A Pathway to Connect Communities
A Case Study of the Beerline Trail Extension in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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A Pathway to Connect Communities

How can creative placemaking bring two communities together? And how can deeper engagement across boundaries foster community safety? Building a gathering space—say, a park, stage, or trail—is not enough; the space needs to be accessible, usable, and able to foster engagement across difference. The effort is complicated when adjacent communities are divided across social, economic, or racial lines. Without careful planning, the effort could be seen as an incursion or as a pathway toward displacement. This case study examines how one set of stakeholders used creative placemaking to foster engagement across different communities, build greater community cohesion, and push for inclusive economic development.

The Beerline Trail extension, formally known as the Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project, is a creative placemaking project in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Established in 2012, it roughly doubled the length of the Beerline Trail, which opened in 2010, to 6.2 miles. The trail runs from just north of downtown Milwaukee to Capitol Drive near the city’s border. This report focuses on the Beerline Trail extension that touches the neighborhoods of Harambee, which is primarily black and low income, and Riverwest, which is adjacent to the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and is one of the city’s most racially and economically diverse communities. The project has engaged community residents along with representatives from government, economic development agencies, law enforcement, and social justice organizations. These organizations and individuals have come together to determine the project’s goals and how the arts can help achieve the community changes they want to see.

This case study explains the Beerline Trail extension’s public safety goals and how it uses the arts, community participation, planning, and economic development to turn a former liability into a community asset. The eight acres of land on which the extension now sits were largely inaccessible and unused for several decades, making the area ripe for illegal dumping, loitering, and defacing of surrounding property. The project reflects a growing interest in using creative placemaking as a form of revitalization and in repurposing old railways into public parks and trails. The Milwaukee Model of Creative Placemaking, described below, emphasizes social justice and the inclusion of communities that have been left out of the planning process. Box 1 discusses creative placemaking and public safety and describes the three case studies of creative placemaking that accompany this report.
BOX 1

Creative Placemaking and Community Safety: Research Agenda

Public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors have begun using creative placemaking strategies to address the challenges facing disinvested communities and their residents, with barriers to public safety being one area of focus. Creative placemaking is a strategic and collaborative approach to the physical, social, and economic development of neighborhoods around arts and culture. We understand “arts” broadly to include murals, music, sculpture, and dance, but it also incorporates creative work more generally, such as promoting entrepreneurism, creatively engaging stakeholders, and using space in novel ways.

Although prior work has drawn links between creative placemaking and public safety, we lack specific knowledge about how public safety–oriented programs that integrate creative placemaking address public safety challenges. This is one of four case studies, and a report synthesizing common themes, that aim to fill this knowledge gap. The other studies include the following:

- **Eden Night Live** in Alameda, California, is an effort by the county sheriff’s department to build a community space by working with community developers, artists, and arts and cultural organizations and to rethink the department’s mission, priorities, and engagement with the community.

- **The Marcus Garvey Youth Clubhouse** in Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York, examines a partnership between a developer and nonprofit organizations to provide a community space and programming for local youth to enhance local safety and perceptions of safety.

- **The People’s Paper Co-op** in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, analyzes artist-led programs and initiatives aimed at reducing recidivism and working with formerly incarcerated residents through transformative art making.

The four programs featured in this series vary in how they address community safety through creative placemaking. The case studies discuss their design, implementation, challenges, and successes. This work aims to inform others interested in understanding how creative placemaking improves community safety, as well as how to measure the effectiveness of these interventions. Although creative placemaking is only one part of the work local stakeholders are undertaking to improve community safety, these case studies focus on that thread.

The Urban Institute collected information for the creative placemaking and community safety case studies between August 2017 and March 2018. Data we collected include semistructured phone interviews with ArtPlace/LISC staff, semistructured, in-person interviews with stakeholders, broadly defined to include community leaders, local artists, nonprofit partner staff, and city government agency staff, in-person focus groups with program participants, systematic observations of key events (i.e., planning meetings, public events), surveys administered by site staff, and a document review of quarterly reports, memos, grant applications, presentations, and other materials. Content, survey, and secondary data analysis methods were used to identify common themes and recommendations presented in the creative placemaking and community safety case studies.
A core goal of this case study is to show practitioners how physically and creatively bridging the gap between disparate communities can improve public safety and quality of life. To do so, we documented this project’s defining features by collecting data from a range of sources. The project team reviewed planning documents, analyzed community survey data, and observed group meetings. We also interviewed 11 stakeholders, including community residents and city government staff. The interviews focused on each participant’s involvement in planning and implementation at different stages.

Overview

Creative Placemaking

Placemaking, with its focus on making places more livable, has been identified as a means to enhance community safety and reduce crime (Walker and Winston 2017). This goal is achieved through activating spaces normally considered public safety liabilities and may be especially valuable in communities facing economic and safety-related challenges.. Economically depressed neighborhoods face higher homicide rates (Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001) and intimate partner violence (Benson et al. 2003) than higher-income neighborhoods. Residents in low-income areas are also less likely to report crimes (Goudriaan, Wittebrood, and Nieuwbeerta 2005). Changing these spaces by engaging the community can, by creating social cohesion, make neighborhood residents aware of and invested in the continued maintenance of a shared safe space (Walker and Winston 2017).

