

CITY SHAPERS : **HOLLAND**

Eastcore

CAPSTONE REPORT 2024

HOPE COLLEGE
PINEGROVE

WESTERN SEM

ORITA

MAFA

ROSA
PARKS

BLACK
RIVER
SCHOOLS

PROSPECT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While many existing efforts to alleviate poverty and related social problems have focused on people or policy, recent research points to the importance of place, specifically neighborhoods, in creating lasting change. Outcomes like educational attainment and life expectancy are closely related to the neighborhoods where we grew up and those where we currently reside. In other words, place matters. The Holland neighborhood of Eastcore, is a place with a rich history, a diverse population, and myriad strengths- both existing and potential. However, it is also a place of concentrated disadvantage. A child growing up in Eastcore is significantly less likely than a child born elsewhere in Holland to eventually earn an income that exceeds their parents' household income at the same age. In other words, the children of Eastcore have less access to the "American Dream." In light of these and other challenges, such as a lack of affordable housing, Eastcore leaders sought resources for creating change at the neighborhood level. Their search led them to Focused Community Strategies (FCS), a community development organization based in Atlanta, Georgia. FCS developed the City Shapers program for building place-based coalitions for action, particularly in under-resourced neighborhoods like Eastcore. Following a period of initial exploration, Eastcore leaders and FCS agreed to partner and the City Shapers Holland initiative was born.

This capstone report represents the culmination of the City Shapers Holland initiative of 2022-2023. It offers a detailed summary of the two-year process, which consisted of three distinct 8-month phases: assessment, alignment, and activation. During the Assessment phase, teams gathered information on all aspects of the Eastcore neighborhood- from historical accounts of its origins to the future envisioned by neighbors. In the Alignment phase, City Shapers teams used relational organizing to connect neighbors to assessment findings and to one another. Finally, this report identifies steps for the Activation phase, including the continued development of place-based leadership capacity and neighborhood change processes in structural, economic, and social domains.



THE FOCUS ON PLACE

PLACE MATTERS

Recent research in community development and social impact is changing our understanding of what it means to foster sustainable and systemic social change. Historically, the majority of poverty-focused work has centered either on people –whether individuals, families, or population groups– or policy. Though both these elements are crucial, an important shift is to look at poverty, people, and policies through the lens of place, specifically through neighborhoods. This is not intuitive, and only recently have changemakers begun to view neighborhoods as the key unit of change, given insights drawn from past failures, big data, and impact measurement.

Research reveals that place has a great deal of influence on a variety of vital outcomes, even long after we leave that place (<https://opportunityinsights.org/neighborhoods/>). Outcomes like income mobility, educational attainment, life expectancy, even creativity and innovation are closely correlated to where we live, and particularly, where we grew up. This means that while relief and attention given to individuals and programs may be helpful, in the aggregate, the inequities of place have a greater influence. Given the growing amount of data and literature about the profound and long lasting effects of place, there are two viable options when considering impactful community development – either moving people to areas of greater opportunity or investing in places that have been historically disadvantaged. The first approach of moving individuals to opportunity neighborhoods is limited and costly, and would still leave behind concentrated areas of inequity. Ultimately, we must opt for investing in place — a focused multi-system strategy in a specific geographic area that seeks to empower its residents while building structures and factors that improve the place for all. In short, place matters — profoundly and for the long run.



WHY EASTCORE?

This focus on place directly relates to our reasoning for beginning the City Shapers project in the neighborhood of Eastcore. While residents of Holland may intuitively sense that one neighborhood may be “better” than another, a review of Holland on the Opportunity Atlas website (www.opportunityatlas.org) reveals the neighborhood of Eastcore is indeed a place of concentrated disadvantage. In the graphic below, the dark red-orange rectangle in the middle represents the least income mobile area in Holland. In other words, a child born in Eastcore is significantly less likely than a child born elsewhere in Holland to eventually earn an income that exceeds their parents’ household income at the same age (adjusted for inflation). This is one way to measure the decline of the American Dream. When the next generation has a less than 20% chance of matching their parents’ income, there are a number of cascading effects: less economic opportunity, less mobility, more stress, poorer health outcomes, etc. This one metric of many reveals that inequity grounded in place affects those who reside in that place well beyond childhood. As this map reveals, the residents of Eastcore (and its adjacent West End) are more vulnerable than other parts of Holland.

