

The North Omaha Trail Project Design Guide

March 2021

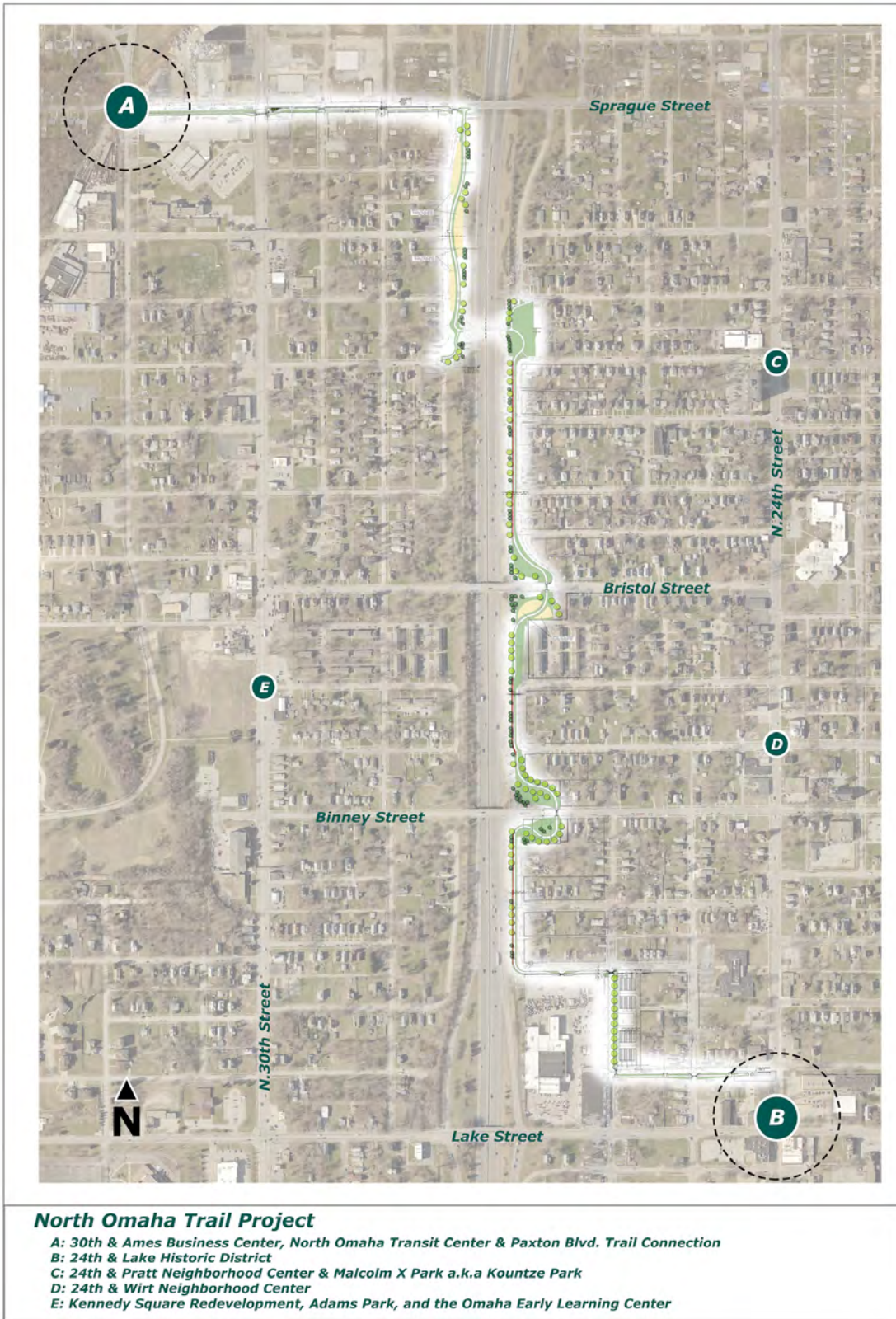


North Omaha Trail artwork by Gerard Pefung

Mission Statement

“Everytime a building is torn down, once it is gone no one ever asks why or what was there [...] Because every day the wonderful things, contributions, and creativity of our people is being erased, eroded, and diluted. [...] So, what we are trying to do is to open up space to say we were here and this is what we did, this is how we contributed”

- Celeste Butler



Summary

The North Omaha Trail project is a valuable investment in North Omaha's public health infrastructure through the creation of a cultural bike and walking trail that will tie in to the Paxton Boulevard Trail and connect several of North Omaha's community anchors, including the North Omaha transit station at 30th & Ames, the 24th & Lake Historic District, and eventually North Downtown & the Riverfront.

