



Deer Park Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan:

A Health Impact Assessment March 2016



Summary

Approximately 125 current residents of the Deer Park neighborhood will experience direct health benefits because the City of Omaha's planned housing improvements will reduce exposures that cause poor birth outcomes, lead poisoning, asthma, and injury. The level of investment being made by the City and its partners is also likely to trigger ripple effects in Deer Park that will improve the health of the 3,500 residents in the focus area through increased housing investment, fewer code enforcement violations, and reduced crime. To create a stronger trajectory for Deer Park and ensure health improvements continue into the future, defining how to catalyze stable real estate investments is key for the two year initiative.



Credit: Omaha by Design

Background

Deer Park, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Omaha, has a rich past, which included waves of new immigrants drawn to south Omaha because of meatpacking jobs in the stockyards. While the area still includes descendants from the earlier mix of residents primarily from southern and eastern Europe, it is now a largely Latino neighborhood. The heart of Deer Park is Vinton Street, a main street corridor that cuts diagonally through the neighborhood along a former ridge trail. Vinton Street features a variety of restaurants, bars, retail stores, and art venues, and there has been a strong push over the past five years to preserve the historic character of the street.

In recent years, the age of Deer Park combined with years of deferred maintenance has resulted in an increase in residential properties in the neighborhood that are deteriorating. In 2010, the loss of nearby Rosenblatt Stadium, the former site of the NCAA College World Series, also removed a key source of funding for neighborhood-led improvements. In order to “arrest the advancement of physical distress in the neighborhood” and “tip the balance in favor of improvement and sustainability,” the City of Omaha and the Deer Park Neighborhood Association created a Redevelopment Plan in 2014.

As a result of the Redevelopment Plan, the City of Omaha will focus its revitalization efforts on a targeted area within the Deer Park neighborhood for 2016 and 2017. The specific focus area is Martha to the I-80 Interstate, 21st to 15th. (see Deer Park maps). This initiative will include rehabilitating 33 properties, constructing five new homes, and assembling a range of partners to provide a holistic response to the needs and aspirations of neighborhood residents. Since improving the health of people living in Deer Park is a core component of the Deer Park initiative, the City of Omaha requested that the Douglas County Health Department conduct a Health Impact Assessment as part of the process.

Purpose & Priorities

The purpose of the Deer Park Health Impact Assessment is to engage stakeholders to provide actionable, evidence-based recommendations about how the two-year revitalization initiative could increase health benefits and reduce health risks to Deer Park residents (see Description of the Approach).

The Health Impact Assessment focused on two key aspects of the Deer Park initiative and sought to answer the following questions:

1. **Housing Improvements** – Based on the current health of Deer Park residents, what health issues could be most affected through the housing improvement activities being led by the City of Omaha and its partners?
2. **Neighborhood Trajectory** – How could the investments made by the City and its partners help Deer Park move to stability instead of experiencing a slow decline? And how could the capacity of Deer Park's residents be strengthened so neighborhood improvements and their associated health benefits would continue after the two-year initiative was over?

Description of the Approach

To better understand what health issues had the greatest potential for improvement through the Deer Park revitalization efforts, the Douglas County Health Department and a multidisciplinary Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Team pulled together information from three main sources:

1. A 2011 Community Health Needs Assessment focused on adults that was sponsored by Alegen Health, Methodist Health System, and the Nebraska Medical Center in partnership with multiple local health departments.
2. A 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment focused on children prepared for Children’s Hospital and Medical Center in collaboration with Boys Town National Research Hospital.
3. Birth and death records collected by the Douglas County Health Department.

To assess the trajectory of Deer Park as a neighborhood, the Douglas County Health Department and HIA Team also collected data on a dozen neighborhood level indicators including life expectancy, housing affordability, and number of code violations. These neighborhood indicators for Deer Park were then compared to Douglas County as a whole and to Deer Park data from 10-15 years prior.

In addition to its monthly meetings to review this data and determine next steps, the Douglas County Health Department and the HIA Team used multiple other mechanisms to determine key findings and ensure collaboration with Deer Park residents:

- Oscar Duran, the president of the Deer Park Neighborhood Association and the South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance, was involved in each step of the HIA. Funding was also set aside for the Deer Park Neighborhood Association to canvass neighborhood residents and create a Deer Park Neighborhood Priorities Report
- A literature review was conducted to bring together the scientific research and experiences from other cities that were most relevant to the Deer Park revitalization initiative.
- When recommendations were drafted, it was done with leaders representing the City of Omaha, Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance, Habitat for Humanity, and the Deer Park Neighborhood Association.

