

Jefferson Avenue Placemaking Project – Final Report

Working Paper 2026-02

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Executive Summary

Jefferson Avenue holds deep historical and cultural significance in Rochester, New York. Once celebrated as "Dream Street" for its thriving Black-owned businesses and middle-class community in the 1960s, the neighborhood experienced significant decline following the crack epidemic of the 1990s. Today, residents contend with poverty, drug use, gun violence, and growing numbers of fatal overdoses. Yet a strong sense of community pride and a wealth of institutional assets remain, providing a foundation for revitalization.

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Jefferson Avenue Placemaking Project, a collaborative initiative between the RIT Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI), Jefferson Ave Community Stakeholders, and the ESL Charitable Foundation. The project was designed to support community-led violence reduction efforts through the framework of placemaking – a community-driven approach that transforms underused spaces into environments where residents feel safe, welcome, and connected.

The project had five core components:

1. Engagement of a community consultant from Excelsior Performance Group, LLC to guide community outreach.
2. Formation of an advisory committee of eight trusted Jefferson Avenue stakeholders with deep neighborhood ties.
3. Three community town halls hosted at Barakah Muslim Charity (BMC) to gather resident input across four domains: Community, Art, Health, and Economic Empowerment.
4. Construction of the Total Health and Wellness Calisthenics Park by Barakah Muslim Charity, demonstrating the tangible impact of placemaking investments.
5. A project evaluation to assess how placemaking activities influence community well-being and collective efficacy.

Community engagement activities revealed that residents feel deeply connected to Jefferson Avenue's history and want revitalization that honors it. They describe feeling welcome on the street but not consistently safe, underscoring the need for community programming and physical investment alongside crime-reduction efforts.

Asset mapping identified 26 community assets along the corridor that can anchor placemaking activities. Resident input, gathered through town halls, centered on four priority areas: community events like cookouts and block parties; arts projects including murals and a neighborhood welcome sign; health and wellness programming centered on the new calisthenics park; and economic empowerment through business spotlights and financial literacy workshops.

The draft 2026 placemaking plan runs from March through November and includes storefront beautification, a community mural, a Health Fair with Trillium Health, a job fair, and a "Mini Block Party" designed to rebuild toward the return of the historic Jefferson Avenue Block Party. CPSI will continue providing technical and evaluation support as the plan moves into implementation.

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Introduction

The Jefferson Avenue neighborhood has a significant role in Rochester's history. Initially settled by Irish and German immigrants in the 1800's, large numbers of African Americans migrated to the neighborhood in the 1950s. During the 1960's, the neighborhood was given the moniker "Dream Street" by neighborhood residents and was known for the significant presence of black-owned businesses and a sizable black middle class. The neighborhood also served as an anchor for important cultural institutions such as the Southwest Area Neighborhood Association (SWAN) and The People's Club.

In the 1990's, the area was severely impacted by the crack epidemic. This contributed to considerable neighborhood decline. The area now struggles with poverty, drug use, and violence. In recent years, growing numbers of fatal and non-fatal overdoses have been reported in the area in addition to numerous shooting incidents. These challenges have increased the fear of crime among the community and have driven away opportunities for reinvestment, undermining overall neighborhood vitality.

Despite these challenges, many community members take pride in Jefferson's history. Residents report deep reverence for the Jefferson Avenue community but are unhappy with the neighborhood's current conditions. Residents report feeling as though they are welcome on the streets of Jefferson, but not safe. Residents also note the need for neighborhood revitalization and civic engagement. Fortunately, the neighborhood maintains significant assets that can contribute to neighborhood revitalization if leveraged appropriately.

This report presents placemaking as a framework for contributing to that revitalization. The report is divided into the following sections: First, we provide a conceptual overview of placemaking. Second, we provide an outline of the Jefferson Avenue Placemaking Project. Third, we discuss the assets on Jefferson Avenue that can facilitate placemaking. Fourth, we discuss the plan development strategy. Fifth, we present a sample placemaking plan for Jefferson Avenue. The report concludes with a brief discussion on project sustainability and next steps.

Conceptual Overview of Placemaking

Placemaking is a community-driven approach to bringing life to unused spaces and transforming them into areas where people feel safe, welcome, and connected (Urban Institute, 2018). The process builds a community's physical, cultural, and social strengths and encourages changes that reflect residents' wants and needs. At its core, placemaking is a process with the means to create quality places in the community (Aelbrecht & Arefi, 2024; Wyckoff, 2014). These places give people the desire to live, work, play, and learn in the community, which strengthens the relationship between people and creates a sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and collective ownership of the neighborhood.

Collaboration, trust, and transparency are key pillars of placemaking. Residents lead the process through local events, shared decision-making, and ongoing engagement to help build and strengthen relationships. The community is the stakeholder. Broader stakeholder involvement distinguishes placemaking from traditional community

development approaches because it prioritizes social opportunities in addition to physical design and land use (Wyckoff, 2014). When communities actively participate in designing their own spaces, placemaking supports emotional well-being, improves quality of life, and helps communities respond to disinvestment and social fragmentation (Urban Institute, 2018). Placemaking can take many forms, ranging from short-term activities to long-term investments.

Creative placemaking incorporates arts and culture into community spaces and encourages residents to use their creative expression to beautify shared spaces and express the cultural identity of the area (Wyckoff, 2014). These efforts can include murals, sculptures, music events, block parties, or other artistic projects. Shaping the look and feel of public spaces can strengthen the cultural pride and identity of the community and bring a stronger sense of ownership and care for the neighborhood.

