

Reimagining the Bank of America Building

Community Engagement Report

Prepared for Maggie Walker Community Land Trust (MWCLT)
by Storefront for Community Design

March 16, 2021



Storefront for Community Design

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1 | Project Summary



1 | Project Summary

Storefront for Community Design was contracted by Maggie Walker Community Land Trust (MWCLT) to lead a community engagement process to receive feedback and ideas from residents for the new intended use of the former Bank of America building located at 1307 E Brookland Park Blvd in Northside's Highland Park community. The Bank of America building closed in 2017 and ownership was transferred to the Richmond Land Bank, a program of MWCLT, in the hope of finding a suitable use and tenant in the coming years.

Storefront developed a creative digital and physical outreach plan to frame an accessible, culturally responsive community listening approach that amplifies the ideas that Northside residents have regarding the intended use of the former Bank of America Building. Data and responses have been collected and presented in this final report for the MWCLT Citizen Advisory Panel to consider as they determine future use of the building.



what happens next?

to 1307 e brookland park blvd



2 | Project Partners

2 | Project Partners

Maggie Walker Land Trust

The Maggie Walker Community Land Trust (MWCLT) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks to develop and maintain permanently affordable homeownership opportunities for low and moderate-income households. MWCLT is committed to providing perpetually affordable homes to families with modest incomes throughout Richmond's neighborhoods. In this way, they can keep our neighborhoods diverse and vibrant, even as housing prices rise.

Without a program like the MWCLT, some neighborhoods in Richmond will be unaffordable to many of our citizens in the next decade. In 2018, MWCLT was designated as Richmond's Land Bank through an MOU with the City that stipulated a primary goal of supporting affordable housing creation, with secondary goals to support the creation of green space, urban agriculture, and economic opportunities.



2 | Project Partners

What is a community land trust?

A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a unique homeownership model, and an affordable alternative to renting. It reduces the cost of homeownership and keeps the home affordable for future generations by selling the building only to an income-qualified buyer, while retaining ownership of the land.

What is a land bank?

A land bank is a non-profit or government organization that acquires vacant and tax-delinquent properties from its locality. Normally, these properties would go through the tax auction process, going to the highest bidder with no guarantee that they would be put to use. Instead, the City transfers them to MWCLT for a low judicial sale fee, and we agree to steward them through a transparent, community-driven process. The Richmond Land Bank, a program of MWCLT, makes its land use designation and disposition decisions with the support of a 9-person volunteer panel called the Citizens' Advisory Panel.



2 | Project Partners

MWCLT Staff, Board and CAP Members:

Richmond Land Bank Citizens' Advisory Panel (CAP)

Gwen Corley Creighton, Chair
Helen Hardiman, Vice Chair
Melissa Guevara
Micah Morris
Phil Cunningham
Chanel Dixon
Sheba Williams
Hillary Small

MWCLT Board

Laura Lafayette,
Board Chair
Carolyn Champion, Vice Chair
Schirra Hayes, Treasurer
Jeisson Apolo, Secretary
Nelson Reveley
Duron Chavis
Chanel Dixon
Allison Domson
William Martin
Mike Mulvihill
Ashleigh Shannon
Tiffany Goodman
Patricia Trotta

MWCLT Staff

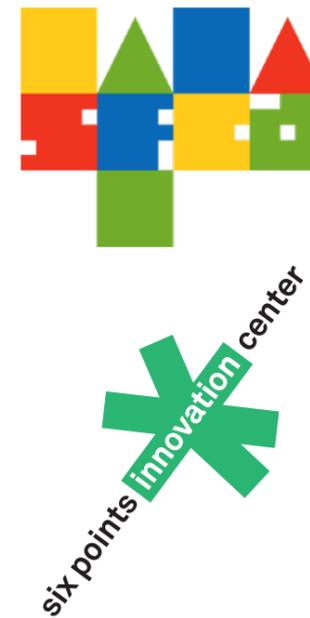
Erica Sims, Executive Director
Nikki D'Adamo-Damery, Community Coordinator
Lynn Bivens, Resource Developer
Julia MacNelly, Project Manager
Flora Valdes-Dapena, Administrative Associate
Sophie Schectman, Americorps VISTA

Storefront for Community Design

Storefront for Community Design (SFCD) is a non-profit design center in Richmond, Virginia that operates three main community-based program branches: Youth Innovation, Design Session, and Community Engagement.



Storefront has a rich relationship with Highland Park dating back to 2013 where the non-profit led beautification efforts, assisted small businesses with capacity building, and led the Highland Park Quality of Life Plan. Storefront continues to be ingrained in the local community through its programming via its Northside homebase, Six Points Innovation Center (6PIC), located on the commercial corridor in Highland Park. 6PIC opened in 2017 in collaboration with four partner non-profit organizations and is a youth-driven space where neighborhood youth have access to innovative programming in the arts, urban ecology, education assistance, public media, public history, and advocacy.



2 | Project Partners

Storefront for Community Design Staff, Volunteers, and Community Voices:

Staff

Shawn Balon, Executive Director, SFCD

Kai Banks, Center Director, SFCD

Anya Shcherbakova, Design Session Program
Manager, SFCD

Veronica Fleming, Consultant, SFCD

Volunteers

Nick Cooper, Board member, SFCD

Bernard Harkless, Board Chair, SFCD

Community Voices

Sunday Jones, Community Voice Lead

Jackie McDonnough, Community Voice Lead

Ellen Robertson, Councilmember, City of
Richmond 6th Voter District

Zenobia Bey, Community 50/50, Six Points
Innovation Center (6PIC)

3 | Project Goals and Strategies

3 | Project Goals and Strategies

Goals

1. Collaborative Engagement

With the help of two key community residents, identify and connect with varying audiences in Northside's Highland Park community through in-person conversations and virtual open house presentations.

2. Meaningful Data Collection

Utilizing a variety of methods, solicit feedback from community members on the potential use of the Bank of America building.

3. Effective Reporting

Utilizing feedback, gather and synthesize responses into a final report that provides recommendations and next steps for a successful community led project.