Creative placemaking, in its simplest sense, is a strategy for revitalization that uses arts and culture as its medium. Funders nationwide are increasingly investing in local community partners to pursue creative placemaking projects. ArtPlace America provided one of the grants that catalyzed arts programming on the Beerline Trail, and it partnered with the Urban Institute for a scan of the field (Ross 2016). This series of case studies (see Box 1) is one of the outcomes of that scan’s suggestions for further research, which found that many creative placemaking strategies are dedicated to “uniting disparate communities,” supporting well-being, supporting career development, and promoting healthy identity of self and community (Ross 2016). Art improves the quality of a place by changing the community’s perception of itself and other people’s perceptions of the community, fostering social connection, and increasing face-to-face social interaction where it would not have existed previously.
A Brief History of Rail-Trail Development

The rail-to-trail movement, which turns abandoned rail tracks into bike- or pedestrian-accessible trails, has a long history in Wisconsin, where converting abandoned rail lines into pedestrian trails started as early as the 1960s. Local interest in outdoor activity and the deregulation of unused rail lines opened a path for communities to purchase and develop these corridors. The first of these trails, the Elroy-Sparta State Trail, opened in 1965 in Wisconsin. Since then, the federal government has provided states funding to purchase out-of-use rail lines and develop trails.

In today’s national conversation, rail-trail development has focused on how green space can be inserted in dense urban areas. The most famous urban rail-trail project is New York City's High Line, which is a case study for the potential ramifications of creating such an amenity. As the vision for the park gained broader support, its eventual development became closely linked to the city’s economic development agenda, accelerating and extending already-increasing property values in the Chelsea neighborhood. Though changes in Chelsea started before the High Line opened, the trail’s development coincided with its transformation into a tourist destination with multimillion-dollar luxury apartment buildings.

These dynamics are also identifiable in a smaller city like Milwaukee, where the Beerline trail’s initial segment, created out of an abandoned railway right-of-way, was developed between 2002 and 2007. With some Milwaukee neighborhoods attracting young residents who are not interested in commuting from the suburbs, an amenity such as a trail can be seen as a strategy to beautify a community, foster healthy activity, spur development, encourage safety, and provide a commuting opportunity. Unused commercial spaces, warehouses, and rails, in particular, have been targets for cleanup and revitalization. Milwaukee has undertaken a number of creative placemaking efforts to stimulate development in areas abandoned by industry. But in communities that have seen widespread disinvestment, an amenity attracting young and affluent new residents can be seen as a leading signal of displacement and gentrification. As such, an inclusive revitalization strategy needs to consider the needs of current residents to avoid unintended harms and minimize displacement.

Neighborhood Context of the Beerline Trail

Milwaukee has among the highest levels of segregation and violence of all major US cities. The two issues are intertwined: the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission’s 2016 annual report found that violence, specifically gun violence, is concentrated in a few neighborhoods, including Harambee (Abadin and O’Brien 2016).
The two neighborhoods at the core of the Beerline Trail Project, Harambee and Riverwest, reflect the city’s divided reality. Riverwest, located along the west bank of the Milwaukee River on the city’s north side, is a diverse and economically thriving neighborhood. Its proximity to the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee attracts young, affluent residents. In 2016, the real estate website Trulia named Riverwest the sixth-best neighborhood in the United States in a midsize city for “living well,” citing quiet streets and access to miles of footpaths or trails (including the original section of the Beerline Trail). The neighborhood is 65 percent white, 18 percent black, and 11 percent Hispanic. In 2013, a single-family home in Riverwest was valued at $153,000 (GMC, n.d.).

Harambee, west of Riverwest and east of Interstate 43, is like many primarily black neighborhoods that have experienced significant economic disinvestment. Its poverty rate is 47 percent (versus 20 percent in Riverwest), and the unemployment rate is 24 percent (versus 6 percent in Riverwest). The neighborhood is 77 percent black, 9 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent white (figure 1). The average single-family home in Harambee is worth $34,500 (GMC, n.d.). Harambee’s crime rate, which local stakeholders interviewed attributed to local drug dealing, is a known concern. In 2016, Harambee had 10 homicides, the highest number of any Milwaukee neighborhood that year.

FIGURE 1
Share of African American and Poverty Rate

Neighborhood conditions have motivated Harambee residents and local organizations, including the nonprofit Riverworks Development Corporation (Riverworks), to create a coalition for community improvement called the Harambee Great Neighborhood Initiative. This coalition drew the attention of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a nonprofit that provides community development funding to smaller organizations. LISC agreed to help fund and work with the Harambee Great Neighborhood Initiative to produce a neighborhood action plan. In accordance with the tenets of creative placemaking, the creators of the action plan identified the arts “as a primary neighborhood asset because...activities related to arts, and community events celebrate Harambee’s unique artistic, cultural, and historical accomplishments and contributions.”

