

ENVISION NOLENSVILLE PIKE

COMMUNITY,
CREATIVITY, AND
IMAGINATION
IN PLACEMAKING

NASHVILLE | JUNE 2016



in partnership with



NASHVILLE AREA
Metropolitan Planning Organization



INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, South Nashville, and the Nolensville Pike corridor specifically, has seen significant growth in international immigration. Starting in the 1990s, Kurdish, Somali, and Sudanese refugees began settling in Nashville, continuing an influx that began with Laotian settlement in the 1970s. Today, Nashville takes in more than 1,000 refugees a year and is home to one of the largest Kurdish populations outside the Middle East. Latino children represent 25 percent of all kindergarteners in Nashville's public school system. According to the Partnership for a New American Economy, the number of new Americans in Nashville has doubled since 2004.

So it was in this context that, in 2013, Conexión Américas opened the Casa Azafrán community center, envisioning it as a gateway to Nashville's de facto (if not officially recognized) International District. The leadership of Conexión Américas hoped to help spark development that would benefit both immigrant families and original residents of the area alike.

Conexión Américas has worked in partnership with the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), a leader in building healthy communities — notably with new policies in 2010 that prioritized transportation projects with walking and bicycling infrastructure and dedicated funds for active transportation.

In June 2015, Conexión Américas hosted a celebration of a future public park, to be constructed adjacent to Casa Azafrán. In a sense this was the beginning of something else, too: a conversation about what the area's residents hoped to see it become. Inside Casa Azafrán, people wrote ideas on sticky notes — more sidewalks, artistic and culturally friendly crosswalks, slower traffic, bus terminals. Later that year, a night-out event with parents and children attending Metro Nashville Public Schools' Early Learning Center with Casa Azafrán elicited

design ideas for the new park and even more ideas for the Nolensville Pike corridor. It was clear that the desire and energy for positive change as real.

In February, Conexión Américas initiated a first step in a conversation centered on these issues as they affect the South Nashville area around Casa Azafrán. Your Community, Your Priorities was a temporary pop-up installation. In the first opportunity for engagement, participants were asked to drop a coffee bean in a jar to cast a vote for one of six priorities for the Nolensville Pike Corridor. The choices for priorities were: Complete Streets; Affordable Housing; Open Green Space; Shop, Eat, Play Locally; Access to Public Transit; and Improved Transit Service. The installation sat inside Casa Azafrán (which serves as a polling place) during the Presidential Preference Primary & County Primary elections, drawing engagement from 260 residents from across Nashville. Open Green Space garnered the most votes at 23 percent of beans cast, with Shop, Eat, Play Locally coming in second, and Affordable Housing a close third. The second part of the installation asked for other ideas to improve the area. Among the suggestions written in: better railroad crossings; more parks; rain gardens; sidewalks; pedestrian bridges; "low-interest options to payday lenders"; and some kind of trolley or subway system. Many of these ideas would resurface later.

Shortly thereafter, in March, the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) began BRT Lite service along Nolensville Pike — a five-lane, fast-moving arterial with eroded sidewalks, few crosswalks and no bike lanes — that runs through an area that is one of the city's most diverse and home to the majority of Nashville's Latino population. The MPO saw an opportunity to engage community members in identifying concerns about and ideas for getting to the bus, while also ensuring that future changes in transportation and

development are led by their own visions.

Therefore, in early 2016, as a way to gain greater insight into the interlocking past, present and future of the Nolensville Pike corridor of South Nashville, Conexión Américas undertook an ambitious multimodal examination of the area. The project comprises three main undertakings.

First, a public art project in which high school students design and create a temporary bus shelter that encourages conversation about community needs and leads to better implementation of transit in the area. Second, an oral history project in which current and former students in Glencliff High School's Escalera program interview longtime residents of the neighborhood and alumni of the school. Third, a monthlong series of Creative Labs in which members of the local community gather to discuss the assets and shortcomings of the Nolensville Pike area and imagine what it could one day become.

The results were thought-provoking and inspiring. This is the story of how they came to be.

Conexión Américas is a Nashville-based nonprofit organization founded in 2002 whose mission is to build a welcoming community and create opportunities where Latino families can belong, contribute, and succeed.



NOLENSVILLE PIKE BUS SHELTER PROJECT

On a chilly February afternoon in South Nashville, a dozen high school students pile out of a southbound No. 12 Nolensville Pike bus, navigate the crosswalk, and briskly cross five lanes. Then they assemble in front of a bus stop on the other side of the street.

The stop itself is not much to see. A single metal bench sits against a dense row of bushes that separate the sidewalk from the parking lot of an auto parts store. In front of the bench, the traffic on Nolensville Pike zips by just a few feet from the sidewalk's edge. Occasionally the students' conversations are drowned out by the roar of a diesel engine. A few feet South of the bench stands a small metal sign bearing the logo of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA).

The group inspects the stop closely, trying to take in every detail as it is, while they simultaneously start to imagine what they might put there to enhance it. Their task: Create a piece of functional public art, centered on this

bus stop, that raises awareness of transit and invites community involvement. Their budget: \$1,000.

