



**WHITTIER
ALLIANCE**

**2019-2024
STRATEGIC PLAN**

**DRAFT FOR
3/26/2019
COMMUNITY VOTE**



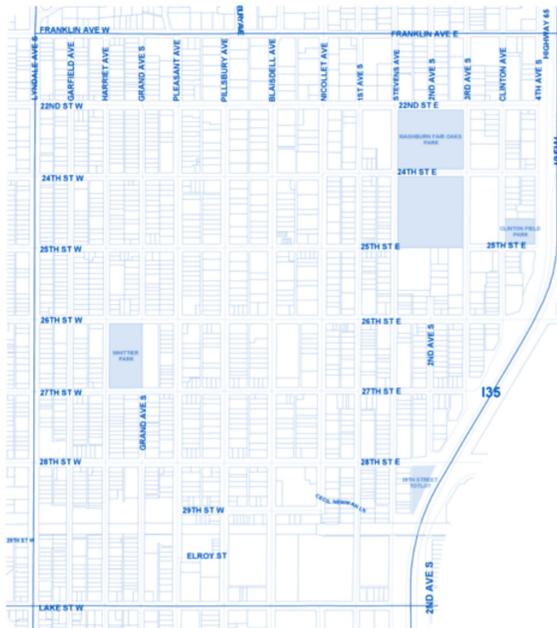
Whittier Alliance is dedicated to building a flourishing and distinctive neighborhood. We are committed to fostering a welcoming, diverse, inclusive, and sustainable community.

Our Neighborhood Story

The Whittier neighborhood, named for the poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, spans 81 square blocks at the threshold of downtown and South Minneapolis. It runs north-south from Franklin Avenue to Lake Street, and east-west from Lyndale Avenue to Interstate 35W. Today it is home to almost 15,000 people.

Through chance, choice, and passionate argument, Whittier has become a community of extraordinary diversity: families, couples, and individuals at every life stage; immigrant communities from across the globe; and people of various backgrounds, races, ethnicities, faiths, and financial realities. The story is in the buildings we call home: beautiful old mansions, single family and multi-family houses, condominiums and apartment buildings, subsidized housing, supportive housing, and homeless shelters – all mixed together in a single neighborhood. Whittier's story is bigger still: We contain the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Children's Theatre Company, Eat Street, Karmel Mall and the Wedge Co-op, immigrant-owned grocery stores and restaurants. Social service organizations, businesses that have been around for 50 years and others that just opened yesterday. Public parks, community gardens, schools, and places of worship to several faiths.

Whittier tells its own story: a neighborhood that is bigger than any one identity -- a community that makes room for those who are thriving, those who are really struggling, and everyone in between. We are defined as a community by our many communities.



Who we are at a glance:

7,083 households, 13.3% of which are owner-occupied

21% of residents are foreign-born

24% of residents live below the poverty line

Residents are 44% people of color, which includes 18% black/African American and 17% Latino

38% of residents don't use a car to get to work

65% of residents have lived here for one year or longer

Source: MN Compass
www.mncompass.org

The Whittier Alliance

The Whittier Alliance is the citizen participation organization for the Whittier neighborhood and has served this community for over forty years. Through those years, the organization has successfully engaged Whittier stakeholders in planning and implementing initiatives that have steadily improved the commercial viability, the housing stock, and the overall livability of the Whittier neighborhood.

In the early years, funding came from foundations, and the neighborhood's goals focused on addressing deteriorating housing and commercial properties and high crime. In the mid-1990s when the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan Phase 1 was introduced, Whittier had sufficiently stabilized to inspire active stakeholders to set visionary goals. At that time, restoring Nicollet Avenue and building a neighborhood school were broadly regarded as impossible, but through the Whittier Alliance's vision and strong leadership, Eat Street and the Whittier Elementary School were realized and are now central to the neighborhood. The Whittier Alliance ensured further stabilization of housing by establishing low-interest loan programs, as well as investing in the Whittier community through targeted grant programs and other financial and technical resources, many of which are still available today.

