Downtown Assessment Strategies

Willmar, Minnesota

RETHOS™
PLACES REIMAGINED

Who we are:

We believe that communities flourish when places are reimagined, histories and cultures are celebrated, and small businesses are supported.

Overview

- Downtown Assessments use broad-based community engagement to identify your town's competitive edge, defining assets, and opportunities to build short and long term vitality

- Rethos' Downtown Assessment method aims to define legacy of a historic downtown, the specific qualities that define it in the present, and a vision for growth that will carry it towards a thriving future.

- We encourage public participation and civic engagement in your downtown's future, and provide a blueprint for investment and deeper connections from residents, businesses, visitors, and more.

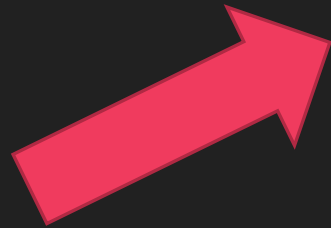# Community Engagement & Cultural Asset Mapping: Background

○ Initiative beginning in 2016 in Minneapolis

○ Designed to be a new, bottom-up alternative to traditional historic preservation

○ Focus on community engagement: meeting people who are typically unengaged where they are

○ Highlighting cultural assets: the people, places, stories, local businesses, traditions, and characteristics which define a place

○ Help assist Main Street communities with defining transformation strategies that help achieve tangible and measurable goals

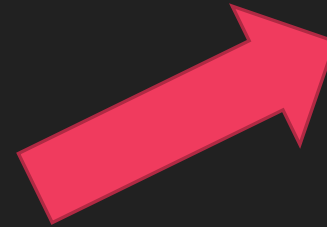# Strengths of a Community Engagement-Centered Approach

- Gives community members a stake in the future. Creates buy-in, personal investment, and collective ownership

- Comprehensive, rather than focused on one initiative

- Tangibly documents the community's ideas, values, and opinions by employing non-traditional engagement methods

- Develops more effective solutions, in-tune with what the community sees as priorities

- Reaches out to population groups that are often overlooked or unable to attend typical public input sessions

- Help to support other plans and studies that focus on a specific area or place

Community Engagement → **Identification of Cultural Assets** → **Strategies to utilize your competitive edge**

Process vs. Outcomes

Collecting stories allows you to celebrate the different voices in your community.

Why this approach?

Community engagement model:

- **Different results come from:**

  - Meeting people at meetings vs. meeting people *where they are*

  - Asking people about what they want vs. what *they already like* about a community

  - *Open-ended, indirect* questions lead to more positive ideas and less criticism

  - Shifts the focus to figuring out *why* someone is attached to their community

  - Knowing **who** you are and **why** people care informs **what** you could do and **how** you could do it

Rethos Cultural Asset Process

How to identify assets:

- Cultural Asset identification comes from the INSIDE: residents, workers, business owners, etc.
- Takes time to gather and evaluate
- Requires multiple means of engagement
- Includes things like recurring words/phrases, body language, demographics of respondents

Cultural Assets

Buildings/Built Environment
- Notable Architecture
- Historic Buildings
- Parks
- Monuments/Memorials

Community Groups
- Civic Clubs
- Non-Profits
- Wellness Organizations
- Churches
- Youth Groups
- Sporting Groups
- Special Interest Groups

Festivals & Events
- Parades
- City Festivals
- Annual Events
- Quirky Fundraisers (ex: polar plunge)
- Food & Drink Events

Arts
- Community Theaters
- Choirs
- Bands
- Murals
- Ongoing arts activity
- Family Art Events

Environment & Landscape
- Natural features
- Parks
- Wildlife Areas
- Outdoor recreation traditions

Cultural Legacy
- Immigrant Traditions
- Food/Drink
- Religious Traditions
- Celebrations

Economic Legacy
- Celebrated Businesses
- Major Employers
- Traditions of type of work

"Invisible" Assets

Intangible Characteristics
- The "it" factors
- Adjectives
- Grittiness, Celebratory, Neighborliness, etc.