The students, ranging in age from 16 to 18, represent two groups: Glencliff High School's International Teen Outreach Program (ITOP) and the MTA's Youth Action Team. They represent a diverse mix of backgrounds — some are African-American, some are white, some are children of Latino immigrants — and attend schools spanning the Nashville metro area. The two groups have joined together to work on this project at the request of Conexión Américas.

After inspecting the site and having some preliminary discussions, the students file onto a northbound bus, which takes them back to Casa Azafrán. Once there, they meet in the cultural center's "Thinkubator" conference room — where pastries provided by the on-site commercial kitchen await — to talk and plan.

Their discussion begins with the bus stop's problems, which an advisor writes on the whiteboard: there's no roof or shelter of any kind, making the stop rather inhospitable in rain or bright sunshine; when someone is seated on the bench, the sidewalk is barely wide enough for another person to pass without walking close to traffic; this fact makes navigating the stop especially difficult for someone in a wheelchair; there are no lights; the sign says it's a bus stop, but there is no indication of which route, or what the final destination is; there are no landmarks to orient a rider to the fact that this is the stop for Glencliff High School; it is another 15-minute walk to get to school from the stop; what little information there is does not appear in any languages other than English.

They've got their work cut out for them, but they seem up to the challenge. They create a text messaging group to stay in touch, and make plans for their next meeting.



Over the course of the next two-and-a-half months, the students meet in the basement of Oasis Center, a youth community center on Nashville's west side. At these meetings, they sketch designs, plot costs, make compromises, and eventually finalize their design, for which they prepare a PowerPoint presentation.

Over the course of these sessions, they unexpectedly have their first experience with government bureaucracy. While MTA likes their design and supports it, Public Works informs them that it isn't ADA compliant because the sidewalk is only six feet wide. So, the students have to adjust their plans in order to reduce the overall footprint and fill out a permit in the process. Lesson learned.





They cut, drill and screw together the basic frame for their bus shelter's roof using pressure-treated wood — and for some, this is their first time using power tools. They affix corrugated tin to the frame. They take turns painting a multi-colored array of puzzle-piece shapes on the main panel, a sheet of plywood that will sit directly above the bench and serve as a community chalkboard. They trace and cut out the shapes of continents from foam board, to represent the many places of origin for the bus riders in this area. They image-search the internet looking for inspiration, sometimes arguing playfully over which Beyoncé songs to listen to while they work.

On April 18, almost 11 weeks after their first trip to this bus stop, a bright sun shines on the students' completed work. The corrugated tin roof is in place, with small lights hung under it. The words "Together We Ride" have been painted in the center of the puzzle piece shapes, with a placard below that invites the reader to leave a personal response to the following questions:

1. How could your riding experience be improved?
2. What about the transit system works or does not work in the place (city, state or country) where you are from?
3. What do you enjoy most about riding the bus?

There are two containers filled with chalk for users to write their thoughts. "We're proud," 17-year-old Braxton Coleman says of seeing the project through to fruition.

One of the project supervisors asks the students to sit together on the bench for a photo. When she positions herself far enough back to fit everyone in the frame, she has one foot in the street — and she has to hurry out of the way as the light turns green and a long column of cars rushes toward her. The stop still has its issues, clearly.

But that's OK. This temporary bus shelter is an invitation to dialogue. It's a beginning, not an end. Just as these students looked closely at this stop and recognized its flaws and potential, they hope others will do the same.

As 17-year-old Danny Harp puts it:

"We hope they write good stuff and bad about our transit system."



ORAL HISTORIES: 'ESTAMOS AQUÍ'

Just as the Nolensville Pike bus stop project brings together two independent groups in a new way, so does a special series of oral history interviews captured over the same time period. In this case, the parties involved are the Nashville Public Library and the Glenclyff High School chapter of the national Escalera program, which is coordinated by Conexión Américas.



Nashville Public Library provides sound engineering and archiving as part of Estamos Aquí — a series of projects and events focused on exploring the culture and history of Latino Americans in Nashville and the United States. The interviews are conducted by both current and former students in Escalera — an extracurricular program aimed at helping immigrant and refugee students navigate the path to college. The students interview longtime residents of South Nashville. This group of interviewees includes former Glenclyff High School students, teachers and administrators. (In a few cases, when students are unavailable and interviewees are unable to reschedule, Conexión Américas staff conduct the interview.)



The first of these interviews takes place on February 24, in the Alumni Room at Glenclyff High School. The room is decked out in Glenclyff Colts paraphernalia from across the decades. Mannequins at the back room sport 1950s- and '60s-era cheerleading skirts, varsity sweaters, and marching band uniforms. A battered pale-blue-and-red football helmet hangs atop one mannequin. Newspaper clippings and old school banners line the walls.

Debbie Young, a 61-year-old white Glenclyff alumna, is the president of the alumni association and the first to be interviewed for the series. Her interviewers are current Glenclyff seniors Erik Serrano and Sheyla Carrasco, who are both 18 and both children of Latino immigrants. Although other interviews are one-on-one, this session is typical of the series: Serrano and Carrasco choose some of their questions from a list of possible that's been provided, but are also encouraged to ask follow-up questions and go wherever the conversation leads.

