NINA COLLECTIVE

SUMMARY REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

City of Madison Southeast and Southwest Area Plans Fall Focus Groups

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Executive Summary

During November 2025, nINA Collective held a series of focus groups with residents of Madison's **Southeast (SEAP)** and **Southwest (SWAP)** planning areas. These conversations aimed to confirm key themes from the City's initial round of engagement (Spring 2025), gather feedback on draft recommendations, and identify community priorities that had not yet been fully captured in the planning documents. These focus groups were offered in Spanish, Chinese, and with ASL interpretation to ensure a broad range of resident participation.

Madison residents from the Southeast and Southwest planning areas shared clear priorities during recent focus groups: safer and better-lit streets, reliable transit, stronger housing quality and affordability, and more youth, library, and community programming. Southeast participants emphasized improved pedestrian crossings, expanded park investment, mixed-use development, and better food and health access. Southwest residents highlighted similar needs while also raising urgent concerns about predatory grocery pricing, uneven rental maintenance, gentrification pressures, and the lack of teen-focused programming. Across all groups, community members called for equitable investment, more visible engagement from local leaders, and planning that supports families, youth, elders, and longtime residents.

Across both planning areas, residents consistently emphasized:

- **Safety and accessibility** in walking, biking, and transit environments.
- **Quality, affordability, accessibility, and maintenance** of housing.
- **Need for more community facilities**, especially multipurpose spaces for youth, seniors, and mental health supports.
- **Better grocery access and food systems**, including culturally relevant food options.
- **Green space, tree canopy, and environmental resilience**, matched with programming for teens and families.

Residents offered strong validation for many of the City's proposed actions while adding concrete, lived-experience-based recommendations that broaden and deepen the plans' equity and community-wellbeing focus.

Methods

Focus Group Design

The engagement process consisted of 7 **separate focus groups** for the Southeast and Southwest planning areas. Three were conducted in person on the Southwest side, four were conducted virtually; two in each of the planning areas. Each session followed a consistent structure:

1. **Presentation of Findings from Spring 2025**
   We shared what was learned in the first phase of community engagement, including themes around transportation, housing, safety, economy, parks, and environment.
2. **Presentation of Draft Recommendations**
   Facilitators reviewed the City's draft actions for each topic area using slides and summary handouts (e.g., transportation improvements, green and resilient actions, housing strategies, economic opportunity, health and safety).
3. **Guided Reflection Questions**
   Participants were asked:
   - Do these recommendations fit what you see and experience?
   - What's missing or needs to be stronger?
   - Who will benefit, and who might be left out?
4. **Open Dialogue**
   Facilitators supported conversation while capturing verbatim notes and thematic observations.

Data Sources

This summary draws from:

- **Transcripts** from SEAP and SWAP focus groups
- **Slides and handouts used in the sessions** providing draft recommendations
- **Facilitator notes** embedded within the transcripts

Analysis Approach

Feedback was coded across four categories for each plan:

1. **What People Liked**
2. **New Suggestions**
3. **What Was Missing**
4. **Who Would Be Impacted**

Themes were validated across multiple focus groups when possible.

Southeast Area Plan (SEAP)

Across the Southeast Area Plan focus groups, residents emphasized the urgent need for safer pedestrian crossings, connected and accessible sidewalks, and traffic-calming improvements on major corridors including Milwaukee Street, Buckeye Road, and Stoughton Road. Participants affirmed the City's focus on expanding mixed-use development, increasing the tree canopy, and investing in accessible parks, particularly Histand Park and Kennedy Park, which serve as vital community anchors. They supported efforts to expand affordable and mixed-income housing, strengthen economic development along key corridors, and enhance youth programming and environmental stewardship. Residents also surfaced concerns about **food access**, inconsistent healthcare availability, and the need for more robust community engagement across southeast neighborhoods. Overall, SEAP participants expressed strong alignment with the City's recommendations while calling for deeper attention to safety, youth investment, basic-needs access, and long-term neighborhood health. See below for more specific details.

