NINA COLLECTIVE

SUMMARY REPORT & RECOMMENDATION

City of Madison Southeast and Southwest Area Plans

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City of Madison SEAP + SWAP Feedback Report

Summary of Community Engagement Focus Groups
Spring 2025

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Introduction

In the Spring of 2025, the nINA Collective conducted 10 focus groups to inform the Southwest and Southeast Madison Plans. We had 87 participants across both groups: 30 participants from the Southeast area and 57 participants from the Southwest area. Specific demographics can be found in Appendix B. Overall, we had excellent multiracial and multilingual representation on the Southwest side. While we did have diverse participants on the Southeast side, with especially high representation from the Latinx community, we were missing robust participation from the Black community. Focus groups were held at the following locations:

Southeast Plan Area

- Access to Independence
- DeJope Community Center
- Kennedy Elementary School
- Nuestro Mundo Elementary School (included bilingual facilitation)
- Virtual

Southwest Plan Area

- Elver Park Neighborhood Center (included Chinese interpretation)
- Meadowridge Library
- Reach Dane on Red Arrow Trail (included Spanish interpretation)
- Theresa Terrace Neighborhood Center
- Zavala's Market & Taqueria (session held in Spanish)

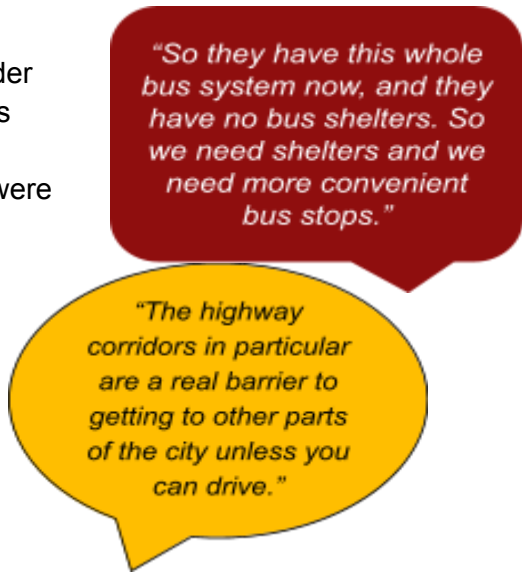
After the focus groups were complete, we drafted summaries for each planning area. These summaries were emailed to all focus group participants for whom we had email addresses. We shared a short anonymous feedback mechanism using Padlet where we asked participants to rate their satisfaction with the summaries. Specific details can be found in the appendix, but all participants in both planning areas said that the summary was either great (captured what was important to me) or good (It's good - but there are a few things I would add or change). One important thing to note is that we were lacking email addresses for almost all Chinese residents and for many Latinx residents, so those who participated from those demographic groups are not represented in the feedback on the summaries to follow.

Southeast Area Plan (SEAP) Community Feedback Summary

Transportation

Community members highlighted significant challenges in transportation access and safety:

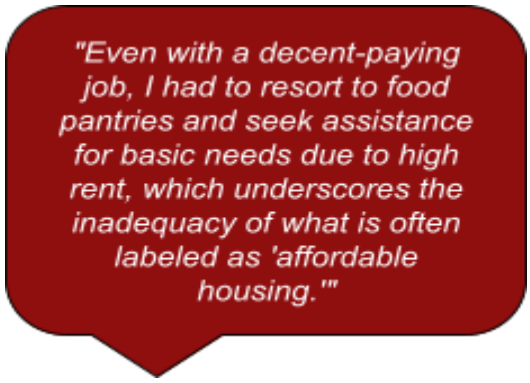
- **Public Transit:** Limited bus routes and infrequent service—especially on Milwaukee Street and weekends—hinder mobility, particularly for individuals with disabilities and families without cars.
- **Safety Concerns:** Dangerous biking and walking conditions were cited frequently. Speeding vehicles, inadequate pedestrian crossings, and poorly lit areas compromise safety.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Residents requested better sidewalks, benches, bike paths (including nature-immersed trails), and enhanced bus stops with shelter and lighting.
- **Accessibility:** Improvements in ADA-compliant infrastructure are needed, such as wheelchair-accessible sidewalks and curb ramps.



