

# Community Engagement for the Historic Eidem Homestead Master Plan



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# Community Engagement for Historic Eidem Homestead Master Plan

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## **Problem and Community Context**

As of the 2010 census, the racial makeup of Brooklyn Park had decreased to 47 percent white from 72 percent white in 2000. Additionally, as of American Community Survey 2014 estimates, 23 percent of Brooklyn Park residents are foreign-born of whom 61.5 percent are naturalized United States citizens. The number of lower income families has risen in the city, giving residents less disposable income to spend on entertainment and education. Furthermore, Brooklyn Park's urban form makes it quite difficult for low income people to travel without transit, although transit serves the city somewhat poorly. All of this makes it difficult for the Recreation and Parks Department to attract residents, especially the foreign-born, people of color, and the poor to visit the Eidem Homestead.

Eidem Homestead is a ten-acre farm that aims to show visitors what farming life was back in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, when Brooklyn Park was one of the nation's most productive areas for potato farming. Eidem Homestead hosts several events each year to celebrate its Norwegian heritage which includes a "Norwegian Christmas" festival as well as movie nights and concerts. It also hosts weekly events in the summer where children can listen to storytellers or help out on the farm. Occasionally, young school children come on field trips.

## **Goals**

Our overarching goal is two-pronged: improve and create new programming to make visitors feel like their trips to Eidem Homestead are enjoyable and worthwhile, and recommend new and effective engagement activities for farm volunteers and the city to attract a diverse group of visitors.

These goals will be accomplished through actions to:

- Help the city of Brooklyn Park "know its audience" at the Homestead.
- Help Brooklyn Park engage the city's diverse youth through school events, families looking for "edutainment", and people of color and new immigrants to the United States.
- Engage diverse families for input to the upcoming Eidem Homestead master planning process.
- Increase visitation to the Homestead by 50% after implementation of the master plan.

- Expand Homestead revenue to support new and existing programming.

## **Issue**

A long-term master plan, historic designation, and improved community engagement is needed to ensure the Homestead is celebrating and preserving Brooklyn Park's history, while also reflecting diverse demographics and interests. With a changing and diversifying community, it is essential that community engagement is incorporated into the master planning process. Challenges of designing an engagement process include reaching the wide spectrum of diverse stakeholders, while also ensuring that current Homestead volunteers and patrons remain engaged as well.

Furthermore, the following recommendations are made with the understanding that both the Homestead and Recreation and Parks Department have limited resources to perform this work. The idea behind successful stakeholder identification and community-based design processes is to build relationships among residents and discover solutions that work for everyone, increase visitation, and create sustainable sources of financing. The Homestead, Recreation and Parks Department, and Community Engagement Staff can deploy monetary resources and outreach efforts strategically, and should expect some unexpected results.

## **Approach and Methodology**

We have noticed that other groups in the past have neglected stakeholder analysis as a critical feature of engagement work. While past attempts have noted the importance of community engagement, they did not mention *who* in the community is to be engaged. Stakeholder identification can answer this question. We propose that the city carry out an extensive stakeholder identification campaign, before master planning engagement begins.

We also think Eidem Homestead should improve and create new programming to make visitors feel like their trips to Eidem Homestead are enjoyable and worthwhile. This will attract new visitors and help the Homestead remain relevant for existing visitors.

### **Prong 1: Programming**

Eidem Homestead hosts a number of well-attended annual events like Norwegian Christmas and Stories on the Porch. People enjoy learning about how to cook on a wood-fired oven, press apple juice and cider, sharpen tools, and paint in the Norwegian tradition of rosemåling. These programs not only offer fun and entertainment for the whole family, but also educate visitors while maintaining the historical integrity of the site.

These activities may be used to collect feedback and survey data in new, fun, and creative ways. One example of an interpretive activity could be called “Tell Your Story” where visitors write and post their own stories of growing up, the foods they ate, how they were prepared, and where the ingredients come from. These kinds of low-cost documenting and listening sessions can transform a space from a passive form of edutainment consumption into an active community-based production of history, reflecting Brooklyn Park’s diversity.

One of the first physical improvements the Eidem Homestead can make is to incorporate wayfinding signs and to improve visibility from the street and bike trail. Currently, there are only two small signs to tell visitors where the farm is located--one at the corner of Noble Parkway and 101st Street and another at the parking lot entrance--while the farmhouse and barn remain mostly obstructed from view by trees. Because of its current design, most people enter and exit the farm by car. Without a comprehensive redesign of the Homestead’s entrance building or creating multiple points for entering and exiting the site, the farm should focus primarily on the installation of

multi-lingual signage on-site and larger, more visible signage that increases visibility from Noble Ave and 101st Ave.

The Homestead can partner with Brooklyn Park's Operation and Maintenance Department to capitalize on the potential of the community garden plots. Improving the presence and accessibility of the community gardens and teaching visitors, through classes on how to maintain their own gardens and the history of potato farming in Brooklyn Park, could be useful and could generate some extra revenue. Furthermore, seminars that emphasize the agricultural backgrounds of immigrants could bring in and support new communities.

