



SNI Revitalization Strategy for Martin Luther King Neighborhood

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About the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative

About SNI

The City of Oklahoma City established the Strong Neighborhood Initiative (SNI) program to help strengthen and revitalize inner-city neighborhoods, by engaging with neighborhood residents and stakeholders to develop strategies, programs and partnerships that will address housing, economic, infrastructure and social needs as well as be a catalyst to attract new residents and businesses. Starting in 2012, the City's Planning Department worked with three initial SNI neighborhoods: Classen's North Highland Parked, Classen Ten Penn, and Culbertson's East Highland. The next phase of SNI included Capitol View and Capitol Hill in 2018, and Metro Park in 2020.

The SNI is considered a five-year commitment; however, if a neighborhood succeeds at meeting or exceeding program measures, the term is shortened, which was the case for Classen's North Highland Parked after four years. If progress is slower and there are justifiable reasons to continue work beyond five years, there is also the option to extend SNI's commitment, typically for two (2) years, with the neighborhood's assurances toward self-sufficiency and support.

To date, the City has invested \$16.7 million in the SNI neighborhoods and there has been more than \$51.2 million of private investment.

SNI Intended Outcomes

Over a five-year period, the SNI intends to tip declining neighborhoods towards long-term, economic sustainability through community engagement, holistic planning strategies, and thoughtful public and private investments.

- Improved quality of life & culture - From place to "A PLACE"
- Engaged and informed neighborhood groups, children and parents
- Decreased turnover in neighborhoods and schools
- Increased homeownership and private investment
- Existing owners staying and aging in place
- Improved property values & market stabilization
- Decreased perception of crime & discrimination
- Greater connectivity and accessibility to jobs, education and services
- Reduction of vacant properties
- Improved health outcomes for all
- Improved green spaces and trees

10 Years of SNI Accomplishments!

40 affordable homes built
3 parks improved
9 properties cleared of trash
98 homes rehabbed
113 blocks of new sidewalks
322 hazardous trees removed
481 trees planted
14 public art installations, and more!

Affordable New Construction
by Positively Paseo



Tree Planting



New pocket park in Classen's North Highland Parked



Hazardous Tree Removal



New Sidewalks



Public Art in Capitol View



Safe and Tidy Program

2022 Neighborhood Selection Process

In May 2022, the SNI Planning Team initiated the process of identifying eligible neighborhood areas to be considered for the SNI program. The process starts with several weeks of data collection, mapping, and visiting neighborhoods to evaluate existing conditions. As the SNI program is principally funded with federal grant funds, neighborhoods must be located within the City's Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA), as approved by HUD.

- Tier 1: In this phase planning staff identified all neighborhoods within the NRSA boundary and analyzed the following factors to determine basic eligibility for the program, such as household incomes, housing values, owner-occupancy, number of children in the neighborhood, and incidents of crime.
- Tier 2: This phase of analysis identifies assets, proximity, and investments, such as existing neighborhood associations, schools, parks, employment centers, commercial areas, and recent and planned public and private investments.
- Tier 3: This analysis identifies conditions and opportunities, such as residential units, building permits, public housing units, and undeveloped parcels.

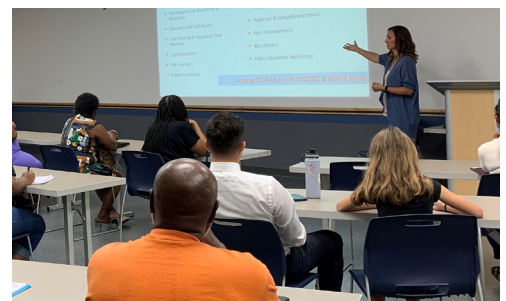
Based on all three tiers, several neighborhoods were identified as good candidates for the SNI Program. Those neighborhoods were invited to attend a workshop to explain the program and application process. Seventeen individuals serve on the SNI selection committee with the purpose to advise on the methodology for identifying eligible neighborhoods, review applications, participate in an interview process, and ultimately make a recommendation to City Council on which neighborhoods should receive SNI program assistance. On November 30, 2022, the Selection Committee reviewed the applications, conducted interviews with the six (6) applicants, and provided a scored assessment using additional criteria:

- Existing capacity to be an SNI neighborhood
- Neighborhood involvement
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Need for SNI resources and programs
- Compatibility with SNI mission

On January 2, 2023 the City Council voted unanimously to accept the Selection Committee's recommendations:

1. Begin to work in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood starting in July 2023, for a five-year term.
2. Continue SNI work in Capitol Hill for two (2) more years, ending in June 2025.
3. In two (2) years, when Capitol Hill and Metro Park "graduate", the Committee will reconvene and invite Heronville, Northeast Renaissance, Ross Heights, and Stockyards City to reapply to fill those two (2) spots.

