Design Thinking and Minnetonka’s Future

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Design Thinking and Minnetonka’s Future

INTRODUCTION

What follows here is a semester-long endeavor I’ve undertaken to understand the city of Minnetonka and its needs and to address its desire to plan for its future. The means through which I have approached the design challenge I was faced with—analyzing neighborhood identity case studies and discovering whether the creation of traditional neighborhoods would be recommended for Minnetonka—can best be described through a “begin anywhere” design process created at Stanford.

Briefly, here are five basic requirements in this process as outlined by Warren Berger in *CAD Monkeys, Dinosaur Babies and T-Shaped People*:

1) gaining expertise about a problem or subject area, primarily through empathy with the people directly involved; 2) framing the challenge you’re going to tackle (which is to say, making sure you’re asking and trying to answer the right questions); 3) generating options or ideas; 4) creating prototypes to test those options; and 5) iterating, or creating subsequent refined versions of your original prototype, based upon feedback. (Berger 272)

As you will see, I did hop back and forth a bit between certain steps and visited and revisited others as needed. I often ran into situations in which new information would require me to move back a few steps in order to move forward in a new and better direction. My journey this semester has led me to engage in several immersive activities on-site in Minnetonka, as well as to meet several very inspiring residents and city employees
who’ve all encouraged me and my work in extremely useful ways. On these pages, I will
discuss my movements through these design steps; provide detailed reports of data I’ve
uncovered that will be useful to the city in determining any future actions; and conclude
with three specific recommendations to the city of Minnetonka as it assessed the idea of
neighborhoods and essentially plans for the city’s future and sustainability.

FRAMING AND IMMERSION

When I was first introduced to this design challenge, the question I faced was: Min-
netonka is thinking of creating official neighborhoods; is this a good idea?

I discovered a very useful article in The Atlantic that was covering a similar under-
taking by the city of Indianapolis. One major plus was a study it cited that indicates that
“strong feelings of connectedness on a smaller scale has a strong relationship to how
secure individuals feel about their place in the world” (Levitz). A couple of potential
minuses were also discussed: (1) that people get very passionate and indeed fired up at
the prospect that some mandate, whether it be the press, realtors, or government, is going
to put a label on their neighborhoods for the sake of naming it; and (2) even if the media
adopts a neighborhood name, there’s no guarantee the public will adopt it.

Many design case studies point out the importance of on-site immersion. My favorite
is one performed by the company IDEO, which went the extra step to observe, for ex-
ample, many children brushing their teeth in their natural environment in order to design
a better toothbrush. Berger writes that people had assumed childrens’ smaller hands
required smaller toothbrushes. What the design team discovered, though, after on-site
immersive research, was that “small kids actually needed thicker toothbrush handles that
require less of a closed fist” (116). On-site immersion has the power to make one realize the utility in examining and reaching past previously held assumptions.

Thus, I embarked on what Stanford would call a second phase of my design process: immersion. I took several ethnographic research trips to the corners and public spaces of Minnetonka: Glen Lake “neighborhood”; Purgatory Park and its nearby residential streets; shopping centers on County Road 101; Lakewinds Natural Foods; the unpaved residential areas north of McGinty Road; and the Ridgedale Library, among other places. These experiences were important in allowing myself to empathize with Minnetonka residents. They also taught me an obvious truth, which was later confirmed by a Star Tribune journalist: Residents are very passionate about, and certainly identify with, their trees.

I was itching to talk with Minnetonka residents one-on-one, and had a great opportunity to do so at Minnetonka City Hall’s open house in October. I spoke with a great number of Minnetonka residents and a handful of city representatives. A couple of key takeaways I gathered are: (1) A very large number of residents were either indifferent to or opposed to the idea of creating official neighborhoods. One resident remarked that it “might be too confusing” to create so many neighborhoods; presumably, this person considers the city as full of cul-de-sacs. (2) On the other hand, all of the city representatives I spoke with were in favor of the idea of neighborhood creation. One representative pointed out that perhaps this disconnect exists because city representatives are more focused on futures thinking. Either way, it’s notable that a disconnect does exist. (3) I had a very nice conversation with historian Betty Johnson, who pointed out that because of the city’s setup, the definition of a neighborhood in Minnetonka is inherently fluid. On the one hand, the city has historically referred to about four very large sections that have been
considered neighborhoods, including Minnetonka Mills. On the other hand, the city has a very large number of cul-de-sacs, each of which residents will consider their “neighborhood.” The city’s makeup is indeed quite different from that of South Minneapolis, which utilized official neighborhoods successfully. (4) The residents I spoke with were all primarily very satisfied with their city, its government, and its services. At the same time, it’s worth noting that a sample of input taken on-location at the city is bound to be a biased sample. But on all counts I asked about (safety, cleanup services, environmental upkeep, historical preservations), the vast majority scored the city at an 8 or higher out of 10. (5) Finally, one of the practical reasons for creating neighborhoods was, as it was stated to me by Resilient Communities Project program manager Mike Greco, who said that such neighborhoods would ostensibly create a system of outreach for the city in getting input from citizens about 12 proposed commercial Village Centers. However, it was pointed out to me at the open house and later confirmed to me via Perry Vetter, Minnetonka’s assistant public works director, that a very effective means of communication is already in place, and has been tested and proven to be successful.

Probably the most notable—and discouraging—takeaway was the citizens’ disinterest in the creation of neighborhoods, or at least “neighborhoods” as I talked about them. I decided to contact the president of a neighborhood in Minnetonka that’s long-established and proven successful: the Sherwood Forest Association. I met with Patrick Nolan, who said the association has been in existence as early as the city’s foundation in the 1950s. It’s currently in what he calls its second “wave,” and is sensing that it’s about time for a third wave of younger residents to start assuming leadership positions. He made clear that the reason the association has been so successful is that it has grown organically to meet
residents’ needs as they arise. He’s not so sure such an effort would be successful if it were mandated; it needs to be community-driven. He mentioned that one possible solution to feeling out the idea of neighborhoods would be to create a toolkit for neighbors who are interested in creating neighborhoods and engaging those around them. Additionally, he showed me an article, “May the Source be With You” (Byron), from Time magazine in 1981. It talked about the possibility of home computers in the future and the ability to manage one’s own bank account and such things from one’s own home. Patrick Nolan saved the article because he thought it was on to something, while people he spoke with remained uncertain. This was only 30 years ago.