Beerline Trail Extension Background

Before 2012, the land around the old railway that eventually was used for the Beerline Trail extension, which cuts across the neighborhoods of Harambee and Riverwest, was a site for illegal dumping and a magnet for nuisance crimes (figure 2). Local stakeholders, however, saw opportunities to activate the space, use it as a way to foster connections between the two neighborhoods and beyond, and stimulate economic development. The City, the Riverworks Community Development Corporation, and other neighborhood partners have been significantly invested in the development of the Beerline Trail extension since 2002, prior to the collaborative creative placemaking initiative which began in 2012. Work included procurement of Wisconsin State Department of Transportation funding to purchase the land as well as the rails-to-trails delineation in the Northeast Side Area Plan.

This earlier work served as a foundation for more recent efforts. The City of Milwaukee’s Northeast Side Plan was adopted as part of the City of Milwaukee Comprehensive Plan in September of 2009 (Department of City Development. 2009). The Northeast Side Plan called for the trail extension and development of the trail as a linear park and directed the Department of City Development and Department of Public Works to work with community stakeholders on its implementation.

The railway was at the core of the broader Harambee–Riverwest impact area identified by stakeholders. The linear nature of the space made it particularly valuable as a way to connect the communities of Riverwest and Harambee, and also to connect Harambee and the commercial strip along Capitol Drive to its north, which prior to trail development residents had to walk across without a traffic signal.
In 2012 beintween, a local organization dedicated to using the arts to improve spaces and encourage social interaction, seeded interest in developing the abandoned space along the Beerline Trail. It envisioned the ARTery as a testing ground for an experimental paving material, a space for the arts, and a bridge to provide a safer way for residents to cross Capitol Drive to reach the commercial center on the other side. Box 2 lists the history of the Beerline Trail Extension development activities.

That year, beintween started fundraising to test maTIREal, a trail-paving material made of old tires, in what is now the Beerline Trail extension. The pilot was part of the graduate school work for the organization’s founder, Keith Hayes. Beintween engaged local creative placemaker Annushka Peck and Riverworks’ Chris Grandt to consult on their vision for developing the project. The owner of the land gave beintween permission to pilot the project, but in the end, maTIREal was not durable enough to withstand bike activity, nor was it handicap accessible.

Still, the pilot provided an opportunity for community members to engage in planning and activities and seeded broader community interest in the space’s potential. Key organizations in this endeavor were the Greater Milwaukee Corporation (GMC) and Riverworks. GMC brings together leaders from the private sector, philanthropy, and nonprofit development to stimulate cultural and economic development in the city. GMC characterizes itself as an incubator of innovation, identifying leaders and ideas that can tackle the city’s most pressing issues. Riverworks is dedicated to promoting inclusive economic development for residents and businesses in Harambee and Riverwest, and it operates the business improvement district in the area.
BOX 2

Timeline of Beerline Trail Extension Milestones and Activities

2012
- Initiation of the ARTery, work by beintween

2013
- Capitol Bridge opens to the public
- ArtPlace America grant awarded to work toward Creational Trails: the ARTery

2014
- Collaboration structure formalizes, and Guiding Lenses Group forms
- Creational Trails opens: Season One performance series
- Initial trail programming begins
- Trail safety audits begin

2015
- Planning and Guiding Lenses meetings continue
- City of Milwaukee purchases extension land and funds trail paving
- Trail extension opens to the public
- First murals are commissioned and painted
- Trail extension evolves into a neighborhood development project

2016
- Planning and Guiding Lenses meetings continue
- Stewardship group forms
- Hood Design Studio is selected to design linear park section

2017
- Linear park design process begins community engagement and fundraising
- Planning and Guiding Lenses meetings continue

Sources: Study interviews and documents provided by project partners.

By 2013 formal efforts were underway to develop the space. The Beerline Trail neighborhood development project was formalized in 2013 when GMC partnered with NEWaukee, an organization focused on creative events programming, and beintween to apply for an ArtPlace grant. The project that came out of that partnership, Creational Trails, funded arts programming on the Beerline Trail extension and West Wisconsin Avenue. At the same time, project leadership worked with the City of Milwaukee to secure funding to purchase the land for the extension from its private owner, which was accomplished in 2015. The city also used these funds and a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to pave the trail (figure 3). At the request of GMC and Riverworks, the City of Milwaukee purchased the railroad bridge and created a public overpass called Capitol Bridge that allows people to cross Capitol Drive safely.
Building on the momentum and success of Creational Trails, the same coalition applied for and received a Kresge Foundation Harvesting Leading Practices award. This funding, in addition to support from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Riverworks, and LISC, coincided with Milwaukee’s formal purchase of the land. The funding allowed the group to expand its community engagement, create its signature neighborhood development plan, and hire Hood Design Studio, an Oakland-based landscape architecture firm, to create a plan for the space. Hood Design Studio held community charrettes and participated in events like the 2016 Designer Experience, an event that brought together residents and stakeholders to exchange ideas for the future development of the space (figure 4).
Leadership and Collaboration

Local nonprofit organizations and the City of Milwaukee have led the Beerline Trail extension (see figure 5 and the logic model in appendix A). As part of this collaboration, GMC is a steward of creative placemaking and the primary stakeholder convener. The Beerline Trail’s ArtPlace America and Kresge Foundation grants were both awarded through GMC.

