

BARRIERS TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN FROGTOWN/THOMAS DALE NEIGHBORHOOD

Landscape Report
August 2

Prepared by:

Prepared for:



Asian Media Access

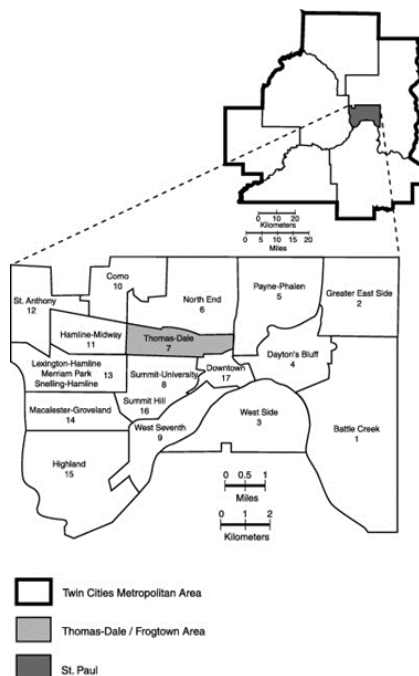
PROJECT BACKGROUND

I. About the Frogtown/Thomas Dale Neighborhood

Frogtown/Thomas Dale is a neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota known for being one of the city's succession neighborhoods, where generation after generation of families have become a part of it. Among the most common immigrant groups in Frogtown are Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Latino people. Diversity becomes evident when you look at the neighborhood's civic organizations, religious groups, businesses, schools, and neighborhood industries. Important community locations in Frogtown include the Rondo Library and Community Center, Fire Station No. 18, and the Hmong American Farmers Market at Unidale.

The construction of the Green Line, completed in 2014, has turned the University's route, through Frogtown, into one of the busiest, liveliest and booming shopping districts in the Twin Cities, although it has also had a negative impact on the flow of traffic through the area¹. Unfortunately, in 2020 many businesses along University Avenue, including businesses in the Frogtown neighborhood along University Avenue, were damaged during the George Floyd riots.

II. Frogtown/Thomas Dale Community Description:



A. Geography: The Frogtown/Thomas Dale community has the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks, Interstate 35E, University Avenue, and Lexington Parkway as the boundaries of St. Paul's Frogtown planning district. However, the neighborhood's historic boundaries extend south of University Avenue several blocks, all the way to Interstate 94. Located northwest of downtown St. Paul, the area historically known as Frogtown includes five smaller neighborhoods: Mount Airy, Capitol Heights, Rondo, Lower Rice Street and East Midway which house an estimated population of 15,593 residents².

University Avenue was established as the main route connecting St. Paul to Minneapolis, prior to the creation of Interstate 94. Thus, it became the neighborhood's key commercial center, with traffic between the Twin Cities helping businesses thrive along this busy route.

Figure 1. "Place-Framing" as Place-Making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Available from https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Frogtown-Thomas-Dale-and-the-citizen-planning-districts-in-St-Paul-Minnesota_fig1_229789106 [accessed 12 Sept 2024]

¹ Script by Jane McClure, edited by Tony Andrea. Video produced and directed by East End Productions.

² Frogtown/Thomas-Dale | MN Compass.

B. Demographics: The Frogtown/Thomas Dale neighborhood in St. Paul is one of the most racially diverse communities in the city and one of the poorest. Frogtown has a diverse total population of 15,593. In 2022,

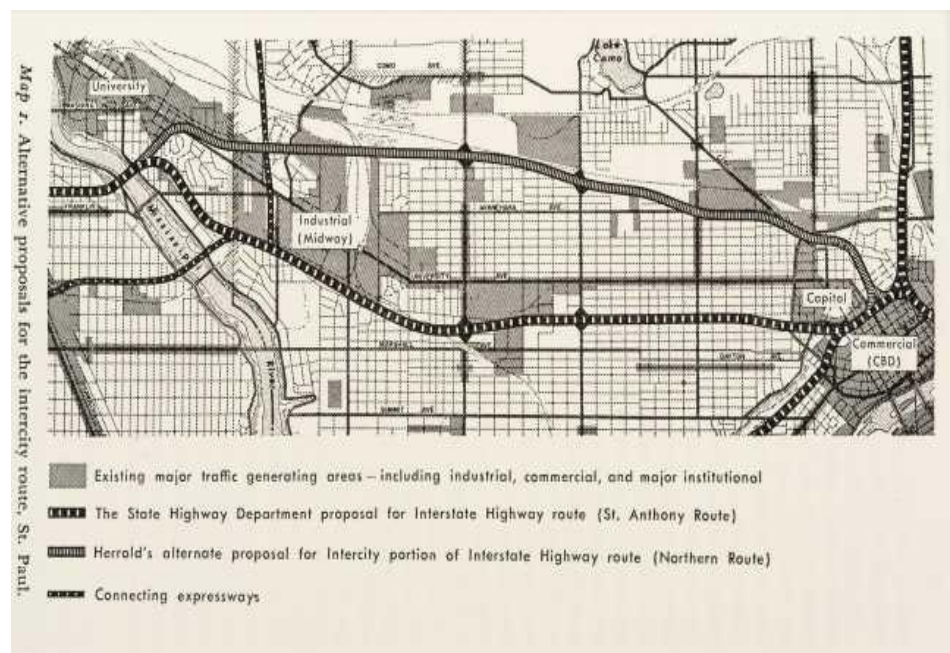
- 28.8% of the residents were Asian,
- 24.6% were African American,
- 25% of the population was White, and
- 13.5% were Latino².