**FUTURES THINKING AND OPTIONS/IDEA GATHERING**

This data redirected me toward a more futures-thinking approach. My thoughts that the idea of traditional neighborhoods wasn’t going to be a sufficient enough initiative were confirmed by my group’s project manager, Minnetonka associate planner Jeff Thomson, who indicated at our next check-in that the ambivalence I was sensing toward official neighborhood creation was, frankly, not entirely surprising to him or his colleagues. He redirected me to try and discover other pieces of this project that the city was interested in discovering: Are the interests of young families and professionals well represented in Minnetonka? How many neighbors do residents know? These were important pieces of information for assessing current connections and planning for the city’s future.

I started researching neighborhoods elsewhere in the U.S., and discovered that the city of Seattle has more than 22 successful neighborhood blogs. While cities like Chicago and Denver do have more neighborhoods than Seattle, not to mention New York City and
Los Angeles, Seattle seemed by far to have the most representation in the blogosphere.

Here is a rundown on Seattle’s neighborhoods with successful, sustainable blogs:

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**Seattle neighborhoods and their blogs:**

(This data does not comprise all neighborhoods in Seattle; merely ones with successful blogs.)

**Ballard neighborhood:** 6 square miles, population 32,000. Its blog is run by a couple with two young kids and journalism backgrounds who “noticed Ballard lacked a daily news source and community forum.” “You power this blog. Not us. We just moderate it.” Advertising-supported, led to creation of journalism network umbrella Next Door Media. On Facebook. Very active.

**Beacon Hill:** 7 square miles; large, overlaps with other neighborhoods, Mid Beacon Hill and North Beacon Hill. Its blog is run by a North Beacon Hill resident and welcomes contributions from any resident of Beacon Hill. North Beacon Hill is 3 square miles, population 12,000. Advertising supported. On Facebook. Very active.

**Mid Beacon Hill:** 2.7 square miles, population 12,000. A “personal neighborhood photo blog,” no advertisements, one blogger. Last post in 2009; no longer active.

**Belltown:** Hip, youthful, just north of downtown. Voted best place to retire in Seattle. Blog is “About the neighborhood, from the latest news to nightlife.” About 0.7 square miles, population 9,500. Last post was in 2008.

**Burien:** South of Seattle. 13 square miles, population 33,000. Active; advertising supported blog. Has mission statement. Part of South King Media.

**Capitol Hill:** 6 square miles; population 40,000. Seattle’s most densely populated neighborhood. Center of the city’s gay and counterculture communities. Has 2 blogs, Capitol Hill Seattle (official and extremely active and advertising supported) and Capitol Hill Triangle (no longer active). On Facebook. Powered by Neighborlogs. CHS blog “Started as an independent, place-focused blog in January 2006 and have grown to incorporate voices from all over the Hill.” Anyone allowed to post upon registering. Interesting: Capitol Hill has designated sub-neighborhoods:

- St Mark’s
- Fancy Pants
- I-5 Shores
- Broadway
- Hilltop
- Miller Park
- Pike/Pine
- Radio Point
- 5 Corners

**Central District News:** 5 square miles, population 29,000. Blog powered by Neighborlogs. Active, community-focused.

**Columbia City:** 2 square miles, population 11,000. Blog no longer exists.
Georgetown: 4 square miles, population 1,200. Blog no longer exists.

Fremont: 1.5 square miles, population 11,000. Active blog, part of Next Door Media. On Facebook.

Greenwood and Phinney Ridge: Have 2 combined blogs, one part of Next Door Media (with ads) and one a locally based team of independent journalists (no ads). Greenwood is 2 sq miles, pop 15,000. Phinney Ridge is 1.2 square miles, population 9,000.

Lake City: 6 square miles, pop 26,000. A Neighborlog blog, active. On Twitter.

Magnolia: 5.5 square miles, pop 18,000. A Next Door Media blog. Active. On Facebook.

Miller Park: An association. Blog is somewhat active. 0.6 square miles; population 6,500.

North of 85th: Somewhat active blog covering large area. Seems to only have one columnist/player. Neighborlogs. Loosely defined; unable to calculate population and square mileage.

Pioneer Square: “Like virtually all Seattle neighborhoods, the Pioneer Square neighborhood lacks definitive borders.” Inactive blog. Formerly Neighborlogs.

Queen Anne: A Next Door Media blog. 4 square miles; population 32,000. Very active, on Facebook and Twitter.

Rainier Valley: 11 square miles, population 49,000. Rainier Valley Post blog is very active and on Facebook and Twitter. Includes a “Happy Hour Guide.” A volunteer-run, neighborhood-based forum.

South Park: 2 square miles, population 4,000. Inactive blog, was a MySpace blog.

Wallingford: 2 square miles, population 14,000. One failed Tumblr, one active independent blog and one active Next Door Media blog that is on Facebook and Twitter.

Wedgwood: 2 square miles, population 7,500. Active Next Door Media blog, also on Facebook and Twitter. Covers Wedgwood and View Ridge neighborhoods.

West Seattle: 12 square miles, population 50,000. Blog very active, on Facebook and Twitter. Not affiliated with other media venue but has long list of sponsoring businesses.

View Ridge: 1.5 square miles, population 5,000. Shares Next Door Media blog with Wedgwood.

A look at the numbers:

Seattle’s median neighborhood (among those listed) is 2.7 square miles and population 14,000.

