



Focus Area: Revitalization, Recreation, and Environment

Grant Finalist: Pontiac Community Foundation (PCF)

Project: Creating a State-of-the-Art Park & Building Community in Pontiac

Background: Our goal is to create a state-of-the-art park at Mattie McKinney Hatchett Park, named after a local community legend, for the Pontiac residents that will serve as a catalyst for future projects in the city. The park's current infrastructure is in disrepair and we plan to create a public space that the community is proud of, with new equipment and ways to recreate for all ages and abilities. This includes new playground equipment, walking path, replacement of all necessary seating and courts, etc. Additionally, we will include community spaces such as a community garden, public art, and hammocks. This grant will improve the City of Pontiac by redeveloping one of our major public spaces for people of all ages to engage with each other. We will utilize this to expand our Open Streets Program throughout the community, focused on closing neighborhood streets for youth and families to play in the summer months, particularly to create community engagement after the continued impact of COVID-19.

Unmet Need: Residents of Pontiac have long dealt with inadequate public spaces. In a recent survey of the community in 2018, issues related to quality of life concerns came up extensively. Many of the survey respondents noted a variety of quality of life concerns such as a lack of sense of community, lack of cultural activities, lack of recreational opportunities, lack of social events, etc. With our parks specifically, many residents indicated that the quality of the facilities were poor, and a general lack of park maintenance creating a sense of blight in the parks. The reason was due to the city filing bankruptcy in 2009 and being taken over by an emergency manager by the state, leading to much of the city's infrastructure and services being outsourced or sold.

According to data from Oakland County, Pontiac has an average life expectancy of 65, which is 20 years lower than neighboring cities such as Troy. The lack of recreational activities and spaces contribute extensively to this decreased quality of life and to worsened health outcomes. It is vital to create spaces where the community feels comfortable and where we increase engagement with our neighbors, as this leads to healthy support systems and living in our local communities, something that is in dire need in the City of Pontiac and why this project is so unique and important.

Outcomes: First, we always approach our work by ensuring we are meeting the needs of the residents in our local community. Therefore, ensuring we have extensive community engagement is vital for the success of this project as a whole. We have received extensive responses to our survey and other community engagement activities which have guided our project design. Second, completion of all construction elements at the park will be a major milestone for evaluation of the project. With the Open Streets Program, we plan to measure the attendance and engagement at the events, with the number of individuals utilizing the park and understanding the residents' thoughts after completion. Finally, the greatest impact that we believe this will have, although harder to measure, is on the quality of life of residents throughout the neighborhood and community. Through a hyper-focused level, we know that providing additional recreational activities contribute to an improved quality of life.

Sustainability: PCF is dedicated to ensuring that the park continues to be maintained and kept in high-quality condition upon completion of the development project. Therefore, PCF has engaged a thorough volunteer network that will partner with the City of Pontiac to ensure consistent maintenance and cleanliness of the park. There are no other areas that need to be sustained besides that factor related to the park. Regarding the Open Streets Program, costs are covered on an annual basis through fundraising, particularly engagement with corporate sponsorships and in-kind partnership support, which has been successful throughout the inception of the program.