

# BY AND FOR RESIDENTS: HOW RESIDENTS BUILT POWER IN NORTH RICHMOND

To voice their priorities and aspirations for their community, North Richmond resident leaders created a Quality of Life Plan to guide and inform future community development. They gained power, agency, and voice in the process.

## THE COMMUNITY OF NORTH RICHMOND

### North Richmond: A Resilient Unincorporated Neighborhood

Located on the west edge of Contra Costa County is North Richmond, a largely unincorporated community between the city of San Pablo and the San Pablo Bay. Rich in diversity, culture, and community spirit, the North Richmond community has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of a tumultuous history of racial discrimination and neglect which has, over time, contributed to significant inequities in a number of arenas, particularly housing, education, community safety, and economic development. This case study tells the story of efforts of resident leaders to have a say in their community's future, and to end the historic pattern of "development happening to residents and not by and for residents."<sup>1</sup>

To appreciate the significance of these resident-led efforts, it is important to first understand North Richmond's complex history. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, North Richmond was a rural, agricultural outpost whose sparse population included immigrants from Italy, Portugal, Mexico, Japan, and Laos, as well as African Americans who migrated from the South. The onset of World War II brought the Kaiser Shipyards to Richmond, resulting in a massive population increase in general and in the African American population in particular, many of whom resided in North Richmond. Overcrowding, inadequate housing and infrastructure support, and growing racial tensions ultimately led to de-facto racial segregation. While developers and planners were focusing on other areas of Richmond to accommodate the growing population, North Richmond, where the African American community was concentrated, was largely neglected.

## BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a 10-year, \$1 billion comprehensive community initiative launched by The California Endowment in 2010 to advance statewide policy, change the narrative, and transform 14 of California's communities most devastated by health inequities into places where all people have an opportunity to thrive.

## HEALTHY RICHMOND

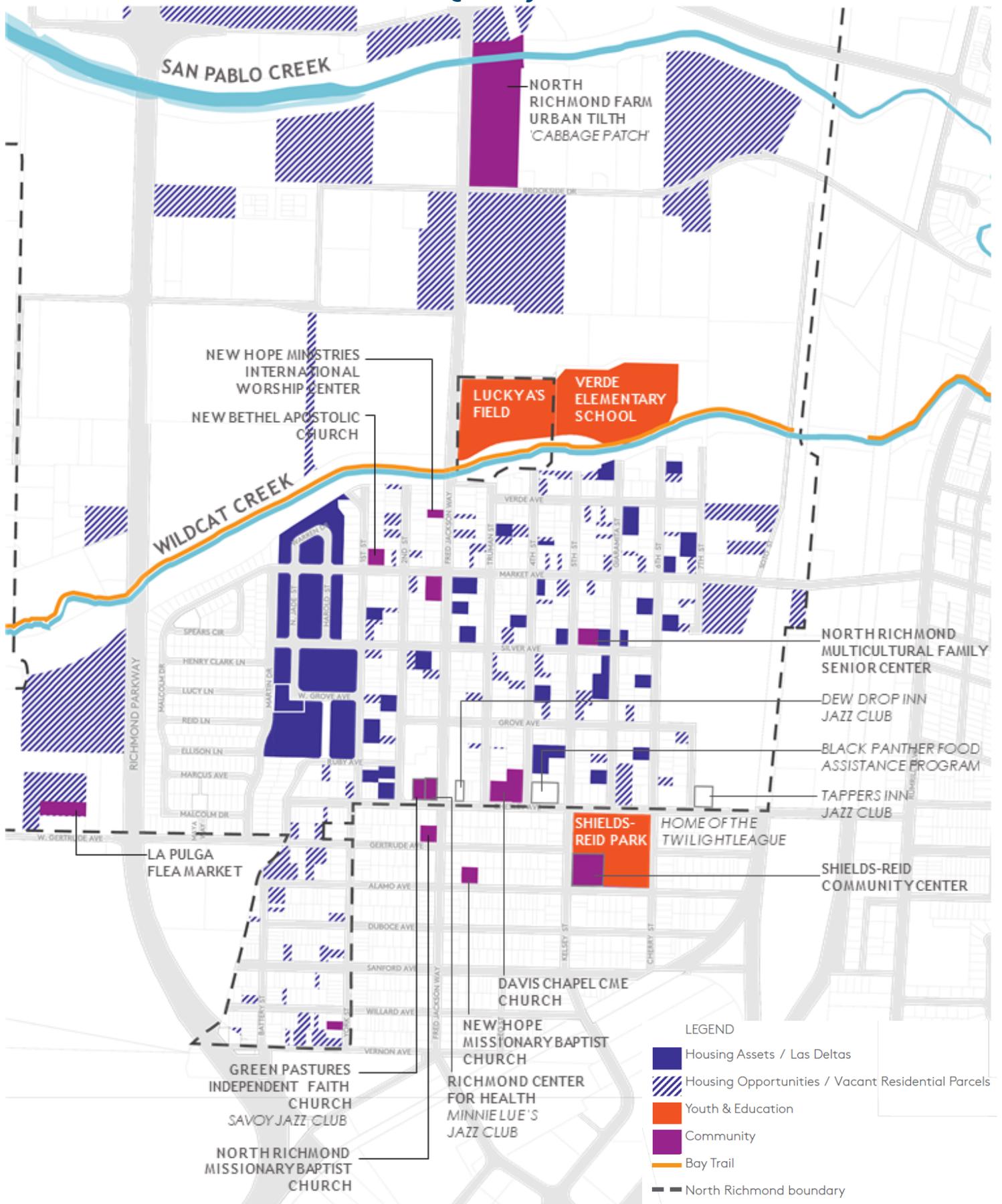
As one of the 14 BHC communities, Healthy Richmond works to make meaningful and lasting local policy and systems changes, improve the health and safety of residents, and become a place where all children are safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

