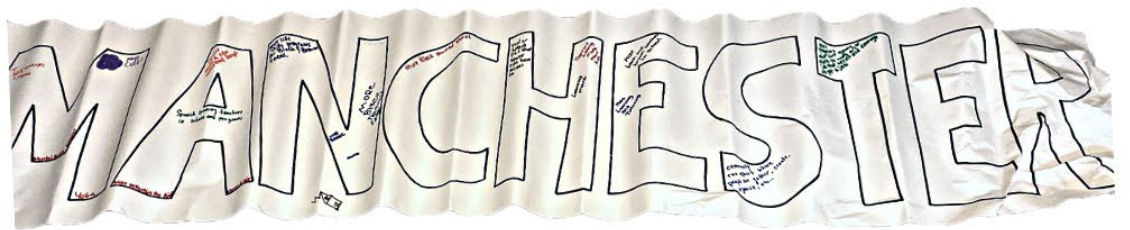




Manchester School Repurposing Report

TRANSFORMING



FINAL REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you to the community leaders, staff, and residents who allowed us into their community to conduct this work. Residents had the option to be publicly identified in our report or to participate anonymously. The below offered to be publicly acknowledged, accounting for 15.0% of our participants.

Debbie Demaria
 Chasitty
 Michael &
 Denise Richardson
 Emily Collins
 Nyah
 Tasha
 Thomas
 Noralize
 Zamantha Torres
 Kathleen Quinn
 Esly
 Sara crandall
 Jalen Bolling
 Alma medina
 Dawn
 Charmaine
 Stephanie Cancel
 Maki
 Naeema
 Shaniya
 Latasha Easterling-Turnquest
 Doubleday SmoothCrime
 Caitlin Oneil
 Pati Lewis
 Elizabeth MacDonald
 Michael Castro

Kaleah
 Tony Rogers
 Florence
 Jim Prosper
 Yajaira
 Samantha
 Aureliana
 Db
 BARRAQ
 Andrea Cattan
 Stephanie DeCampos
 Alexis France
 Kimberlyn C Walters
 David Logan
 Shane Haydt
 Winnie M
 Brad smith
 Phil MacVane
 Seth Stefanovicz
 Karen gliha
 Chellie Leslie
 Katherine Johnson
 Nancy Gebord
 Anne-Marie Archambo
 Laura Kelley
 Brian Bell
 Freda curiel

Gina Benoit
 Ron Schack
 Sharon Gazdzicki
 Shelley McCone
 Alexis Blauvelt
 Dave
 Judy Burr
 Kassander
 Christine Tomlin
 Mike Filburn
 Carrie Dettore
 Colin McNamara
 Marianne policastro
 Miriam Byroade
 Mildred
 Chris Jones
 Rosemarie Parla Chirico
 Leslie Frey
 Christopher Silver
 Bill Ludwig
 Brett Tower
 Kelly S
 Tim Becker
 Amanda Smith, LPC
 Linda Blakesley
 Richard Kohls
 DeWilton Timberman

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

2SLGBTQIA+: stands for Two-spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and more. According to the Two-spirit Society of Denver, “The term Two Spirit refers to another gender role believed to be common among most, if not all, first peoples of Turtle Island (North America), one that had a proper and accepted place within indigenous societies. This acceptance was rooted in the spiritual teachings that say all life is sacred and that the Creator must have a reason for making someone different.”¹ For definitions of many of the other terms, please see this resource by the Unitarian Universalist Association.²

Bengali: refers to people with ancestry from Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Black: refers to people with African ancestry. Black is a constructed racial term that has real-life consequences.

BIPOC: stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

Cisgender: (shortened to cis) is a gender term that refers to people whose gender is consistent with/matches the gender they were assigned at birth, raised as, or socially conditioned as. Cisgender includes (but is not limited to) cis women and cis men.

Indigenous: refers to people who are Indigenous to a land. According to the United Nations, “Indigenous peoples have in common a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonization and a strong link to their lands. They maintain, at least in part, distinct social, economic and political systems. They have distinct languages, cultures, beliefs and knowledge systems. They are determined to maintain and develop their identity and distinct institutions and they form a non-dominant sector of society.”³

¹ <https://soulforceactionarchives.org/1998/01/01/two-spirit-society-of-denver/>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4lBibGzUnE&t=55s>

² <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity>

³ <https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/indigenous-peoples>

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Latinx: refers to people of Latin American ancestry. This is an umbrella ethnic term that refers to people from Latin America, though it tends to center settler colonial identities over Native people.

Native: refers to people who are Indigenous to their ancestral lands. For example, many Indigenous people live in Manchester, while the Native people who for time immemorial have cared for their ancestral lands of what is currently called Manchester include the Podunk and the Wangunk people.

POC: stands for People of Color.

South Asian: refers to people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Transgender: (shortened to trans), is a broad gender term that refers to people whose gender does not match the gender they were assigned at birth, raised as, or socially conditioned as. Transgender includes (but is not limited to) trans women, trans men, Two-spirit, non-binary, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, and agender.

White: refers to people of European ancestry. White is a constructed racial term that has real-life consequences.

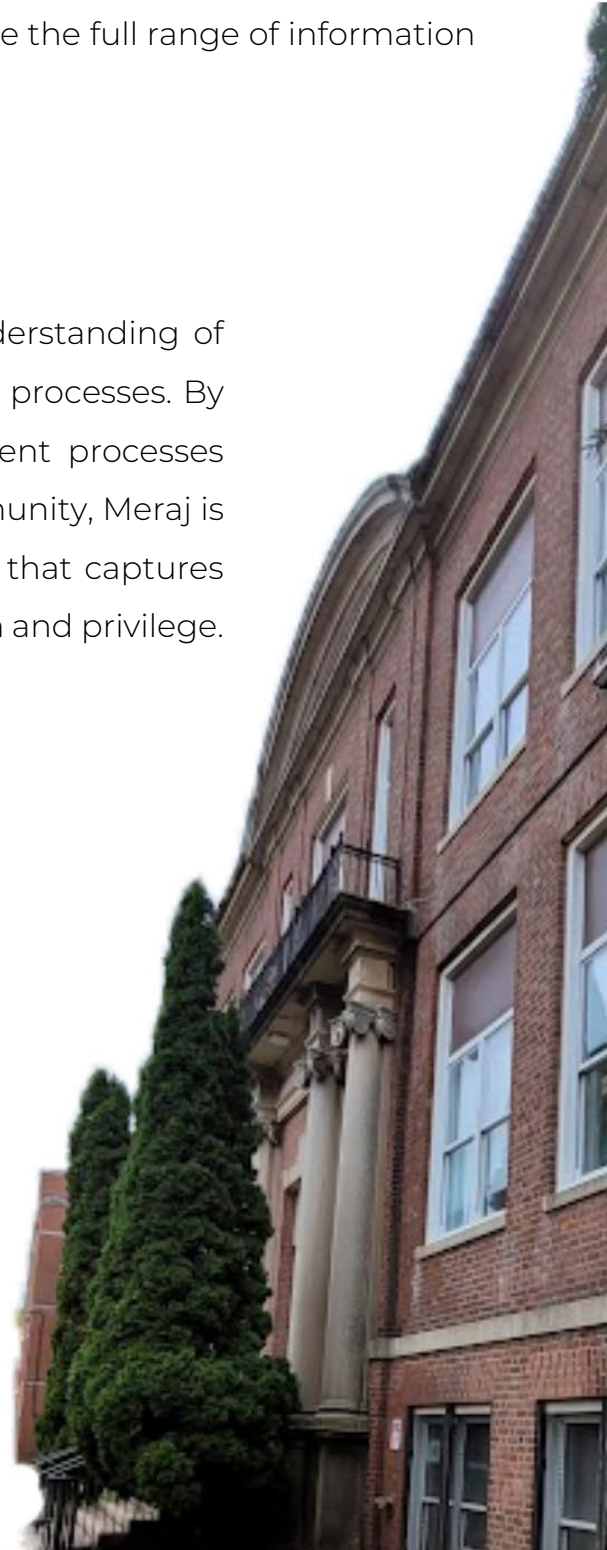
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary captures a high-level overview of our methodology, results, community challenges, pathways for addressing these challenges and next steps. The full report contains details for all the points. We highly recommend reading through the report, including the appendix to capture the full range of information captured in our process.

Methodology

Meraj Consulting begins every process with an understanding of the individuals who have been excluded in previous processes. By utilizing data from previous community engagement processes and centering the most marginalized within a community, Meraj is able to create an equitable and co-created process that captures the voices of individuals of all levels of marginalization and privilege.

This public outreach campaign entailed three main approaches: 1) a survey to solicit residents' feedback through the "Your Voice Matters Manchester" platform; 2) focus groups with Manchester residents historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes in the Town of Manchester; and 3) Direct community interaction through visiting community spaces and coffee hours.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results

Meraj engaged with 525 people over the course of the community engagement process. This included 235 survey responses, 96 Black residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 25 Bengali residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 32 Latinx residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 17 transgender residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 48 individuals we spoke to in public spaces from various backgrounds, 65 attendees total for the four town halls, and seven responses via the text line, for a total of approximately 525 people (± 26 people).

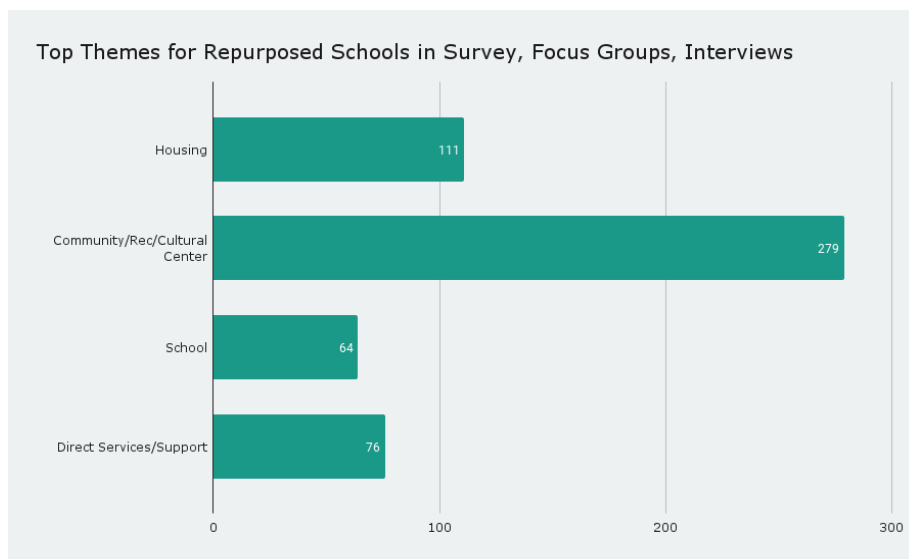
Cumulatively, based on the numbers from all these combined methods of community engagement, we spoke to 225 white people (43%), 180 Black people (34%), 72 Latinx people (14%), 29 South Asian people (6%), and at least 37 transgender people (7%).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Top Themes

The recurring top themes that Manchester residents asked for throughout the community engagement process included housing, a community recreational/cultural center, a school, and direct services/support. Additionally, residents asked for affordable housing, transitional housing, and housing for seniors and disabled people.



