A PLACE TO SEE

A Regional Entrepreneur Perception Analysis of The West Bank, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Neighborhood Business Fellows
A CHANCE and Carlson Net Impact Program
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The West Bank is the commercial district located in the diverse Cedar-Riverside community, directly east of downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Executive Summary

A Place to See is a collaboration completed by the Carlson Neighborhood Business Fellows under the guidance of the Cedar-Humphrey Action for Neighborhood Collaborative Engagement (CHANCE). The mission of CHANCE is “to create new and effective partnerships and strengthen local networks between the University of Minnesota and the Cedar-Riverside community.” The Carlson School of Management Net Impact Chapter is a partner in accomplishing this mission by supporting the work of the Neighborhood Business Fellows. The commercial district located in the Cedar-Riverside community is known as The West Bank, with the financial support of State Farm Insurance, the Neighborhood Business Fellows conducted a Regional Entrepreneur Perception Analysis on behalf of the West Bank Business Association (WBBA) during the fall semester of 2009.

The goals of A Place to See: A Regional Entrepreneur Perception Analysis of The West Bank are to:

- Gain insight into how successful Minneapolis - St. Paul entrepreneurs view The West Bank commercial district as a business opportunity.
- Establish clear recommendations for how the WBBA can increase the competitiveness of the commercial district in order to attract and retain highly skilled business operators and drive customer traffic to existing businesses.
- Give Carlson MBA students the opportunity to meet and learn from successful independent, community-based entrepreneurs - a group of business people that are not included in the traditional MBA curriculum.

This research and its recommendations should be of particular interest to business and property owners on The West Bank as it explains why the area has a relatively low perceived competitive position for the attraction of both customers and business locations relative to other commercial districts in the Minneapolis - St. Paul Region, despite its possession of many strategic business assets. The West Bank is located directly adjacent to the University of Minnesota – one of the region’s top employers and day time destinations, just over one mile east of downtown Minneapolis, is in close proximity to the heart of residential St. Paul, has a 287 room hotel located in the district, is conveniently located near both highway and public transportation corridors, possesses excellent nightlife and entertainment destinations for both theater and music, and already has a diverse offering of retail and restaurant goods, including high-end outdoor apparel, bicycles and cycling accessories, furniture and knitting supplies, and brewed on the premises beer. Understanding how to better leverage these existing assets, is key to the future financial success of The West Bank commercial district.

The recommendations made in A Place to See seek to shed light onto contemporary issues facing The West Bank business community while taking into account the community’s exceptional and unique past. The recommendations are broken up into two separate categories:

Strategic Planning & Advocacy

- Create a formal district-wide strategic merchandising plan.
- Support niche retail that is compatible with the district’s nightlife establishments and university student and faculty tastes.
- Advocate for the inclusion of University businesses and commercial facilities to be located in the district.
- Find a celebrity investor.

Programmatic Actions

- Increase the visibility of public safety officers through programming initiatives.
- Facilitate and lead young Somali and university student entrepreneurship development programming.
Background

CHANCE was founded in 2006 by students at the Hubert Humphrey Institute for Public Policy who wanted to see The Institute become more involved with the affairs of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood that directly abuts the University of Minnesota campus. In the past three years, the effort has grown to involve many private businesses, public agencies and not-for-profit organizations located in Cedar-Riverside.

Since 2007, CHANCE has operated through the Center for Integrative Leadership. Through collaboration among University of Minnesota schools, Cedar-Riverside institutions, residents and business owners CHANCE seeks to expand sustainable community partnerships. On the University side, partners include the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota Law School, University Libraries, the Office of Public Engagement, and the Office of University Relations. On the community side, CHANCE has on-going relationships with the many community not-for-profit organizations and associations, including Augsburg College and Fairview Hospital.

The Neighborhood Business Fellows Program was conceived by the 2008 Carlson Net Impact President Ben Schein as a co-curricular activity with a mission to foster engagement between Carlson MBA students and businesses located on The West Bank. He secured $5,000 of funding from the University’s Office of Public Engagement to begin the initiative and State Farm Insurance has since committed additional funding to continue the program.

A Place to See is the second project completed by the Neighborhood Business Fellows. In the fall of 2008 under the leadership of Dan Kaskubar, the fellows wrote business cases based on the administrative and strategic situations being faced by four West Bank businesses. It is the goal that these cases will be adopted into the curriculum for undergraduate entrepreneurship classes at the Carlson School of Management.

