

## Introduction

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The Sunset Lounge is a beloved cultural institution located at the corner of Rosemary Avenue and 8th Street in the Historic Northwest District. During the Jim Crow era, the venue was the heart of social and cultural life in the district. In addition to attracting big name acts like Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, the Sunset Lounge also hosted fundraisers, high school dances, and a wide variety of other community events.

After desegregation, the neighborhood started on a steady decline. Upper and middle-class black families moved out, as did the once-thriving businesses. The Sunset no longer was a regional draw and instead started to function primarily as a neighborhood bar and for entertainment. While still a predominantly African American neighborhood, the community's context and needs have shifted dramatically over the past 70 years.

# Community Engagement

From August 2016 to April 2017, the HNWR team spoke to over 800 community members about what changes they'd like to see in the Sunset Lounge and the open space across from it. Phase 1 focused on understanding the community's infrastructure and programming needs and preferences. In Phase 2, we tested out some of the community's ideas in the open space in real time.

Hundreds of people came out to experience the temporarily improved space and provided valuable feedback on which elements should be kept, improved, or done away with. Phase 2 also dug deeper into community members' values and how they would like to participate in the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge on an ongoing basis.

## Phase 1

Phase 1 took place from October 2016 - March 2017. We engaged a total of 591 community members by setting up survey stations at events, meetings, popular gathering places, churches, etc. 52% of the survey respondents are residents of the Historic Northwest. The remaining 48% come to the Historic Northwest District to work, see entertainment, visit friends and family, attend church, etc.

**"Provide skills-enhancing programs for residents of all ages, with a focus on youth"**

Top 3 programs respondents would like to participate in at the Sunset Lounge



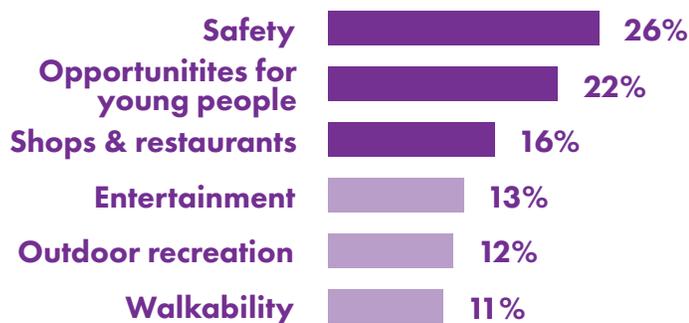
**"The open space across from the Sunset Lounge should be regularly activated"**

Top 3 things respondents would like to see in the open space across from the Sunset Lounge



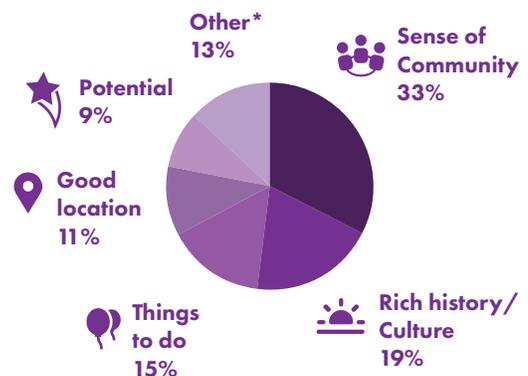
**"Our main priority is to improve safety"**

What respondents wish there was more of in the Historic Northwest



**"There is a strong sense of community and history here"**

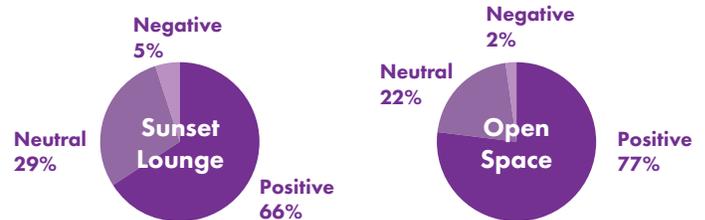
What respondents love the most about the Historic Northwest



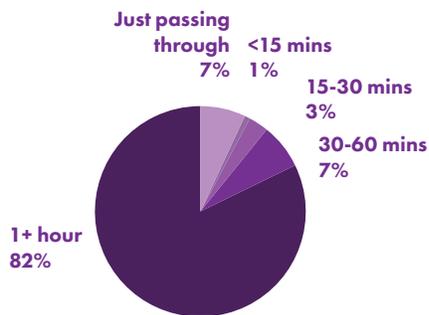
# Phase 2

In April 2017, the HNWR kicked off Phase 2 which included three core components: 1) Hosted community focus groups to build on the Phase 1 community engagement process, 2) Hosted a Better Block prototyping event where community members were able to test out temporary improvements to the open space, and 3) Conducted surveys and activity counts to assess the community's response to the prototyping event. We engaged 248 community members. 30% of survey respondents are residents of the Historic Northwest District.