Other interviews:

February 24: Janis Sontany, Glenclyff alumna, former state legislator and Metro Councilwoman, interviewed by Anita Adithavone

March 1: Valerie Craig Stringer, retired firefighter and Glenclyff alumna, interviewed by Kenia Umanzor

March 1: Bill Weeks, longtime resident and Glenclyff alum, interviewed by Steve Haruch (Conexión Américas)

March 1: Larry Kittrell, special education teacher at Glenclyff for 28 years, interviewed by Nereida Ortega

April 1: Will Pinkston, longtime resident and current school board member, interviewed by Bryan Itzep

April 6: Suzanne Link, Glenclyff alumna, interviewed by Elizabeth Narvaez-Vega

April 6: Linda Wyatt, Glenclyff Elementary School teacher for 34 years, interviewed by Sandra Habib

April 12: Anna Page, Glenclyff alumna and former Metro Councilwoman, interviewed by Mayra Cervantes (Conexión Américas)

April 20: Chuck Byrn, interviewed by Rosa Marta Mulanax (Conexión Américas)

These are wide-ranging conversations, and cover a lot of ground both in personal biography and area history. Still, certain themes emerge, some of which are summarized below.

What was the neighborhood like when you were growing up?

To a person, interviewees stress what a caring and tightly knit community they grew up in during the 1950s and 1960s. Wyatt remembers that "the community was very close," and that parents knew each other. "It was almost like everyone was kin."

"We knew our neighbors," Young says. "I'm still friends with my childhood neighbors." When her interviewers say today's generation doesn't have that kind of connection, Young advises them to talk to their neighbors. And if they keep their distance? "Get in their face."

The physical appearance of the area was much, much different, as every longtime resident can attest. Wyatt says that Nolensville Pike in those days was just a two-lane highway, and Harding Place, now a major thoroughfare, "was just a field." Stringer remembers the local businesses as a collection of mom-and-pop dime stores. "This area was almost out in the country"

As Byrn remembers, "There was no Metro government here at the time." (The Metro charter, which unified various city governments, was signed in June 1962.)

The demographic makeup of the neighborhood was also much different. It was all white, made up of "mostly people who worked hard for a living," Page recalls. Byrn has a slightly different way of putting it. "There was one color back then," he says. "Redneck."

"It was a much simpler time back then," Sontany says. Where Wright Middle School stands now, on Antioch Pike, was a cow pasture. "We were a small town back then — we had a small town feel," she adds. "Now we're considered the It City."



What was Glenclyff High School like back then?

When talking about their experience as students at Glenclyff interviewees describe a fairly regimented school in which the principal and teachers held unquestioned authority. "No talking in class unless called upon," Sontany recalls. "We were almost scared to death of teachers and principals," Stringer says, describing discipline as "heavy-handed." Kittrell describes seeing the principal walk the halls with a paddle: "It blew my mind," he says.



The student body itself was much different than today's mix of ethnic heritages and languages. "I was here before integration, so we had a white student body," Sontany says. "All of our teachers were white — even the custodians."

And while the rules of conduct were strict, the dress code was more relaxed back then, compared to today's Standard School Attire requirements. Even so, girls weren't allowed to wear pants when most of the interviewees attended.

As for academics, all interviewed say they remember having good teachers who cared about their students. It was a more innocent time, several say — citing the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as a turning point. "There wasn't as much to learn back then," Sontany says. "The curriculum was much simpler."

Pinkston offers that Metro Schools' curriculum has changed little since the 1950s, arguing instead that the methodology has changed. "It used to be lots of lectures," he says. "Now, it's more project-based."

What was social life like then?

Several interviewees also suggest that the lack of internet-enabled cell phones and other technology influenced their social lives. Mostly for the better.

"We talked to each other," Young says.

Football and basketball games at the school were important social events, as were fundraising auctions. Outside of school, there were fewer options than there are now. That meant that important shopping trips required a trip downtown to shops on Church Street and Harvey's department store.

"You had to dress up to go downtown," Sontany recalls.

In the neighborhood, there was a roller rink, long since gone, a bowling alley, recently demolished, and the small diversions afforded by dime-store magazines and soda fountains. But there is one destination that beats out all others as the center of the Glenclyff High School social universe of the time.

"Back in the day you used to cruise Shoney's," Sontany says. (That's where she met her first boyfriend.) It was a place to see and be seen.

How has Glenclyff High School changed?

Wrapped up in this question is the very difficult subject of school desegregation in 1960s Nashville, though interviewees tend to describe this process in fairly simple terms.

As African-American students began to be bused in from surrounding neighborhoods during integration, the demographics of Glenclyff changed, and it was, as Stringer describes it, "a little bit of a shock for everybody."

But by and large, interviewees said, this was not a problem. "I embraced it," Young says. "I always have."

Sontany describes her tenure at Glenclyff as "exciting times ... a lot of turmoil with civil rights and the beginning of the Vietnam War."

