



**CITIZENS + STUDENTS**  
**PLAN TOGETHER**  
**NORTHERN HILLS**  
**PTNH2021.CA**

# REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

APRIL 22, 2021

Compiled by  
Barry Dai | Gian Marco Visconti | Vandana Solanki

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was started and completed on Treaty 7 territory. We give thanks to the First Peoples of this region, including the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Stoney Nakoda Nations, and the Metis Nation (Region 3), who continue to make this place their home.

We would like to thank the Northern Hills Community Association for their support of this project, with special acknowledgment to Executive Director Yana Soldatenko and President Ian McAnerin. We are grateful to all the community stakeholders, including business owners, local organizers, and residents who shared their thoughts and wishes with us.

We would also like to thank our professor Fabian Neuhaus for encouraging us to push the boundaries of our planning education.

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\*This report is intended for double-sided printing.

# STATEMENT FROM THE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

## **NORTHERN HILLS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON THE ONE YEAR ON (OYO) PLANNING AND COMMUNITY FOR THE PANDEMIC DESIGN STUDIO**

This COVID pandemic has changed so many things. Businesses, jobs, economies, lives, and the way we connect and interact with each other, the way we keep and maintain our community connection. It affected us as an organization who services its community, its residents. We had to learn HOW we can now safely reach, connect, engage, and support our residents across all ages, mediums, and spaces.

Together with the Graduate students from School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape (SAPL) in University of Calgary and Federation of Calgary Communities, through this collaborative project we were able to analyze, learn, and create ways we can shape the impact of this pandemic on our community.

Throughout the course of this project, we have seen how our community has been inspired to imagine, think, hope, and get excited about what could be done to bring more neighbourhood exchange, inclusion, and sense of belonging by activating community spaces in the community. This project findings will be analyzed and applied towards our various projects, events, and programs.

Northern Hills Community Association (NHCA)



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Plan Together was a collaborative engagement project between Planning students at the University of Calgary and the Northern Hills Community Association (NHCA). Our goal was to encourage greater social connection and to seek planning solutions to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working in partnership with the NHCA and in consultation with other associated stakeholders, we conducted a 4-month study aimed to collect ideas on what improvements could be made to the urban conditions of Northern Hills. Variably, throughout the engagement process, we explored ways to enhance parks and pathways, beautify the neighbourhoods, and create a platform to share stories about the community.

## PROJECT TEAM



**Barry Dai**

Graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Arts from the University of Windsor, Barry continued to pursue the Master of Planning at the University of Calgary. He is interested in urban design, placemaking, and other topics that focus on the relationship between people and space.



**Gian Marco Visconti**

Gian Marco holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Library and Information Studies from the University of Alberta. His interests as a planner include public art and placemaking, urban ecology, and storytelling.

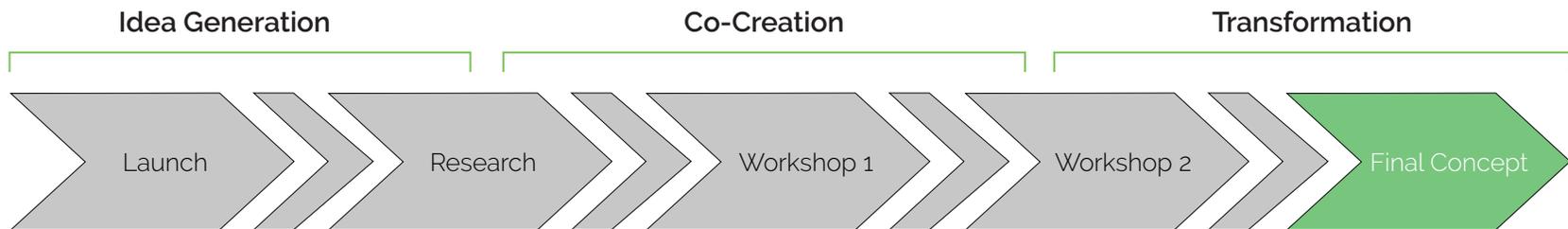


**Vandana Solanki**

Vandana holds post-graduate degrees in Geography, and Regional Planning from India. She believes that the future of a nation relies on the way we carry out the development in cities, towns and rural settlements. She is inclined towards creating live-able places informed by the local communities.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

The Project began in January 2021 and developed over three major stages: Idea Generations, Co-Creation & Transformation.



Major milestones included:

**January 16, 2021** - Launching of our web platform (ptnh2021.ca) and initial engagements

**February 10 to February 28, 2021** - Conducting our first workshop with the community, focused on gathering general ideas from the residents

**March 19 to April 11, 2021** - Conducting our second workshop with the community, focused on designing pathway interventions together

**April 11 to April 22, 2021** - Installing a Wishing Wall in the community in both physical and virtual space



## 2. RESEARCH

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT



### PROFILE

57,000 residents  
40% immigrant population

Most common languages spoken

- English
- Cantonese
- Mandarin
- Tagalog

5 distinct neighbourhoods

- Country Hills
- Country Hills Village
- Coventry Hills
- Harvest Hills
- Panorama Hills

Abundance of blank fences

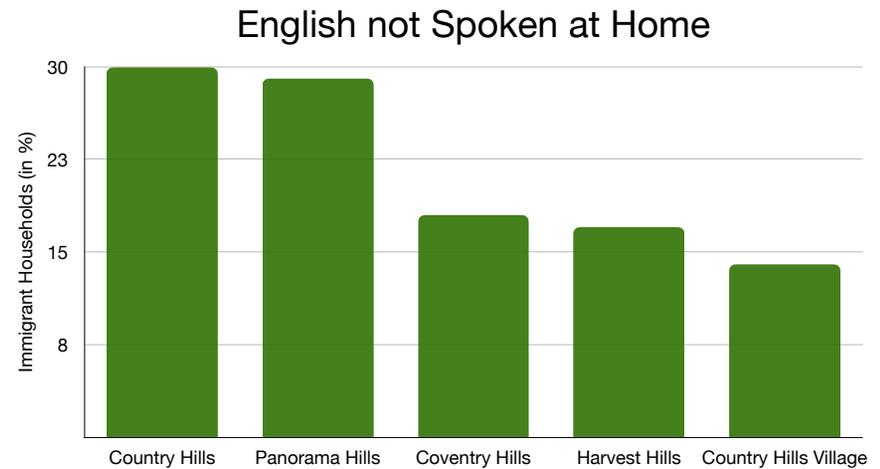
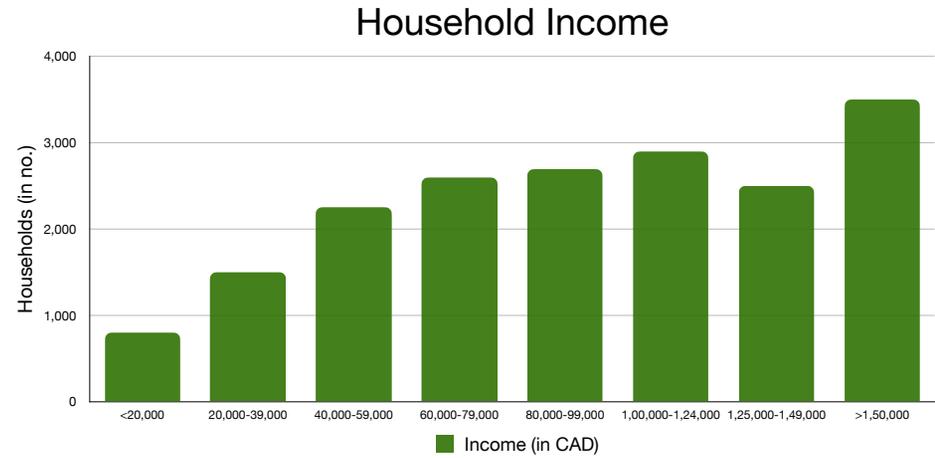
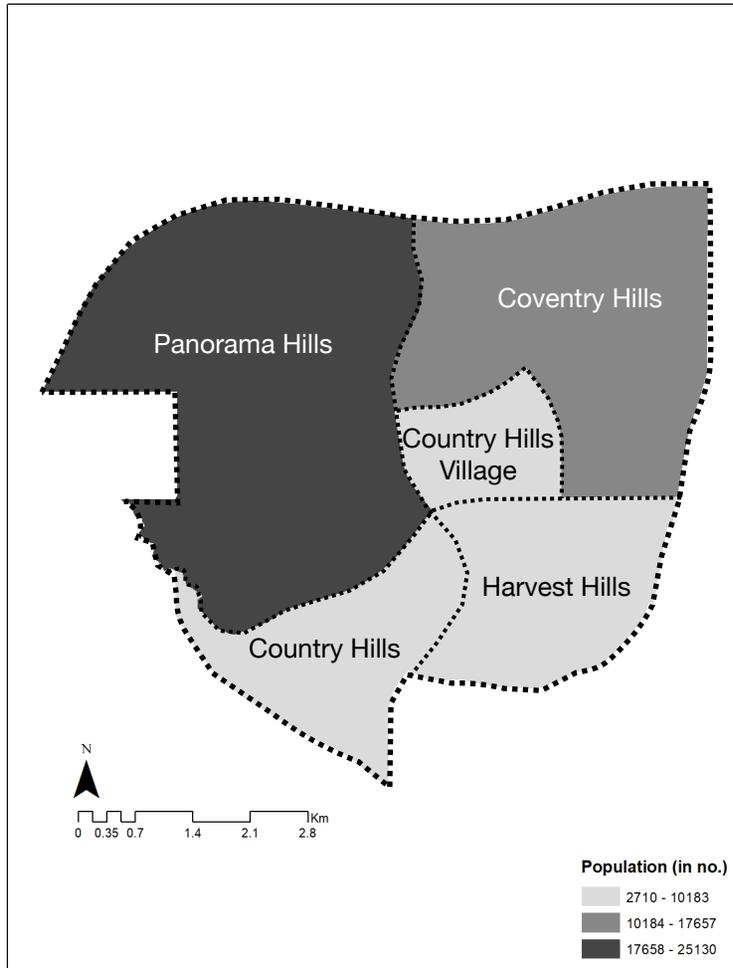
Home of the longest mural in Canada

