

C I T I Z E N
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mifflin concept



based on interviews
between borealis
& peer queers of madison wi
*featuring instant images taken during
anwar floyd-pruitt and emily popp's collaborative
thresholds mapping project*



Noah



Austin



GUZZO PINC



Mason

THE BEGINNINGS OF MIFFLANDIA:

Throughout late 2018 and early 2019, Madison's Planning Division worked with social practice artists in order to promote participation in the city planning process—particularly in the West Washington - West Mifflin Area Plan. This plan analyzes opportunities within a small area centered upon the 400-500 blocks of West Mifflin Street and West Washington Avenue in Madison, WI. The intended result of this engagement is the development of recommendations with detailed design standards and implementation strategies for the planning areas. This plan addresses land use, preservation, redevelopment opportunities, building and streetscape design, open space, activity nodes, and connectivity to the abutting neighborhoods.

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:

Emily Popp - Mifflandia Artist and Coordinator (@emilyadriapopp)

Anwar Floyd-Pruitt - Thresholds Mapping (www.anwarfloydpruitt.com)

Rob Dz - Music Mapping (@iamrobdz)

Maria Amalia Wood - Comics Mapping (www.mariaamalia.com)

Borealis - Story Mapping for Citizen Cityzine (alauraborealisart.com)

WHAT IS CITIZEN CITYZINE?

This zine contains excerpts from interviews that artist Borealis conducted with peer queers in and around the Mifflin neighborhood. Borealis asked LGBTQ+ interviewees to imagine an ideal neighborhood in whatever terms were appropriate and interesting to them, addressing their primary concerns about *and hopes for* city planning in Madison. A city survey helped guide many of the conversational prompts, although the collection of quotes and stories in the pages that follow represent hours of collective imagining sparked by a queer urge to organize.

Included in this zine are instant images taken during the Thresholds Mapping component of Mifflandia, facilitated by Anwar Floyd-Pruitt and Emily Popp.

(Cover image by Glory L.)

WHEN THINKING ABOUT CITY PLANNING, WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST CONCERNS?

“I feel like city planning is not for me. I’m probably too young and poor for anyone to take my ideas seriously. Like an equal balance of emphasis on architecture and social services in order to plan a city well might not be considered helpful or useful. But that’s what I want to say! Do what you want with ugly buildings, I guess, but please make sure there’s access to all of those buildings and that all voices are heard in the deliberation process.” - *X*

“I’m concerned with how city planning chooses to reinforce capitalism instead of compassion and livability. I think about hostile architecture. I think about gentrification and how public transportation, affordable housing, and accessibility play into that.” - *Jess*

“I think about how people can get around and whether or not that’s accessible. I heard about a city that started to rethink city planning and dropped their lens to a three year old, looking at the city from their perspective. They realized that the city wasn’t actually safe for kids; there were bushes or things that would get in the way of seeing intersections or feeling safe. So, I think about what different lenses or views we can use to witness a city. Walking or rolling through the space on a wheelchair or on a bike. Is it a place where we can actually get around, or is it just built with cars in mind? Madison is sort of a hodge-podge of that; some areas are clearly set up for biking or walking while others are really not. Even some neighborhoods with sidewalks have really bumpy sidewalks, or they are never shoveled, and so accessibility is clearly not a priority in the planning or in the upkeep of those neighborhoods. Accessibility is a primary concern of mine.” - *Owen*

“I’m nervous that all the buildings and streets wind up looking the same and lose a lot of their charm. I’m also concerned that the process to change these things happens too fast, in some ways. I like knowing that we are prepared to make changes, and I appreciate that many aspects of neighborhood planning are years in the making, and I wonder if the rest of the public finds out about those plans too late in the game to make a difference.” - *Mari*

“I would say that we need to concern ourselves with how we house and keep safe all the people who live here NOW before we get too worried about who will maybe be coming to town. I think those solutions can go hand in hand if we put our minds to it and are honest about the housing struggles we’re facing.” - *CJ*



Troy C.

DESCRIBE AN IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN TERMS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU.

“I like to see people getting around how they need to. An efficient public transportation system is important to me. I also want to see natural spaces and community gardens; I think Madison does a pretty good job of having those. I think about spaces where folks can gather for organizing, chatting, getting coffee, finding support, and all of that, as long as we’re also considering if those spaces are explicitly welcoming for LGBT people, folks of color, or low income communities. . . . and I want us to invest more in public arts. I want a diverse, vibrant, welcoming community.