The median household income was \$51,692 in 2022, while the median household income for the city of St. Paul was \$69,919 for the same year. About 49% of all households are renters, and 70.1% moved in 2010 or later. In addition, the Frogtown neighborhood is home to one of the largest concentrations of foreign-born residents, with 29.1% of its population born outside the United States².

Compared to the statewide poverty rate in 2022 (9.6%), Frogtown's poverty rates are noticeably higher, with 23.9% of residents living below the poverty line. In addition to this, almost 12% of its population under 65 does not have health insurance coverage. The characteristics of impoverished areas in Frogtown show that they are more likely to be home to immigrants and refugees, people of color, and people without a high school diploma or GED. All this situation of poverty and historical trauma has made substance use a prevalent problem in communities such as Frogtown².

Rondo Neighborhood

Rondo neighborhood ran roughly between University Avenue to the north, Selby Avenue to the south, Rice Street to the east, and Lexington Avenue to the west. African American people set down roots with their churches, businesses, and schools, creating a strong community. However, with the construction of the Interstate 94 between 1956 and 1968 the neighborhood was cut in half and more than 600 African American families lost their homes. At the same time numerous businesses and institutions were also lost, fracturing its identity as a cultural center³.



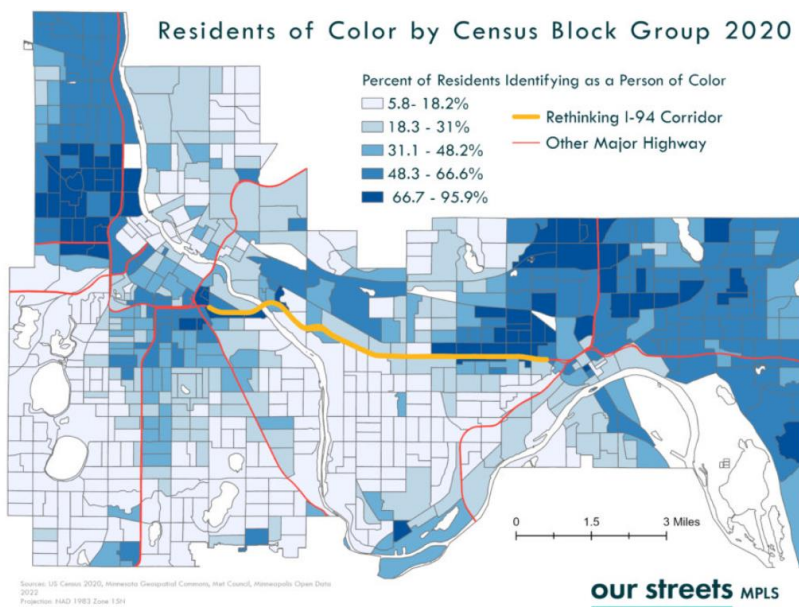
³ Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul. Rondo Neighborhood, St Paul/MNopedia

Interstate 94 W & Rondo Ave, St Paul, MN 55103

With the construction of I-94 in 1960, great and persistent damage was caused to the residents of the Rondo neighborhood. This road not only divided the community in two, but also destroyed part of it. Many homes and businesses were demolished to make way for the freeway, and, according with the article "Conectando pasado, presente, futuro" de Reconnect Rondo, more than 700 African American families had to sell their homes, many of them at unfair prices. The same happened to 300 small businesses and institutions, adding to Rondo's economic destruction.

The impact of urban highways like I-94 on communities of color was undeniably severe and because of this, the Rondo neighborhood lost 61% of its population.

The Devastating Impacts of I-94 on Communities of Color



*Source: <https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org/learn-more/i-94-harms-our-communities/#:~:text=I%2D94%20tore%20through%20the,scars%20across%20the%20city%20landscape.>

In Minneapolis, according to the Twin Cities Boulevard website, 80% of black residents lived in the area where I-94 was built. Similarly, in St Paul, more than 6,000 people and many businesses, including the historic Rondo neighborhood, were displaced due to the construction of this highway.

What becomes obvious is that these communities of color did not have the leverage to stop construction projects, which made them vulnerable to decisions that were made without consulting their input. The deliberate design of I-94 not only destroyed family homes and businesses, but also perpetuated racial segregation and social inequities.

