



Pass the Potatoes: Environment Omaha
Final Results Document

Introduction

On July 15, Environment Omaha launched Pass the Potatoes, a virtual town hall event that invited anyone interested in Omaha to submit ideas for improving the sustainability of the city. The site allows the public to generate ideas, help others evolve their ideas and ultimately vote and prioritize the best ideas. Ideas were sought in each of the five Environment Omaha content areas.

- Natural Environment
- Urban Form and Transportation
- Building Construction
- Resource Conservation
- Community Health

Users were asked to submit as many ideas as they like and encourage others to support and build on their ideas. The results of the effort were fantastic. More than 400 Omaha residents participated, contributing 130 great ideas about improving the sustainability of the community. At the completion of the project, a panel of experts was convened by Omaha by Design and the city to select one of the submitted ideas for implementation. Announcement of the selected idea will be made in early January.

This document provides all of the ideas submitted through Pass the Potatoes.

Environment Omaha

In November 2008, the City of Omaha partnered with Omaha by Design to launch Environment Omaha, a new multi-year policy development initiative that calls for the creation of a comprehensive environmental section for the city's master plan. The initiative is addressing five major content areas – the natural environment, urban form and transportation, building construction, resource conservation and community health.

The initiative's work plan mirrors the process employed by the City of Omaha and Omaha by Design to help create the city's Urban Design Element (UDE). The UDE, designed to improve the quality of development in Omaha while protecting and enhancing the city's natural environment, was adopted as part of Omaha's master plan in 2004. In August 2007, the Omaha City Council approved a groundbreaking package of zoning code revisions and additions designed to implement the UDE's recommendations.

Topic 1: Natural Environment

Topic Description

We may not have mountains or oceans, but did you know Omaha is home to one of the oldest restored tallgrass prairies in the nation and 299 miles of natural creeks and streams? The air, climate, landforms, water features, and plant and animal communities within our city are part of our identity and quality of life. They help form the basis of who we are and how we think.

What can Omaha do to preserve and enhance the unique character of its natural environment? What are you doing to protect and promote the natural environment that could be implemented on a citywide scale?

Top Ideas (As voted on by participants)

- 1. Plastic Bag Tax (100 Points)** - Omaha should implement a 5-cent bag tax on all plastic bags distributed at area stores with the funds generated used for community environmental initiatives.
- 2. Green Rooftops (70 Points)** - Omaha should look into adding Green Rooftops-especially Downtown.
- 3. Update the weed ordinance (58 Points)** - Did you know that if you planted native prairie grass in your yard, it technically violates the city weed ordinance? Let's support and encourage residents to grow what's most suitable to this climate.
- 4. Protect the Papio (54 Points)** - Omaha lies within the Papillion Creek Watershed, which according to the Papio-NRD is, "one of the most flash flood prone areas in Nebraska." In developed areas, the creek has been channelized and does not behave in a natural way which disrupts wildlife and reduces water quality.
- 5. Recycling for Apartments (51 Points)** - Allow recycling for apartments and other multi-family buildings. Currently Omaha only picks up recycling for single family houses.
- 6. Urban Farmscapes (50 points)** - Transform foreclosed or vacant commercial properties into urban farmscapes that are integrated into the public school curriculum.
- 7. Bigger City Recycling Bins (47 Points)** - Most of what we use today can be recycled by the City of Omaha, but the size of our recycling bins dwarfs that of our trash cans AND when the recycling bin overflows or wind gusts blow, the recycling items blow away and then become a part of our litter problem.
- 8. Introduce prairie aesthetic into public parks and properties (45 Points)** - Nothing is more impressive than a wide-open field of prairie grasses and wildflowers swaying in the breeze. Now imagine that same look and feel at your neighborhood park or the side of the highway that you take to work daily.
- 9. Cut back on mowing of urban interstate highway (44 Points)** - When the urban interstate highway was built in was seed with native plants because of the ability of the plants to stabilize the soil and not needing of frequent mowing. We mow heck out urban interstate.
- 10. Storm Sewer Utility (40 Points)** - Currently there is no utility or fee for the use of the storm sewers, and thus, there is little incentive for anyone to limit the amount of impermeable surface on their property because no matter how much stormwater runs off of it and uses the sewer



Topic 2: Urban Form and Transportation

Topic Description

In 1950, Omaha's population density (the number of people per unit of area) was about 6,000 people per square mile. Today, it's substantially lower - about 3,650 people per square mile. What are we doing, or not doing, with all that space? Are we hampering our ability to efficiently move around the city and provide the city services we all need and want?