I also think about the cost of food. People should be able to afford the food in their neighborhood without needing more than one job. Madison is okay for food prices, but compared to other places in the state, the cost of living here is actually very expensive.



Annie E.

I also think about safety. An ideal community doesn't over-police their community. We would help each other recover from trauma by providing access to mental health care. We would find alternatives to incarceration and policing. We need more providers of care who are accessible. I know that nonprofits are the model, but I don't necessarily know that they're the way to go for all of these solutions. We need city funded grants, big chunks of money, to build sustainable systems that include creative expression, trauma-informed care, truly liveable communities, and all of that.” - Owen

“Off-street parking and as much free stuff as possible, honestly! We look for things like parks and libraries, where we can spend time without having to spend much money. As far as the actual houses, having lots of different kinds of houses with different porches and personalities is ideal. Green space, the greener the better, and walkable neighborhoods where folks can get to their supermarkets and parks easily.” - *Heather*

“With all this, we’re talking about keeping what’s good while looking for systemic change. Ideally, as far as transportation, more people with cars would take the bus. I’d love to get rid of my car and make those changes for myself . . . Ideally, people wouldn’t be forced into and out of certain neighborhoods based on income requirements or sudden changes of their circumstance, like when they graduate with or without a high paying job.” - *Jaime*

“I’m a really big fan of communal living and community housing . . . giving families or units of roommates shared space or a public realm as well as private space. I’d also say that there should be regulation of big businesses, and cities should make sure that smaller businesses, artists, and organizers are getting support, too, to find places for organizing that don’t cost money. The places we live, these ideal communal living arrangements, would also need to be affordable. Beautiful public spaces are important, as is making sure that the people who manage those spaces are paid well for their labor. Lots of public art. Art everywhere. Great schools in neighborhoods that are well funded . . . as a point of comparison, there’s this gym that is right across the street from where I lived in the Mifflin/West Washington area, and it was really just this big block of place that had no civic function. I felt really alienated living right across the street from it. Putting blocks of spaces into a neighborhood, where only certain people can go, and everyone else is uncertain what it is and why it’s there, is how you destroy the public. Let’s aim for access and community through these logistics to build a strong public.” - *Rena Yehuda*

“Well, looking at the city survey, I’d say that folks who know more about city design than I do should really just find the most innovative way to keep bikers, pedestrians, kids, and everybody living and moving safely around a neighborhood. I don’t know if painted crosswalks or islands or what is the best method, but instilling some confidence in a neighborhood that it’s meant for everyone is really going to be the key.” - *X*

“My ideal neighborhood would have a farmer’s market that’s not so bougie that we can’t afford it. It would have all kinds of art and community centers to take classes and safe bike lanes and plants on porches and people who have opportunities to get to know each other.” - *Cass*

DESCRIBE AN IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN TERMS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU.

“My ideal neighborhood looks and feels safe and diverse. The community has a wide demographic when it comes to race, gender/sexuality, and disability. People know each other by name. All neighbors have a good grasp of social services in the area and can make accurate recommendations to their peers. People care about each other and want each other to be safe, and feel accountable to each other. People feel safe to be visibly Black, visibly queer, visibly disabled. There are Black community centers and programs, and ones for queer, Latinx, Hmong, and disabled populations.

There are healthy and cheap grocery stores within walking distance or a short ride on public transit. People who want them can have gardens in their yards. There’s also community garden space. There’s well stocked food pantries and many free meals on various nights of the week at community centers. There’s a farmer’s market. It’s easy and cheap to be vegan. No one struggles to have their allergy or dietary needs met. No one is ever hungry.

Public transit is well funded, clean, efficient, timely and FREE. Bike infrastructure is ramped up - more cycletracks, protected intersections, advisory bike lanes, bike parking garages, and other ways of rethinking streets for bikes. The neighborhood is built to be walkable and bikable first. There are incentives for people not to drive.

There is affordable and accessible housing for everyone. There’s apartments, single family homes, assisted living, all mixed together. There’s no breed specific legislation. There’s a strong and well funded Tenant Resource Center. No one can be evicted. Efforts to address homelessness are housing first initiatives.