By the early 1980s, when Link attended, Glenclyff was roughly half white — drawn from the surrounding neighborhood — and half African-American — bused in from the Melrose neighborhood several miles away. These two populations only saw each other at school, Link recalls. The white kids walked home, and the African-American kids "went home in seven busloads." The worst part, she says, "was not being able to play together after school."

Kittrell was part of the change. He was the school's first special education teacher, and was at Glenclyff when the first ESL class was formed. As he recalls, "It was very different for us to have such a multilingual environment." At the time, there wasn't even a standard test to give to determine whether a student needed English-language assistance. Today, there are more than 100 languages other than English spoken by Metro Nashville Public Schools students.



How has the neighborhood changed?

While all the longtime residents hold very positive views of the neighborhood they grew up in, most are just as enthusiastic about what it's become.

"Now, it's totally different," Page says. "It's so diverse now. It's amazing." Sontany echoes that sentiment: "To see the changes is awesome."

Page is quick to point out that while the demographics of the neighborhood have changed dramatically over her lifetime, the aspirations of its residents have not. "We all want a safe neighborhood," she says. "Good investment. Good schools."

That said, change has not been welcomed by everyone. Page recalls when she served on the Metro Council and a bill came up that would have mandated an English-only policy for Metro government. "It was a real eye-opener," she says. Some constituents turned on her, but she felt

strongly that she had to vote against the measure. "It was not hard [to do]," she says, "just sad to see the hate."



Many of the interviewees talk about the new diversity in terms of what they are able to eat.

"There are many good things about immigration," Pinkston says, "but the food! Pretty extraordinary to see." He proposes a T-shirt: "Nolensville Road: Come for the Cars, Stay for the Food."

"Where else can you have such an array of restaurants of every known ethnicity?" asks Young. "I think it's awesome. Back then all we had was meat-and-three. ... I love tamales. I love pad thai. I love korma." (Young is a former school kitchen manager who also cooked at the local Flatrock Coffee from 2009-10 before retiring.)

Moreover, several interviewees single out Casa Azafrán, home to Conexión Américas' offices, its Mesa Komal commercial kitchen, and a host of other organizations.

"Whenever I have a conversation, I tell people about Casa Azafrán," Page says, calling it a "fabulous community center" and a "great place to vote."

Similarly, Byrn says, "The last time I was through here, this was a used car lot. This is a much better use of the space. ... It makes me happy to see something positive." Addressing his interviewer, Byrn continues, "Y'all continue to make this place vibrant and grow. You're Americans, and you're making this place greater."

Note: These recordings are held in a special collection at the Nashville Public Library.

Listen to the interviews at conexionamericas.org/stories



ENVISION NOLENSVILLE PIKE: CREATIVE LABS

Throughout the month of March, Conexión Américas conducts a series of Creative Labs aimed at engaging the communities that call the Nolensville Pike corridor home. Around 150 community members take part in the Creative Labs, including some middle and high-school students. The schedule runs as follows:

March 7: Casa Azafrán, with Spanish speakers (one midday and one evening session)

March 10: Flatrock Coffee, Tea & More with English speakers

March 12: Salahadeen Center of Nashville, with Kurdish-Americans

March 19: Casa Azafrán, with Somali-Americans

Note: "English speakers" here means mostly white Americans who primarily speak English; most of the other participants also speak English in addition to Spanish, Somali, Kurdish, Arabic, or other languages.

These sessions are led by writer and storyteller Tasneem Tewogbola. Each Creative Lab follows the same basic format.

Attendees are split into groups, each at its own table. On the tables there are several laminated maps of the area, a set of cards with icons printed on them, sticky notes, pens, Play-Doh, and flexible pipe cleaners. Joining these discussion groups at each table is a facilitator from either the Nashville Civic Design Center, Metropolitan Transit Authority or Walk/Bike Nashville, the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Metro Arts, Mayor's Office of Transportation and Sustainability, and the Metro Planning Department. The walls are hung with a map showing the proposed Bus Rapid Transit Lite line for Nolensville Pike, as well as representations of three different countywide transportation options via the nMotion initiative, and Nolensville Pike as envisioned by the NashvilleNext project. Additionally, there are photos of bus shelters, public squares, fountains and other potential design inspirations from around the world. Over the course of two hours, participants go through three main exercises.

For the first exercise, participants are asked to write, on sticky notes, their responses to a series of questions about the Nolensville Pike area. Some examples follow.



"Old trees and big yards," one English speaker says. Another describes the "small-town" feel of the area, and yet another adds: "Zoe the goat." (Zoe is a neighborhood fixture, and a story for another time.) "Everything is close by — just like Havana," remarks one Cuban-American participant.

Many — and again, this is across all the sessions — cite diversity as a strength. This includes the variety of restaurants and cuisines available in the area. Nolensville Pike has "the best food in the city," according to one Spanish speaker. It's a sentiment shared by many in these discussion groups, just as it is in the oral histories.