Background & Benefits

North Omaha is a community that has been subject to systemic disinvestment and decline for decades. This disinvestment is still evident today and includes a lack of investment in public health infrastructure, including trails, parks, and outdoor amenities. The development and activation of the North Omaha Trail represents the kind of investment that is needed in this community.

Neighborhoods where children can safely walk or bike to a park, school, or to a neighbor's home are generally also good places to live. Moreover, trails can safely connect people to the places they want to be, economically benefiting local businesses near these routes. Communities in North Omaha know this, so it should be no surprise that this trail has been a community vision for years. The proposed route builds upon years of local, regional and national planning efforts, including: [the North Omaha Development Project](#), [the Village Revitalization Plan](#), and the recent [Forever North Strategy](#). The route also has the potential to serve as a component of the nationally designated US Bicycle Route System and the Historic California Trail system. Moreover, this project will put Omaha in good company, as the North Omaha Trail project follows the examples set by other successful urban trails like the Atlanta's Beltline Trail, New Orleans' Lafitte Greenway, Detroit's Dequindre Cut, and Minneapolis' Midtown Greenway.

Many people realize exercise is important for maintaining good health in all stages of life; however, many do not regularly exercise. Providing convenient access to places for physical activity, such as trails, increases the level of physical activity in a community. In addition to helping control weight, physical activity helps prevent heart disease, helps control cholesterol levels and diabetes, lowers the risk of certain cancers and helps reduce anxiety and depression. Moreover, people have a right to move about their daily life and access the resources and amenities a city or neighborhood has to offer without being subject to harm.



Left: Martin Luther King Jr. Middle: bike tour in North Omaha. Right: Muhammad Ali

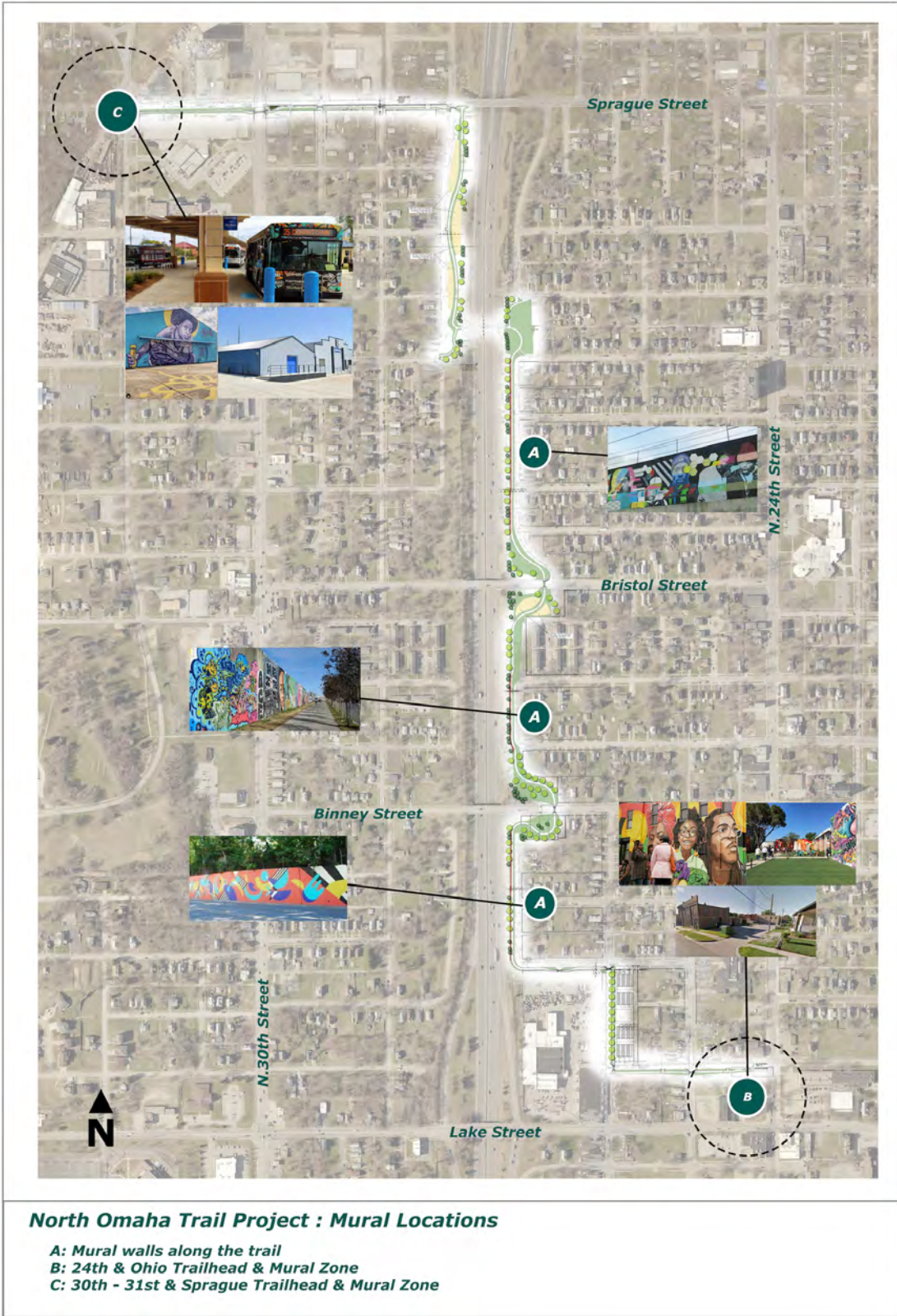
All of the potential benefits of trails are amplified when historic and cultural resources are embedded along a trail's route. North Omaha is filled with creative talent and cultural resources like [NOISE](#), [Culxr House](#), the [Union for Contemporary Art](#), and the [Great Plains Black History Museum](#) to name a few. The North Omaha Trail project will serve as a canvas for local artists and creatives by creating multiple opportunities to incorporate creative projects throughout the route. This trail will be afro-futuristic and further defined by the art, history, and culture of the communities along the route.