3 | Project Goals and Strategies

Strategies

1. Engage two community residents to inform outreach strategies while providing a stipend for the efforts put forth to collect data.
2. Engage 6PIC partners to incorporate the youth voice into feedback.
3. Engage an experienced professional to facilitate community meetings.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, use the following strategies to secure input in a safe manner:

- Host a virtual community engagement open house targeting Highland Park residents
- Conduct masked door to door outreach to businesses along the Brookland Park Boulevard and Meadowbridge Road business corridors
- Develop a survey to secure community / business feedback
- Design a poster to post at 6PIC and along the Meadowbridge Road business corridor
- Integrate an interactive QR Code for easy access to an online survey
- Publicize community meeting in weekly newsletter from Councilwoman Ellen Robertson
- Create virtual posts for community meetings and online survey through social media outlets such as Next Door, Facebook, and Instagram

4 | Project Schedule



Phase 1

Research and Background Information

July - September



Phase 2

Branding Design and Community Survey

September - December



Phase 3

Community Engagement: Virtual Open House and Highland Park Quality of Life Meeting

December 15, 2020 and January 14, 2021



Phase 4

Final Recommendations and Next Steps

February - mid-March

Phase 1: Research and Background Information

During the research and background phase, the team reviewed the current conditions of the Bank of America building and also researched its past use.

By visiting the building, taking photos and videos, and reviewing floor plans, the team was able to understand its current conditions and use this information to present to the community and also apply potential uses.

Bank of America building

- Built in 1948
- 1 story
- First Floor: 2,510 SF
- Basement: 2,340 SF
- Total: 4,850 SF
- ATM in front atrium (to be maintained)



images: Existing exterior and interior images of the bank building

Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

During the branding and community outreach phase, the team created fun and engaging posters to hang along the business corridor to gain interest from the community.

Community voice leads and consultants canvassed the Highland Park business corridor and Brookland Park business corridor to discuss the bank building with local business owners. An online survey was also developed for all residents of the Northside, and beyond, to provide their ideas for the future of the bank building.

what happens next?

to 1307 e brookland park blvd

we need your voice!

Richmond Land Bank, a program of the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust, recently acquired the old **Bank of America Building** in Highland Park and wants to know what YOU think it should be next!

- Interested in participating? Have ideas? **Take a short survey to share your thoughts!**
- Join the virtual community meeting on Dec 15th 6:30-8:30pm

Scan with your smartphone or go to: <https://bit.ly/2Kxqael>
Survey open until Dec 10, 2020!

Go the zoom link on a computer here: <https://bit.ly/36zEQIO>

OR dial in: +1 646 558 8656
Meeting ID: 995 1353 2690

Questions? Contact hello@storefronrichmond.org

image: Poster designed to engage the community and provide access to the online survey

Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Community Survey Results

Due to COVID-19, the project partners were unable to directly engage with individuals in the neighborhoods. Staff, volunteers, and community leaders opted for virtual engagement and worked with students to create flyers that included a QR Code to link to the online survey. The businesses on the corridor were gracious to allow posters to be displayed in their windows and flyers to be left behind in their storefronts for patrons. **The survey yielded 95 responses with 88 responses from Northside residents and 7 nonresidents.**

There was an overarching theme to the businesses residents would support, and feel like the neighborhood needs. Grocery stores, banks, restaurants, doctor offices, and a children's / teen center were among the top businesses listed in the survey as needed in the community. We also asked residents for business types that they would like to see less of and the community responded with convenience stores, barber shops, corporate chains (e.g. Dollar stores), fast food, and hair salons. Below is an overview of the responses and survey results.

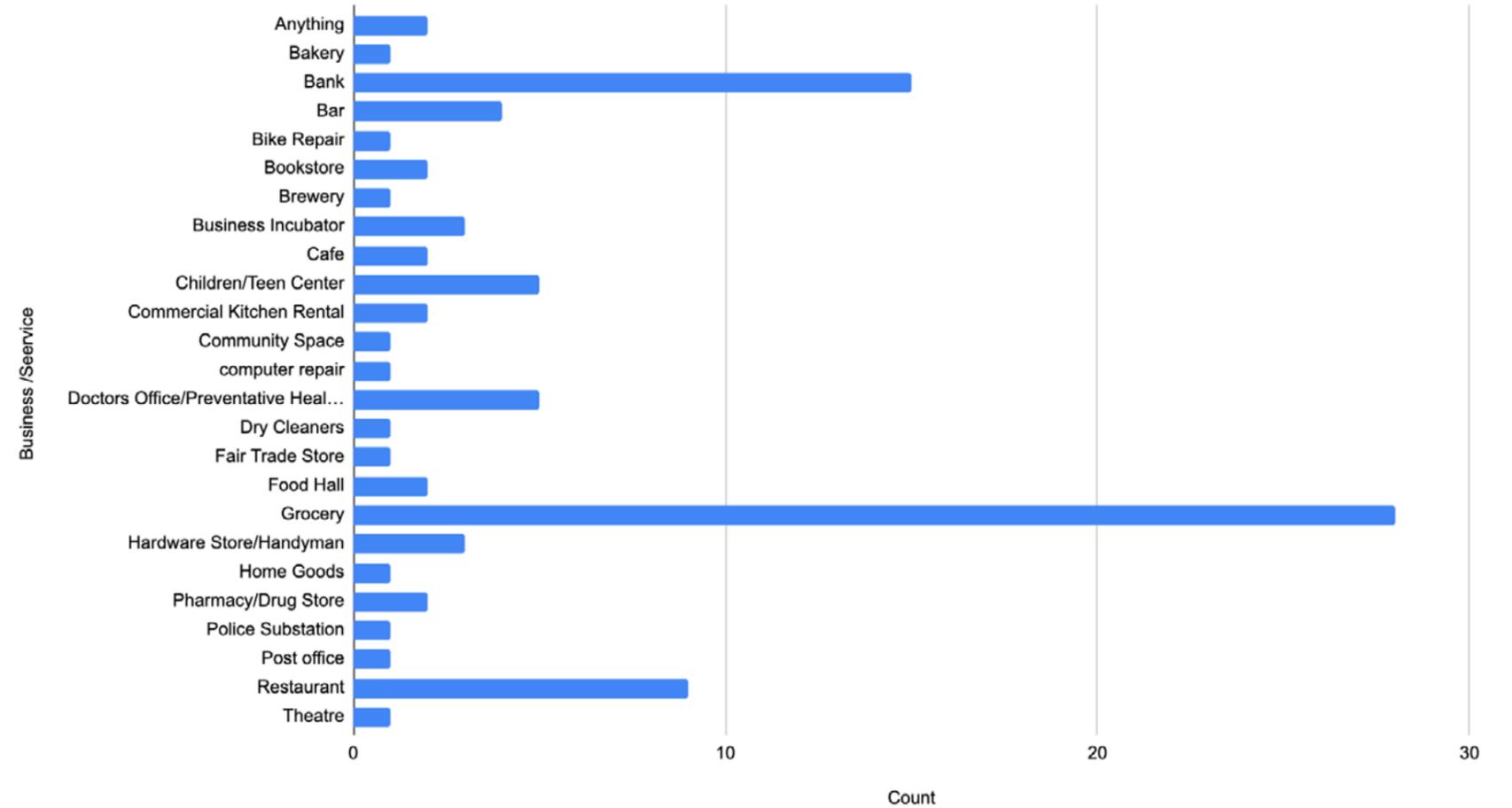
Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Q | What business / service is really needed in the Highland Park Community?