SNI staff hosted the MLK neighborhood's celebratory kick-off meeting on February 4th, 2023 at Ralph Ellison Library.



First Selection Committee Meeting



Selection Committee Interview with MLK Neighborhood Leaders.



SNI Kick-off Meeting at Ralph Ellison Library with MLK Neighbors & Stakeholders.

Introducing the MLK Neighborhood

About MLK



SNI/MLK meet-up at Eastside Pizza in July 2023.

The SNI boundaries for the Martin Luther King (MLK) neighborhood are Northeast 30th Street, MLK Boulevard, Northeast 23rd Street and Glen Ellyn Avenue. It has a population of 780 residents and 91% are African-American. There are 546 residential units with an average market value of \$46,794 (2022). The residences are 40% owner-occupied, with the majority of the homes owned by investors.

The following comprehensive lists of neighborhood assets, concerns, and needs were provided by the MLK neighborhood as part of their SNI Application. There is no doubt this enthusiastic group of thoughtful neighbors will accomplish big things over the next five years.

Community Input from MLK Neighborhood

Neighborhood Assets

- » Commitment of community members to support and grow the neighborhood
- » Vibrant cultural identity of the area
- » Proximity within OKC
- » Link between Capitol View and Adventure District, two of OKC's thriving neighborhoods
- » Freedom Center
- » Future Clara Luper Civil Rights Center
- » Future Harmony Apartments Project
- » Northeast Renaissance TIF
- » East End District
- » Number of businesses within MLK
- » Unique design and layout out of the neighborhood

Neighborhood Concerns

- » **High Concern**
 - Housing Conditions
 - Vacant Lots
 - Vacant Homes
 - Infrastructure such as sidewalks and lighting
 - Handicap access and walkability
 - Parks, recreation, and open/green space
 - Code enforcement/property maintenance
 - Hazardous Trees
 - Historic preservation, arts, and culture
 - Crime and Safety
 - Traffic
- » **Other Concerns**
 - Infrastructure such as roads and drainage
 - Access to healthy foods
 - Land use and zoning
 - Community facilities and services
 - Educational facilities
 - Trees – need more trees planted
 - Public transit
 - Community partnerships
 - Commercial or business development
 - Housing discrimination
 - Landlord-tenant disputes
 - Bicycle facilities

Neighborhood Needs

Create a safer and more walkable neighborhood.

- » Construct new and improve existing sidewalks, including traffic calming measures on Prospect Ave
- » Install stops signs, speed limit signs, and crosswalks especially where children walk and play, particularly near Thelma Parks ES.
- » Request Children Playing signs.

Improve misperception of crime in the area.

- » Increase presence of law enforcement through support and collaboration with City Police.
- » Create parking lot for patrol cars to increase the police presence in the neighborhood.
- » Create Neighborhood Watch to promote safety.

Make improvements to Phillips Park.

- » Improve the park with amenities such as; walking trails, exercise equipment, pavilion with electrical outlets, splash pad, benches, and more.
- » Erect a statue in Phillips Park of MLK Jr.

Formulate strategies to address status as food desert.

- » Attract a grocery store.

Improve the perception of the neighborhood.