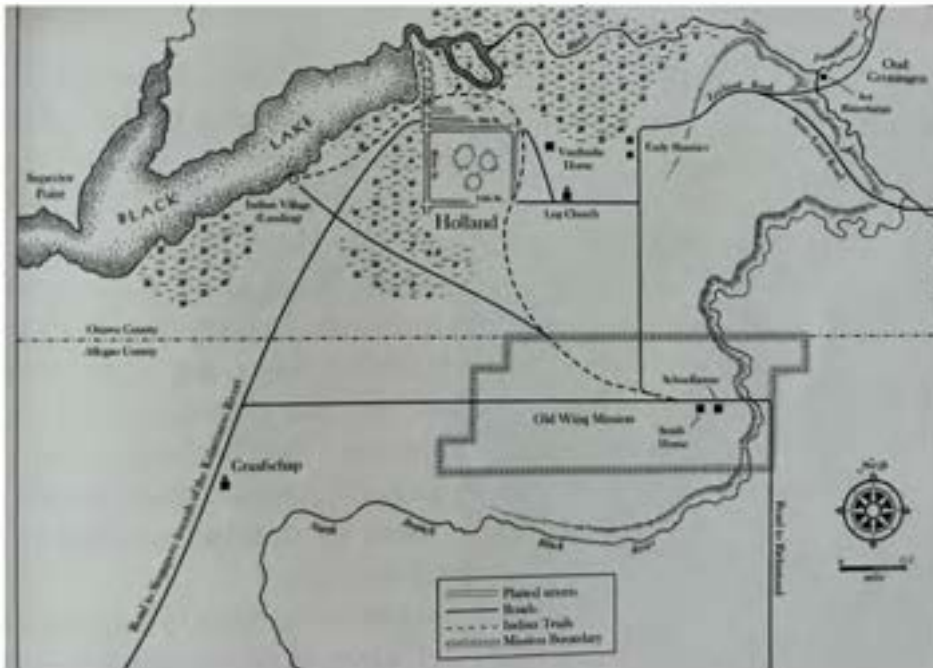


The aim of this project is to initiate a process of systemic change to develop and empower all residents of the Eastcore neighborhood, and to serve as a model for other Holland neighborhoods.

THE STORY OF EASTCORE

Before initiating systemic change with and for the Eastcore neighborhood, it is essential to understand the history of this land and its residents. Focusing on place includes paying attention to the people who made the place what it is today. As one of the first neighborhoods in Holland, Eastcore has a long history of growth, challenges, and change.

Prior to the arrival of European settlers in the 1800s, the Holland area was home to the Odawa tribal nation, as well as the Potawatomi and Peoria people. Lake Macatawa, on whose banks the city was built, was known as Mekatewegamie, or Black Lake. The Odawa tribe spent winters in West Michigan and summers on the Leelanau Peninsula, near present-day Traverse City, Michigan. The increasing presence of settlers and federal policies calling for Native American removal forced Native residents of the area to choose between leaving and assimilating to the culture of European settlers. Ultimately, most of the Odawa nation chose to relocate permanently to Leelenau, though the county where Holland was subsequently founded still bears their name: Ottawa.



Perhaps the most prominent figure among European settlers to the Holland area was Albertus Van Raalte. Though not the first to “settle” here, Van Raalte was incredibly influential in the development of Holland as a place to live, work, learn, and worship. He and his followers immigrated to West Michigan after fleeing religious persecution in the Netherlands. He was responsible for buying and financing 19,000 acres of land in Ottawa and Allegan counties. He was involved in improving the harbor of Lake Macatawa and establishing Holland as a major port on Lake Michigan. He established a local school as well as a congregation of the Reformed Church in America. Holland was incorporated as a city in 1867, twenty years after Van Raalte’s arrival.

In the very early days of Holland, Eastcore comprised a big portion of the city. The architecture, home sizes and lot sizes suggest that early settlers were wealthy and connected. As more plots were developed to the south, lot sizes got smaller and houses were simpler. There was a large development known as Cedar Flats to house workers for the industries in town, including Holland Furnace, Bush and Lane Piano, Baker Furniture, and Bolhuis Lumber. At this time, people conducted their daily lives within a few blocks of their houses – work, school, shopping, church. Neighbors were closely connected through these multiple channels, and were encouraged to limit connections to those outside of the Dutch Reformed community.

In the mid-1900s, however, Americans became more mobile with the widespread use of automobiles. The City of Holland expanded its borders and the Holland Economic Development Corporation bought land on the perimeter encouraging industry to locate there. The promise of inexpensive available land encouraged shopping and housing developments to the south, east and north. Neighbors moved out to these newly built houses on wide lots. Becoming more mobile meant that shopping, church and work moved outside of the Eastcore neighborhood. This broad social and residential shift happened in small towns all across the country, and Eastcore was no different.