Some participants simply respond with "community," which can be read as their own ethnic group or a larger sense of community that spans ethnicities — a view that other responses would support.

Why do you live, work or study here?

The reasons vary somewhat, but many of the participants, regardless of origin, cite proximity to their own cultural communities, closeness to downtown, closeness to their own businesses or jobs, easy access to shops catering to their ethnicity, convenience of a nearby church, masjid, or other religious center.





How does Nolensville Pike make you feel?

"Good," "familiar," "normal," and "like home" are a few of the responses from Spanish speakers. They are largely positive, but there are some acknowledgements of what could be better.

"Much potential but needs more streetscaping," responds one participant. "Necesita ser más limpia," responds another. ("Needs to be more clean.")

"Home," "protected," "normal," "like I'm unique," and "homesick" are among the responses from the Kurdish-American group. One middle school-aged child simply responds, "bored," which might have as much to do with her place in life as with the neighborhood itself.

Surrounded by "authentic culture" is how one English-speaking participant describes the feeling of living in the neighborhood. "Like I'm at Epcot," says another, perhaps suggesting that the area is a "small world," of sorts. Another says she feels like she's "inside a gray room," a reference to the concrete that dominates the built environment.

"Comfortable" and "good" are among the responses from the Somali-American Creative Lab. But as a group, they are also more vocal about the challenges facing the area.

"Stressed" is how a Somali-American named Ibrahim describes his feeling — a reference to rush hour. Others support this feeling, saying they feel fine until 5 or 6 p.m. rolls around, a time when they feel nervous and frustrated by the traffic congestion and lack of sidewalks. A man named Muhammed says that in the last decade his commute has gone from 15 minutes to an hour by car.

And while some participants say the bus is too slow, one Somali-American prefers to look on the bright side. He says that sitting on the bus while stuck in traffic forces him to see things he would never notice while driving. This includes a recent discover: the ice cream shop La Michoacana, which has become one of his favorite places in the neighborhood.

For the second exercise, each discussion group is asked to consider the cards that are stacked on their table. The cards have icons printed on them that represent Jobs, Safety, Transit, Green Space, Agriculture, Business, and Affordable Housing. The task for this exercise is to choose the three that represent the areas of greatest priority. After each table chooses their three, the larger group must then decide on a Top 3 for the session.



There is both consistency and variability in the results. For instance, every group puts Transit and Affordable Housing in the Top 3. But whereas the Spanish speakers put Jobs at No. 1, Safety takes the top spot with the Kurdish-American, Somali-American and English-speaking groups. Interestingly, Green Space only makes the Top 3 with the English-speaking group. And while the focus of their concerns vary, all of the session groups cite pedestrian safety in particular as a concern. In the evening session for Spanish-speakers, one participant describes Nolensville Pike as a place where she sees "people on bikes and on foot taking their lives in their hands."

One particular worry for the Somali-American group is the stretch of Nolensville Pike in front of Al-Farooq Islamic Center, a vitally important meeting place where on any given day 300-400 children might need to cross a busy street where the crosswalk is hard to see as drivers come over a rise in the road. A deeper safety concern expressed in the Somali-American Creative Lab centered on police. "Sometimes I'm scared of walking alone," one man says, even though he has survived civil war in Somalia. "We need more police," another man adds. Many in the group agree that police response can be slow — "sometimes 2 hours," one man says. One suggestion: hire more Somali police officers to patrol neighborhoods with significant Somali-American populations.



Furthermore, participants in both the English-speaking and Kurdish-American sessions talk about how the side streets in the area are being used as shortcuts to bypass the traffic congestion on Nolensville Pike, creating sometimes dangerous conditions with cars speeding down residential streets.



The Somali-American group is particularly concerned about Affordable Housing. Over the past year or so, several hundred Somali-American families found themselves priced out of a large apartment complex as rents were raised. The families have scattered to other apartment complexes around the area, breaking up a de facto center of Somali Nashville. It's part of a larger pattern of migration within the city, as Somali-Americans have had to move where rents are affordable. "I've been to eight schools from Kindergarten to 8th grade," one young man says.

And as with anywhere in America, jobs are a topic of great interest. When someone in the Spanish-speaking Lab suggests higher wages across the board, she is met with cheers. On the other hand, some business owners in the Kurdish-American session suggest that some of the proposals for the area — widening Nolensville Pike to create bike lanes, for instance — could have a negative impact on their livelihoods if they reduce space for customer parking.

Some of the problems seem intractable. How to create more green space when so much of the area is already paved? How to prevent bike lanes from becoming turn lanes for cars? How to reduce the number of car lots when these businesses seem to be thriving?



"There's a lot of growth," one Kurdish-American participant says, echoing the sentiments of many Nashvillians, "but the same infrastructure."

For the third exercise, the groups pull out their laminated maps. This is where participants are asked to be creative. Now that they've talked about what they like, what's important to them and what's at stake, Tewogbola asks Creative Lab participants to imagine what they want to see here. What would improve life along Nolensville Pike? Add it to the map using Play-Doh and pipe cleaners. Beyond that, there's just one instruction: think big.