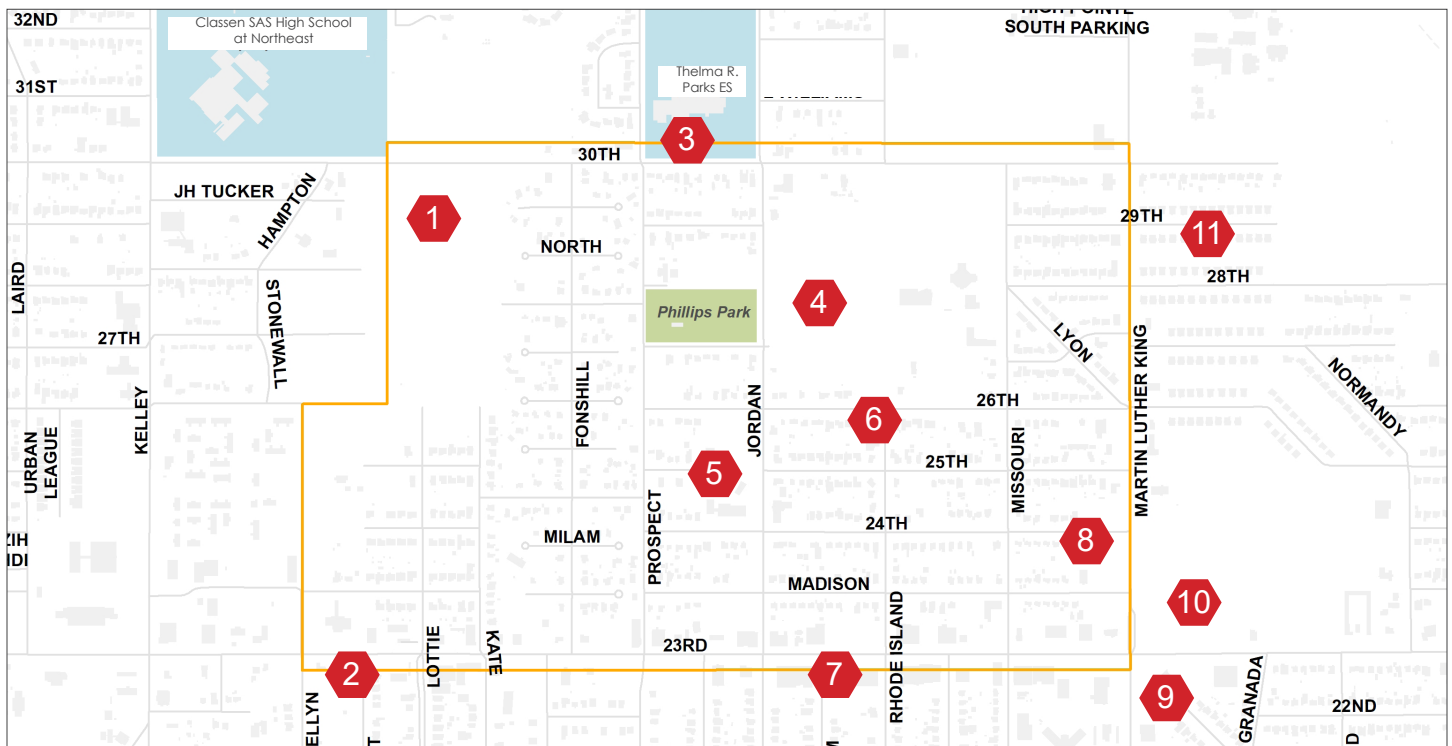
- » Clean-up on abandoned properties and lots; including tree maintenance.
- » Repair and maintain chain link fences to improve safety of animals, people, and property.
- » Increase zoning and code enforcement.
- » Increase community maintenance and beautification including streetlights and lamp posts.
- » Increase resources to clean-up discarded items
- » Request No Dumping Signs.

Improve Elderly ability to Age In Place.

- » Increase resources for elderly residents and those with limited mobility.
- » Increase resources for aging comfortably in place.
- » Increase resources to assist elderly with maintaining their property and tree maintenance.