Many different types of projects were considered for implementation during the 2009 fall semester. A Regional Entrepreneur Perception Analysis consisting of structured personal interviews conducted by MBA students was determined to be the best possible project for the following reasons:

• The perceptions of the Minneapolis - St. Paul entrepreneurial community’s assessment of exactly what kind of business opportunity a location on The West Bank presents to an entrepreneur is information that has never before been gathered for the WBBA.

• The project had a scope that could be completed effectively in one semester by full-time graduate students as a co-curricular activity.

• Students would gain an exceptional educational benefit by meeting with and engaging successful independent business people.

A Place to See is the first piece of primary research that enables the WBBA to effectively manage The West Bank commercial district using a market-based approach. As a commercial district wide advocacy and management entity focused on the concerns of business and property owners, the WBBA sees its primary clients as the commercial organizations that either lease or own commercial property in the district. Similar to shopping mall management practices, it is in the best interests of business and property owners for the WBBA to retain and attract the best possible commercial tenants. Interviewing successful entrepreneurs in the Minneapolis - St. Paul Region gives the WBBA insight into the decision making processes of some of the region’s best business people with regards to how they choose to locate their establishments.

This document is a starting point for further developing the programs of the WBBA. The strategic recommendations made in this report should form the foundation from which the WBBA can most efficiently and effectively craft strategic initiatives such as business recruitment, marketing communications and advocacy strategy.
Methodology

The entrepreneurs that were interviewed were recruited by the Neighborhood Business Fellows Director in the summer of 2009. Recruitment was based on a two tiered criteria designed to best meet the needs of the WBBA:

Tier One: Required of all business owners interviewed

**Local and independently owned** – It was required that interviewees own and operate local, independent businesses for two reasons - A) independently owned businesses have been shown to help build a commercial district’s identity and marketability, as well as have a greater impact on the appreciation of real property in the surrounding community than chain or corporately owned businesses; and B) independently owned businesses provide greater access to the decision makers of where to locate a business establishment.

**Multiple business locations** – Only entrepreneurs operating multiple locations were recruited for interviews because; A) entrepreneurs with multiple locations have shown that a first or primary business establishment has been financially successful enough to warrant the opening of a second location, verifying the strength of the entrepreneur’s business acumen, and B) the decision as to where to locate the second location may be more carefully analyzed and considered than the decision to open the initial establishment. The first business opened by many entrepreneurs is often the result of lifestyle as opposed to business considerations. Understanding why a business person chooses a second location therefore shines greater light onto the specific variables that are most important to why certain locations are chosen over others.

Tier Two: Preferred but not required of interviewees

**Diversity of business types** – It was important to interview owners of many different types of businesses in order to understand how the location question is affected by their operations. Restaurant, bar, bakery, café, hardware, apparel, art gallery and hair salon owners were interviewed. This diversity of business types gives a more well-rounded view of the criteria by which operators of different types of businesses select locations.
Racial and gender diversity of owners – It was determined that since The West Bank is a commercial district made up of many immigrant and female owned businesses that the pool of interviewees should reflect that diversity as best as possible.

Seven business owners agreed to be interviewed by the nine Carlson MBA students participating in the Neighborhood Business Fellows program. These seven business owners operate, or have operated in the very recent past, 29 business locations. No business owner has ever owned a business in The West Bank commercial district and the various business locations of interviewees demonstrate great diversity in how entrepreneurs decide where to locate their businesses. Some of the businesses owned by interviewees are located in established Minneapolis - St. Paul commercial districts including Linden Hills and Uptown in Minneapolis, Grand Avenue and Highland Park in St. Paul; while some businesses have stand alone locations in the relatively underserved communities of North, Northeast and South Minneapolis.

Once business owners were confirmed to be interviewed, a structured interview script was designed so that all of the interviewees would be asked the same questions. Questions were intended to give insight into the interviewee’s business operations, location decision considerations, knowledge of The West Bank, opinions of the general Minneapolis - St. Paul business environment and prospects for future investment or expansion. The nine neighborhood business fellows were broken up into three teams of two and one team of three. Each team interviewed at least one business owner, with the majority interviewing two, over a period of three months from October to December 2009.