The purpose of this document is to distill the community input gathered over the course of the 5 community design sessions, held virtually in January and February 2021, into a guide to be used as the North Omaha Trail comes to life later this year. The feedback provided at these sessions was a starting point for the establishment of ongoing advisory groups that will help oversee the phased implementation of the North Omaha Trail project and related projects in the area over time.

Advisory groups for ongoing community guidance:

1. Art, History & Culture
2. Landscape, Community & Placemaking

The following pages detail anchor projects for each activation area, other projects identified and championed at the design sessions, along with key themes that were identified via the sessions and the design survey.



1. Art, History & Culture



Mural at 2417 Burdette Street.

North Omaha is the epicenter of Black history in the state of Nebraska. The North Omaha Trail project will open up space for the community to recognize the people, places, and events which shaped Black culture locally and honor the contributions North Omaha has, and continues to make nationally and internationally. Moreover, by creating multiple opportunities to integrate artistic projects along the route, the North Omaha Trail project will serve as a canvas for local Black and Indigenous artists and creatives. The North Omaha Trail will be a cultural trail that's content is framed and guided by the communities along its route.

Advisory Group

The Art, History & Culture advisory group will guide culturally oriented projects to ensure that artistic and historical projects on and around the trail represent the communities along the trail authentically and are not offensive. This group will also act as a conduit for local artists and future culturally oriented projects related to the trail. Additionally, this group may help determine the trail's identity by providing input regarding branding, logo's, etc. People who participated in the community design sessions and people from the community who support the North Omaha Trail project are welcome to participate in the advisory group.

The following guidance for artistically and historically oriented projects outlines anchor projects that should be initiated along with the trail’s construction and provides a reference point for the Art, History & Culture advisory group going forward.

Art Guidance

Anchor Project: Mural Wall & Mural Districts

A key artistic component of the North Omaha Trail project will be more than 6,000 square feet of mural wall space along the trail divided into three, 2-4 foot mural wall segments that will run along 27th Street between Pratt to Corby Streets. Community feedback overwhelmingly agreed that mural opportunities should prioritize black and indigenous artists from Omaha, particularly those from North Omaha. However, some space may be reserved for a revolving, free wall section that can accommodate artwork from local, national, and international artists.