There are tons of local businesses that employ people at livable wages. The local businesses participate in community conversations, donate to fund art projects and community groups, and sell such a wide variety of things that I never need to use Amazon again. All of the businesses have robust online presences not only to keep them accountable, but so people can interact with them without leaving their homes at all. All businesses are unionized.

People have access to safe sex supplies, injection sites, and needle exchanges. Rehabilitation centers are free to stay at and have evidence based practices. Drug use is not criminalized and is treated like a public health problem instead. There are no prisons and no police. There are community health

centers and community pharmacies that don't gatekeep trans folks. There are many doulas and midwives to choose from when starting a pregnancy journey. There are queer and trans inclusive sex shops. Planned Parenthood is celebrated and never picketed.

There's murals EVERYWHERE. There's tons of public plaques and markers and statues paying homage to the history of the neighborhood and its future. There's so much green space, with parks and trees lining the streets. There's more than one local community center, or museum, or historical society, and all of them are well funded and always putting on different kinds of free classes for different ages and groups. There's tons of festivals and concerts and parades and art shows and craft fairs.

Everything is based on universal design. Not only is the ADA implemented, people make an effort to go above and beyond to provide access. All public transportation stops and passages are cleared within 6 hours of a snow emergency, and cleared completely - no ice, no snow berms to clamber over. There's always plenty of parking and plenty of disabled parking. Sidewalks are wide, level, and well-maintained. Older facilities are given money to retrofit for accessibility. A commission conducts regular "walkability audits". There are incentives to designers to increase accessibility in innovative ways. The entire neighborhood is digitally mapped for accessibility, re: which coffee shop has staff that know ASL, which menus are in braille, etc that's city funded while also being crowd sourced. There's a cross-disability justice coalition.

There are safe, alcohol free spaces for people to be in late at night and 24/7. Things like libraries and community centers that never close, sober arcades, coffee shops, bubble tea shops, bookstores that are open to the wee hours of the morning. There is a "dry bar" aka a normal bar that doesn't serve alcohol. A lot of these places are NOT 18+ so there are places for teens to hang out, too. Some of these places are queer specific and all are queer friendly.

Communities are Alzheimer's and dementia friendly. There's a big and beautiful cemetery/park for green burials. There are death doulas.

Schools are big, beautiful, highly funded, and free. Including higher education.

Recycling centers are huge and robust.

There are no facists and no nazis. Hate groups are driven out of town.

Election days are municipal holidays and no one has to work." - Jess

HOW DOES AN IDEAL COMMUNITY KEEP ALL OF ITS MEMBERS HEALTHY AND SAFE?

“By caring about their humanity more than profit.” - *Jess*

“Wow. What a beautiful and important question. The importance of public spaces can't really be overstated. If we can't see each other, we can't check in with each other and how we're doing. We need spaces to gather and reflect or make decisions or support each other. I think that visionary work like this is important, because it also calls to mind questions about policing. Is policing just about protecting property and white supremacy? I don't know what community policing should look like, but I know that it doesn't include prisons, near the neighborhood or otherwise. I know that community policing would include people who have the most contact with the rest of the community. From the outside, that might not seem linked to city planning, but we have to make sure we do see them as linked.” - *Rena Yehuda*

WHO SHOULD OPERATE AN IDEAL NEIGHBORHOOD AND MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT ITS FUTURE?

“The people who live there operate the place and make decisions, and those that have been historically marginalized or oppressed get a bigger say.” - *Jess*

“Maybe kids? . . . We need intergenerational conversations, and conversations among the people who live in a place, but I think we should consider asking kids what they think and need. They've usually got great insights.” - *Owen*

“The folks who live there are the ones who know best what's best for their neighborhood. Even if areas are student housing, those students that are going in and out of there should help in making those decisions. They'll have guesses about what future students will need . . . combine those voices with everybody living around the neighborhood when making decisions.”
- *Heather and Jaime*

“The people who live there should make those decisions, but because there will always be places in Madison where folks can't afford to live, then I would add that the people who *can't* afford to live in a neighborhood should also have a say in the development of those expensive neighborhoods.”

- *Rena Yehuda*

WHERE/HOW/TO WHAT SHOULD A COMMUNITY ALLOCATE ITS SHARED FINANCIAL RESOURCES?

