CPD. This strain is directly linked to unjust assumptions and racial bias towards young people in the community. This strain will be exacerbated as the stadium opens and the neighborhood bear witness to thousands of outsiders (with their own assumptions and racial biases) coming in on game day.

## NEIGHBORHOOD TAX ABATEMENT ADVISORS

### THE CONCEPT

The Neighborhood Tax Abatement Advisors is a working group of West End residents and youth that advises the city council on any potential tax abatement decisions that come before council. The working group releases a public report on any decision before a vote is taken. Tax Abatement Advisors must complete a class on tax abatement before they can participate, and the group receives advice and counsel from a national and/or local organization.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The city government uses tax abatements to incentivize development. Currently, these decisions receive very little input from the people who are most impacted by the development. This council would give residents an important voice on development projects before they receive support from the city.

## WEST END HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS ASSOCIATION

### THE CONCEPT

The West End Homeowners and Renters Association is a neighborhood group that represents West End homeowners and renters during key public decisions. The City of Cincinnati, the Port, and any other public agencies are required to include a representative from the Association and the West End Community Council when making any decisions that affect housing in the neighborhood. This representative will be nominated by the neighborhood, selecting two individuals who can fairly communicate the varying perspectives of homeowners and renters.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When public and quasi-public entities make decisions about housing that impacts a neighborhood, they typically reference feedback from community sessions; however, the actual individuals most impacted are not present. In the spirit of transparency and collaboration, this association representation centers the voice of those directly affected during the decision-making process.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CODE ENFORCEMENT OVERSIGHT BOARD

### THE CONCEPT

The Code Enforcement Oversight Board is a group of Cincinnati residents, including those from the West End, who can advocate and support their neighbors by informing residents when and why they received citations or code order violations. Because West End homeowners have concern over an increase in citations, the CEOB was established to build an open and transparent relationship between homeowners and city inspectors.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

By working together, the CEOB and residents can make sure that those on fixed income have exhausted all options for making repairs rather than feeling forced to sell their homes. When residents can stay in the West End, they can benefit from future investments made in the community.

## NEIGHBORHOOD FORUM: “LEARNING FROM HISTORY - THE CITY WEST EDITION”

### THE CONCEPT

The Neighborhood Forum is an interactive event and panel discussion that uses the past, present, and future of City West to explore and unpack City West development. During the event, hosted in the West End, a panel of individuals and organizations responsible for City West will share how key development events unfolded, providing a unique opportunity for residents and key players to learn from previous mistakes and discuss what these learnings mean for future affordable housing efforts in the neighborhood.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The redevelopment of City West was significant for the West End. For many residents, the ongoing development is a source of great tension, partly because fewer affordable units were made available than initially promised. By openly sharing the details of that development with the community, leading organizations like CMHA and The Community Builders provide space for community healing and understanding. As the primary holders of protected affordable units in the neighborhood, these nonprofits have an opportunity to discuss neighborhood development in a more transparent and honest way.

# APPENDIX A

Below are other themes that emerged from the resident focus groups.

## PARKING

*How can we ensure that West End residents have protected parkings rights, even during soccer games?*

### PERSPECTIVES

- What if the FCC stadium is surrounded by parking and nothing else?
- Limit off-street parking - create fair parking.
- Worst case scenario: surface parking lots and parking lots replace buildings.
- Worst case scenario: no parking enforcement

## HOUSING/PROPERTY VALUES

*How can we make the West End a model for housing development that honors inclusivity and investment?*

### PERSPECTIVES

- More homeownership would be a win from this.
- Best case scenario: affordable homes on Laurel Park Dr.
- Currently a West End strength is the affordability of home ownership.
- Based on the excessively high number of multi-decade deed-restricted low-income units in the West End, the community could never become OTR 2.0.
- Public Housing - I've been hearing talk of Stanley Rowe coming down.
- Some neighbors feel that low-income housing weakens the community or even 'destroys' the community
- Build urban housing (not McMansions). Make them affordable.
- "The low-income housing has a huge impact on community - it is destroying the West End."
- Keep affordable/ low-income housing
- What if business takes over the West end and housing goes up.
- There is a fear that development opportunities go to developers who only want to do multi-unit rentals.
- The West End needs more senior buildings.
- "I think we should have more townhouses"
- Outside developers can't redevelop City West because of long term affordability requirements.
- As a City we aren't submitting enough quality applications for low-income housing tax credits so we aren't collecting the proportion of those funds that we should and can be collecting.

## COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

*How can we create commercial development that supports local entrepreneurship, local opportunity and fits within the current fabric of the neighborhood?*

### PERSPECTIVES

- A win would be if Linn Street Boulevard became a central business corridor.
- Bring back the schools, housing, grocery stores and Joe's on Bank Street.
- Turn Liberty Street (connector) into commercial development.
- Preserve the Regal Theater.
- Preserve the Lincoln Center.
- Focus on small business development. Worst case scenario: loud concerts, too many bars, no family businesses.

## SPORTS MATTER

*How can we preserve and promote the positive impact of sports on young people, other than simply soccer?*

### PERSPECTIVES

- Some Bengals players show up just to take pictures of the community.
- "I think it [rock climbing] is going to be a fun thing. It will probably be \$20 to do the rock climbing.
- A strength of the West End is sports in general.
- The boxing heritage (youth boxing) is an asset and strength.

## WEST END IDENTITY

*How can we share and preserve the identity of the West End in the face of so many neighborhood changes?*

### PERSPECTIVES

- Residents fear the neighborhood will lose its residential feel and be a business commercial area.
- Residents care.
- The West End used to be a white neighborhood and a predominantly Jewish neighborhood.
- There is a sense of community here.
- West End is diverse in age, race, new and old residents.
- West End children are raised with respect and morals.
- Not all of the West End is subsidized housing.
- It is a downtown neighborhood and green space. It is a community.

## HISTORY

*How can we celebrate and honor the history of the West End?*

### **PERSPECTIVES**

- Tell the story of mostly black owned community that was destroyed by I-75.
- Prior to the “Urban Renewal’ plan in the early 60’s there were: 10,295 dwelling units, 137 food stores, 118 bars and restaurants, 86 barbershops and beauty parlors, 80 churches and mission, 24 dry cleaners and 6 funeral homes.
- Cotton Club on Mound Street was important.
- Black owned businesses set the morals and values of the West End.
- The history of the West End is significant, although not well know. It needs to be highlighted.
- Great leaders - Peanut Jim, Joe Mallory, Reverend McCracken - should be lifted up.
- There was a skating rink in the 1970’s.
- There are underground pig trails under Laurel and Lincoln Park.
- Highlight that the West End was ‘poor’ and then transformed to ‘black.’
- History of the West End worth sharing: Lincoln Park was destroyed by I-75.
- People have made a lot of sacrifice for I-75, the railroads, City West.
- The West End used to run all the way to the river and included Queensgate.
- Crosley Field was in the West End.
- Residents named historic buildings and organizations as strengths of the West End, namely: Lincoln Center, Seven-Hills Neighborhood Houses, and the Regal Theater.
- Preservation of historic homes and buildings is a strength of the West End.

# APPENDIX B

Additional community concepts:

## WHO DECIDES?

- Identify a city council member to be a West End “Cheerleader” or “Champion”
- Create a community land trust or land bank
- Invest in the West End Business Alliance to increase the voice of small and established businesses
- Invest in black-owned businesses and have data that tells the story of who owns what
- Develop channels of open and constant communication between the City, the Port and FC (through social media, on community online publications, etc.)
- Hire and support black leadership in community engagement efforts
- Any association or group meant to represent the West End should reflect the demographics of the neighborhood

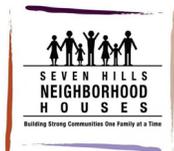
## CHANGE FOR WHO?

- Increase and preserve affordable housing options for renters and owners
- Have youth representation on the West End Community Council
- Over-the-Rhine Community Housing is a preferred developer
- Zero luxury units
- “0” displacement
- Legacy property tax relief grant
- CMHA and City West units modernized and functioning
- Good cause eviction policy
- The Port donates all of its properties to the community land trust
- Recruit and provide incentives for families to move back

## WHO IS SAFE?

- Provide shuttles from parking garages outside of the West End
- Control alcohol consumption at games
- FC complete a post-game sweep of the community for trash

# THANK YOU



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