

## Reimagine Mendota receives Community Heart and Soul Seed Grant

On March 31, 2023 Reimagine Mendota was awarded the Community Heart and Soul grant (CH&S). Developed and field-tested over a decade in over 90 small cities and towns across America. CH&S is a resident-driven process that identifies what residents love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it.

Heart and soul work is based on three powerful principles:

- Involve everyone
- Focus on what matters most, and
- Play the long game.

Grant funds were designated for hiring a program coach, establishing and marketing Reimagine Mendota, and hosting community meetings, listening sessions and events to collect data. It should be noted that this grant was not meant to fund a specific project or building. We are thankful to Community Heart and Soul, the City of Mendota, and sponsors for making this work possible.

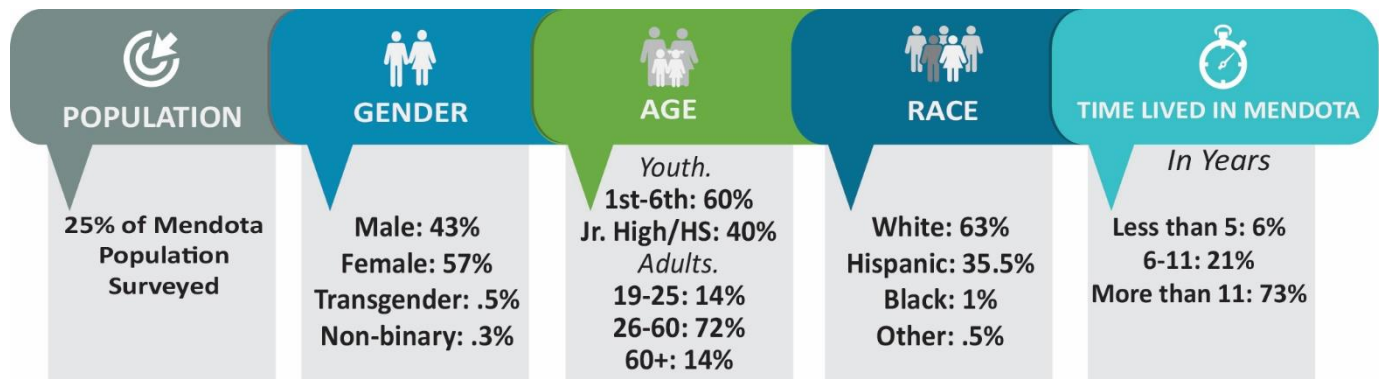
### Involve Everyone

To ensure that all demographic groups were equally represented from the data collected, Reimagine Mendota:



- Sent a mailer to all **3,782** households in Mendota to promote the **9** CH&S Community Chats located around the community.
- Hosted a listening booth at **13** community events.
- Held **7** listening sessions at private facilities (High-rise, VFW, Williams Way Court, etc.)
- Conducted personal interviews with **50+** residents.
- Worked with **4** high school students to interview their peers at lunchtime.
- Trained **20** middle school students to conduct interviews with seniors, city workers, and school faculty.
- Collected **300+** coloring sheets from elementary students showing what they love about Mendota.
- Distributed survey links to both adults and youth resulting in about **600** responses.
- All materials, surveys, and sessions were available in English and Spanish.

### Who we heard from...





## Hopes for the future

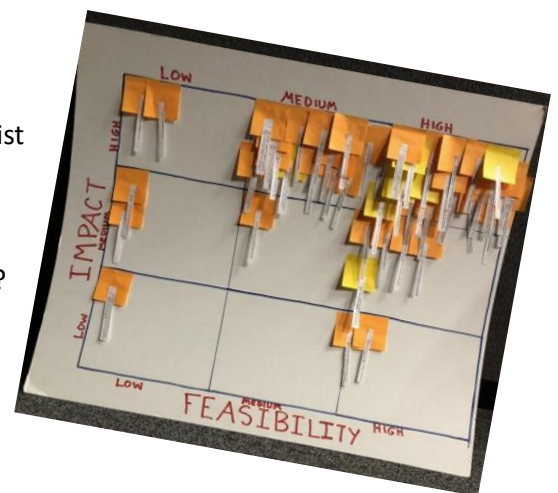
In addition to what people like about Mendota, Reimagine Mendota surveys asked what people want for the future of Mendota. Considering we have many opportunities downtown and city-wide for improvements, this data can be used to help determine what will thrive in our community. Below is an overview of suggestions from the surveys, with the top five mentions within each theme.