The Healthy Richmond staff engage, convene, and coordinate community-based organizations and resident leaders in the initiative to collectively work towards increased health equity and racial justice in the community.

For more information about Healthy Richmond go to [www.healthyrichmond.net](http://www.healthyrichmond.net)

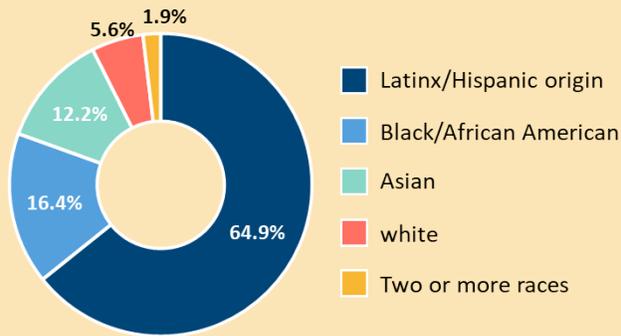
# ASSET MAP OF NORTH RICHMOND

From the Quality of Life Plan



*\*Italics highlight historical cultural assets*

## NORTH RICHMOND POPULATION 2016 Census Estimates



Moreover, discriminatory policies and real estate practices negatively affected the housing security and economic stability of North Richmond residents, the vestiges of which are still experienced today. As a result, North Richmond has experienced periods of community unrest and violence, which were exacerbated by inadequate police protection and municipal support. At the same time, these challenges also gave birth to a spirit of community leadership and activism which continues to this day and helped fuel the development of the North Richmond Quality of Life Plan.

### Visioning for the Future: Laying the Foundation for the Quality of Life Plan

The Quality of Life Plan process was initiated when community members learned that the Housing Authority of Contra Costa County sought to redevelop Las Deltas (part of the dark blue areas on the asset map on the previous page), an historic affordable housing project that sits at the heart of the North Richmond community and which had been neglected and fallen into significant disrepair. Stakeholders noted that they wanted community input into the redevelopment process and invited Healthy Richmond to the table to support the community engagement effort.