GMC engages in the “Milwaukee Method” of creative placemaking (GMC 2015), which was developed with other Milwaukee creative placemaking partners. In 2014, GMC formed a creative placemaking committee to formalize its commitment to the method and engagement with local communities. This committee produced a document that describes the Milwaukee Method framework, which

- unifies arts and culture with economic and community development;
- accelerates neighborhood development by creating civic gathering places;
- increases density, safety, business creation, the tax base, and property values;
- strengthens public and private alignments; and
- supports artists, makers, and other cultural workers to colead neighborhood engagement.
These are the tenets through which the Beerline Trail extension’s leadership team has approached its planning.9

Riverworks, the main organization in the planning group, works on the ground to cultivate relationships with businesses and encourage residents to pursue entrepreneurial activity in relation to arts programming on the trail. GMC’s partnership with Riverworks has been crucial to moving this project forward and maintaining the trail. Riverworks provides access to the area for development as well as relationships with local businesses and residents, and GMC provides an established method of creative placemaking to experts in the field.

Several Milwaukee government administrative offices have been involved in the Beerline Trail’s development since 2013. These entities include the Department of City Development, the Department of Public Works, and the district attorney’s community prosecution units. The city has been a project leader since the inception of Creational Trails and continues to send representatives to all project leadership and meetings of the Guiding Lenses group, a volunteer group of community organizations, artists, creative entrepreneurs, local leaders, and leadership representatives. The city’s contributions come in many forms, such as funding the project, providing development guidance, and purchasing the land for the Beerline Trail extension.

Art events and programming on the Beerline Trail were facilitated by three organizations: MKE<->LAX, beintween, and NEWaukee. MKE<->LAX is the project’s main creative placemaking consultant and the active project lead. During Creational Trails, it provided mentorship and collaboration to NEWaukee and beintween, led by Angela Damiani and Keith Hayes, respectively. Beintween fostered partnerships with local artists to create public art events.

The community side of the project’s collaboration structure comprises the most fluid set of stakeholders but the most critical to upholding creative placemaking values. It includes the community engagement specialists who work for Safe and Sound, Riverworks, Running Rebels, and residents who were tapped for participation through the Guiding Lenses Group. Safe and Sound unites community members, law enforcement, and prosecution staff to tackle public safety issues endemic to each of Milwaukee’s police districts through community prosecution units. The Beerline Trail extension, Harambee, and Riverwest sit in District 5, so the areas share the same community prosecution unit staff.

The Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project structure diagram (figure 5) shows a distinction between who advises and who makes final decisions. The project conveners include
• City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works (DPW) and Department of City Development (DCD);
• Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC);
• Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC);
• MKE<->LAX; and
• Riverworks Development Corporation and Riverworks Business Improvement District (Riverworks).

Organizations that advise and collaborate include the Bader Foundation, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation (GMF), the Guiding Lenses Group, Rails to Trails, and the Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC).

Project decision makers agree to consensus decision-making on all aspects of the project, considering input from collaborators. Project elements include governance, funding requests and management, budget estimates and distribution, initiative production, and public relations. The GMC and Riverworks apply for funding and manage the project through Riverworks activities. Riverworks has a physical presence in the area, making it a key partner in garnering community shared ownership and participation. The City of Milwaukee’s involvement is necessary for overcoming regulatory hurdles and clarifying what is allowed on the trail. Sara Daleiden, who represents MKE<->LAX, is the project leader and facilitates and contributes to consensus decisionmaking.
Advisers to project leadership reside mainly in the Guiding Lenses Group. Guiding Lenses participates in periodic large group meetings at which leadership staff present project updates, with a representative from MKE<-->LAX facilitating the discussions. The meetings sometimes include small-group discussions about public safety, trail programming, arts, housing, and youth. The group first convened in 2014 by the organizations behind Creational Trails to gain consensus between the stakeholder groups. It is also the most direct way the project’s core collaborators get input from community members or local organizations on new plans. The Guiding Lenses Group continues to meet as the project shifts toward its neighborhood development lens and shifts away from trail-specific development.
To ease the transition to a broader focus on neighborhood development, GMC gathered 65 people (not all of them members of the Guiding Lenses Group) to hold a strategic actioning session. The two-day event in February 2015 included GMC, Riverworks, city government, local businesses, neighborhood residents, community leaders, nonprofits, and artists. Participants engaged in activities that helped the team create seven workgroups, guiding lenses, and a leadership structure. A follow-up session was held to develop work plans for a stewardship plan, the trail extension, neighbor-centric park design, creative entrepreneurship, story building, art and neighbor engagement, and housing and resident resources. These sessions were crucial to getting stakeholders with diverse perspectives on the same page for the next stage of the Beerline Trail extension and the corresponding neighborhood development plan. Today, these are topics of engagement in monthly meetings. To keep participants engaged between meetings, the project team uses a project management system (Basecamp) to manage the project and foster ongoing engagement.

**Activities and Programming**

Programs and events on the trail that promote entrepreneurial development of people in the arts as a sustainable job creation approach (see Markusen 2004) include ICAN 2 Labs, maker fairs, a dolphin tank, and business showcases during Riverworks Week. Integrating the arts with economic development has branded Harambee as an “arts district” and made it a destination. The project’s economic development goals are tied to public safety measures important to community residents. In drawing traffic from nonlocals, the trail aims to create an audience for the emerging creative economy and change the perceptions of Harambee as an unsafe place.