1. What Participants Liked

Transportation & Safety

- Prioritizing sidewalk gaps and adding crossing improvements (e.g., bridges, underpasses) at locations such as **Milwaukee Street**, **Swanton & Thompson**, **Buckeye & 51**, and **Pflaum & 51**.

Parks & Green Space

- The **2026 Parks Development Plan**, which will upgrade over 20 parks in the area.
- Increasing the **tree canopy** and protecting green spaces.

Housing & Land Use

- Increasing density along transit corridors.
- Allowing mixed-use development at community nodes.
- Incentivizing affordability through bonus stories or City-owned land.

2. New Suggestions

Green Space & Environment

- Create **community food-growing spaces**, such as gardens or small urban farms.
- Integrate **prairie habitat** and environmental stewardship into park design, instead of relying solely on lawn landscaping.

- Replicate models like **Warner Park's school partnerships**, bringing environmental education to youth.
- Prioritize **Histand Park** and **Kennedy Park** in 2026 Parks Development Planning.
- Consider **cooling center expansion** in areas with heat vulnerability.

Economic Development

- Address **commercial affordability** along Stoughton Road; residents noted vacancies and high rents as barriers to revitalization.
- Prioritize grocery access and fresh food availability as part of the area's economic strategy.

3. What Was Missing

- **Food access** and grocery stores were absent from recommendations but repeatedly named as critical needs.
- Some questioned whether **Stoughton Road connectivity** should be a priority, suggesting limited community benefit.
- More explicit investments for **youth programming**, especially teens.
- **Healthcare access**—participants named long waitlists and the need for more practitioners.

4. Who Would Be Impacted

- **Pedestrians and transit-dependent residents**, including elders and families.
- **Youth and teens** needing safe, engaging spaces.
- **Residents facing food insecurity** or with limited transportation access.
- **Renters and homeowners** near proposed neighborhood development zones.
- **Seniors and residents with disabilities**, particularly in relation to mobility improvements and healthcare access.

Southwest Area Plan (SWAP)

Feedback from Southwest Area Plan focus groups highlighted shared priorities across diverse groups, including the need for safe, well-lit streets, restored and reliable transit service, and high-quality affordable housing supported by strong maintenance standards. Residents repeatedly endorsed the creation of a Southwest community center, expanded library programming, and improved access to job training and small-business development. Shared

resident concerns included: grocery access barriers, predatory pricing, disproportionate disinvestment, and the impacts of gentrification and inequitable commercial opportunities on Black residents. SWAP participants also stressed the need for youth programming beyond existing institutions, and called for more direct engagement from local alders to witness and address safety concerns, poor lighting, and transit challenges firsthand. Taken together, SWAP insights reflect a community seeking equitable investment, economic fairness, and safe, vibrant neighborhoods where families, youth, and elders can thrive. See below for a detailed review of responses.

1. What Participants Liked

Transportation

- Sidewalk improvements and safety upgrades on **Schroeder Rd**, **Raymond Rd**, and surrounding arterials.
- Studying the **restoration of Hammersley Road transit service**.
- Adding **Route D buses** to address overcrowding.
- Expanding **bus shelters**.

Housing & Neighborhoods

- Increased mixed-use housing and better walkability.
- Acknowledgment of **housing maintenance challenges** and the need for higher-quality affordable units.

Community Spaces

- Wide support for a **Southwest community center** with multi-age programming, mental health support, fitness, and youth space.
- Enthusiasm for potential **Meadowridge Library expansion**, seen as a central community resource.

2. New Suggestions

Transportation & Safety

- Consider **accessible overpasses or tunnels** for high-traffic, dangerous intersections (e.g., Raymond, Whitney, Gammon, McKee).
- Improve bus shelters with **lighting, seating, and real-time arrival displays**, and ensure they are safe at night for vulnerable riders.
- Improve **pedestrian safety** at difficult intersections such as High Point & Raymond Rd.