The following parts of this document summarize key findings and recommendations from that process. For more information, please see the appendices.



Credit: Phil Rooney, Douglas County Health Department



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Key Findings – Housing Improvements

Births outcomes, lead poisoning, asthma, childhood injuries and obesity/diabetes are the key opportunities for improving the health of Deer Park residents.

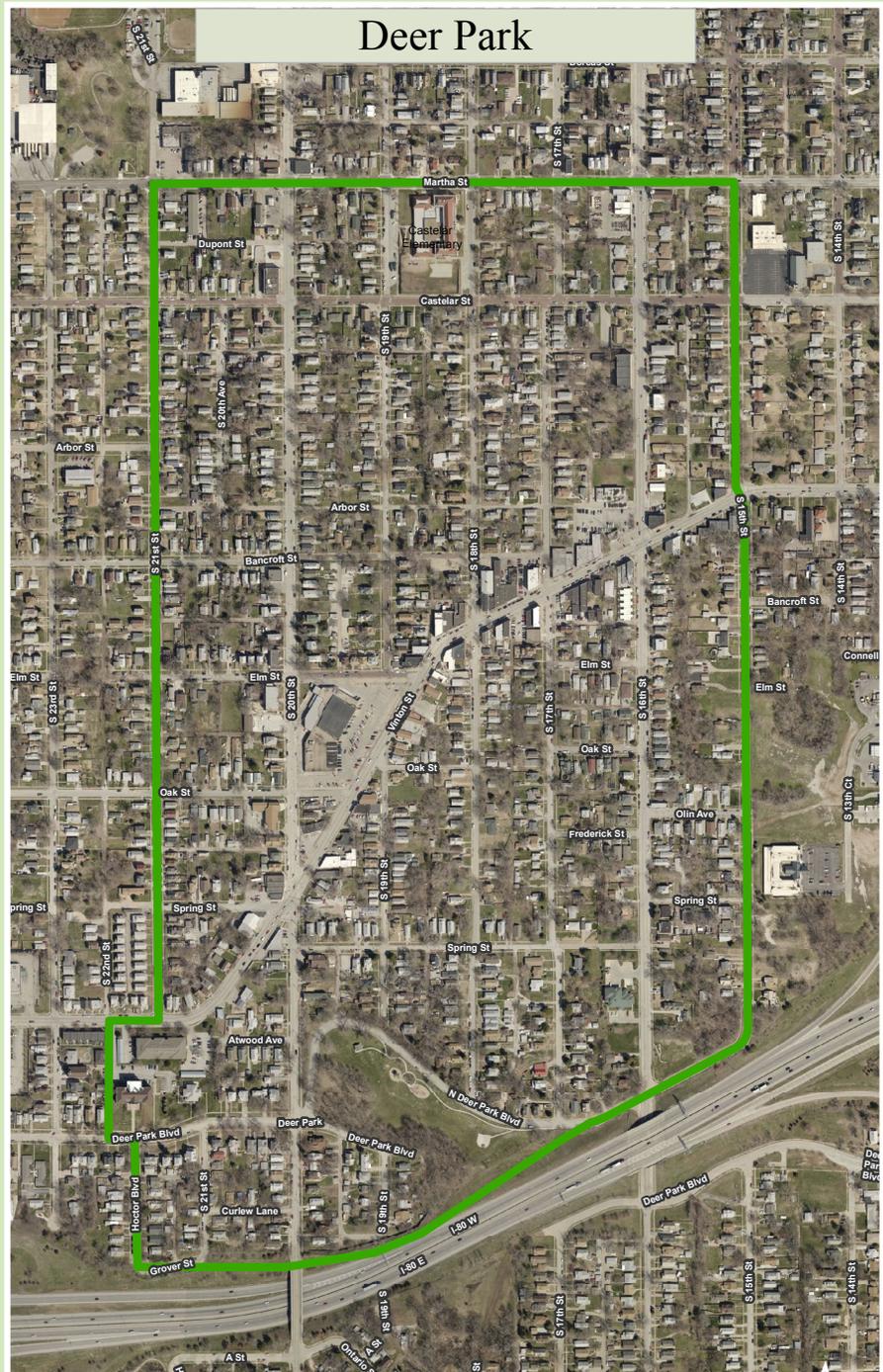
- Deer Park has a high number of low birth weight and pre-term births compared to the rest of the county. Improvements to other priorities such as exposure to lead and other toxins and indoor air pollution for asthma would benefit birth outcomes as well.
- The risk of lead poisoning has greatly diminished over the past decade; however, seven children still tested positive for elevated blood lead in 2014 in ZIP code 68108.
- Almost 1 in 10 children in southeast Omaha currently have asthma which is the second only to northeast Omaha.
- Injuries are the leading cause of death for children over the age of 1 nationally. Over a two year period, one out of every eight children in southeast Omaha is injured seriously enough to need medical treatment.
- 1 in 4 children and 3 in 10 adults in southeast Omaha are obese. Southeast Omaha also has the highest rates of diabetes in Omaha.