“Schools, splash pads, libraries, beautiful things like planters and happy things like parks. Or whatever it takes to get cars off the streets circling around and looking for parking! We should look at getting free places for teens, where they can hang out. There’s so much aimed at kids and families, but teens need places to hang out and be productive or safe.” - *Heather*

“. . . But even places that are free aren’t really solutions to all of our problems, like libraries with a bunch of cops hovering around is probably not the best example of a place to rely on completely for teens to spend their free time. We need to support all these valuable resources and also consider new options in neighborhoods, too.” - *Jaime*

“Education, but that can mean many different things . . . pay local educators to flex pedagogy based on solving real world problems. Root them in public spaces and parks and arts.”

- *Rena Yehuda*

“Our community should strive to redistribute wealth to historically and currently oppressed populations; whether that’s through direct reparations or reparations via investment in community programs and structures (which ultimately benefit an entire community). The community should focus less on “driving economic growth” as a factor and more on making a community more livable, more accessible, and more kind with its money. There should be strong and healthy unions. Community budgets should be firm and borderline hostile to big businesses; collectivist, socialist, and democratic.” - *Jess*



WHAT MAKES A NEIGHBORHOOD AN EXCITING PLACE TO LIVE, OR A PLACE YOU'D WANT TO BELONG?

“Celebrating my identities and those of people like me and unlike me. Having lots of art and safe and fun things to do.” - *Jess*

“I really like that they started painting the electrical boxes around town. It definitely makes something really ugly a lot more beautiful, and I think it was a really great idea. We should keep doing public art projects like it because it helps make this a nice place to live. We were in another city that had sculptures that were clearly art pieces, but also very clearly meant to be interacted with; children could climb on them. Something like that would be interesting to see more of in Madison.” - *Heather*

“On that same note, I'd love to see more murals. Especially weird ones. And we need to see more people of color up on our murals, and more art from POC. Our kids need to see that as they're growing up. I think we should take a look at where the art is in Madison and fill in the gaps with as much art as possible all over town. That would be great.” - *Jaime*



“Character, not manufactured from a catalog but pulled up through our roots and out our paintbrushes. Stability, like everyone's got a plate of food and a roof and whatever else they need. That's the neighborhood I'd advocate for, no matter what shape or size its buildings take.”

- *Mari*

“You know, the tall buildings that are popping up around downtown are kind of exciting. What's going to happen there? What could we do with the new spaces? But when it comes to a place I want to belong, I really look for some kind of unique character or history of a place.”

- *Chris*

“I’m thinking about how faith communities play into this. I do believe in unity through factions, so to speak, or the unique communities that we’re a part of making up our general public. I think that having really strong and progressive faith communities in a town is actually a really important thing. An ideal community is not one where everyone is the same and thinks the same. It’s one where everyone has constituency and agency, where they feel safe and compelled to talk to each other. When I compare Madison to my ideal community, Madison is very segregated. The amount and kind of space that the university takes up is bizarre and I think very toxic. Most UW students don’t even go off campus. I share this as a university student, but students can no longer afford to think of themselves as separate from the rest of the town, especially when big decisions are being made about its future.” - *Rena Yehuda*

“I would be excited to know that my friend who uses a motorized scooter could navigate a neighborhood, and I wouldn’t have to give special directions to get to my apartment around any kind of construction happening. That kind of plan would be exciting through all of these changes. Also, even if I didn’t live there, I would like knowing that there is some kind of cooperative in the neighborhood for folks to live communally. If that can’t happen, incorporating as many trees or green area as possible to help a neighborhood feel like it’s meant for all the residents and not just the businesses or the people who can afford to live in the tall, fancy buildings.” - *X*

“Well, I definitely don’t care about big corporations unless they are fairly employing lots of people with varying levels of education. And I don’t really care about shopping, or paying to work out. So, I guess what I would want in any neighborhood being revitalized would be to take a close look at who is allowed to live there, if they are safe, and if they are happy. Personally, that means having access to a library and a good school and lots of art to look at wherever I go.” - *Gregg*

“I want to belong to a city of innovators who think through all the complexities of the social problems we face and use an integrated approach to solving them. Where we see new development as an opportunity to rethink housing, and we aren’t afraid to be bold in our art . . . ideally, we would build in room to play in any new neighborhood, whether that’s through buildings with flexible or mixed use or shared open spaces like gardens. I like knowing that there are artists asking these questions alongside designers, and ideally, we won’t settle for just one answer but continuously pursue fresh perspectives while honoring and shaping the place we live.” - *CJ*

WHAT OTHER CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE FOR CITY PLANNING?