Housing

Affordable, accessible, and community-integrated housing is a top concern:

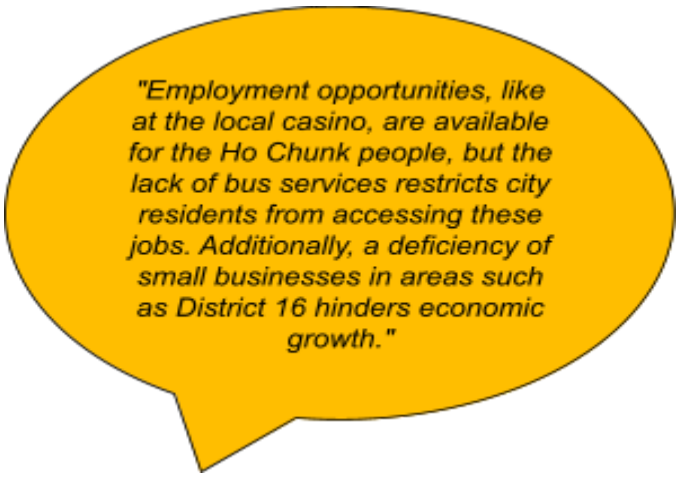
- **Affordability Crisis:** Rising rent costs and long waitlists for affordable and accessible units are key frustrations.
- **Diverse Housing Needs:** Suggestions include building multifamily units, one-level or first-floor homes, and housing for seniors and people with disabilities.
- **Mixed-Use Development:** Residents support integrating housing with stores, clinics, and community spaces.
- **Zoning and Density:** Increased housing density along Milwaukee Street is recommended to accommodate population growth.
- **Community-Centered Design:** Residents want developments that foster neighborhood connection and provide family-oriented resources.



Jobs & Economic Security

Economic opportunity was another recurring theme:

- **Employment Barriers:** Many struggle to find stable, local jobs—particularly undocumented residents who face additional hurdles.
- **Limited Opportunities:** Undocumented immigrants face significant employment barriers.There's a desire for employment diversity beyond cleaning, food service, and warehouse jobs.
- **Local Business Support:** There is a scarcity of local businesses and numerous empty storefronts on Milwaukee Street, highlighting the challenges of business prosperity in the area. Residents advocate for small business development and retail presence in the neighborhood.
- **Job Access:** Job accessibility is hindered by the residential nature of the neighborhood and transportation issues, so improved transit would also improve access to jobs across the city.



Safety & Wellbeing

Residents expressed concerns about both personal safety and health service accessibility:

- **Crime & Violence:** Incidents of shootings and general feelings of unsafety were mentioned frequently.
- **Environmental Safety:** Speeding, road noise, and poor lighting near schools and parks create unsafe conditions.
  Health Access: The need for urgent care, clinics, and culturally responsive care for aging and disabled populations was emphasized.
- **Community Safety Strategies:** Suggestions included neighborhood watch programs, foot or bike patrols, and infrastructure to slow traffic.
- **Preventive & Holistic Approaches:** Calls for community-centered, preventive safety measures and wellness initiatives were common.

"To me, as I think about health and safety, it's that you don't have to worry about those shots in the middle of the night and whatever the case may be, but being able to walk down your sidewalk - if you're lucky enough to have a sidewalk - is to be able to walk any time of day to that extent and not have to worry about looking over your shoulder."

"I think the issue of safety is not solely about violent crime, but also about lack of safety for people walking/biking and a general lack of "eyes on the street." Unless you are driving a personal car, these neighborhoods feel very isolated from the rest of Madison."

Community Spaces

The community strongly desires more inclusive, functional public spaces:

- **Third Spaces:** There is enthusiasm for places beyond home and work that promote connection, such as community centers, cultural gathering spaces, and youth areas.
- **Parks and Recreation:** Residents appreciate existing parks (e.g., Kennedy playground, sledding hill) but want more revitalized and accessible green spaces.
- **Creative Use of Land:** Participants suggested using underutilized spaces for community gardens, art installations, and picnic areas.
- **Welcoming Events:** Community members feel most welcome during school events, cultural gatherings, and outdoor neighborhood activities.

"I mean really, like my dream would be so, okay, so the current Karmenta site on Milwaukee street, which is currently the Salvation army shelter, which is temporary because they're building the new shelter that will become like a vacant space - having some kind of like community space, a coffee shop, a library, a bank, something to have like multi purpose. I think like Warner Park, a community center that's accessible for meetings, for kids to attend, that host events, that holds classes and within resources within it.

You know, you could have some private businesses, some city space, but like a multi purpose community space on Milwaukee street."

