

NORTH CENTRAL PLAN

Celebrating the Past &
Organizing for a Vibrant Future!

Executive Summary
FINAL DRAFT
May 10, 2021

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Community Vision Statement

By 2040, the North Central Community will be...

A whole, healthy, and vibrant community comprised of distinctive neighborhoods, housing, and cultural, religious and educational amenities, North Central will be a well-maintained, safe, and inclusive home for all residents, businesses, and institutions.

Centrally-located and well-connected to all areas of the city and region, residents of North Central will have physical and organizational access to jobs, education, health care facilities, businesses, and other key amenities to ensure an excellent quality of life.

Led by the people who call North Central home, the community will provide equal support and assist residents and stakeholders to thrive and chart their own future—this generation and the next.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The North Central community is a community of contrast. Contrast between two neighborhoods—Vandeventer and Covenant Blu Grand Center—one a residential neighborhood and the other home to the region’s most significant arts venues. Contrast between a historic epicenter of Black culture and economic and the racist practices of redlining. Contrast between strong and vibrant institutional neighbors and widespread vacancy and decay. Contrast between negative regional perceptions and the pride of neighbors who call North Central home. Contrast between past struggles and the promise of a bright future.

Initiated and led by the residents of the North Central community, the North Central Vision Action Plan articulates the community’s core values and vision for the future of North Central. This vision will be achieved through a specific and actionable roadmap that not only improves the physical conditions and beauty of the neighborhoods, but empowers all residents with equitable opportunities to thrive and have an excellent quality of life.

Most importantly, the North Central community recognizes that they are their own best advocates and must lead the improvement of the place they call home. This North Central Plan is a call to action for all members of the North Central community to organize for success, demand accountability, and lead the creation of the bright and vital future that residents deserve.

Project Objectives

The North Central Vision Action Plan is visionary but achievable plan to revitalize the neighborhoods, assets, and amenities of the North Central community. In order to make this vision a reality, the North Central planning process and this plan are built upon the following guiding principles:

- » **Equity at the Center**
- » **Asset-based Revitalization**
- » **Holistic Sustainability**

More specifically, North Central Vision Action plan seeks to create:

1. A community with stronger stakeholder relationships between residents, businesses, community organizations, faith-based organizations and government (elected and appointed officials, public health, public safety and public works departments schools, etc.);
2. A clear vision for redevelopment which addresses the need for inclusive housing and economic development policies;
3. A roadmap and timetable for the implementation of both short and long-term projects and policies, that will improve the lives of residents and businesses in the North Central Plan footprint;
4. The City of St. Louis’ adoption of a revised North Central Plan based on the Community’s Vision Action Plan; and
5. Informed and engaged neighborhoods prepared to influence policy changes, access local, state, and federal funding and attract private investment.

EQUITY AT THE CENTER

The North Central Plan is rooted in the value that all people deserve dignity, respect, and an equal opportunity to have an excellent quality of life. As with many communities of color, North Central has been harmed by policies and attitudes that have removed this opportunity for residents. The North Central Plan aims to restore these lost opportunities and empower the community to chart our own future and to thrive.

ASSET-BASED REVITALIZATION

Successful implementation must build upon existing strengths. Despite its historical and current struggles, North Central is a community with numerous assets—not least of which are the people who proudly call the North Central neighborhoods home. By leveraging these existing assets and resources, the community is positioned to build from strength and achieve a vibrant and vital future that is of and for the community.

HOLISTICALLY SUSTAINABLE

Triple-bottom-line sustainability, focusing on the health and achievement of residents, the quality of the physical environment, and the economic empowerment of all people to build wealth and social capital—people, place, and prosperity—is the benchmark by which the North Central Plan is conceived. Woven throughout the Plan, every initiative presented is designed to achieve holistic, authentic, and long-term sustainability.

Core Values...