Seattle’s average neighborhood (among those listed) is 4.5 square miles and population 19,623.
SEATTLE, WA
An idea of the city's neighborhoods currently and formerly represented in the blogosphere and their not-so-solid boundaries.
Almost all blogs are advertising supported and run by committed citizens of the neighborhood, many of whom are professional, independent journalists. A growing handful of them fall under the journalism umbrella network Next Door Media, which was created by concerned citizens of the Ballard neighborhood who sensed a real need for hyperlocal news distribution. According to Next Door Media’s website, the organization’s reach—which includes data taken from the Facebook and Twitter accounts it creates along with each new blog—has surpassed that of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and “every media company in town except KING 5 and the Seattle Times” (Next Door Media).

I am a former journalist who follows conversations about the future and sustainability of newspapers and even the journalism industry. There was a time in which the idea that newsrooms would become nonprofit organizations was batted about with sincerity, notably by a former Washington Post journalist (Coll) concerned about the future of newspapers as watchdogs that produce quality journalism in a climate that’s primarily bottom-line focused.

Conversations like these lead me to believe it wouldn’t be impossible to imagine a future in which a city is supporting, or providing resources for, community blogging. Perhaps it could come in the form of offering an online toolkit of sorts for concerned neighbors to begin blogging; perhaps it would mean the city would offer a small stipend to interested citizens who want to apply for and become committed to blogging for their neighborhood.

This would lead us back to the neighborhood question: So what would such neighborhoods look like, particularly in terms of size? To work with this idea, I referred back to my research on Seattle’s neighborhood blogs. I had discovered that among Seattle’s neighborhoods with successful blogs, the average size was 4.5 square miles and average population was around 19,000. Considering that, according to data I acquired, Minnetonka’s total area is 28.2 square miles and population is around 50,000, I determined that one could plausibly fit four neighborhoods ripe for successful blogs within the city of
Minnetonka. Perhaps this would require creating a quadrant; paying attention to natural boundaries, 494 already creates one split through the middle of Minnetonka, so one idea would be to begin there.

During my interview with Patrick Nolan, we discussed the city of Edina’s recent efforts to create neighborhoods. I had heard in an initial rundown of the project that the city’s efforts had been unsuccessful; Nolan, a former Edina resident, was able to explain to me why. Residents were passionately opposed to the idea of imposing a name on their neighborhood simply for the sake of naming or labeling; they wanted it to be something that grew organically out of an area’s history or character. Research in The Atlantic indicated a similar sentiment within efforts of New York City, Los Angeles, and Indianapolis to create official neighborhoods: It’s an issue that makes residents fired up and passionate, and “whether or not (such names) will really be adopted by the public at large is unclear” (Levitz).

I worked with the idea of four neighborhoods that were identified through something
other than a name. I also worked with the research I did on Seattle blogs, which indicated to me that people want their neighborhood boundaries to be fluid and ultimately user-recognized as opposed to official and strictly drawn out.

To illustrate this sentiment, I created a logo for purposes of beginning to envision how such a system would play out. This logo is strategic in that it portrays four distinct yet connected neighborhoods; these neighborhoods are represented by a convention other than a name (color, shape, or some other means would be good alternatives); has a bit of a fluid form to suggest fluidity in determining boundaries; and is ultimately a tree, which holds a great deal of significance to Minnetonka residents.

PROTOTYPING AND ITERATING

To test my research out and illustrate some of my ideas, I created two prototypes. The first is of a blog that incorporates the neighborhoods logo I set forth. The second is an online network that would be similar to the national website Meetup.com. This second prototype sprung from a need my class has been discussing sporadically all semester: the need for people to connect via their interests. I also thought back to the evening at city hall, in which several Minnetonka residents lamented that there was no system in place for engaging newcomers to a particular community. Out of curiosity’s sake I contacted a data guru at Meetup.com, who told me that currently 700 users of the site identify them-
selves as being from Minnetonka, Minnesota. This, I think, demonstrates a need; whether that’s already being filled by Meetup.com, or whether it’s something the city could use as a model for building its own place-based network would be worth some consideration. Certainly I did sense a need for more Minnetonka-specific interest groups based around particular schools and communities from a survey I released—which I will discuss a little later.

For purposes of prototyping, I built these visuals:
The first is a blog proposal for what one would look like that would represent a quadrant of Minnetonka neighborhoods in the blogosphere. The second is inspired by the site Meetup.com, “Minnetonka Connections,” in which I’ve placed eight groups based on both interests and needs as placeholders: carpool seekers; exotic pet owners; dog walkers; babysitter seekers; sci-fi readers; singles; dads; and moms. So now the prototypes were in place; where to go from here?

I decided to create a survey that asked questions about these very items. Did citizens like the idea of a blog? Of a network connecting people via different needs or interests? I’d been particularly directed by our team to focus on young families and professionals to discover whether their interests were adequately represented in the city and how many of their neighbors they know. This survey covered all of these points, and I distributed it liberally. I was having troubles getting anyone to take this survey, despite outreach to people I had met and interviewed, families I knew of in Minnetonka, and a reporter at Patch Minnetonka. It wasn’t until the semester was almost over that Patch Minnetonka decided to post it to their site—and then I ran into the fortunate problem that I was getting a whole bunch of great data that had come in later than I had hoped, but still just in time for me to be able to gauge a couple of in-depth observations about the people I was meant to observe.

For reference, here is a rundown of the survey’s results in their entirety (as well as a great idea of the demographics of Minnetonka residents who utilize Patch Minnetonka):
Minnetonka Residents: Neighborhood Identity Questions

TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 56

QUESTION 1: Welcome, and thanks so much for taking this 10-question survey. Your anonymous responses will be utilized by a graduate Design Thinking course at the University of Minnesota (LS5993) to help inform the city of Minnetonka in its Resilient Communities Project in partnership with the U. If you have further questions, please feel free to e-mail Maggie Sattler at sattl014@umn.edu.

Let's get started: How many years have you lived in Minnetonka?