Summary of Interviews

All of the entrepreneurs interviewed claimed to have a very good understanding of The West Bank. Some were once students at the University of Minnesota, many routinely visited the area in the 80s and 90s, and many were familiar with some of the business district’s more established destinations. All of the interviews aligned upon the following themes of general agreement:

Risk to public safety – The number one concern to emerge from the interviews was the perceived public safety risk to individuals visiting and working on The West Bank.

Lack of quality housing stock – The lack of perceived quality housing in the surrounding neighborhood signals too many entrepreneurs that the disposable income in the adjacent community is relatively low and therefore cannot provide base financial support for their businesses.

Difficulty of catering simultaneously to both Somali residents and university students and faculty – It is perceived that the two main customer groups on The West Bank are recent Somali immigrants and university students and faculty. Many of the entrepreneurs commented that building a portfolio of products and services that would appeal to both potential customer groups seems to be very difficult.

Identity of the business district is difficult to understand – Many interviewees stated that the West Bank has yet to reclaim an easily understood business and cultural identity after the demise of its reputation as a hippie or alternative community in the 80s and 90s.

Business recruitment works – Two of the seven entrepreneurs interviewed expanded into specific locations due to direct recruitment by community groups. Both business owners were hesitant to expand because they felt they were already serving those trade areas at their existing locations. This is a sign that the entrepreneurs would not have chosen those specific locations through the typical commercial
brokerage process and without the encouragement of recruitment. Both entrepreneurs have stated that their businesses have been successful beyond their wildest imaginations, proving that the communities were correct about the existence of pent-up demand for their products.

This information should be of substantial interest to West Bank business and property owners. The West Bank has suffered from two high profile business closings in the past twelve months, Tam-Tam’s and The Global Village. The subsequent re-leasing of the latter’s space has widely been viewed as poorly managed and a missed opportunity. The average commercial district in the United States has a 20 to 25 percent turnover in tenants annually, therefore making strategic foresight necessary in order to achieve the most successful and effective management of business closings.

It must be noted that a few key considerations that might be seen as important to locating a business on The West Bank were not mentioned by the entrepreneurs interviewed.

Adjacency to the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College – None of the interviewees stated that the universities’ large number of students and employees are assets, despite their disposable incomes, willingness to be first adopters and interest in international affairs and local culture.

Financial considerations – High lease rates and affordable financing for build-out costs rarely came up in the interviews. The vast majority of the interviewees have not encountered non-market loan programs that have been large enough to adequately benefit their businesses. However, one entrepreneur was able to secure a $16,000 loan from a community development corporation to facilitate build-out costs for a new location that she was actively recruited to open.

Parking – Customer and employee parking was not mentioned by any of the interviewees as either a positive or negative aspect of locating a business on The West Bank.

Defined Opportunities

Interviewees commented that The West Bank does have important business assets that are under utilized. The entrepreneurs identified three key benefits to a location on The West Bank:

Excellent Access to Transportation Infrastructure – The West Bank is centrally located in the Minneapolis - St. Paul region with excellent access to major roadways and public transit infrastructure. One interviewee located a high price-point business in a standalone, post industrial location due to the site’s access to commuter routes. A keen business person could use a location on The West Bank to encourage customers to stop in after work, or before or after an event in downtown Minneapolis.

Nightlife Destination Businesses – The West Bank does possess a number of key regional nightlife establishments. Nightlife is important to many retailers because nightlife venues often attract customers with a high level of disposable income to a commercial district - often young, single and/or gay. It is believed by many apparel and arts related retailers that consumers of nightlife entertainment are more likely to consume fashionable, niche retail goods on a regular basis. Being located in a nightlife district also gives retailers greater visibility in the regional marketplace, nightlife being a core competitive advantage that all urban, commercial districts have over suburban shopping destinations. Interviewees commented that nightlife businesses should have a positive spin-off effect on other types of businesses.

Affordable Commercial Space – Lease rates and property costs were believed to be more affordable on The West Bank than in other commercial districts near downtown Minneapolis. The West Bank gives low operating cost businesses the most affordable means to locate near the downtown core and in a destination community. One interviewee stated that “niche retailers should be more competitive on the West Bank than in other commercial districts.”
Impediments to Investment

Interviewees identified issues of concern that must be addressed in order to make The West Bank a more desirable location for business activity. These issues range from community capacity building to residential development and eliminating barriers to investment.