Healthy Richmond's support was critical to the success of the community engagement process. Advocating for and meeting the needs of North Richmond's unincorporated community is complicated and confusing, particularly since different parts of this community are served by the city of Richmond while other parts are served by Contra Costa County and the delineation has not been clear. Understanding the political structures and processes and how to navigate them is exceptionally challenging, which has made it difficult for residents to effectively advocate on behalf of their communities. With monetary support from The California Endowment (TCE) and Bay Area Local Initiatives Support Corporation (BALISC), and backed by its diverse array of collaborative partners, Healthy Richmond was poised to support the North Richmond community by bringing to bear its resources, networks, and community organizing experience to ensure that the community engagement process would result in authentic and meaningful community policy and leadership recommendations to which decisionmakers could be held accountable.

It was an opportune time for development in general—neighborhood violence was on the decline and the greater Richmond area was becoming a more desirable option for people and companies that were being priced out of other Bay Area cities. Residents recognized the tremendous benefits that could come with redevelopment, but they were also extremely wary of the potential for gentrification and community displacement. It was thus also an opportune time for Healthy Richmond and BALISC to work collaboratively with North Richmond community members to lift up their concerns as well as to articulate their hopes and dreams for the future of their families and their neighborhood. With support from Healthy Richmond, TCE, Neighborhood Housing Services, and BALISC, resident leaders worked tirelessly to ensure that the vision for the future of North Richmond articulated the aspirations of the community, that future decisions made *about* the community would be informed *by* the community, and that decisionmakers would begin to value (and be held accountable to) community voice.

# DEVELOPING THE QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN

The Quality of Life Plan illustrates the collective voice and influence of North Richmond residents in building a stronger and integrated community. It is a guide for investment and action that reflects the aspirations and priorities of the community. To bring the plan to life, the Healthy Richmond staff recruited a core group of community members to form the North Richmond Resident Leadership Team (RLT) to organize and express the dreams and concerns of the North Richmond community for their neighborhood with several community development projects being proposed. Healthy Richmond staff also formed the Leadership Circle, an advisory group comprised of organizational stakeholders with expertise in housing, youth and education, community safety, and business opportunity, to collaborate with the RLT on identifying resources and implementation partners to develop actionable steps toward improving the quality of life in North Richmond. The text box below describes the process of developing the North Richmond Quality of Life Plan.

## DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE



Healthy Richmond staff engaged and trained a multi-racial and inter-generational group of residents to form the RLT. They also created the Leadership Circle, a team of organizational stakeholders with expertise in four priority areas, to collaborate with the RLT in the development of the Quality of Life Plan.



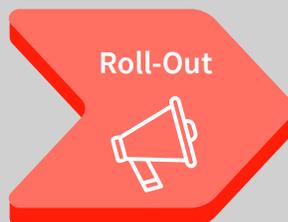
The RLT conducted 127 one-on-one interviews with residents and eight focus groups with key stakeholders using the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) framework to better understand the needs and desires of the community.



The North Richmond RLT held a community visioning event at Verde Elementary School to share back thematic findings from their needs assessment with the community. More than 80 community members attended.



In partnership with the Leadership Circle, the RLT developed the Quality of Life Plan to articulate the strategies and action plan for each priority issue area identified by the community in the needs assessment phase.



The RLT hosted a public roll-out ceremony to present the published Quality of Life Plan to the community. It was an opportunity for elected officials, government representatives, and people in philanthropy to hear directly from residents and to affirm and vow to support the Quality of Life Plan.

## Nurturing Resident Leadership and a Unified Team

Healthy Richmond staff identified key strategies to build the leadership and community organizing capacities of a group of resident leaders and empower them to play a strong role in constructing the vision for the future of North Richmond. Throughout the full process of activities leading into the development of the Quality of Life Plan, Healthy Richmond staff worked with the RLT to build their advocacy skills and strengthen their ability to work together.

