

Community Needs Assessment Purpose and Outreach Methods

Each year the City of Duluth receives roughly \$3 million in community development funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide decent housing, a suitable living environment, and opportunities to expand economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income persons. Annual funding sources include Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnership Program, and Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG). To receive these funds, HUD requires the City to create a Consolidated Plan that lays out how the City of Duluth and its partners will use an expected \$15 million in HUD funds over the next five years to meet community needs. Through the consolidated planning process, the City uses public feedback and data to assess community needs and plan how to meet those needs.

As part of the 2025-2029 Consolidated Planning process community outreach, the City Planning & Development Division staff have used multiple outreach strategies to engage community members and the organizations that serve our community. A Community Needs survey was available for about 3 weeks from May 10 to May 31, 2024. The survey was available online and City staff tabled at community events with the survey. Division staff conducted one-on-one interviews, both in-person and over email, with nonprofit and service providers who work on issues of healthcare, housing, homelessness, education, and other community issues. The Community Development Committee held a Public Hearing on June 25, 2024 to hear about community needs.

Key Needs From All Outreach Methods

- A competitive housing market, including a limited availability of affordable housing units, is pushing people with moderate and lower incomes into lower quality housing and riskier home purchases. Many renters and potential homebuyers feel they are forced to choose unhealthy and unsafe housing because they can't find affordable alternatives. Potential homebuyers reported having to offer over asking prices and sometimes waive inspections in order to make competitive bids.
- A lack of affordable childcare options, including outside typical business hours of 8am-4pm, is preventing community members from getting and maintaining employment.
- There are not enough landlords who accept Section 8 housing vouchers, resulting in very limited housing choices for renters with low incomes. Some survey respondents reported that once they mentioned their housing voucher, they had difficulty finding property managers who would even talk to them about rental units.

Community Needs Survey

Planning & Development Division staff emailed information about the survey, and a printable flyer with the link and QR code to the survey, to community partners asking them to share the survey on social media. The City shared the survey on its Facebook page. City partners such as the library and CareerForce were asked to display the information about the survey near computers that members of the public have access to at their locations.

City staff tabled at three events held by various community entities. The Lincoln Park Farmer's Market Kick-Off Party was held at the Harrison Community Center in Lincoln Park on May 16th from 3-6 pm. The weather was gray and a chill filled the air but the market goers still had energy to partake in a survey.

Many chose to take a flyer with a QR code that would lead them to the survey at their convenience, and several people completed the paper version of the survey.