Life expectancy for ZIP code 68108 (which includes Deer Park) is 4.5 years less than all of Douglas County. To provide context, life expectancy in Deer Park stands at 74.3 years, which is closer to living in Bulgaria or El Salvador than the United States.

Housing improvements to reduce lead exposure and asthma triggers show a high return on investment.

- A 2009 cost-benefit analysis found that every \$1 invested in controlling lead paint hazards results in cost savings of at least \$17 (\$17-\$221) from improved health outcomes, increased IQ, higher lifetime earnings and tax revenue, reduced spending on special education, and reduced criminal activity.
- Studies of housing interventions to control asthma triggers have reported that for every \$1 invested, \$5 to \$14 in savings have been created. These asthma studies focused on direct medical costs. If additional benefits from less work days missed for parents and fewer school days missed for children were included, these interventions would show even more substantial returns.

Deer Park Redevelopment Boundaries



Key Findings – Neighborhood Trajectory

Deer Park is facing greater challenges now than a decade ago.

- From 2000 to 2010, the vacancy rate went from 8% to over 13%. In 2014, there were 11 demolition orders and 47 housing units deemed unfit and unsafe.
- Over the last 15 years, educational attainment and homeownership have decreased in the neighborhood and the percent of children living in poverty has increased.

Deer Park has several strong assets that aid in the goal of improving the trajectory of the neighborhood.

- Approximately 78% of residents remain there from year to year – a rate similar to Douglas County as a whole. This stability, combined with a strong neighborhood association, helps provide continuity and leadership capacity for improving conditions in Deer Park.
- The neighborhood continues to be affordable in comparison to Douglas County in terms of how many Deer Park residents are burdened by housing costs. Currently, 62% of renters and 72% of homeowners in Deer Park pay less than 30% of their income for housing, which is very similar or better than the county average.
- Deer Park is a very walkable neighborhood (Walkscore of 74/100) with Castelar Elementary, Deer Hollow Park, and the Vinton Street commercial corridor all providing a variety of nearby goods and services.

There is strong evidence that focused housing investments can create ripple effects that extend beyond program recipients into the larger neighborhood once a threshold of investment is achieved.

- A study of Community Development Block Grant expenditures across 17 cities found that once \$87,000 per Census tract was exceeded, the trajectory of the neighborhood improved across a variety of indicators such as teen birth rates, owner-occupied housing, median home values, number of businesses, rates of violent crime, and vacancy rates.
- A study commissioned by the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond (VA) found that by focusing its housing and capital improvement investments in particular areas, the City of Richmond's Neighborhood in Bloom program was able to show that their public and nonprofit investments were sufficient to induce current property owners and other private investors to better maintain and enhance the housing stock of the neighborhood. This effect occurred even beyond the target area defined by the City and was also accompanied by a 19% reduction in crime.

An organization representing the priorities of neighborhood residents is key to ensuring current residents benefit from revitalization and improvements can be sustained.

- Revitalization can occur in two main ways: 1) through the efforts of existing residents to improve the conditions of their neighborhood (which is called incumbent upgrading in the research) and 2) through an influx of private capital and new, wealthier residents (known as gentrification). The level of neighborhood organizing has been found to be a key factor in steering revitalization toward incumbent upgrading over gentrification.
- Research findings on gentrification document that residents that remain in the neighborhood often benefit from improved City services, decreases in crime, and even improved credit scores. However, these benefits often come at the cost of the most economically vulnerable residents who are at risk of being displaced due to increased real estate speculation and rising rents.
- Research also finds that while public and nonprofit investment can catalyze revitalization, they are insufficient for sustaining it. Neighborhood leaders have to focus on leveraging public and nonprofit efforts to promote stable private market investment – including property maintenance by current residents – to ensure neighborhood improvements continue.