**“Even though in the beginning we didn’t know each other and the struggle for us is that we don’t speak Spanish ... we all had the same common interest. Those of us who are parents, we’re here because we want the best for our children [and our families]. It’s in [our] best interest that they’re in a happy, healthy, and safe place.”**

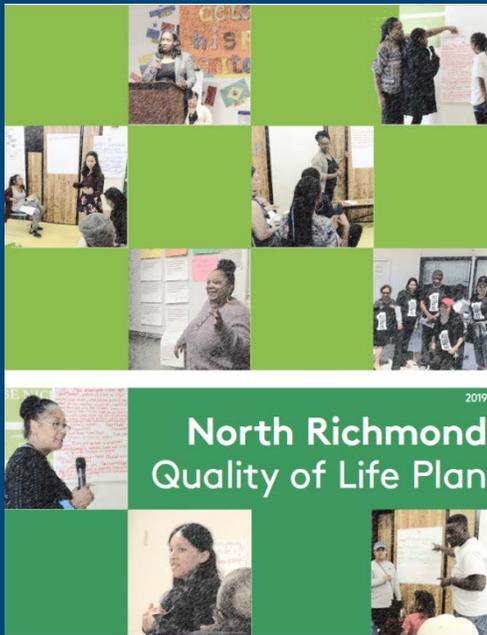
**-North Richmond Resident Leader**

### Building Advocacy Skills

Fueled by their determination to build a better future for the children of North Richmond, the resident leaders had the passion and will to effect change, but they needed support building their advocacy and organizing skills. To support them, Healthy Richmond staff worked with the resident leaders to develop their understanding of and ability to navigate political systems and helped them to hone their public speaking skills.

- **Political Education.** The goal of the political education process was to build the RLT’s knowledge of political structures and systems in North Richmond to prepare them for effective civic engagement. To that end, Healthy Richmond staff coordinated research meetings where resident leaders learned about government structures and systems, key stakeholders in Richmond and the county, the redevelopment process, and the harmful effects of gentrification and displacement on communities. Additionally, regional experts joined multiple planning sessions to present on best practice models, such as cooperative business development, equity-based community development efforts, community benefit agreements, and traffic safety policies.
- **Public Speaking.** A key strategy was to provide opportunities for the RLT to practice public speaking so that they would feel confident and prepared to interact with institutional stakeholders. Prior to community events and meetings, Healthy Richmond staff dedicated time to work with resident leaders on rehearsing their presentations and remarks during their planning sessions. The public speaking exercises helped resident leaders identify specific questions to ask institutional stakeholders about redevelopment plans and strategies to articulate and advocate for the needs and desires of the community.

# THE QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN



Within the Quality of Life Plan itself the RLT, with the support of Healthy Richmond, provides the history of their community, the process of creating the plan, their vision and commitment, the priority areas chosen by the community, and their action plan to achieve their vision. Healthy Richmond and the RLT are working to ensure that future developments in North Richmond will be informed by this plan. Below highlights the vision, commitment, and priorities from the North Richmond Quality of Life Plan.

## Our Priority Areas

- **Housing:** affordable housing and pathways to homeownership that promote a mixed-income community and social cohesion.
- **Youth and Education:** supportive environments for youth that encourage learning, civic engagement, social cohesion and a sense of belonging.
- **Community Safety:** examining policies to address traffic safety and promote safe, equitable access to transportation.
- **Business:** promote local enterprises and diverse employment opportunities that promote upward social mobility.

## Our Vision

We envision a North Richmond where residents enjoy a high quality of life made possible by affordable housing, living-wage jobs, community services, and public safety.

In our vision, we will have:

- mixed-use residential and commercial development that meets the needs of all segments of the population, with priority given to affordable housing and repurposing of vacant lots;
- an economy that offers diverse employment opportunities that promote social mobility, and small and large enterprises contribute to the self-sufficiency (including food security) of North Richmond;
- vital community programs related to homelessness, rehabilitation, education and training, youth and elderly services that are easy to access;
- public infrastructure, including green infrastructure, that is upgraded and well-maintained, and the design of a built environment that contributes to crime prevention.

Ultimately we envision a safe and prosperous environment that is home to healthy and engaged residents and creates positive opportunities and outcomes for young people.

## Our Commitment

We commit to implement this vision in such a way that demonstrates how diverse people can live and work together in unity.