Health-focused placemaking supports the physical and mental well-being of the community (Project for Public Spaces, 2024). These activities promote physical activity and healthier lifestyles through parks, outdoor fitness areas, walking paths, or community gardens. It also promotes the importance of healthy diets and encourages health services like medical screenings, vaccinations, and/or mental health resources. Improving the physical and mental health of a community helps neighborhoods thrive through fostering stability and resilience.

Placemaking focuses on strengthening the social ties of a community (Project for Public Spaces, n.d.). Many communities that are struggling with a lack of resources and support

show instances of isolation, mistrust, and an overall lack of shared identity and collective efficacy. Community activities (such as those mentioned above), outreach programs, and pop-up gatherings can encourage residents to come together and form relationships, learn to care for one another, and build a stronger sense of community. Over time, these strengthened social connections create a foundation for long-term revitalization and collective impact on the community.

Placemaking can play an important role in business revitalization. Placemaking can promote local investment by prioritizing local businesses in placemaking activities. Some placemaking strategies that aid in business revitalization are community murals, cultural festivals, and live music events. Community-led projects that work closely with local businesses enhance the local economy, build social cohesion, and reinforce shared values (Morrison, 2024).

Placemaking matters for the Jefferson Avenue community because it enables residents to take the lead in controlling the future of their neighborhood. It provides a framework to strengthen social ties and restore a sense of ownership over public spaces (Urban Institute, 2018; Project for Public Spaces, 2024; Project for Public Spaces, n.d.; Wyckoff, 2014). The violence, disinvestment, and loss of local institutions can be better addressed when residents have stronger connections between one another and their community. This enables long-term revitalization through small steps like community events and beautification projects that shift perceptions to a sense of safety and belonging. These small achievements can attract additional investment and inspire larger changes, and

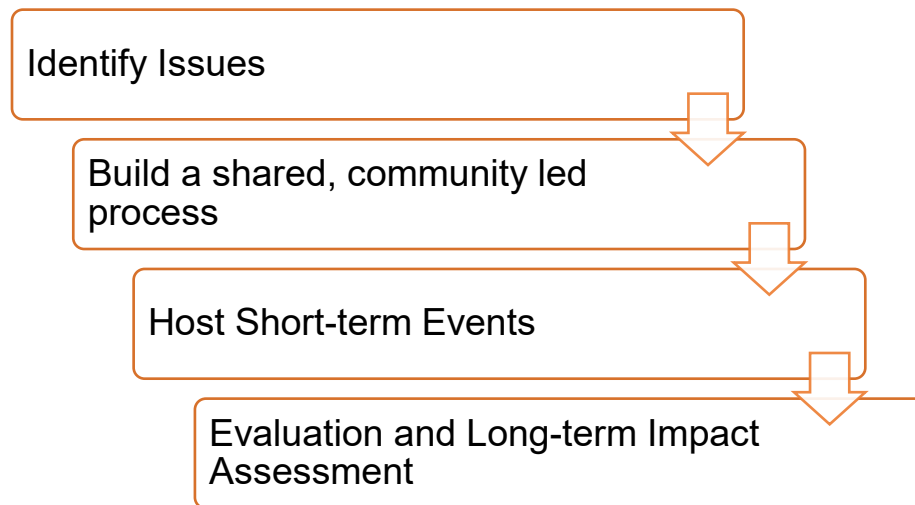
when residents see their ideas reflected in neighborhood changes, their participation grows and collective efficacy follows.

Project Outline

This project began through a partnership between Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), Jefferson Avenue Community Stakeholders, and the ESL Charitable Foundation. The RIT Center for Public Safety Initiatives received funding from the ESL Charitable Foundation to support the development of a placemaking plan project focused on Jefferson Avenue. The project was designed to support community-led violence reduction efforts by incorporating placemaking activities.

The project had five core components. First, CPSI secured the services of a consultant from Excelsior Performance Group, LLC to guide community engagement for this project. Second, an advisory committee was formed, consisting of trusted community stakeholders. Third, community town halls were held to solicit community input for the placemaking framework. Fourth, Barakah Muslim Charity (BMC) constructed the Total Health and Wellness Park, which aimed to activate an underused space and demonstrate the potential that placemaking can have on improving health and connection in the neighborhood. Finally, CPSI completed an evaluation of the project to assess how placemaking activities can influence community well-being and collective efficacy. The conceptual framework of the placemaking project is illustrated in Figure 1 (Project for Public Spaces, 2017).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Placemaking