Recent & Planned Investments near MLK

1. New Housing Development
New construction of 75 single family, rental homes
Location: South side of NE 30th between N Fonshill and N Hampton
Budget: Unknown
Status: Underway
Funding source: Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and Private
2. NE 23rd Streetscape Enhancements
Location: NE 23rd St. from Kelley to Miramar/Katy Trail
Budget: \$5 million
Status: Anticipated Start TBD
Funding Source: Sales Tax Project
3. SNI Afterschool Program Thelma Parks ES
Operational since 2018. Administered by Urban League of Greater OKC.
4. Residential Resurfacing
Location: Area bound by Kelley Ave, MLK, NE 23rd St, and NE 36th St
Budget: \$8.6 million
Status: Completed
Funding Source: 2017 Bond Issue
5. The Harmony - Marcus Garvey Apts for Seniors
The original school building will offer 20 new apartment units, and three new buildings will offer another 20 units.
Budget: \$10.9 million
Status: Under Construction
Funding Source: Several public sources
6. Sidewalks
Location: Neighborhoods adjacent to N MLK Blvd and NE 23rd St
Budget: \$3.1 million
Status: Completed
Funding Source: Sales Tax Project
7. EastPoint Redevelopment Project
Includes a grocery store, restaurants, coffee shop, health clinic, and more.
Budget: \$8.7 million
Status: Completed
Funding Source: Private Investment
8. Clara Luper Civil Rights Center
Event center, museum exhibits, cultural activities, education programs, etc.
Location: Near MLK Blvd and NE 25th St
Budget: \$12.8 million
Status: Under Construction
9. Ralph Ellison Library Improvements
Location: SE Corner of NE 23rd & MLK
Budget: \$3 million
Status: Completed
Funding Source: 2017 Bond Issue
10. NE Corner of NE 23rd and MLK
Recently acquired by OCURA for future redevelopment.
Location: NE Corner of NE 23rd & MLK
Status: Project to be determined
Funding source: TBD
11. The Creston Park Development
Approx 554 units of mixed- income, mixed tenure rental housing for both families and seniors, including 124 assisted living/memory care units, commercial spaces along MLK, a community center, activity fields and pocket parks.
Location: Along MLK between NE 26th and NE 29th
Budget: \$145.5 million
Status: Approx 6 years for all 3 phases. Construction beginning in early 2024.
Funding source: Several public sources



Housing in MLK

GOAL #1: Eliminate barriers and improve access to affordable, safe, energy efficient and fair housing for both owners and renters in the neighborhood.

One of the greatest attributes of the MLK neighborhood is the variation of housing styles and sizes, both single and multi-family. Most are attractive and affordable, however, as the neighborhood association has stated, a significant number of issues exist, such as housing conditions, vacant lots, and the number of boarded homes. These housing-related issues will be a SNI priority for the next five years and will require a great amount of participation and assistance from caring neighbors, property owners, landlords, and stakeholders.

To address the conditions of existing homes, for those who wish to age-in-place, need exterior maintenance, handicap accessibility, and for those who wish to make their homes more energy-efficient, the City and several SNI partners will offer services, education, and housing rehabilitation programs to assist.

MLK currently has 35 boarded-up homes and 195 vacant residential lots presenting challenges to the urban fabric. However, these, along with more than 20 acres of undeveloped land, present unique housing opportunities. Increasing the number of homes and people living in the neighborhood will increase values, decrease crime, support nearby businesses, increase income diversity, and build personal wealth and long-term stability for the residents. The SNI team is committed to ensuring there is a great amount of thoughtful community discussion and transparent collaboration between the neighborhood association and housing partners who propose projects in the MLK neighborhood.



Vacant lot with potential for new home



Boarded home with potential for renovation

Housing Needs Expressed by Neighbors

1. Owner-occupied rehab housing rehabilitation, including emergencies, handicap accessibility, weatherization, and exterior maintenance.
2. Safe rental properties
3. Increase the number of affordable and market-rate, single-family homes, senior housing, and special needs units
4. Reduce number of boarded-up, vacant homes
5. Down-payment assistance and interest-rate buydowns
6. Property maintenance assistance for exterior (SNI Safe and Tidy)
7. Exterior paint and beautification assistance or events
8. Legal assistance to investigate and clear titles and deeds

Additional Housing Needs Expressed by Community Stakeholders

1. Lead-based paint contractor training funds/program
2. Lead-based paint testing and remediation/abatement funds
3. Quicker application to implementation process for housing rehab applicants
4. More construction contractors
5. Extend infrastructure such as sidewalk, sewer and water as needed to vacant lots
6. Low-interest, revolving loans for landlords to improve homes to established energy-efficiency and safety standards
7. Small-scale developer/investor access to capital from banks and the City
8. Various loan types and incentives for new construction and rehabilitation/resell for owners and investors
9. Environmental review and cleanup of vacant lots
10. More local, private developers and investors

11. More non-profit developers, including a NEOKC-based Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO)
12. Investigate Residential Building Code and Zoning Ordinance for potential barriers to duplex and four-plex development and construction.