Former Icons
- Businesses that closed
- Buildings torn down
- Parks built over
- Groups/people no longer in existence

Example: Logan Park Neighborhood, Minneapolis

Community Priorities:

- Preserving affordable housing
- Parking
- Maintaining authenticity
- Branding identity
- Lack of participation

Recommendations

- Repair and maintain cobblestones along Quincy Street
- Integrate more bike infrastructure into built environment
- Investigate public/private ownership models for artist studio buildings
- Support more public art projects throughout the neighborhood
- Hold neighborhood change forums on gentrification and change

Example: Enhanced Assessment in Downtown New Ulm

Recommendations

O Open communication channels

O Consider residents first when planning for downtown

O Reactivate Main Street Position

O Creation of outdoor, public spaces

O Give the community a chance to acknowledge and mourn the loss of longtime institutions; Creatively brainstorm the future

Community Priorities:

• Historically German

• Festival Centric/Tourist Friendly

• Tradition of resiliency in the wake of destruction

• Coping with significant business loss

• Cleanliness

• Community accountability

• Culture around eating and drinking

• Desire for downtown Grocery Store

• Things for kids/families

• Revamp rules for alcohol and events

• Define downtown boundaries

• Placing responsibility on City/Chamber

• Focus on keeping downtown retail not service

• General lack of awareness

• Age split and "Auslanders"

• Need for access: aging population

New Ulm Assets | Restaurants and Bars | Retail | Arts, Event, and Community Spaces | Intangible Cultural Characteristics | Former Icons