- Fewer than 6 months: 4 respondents; 7.1%.
- 6 months–1 year: 0 respondents.
- 1 year–3 years: 3 respondents; 5.4%.
- 3 years–5 years: 2 respondents; 3.6%.
- 5 years–10 years: 9 respondents; 16%.
- 10 years or longer: 34 respondents; 60.7%.
- I've lived here my entire life: 4 respondents; 7.1%.
- Other: 1 respondent; 1.8%.

QUESTION 2: What is your age range?

- Younger than 18: 1 respondent; 1.8%.
- 18–24: 1 respondent; 1.8%.
- 25–40: 9 respondents; 16.0%.
- 41–55: 20 respondents; 35.7%.
- 56–70: 15 respondents; 26.8%.
- 71 or older: 10 respondents; 17.9%.

QUESTION 3: Provide us with some basics about your household. (Please answer all that apply.)

- I live in an apartment or townhouse: 2 respondents; 3.6%.
- I live in a house: 52 respondents; 93.0%.
- I live alone: 5 respondents; 8.9%.
- I live with a roommate: 0 respondents.
- I live with my partner or spouse: 45 respondents; 80.4%.
- I live with one or more infants, toddlers, or children: 16 respondents; 28.6%.
• I live with one or more teenagers: 11 respondents; 19.6%.
• I live with one or more pets: 35 respondents; 62.5%.
• I live in a cul-de-sac: 13 respondents; 23.2%.
• Other: 5 respondents; 8.9%.
  • An unmarried daughter.
  • Also live with 1 adult child.
  • We live and work in a barn on a 4-lane county road.
  • Live by Gro-Tonka Park.
  • Caretaker for our elderly parent who now resides with us in our home.

**QUESTION 4:** Which of these platforms do you engage with regularly or at least once per week? (Check all that apply.)

[Skipped question: 2.]

• E-mail: 54 respondents; 100%.
• Facebook: 40 respondents; 71.4%.
• Twitter: 9 respondents; 16.1%.
• Blogs: 12 respondents; 21.4%.
• Goodreads: 8 respondents; 14.3%.
• Pinterest: 12 respondents; 21.4%.
• Other: 2 respondents; 3.6%.
  • Patch I really like the Hopkins Patch.
  • LinkedIn.

**QUESTION 5:** Which of these city-managed communications do you engage with routinely?

[Skipped question: 6.]

• The City of Minnetonka’s website: 29 respondents; 58.0%.
• The City of Minnetonka’s newsletter: 43 respondents; 86.0%.
• The City of Minnetonka’s Twitter page: 3 respondents; 6.0%.
• Other: 7 respondents; 14.0%.
  • None.
  • Local ‘Patches’
  • Like Patch I realize it might not be city managed but I would think on should be able to provide city information to Patch.
  • Minnetonka Patch
  • Mtka Patch
  • Patch
  • Posts that come via email
QUESTION 6: Why did you move to Minnetonka? (If you’ve lived in Minnetonka your entire life, please tell us why you choose to stay in Minnetonka.)

[Skipped question: 2.]

• My wife grew up in the area and we moved back to Minnetonka to be closer to her aging parents. It was more a decision to live in the west metro than specifically in Minnetonka.
• We chose Minnetonka specifically when moving here from California 7 years ago. The number one reason was the school district. Number 2 would have to be the proximity to job. Number 3 is probably the landscape/large numbers of trees and natural areas.
• Parents live here
• 30 years ago - the schools, quality of life, proximity to our synogogue
• I chose to stay in Minnetonka because of the area where I lived after marriage.
• Grew up in southern Minnesota; went to college in Minneapolis. Moved to Minnetonka after we got married over 25 years ago. Wanted to get away from more congested city to homes not so close together (1 to 1/2 acre lots), Mtka had reputation of being pretty/green/good place for families.
• close to work and ambiance of comunity
• No particular reason
• High quality schools with language immersion guaranteed. Also, safer neighborhood than our former neighborhood in the city. Beautiful developed trees and other natural spaces surrounding us.
• Wanted to live inside the 494 ring due to work locations.
• I ;have travelled around the world and always come back to Minnetonka because it is home. I love it here.
• We moved here because I got a job here (1969).
• Found a reasonably priced home in a private neighborhood with woods and lots of wildlife, conveniently located to shopping
• I moved back to minnetonka because there was a good condo to rent in our budget.. My husband currently works in minnetonka but goes to school in Minneapolis. I work in Edina, It seems like a good quiet location for our family of four.
• Closeness to downtown, convenience of travel, open spaces, shopping
• City Management, Schools, Affordability
• I grew up in Wayzata. After attending college in Minneapolis, I wanted to buy a house in the suburbs around Lake Minnetonka. We ended up finding our preferred house in Minnetonka. The house was built in 1946 and we like the large 1 acre lot, large trees, rolling hills, and quality construction of the older homes.
• because
• we liked the area and had lived in an adjacent suburb for many years, but we liked the size of the lots in Minnetonka and the many trees and wildlife in our area so 12 years ago we bought a lot and built a new home which is more adaptable to handicap accessibility than our old home. The location is great, near to major highways and shopping yet a feel of being in a park. We love it here.
• Chose Minnetonka for the schools and neighborhoods. We wanted the kids to have every opportunity to have the support and environment that would help them flourish and feel safe and secure. Our choice is reaffirmed often as we watch our kids mature and make smart choices.
• I heard it had good schools. I liked the location: easy access to major highways, shopping, services; near a beautiful lake; great place to raise a family.
• a move from Calif.
• It was convenient to our jobs, the particular property was very attractive.
• Purchased a condo.
• In 1990 the barn on Shady Oak Rd. was for sale. We needed a place to have our business and to live. It fits us well! It is one of the original raspberry farms.
• Schools
• Location - proximity to lake, central location on west side of cities. School District. Mature envi-
ronment due to established neighborhoods.