Implementation Strategies

1. Work with all housing partners, both public and non-profit, to ensure program policies and applications are low-barrier, accessible, and bilingual.
2. Ensure that services and programs are in place to allow residents to age-in-place, and maintain current ownership, neighborhood culture, and character by retaining the current stock.
3. Work with non-profits and lending institution to offer down-payment assistance to increase homeownership.
4. Work with owners to address exterior property maintenance issues through SNI Safe and Tidy.
5. Connect neighbors with agencies that provide legal assistance to clean up titles and deeds.
6. Connect neighbors with City of OKC Housing Rehab programs.
7. Provide Fair Housing and landlord-tenant education.
8. Work with non-profit partners and local private partners to rehab and build mixed-income, single-family, multi-family, and special needs housing. With more than 200 vacant lots, there is ample opportunity and need for rebuilding the residential fabric of the neighborhood.
9. Work with local stakeholders and partners to rehabilitate the 35 boarded up homes so that they are habitable.

Existing Housing Types in Martin Luther King



Existing - Single Family Housing



Existing - Single Family Housing



Existing - Duplex Housing

New Construction and Renovated Housing Type Examples



New Construction - Single Family



New Construction - Single Family



Renovated - Duplex Housing

Business + Economic Development in MLK

GOAL #2: Increase economic development opportunities for new and existing businesses within and adjacent to the MLK neighborhood.

The MLK neighborhood has two (re)emerging commercial corridors, Northeast 23rd Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard. There are several public projects underway such as the Clara Luper Civil Rights Center and streetscape infrastructure improvements that will undoubtedly enhance the area and celebrate its history, culture and potential.

The recent investments in the Market at Eastpoint and Centennial Health, as well as the nationally recognized and award-winning EastPoint development, with several Black-owned businesses and gathering places. The formation of the East End organization and its membership into the City's Commercial District Revitalization Program (CDRP) is another step towards a healthy and vibrant business environment along NE 23rd Street.



Source: The Oklahoman

Business + Economic Development Needs

1. A variety of commercial spaces such as pharmacy, hardware, coffee shops, bookstores, salons, barber shops, laundry, breweries, bars, entertainment venues, entrepreneur spaces, co-working space, maker's spaces, warehouse, storage facilities, office space, healthy restaurants, and outdoor dining
2. Pop-up and temporary spaces for weekly farmer's market
3. Education for potential and existing business and commercial property owners – basics of business, financing options, city codes, permitting, licensing, and zoning
4. Loans and grants to maintain and renovate aging commercial buildings and facades such as outdoor sign replacements, murals, and storefront cleanup for commercial buildings
5. Enforcement of existing city code for property maintenance and improperly zoned properties
6. Safety & Security: Increased law enforcement through presence, support, and collaboration with OCPD
7. Infrastructure Improvements: Sidewalks, beautification, lighting, traffic management, reduction of driveways