As the members of the North Central Community, we believe that:

- » **Everyone has the opportunity to thrive *in place* and *in a multi-generational community*.**
- » **Everyone is respected and provided equal consideration.**
- » ***We, the community*, make decisions with transparency and provide forums and venues for all residents and stakeholders to participate.**
- » ***We, the community*, share responsibility for improving the North Central neighborhoods and implementing the Plan.**
- » ***We, the community*, are stewards of our environment for future generations.**

Genesis of the North Central Plan

The genesis of this North Central Vision Action Plan is found in the original North Central Plan. Completed in August 2000, the original plan presented a visionary and ambitious future for the neighborhoods that is covered. As described in the introduction to the plan:

“One purpose of this North Central Plan is to describe the tangible and intangible elements which make the North Central neighborhoods places which their residents cherish. A second but equally important purpose is to establish a vision for improving other aspects of the area to make it a better place to live and work and to make possible a better future for its citizens.”

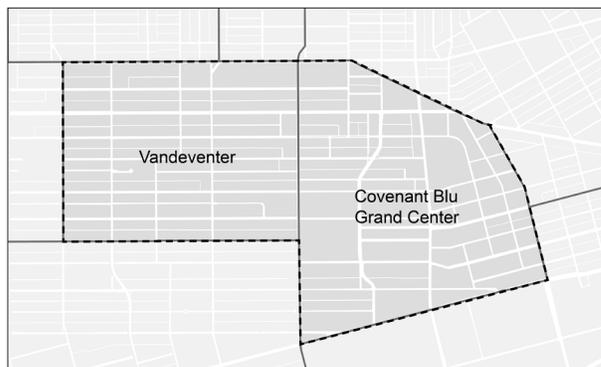
Although the original North Central Plan set forth many creative recommendations for achieving these objectives, the Plan did not articulate a actionable road map for implementation. Nor did it focus sufficiently on the capacity and organization of the community, necessary components for long-term, sustained, and community-based implementation. As a result, much of the plan was never able to be effectively completed. Furthermore, the plan was never adopted by the City of St. Louis, limiting its impact on City investment and the ability to guide private development.

In 2019, a consortium of community residents approached the Deaconess Foundation to discuss a partnership to update the plan. This initial outreach, fitting within the Deaconess Center for Child Well-Being’s mission and charter, forged a partnership between North Central neighbors, the Deaconess Foundation, and the United Church of Christ (UCC) Church Building & Loan Fund (funding partners). The Deaconess Foundation facilitated formation of a community Steering Committee and, over 12 months of engagement with this Committee, initiated the community-based planning process for this North Central Vision Action Plan.

PLANNING AREA BOUNDARIES



NORTH CENTRAL PLAN 2000
 Planning Boundaries were Evans Avenue to Page Boulevard (North); Washington Boulevard to Lindell Boulevard (South); Grand Boulevard to N. Theresa Avenue (East); N. Taylor Avenue (West).



NORTH CENTRAL PLAN 2020
 The new planning boundaries are Dr. MLK Drive (North); Delmar Boulevard to Vandeventer Avenue to Lindell Boulevard / Olive Street (South); N. Compton Avenue (East); and N. Newstead Avenue (West). These boundaries align with the Vandeventer and Covenant Blu Grand Center neighborhood boundaries.

Creating the Plan

The North Central Vision Action Plan is sponsored by the Deaconess Foundation and the UCC Church Building & Loan Fund with financial support provided by the Deaconess Foundation. This plan is an update to the original North Central Plan, completed in 2000, and has been developed to fulfill all City of St. Louis requirements for plan adoption.

The asset-based planning process put equity at the center, implementing a SOAR analysis methodology to define the Core Values of the community. The plan is built upon the results of the community SOAR analysis; community well-being survey; and alignment with City of St. Louis plans, policies and initiatives, as well as the feedback and input collected by the community throughout the planning process. At the start of the project two initial tasks were completed as a basis for understanding the community today, resident and stakeholder interviews as well as a detailed street

by street, on-site walking survey of the neighborhoods as a snapshot of existing conditions today. A summary of both the SOAR analysis and the existing conditions summary can be found in the Yesterday & Today Section of this report.