Development of the Strategic Plan

The Whittier Alliance began developing a new strategic plan in early 2017, forming a working group and seeking a consultant to assist with community focus groups. Since then, we have organized over 15 opportunities for direct engagement and feedback, including focus groups in multiple languages, issue-specific workshops, and online surveying. In these conversations, four priority areas for 2019-2024 rose to the surface: community engagement; housing; businesses, institutions, and other organizations; and organizational sustainability.

Goals and objectives for each priority area were elaborated by the community through issue-specific workshops in October 2018. The working group then sifted through all the brainstorming, looked for connections and common themes, and brought it all together into a cohesive whole.

The strategic decisions in this plan will drive work plans, budget, board agendas, existing committees and new committees and their charges, and accountability to the community. We heard loud and clear that people would like more participation and more voice – you'll see this reflected throughout the plan. In addition, we hope for this to be a "rolling" plan, with routine monitoring and formal annual reviews and updates that can ensure it stays current as the work moves forward.

Strategic Priorities for 2019-2024

Community Engagement

Inspire and equip the Whittier community to be good stewards of the neighborhood and to make the change they'd like to see.

Housing

Protect and expand the variety of housing options in Whittier, for people at every life stage and economic condition.

Businesses, Institutions, and other Orgs.

Support the vibrant and distinctive mix of Whittier businesses, institutions, and other organizations.

Organizational Sustainability

Develop the institutional power necessary to achieve our priorities and reliably serve the neighborhood for another 40 years.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Inspire and equip the Whittier community to be good stewards of the neighborhood and to make the change they'd like to see.

1. Be a warm and welcoming organization to the full Whittier community.

- Provide food for attendees and make events/meetings fun!
- Communicate openly, transparently, with visual tools, and/or in multiple languages.
- Review outreach, planning, and programming of WA activities and meetings to ensure the organization is welcoming, inviting, and accessible.
- Consider marketing/messaging campaign to communicate that all are welcome.

2. Actively build awareness of how to participate in WA activities and connect with fellow community members.

- Create a community ambassador role to build relationships and deepen connections with underrepresented groups.
- Connect community members online and in person to volunteer opportunities at WA and elsewhere in the neighborhood.
- Create a comprehensive resource base that aids community members in resolving issues, between each other, tenants and property owners, or themselves and the City.
- Design meetings, events, and forums to break through siloes within the community. (e.g. social service providers, inter-faith, youth-serving organizations, etc.)

3. Help community members develop the civic, political, and grassroots experience/skills they need to make real change and have real influence.

- Facilitate skill-building and educational opportunities for community members to navigate government/legislation.
- Identify and call on the unique skills and expertise of our community.
- Create effective channels of direct advocacy - to City Hall and within the community.
- Pursue strategies to increase voter turnout, such as creating lawn/yard/window signs, voter registration events/drives, etc.

4. Recruit participants and leaders that reflect and represent the broad diversity of the neighborhood, from one-time volunteers to the Board of Directors.

- Pursue wider education, communication, and recruitment efforts regarding the role of the WA Board and other leadership opportunities.
- Review and update bylaws to remove any unnecessary barriers to formally participating in the organization, while ensuring integrity of process.
- Diversify meeting and event locations, formats, topics, time, and day of the week.

HOUSING

Protect and expand the variety of housing options in Whittier for people at every life stage and economic condition.

1. Increase the diversity, accessibility and affordability of Whittier housing.

- Map neighborhood to understand more clearly where we are today (e.g., the housing mix, developable land, sale targets).
- Explore alternative ownership and financing models, such as housing cooperatives and converting apartment buildings (particularly those facing steep rent increases) into co-ops.
- Preserve and increase ownership and long-term rental opportunities for residents.
- Protect fair housing practices.