The communities along I-94 have endured decades of negative impacts from the highway. For example, increased traffic and noise pollution are obvious, while others remain hidden but equally harmful. The community has been facing harsh realities, ongoing challenges, and injustices for many years.

Another article written on Twin Cities Boulevard called "I-94 Harms Minneapolis and Saint Paul Communities," describes how the Minnesota Department of Transportation attempted to silence opposition voices by offering promises of the freeway's benefits. For example, they offered solutions to congestion and traffic deaths as well as an increase in property values. However, the same article mentions how those promises were not fulfilled for more than 60 years, as communities along I-94 continued to endure the negative effects of this highway, such as increased environmental and noise pollution.

The reality is that this community has been facing harsh realities and injustices for many years. Even with the intervention of leaders such as Reverend Floyd Massey and Timothy Howard, who worked hard to lessen the effects of the construction of the highway, the underground construction of Interstate 94 could not prevent the division of the Rondo neighborhood and the subsequent evacuation and relocation of hundreds of people and businesses. It is estimated that 1-in-8 African Americans in St. Paul lost their homes to the construction of the freeway and many businesses never reopened⁴. The displaced families moved to other areas of the Twin Cities such as Maplewood, Brooklyn Center, Robbinsdale, and Crystal. Those who remained living in Rondo had to suffer the consequences of the decline of the community and the geographical disruption of the neighborhood next to the highway. Even though the Rondo neighborhood would never be the same, it continues to keep its spirit alive. Every year since 1983, its inhabitants celebrate the Rondo Festival in July to commemorate the history and legacy of the community.

What happened to the Rondo neighborhood due to Interstate 94 is frequently cited and discussed as a warning against future constructions, including the Metro Transit Green Line service that connects St. Paul with Minneapolis⁴.

Hamline-Midway Neighborhood

Hamline-Midway is a neighborhood and Planning District #11. Its boundaries are Transfer Road on the west, University Avenue on the south, Lexington Parkway on the east, and by railroad tracks just north of the Pierce Butler Route in the north. Its name "Midway" is because it is halfway between downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis⁵.

In the 1850s settlers began to live in this neighborhood and in 1880 Hamline University moved to the area. However, it was not until 1890 that its development accelerated due to the University Avenue streetcar service. Like the rest of the city of St. Paul, this neighborhood experienced significant growth in the population of people of color between 1990 and 2000⁵.

The Metro Transit Green Line opened in 2014, while the bus rapid transit line, Metro Line A, opened in 2016 along Snelling Avenue. Allianz Field⁶ opened in 2019 on the site of a former bus garage in downtown St. Paul, but redevelopment of the surrounding area has been slow since it opened.

Downtown St. Paul

Downtown St. Paul is the central business district. Its boundaries are the Mississippi River to the south, University Avenue to the north, US 52 to the east, and Kellogg Boulevard to the west. It is made up of the neighborhoods of Dayton's Bluff, Summit-University, West Seventh, Frogtown, West Side,

³ Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul. Rondo Neighborhood, St Paul/MNopedia

⁴ Minnesota Historical Society Library: Rondo Neighborhood & I-94: Overview.

⁵ Twin Cities Daily Planet. Looking to the future with an eye on the past – Hamline Midway Coalition – District 11 Planning Council

⁶ A soccer stadium in St. Paul

and Payne-Phalen. The West Side neighborhood is across the river while Interstate 35E and Interstate 94 run through the north side of the neighborhood, providing a separation between the State Capitol and other state government buildings from the rest of downtown.

According to U.S. Census data, the population of Downtown St. Paul in 2020 was 9,621, of which⁷:

- 69.6% were White,
- 11% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and
- 9.7% were African Americans.

Only a small percentage (3.3%) of the Latino population lives in this neighborhood. The total of its foreign-born residents is close to 12%⁷.

The median household income in 2022 was \$ 64,243 and about 62% of all households in the neighborhood were renters. A portion (14.8%) of downtown's residents live below the poverty line, just around five points above the national median (12.9%). Of Downtown St. Paul residents, 95.2% have at least a high school diploma and 58.4% have a bachelor's degree or higher⁷.

⁷Minnesota Compass. Downtown neighborhood data. Downtown | MN Compass.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

This project will seek to increase policies, plans and community designs through North Minneapolis Blue Line and St. Paul Sears Redevelopment to better connect residents with activity friendly routes to everyday destination to live/learn/work/play, and provide safe, culturally based places for increasing physical activities.

Historical Perspectives on the Impacts of I-94

Our project is not only interested in addressing the current needs of the community, but also recognizes the traumatic effects left by the construction of I-94. Because the old Sears building was built during that time and is located off I-94, we have formed a partnership with Elluminance Era and the Frogtown/Rondo Black Church Alliance to document the stories of the neighborhood through audio and video recordings.

As a result, we will be able to deepen our understanding of residents' experiences, as well as position the Sears Building as a historic and memorial landmark that reflects the significant impacts of transportation development on the neighborhood's prosperity and connectivity.