## Most survey respondents feel positively about the Sunset Lounge and Open Space.

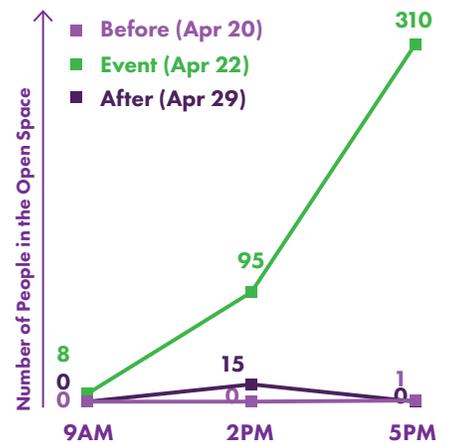


## 82% of survey respondents planned to spend at least an hour in the open space at the Better Block event.

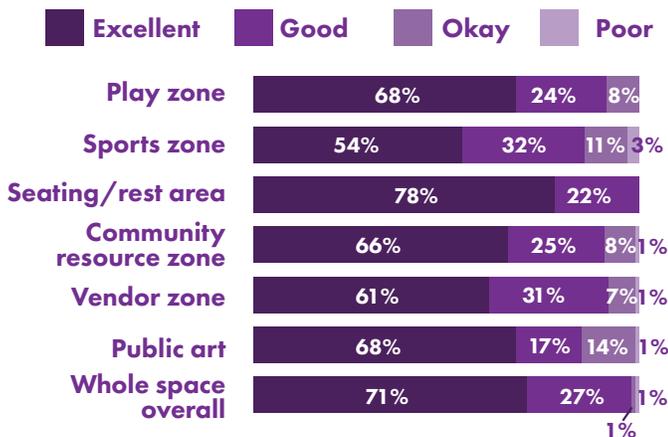


## Level of Activity in the Open Space

We counted people in the open space before, during, and after the April 22 Better Block prototyping event to understand how usage levels change at different times of day.



## Most people rated each improvement as "excellent". Overall, the seating/rest area received the highest ratings.

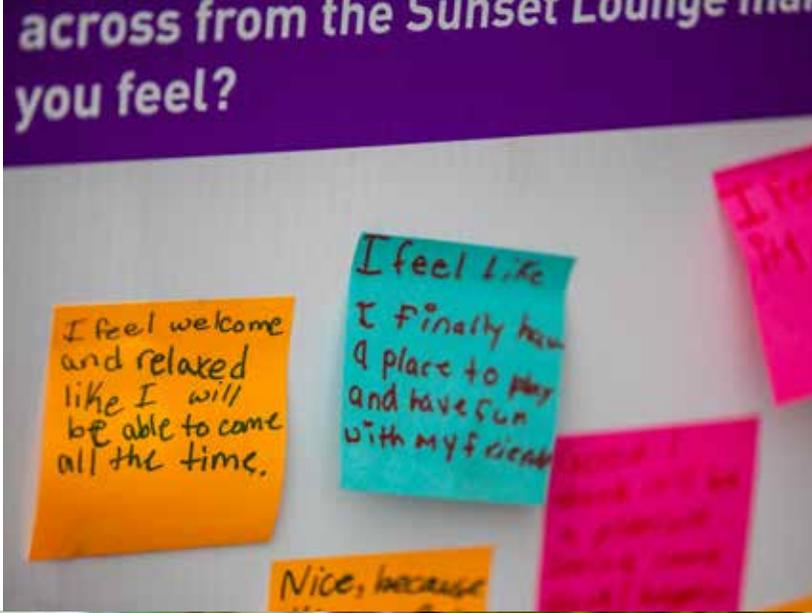


## The most important impacts of the HNWR project should be to increase community safety and access to programs.

### Top 3 impacts respondents would like to see as a result of the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and Open Space







# Vision

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The redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and the vacant lot will provide the Historic Northwest District with a new multi-purpose venue and public space focused on arts and entertainment for all ages. This project will bring together community partners to offer diverse programs

that reflect the history, cultures, and needs of the area. By bringing activity and new job opportunities to these spaces, this redevelopment project will help create a safe and economically thriving community.

## Action Areas

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The CRA can take concrete steps towards achieving this vision by focusing on five key action areas:

### Action Area #1: Keep up the momentum.

There is still roughly a year between now (June 2017) and the completion of the Sunset Lounge renovations (Fall 2018). During this time, it's critical for the CRA to maintain the momentum and excitement about the HNWR project by working with community partners to regularly activate and improve the lot across from the Sunset Lounge. This time can also be used to continue the conversation about the uses and role of the Sunset Lounge in the Historic Northwest District.