Top 5:

- Grocery
- Bank
- Restaurant
- Doctor's Office / Preventative Health
- Children / Teen Center

What Business is needed in Highland Park



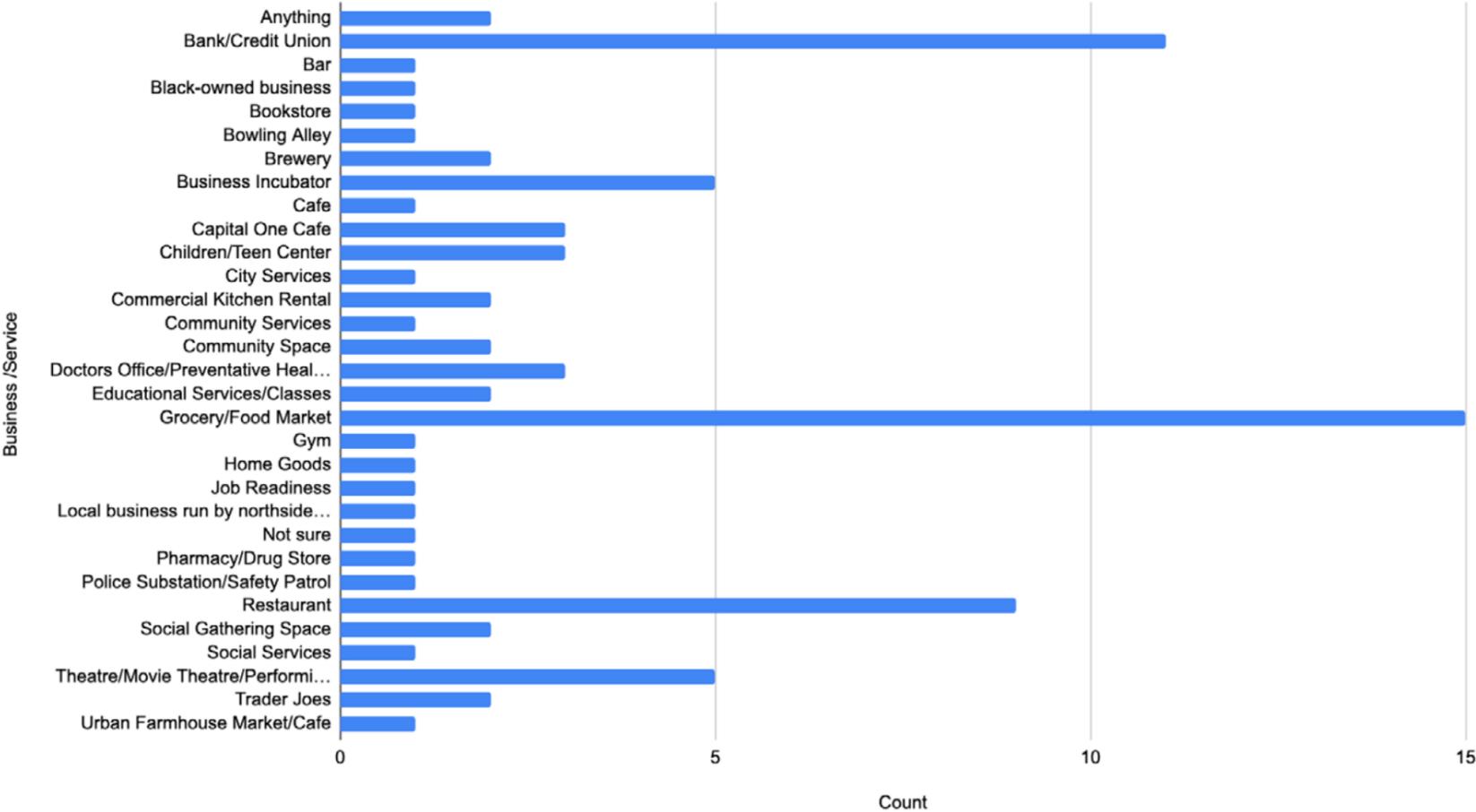
Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Q | What would you like to see in the Bank of America Building?

Top 5:

- Grocery / Food Market
- Bank / Credit Union
- Restaurant
- Business Incubator
- Theater / Movie Theater / Performing Arts

What would you like to see in the Bank of America building?