ICAN 2 Labs was one of the first programs to be held on the trail. It was introduced by beintween in summer 2014 to engage local youth in creative and entrepreneurial activity. The space for these activities was created using old shipping containers, which housed digital access, internet access, resources, and materials for youth to use in the project of their choice.

Creational Trails’ big production was the Season One performance series held during summer 2014. Project partners called for local artists and performers to audition for a chance to perform. The open call engaged local artists and exposed them to a larger audience. Beintween, MKE <-> LAX, and community organizers found creative ways to advertise the open call and the event. Twenty performers were chosen from the showcase, which was held at a local church.
Riverworks Week is the business improvement district’s annual series of events showcasing what the creative district has to offer. Hosting it on the Beerline Trail extension has presented an opportunity to rebrand Harambee as a creative district and highlight the local community. Riverworks invites local artists from all disciplines, creative entrepreneurs, and local businesses to present their work.

Art installations and murals have been the most constant features of the trail. In fall 2015, the Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project unveiled its first permanent art installation, a piece by the artist Tyanna J. Buie called Streetlights (figure 6). The installation consists of 10 steel (nonfunctioning) streetlights whose middle sections are manipulated to represent one word of the phrase “Taking Root Pulling Together Land Beyond Hill Hope Bridges All.” The words and the streetlights’ placement symbolizes the bridging of Harambee and Riverwest, though the installation is not on the extension. The trail has five murals. Riverworks commissioned works from Fred Kaems, John Kowalczyk, and Rozalia Singh. The streetlights and the murals reflect some aspect of the trail’s adjacent communities and even engaged residents in painting them.

**FIGURE 6**

*Streetlights by Tyanna J. Buie*

![Streetlights by Tyanna J. Buie](image)

Photo by the artist.
Safety audits on the trail are a partnership between Safe and Sound, Riverworks, the district attorney’s community prosecution unit, and the Milwaukee Police Department. The audit consists of walking the trail, observing, and documenting areas where safety can be enhanced. The practice is based on the principles of crime prevention through environmental design, enhanced among this group by training received from Gregory Saville of AlterNation LLC on SafeGrowth. In this context, safety audits connect public safety stakeholders and community members, creating an air of shared responsibility for safety. Interview participants reported that this activity confirmed their assumption that creative placemaking and changing the environment can reduce crime.

Monitoring and Evaluation

One of the challenges facing creative placemaking is capturing short- and long-term project outcomes. However, with a wide range of stakeholders at the table, potential indicator data collection could come from multiple sources.

Thus far, the Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project has focused on creating a formal evaluation strategy. In interviews with project staff, neither Riverworks nor GMC reported having a concrete evaluation plan. They are, however, monitoring the impacts of the extension. In 2016, they hired Virginia Carlson, a data consultant, to produce an evaluation practice report. Per the report’s recommendations, the project team monitored eight indicators: number of people in poverty, per capita income, employment rate, labor force participation rate, aggregate self-employment income, residential property values, homes in tax deed status, and job availability. The report also suggests collecting qualitative indicators related to community engagement to capture changes in residents’ perceptions.

Evaluation capacity lies within Riverworks, which looks at several indicators to monitor changes related to its programming. It has looked at city property databases to track foreclosed and tax-delinquent homes and businesses. Harambee was previously the subject of a LISC Sustainable Communities Initiative report that looked at housing, economic, community safety, education, and cultural indicators to assess the impact of previous community development investments. Riverworks continues to gather data for LISC on changes in the composition and economic status of Riverworks-area residents.

The community prosecution unit’s safety audits ensure the community’s trail safety needs are met. Safety survey respondents are not limited to Harambee and Riverwest residents. The survey team has consisted of community prosecutors, LISC staff, Safe and Sound community coordinators, Riverworks
staff, GMC partners, city government officials, Milwaukee Police Department community liaison officers, and business owners. Safety audits were performed in summer 2014 and fall 2015. In both instances, participants were concerned about surveillance cameras, vehicular traffic on the trail, lighting, signage, maintenance, and graffiti. The findings were shared with the Guiding Lenses Group. Riverworks took on easily actionable items, such as graffiti removal or vegetation management. Concerns that required financial resources or city approval were subject to further discussion.

Because the trail extension is on property owned by the City of Milwaukee, the city government is in the best position to monitor and track trail activity. In 2017, the Department of Public Works installed infrared trail counters to count the number of people who enter from the extension’s southern end. Each of the project’s lead organizations will need to collaborate to ensure the appropriate data are being collected by an organization with the capacity to do so.

Riverworks and Hood Design Studio surveyed residents in September 2017 during Riverworks Week (table 1). Because survey participation was affected by dissemination of event information and respondents were only those already using the space, the survey results were not a rigorous or comprehensive analysis of what community members want and may omit those not already engaged. Nonetheless, the results offer a guideline for future programming. Respondents were most interested in safety improvements and maintenance, followed by public art or sculptures. Respondents were less keen on maker spaces, picnic areas, or food gardens. The Beerline Trail leadership team hopes to use these opinions to focus on which amenities and programming to pursue from Hood Design Studio’s final plan.

