

Whittier

A Study on Minnesota Connectivity

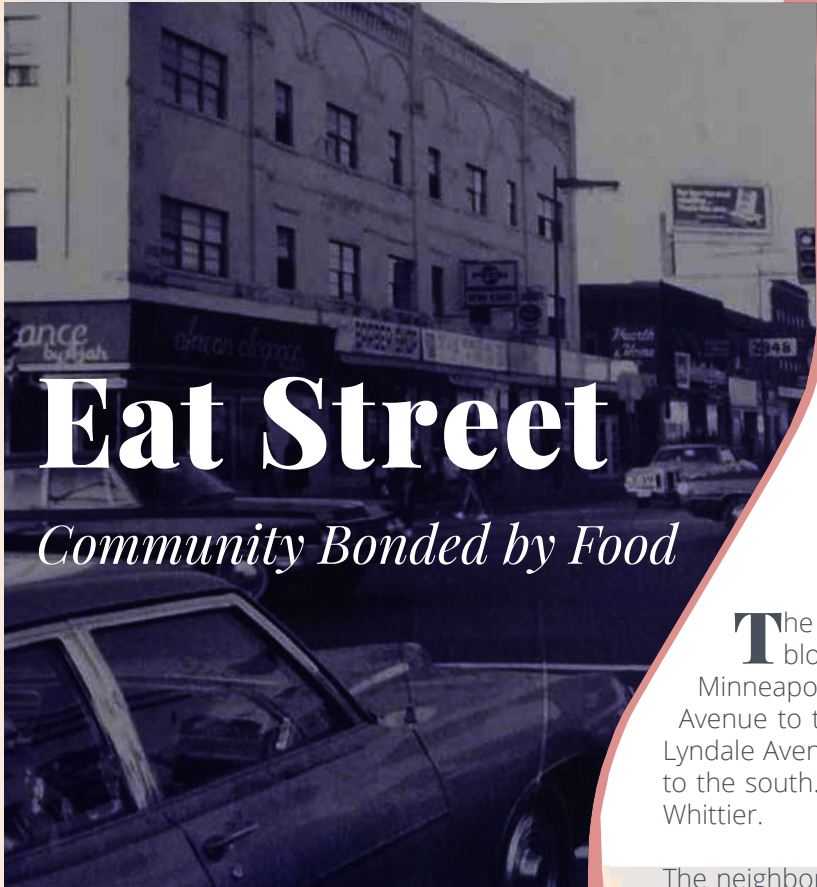
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MASD Innovation Tools and Techniques
Curt McNamara
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*“Local sells, and for that reason is a powerful
antidote to mobility expansion.”*

- In the Bubble, John Thackara





Eat Street

Community Bonded by Food

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The Whittier neighborhood is 81 square blocks one mile south of downtown Minneapolis. Whittier is bounded by Franklin Avenue to the north, Interstate 35W to the east, Lyndale Avenue South to the west and Lake Street to the south. Approximately 14,000 people live in Whittier.

The neighborhood is most famous for the Nicollet Avenue commercial corridor, known as 'Eat Street' – in fact many people describe themselves as living in the 'Eat Street neighborhood'. The multicultural dining options include great Vietnamese, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Somali, Carribean and American – and that is leaving out many other restaurants and the amazing ethnic groceries. Our Eat Street guide can spark further exploration.

Lyndale Ave, Franklin, Lake Street and 26th St are also commercial corridors, shared with other neighborhoods. The dense commercial corridors are part of what makes Whittier so special, especially in summer when people spill out on the sidewalk cafes and neighbors sit on front stoops and chat to passersby. Whittier is a vibrant, multicultural community: its slogan is 'The International

