



# MUSKEGO WAY FORWARD

Revitalization Plan

*Staffed and supported by*



## BACKGROUND

In October 2014, a group of neighborhoods including Muskego Way, Clarke Square and Historic Mitchell Street was awarded a grant under the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program (BNCP), a federally funded neighborhood revitalization initiative to catalyze community-driven change.

The BNCP provided a model for capacity building and neighborhood revitalization, including technical assistance and financial resources. The infrastructure of this program supported the ability of community members and partners to engage in a resident-driven process to develop a comprehensive revitalization plan that would respond to neighbors' needs and concerns.

A resident-led advisory committee, Southside Neighbors Helping Neighbors (SNHN), was catalytic in the initial planning efforts to support the BNCP. The group recruited volunteers, led project-based learning opportunities for neighbors and wrote the initial iteration of this plan, which included shaping a vision and identifying priorities that helped advance an intergenerational framework for community building.

The committee also determined the following set of values to drive positive and healthy revitalization efforts within the targeted neighborhoods.

- Place community and residents first.
- Demonstrate sensitivity for diverse cultural and faith-based traditions.
- Value collective child-raising and strong family structures.
- Engage in informed problem solving.
- Hold one another accountable to the work.
- Build trust and relationships.
- Work collaboratively.
- Embrace optimism.

As leadership capacity in the initial three neighborhoods continued evolving over time and as a response to community empowerment, the efforts of this initiative shifted to focus primarily on Muskego Way the heart of these neighborhoods. While continuing to build on surrounding assets such as Historic Mitchell Street, Clarke Square and Layton Boulevard, the boundaries for this area are recognized as a way to strengthen community development, guide funding, and develop the priorities, goals and strategies outlined in this updated neighborhood revitalization plan.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

### *Muskego Way Forward & Milwaukee Christian Center*

Current revitalization efforts in Muskego Way are part of a neighbors-led initiative supported by the neighborhood group Muskego Way Forward. This organization is staffed and supported by local nonprofit Milwaukee Christian Center, which is driven by the mission to build strong neighborhoods full of opportunity.

In Muskego Way Forward, we connect neighbors, partners and resources around the community's hopes for the Muskego Way neighborhood, while building on existing people and places to strengthen the neighborhood through opportunity creation and leadership development. We embrace a vision of neighbors that seek to grow the confidence, support, ownership and sense of community among one another by focusing on asset-based community development and building on the skills of community members. We understand that trust, and a feeling of connectedness among neighbors, is fundamental to advancing our collective revitalization efforts.

Our responsibility is to work with neighbors to empower them to want to make a difference in their community. To accomplish this, we have identified various strategies, including building a resident-driven advisory committee, helping neighbors find ways to solve identified quality of life issues, strengthening the capacity of block watch groups and working with other near south side neighborhood agencies to help effect positive change.

Our combined commitment to increasing and diversifying resident participation in our collective programming enables us to work together to strengthen future projects, events and activities, as well as connect with neighbors throughout our community.

## MUSKEGO WAY OVERVIEW

Embedded in the heart of the Historic Old South Side neighborhoods of Milwaukee, Muskego Way offers a collection of history, multicultural backgrounds and deep-seated family values (love, communication, trust and understanding).

Historically, merchants played an integral part in the development of the neighborhood. Often, business owners opened their shops in the same areas in which they lived. However, historic economic shifts played a role in changes within the neighborhood.

Neighbors are proud of the rich diversity of the area, and often declare Muskego Way one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The population is just under 75 percent Hispanic or Latino, and also includes Asians, African Americans, Caucasians and other ethnic groups from around the world. The population is also demographically one of the youngest in the city, as youth under 17 accounts for a third (33 percent) of the Muskego Way population, compared to 26 percent of the city's population.

Despite community motivation to continue improving their quality of life, it is important to recognize that many residents in the neighborhood face disparity in both economic and educational attainment. Thirty-nine percent of residents in Muskego Way live below the poverty level (\$24,000 per year for a family of four), compared to 27 percent citywide. For some, poverty stems from unemployment, and for others, from low wages and/or part-time work. This economic insecurity affects everything from neighborhood housing conditions to transportation access (over a quarter of residents have no vehicle available to them).

In addition, 12 percent of people 20-64 years old in Muskego Way are unemployed and actively seeking employment (the same as for the City of Milwaukee). Educational attainment is one factor in understanding our local labor market; among residents 18 to 24 years of age in our community, 49 percent of males and 41 percent of females have less than a high school diploma or GED.

Despite these challenges, Muskego Way neighbors choose to build on the assets of the community, including the diversity (race and ethnicity, length of residency, age) and density of the area. We are motivated and united by the desire to attain a family-oriented environment, where neighbors regularly interact with one another, help each other and foster a healthy community and environment for all to share with pride.