Use public policies to mobilize community members to exercise more

Cultural diversity has evolved over the years around the world, as communities continue to be shaped by the mobility of people and their aspirations. Biculturalism is a philosophy that refers to how people can master the rules and norms of a new culture without abandoning their own values, language and social support. It refers to a sense of belonging to a culturally larger community and promotes cultural resilience.

Considering the integration aspect of biculturalism, this project proposes a bicultural healthy living framework with a holistic approach to maximize the benefits of the different cultures living in this community. This bicultural framework of healthy living will be applied to all activities in this proposal, recognizing the resilience and creativity of all communities, their families and individuals, which is demonstrated in their success and abilities to navigate the often tedious and confusing government systems.

Events and Surveys shaping the SEARS Redevelopment Plan

Engaging the Community Through Outreach Activities:

Since June 2023, Asian American Business Resilience Network (AABRN), Asian Media Access (AMA) and partners have collaborated and demonstrated an impressive community outreach and engagement events and continuously work on interacting with diverse communities. These events can be grouped into five main activities:

- **Neighborhood meetings:** More than 100 meetings were held, including weekly sessions via Zoom and face-to-face meetings.

- **Door knocking:** More than 180 residents engaged via door knocking activities to engage them in safeguarding the Sears building. This face-to-face approach allowed project managers to hear first-hand the concerns, suggestions, and expectations of residents.
- **Summer Multicultural Events:** Participated in multicultural summer events such as the Asian Street Food Festival, Juneteenth, the Fortune Tales Music Festival, National Night Out, and Imagine Rondo, where it connected with residents to share project updates and gather their opinions and feedback.
 - **Sears Interactive 3D Model Discussion:** This was carried out during the multi-cultural events of the summer and had the collaboration of Juxtaposicion. Community members were actively involved, visualizing what the site would look like and voicing their opinions for the redevelopment by rearranging various elements of the design. This activity increased awareness of the project and ensured that the input provided by residents was taken into account in the development process. This activity was attended by more than 100 participants of various races, genders, ages and backgrounds, some of whom also answered the Sears Development Survey on the ways in which people are currently accessing the site. This survey also asked about changes that would motivate residents to walk, bike, or use public transportation. Finally, participants were also able to give their opinions on what services they would like to see provided at this location.
- **Community Center Visits:** AMA and AABRN organized visits to area Black churches, Hmong senior centers, and Minnesota's Vietnamese community. Additionally, open houses were held to support Black/African American, Asian American, and Somali American residents in the area, thus maintaining the project's commitment to working with BIPOC communities to ensure that their voices are reflected during the planning process.
- **Survey Distribution**
 - **Community Surveys:** Survey designed to gather opinions and feedback on the transformation of the Sears site into a World Cultural Heritage Center. These surveys were mostly conducted during door knocking and community meetings, which ensured the direct and personal engagement of the participants. More than 200 community members participated in these surveys, selecting their five preferred characteristics that would best suit their needs; The top two preferred characteristics were the "Wellness Technology Center with Holistic Care" and the "Community Service Center".
 - **Physical Activity Survey:** Physical activity survey was also carried out in which more than 250 residents in the community participated. This survey collected information on barriers to physical activity and the resources and facilities that would most effectively encourage physical activity around Sears Redevelopment. Results are shown below.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SURVEY

A survey examining barriers and access to physical activity was administered by Asian Media Access (AMA) staff and Juxtaposition Arts staff during in the city of St. Paul, Minnesota in 2024. This survey had 140 participants, of which 36 were residents of the Frogtown neighborhood. During community events, AMA and Juxtaposition Arts staff interviewed community members who attended the events, regardless of their race, age, or background.