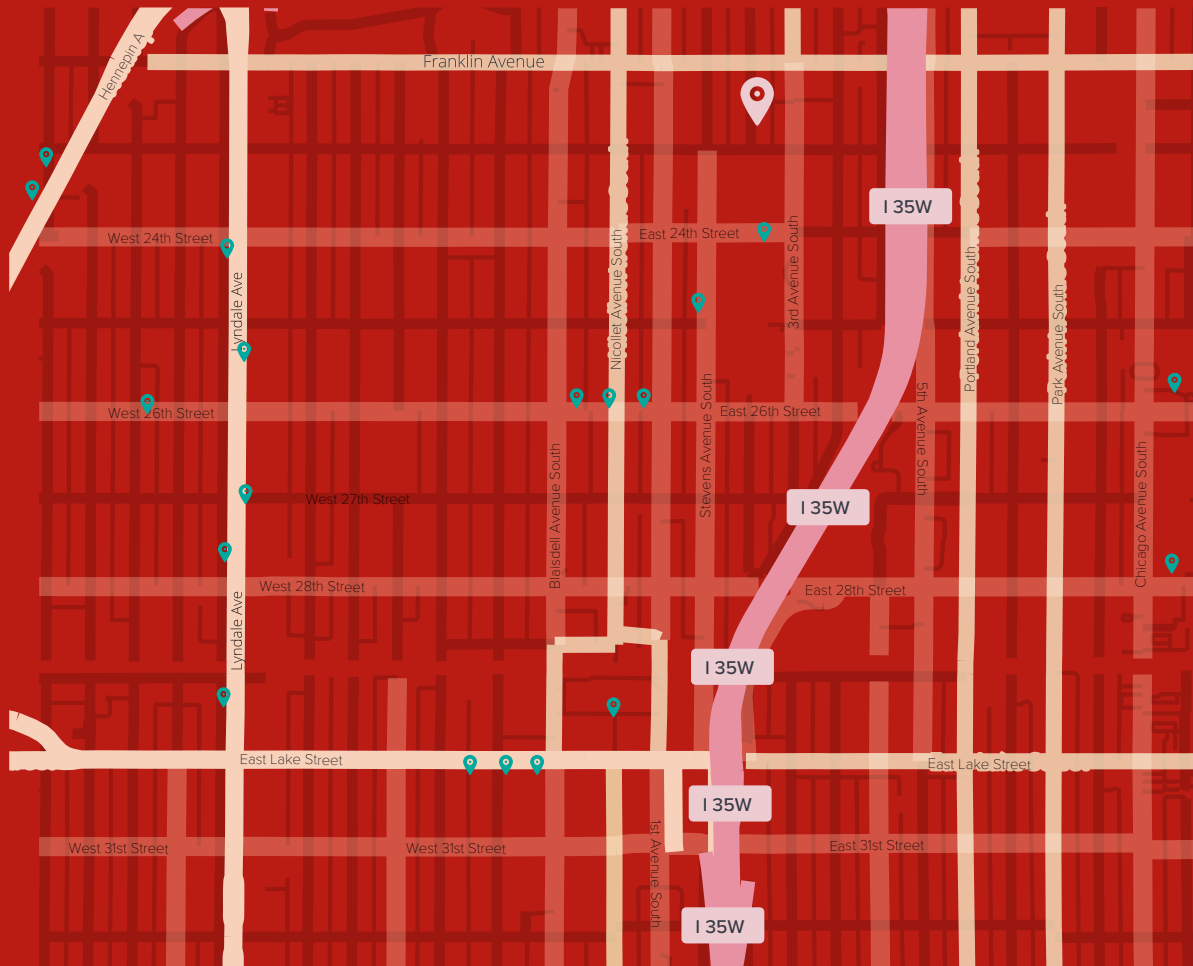
Neighborhood'. It also has been a home base for the arts and artists in Minneapolis for around 100 years.

Earlier this month, the Hennepin History Museum in Minneapolis opened a new exhibit focused on the history of Eat Street, Eat Street 20: In Their Own Words. Eat Street is the several-block stretch along Nicollet Avenue that is home to more than 50 restaurants, with cuisines representing a wide variety of places around the world: Malaysia, Germany, China, Mexico, Jamaica—they're all here.

Eat Street initially got off to a rough start when the city closed off part of Nicollet and allowed a KMart to be built. The stretch north of the KMart became, to put it mildly, dodgy; crime was rampant, with drug dealers and prostitutes openly conducting business on the street. To restore the neighborhood, the Whittier Alliance was formed to take back the neighborhood, and in 1997 the organization debuted the branding plan called Eat Street. ●

Whittier Traffic

BOUNDARIES, FLOW, AND BUSINESS



TRAFFIC + FLOW

Whittier is bounded by 35W on its Eastern border, East Lake Street on its Southern border, Lyndale on its Western border, and Franklin Avenue on its Northern border. Areas closest to 35W suffer from sound and traffic pollution, and some of these areas closest to the highway are blighted and struggling. In addition, Whittier's proximity to downtown Minneapolis makes it's northern border prone to crime. As you move westward from the highway, internally Whittier starts to feature thriving infrastructure around Eat Street, the Mia, and MCAD, with the Whittier Alliance featuring rich demographics and deep artistic and creative community in its residents and programming.

Towards Lyndale and East Lake Street, economic infrastructure becomes more focused on small business and restaurants, with traffic flow picking up carrying north to Downtown Minneapolis and south into Uptown. LynLake features what is considered the heart of Uptown bars and businesses, attracting locals to theatre, food, and entertainment.