- We moved to Minnetonka 48 years ago from the Chicago area and loved it so much that we’ve moved twice since and stayed in Minnetonka. Reasons: great schools, great, efficient, accessible city services, especially public safety and basic infrastructure, friendly neighborhoods. I could go on and on and on!
- Because we found the house we wanted in Minnetonka.
- Because I wanted my children to go to a good school -which they attended Hopkins schools for 13 years. Best school district ever!! Stayed in Minnetonka when my kids moved out and we downsized six years ago, because I love the area.
- Location of building
- Schools
- We bought a home in Minnetonka for the great schools, the awesome parks and trails, to be near the lake, and the easy commute to Minneapolis where my husband works. Plus, we are fortunate to have the benefit of living close to both a major city and a rural landscape. We are so happy we moved here!
- Moved to be in the Hopkins School District and liked the house.
- Convenient location, houses tend to hold their value (good investment)
- To raise our children in a safer city than Minneapolis and send them to a five-star school district. A note about safety: we had encountered gunshots and arson in our old Minneapolis neighborhood (Longfellow) and we moved here to escape. A note about the schools: the school-age children in Minnetonka seem to hold their innocence longer than the ones in Minneapolis. There is less poverty. When I first encountered a group of young teen boys in Minnetonka, I braced myself for trouble, but instead they greeted me with a warm “hello,” and what I noticed were “happy eyes.” Definitely a different culture here.
- we moved to Minnetonka for the schools and the proximity to work.
- Got married to a Minnetonka resident
- Schools and proximity to Minneapolis
- Right house, right price, right neighborhood
- Close to Hopkins where my Husband has a business
- It’s a clean ,well run city
- Move here for the school district for my daughter. We live in the wayzata school district
- We built our house here in 1984 when our kids were small because we believed it was a good area to raise kids and was far enough away from the cities but still easy to get there.
- It’s proximity to Downtown where my husband is employed and we needed a certain size dining room and the newer homes in our price range did not have formal dinings or the size was smaller.
- large lots, lower taxes
- 23 years ago we moved here from Missouri and Hopkins schools were some of the best. We also liked the easy proximity to downtown, the lake and Edina.
- We moved because of schools and lake activities. Our children attend the best school
- The neighborhood is the reason we have stayed in our house for over 29 years. We have an extremely close knit neighborhood including a monthly bookclub, Bunco group and seasonal parties. We have thought about moving to a larger home, but have stayed because of the culture our neighborhood. I haven’t experienced anything like it.
- I like the fact that I am 11 miles from downtown yet see wildlife regularly. I love the trees and the parks and trail system
- Location, family
- For the large lot - I wanted to have a big garden and my husband just wanted space. Now the large lot isn’t so desireable.
- rental house
- We relocated to the twin cities area due to an employment opportunity. We chose the suburb of Minnetonka due to the great quality schools, tree lined neighborhoods, and small community feel. When we moved here we rented a townhome because we didn’t want to buy a home until we were sure we were going to stay. We are now in the process of looking for a home to buy--we love it here.
QUESTION 7: How many of your neighbors do you know?

[Skipped question: 2.]

• More than 30. We have a very social neighborhood with a book club and several other social activities throughout the year.
• Say hi to all of them but only really know the family in one house right next door.
• 10
• most all of them- annual night out block party, other activities
• 5
• dozens - our kids went to/go to catholic schools and those parents (some in my neighborhood) get to know each other well. Also am in neighborhood book club and met neighbors at “night for neighbors” and walking dog or kids (although it was easier meeting people when kids were younger and not stuck in front of X-box).
• 9
• 5
• In the past 5 months since we bought the house we have met all but one adjoining neighbor, as well as probably 15 other houses on the streets nearby at Nat night out, trick or treating, and at the park.
• 5
• I know all of the neighbors on my street and pretty much around our block. I also participate in two different book clubs with those same neighbors.
• 14
• Most
• A few, we live in condos so there is some animosity but also a pretty good community here.
• 10-15
• Neighborhood is in transition (old to young) Only know 7 neighbors well now.
• I know almost all of them. However, we rarely talk to them. We just wave as they drive by, chat briefly if they are walking, or attend a neighborhood gathering once a year or less often.
• all
• Quite a few, especially the ones on either side of us. We have become good friends.
• Many, many. Our neighborhood is very social and we help each other out with child care when needed. It is a close knit area even with the many new families that have moved into neighborhood in the last 5 years. We chose this area for the kids’ and our neighborhood has many of all ages.
• Lots of them.
• all
• 100% of those within two homes of us otherwise about 80%.
• 20
• About a half dozen. (No one lives next door. Our neighbors live across the street in Beachside Townhomes.)
• 25
• Several
• Our neighborhood includes 22 homes on 2 adjoining cul de sacs. I know all of these neighbors.
• 6
• Only know neighbors on either side. Previous neighborhood lived there for 25 years and knew everyone in the cul de sac - 25 houses.
• We are not next to any one but I know maybe 10 that live close.
• At least 10
• 5
• 12 families
• 10 or more
• About 50+, including parents and their children.
• we know the neighbors in 5 of the 8 homes
• most of them 50 plus
• A few
• most
• All of them
• All of them
• All of them!
• Most, though not all as well as some.
• Ten of my neighbors, but alot of them do not know each other. As an outsider to Mn we find that Minnesotans are superficially friendly but not inclusive. I belong to a two area Newcomer groups and that is the concensus among transplants to Mn.
• 20
• 1/2-3/4
• Several, too many too count
• I know 95% of my neighbors within a 4 block radius.
• About ten
• 3
• 5
• a fair number
• We only know 2 neighbors, but due to living in a town home setting, we have recently had some new neighbors move in that we haven’t met yet.

QUESTION 8: Do you feel your interests are adequately supported in Minnetonka? Why or why not? (Please explain your interests.)

[Skipped question: 3.]