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<th>Proposed amenity</th>
<th>Love it (%)</th>
<th>Don't care (%)</th>
<th>Don't like it (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public art and sculptures</td>
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Source: Greater Milwaukee Committee and Riverworks survey of 156 Riverworks Week attendees.
Note: Sample is not representative of Riverwest and Harambee residents.
Challenges and Impacts

Challenges

The challenges the Beerline Trail faces are consistent with those of other creative placemaking projects: assembling adequate financing, countering community skepticism, avoiding displacement and gentrification, and forging sustaining partnerships (Markusen and Gadwa 2010, 15). These themes appeared in stakeholder interviews and gatherings.

The planning group’s heftiest hurdle is obtaining funding to implement the next phase of trail development. The Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the City of Milwaukee, Fund for Lake Michigan, the Milwaukee Arts Board, the Paul Fleckenstein Trust, and the National Endowment for the Arts have contributed funding, but not enough to carry out the plan to meet community expectations. In response, the project team has formed a stewardship group to engage local funding sources.

Funding is crucial to keeping people engaged through programming and Guiding Lenses meetings. Project facilitators can no longer provide stipends, which they did under the Kresge grant to ease the burden on community members who cannot typically take midday meetings. People used to place themselves in working groups and talk about what they wanted to bring to the larger group. Working groups would meet, come up with plans, and submit plans to the overall group. There was also a youth-specific Guiding Lenses group. One stakeholder theorized that the youth group disbanded because there was not enough funding to support any of their program ideas.

People who have been involved in the trail development are concerned that uneven engagement will destabilize social connection goals. Stakeholders have noticed that more people from Riverwest are coming through the trail or attending events on the extension. One resident, talking about communities such as Harambee, theorized that this is because of differences in the ways the neighborhoods use outdoor space:

- Residents tend to associate riding a bike as a means of transportation that’s poor and lacking, instead of health benefits and the ecological benefits. So, if we can change those people’s thoughts and get them on board, that will go a long way to get them to utilize those spaces more.

To encourage residents to use the trail, community organizers primarily rely on word of mouth. Someone suggested increasing the number of residents in the Guiding Lenses Group to combat low trail use. Challenges to engagement may be related to the trail’s lack of signage. Also, the trail is not an
uninterrupted line of green space. It is cut off at certain points by heavily trafficked streets, and the prospect of crossing vehicular traffic can deter both bicyclists and pedestrians.

The perception of safety on the trail extension differs from that on the south section. Some residents feel the trail is unsafe because of the lack of foot traffic during certain parts of the day, even though there are businesses and residences on the trail. The portion from Keefe Avenue to Capitol Drive is commonly perceived as “the back door for everyone,” implying the space is secluded, unsafe, and not meant for legitimate activity. Safety audits have produced recommendations to improve feelings of security, but getting the resources to carry out these recommendations is challenging. Another suggestion from a Guiding Lenses Group meeting is that creating more trail access points would enhance feelings of safety.

However, most of the street segments or alleys adjacent to the trail are owned by private businesses, and the city does not have the right to claim them under eminent domain. Getting buy-in from businesses in the Riverworks business improvement district area, which have not been invested in community relations for many years, is a slow process. One Riverworks staff member noted it is not always apparent to businesses that they should support trail activities:

These types of smaller manufacturing businesses in the area, the landscaping company that’s there, they’re very much in tune to their own property and own businesses, and their focus is running their own business and not necessarily a stewardship of a public space. Rightfully so, their intention isn’t on making this a friendly area. The negative connotations come from just a negative lack of understanding.

Impacts

Stakeholders believe the Beerline Trail extension beautifies a piece of land once home to rubbish and creates a pathway for resources between Harambee and Riverwest. The trail creates a social and economic center of gravity for people on both ends and creates a physical space for programming. Once the Hood Design Studio plan is finalized and approved, it will be clearer what resources will be made available on the trail. Additionally, there will be opportunities for interaction between the two neighborhoods beyond involvement in the Guiding Lenses Group. For Harambee, which has long fought for resources through formal and informal community-driven initiatives, the trail signals a shift toward investment. This work also builds on the history of development in Riverwest. Stakeholders emphasized that this new space fills a void and fosters a sense of community ownership across Harambee and Riverwest.
For many members of the public, being involved in the Beerline Trail extension planning was their first exposure to creative placemaking. Stakeholders wanted the trail to be useful beyond aesthetic purposes: they wanted to create a space that reflected neighborhood personality. They could only ensure this by being active in the planning, whether through the Guiding Lenses Group or community charrettes. One stakeholder noted, “A lot of it is making public spaces usable in a way that crosses race, economic situation, circumstances, boundaries, whether you’re from the neighborhood or not.” The goal of creating a space that reflects the character of the neighborhood is achieved by elevating the authentic community voice through meaningful engagement. It is not just about thanking community members for their opinions but wanting community members to rise and lead in new ways with resources in hand.