The Homestead is uniquely positioned to create new, instructive programming as well. Given the needs for funding and demand for increased capacity to do much of this stakeholder identification work, new programming could help compensate the tireless work of staff and volunteers. Once developed, it could also help establish sustainable funding streams that reduce the Homestead's reliance upon weather-dependent gate receipts.

Some of the most well-received educational programs at the Homestead include cooking, cider pressing, whittling, traditional wood painting (rosemåling) and gardening. Currently, visitors consume these programs passively, by being told what volunteers or practitioners do and asking questions. Instead, the Homestead could begin to offer classes where paying visitors learn how to use the wood-fired stove to cook lefse or other traditional Norwegian dishes, press their own cider, or make their own butter and cheese. At the end of these visits, visitors would receive a book of recipes and, of course, food and drinks they have made.

This would create a system where current volunteers--mostly older, retired folks--can earn extra income, pass along their skills and knowledge to others, secure additional funding for staffing and infrastructure, and possibly generate a sustainable stream of volunteers who carry these traditions into the future.

Finally, the current programming, improved programming and visibility, and the creation of new programs that generate extra income and support the efforts of volunteers must include some form of reflection. This could take the form of on-site “Tell Your Story” activities to more traditional survey collection. People willing to pay for courses may be a good place to start to identify potential interviewees, key stakeholders, or organizers in their neighborhoods. However, the Homestead must be strategic in identifying people who reflect Brooklyn Park’s diverse population for further follow-up research.

## **Prong 2: Stakeholder Identification**

By asking “How can Eidem Homestead’s five unused acres work for the community?” the city may position itself as an entity geared toward empowering many voices and people who have been previously excluded from prior planning processes. We believe that this work begins with the people and groups that already frequent the Homestead.

Kids, parents, schools, and youth organizations represent the key stakeholder groups that already reliably patronize the Homestead. Maximizing their involvement is the first step to successful stakeholder identification, and requires the least amount of new resources and staff hours. Traveling exhibits such as the cider press present opportunities to “flip” the engagement process and bring the farm to stakeholders. Additionally, an opportunity exists for Brooklyn Park’s “Recreation on the Go” vehicle to include farm related activities such as whittled crafts and petting zoos with Homestead animals.

The Homestead could partner with a number of youth organizations. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and National Honor Society members are always looking for opportunities to earn badges and volunteer hours. The Homestead could partner with these organizations and discover opportunities on the farm for young people to earn them. Other groups that may be invited to participate in the



farm and provide feedback are choirs, who regularly sing at Norwegian Christmas, and other kinds of musical groups. These groups provide access to stakeholders such as the parents of the youth and other community events and organizations with which youth organizations collaborate.

Athlos Leadership Academy, across the street from the Homestead, has demographics that reflect Brooklyn Park's population. It provides a source of students who can get involved in extracurricular school activities, such as through school groups like a choir that goes caroling at Norwegian Christmas. Brooklyn Park can further capitalize on stakeholders involved in school by coordinating with PTOs. Presentations at PTO meetings could help introduce the Eidem Homestead master planning process and current programming. Enthusiastic and engaged parents and teachers could be recruited for volunteering or outreach for the Homestead.

We have noticed that there are multiple efforts by Eidem Homestead and Brooklyn Park on social media platforms to advertise events such as Norwegian Christmas. We recommend that social media efforts be consolidated to one Facebook page. We also recommend that this Facebook page be kept very active for as much outreach as possible. A good benchmark for posting on the Homestead's page is one post per week at minimum. Beyond that, it's helpful to reply and engage promptly with users that post questions on the page.

These outreach and stakeholder identification techniques can be used to take convenience samples, in which parents, students, or community member knowledge is used to generate follow-up lists of other possible stakeholders, outreach methods, and possible sites that would be useful for hosting engagement processes.

Social media polls provide stakeholders an easy informal channel to express their opinions. Polls can serve to help Brooklyn Park evaluate visitor experiences by asking questions such as, "What was your favorite memory from Norwegian Christmas this year?" Furthermore, polls can help guide

Brooklyn Park as they seek to improve visitor experiences, by asking questions such as, “What would you most like to see at Norwegian Christmas next year?”

## **Engagement Process**

After identifying key stakeholders and locations suitable for hosting outreach activities and listening sessions, the Community Engagement Division, Recreation and Parks Department, and Eidem Farm should begin their community engagement process. Below is a step-by-step guide for what the engagement process could look like. However, it should remain malleable depending on the interests of key stakeholder and community needs.

### **Step 1:**

- a) Invite Key Stakeholders; Always reflect on the guiding question from above: “What can the five unused acres at Eidem Homestead do for you?”
- b) Scattered Site Informal Meetings at sites that have been identified based on outreach and interview findings (e.g. trust building with who is there; accept non-closure; discover more community members/sites who aren’t there but should be).
- c) Scattered Site Informal Surveys (e.g. collect feedback on meetings; use outreach to collect data; advertise in certain places, not others).
- d) Synthesize findings from meetings/trust building; reflect.
- e) Repeat as Needed. This process is designed to be iterative.