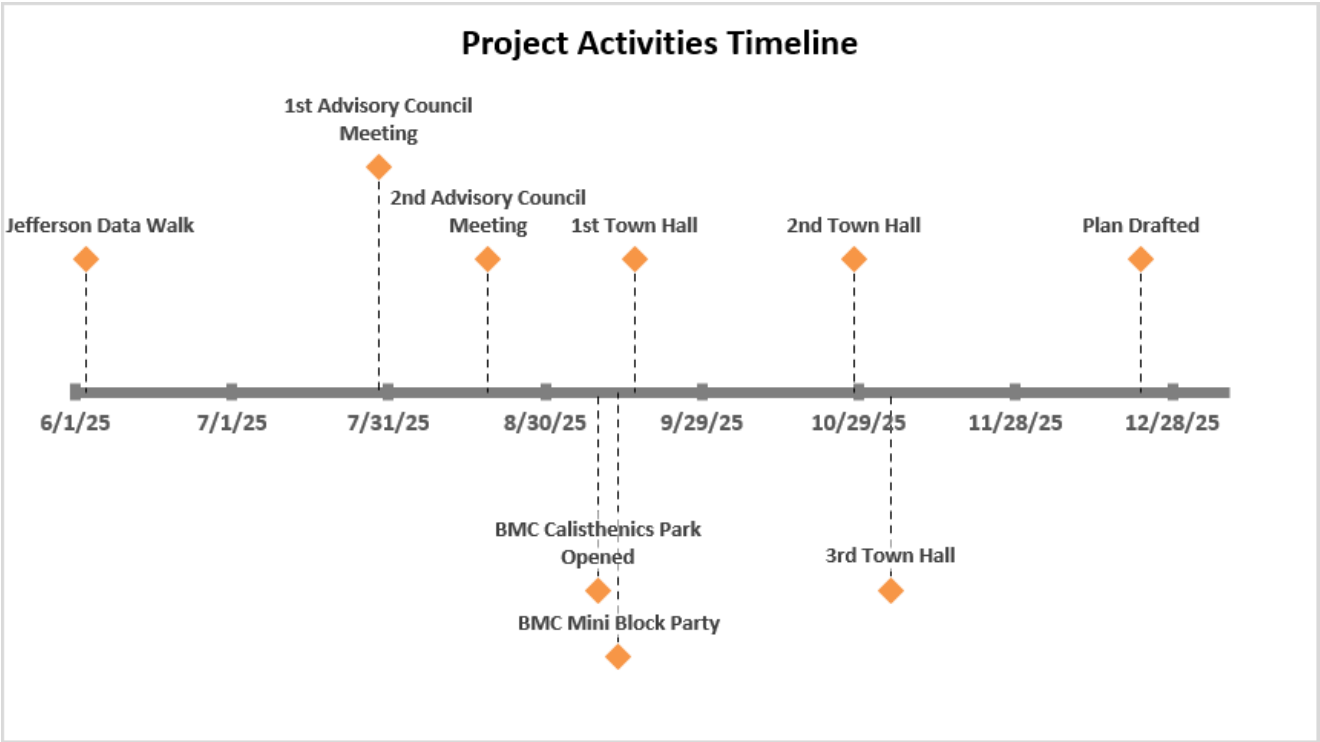


Project Timeline

CPSI staff began planning project activities in early 2025. This included consultations with community stakeholders and the consultant from Excelsior Performance Group, LLC. In early June, the CPSI team and the team consultant commenced a “data walk” to observe the neighborhood, build rapport with stakeholders, understand neighborhood strengths and challenges, and identify locations suitable for placemaking activities. Our first and second advisory committee meetings were held in July and August, respectively. The Barakah Muslim Charity Calisthenics Park opened in September 2025. Shortly thereafter, a baby block party was held to celebrate the opening of the park and to demonstrate the importance of investments promoting placemaking activities can have in aiding neighborhood revitalization efforts. Between September 2025 and November 2025, three town hall forums were held to seek community stakeholder input on the placemaking activities deemed most important for Jefferson Avenue. Data was collected

at each of the activities noted above and served as source information for this report and the Jefferson Avenue placemaking plan. Figure 2 depicts the project timeline.

Figure 2. Jefferson Avenue Placemaking Project Activities Timeline



Jefferson's Assets

Before engaging community stakeholders, CPSI research staff developed an asset map of Jefferson Avenue. Asset mapping is a useful tool that empowers communities to take advantage of their resources while also recognizing the resources their community would benefit from (Alzheimer et al., 2025). Resources may include housing, food, religious centers, non-profit businesses, and more. This process allowed for the systematic examination of Jefferson Avenue’s assets and assessment of how they can be utilized to advance a placemaking plan.

The CPSI evaluation team focused on four types of institutions: educational institutions, faith-based organizations, for-profit businesses, and non-profit organizations. The sole educational institution found along the target area is George Mather Forbes School.

There are three faith-based institutions: Edgewood Church on Plymouth, Trinity Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, and Abundant Life Faith Center. There are two non-profit organizations: Head Start/ABC, and Barakah Muslim Charity. The Honorable Willie Walker Lightfoot R-Center for Equity and Justice is operated by the City of Rochester but categorized as a non-profit organization here due to the unique nature of the services it provides to the community. Lastly, there are 20 for-profit businesses.