What sets Eastcore apart, however, was that it never fell to “blight” in the way many towns did. City leaders and local non-profits were aware of the possibility and worked to avoid it. As individuals and families from other countries and areas of the US moved into Eastcore, some identified themselves as “immigrants” while others were “refugees.” Mexican workers were brought to Holland to work in the fields and agricultural processing plants. Many worked multiple jobs and long hours. Refugees from Cambodia also moved into the neighborhood, sponsored by churches and given assistance with rent and food and language classes. Many teens and young adults of the immigrants sensed the difference and the tension gave rise to gang activity and neighborhood violence in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Area leaders, along with federal law enforcement, took measures to quell the activity, such as marches, community meetings, targeted arrests, and action from neighborhood churches. These measures eventually succeeded, but the reputation has stuck with Eastcore to this day. The neighbors that live in Eastcore report feeling safe, while others remain wary of living in or even visiting the area.

Eastcore is unique from other core city areas in the United States in that a majority of the structures still remain as they did when they were built. Houses are largely the same. Commercial and manufacturing buildings may have changed uses but structures are still intact. The difference is in the diversity of the neighbors across almost all measures. Many are thriving. Others are not. The social infrastructure that was naturally in place in the first 100 years of Eastcore needs to be reimaged and built in new ways.

HOW CITY SHAPERS CAME TO BE

The City Shapers program was designed by Focused Community Strategies (FCS), a community development organization based in Atlanta, Georgia. FCS is a 501c3 organization that has been empowering neighborhoods to thrive since 1978. The mission of FCS is to partner with under-resourced neighborhoods to provide innovative and holistic development that produces flourishing communities and God's Shalom. The Lupton Center is the training and consulting branch of FCS. As a 2020 Thriving Congregations grantee of the Lilly Endowment, FCS developed City Shapers to help build place-based coalitions for action.

3Sixty was familiar with FCS's place-based measurement tool known as the Flourishing Neighborhood Index, and at the news of the grant, inquired about the City Shapers program. In April of 2021, 3Sixty hosted a City Shapers interest meeting on Zoom with Lupton Center staff and Eastcore community members. By August of 2021, partnering organizations were confirmed, seven (7) team captains were identified, and the Holland City Shapers initiative was born.



In addition to organizational partners, our cohort included a total of 12 Eastcore residents, representing the diverse demographics of the neighborhood and bringing to our process an astounding 170 cumulative years of experience living in the neighborhood!



THE PARTICIPANTS

3SIXTY

Since 2005, 3Sixty has invested in building living communities where neighbors feel equally known and committed to the well-being of their neighborhood. Jake Norris is the Executive Director of the non-profit with three part-time employees and a six member board of directors.

EASTCORE NEIGHBORS

To represent neighborhood leadership, 3Sixty's Eastcore Neighborhood Connector Lori Appeldoorn assembled a team of five additional Eastcore residents to join the cohort to build community with dedicated stakeholders and organizations.

HYK CONSULTING

Working with multidisciplinary teams, HYK Consulting provides planning, design, and strategic thinking services grounded in three key values: intentional engagement, thoughtful analysis, and prudent stewardship. The goal: To create enduring and sustainable communities that elevate our everyday life.

MOVEMENT WEST MICHIGAN

A nonprofit that unites Christian faith leaders to serve with humility and love for the flourishing of all in the community.

WEST MICHIGAN WORKS

West Michigan Works! is a division of ACSET, an equal opportunity employer/program and a proud partner of the American Job Center network. WMW assists people with job searches, career workshops, and finding resources for talent development. It also helps small businesses find, train and retain employees.

COLLECTIVUS

A housing collaborative exploring innovative housing strategies to both build cost effective housing units and maintain affordability over time.

CITY OF HOLLAND, COMMUNITY & NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES (CNS) DEPARTMENT

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HOPE COLLEGE

This small liberal arts college is a major presence on the northern section of Eastcore. Not only does Eastcore include a large section of Hope student housing, but Hope College also encourages staff and faculty to live in close proximity to the campus.

14TH STREET CRC

This Christian Reformed Church has been a presence on the corner of 14th and Central since it was built in 1902. Several deacons from the church joined the cohort in an effort to learn and strengthen ties with the residents of Eastcore.

WINNING AT HOME

WAH is a Christian-based counseling center located in Eastcore with a mission to make marriages and families stronger through counseling, coaching, community events, speaking and media resources.