Perceived risk to public safety – Public safety has always been a major concern on The West Bank, and will continue to be so in the near future. One interviewee stated that The West Bank’s business proposition is “bars, music and crime.” These perceptions always surprise people that possess an intimate knowledge of The West Bank because they feel that crime is not any more prevalent there than any other community in Minneapolis. But this perception supersedes reality and must be dealt with proactively by the WBBA. It is a serious impediment to both customer traffic and the recruitment of new businesses. Not only is it believed that many Minneapolis - St. Paul residents feel that The West Bank is unsafe, the entrepreneurs interviewed would be concerned about the safety of their employees if they were to open a location in the commercial district. This is an especially acute concern for restaurant and bar owners whose employees leave work late at night in the possession of large amounts of cash.

Lack of quality housing stock in the surrounding community – A major barrier to locating a business on The West Bank is the lack of perceived high quality housing in the immediate vicinity of the business district. Many of the interviewees built their businesses by being a primary provider of a good or service in a residential trade area. The West Bank’s destination based marketing strategy appears to have been born out of necessity, due to the fact that the adjacent community does not offer adequate customer dollars to build long-term financial support.

The WBBA’s current strategy for utilizing Neighborhood Revitalization Program funding to build badly needed housing in the community is an excellent and correctly focused strategic initiative. However, this
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is a long-term, high investment issue that will not be solved quickly or without prolonged advocacy with both government and the regional business community.

Mutually exclusive Somali resident, and university customer segments – The two most prominent developments on The West Bank are the University of Minnesota and Riverside Plaza. These two properties give the interviewees the perception that the customer base for The West Bank is primarily composed of university students and recent Somali immigrants. Entrepreneurs commented that developing a “crossover product hit” would require deep knowledge of both customer segments and acts a significant barrier to investment. One interviewee stated that the interview process was misaligned, suggesting that the governing question should not be “what kind of business opportunity is The West Bank, but instead should be - what kinds of goods and services does the Somali community need?”

Unclear business identity and trade area market size – Many of the entrepreneurs commented that The West Bank does not have a clearly communicated business identity. They do not know who visits The West Bank and what core customer markets the commercial district seeks to serve. One interviewee stated that “The West Bank appears to have two types of customers, a small number of aging regulars that visit the establishments frequently, and people that come to the business district for specific entertainment but otherwise have no repeat customer relationships with individual businesses.”

Even though the interviewees were aware of the many nightlife and entertainment oriented businesses on The West Bank, many did not believe that the area felt like a true nightlife district. Much of this is due to the incoherent physical form of the community, and the types of businesses that are, or are not, located in the district. One interviewee commented that “as a small business entrepreneur with limited access to formal market research data, The West Bank is very difficult to judge as a business opportunity due to the fact that one of the trade area’s highest revenue businesses, the Barnes & Noble at Augsburg College, is not located in the commercial district.” With goods and services providers located on the universities’ campuses absorbing a large amount of the commercial activity in the trade area, prospective entrepreneurs do not have a good sense of the commercial district’s total market activity, and if their respective businesses can increase overall commercial activity or successfully grab existing market share. Without a clear understanding of the marketplace, experienced business people that practice prudent risk management are less likely to locate a business on The West Bank.

Uncoordinated real estate investment and tenant leasing – Many interviewees commented that The West Bank is in dire need of a more coordinated approach to investment & leasing. Some business people stated that “only a significant multi-million dollar investment in the commercial properties on Cedar Avenue, restoring them and installing good tenants will kick-start a solid revitalization of The West Bank.” This attitude shows that management of leasing and investment activity is required in order to further the economic development of the business district. Comprehensive management, even of an informal nature, will signal to the entrepreneurial community that The West Bank has turned a corner in its revitalization.
Evidence of the lack of a clear investment strategy for the district is apparent in the uneven physical form and urban design of Cedar Avenue. One interviewee commented that “Cedar Avenue is a doughnut, there are prominent businesses along the periphery like Town Hall and the Triple Rock Social Club but the middle of the district feels vacant. There is not a mental connection between the many businesses that make up the district. For the average person, walking from Town Hall to the Triple Rock is like walking from Siberia to Mexico.” The uneven scale and form of the district supports the claim that customers only visit entertainment offerings on The West Bank and do not visit The West Bank itself. Another interviewee commented that the district appeared “tired looking”, making business expansion in the area unappealing.