Long continuous sidewalks, bike paths and pedestrian bridges are popular additions, which is not at all a surprise given how high Safety was among priorities across all groups. The intersection of Nolensville Pike and Thompson Lane is a popular choice for a pedestrian bridge because it is very busy and very difficult to cross safely on foot. Another suggestion: constructing a walkway from that intersection to nearby Coleman Park.



Transit, another priority across all groups, takes many forms on these newly envisioned maps. One group suggests making themed bus stops both to entice riders and to beautify the neighborhood by breaking up the gray expanses of concrete with color. A park-and-ride station could help alleviate traffic and encourage more bus use.

Light rail makes an appearance. So does the suggestion of adding some kind train, "like it is in Germany." Another idea consists of somehow using the existing tracks that run through the train yard at Thompson Lane to create a commuter line connecting downtown to communities further out. Even better, one Kurdish-American discussion group is bold enough to propose a subway —

the route represented by long strips of orange Play-Doh — from downtown to the Nashville Zoo.

While Green Space doesn't crack the Top 3 for all of the Labs, every group adds plenty of green to their vision maps. This takes the form of athletic fields, community gardens, roadside trees, grass buffers between sidewalks and streets, and new or expanded parks. One school-age Kurdish-American takes the community garden idea a step further and suggests a community farm. Another dreams up a bike route that leads to a greenhouse for growing fruit. Yet another wants to add a hiking trail — and a mountain to go with it.

Not all the additions are practical, though. Diversions are important too, as shown in Play-Doh versions of amusement parks, a bookstore, and a music venue — perhaps in the form of a pavilion at Coleman Park, or an amphitheater at the Fairgrounds.

One Kurdish-American participant adds "more housing units" to his group's vision map. An English-speaker specifies "denser residential housing" south of I-440, which would preserve an area of predominantly single-family homes between the highway and downtown.



And just as participants appreciate the diversity of the area, they also imagine new ways to celebrate it. That includes ideas for public art, and even a public school specifically designed for immigrant students. And every group in every Creative Lab comes up with some version of the same idea. It's an idea that encapsulates what the whole project has been about, and the overriding spirit of the Nolensville Pike corridor and the people who call it home: a sign welcoming visitors to the neighborhood — written in as many languages as possible.



APPENDIX A: IN THE WORKS

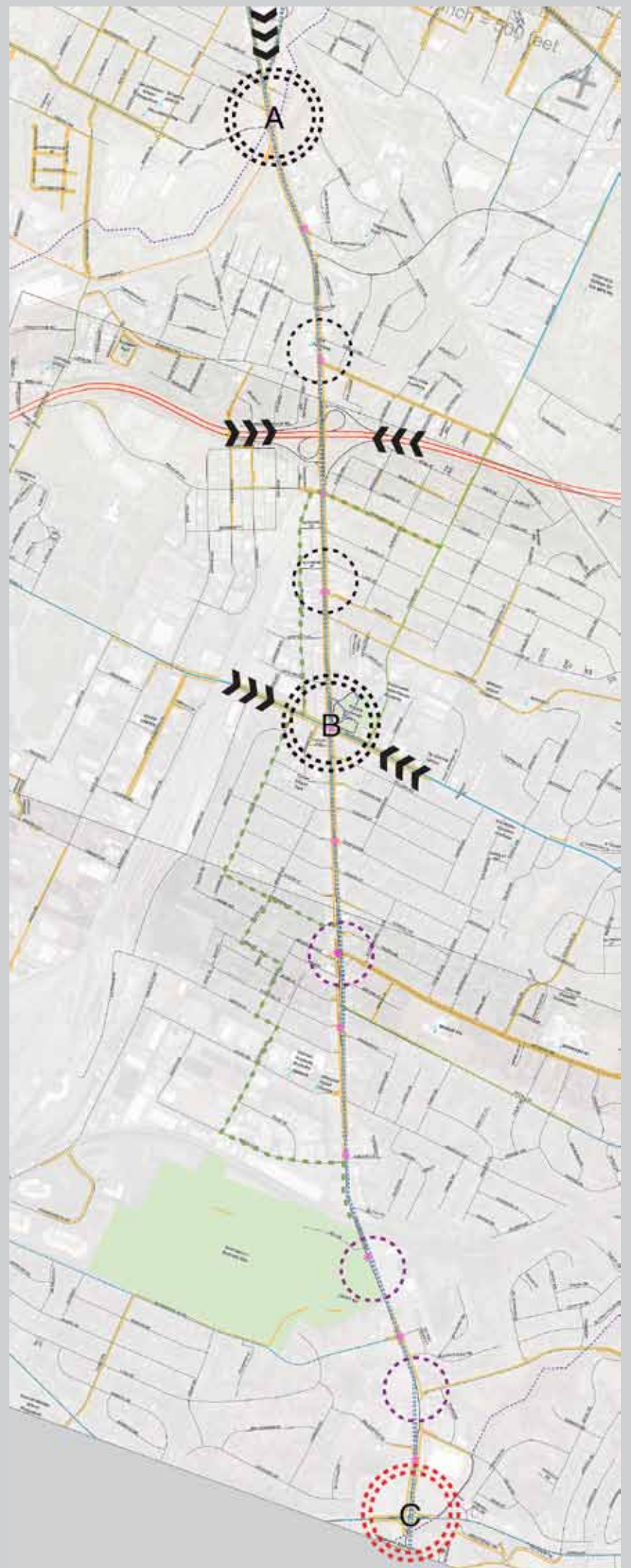
In June 2015, the Metro Planning Commission government adopted NashvilleNext, a 25-year plan for Nashville's infrastructure and built environment. Among many other features, the plan identifies numerous high-capacity transit corridors in need of attention, and Nolensville Pike is among those cited as high-need. Several areas mentioned by Creative Lab participants as dangerous or in need of improvement — areas along Nolensville Pike, Thompson Lane and Old Hickory Boulevard — are flagged in NashvilleNext. Priorities include increasing transit capacity, providing better connection to housing, multi-use paths, and transitioning to mixed-use developments where possible. NashvilleNext Volume V, "Access Nashville," addresses walking improvements, as well as Complete Street upgrades, and identifies areas where bike lanes should be added, including parts of Woodbine.