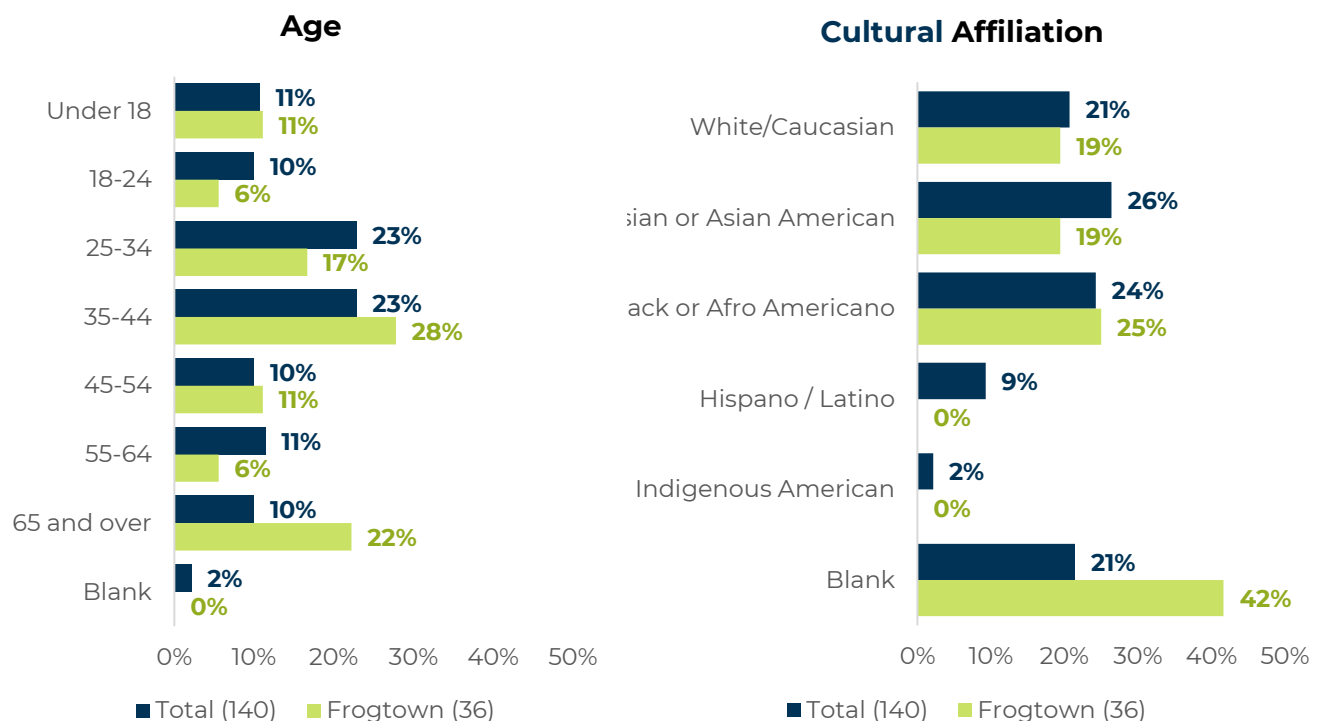
The data was collected at the following events:

- 1) Asian Street Food Festival, on June 8, 2024.
- 2) Asian Street Food Festival, on June 9, 2024.
- 3) Sears Juneteenth event: held on June 15, 2024.
- 4) Fortune Tales Music Festival: held on June 21, 2024.
- 5) Imagine Rondo Event: celebrated on July 14, 2024.

Demographics

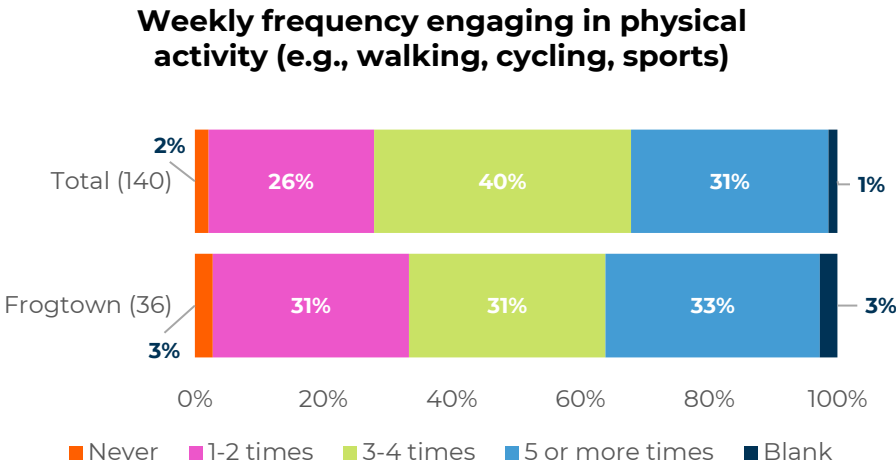
The most represented age group among the participants in the survey was 25-44 years old (56%), with 35-44 years old being the most prevalent age range for Frogtown residents (28%).

In terms of cultural affiliation, 26% of all participants self-identified as Asian or Asian American (19% from Frogtown), 24% as Black or African American (25% from Frogtown) and 21% as White/ Caucasian (19% from Frogtown).



