

Design Strategies for Burning Health Issues

Edison Eastlake Redevelopment Master Plan designed by Mithun.

When daily summertime temperatures top 112 degrees Fahrenheit, the spaces where people work, live, study, play and even commute literally have life or death implications. Take July in Edison Eastlake, a mixed residential neighborhood of Phoenix: Simply walking from home to the bus stop or the grocery store exposes residents to blistering sidewalks with surface temperatures over 130 degrees. The health impacts of living with this extreme heat are numerous; addressing them requires conversations with diverse partners across the built environment.

Recognizing a critical need to address heat-related and other health issues while renovating obsolete and unsafe public housing units, the City of Phoenix Housing Department called on design firm Mithun to develop the Edison Eastlake One Vision Plan through a process centered on robust resident and community engagement. From the outset, neighborhood residents insisted that health and well-being be main considerations in the project. A nearby hospital, St. Luke's Medical Center, also presented opportunities for collaboration. It wasn't long before several common priorities emerged, including safety and security, physical and mental health, access to education and economic opportunity, and preserving and enhancing neighborhood history and identity.

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- Erin Ishizaki, Mithun

Bringing to life the ambitious plan to cool the sidewalks and surrounding neighborhood required discussions with an extended group of partners, including the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the Maricopa County Public Health

Department, The Nature Conservancy, Arizona State University and the Vitalyst Health Foundation.

USGBC member, architect and urban designer Erin Ishizaki, AIA, AICP, is a partner at Mithun. "Having a public health expert embedded in the mix is a game changer," Ishizaki observes. "And once you hear the health-related data about what is really going on in the community, you can't go back."

Ultimately, features of the extreme heat management plan included heat-resilient homes; sidewalks with 75 percent minimum shade cover; heat resiliency centers; new cool paving technologies; and more open, public space. Plan implementation is underway, with support from a HUD grant awarded in 2018.

"Between 50 to 80 percent of a person's health outcomes are determined by the built and/or socio-economic environment," Ishizaki says, "We can have the greatest impact by being intentional with design that is responsive to specific needs—and listening to those needs from the very beginning."



Edison Eastlake neighborhood tour with project partners.



Conversation guide

Projects and initiatives related to health and health equity in the built environment often start with a conversation between individuals or among small groups. It may be a formal convening led by a foundation or city agency, a workshop at a convention or even coffee between colleagues.

The Joint Call to Action to Promote Healthy Communities is engaged in a year-long effort to spur these conversations among our members and beyond. We've compiled stories about discussions that have led to healthy solutions at the community, regional and state levels.

Here are the questions they asked in Phoenix →



Resident Leadership class.

WHO'S COME TO THE TABLE SO FAR

- Arizona State University School of Sustainability
- Catholic Charities and other NGOs
- City of Phoenix representatives from Housing Dept., Human Services Dept., Aviation Dept., Public Works, Police Dept., Office of Arts and Culture and Transportation Dept.
- Edison Eastlake residents
- EJP Consulting Group
- Gorman & Company
- GRID Bike Share
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
- Mithun
- Maricopa County Public Health Department
- St. Luke's Medical Center
- The Nature Conservancy
- Vitalyst Health Foundation

1. STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Improved health and well-being was a goal of the Edison Eastlake neighborhood in prior city planning efforts; however, it wasn't a priority in the past. The initial redevelopment team that was replacing obsolete public housing with a redeveloped mixed-income community was aware of prior neighborhood plans (including the Reinventing Phoenix plan) that included engagement by St. Luke's Medical Center, immediately adjacent to the Edison Eastlake community. Initial conversations probed:

- What common threads exist among past community engagement and planning efforts? What are some logical collaborations or partners to approach?
- What are the most pressing drivers of health-related issues in Edison Eastlake that this redevelopment can address?
- How do we build community trust in an underserved neighborhood?
- How do we ensure that we're adequately addressing health equity and incorporating existing public housing residents' needs into the Edison Eastlake One Vision Plan?

2. BUILDING OUT THE CONVERSATION

Historically, the neighborhood has experienced high unemployment and poverty levels that are compounded by declining public housing and infrastructure, along with intense hot weather. To address this community's needs, Mithun suggested using "quality of life and well-being" as a holistic theme for the revitalization to address a range of intertwined health and wellness issues. Key questions were:

- How can the neighborhood redevelopment and programming best address community needs and hopes for:
 - safety and security;
 - resident physical, mental and social health;
 - affordable living and green building;
 - celebrating and enhancing neighborhood identity, history and culture?

3. CLOSING THE LOOP

As the team moves forward in implementing the Edison Eastlake One Vision Plan to build new affordable housing, they are remaining focused on resident needs and goals through cross-sector partnerships. Questions include:

- What current programs and activities of the project partners are aligned with the Vision Plan and can contribute to the community-driven vision? What early actions and investments can show commitment to the community?
- What is the most effective way to continually develop Edison Eastlake resident leaders' capacity to shape the development and support ongoing engagement with the broader community?
- Through workshops, focus groups, site walks and other communication channels, project partners sought input on what kind of quality-of-life projects were desirable. To identify Action Activities, the partners asked:
 - What do residents believe are the highest priority quality-of-life and heat strategies?
 - How should we structure our approach so that we're doing the most good for the most people most quickly and maximizing our investment leverage?