Implementation Strategies

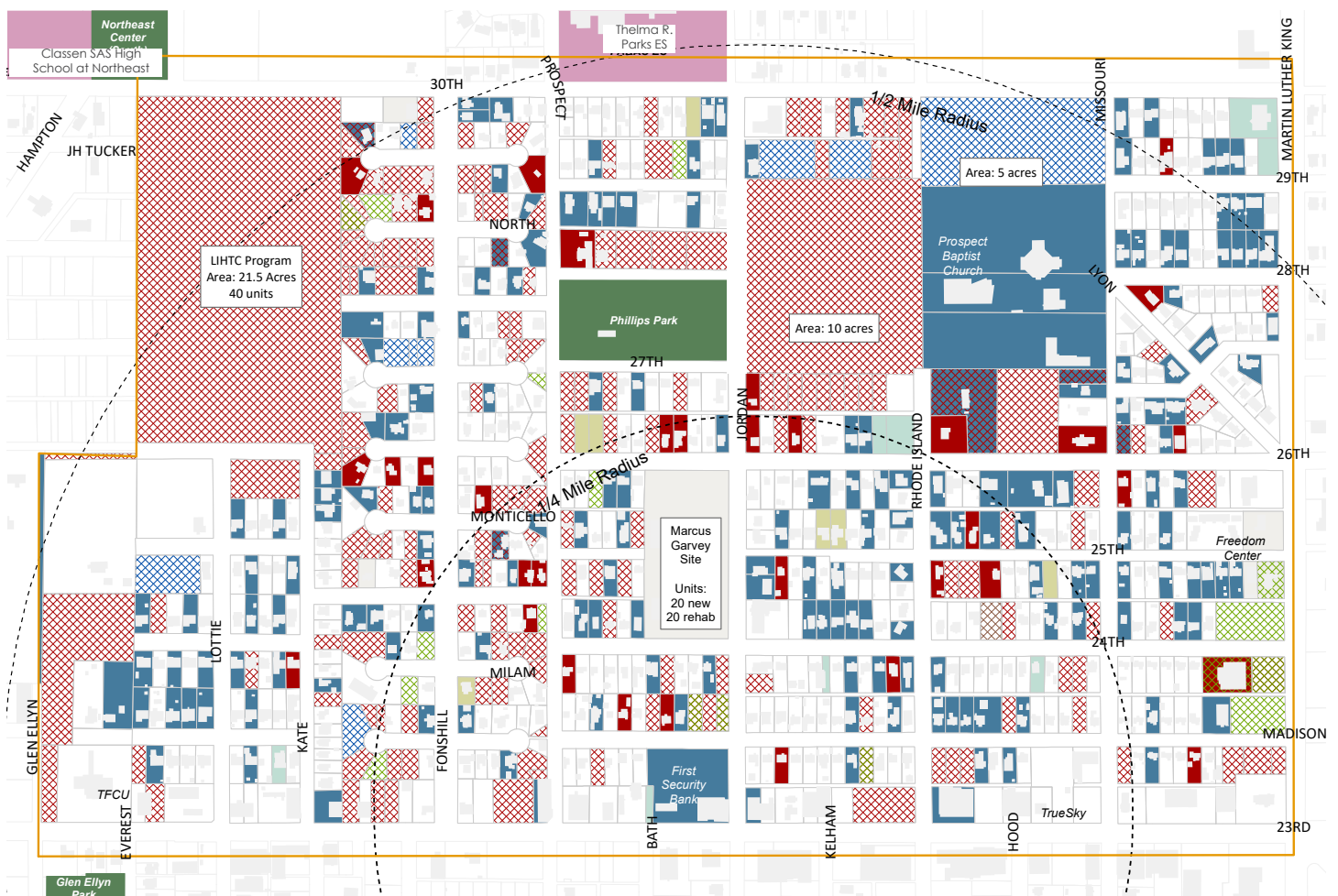
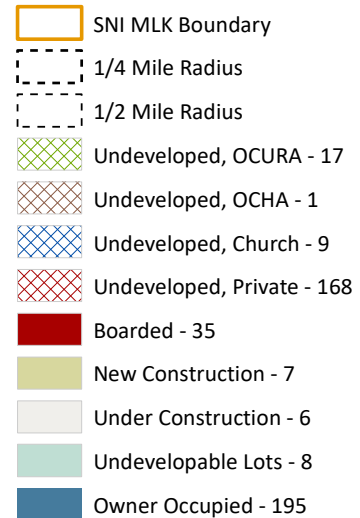
1. Inform entrepreneurs and businesses about existing economic development assistance and small business programs through organizations such as the Community Action Agency, Progress OKC, NEOKC Renaissance, The Alliance for Economic Development, and others.
2. Partner and build relationships with area businesses and schools for events, career mentoring and business development.
3. Work with Code Enforcement to create a program to sensitively mitigate property maintenance violations and abandoned commercial properties.
4. Work with the Public Works and other city departments to coordinate capital improvements and catalyst redevelopment projects, such as a plaza space and art.
5. Work with the East End Commercial District to identify priorities and opportunities, then brand and market to attract more revenue, housing, businesses, and people.
6. Identify vacant properties and work with local partners and lenders to form public private partnerships to implement infill development and beautification projects.
7. Work with the Alliance for Economic Development to implement a facade improvement programs in SNI areas.