Lola

Inspired

Lamplighter Family Sports Bar

Gallery 512

B&L Bar

Bailey Creek Boutique

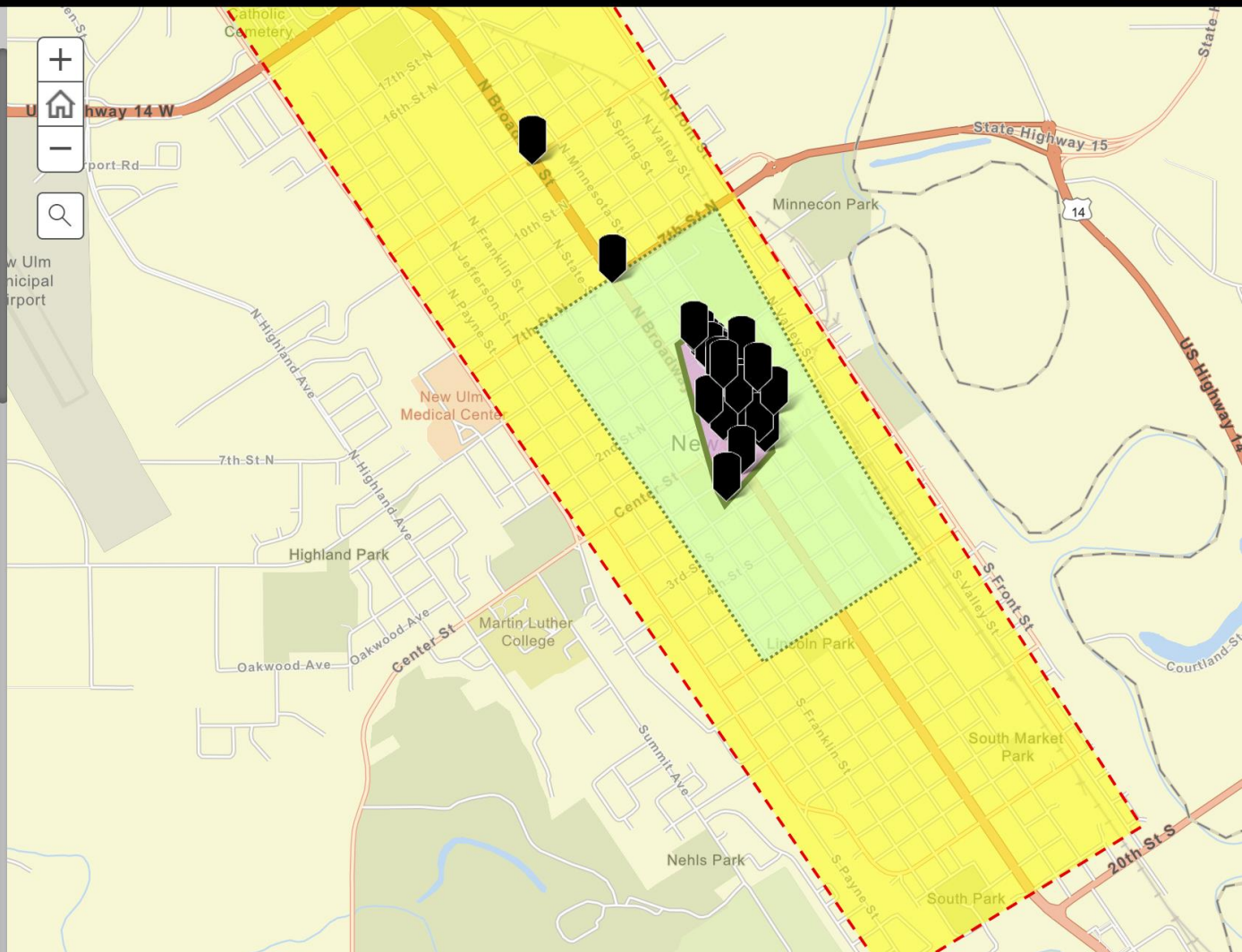Backerei & Coffee Shop

Sozial

Rodney's Tavern

New Ulm Community Market and Cooperative

Patterson's Diamond Center

Lakes on 1st

Downtown New Ulm, MN

"A City of Charm and Tradition."

⚙ Edit ×   Cultural Assets in New Ulm, MN

New Ulm Assets   Restaurants and Bars   Retail   Arts, Event, and Community Spaces   Intangible Cultural Characteristics   Former Icons
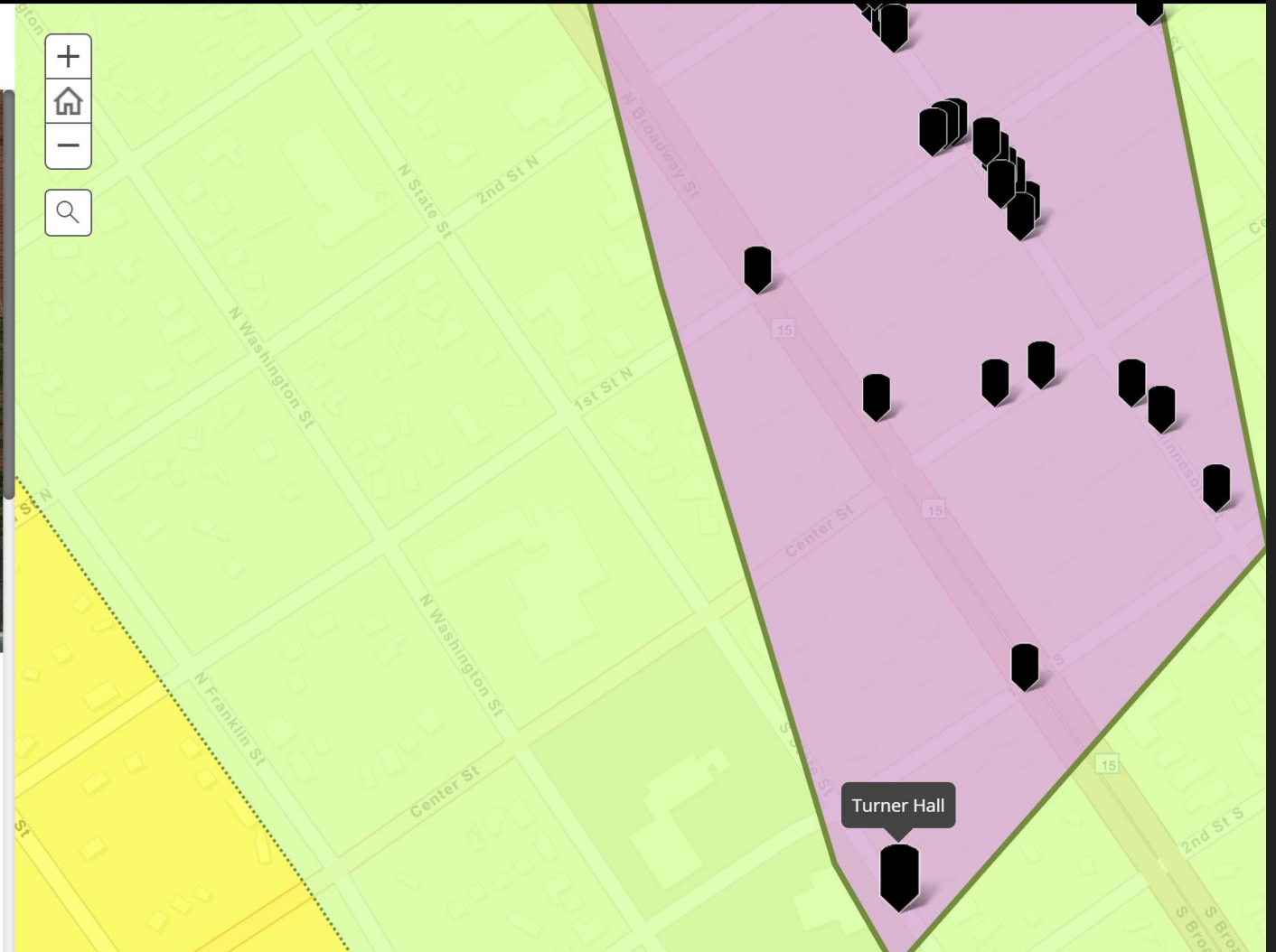
Turner Hall