SEAP Recommendations

Based on community input, the following actions are recommended:

- **Transportation:**
  - Expand and enhance bus routes, especially on Milwaukee Street and weekends.
  - Invest in infrastructure for walkability and bike safety (e.g., speed bumps, lighting, sidewalks). Keep creating more paths under/across the highways.
  - Ensure transit and pathways are accessible for people with disabilities.

- **Housing:**
  - Increase affordable, accessible, and diverse housing stock.
  - Encourage mixed-use developments that integrate housing with essential services and amenities.
  - Explore higher-density zoning in growth corridors like Milwaukee Street.

- **Economic Development:**
  - Support job creation through local business incentives and inclusive hiring strategies.
  - Provide job training and pathways to diverse employment, especially for immigrants and undocumented residents.
  - Integrate walkable businesses, such as coffee shops, banks, barber shops, small grocery stores into more residential areas.

- **Health & Safety:**
  - Improve access to healthcare services through new clinics and mobile health programs.
  - Support neighborhood patrols and invest in environmental safety measures like lighting and traffic control.
  - Implement culturally sensitive and preventive community safety strategies.

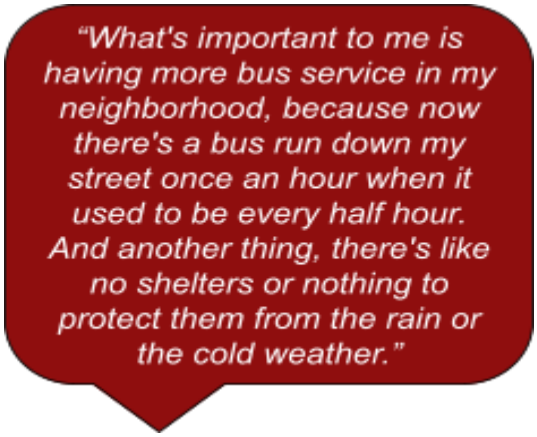
- **Community Engagement:**
  - Create and maintain welcoming community spaces that reflect the area's cultural and linguistic diversity.
  - Increase access to parks, gathering spaces, and arts-based programs. Consider adding a splash pad at Hiestand Park.
  - Prioritize family-friendly and intergenerational amenities and events that are accessible year round.

Southwest Area Plan (SWAP) Community Feedback Summary

Transportation

Residents voiced consistent concerns about the inefficiency and limited reach of public transportation in the Southwest. Key issues included:

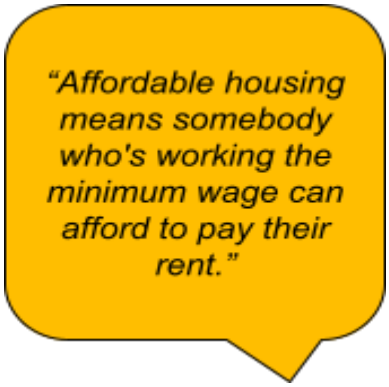
- **Public Transit:** Infrequent bus service and limited early-morning access are a challenge for residents. Lack of bus shelters, insufficient signage, and no protection from weather conditions also contributed to low accessibility of public transportation.
- **Safety Concerns:** Pedestrians and cyclists experienced poor lighting, dangerous crossings, and inadequate bike lanes.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Participants noted specific road concerns such as the need to repave Schroeder Road and manage speeding and traffic volume in residential areas.



Housing

Affordable, safe, and accessible housing emerged as a top priority. Residents highlighted:

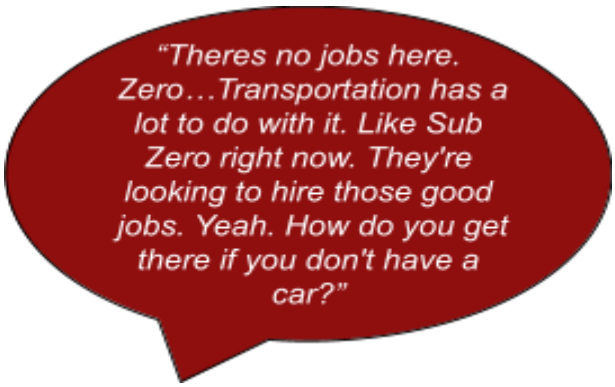
- **Affordability Crisis:** High rent, high property tax assessments, and limited housing options for low-income families and seniors prevent access to sustainable housing.
- **Diverse Housing Needs:** Residents expressed a desire for townhouses, condos, mixed-income, and mixed-use developments.
- **Safe Rental Housing:** Poor maintenance of rental properties and lack of accountability for landlords led residents to ask for increased housing code enforcement.