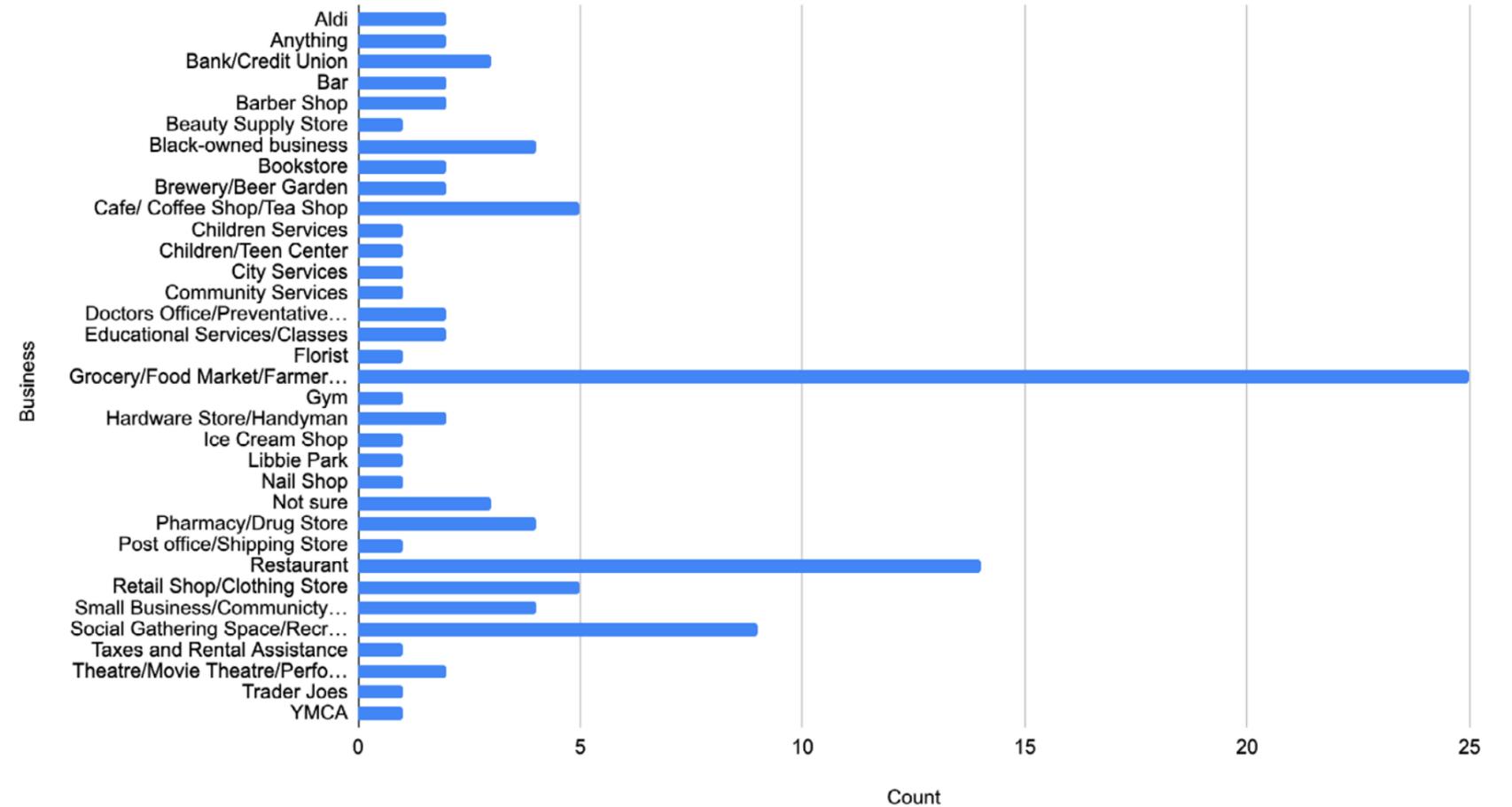
Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Q | What businesses would you like to see more of in Highland Park?

Top 5:

- Grocery / Farmers Market
- Restaurant
- Social Gathering Space / Recreation / Game Center / Entertainment
- Cafe / Coffee / Tea Shop
- Retail / Clothing

What businesses would you like to see more of in the Highland Park Community?



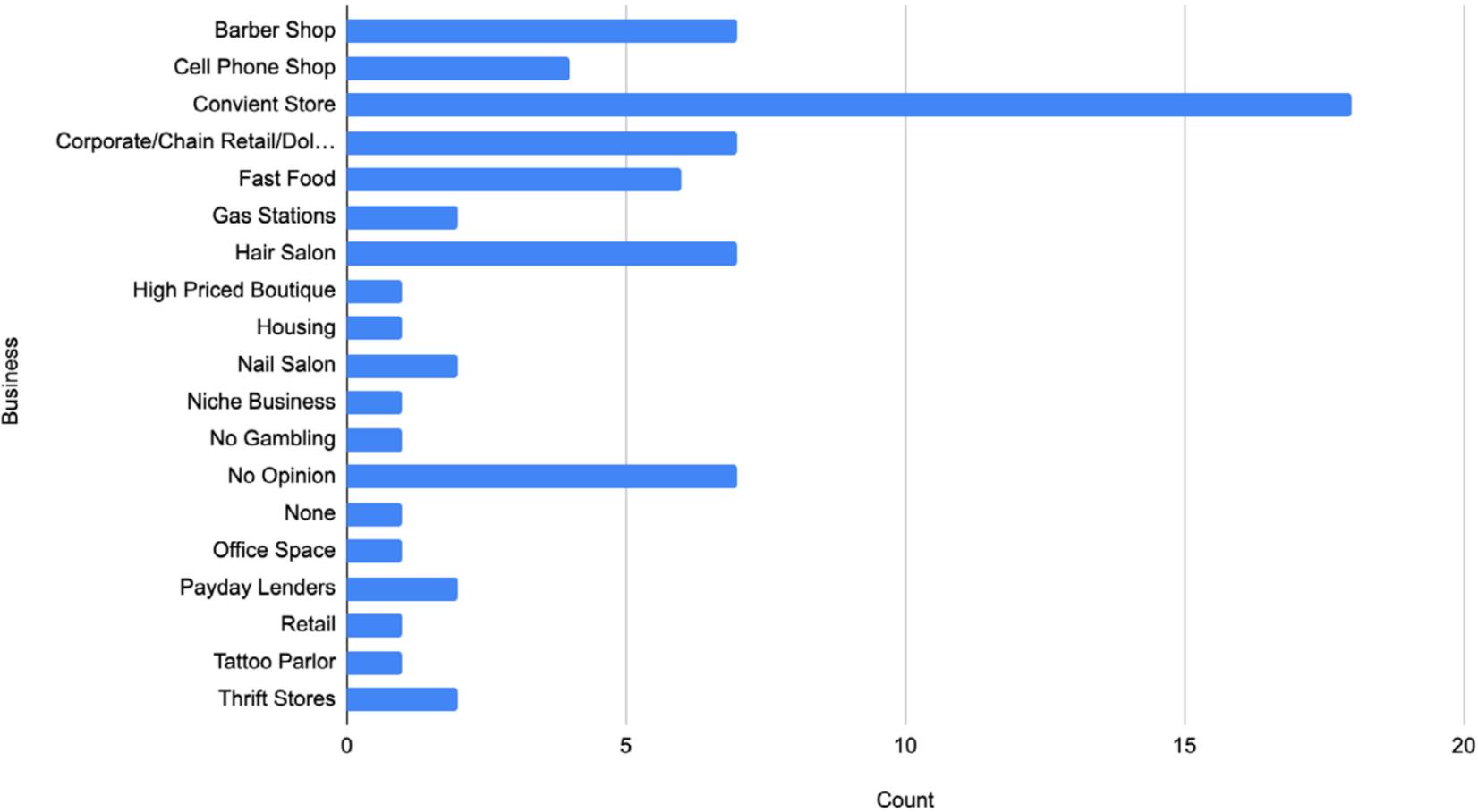
Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Q | What businesses would you like to see less of in the Highland Park Community?