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102 S State St, New Ulm, MN 56073

Community Hall

Themes: German, Heritage, Bar, Historic, Lasting Legacy, Community Service, Murals, Food, Dance,

Originally constructed in 1857 by early Turner settlers, the Turner Hall is one of New Ulm's most storied and historic buildings. The building was truly a community endeavor as it was constructed by volunteers on Sundays with logs floated downstream from a borrowed sawmill.

Turner Hall

"A City of Charm and Tradition."

New Ulm Assets | Restaurants and Bars | Retail | Arts, Event, and Community Spaces | **Intangible Cultural Characteristics** | Former Icons

German Character

German Character

Themes: German, Heritage, Historic, History, Community, Culture, Lasting Legacy, Sound Mind Sound Body, Festivals, Drinks, Food

Before it was even named the idea for New Ulm was conceived by Frederick Beinhorn in Germany before immigrating to the United States. He arrived in America in 1852 and by 1853 had formed the "Chicago Land Society" with other German immigrants. One year later in 1854 the site of present New Ulm was selected by the group, named as such since many of the group members hailed from the Province of Wurttemberg, Germany, of which Ulm is the principal city.

Shortly thereafter in 1856 one Wilhelm Pfaender, along with the Turner Colonization Society of Cincinnati (Turners), would arrive and
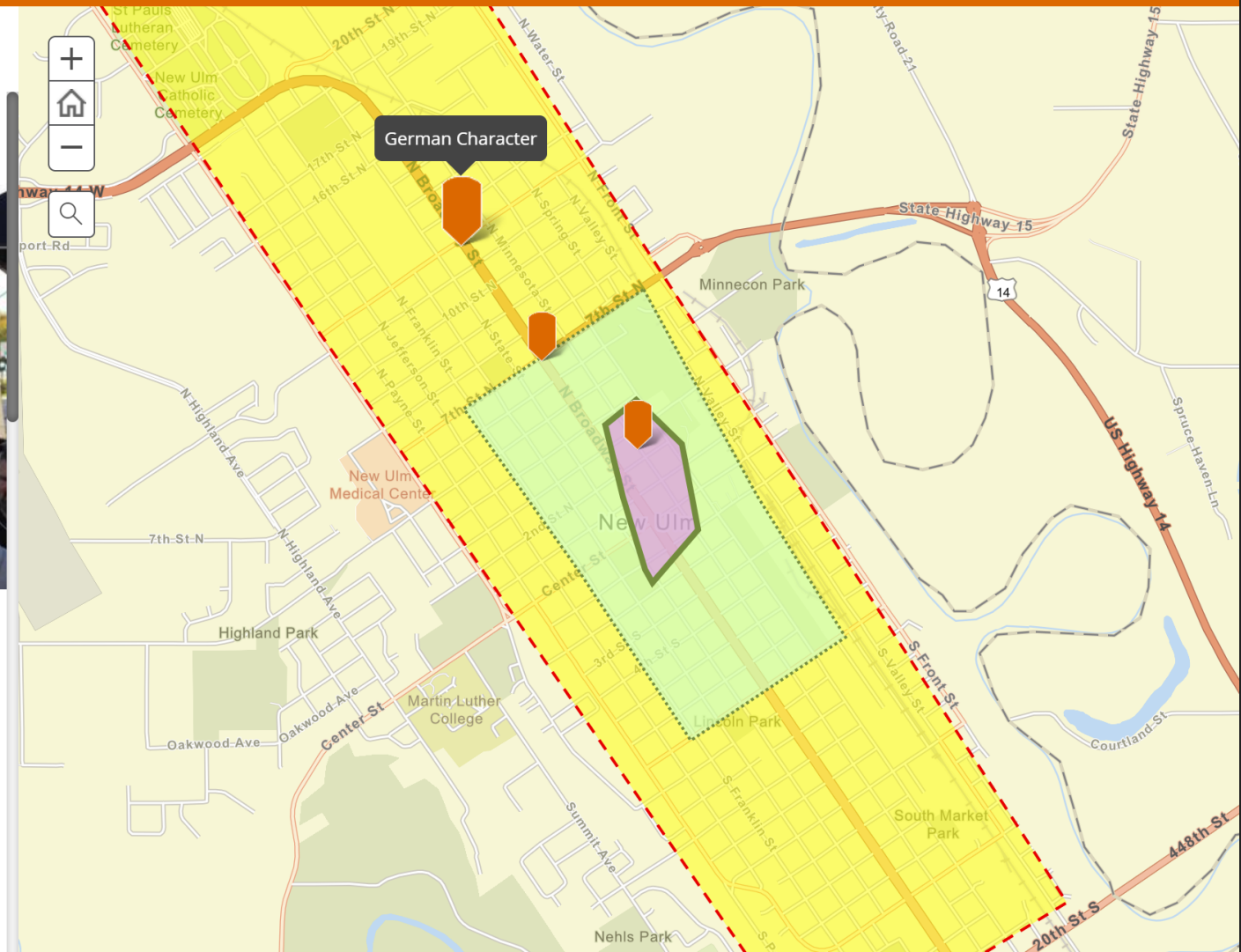
Where can you find Rethos? (PRE COVID-19)