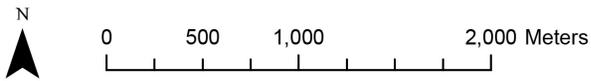
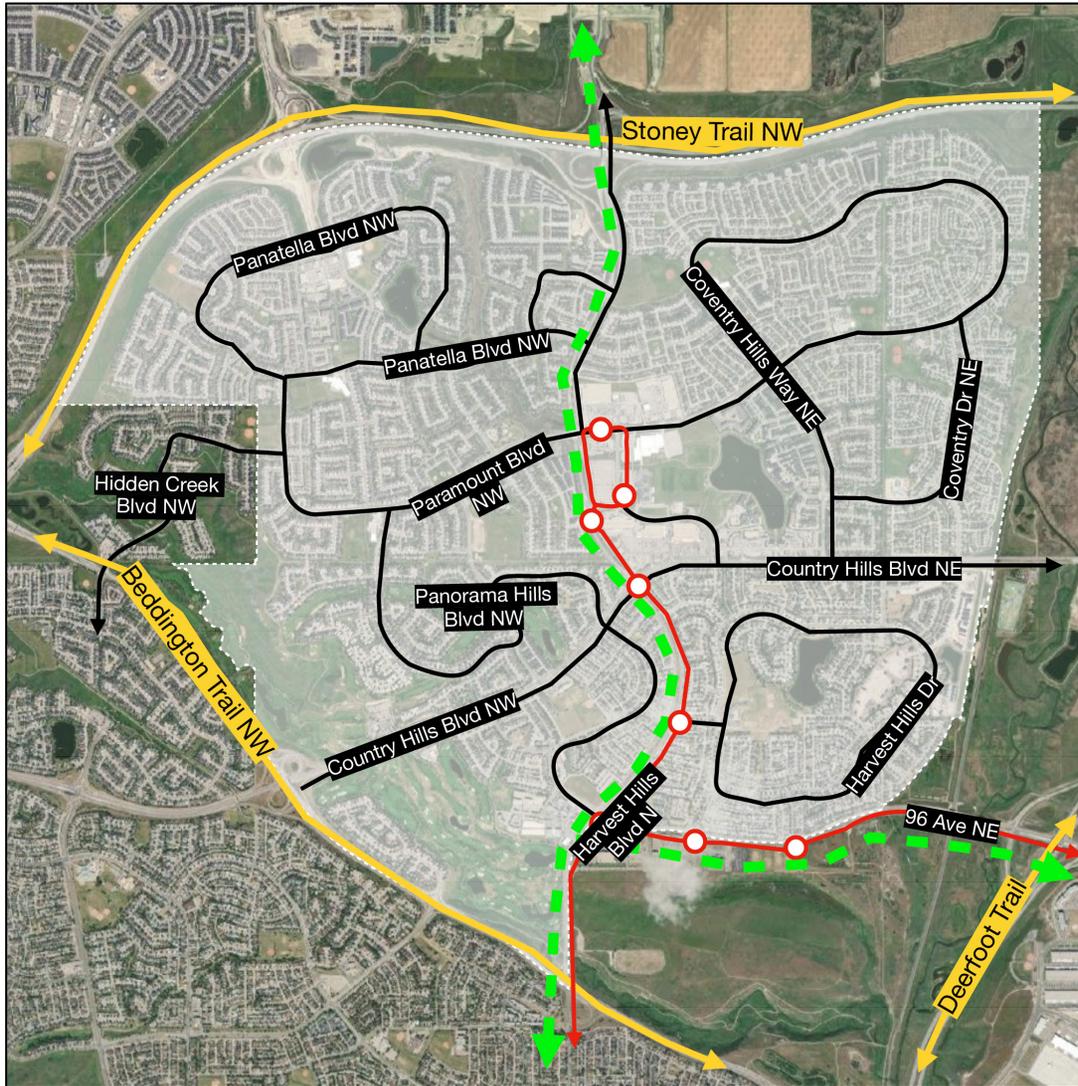
Northern Hills Community is a part of NW and NE quadrant of the city. It is surrounded by Deerfoot Trail to the East, Beddington Trail to the West and South, and Stoney Trail to the North.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

As per the Census (2016), the Panorama Hills constitute maximum population in the community, followed by Coventry Hills.

Northern Hills homes mostly middle-income group residents.





## CONNECTIVITY

Northern Hills is well connected with other parts of the city through well-laid network of streets and public bus transit (only 13% residents use transit).

No LRT at present, however, the upcoming Green Line LRT is expected to fulfil the accessibility requirements of the residents.

Established network of local pathway, and it's proximity to the Rotary Mattamy Greenway and the Bow River Pathway, presents a good scope for enhancing the walkability in the community.

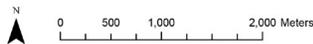
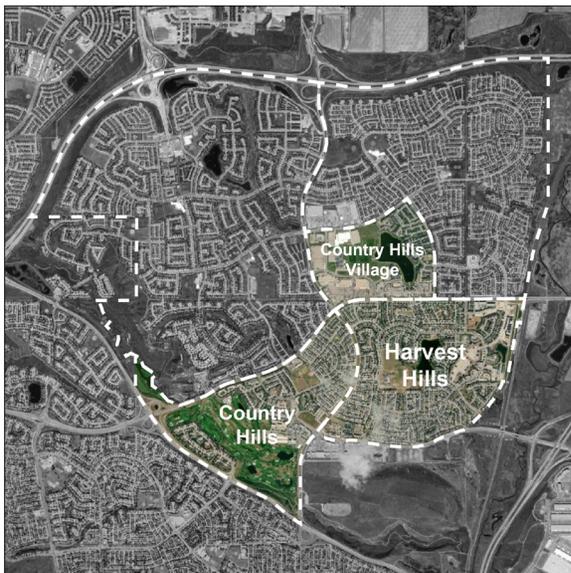
Bikeway network is available in just a few parts only.