In addition to oversight by the Art, History & Culture advisory group, key organizations that could help select initial mural artists from the community, facilitate mural installations, and solicit a call for artists if necessary include the following partner organizations: Culxr House, The Union for Contemporary Art, and the Great Plains Black History Museum.

In addition to the mural wall, the areas around the initial trailheads (31st-30th & Sprague Street and 24th & Ohio Street) have been identified as focus areas for additional murals or art installations.



Atlanta Beltline mural example

Other Art-Related Project Ideas

The following ideas were also discussed during the community design sessions, and/or appeared on the online survey:

- Poetry stamped or written on the trail itself
- Printable murals to showcase photographic works
- Art as wayfinding and creating a sense of direction
- Sculptural and interactive art opportunities
- Painted benches and trash cans
- Artwork painted on or embedded in the trail itself
- Creative/artistic mile markers
- Section specifically for history
- Tree installations
- Community event(s) during mural installation process
- QR codes used to link to more information about the art

Art Themes & Reference Points

The following is a list of artistic themes, directions, and reference points that were discussed during the community design sessions that can help guide artistic projects along the trail:

- Afro-futurism
- Local Black artists first
- Positive local Black History
- Highway 75 & the 1100+ displaced families
- Multiple mediums (poetry, textile, etc.)
- Unconventional
- Work that generates tourism
- Highlight Omaha's contribution to national Black history
- Capture recent history of new immigrants
- Inspiration
- Indigenous representation
- Beautification
- Art that creates photo-op opportunities
- Express Vibrancy
- Art with Uplifting qualities
- Evoke emotions with color
- Technology and STEM
- Malcolm X
- People - (*initial list of historic people in the appendix*)
- Black & Indigenous solidarity
- Music & Jazz
- Church and religious history
- Black Panthers
- Creative freedom
- Support new muralists with more experienced muralists
- Involvement by local schools, especially North High
- Input and involvement by residents during mural selection process

History & Culture Guidance

Anchor Project: Street Renaming

North Omaha has a rich history. It is no surprise that community members expressed the importance of maintaining the historical integrity of the areas along the trail while recognizing the many notable people, places, and events that have shaped and continue to shape the community.

One immediate way historic value could be intertwined into this project early is by pursuing the historic street naming of streets that intersect with the trail, starting with streets that also connect 24th & 30th Streets (across the highway), like Binney, Bristol, and Sprague Streets. In addition to oversight by the Art, History & Culture advisory group, the Great Plains Black History Museum could play a central role in this effort, potentially in conjunction with their planned exhibition highlighting streets in Omaha which currently honor historical figures.



Other History & Culture-related Project Ideas

The following ideas were also discussed during the community design sessions, and/or appeared on the online survey:

- Record oral histories from the community, especially elders - capturing history before it's gone - use QR codes placed along the trail to access
- Embed historical information along the trail in art like the mile markers or on the trail itself or with standalone projects
- From the trail, have signage to point to specific historical locations like the Broomfield Row House, Patton Hotel, or the Streetcar barn, etc.,
- Embed history in trail seating and benches
- Save and incorporate bricks from historic buildings into the trail and art work

Historic Themes & Reference Points

The following is a list of historical themes, directions, and reference points from community design sessions which are meant to help guide activation and art projects along the trail:

- Recognize positive history and honor all the black community has done
- Location and proximity to the trail should guide historical focus
- The History of Hwy 75 from the community's perspective
- Historic streetcar centers
- Historic Neighborhood & Community groups
- The history of Native Omaha Days
- Continue to recognize historic people in other ways besides street signage (*initial list of historic people in the appendix*)
- Recognize younger historical figures like Symone Sanders
- Economic history / business history
- The Diaspora
- The Great Migration
- Indegenuous histories and land recognition
- Church & Religious Histories
- History and Stories from Spencer Homes
- Stone Cold BBQ
- Digital apps, QR codes, and/or geocoded historical web maps which link to the GPBHM website

2. Landscape & Placemaking



Left: Just Ride at Cluxr House (photo by Abiola Kosko). Right: Potential planting location along the trail.