Neighborhood Trend by Level of Private Investment

Older neighborhoods, especially lower-income ones, have to navigate between two extremes of private market investment. In many neighborhoods, particularly in Omaha, the greater challenge is under-investment that leads to the slow decline of the area. In other neighborhoods, particularly in high-demand areas such as New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area, a large influx of capital investment and new residents raises housing costs which displaces existing residents.

Health Impacts and Recommendations

Based on the available evidence, below are health impacts that will likely result from the Deer Park Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan and recommendations for promoting health benefits and minimizing harms experienced by neighborhood residents.

Housing Improvements

Health Impacts

- Building 5 new infill houses and rehabilitating 33 existing properties will improve health outcomes to the degree that exposure to lead paint, indoor air pollution, asthma triggers, and fire and safety hazards are reduced. These housing improvements would improve 4 out the 5 health priorities for Deer Park (birth outcomes, lead poisoning, asthma, and childhood injuries).
- With a total of 38 properties improved and Deer Park averaging 3.3 people per household, approximately 125 people would benefit directly from housing improvements. The improved housing quality will also benefit future residents of these locations.

- Cases of childhood lead poisoning and number of asthma attacks are likely to decrease due to housing conditions being improved for 38 properties. One factor in how much these cases are reduced is whether owner-occupied or rental properties are rehabbed.
- Approximately 60% of lead poisoning cases in Douglas County occur in rental properties despite only 37% of the population renting. Though the numbers of cases are limited, recent data shows a similar rate of lead poisoning in rental properties in Deer Park. Healthy housing assessment data from Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance found higher rates of asthma triggers, especially pests, in Deer Park rental properties.
- While the City of Omaha has citywide rehab programs that focus on rental properties, the 33 housing rehabs planned in Deer Park are for owner-occupied properties. Reductions to childhood lead poisoning and asthma attacks would be increased if rental properties in Deer Park were included.

Recommendations

The City of Omaha and Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance conducting before and after healthy home assessments to monitor the specific impact achieved by the 33 housing rehabs would also highlight opportunities to increase health benefits to program recipients. Key metrics to track include decreases in lead levels and asthma triggers as well as other improvements in indoor air quality.

The City of Omaha securing additional funding or partnerships to rehab rental properties would increase the health benefits experienced by lower income renters in Deer Park.

Deer Park rental property owners applying for the citywide rental rehab programs would also increase these health benefits.

Providing copies of the 2015 Landlord and Tenant Handbook developed by Legal Aid of Nebraska and engaging partners who provide education around tenant rights would also protect the health of renters in Deer Park.