• In general, yes but I don’t expect the city (government) to support my personal interests. As a fine artist, I would love to have the city promote more arts oriented activities like Hopkins, Edina or Eden Prairie but, the fact that they don’t does not diminish my quality of life. I, personally, could do more to promote my own self-interest with the city.
• Yes, for the most part. Would like to see more restaurants in the 7&101 area since I need to drive down to Eden Prairie or Chanhassen for the ones I like.
• more parks
• yes
• Yes,
• idk. i guess we could get more involved in some of the events. sometimes smaller events like "glen lake days" would be nice.
• Living in a area that supports nature with walking trails. marshlands, trees etc
• Yes
• Education is certainly a priority here, which is great. The city also appears to have some good environmental protection plans forming and native habitat restoration projects, which is great.
• I do not feel that the 55343 side of Minnetonka is as well taken care of as the 55345 side of Minnetonka. More resources seem to be used to improve that side of the city.
• Yes, we love going out by the lake, bike trails and parks, eating out and enjoy the green spaces MTKA offers. Close community is important to us.
• Yes, I am involved with senior programs and volunteering through the Minnetonka Community Center.
• Since I’m very vocal with my neighbors and with the City of Minnetonka I feel that many of my interests are at least addressed, if not fully supported: adequate snow plowing/street parking in the winter, deer, coyotes and more
• Partially, I would really like a playground for my children who are 2.5 and 1.5. In the area we live there are few updated playgrounds that are well kept up that I would feel comfortable taking my family- and Bryant is usually too busy to bring them there safely in the summer months.
• Yes, we love being outside and have 1.5 acres lot next to the trail system.
• Our requirements are fewer now. But Minnetonka continues City services and activities that we would expect from a top tier city.
• Our primary interests are outdoor recreation. The walking, hiking, bike trails, and parks are all great in Minnetonka. We use Purgatory Park, Jidana Park, and others. We also really like our nearby sub-community of Glen Lake, which includes the elementary school our kids previously attended, and the nearby Fresh Seasons grocery, the Gold Nugget restaurant, Kraemer’s Hardware, and the displaced Tonka Cycle & Ski (we still travel to their Hopkins location).
• Yes, we regularly use the community center, Williston Center and a lot of the community activities both in Minnetonka and Hopkins.
• Yes. We have easily been able to find many things for our kids and ourselves to be a part of from sports to choir and girl scouts.
• I’m not sure what you mean. I wouldn’t expect any place to support my interests if you mean the things I like to do or think are important. I find lots of opportunity to visit the lake if I want to do that. I can find art experiences here. Is that the kind of thing you mean? In general, I can find what I need in this area.
• “minnetonka” is more interested with self image !!
• No. I see the city council hyper-focused on “seniors”. They are planning a seniors-only city that I don’t want to live in.
• Yes
• Yes. They allowed us to have a CUP so that we could have our business in our home.
• Yes. Trails, parks, libraries, and adequate retail.
• I feel informed and take advantage of many Minnetonka programs including recreation, services like brush drop-off and mulch pick-up, community gatherings such as kids fest and the fire station days. My roads are taken care of, the park in my neighborhood is maintained. I feel safe. Completely. City services have adapted to changing community needs: expanding trails and parks adding environmental services such as brush drop off expanding the senior program to include active athletics as well as multiple leisure activities adding events that bring the community together - Summer Festival, Fire Dept and City Open House, etc.
• For the most part.
• Yes - love the trails for walking.
• I would like to see a news report of what’s happening in Minnetonka maybe on Thurs. What I get is news about different events on different emails. Why not something once a week maybe Patch could do it. Hopkins has a news blast called Connections.
• Yes. Lots of family activities, parks, trails, restaurants, environmentally conscious (composting, water quality initiatives, etc.), support for small businesses.
• Somewhat. Hard to find vegetarian restaurants near my home.
• Yes - Minnetonka supports maintaining its natural resources, trees, parks, and general feeling of community and pride.
• No. I think they focus on primarily on what will generate tax revenue, and discount the opinions of the homeowners and neighborhoods. This is based on previous interactions with the city.
• Yes. I love to walk while listening to audio books. Not far from my home, I can walk on a nature trail called Purgatory Creek. Off the trail, my kids and I can even walk down a beaten path through the forest to their school. Their school is one farther than our neighborhood school, and it offers them Spanish Immersion education -- a dream! If I want to shop in a small town, I can go to Excelsior. There’s ice skating a block away at our park or at the community center, a community pool, a nearby SuperTarget. What more could you ask for? Oh, I also like to be near a cheap movie theater, which they have 10 minutes away in downtown Hopkins.
•?
• Yes-but they spend too much money on things they do not need and could spend it on fixing the roads and plowing on time
• No. We feel more bike lanes are needed to bring people together and remain active. I mean the safe off road type
• Supported by who/what? The gov’t? The gov’t has no business in “supporting my interests”
• Yes over the years and because we work as volunteers at the Henn Cty Home school it has
served our needs for years.

- Roads, parks, shopping, etc. are all very well organized
- Yes I do
- Yes, pretty much.
- For the most part, they do a great job of keeping the roads clear in the winter. They send out tree inspectors to protect our community canopy. They work at educating the residents in the removal of invasive species. They keep us well informed by the newsletter and website. My only concern is the cost of cable and I would like to see more companies (ie ATT, Verizon, Google.) As another concern is the amount of money spent on the park at the Burwell House. I feel that the $$$ spent could have gone to benefit more residents of the community. The Park is seldom used and the improvements I feel do not warrant the expense.
- yes, open space, natural planning, continue large lot size
- Minnetonka has been very supportive in regards to maintaining streets and parks. I’m very disappointed that the school district status (mainly due to toooo many open enrolled kids) has declined.
- For, most part yes, however we need a new community center like other surrounding cities
- No, I feel that the city council makes decisions without the input of residences. My house value keeps declining, but my taxes continue to go up every year.
- Yes
- Yes
- I don’t feel very connected to other Minnetonka residents. I don’t think our family fits the profile - ie we are not Republicans. We are interested in walking and biking and neither is supported in our neighborhood with the appropriate sidewalks and trails. It is an ok place to live but I wouldn’t say I feel especially proud of Minnetonka.
- yes
- To some degree. My kids are able to be involved in many extra-curriculars from academic programs to sports programs. We love eating at non-chain restaurants and unfortunately Minnetonka lacks in that dept. There are also not a lot of family arenas for activities, but we can go to nearby Eden Prairie (movies, lazer tag and bowling) or Minneapolis (theater, museums, and sporting events).

