



Youngstown MOVE Roundtable Executive Summary

The Youngstown MOVE Roundtable took place from January 13 to February 17, 2023. The Roundtable was sponsored by Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and co-hosted by Sarah Lowry, Director, Healthy Community Partnership and Hunter Morrison, Consultant, City of Youngstown.

Context

Belmont Avenue, a main thoroughfare from Liberty Township to Youngstown and point of access from I-80, was once a thriving locus of activity. Many Youngstown residents have fond memories of enjoying its former amenities including movie theaters, candy stores, restaurants, and shopping. Over the years, many of these businesses have closed, leaving aging infrastructure, vacant storefronts, and a tired streetscape. Despite this, there remain a number of important assets scattered along the corridor: entertainment venues, the university, the hospital, a small business incubator, and an array of ethnic restaurants renowned by locals. The opportunity before us is to establish and pursue a vision to make Belmont Avenue a prized gateway into the city, a welcoming and vibrant corridor that is bustling with activity and conveys a strong sense of place - so that the corridor becomes not only a thoroughfare, but a destination unto itself.

Focus: Belmont Avenue Corridor

Fast forward 20 or 30 years. Imagine Belmont Avenue is a vibrant street full of activity: people are bustling about, there is a lively retail and restaurant scene, and it's easy to hop on transit to get where you need to go. What does it look like? Who is it for? What needs to happen to make this vision a reality?

Framing Question:

"What could we do together to improve Belmont Avenue?"

Purpose/format

The Youngstown MOVE Roundtable was comprised of more than a dozen stakeholders from the Belmont Avenue Corridor, because they are already invested in Belmont Avenue's success. This group involved representatives from local and regional government, small business owners, arts and culture organizations, economic development, higher education and healthcare institutions, community-focused nonprofits, and planning consultants.

The Youngstown Roundtable participants made it clear from the beginning that they want to take action for change. During the 6 weeks, the Roundtable addressed four key topics: narrative/image shift, transit-oriented development, messaging and vision statement, and corridor revitalization.

Initial Outcomes

The Youngstown Roundtable resulted in: an established coalition of stakeholders representing a diverse range of interests, geographies, and perspectives from Belmont Avenue corridor, a collection of themes or "buckets" of action steps to inform future revitalization efforts, the development of a vision statement to use as a foundation for communication across all audiences, the collective



acknowledgement that this is a long-haul effort which will require significant and ongoing alignment of both efforts and funding, and a shared commitment to work together to improve Belmont Avenue.

The Roundtable also identified its commitment to deep community/resident involvement throughout the iterative planning, activating, and celebrating phases of this work and to building a bigger tent of stakeholders and “believers” over time. Roundtable members recognized a major key to the successful revitalization of Belmont Avenue is the ability to foster strong partnerships between major entities to advance this work, such as the City of Youngstown, Trumbull County/Liberty Township, Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport, and Youngstown State University.

Suggested next steps:

The current condition of Belmont Avenue reflects the attention and resources that have and have not been devoted to it over time. Improving Belmont must become a conscious, collective decision of intention and action – an ongoing, multi-year campaign – so that Belmont Avenue can reclaim its former status as the destination of choice for shopping, dining, and entertainment for residents and visitors alike - a place where lifelong memories are made. While this will require ongoing effort and coordination, the Roundtable unanimously agreed to continue to work together to improve Belmont Avenue, serving as the initial core group and building momentum.

Based on the Roundtable and our experience in the transit/land use/community development space, M: PACT would like to suggest the following:

- Activate a strong and simple messaging/branding campaign.
 - Give people a story and a reason to believe.
 - Begin opening hearts, minds, and purses for a transformed and revitalized Belmont Avenue – tell a new story that people can believe and buy into and belong to
 - Imagine that everyone is holding one egg. Think about creating a big-enough basket so that everyone will be willing to “spend” their egg in the Belmont Avenue basket.
- Prepare for a marathon.
 - Be realistic and concrete about what level of change is possible in a given timeframe.
 - Need action agendas for short (this year), medium (2-5 years) and long term (>5 years)
 - Celebrate success and leverage every step to build momentum and supporters.
- Be visible.
 - Show how amazing a marathon can be with a few 50-yard dashes (quick turnaround, high-profile, high-impact events such as a neighborhood movie night, restaurant week, or Belmont clean-up) this summer.
 - Be intentional about being a campaign – designate spokespeople, make a plan for earned media, social media, in-person interaction.
- Decide what level(s) of coordination is needed.
 - Start with your “basket” message and identify clear “sub-baskets” to keep everyone oriented in the same direction so multiple efforts can be aligned but not micromanaged.
 - Keep the glue sticky: ensure quality communication and alignment at every level
 - Need multiple definitions of success and recognition
 - Big picture/vision level
 - Each “bucket” or focus area (example: placemaking, planning/zoning)