Top 5:

- Convenience Store
- Barber Shop
- Corporate / Chain / Dollar Store
- Fast Food
- Hair Salon

What businesses would you like to see less of in the Highland Park Community?



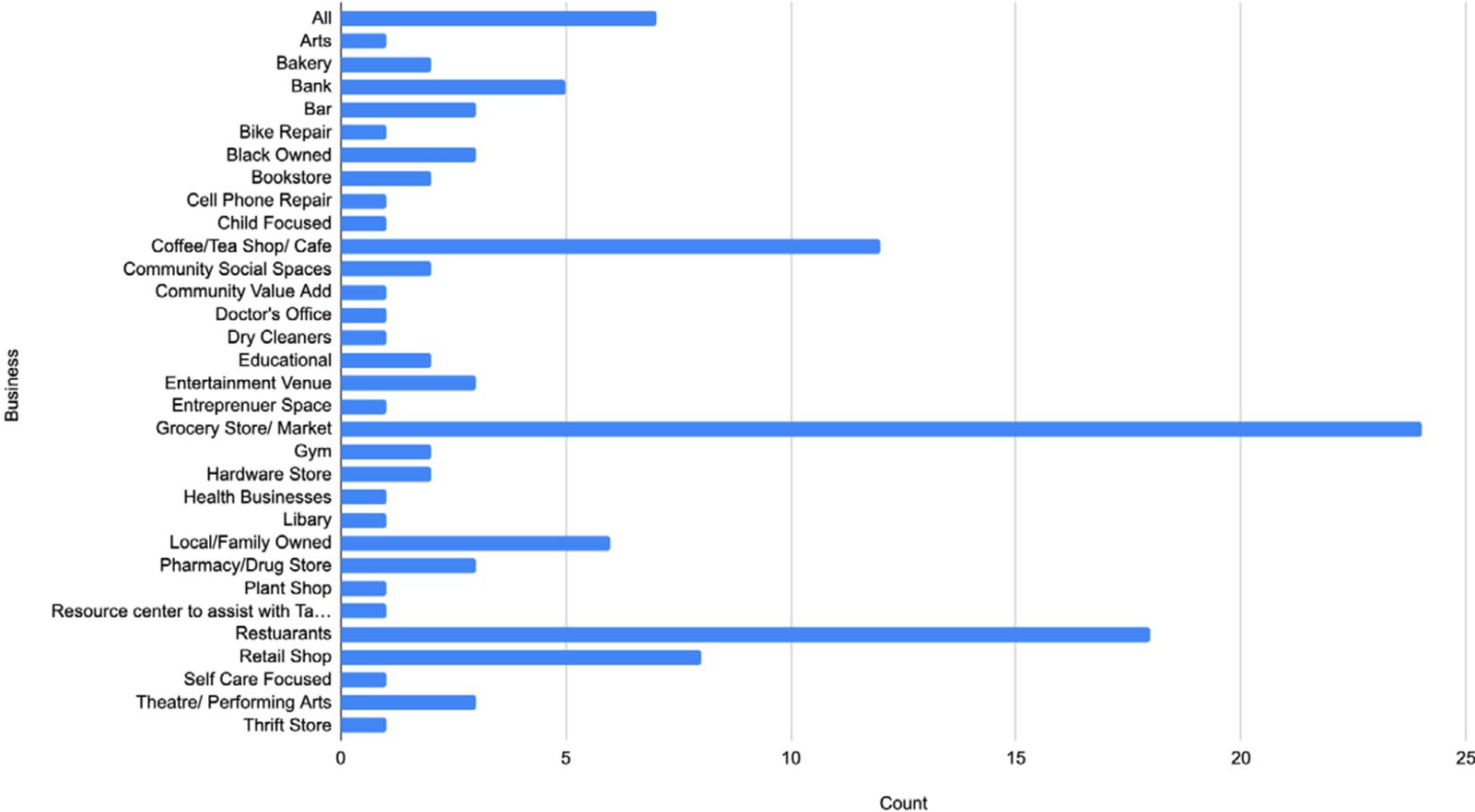
Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Q | What kind of business would you patronize?

Top 5:

- Grocery Store / Market
- Restaurants
- Coffee / Tea Shop / Cafe
- Retail Shop
- Local / Family Owned

What kind of business would you patronize?



Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Community Voice Leads

"I feel that the survey captured a wide array of responses and opinions that can be used to determine the next use for the Bank of America Building. I appreciated the residents who joined our zoom meetings and conversation. I would like to see future opportunities for more community members to attend meetings as the project progresses."

Overall, I feel the survey was the best way to get a pulse on the wants and needs of the community during COVID-19 and I recommend all options listed as a top five with exception of a children's / teen Center. 6PIC is currently serving the needs of our teen community and it would be nice to see another major need fulfilled through the Bank of America building."

—Sunday Jones

"We communicated with many of the stakeholders, talked to people on the street, people that are not connected by Nextdoor / social media, and used facebook network to connect with people such as the North Highland Park group."