MTA's nMotion process, which lays out a series of possible scenarios for the Nashville area's transit future, includes light rail along Nolensville Pike in one

scenario. BRT Lite began operation this spring, and nMotion is expected to be officially adopted in July or August of this year.

Sidewalks already under construction include a stretch of Harding Place between Nolensville Pike and I-24. Areas planned for sidewalk construction include Nolensville Pike between Tusculum and Hickory View (project funded) and Tusculum between Nolensville and McMurray (design phase).

Other areas of potential focus include: creating greater connectivity between green spaces via the Greenway Master Plan; using schools as a way to prioritize zones for immediate walking/biking/transit improvements; looking at historic properties that might be in need of protection; seeking out case studies for affordable housing and affordable retail space in order to help preserve the socioeconomic fabric of the area.



APPENDIX B: FROM IDEAS TO POSSIBILITIES



NOW



ART BUS STOP AT CASA AZAFRÁN



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND GLENROSE AVE BY
CASA AZAFRÁN



NOW



MID-BLOCK CROSSING TO FUTURE
CASA AZAFRÁN PARK



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE ENTRANCE TO FAIRGROUNDS



NOW



GRANDVIEW AVE BIKE STREET



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE & HARDING PLACE INTERSECTION ENVISIONED AS A ROUNDABOUT



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND HARDING PLACE INTERSECTION RE-ENVISIONED AS A ROUNDABOUT WITH INFILL SUGGESTIONS



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE IN THE FLATROCK AREA ENVISIONED WITH LIGHT RAIL AND COMPLETE STREETS



NOW



MID-BLOCK CROSSING ON NOLENSVILLE PIKE BY PLAZA MARIACHI



NOW



MID-BLOCK CROSSING ON NOLENSVILLE PIKE
BY WOODBINE HISTORIC AREA



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND ANTIOCH ENVISIONED
WITH ART CROSSWALKS AND COMPLETE STREETS



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND I-440
ENVISIONED WITH UNDERPASS MURAL



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND THOMPSON LANE ENVISIONED WITH PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE AND STREETSCAPING



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND HARDING PLACE INTERSECTION ENVISIONED AS A ROUNDABOUT (pedestrians and cyclists use under road paths)



NOW



NOLENSVILLE PIKE AND THOMPSON LANE ENVISIONED WITH BIKE STREET, STREETSCAPING, CROSSWALKS, ROUNDABOUT, AND INFILL DEVELOPMENT



NOW



ENTRANCE TO NOLENSVILLE PIKE FROM THOMPSON LANE



NOW



ENTRANCE TO ZOO ON NOLENSVILLE PIKE WITH BIKE LANES, FUN BUS SHELTER, WALKWAY TO CROFT MIDDLE DESIGN CENTER, AND STREETSCAPING



GRANDVIEW ENVISIONED AS A BIKE STREET, WOODBINE ENVISIONED WITH SIDEWALKS, NOLENSVILLE WITH STREET TREES AND IMPROVED SIDEWALKS