- Future Green Line LRT
- Major Highway
- Main Roads & Bus Routes
- BRT Route
- BRT Bus Stops

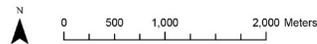
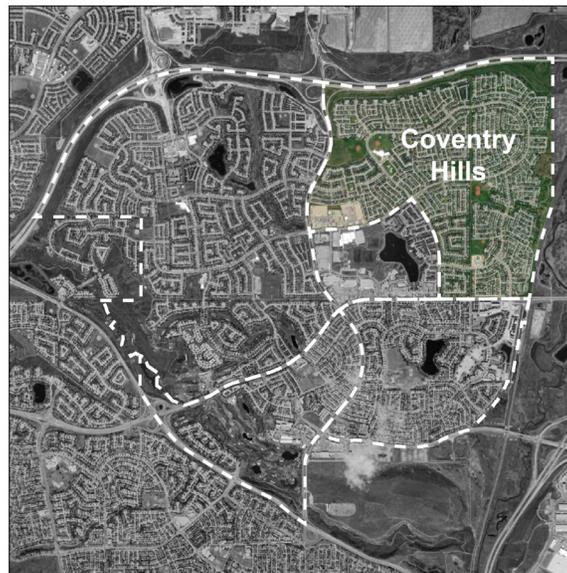
## PLANNING HISTORY

The community is a part of new development in Calgary and was set up between 1990 to 2000. Country Hills, Harvest Hills and Country Hills Village were the first few communities set up in 1990, followed by Coventry Hills in 1991, and Panorama Hills in 1997.

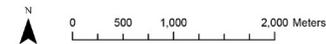
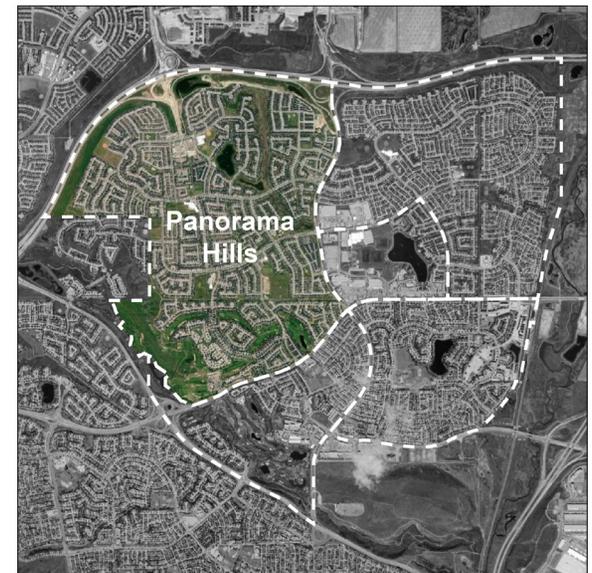
1990



1991



1997



During 1960s, Calgary added large quantities of land under its municipal limits. In this period, Calgary began its momentous shift to a suburban form, identified as “the age of the developer”. The Private developers were given the opportunity to build and finance their own subdivisions. While developing the sub-divisions, the private developers prioritized cars over pedestrians. All these 5 neighborhoods were developed in silos and walkability aspect was missed out. With the passage of time, when families started expanding, residents felt the need for public transit. Public transit was supplied later, however, walkability, dog park, and missing sidewalks are a few concerns which are currently present in the community.

## STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The key stakeholders for this project include the following:

1. Northern Hills Community Association (NHCA)
2. Vivo for Healthier Generations (Vivo)
3. Local Business Groups:
  - Cory Lomsnes RE/MAX
  - Panatella Dental Clinic
  - Bytertools
  - Metta Yoga
  - Kumon – Panorama Hills
4. Community Interest Groups:
  - Office of Michelle Rempel, PC MP
  - Northstar Residents Association
  - North Calgary Cultural Association
  - New Beginnings Church

Regular biweekly meetings were kept with the NHCA throughout the entire engagement process to ensure they were current on all the activities of this project. However, in January, we conducted shorter, focused consultation meetings with other stakeholder groups to help inform the topic of our workshop series.

## COVID IMPLICATIONS

These consultations helped us understand the community's aspirations and challenges in the current moment, such as:

- Addressing lack of organizational space
- Improving outdoor recreational space
- Supporting local business over chains
- Combatting feelings of isolation

Spaces that are accessible, easy to find, and consistent are really important

No business has been spared any kind of impact

I would love to see more local businesses because there are a lot of chains

We are trying to keep their spirits high

Improving Walkability	Strengthening Community Ties	Encouraging Outdoor Activity	Keeping Small Businesses
Tactical Urbanism	Fence Decorating	Bike Pump Track	Business Forum
Car-less Streets	AR Art Tour	Dog Park	Limiting Chains
Resting Stations	Cultural Festivals	Street Party	Community App

## PRESENT CHALLENGES

At present, the major challenge for NHCA is to integrate 57,000 residents living in five different neighbourhoods as one entity. The enormous scale of the community and its history of developing in silos has led to a major planning constraint: the uneven distribution of institutional resources.

For example, the Northstar Residents Association operates in Panorama Hills with independent funding. Other community groups, such as Creating Coventry, create programming within single neighbourhoods but do not intervene in others. Additionally, amenities in one location may not be accessible to the large majority of residents.

This issue of scale in Northern Hills has potential to further erode social connection in the community.



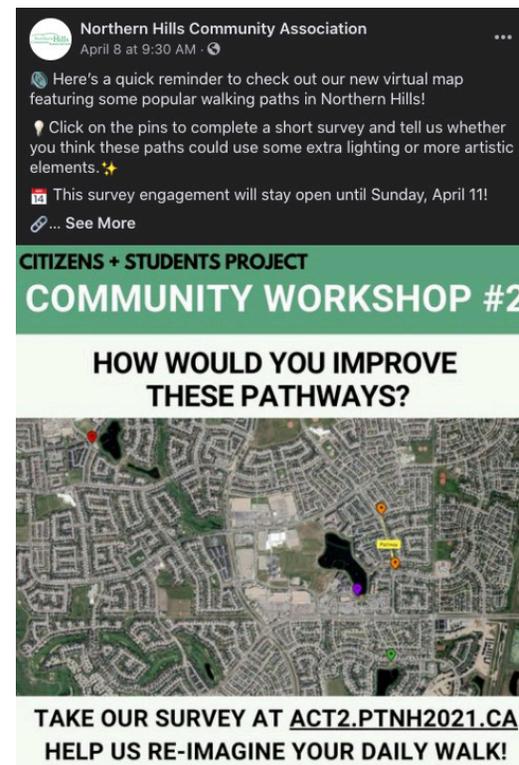
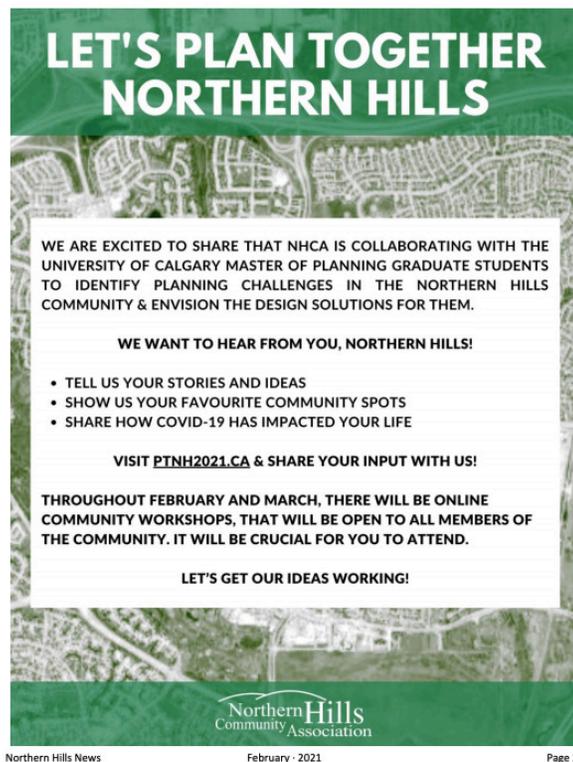
# 3. PLATFORM

## ABOUT THE PLATFORM

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted our social interactions, shifting all engagement activities from in-person to online only.