MLK Opportunities Map

While the SNI is limited in our capacity and funding for business interests, one area that the SNI intends to help indirectly is by providing for housing opportunities to increase the number of potential customers for businesses. For example, small businesses such as coffee shops, florists, and corner stores, need about 1,000 households within a half mile walking distance to thrive. With more than 200 undeveloped lots and more than 10 acres of vacant land, there is ample opportunity for adding more households. The Housing Implementation Strategies are on page 6.

As requested by several neighborhood and commercial stakeholders, SNI will also help with access to the commercial corridors by improving infrastructure such as sidewalks, handicap accessibility, trees for shade, and bicycle infrastructure. These efforts are described in the Infrastructure section of this document. Collaboration and communication between the neighborhood residents and the business community will be mutually beneficial and key to the area's revitalizations efforts.

Map Legend



Infrastructure in MLK

GOAL #3: Ensure public spaces and infrastructure provide safe and multi-modal access to healthy foods, jobs, healthcare, recreation, education and special “places”.

Infrastructure is sometimes described as the foundation of a city, as it is what makes our neighborhoods habitable, safe, and healthy. The ground, streets, sidewalks, waterlines, sewer lines, drainage, storm water, even trees are considered infrastructure. It is obvious that the MLK Neighborhood Association has advocated well for itself over the years, as it has received and continues to receive a significant amount of infrastructure improvements by the City.

As the neighborhood has noted, however, there is more to do, particularly in Phillips Park and along its business corridors. More sidewalks, ADA ramps, lighting, and trees are needed throughout as well, particularly to provide safe bicycle and pedestrian access to schools and businesses. Through observation, perhaps one of top needs is the removal or trimming of large, hazardous trees that are endangering residents and homes. Another need is to ensure infrastructure exists or can be extended to aid in the construction of homes on vacant lots.



Neighbors Night Out at Phillips Park



Sidewalks completed in 2022

Infrastructure Needs

- **Increased safety:** Improved streets and sidewalks can make it safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers to navigate the area. This is especially important for children walking or biking to school.
- **Improved accessibility:** Well-maintained streets and sidewalks can make it easier for people with mobility challenges to get around.
- **Enhanced appearance:** Upgraded streetscapes can improve the overall appearance of the neighborhood, making it a more attractive place to live, work, and visit.
- **Economic benefits:** Improved infrastructure can attract new businesses and residents to the area, boosting local economy.

Implementation Strategies

1. Create a safer and more walkable neighborhood
2. Construct new and improve existing sidewalks along key corridors
3. Install stops signs, speed limit signs, and crosswalks, particularly where children walk and play with particular focus near Thelma Parks Elementary School
4. Request “Children Playing” signs
5. Collaborate with MAPS to make improvements to Phillips Park; suggestions received include walking trails, exercise equipment, splash pad, interactive playground, benches, picnic area with electrical outlets, public art, basketball court repair with mural, and a parking area
6. Include Civil Rights Leader public art improvements to Phillips Park; one suggestion is a statue of MLK Jr
7. Make neighborhood improvements such as more trees, street sign toppers, and neighborhood entrance sign
8. Utilize OGE to repair existing lighting, adding locations as needed

Wellness + Human Services in MLK

GOAL #4: Work with local partners to provide services that result in positive outcomes for individuals and families, particularly related to education, safety, employment, health, mobility, and personal enrichment.

The SNI operates from a holistic approach towards revitalization. This includes fostering the support of the broader community by connecting neighbors to resources, improving physical and social connectedness, creating a “sense of place”, and providing a space where the neighborhood can be heard. The MLK Neighborhood understands this holistic approach. In their application they wrote, “Perhaps most importantly, the people who live and work in this community have proven that they are here to stay. They have banded together in support of their homes, businesses, and community projects in the past, and are willing to continue doing so for years to come. This neighborhood is special because the residents have formed a community. They really care about the future of their neighborhood.”