The community-led planning process was guided by the North Central Steering Committee, made up of residents and stakeholders, including appointed institutional representatives, from within the Vandeventer and Covenant Blu-Grand Center Neighborhoods. A co-chair representative from each neighborhood was appointed to lead the committee. The role of members was to provide input and guidance to the planning process, using their skills, knowledge and experience as members of the neighborhoods to assist in understanding their neighborhood and best approaches to reaching and engaging varied constituents, as well as review and approve the final Plan for adoption by the City of St. Louis.

Planning Process Timeline

September	October	November	December
Phase 1 Project Commencement + Project Area Analysis		Phase 2 Community Vision + Core Values	Phase 3 Community+Neighborhood Framework Plan Options
Community-Kick Off 09/19 Steering Committee Meeting #1 09/30	Community-Wide Open House 10/06 Steering Committee Meeting #2 10/28	Town Hall #2 11/2	Steering Committee Meeting #3 12/09



Community-Wide Townhall Meeting #1; October 7, 2020.

January

February

March

April/May

Phase 3

Community+Neighborhood
Framework Plan Options

Phase 4

Draft Vision Action
Plan

Phase 5

Final Vision Action Plan + Client Approval

Steering Committee Meeting #4
01/27

Town Hall #3
02/2

Steering Committee Meeting #5
02/17

Town Hall #4
03/23

Plan Celebration
05/15

Revitalization Principle 1:

Place – **Build a whole, healthy, and vibrant community.**



Revitalization Principle 2:

People – **Empower residents to achieve an excellent quality of life.**



Revitalization Principle 3:

Organization – **Organize for successful, equitable, and long-term implementation.**



- Goal 1: **Respect, celebrate, and build upon the diverse history of North Central.**
- Goal 2: **Create whole, healthy, and vibrant neighborhoods.**
- Goal 3: **Rehab existing homes and provide a diversity of new infill homes.**
- Goal 4: **Promote and support the creation and retention of viable community businesses and creative-arts industries, and promote entrepreneurship.**

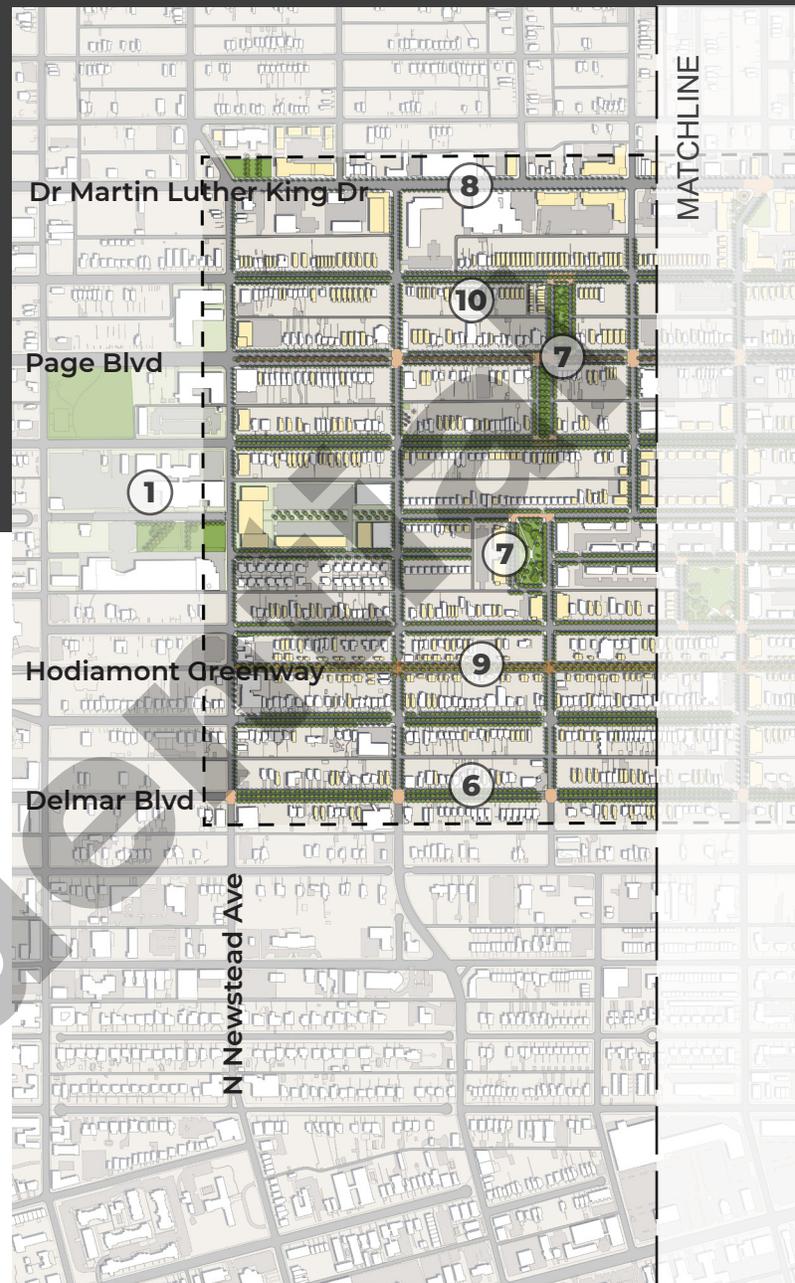
- Goal 5: **Support and assist North Central residents to remain in place and build wealth and social capital.**
- Goal 6: **Connect and engage residents of all ages to sustainable employment and community services.**
- Goal 7: **Attract and provide access to high-quality recreational, educational, health, and cultural amenities and programs.**
- Goal 8: **Improve and enhance public infrastructure and public services.**
- Goal 9: **Improve neighborhood safety for all residents and visitors.**