Because putting the reins in the hands of residents promotes collective efficacy and defines social norms (Collins, Neal, and Neal 2014), one key aspect of the Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project has been community engagement. Engaging with planners and stakeholders empowered residents. The Guiding Lenses Group gave residents a seat at the table. Stakeholders thought the Beerline Trail extension project team was trying to get the word out about the trail and dispel fears of displacement. Project leaders have collaborated with Safe and Sound, a trusted community safety organization, to thoroughly engage people through door-to-door notifications, flyers, and community meetings, as well as unconventional forms, such as driving through the neighborhood while playing music to advertise their local artist showcase.

Public art (e.g., murals and installations) visually “activates” the trail and tells the story of the two communities. Streetlights takes a mundane feature of public space and turns it into a message of unity. One of the murals is a psychedelic depiction of the architectural style of homes common in the two neighborhoods. Rozalia Singh’s mural Welcome to Harambee and Riverwest features the trail’s history and future by combining an image of an old train with images of cyclists (figure 7). Art along the trail also makes the trail more conspicuous. Curiously, few stakeholders touched on arts on the trail beyond the murals and the graffiti-deterring effect they have had. Stakeholders spoke more about the space’s potential to expose people outside the neighborhood to local artists and entrepreneurs, most likely because art production on the trail extension has focused on temporary installations and programming with an eye toward permanent art.
Activities on the Beerline Trail extension demonstrate that Harambee and Riverwest have the capacity to build social and economic capital. Collaboration through the planning process has made organizations across the city aware of the neighborhoods’ cultural richness and brought resources such as local and national funding into the community. It has also created a way for community leaders to engage with each other. The project’s collaborative aspect extends to the commercial sector along the Beerline Trail. Businesses in the Riverworks business improvement district have been in direct contact with residents and stakeholders in the planning group. The trail has been a point of engagement with businesses that have long existed alongside the trail and relied on Riverworks’ business improvement district strategies to decrease blight.

There has been buy-in from businesses who see the trail and the community engagement around it as a legitimate, cost-effective strategy to prevent damage to their own spaces. Some owners of large warehouses have donated wall space facing the trail for more murals. The trail was described as a potential amenity for employers in the warehouse district alongside the trail. Once construction on the next phase begins, the project partners hope it will draw others to invest in the community by bringing businesses with them. One organization that has already invested in a commercial space along the trail
is Running Rebels, a nonprofit that engages youth in mentoring and recreational activity as a crime prevention strategy. Running Rebels purchased the building at the end of the trail on Capitol Drive.

Of course, these impacts change perceptions of public safety on the trail and in the surrounding neighborhoods. The theory is that public safety will be enhanced through blight removal and enhanced activity on the trail. Criminal justice and community stakeholders noted that public safety was a lot about perception, upholding the importance of crime prevention through environmental design and the importance of beautifying a space. Safety audits have been valuable to patrons of the trail and to businesses. One member of the community prosecution unit noted that the audits make the space more welcoming for “legitimate users.” Riverworks’ business improvement district team previously removed graffiti in the area; that job has decreased since they put in their own murals and activated the space. Creating murals removes the burden of graffiti cleanup on local organizations such as Safe and Sound and Riverworks. The programming on the trail geared toward youth engagement, which provides healthy outlets for self-expression, is also related to the decrease in graffiti.

One of the biggest indirect impacts of the Beerline Trail extension has been that creating outside interest in the area dispels misconceptions about Harambee. Despite local talent, places to perform or showcase art did not exist in Harambee. There are now permanent performance spaces that have attracted crowds from throughout the city during Riverworks Week and Creational Trails. These events have marketed Harambee as a “creative district.” Perceptions are changing within the neighborhood as well. One 20-year resident said she would never have thought of going out for a run in the neighborhood. The trail is a safe outdoor space that encourages healthy activity. Because of these features, the Beerline Trail extension is turning Harambee into a destination. As one resident noted,

It's interesting because this area still is predominantly black, African American. It is changing. I think for the better. You want to talk about gentrification. People moving are the same ilk, income levels...it's not the same type of gentrification where property prices go up. The city is not trying to make that same mistake again. That's why you have all these city planners involved. It's warm to walk that and see the different types of people walking their dogs. It's slowly becoming a place for people to go to.

This observation touches on several themes that have come up in conversations about the trail: the impact of investment, fears of displacement, and the importance of community engagement. The Beerline Trail extension is a bright spot in a community long shrouded by economic disinvestment and negative perceptions of safety. The trail has activated the space, but creating permanent programming and engagement will be important for making Harambee safer and more livable. The project’s lead organizations hope that by lifting up current residents, they can mitigate risks of displacement.
Next Steps

The Beerline Trail is destined to have a profound effect on Harambee and Riverwest, particularly in community safety. The rail line’s dramatic restructuring and repurposing signals to “illegitimate users” that it is no longer a place no one cares about. Engagement in trail activities, programming, and planning has created a new wave of community interest in development. That is not to say that the interest was not there before. Residents of Harambee and Riverwest who have been community leaders for years now have a seat at the table with the leaders and organizations they have wanted to reach. The latest iteration of the project acknowledges that improving the community aesthetic will not erase the effects of systematic inequality.