Housing & Youth

- Set **quality standards** for accessible, affordable housing (better materials, soundproofing, pest control).
- Create **indoor youth spaces** within apartment complexes to reduce hallway congregation during winter.
- Requests for **sports leagues, teen-specific programs, and recreational options beyond the Boys & Girls Club**, especially for youth who are not currently engaged.

Community & Economic Opportunity

- Offer **accessible job training** beyond healthcare (additional medical roles, trades, certifications).
- Strengthen **business incubator** programs along the Verona Road commercial corridor.
- Expand improvements beyond formal recommendations to address challenges along the **Raymond Road corridor**, a major community connector.
- A clear desire for **direct engagement with alders**, visits to the neighborhood to witness safety conditions, and more transparent alder-district communication.

3. What Was Missing

- **Emergency call stations** ("blue lights") in areas with high safety concerns.
- A clear, differentiated **approach to policing**; more presence near schools, but less in parks.
- Accessible **mental health services** tied into community spaces.
- More clarity on whether the City will enforce **housing quality** standards, not just permit additional construction.
- **A major call for grocery affordability and anti-exploitation efforts** in food deserts, including community concern about predatory pricing at local corner stores.

4. Who Would Be Impacted

- **Transit-dependent residents**, especially elders, immigrants, and low-income families.
- **Renters in aging or poorly maintained units**.
- **Youth**, especially those needing indoor recreation and safe gathering spaces.
- **Workers and job seekers** benefiting from training and business incubators.
- **Women and families**, particularly those who cited concerns about nighttime safety and bus reliability.

Insights from specific population groups

People with Disabilities

Residents with disabilities emphasized how foundational accessible infrastructure is to their daily safety, independence, and wellbeing. They affirmed many of the City's proposed improvements such as: sidewalk connectivity, lighting, reliable transit, mixed-income housing near transit, and the creation of accessible community gathering spaces However, their perspectives underscored the accessibility impacts of these recommendations:

- Long waits for buses, dark corridors, and disconnected sidewalks pose disproportionate safety risks.
- Poor rental maintenance creates health and mobility barriers.
- Community centers and libraries serve as lifelines, not amenities, providing accessible job access, technology, and social services.

Their feedback highlighted a need for practical, disability-informed enhancements such as smaller buses for more frequent service, safer nighttime conditions, better property maintenance, and expanded community programming. They also stressed gaps in transparency around funding, housing enforcement, and the timeline for community facilities. Overall, this group reinforced that infrastructure and programming must be implemented with accessibility at the center, ensuring disabled residents are not only included but able to fully participate in community life.

Chinese Residents

Chinese residents echoed many of the broader community's priorities: safer intersections, better lighting, restored bus routes, and expanded mixed-use and affordable housing, while bringing forward detailed technical and neighborhood-based insights. Their recommendations emphasized pedestrian safety through overpasses or underpasses, improved traffic signal timing, targeted lighting upgrades, and appropriate siting of mixed-use areas to preserve residential stability. They also uplifted the importance of expanded library and community programming, tree maintenance, and clear municipal coordination with surrounding jurisdictions. Their feedback reflects a desire for safe, predictable, well-maintained neighborhoods where youth, seniors, families, and transit-dependent residents can thrive. Overall, participants stressed that equitable growth requires coherent planning, strong maintenance systems, and accessible community resources across all neighborhoods.