Jobs & Economic Security

Economic opportunities were seen as essential to community well-being. Participants identified:

- **Limited Opportunities:** There is a shortage of local jobs and dissatisfaction with current employment prospects in their neighborhoods.

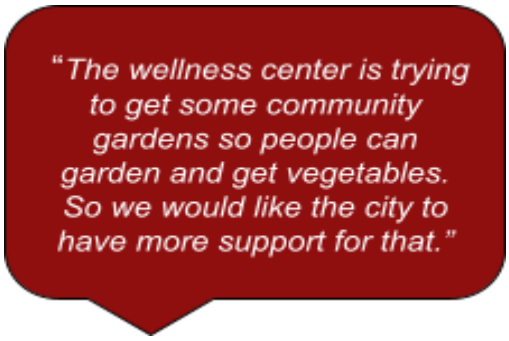


- **Job Training:** Residents supported job training programs to match local industry needs.
- **Nontraditional Employment Pathways:** There is a desire to expand options for youth employment, summer jobs, and business incubators to foster entrepreneurship.
- **Living Wage**: Participants want wages to rise in line with housing and living costs.

Safety & Wellbeing

Community members shared concerns about safety and access to essential health and wellness services:

- **Policing**: There were some reports of slow police response to emergencies. Some residents called for greater police presence, especially in school zones and apartment areas; however, others felt police presence in public areas like parks made their neighborhoods less welcoming.
- **Environmental Safety:** Poor lighting and sidewalk conditions were noted as contributing to safety risks. In addition, participants discussed the importance of sanitation improvements, including trash management and pet waste disposal.
- **Health Access:** The need for urgent care facilities and accessible healthcare services was emphasized.



Community Spaces

Residents expressed a strong desire for more accessible and inclusive community spaces:

- **Community Gathering Spaces:** Residents appreciate parks and spaces like Elver Park and the Allied Wellness Center, though more spaces are needed. There is demand for community gardens, dog parks, exercise facilities, and walkable community and cultural centers.
- **Welcoming Events:** Residents are interested in community-driven events such as potlucks, clean-up days, and inclusive recreational programming. Numerous people also specifically mentioned missing the Elver Park Fireworks which used to be a community event where people of all backgrounds celebrated together.
- **Community Enrichment:** Residents suggested investing in driving schools to support both youth and adults.

SWAP Recommendations

Based on focus group feedback, the following priorities and actions are recommended:

1. **Enhance Transportation Infrastructure**
    - Expand bus routes and frequency, particularly for weekends and early-morning commutes.
    - Install and improve bus shelters, bike lanes, lighting, and pedestrian crossings.
    - Address traffic safety with stoplights, road repaving, and calming measures in residential areas.

2. **Increase Affordable and Safe Housing**
    - Invest in affordable, mixed-income and mixed use developments and senior housing.
    - Enforce housing safety regulations and conduct regular property inspections - especially in lower-income neighborhoods where residents have limited power to confront landlords about code violations and unsafe living conditions.
    - Align property tax appraisals with market realities to reduce financial burdens.

3. **Support Economic Growth**
    - Develop job training programs tailored to local employment gaps.
    - Promote youth employment and business startup resources.
    - Adjust wages to reflect the cost of living.
    - In the Allied neighborhood specifically, participants would like to see business development in the Atticus Way/Helene Parkway area that would provide options both for walkable shopping and for teens to get jobs.

4. **Improve Safety and Health Services**
    - Build or expand urgent care and health services in underserved areas
    - Increase street lighting and improve sanitation services
    - Boost safety patrols around schools and transit hubs.

5. **Invest in Community Spaces and Events**
    - Create more inclusive and multi-use public spaces.
    - Organize regular, culturally responsive community events including skill-share opportunities for youth and adults.
    - Develop amenities like community centers, community gardens, and wellness spaces.

Conclusion: Shared High-Level Themes Across Both Areas

As you can see, there were many concerns and ideas that were present on both the Southeast and Southwest sides. Above, you see suggestions specific to each side of town. In this section, we outline common concerns and areas of potential that are shared across both of the South Madison districts.