## MUSKEGO WAY PRIORITIES

Our primary focus is putting our community and its residents first. As part of this, we understand that collaboration and healthy connections between neighbors and partners is a key component of providing a better future to the community we love. Ultimately, working collectively to build and cultivate relationships through collaborative, asset-based development will make our efforts stronger.

For neighbors to connect with, trust and depend on each other, they need a societal infrastructure, built on community institutions and partnerships that provide opportunities to foster community between those of different backgrounds (races, ethnicities, languages, ages, years of residence in the neighborhood).

Neighbors are committed to leading by example through the creation of opportunities to better understand the needs of the community. This is supported by participation in project-based learning, which provides Muskego Way neighbors a venue to work together and learn more about neighborhood conditions, while fostering relationships and building capacity to strengthen the ongoing revitalization process. Neighbors seek change through their voices and actions in supporting the priorities that guide this plan: safe neighborhood; neighborhood development; youth education and leadership; and healthy families.

Muskego Way residents demonstrate their commitment to these efforts by:

- Participating in informative neighborhood communications (lunch and learns, social media, e-newsletters) that allow all community stakeholders to understand the history and diverse neighborhood fabric of Muskego Way in order to nurture organic partnerships with other community organizations and maximize impact.
- Providing input during discussions on revitalization efforts, community committees and other strategies that are helping to shape the vision and priorities of our work in areas such as economic and business development, education and youth development, health and wellness, housing, safety, security, seniors and faith-based institutions.
- Building on their capacity as ambassadors of a safe, clean and healthy environment through leadership trainings based on their own interest and skills.
- Proudly promoting Muskego Way Forward projects, activities and events that foster trust, communication, collaboration and the recruitment of other residents.
- Actively participating in Muskego Way Forward discussions while respecting differing opinions, backgrounds and culture.

The following focus areas represent identified community priorities and the corresponding goals and strategies we have outlined for sustainable impact within Muskego Way.

### SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD

#### *Creating peaceful streets and a connected community*

Safety is the priority articulated most often by residents, and one upon which we have focused a great deal of our attention. While partnering with law enforcement to address these challenges is key, promoting peaceful streets is not only about combating crime, but also about building community.

**GOAL ONE:** Grow union among neighbors, youth, law enforcement and community stakeholders toward the support of a strong neighborhood.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Accelerate a Neighbors' Safety Network by increasing neighbors' connections through various communication platforms to activate Block Watch Groups.
- Design safety awareness and crime prevention community listening circles.
- Organize collaborative community safety training sessions.
- Expand community block clean-ups and beautification projects.

**GOAL TWO:** Decrease nuisance activities and property crime in the neighborhood.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Increase the number of neighbors engaged in block groups in the neighborhood.
- Increase the number of reported nuisance activities and property crimes by neighbors.
- Coordinate neighborhood walks to identify blighted areas.
- Hold leadership training sessions.
- Initiate crime prevention through an environmental design neighborhood initiative that promotes methods for natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement and maintenance.

**GOAL THREE:** Reduce violent crime incidents related to domestic and gun violence.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Hold pop-up events to promote peace, inclusion and creativity.
- Expand partnerships to initiate a violence prevention coalition in the neighborhood.
- Increase community policing involvement in block groups.
- Develop strategies to mediate conflicts, as well as prevent retaliation and other potentially violent situations.
- Expand awareness and access to domestic violence services.

**GOAL FOUR:** Coordinate safe streets for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Promote walking and bicycling by offering safety education programs to the community.
- Identify infrastructure improvements and enforcement projects for traffic calming neighborhood.

**NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

*Identify and secure opportunities for community economic vitality and revitalization of spaces in which neighbors live, work and recreate*

Research indicates that beautification increases home values and attracts new businesses to a developing area. Additionally, beautiful spaces create community attachment, cohesion and loyalty for a neighborhood or city. Resident involvement in beautification projects provides an inspirational opportunity to connect with the community and build a sense of ownership, pride and identity.

**GOAL ONE:** Support community spirit and pride.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Formalize Muskego Way Forward Neighborhood Association.
- Contribute to the neighborhood's image through the creation of public art.
- Promote new opportunities for social interaction among neighbors.
- Connect community groups and community partners.
- Build neighbors' capacity to advocate for their neighborhood.

**GOAL TWO:** Connect neighbors to live in a safe and healthy environment by promoting property improvements and revitalization.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Identify and promote safe and affordable housing resources and programs available to the community.
- Create a targeted investment neighborhood.
- Initiate landlord compact.
- Hold tenant support sessions.

**GOAL THREE:** Provide opportunities for residents and local businesses to reach their financial goals and growth.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Develop a neighborhood market analysis.
- Hold business resource fairs.
- Facilitate workshops to support entrepreneurship and financial literacy.
- Create a neighborhood directory of services and businesses.