Positive change is achieved through collaboration among many stakeholders and empowerment of resident leaders from multi-racial and multigenerational backgrounds.

A coalition of residents meets regularly to update the community vision, make plans and set priorities, and form partnerships with local officials, developers and other stakeholders to implement the vision. In addition, there is ongoing consultation between the community and developers.

Diverse streams of funding are pursued at the federal, state and local level. Potential financing mechanisms include Community Benefits Agreements, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, grants and local fundraising.

People who have power to bring about change are held accountable to their promises, and the relationship among residents, or between residents and other stakeholders, is coequal and mutually respectful.

## Fostering Collaboration

In addition to building resident leaders' knowledge and skills for civic engagement, Healthy Richmond staff engaged in activities designed to encourage collaboration within the RLT to support, as a unified group, community organizing and the development of the Quality of Life Plan. To this end they set aside dedicated time for relationship and trust building among the resident leaders, as well as intentional space to continuously debrief and reflect on their leadership development and collective work towards developing the Quality of Life Plan.

- **Relationship and Trust Building.** The multi-racial and intergenerational group of resident leaders brought together different perspectives and lived experiences that represented the diversity of the community. To support resident leaders in bringing their full selves to the RLT and get to know each other, Healthy Richmond staff organized frequent meetings and purposefully set aside time for resident leaders to talk about their family's history living in North Richmond and individual motivations for this work. They provided translation to English-speaking and English-learning resident leaders to ensure that all could participate effectively in dialogues within the group about their shared values and goal of creating a strong future for their children and families.
- **Space for Reflection and Learning.** Healthy Richmond staff further fostered camaraderie within the RLT by incorporating time after meetings and events for resident leaders to debrief and reflect on their collective community organizing experience. Resident leaders utilized that space to capture their thinking, provide each other feedback to support their leadership development journey, and develop strategies to continue moving the work forward together.

**“I have learned that I can do more than I thought and, working as a team, we can get things done.”**

**-North Richmond Resident Leader**

Building the RLT's capacity to engage community members and decisionmakers and advocate on behalf of their community ultimately led to the successful publication and presentation of the North Richmond Quality of Life Plan. Resident leaders were proud of this accomplishment and took note of the fact that decisionmakers were finally taking notice of them and taking their needs seriously. Energized by their success, the RLT members intend to share their learnings, expand the pool of resident leaders, and implement their action plans to further grow their power and bring their visions for their futures into fruition.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LEARNING

The process of building resident power and developing the Quality of Life Plan was intense, arduous, and—according to the resident leaders and Healthy Richmond staff—ultimately rewarding. Much was accomplished and much was learned over the course of this effort, particularly as it relates to resident power building. These accomplishments and learnings are the focus of this final section of the case study, with specific attention paid to how power was built and the factors and facilitators of success, highlighted in the text boxes, that Healthy Richmond encouraged and promoted throughout this strategy.

### What Was Accomplished? Indicators of Progress

By participating in the RLT, residents have gained a deeper understanding of their leadership and change-making potential, and are lifting their voices to hold stakeholders accountable, and exercise real power. Specific indicators of success include:

- **A plan that clearly documents and the needs, aspirations, and recommendations of the community.** Through the Quality of Life Plan, residents now have a document that serves as a resource for continued dialogue with their community, a tool to hold decisionmakers and partners accountable, and an action plan on how to implement their goals and priorities. The plan has already become embedded into the work of the North Richmond MAC (Municipal Advisory Committee) and the County Planning Commission as development in North Richmond moves forward.
- **A cadre of leaders equipped to continue to grow and share the work.** RLT members now have a shared language for talking about their vision for their community and are empowered to continue the work by implementing the action plans they articulated in the Quality of Life Plan. As one RLT member shared about the continued work ahead, “We discovered that we can really work together because we [want to accomplish the same things]. We have the power to keep going and that is what makes us really want to stay in the RLT.”
- **Collective power.** By understanding and demonstrating their strength as a group, the RLT has tapped into their collective power and have become a force in North Richmond that partners and stakeholders in the community seek out to understand community needs. One RLT member reflected, “I realized we had power when we had the county [leaders] and other organizations coming to our meetings and listening to what we had to say. Yeah, I think I have power because now they know who we are.”
- **Deepened relationships between residents and leadership circle stakeholders.** Most members of the Leadership Circle work in North Richmond and do community outreach in the neighborhood, but through this process Leadership Circle stakeholders were able to deepen their relationships with residents. As one Leadership Circle member reflected, “I know a lot of people in the neighborhood, however, with many of those with whom I worked, I had never worked alongside them with such intensity. And during this process, I built with many residents trust, understanding, and appreciation of their perspectives.”
- **Increased active civic participation.** The nature of resident engagement shifted from just showing up and attending community meetings, to residents being more active by using their voice and demonstrating their leadership. One RLT member reflected on this shift, noting: “In October (at the vision sessions) we had the opportunity to invite people in power—you know,