Themes / Top 5 Listings	Themes / Top 5 Listings
<p><b>COMMUNITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create Community Kitchen space</li> <li>Establish newcomers welcome packet/committee</li> <li>More affordable senior housing</li> <li>Update city website</li> </ul> <p><b>FAMILIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Things to do (Youth center/activities)</li> <li>Businesses (Arcades, Go-Karts, Mini-Golf)</li> <li>Skatepark</li> <li>Youth Leadership/Volunteer programs</li> </ul> <p><b>ATMOSPHERE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Downtown revitalization (Paint, flowerboxes, etc)</li> <li>Amphitheater/band shelter/pavilion</li> <li>Fix/add sidewalks and bike paths</li> <li>Encourage/support "Shop Local"</li> </ul> <p><b>BUSINESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have pop-up shops</li> <li>Enforce codes (building/businesses)</li> <li>No more vape/gambling shops</li> <li>Strengthen economic development/Mentor new businesses</li> </ul>	<p><b>EVENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More community events/live bands/walks</li> <li>Create art space/gallery walks</li> <li>Revitalize tri-county fair/fairgrounds</li> <li>Create various clubs (chess, fishing, running, etc)</li> </ul> <p><b>RECREATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fix pool/add splashpad</li> <li>Build indoor sports complex</li> <li>Fix/add sports fields, parks, frisbee golf course</li> <li>Add paddleboats/kayaks at the lake</li> </ul> <p><b>HISTORY/TRADITIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More connections between cultural groups</li> <li>Add art/murals throughout community</li> <li>Create space to showcase local art/theater/music</li> <li>Create history app/tour and promote museums</li> </ul> <p><b>LOCATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add public transportation</li> <li>Add signage/community promotion</li> <li>Enhance tourism</li> </ul>

## Prioritize future projects

At the *Focus on Mendota Summit*, participating residents receive the full list of mentioned projects. Residents review each item within the themes to determine:

- **Impact.** Is the action predicted to have a high, medium, or low impact on the community? What are the benefits of the idea? How will quality of life change? For whom and for how many?
- **Feasibility.** Is the idea something that can be accomplished in a short amount of time and with modest resources and readily available funding? Or will it involve a multi-year effort involving many partners and funders?



Once impact and feasibility are determined, three ideas for each theme are presented and participants voted for what is most important to them. Check out [reimaginemendota.org](http://reimaginemendota.org) for full results and the next steps.

## Play the long game

There is a renewed energy in our community. With this asset-based approach, people can focus on positive parts of the community and the opportunities ahead. Through the grant work, Reimagine Mendota:

- Recruited an additional 25 new volunteers.
- Secured two grants (Design- free consultation. Youth Substance Prevention – \$1.875 million).
- Used data to write two grants (pending), a feasibility study, and data will be used for other future grants.
- Presented at various civic group meetings.
- Established a website (reimaginemendota.org)
- Expanded social media presence.
- Secured additional dollars in donations.
- Hosted the *Food Truck Monday Mainia* based on resident input of what they like.
- Established a new way to gain feedback for community and organization efforts.
- Worked within grant budget to have dollars for ongoing promotion of Mendota and revitalization efforts.

## Long Game Next Steps

- Promote value statements and prioritized, proposed future projects for continued feedback and to determine feasibility.
- Work with the city to develop a city plan and workgroups for action.
- Engage the community for feedback and volunteers to help implement the developed plan.
- Celebrate the work and success we collectively have achieved.



## THANK YOU:

*We want to express sincere gratitude to Community Heart and Soul for awarding Reimagine Mendota the grant. We are very thankful to Jason Nieves, who coached the group throughout the process, provided valuable feedback, and encouraged us at every step. Thank you to the City of Mendota for their financial and human resource support, believing in the project, and recognizing the results that will guide future city decisions. A heartfelt thanks to all financial sponsors who contributed the matching funds needed for the grant. A special thanks to the businesses who hosted community events, provided food discounts for meetings, and promoted our events. Most importantly thank you to all volunteers who dedicated their time and energy to reach as many residents as possible and to the residents who gave their input. Your efforts are truly appreciated and all should be proud of the results. A special thanks to Amy Brewer and Annie Short, who volunteered their time to co-lead this project.*