Figure 3. Jefferson Avenue Asset Map by Category

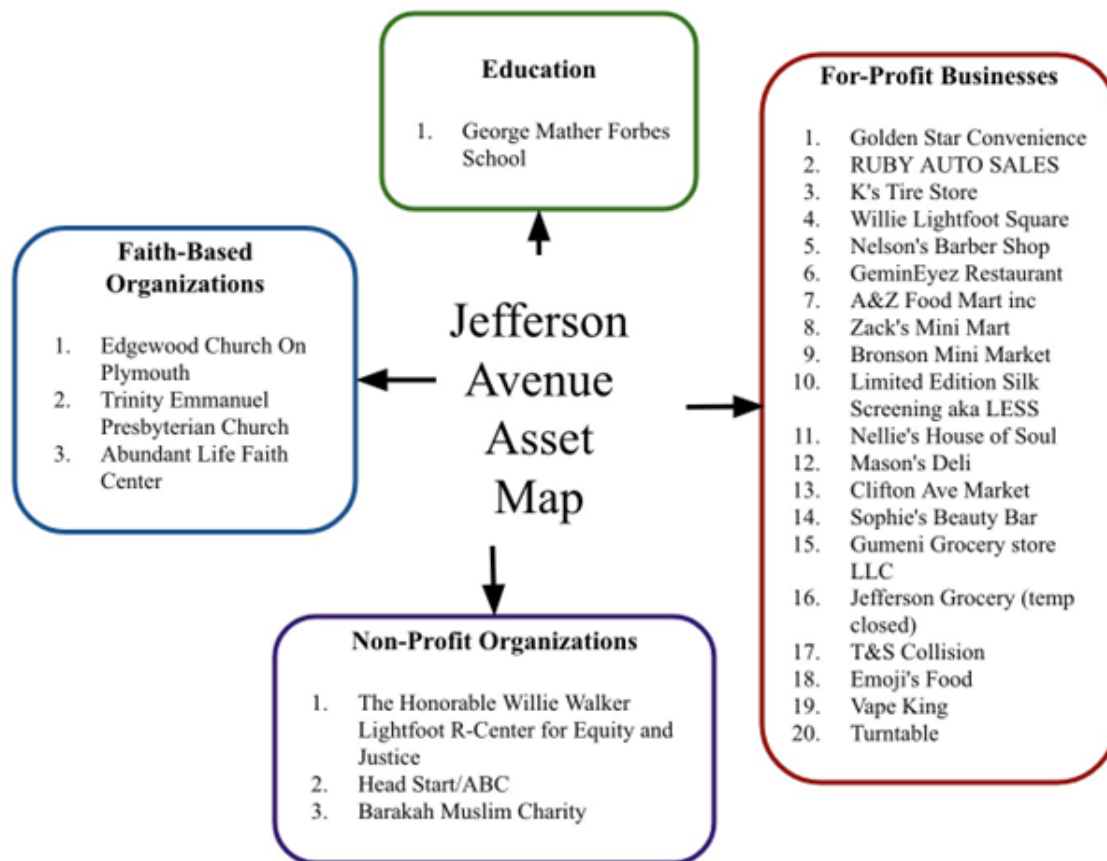
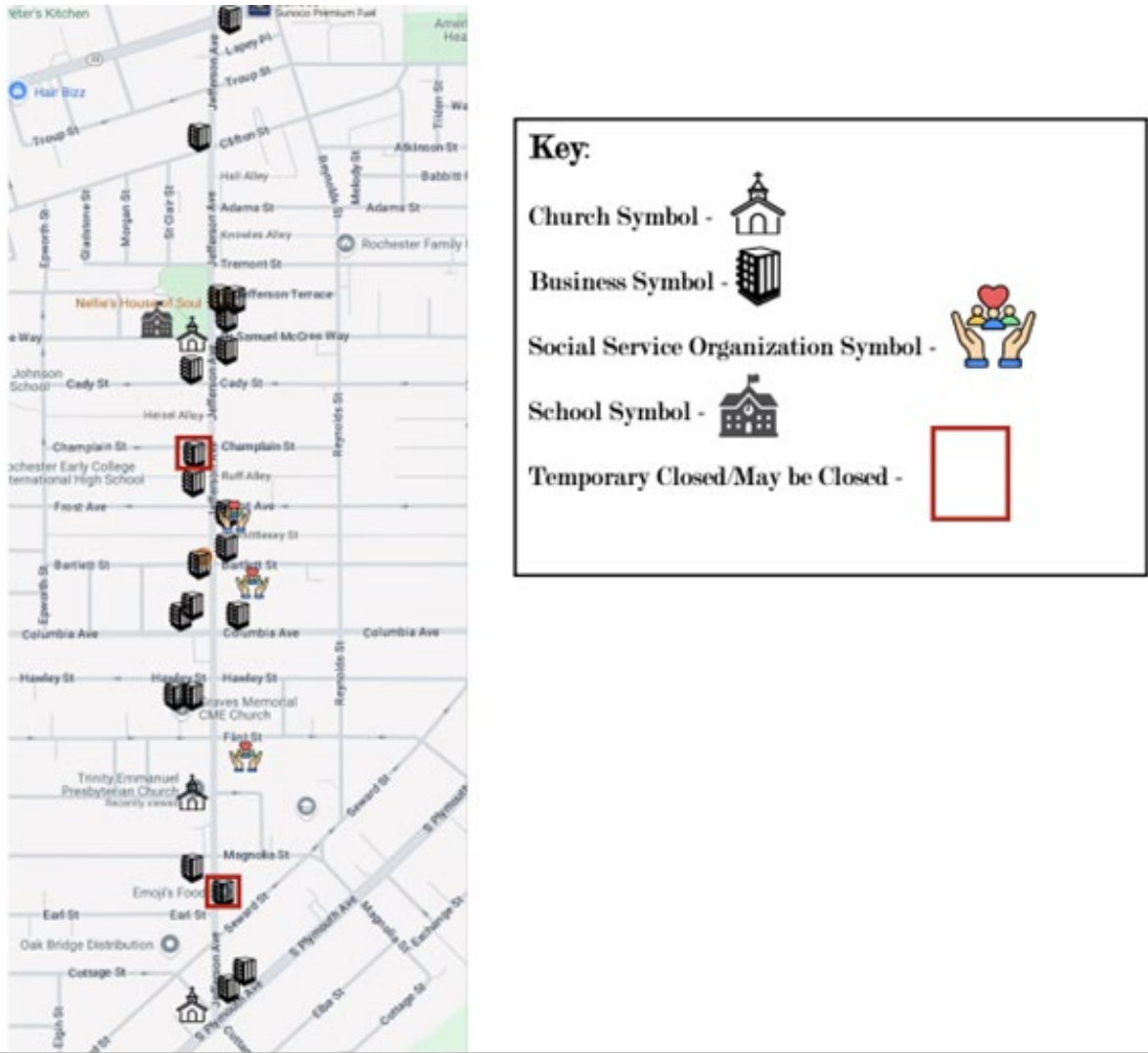