the ones in charge for the community. But this time, they didn't come to talk, they came to listen. Listen to what the community was demanding.”

- **Ability to hold stakeholders accountable.** Once RLT members built a shared foundation of understanding about civic engagement and organizing, they became more confident, strategic, and assertive when holding stakeholders accountable. As one Leadership Circle member stated, “as time went on, the residents themselves began asking more questions, and as they got command of the issue, and developed relationships, they were able to be more assertive in what they wanted to see both in data acquisition as well as policy outcomes.”
- **Seats at the table.** Resident voice will continue to be incorporated and heard across an increasing number of tables and committees, as RLT members have advocated for these positions that will strengthen their ability to hold partners and stakeholders accountable. They include: a youth seat on the North Richmond MAC, two resident seats on the Housing Authority of Contra Costa County's RFP (request for proposals) committee for site developers, and the new department of children and youth in Richmond will have two seats for North Richmond residents. Additionally, two RLT members recently graduated from the Urban Habitat Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute and they are in the process of applying for local City and County Commission seats.

## How Was Power Built?

People Power is a critical Driver of Change<sup>2</sup> to achieve community transformation in TCE's Building Healthy Communities initiative. The following illustrate effective strategies that Healthy Richmond used to support resident power building in North Richmond.

- **Leverage inherent strength of residents.** Residents are best equipped to solve their own community needs and problems. Healthy Richmond began this work to make sure the process was truly driven by residents, strengthening the work to endure and become embedded within the community.
- **Equip residents with an understanding of how policy and systems work.** Healthy Richmond supported resident leaders by giving them the tools and trainings they needed to understand and effectively navigate the different systems involved in the work.
- **Attend to bridging cross-cultural connections.** Healthy Richmond was deliberate about bringing together resident leaders from multi-racial and inter-generational backgrounds that were unified by a shared vision for their community. Being intentional and sensitive about how they did this helped foster multi-racial alliances and cross-racial solidarity.
- **Building collective capacity to advocate together.** By learning, organizing, and advocating together, RLT members became a source of strength for each other, incorporating a healthy feedback structure to strengthen the work, and connecting with each other on a personal level, creating a sense of family.



## What Was Learned? Project-Level Reflections

Healthy Richmond's experience as a convener of residents and stakeholders and a facilitator of community leadership development offers a useful lens for others interested in engaging in similar, resident power-building strategies. The following lessons lift some reflections from the implementation of this resident engagement strategy.

- **Lead with values.** The underlying value of this work— the belief that residents should have the voice and power to determine their destiny by leading efforts to address community concerns – served as a guidepost throughout the implementation process. Centering the “why” of the work helped Healthy Richmond navigate through challenges and gave them a roadmap for healthy leadership development and decisionmaking.
- **Gain community trust.** From the start, Healthy Richmond built mutual trust with residents by being upfront about the expectations of the process and sharing the journey together. Healthy Richmond staff members stood shoulder-to-shoulder with residents at community events and stakeholder meetings by working in solidarity with the RLT, which led to the residents becoming more engaged and committed to the process.
- **Devote time and resources for relationship building.** Healthy Richmond staff members structured RLT meetings and trainings to incorporate time for RLT members to get to know each other on a personal level, since the nature of the work affects all elements of residents' lives. RLT members developed a deep bond, fostered by mutual trust in each other, a safe space to learn and grow with each other, and a healthy feedback structure that ultimately strengthened the work.
- **Create space for joy and celebration in the work.** It is important to emphasize not just the end results of political wins or the number of people who turned out, but also the journey and the process to get there. Healthy Richmond staff members understand the difficult, but urgent, nature of the work and offered encouragement during the hard times and paused for celebration to relish their accomplishments along the way, and to offer hope and motivation for the continued fight.