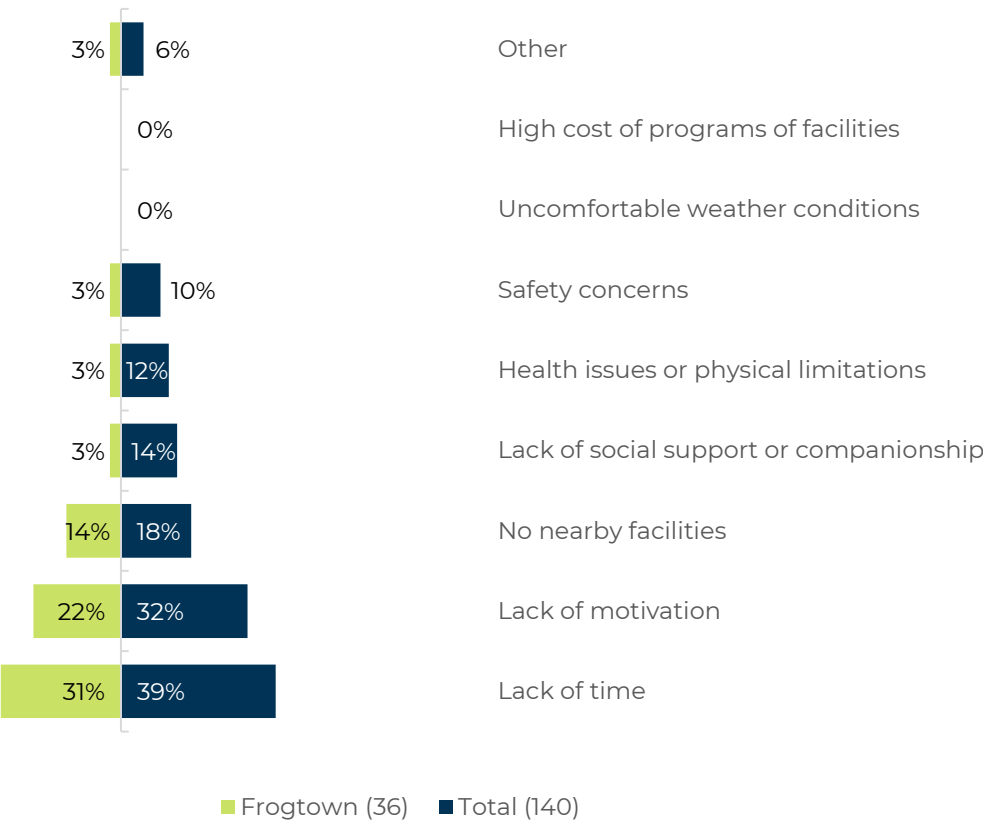
Findings

Of all those surveyed, 40% stated that they exercise 3-4 times a week, compared to 31% of Frogtown respondents. However, 31% of total respondents compared to 33% of Frogtown neighborhood participants reported engaging in some form of physical activity five or more times a week.



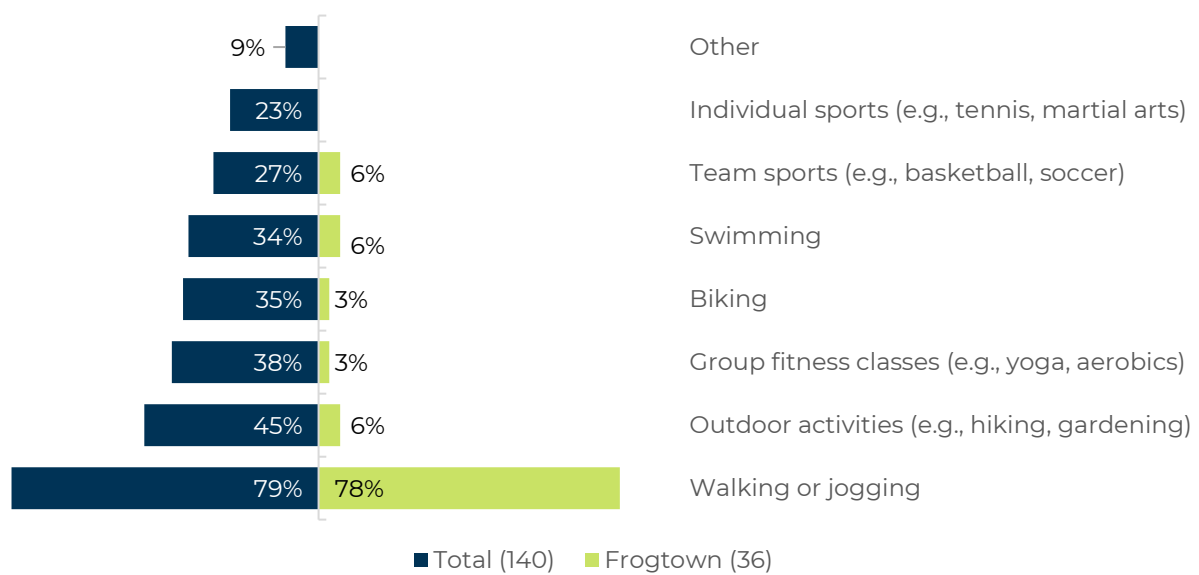
Participants pointed to lack of time and motivation as the main barriers to physical activity. It should be noted that 18% of the total participants (14% of Frogtown residents) pointed to not having facilities nearby as the third most challenging barrier to engaging in physical activity.