The key elements in how our city is laid out - the type and location of housing, the presence of sidewalks and trails, the type and location of employment centers, the physical design of our roads - all impact the way we navigate around Omaha. We know cars are important, but we also need to make room for walkers, bikers and those who would use mass transit if it was easy and got them where they needed to go.

What can Omaha do to make better use of the space it currently occupies? What can we do to encourage the use of active forms of transportation (walking, biking, public transit)? What are you doing individually that could be implemented on a citywide scale?

Top Ideas (As voted on by participants)

- 1. Find the Bus (52 Points)** - Omaha is a growing mid-size community and our bus system has grown and become confusing. It should be easy to ride the bus. recycling/trash can next to them.
- 2. Commuter Train to Lincoln (41 Points)** - With discounts on game day! High speed rail would be great, but anything is better than the current situation.
- 3. Make bike / trail system more useful (40 Points)** - Omaha has a decent Bike Trail system, but the system is pretty poor for actually trying to get anywhere.
- 4. More bike lanes / trails (32 Points)** - More bike trails and lanes are needed so we can more easily and safely commute around the city.
- 5. Car parking turned into bike parking (31 Points)** - 16+ bikes can be parked in a space that was once filled by one car at a time.



This is something Omaha should really consider. In eliminating just 4 (FOUR) car parking spaces, 64 (SIXTY FOUR) bike spaces could be created, and at a cost of next to nothing.

- 6. Green Streets Master Plan (31 Points)** - Utilize and follow the Green Streets Master Plan that Omaha by Design and the City of Omaha have put together.
- 7. Introduce Diagonal Parking in Downtown Benson (24 Points)** - Diagonal parking could slow speeders and reduce aggressive driving while giving shoppers ample (up to 40% more) parking - something desperately limited in Benson.
- 8. Develop Rail/Bus Intermodal Center (22 Points)** - Develop Rail/Bus Intermodal Center.
- 9. Add more extensive "bike education" to driver's education (22 Points)** - When going through driver's ed, bicyclists on the road are barely covered, if at all.
- 10. Change the NE Dept. of ROADS to the Dept. of Transportation (20 Points)** - We are the only state in the nation to still have a "Department of Roads."

Topic 3: Building Construction

Topic Description

Omaha's buildings are a diverse mix of large and small, old and new, unique and cookie-cutter. We realize the impact our built environment has on our economy and culture, and we want to become a national leader in innovative building construction, renovation and building maintenance. In order to do that, we need to maximize the use and appearance of our existing buildings, promote the creation of inspiring new places, and provide the tools and resources necessary to make it all possible.

What can Omaha do to become a national leader in the appearance and function of our built environment? What have you done (or know can be done) to improve the construction, renovation or maintenance of your home that could be implemented elsewhere? If you're a builder or developer, what have you done to improve the construction, renovation or maintenance of Omaha's built environment that could be implemented elsewhere?

Top Ideas (As voted on by participants)

- 1. Green Roofs (54 Points)** - I'd love to see more green roofs around the city,
- 2. Tax breaks for using reclaimed lumber (36 Points)** - It would be great to provide an incentive for home builders to use reclaimed lumber to build new homes.
- 3. LED Lighting Retrofits (36 Points)** -A low-power, high-efficiency technology created with non-toxic materials, LEDs are the next generation of lighting, leading the way into the green age of illumination.
- 4. Mandate sidewalks (34 Points)** - Mandate sidewalks so that we have walkable neighborhoods.
- 5. Geothermal heating and cooling (28 Points)** - Pipe underground collects the 50-60 degree constant temperature below grade. It redistributes the warm or cool energy to the building, reducing heating and cooling costs.
- 6. All public buildings should be LEED certified (25 Points)** - Energy efficiency should be required in all public buildings.
- 7. Living machines and greywater recycling systems (24 Points)** - We can relieve pressure on Omaha's sewer systems and conserve water by installing living machines and greywater recycling systems to treat greywater naturally.
- 8. Porous Pavement credit (23 Points)** - Increased use of porous pavements (pavers, concrete, even recycled glass) which allow water to drain through vs. run off.
- 9. Green walls (19 Points)** - Green walls improve energy efficiency, are beautiful, and can even be used to grow vegetables and other foods.
- 10. Greenspace for new urban construction (15 Points)** - Increase the setback from the street and incorporate plaza design with raised bed and tree plantings