Undemonstrated grassroots entrepreneurialism – “Entrepreneurial spirit needs to be demonstrated by local residents and stakeholders first, before outside entrepreneurs and investors will be interested in locating businesses in any given community” was a general line of responses given in the interviews. This first step of resident entrepreneurial activity is not perceived to have taken place on The West Bank. Many interviewees stated that there is a “lack of ownership” in the community, with many organizations being “not-for-profit in nature that do not create very many jobs and are being led by administrators who live outside the neighborhood with no ownership stake in its financial success.” Many of the entrepreneurs interviewed got their start by opening businesses in their own personal residential communities before branching out into second locations.

Recommendations

Based on the interviews conducted and previous work experience with commercial districts and their entrepreneurs, the Carlson Neighborhood Business Fellows believe that the market position of The West Bank commercial district can be dramatically improved. The implementation of a few simple, programmatic steps can be taken to better position The West Bank as a commercial district of choice for expanding entrepreneurs in the Minneapolis - St. Paul Region. The following recommendations are intended to improve The West Bank’s competitiveness for securing the locations of the best business operators as well as the dollars of individual customers.

Strategic Planning & Advocacy

Create a formal district-wide strategic merchandising plan – A district-wide merchandising plan is very similar to a merchandising plan that would be assembled for the layout of a retail store. Merchandising is the methods, practices and operations used to sustain certain categories of commercial activity. In a retail store this includes where certain products should be located to increase sales, the precise stocking of shelves and the overall distribution of goods in a physical space. The placement of milk in the rear of the grocery store is a famous merchandising tactic. Because milk is purchased frequently and is a primary motivator for a trip to the store, it’s placement in the rear of the store makes a customer pass many other products, with the goal that they will make additional, impulse purchases.

A district-wide merchandising plan will treat The West Bank as one commercial entity. It will provide insight into the best locations for particular business types; prioritize signage and façade improvements; consider how customer’s enter the district, whether by car, bike or public transit; incorporate planning for public art and gateway signage; as well as manage space so that the commercial district as a whole can generate the greatest amount of revenue possible. This plan can then be
used as a guide to prioritize where resources should be allocated such as, 1) what businesses should be granted technical assistance in order to improve their business practices, 2) what types of businesses should be recruited to fill particular spaces, and 3) where in the district will new investment get the greatest total return or “bang for the buck”.

Relying solely on the market to best merchandise The West Bank has failed the business community. This is apparent when one stands at the corner of Cedar and Riverside Avenues. This intersection should have great prominence in the commercial district, as it stands at the heart of the trade area and is the crossroads of commuter routes connecting the universities to the east with downtown Minneapolis to the west. However, the presence of The Associated Bank branch, set back from a large and unnecessary right turn lane, leaves the corner bare of street life and customer traffic. Arguably the district’s best merchandised retailer, Midwest Mountaineering, is largely invisible from nearly all corners of the intersection, despite its location a mere 50 feet away. At a strategic place where customers should be invited deeper into the district to experience and purchase products, no communication is made. A district-wide strategic merchandising plan will act to avoid these missed opportunities through coordinated and thoughtful planning.

Support niche retail that is compatible with the district’s nightlife establishments and university student and faculty tastes – The entrepreneur interview process showed that many leaders in the Minneapolis - St. Paul entrepreneurial community felt that low operating cost businesses should be viable on The West Bank; this includes niche retail and personal service businesses. A niche business services particular customer segments, examples include vintage clothing stores, integrated health and wellness centers, and retailers of culturally and professionally specific media. Developing a strategy for recruiting and supporting these particular business types has multiple advantages for the WBBA including:

**Utilization of affordable spaces and regional accessibility** – A niche retail strategy takes advantage of The West Bank’s market position as the most affordable commercial district near downtown Minneapolis. The district’s location near key transportation infrastructure at the geographic heart of the region supports niche businesses that need to draw customers from the entire regional marketplace.