North Omaha has a wealth of community groups, community gardens, community based organizations, and entrepreneurs, that continually work to improve people's well being and quality of life. The North Omaha Trail project will create an opportunity to increase communication between people and create a platform to raise awareness of community events, businesses, and other happenings within the area. The trail will provide more access to greenspaces that community members will be able enhance with additional community gardens and plantings however they see fit.

Advisory Group

The Landscape, Community & Placemaking advisory group will provide continued input on landscaping, community programming, and wayfinding along the trail and serve as a communication channel between community gardens, community groups and organizations, businesses, and community members around the trail in order to support community lead initiatives in the area. This advisory group may also act as a representative body for the trail, helping to attract and direct outside support. People who participated in the community design sessions and people from the community, especially neighborhood and community groups, who support the North Omaha Trail project are welcome to participate in the advisory group.

The following guidance for community and landscaping projects is meant to act as a reference point for the Landscape & Placemaking advisory group and outlines the initial landscaping projects that should be initiated along with the trail's construction and highlights some of the community led projects that are currently being planned or implemented in the area.



Landscape Guidance

Anchor Project: Sustainable Landscaping

The key landscaping project will be enhancing the greenspace along the trail at the time of trail construction with a focus on lower maintenance, more sustainable trees and plants while creating a blank canvass for future community lead planting projects. These initial plantings will include a variety of trees planted along the Highway 75 fence line and little bluestem planted at intervals along the trail. During the construction several areas will see soil remediation, which will make them ideal locations for supporting future community gardens and planting areas.



Left: The Union's Abundance Garden (photo from the Union for Contemporary Art). Right: Prairie Blazing Star

Landscape Themes

a. Themes:

- Sustainability and low maintenance plantings
- Native Plants , Edible plants, Red Buds trees, Catalpa trees, Fruit trees, etc (See survey results & sustainable plant examples in the appendix)
- Afro-futuristic landscaping
- Reclamation & Landback Principles
- Art installations (especially in 26th and Ohio - Corby area)
- The trail as a “place of healing”
- Soil testing and treatment
- Attract nature; bunnies, butterflies, birds etc
- Whole trail as a linear outdoor classroom - signage next to plants etc
- Educational opportunities around Landscaping and Development
- Bicycle fixit stations
- Creative housing design and construction on vacant lots

Community Programming Guidance

Anchor Project: Culxr House SkatePark Expansion

Culxr House is working to expand their programming on 24th & Wirt Street with a large expansion and potential indoor skate park. The trail and Culxr house expansion are mutually beneficial projects as the trail may act as a transportation route for people going to Culxr house and the Culxr house expansion will attract more multimodal users (bikes, skateboards, skates, scooter, etc).



Construction underway on Culxr House's skatepark expansion.

Other Community Programming Project Ideas

- Outdoor Markets and small business opportunities
- Bike safety classes by Change of Omaha & Children's Hospital
- Food Trucks
- Coordination between local gardens to increase access to healthy food access in the area
- 24th & Ohio placemaking project
- Potential overlap with the 24th Street Streetscape project
- Organized Runs, Walks, and Health Fairs (Potentially with Charles Drew, NOCCC, Creighton, Business Groups, Young Professionals, and others)
- Collaborating with local youth programming & mentoring programs
- Opportunity for North High Classes & Athletics programs to utilize the trail
- More social bike rides like Just Ride
- Upcoming Heartland Workers Center Get Out The Vote project
- Bike giveaways and free Heartland B-cycle memberships
- Adopt-a-block programs & community clean-ups
- Outdoor classrooms with local schools
- Aerosol art classes
- Plein Air Paintings
- Yoga Classes

■ Landscaping and Development education

Community Groups

Organizations and groups that currently provide community programming, events, and projects in the area include the following. Please note that this list is not comprehensive; rather, it identifies organizations and groups identified during the design sessions.