The main platforms we used to build our engagement activities were Bang the Table and Padlet. We used Bang the Table to create our main website (<http://ptnh2021.ca>), where we provided project updates and gathered community feedback. Padlet was used for conducting community workshops and other focused interactions, such as the virtual wishing wall. Throughout the project, we actively maintained these online pieces and experienced meaningful interactions with the residents.

The Community Association played a critical role in promoting our platform, helping us reach out to residents through their community newsletter and social media channels.



# MAINTENANCE & INTERACTION: BANG THE TABLE

## SUMMARY OF THE WEBSITE TRAFFIC

Our website saw a total of 1200+ visitors. 100 of those visitors were engaged in our polls, surveys and other interactive activities.

### Definitions of Visitors

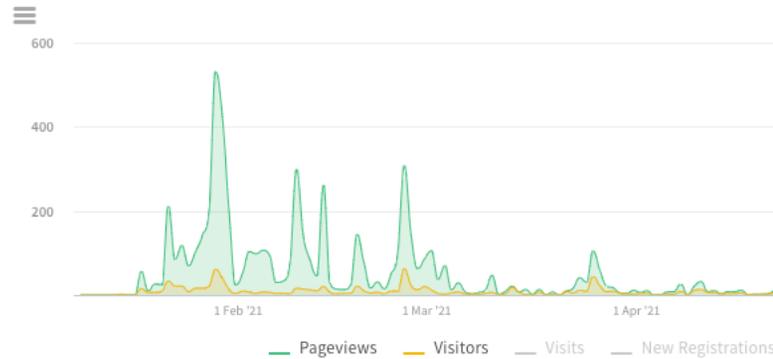
- Aware Visitors (551) - had made at least single visit to the site
- Informed Visitors (263) - taken further visit and clicked on something
- Engaged Visitors (100) - engaged in poll, surveys, made any submission, etc.

### TRAFFIC

#### Visitors Summary

Next Calgary from 07 Jan '21 to 21 Apr '21

[DAILY](#) MONTHLY

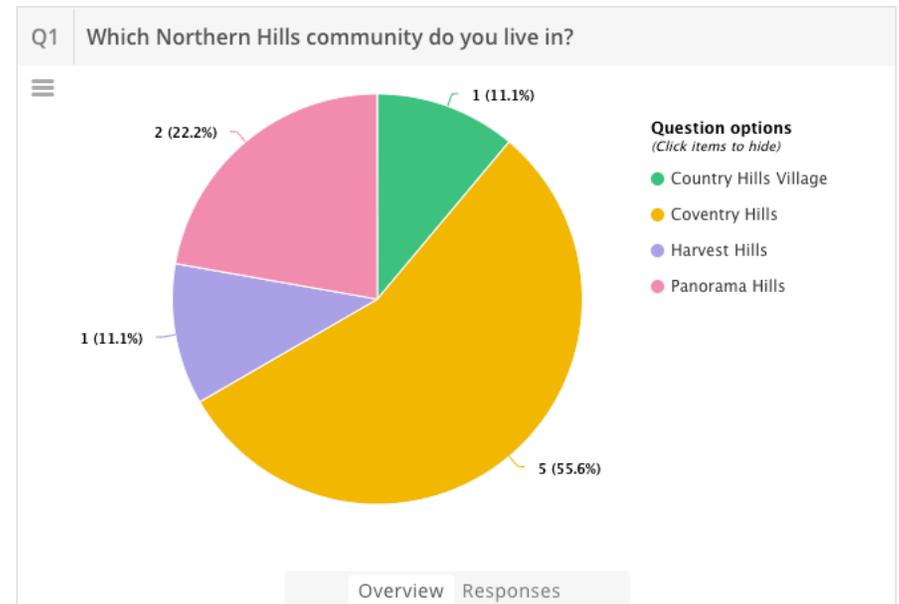


\* Select a section of the graph to zoom

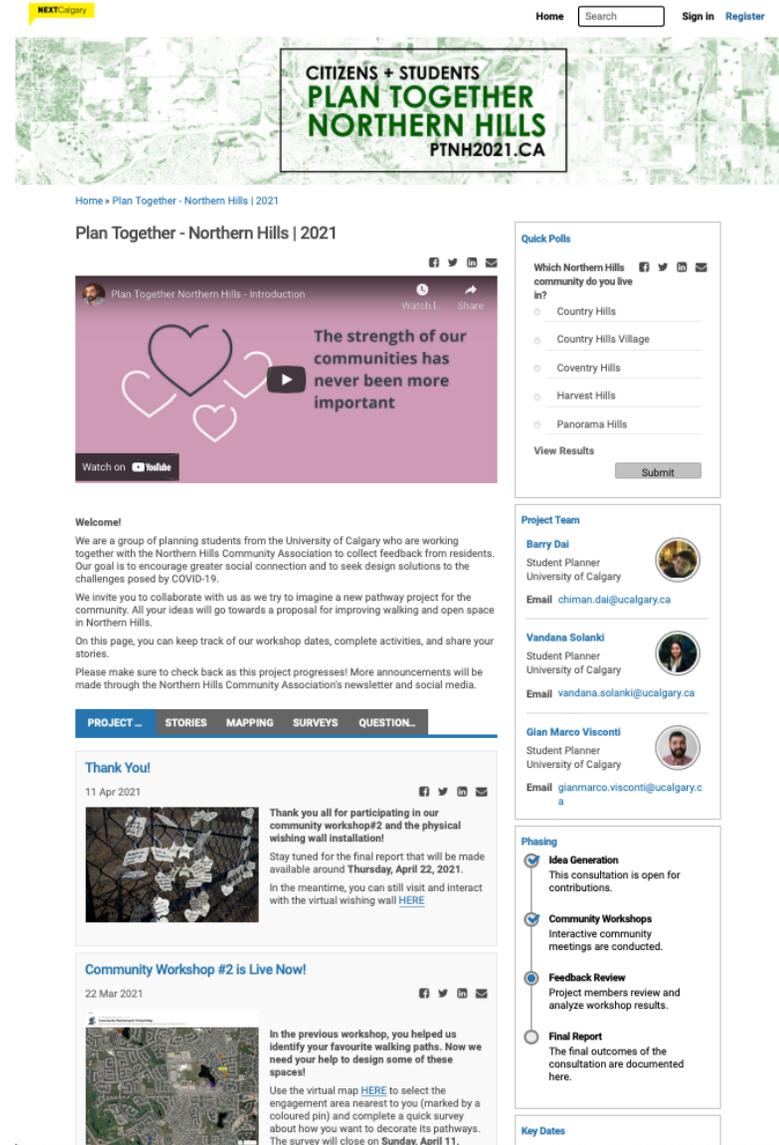
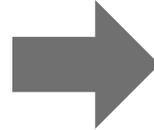
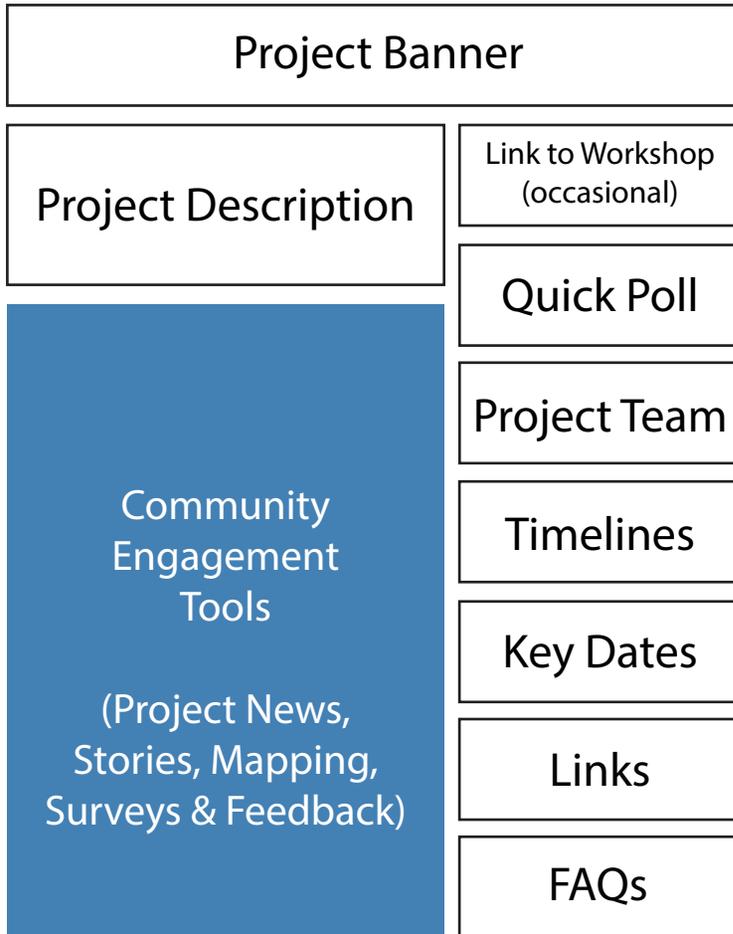
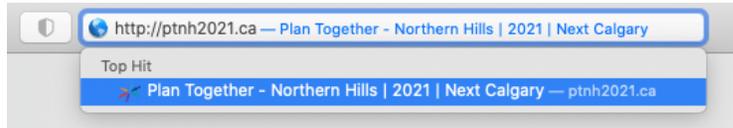
### Highlights