#### Recommendation:

- **Develop a schedule of incremental improvements and other "quick wins".**

We recommend piloting semi-permanent improvements such as shade, picnic tables, and play equipment for a period of 12 months.

### Action Area #2: Build a culture of engagement.

For the CRA, the key to building a culture of engagement in the Historic Northwest is to "meet people where they are". This involves not just holding community meetings at different times of day, but also attending programs and events that people normally go to anyway, and engaging them there. Community engagement should be regarded as an ongoing and ever-evolving process.

#### Recommendations:

- **Continue collecting feedback at public events.**  
The use of large, colorful survey boards at public events has proven to be effective in inviting community members to participate in conversations.

- **Hire dedicated community outreach staff.**

The CRA would benefit from having dedicated outreach staff to build relationships, engage the community in local projects, and serve as a direct link between neighborhood residents and the City of West Palm Beach.

- **Share information.**

Provide community members with a centralized place to access information about initiatives or activities in the Historic Northwest.

- **Form a community steering group for the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands.**

A steering group consisting of local leaders and dedicated residents can help the CRA stay accountable to those who are going to be most affected by the revitalization process.

- **Involve the community in the design and maintenance of the open space.**

Volunteers can help with maintaining the open space, planting trees and gardens, building and painting furniture, and creating public art.

- **Reduce administrative barriers to hosting activities in the Sunset Lounge and open space.**

There should be a streamlined process for applying and booking the Sunset Lounge and open space for both public and private events, as well as a publicly accessible calendar for these events and activities.

### Action Area #3: Identify key elements for transforming the Sunset Lounge into a new multi-use community venue.

Today, community members are calling for the Sunset

to return to being a multi-purpose community venue. Community members were less excited by the idea of the Sunset Lounge becoming a renovated music lounge and more enthused about repurposing it into a community space where people of all ages can socialize, learn, and develop skills.

### Recommendations:

- **Provide programming for all ages throughout the day.**  
The programming of the Sunset Lounge and open space should be flexible enough to support a diversity of uses, during both daytime and evening.
- **Find an operator that is “in touch” with the community.**  
The operator, screened by a community steering group, should be both business savvy and community minded, balancing profits and the needs of neighborhood residents.
- **Hire locally.**  
The future operator of the Sunset Lounge should prioritize hiring local residents to staff, program, and maintain the venue.

### Action Area #4: Design and program the open space as if it were a community center without walls.

Many community members were skeptical about transforming the lot across from the Sunset Lounge into a public space. Community members questioned whether it could ever serve as an appropriate place for children and families. Once people saw the transformation of the open space at the Better Block event, with new infrastructure and programming, the community’s mindset shifted. They now see great potential in transforming the open space into a permanent, programmed public space.

### Recommendations:

- **Create a multi-generational space for active and passive recreation.**  
Elements to include are play areas, seating areas, public art, infrastructure for older adults, open space and interactive water features.
- **Staff the open space.**  
Parents and children alike feel more compelled to

go to a park, knowing that there are qualified staff on site to provide some supervision and informal activities.

- **Increase public access to equipment to activate the open space.**  
In order to make it easier and more attractive for third parties to activate the open space, consider partnering with Parks and Recreation to provide an “equipment lending” service to the public.
- **Activate the space at night.**  
Given the location and context of the open space, it is critical for the CRA and other partners to “program out” any antisocial behavior to make residents feel more at ease using the space at night.

### Action Area #5: Provide safe connections.

The most common, recurring theme during community engagements was safety. 72 percent of community members would like to see the redevelopment of the Sunset Lounge and surrounding lands result in a safer community with less crime, making it the number one desired project outcome.

### Recommendations:

- **Increase community policing.**  
Community members called for increased community policing, where police officers regularly patrol the streets and develop a sense of personal familiarity with residents and business owners.
- **Provide consistent pedestrian lighting.**  
Providing consistent pedestrian-oriented street lighting along the corridors that connect to the Sunset Lounge is critical to supporting both neighborhood safety and programming at the Sunset Lounge.
- **Activate the edges.**  
The CRA should explore ways to activate the lots around the Sunset with businesses and other active uses, to increase the number of “eyes on the street” throughout the day.
- **Provide secure transportation and parking options.**  
The CRA should work to extend the trolley service into the neighborhood, and partner with local churches to provide additional parking with existing lots.

## Next Steps

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The CRA will use the findings and recommendations of this report as a guide in the planning and design of the Sunset Lounge and the open space. The Sunset Lounge will be under renovation from late Summer 2017 to

Fall 2018. During this time, community partners play an important role, whether it's by providing additional feedback on the redevelopment process and/or helping program the open space.



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