Whittier features a densely populated demographic speckled with small parks and business, with a dedicated resident base, spanning diverse perspectives and incomes. 

Life, Lushness, and Development

OPPORTUNITIES FOR BEAUTY

ABSTRACTION STUDY

In taking a representational study on Whittier, we start to see the effects on traffic flow on the health of local economies and opportunities for locality. Because Whittier has a vibrancy in its locality, there is a lushness to its interior that is supplemented by local business. Whittier is home to Eat Street businesses, the Mia's influence for free art to the public, three of the best local record stores in Minneapolis, Glam Doll doughnuts, several independently owned yoga studios, and several acclaimed art galleries, not to mention MCAD's offerings to community enrichment.

It appears then there is a huge opportunity for a creation of locality in the more blighted neighborhoods near the freeway, and on Lake Street, which has historically been home to some of the harsher areas, and where K-Mart has been holding reign. What is characteristic of these areas is a lack of healthy food options, sound pollution, littering, crime, huge concrete parking lots, and a lack of community enrichment.

The diagram to the right shows an abstracted, generalized view of pockets of activity in Whittier, meant to represent the correlation between the high traffic areas and growth. It appears that the most opportunities for growth appear to be near the blighted areas at the intersections between the highways and thoroughfares that carry traffic into residential areas.



How might we create the conditions for life in areas where community has struggled to exist?



Leveraging Minnesota Strength

ARTS, COMMUNITY, AND EVENT PLANNING CAPABILITIES

LOCAL OFFERINGS

Incorporated in January 1977, the Whittier Alliance first formed as a coalition between residents, property owners, places of worship and local businesses when the neighborhood was suffering through a period of high crime, decaying housing and vacant storefronts. Over the intervening decades the neighborhood has grown to be one of the most interesting, diverse and popular places to live, work or eat in Minneapolis.

Over the years the Whittier Alliance has:

- Leveraged millions of dollars to acquire, renovate and rehabilitate properties through housing loans and specific projects.
- Assisted in the opening of the 600-student Whittier International Elementary School in 1998.
- Created the Nicollet Avenue "Eat Street" branding and streetscaping.
- Held many, many events in the neighborhood's streets and parks.
- Advocated for the neighborhood to the City, the Parks, Public Works and the Legislature.
- Established many of the popular co-operatives in the neighborhood.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Whittier has 7658 households, of which only 359 are single family homes
- Whittier households are 15% owner occupied and 77% renter occupied (the other 8% are

vacant)

- Only 63% of residents have lived at their place of residence for more than a year
- 59% of residents are White and 41% are People of Color, including 17% Black/African American and 16% Latino
- 19% of residents are foreign born.
- 29% of residents live below the poverty line
- Only 62% of residents use a car to get to work!
- Source, and further info: MN Compass.

ADJACENT STUDIES IN PUBLIC ACTIVATION

Organizations in Whittier are known for hosting events that activate and rejuvenate blighted and crime ridden areas. Other neighborhood artist events include installation events, on-site theatre, art gallery showings, outdoor yoga, outdoor cinematic events, and food truck events, however - in the more residential neighborhoods that are still struggling with these areas in Whittier there is a definitive lack of endeavors looking to answer this crime.

In addition to this, corporate owned land does not allow for overlay of business use - for example, a parking lot is prime real estate for activation, but the K-mart parking lot lies vacant for most of the year, breeding squatting, crime, and prostitution.

The main opportunities for leverage are spaces for community events involving key neighborhood players in parks, vacant lots, and high traffic zones.

1. USING KEY COMMUNITY PLAYERS...
2. REACTIVATE PARKS WITH THEATRE/CINEMA
3. FLOOD VACANT LOTS WITH FARMERS MARKETS
4. RECLAIM UNDERPASSES WITH STREET ART

Injecting Community

Stimulating Participation, Health, and Play for Whittier

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Using the methods discussed above, buy-in from local business would allow for infrastructure to encourage participation from locals into investing in a neighborhood that is beautiful, whole, and thriving on play, beauty, and health. Thus reducing turn over in a college - residential area, these programmatic events would allow for community to grow from the grassroots, allowing neighbors to come out and interact, get good wholesome food, enjoy a new experience of cinema or theatre outside, and may or may not be enticed to enter and support the small businesses that are putting the event on in the first place.

Also, by utilizing spaces that are unused, under utilized, and paved by larger big box retailers, this real estate can become the grounds for larger scale events that allow for the community to come together and rehabilitate areas that have stood empty. Tackling the problems of food deserts, this also helps social justice problems in these areas where food is scarce.