TOTAL VISITS	MAX VISITORS PER DAY	NEW REGISTRATIONS
1.2 k	62	0
ENGAGED VISITORS	INFORMED VISITORS	AWARE VISITORS
100	263	551

Based on a quick poll on the website, most visitors claimed they live in either Coventry Hills or Panorama Hills.



# PLATFORM LAYOUT & ENGAGEMENT TOOLS



# SHOWCASES OF SAMPLE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

**Quick Polls**

Which Northern Hills community do you live in? 

Country Hills

Country Hills Village

Coventry Hills

Harvest Hills

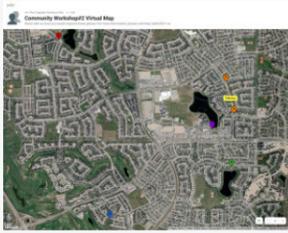
Panorama Hills

[View Results](#)

Quick Polls

**Community Workshop #2 is Live Now!** 

22 Mar 2021



**In the previous workshop, you helped us identify your favourite walking paths. Now we need your help to design some of these spaces!**

Use the virtual map [HERE](#) to select the engagement area nearest to you (marked by a coloured pin) and complete a quick survey about how you want to decorate its pathways.

The survey will close on **Sunday, April 11, 2021.**

Project News

## Share your community stories & memories

- How would you describe living in Northern Hills?
- What are some memorable moments you've had in Northern Hills?
- What do you like or dislike about Northern Hills?

Please use the following submission box to share with us your community stories & memories.

*(If possible, please include which neighbourhood you live in. Thank you!)*

Stories

All fields marked with an asterisk (\*) are required.

1. What was your employment status before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic? (Before March 1, 2020)

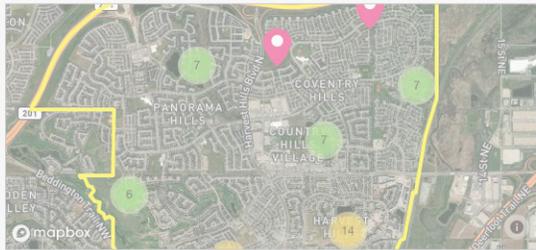
Choose an option

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Self-employed
- Student

Surveys

**Where in Northern Hills do you like to walk?** 

less than a minute



Mapping

## Questions or Comments?

If you have any other questions or comments regards the project, feel free to use the submission box below.

We are updating the platform **regularly** and your feedbacks would mean a lot to us!

Thank you!

Questions

## DESCRIPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Types of Engagement Tools	Purpose
Quick Polls	To study where the community members come from, also act as a warm-up exercise for engagement tools
Project News	Act as a platform to release the announcement and updates regards the project
Stories	Invite residents to share their community stories and memories living in the Northern Hills
Surveys	Collect data and responses with a set of formal questions
Mapping	Provide a set of questions and ask the residents to help identify areas for implementation by pinning on maps
Questions	To clarify any questions raised by the residents

## SUMMARY RESULTS OF ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Types of Engagement Tools	Number of exercises created by the project team	Result	Number of Participants
Quick Polls	1 poll	43 responses	43
Stories	1 question	3 stories	3
Surveys	8 surveys	68 submissions	47
Mapping	8 mapping exercises	107 pins	25

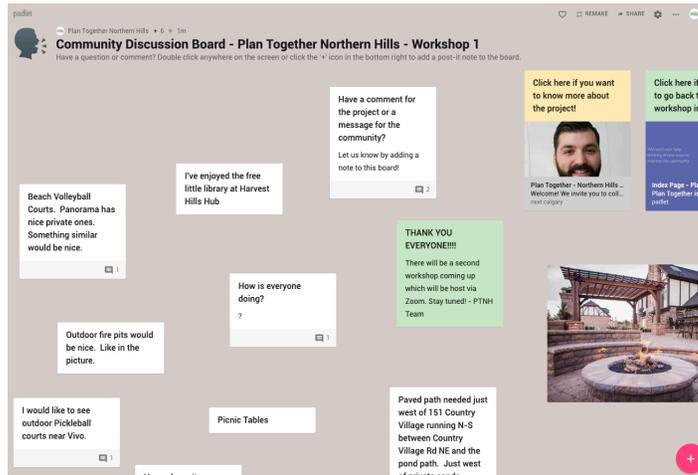
In addition to these engagement tools, we set up a project email to answer inquiries from the community members. Through this channel, we heard concerns over road safety, new recreational facilities, and other concurrent engagement projects, etc. Overall, the interactions with the community members were very positive.

# MAINTENANCE & INTERACTION: PADLET

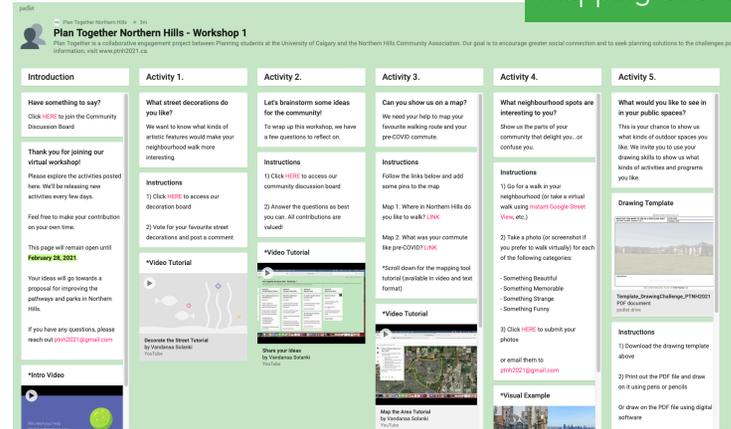
## SHOWCASES OF PADLET BOARDS BEING CREATED

Community Workshop 1 - <http://act.ptnh2021.ca>

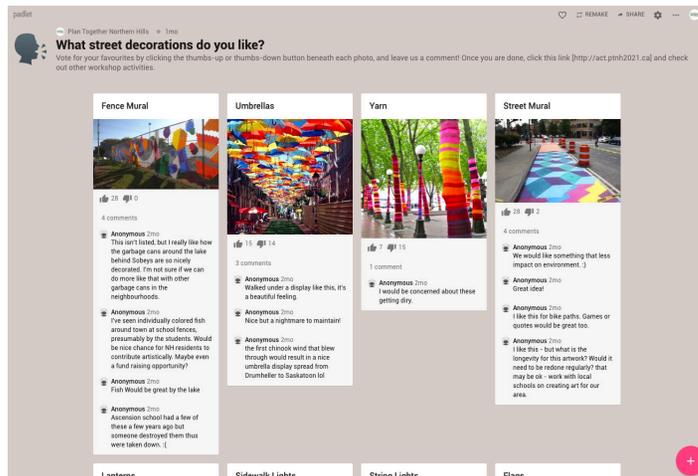
There were links back to the Bang The Table platform where the activities of mapping and survey held.