THE PROCESS

Working with hundreds of organizations over the years, the Lupton Center at FCS brought with it a profound conviction about how organizations and community leaders successfully change their response to material poverty – through better processes, stronger relationships, and common values, not new programs.

The design and objective of the City Shapers was to convene a learning cohort for two years of discovery, collaboration, and innovation. As FCS operates with the values of neighboring, dignity, and development, there was a desire to carry these into the City Shaper process somehow. The cohort model provides an opportunity for residents, organizations, and community leaders to work together to address chronic, material poverty.

Cohort members were to participate in three, eight-month long modules focused on: 1) assessing a particular neighborhood and deeply understanding the communities in which they are rooted; 2) aligning their program plans and partnerships to reflect the findings of the assessment; and 3) activating those program plans in the neighborhood. The cohort would be equipped with the tools and support to evaluate their own strengths, examine and understand the neighborhood and adapt their roles and responsibilities within the neighborhood accordingly.

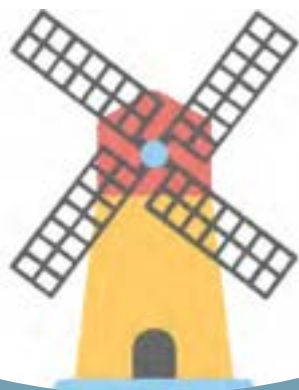
There were many advantages to this approach – its relational character, a values-driven ethos, the opportunity to curate a diverse cohort with equity in mind from the start, and the multi-sector approach lending itself easily to systemic change. The risks to this process would be that it could extend beyond the timeline and scope of the cohort, interpersonal conflict or organizational myopia could derail it; or that it could lose focus on empowering the neighborhood, ultimately deferring back to existing power structures and traditions.



THE GOAL

The primary, essential goal of City Shapers was to build capacity for the Eastcore neighborhood to direct its own future. In 2019, 3Sixty conducted a neighborhood-wide survey in partnership with Hope College sociology professor, Dr. Aaron Franzen. Through door-to-door surveys, we engaged 188 residents and discovered one of the core issues was that long-time residents (who had lived in the neighborhood for more than five years and saw themselves remaining in the neighborhood in five years) were more likely to indicate a lack of neighborhood leadership, both from elected officials as well as fellow residents. Based on these survey findings, and the demonstrated need for more local, representative leadership, 3Sixty organized a core group of dedicated neighbors to form the “Neighborhood Advocacy Team” (NAT) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Through City Shapers, 3Sixty aimed to expand, redefine, and formalize the NAT into a self-governing leadership team for Eastcore.

A secondary goal was to equip 3Sixty with the experience and the network to expand holistic neighborhood development work throughout the Holland/Zeeland region.



PHASE 1: ASSESSMENT

The assessment stage consisted of five parallel processes, all focused on gathering information to more fully understand the Eastcore neighborhood and its residents: Story, Indicators, Data, Voice, and Support Systems



The Process

The story team collected information from a wide variety of sources including Robert Swierenga's *Holland Michigan: From Dutch Colony to Dynamic City*, newspaper articles, archived photos and histories, and personal interviews. By looking at the local environment and its history, we developed a richly layered understanding of the unique story that makes the community what it is today.

The Key Points

The story of Eastcore throughout its history has been one of belonging, thriving, and surviving:

- In the earliest years of Holland, the lives of residents could be fully lived in Eastcore. Work, school, church, groceries, doctors- all were available in or near the neighborhood.
- In the 1900s, as automobile ownership grew and the city expanded, many businesses and service providers moved outside the neighborhood. Eastcore remained a prime location for homes and schools.
- Later in the 20th century, demographics in Eastcore shifted as immigrants from Latin America sought agricultural work and other forms of labor. Holland also welcomed many refugees during this time, primarily from Southeast Asia. Tensions among youth in these groups led to gang activity through the 1990's.
- Presently, Eastcore serves a primarily residential function, while most services, businesses, schools, and jobs are outside the neighborhood. Eastcore is a diverse neighborhood, not only racially, but also in terms of socioeconomic status and education level. Some residents of Eastcore are thriving, while others are merely surviving.