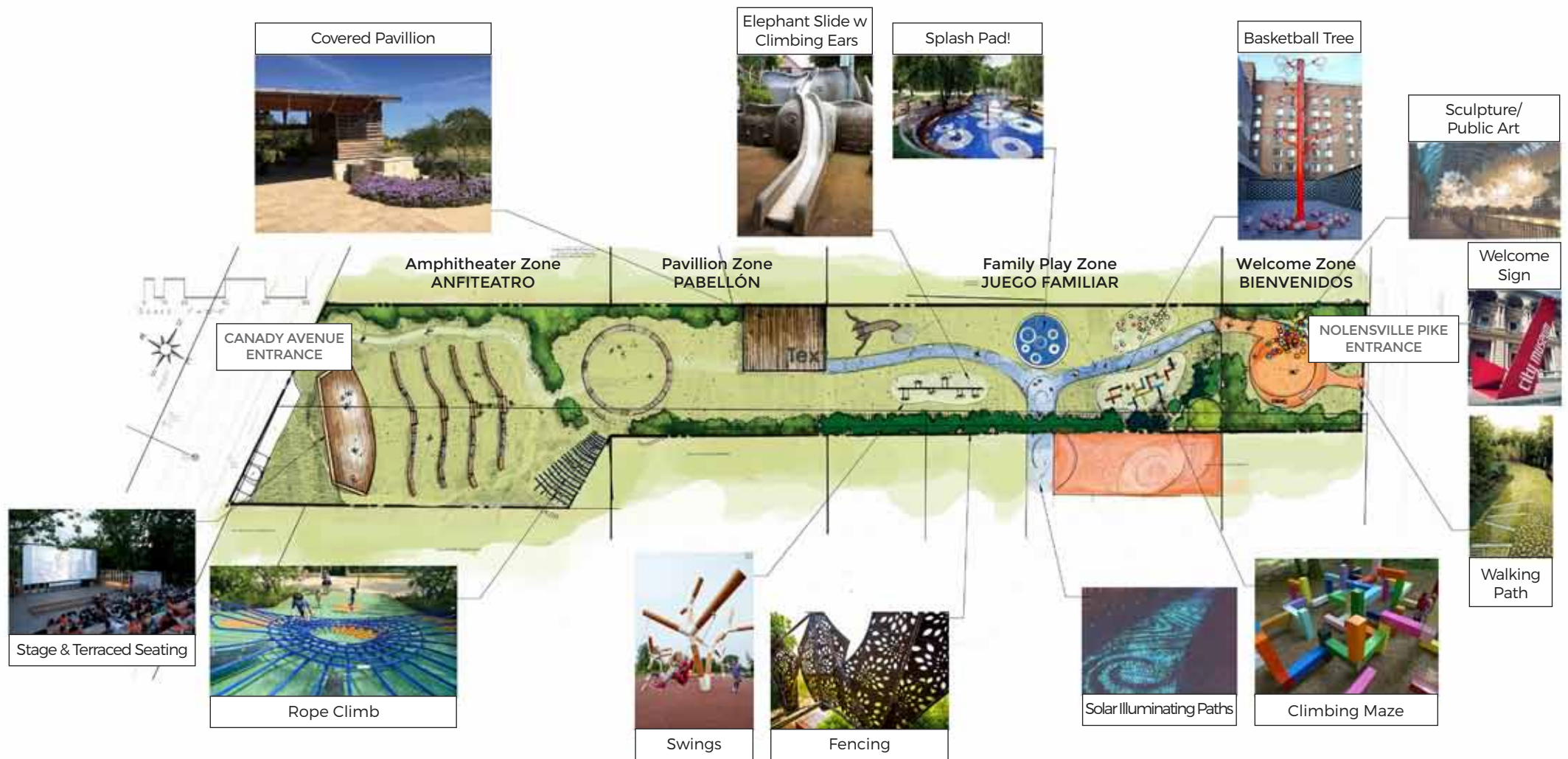
CASA AZAFRÁN PARK

Southeast Nashville has the fewest open green spaces and parks in Davidson County according to the Nashville Open Space Plan (2011). The plan calls to "Establish an anchor park, or series of parks, in Southeast Nashville in the next five years" as one of the top open space goals for the county.

Conexión Américas is partnering with the Mayor's Office and Metro Parks to create a public park next to Casa Azafrán. The community center hosts more than 10,000 visitors per year, primarily families with young children. "Where's the playground?" is one of the most common questions heard from families who wish to linger in the inviting surroundings after an English class or a visit to the doctor or financial counselor. The need for open green space --and a playground-- nearby became even more urgent in 2014 with the opening of Metro Nashville Public Schools' Casa Azafrán Early Learning Center, which serves 100 young children five days a week.



Future Park Site



Conexión Américas, Metro Parks, and landscape architect Tara Armistead gathered inspiration and input for the future park via:

- A creative lab with students, teachers and parents in the Casa Azafrán Early Center
- Discussions at neighborhood association meetings
- An online survey

- An invitation to Casa Azafrán visitors to leave ideas on sticky notes on a wall in the lobby

The future public park will connect children and families with each other, with neighbors, with nature, with public art, and with opportunities for outdoor physical activity.



Conexión Américas thanks its partners in contributing their work, input, and support to this project:

Flatrock Coffee, Tea & More
La Hacienda Taquería
Metro Arts Commission
Metro Parks and Recreation Board
Metro Planning Commission
Metro Public Works
Metro Transit Authority
Nashville Area MPO
Nashville Civic Design Center
Nashville Public Library
Nashville Zoo
Oasis Center
Office of Mayor Megan Barry
Salahadeen Center of Nashville
Transportation for America
Walk/Bike Nashville
Woodbine Neighborhood Association

Report authored by Steve Haruch
Photography by Kate Gazaway
Renderings by Nashville Civic Design Center
Graphic design by Brad Talbott

Made possible by generous funding from
THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