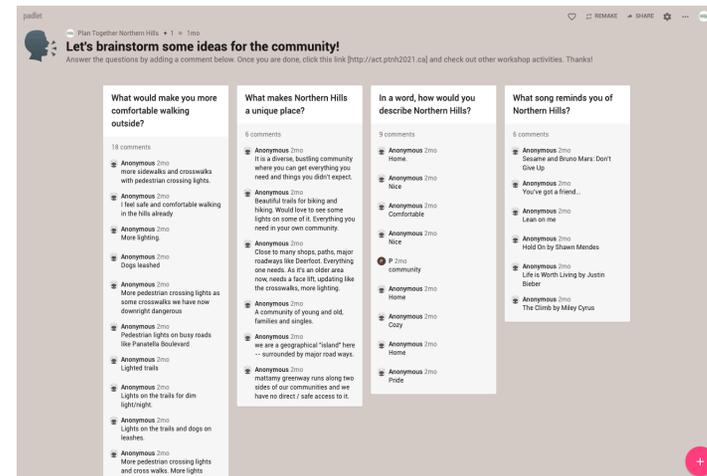
Community Discussion Board



Workshop 1 Index Page



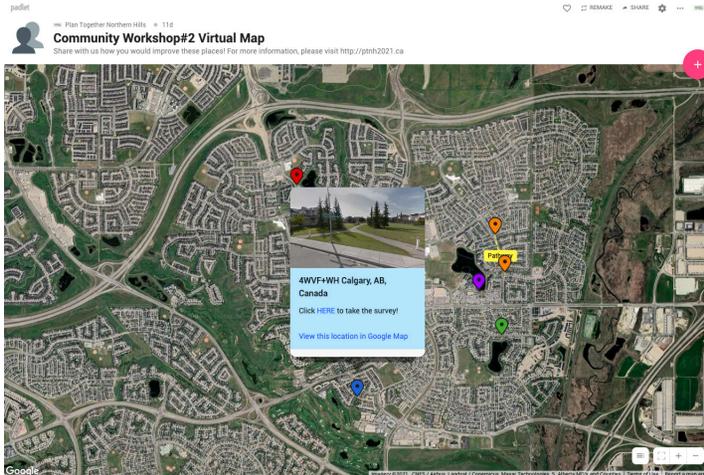
“What street decorations do you like?” Board



“Let's brainstorm some ideas for the community!” Board

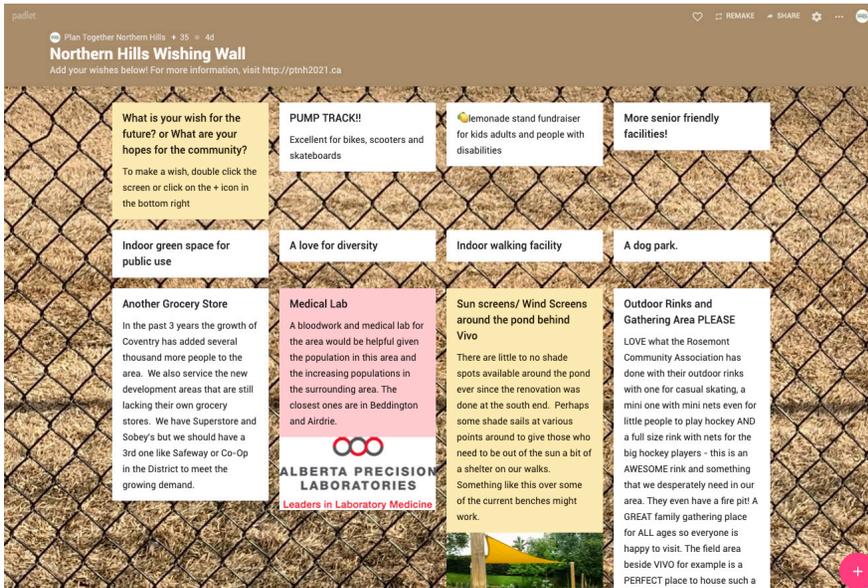
# SHOWCASES OF PADLET BOARDS BEING CREATED

Community Workshop 2: Virtual Map - <http://act2.ptnh2021.ca>

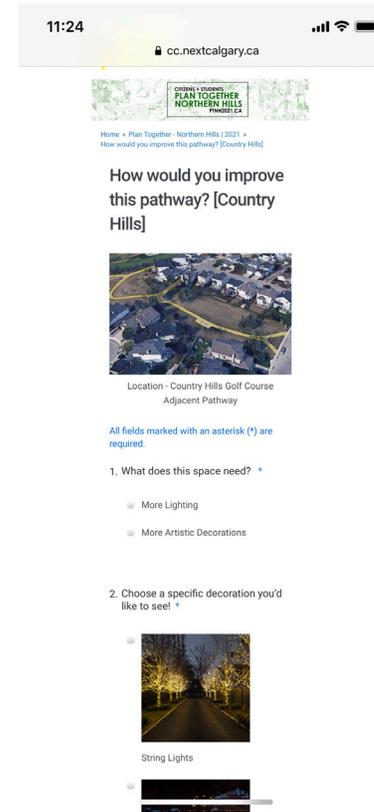


Each pin has a link to an unique survey created on Bang The Table.

Wishing Wall - <http://wish.ptnh2021.ca>



This QR code is another way to access this virtual wishing wall platform.





# 4. COLLABORATE

# COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 1 OVERVIEW

Date: February 10 to February 28, 2021

## INTENTION

To create interactive activities that would reveal residents' likes and dislikes about the community, as well as their views on what amenities were available or lacking. All residents of Northern Hills were invited to participate and we promoted the workshop using the NHCA's social media channels.

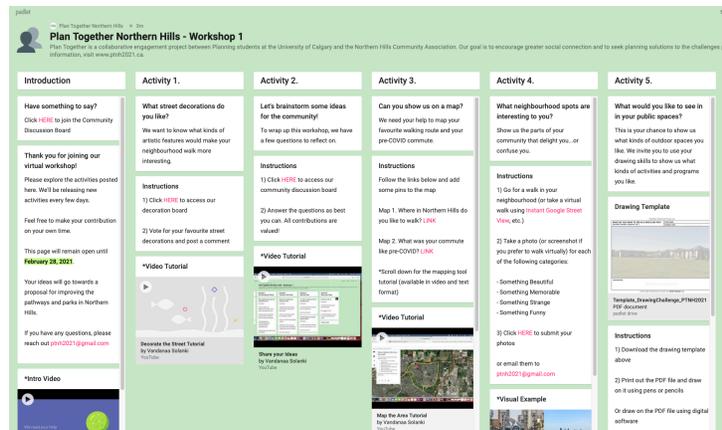
## METHODS

During this workshop, we built an online portal using Padlet where participants could access all activities simultaneously and complete them on their own time. Residents were asked to complete the following exercises:

- Voting on a list of potential street decorations
- Brainstorming about the community's uniqueness and walking conditions
- Locating special places on a map

## TAKEAWAYS

This workshop helped us identify some major key concerns of the community, such as safety, visual appeal, and sustainability. We received very positive responses to proposing the idea of additional lighting and other arts-based interventions and we learned that the community generally values its outdoor spaces.