- Goal 10: **Establish clear communication and accountability with the City of St. Louis.**
- Goal 11: **Create a participatory decision-making process for residents to guide the future of the community.**
- Goal 12: **Ensure a just, equitable, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future for the North Central community.**

North Central Community Urban Design Plan

The revitalization of the North Central neighborhoods as a whole, healthy, and vibrant community is guided by the North Central Community Urban Design Plan. The Urban Design Plan synthesizes the five Goals for Place, and their respective strategies, with geographic and place specific strengths, opportunities, and assets within North Central.

The North Central Community Urban Design Plan consists of ten (10) individual focus areas, which address the entirety of the North Central Planning area. The focus areas are orchestrated by the North Central Urban Design Framework Plan, which sets out physical development and revitalization priorities—articulated by the North Central community and supportive of the Community Vision.



Focus Areas:

1. Partner with & leverage institutional anchors.
2. Grow the Grand Center Arts District.
3. Create a wellness district around Cochrane VA Medical Center.
4. Infill & strengthen community shopping centers.



- 5. Establish a neighborhood center around enhanced community amenities.
- 6. Revitalize Delmar as a residential boulevard and linear park.
- 7. Build small residential parks as a framework for new infill housing.
- 8. Develop Dr. MLK Drive and connect to north to The Ville.
- 9. Infill new housing along the Hodiament Greenway linear park.
- 10. Rehab and infill neighborhood housing with a variety of house types on safe, beautiful streets.



Early Action Items

Identification and successful completion of several early action items will be key to setting the stage for implementation. The reason for this is three-fold: first, it will establish essential community frameworks and organization to build capacity for continued, ongoing implementation efforts. Second, it will help attract investment to the North Central community from regional and community development partners that is critical to achieving this Plan. Lastly, it will demonstrate to the residents of the North Central community that they can, in fact, become the agents of the change they seek.

In order to successfully begin implementation of the North Central Vision Action Plan, the following early action items should be completed by community members and our partners:

1. **Establish a new North Central Implementation Steering Committee** to provide a forum for continued community engagement.
2. **Build community capacity** by establishing a community-based development organization (CBDO) and other community-based organizations to guide and facilitate implementation.