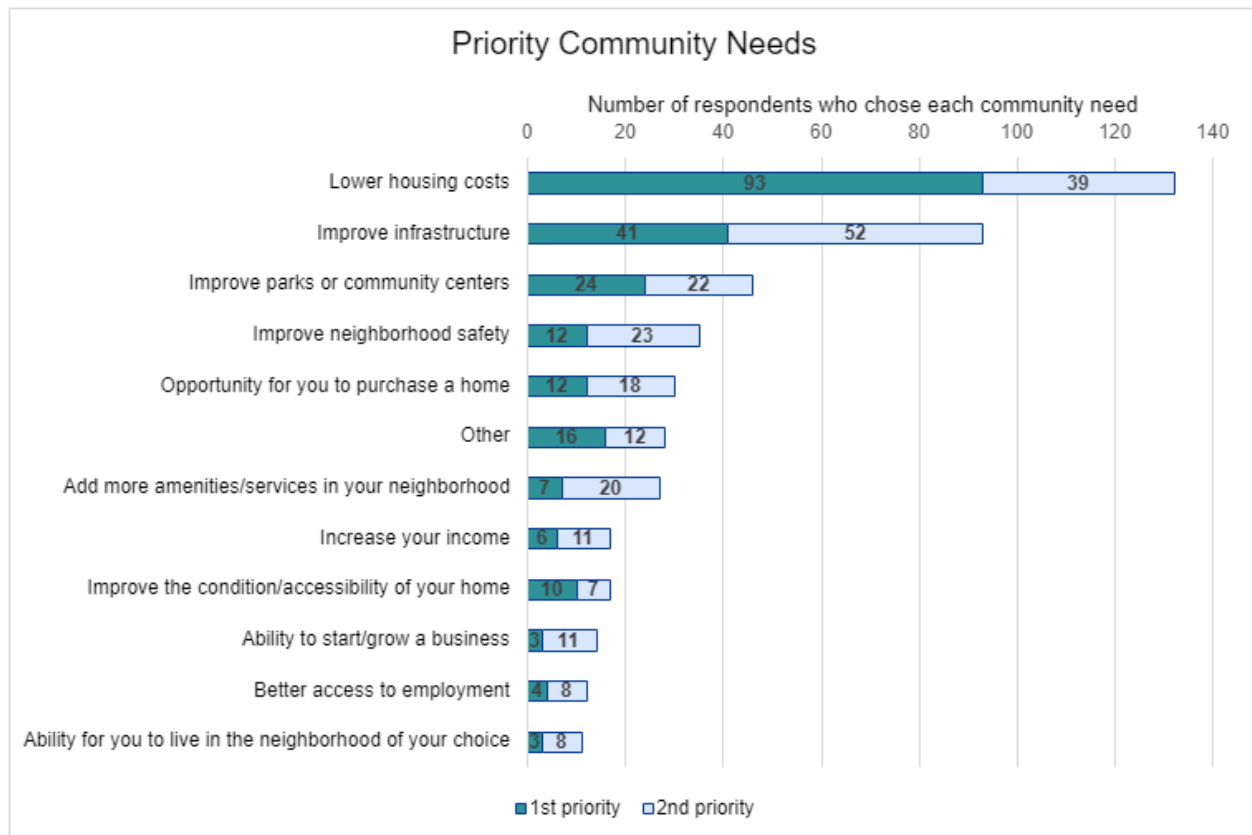
Union Gospel Mission invited Planning staff to attend the lunch hour on May 29th from 12-1:00 pm. The guests there expressed a lot of interest in the survey. Many took flyers with the QR code and several people completed the paper version of the survey. City staff heard directly from some of the population in Duluth that experiences financial hardship, sometimes to the point of houseless-ness. Our final outreach event was Freedom Fridays at the Family Freedom Center in Central Hillside on May 31st, from 4-6:00 pm. This particular Freedom Friday happened to have primarily children in attendance. The kids did not disappoint however, because they had a lot of enthusiasm for filling out the paper surveys, and some took flyers home for their families.

Neighborhood	% of Respondents
East Hillside	14%
Lincoln Park	14%
Bayview Heights	0.5%
Central Hillside	12%
Chester Park/UMD	5%
Cody	1%
Congdon Park	1%
Denfeld	4%
Downtown/Canal Park	4%
Duluth Heights	2%
Endion	2%
Fairmount	1%
Gary-New Duluth	2%
Hunters Park	1%
I live in Duluth but I'm not sure which neighborhood I live in	2%
I live in Duluth but my neighborhood isn't listed	2%
I live outside Duluth	4%
Kenwood	2%
Lakeside/Lester Park	13%
Morgan Park	0.5%
Morley Hieghts/Parkview	2%
North Shore	1%
Norton Park	0.5%
Oneota	0.3%
Park Point	1%
Piedmont Heights	1%
Riverside	1%
Smithville	0.2%

The Community Needs Assessment survey received 231 responses. The survey asked for four demographic identifiers: neighborhood, gender, age, and race. About 53% of respondents live in neighborhoods that include CDBG eligible low-to-moderate income census tracts. About 81% of the respondents identified their race as white, which is about 7% lower than the total white population in Duluth. About 19% of survey respondents identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), which is about 7% higher than the BIPOC population in Duluth, according to the most recent U.S. Census. The survey also received the majority of responses from people who identify as female, at 72%. Four percent of survey respondents identify as nonbinary, and 24% of survey respondents identify as male. The age dispersal of respondents was 24% of respondents were ages 18-34, 50% were ages 35-54, 14% were ages 55-64, and 11% were 65+. Two percent of responses were from people age 17 or under.

Spirit Valley	2%	
Woodland	4%	
Qualified Census Tract	53%	
Race	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Asian	2	1%
Black	5	3%
Mixed Race	21	11%
Native American/Indigenous	8	4%
White	161	81%
Total	198	100%

Survey respondents were asked to choose a first and second-priority community need. When first and second choices are totaled, the overwhelming top choice is “lower housing costs.” The second and third priorities are “improve infrastructure” and “improve parks or community centers.” Many survey respondents also chose “improve neighborhood safety” as a top priority.