### **Step 2:**

- f) Host open design charrettes around the community at sites identified in step 1 and through outreach activities (County Fair and Tater Daze Festival could be great places to do this)
  - (1) Identify what may be done with remaining 5 acres
  - (2) Use the 5-acre plot to build community trust, relationships
- g) Synthesize information. Identify favored features from design charrettes that will be incorporated into Step 3.
- h) Repeat as Needed. This is an iterative process.

### **Step 3:**

- i) Incorporate feedback from Step 2 into an Interactive Visioning Session
- j) Digitize the common features from Step 2 into multiple proposals, using some or all of the following software:
  - (1) ArcMap
  - (2) inDesign
  - (3) Other software the city or other design team has that can show possible futures for the site
- k) Take the interactive vision to scattered sites

- (1) Get feedback by dot voting: The design team (having compiled common features and designed visions for the Homestead master plan) will conduct dot voting on the most favored features.
- (2) Synthesize and choose top features. Use dot voting results to select the most favored features.
- l) Centralized, final ranking vote at city hall/centralized location
  - (1) By this time, enough trust should have been built that people will come to a centralized location once. This meeting will be run and/or staffed by the design team, community engagement team, Eidem Homestead officials, volunteers, and the Department of Recreation and Parks.
  - (2) display scattered-site feedback in hierarchical order by most common to least common
  - (3) Determine community wants/desires for space (Remember the question: “What can the five unused acres at Eidem Homestead do for you?”)

#### **Step 4:**

- m) Accept that Step 3 may take 5 years: Ground was broken on Frogtown Park and Farm after 5 years of community-based listening sessions, outreach activities, and participatory design workshops
- n) Incorporate the results from the visioning sessions into writing the Draft Plan for the remaining 5 acres.
- o) Include the process in the 2017 Parks Plan and City Comp Plan

#### **Step 5:**

- p) The final plan will need to be approved and funded by the city council
- q) Assist community members with information about letter-writing and best practices for meeting with and persuading local, regional, and state officials
- r) Encourage attendance at final city council meeting
- s) Use built coalition of community members to lobby state and local politicians for funding for the master plan.
- t) Partner with organizations who can help with gap financing (Historical societies; Urban Land Institute; Trust for Public Land; etc)

## **Conclusion**

Implementing a two-pronged approach that combines engagement and programming will best serve to help Eidem farm fulfill its potential and preserve its history. Programming and stakeholder identification will inform an engagement process, guided by the question of “What can the five, unused acres at Eidem Homestead do for you?” The feedback from this engagement process will ultimately be incorporated into the draft plan and then into the city’s comprehensive plan.

## Goals and Actions

Our overarching goal is two-pronged: (1) **recommend new and effective engagement activities for Homestead volunteers and the city to attract a diverse group of visitors** and (2) **improve and create new programming to make visitors feel like their trips to Eidem Homestead are enjoyable and worthwhile**. These goals will be accomplished through actions to:

- Help the city of Brooklyn Park “know its audience” at the Homestead and keep programming relevant.
- Engage diverse groups to collect input for the upcoming master planning process.
- Help the city engage its diverse youth through school events, families looking for “edutainment”, people of color, and new immigrants to the United States.
- Increase visitation to the Homestead by 50 percent.
- Expand Homestead revenue to support new and existing programming.

### Programming

- Sustain**
  - Current programming geared towards children
  - Historical integrity of the site
- Improve**
  - Signage and visibility
  - Coordination with other city departments
    - Marketing and social media advertising
    - Community gardening program

### Create

- Instructional courses
  - Cooking, cheese-making, butter churning
  - Cider-making
  - Whittling
- Animal husbandry
  - Wood painting (Rosemaling)
  - Gardening
- Surveys to collect feedback

### Stakeholder Identification

- Kids, Parents, Schools, Youth Organizations
- Expansion of traveling exhibits in schools
  - Animals
  - Trunk of homestead items
  - Apple juice press

- Scouting groups and student volunteer organizations
- Boy and Girl Scout badge work
  - National Honor Societies mandatory volunteer hours

### Outreach

- Parent-Teacher organizations
- Athlos Leadership Academy
- Community events in or near Brooklyn Park
  - Tater Daze
  - Hennepin County Fair

### Interview

- Use outreach activities to generate follow-up information
- Exit surveys
- Social media polls

## Engagement Process

Key stakeholders identified during the Stakeholder Identification process should be invited to informal surveys and meetings to gain input on master planning process. The World Cafe engagement strategy of multiple rotating small group discussion in a casual environment would be best for this step. Stakeholders wants and needs should be synthesized for better understanding.

Open design charrettes allow input to master plan on a variety of topics, including the physical space, programming, funding needs, and other considerations. An open design charrette is a hands-on, creative exercise for re-imagining a space.

Feedback from design charrette, meetings, and surveys should be incorporated into the “interactive visioning” of the site with a visual representation of multiple suggestions. In a public meeting, meeting organizers can use dot voting to determine what design features are most favored by stakeholders. The winning design goes into the draft plan.

Draft plan will be incorporated into the city’s comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plan is approved and funded by the city council.

# Improving Eidem Homestead’s Future