Both sets of focus groups stressed the need for strong public transit infrastructure, particularly regarding frequency, early service, and bus shelters to keep residents shielded from the elements. Safety concerns were prominent, including dangerous pedestrian crossings, poor street lighting, and a lack of bike and walking infrastructure. Both groups would like to see enhanced pedestrian and bike safety through better signage, sidewalks, and traffic-calming measures.

There was frustration with poor road conditions, drainage issues, potholes, and inadequate utilities, including internet access and sanitation. Residents would like the City to prioritize upgrades to basic infrastructure—roads, utilities, internet, and flood prevention.

Participants consistently highlighted rising housing costs, poor rental conditions, and a lack of affordable options. Concerns about housing inspections and code enforcement were echoed in both parts of the City, and participants would like to see a consistent enforcement of housing codes especially in low-income areas of the City. Residents would also like to see an increase in affordable, mixed-income, and mixed-use housing options, as well as a commitment to ensure new developments include access to amenities and public transit.

Residents in both sets of focus groups reported limited local job opportunities, especially for youth. There was a desire for training programs, youth employment, and higher wages to match the cost of living. Residents would like to see an investment in job readiness programs, support for small business growth, and targeted employment opportunities for youth and underrepresented populations.

Safety concerns were broad, including slow police response, vandalism, and community violence, poor lighting, unsafe school zones, and a need for stronger community presence were raised in both sets. Some residents would like to see an increase in police and safety patrol presence, while others are indicated feeling less safe with increased police presence - especially if it’s more in service of surveillance than responding to emergencies. Residents on both sides of town would also like to see improvements in lighting, visibility, sidewalks and traffic signage.

Both groups also emphasized the importance of public gathering spaces to foster belonging, especially for culturally diverse and multigenerational communities. Community members also want more events that reflect their identities and needs. Residents would like to see an increase in parks, cultural centers, and event spaces where they can connect with their neighbors. These spaces could be used to expand access to adult education, recreational programming, and community-driven events like potlucks, wellness activities, and clean-up days.

People reported feeling most welcome during inclusive community events and in spaces that acknowledged their cultural and linguistic diversity. Residents asked that the City ensure planning, programs, and public spaces reflect and celebrate the diversity of the community. Specific examples of this included the fireworks at Elver Park, Luna' Grocery Store, Allied Wellness Center, neighborhood schools, and libraries. Building on these examples, the City has the opportunity to integrate welcoming and inclusive spaces into all of their planning in the Southeast and Southwest areas.

Appendix

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction and Overview:

The City of Madison has contracted with the nINA Collective to host a series of focus groups to inform the development of the area plan for your neighborhood. An Area Plan is a long-term vision that focuses on guiding changes to the physical parts of our community. They shape the changes that may come from new housing or commercial uses made by private property owners. They also shape public infrastructure, like streets and parks improvements carried out by the City.

Anticipating Madison's future needs and planning for the uses of our limited space is critical. Planning considers many factors, such as expected population growth, the economy, the environment, cultural characteristics, and transportation needs.

Your ideas, concerns, and experiences will help shape future plan recommendations that lead to city policies, city laws and potential changes to your neighborhood and the City. We share your feedback with the Mayor, Alders and other policymakers that guide city policy. Some suggestions will be easily found in plan recommendations, others, that are out of the scope of the plan, will be shared with the agencies and partnerships that work on those issues.

Your names and any identifying information will be kept confidential. nINA Collective, as an external consultant, will hold all of the focus group data and will report on overall themes and insights that emerged from these conversations. Nothing you say here today will be attributed to you personally. In our report from the focus groups, some quotes may be used, but we will never link those quotes or any identifying information to individuals.

Ground Rules:

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Please speak one at a time. This will help us capture everyone's thoughts and opinions. Also please be aware of how much or how little you are talking. As facilitators, we may cut in or redirect the conversation onto the next topic or to allow another person the chance to speak. Comment sheets will be provided if you have additional thoughts that were not incorporated into the conversation.

Are there any questions before we begin?

- after this section, begin recording the conversation -

Question procedure for facilitators:

- Ask the top level question first and invite responses from the group.
- Underneath the top level questions are follow-up questions to be asked one at a time.
- When appropriate, examples are also included in the follow-up questions.

City of Madison community engagement focus group questions:

1. What's important to you regarding transportation in your neighborhood?
    a. If examples are needed, you can share: such as biking, walking, bus, safe crossings, etc…
    b. Share if __*(what's important)*__ is already happening in your neighborhood, or if it's something you would like to see added or improved.