Indicators

The Process

Through the Flourishing Neighborhood Index survey, we gathered information on proven indicators of community health and wellbeing. The cohort administered a **45-minute survey to 82 neighbors** for responses on 12 indicators:

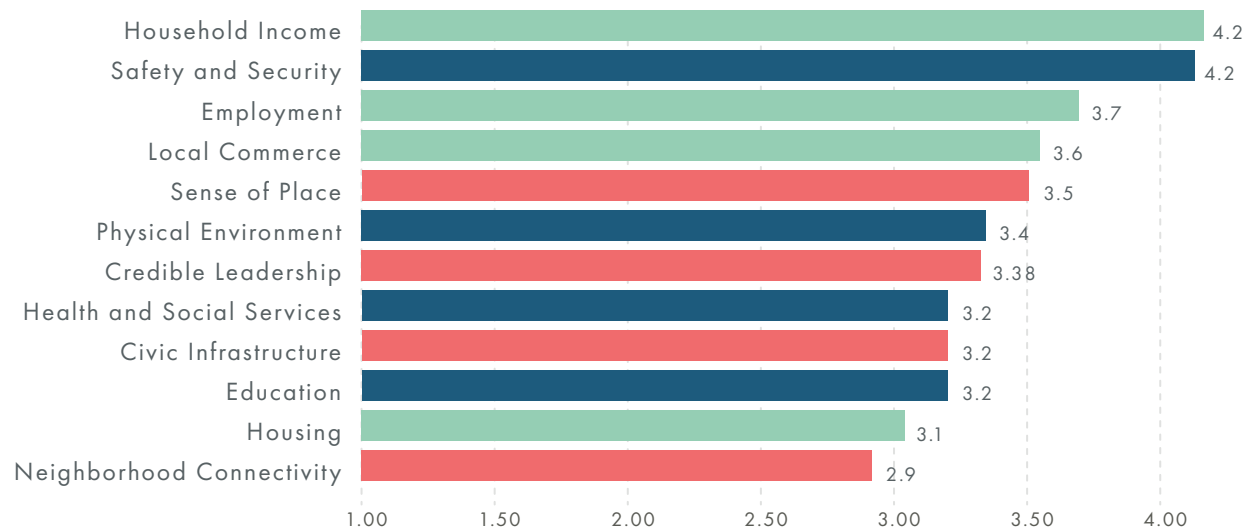
- Social Indicators: Sense of place, credible leadership, civic infrastructure, neighborhood connectivity
- Economic Indicators: Household income, employment, local commerce, housing
- Structural Indicators: Safety and security, physical environment, health and social services, education

Responses were pooled, resulting in a mean score between 1 and 5 for each indicator (with higher scores indicating greater levels of flourishing). A visual summary of findings is in the table below.

The Key Points

- **Low neighborhood connectivity:** Neighbors do not feel connected to each other, or to a neighborhood identity
- **Lack of affordable housing:** Residents are concerned about the future of housing options
- **Safety and perception:** Residents feel safe in Eastcore, but believe that non-residents do not see the area as safe

Benchmark Comparison





DATA

The Process

By looking at available local, state, and federal data, we sought to uncover essential information and trends of the community. The Data Team walked parcel by parcel and inventoried 1068 total properties covering 264 acres in Eastcore. Additional information was overlaid with data from the City of Holland, Hope College, and other publicly available sources.

The Key Points

- **Property ownership:**

- Eastcore is primarily residential, with around 80% of land allotted for residential purposes

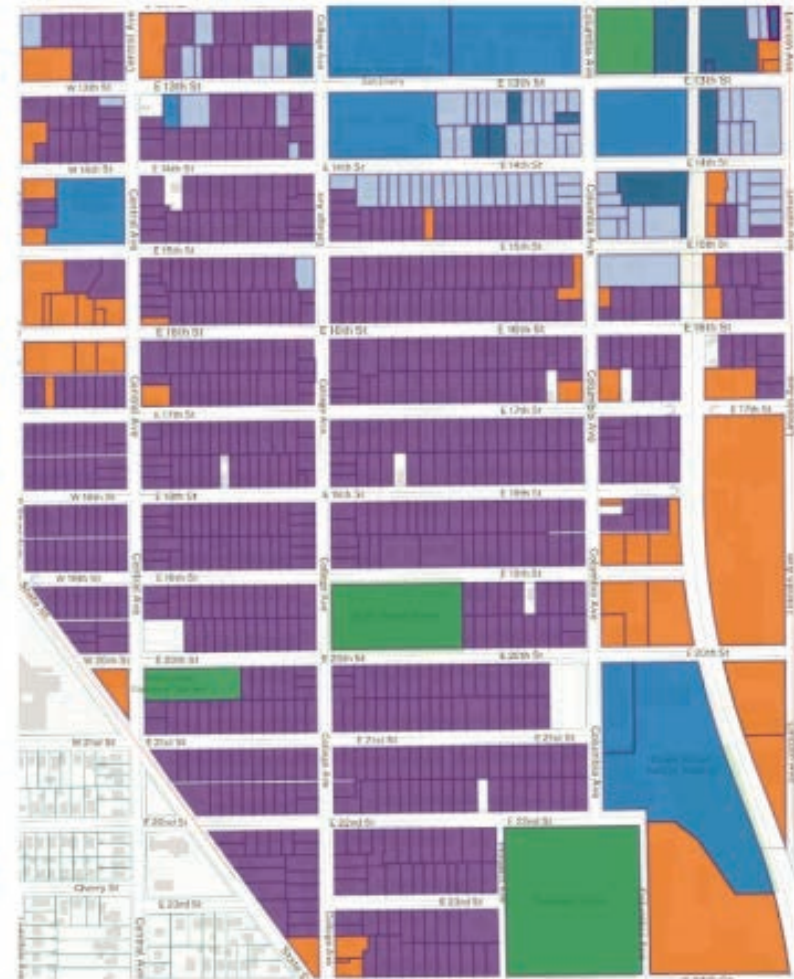
- Nearly 40% of the total housing units in Eastcore are rental properties

