

Grand Avenue Steering Committee Meeting 2/8/24

MEETING NOTES

- I. CED Planning Grant Overview
- II. Introductions/Attendees:
 - a. Manuel Gamez
 - b. Jennifer Santiago
 - c. Francelia Astudi
 - d. Israel Cornejo
 - e. Oscar Ramirez
 - f. Lourdes Riviera
 - g. Waldermar Cruz
 - h. Diana Morado
 - i. Dora Rodriquez
 - j. Christian Ucles
 - k. Eliot Velazquez
- III. Discussion: What defines Grand Avenue? + Other Topics
 - a. **Belmont Cragin is family-focused:**
 - i. There are many families here, some of which have been here for generations.
 - ii. Many households are intergenerational, with the average household size around 3-4.
 - iii. Young families come here and bring their relatives with them.
 - iv. There should be a focus on family, community, children
 - b. **Belmont Cragin is young:**
 - i. One third (check this) of residents are 18 or under.
 - ii. There are many children and youth in the neighborhood.
 - iii. These youth may take over family businesses, property in the future.
 - iv. It's important to incentivize remaining within the community.
 - v. There should be places and activities for children along the corridor - where children go, parents follow - so there should be shopping and restaurants there as well.
 - vi. Activities could include indoor soccer fields.

- vii. There should be more resources and activities for young females
- c. Belmont Cragin is one of the fastest growing Latino neighborhoods in Chicago:**
 - i. Need to embrace that culture
 - ii. There is a tapestry of different heritages (Cuban, Puerto Rican, Ecuadorian, Mexican, etc.)
 - iii. There is a thriving immigrant community AND a thriving community of families who have been here for generations
- d. Belmont Cragin needs a visual identity and visual representation of the rich culture that exists here:**
 - i. Grand lacks what places like Paseo Boricua in Humbolt Park have - a distinct visual identity that ties to the culture of the people who live in the neighborhood.
 - ii. Grand needs an "in your face" visual identity
 - iii. Grand avenue is "bare" - you don't know you're in Belmont Cragin
 - iv. Identify the area, be proud, and put it on a map
- e. Avoiding gentrification and preserving culture is critical:**
 - i. Need to preserve and highlight culture without pushing people out.
 - ii. Non-residents start buying up properties when projects like this occur.
 - iii. Need to educate people about the importance of buying properties, keeping properties.
 - iv. Don't want to lose the neighborhood
 - v. There are many renters here and less ownership
 - vi. There is so much potential here. Now we need to raise our voice - people have worked so hard for decades - let's amplify their voices
- f. Embrace the other cultures that exist within Belmont Cragin:**
 - i. There is a fairly large eastern European population, particularly among older generations
 - ii. Embrace this culture as well as latino culture
- g. Grand Avenue is very auto-oriented:**
 - i. Safe pedestrian conditions should be prioritized
 - ii. The neighborhood should become more walkable
 - iii. Parking in select locations can bring visitors to the area, allowing them to get out and walk around and explore.
- h. Grand Avenue needs to be beautified:**
 - i. Some landlords don't upkeep their buildings and facades - how can this be prevented?
 - ii. Grand Ave is dull and needs pops of color
- i. Economic Development along the corridor:**
 - i. There are many mom and pop shops and these should be retained + more should be added
 - ii. Support small businesses and ensure that money circulated throughout the community

- iii. There should be a diverse mix of uses along the corridor, such as different shops, services, and residential
 - iv. Soccer-based businesses
- IV. Project Branding and Identity
 - a. Key words:
 - i. Vibrant
 - ii. Roots
 - iii. Heart
 - iv. Home
 - v. Evolution
 - vi. Voice
 - vii. Family
 - viii. Vibrant
 - b. Ideas
 - i. Play into auto-oriented theme (lots of auto shops)
 - ii. Something that is Spanglish or easily translated between both languages
 - iii. Our Grand Plan
 - iv. Our Grand Vision
 - v. La Avenida
 - vi. The Grand Grand
 - vii. Belmont Cragin Vision
- V. Next Steps
 - a. Meetings every other month
 - b. Branding survey
 - c. Website