- Juneteenth Nebraska
- Native Omaha Days
- Bryant Center Basketball Courts
- Great Plains Black History Museum
- Culxr House
- Union for Contemporary Art
- Change of Omaha Garden
- Healing Roots
- Global Leadership Garden
- Habitat for Humanity Gardens
- B&B Boxing
- NOISE
- House of Afros Capes & Curls
- POC Collaborative
- Black Men United
- 75 North
- Malcolm X Foundation
- OEDC & Fair Deal Market
- North 24th Street BID
- The Salvation Army
- Neighborhood organizations like Neighborhood Action & Fact and NONA
- Empowerment Network
- Just Ride

Wayfinding Guidance

Anchor Project: Wayfinding signage to and from the trail

Places are defined by their connections to other places not their imaginary boundaries. Development of a strong wayfinding/ signage plan will help direct people to the trail while also acting to “connect the dots” by directing people to neighborhood centers and other community resources around the trail (see the conceptual wayfinding plan in the appendix). Additionally, wayfinding and signage will create an opportunity to create a logo and brand identity for the trail based on the guidance found here and with input from the advisory groups.



Wayfinding examples and potential branding influences.

Other Wayfinding-related Project Ideas

The following details some wayfinding ideas shared during the Design Sessions.

- QR Codes, Website, or specially designed apps that point people to other places, activities, and businesses in the surrounding area
- Wifi along the trail
- Trailhead signs that include trail rules, reminders to value other people, and land recognitions
- Wayfinding and location information painted or embedded in the trail itself
- Historical California Trail signage places at specific locations on the trail.

The North Omaha Trail Project

Design Guide



The Pratt Street Bridge

Community Partners as of March 2021

North 24th Street Business Improvement District, Culxr House, Omaha North High, Black Men United, the National Parks Service, Change of Omaha, the Great Plains Black History Museum, ConnectGO, the Union for Contemporary Art, NONA, the Papio-Missouri Natural Resource District, Omaha Economic Development Corporation, Healing Roots, Amplify Arts, 4Urban, Array Group, Mt. Moriah Church, The BOSS 95.7, Metro Smart Cities, TBC Store, Keep Omaha Beautiful, POC Collaborative, Mode Shift Omaha, Habitat for Humanity, NOISE, the City of Omaha, Heartland B-Cycle, Black Votes Matter, Omaha by Design, North End Teleservices, House of Afros, Capes & Curls, ONE Omaha, B&B Boxing, and the philanthropic community.

North Omaha Trail Design Guide - Appendix



24th & Pratt Community Garden (photo by Manuel Cook)

Historic People

This list is not comprehensive; rather, it is an initial list of who people want to see recognized by those who voted for them on the online survey. There were a total of 157 people who responded to the survey.

Top two:

Malcolm X - **73%**

Ernie Chambers - **70%**

Between 30-50% voted for:

Terrence ‘Bud’ Crawford

Mildred Brown

Preston Love

Gabrielle Union

Brenda Council

Preston Love Jr.

Gale Sayers

Bob Gibson

Bertha Calloway

Johnny Rodgers

Earl & Louise Little

Rowena Moore

Between 25-29% voted for:

Buddy Miles

Clarence W. Wigington

Alfonza W. Davis

Cathy Hughes

Curly Martin

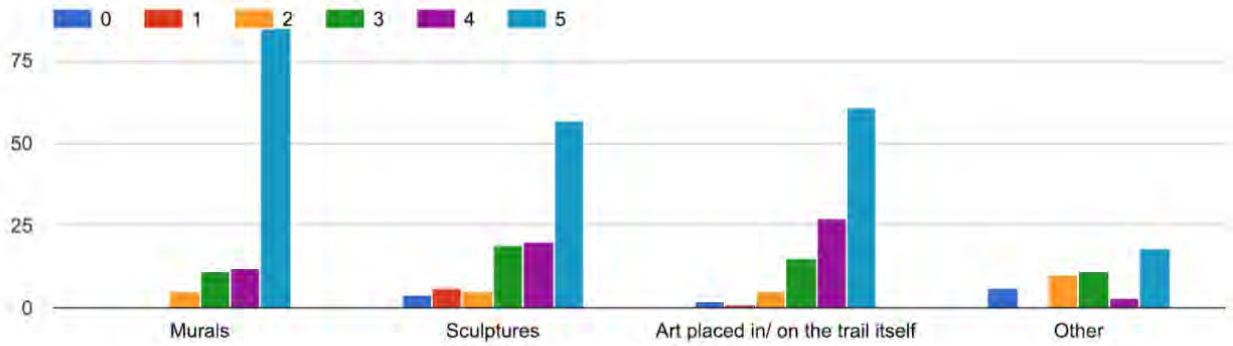
Other people mentioned in the survey and design sessions include:

Gene Haynes, Marshall Taylor, Steve Hogan Sr, Dr. Wead, York, Thomas Warren, John W Ewing, Buddy Hogan, Matthew Stelly, Eliga Ali, Luigi Waites, Brigitte McQueen, Precious McKesson, Dominique Morgan, Cydney Franklin, Martha Love, Willie Barney, Willie Hamilton, Carolyn Thomas, Robertha Wilhelm, Symone Sanders, Jannette Dortch, Kimara Snipes, Carmen Tapio, Charles Washington, Senator Edward Danner, Bernice Dodd, David Rice, Ed Pointdexter, Chris Wiley, Vivian Strong, Will Brown, Amber Ruffin, George Althouse, Leola Jones, Frank Dailey, Ray Lawrence Williams, Judge Elizabeth Pittman Davis, Dorothy Eure, Ruth Mae Abraham, Nellie Mae Webb, Charlotte Shropshire, Lorraine Patterson, Lillie Gunter, Irene Gunter, the Tuskegee Airmen, the Black Panthers, and Indigenous peoples.

Art

This graph shows survey respondents' general preferences for art along the trail. There were a total of 157 people who responded to the survey.

This trail creates an opportunity for more public art and opportunities for local artists. What would you like to see? 0= no interest. 5= high interest.



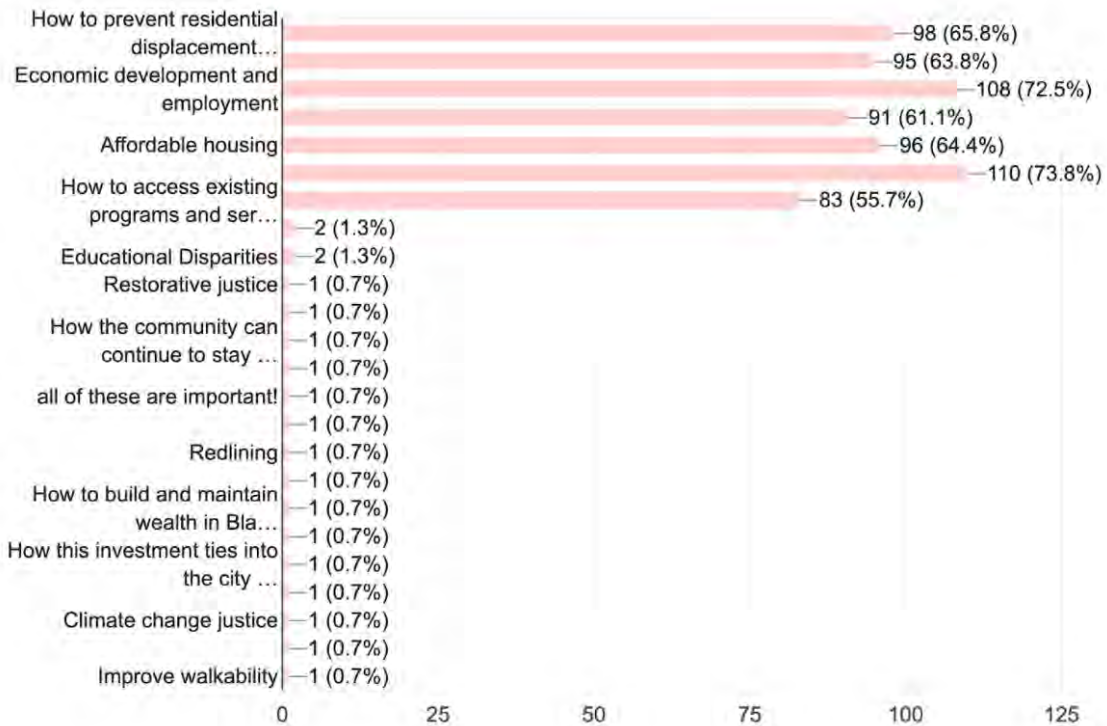
"Be You To Full" Mural by Rggie Leflore at 24th & Ohio Street (photo from the Union for Contemporary Art)

Important Community Topics

This graph shows survey respondents general thoughts about community topics that should be addressed in the area. The top survey responses were: How to attract healthy food options (73%), increasing economic development and employment (73%), how to prevent residential displacement (66%), affordable housing (65%), public health disparities (64%), race relations (61%), how to access existing programs and services (56%).