Credit: Phil Rooney, Douglas County Health Department

Neighborhood Trajectory

Health Impacts	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underinvestment by the private market in Deer Park (including by current property owners) is the key risk to the trajectory of the neighborhood. A large body of research has documented higher rates of death and illness in disinvested neighborhoods. • The level of investment the City of Omaha and its partners are making in Deer Park is likely to generate ripple effects that will improve the health of the entire redevelopment area of 3,500 people. Increased housing investments, fewer code enforcement violations, and reduced crime are likely effects based on the research. • The magnitude and sustainability of these impacts on the health of neighborhood residents will depend on the collaboration effectiveness with neighborhood residents. 	<p>The City of Omaha using early Deer Park partners meetings to define a common agenda and mutually reinforcing activities for catalyzing stable private real estate dynamics would likely increase the magnitude of the ripple effects from the Deer Park initiative and ensure health improvements can continue after the initiative ends.</p> <p>Monitoring permits for private market housing improvements and conducting post-initiative neighborhood scan of housing conditions would help determine if private investment has been catalyzed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising housing costs can trigger negative health outcomes from overcrowding and displacement (especially for low-income renters). Overcrowding is linked to increased spread of infectious diseases, poor child development, as well as a greater safety risks. Displacement has been shown to cause detrimental health effects from increased stress and being forced into poorer living conditions including homelessness. • While not a strong risk at this time, Deer Park’s walkability and location approximately 1.5 miles from downtown Omaha could create gentrification pressure (and rising housing costs) in the future. 	<p>Using the Deer Park initiative to intentionally increase the capacity of the neighborhood association and other neighborhood institutions would aid in avoiding either private market extreme – disinvestment leading to slow decline or rising housing costs from gentrification.</p> <p>Developing affordable housing safeguards would help the City of Omaha promote mixed-income neighborhoods and protect the health of low-income residents. Examples include developing indicators of rising housing costs, enforcing eviction regulations, and exploring permanently affordable housing models such as community land trusts, limited equity cooperatives, and long-term deed-restricted housing programs.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City’s investment in Deer Park is also an investment in improving health equity. Two-thirds of Deer Park residents are Latino. Disparities for Latinos have been consistently documented in Douglas County. For examples, 28% of Latino residents lack healthcare insurance compared to 19% for African Americans and 9% for Whites. • The degree that health disparities are reduced depends on involving Latino residents including non-English speakers and individuals who might not be U.S. citizens. 	<p>Making the programs offered by the City of Omaha and its partners available bilingually and biculturally would better reach the Latino population of Deer Park and reduce health disparities. Securing partners: 1) with funding that can be used for legal immigrants or 2) who do not have eligibility criteria based on immigration status would also improve health equity.</p> <p>Involving Metropolitan Community College, especially their Express program, would provide job-readiness opportunities for residents of Deer Park. It could also provide second language classes (included Spanish for English native residents) which would improve the capacity of the residents to work together effectively.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obesity and diabetes are the only health priorities for Deer Park that would not be directly affected by housing. • Improved lighting and free family activities were two priorities identified by neighborhood residents that would increase physical activity and thus reduce chronic diseases like obesity and diabetes. • Based on best practice research compiled by the University of Wisconsin, streetscape and other sidewalk improvement efforts would also increase physical activity (and pedestrian and cyclist safety). • Street trees have been shown reduce air pollution and stress. For example, a recent study found that areas with a high number of street trees provided residents with health benefits equivalent to \$10,000 more in income or being seven years younger. Emerald Ash Borer will likely kill many ash trees when it arrives in Omaha, which would increase health risks in Deer Park. 	<p>Several opportunities exists for the Deer Park Neighborhood Association and the Vinton Street Merchants Association to increase their capacity to involve residents and new partners while also creating health benefits in the neighborhood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding free family programming (e.g. National Night Out or Open Street events) at public spaces in Deer Park. • Partnering with City of Omaha Public Works Department on 1) streetscape improvements to Vinton Street and 2) identifying sidewalk repair and lighting issues especially near Castelar Elementary and Deer Park Hollow. • Engaging Keep Omaha Beautiful, the Nebraska State Arboretum’s ReTree Nebraska program, and the City of Omaha Parks Department to increase the number of non-ash trees in Deer Park.

Conclusions

1. The City of Omaha's housing improvements will directly benefit the health of approximately 125 current residents of Deer Park. Pre and post healthy home assessments would ensure that opportunities to improve health impacts related to birth outcomes, lead poisoning, asthma, and childhood injuries are found and that results are tracked. Funding for rental property rehabilitation, combined with partnerships to serve individuals that are not U.S. citizens as well as those who do not speak English, would make certain the most at-risk neighborhood residents benefit from the City's efforts.
2. The level of investment being made by the City and its partners is likely to trigger ripple effects in Deer Park that will improve the health of the 3,500 residents through increased housing investment, fewer code enforcement violations, and reduced crime. Defining a common agenda and mutually reinforcing activities with neighborhood residents and investors will increase the magnitude and sustainability of these ripple effects. The key outcome is to catalyze stable private real estate dynamics that will sustain Deer Park after the two year initiative ends so a stronger trajectory for the neighborhood is created while maintaining housing affordability.
3. The Deer Park Neighborhood Association and the Vinton Street Merchants Association can improve physical activity, safety, and air quality (as well as the vitality of the neighborhood as a whole) by building partnerships to: 1) program family events at neighborhood public spaces; 2) enhance the streetscape on Vinton; and 3) identify opportunities to improve lighting and sidewalks and increase street trees.



BUILD WITH HEALTH

Build with Health is a collaboration between the Douglas County Health Department, the City of Omaha, and eight other partners (Omaha by Design, MAPA, Live Well Omaha, CHI Health, Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, UNMC College of Public Health, and ONE Omaha). *Build with Health* focuses on using community design and neighborhood engagement to create healthy, thriving places throughout Omaha.

For more information on *Build with Health* or Health Impact Assessments, please contact:

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Supplemental Information for this HIA is available in the Appendices -- see attached or go to <http://www.douglascountyhealth.com/healthy-community/health-impact-assessments>.

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