"It was helpful to envision what other bank conversions looked like; it gives a sense of possibilities and activates people's imaginations"

—Jackie McDonnough

The image shows a Facebook social media post with a green and white color scheme. At the top, a green banner asks "what happens next?" in white text. Below this, the address "to 1307 e brookland park blvd" is written in green. A green line-art illustration of a building is shown with a speech bubble that says "we need your voice!". The main text of the post reads: "Richmond Land Bank, a program of the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust, recently acquired the old Bank of America Building in Highland Park and wants to know what YOU think it should be next!". To the right of this text is a QR code and a link: "Scan with your smartphone or go to: <https://bit.ly/2Kxqae1> Survey open until Dec 10, 2020!". Below the QR code is another link: "Interested in participating? Have ideas? Take a short survey to share your thoughts!". Further down, it says "Join the virtual community meeting on Dec 15th 6:30-8:30pm" and provides a Zoom link: "Go the zoom link on a computer here: <https://bit.ly/36zEQIQ>" and a phone number: "OR dial in: +1 646 558 8656 Meeting ID: 995 1353 2690". At the bottom of the post, it says "Questions? Contact hello@storefrontforrichmond.org". The post's engagement statistics are shown at the bottom: "5,276 People reached", "509 Engagements", and "4 comments 42 shares". There is also a "Boost Post" button.

image: Facebook social media post

Phase 2: Branding Design and Community Survey

Community Voice Leads

"I visited thirteen businesses along the Brookland Park Boulevard corridor west of Barton Avenue. They included four new businesses inclusive of a coffee shop, deli / market, juice bar and craft / gift shop. When asked about the Bank of America building, new businesses were largely unaware of the existence of the bank. When asked about potential uses for an old bank building, the new businesses recommended a place for youth, a bar, and / or restaurant. Nine additional respondents included convenience stores, beauty shop, barber shop, bakery, an apparel shop, arts and crafts shop, and a restaurant / deli. The nine respondents suggested that banking services were most important to them. Other suggestions included apartments or a community center for youth."

—Veronica Fleming

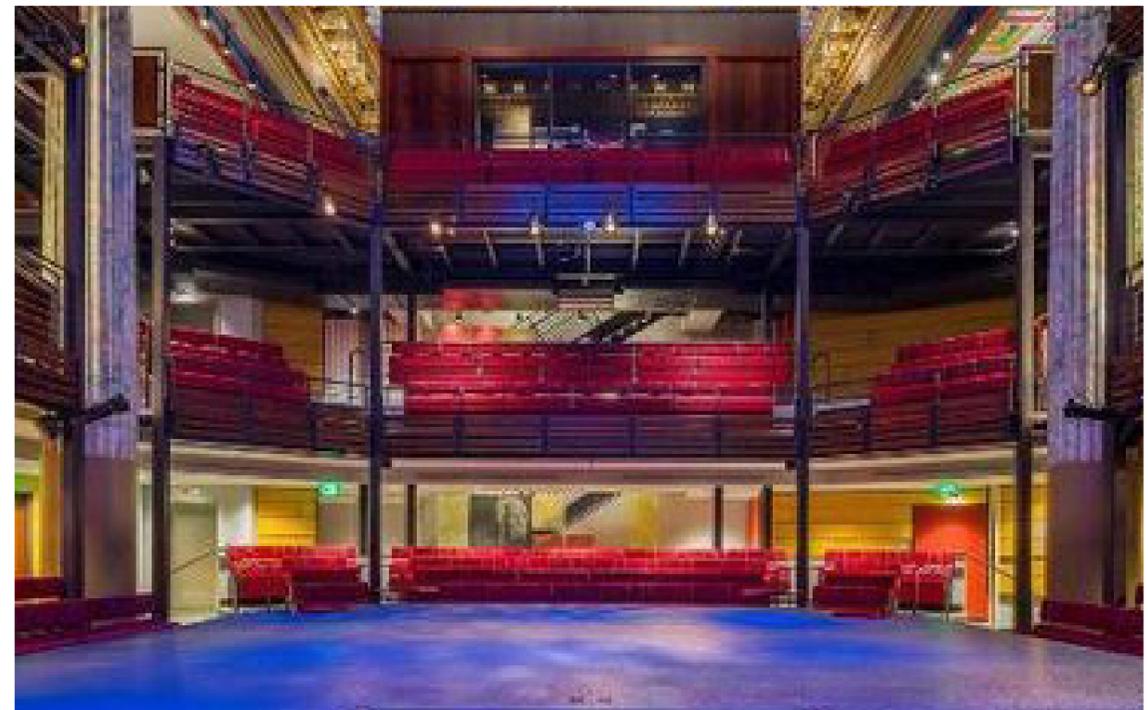


image: Case studies of bank buildings repurposed
top: restaurant / bar; bottom: theater / events space



Phase 3: Community Engagement: Virtual Open House and Highland Park Quality of Life Meeting

Due to COVID-19, the project partners were unable to directly engage with individuals in large groups. Staff, volunteers, and community leaders opted for virtual engagement and held an open house on December 15, 2020. The project partners presented their research from Phase 1 and Phase 2 and provided case studies to spark the imagination of attendees. **Over 30 attendees attended the virtual meeting.**

The project partners also attended the Highland Park Quality of Life meeting on January 14, 2021 to present their findings and ideas to seventeen community members in attendance. Both presentations provided attendees the forum to voice their ideas, concerns, and / or questions regarding the use of the bank building.