Latine/x Residents

Participants in the Spanish-language focus groups strongly affirmed the City's focus on pedestrian safety. Ideas such as pedestrian bridges, underpasses, and flashing signals were

especially well-received. Residents also voiced support for park development and tree canopy efforts. Economic opportunity strategies and efforts to expand affordable housing were welcomed, as were the City's attempts to gather community input. Overall, the group reinforced the importance of equitable engagement, safer streets for children and pedestrians, investments in key parks, and meaningful economic and housing solutions for low- and moderate-income families across both the Southwest and Southeast neighborhoods.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

While some of the recommendations below do not fall under the purview of the City of Madison's Planning Department, we are including the shared priorities we heard from residents with the hope that they can be shared with the appropriate City Departments to inform future action. Based on resident input across both planning areas, the following system-level recommendations are suggested:

1. Prioritize Safety & Accessibility in Mobility Systems

- Invest in **pedestrian safety upgrades**, including: better lighting, redesigned crossings, traffic calming, bridges, underpasses, and/or flashing beacons.
- Restore or expand **bus routes** in areas where walking distances are long or unsafe.
- Improve **bus shelter design** with lighting, visibility, and real-time information.
- Explore **smaller buses** for low-ridership areas to increase frequency and reduce wait times - an important accessibility issue for seniors, disabled residents, and families.

2. Address Housing Quality Alongside Affordability

- Enforce clear and consistent **rental maintenance standards**, with rapid response timelines for heating failures, leaks, pests, and property neglect. Pair these expectations with approval for new housing developments.
- Address concerns about **gentrification and displacement**, ensuring new development does not raise rents beyond what current residents can afford.
- Support a balance of **accessible and affordable** mixed-income and missing-middle housing options, with thoughtful siting to protect neighborhood character while expanding opportunity.

3. Expand Multi-Use Community Hubs

- Cultivate **multigenerational hubs** for youth, families, and seniors that include: accessible job training, mental health supports, and service coordination.
- Preserve and expand access to **library programs**, including after-school computer use, digital literacy classes, summer activities, and culturally specific programming.
- Develop youth programs beyond the Boys & Girls Club, including **team sports, teen recreation, mentorship, and creative programming**.

4. Ensure Equitable, Inclusive Economic Development

- Prioritize **grocery access**, including efforts to reduce predatory pricing, improve proximity to affordable stores, and support culturally relevant food retailers.
- Increase support for **small-business incubators**, especially those serving Black, immigrant, and low-income entrepreneurs.
- Address community concerns about **inequitable access to commercial leases**, including fair opportunities for Black-owned and community-serving businesses.
- Revitalize high-vacancy commercial areas with **transparent planning** and inclusive economic strategies.

5. Enhance Green Infrastructure & Climate Resilience

- Expand the urban **tree canopy**, including shade on major roads.
- Support **pollinator gardens**, prairies, and natural habitat in parks.
- Incorporate **community food-growing spaces**, natural landscaping, and environmentally integrated education programs.

6. Improve Governance, Engagement, & Transparency

- Strengthen communication and coordination among **multiple alder districts**, surrounding municipalities, and community stakeholders.
- Increase **in-person alder engagement** in neighborhoods experiencing safety issues, poor lighting, or transit barriers.
- **Improve communication** around the timeline, funding, and criteria for community center and library expansions.

7. Integrate Food Access & Affordability as Planning Priorities

- Address the severe lack of affordable, accessible grocery options, especially in the SWAP area, recognizing food access as an **equity and public health issue**, not only an economic one.
- Explore strategies to support **community food businesses**, food carts, culturally relevant grocers, and affordable fresh food markets.

Conclusion

Across both plans, residents offered clear, actionable, and experience-rooted feedback. They affirmed many of the City's draft recommendations while emphasizing the need for:

- Greater focus on **safety**, **quality of life**, and **food access**
- Stronger commitments to **youth**, **seniors**, and **low-income families**
- Investments that reflect the lived realities of **immigrant**, **Black**, and **multilingual** communities
- More holistic approaches that combine **infrastructure**, **programming**, and **community care**

This report captures the voices of residents who live, work, and raise families in the Southeast and Southwest sides of Madison. Their guidance provides a roadmap for shaping plans that address not only physical infrastructure but also community well-being, belonging, and long-term resilience.