QUESTION 9: Do you think your community could use a local blog? Why or why not?

[27 responses.]

- What would it hurt? As long as it’s apolitical, well written and entertaining, I would respond favorably to a blog or any form of communication that involves my neighborhood.
- I thought we kind of had that in Patch
- sure. i’m not sure if i’d follow it, but i do get email from Patch.com; nice to know what’s going on locally
- I am not really interested in allowing social media to control part of my life.
- Local bloggers bring communities together. I do get patch updates and enjoy those
- I don’t know enough about what a blog is or does or might add.
- Wouldn’t hurt, I’m not big on blogs but why not?
- Not sure as I don’t participate in blogs.
- Not sure what additional info we could glean from it.
- I think the Patch articles combined with the reader comments seems to serve the same purpose. Besides, I think the value of blogs is severely hampered by the pointless whining of many users.
- I don’t think I would use a blog. I think in person interaction is far superior to cyber relationships.
- what would the purpose be to have city council with A blog
- I’m ambivalent. The mayor tried this for his election but only the former mayors blogged on it & it looked artificial.
• Not familiar with blog.
• I believe that there are many outlets for community issues and opportunities for socializing already with the programs that Minnetonka has, including access with minnetonka.
• Yes - whether I use it or not, we need to respond to every available method to get out city information.
• I would be unlikely to take the time to read it.
• Don’t need it.
• Maybe, if tied into the city website. It would depend on who wrote it, the topics, and how much human interest versus city regulations was covered.
• Maybe, I’m not sure we need a blog but some type of news blast once a week. Patch sends stuff.
• Yes and no. Who maintains it? A volunteer? An improvement would be to make the city planning efforts more transparent. Despite being set up to receive messaging from the city about projects, it doesn’t seem to work, and I’m often surprised to hear about projects happening that I would have been interested to know about.
• Won’t let me click on Yes if I comment here, so Yes, and we have one: Minnetonka Patch.
• not really into blogs
• I think what is out there is enough
• Not sure. I would check it out initially and judge it’s value to me then. It is worth exploring.
• it has Minnetonka Patch
• Yes--I would especially like something that focuses on upcoming events. I do follow the Patch, but wish it was more informative.

QUESTION 10: Which of the following online forums for Minnetonka residents would you be willing to participate in?

• One based on interests (dog walkers, knitters, book clubs, etc.): 34 respondents; 60.7%.
• One based on services (finding a babysitter, joining a carpool, etc.): 18 respondents; 32.1%.

[31 text responses.]

• I don’t think a Minnetonka blog needs to be as specific as “dog walkers” or “car poolers”. There are 50000 interesting stories (residents) in the city that covers a more diverse cross section of suburban life than most people know.
• landscaping - how to get rid of weeds, how to choose flowers and shrubs and trees; where to get discounts on these (wish city would offer more and larger quantity of trees in spring at reduced cost)
• none
• Babysitters/mom connections, edible gardening group
• I am satisfied with the Minnetonka website and newsletter.
• One based on helping the lonely elderly who just need some communication and friendship. Many of the interest groups are already available to seniors.
• transportation
• Member at Williston Fitness Center
• I would only be interested in communicating about geographically oriented activities. In other words, I would like to join bike rides that start in my local area. However, I see no point in a Minnetonka based forum for activities that are not geographically specific.
• I would not be interested in an online forum.
• involved with a HOW TO learning center. DIY, recycle for reuse in the home etc.
• It would have to provide information or value. I don’t want to spend time tied to a computer on a forum when I could be out doing my interest. For services I talk to the people I know for ideas; they know me & I trust their recommendations more than an anonymous forum -- unless the city
is willing to vouch for everything that is recommended on its board.

• Nature photography
• I like Patch. Hopkins Connection once a week. Royal Report is good to.
• Summer/winter activities - what might I like to participate in this week? Public safety - what’s happening that I need to know about to keep safe - current crime hot spots Place for teens willing to do yard work and household chores to post their availability.
• At this point I have no interest in joining an online forum.
• School events, outdoor activities, small business news, holiday events, people making a difference in our community, babysitting services, house cleaning services, handyman services.
• Again I’m not much for blogging but like the way one might get info. once a week.
• N/A
• None that I can think of.
• Any digital forum that fosters sharing and collaboration is a welcome way to bring people together.
• possibly book clubs
• I didn’t realize there was a lack of online forums. Last thing I need/want is another government-sponsored “initiative” to help me find a babysitter.
• Because of our age we are happy the younger ones in Mtka are doing are taking up the slack but we have done community things for many years....
• Bird watching, nature study, local history
• Movie club, gardening
• none
• Walking areas in Minnetonka
• Not interested.
• Babysitting perhaps. Buckthorn eradication group.
• I would also love one that talks about the different sports clubs that kids can join: for example, my son wants to join football for young boys and I have no idea where to even begin looking--and when I do find something how do I know if it’s a good program compared to others?
SYNTHESIS

What I’ve shown so far is a path of my empathy-gaining, challenge-framing, idea-generating, prototyping, and iterating progress model. It is not thorough nor totally complete, as there were times along the way in which new information required me to re-frame (after meetings, check-ins and interviews), then seek more expertise through empathy (as in the survey), and so on. There were times in which I gained information from city officials as well; assistant city manager Perry Vetter provided me with a thorough rundown of the city’s process of engagement for collecting neighborhood input on new developments, for example, and the city’s community relations manager Jacque Larson provided me with a great idea of the city’s current outreach, including a very successful monthly newsletter and community website utilization rate. Data from the city’s past annual surveys has assisted me as well in gaining perspective on demographics and residents’ satisfaction levels—including data from a 2009 survey that specifically sought to feel out residents on their own neighborhoods.