Respondents were then asked to answer a follow-up question about their top priorities. Most of the 132 respondents who chose lower housing costs reported that rent payments are too high (86%). Half of

these respondents (51%) reported utility payments are too high and nearly half (48%) reported that mortgage payments are too high. Several respondents added that property taxes are too high. Ninety-three respondents chose “improve infrastructure” as a top priority. Responses to the follow-up question has minimal differences. The options to “improve streets”, “add/improve pedestrian safety and accessibility”, and “improve sidewalks” were within 2 percentage points of one another at a response rate of 68%, 67%, and 66% respectively. The 20% of respondents who chose “other” identified

“Anything that can be done to make it easier to travel without a car!”

multi-modal transportation, listing pedestrian, bicycle, and bus infrastructure as a priority at 11%. As one respondent put it, “Anything that can be done to make it easier to travel without a car!” Also of note is the 2% of “other” responses that identify water and sewer infrastructure, including lead pipe mediation, as a priority.

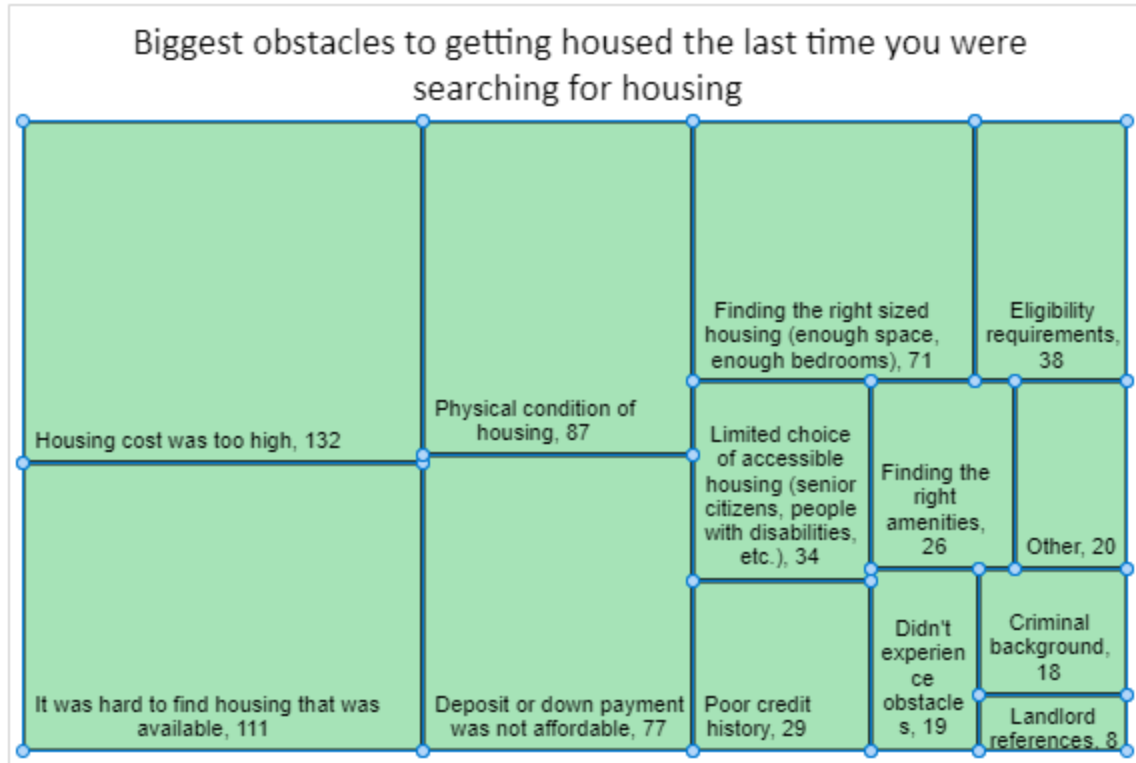
The third-highest ranked priority, “improve parks or community centers”, received a total of 47 responses. The follow-up question revealed “improvements to playground facilities” and “community center improvements” are of nearly equal concern at rates of 57% and 55% respectively. Following closely is the preference to “improve access for people of all abilities, at 40%. Thirty-two percent of respondents identified “other” as a priority, with major themes ranging from the need for more restrooms, garbage receptacles and sharps containers, to tree maintenance and invasive species mediation with native plantings.