Most Challenging Barriers to engage in physical activity as often as they would like



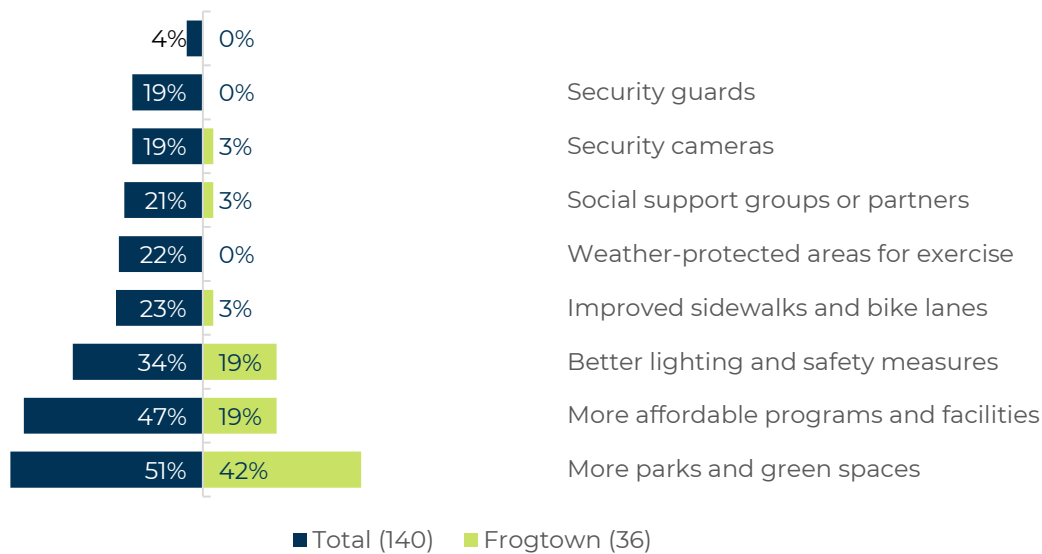
When asked about what physical activities are most interesting to them, about 80% of both the total participants and residents of the Frogtown neighborhood chose walking or jogging. Other activities that participants found interesting were outdoor activities, group fitness classes, biking and swimming.

Physical Activities Residents are most interested in



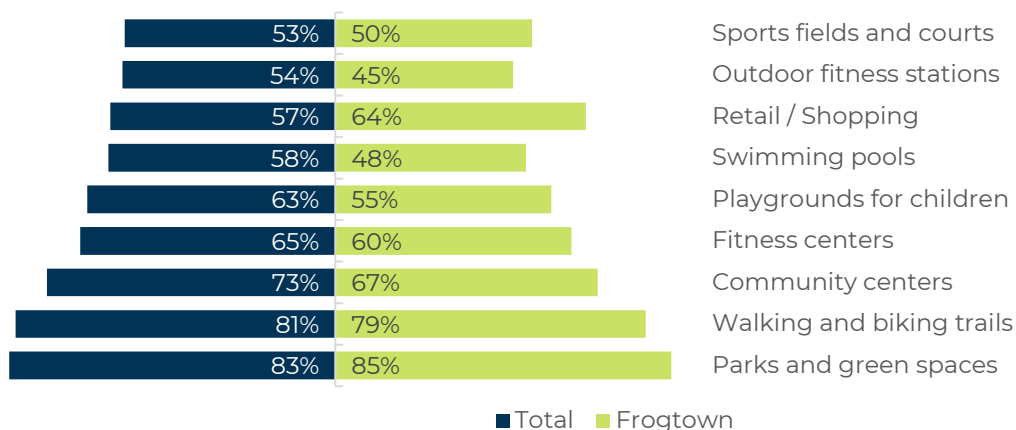
Regarding improvements or changes that would motivate participants to engage in more frequent physical activity, 42% of Frogtown residents said having more parks and green spaces as the top improvement or change, followed by more affordable programs and facilities and better lighting and safety measures.

Improvements or changes that would encourage more frequent activities



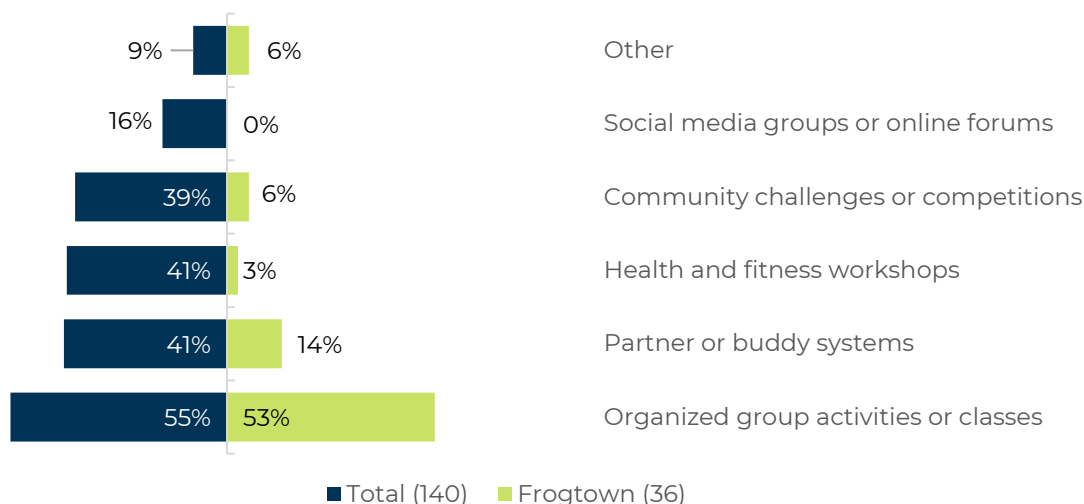
Most participants, 83% of the total and 85% Frogtown participants, considered parks and green spaces as the facilities they most need access to for physical activity. The other two facilities that all participants considered very important for physical activity were the walking and biking trails and the community centers.