**Exploit nightlife and university customer crossover** – The recruitment and support of niche retail and personal service businesses would allow for the WBBA to build on student and university faculty tastes, while leveraging the regional visibility provided by its established nightlife destinations. University students and faculty consume a great deal of diverse media and have developed an appetite for many different kinds of products and services. They embody the *Long Tail* trend in consumer marketing described by Chris Anderson, the editor-and-chief of *Wired Magazine*, that states that due to media and telecommunications divergence, people’s tastes are becoming more widely varied and niche products are accounting for a greater amount of share in consumer markets. This trend is apparent in industries as varied as beer, music and air travel. The entrepreneur interviews discovered that consumers of nightlife entertainment are also more likely to purchase niche retail goods. The West Bank can be a leader in grabbing long tail market share due to its geographic proximity to university students and faculty, as well as its current market position as a nightlife destination.
Build 24 hour revenue capacity for the district – With The West Bank known primarily as a place for nightlife, the commercial district should be better managed during morning and afternoon hours in order to fully maximize revenue for the district’s businesses. Acadia Café’s decision to stop serving breakfast in the fall of 2008 is proof that the absence of daytime activity is costing businesses revenue. A better managed commercial district with a greater variety of goods offered during the day would generate greater revenue and return-on-assets for West Bank businesses. The large discrepancy in daytime customer traffic is readily apparent when The West Bank is compared to Dinkytown and Stadium Village, the two other commercial districts located near the University of Minnesota. Daytime customer traffic is on-campus near The West Bank; the commercial district is failing to capture their customer dollars.

Synergies with Real Different – The WBBA’s Real Different marketing campaign and brand identity is evidence that the stakeholders in the WBBA understand that their market competitiveness relies on uniqueness. A niche retail and personal services development and recruitment strategy can easily be extended from this brand building program.

Advocate for the inclusion of University businesses and commercial facilities to be located in the district – A major detriment to the further revitalization of The West Bank is the area’s universities’ and colleges’ willingness to locate the providers of many goods and services targeted toward students on-campus. The long term growth of The West Bank will largely rest on these institutions’ decisions to support The West Bank business community by anchoring the commercial district with services currently located on-campus.

The national best practices leader for utilizing university commercial assets to anchor an adjacent commercial district is the University of Washington in Seattle. Since the 1910s, the University of Washington...
tton has located its university bookstore off-campus in The University District commercial district. The long tenure of the of the bookstore’s location off-campus suggests that the University has repeatedly decided that despite the financial savings that could be incurred by moving the bookstore onto the University’s large, continuous property holdings there is a substantial net benefit derived from locating the bookstore in the adjacent commercial district.

The University of Washington is an institution that is directly comparable to the University of Minnesota. It is a large, urban; research focused public university located at the center of a large regional economy. There is no reason why their best practices cannot be applied to The West Bank. To start, books and classroom materials that are required by students whose departments are located on The West Bank of the University campus could be moved to a West Bank bookstore located off-campus, this includes, Business, Law, Art, Theatre and Social Science schools and departments. A potential West Bank bookstore could be shared by the many different education institutions located on The West Bank.

A move of this nature by The West Bank higher education institutions offers the kind of large investment that many of the interviewees stated is needed in order to kick-start the revitalization of the district. It also provides foot traffic to existing businesses, increased eyes of the street to better prevent crime, and allows for entrepreneurs to better judge the total market size of the trade area. This strategy is being implemented by colleges and universities around the country as they seek to turn neighboring commercial districts into assets that not only provide better products and services to current students but act as a determining factor in the recruitment of new students and faculty.

Find a celebrity investor – The West Bank is a community that has undergone significant physical and social changes in the past forty years - many with a detrimental effect on the neighborhood - due to large scale, top down policy decisions. Remediing the negative effects of these historical events can be of interest to a deep pocketed, celebrity investor.

This concept was introduced to the Neighborhood Business Fellows by one of the entrepreneurs interviewed. She stated that Magic Johnson’s investment in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City is a financing model that could be duplicated on The West Bank. Magic Johnson, the former LA Lakers basketball star, is the founder of Magic Johnson Enterprises, a for-profit real estate development company focused on investing in ethnically diverse, urban communities. He is also the only person to be a Starbucks franchisee. His significant investment in Harlem One Stop, a retail and restaurant development anchored by a movie theatre, was a catalyst for continued investment in that community.