3. **Achieve adoption of the Plan by the City of St. Louis** as a Topical Plan.
4. **Establish an ongoing outcome reporting and management system** to track progress.
5. **Establish a community-based wireless mesh broadband network** in the North Central neighborhoods to provide free or very-low-cost internet access and smart community infrastructure.

Successful completion of these early action items will achieve important milestones in the implementation of the North Central Plan. Furthermore, these actions will address key implementation priorities identified by the North Central Steering Committee during the planning process.

These early action items are presented in detail in Chapter 4 *Implementation Plan*. All early action items should be completed no more than 24 months after approval of the Plan by the North Central Steering Committee, and some should be completed within 12 months.

Implementation Priorities

SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES (1 to 3 years)

1. Establish a Residents' Council to engage with and serve as a forum for community residents; and to serve as a liaison between residents and the City of St. Louis.
2. Establish a certified Community-Based Development Organization (CBDO; also known as a CDC) to lead implementation of the Plan; secure CDBG grant funding; and access other sources of funding, including dues, donations, grants, and assessments.
3. Establish a community-based, volunteer organization to regularly clean up alleys and vacant lots; mow vacant lots; and other community beautification activities.
4. Provide free or very low-cost community-wide internet access in North Central through neighborhood Wi-Fi hotspots.
5. Create a Community Safety Committee to improve public safety in North Central.
6. Establish a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO)—that is accountable to the community—and ongoing funding source to purchase land-bank vacant lots and derelict buildings.
7. Building upon the City's Emergency Home Repair grant program, secure and deploy resources to North Central residents for emergency home repairs and small home improvement projects (under \$5,000); resources can be deployed as grants for emergency repairs and a low-interest or no-interest loans for qualifying low- to medium-income households.

MEDIUM-TERM PRIORITIES (4 to 10 years)

8. Facilitate rehab of existing buildings by connecting qualified local developers with rehab opportunities
9. Facilitate development of new infill housing by acquiring vacant property and issuing Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for developers.
10. Work with neighboring institutions (like Ranken Tech) and local incubators (like TRex and Launch-code) to build job skills and entrepreneurship capacity among North Central residents.
11. Develop a community history project to discover and preserve the cultural history—especially African-American history—of Delmar Boulevard; North Central neighborhoods and churches; Grand Center; and other assets and utilize this history in neighborhood revitalization efforts.

LONG-TERM PRIORITIES (More than 10 years)

12. Improve the greening and walkability of North Central through the Brickline Greenway and Hodiamont Greenways linear parks, in partnership with Great Rivers Greenway.
13. Provide a diversity of housing types in North Central, including apartments for young adults and couples; homes for families; and accessible, easy-to-maintain houses for seniors aging in place.
14. Support the development of high-quality community retail and services businesses within the local commercial nodes of MLK Plaza and Lindell Marketplace.
15. Create a health and wellness district around Cochrane VA Medical Center and other existing health-care facilities.
16. Support creation of a commercially-viable and vibrant mixed-use corridors along Dr. MLK Jr. Drive.

Conclusion

Redevelopment interest is growing in North Central and the rest of the North Central Corridor. The North Central community is well positioned to capitalize on city-wide, regional and national plans, policies, and initiatives; area stakeholders and partners; and local development context in order to set the community up for success. The North Central Vision Action Plan responds to these opportunities by building community accountability and community-led growth within the areas of racial equality, stakeholder partnerships, and local market context.

Developed through an intensive, seven (7) month community-based planning process, the North Central Vision Action Plan is of and for the North Central community. The Plan responds to the community's needs, wants, desires, and vision for their future. The North Central Plan is built around the guiding principles of Equity at the Center, Asset-based Revitalization, and Holistic Sustainability. The Plan also works to both further City-wide values for equitable and sustainable economic development and revitalization, and to advance the achievement of these values with the North Central community.

Throughout the following pages, a detailed vision and actionable roadmap is set forth for the future of the North Central community.

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