Figure 3 presents a diagram of the assets found along Jefferson Avenue from South Plymouth Ave to West Main Street. Below, Figure 4 situates key assets on a map along Jefferson Avenue.

Figure 4. Jefferson Avenue Assets Represented on Map



Asset Map Analysis

An analysis of the asset map points to several opportunities and challenges. First, there are suitable assets in the community to develop and execute a robust, community-based

placemaking plan. The religious institutions and non-profit organizations on Jefferson Avenue – though few – can play a critical role in coordinating community engagement, supporting implementation of placemaking activities at their locations and in the broader community, and in seeking input from community members. Importantly, care must be taken to ensure these organizations have adequate support and capacity to carry out placemaking activities, as they are likely heavily burdened because of the services they provide to the community.

Second, there are more than 20 businesses on Jefferson Avenue, but a disproportionate number of them are small, independent convenience stores. The limited range of business types constrains the ways business activity can be incorporated into a placemaking plan. It is important to incorporate business into the placemaking plan because having local businesses take the lead on placemaking in their neighborhood can also inspire resident engagement. Business owners can lead placemaking by sponsoring or hosting placemaking events. Businesses can provide funding for beautification projects or promote local events to boost engagement. Collaborating with other local businesses and hosting block parties, pop-up markets/events, and workshops are ways businesses can support placemaking.

Placemaking Plan Development

Advisory Committee

The advisory committee consisted of key Jefferson Avenue residents and stakeholders. Advisory committee members helped build trust and transparency with the residents of

Jefferson Avenue and provided critical feedback on project activities. Placemaking is effective when those guiding it have strong ties to the neighborhood and can advocate for the wants and needs of their community. The first step was forming the committee of five to seven individuals who are well known, respected, and familiar with Jefferson Avenue's history. Our intention was for them to be an extension of our team, reaching out to the community, and encouraging participation. They would also offer guidance on project materials and provide feedback on community events. The research team canvassed the neighborhood, spoke with business owners, and invited participation from people who were already serving the community. Additionally, Barakah Muslim Charity (BMC), a staple asset in the Jefferson Avenue neighborhood, partnered with the research team to serve as the hub for meetings and town halls.

The advisory committee consisted of individuals with longstanding community involvement. Several members resided in the neighborhood, and most had extended family members living in the community. All members had an extensive knowledge of the neighborhood's history. Some had extensive experience managing businesses on Jefferson Avenue and brought insight into the commercial landscape and its challenges over the years. Others had extensive experience working in the non-profit sector and mentoring community youth. A list of all advisory members is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1. Project Advisory Board Members	
Name	
1.	Nelson Baldwin
2.	Kevin Brown
3.	Robert Carlos
4.	Pat Jackson
5.	Willie J. Lightfoot Sr.
6.	Carl Roby
7.	James Vaughn
8.	Jerome Ward

The advisory committee expressed the importance of consistency, trust, and transparency, real-time responses to community needs, and youth representation. To build trust with neighborhood residents, key stakeholders needed to be transparent about the objectives of the project and the values of the stakeholders, demonstrate consistent engagement with the community, and commit to following through on projects. The advisory committee also stressed the importance of a plan having tangible results that acknowledge not only the challenges, but also the rich history of the community.

In conversations about the future of Jefferson Avenue, the advisory committee emphasized the importance of a community that is safe, healthy, and supportive. They spoke about restoring community ownership and the need for affordable and available housing, childcare, and mental health centers. In addition to community ownership, the committee explained the need for community empowerment, especially in terms of financial literacy. This guidance shaped the process and priorities of the project and ensured that the plan reflects the lived experience and aspiration for people who call Jefferson Avenue their home.

Neighborhood Investment Strategy

To increase awareness of the project, the research team developed an investment strategy with three focus areas: brand awareness, partner generation, and resident engagement. First, CPSI staff and the consultant from Excelsior Performance Group, LLC began the engagement process by canvassing the neighborhood. Business owners and residents on Jefferson Avenue were informed about the advisory committee and planned town halls for community feedback. Second, neighborhood ambassadors from Barakah Muslim Charity conducted outreach. Third, following the installation of the calisthenics gym, a baby block party was thrown to demonstrate the value of placemaking activities to the community. The goal of these activities was to increase community engagement throughout the plan development process.

Baby Block Party

One component of the placemaking plan is to encourage exercise, health, and wellness. BMC installed a calisthenics park to provide healthy exercise options for community members and to demonstrate the value of placemaking activities in neighborhoods such as Jefferson Avenue. Upon the recommendation of the advisory committee, a “baby block party” was held to celebrate the installation of the calisthenic parks, kindle community interest in the project, and encourage attendance at town halls. The gathering was inspired by Jefferson Avenue’s historic tradition of hosting the Jefferson Avenue Neighborhood Block Party.