- Hope College is the largest single property owner in Eastcore (~7% of land parcels), with the majority of this property being for student housing

- **Green Spaces:** There are four green spaces in Eastcore, but only two are public parks and these appear to be underutilized

- **Commercial Spaces:** There are 42 commercial spaces primarily on the periphery of the neighborhood, with most not being spaces that neighbors would frequent on a regular basis

- **Third Spaces:** A "third space" is a communal space distinct from the first (home) space and the second (work) space. There is an apparent lack of third spaces in the Eastcore neighborhood.



1068 total properties covering 264 acres

Voice

The Process

By gathering residents, we listened deeply to their perspectives and ideas on where the community is, where it wants to go, and how it should get there. The Voice team hosted seven listening sessions with target groups in Eastcore, exploring where they feel the neighborhood is, where it should go, and how to get there. These sessions took place at 14th Street CRC, the 3Sixty Tool Library, the Iglesia Cristiana Misionera and Mi Favorita and included bilingual sessions for residents, a session for businesses, nonprofits and institutions, and a Spanish-speaking session. To gather additional Voice data, team members went door knocking throughout all of Eastcore and engaged with 256 neighbors.

In listening sessions and individual conversations, neighbors were prompted to “picture Eastcore as a flourishing neighborhood.” Then, they were asked:

- What do you see... feel... hear?
- What unique strengths does Eastcore have to make this happen?
- What stands in the way of this happening?



The Key Points

After reviewing the many responses and feedback, three main themes emerged:

- **Social Cohesion:** Neighbors reported wanting more connectivity
- **Walkability is an Asset:** Neighbors enjoy walking, but desire more greenery and color
- **A Lack of Neighborhood Identity:** Most residents of Eastcore think of their block as their neighborhood, while very few identify with the name ‘Eastcore’
- **Perceptions of Safety:** neighbors feel safe in Eastcore but report that the broader community views Eastcore as unsafe





Support Systems

The Process

By surveying service providers, we took a careful look at the health of the systems set up to support those experiencing material poverty. The Support Systems team received responses from 49 representatives of organizations serving the neighbors of Eastcore.

The Key Points

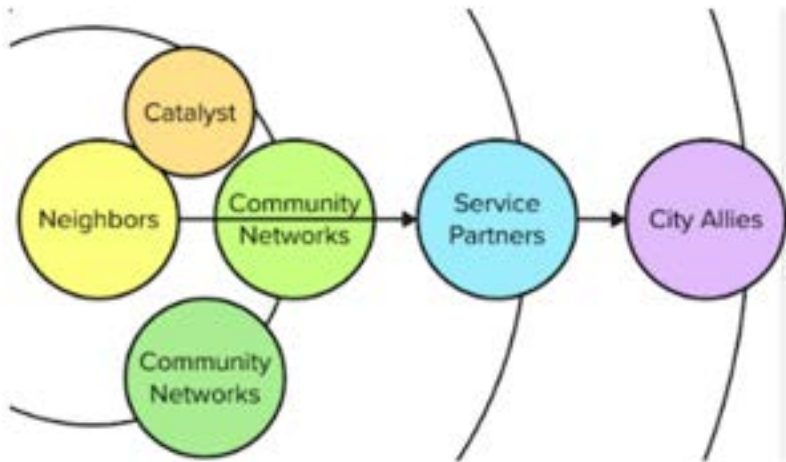
- **Highly Competent:** Leaders report that they are committed to their roles and organizations and lead well
- **Clear and Collaborative:** Local service providers and support services know their missions and are able to work together effectively
- **Need More Participation and Relationships:** Service providers perceive a need for increased community engagement, namely in the following aspects:
 - “Feedback Loop” - Program health increases when there is a consistent, intentional process by which the feedback of program participants is engaged and responded to carefully
 - “Legitimate Exchange” - Program health increases when people move from being passive recipients to having an active involvement in the process. The program is not doing for others what they can do for themselves. Program participants are investing their gifts and resources in a legitimate way (as opposed to aesthetic or superficial ways).
 - “Friendship” - Program health increases when program leaders have authentic, personal friendships with people experiencing material poverty. When relationships extend beyond program requirements to permeate personal lives, rigid social, economic, and other “us”/“them” barriers begin to fade as well.



