



August 19, 2020

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Dear DoMI leaders,

I'm writing on behalf of Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC), and the residents who live near and will use the planned Bloomfield Neighborway.

BDC engages entities City-wide to advocate for equitable, inclusive community process that is designed first to reach traditionally marginalized populations. We use what we've learned in designing our own community process as well as our capacity to encourage change. If done consistently, the outcome is increased trust that the entity is listening and acting on behalf of the people it serves.

We support the Neighborway as a piece of a larger system that provides a safer route for cycling. BDC, and Bloomfield's neighbors, as overwhelmingly expressed to us the last several years, want to see improvements made on our streets that slow traffic and make our neighborhood more comfortable to bike and walk.

At issue is the lack of a community process by DoMI, Healthy Ride, and BikePGH. In a neighborhood that has traditionally supported multi-modal safety infrastructure, the Bloomfield Neighborway should have been a slam dunk. However, the project process has become muddled, unfocused, and top-down, and the design was presented to the community from the beginning as a finished product with minimal time allowed for community engagement and feedback. This forces community groups and residents into a reactionary position, and ensures that neither design equity nor community safety are built into our streets.

The community process has felt rushed and has excluded some of the most affected people, who also happen to be traditionally marginalized populations. Below are some questions, as well as (we hope) helpful input to create an equitable community process.

- Does the community process developed by City Planning apply to other departments? Their process is a helpful baseline to build on.

- What is the current City standard for an equitable Covid-era community process? DoMI mailed postcards, but many residents reported not receiving them. Residents without access to technology and did not receive a postcard were not able to learn about the Neighborway meetings unless they talked to a neighbor, and many people do not leave their homes right now. A call-in number wasn't provided, which means that a resident couldn't participate if they don't have access to technology. Two of the people who live at the corner of Comrie and Mathilda, where the most impactful changes are proposed, are elderly and do not use the technology required to know about these meetings or to participate in them. At least one of them stated they did not receive a postcard. Elderly and low-income people were left out of the community process. Social media is free and easy but not at all effective in reaching marginalized populations.
- What is the reason for the urgency on this project? The mini charette process is rushed. This short time frame creates a burden in asking BLS/BDC to find people available on such short notice, particularly when DoMI should have the contact information for people who attended the two online meetings. The two Neighborway community meetings were announced about a week before the meetings. Two weeks is the absolute minimum BDC takes to ensure that we're doing everything we can to get people to meetings.
- The timeline for initial and continuing evaluation and changes, as well as the public release of data gathered, is unclear. Could that be clarified?
- The current format for the virtual Zoom meetings is not conducive for public feedback. Are there other ways to host more community-minded virtual meetings, which create a forum for discussion and input? The current format doesn't allow for any discussion or dialogue, vital in a community process.
- Even in a pandemic there are ways to include in-person engagement at or near the site. What is the reason this wasn't considered?

We've put together some suggestions on how to change the current Neighborway process to be more equitable, which I know is important to DoMI as well.

1. BDC wants to see improvements made on our streets that slow traffic and make our neighborhood more comfortable to bike and walk. Proactively reach out to RCOs/community groups along the planned Neighborway and meet with them to learn the plans that neighbors may already have. Discuss with them how the resources you've secured may be able to help them develop the streets they need. Create a plan together.
2. Engage the RCOs/community groups to assist with the community process in order to understand how to best reach a neighborhood's population.
3. Put a modest amount of money and staff time into ensuring that all populations have the same opportunity to learn about the meeting and participate in the community process. Two strategies proven to work in Bloomfield are paying to boost FB/IG posts (at a cost of \$50 per meeting by a single organization) and physical flyering, that when used together are extremely effective. Consider asking RCOs/community groups for help accessing their social media followers, newsletter subscribers, and volunteers for flyering.

4. Work with RCOs/community groups along the Neighborway to convene a joint community meeting with your teams. We, and the residents, want to be a partner rather than forced into a reactionary role, and many RCOs have existing standards for community process in their neighborhoods that could make community meetings easier and more effective.
5. Finalize the design after working with the community, and provide data for why choices were made over other options and a timeline for reporting on the evaluation of the project once installed. Provide this data to the partnering community groups as well so that they can help ensure the community understands the decisions.
6. Eliminate confusing messaging. Residents very recently received postcards informing them that construction begins very soon. Many who are aware of the charette believe that it is simply a formality to convince the community that the existing plan is the best plan.
7. Significantly adjust the existing virtual meeting format. One way is permitting participants to ask their own questions to allow for follow-up and clarifying questions. This ensures that the facilitator will not leave out or misinterpret written questions. Additionally, people accessing virtual meetings over the phone do not have access to the chat feature in order to write out their comments or questions.
8. Do more to accommodate marginalized populations in community engagement. Add a call-in number to all meetings. Do not require all comments and questions in the chat, because those calling in can't access chat. Add to or replacing the virtual meeting using an outdoor, pop-up, open house style allows for plentiful distancing and avoids indoors and crowding. BDC, through our Bloomfield Mobility Principles process, has successfully conducted these outdoor, pop-up events in the past 2 months on Liberty Avenue and at the Bloomfield Saturday Market with Studio for Spatial Practice to gather community input.
9. Include demographic questions on engagement forms, and in order for people to join a community meeting. For people calling in, take the time to follow up with them after the meeting to collect demographic information. This provides you and the community with the understanding of the populations being reached and proves that those most affected by DoMI projects are participating in your process. Bonus is that it increases transparency, which increases trust in your work by communities. Here's a great example of what this can look like on the public-facing end from Oakland, CA.
<https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/aaab6353-c52e-4cc5-872e-a4e7362dd721/page/TP3OB?s=gMID9iTnPl0>

Our staff and board are ready to be a partner and resource to you. We support your work. Adopting a more equitable and accessible community process will build trust in your work and in DoMI, leading to less pushback when projects like this are proposed or installed. I'll be out of town Wed, Aug 19 through Sunday, August 22, however please reach out if you'd like to talk further and we can make time early next week.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Christina Howell', with a stylized, flowing script.

Christina Howell