Topic 4: Resource Conservation

Topic Description

Did you know that Americans collectively use an average of 26 billion gallons of water each day or that almost one-third of the residential waste generated in the United States is packaging? We want to grow and prosper as a city, but we want to do so in a responsible way, one that respects the planet's finite resources. Thinking about what we use and how we use it is not only responsible but could jumpstart a local "green economy" that provides jobs and taps into our population's ingenuity and productivity.

What can Omaha do to ensure that resource conservation continues to occur, even in the midst of community growth? What are you doing to conserve natural resources that could be implemented on a citywide scale?

Top Ideas (As voted on by participants)

- 1. Curbside Apartment Recycling (47 Points)** - What my home-dwelling neighbors have that I do NOT is curbside recycling. T
- 2. Allow small wind turbines (36 Points)** - Currently the City will not allow small-scale wind turbines in the city limits without a special permit.
- 3. Promote using public transportation (30 Points)** - A concerted effort should be made to promote the use of public transportation in Omaha.
- 4. More energy from solar and wind (27 Points)** - Omaha has more sun and wind than anywhere I've been. I propose giving property tax credits for solar panel and wind turbine installations on one's personal residence.
- 5. Change parking regulations (26 Points)** - I propose a rewrite of parking lot policies to consider the minimum amount of parking space development rather than maximum capacity.
- 6. Biofuels Use in Public Vehicles (26 Points)** - Biodiesel can be used in any diesel engine without modification while emitting 78% less carbon dioxide, and can be mixed in any ratio with petroleum diesel.
- 7. Greywater systems (25 Points)** - I propose that incentives be given for new builds and retrofitting of old buildings in the corporate as well as private sector for installation of graywater systems.
- 8. Natural resource plans for new developments (24 Points)** - New developments should be required to have a certain amount of greenspace
- 9. Stop mowing down vast tracts of grass adjacent to highways (24 Points)** - In almost all cases, these roadways are flanked by inexplicably vast tracts of mowed, barren land.
- 10. Suburban Farm Belt (21 Points)** - Create a vision for the transition between urban and rural to rival the current vision for a high-speed auto beltway.



Topic 5: Community Health

Topic Description

Can you walk, bike or take the bus to the places you frequent in Omaha (work, school, shopping, a night out)? Are there sidewalks, trails, bike lanes and well-marked street crossings in your neighborhood? Believe it or not, these things can help make or break the overall health of our community, as does access to affordable, healthy food and personal decision making that supports healthy living.

What can Omaha, as a community, do to improve the health of its citizens? What have you done (in your life, in your neighborhood, at work) to improve health that could be implemented on a citywide scale?

Top Ideas (As voted on by participants)

- 1. Create a bike sharing program (35 Points)** - Many cities already have bike sharing programs like B-cycle. Des Moines just started a small program. Omaha can do it, too.
- 2. Community Gardens (34 Points)** - A great way for people to interact with each other, support eating your fruits and veggies, and have a place to relax.
- 3. Promote bicycling and walking to school (23 Points)** - The obesity epidemic is a big problem for school-aged children yet the rate of children walking/biking to school has dropped dramatically in recent years.
- 4. Sidewalk connections (17 Points)** - There are missing segments of sidewalk in many areas in town.
- 5. Tax incentives for bicycling (16 Points)** - Federal law now provides tax incentives to bicycle to work (in addition to already existing incentives to carpool and take public transit), yet many employers have yet to offer such incentives to their employees.
- 6. Have local control policies regarding alcohol outlet density (16 Points)** - There is a direct connection between alcohol outlet density (the number of alcohol licensees in a given area) and increased crime rates.
- 7. Encourage online neighborhood resources (11 Points)** - The mission of online neighborhood connections "is to help neighbors connect and foster community within the neighborhood."
- 8. Strengthen neighborhood organizations (7 Points)** - Work with the Neighborhood Center, mayor's office, and City Planning to restore and strengthen the city's 100 or so neighborhood organizations.
- 9. Neighborhood Health Clubs (5 Points)** - I propose that neighborhoods come together to form a group that is dedicated to making sure people stick to their exercise programs.
- 10. Body Litter (5 Points)** - Has anyone ever noticed the excessive amounts of body litter? We walk in it, step on it; track it into our cars, homes and offices. Saliva carries disease.