The event began slowly, with people walking by and watching from a distance with skepticism and curiosity. As the morning progressed, more residents were coming together and talking, using the calisthenics gym while kids were playing games. By midday, many residents were stopping by to talk, laugh, and join in on activities. By the early afternoon, interactions were significantly more inclusive; the space was full of adults and children eating together, picking up litter in the area, and moving back and forth between games, talking, and trying out the gym. Throughout the event, people were laughing, mingling across age groups, and openly interacting with one another without cliques or separation. Even previous onlookers eventually came over for food and conversation before helping with the clean up at the end. The baby block party brought neighbors together in a genuine and relaxed atmosphere, showing the need for more shared spaces and connections.

As part of the engagement strategy, the project consultant collected community input on interactive posters hung up throughout the space. The research team invited the residents to share ideas, concerns, and aspirations for Jefferson Avenue, to build the placemaking plan around resident input. The posters saw immense engagement and participation from residents and became an easily accessible way for them to contribute feedback in real time.

Community Town Halls

Three community town halls were hosted at BMC on weekday evenings throughout the fall of 2025. They were designed as a structured open forum for people from the

neighborhood to provide their input on how to enhance the quality of life on Jefferson Avenue through the facilitation of prosocial placemaking. The forum focused on four categories: Community, Art, Health, and Economic Empowerment. During the town halls, we asked residents: “If you were going to hire Jefferson Ave., what would you want to see on its resume?” We hoped that this question would encourage residents to consider Jefferson’s strengths, as well as areas for growth.

We presented participants with a large map of Jefferson Avenue – from Plymouth Avenue to Main Street – that highlighted significant local businesses and institutions. We asked residents if there was anything about the map they would change or add. The most significant feedback we received was extending the map to Brown Street because that is where Jefferson Avenue ends, and the block is still considered to be a part of the neighborhood. Residents shared stories about the different friend groups they saw on Jefferson; those from the Brown Street area were an important part of the Jefferson community and deserved a distinct zone on the map. This conversation expanded our understanding of how to connect with the community in the sense that while someone may live in a surrounding neighborhood, they are still connected to and identify with Jefferson Avenue.

For the domain regarding community, participants were asked, “What does community look like on Jefferson?” With the focused goal being to build bonds and connections between neighbors that make Jefferson better as a whole. Participants expressed shared pride and investment in business and home ownership on Jefferson. Participant

comments demonstrated deep love for the neighborhood and pride in its history.

Participants noted that community events like the famous Jefferson Avenue Block Party, community cookouts, field day activities through the recreation center, and youth-centered events could strengthen the community. The residents added that they appreciate how different generations of people live in Jefferson and how many people are friendly. The residents agreed that community events have the power to draw other people into the neighborhood, and investing in youth is important for Jefferson's growth.

Next, we asked for community input regarding art and creativity on Jefferson. Our question was: "What does a lively Jefferson look like?" Participants shared how art could help tell the history of Jefferson Avenue, as well as support and reinforce positive mental health in the community. The residents expressed their love for the religious diversity in the neighborhood, and they believed that art could help express the beauty of that diversity. The residents showed interest in the establishment of a recording studio on Jefferson so people could channel their emotions into creating music. There was also interest in the creation of an artsy public community board and mural space that could be used for sharing information and news.

We then asked residents about the health and wellness of their community. Participants shared that Jefferson has strong family values that promote self-respect and self-empowerment. Behaviors like usage of the calisthenics gym, community watch clubs, and self-awareness can lead to a healthier Jefferson. Residents also shared that the conversation surrounding mental health is new for them, and these were not

conversations that happened in the past. The residents discussed how they have seen the negative effects that homelessness, drug use, and traumatic experiences have had on the community. The residents believe that people on Jefferson Avenue have individuals they can talk to and safe spaces they can go to. The participants shared that it is important that they talk to each other using positive language and lean on neighborhood ambassadors to help create a healthy community.

Lastly, we asked the participants about their thoughts surrounding economic empowerment on Jefferson. Participants identified Jefferson's loyal residents – Black- and Brown-owned businesses – and history as strong assets. The residents expressed how important it is that people want to move to Jefferson and stay in the neighborhood, and that Jefferson Avenue be presented in another light. Jefferson needs more residents to attract more businesses. The residents came up with the idea of creating a sign at the start of Jefferson Avenue that welcomes people to the neighborhood and designates the area as important and historically Black. The residents also expressed having a pharmacy, a grocery store, a doctor's office, a cafe, and more. There were desires for movie theaters, poetry clubs, and banks. Overall, the residents wish for more for their neighborhood and want to feel financially successful.

Challenges

The research team faced some challenges collecting information from community residents and stakeholders. Originally, the project design was intended to hold each of the three community town halls in a different "zone" of the neighborhood. The goal was

to reach as many residents as possible from as many areas of the street as possible.

However, logistical constraints and the time required to secure and coordinate multiple meeting spaces led to the decision to hold each town hall at Barakah Muslim Charity (BMC). BMC is a centrally located, well-known, and easily accessible location on Jefferson Ave.

During these town halls, it was important for residents to be willing to use their voices. Despite ongoing outreach efforts, engaging residents and communicating the purpose and timing of the town halls was a challenge, which resulted in varied attendance across sessions. Additionally, discussions often gravitated away from the successes and focused more on the memories of the “old Jefferson”. This required careful facilitation to redirect conversations toward identifying the existing strengths Jefferson Avenue still has and envisioning realistic pathways for a revitalized Jefferson Avenue.