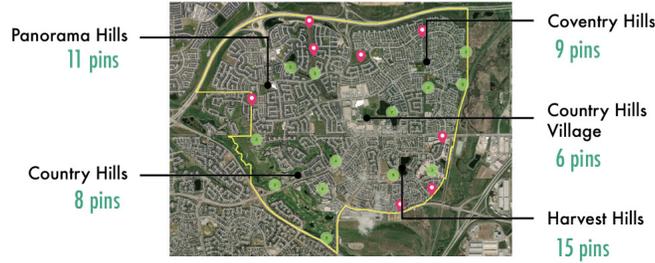
# WORKSHOP 1 SUMMARY

Street Decorations Vote:  
230 votes; 25 comments

Brainstorming:  
39 comments

Mapping:  
141 visitors;  
25 contributors; 86 pins

Where in Northern Hills do you like to walk?



Key things that the residents care about:



What makes Northern Hills a unique place?



What decorations would you like? (Top 4)

Sidewalk Lights



46 likes, 1 dislike

"...this would make the pathways more welcoming at night..."

String Lights



32 likes, 4 dislikes

"...would love this where pathways are lined with trees..."

Fence Mural



29 likes, 0 dislikes

"...would be nice chance for NH residents to contribute artistically..."

Street Mural



28 likes, 2 dislikes

"...I like this but what is the longevity for this artwork?"

Key takeaways: Community values lighting and artistic/visual appeal, and sustainability for design.

What would make you more comfortable walking outside?



Key themes: 1. Diversity of communities 2. Trails for walking and biking 3. Access to services & amenities

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOP 2 OVERVIEW

Date: March 19 to April 11, 2021

### INTENTION

To take the community's brainstorming ideas and apply them to specific physical locations. Because of the relative safety of outdoor activity during the pandemic and the fact that many residents expressed their appreciation for outdoor amenities, we created a series of activities designed to reimagine some of the most popular pathways.

### METHODS

This workshop consisted of two components: the online survey and virtual map, and a series of Instagram quick polls, which targeted the locations on the right.

We asked residents of each respective neighbourhood to:

- Determine whether the pathway required more lighting or more artwork
- Suggest a specific decoration they would place on the pathway
- Consider what activities they would like to do in the space
- Propose alternative intervention strategies

The Instagram posts were an opportunity to scale down further and to ask residents for their opinion on specific interventions strategies.

### TAKEAWAYS

This workshop gave us a clearer picture of how street decorations and other interventions could be implemented in key walking locations across the community; however, at this point, we experienced a turning point and decided that proposing a series of physical interventions would not be enough to address the issue of social cohesion that we established at the beginning of the engagement process. This realization set the tone for the development of our final concept.



Country Hills  
Golf Course  
Pathway



Country Hills  
Village Pond  
Pathway



Panorama Hills  
Pond  
Pathway

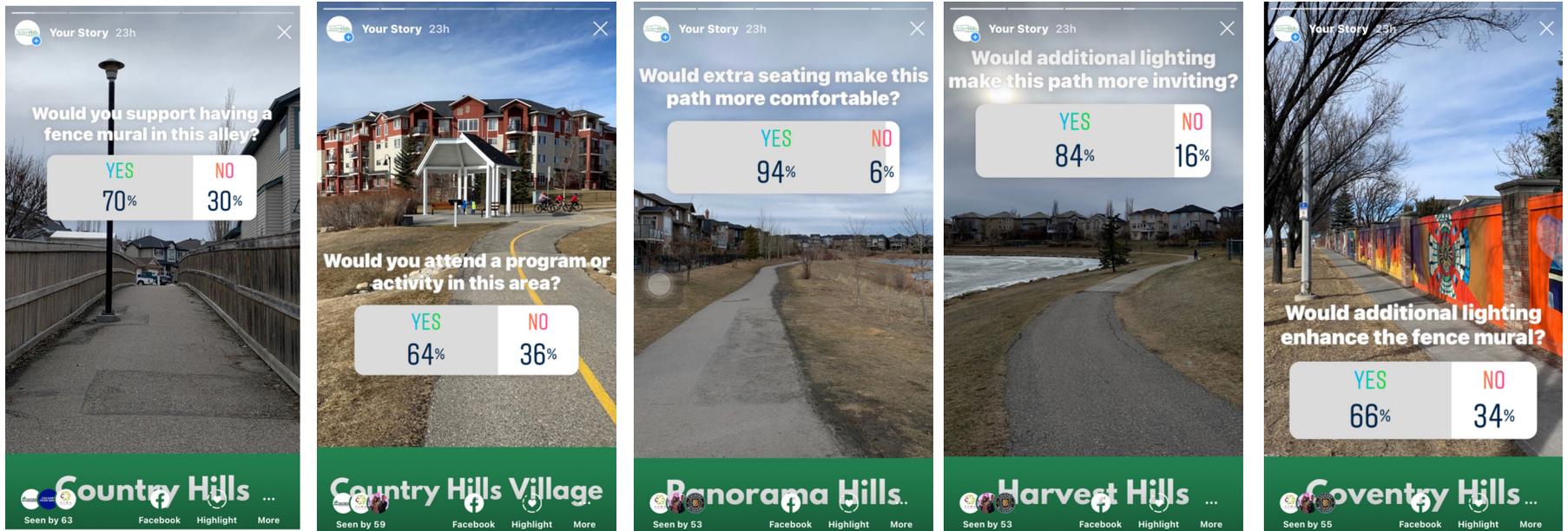


Harvest Hills  
Pond  
Pathway



Coventry Hills  
Fence Mural  
Pathway

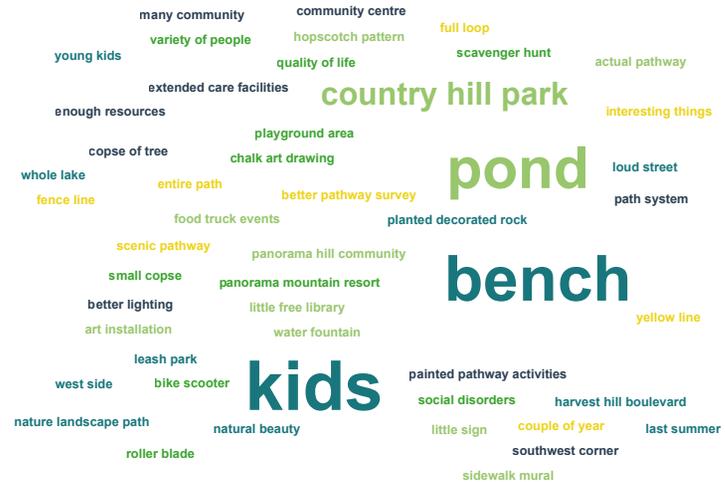
## WORKSHOP 2 SUMMARY



### What kinds of activities would you like to do in these areas?



### What ideas do you have for these areas?





# 5. VISION & NARRATIVE

## OUR VISION

The culture of quarantining and physical distancing that has emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has left a deep mark on the social wellbeing of many communities, disrupting the level of human interaction that is possible with our loved ones. The vision of the Plan Together project began as a process of getting to know the Northern Hills community and the way its residents have coped with these ongoing challenges, and it evolved over time to be a vehicle for cultivating a greater sense of community despite the damage done to our social networks.

In the context of urban planning, sense of community carries many meanings but the most relevant definitions to this project include: feelings of attachment, social interaction, and urban form (Beske, 2007). Attachment refers to our ability to assign and retain memories of our surroundings. Social interaction refers to the quantity and quality of our encounters with other people and objects in our environment. Finally, urban form refers to the level of personal comfort we feel while inhabiting a particular space.

As this engagement process came to a close, we imagined a way to use our findings to repair the damage done to the sense of community in Northern Hills as a result of COVID-19, and to strengthen the bonds between the highly individualized neighbourhoods which comprise the community as a whole. Our hope was to develop a framework for community building that could encompass the enormous scale of this community that could be applied many times over, in many ways.



## URBAN STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a powerful tool for creating active citizenry that is already employed in the planning process; however, historically, it has mainly been used to persuade the public into accepting the planner's future vision (Taylor & Wei, 2020). Our vision was not based in the idea of imposing solutions on the community. We wanted to spark dialogue as a means to empower residents to identify and develop solutions to issues as best suits their own needs. We wanted to allow space for the community to tell its own story and build community capacity, or the potential to define and address issues collectively (Taylor & Wei, 2020).