2. What's important to you regarding housing in your neighborhood?
    a. Share if __*(what's important)*__ is already happening in your neighborhood, or if it's something you would like to see added or improved.
    b. What does affordable housing mean to you?
    c. What kind of housing would best meet your needs?

3. What's important to you regarding jobs and economic opportunities in your community?
    a. Share if __*(what's important)*__ is already happening, or if it's something you would like to see added or improved.
    b. How do you get to work or school - are there things that limit your ability to get to a job/school?

4. What's important to you regarding health and safety in your neighborhood?
    a. Share if __*(what's important)*__ is already happening in your neighborhood or if it's something you would like to see added or improved.

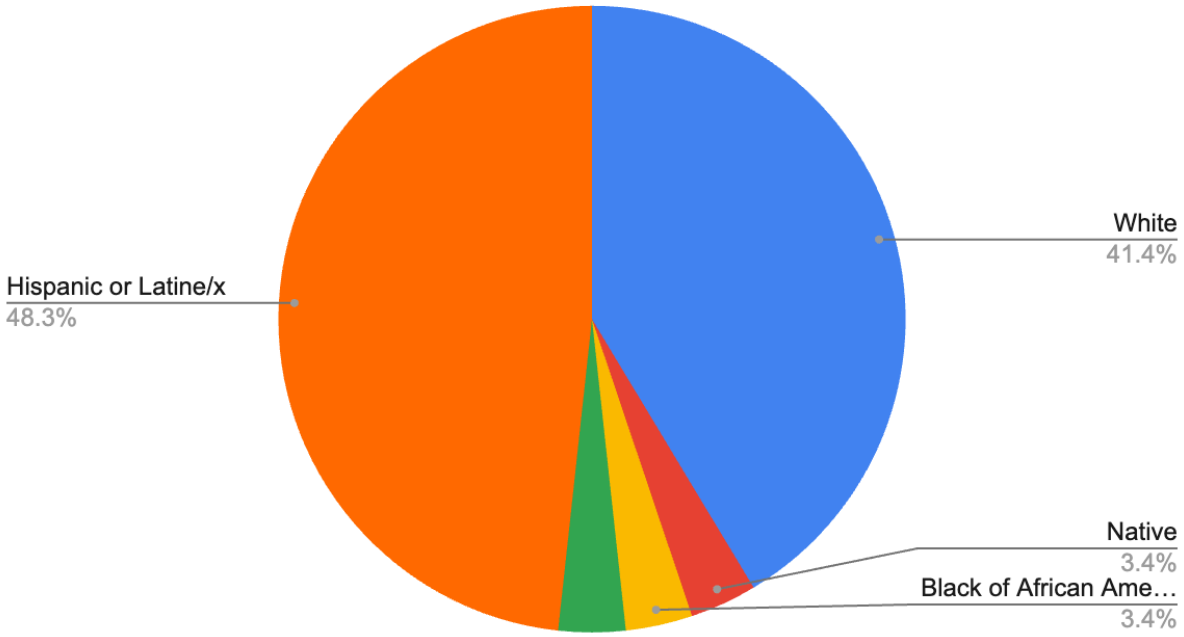
5. What are some of the activities, events, or places in your neighborhood that make you feel welcome?
    a. If examples are needed, you can share: such as parks, playgrounds, places with public art, festivals, or other community events.

6. If you could make a wish for one infrastructure project (something physical that can be built or installed) that would really benefit your community, what would it be?
    a. If examples are needed, you can share: such as lighting, sidewalk repair, art projects, community gardens, etc…(Must be something physical that can be built or installed)