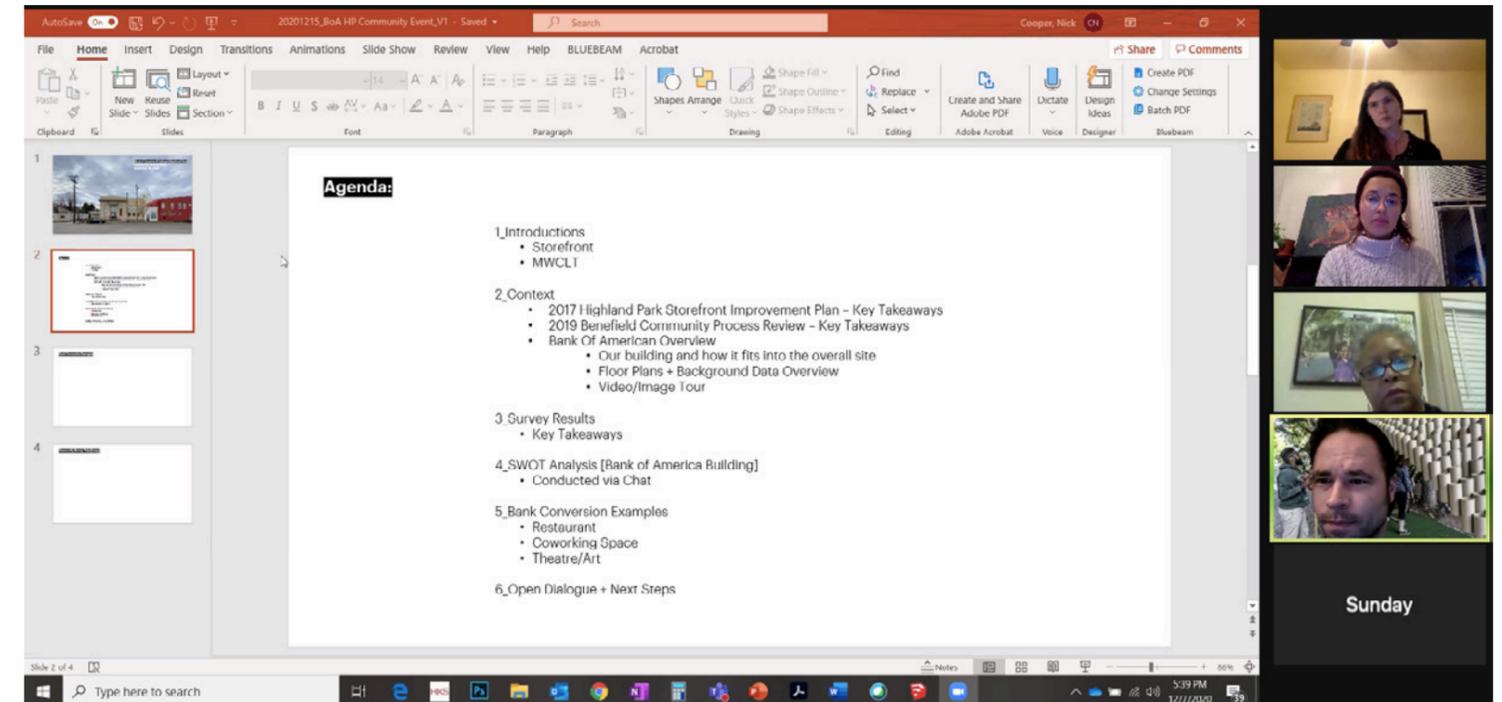


image: Preparing for the virtual open house

Phase 3: Community Engagement: Virtual Open House and Highland Park Quality of Life Meeting

MWCLT | Richmond Land Bank Next Steps

Next Steps for the Richmond Land Bank *exact dates subject to change

| January 2021 | February 2021 | March-May 2021 | May-August 2021 | August-Dec 2021 |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| MWCLT staff receives and reviews final report from Storefront for Community Design. This report is shared with the Citizens Advisory Panel (CAP). | MWCLT staff presents a summary of the engagement process at the public CAP meeting in mid-February. | The top priorities emerging out of this engagement process will be reflected in an RFP/RFQ that MWCLT will release. | MWCLT staff reviews responses to RFP/RFQ. All respondents would be required to attend a public CAP meeting to answer questions from community members in attendance. | MWCLT makes a recommendation for final end user to the CAP at a public meeting. The CAP either approves or makes an alternate recommendation. MWCLT Board has final approval. |

image: Virtual open house held on December 15, 2020

Phase 3: Community Engagement: Virtual Open House and Highland Park Quality of Life Meeting

The following are comments collected from the chat box during a discussion reviewing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis) for the Bank of America building.

Strengths

- Accessibility
- Location
- Distinguished building
- Center of the community
- Anchor for the neighborhood
- Bus stop accessibility
- Building size is larger than neighboring buildings

Weaknesses

- Limited parking
- Perception of safety
- Banking restrictions
- Trash outside due to proximity to convenient stores
- High ceilings may be costly for utilities of new use

Opportunities

- Increase positive perceptions of the area
- Central location for a new business
- Adjacent businesses and sites could / would benefit from increased pedestrian traffic
- Safe, central gathering place for community engagement
- Possibility to inspire / educate youth directly and indirectly
- Local businesses / residents could spend dollars in the community

Threats

- Repairs to an old building
- Generate too much traffic and not enough parking
- Community trust / buy-in
- Sale to the wrong owner could result in an “easy” solution that does not benefit the community

Phase 3: Community Engagement: Virtual Open House and Highland Park Quality of Life Meeting

The following are comments collected from social media (via Inclusive Northside) when asking communities to complete the survey in November and December. Additional quotes collected from the virtual meetings can be found to the right.

 **Duron L Chavis** shared a post. ...
Admin · December 10, 2020 · 

I think it should be a local food hub with commercial kitchen space

 **Mel Vaughan**
Food hub sounds like a great idea! Or just a donation space in general for dry goods and/or clothing  1
Like · Reply · Share · 9w

 **Katy Rugg**
Yes!!!  1
Like · Reply · Share · 9w

 **Mervyn Han**
Agreed! As a food hub, perhaps the building could include a coffee shop, a platform for performances and live music, and community rooms for local organizations. These are great ways to foster community within our neighborhood!  1
Like · Reply · Share · 8w

“When looking at local precedents, Firehouse 15 was amazing along the Meadowbridge Road corridor. It was an idea ahead of its time.”

“It’s great to see precedents, we just don’t know what’s possible.”

“The question I have is what type of restaurant?”

“Northside Gourmet Market is a new addition on North Avenue. It’s too new to understand success, but they offer fresh produce and may be a good case study.”

“Agreed on asking what kind of grocery store. Aldi’s and Trader Joe’s price points are lower than other local grocers.”

“There has been a lot of community support and event meetings for food access in Northside Pre-pandemic.”

“Will there be a follow-up survey that proposes options?”

“A co-working space?”

“I think a food hall idea could be interesting. Bringing multiple little ‘restaurant’ type vendors to the neighborhood.”

“We can think about community focused programs to respond to community wealth in general.”

5 | Project Recommendations and Next Steps

5 | Project Recommendations and Next Steps

Final Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed by the project partners for the MWCLT Citizens' Advisory Panel and MWCLT Board to consider as they determine future use of the building.



image: Case studies of bank buildings repurposed

Recommendation #1

Review and analyze the top five uses initially proposed by the community:

After a thorough review of the survey results, conversations, and virtual chats, the following top five uses are initial recommendations for the Bank of America building. Refer to the following recommendations for inclusion in the Request for Proposals (RFP).

Top 5 Uses

1. Grocery / Farmer's Market

Potential business models may include affordable products, commercial kitchen space, food hall, and / or pharmacy.

2. Restaurant

Business models may include black-owned or community-based small businesses with the inclusion of healthy food options.

3. Coffee Shop / Cafe / Bakery

Business models may include black-owned or community-based small businesses in a creative space.