“Folks are getting pushed out of a lot of neighborhoods. Places are getting too expensive for folks of color to rent or for lower income people or people with disabilities to access or rent. I think that that’s something that is overlooked in planning. We want to make spaces cozy and welcoming, but we want to consider the cost of that for the people living there.” - *Owen*

“I want Madison to actually deserve the spot it gets on all those bougie “top 10 best place to live!” lists. I want Madison to be ahead of the pack and to set an example instead of rolling out disappointment after disappointment. My last thought is I DO NOT WANT ANY MORE HIGH RISES! I do not want more luxury apartments! I DO NOT WANT huge ugly monochromatic eyesores to house expensive chain stores and destroy the character and reputation of Madison feeling like a “small town” when it’s an average sized city.” - *Jess*

“We want the sidewalks and streets to be as safe as possible. People don’t really stop and look at the flashing beacons at crosswalks, so maybe figure out a safer method than that and then try to make it look nicer than some kind of video game . . . We also like the separate bike lane with a divider in between, because it helps us feel like we aren’t going to hit someone . . . underground parking could help with removing snow from the equation, and alleys or other offstreet parking can help keep things looking nice and just be all around more safe. It’s also okay to think about churches being open spaces that are a welcoming resource to the community, which is something that our church thinks a lot about. If other families would also use it, we would also want more community gardens, play structures, and happy green space to spend our time. As far as planning for shopping in a neighborhood, we would love to try to do less big box and more local, but the farmers markets are all too crowded and small. It would all have to get a lot more accessible, both financially and physically.” - *Heather and Jaime*

“I think what’s hard about answering the questions about building types and favorite park types and crosswalks is that it doesn’t address underlying issues in places like Madison . . . will there be people without affordable apartments still? I don’t want to sound like it isn’t cool to get to decide these things or help shape a plan, because it is pretty cool to be talking to an artist about this. There should be lots more of this kind of talk throughout the process.” - *X*

“Equity. Historically, I don’t think that city planning prioritizes people who might be at disadvantages. The physical structure of our world informs who has access to what, both in a more metaphorical sense in and in an actual physical sense. Do sidewalks have lips for people in wheelchairs, do crosswalks all have cues for blind folks, are our streets plowed during major weather? Do we perpetuate assumptions about ways that students should be living? That students should live in something that’s totally rundown and unlivable or completely overpriced? When we make assumptions about where students can or should live, it divides students physically from the rest of their community. It perpetuates and really informs toxic ideas of what it means to live in community when there’s a big college right in the middle of it. When it comes to some of the architecture being proposed for these neighborhoods, they can be ugly; not ugly because they’re aesthetically not pleasing, because some of them are just fine, but because we are receiving strong messages about who is supposed to be or live there. I don’t want designs that will make people feel alienated from the place they live. Designs that are only sustainable for the very wealthy. Perhaps there are plans in place to address this, but I wonder: who’s told to shut up or go inside during these conversations?” - *Rena Yehuda*

“I wish there could be some way to keep Madison’s character and not just transform the whole place into a set of boxes. Is that in the works? Can we do that? Will adding art in places be enough? Maybe that’s a start. There’s got to be some kind of compromise. I hope that parks and art can level some of the playing ground, so to speak. Like, even if it feels like we really need these big buildings to house people, we can have enough public space to make neighborhoods have some livability for lower income people. More public places to grill out and just *be* would be nice.”

- *Cass*



“Any possible way that the city can foster creativity in the Mifflin / West Washington Area should be supported. At first, I wasn’t even sure what was considered in or out of that neighborhood, because it feels sort of fragmented. Maybe it’s West Wash cutting straight through the area that makes it hard to figure out? But with a focus on the arts and how we make the area more livable for everyone, this plan can strengthen some city roots, keep character, and maybe even help us look at the neighborhood in a new way. If we’re creative not only while considering the artistic potential of the neighborhood but the other social possibilities, we might help solve some pre-existing housing problems. Is it okay to call them problems? Let’s house more of the people trying to live safely in Madison, make it all accessible, be flexible in our plan, make sure it’s affordable, celebrate shared spaces, and trust the people who live here. Did I mention art? And lots of free-to-the-public stuff? And accessibility? Did you get all that, Bo?” - *Gregg*



Amanda W



Vicky Yang