Many residents of color in particular shared that they would like to see a community center that culturally reflects them, that is staffed by people from *within their communities*, that has free bus and shuttle transportation to the building(s), and that town staff offices that are not being used for programs shouldn't be relocated there.

For a school, residents expressed that community schools should be reopened, some residents expressed particular support for the Odyssey Community School, and a recurring theme in the focus groups with Black, Latinx, Bengali and Trans residents was a lack of knowledge about the schools being closed.

In terms of direct services and support, residents emphasized language access for medical care, particularly in Spanish and Bangla, job training, immigration/citizenship support, adult continuing education, job training, gender affirming medical care, and childcare (including daytime and evening).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Top Themes by School

Nathan Hale

The two major themes we recommend be implemented at Nathan Hale include a school and housing. With that being said, such spaces would need to be created with the intention and function of a community space.

Based on our community engagement, it is clear that Manchester needs a larger plan for housing that extends beyond Nathan Hale, Robertson and Washington. True affordable housing was desired by almost all residents we spoke with and can be transformative for Manchester residents and their families.

Washington

The responses for the repurposing of Washington were in favor of utilizing the building as a recreation and cultural center, as well as the possibility for utilizing at least part of the building as a school.

Robertson

In addition to the continued desire for below 50% AMI affordable housing, school, and a rec and cultural center, there is a desire for a larger community-cultural center that also hosts direct services and support for the community.

Robertson would be able to offer affordable and accessible mental and medical health services, including culturally led and specific services, one-on-one support, group support, and mobile services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Addressing Community Challenges

By intentionally building out programs and services with the most marginalized in mind, the town ensures that these programs and services are accessible to everyone. Equitable hiring and language justice must also be at the forefront of this process. In addition, representative and multilingual staff should be hired to run and administer these programming and services in order to build relationships in the communities. Focus group participants also emphasized that financial and transportation accessibility are essential for these spaces. Residents were clear in their responses that they do not want existing services as they currently operate to be duplicated in the new spaces.

The town should create a communication plan to advertise programs and services that are created intentionally for the most marginalized communities. This entails creating separate plans for different communities based on community needs particular to those communities. Specific examples as suggested by the community are mentioned in the section titled “Next Steps for Community Engagement Process.”

Conclusion

The worst decision that can be made in the repurposing of these schools is a usage that contradicts community members’ desires and/or no decision at all, leaving the buildings vacant.

Manchester as a town has some extensive gaps and some incredible programs and services. Utilizing these buildings to address some of the gaps would be an enormous step to building a more holistic sense of community in the town. In this report, we highlighted some key recommendations and next steps that can support the board of directors, town staff, and BoE in better serving the entire Manchester community, and which will begin the journey to undo the harm caused by the marginalization of many groups in town.

INTRODUCTION

From May 2022 to Dec 2022, at the request of and in contract with the Town of Manchester, Connecticut, and the Repurposed Schools Committee (RSC), Meraj Consulting L.L.C launched a public outreach campaign to engage the community for feedback and input on the repurposing of three vacated or soon to be vacated school buildings by providing public input opportunities to discuss preferences for the effective repurposing of the buildings.

4

As solicited in the Request for Proposals (RFP) by the Town of Manchester and the RSC, Meraj Consulting was specifically tasked to “help ensure community participation and inclusion in the decision-making process, especially of those community members historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes.”

Over the six months, Meraj Consulting created a multi-prong and time sequenced process that included multiple rounds of engagement to determine and document the needs and values of the community relative to repurposing the three school buildings. Meraj created a holistic and intersectional process to ensure participation by communities of color, young adults, immigrant communities, poor/low-income folks, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities.

This public outreach campaign entailed three main approaches: 1) a survey to solicit residents’ feedback through the “Your Voice Matters Manchester” platform; 2) focus groups with Manchester residents historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes in the Town of Manchester; and 3) Direct community interaction through visiting community spaces and coffee hours.

⁴ Nathan Hale closed in 2012 and is currently fully empty, unusable, and requires extensive fixing. In its current state the building is nearly unusable if not entirely unusable. Robertson is currently utilized as an in-between school for when other area schools are in the process of being renovated. These renovations are an ongoing process driven by the Board of Education that will not be completed until 2025. Washington is currently used as a home for Manchester Middle Academy and the Mahoney recreational center.

Per the original RFP, this report captures the feedback captured from community members historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes. Results are broken down by school. In creating an inclusive process we were able to capture voices representative of Manchester's current resident makeup, including both individuals who have been excluded previously and individuals who have been included in the foundation of community engagement processes.

To capture the needs and values of the community it was also essential to understand current barriers that exist within the community functioning and services currently available. These barriers and challenges are included in the Community Challenges and Process Limitations section below. Our team offers some recommendations for pathways to bridge the gap between town staff and residents and to address the barriers and challenges experienced by the most marginalized community members.

In addition to capturing community member voices we conducted outreach to town staff and Board of Education (BoE) staff to understand their needs and how they intersect with the needs identified by residents. Our team also worked with the departments of Public Works and Planning and Economic Development to identify structural or zoning limitations for the three schools and to identify where different offerings provided by residents and staff might fit best.

Lastly, we include next steps for engaging with the most marginalized in the community as decisions are made to repurpose the three schools.

Our team offers these recommendations to the Town of Manchester and Board of Directors.

Meraj Consulting Methodology

Who We Are?

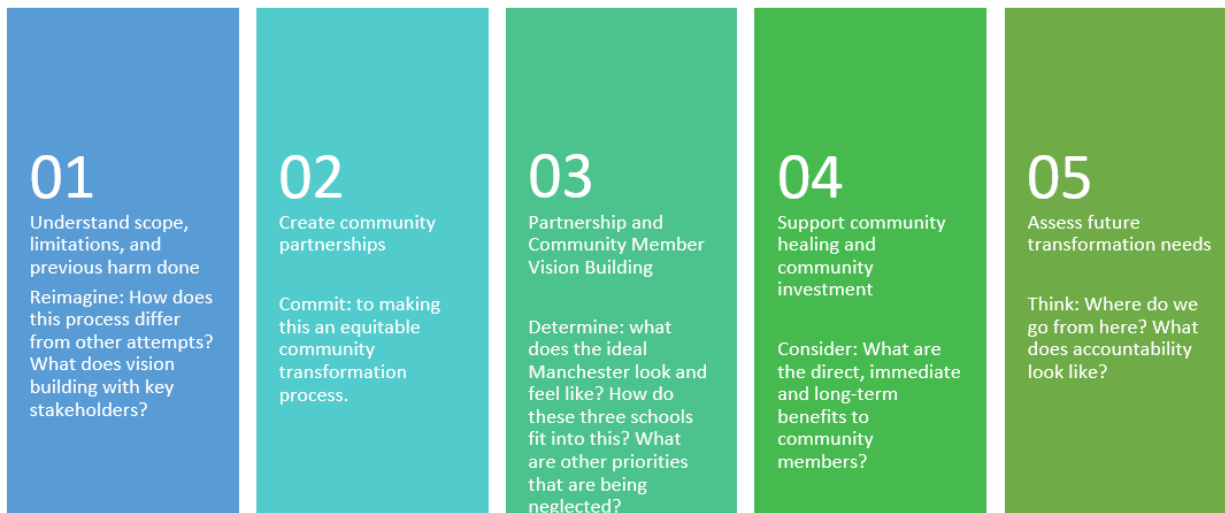
Meraj Consulting was founded in 2020, bringing together over 20 years of community work in over two dozen countries. We utilize our own lived experience, both professional and personal, in every aspect of this work. Our consultants have worked in two dozen countries, supporting nonprofits, for profits, schools and universities, community and religious centers, state-run agencies, municipalities and governments. We support communities in community engagement, equity and transformation, including hiring practices and service/program development, leadership development, community base building, org capacity building and incubation, vision building and strategic planning, and many other areas. Our expansive expertise allows us to always bring in necessary elements of transformation that might not always be incorporated in a traditional sense.

Meraj Consulting begins every process with an understanding of the individuals who have been excluded in previous processes. By utilizing data from previous community engagement processes and centering the most marginalized within a community, Meraj is able to create an equitable and co-created process that captures the voices of individuals of all levels of marginalization and privilege. We utilize a multi-consultant model that allows us to bridge gaps within communities, always meeting communities where they are at.

For us, community engagement is a process of walking towards accountability, initiated by individuals or groups who have historically had inequitable power to address systemic harm due to inequity. Our intent is to transform the community into a community where inequity does not exist and justice is achieved. Community Engagement is a stepping stone to a community's self-actualization and community members' healing and ultimately belonging. We utilize community engagement as a way of reinvesting into the most marginalized communities in all towns and cities that we work with.

Methodology

PROCESS



1. Understand scope, limitations and previous harm done

Having worked with dozens of communities we recognize that often the scope on paper in an RFP must change in the process to allow a process of co-creation to thrive. Without understanding previous harm done within a community it is difficult to reach the individuals most harmed previously.

2. Create community partnerships

As outsiders we carry privilege within a community and recognize our responsibility to ensure the communities' safety throughout our work. We make clear that we are not accountable to whoever sends us a check, rather we are accountable to the most marginalized within any community. Community partnerships allow us to conduct this work thoroughly and serve as accountability partners.

3. Partnership and Community Member Vision Building

This vision building process is used as a catalyst for co-creating the process and ensuring there is benefit to the community at every stage of the process. Our policy is to do everything we can to have every community member we interact with benefit in the moment, instead of waiting for results that might not be experienced for years to come

4. Support community healing and community investment

We are often called in because harm has been done in the past. In fact, it is rare to find any community where harm has not been done. Part of our work always includes a healing and building component. This requires understanding the challenges that might fall out of the scope of our work and working to address them either way. As we work with community leaders and organizations, we offer a consulting exchange for their time and support. This allows us to invest in community work outside of the work we are hired for, hopefully leaving the community better off than when we started any process.

5. Assess future transformation needs

We will always include recommendations for next steps and ways to address the systemic barriers that created the conditions in which our work was needed in the first place.

FRAMEWORKS

To ensure this work is equitable, all of our work is built on the following principles:



The 9 frameworks seen above are integral to our organization's foundation. In all our work, we attempt to center as many of these frameworks directly in the work, depending on the community's needs. For this project we centered intersectionality and assembly theory, language justice, and economic justice to achieve our goal of reaching our target populations.

Intersectionality and Assemblies



Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. Kimberlé Crenshaw ⁵



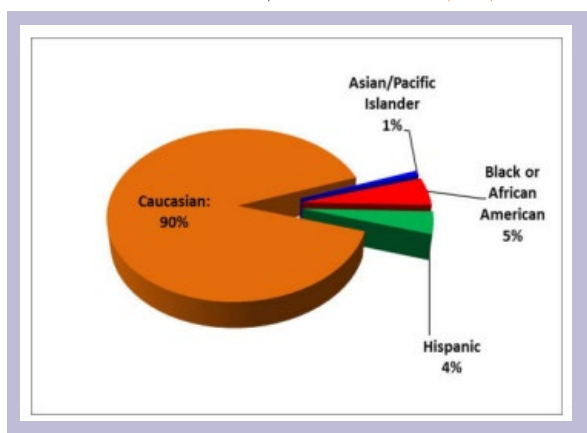
Intersectionality is a basic framework to look at how different identities impact one another and how they create circumstances that go beyond the experiences of the identities showing up separately.