Draft Jefferson Avenue Placemaking Plan

The framework for the placemaking plan for Jefferson Avenue follows five core principles.

1. Promote empathy and understanding through recognizing the history, trauma, and strengths of Jefferson Avenue.
2. Support collective well-being by using placemaking to improve the mental, physical, and social health of the community.
3. Activate underused or unused spaces in the neighborhood for meaningful community spaces.
4. Strengthen social ties and leadership by building trust, pride, and a shared responsibility among residents for their community.

5. Create small tangible achievements that can build momentum for larger efforts.

The strategies for the placemaking plan are designed to be cost-effective, replicable, and resident-led. Importantly, we refer to this plan as a draft because we expect it to undergo additional iterations as community consultations continue. The plan does not include an exhaustive list of possible placemaking activities. A detailed list of additional activities that can be added to this plan can be found in Appendix 1. Below is a one-year placemaking plan for Jefferson Avenue for 2026:

Table 2. Jefferson Avenue Placemaking Plan for 2026			
Month	Activity	Category	Description
March	1. Finishing Plans for the “Mini Block Party”	Community	This month is designated for planning.
	2. “Welcome to Historic Jefferson Avenue” sign	Art/Creativity	
	3. Plan Jefferson Business Spotlight Series	Economic Empowerment	
April	1. Storefront Decoration Day	Art/Creativity	Local business owners will have a day where they can beautify their storefronts; the community will gather to share insights for the community mural; classes on growing food will begin in the community garden; and, the first monthly Jefferson Business Spotlight Series will occur.
	2. Mural Planning	Art/Creativity	
	3. Begin Community Garden Classes	Health/Wellness	
	4. First Monthly Jefferson Business Spotlight Series	Economic Empowerment	

May	1. Starting the Mural	Art/Creativity	The community mural will start coming to life. To promote mental health awareness month, residents can attend a poetry workshop and have the opportunity to share their work. Community stakeholders will also work with the Mental Health Association of Rochester to host a mental health workshop.
	2. Poetry workshop/open mic night	Art/Creativity, community	
	3. Mental Health Workshop	Health/Wellness	
June	1. Neighborhood Calisthenics Competition	Health/Wellness	Community stakeholders will organize a friendly calisthenics competition at the park behind Barakah Muslim Charity. Residents can work on creating a community info board, and community stakeholders can start connecting with people who can help with establishing a recording studio, as well as start planning the Fourth of July community cookout.
	2. Creating Community Info Board	Art/Creativity, Community	
	3. Connecting with the Necessary Partners to Create a Mobile Recording Studio	Art/Creativity, Community	
July	1. Fourth of July Cookout	Community	Barakah Muslim Charity can help community stakeholders put together a community cookout.

August	1. Free Haircut Day	Community	Community stakeholders can connect with local barbershops to host a day of free haircuts. By this point, the “Mini Block Party” should be ready to happen.
	2. “Mini Block Party”	Health/Wellness, Community	
September	1. Health Fair	Health/Wellness	Community stakeholders can partner with Trillium to host a Health Fair on the Avenue
October	1. Job Fair	Economic Empowerment	Community stakeholders can partner with organizations and institutions to support efforts of residents seeking employment.
November	1. Yoga/Meditation	Health/Wellness	Residents can attend yoga classes that center around mindfulness/meditation.

The first few months of the year can be designated as planning months. During these months, community stakeholders can work on organizing events for the year and getting in contact with necessary community partners. For example, some larger-scale events like a block party and the creation of a “Welcome to Historic Jefferson Avenue” sign will require more moving parts and organizations getting involved.

Art & Culture

Placemaking for culture and arts in the Jefferson Avenue neighborhood can begin with a series of small but impactful projects reflecting the history and cultural identity of the area. Residents shared a desire for art on public display that illustrates Jefferson's history. This can include ideas such as window painting and storefront beautification days, seasonal decorations, etc. This inspired the idea of a Jefferson Identity Mural series that presents themes like the history of black-owned businesses in the area, cultural diversity, and artwork created by local youth.

During the months of April and May, with the resurgence of warm weather and high spirits, community stakeholders can advertise a specific day when local businesses should decorate their storefronts. Additionally, community stakeholders can identify vacant or underused wall space on Jefferson Avenue and plan some days to gather residents together to share ideas for some murals. Community stakeholders can partner with local artists to carry out the neighborhood's vision.

Residents also shared interest in a "Welcome to Historic Jefferson Avenue" sign to celebrate the significance of the area as a historically black neighborhood. This project could start in early spring and be carried out into early fall, with community stakeholders gathering insight from the community and partnering with the necessary craftsmen to create the sign. Additionally, participants showed enthusiasm for a pop-up recording studio offering residents the chance to channel emotions, share stories, and develop skills through music and audio projects. Lastly, to promote communication and creative expression, participants suggested community information boards that display event

flyers, neighborhood resources, and artwork. Together, these arts and culture-based projects can promote creativity and positive energy in the community and can be carried out throughout the whole year.

Health & Wellness

Jefferson Avenue can build upon existing assets for the placemaking plan regarding health. Residents enthusiastically expressed appreciation for the new calisthenics park and how it promotes healthier routines and self-discipline. The plan can incorporate the calisthenics park through weekly “open gym” sessions, community fitness challenges, and a space for yoga and meditation classes. In June, community stakeholders can hold a neighborhood calisthenics competition at the new park. Residents can be given about a month to sign up for the competition and prepare, and the whole community can gather to support residents as they compete.