There are a lot of important topics that our community needs to address. What other topics would you like to see discussed as we develop this trail?

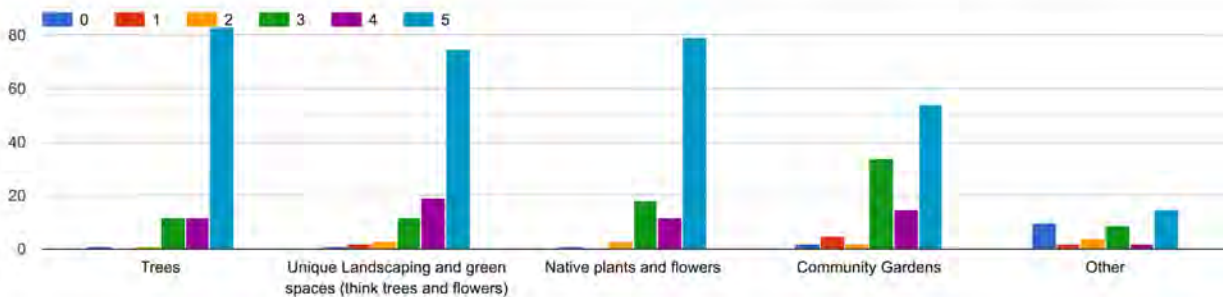
149 responses



Landscape / Plant Guide

This graph shows survey respondents' general thoughts about how to incorporate nature and gardening along the trail and throughout the surrounding area.

This trail will be an opportunity to bring nature into the community. What type of natural elements would you like to see emphasized along the trail? 0= no interest. 5= high interest.



Other nature related ideas provided by community expert Alajia McKizia:

Pollinator/ Native Plant Garden- Creating a pollinator friendly strip along green space on the trail. A pollinator garden is a garden specifically designed using pollen producing and nectar plants to attract pollinators. A pollinator garden is usually made up of wildflower, flower, and herb plants. Nebraska extension's pollinator garden plants list:

<https://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/landscape/pollinatorplants.shtml>

Edible Native Plants- Could be located far from the trail, and community-managed. Includes plants like elderberries, service berries, and currant bushes.

Seed Saving Garden- Creating a Seed Saver Garden that could be managed by the community & the Seed Bank. This protects plant biodiversity, preserves old and creates new plant varieties, and supports the local food system. Could include a Little Free Seed Library to house local saved seeds people can grab along the trail.

Community Garden- Potentially growing food bearing plants on 24th & Ohio or alongside the trail in treated soil areas. Things to think about- hours of sunlight, water access, who manages? (partnering with Change Omaha, or other food/garden orgs.)

Community Orchards could be a possibility away from the trail, and most fruit trees don't take up lead or other toxins in the soil.

Phytoremediation Plantings- In areas where the soil will not be treated, adding plants for phytoremediation. Phytoremediation- the use of plants for the cost-effective, environmentally friendly rehabilitation of soil and groundwater contaminated by toxic metals and organic compounds. Phytoremediation examples that grow in Nebraska include sunflowers, indian grass, black seed mustard.

Sustainable Landscaping Examples



Pale Purple Coneflower



Purple Coneflower



Catalapa Tree



Brown Eyed Susan



Lead Plant



Golden Rod



Anise Hyssop



Little Bluestem



Side Oats Grama



Rattlesnake Master



Black Eyed Susan



Prairie Blazing Star



Indian Grass



Greyheaded Coneflower



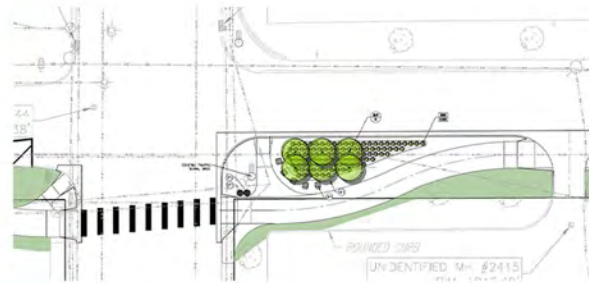
Bee Balm



Redbud Tree



Example of bluestem plantings along the trail. Rendering by the National Park Service



Example of the 30th & Sprague Street improvements and tree plantings.