⁵ <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>

In our work, we aim to center individuals carrying multiple marginalized identities and we build our process around their needs. This allows us to create a process that accounts for race, gender, orientation, ability, age, class, education, citizenship, and various other identities at once, allowing the process to be accessible for everyone with or without those identities. At times we are not able to account for one or more of these identities. In those instances we do work to try to inspire long-term transformation to allow those identities to be accounted for in the future.

This work begins with understanding the basic makeups of town residents and comparing that with individuals in power, in this case town staff and Board of Directors. Looking at the census and town staff data from 2019⁶, we see that although white residents make up less than 60% of Manchester⁷, they make up 90% of town staff. This is one identity and one example.

Ethnic Diversity of Town Employees



Ethnic Diversity of Town Residents

Race and Hispanic Origin	
White alone, percent	59.9%
Black or African American alone, percent (a)	16.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a)	0.6%
Asian alone, percent (a)	11.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a)	0.0%
Two or More Races, percent	4.5%
Hispanic or Latino, percent (b)	14.7%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	55.1%

In FY 2019, the Town of Manchester has **479** full-time employees and **385** part-time employees.

- The majority (90%) of the town workforce comprises of White or Caucasian employees.
- 5% of employees are Black or African American.
- 4% of the Town employees are Hispanic.
- Only 1% of the staff is Asian/Pacific Islander.

⁶ <https://soulforceactionarchives.org/1998/01/01/two-spirit-society-of-denver/>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4lBibGzUnE&t=55s>

⁷ <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity>
<https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/indigenous-peoples>

For more information about intersectionality, please watch the following video by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term about its use and what it means. The video is available with English and Spanish subtitles.

https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality

We utilize intersectionality to help understand power and how community members experience a space. Assembly theory allows us to understand how individuals connect, learn, and grow based on the different identities they carry. Assembly theory is necessary to look at both privilege and marginalization since individuals assemble across both. When individuals assemble through privilege, they create exclusionary systems and replicate the factors needed for others to be marginalized. On the other hand, when individuals assemble through marginalized identities, they build safety and are able to create pathways for inclusion. Recognizing that safety is not guaranteed we are able to build safety by honoring how different groups assemble through creating space exclusively for different assemblages.

Intersectionality and assembly theory were our guiding force in creating separate focus groups that center the most marginalized within the community. We created Black only, Bengali only, Latinx only, and Trans only spaces to account for how these groups assemble and to honor the intersectionality each of these communities represents.

Language Justice

Manchester hosts a large non-English speaking community, or communities that do not build and envision in English. Conducting events in English only excludes a percentage of the population. As a core foundation of our work we will always at the very least conduct programming into multiple languages, often conducting programming in three. In Manchester, we conducted this community engagement process in English, Spanish, and Bangla, and one interview in Arabic. Conducting events and interviews in individuals native tongue allows them to express themselves freely in a way they would not be able to in another language.

Economic Justice

For Meraj Consulting, Economic Justice is a set of principles that allow and lead individuals to equitable material sustenance and sustainment. Economic Justice is important to us because we view it as a necessary pathway for equitable community development. Such practices are one example of the ways in which the Town of Manchester can better serve and conduct community outreach to its residents, particularly those who have been historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes in the town. We provide this as one of many examples that the Town of Manchester can and should incorporate into future projects and community outreach moving forward. This isn't simply a theoretical suggestion; some residents that Meraj staff spoke to during focus groups expressed that they couldn't be bothered to participate in another town survey process, when not only have their voices and suggestions been ignored in the past, but also because some residents have more pressing issues on their mind than a town survey, including worrying about what one's next meal will be, or making rent, or affording diapers for their child. Economic Justice acknowledges this imbalance and addresses it.

Economic Justice is both essential to our work within communities and our internal economic policies. To honor community voices and show our appreciation for their contributions, we enacted the following compensation pathways:

- **Consultant exchange for community leader/organization support.**
 - We offer at least a one-to-one consulting exchange to community leaders and/or their organizations. This exchange can be for any form of consulting work that Meraj has engaged in and is accessible anytime during the contract period or in the year following.
- **Stipends for participants.**
 - Gift cards were offered during our canvassing events, focus groups, and one on one interviews for participants wherever possible.

Lastly, a core part of economic justice for our team is ensuring that at least 25% of the contract value stays in the community we are working in. This includes but is not limited to:

- Hiring Manchester resident consultants
- Participant stipends
- Catering and other expenses for services from locally owned businesses

METHODS

This public outreach campaign entailed three main approaches: 1) a survey to solicit residents' feedback through the "Your Voice Matters Manchester" platform; 2) focus groups with Manchester residents historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes in the Town of Manchester; and 3) Direct community interaction through visiting community spaces and coffee hours.

A. Survey

The survey was open from June to November 2022 and consisted of 33 questions, including demographic questions and questions specific to the three schools in question – Nathan Hale, Robertson and Washington. The survey was filled out by 235 residents. The survey was shared on the Your Voice Matters platform, as well as through social media and community partners. Additionally, our consultants canvassed events held in Manchester between June and September 2022. The survey was used to capture a broad spectrum of voices.

Meraj also instituted a texting line, that allowed individuals to text us thoughts and ideas. Seven residents utilized this additional service.

B. Focus Groups and Interviews

Meraj Consulting conducted focus groups with four communities of residents historically marginalized and excluded from Manchester's decision-making processes and are more difficult to reach through a traditional survey, including Black residents, Latinx residents, Bengali residents, and transgender residents. These groups were centered intentionally for the following reasons:

- Black residents due to ongoing and historic marginalization.
- Bengali and Latinx communities for language access and justice, due to the language barrier of an English survey and cultural differences.
- Trans folx due to lack of safety and data being collected for the first time.

Meraj Consulting hired three consultants to lead outreach in Manchester's Black, Latinx and Bengali residents, respectively, with two of the consultants being Manchester residents themselves. The Director of Meraj Consulting, Mx. Yaffa, led outreach in Manchester's transgender communities. Such outreach entailed interviews at community events, focus groups, and phone calls. As a thank you for the time and effort these residents put into sharing their views, experiences, ideas, and concerns, Meraj Consulting compensated trans residents and residents of color with gift cards. In total, over 150 individuals participated in our focus groups.

The School Repurpose Taskforce also held four town halls from March to November 2022. Meraj was able to co-facilitate two of these town halls. Feedback was gathered from 65 individuals at these townhalls, with over 90% of white community members in attendance. This feedback was also incorporated into the results of this report.

It is important to note that all names for quoted participants have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of residents.

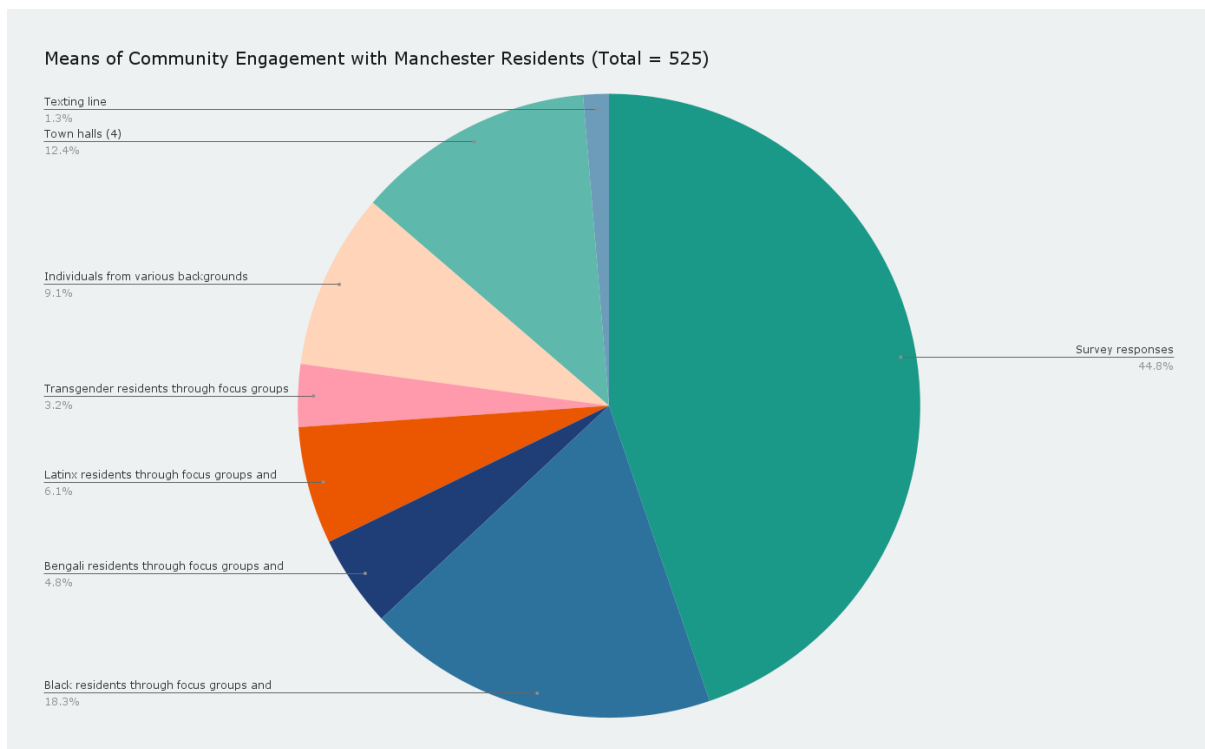
C. Direct Community Interaction

Meraj Consultants visited various public community spaces throughout the contract period and engaged with residents where they are. Most notably, consultants utilized public transportation and engaged with passengers on buses, Ubers and at bus stops throughout the town. These interactions allowed Meraj to interact with more than 50 individuals/families who are experiencing houselessness, job insecurity, disability, and various medical conditions. These individuals shared with us what social services in the town look like for them, and shared the challenges and/or harm they experience in the town.

Our consultants visited various business and social hangout spaces and talked to residents formally and informally. One of our formal pathways was through coffee hours. Our team advertised the hours we would be in a Manchester-based business for residents to join us for free coffee and baked goods and to share their thoughts with us. Initially the location was advertised online, however, due to safety concerns the location was sent to individuals who signed up. Our team had conversations with 13 residents at six coffee hour events.