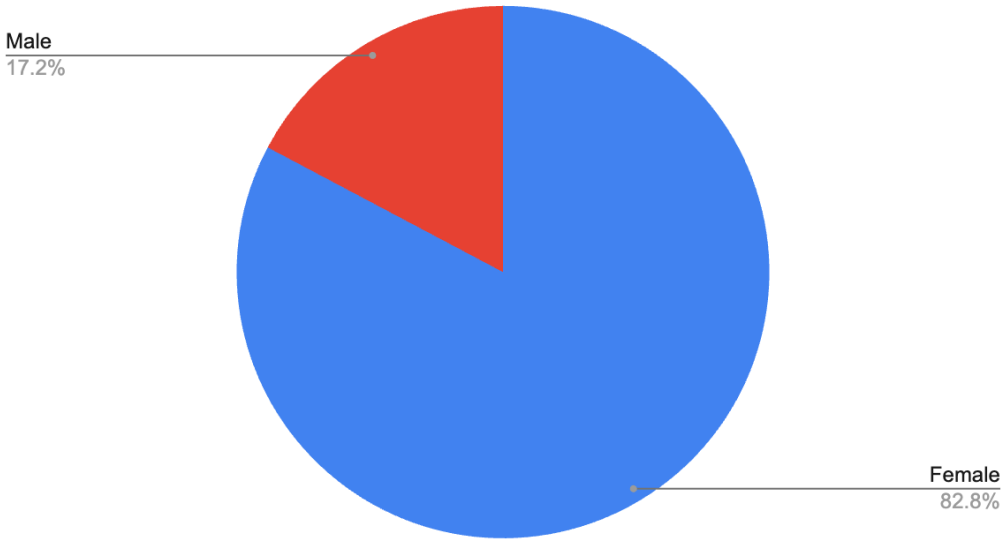
7. Is there anything else you would like us to know or to share back with the City at this time?