**"Somewhat Important" + "Important"
to have access to these facilities or amenities
for physical activity**



Finally, when participants were asked about the type of community support that they would find most help for them be physically active, 55% of the total (53% of Frogtown residents) pointed to organized group activities or classes as the preferred type of community support. Other types of support that respondents preferred were partner or buddy systems, health and fitness workshops and community challenges or competitions.

**Type of Community Support
that would help residents be more active**



REDEVELOPMENT OF SEARS SITE

Building Community Foundations and Trust

Our efforts have generated impressive levels of participation and have significantly shaped the direction of the project, ensuring that the redevelopment aligns with the diverse needs and aspirations of the community. Through our interactions we have established a strong foundation of trust and collaboration, fostering a sense of shared ownership over the future of the Sears site. The information provided by community members highlights the critical need to create environments and opportunities that promote connection, health, and physical activity. AABRN and AMA will incorporate this input into the Sears Redevelopment Master Plan, focusing on Active Living and Everyday Destinations to transform the site into a vibrant World Cultural Heritage Corridor.

Additionally, Asian American Business Resilience Network (AABRN) and Asian Media Access (AMA) have been actively collaborating with partners on the Sears Redevelopment Project. The Sears Redevelopment Project is supported by an impressive network of more than 30+ partners, all of whom are making significant strides in fostering collaboration and community development.

Transit-Oriented Development: Enhancing Connectivity and Accessibility

Enhancing Urban Connectivity as Ways Encouraging Physical Activities:

Street connectivity is an integral part to urban planning and influences accessibility, transportation, and public health. A properly connected network should facilitate efficient travel routes and promote pedestrian and cyclist safety. Community subdivision regulations require that new or reconstructed streets have connections to adjacent neighborhoods and services. This policy is focused on fostering vibrant and interconnected communities that prioritize friendly environments and physical activity for passersby.

Promoting Street Connectivity through Sears Redevelopment

Sears' large empty parking lot worsening the venue's connectivity issues, becoming a physical barrier to pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The redevelopment of this space offers the opportunity to improve neighborhood connectivity, through the creation of mixed-use developments with pedestrian-friendly design and amenities.

This project is working to develop solutions for this area and improve connectivity within the neighborhood to ensure seamless access throughout the site. Our primary goal is to effectively reconnect communities and facilitate access to key destinations such as Western Sculpture Park, the State Capitol, the Rice Street Corridor, downtown, and others.

Considering the Transit-Oriented Development

We are considering the continued pursuit of transit-oriented development, aligning closely with community subdivision regulations and zoning codes to improve connectivity and accessibility. We are exploring options for everyday destinations through multi-use trails for pedestrians and bike riders. In addition, we are in the process of planning how residential developments can connect to neighboring communities and other essential destinations through sidewalks or paths.

Embracing Sustainable Transportation Beyond Automobiles

This project will prioritize modes of transportation beyond cars, highlighting walking, biking, and the use of public transportation. It is also intended to encourage communities to participate in healthy activities such as outdoor gardening, walking, and cycling.

Community-Oriented Development: Creating Safe, Educational, and Creative Opportunities

The former Sears building is located along Highway 94, at 425 Rice St, nearby to Rondo and Frogtown neighborhoods. The goal of this project is to provide educational and creative opportunities for African American, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals and families.

Safety

A primary goal of the World Cultural Heritage Corridor is to provide additional safe spaces, such as a Zen Garden and a children's area, for the enjoyment of BIPOC youth. In addition, they plan to include an Event Center to present concerts and dance recitals to embrace Asian and Black cultural music, and a Cooking Center to rent and provide teaching and learning opportunities for cultural dishes. All this is intended to enrich and to appreciate the heritage of these neighborhoods.

Education

Another important aspect of this redevelopment plan is to implement a SMART Pathway school, which will focus on BIPOC youth combining creativity, athleticism and IT skills (such as social media and web design). The specialization in sports will set it apart from the currently existing charter schools in the surrounding areas, enriching the possibilities through this unique aspect. Through the implementation of a BIPOC-focused charter school with a specialization in sports, arts, and IT activities, the redesign is aimed to encourage families and strengthen future career opportunities.

Creativity

Finally, this site will benefit the creative zone that already exists through features that are not found in the current creative space, such as 3D virtual reality and the immersive theme park. These features will provide a space for multimedia art where artists and residents will be able to tell their stories in many different formats, combining past heritage with the cultural experiences of modern art.