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## Five questions for Dan Baisden, City of Fort Wayne community development administrator

Oct 23, 2023



Baisden





A mural is dedicated in the Nebraska neighborhood in the fall of 2022.

Journal Gazette files

1 How does the Neighborhood Planning and Activation Team differ from other city planning teams?

**A:** Our Neighborhood Planning and Activation Workgroup launched in January 2022, focusing on working alongside neighborhood associations to write actionable plans and provide capacity-building and training while implementing projects to advance goals and improve neighborhoods.

Our ethos follows the Embedded Planning Praxis created by Jonathan Pacheco Bell, which situates our work on the ground, embedded in neighborhoods, building authentic relationships and increasing public participation in the planning process. We often walk neighborhood streets with clipboards and yellow vests, observe neighborhood activity, talk with residents on their front porches and facilitate meetings to help the neighborhood set strategic plans.

2 Why is community engagement critical for Fort Wayne?

**A:** Community engagement is essential for all neighborhoods, as it will lead to more equitable and sustainable decision-making that improves the community's social capital and enhances livability.

Our team embodies the work of Jane Jacobs, Norman Krumholz, Eric Klinenberg, Sherry Arnstein and Robert Putnam, blending elements of sociology, psychology and urban planning, recognizing that engagement is crucial to any project's success.

For example, we added a requirement to the Neighborhood Improvement Grant program to engage neighborhood residents and evaluate options before applying. This allowed the

neighborhood to make an informed decision requiring multiple voices, creating metrics and enhancing project outcomes.

3 What's a recent example of the team's work with a neighborhood association?

**A:** One example is our work with the Hamilton Neighborhood Association, located just northwest of downtown. After nearly three decades of active and nonactive status, we began working with a small group of neighborhood residents who wanted to re-establish their association.

In July, we hosted a "get to know the neighborhood" block party at Franklin School Park. Since then, we have facilitated neighborhood meetings, worked with residents to host a Halloween bash, selected and implemented a new brand identity, and in the next six months will finish a neighborhood report which includes resident input based on dozens of interviews and surveys.

4 What are two neighborhood projects piloted by your team and affiliated teams this year?

**A:** 1) We strongly believe that leadership development at the neighborhood level is critical to mobilizing residents to see and be involved in change that benefits their community. FORT-ify offers a rapid, immersive and experiential education to accelerate neighborhood associations by providing workshops and tools centered around asset-based community development, civic engagement, fundraising and governance.

2) We also launched our first Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design pilot area with the Fort Wayne Police Department, which works to develop physical interventions that prevent crime in a neighborhood.

So far, in the first year, we have seen significant success.

5 What kinds of projects can residents look forward to in the next few years?

**A:** We are excited to continue our work, especially in developing new neighborhood plans in Historic Northeast (Forest Park, North Anthony, Northside), Northwest (Bloomington, Five Points-Lincoln Park, Hamilton, Nebraska, North Highlands), and East Central. We will continue implementing Packard 2030, where we have already seen significant city investment based on plan recommendations.

Other projects include our signature Neighborhood Improvement Grants, which helped 47 neighborhoods complete projects this year and look to match the momentum in 2024. Finally, we look forward to hosting another Inspire Neighborhood Leadership Conference, which works to equip neighborhood leaders with tools and ideas they can bring home.