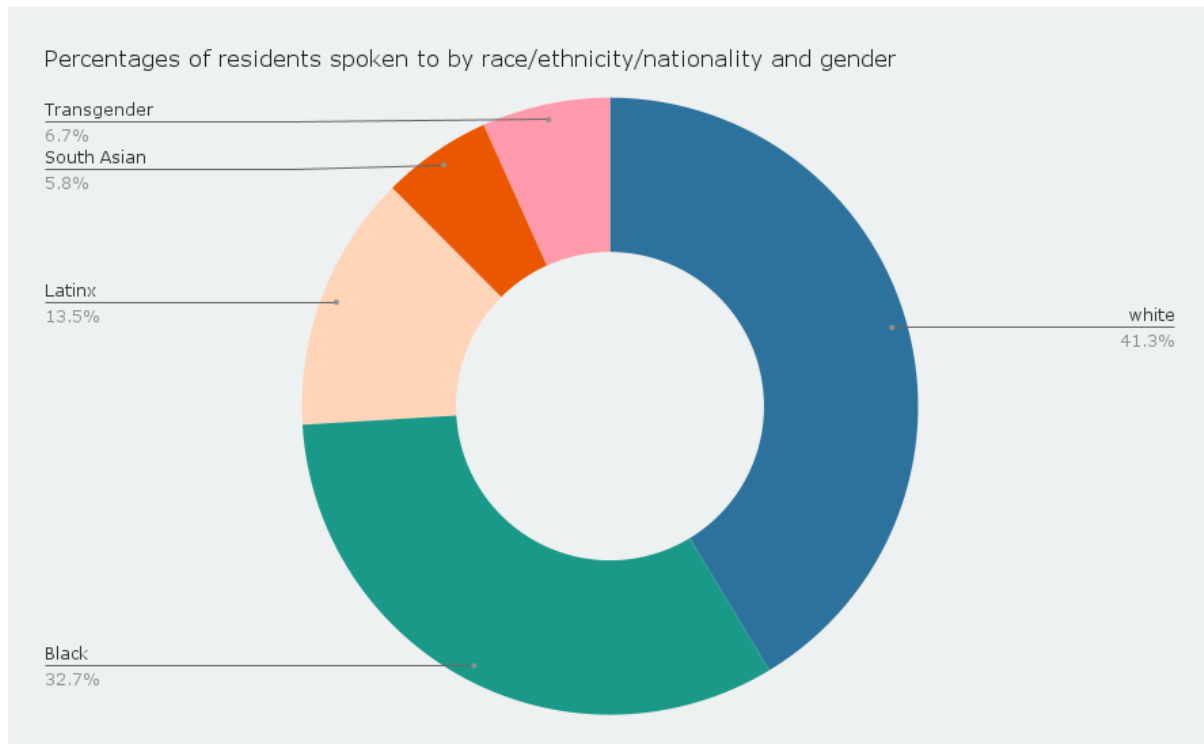
Results

Meraj Consulting staff and contractors engaged with **525 people** over the course of the community engagement process. This included **235 survey responses**, 96 Black residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 25 Bengali residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 32 Latinx residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 17 transgender residents through focus groups and direct community interaction, 48 individuals we spoke to in public spaces from various backgrounds, 65 attendees total for the four town halls, and seven responses via the text line, for a total of approximately 525 people (± 26 people⁸). Cumulatively, based on the numbers from all these combined methods of community engagement, we spoke to 225 white people (43%), 180 Black people (34%), 72 Latinx people (14%), 29 South Asian people (6%), and at least 37 transgender people (7%).



⁸ Individuals' identities are complex, and some individuals have multiple racial identities. Additionally, as we were canvassing, we talked to families with multiple individuals present but only one survey was filled out for the family. As such, in our attempt to honor those identities and individuals, it means there is a slight percentile inaccuracy in the total numbers to account for that. We estimate that inaccuracy to be at 5%. Moreover, some respondents responded in the survey by trolling and identifying as every racial category in addition to very silly write-in descriptions.

The results from the survey, focus groups, direct community interaction, town halls, and the text line were analyzed to draw the top recurring themes desired by the community. The responses were cross-analyzed by race/ethnicity/nationality and gender from the survey. Then, our team worked with town staff, Board of Education staff, and the offices of the Public Works and the Planning and Economic Development departments to offer recommendations for offerings in each of the three school buildings.

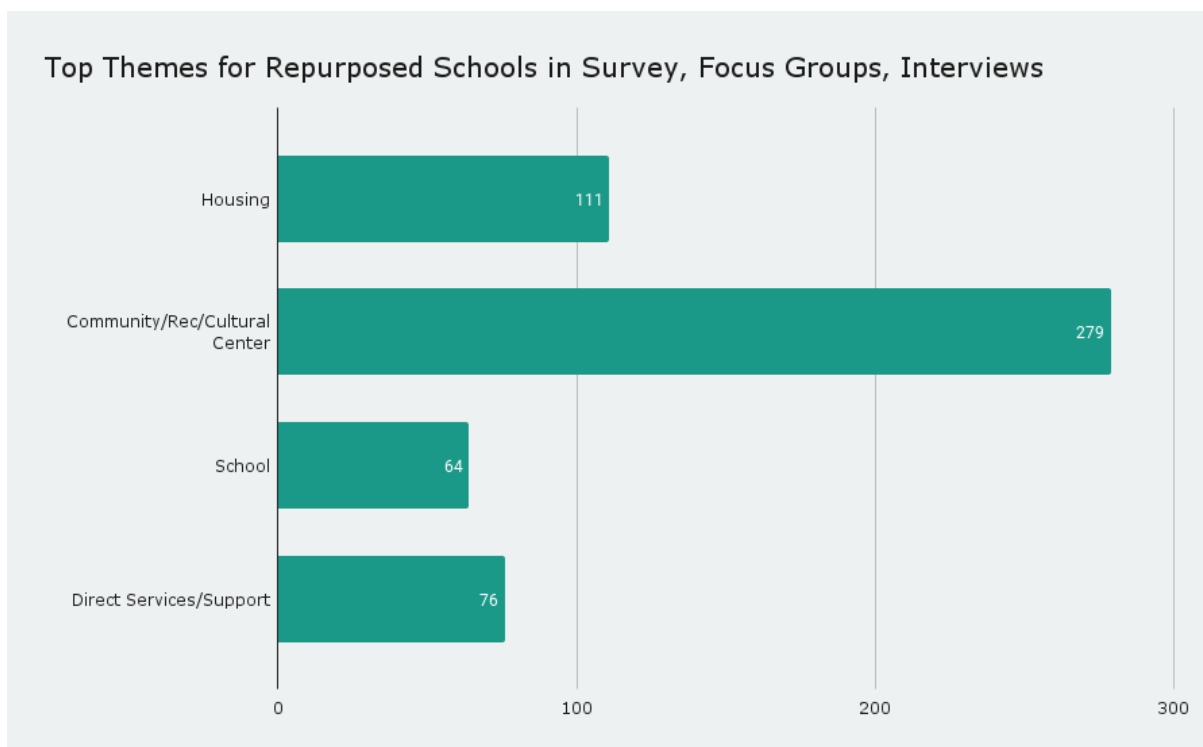


The recurring top themes that Manchester residents asked for throughout the community engagement process included: housing, a community recreational/cultural center, a school, and direct services/support.

In terms of housing, many residents asked for affordable housing, transitional housing, and housing for seniors and disabled people. For the community/recreational/cultural center, many residents of color in particular shared that they would like to see a community center that culturally reflects them, that is staffed by people from *within their communities*, that has free bus and shuttle transportation to the building(s), and that town staff offices not used for programming should not be relocated there. For a school, residents expressed that community schools

should be reopened, some residents expressed particular support for the Odyssey Community School, and a recurring theme in the focus groups with Black, Latinx, Bengali and trans residents was a lack of knowledge about the schools being closed. Finally, in terms of direct services and support, residents emphasized language access for medical care, particularly in Spanish and Bangla, job training, immigration/citizenship support, adult continuing education, job training, gender affirming medical care, and childcare (including daytime and evening).

It is critical to note that the community largely did not have a single preference for what should be done with each of these buildings, and are open to these schools being repurposed into any of the top four themes. In other words, these recommendations are transferable between the schools.



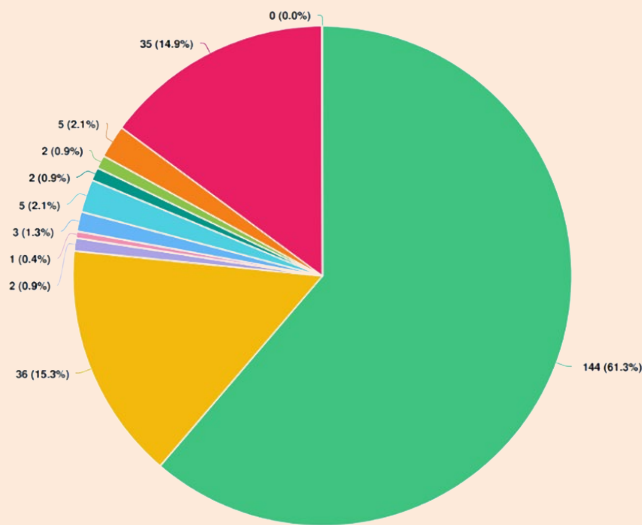
Results that are specific to the survey, as well as to the focus groups and direct community interaction, will be discussed on their own terms in the appendix. In the next section of the report, community members share their thoughts on implementation and next steps to successful implementation of any of these recommendations.

Tables from Survey by Race/Ethnicity/Nationality, Gender, Income

GENDER

Q5 What is your gender?

For a list of various gender descriptions please visit <https://young.scot/get-informed/national/gendere-identity-terms>

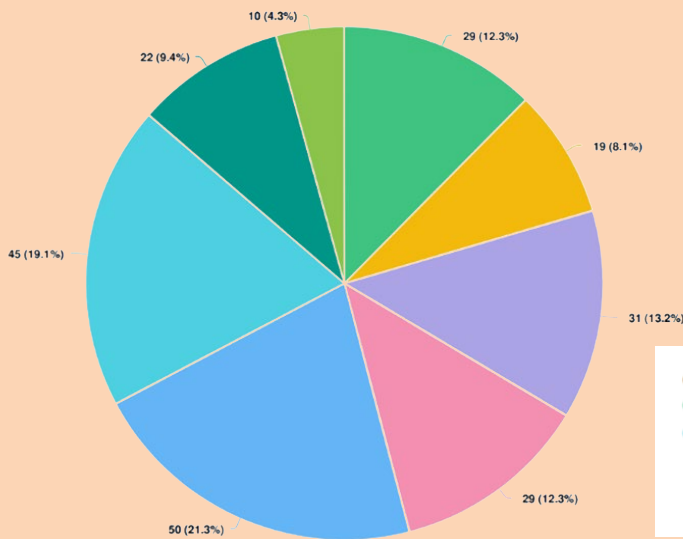


Question options

- Cis-Female
- Cis-Male
- Trans-Female
- Trans-Male
- Two-Spirit
- Non-binary
- Gender non-conforming
- Genderqueer
- Agender
- Other (please specify)
- Third Gender

INCOME

Q9 What is your household income level?