Additional Ideas Submitted

Additional Idea Submitted

Although the following ideas were not selected as “favorites” by other users, they represent a growing number of individuals interested in improving the sustainability of Omaha. These ideas, along with the other favorites, are eligible for implementation. If you see an idea you like, don't wait for formal organizations like the city to implement, grab some friends and implement!

- Start a letter writing campaign to end hemp prohibition
- Community Composting
- Electric city signs powered by solar power
- Reduce the use of chemicals on lawns and in parks
- Plant Trees Along Interstate System
- City Office Policy to Turn Off Computers, Lights After Work Hour
- LED Street Lights
- Remove Concrete in all Medians and plant trees, grasses, flowers
- Wash personal vehicles on grass areas or with biodegradable soap
- Tree It Up
- Volunteer recycling for bars, clubs, restaurants
- Permeable Parking Lots
- Stop the dumping
- Increase Urban BioDiversity
- Mandatory recycling bins for businesses
- Promote Home Landscape Rain Gardens to Naturally Filter Run Off
- Tax Abatements for Community Gardens
- Require new homes to plant at least one tree
- Fruit Tree Database - Local Food
- Light Shields
- Underpass parks
- A Better Looking Dodge Street
- Organize initiative to plant trees in impoverished areas
- Airport Recycling
- Testbed for the “Solar Roadways” project
- Rubber Sidewalks
- Stop the Keystone XL pipeline
- Electric car charge stations
- Get Outdoors
- First thing first: Integrate nature into our daily lives
- Create protect and expand local centers
- Golf Course Recycling
- Prairie Grass Potholes
- Neighborhood Islands
- Let's right-size new streets & narrow low-use existing streets
- Reduce Landfill Food Waste by Creating a Compost Cooperative
- Enforcement of AntiLitter laws
- Curbside Composting
- Beach at Zorinsky
- Add more extensive “bike education” to driver's education
- Change the Law to Allow NEIGHBORHOOD ELECTRIC VEHICLES (NEV)
- Promote using MAT bus
- Teach Kids How to Ride Bikes in Elementary Schools
- Reintroduce adults to bicycling
- Electric buses with Bike racks on the back and front
- Buy out blighted areas to accommodate urban infill projects
- License Plate Fund Raiser
- Develop Rail/Bus Intermodal Center
- Divide the City
- More Friendly Buses
- Making Omaha a more PET Friendly town
- Develop New Crossroads Transit Center
- Bike Lane on Leavenworth and Pacific to 204th Street
- Tax Breaks for Using Active Forms of Transportation to Work
- Tax code reforms for underutilized land
- Safer Old Market
- Improved timing for traffic lights
- Tourism Route(s) on MAT-Routing Map In Convention Packets
- Commuter train to Nebraska City
- Vans rather than school buses
- Update the Gene Leahy Mall

- Develop affordable housing along transit nodes
- Green cleaning supplies
- Greenspace for new urban construction
- Require Bike Racks with New Construction
- Why not 'rent' out our grassy areas ?
- Keeping Up Older Areas by reducing taxes
- Better maintenance in fewer parks - return parkland to tax rolls
- Set up recycling site for building materials
- Natural resource plans for new developments
- Two-stage ditch design to minimize erosion
- Modify zoning/tax law to encourage urban/suburban farms
- Alternative Energy
- Stop mowing down vast tracts of grass adjacent to highways
- Stop using herbicides in parks, golf courses, etc.
- Recycling Incentive and Pay-as-you-Throw Program
- Curbside organic waste pickup (yard waste and FOOD SCRAPS)
- Revamp and maintain Wasteline web site
- Funding for promoting the Under the Sink facility
- Maps, nodes & links
- Encourage online neighborhood resources like frontporchforum.com
- Swinging bench rose garden
- We should mow the Lake Cunningham Frolf course