

PROJECT CONNECT BRINGS COMMUNITIES, POLICY-MAKERS TOGETHER

Project Connect is an initiative that will increase the power of the community's voice.

In the long effort to bring NGA to St. Louis Place –a \$1.75 billion project that is the largest federal investment in the history of St. Louis – city government has always made sure that the surrounding neighborhoods had an influential voice. Now that NGA has committed to St. Louis, the Mayor's Office has launched Project Connect, an initiative that will increase the power of the community's voice and leverage diverse investments to best improve North St. Louis. Project Connect is a two-pronged strategy. First, City officials are learning from and working with community-members through a series of public meetings, stakeholder interviews, and neighborhood working groups. Second, the Mayor's Office is using community insight to connect major private and public investments so they do the most good in local communities. Community engagement is integral to identifying how and where investment, both public and private, will uplift the neighborhoods of North St. Louis.

"Local people are really the experts on the strengths and challenges of their communities," said Otis Williams, Executive Director of the St. Louis Development Corporation. "The more we work with them, the more we listen to what the community wants and needs, the better we are able to make lasting, helpful improvements to the City. That conversation is integral."

The goal of the first Project Connect public meeting, held on June 6, 2016 in the Carr Square Neighborhood, was to begin this conversation.

More than 250 community-members attended, along with Mayor Slay, Otis Williams, NGA officials, and City planners. The meeting began with a series of information sessions, but the bulk of the evening was set aside for community-members to ask questions, raise concerns, and offer suggestions. Two dozen residents spoke, and the feedback has already informed the way the project team will be working with the community.

The next step in the process is to continue conversations with neighborhood leaders, in order to solicit feedback and provide updates to the communities. "We expect that by listening to people within these communities, we can gain insight on what is needed to uplift these struggling neighborhoods. The discussions will be wide-reaching to include social, economic, and physical issues," said Isa Reeb, one of the leaders of the City's Project Connect team.

Project Connect began with the insight that major investments in the City aren't islands –they're intricately connected to the communities they occur in, as well as to other public and private projects. Mayor Slay and his staff realized that by bringing together all the stakeholders – developers, City officials, and, most importantly, community-members –more and better investment could occur throughout St. Louis. That investment would be informed and improved by the experiences and desires of regular citizens, the people who know local communities the best.

"The City will work with local residents and businesses to promote similar activities to enhance the surrounding community."

Otis Williams, SLDC