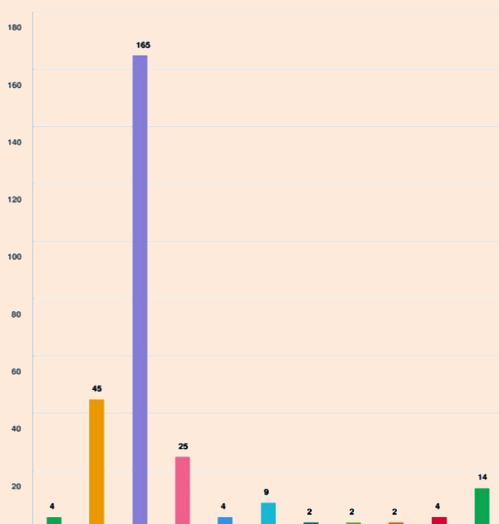
Question options

- \$15,000 or less
- \$15,000 to \$30,000
- \$30,000 to \$50,000
- \$50,000 to \$70,000
- \$70,000 to \$100,000
- \$100,000 to \$150,000
- \$150,000 to \$250,000
- \$250,000 or more

Mandatory Question (235 response(s))
Question type: Dropdown Question

RACE/ETHNICITY

Q7 Which category/categories describe you? (Select all that apply)



Question options

- Asian
- Black
- White
- Latinx
- South West Asia/North Africa
- American Indian
- Alaskan Native
- Pacific Islander
- Native Hawaiian
- South or South East Asia
- Other (please specify)

Mandatory Question (235 response(s))
Question type: Checkbox Question

Nathan Hale

Out of the three schools Nathan Hale received the most diverse array of responses. Having been closed for over ten years, the community has felt its absence. There was one thing that the entire community agreed upon – whatever the building is to be



repurposed into must be a community space. The two major themes we recommend be implemented at Nathan Hale include a school and housing. With that being said, such spaces would need to be created with the intention and function of a community space. This need was made very clear in community responses.

Schools

When the schools were closed/shut down, it was very clear that the predominantly Black/Brown schools were chosen to be closed and the community was rightfully upset. Also remembers that there was a lot of backlash from white, wealthy families in Manchester who did not want the kids from Washington, Nathan Hale, and Robertson to 'integrate' into their schools. It sent a very clear message to the low-income families in Manchester, in my opinion. - 25-year-old Bengali woman

A question that was asked of us often is “why did the schools close in the first place when we need more schools?” Many individuals felt that the community has suffered with the closing of the school and yearned to return to a time with a school in the Nathan Hale neighborhood.

13.7% of individuals interacted with mentioned their desire to have a school in place of one of the vacant school buildings. Additionally, 26.5% of individuals were interested in lifetime learning opportunities that are accessible to community members.

The BoE has communicated their needs for a permanent space for Manchester Middle Academy (currently at Washington), space for Bentley Alternative Education (currently at MHS), space for the Ecredit Program (currently in rented space), and a space for Adult Education (currently in rented space). Some of these schools could be permanently housed in Washington or Robertson instead of Nathan Hale to meet these needs. An expansion of the Adult Education office could be a pathway to meet the BoE needs as well as the desires of the community to have a lifetime education space within the community.

Another option, 15 survey respondents and a handful of other individuals from town halls and texts would like to see Odyssey Community School moving into Nathan Hale revisited. Our team was able to confirm Odyssey's continued interest in utilizing one of the vacated schools to house their school in the future. Out of the three vacant schools only Nathan Hale would meet the size requirement Odyssey is looking for.

In asking about the future vision for these school buildings many community members shared their experiences with the current school system. Within all of our focus groups and targeted interviews, individuals shared experiences of marginalization within the school system. As a result, many asked about the possibility of building an alternative pathway to schooling that is built with the needs of the most marginalized community members centered from the beginning. Individuals shared experiences of racism, transphobia, lack of language access, bullying by teachers and administrators, and lack of disability accommodations.

A final option for repurposing Nathan Hale related to schooling could be establishing a new alternative school that serves the community, such as an unschooling co-op or charter school. A new alternative school would be an opportunity to create a multilingual school that is built for BIPOC and non-English speaking families first. This would also be an opportunity to create trans and disability-friendly schooling that accommodates the needs of the most marginalized within the community.

Numerous resources are available on how to start a charter school and other alternative schooling options, such as unschooling co-operatives, in the state of Connecticut. For instance, TwineSIS offers curated resources for opening a private school in Connecticut, including state regulations, resources, and support⁹. Time4Learning offers resources and a list of existing homeschooling/unschooling co-ops in Connecticut¹⁰, and Connecticut's Department of Education provides an overview of guidelines and resources for homeschooling/unschooling.¹¹

Additionally, all of these options should allow the school to be used as a community space after school hours for community events and programming.

⁹ <https://choosetwine.com/starting-a-private-school/states/ct/#regulations>

¹⁰ <https://www.time4learning.com/homeschooling/connecticut/local-groups-co-ops.html#ct-homeschool-groups>

¹¹ <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Homeschooling/Homeschooling-in-Connecticut>

Housing

Across the board, affordable housing was identified as the repurposed schools, by both historically marginalized white community. Community residents specified that they mean housing below 50% of the Area Median Income for multi-bedroom family units for single-parent residents.

Community residents also shared their desire for building a more robust temporary and transitional housing system for residents with a particular focus on shelters for unhoused residents, domestic violence victims, and no freeze shelters. There was also a desire to have a space built to support youth aging out of the foster care system. Many residents communicated that housing would also be an opportunity to include a community food pantry and to have dedicated community rental space that community members can use year-round.

Based on our community engagement, it is clear that Manchester needs a larger plan for housing that extends beyond Nathan Hale, Robertson and Washington. True affordable housing was desired by almost all residents we spoke with and can be transformative for Manchester residents and their families. Additionally, Latinx residents in particular addressed the need for an entirely new housing application model that does not require credit score information or social security numbers. The Manchester Affordable housing plan should also include pathways for home ownership for individuals historically impacted by redlining and racist housing systems.

From our engagement process, housing was one of the most desired and the only area of conflict between residents based on race and household income. White residents with a household income of more than \$70,000 a year were much more likely to say affordable housing was not needed in the community than any individuals making less than \$70,000 a year.

You asked what we should do with this closed School Nathan Hale on Spruce Street we have a great need for senior housing apartments a great need, thank you is that a possibility for this school they did it with Bennett please if you could do that would be great!

Text from community member

Washington

The responses for the repurposing of Washington were in favor of utilizing the building as a recreation and cultural center, as well as the possibility for utilizing at least part of the building as a school. Currently, Washington is split into two, Manchester Middle Academy on one end and the Mahoney Recreation center on the other. A similar set up in the future could work, or a mix of below 50% AMI affordable housing on one end and a recreation center for the community on the other.

Across all groups we spoke with there was consensus that an accessible recreation and cultural center was needed in the community.



Community Center/Recreation Center/Cultural Center

Residents desired a space that could be used for social and cultural hangouts by marginalized groups and other community residents throughout the day and into the evening. Many residents shared the need for a space that operates late into the evening to offer counter-programming for individuals that yearn for a space other than going to bars for socialization. Residents wanted a space that could be a cafe throughout the day, where individuals can work from and engage with one another. This space would also be used

to host community events in the evening such as open mics, karaoke, dancing, storytelling and more. Residents requested that this space be staffed by multilingual staff that are representative of the community and are trained in being able to support community members from the most marginalized backgrounds.

I haven't seen and didn't see very much from the town during my time working and living here to engage the Black community overall when it came to programming and would like to see the town make an intentional effort to do that once they make their decision about what they plan to do with the schools. I am and was impressed by the variety of programs they offer and run but I'm not sure how well they are doing about reaching out to the Black community to ensure they know about these programs. Accessibility to the programs by Black people and families once they are running at the closed schools should be top priority.

- Val, Black community organizer and former resident

Residents asked that this space also be used for alternative education purposes, having reading rooms, study halls, music rooms, computer labs, and maker spaces that allow them to engage with education outside of their school. Beyond just the academic support, residents asked for social and emotional support clubs for youth, such as field trips to places like museums, aquariums, amusement parks, colleges visits to learn about higher education, STEM programs, robotics, homework support programs, and peer support groups such as chai night for Bengali girls.

There is interest from town staff to potentially house the youth services office at Washington. This move could be in line with the community's desires for youth space and programming.

We don't just need a laptop handed to me, but support in understanding how to use it. So, even if resources are there, it's not helpful when folks are not properly equipped on how to use those resources. The town should use the space for computer classes and other specific classes led by another Bengali woman, because we would feel more comfortable if it was someone similar to us.

-Farah, 58-year-old Bengali woman (translated from Bangla to English)

Since Washington already has a recreational center and community pool, it would be easy to implement the use of the center for community members, hosting spotting opportunities.

Lastly, community members desired an incubation hub that supports community members in launching their own programming and organizations, that provides a space to build community power, as well as opportunities for transformation and reclamation skill building. This space in particular would need to be created by a separate entity than the town. It is in the town's best interest to support the creation of this space as it will allow new ideas to be cultivated and grown. However, there would be a conflict if the town is running this service directly. Directly related to this and to honor the desire for cultural space that allows the most marginalized individuals to have a space within community programming there, is a desire to create a Pride Center, a space for non-English speaking individuals, and a space for Black individuals to belong. These spaces could be hosted in Washington and would need to be staffed and run by individuals from those communities to ensure safety.

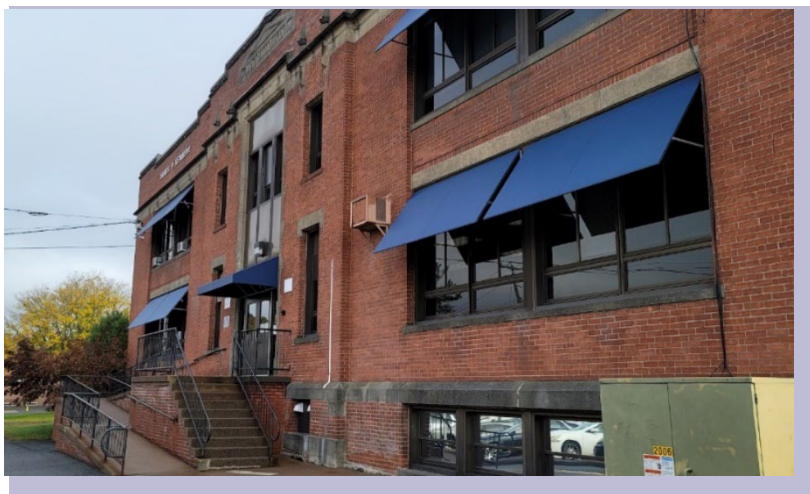
As mentioned in the opening to the results, many of these offerings could be housed in any of the three buildings. Some of the recommendations from Nathan Hale would similarly apply to Washington, including moving the Adult Education office programming into Washington.

Robertson

Similar to Washington, Robertson is also currently used for dual purposes. The older part of the school currently houses the Board of Education office. The newer extension is currently used to house schools that are being renovated in the town and is expected to be vacated in 2025 once all the schools awaiting renovation are fully renovated.

One of the major differences between Robertson and the two other schools is that Robertson was included in the larger Parks and Recreation plan announced last year. Since Robertson is at the intersection of various plans that require coordination between the BoE, town staff, and the communities' needs, making a decision for Robertson will require coordination between the various offices while taking the communities' needs below into consideration.

In addition to the continued desire for below 50% AMI affordable housing, school, and a recreation and cultural center, there is a desire for a larger community-cultural center that also hosts direct services and support for the community.