Meeting community members where they are:

- Local businesses
- Restaurants
- Schools
- Parks
- Places of worship
- Generational gathering spaces
- Special events

Engage residents in a variety of ways:

- SWOT analysis with focus groups
- One-on-one interviews with community members
  - in person, virtually, phone or email
- Creative engagement strategies (Place It, Mind Maps, Place Connections)

Downtown Assessments amidst COVID-19

Creating virtual spaces:

- More digital focus group efforts

- More digital (hard copy if needed) surveys tailored to specific groups

- Increase one-on-one interviews (emails, video calls, etc.)

- Connect with local partners to help facilitate connections

- Hiring local translators/connection partners to ensure outreach to all downtown stakeholders

Engage residents in a variety of ways:

- Virtual SWOT analysis with focus groups

- One-on-one digital interviews with community members

- Creative engagement strategies curated by Rethos and facilitated by local partner

What Comes Next?

End Products

- Competitive Edge Report with Transformation Strategy Recommendation

- Guided implementation

- Complete survey results

- GIS Interactive Story Map—Willmar will retain ownership of this map for future use

Next Steps: Rethos

- Define timeline and agree on months of study (*in process*)
- Rethos staff will schedule a follow up call with Main Street focus group (*planned for next week*)
- Rethos will curate public survey information, and manage all details surrounding public input

Next Steps: Willmar

- **Willmar team will share a Downtown Assessment team roster with broad representation with Rethos staff**

- Willmar team will arrange for publicity, meeting locations, and meeting times for focus groups

- Willmar team will assist Rethos Staff in making connections with special focus groups (ex: Senior Center, Kids Groups)

- Willmar team will share additional information with downtown businesses, landlords, or other invested individuals about Rethos Staff visit dates, and that they will be in their business

Next Steps Willmar: Define Focus Groups

City Staff & Council

- ☐ Fire Department
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Parks Department
- ☐ City Council
- ☐ City Staff
- ☐ Library

Property Owners

Business & Retail Group

- ☐ Small Business Owners
- ☐ Bar Owners
- ☐ Restaurant Owners

Services

- ☐ Banks
- ☐ Insurance
- ☐ Tech
- ☐ Graphic Design
- ☐ Law
- ☐ Medical

Attractions, Festival & Event Organizers

General Public, Students, Retirees, etc.

Final Work

- Rethos staff will create an online survey
- Rethos staff will set up one on one calls or meetings with specific community members to seek out additional information
- Rethos staff will evaluate survey findings in combination with other data gathered
- Rethos staff will schedule a time with Willmar team to present final findings, this presentation can be public.

Focus Group Questions

(These may vary for each group.)

When you think of Downtown Willmar, what is the first word that comes to mind?

Who/What is working in downtown Willmar?

(People, businesses, committees, specific areas, city codes etc.)

Who/What is not working in downtown Willmar?

(People, businesses, committees, specific areas, city codes etc.)

Which places do you frequent in downtown Willmar?

Businesses, public spaces, events, etc.

What is the biggest gain downtown Willmar has seen?

What is the biggest loss downtown Willmar has faced?

What is missing in downtown Willmar?

Specific places, plans, people, city codes, etc.

Where do you see downtown Willmar in 5 years?

Pleas feel free to reach out to me with any questions:

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Thank you!