“Supply was so limited, you were bidding against 10s of other people on every home. Had to waive common sense things like inspections. Competing against cash offers.”

Survey respondents shared many insights about the obstacles they experienced looking for housing. Overall respondents reported struggling to find available housing at all, and the housing they could find was frequently too expensive or not in good condition. Some respondents reported having to agree to risky deals, and having to settle for unhealthy or unaffordable housing because of a such competitive housing market. Some respondents reported that their needs have changed since purchasing a home and that they are stuck in housing they can’t age in or housing their family has outgrown because they can’t find affordable housing that meets their new needs.

Many renters with housing vouchers reported not being able to find enough landlords who will accept Section 8 vouchers and that they often had to settle for unhealthy, run-down housing. Some renters struggled with very high move-in costs, up to three times the monthly rent amount. Families, particularly single parents with only one household income, expressed difficulty being able to afford enough bedrooms for the size of their family. One respondent wrote, “Competition with college students renting single family homes by the bedroom. I’m a single mom and have to put 3 kids in a two bedroom because that’s all I can afford.”

“Getting ignored by landlords when looking for section 8 rentals. Why are landlords so hesitant in allowing section 8?”



Consultation with Community Partners

Planning staff also consulted with community organizations and partners to identify needs, issues, and priorities that should be reflected in the Consolidated Plan. The top three identified existing needs include:

- Affordable housing
- Childcare
- Rehabilitation and repairs to existing housing stock

Every agency that responded to the questionnaire mentioned the dire need for affordable housing at least once, if not a few times. Making matters worse, even when affordable housing is available for rent, it is in too poor of condition for Section 8 voucher holders to use their federal funding for subsidized housing. The more affordable rental properties in Duluth tend to be in poor condition due to their old age and the increasing cost of labor and materials for making repairs. Affordable childcare, including outside typical business hours of 8am-4pm, has been identified by area agencies as a necessity for acquiring and maintaining employment. Public transportation was also mentioned several times, for improving the rate of employment for their clients.

Over the next five-years, the agencies intend to work toward:

- Affordable housing, including in higher-income neighborhoods
- Continuing to provide the basics, such as food, clothing and shelter
- Assisting clients in navigating employment and available social services
- Down-payment assistance for homeownership and BIPOC homeownership
- Providing or helping to supplement childcare

During these in-person interviews, agencies would often mention the right of individuals to live in their preferred neighborhood. They observe the current housing market in Duluth not offering enough affordable options, or housing that accepts Section 8 vouchers, in neighborhoods with higher average household incomes. Clients have noticed this as well, as they have struggled to find housing in neighborhoods that feel safer to them. One respondent, when asked if they are living in their preferred neighborhood said, “No, I have section 8 so I am limited on where I can live... I have witnessed more violence here in this public and section 8 housing than I have in my entire 30 years. My heart aches for the conditions and locations that families have to live in because they are low income. You can only expect people to be as healthy as the people they are surrounded by.”

Planning Division staff will continue to consult the area agencies throughout the Consolidated Plan process.

Public Hearing

Approximately 20 people attended the Community Needs Public Hearing on June 25, 2024. In small groups, attendees participated in a funding activity. Each group was provided with 20 cards valuing \$50,000 each, for a total of \$1 million. In their groups, they decided how to allocate that funding among about 30 different eligible funding activities. The highest funded programs by all the groups combined were 1) multi-family new construction, 2) single-family new construction, and tied for 3) multi-family rehab and childcare.

The activity limited funding public service programs because of HUD's 15% cap on public service spending. The highest funded public service programs by all the groups combined were 1) childcare, tied for 2) mental health and housing for people with needs, and 3) housing for single parents with children.

After their initial funding decisions, the groups were told that the funding had been reduced and they needed to remove \$150,000. The categories that were most frequently cut or removed were sidewalks, infrastructure improvements, and multimodal transportation improvements. Participants commented that these were important community needs, but that other entities or funding sources would be more appropriate to address these needs (for example: the Duluth Transit Authority, and funding specifically for transportation, infrastructure, and street maintenance).