Community-Cultural Center & Direct Services and Support

There are currently very few spaces in Manchester that center the diverse array of cultures of the Manchester community. Community residents desired a space that would be a full-service space for them. This space would serve as a cultural hub by being created in a way that centers the needs of the most marginalized within the community and can be a cross-cultural, multi-generational space that offers support pathways for every stage of life. Although we recommended moving many of youth programming to Washington, it is important to have a space that offers programming for children younger than school age, parents and caregivers, and older adults within the community. Building a new over 70,000 square foot building, as reflected in the Parks and Facilities Master Plan could support building this cultural center. Additionally, this space could also meet the need for a 30,000 square foot center for a new Senior Center.

We need more event spaces that people can host to have parties and celebrations, but not places that are heavily surveilled or controlled by those who would pose requirements we cannot meet. We have many people who are going through a difficult time in their life and are coping with trauma and go to bars to distract themselves. We want more of these spaces to be run by our communities, more 'community bars' where in the afternoon it's for families and it also has a late-night function...with open mic nights, karaoke, space to share food and dance. People can go up and talk and share what's on their mind and on their heart, or they could share a story, or a fundraiser. Community members can take turns making food and selling it during karaoke nights. And if the bar generates more money than the daycare, then that money could go into subsidizing the daycare to bring down the cost and not compromise on wages.

- Jose, 35 to 45 year-old Latino man

Community members shared the need for day and night care, mentioning the difficulty in finding care for second and third shift workers without the enormous barriers of prohibitively expensive costs, operational hours that don't account for second and third work shifts, and overly burdensome applications, particularly around income verification. This space could offer an alternative for both day and night care; creating services necessary for the continued support of parents and caregivers in the town.

At the same time, adults shared the desire to have a space that can support them in advancing their careers and obtaining financial security. Undocumented community members in particular shared the difficulty in finding jobs that pay more than \$8/hour within the community. Individuals are interested in training and licensing opportunities in fields such as childcare, clerical work, peer support, financial literacy, career mapping, plumbing, electrical work, coding, social sciences, cooking, yoga, gymnastics, dance, and language instruction.

As a multi-generational space, this center could host a multitude of family support and education spaces, as well as conflict resolution and transformation spaces that offer practical services as well as support community members in skill building in these areas. Residents also shared the need for mental health care that recognizes marginalized communities and cultures, as well as medical services that are accessible. Non-English-speaking communities shared the difficulty in accessing support in their native language for both mental and physical health care. Additionally, Trans community members shared that Manchester currently does not have gender-affirming medical care and services and community members must travel to New Haven or even out of state for medical care.

With Robertson being a space that supports the various aspects of community needs, it would be able to offer affordable and accessible mental and medical health services, including culturally-led and -specific services, one-on-one support, group support, and mobile services. Many individuals in the community struggle finding services without insurance. Offering low-cost options for those without insurance would be a way to bridge this gap.

Beyond this one center, community residents mentioned the need for community mobile vans, medical clinics with language access, health advocates and navigators, and clinics where residents feel comfortable and won't be discriminated against.

Community Challenges and Process Limitations

In order to come up with recommendations for the three schools, it was necessary to understand the current challenges community members face. The aim of repurposing these schools is to reuse these spaces in ways that work and are meaningful for town residents. Without understanding the challenges, we only capture half the story of what these schools should be repurposed into.

Additionally, we captured the process limitations in hopes that future processes for community transformation are able to incorporate these and build more robust and equitable processes in the future.

Since our primary efforts were to capture recommendations for what to convert the school buildings into, we did not focus on capturing exact quantitative data for the challenges and limitations section. The following two sections are qualitative in nature, and are sentiments shared generally with the different populations mentioned.

Challenges

During our first town hall meeting with the town, we asked residents what their favorite thing about the town was. Some spoke of the downtown area, others the schools and available programming, and the majority spoke about the people in town. Manchester's defining feature is its people. There is a lot of love in Manchester, but that does not mean that there are not everyday challenges that the community is facing.

Residents from all backgrounds spoke about the direction Manchester is heading in. Participants from Black, Latinx, Bengali, Trans, and working-class white communities shared that they did not feel the town and its services were being built for them or with them centered in the creation process. Residents shared similar sentiments in the 2021 affordable housing report written by Sustainable CT.

For many of the residents we spoke with, this means that current services are inaccessible for Black, Bengali, Latinx, and Trans community members. Countless BIPOC and Trans participants shared that at current offerings they do not feel safe and do not belong due to this.

By definition, being marginalized is to be treated as peripheral/insignificant. As we recognize and honor that certain communities are marginalized within the town of Manchester and more broadly, the country, we are saying that some communities in Manchester are treated as peripheral in every part of daily life. This means that by default, town programming and services are in fact, not being built with the most marginalized in mind. The shift to building programming and services that center the most marginalized is one that requires intentionality, training and skill building, and long-term visioning. When we create with the most marginalized in mind, we build for everyone. When we do not center the most marginalized in our processes then we create exclusionary programs that continue the conditions for marginalization.

This lack of centering shows up in various areas of town life. Some of the ways this lack of centering shows up in town services and programming are:

- Inequitable hiring practices; meaning, town staff are not representative of town residents. For example, only 10% of town staff are people of color when over 40% of Manchester residents are people of color.
- Lack of communication and transparency from the town, since the most marginalized are not included in decision-making and communication practices are not built to center their needs.
 - Most BIPOC and Trans residents we spoke with did not know the schools were closed.
- Retaliation, in the form of ostracization and punishment, when individuals speak out against their oppression.
 - This pushes individuals to share their truth in established safe spaces.
- Lack of safe transportation.
 - Participants shared at least three recent instances of Black children harassed on their way to programs or services.

- Many of the unhoused individuals we spoke with spoke about the impending return of mistreatment after the free bus services came to an end.
- Hiring consultants, in particular not representative consultants to understand marginalized communities' needs instead of investing funds into most marginalized communities.
 - Many community members' basic needs are not being met, and these funds could go to address these needs directly.
 - This leads to community engagement burnout and prevents participation.
 - Reflection from Black Manchester resident: "Lower-income residents who are struggling to survive and whose basic needs aren't being met – asking these questions of residents who are in these financial situations felt exploitative and extractive. These questions have been asked of the residents before, and nothing happened. Asking residents what they want to see years from now feels whimsical when residents may not even be here in a few years due to their struggling to get by. Furthermore, residents question why a firm was hired and money was spent for this process when there is so much need in Manchester right now and people are struggling to survive."

This is an area of work our team is very familiar with. Addressing this challenge requires a holistic approach that supports the town in envisioning a town that is built with the most marginalized in town, training for town staff and other publicly held offices to understand marginalization and skills to build beyond it, and a comprehensive community accountability process that addresses the current structures in place that maintain marginalization. It is important to address any and all retaliation practices and build systems of support for individuals who are harassed in the town, making it clear that such behavior is not acceptable.

Honestly, I would make it uncomfortable, preferably impossible, for white supremacists and bigots to live and work in our city. I would require mandatory representation of BIPOC, all religions and LGBTQ in our Town leadership. Make our streets safer by placing crosswalks at EVERY residential intersection and speed bumps in our neighborhoods. Free sports and activities in our parks for children/teens and their parents. Food fairs celebrating diverse cultures. Religious holidays publicly celebrated and supported in our town (fairs, decorations, events) with a equal amount of attention and consideration as Christmas. Free, quality humane access to MENTAL HEALTH services for EVERYONE.

- White resident survey response

Addressing the Challenges

Manchester has some incredible programs available to residents. By intentionally building out programs and services with the most marginalized in mind the town ensures that these programs and services are accessible to everyone. Manchester residents from the most marginalized backgrounds yearn for this accessibility.

Community engagement results indicated that school repurposing should be owned by and for community members, specifically members of the community currently excluded from current services and spaces. The repurposed schools, both in process and end result, should and must center the most marginalized community members and ensure accessibility to the services and programs for Black, Latinx, trans, disabled, low-income, and/or Bengali/South Asian residents. Community members, particularly those historically excluded and marginalized from town decision-making processes, made the point to continuously request that existing town staff, who are majority white and cisgender, not run the programming and services that will take place at the repurposed schools. In fact, town staff should and must be trained on equity and community health and wellbeing pathways.

Moreover, community spaces and services should be envisioned by the community, while the town provides the funding for the spaces and services.

Equitable hiring and language justice must also be at the forefront of this process. For example, there must always be multilingual services and programs, culturally competent events to engage the Black community and non-Black communities of color. In addition, representative and multilingual staff should be hired to run and administer these programming and services in order to build relationships in the communities. Residents identified this as critical in order for historically marginalized residents to be able to take advantage of the programs and services, which according to our focus groups are currently being under-utilized by these communities. Focus groups participants also emphasized that financial and transportation accessibility is essential for these spaces. For instance, the town should create safe, free, and accessible transportation pathways, including creating bus stops at Washington and Nathan Hale. In addition, residents were clear in their responses that they do not want existing services as they currently operate to be duplicated in the new spaces.

Finally, the town should create a communication plan to advertise programs and services that are created intentionally for the most marginalized communities. This entails creating separate plans for the different communities based on community needs particular to those communities. Specific examples as suggested by the community are identified in the later section titled "Next Steps for Community Engagement Process."

Limitations

Like with any process, there were certain limitations to the process we utilized for community engagement in Manchester.

1. Community Engagement burnout
 - a. Many Black community members we spoke to simply declined participation in the community engagement process due to historical and ongoing marginalization that ignored their ideas and concerns and further excluded them from town decision-making processes.

2. Community challenges are widespread, go beyond the scope of repurposing schools, and require a comprehensive plan to address.
 - a. For many of the challenges identified and community needs raised, additional services, programming and physical spaces are needed than what can be provided at Nathan Hale, Washington and Robertson alone.
3. Trolling and abuse from community members.
 - a. There were numerous instances of trolling and racist and transphobic abuse from community members in the surveys and in online community spaces. This made it impossible to host spaces for all community members together.
4. The survey did not list “School” as an option, which may have limited respondents’ responses on the matter.
5. Community engagement for this project did not center Indigenous community members.
 - a. Our community engagement process did not center Native community members of Manchester. While some residents of Manchester who are Indigenous to other lands may have fallen under the category of Latinx, the Native people of what we currently call Manchester, including the Podunk and the Wangunk, were not directly or explicitly centered throughout this process. This should not be repeated in future Manchester community engagement projects or processes. Town-driven community engagement must center the Native caretakers of the lands the town is currently being sustained by.
6. Limitations with the Your Voice Matters Manchester platform
 - a. For the purposes of data analysis, Meraj Consulting sought to cross-analyze certain responses in order to account for more nuance and to center those most marginalized. However, for the survey responses, which accounts for more than roughly half of the total number of community responses, there is no way within the platform itself to cross-reference the responses across different categories or questions in an automated way. Therefore, Meraj Consulting staff and contractors had to utilize more manual forms of data entry, which may result in unintentional, minor error.

