

WELD STREET

Restoring neighborhood needs one Rochester alley at a time

Marketview Heights goal: Make it inviting and safe

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Hinge Neighbors, an organization that bridges the voices and communities on either side of the Inner Loop, has started its work on an upcoming project in the South Marketview Heights neighborhood.

The MarketView Mews Project aims to turn different alleys within the neighborhood into safe and inviting spaces for the community, starting with Bohrer Alley.

"We'd like to reactivate the alley, make it safer, and get neighborhoods together and involved," said Hinge Neighbors President Suzanne Mayer.

According to Mayer, the idea for starting with Bohrer Alley stemmed partly from the 2014 Marketview Heights Urban Renewal Plan where part of the alley closest to Scio Street was included, but she said nothing was ever done. In doing this project, Mayer said the goal is to show the community that together they can come up with a plan for the neighborhood, and then execute it within a year.

She hopes that Bohrer Alley, once finished, can serve as a blueprint for other alleyway revitalization projects in both the North and South Marketview Heights neighborhoods going forward.

Dozens of community members from the city and the South Marketview Heights neighborhood met at the Lewis St. YMCA in February to voice their thoughts and consider how to get started.

This coverage of the revitalization of Bohrer Alley, which runs between the northwest end of Weld Street and Woodward Street, is part of our ongoing Weld Street project. The project examines how the dynamics at play in Rochester can be seen on just one street.

Challenges, tragedy, hope and a sense of community that any neighborhood in the city might experience can be witnessed just on Weld. Our goal for this project was to create something representative of Weld Street as a whole. To show the light within a community that often gets overshadowed by the darkness.

Now we wonder, what's happening in Weld Street's backyard?

'Bohrer is no longer boring'

The meeting was led by Mayer and Hinge Neighbors Vice President Shawn Dunwoody. Taking inspiration from the Corn Hill Neighborhood, they explained they hope this project will bring a focus of positivity into the neighborhood going forward.

Throughout the presentation, Mayer shared her hopes for a realistic and effective planning process.

"We call it an iterative process, we start small and keep working," Mayer said. "So, by a year from now, we're not talking about the dream anymore."

Many examples of different potential architectural designs were presented for the group to consider. Some of the main problems these designs addressed included:

- Enhancing the lighting in the alley.
- Replacing the pavement with grass and/or permeable pavement.
- Adding traffic control solutions like removable bollards.
- Adding accessory dwelling units to take up some of the space and land along the alley.
- Adding gardens and greenery to make the space more inviting.
- Painting murals on buildings alongside the alley.
- Adding benches to create spaces that would allow those living in the area to be more active within the alley.

Hinge Neighbors said they hope implementing design plans like these will allow the neighborhood to reclaim these alleys, providing a safer environment for children and neighbors to enjoy.

How will this project address community concerns?

After the presentation, Dunwoody took questions from the group while Mayer drafted notes on the discussion.

The group's main concerns related to



Backyards, garages and driveways line Bohrer Alley. PHOTOS BY TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE



An open lot on Bohrer Alley was recently mowed with flowers planted in it.



Trash pours out of a garage on Bohrer Alley.

the criminal activity that takes place on Bohrer Alley. Group members took turns explaining how they often see people selling and using drugs in the alley out of their kitchen windows. They worried about the potential safety risks this can pose for children in the neighborhood and suggested the idea of adding surveillance cameras to the alley.

Mayer told Democrat & Chronicle reporters that the city has put a lot of focus on the front of neighborhoods and streets, while not enforcing these same measures in the backyards.

"Whatever happens on the alley can happen and Weld Street and vice versa," she said. "So that's what we're trying to do, make it better."

Another main topic of concern was speeding.

Cars are often speeding up and down the alley, leaving some people in the group to question whether it would even be realistic and safe to create a space like this. Though the bollards may be a temporary solution, the meeting attendees agreed that once people not living in the neighborhood realized the

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ure out how to make their best use of lighting to prevent and drive away some of this illicit activity. As a result of this work, she said they have since installed new solar lights in Bohrer Alley.

With a lack of attention on alleyways in the city, they at times become dumping grounds for trash. To make these alleys a safe and inviting place for the community, Mayer said there needs to be a beautification process. The first step: cleaning up Bohrer Alley.

To do this, Mayer said the group was able to adopt a lot in the alley to turn into a community garden, and in April, community volunteers held their first Bohrer Alley clean-up day. Pedraza, who is also in charge of the garden's upkeep, said they were successfully able to clean up the majority of the alley, except one vacant lot that the city promised to take care of.

As of now, the junk on that lot is still there, he said in April. We reached out to the city for information, but haven't gotten clarification yet.

During this clean-up day, Pedraza said, the vines covering the back fences in the alley were all cleared out, making it a more open space in an attempt to combat any illegal activity happening there.

"Now people don't have places to hide," Pedraza said. "You're out in the open no matter where you are."

He hopes paving the alley will be the next step.

What is next for Bohrer Alley?

According to Mayer, the revitalization of Bohrer Alley is going to be a year-long project - and there is still a lot to do. Here are some of their upcoming plans:

- Once their grants get approved Mayer hopes to hire local artists to paint a mural and display their artwork on walls and fences in the alley.
- They are currently in the middle of trying to employ someone from the community to mow the lawn and take care of the landscaping.

Mayer said they have been investigating different ways they can combat the speeding issue on Bohrer Alley.

Although there is a lot more work to do, Mayer is hopeful this project will help unify the Marketview Heights neighborhoods and make them safer, more inviting spaces for those living there. The majority of the properties on streets like Weld Street are rental properties, so by making these neighborhoods better, Mayer said, they can increase homeownership and create a steadier environment.

Hinge Neighbors will host more meetings to further these discussions and involve more voices from the neighborhood.

— *Madison Scott is a journalist with the Democrat and Chronicle who led the Weld Street Project. She has an interest in how the system helps or doesn't help families with missing loved ones. She can be reached at MDSScott@gannett.com.*