A celebrity investor could take the form of a high profile entertainer, such as a former professional sports star, a Hollywood actor, a well known figure from the business world, or her foundation. Minnesota examples could include Prince, Bob Dylan or Best Buy founder Richard Schulze. Such an individual not only has a lower requirement for return on investment than most financiers, but they would also bring badly needed positive media attention to The West Bank.
Programmatic Actions

Increase the visibility of public safety officers through programming initiatives - Due to the numerous public safety concerns brought up by the interviewees, the WBBA must be seen as innovatively addressing The West Bank’s perceived crime problem. Integrating public safety officers into the overall programming of the district is an excellent strategy.

This is not a novel idea. The most well known means of integrating public safety officers into commercial district programming is the presence of police officers on horseback. This tactic, most notably employed in large nightlife and entertainment districts like the French Quarter in New Orleans, communicates to visitors that public safety officers are an integral part of the experience offered in the district. Creative ideas to increase police visibility need be explored. The City of Chicago has integrated All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) units into local patrols. Since Polaris is a Minnesota based manufacturer of ATVs this program should be implemented in Minnesota and The West Bank could be the first community to adopt it. Police cars that serve The West Bank could be painted special colors or with unique designs that build The West Bank’s identity; or a semi-permanent shanty or shack could be constructed in the commercial district to shelter officers during foot patrol shifts. This shack could be decorated and heated. Or lastly and most simply, police officers could wear special uniforms or hats while working on The West Bank. Since public safety is very important to the efficient functioning of any commercial district, public safety officers should be treated as an integral part of the urban shopping, dining or entertainment experience offered.

Facilitate and lead young Somali and university student entrepreneurship development programming - Entrepreneurship is a culture and a way of life. It needs to be stewarded and cultivated in younger generations. The WBBA should advocate for and partner with organizations to teach and promote entrepreneurship to the local Somali and university student populations. A potential program could see leaders of the WBBA provide mentorship to both teenagers living on The West Bank and students, particularly undergraduates, studying at the local universities so that entrepreneurial culture can be developed locally on The West Bank. Participants in such a program could be encouraged to form new ventures that sell goods and services as vendors at West Bank events or through agreements with West Bank businesses. Financing could be provided by student loans (many students already use student loans to pay for far more than just tuition and essential expenses), the Carlson Microfinance Alliance or from a Foundation partner.

The long-term goal of such a program would be to foster a deep connection among young people already living or studying on The West Bank that ‘The West Bank is their community. Such a connection will tie young entrepreneurs emotionally to The West Bank so that if they decide to open a retail or restaurant businesses in the future, it would increase their likelihood to do so on The West Bank.

The recommendations that have come out of A Place to See are meant not only to stimulate creative and innovative thinking as to how the WBBA can best leverage their existing assets to improve the business conditions in their trade area, but they are also intended to be the seeds of further engagement between the University of Minnesota and the community located on its western edge. It is strongly believed by the Neighborhood Business Fellows that the insights of the Minneapolis - St. Paul Region’s entrepreneurial community are extremely valuable not only for their creativity and resourcefulness, but above all for their optimism.
Interviewees

Ini Iyamba
Ivy & Ivy Men’s + Design (now closed)

Harvey McLain
Turtlebread Company

Steven Miller
Chatterbox Pub

Jon Oulman
Club 331, Club 501, Jon Oulman Salon & Gallery

Phil Roberts
Parasole Restaurant Holdings - Burger Jones, Chino Latino, Good Earth, Il Gatto, Manny’s, Muffuletta, Pittsburgh Blue, Salut Bar Americain

Stephanie Schimp
Blue Plate Restaurant Group - Edina Grill, Groveland Tap, Highland Grill, Longfellow Grill, Three Squares Restaurant

Jim Welna
Welna Hardware & Welna Hardware II

Participating Neighborhood Business Fellows

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Program Director & Lead Author, MBA Class of 2010

Amelia Brunelle
MBA Class of 2011

Raj Chavali
MBA Class of 2011

Anna Estlund
MBA Class of 2011

Kristina Gorder
MBA Class of 2011

Anne Huart
MBA Class of 2011

Phillip Kim
MBA Class of 2010

Keith Lindgren
MBA Class of 2011

Stephen Meinz
MBA Class of 2010

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