SEAP Focus Group Demographics

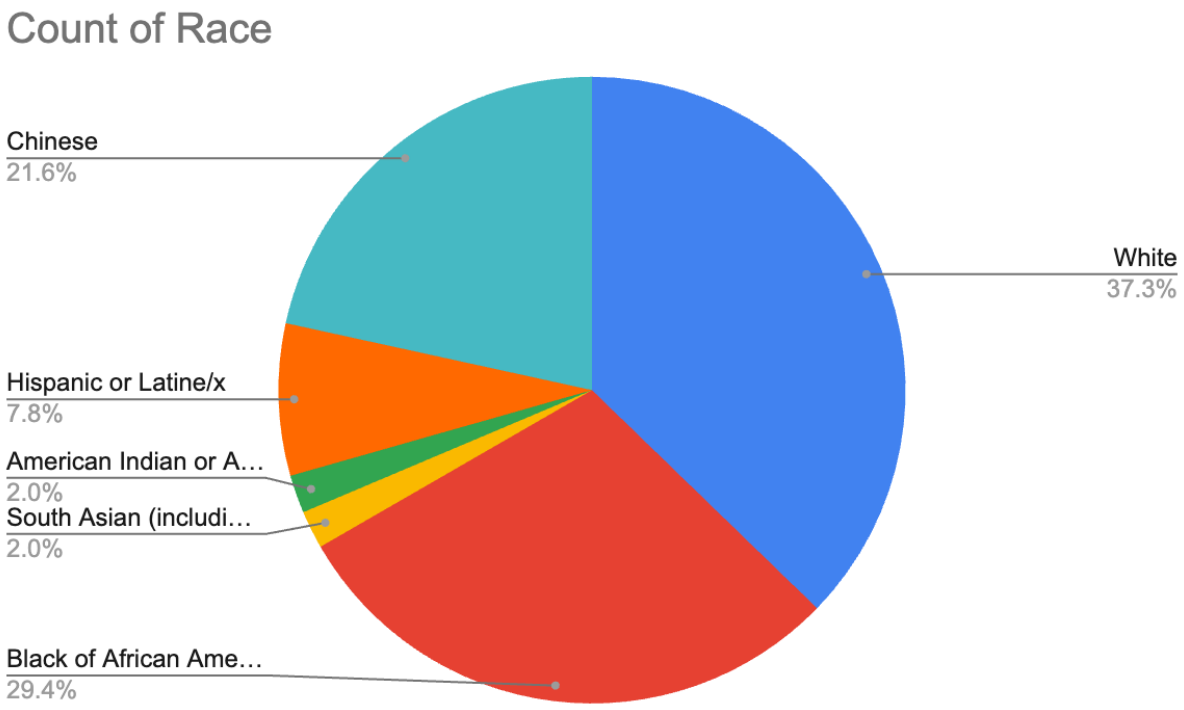
Count of Race

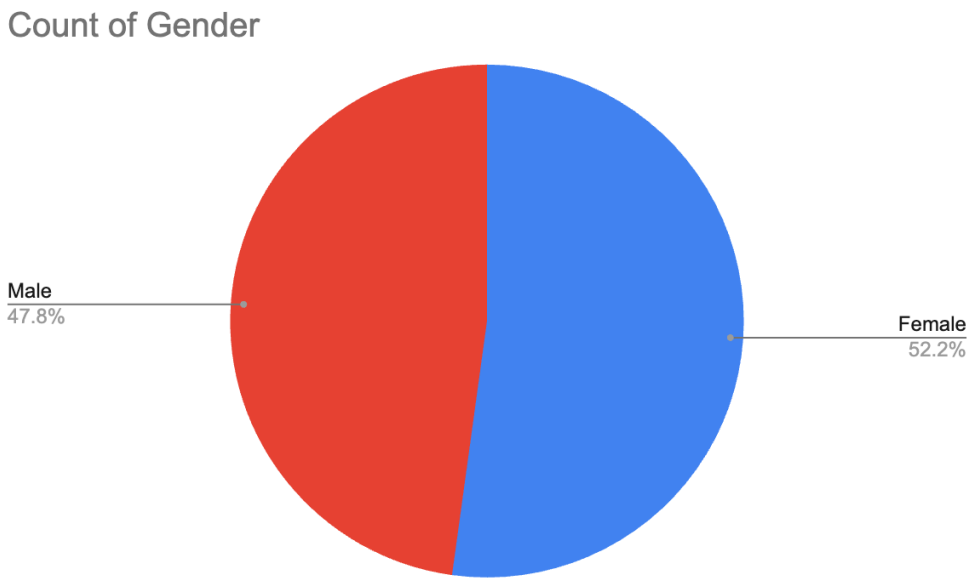


Count of Gender



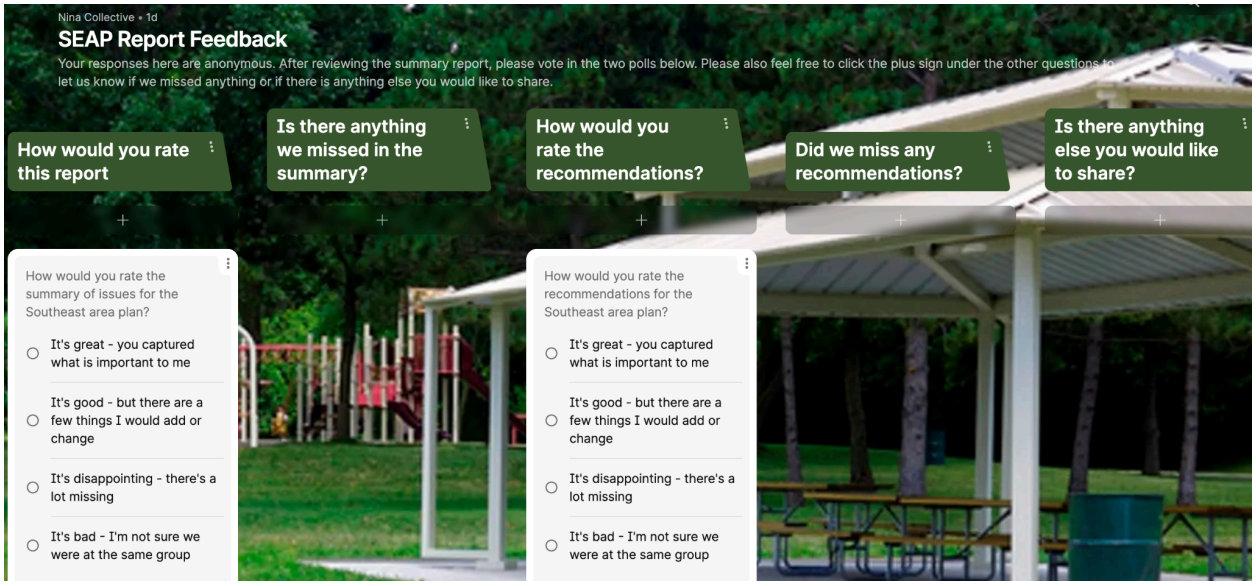
SWAP Focus Group Demographics





Feedback on Survey Summaries from Focus Group Participants

We created a padlet for both SEAP and SWAP with the same questions. You can see below for the questions that were included.



Poll questions were:

- How would you rate this report?
- How would you rate the recommendations?

The multiple choice responses for both poll questions were:

- It's great - you captured what is important to me
- It's good - but there are a few things I would add or change
- It's disappointing - there's a lot missing
- It's bad - I'm not sure we were at the same group

The open ended questions were:

- Is there anything we missed in the summary?
- Did we miss any recommendations?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

To view the padlets, you can view the following links:
SWAP Padlet
SEAP Padlet