As I mentioned earlier in this paper, I had initially treated this project and design challenge as a question of whether a need exists now for official neighborhoods in Minnetonka. After all of my experiences and research, I have determined that a need to create official neighborhood boundaries does not exist now. At the same time, though, the city is (from what I’ve gathered) concerned about its ability to attract and sustain young professionals and families, as its population is largely made up of firmly planted and aging residents. As the city of Minnetonka prepares for the future and is interested in exploring ways to attract young people to the area, I do think it’s worth looking beyond the numbers of current communications efforts and studying the experiential variety that exists in the city.

Of the 2009 neighborhood survey’s respondents, 69% were over the age of 45 and also primarily opposed to or indifferent to the idea of social media and heightened electronic communications with the city. In the survey I released, which had a similar number
of respondents (56) as the 2009 survey did (73), 80% of respondents were over the age of 41, and 59% have lived in Minnetonka ten years or longer. While it may not be an entirely unbiased sampling, the data does suggest that the city’s most active and committed citizens (my survey respondents were, after all, all Patch perusers) are not necessarily the young professionals and families it wants to include. Of the 31 survey respondents who provided elaboration on what they thought about an online forum to connect people via their interests, I received 8 “not interested” responses, 6 unclear ones, and 17 “yes” responses that provided further clues on what topics and activities residents would like to connect with other residents on. These responses were very encouraging.

While it’s no bold statement to say that there is a growing population of millennials for whom electronic communications such as e-mail, texting, and social media are the norm, it is notable that a recent survey discovered that the need for face-to-face communication still exists in this age group (“Face Time”). It’s just that the platforms through which these plans and connections are made have changed.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

To sum it up, here are my final recommendations for the city of Minnetonka:

(1) Consider the future and potential effectiveness of new electronic platforms for encouraging the citizens of Minnetonka to connect with one another. The city itself wouldn’t need to mandate or blog, but rather provide resources for residents to pick it up. Requiring interested residents of set communities to apply could be an option; so could offering a monthly or yearly stipend to committed bloggers. Such resources could eliminate the need for advertising as we saw with the blogs in Seattle, which seems to me to create something of a conflict of interest. Either way, the city could use it as a means of listening to the conversations citizens are having, and could also be at the forefront of such an engaged, sustained movement to foster better communication between citizens.

And if blogging is determined not to be the best route, a Meetup.com/Minnetonka
Connections type of site that provides the basic forum setup to encourage residents to connect might be the right answer. Or some combination of both, perhaps. At any rate, it is a large commitment to consider and would be one that could have, say, a 3-year or 5-year timeline and ought to involve resident input, maybe even focus groups, along the way.

(2) My second recommendation to the city of Minnetonka would be to be open to divergent thinking, a behavior that is meant to “multiply options to create choices”; its nemesis is convergent thinking, which is “a practical way of deciding among existing alternatives” (Brown 66-67). My understanding is that the city is heavily reliant upon its very thorough annual survey, among other traditional tools, to capture an in-depth picture of residents’ satisfaction. At the same time, I discovered through data that was provided to me that 31 of 229 (or 13.5%) of the city of Minnetonka’s full- and part-time employees live in the city of Minnetonka. While I have been told that there are certain tokens of immersion already in place, such as involvement with city organizations, I can’t help but wonder whether the numbers mean there’s room for risk of miscommunication and a need for further experiential understanding of the context in which Minnetonka residents live. While addressing new challenges in traditional ways might be practical, it will also only ever lead to the best answer being pursued among existing alternatives, rather than a means of creating new possibilities by probing the future.

I would like to allow that this particular recommendation might have its shortcomings; it is likely that there are activities that encourage divergent thinking that are underway that I am not aware of. I’m simply pointing out that pieces of consistent evidence suggest to me a need to try new, more immersive activities to truly seek innovation and plan for Minnetonka’s sustainable future.

(3) Think about the future of neighborhoods and how they’ll be defined. The city of Edina, for example, recently undertook efforts to create official neighborhoods and put a name on them. This, I am told, was met with a very passionate backlash from Edina
residents, who were strongly opposed to the idea of placing a name on an area simply for the sake of naming or labeling and not out of some means that grows organically out of the area’s history and character.

Throughout this paper, I have explored other means of distinguishing neighborhoods, such as doing so by color. One could also do so by shape, or by a name that does grow out of a neighborhood’s character, or perhaps through some vote that engages the neighborhood, or other means that arise. I think another important thing to note here is that the idea of neighborhoods is changing all the more rapidly because of the interactivity the Internet provides opportunities for. For example, as we’ve discussed in class, one person who moves can now stay connected to his or her former neighborhood that exists in another country via Facebook. And people are finding all kinds of ways to connect at a grassroots level, whether it be by finding people of like-minded interests on Meetup.com or finding a random stranger’s couch to sleep on while traveling via Couchsurfing.com. The idea of “neighborhoods” and what makes up one and what, essentially, connects people is one that is ever-evolving and bound to change ever faster thanks to such emerging platforms.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Thanks so much for taking the time to go through my experiences and research throughout this semester. I’d like to emphasize that I found my design thinking model to be extremely useful in allowing me to move efficiently and mindfully through the process; in putting the emphasis on a human-centered approach that encouraged me to have as much direct communication with residents as I possibly could; and in ultimately allowing me to make concrete recommendations to the city of Minnetonka based on a careful synthesis of research, experiences, and thought processing.

If further research on this topic is pursued, my suggestion would be to pursue further exploration of the ideas I laid out in my third recommendation. What will neighborhoods
of the future look like? Architect Andres Duany, for example, envisions a metropolis-focused future in which neighborhoods are smaller, even homes are smaller, and people won’t wind up traveling so far to get to work, play, and their social lives (Hampson). At the same time, people are likely to be more connected online and perhaps meet their needs of connection through virtual networks. In the next 10 years, will neighborhoods generally still hold meaning in the way they do today? Will interactive electronic communications platforms give further meaning to such connections? Could we see a hybrid of the idea of a neighborhood that combines physical geography with interactive platforms? These are questions that any further research ought to address.