## What Factors Support Success?

The priorities the North Richmond RLT are tackling are complex issues that involve multiple partners, stakeholders, and systems. The following emerged as key factors that are required for this work.

- **Adaptability.** Recognizing that no two communities are the same (even North Richmond and the city of Richmond), Healthy Richmond customized their approach for the local neighborhood context.
- **Responsiveness.** Healthy Richmond has learned to turn and act quickly when responding to changing policy contexts and political environments.
- **Patience.** Relationship building across residents, community organizations, and systems takes time, but investments in time and patience throughout the process are critical for authentic and impactful engagement.
- **Humility.** Healthy Richmond operates with an awareness that they are not the experts in this work. They rely on their partners and residents to bring their expertise to the table.
- **Unrelenting faith.** This work is hard, complex, and daunting. Healthy Richmond operates with a relentless belief in the potential of their residents to make and drive change.

## Looking Forward: The Continuing Journey

The process of creating the Quality of Life Plan has shown the community’s ability to come together and create a shared vision and priorities for their neighborhood. Talks have already begun around embedding the plan within “Envision Contra Costa 2040,” Contra Costa County’s general plan to address land use, housing, climate change, environmental justice, and other important issues over the next 20 years. The North Richmond RLT is eager to ensure that their Quality of Life Plan can be used as an effective tool going forward and are committed to continue leveraging and growing their power to ensure all future development in North Richmond is “by and for residents.”

Much has happened since the roll-out ceremony of the Quality of Life Plan in March 2019, as the RLT members have been busy planning early action projects in their four priority areas. Their current plans, and the organizations with whom they will partner, are outlined in the table below.

Priority Area	Partners	Early Action Project
Housing	Neighborhood Housing Services	To support wealth building, rent-to-own preparation, and home ownership the RLT is hosting homeownership and wealth building workshops for residents in partnership with Neighborhood Housing Services. Additionally, through continued meetings with residents and county decision-makers, the RLT is creating a Housing Policy Platform to inform all future community development projects.
Youth and Education	RYSE	To engage youth in imagining and designing a youth center that will provide resources and tools for youth to achieve their full potential, the RLT is conducting focus groups with local youth. RYSE, Healthy Richmond, and the RLT will support implementation and outreach, and will engage partners in the process.
Community Safety	Urban Habitat	The RLT is writing a proposal about traffic improvements to present to the county. To inform this proposal, they are planning a Traffic Safety Community Meeting to understand and explore strategies such as Vision Zero and Complete Streets. They also hope to engage a broader group of residents in this process.
Business Opportunity	Cooperation Richmond	To support a sustainable economy in North Richmond through building community wealth, the RLT is in the process of creating a cohort of North Richmond entrepreneurs that will learn how to create and maintain a community-owned cooperative.

This case study was authored by Laura Wong Ravinder, Marianne Chen Cuellar, and Rachel Estrella from Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), the learning and evaluation partner of Healthy Richmond, in the Summer of 2019.

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<sup>1</sup>From the Healthy Richmond SWOT Report, p.5

<sup>2</sup>The five Drivers of Change are: People Power, Youth Leadership Development, Enhanced Collaboration and Policy Innovation, Levering Partnerships and Resources, and Changing the Narrative. Learn more [here](#).

Cover photo: Booth, Edward, "[North Richmond Quality of Life Plan Rolls Forward](#)." *Richmond Pulse*, 2 April 2019.

All other photos: The California Endowment