PHASE 2: ALIGNMENT

The Assessment Phase of City Shapers (Phase 1) was fruitful in terms of the insights gained and opportunities to engage the neighbors of Eastcore. However, it was crucial to grow these relationships beyond information-gathering into a true collective capacity for change by moving into the Alignment Phase (Phase 2). Drawing upon practices of the FCS neighborhood engagement team as well as tactics of relational organizing, the cohort set out to connect neighbors in a variety of ways, in order to (1) present assessment findings and (2) create alignment across multiple systems affecting Eastcore.

The cohort began to employ three methods of alignment: one-on-one meetings, house gatherings, and town hall events. The graphic below illustrates the dynamic that as neighbors gathered to find their voice, and were connected to other organizations and structures within the neighborhood system, that alignment would be shaped by the collective, representing the hopes and aspirations of the neighborhood, with 3Sixty serving as catalyst.



The next graphic shows a cumulative count of the many meetings, gatherings, and events hosted over an 8-month period in the cohort.



There was a great deal of energy and goodwill generated through these tactics and many connections between service partners and city allies were formed. However, the alignment process was limited because the neighborhood of Eastcore has no formal community network that is led by the residents themselves, such as a neighborhood association or civic league. This resulted in neighbors speaking more as individuals than as a collective and required more energy from the catalyst, 3Sixty, to sustain neighborhood engagement. **Alignment as a function of community engagement and empowerment is ultimately most successful as the neighbors begin to own this process.**

PHASE 3: ACTIVATION

Building upon the critical information gathered during the Assessment Phase (Phase 1) and the neighborhood priorities identified during the Alignment Phase (Phase 2), the third phase of the City Shapers process is Action. The Action Phase is intended to include just that: Acting on the implementation of plans envisioned and refined during the first two phases. This proved challenging, however, for our cohort, as the topics and potential projects identified during Alignment were wide ranging. Therefore, we see the Action Phase as extending well beyond the two-year City Shapers period. **More discernment, prioritization, and leadership development is needed.** To this end, over the course of 2024 three neighbors and 3Sixty personnel (Jake Norris, Lori Appeldoorn, and Kevin Wolthuis) will intentionally identify resident leaders and convene work groups dedicated to the social, structural, and economic health of Eastcore.



TRANSITIONING TO NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP

The extension of the critical work of City Shapers will be well-supported in Eastcore. In November 2023, 3Sixty was awarded a \$35,000 multi-year Responsive Grant from the Community Foundation for the Holland/Zeeland Area to fund place-based leadership development in Eastcore. Grant funds will support key staff positions, material and operational costs of hosting regular neighborhood meetings, as well as stipends for neighborhood leaders to ensure diverse, representative leadership for Eastcore. **The two-year City Shapers process was instrumental in providing the data, experience, and credibility needed for 3Sixty to obtain this competitive grant funding.**