The involvement of business in these endeavors allows for an additional feedback loop wherein both the businesses and the people who live near them thrive and support each other in a symbiotic relationship. Instead of traveling to a familiarly branded big retailer, these events create a pride in their own neighborhood for hosting such diverse and interdisciplinary approach to entertainment. Thus, the communities that participate in them experience Locality as Thacakra puts it. Residents are less likely to leave, crime is reduced, and neighborhood economies thrive.

WHITTIER MPLS



Partnership Opportunities

WHO'S WHO OF THE WHITTIER SCENE

Whittier neighborhood hosts a thriving ecosystem of businesses focused on food, in addition to a vibrant civic personality and passion for locality. Potential partners range from businesses involved directly in creating locality, to adjacent supporting businesses that have historically shown interest in supporting locality in Minneapolis.

ADVENTURES IN CARDBOARD

An artist led, alternative childcare company, Adventures in Cardboard highlights unfettered play for youth during the summer months, occupying parks, and encouraging local participation.

SUNRISE BANKS

A local bank, named best of Better Business Bureau and B Corps, Sunrise is a local player in funding and financing operations that foster community engagement.

WHITTIER ALLIANCE

An obvious partner, the Whittier Alliance's involvement in the health, safety, and vibrancy of the community is the cornerstone of the rejuvenation of the local fabric.

TARGET CORPORATE

Known for their philanthropic attitudes towards creating community, Target's headquarters is another potential partner for financing.

3M + MIA

Another potential corporate sponsor, 3M has been involved with pushing envelopes in artistic installation and innovation within the Whittier neighborhood. A potential partnership to get involved with activating parks and site-specific events, this duo could prove valuable for locality.

LOCAL FOOD BUSINESSES

All of Eat Street could participate in a local celebration of diversity of food. Augmented by food trucks, a Whittier hosted food truck fair would be an amazing highlight to an already burgeoning local food scene, stimulating additional restaurants and supporting local businesses.

MINNEAPOLIS COLLEGE OF ART + DESIGN

A resource for local artistic talent, Minneapolis College of Art + Design is a potential partner that would help further the reach of the local art scene into street installation and vibrancy.

- 1.** KEY COMMUNITY PLAYERS
- 2.** REACTIVATE PARKS WITH THEATRE/CINEMA
- 3.** FLOOD VACANT LOTS WITH FARMERS MARKETS
- 4.** RECLAIM UNDERPASSES WITH STREET ART

Event Proposals

HOW MIGHT WE CREATE EVENTS TO HELP BOLSTER WHITTIER'S LOCALITY?

After identifying the problems and the opportunities, the following events would help the locality of Whittier become more competitive with the offerings of the Lowry neighborhood, with their sculpture gardens and Movies in the Park

ADVENTURES IN CARDBOARD CHILDREN'S THEATRE PRESENT: "CAPTURE THE MEDIEVAL FLAG"

Educational theatre meets the local play event of the year - this all weekend festival celebrates the primitive joy of make believe. Build castles, create armor, collaborate with your castle mates, trade potions and spells - conquer the world. Adventures in Cardboard, in partnership with the Childrens Theatre, bring to you the event of the summer: hosted in the park in front of the Mia.

MINNESOTA EATS: THE EAT STREET-FAIR

Sunrise Banks, in conjunction with Whittier Alliance and Eat Street business owners, present a food fair celebrating Minnesota based street food. Hosted every second weekend in the summer, come experience street food, our way, spanning diverse palletes in incumbent Whittier style such as Jaimacan, BBQ, Cajun, Vietnamese, and American Diner, while also enjoying street food, the food truck way.

THIRD THURSDAY AT THE MIA FEATURING: WHITTIER COMMUNITY ART

Mia hosts for their Third Thursday events a highlight of the local talent and street art rampant in the local Minneapolis scene. In order to promote the event, they include an Instagram story, where the marketing team features and posts things of note, and culminates in a partnership with the City of Minneapolis to commission local talent to envision underpass use on the Hennipen/Lyndale exit, kitty-corner to the Walker's sculpture garden.

NICE SET: LOCAL DJ'S TAKE MINNEAPOLIS

Icehouse, in conjunction with First Ave and Go 96.3, feature a collection of local music acts in pop up sets in Minneapolis underpasses through outfitted sound systems in retrofitted vans. Supplemented with food trucks, these events are art making parties, wherein community members can come, participate in the beautification of Minneapolis's blighted underpasses, and create community culture.

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