Next Steps for Community Engagement Process

Manchester Residents requested that updates for the repurposing of these schools and any other buildings be communicated with them. Here are some requests from residents:

1. The Town of Manchester should host several community conversations once this report is completed to have a few final discussions about what will happen next.
 - a. This includes hosting several more in-person and virtual conversations after the report is done with the residents who live in the actual neighborhoods where the schools are located to ensure they have every opportunity to be heard about what they want to see happen with these schools.
2. In terms of community engagement, engage with the community, particularly those most marginalized, where they are at. For instance, by attending community events. In addition, utilize the schools to advertise the new programs to families.
3. In terms of advertisements, knock on doors to pass out flyers, and advertise meetings and build community awareness around the project's next steps via social media, newsletters, newspapers, robocalls, and emails. Ensure language justice by providing all advertisements in English, Spanish and Bangla. Ensure disability access by providing image descriptions and alt text for virtual advertisements on all graphics/flyers, as well as large-print and Braille options for flyers.
4. Ensure that the meetings are hosted in several languages (i.e. Spanish and Bangla) and provide ASL interpretation. For virtual events, CART captioning should additionally be provided.

Lastly, residents have asked that town staff and the Board of Directors reflect on how community engagement has been conducted in Manchester in the past, and to create more equitable engagement processes in the future, moving forward.

Conclusion

Manchester residents, town staff and the Board of Education are all excited for the repurposing of these buildings and allowing them to be utilized in ways that center the community in the three neighborhoods. The worst decision that can be made in the repurposing of these schools is a usage that contradicts community members' desires and/or no decision at all leaving the buildings vacant.

Manchester as a town has some extensive gaps and some incredible programs and services. Utilizing these buildings to address some of the gaps would be an enormous step to building a more holistic sense of community in the town. In this report we highlighted some key recommendations and next steps that can support the Board of Directors, town staff, and Board of Education in better serving the entire Manchester community, and which will begin the journey to undo the harm caused by the marginalization of many groups in town.

Appendix

Nathan Hale

In terms of the overall data, accounting for survey responses, focus groups and direct community interaction, 59 out of 219 or 27.0% called for Nathan Hale to be repurposed into housing, with 28 or 47.5% of those respondents specifically calling for the housing to be affordable. In particular, 26 white respondents, 15 Black respondents, 15 Latinx respondents, two American Indian respondents, two Asian respondents, one SWANA respondent and two South/Southeast Asian respondents.

In terms of the 30 total responses, or 13.7%, that suggested that Nathan Hale be kept a school, nine responses mentioned the Odyssey Community School by seven white respondents and two Latinx respondents. Of these respondents who mentioned Odyssey by name, 5 reside in the Nathan Hale neighborhood, 3 in the Highland Park neighborhood and one in the Martin neighborhood. Odyssey was also mentioned once from a text respondent and once in a town hall.

149 respondents, or 68.0%, indicated that Nathan Hale should become a community or recreation center, including 57 white respondents, 27 Black respondents, 54 Latinx respondents, 8 South/Southeast Asian respondents, 4 American Indian respondents, and two Asian respondents.

58 respondents, or 26.5%, noted that they would like to see Nathan Hale converted into a site where direct services are provided, including 22 white respondents, 19 Latinx respondents, 10 Black respondents, 8 South/Southeast Asian respondents, and one American Indian respondent.

One white respondent in particular shared that they would like to see Nathan Hale converted into a Manchester Adult & Continuing Education and Family Resource Center. This respondent elaborated,

“This educational center would include a home base for Manchester Adult Education offices and classrooms. A family resource center would be housed here too where families may register for school all in one location,

seek information about town or school, receive childcare during classes, and include social workers to address barriers to needs. A limited health clinic could be included too where families can get information and referrals. The American Job Center could be requested to set-up an office there once per week to engage families seeking employment and connect them with its Downtown Manchester location. Finally, a drug and alcohol service could be provided for adults seeking help. And a social worker versed in the pardon application process could be contracted for one day a week to counsel those seeking pardons through the online pardon process.”

Based on overall results when cross-analyzed by gender, in total, 183 respondents or 83.6% identified as cisgender, 37 respondents or 16.9% identified as transgender (as broadly understood, detailed above), and 32 or 14.6% identified as “Other.”

Based on these results, 38 cisgender respondents or 20.8% suggested that Nathan Hale be repurposed for housing; 59 cisgender respondents or 32.2% suggested a community center; 24 or 13.1% suggested a school; 23 or 12.6% for direct services; and 26 or 14.2% as “Other.”

Moreover, two transgender respondents or 10.0% suggested that Nathan Hale be repurposed for housing; 7 or 35.0% for a community center; one or 5.0% for both a school and direct services; and 3 or 15.0% suggested “Other.”

Finally, two or 6.3% respondents who identified themselves broadly as an “Other” category suggested Nathan Hale be repurposed for housing; 11 or 34.4% for a community center; 5 or 15.6% for a school; three or 9.4% for direct services; and nine or 28.1% for something “Other.”

Washington

Of the overall responses to questions around Washington, 43 out of 194, or 22.2% of responses called for the building to be repurposed into housing. In particular, 17 white respondents, 13 Latinx respondents, 11 Black respondents, one American Indian respondent, two South/Southeast Asian respondents, and one “Other” respondent.

In terms of repurposing Washington into a school, 15 or 7.7% of respondents indicated their preference for a school, among them 10 white respondents, 4 Black respondents and two “Other” respondents.

161 or 83.0% of respondents called for Washington to be repurposed into a community or recreation center, among them 71 white respondents, 52 Latinx respondents, 26 Black respondents, eight South/Southeast Asian respondents, 5 respondents who indicated “Other,” 4 American Indian respondents, and one Asian respondent.

44 or 22.7% of respondents suggested Washington be changed to a place that provides direct services, including 12 white respondents, 19 Latinx respondents, 9 South/Southeast Asian respondents, 7 Black respondents, two South West Asia/North Africa respondents, and one respondent each who is Asian, American Indian, and “Other.”

23 cisgender respondents or 12.6% suggested that Washington be repurposed for housing; 67 cisgender respondents or 36.6% suggested a community center; 12 or 6.6% suggested a school; nine or 4.9% for direct services; and 25 or 13.7% as “Other.”

Moreover, zero transgender respondents suggested that Washington be repurposed for housing; 7 or 35.0% for a community center; and 1 or 5.0% for a school, direct services and “Other.”

Robertson

Of the survey responses to questions around Robertson, 45 out of 173, or 26.0% of responses called for the building to be repurposed into housing. In particular, by 19 white respondents, 14 Latinx respondents, 12 Black respondents, one South/Southeast Asian respondent, one Asian respondent, and one “Other” respondent.

In terms of repurposing Robertson into a school, 19 or 11.0% of respondents indicated their preference for a school, among them 12 white respondents, 5 Black respondents, 4 Latinx respondents, one South West Asian/North African respondent, one Asian respondent, two American Indian respondents, two South/South East Asian respondents, and one “Other” respondent.

113 or 65.3% of respondents called for Robertson to be repurposed into a community or recreation center, among them 48 Latinx respondents, 29 white respondents, 24 Black respondents, 8 South/Southeast Asian respondents, one Asian respondent, two American Indian respondents, and 3 respondents who indicated “Other.”

42 or 24.3% of respondents suggested Robertson be converted into a place that provides direct services, including 18 Latinx respondents, eight South/Southeast Asian respondents, 8 white respondents, 7 Black respondents, two American Indian respondents, and one Asian respondent.

23 cisgender respondents or 12.6% suggested that Robertson be repurposed for housing; 31 cisgender respondents or 16.9% suggested a community center; 16 or 8.7% suggested a school; 10 or 5.5% for direct services; and 31 or 16.9% as “Other.”

Moreover, zero transgender respondents suggested that Robertson be repurposed for housing; two or 10.0% for both a community center and a school; one or 5.0% for direct services; and 5 or 25.0% as “Other.”

1. Surveys

A. Background

Over the course of five months, from June to November 2022, a total of 235 individuals responded to the “Manchester School Repurposing” survey. A total of 33 questions were included in the survey, and five of these included demographic questions, including, race/ethnicity/nationality, gender, sexual orientation and income.

In terms of demographics, the survey included 153 white residents, or 65.1% of all respondents, 36 Black residents or 15.3% of all respondents, 30 multiracial/multiethnic/multinational residents or 12.8% of all respondents, 15 Latinx residents or 6.4% of all respondents.

Moreover, 181 straight residents filled out the survey, or 77.0% of all respondents, 185 cisgender residents filled out the survey or 78.7% of all respondents, and 137 or 58.3% of all survey respondents identified themselves as white, cisgender and straight. These results are not surprising, and Meraj Consulting anticipated that most of the respondents would be by Manchester residents who historically *have not* been marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes. As a result, Meraj Consulting also devised focus groups as a parallel approach to engage community members historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes.

B. Nathan Hale

Of the survey responses to questions around Nathan Hale in particular, 40 out of 170, or 23.5% of responses called for the building to be repurposed into housing, with one if four specifying that the housing should be affordable housing. In particular, by 26 white respondents, 7 Black respondents, 5 Latinx respondents, two American Indian respondents, two Asian respondents, one SWANA respondent and one South/Southeast Asian respondent.

In terms of the 30 total responses, or 17.6%, that suggested that Nathan Hale be kept a school, 9 responses (seven white respondents and two Latinx respondents) mentioned the Odyssey Community School. Of these respondents who mentioned

Odyssey by name, 5 reside in the Nathan Hale neighborhood, 3 in the Highland Park neighborhood and one in the Martin neighborhood.

77 respondents, or 45.3%, indicated that Nathan Hale should become a community or recreation center, including 57 white respondents, 10 Black respondents, 7 Latinx respondents, 4 American Indian respondents, and two Asian respondents.

27 respondents, or 15.9%, noted that they would like to see Nathan Hale converted into a site where direct services are provided, including 22 white respondents, 4 Black respondents, two Latinx respondents, and one American Indian respondent.

The survey responses to “If you had unlimited funding, what would you want [Nathan Hale/ Washington/ Robertson] to be converted into? (Be as specific as possible)”¹² were further analyzed by gender. Gender is broken down into the three groups – cisgender, transgender and Other. Cisgender refers to people for whom they identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Transgender refers broadly to people for whom they identify with a gender, genders or gender different from that which they were assigned at birth. Transgender includes transgender women, transgender men, non-binary people, genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender people. Other refers to people who filled in their own gender. Based on the survey results, the majority of these “Other” responses were either criticizing, mocking or discriminatory of gender categories beyond the rigid and incomplete colonial binary of male and female.

In total, 183 respondents identified as cisgender, 20 respondents identified as transgender (as broadly understood, detailed above), and 32 identified as “Other.” Based on these results, 38 cisgender respondents or 20.8% suggested that Nathan Hale be repurposed for housing; 59 cisgender respondents or 32.2% suggested a community center; 24 or 13.1% suggested a school; 23 or 12.6% for direct services; and 26 or 14.2% as “Other.” Moreover, two transgender respondents or 10.0% suggested that Nathan Hale be repurposed for housing; 7 or 35.0% for a community center; one or 5.0% for both a school and direct services; and 3 or 15.0% suggested “Other.”

¹² Questions 23, 25 and 27, respectively.

Finally, two or 6.3% respondents who identified themselves broadly as an “Other” category suggested Nathan Hale be repurposed for housing; 11 or 34.4% for a community center; 5 or 15.6% for a school; 3 or 9.4% for direct services; and 9 or 28.1% for something “Other.”