The main way this creative placemaking project tackles public safety is through improving quality of place. Creative placemaking strategies must go beyond physically transforming an environment to make tangible changes in the activities that take place there (Ross 2016). Uniting two disparate communities could help residents come to a mutual understanding about what is valued and what behaviors are acceptable, thereby activating the function of informal social control (Sampson and Groves 1989). The Beerline Trail Neighborhood Development Project’s holistic redevelopment strategy assumes that the connection the trail creates will foster cultural exchange. To make this happen, project leadership must facilitate these connections and ensure outcomes benefit all those involved. The process must be cognizant of the power imbalance between the two neighborhoods. Maintaining community engagement is crucial to achieving public safety or quality of life goals related to the Beerline Trail.
Appendix A. Logic Model

LOGIC MODEL: ARTERY AND BEERLINE TRAIL (MILWAUKEE, WI)

### Inputs
- Greater Milwaukee Committee
  - Project mgmt. & fundraising
  - CPM Committee
- Riverworks
  - Stewardship
  - Community engagement
  - Local business engagement
- MKE & J-LAX
  - CPM expertise
- City of Milwaukee
  - Property owner
  - Assesses project feasibility
  - Trail maintenance (through Riverworks)
- Guiding Lenses Group
  - Advises on all aspects of trail health & wellness, public safety, neighborhood engagement, etc.
- Beintween (former partner)
  - ARTery project founders
  - Community engagement
  - Construction administration
- ArtPlace America
  - Funding ($350,000)
- Other advisors:
  - LISC
  - Greater Milwaukee Foundation
  - WI Women’s Business Initiative Corporation

### Activities
- **Neighbor-Centric Park Design**
  - Trail walks
  - Trail development plan
  - Park designer selection
  - Hood Design plan feedback
  - Door-to-door community conversations
- **Community Engagement**
  - Strategic actioning sessions
  - Guiding Lenses meetings
  - Riverworks community charettes
  - Community surveys
- **Arts/Programming**
  - Creational Trails
  - ICAN 2 Labs
  - Murals & art installations
  - Riverworks Week
- **Creative Entrepreneurship**
  - Local artist showcase space
  - Creational Trails
  - Dolphin tank, maker’s markets/pop-ups
- **Public Safety**
  - Community safety audits
  - Riverworks graffiti abatement
  - The Ex Factor meetups
- **Stewardship**
  - Creation of a multi-year strategic plan to maintain aspects of trail
  - Riverworks clean-ups & plantings

### Outputs
- **Usage**
  - Increased daily (regular) usage
  - Usage counts by segment
    - By residence or place of employment
  - Increased event activities
  - Number and location of formal events/activities
  - Attendance counts
  - More art installations/activities on trail
  - More entrepreneurs active on trail (usage/sales)
  - More planning/process engagement
  - Meeting attendance and frequency
  - New active stakeholders/organizations
  - New initiatives
- **Community Safety**
  - Decrease in physical signs of disorder along the trail (e.g., dumping, littering, graffiti, etc.)
  - Police calls for trail/adjacent area (either up or down)
- **Community Perceptions**
  - Increased awareness/positive opinions of trail and activities
  - Improved opinions of adjacent neighborhoods
- **Neighborhood Economic Development**
  - More jobs/businesses operating in neighborhood surrounding the trail
  - Increased knowledge of resources for development
  - Increase in neighborhood beautification efforts

### Outcomes
- **Short-Term Outcomes**
  - Increased perception of safety in communities along the trail
  - Decrease in property and violent crime in adjacent areas
  - Increase in local business and community development activities
  - Harambee branded as an “Arts District”
  - More community leaders
- **Long-Term Outcomes**
  - Diminish impact of “Holton Street Divide”
  - Increased collective efficacy
  - Rehabilitation of residential areas around the trail
  - Increased housing and commercial investment adjacent to trail and in surrounding neighborhoods
  - Housing market stabilization to address economic disparity
  - Economic sustainability of local businesses
  - Increased income diversity in Harambee

Note: Dashed boxes represent economic development goals adjacent to the project.
Notes


3. Examples include Walker’s Point, a redevelopment project of an area that used to be home to lake freighters; the revitalization of West Wisconsin Avenue with the use of art and light installations to draw traffic to a commercial area that was not getting much attention; and Typeface, a project led by NEWaukee that uses murals on abandoned storefronts to tell the story of four Milwaukee neighborhoods.


5. 2012–16 five-year American Community Survey estimates. We used Milwaukee County census tracts 67, 69, 70, 81, 106, 1856, and 1857 for Harambee and census tracts 71, 72, 79, 80, and 107 for Riverwest.

6. 2012–16 five-year American Community Survey estimates.


8. Here, economic development is any strategy that can alleviate economic burdens on low-income communities through neighborhood revitalization (Cummings 2001), entrepreneurial development (Markusen 2004), community engagement, and business improvement districts (Schaller and Modan 2008).

9. The Beerline Trail extension is not Milwaukee’s only creative placemaking effort, as GMC and its partners are also redeveloping West Wisconsin Avenue and Walker’s Point (GMC 2015).
References


About the Author

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