To address mental health conversations surrounding substance abuse, trauma, and homelessness, the plan can work towards implementing pop-up health stations offering services like blood pressure and glucose screenings, Narcan education, counseling services, and community-led group therapy sessions. In September, community stakeholders could partner with Trillium Health to hold a Health Fair on Jefferson Avenue. This fair could provide several healthcare services, free of charge. The Health Fair would happen just in time for the back-to-school season. Additionally, the community garden offers opportunities for classes on how to grow food, which can strengthen physical well-

being and social cohesion in the community. These classes could begin in April and be held throughout the summer and fall.

Community

The placemaking plan for building community focuses on rebuilding shared traditions and creating spaces for residents to connect with one another. Throughout all the advisory meetings and town halls, the historic Jefferson Avenue Block Party was mentioned with immense praise and enthusiasm. The block party once brought the entire neighborhood together, and the committee wants to work towards rebuilding that tradition. The plan suggests having the community coordinate a “Mini Block Party” series offering food, music, art, games, and visibility for local businesses. These smaller-scale events can take place quarterly or twice a year to gain momentum and ultimately host the Jefferson Avenue Block Party again, in time.

This “Mini Block Party” would require a lot of preparation. Community stakeholders could begin planning this event at the beginning of 2026, with the hopes of throwing the party by the end of the summer. Community stakeholders could organize entertainment, like local musicians, as well as various local vendors, and coordinate shutting down the street. With enough time to plan and connect with the necessary resources, the “Mini Block Party” could be a success, and perhaps in 2027, the famous Jefferson Avenue Block Party will make its return.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment in the placemaking plan should strengthen the local businesses and build financial competence for residents. A monthly Jefferson Business Spotlight Series can raise visibility of existing businesses by sharing their stories and offerings across social media and flyers, encouraging residents to support them. Pop-up market days hosted in community spaces can offer both young and old business owners opportunities to experiment with new ideas and attract new customers. Lastly, to support economic growth for residents, workshops offering financial literacy education can be hosted in community spaces. Activities related to economic empowerment could be especially beneficial to the community in the colder months from October to December, when there is less interest in gathering outside and more negative feelings about the year coming to a close. Community stakeholders could partner with companies and institutions in the surrounding area and organize a job fair before the holiday season, where Jefferson residents can come and find work. The winter months are also an appropriate time to consider mental health and wellness by creating spaces for residents to gather and prioritize their own mental health.

What Happens Next?

The Jefferson Avenue Placemaking project will now focus on activity implementation, community capacity building, long-term planning, and continued project assessment. The placemaking plan will be provided to community stakeholders and utilized as a roadmap to develop and execute placemaking activities along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. The project advisory committee will be consulted concerning next steps. Attempts will be

made to secure additional funding for placemaking activities along the Jefferson Avenue Corridor. Staff from the Center for Public Safety Initiatives will engage stakeholder leadership along Jefferson Avenue about their role in supporting the execution of this placemaking plan. Under the supervision of Dr. Altheimer, staff and students from the Center for Public Safety Initiatives will continue to provide technical assistance on project implementation and assessment to support project sustainability.

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Appendix 1: Alternative Placemaking Activities for Consideration

Community	Art/Creativity	Health/Wellness	Economic Empowerment
Neighborhood block parties	Mural painting projects	Free fitness classes (yoga, Zumba)	Pop-up markets & vendor fairs
Community clean-up days	Open-air art galleries	Community garden planting	Small business showcases
Town hall / listening sessions	Street performance festivals	Walking & biking tours	Financial literacy workshops
Neighborhood history tours	Photography workshops	Mental health & wellness fairs	Job skills & resume workshops
Intergenerational storytelling circles	Public sculpture installations	Free health screenings	Microenterprise pitch competitions
Cultural heritage celebrations	DIY craft workshops	Community cookbook & cooking demos	Cooperative buying & savings clubs
Neighbor-to-neighbor skill shares	Chalk art festivals	Outdoor mindfulness & meditation	Entrepreneurship boot camps
Community movie nights	Community theater productions	Community sports leagues	Worker-owned co-op info sessions
Youth mentorship programs	Spoken word & poetry slams	Nutrition education workshops	Neighborhood investment forums
Welcome events for new residents	Mosaic & tile art installations	Stress relief & self-care pop-ups	STEM & workforce development fairs
Neighborhood watch & safety walks	Music in the park series	Community mental health first aid training	Tax prep & benefits access clinics
Interfaith & multicultural dialogues	Community mural design contests	Farmers markets	Crowdfunding & grant writing workshops

About the Center for Public Safety Initiatives

The Center for Public Safety Initiatives (CPSI) is a multi-disciplinary research center that examines strategies to reduce crime and enhance the administration of justice. It provides program evaluation, data analytics, and project management services to area law enforcement, community non-profits, and other criminal justice professionals, and it contributes to general knowledge generation of the nature and causes of crime and violence. Its educational goals include training graduate and undergraduate students in strategic planning, program evaluation, and policy analysis.

The foundation of the Center is the practice of action research in which relevant data and analyses are brought to bear on the day-to-day decision-making processes of organizations. The Center serves the practice of policy development and implementation in real time and is a testing ground for 21st century university engagement, demonstrating how rigorous research and analysis can play a role in improving the lives of society's most marginalized citizens.

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