Wellness + Human Service Needs

1. Housing Education Workshops
2. Crime and Safety Workshops
3. Resources for elderly residents and those with limited mobility
4. Resources for aging comfortably in place
5. Resources to assist elderly with maintaining their property and tree maintenance
6. Childcare centers and afterschool programs– art, physical activity, sports, and tutoring in math, reading and computer literacy
7. Increased OKC Police, Code Enforcement and Animal Welfare presence and participation
8. Food and homeless services – more access, proximity, transportation

Neighborhood Alliance of Central Oklahoma (NACOK)

NACOK is a partner agency of the SNI program. Their mission is to create safe, healthy, and attractive neighborhoods for all. Each SNI neighborhood has a NACOK representative that can assist with capacity building within the neighborhood organization, connect leaders with resources, and answer questions about local government processes.



Implementation Strategies

1. Partner with Neighborhood Alliance to provide education and capacity training to the neighborhood
2. Connect teens and adults for educational opportunities and career training
3. Share information about social service agencies, police, schools, health professionals, and faith-based organizations
4. Connect residents and neighborhoods with arts and enrichment programs
5. Partner with OKCPS and non-profits to ensure that children have access to high-quality, low barrier afterschool and summer programs, tutoring and mentorship opportunities
6. Partner with Code Enforcement, Animal Welfare and OCPD to address immediate issues, provide crime prevention education and build a stronger relationship with neighborhood residents
7. Connect with local agencies, non-profits and/or churches to ensure neighbors have access to healthy foods

Programs at A Glance

Housing Programs	Agency	Yr 1	Yr 2-3	Yr 4-5
Whole Home Housing Repair Program	City of OKC Housing Rehab Office		X	X
Exterior Home Repair Program (HEMP)	City of OKC Housing Rehab Office	X	X	X
Emergency Repairs and Accessibility Only	Community Action Agency of OKC (CAA)	X	X	X
Homebuyer Assistance (DPA & CC)	CAA and NHS	X	X	X
Homebuyer Education	CAA and NHS	X	X	X
Landlord & Tenant Education	Metro Fair Housing (MFHC)	X	X	X
Fair Housing Outreach & Education	MFHC and Legal Aid	X	X	X
Title and Deed Legal Assistance	Legal Aid	X	X	X
Code Compliance & Clean-up "Safe & Tidy"	SNI	X	X	X
Construction of Affordable Housing	Progress OKC + Others		X	X
Rehabilitation of Renter-Occupied Housing	To Be Determined			
Business + Econ Development Programs	Agency	Yr 1	Yr 2-3	Yr 4-5
Business Facade Improvements	The Alliance for Economic Development	X		
Business Corridor Planning	City of OKC CDRP	X	X	X
Business Corridor Capital Improvements	City of OKC + City of OKC CDRP	X	X	X
Small Business Training	CAA + NEOKCR + Progress OKC	X	X	X
Entrepreneurial Outreach	CDRP + Public Works + NEOKCR + Progress OKC	X	X	X
Infrastructure Programs	Agency	Yr 1	Yr 2-3	Yr 4-5
Graffiti Removal	CAA	X	X	X
Sidewalks, Ramps, and Signs	City of OKC + SNI	X	X	X
Street Lighting	OG&E		X	X
Public Art and Beautification	City of OKC + SNI + OKCArts		X	X
Bicycle Facilities and/or Education	City of OKC + SNI		X	X
Parks, Green Spaces, Rec Improvements	City of OKC + SNI		X	X
NeighborWoods Hazardous Tree Removal	SNI	X	X	X
NeighborWoods Tree Plantings	SNI	X	X	X
Health + Wellness Programs	Agency	Yr 1	Yr 2-3	Yr 4-5
Neighborhood-led Initiatives + Outreach	NACOK	X	X	X
Crime Prevention Education	OCPD & NACOK	X	X	X
Elementary Summer & After-School Programs	Various Agencies	X	X	X
Public Transportation Assistance (Share-A-Fare)	EMBARK Special Services	X	X	X
Short Term Rent, Mortgage, & Utility Assistance	CAA	X	X	X
Local Arts and Enrichment Initiatives	OKCArts, et al	X	X	X

Contributors

MLK Leadership Team

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Selection Committee Members

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Kassy Malone, OKC Housing Authority
Lauren Sullivan, Rebuilding Together
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Vanessa Morrison, OU Institute for Quality Communities

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