2. Serve as a resource hub for all residents and property owners/managers.

- Connect residents to existing housing resources, on WA website and in office.
- Hold civic forums to educate and mobilize residents on issues of ownership and long-term residency.
- Conduct tenant/owner forums to identify rental issues and develop solutions.
- Explore options for a mediation program (e.g., point person, funding, resources for tenant/landlord disputes).
- Equip residents to organize and advocate on behalf of their own housing needs (e.g., trainings).

3. Establish and promote a clear, strategic vision for Whittier's built environment.

- Define clear vision for the neighborhood, with supporting design guidelines and neighborhood plans.
- Form a small team with expertise to serve as neighborhood voice in meeting with developers who wish to build in Whittier.
- Advocate for new policies and projects that are in line with this vision, especially ones that preserve recognized strengths of the neighborhood.
- Establish working relationships with Development Review team (CPED), Planning Commission, City Council Representative.

BUSINESSES, INSTITUTIONS, AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Support the vibrant and distinctive mix of Whittier businesses, institutions, and other organizations.

1. Promote Whittier and its destinations.

- Continue to produce and distribute the Whittier dining guide.
- Continue and grow the Eat Street Festival.
- Explore neighborhood-specific days for Whittier businesses and organizations.
- Evaluate the idea of a free shuttle bus along Nicollet.

2. Support small, independent, locally- and family-owned businesses at all price points.

- Increased place-making and signage that calls more attention to local businesses.
- Explore options for expanding revolving loan program to include small business loans.
- Explore how Whittier Alliance can effectively advocate for preservation of affordable commercial space.
- Explore opportunities for Whittier Alliance to play a role in increasing the availability of commercial parking space.
- Continue administering the facade grant program.

3. Connect Whittier-area businesses and organizations with one another and the broader community

- Identify all organizations in Whittier and develop a plan to seek open communication channels with each of them.
- Facilitate opportunities for strategic partnerships among businesses and institutions.
- Host opportunities for businesses to build skills and network (e.g., workshops, etc).
- Evaluate ways to connect Whittier employers to job candidates within the neighborhood.

4. Serve as an effective resource for Whittier-area businesses and organizations navigating City or County processes and regulations.

- Become a more effective advocate for small businesses and commercial space with regard to new development.
- Serve as a liaison to the City's small business team.
- Explore methods for reviewing the economic output of Whittier businesses in the context of Minneapolis as a whole (tax revenue, employment, diverse business ownership, etc.).

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Develop the institutional power necessary to achieve our priorities and reliably serve the neighborhood for another 40 years.

1. Align plan strategies with greater financial stability, diversification, and organizational independence.

- Expand and diversify income, towards a balanced mix of grants, City funds, private donations, and large/small donor fundraising. Pursue funders and donors prepared to give multi-year support rather than one-time grants.
- Secure grants to better engage POC, LGBTQ, renters, single parents, and other specific communities that make up Whittier.
- Continue to create “merch” opportunities like the Whittier shirt and Eat Street cookbook.

2. Develop culture and procedures among the Board, Staff, and volunteers that encourage institutional health and sustainable growth.

- Pursue health insurance for staff. Make sure office responsibilities are set up to keep staff engaged, valued, and developing skills -- e.g., professional growth plans.
- Create processes for capturing and passing on institutional/neighborhood knowledge.
- Establish Board culture and procedures that support skill and knowledge building, and personal advancement within WA.
- Treat volunteer work with care, to encourage great experiences, spark a desire to come back, and identify and support those who want to step up.
- Regularly review and evaluate all guiding documents (e.g. strategic plan, internal policies, by-laws, etc.).

3. Increase awareness of Whittier Alliance and what the organization does.

- Develop and implement a multi-faceted marketing strategy to regularly reach more community members online and in the neighborhood.
- Make sure Whittier Volunteer Hub webpage captures all the help that’s needed (administrative, translation services, flyering, etc.) within WA and is publicized more.
- Pursue relationships with other neighborhood associations, and community organizations whose work is aligned with WA’s.
- Survey the community on an ongoing basis to prioritize issues and opportunities.