4. Community Center

Business models may include performing arts, business incubators for the arts, social gathering space, entertainment, and / or co-working space.

5. Doctor's Office / Preventative Health

Business models may include vaccination center, in-home health services to community members, health education, and / or sidewalk labs.

Note: Community members voiced their interest in a banking institution / credit union, but it is understood that due to a restrictive covenant on the current building, retail financial institutions can not be developed in the Bank of America building.

Recommendation #2

Continue to engage the community prior to the final RFP announcement:

It was made relevant during the virtual meetings that the community was unaware of the potential for the Bank of America building. After showing case studies, the community immediately began to see the potential for the building and the impact it could have on the community.

We recommend that further engagement be conducted once the RFP is developed and publicized. We understand that the building use will not be determined prior to the RFP, so continued collaboration with the community will be pertinent

to understand which use will have the greatest impact for the community's current needs.

One recommendation to receive immediate community response is to develop and distribute a targeted survey that includes imagery and questions specific to the building use. Targeted questions and visual imagery of businesses can be used to narrow down the business types (i.e. What kind of grocery store would you like to see in the neighborhood? Out of these five images, which use would be most suitable?). In addition to targeted questions, it will be important to collect additional demographic information (i.e. Race? Age? How long have you lived in the neighborhood?). The community's recommendations will inform CAP's decision during the assessment of the RFP applications.

Recommendation #3

Develop marketing material to celebrate the work completed thus far and request additional feedback:

In order to spark excitement and engage the community further, we recommend the distribution of a well designed flyer that provides a brief overview of the project. This can be distributed through social media outlets and directly to the community through 6PIC partners and Highland park businesses. An additional QR Code can be added to the flyer to inform the community of the targeted survey discussed in Recommendation #2.

Note: One-page flyer to be developed by Storefront for Community Design once MWCLT confirms next steps for community engagement efforts with RFP distribution.

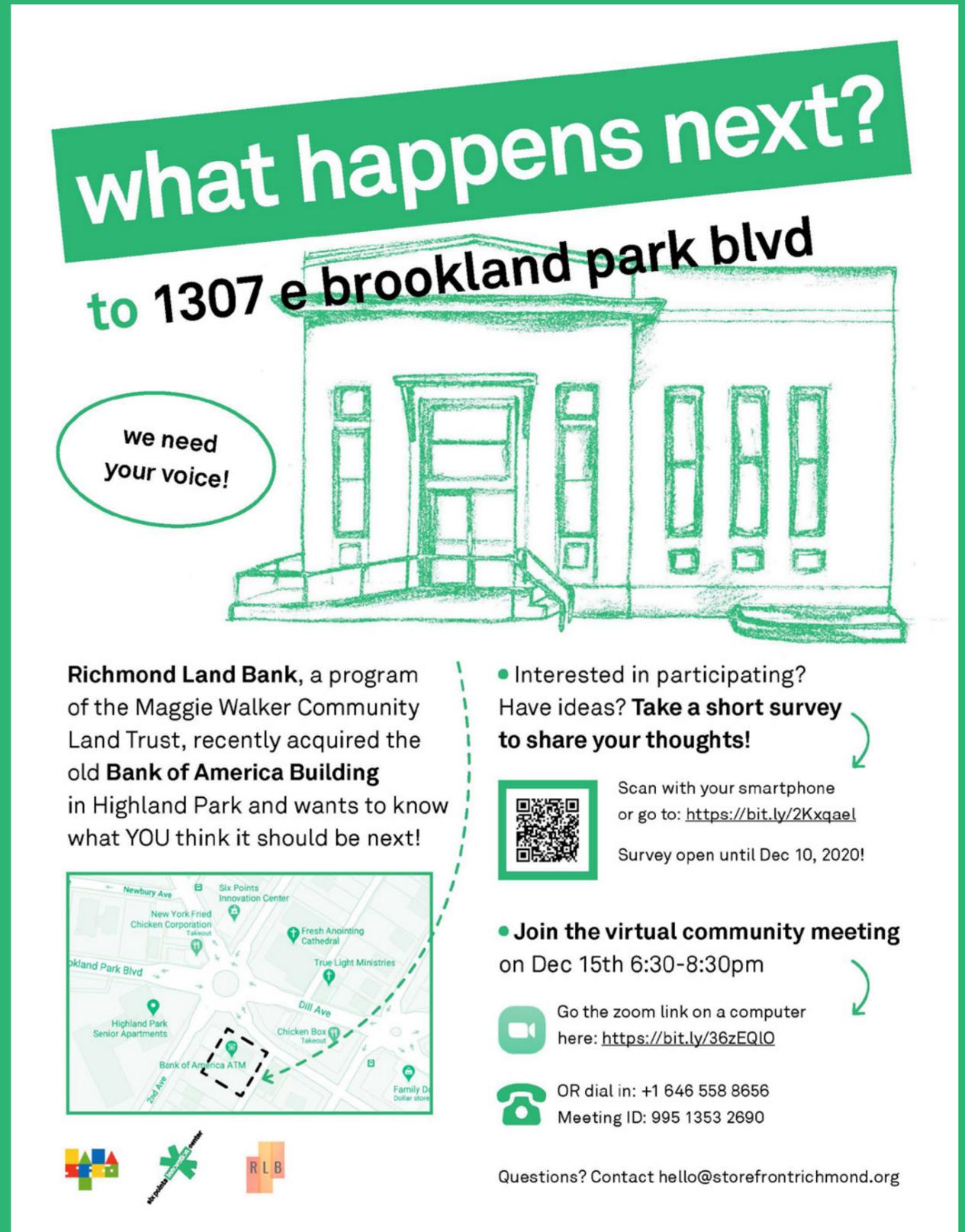


image: Example flyer from initial engagement efforts

5 | Project Recommendations and Next Steps

Recommendation #4

Maintain community engagement efforts through the development and construction of the project:

It is critical that as the project progresses, MWCLT provides opportunities for the community to have a voice in the development.

We recommend that the community be engaged in the following ways:

1. Attend the public CAP meeting to ask questions to potential candidates selected from the RFP / RFQ process.
2. Attend an initial development meeting to ask questions and provide feedback on conceptual plans from the end user selected by the MWCLT Board.

Thank You

Storefront for Community Design

Contact: hello@storefrontrichmond.org



Storefront for Community Design