Nathan Hale					
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Community Center</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Direct Services</i>	<i>Other</i>
Cisgender	38	59	24	23	26
Transgender	2	7	1	1	3
Other	2	11	5	3	9

c. Washington

Of the survey responses to questions around Washington, 24 out of 145, or 16.6% of responses called for the building to be repurposed into housing. In particular, 17 white respondents, 3 Black respondents, 3 Latinx respondents, one American Indian respondent, one South/Southeast Asian respondent, and one “Other” respondent.

In terms of repurposing Washington into a school, 15 or 10.3% of respondents indicated their preference for a school, among them 10 white respondents, 4 Black respondents and two “Other” respondents.

Eighty-nine or 61.4% of respondents called for Washington to be repurposed into a community or recreation center, among them 71 white respondents, 9 Black respondents, 5 Latinx respondents, 5 respondents who indicated “Other,” 4 American Indian respondents, and one Asian respondent.

Thirteen or 9.0% of respondents suggested Washington be changed to a place that provides direct services, including 12 white respondents, two Latinx respondents, two South West Asia/North Africa respondents, and one respondent each who is Black, Asian, American Indian, South/ South East Asia and “Other.”

Based on the survey results, 23 cisgender respondents or 12.6% suggested that Washington be repurposed for housing; 67 cisgender respondents or 36.6% suggested a community center; 12 or 6.6% suggested a school; nine or 4.9% for direct services; and 25 or 13.7% as “Other.”

Moreover, zero transgender respondents suggested that Washington be repurposed for housing; 7 or 35.0% for a community center; and one or 5.0% for a school, direct services and “Other.”

Finally, two or 6.3% respondents who identified themselves broadly as “Other” category suggested Washington be repurposed for housing; 15 or 46.9% for a community center; two or 6.3% for a school; 3 or 9.4% for direct services; and 8 or 25.0% for something “Other.”

Washington					
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Community Center</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Direct Services</i>	<i>Other</i>
Cisgender	23	67	12	9	25
Transgender	0	7	1	1	1
Other	2	15	2	3	8

D. Robertson

Of the survey responses to questions around Robertson, 26 out of 124, or 21.0% of responses called for the building to be repurposed into housing. In particular, by 19 white respondents, four Black respondents, four Latinx respondents, one Asian respondent, and one “Other” respondent.

In terms of repurposing Robertson into a school, 19 or 15.3% of respondents indicated their preference for a school, among them 12 white respondents, 5 Black respondents, 4 Latinx respondents, one South West Asian/North African respondent, one Asian respondent, two American Indian respondents, two South/South East Asian respondents, and one “Other” respondent.

Forty-one or 33.1% of respondents called for Robertson to be repurposed into a community or recreation center, among them 29 white respondents, 7 Black respondents, one Latinx respondent, one Asian respondent, two American Indian respondents, and 3 respondents who indicated “Other.”

Eleven or 8.9% of respondents suggested Robertson be converted into a place that provides direct services, including 8 white respondents, two American Indian respondents, one Black respondent, one Latinx respondent, and one Asian respondent.

Based on the survey results, 23 cisgender respondents or 12.6% suggested that Robertson be repurposed for housing; 31 cisgender respondents or 16.9% suggested a community center; 16 or 8.7% suggested a school; 10 or 5.5% for direct services; and 31 or 16.9% as “Other.”

Moreover, zero transgender respondents suggested that Robertson be repurposed for housing; two or 10.0% for both a community center and a school; one or 5.0% for direct services; and 5 or 25.0% as “Other.”

Finally, four or 12.5% respondents who identified themselves broadly as an “Other” category suggested Robertson be repurposed for housing; 7 or 21.9% for a community center; one or 3.1% for a school; zero for direct services; and 8 or 25.0% for something “Other.”

Robertson					
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Community Center</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Direct Services</i>	<i>Other</i>
Cisgender	23	31	16	10	31
Transgender	0	2	2	1	5
Other	4	7	1	0	8

2. Focus Groups & Direct Community Interaction

Meraj Consulting conducted focus groups with four communities historically marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes in the Town of Manchester. This included Black residents, Latinx residents, Bengali residents, and transgender residents.

Black Community Members

Meraj Consulting staff and contractors spoke to 180 Black Manchester residents, including some former residents, about community needs and views regarding the repurposing of the three schools. Meraj conducted two focus groups and individual interviews with a total of 16 residents. For these residents, some of the top themes that emerged were community needs for free events, classes with food, and programming for the whole family, as well as affordable housing, as top community needs for the repurposing of the schools. The other top theme was the fact that the residents were not aware that the schools were even closed.

Table 1: Overall Themes in Focus Groups with Black Community Members

(Number of times themes raised by focus group participants)

17	Free events, classes with food and programming for whole family; Hire Black residents to run programming/town financial support
11	Tired of participating/not being heard; Not enough engagement; Want to see town do better/engage community after report completed
8	Affordable housing
8	Didn't know schools were closed
6	Language justice & access/cultural competency

In terms of community members' views on the repurposing of the schools, one participant, a 25-year-old, shared that Washington should be made into a Y or a Boys

and Girls Club. Another participant suggested that an indoor pool be built at Nathan Hale. More generally, participants also stated that transportation and free shuttles must be provided to and from the repurposed schools. This suggestion is a community need that is responding to a barrier that currently exists for some Black Manchester residents – that transportation access to community spaces, classes, extracurricular activities, enrichment and continuing education for youth, adults, seniors and families is a serious barrier for some if not many Black Manchester residents.

Bengali Community Members

Meraj Consulting staff and contractors spoke to 20-25 Bengali Manchester residents, including former residents, about community needs and views regarding the repurposing of the three schools. Meraj conducted two focus groups with six Bengali girl youth, three Bengali women, in addition to two individual interviews, for a total of 11 Bengali community members. For these residents, some of the top themes that emerged were community needs for language justice and access and cultural competency, barriers to medical and mental health care, and the community need for free events, classes with food and programming for the whole family.

Table 2: Overall Themes in Focus Groups with Bengali Community Members

(Number of times themes raised by focus group participants)

11	Language justice & access/cultural competency
8	Barriers to medical/mental health care
8	Free events, sports, art galleries, theatre, study spaces; classes with food and programming for whole family; Hire Bengali residents to run programming/town financial support
3	Didn't know schools were closed
2	Not enough engagement; Want to see town do better/engage community after report completed
1	Affordable housing

In terms of community members' views on the repurposing of the schools, one participant, a 24-year-old woman named Leena¹³ shared that for Nathan Hale in particular, the school should become a community center that provides daycare and resources pertaining to immigration and jobs. Leena shared, "The problem with our community is not having enough access to specific resources. Or not having enough education on how to apply for a job, or a citizen exam."

According to Mumtaz,¹⁴ a 53-year-old Bengali woman who has lived in Manchester for 25+ years, "the most important issue, especially for Bengali women, is the language barrier." Mumtaz elaborated that interpretation and translation services are the highest needs in our community right now, and that many Bengali parents struggle to communicate with their children's schools as well as in doctor's offices. Mumtaz also suggested that English classes be taught by someone who is Bengali, in order to create a stronger connection with the students, and Farah¹⁵ a 58-year-old woman who has also lived in Manchester for 25+ years, suggested that the repurposed schools include "a space for computer classes and also other specific classes led by another Bengali woman" in order to feel more comfortable with someone similar to her.

Latinx Community Members

Meraj Consulting staff and contractors conducted three focus groups and four individual interviews with a total of 22 Latinx residents. For these residents, some of the top themes that emerged were community needs for free events, classes with food and programming for the whole family, language justice and access, and barriers to medical and emergency care both in terms of cost and language access.

Note-taking for the focus groups with Latinx participants more often accounted for general thematic grouping, and not for individuals' responses. Therefore, exact numbers are unable to be ascertained. Nonetheless, consistent themes among the 22 Latinx residents in the focus groups included that there was not enough

¹³ Leena's name has been changed for anonymity.

¹⁴ Mumtaz's name has been changed for anonymity.

¹⁵ Farah's name has been changed for anonymity.

engagement by the Town of Manchester; wanting to see the town do better in terms of engagement with the community once the report is completed; hiring Latinx residents to run programming at the repurposed schools with the financial support of the town; that they are tired of participating/not being heard; community needs for free events, classes with food and programming for whole family; affordable housing; and being unaware that the schools were even closed.

Table 3: Latinx Community Needs for the Repurposed Schools
(Number of times themes raised by focus group participants)

24	Art club/Arts/Art workshops; Dance (K-pop club, Zumba); Singing; Sports/Community sports and programs; Entertainment; Clubs (plants, cooking, puppies)
17	Direct Services (Legal aid, Know your rights legal clinics; Latinx health and dental clinics)
12	Continuing Education (job training for undocumented folks, Career workshops, Job training workshops (i.e. cosmetology), English classes, financial literacy); College Access/ College Access Help
11	After school programs, Financial literacy classes for young folks, Childcare/Daycare
10	Housing

Vanesa¹⁶, a 20-30-year-old Latina who is undocumented and a mother, shared that when she went to the Manchester Emergency Room with her kids, they did not offer her interpreters for four hours. Jose¹⁷, a 35-45-year-old Latino who is undocumented and a father, expressed the community needs for safe and family-friendly community spaces as well as the need for more affordable daycare. Jose offered the following suggestions:

¹⁶ Vanesa’s name has been changed for anonymity.

¹⁷ Jose’s name has been changed for anonymity.

We need more event spaces that people can host to have parties and celebrations, but not places that are heavily surveilled or controlled by those who would pose requirements we cannot meet. We have a lot of people who are going through a difficult time in their life and are coping with trauma and go to bars to distract themselves. We want more of these spaces to be run by our communities, more 'community bars' where in the afternoon it's for families and it also has a late-night function...with open mic nights, karaoke, space to share food and dance. People can go up and talk and share what's on their mind and on their heart, or they could share a story, or a fundraiser. Community members can take turns making food and selling it during karaoke nights. And if the bar generates more money than the daycare, then that money could go into subsidizing the daycare to bring down the cost and not compromise on wages.

Trans Community Members

Meraj Consulting staff and contractors conducted 15 individual interviews and hosted two coffee hours with a total of 17 transgender residents. For these residents, some of the top themes that emerged were community needs for trans specific medical services, both in terms of physical and mental health; an LGBTQ+ community center that includes safe community programming; and affordable housing at below 50% AMI; free events and classes with food and programming for whole family; and access to free public transportation.

Trans residents expressed that they were shocked to be included in the town engagement; that they want to see the town do more to prioritize their safety and to be engaged in future processes; and to hire trans residents to run programming with town financial support. In terms of the schools, transgender residents we spoke to in focus groups named that a pride center should be included in one of the schools that is run by and for LGBTQ+ residents (perhaps Washington or Robertson, or wherever there is a cultural center); to create a medical space where folks can receive hormone replacement therapy (HRT), counseling, and trans specific care (Robertson might be best); transitional housing at Nathan Hale or new space in Robertson for trans, disabled, unhoused, and/or individuals aging out of foster care residential facilities; and a 2SLGBTQ+ specific organizing space for advocacy and to build out services that town is not providing (potentially in Washington).