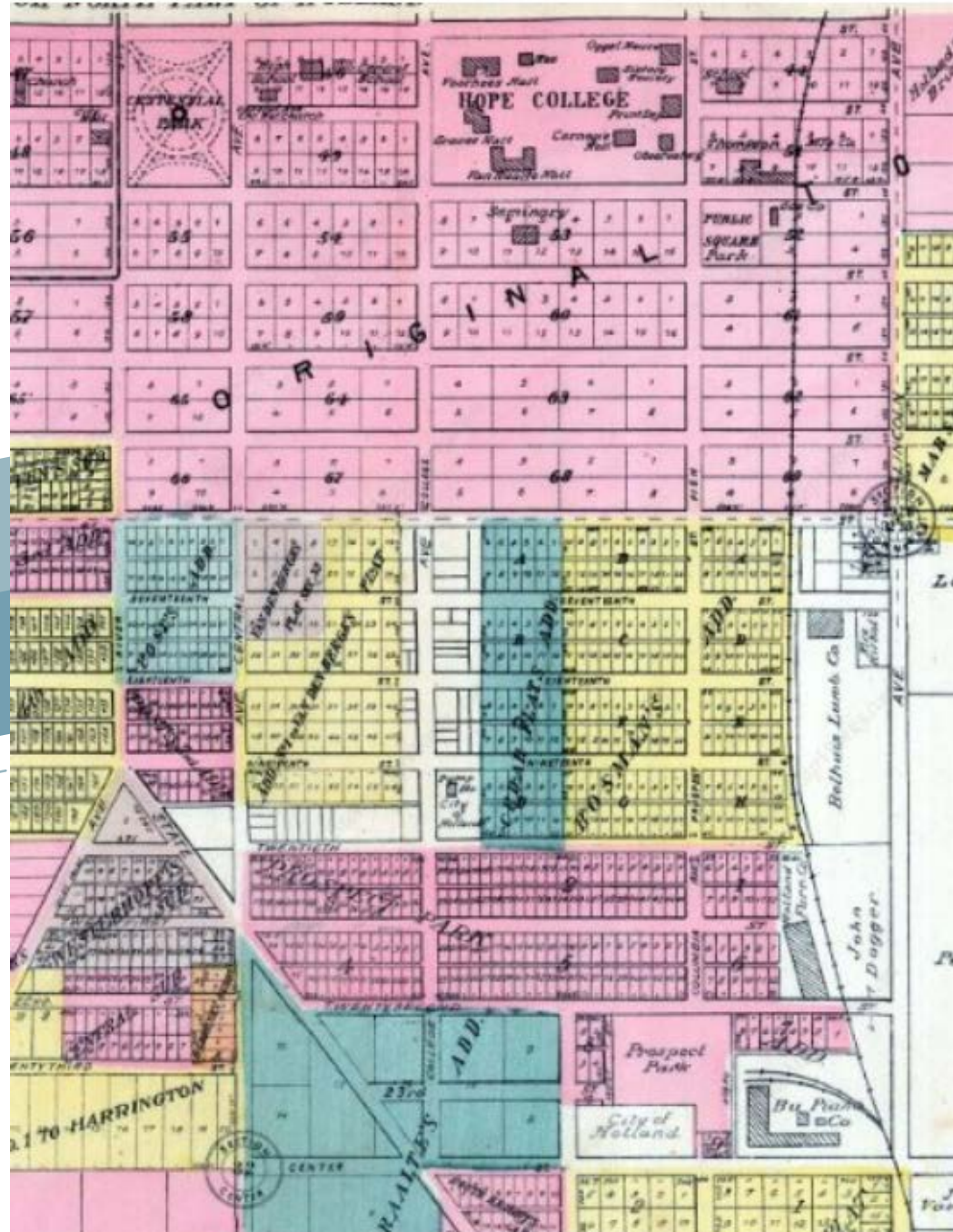
SUPPORT

Our cohort was made possible by the financial contributions of individual cohort members, the partnering organizations, as well as Ready for School, and Great Lakes Urban. **On behalf of 3Sixty and the City Shapers cohort, thank you for your generous support!**





Please use the QR code for more info, maps, photos, and data.

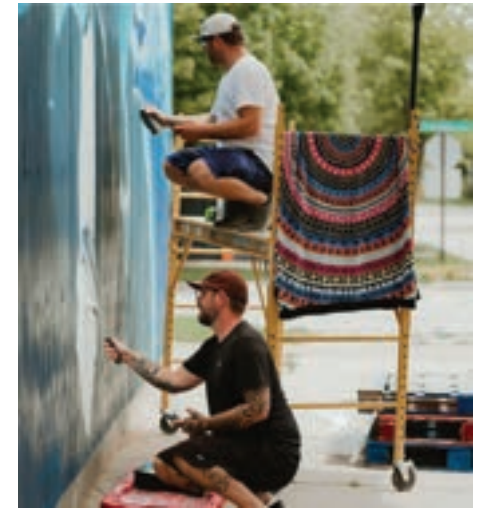


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Learn more about the City Shapers process and Holistic Neighborhood Development with Focused Community Strategies.

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info@fcsministries.org







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