**GOAL FOUR:** Reclaim, maintain and protect underutilized vacant lots and properties.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Engage residents and partners in improving the appearance of public spaces.
- Activate vacant storefronts with creative projects.
- Identify and transform vacant lots into community green space as they are available.
- Invest in parks and playgrounds.

## **YOUTH EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT**

*Improve educational and enrichment opportunities for youth in the neighborhood*

Our work over the past several years has shown us that the needs of young people and their development must be core to our work in engaging residents and developing our neighborhoods. Based on the high number of youth and young children in our area, we are directing many of our efforts at children and families with young children. Consistent with our belief of working with and on behalf of neighbors, addressing youth needs and development means that we must actively engage them in our work.

**GOAL ONE:** Strengthen schools in and serving the neighborhood

**Supporting Strategies**

- Connect schools to resources to better serve students and families.
- Support schools as community hubs for families and neighbors.
- Support community schools in utilizing best practices and potentially expand the community schools model to include additional schools serving the neighborhood.

**GOAL TWO:** Expand youth programs and attract youth service organizations to the neighborhood.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Identify community resources that allow physical, social and mental development to thrive among our youth.
- Connect children with art enrichment programs offered in the neighborhood.
- Connect youth with organizations that encourage them to pursue post-secondary education.

**GOAL THREE:** Increase participant-driven job readiness and youth empowerment programming.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Provide education and hands-on construction training to young adult neighbors between the ages of 18-25 through the Milwaukee Christian Center's YouthBuild program.
- Prepare students to successfully enter the workforce by increasing the participation of young neighbors in the Young Professionals Academy.

**HEALTHY FAMILIES**

*Cultivate family wellness by supporting physical and emotional development while connecting parents and family members to services and programs*

We believe that strong families mirror strong communities. Healthy families provide the foundation for respectful, loving communities where caring and sharing are valued, and where a sense of ownership is established. Through our work, we have learned that strong families are first healthy families – both physically and emotionally.

To cultivate effective community leadership, we first need healthy mentors and role models in the home. We are working to engage community partners to provide access to essential parenting resources, in addition to the other strategies outlined below.

**GOAL ONE:** Create civic engagement opportunities for families to sustain conversations impacting their quality of life and neighborhood.

**Supporting Strategies**

- Coordinate and promote table-to-table activities.
- Create spaces for families to connect with other members of the community.



**GOAL TWO:** Launch healthy living and environmental sustainability education.

### Supporting Strategies

- Activate and promote a health club in the neighborhood.
- Promote the Mitchell Street Farmer's Market.
- Connect residents to community resources to assist them meet basic needs such as food, housing, medical and other services/resources.

## CONCLUSION

Our efforts during and following the BNCP process have required dedicated, coordinated work, and have resulted in a long-term plan to support residents' ability to take ownership of the development of their community. We have seen neighbors connect with each other, learning together how to use our shared power to change our neighborhoods. The community mobilization and engagement that has resulted through these efforts has continued to demonstrate the passion residents have for their community, which is fueled by a desire to enact positive change.

Our neighbors are ready to forge a new path that leads to a safer, healthier, happier south side. Yet, we cannot sustain that path on our own. We must continue to foster a fundamentally collaborative, rather than competitive, environment between the organizations that serve our neighborhoods. In addition, our efforts will require more resources to creatively allocate in disinvested areas, to benefit both individual neighborhood residents as well as anchor agencies and area nonprofits.

### Key Learnings

- Our neighborhood's greatest strength, its diversity, also poses challenges to organizing and engagement efforts. Our Latino population includes Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Dominicans and perhaps others from the Latino diaspora, a population also divided by race. These differences are not captured by census data, which groups all Latinos together.
- Through our discussions with residents, we have also learned that the immigration status of our neighbors and their families can inhibit participation in community-building endeavors. Having learned about the prevalence of this barrier, we commit ourselves to working with neighbors and partners to identify ways to reach those who are not comfortable attending public meetings.
- Most of our neighbors were previously disconnected from any of the decision-making forums that define our neighborhood; this was a moment of opportunity for us to voice our desires and concerns. Our goal over the next several years will be to increase the number of voices and perspectives that contribute to our neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- Providing child care, meals and translation services at meetings and varying the times and locations of meetings can help to address some of the challenges resident organizers face.
- Resourcing the work outlined in this plan is essential. Our plan ultimately calls to the public and private sectors alike: please join us in our neighborhood revitalization efforts. Only together can we succeed.

When we speak with the neighbors in our community, we are hopeful, as we all share common goals: a desire for connectivity, a commitment to our children and an aspiration for collaborative action to better the lives of all of those living in Muskego Way.