Rather than taking a traditional needs-based approach to planning in the community, which focuses on identifying deficiencies and elevates the opinions of outside experts, we opted for an asset-based strategy, which focuses on mapping available features and restores agency to the residents.

### **Needs-Based**

- Identifying deficiencies
- Prioritizes the outside expert
- Disempowers communities

### **Asset-Based**

- Identifying existing features
- Prioritizes active citizenry
- Empowers communities



# 6. TRANSFORM

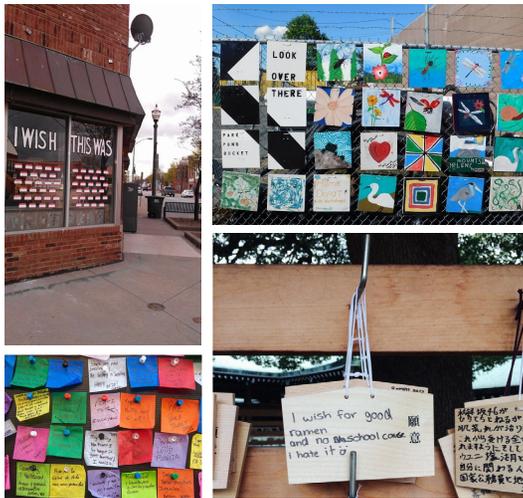
# WISHING WALL

## DESCRIPTION

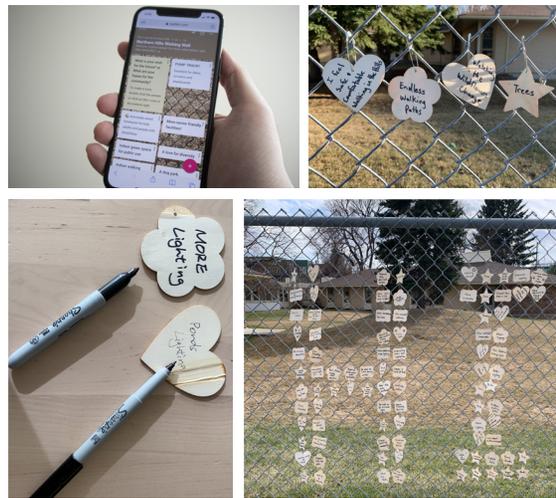
The Northern Hills Wishing Wall was a public art installation we built in the community to invite residents to share their wishes and reflections on the place they live. This installation was completed with permission and assistance from the NHCA and the City of Calgary.

We drew inspiration from both the traditional Japanese practice, wherein Shinto and Buddhist worshippers write prayers and wishes onto wooden plaques (Reader, 1991), and contemporary interpretations of the idea.

The many fences that can be found throughout the community provided the perfect canvas to implement this idea. Many fences are bland elements of the urban fabric that detract from the visual appeal of the street. The Wishing Wall transformed these mundane structures into something new and exciting.



[1] Precedents Research



[2] Prototyping



[3] Installation

## DESIGN CONCEPT

The Wishing Wall serves two purposes:

1. Using artwork to transform and give identity to a physical space
2. Collecting ideas and stories from the community

The wall was designed to focus more on process rather than achieving a particular end goal: it was dedicated to the stories the residents wanted to tell. We wanted the residents to have a chance to reflect on their experience living in the community and to guide the conversation of future growth.

In the long-term, our hope is that the NHCA will adopt the Wishing Wall concept as a communication strategy to inform future growth in the community. With consistent implementation, the Wishing Wall could serve as a public think-tank.

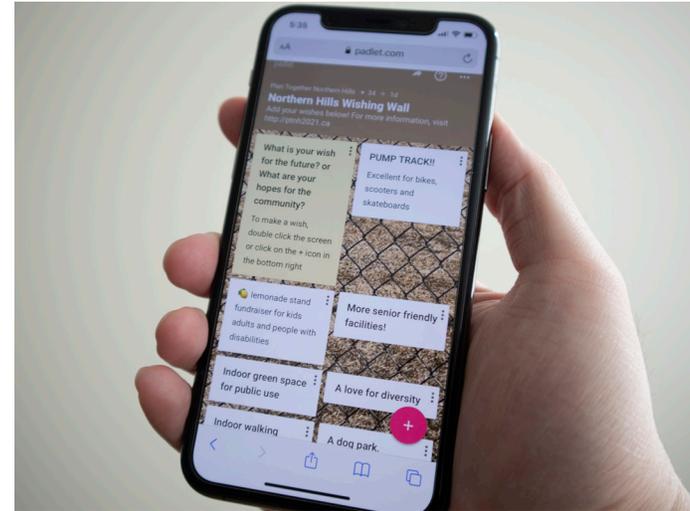
## LOCATIONS

Both sites were chosen for their central location and high foot traffic. These areas serve as a hub where residents shop, work, and play. They also contain active trails for biking and walking. The pond is a recognizable landmark but it lacks character and identity.

In both locations, we took fence structures that were bland and intimidating, and tried to make them more visual appealing by adding a more human touch to them.



## EXECUTION



Physical Components	Virtual Components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plywood Pieces (around 6 x 6 x 0.2 cm)</li><li>• Nylon Zip Tie (Length: 15cm)</li><li>• Sharpie Pens</li><li>• Poster with QR code</li><li>• <i>*Pipe cleaners to enhance visibility (optional)</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Virtual Wishing Wall website on Padlet</li><li>• A QR code that links to the virtual wall</li></ul>

The wall took up both physical and virtual space. The physical portion was populated with the ideas we had gathered during the past 4 months of workshop activities. With respect to COVID-19 restrictions, residents were asked to contribute more wishes and ideas to a virtual wall, ensuring safe and accessible participation.

On the physical site, we arranged the wooden pieces into positive greetings, such as “HI” and “HELLO,” to capture the attention of passersby. A poster containing a QR code was placed next to the installation to allow visitors to access the virtual wall.

**PHOTOS OF INSTALLATION (SITE A: NEXT TO THE NORTH POINTE BUS TERMINAL)**



## PHOTOS OF INSTALLATION (SITE A: NEXT TO THE NORTH POINTE BUS TERMINAL)



## PHOTOS OF INSTALLATION (SITE B: NEAR THE CENTRAL POND AREA)



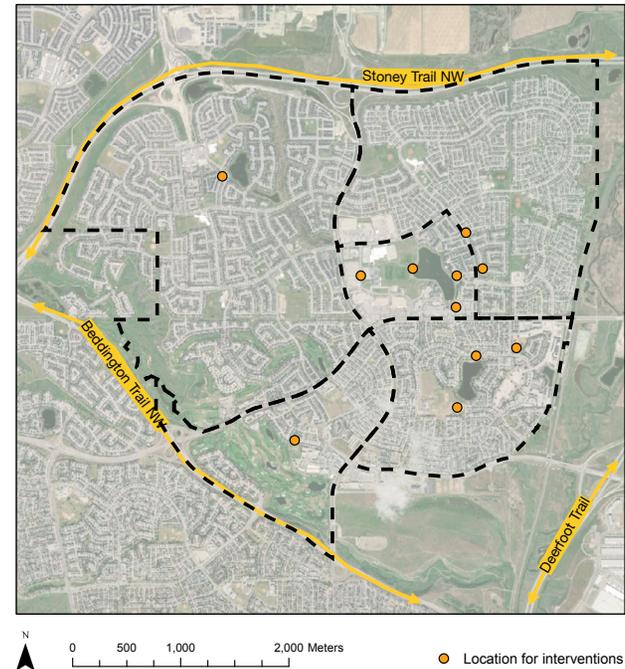
## PHOTOS OF INSTALLATION (SITE B: NEAR THE CENTRAL POND AREA)



## FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Future implementation of this arts-based communication strategy could follow two models:

- Centralized: the wishing walls remain in the central area surrounding Country Hills Village
- Decentralized: the wishing walls are dispersed to all communities



A centralized approach emphasizes the centre as a key gathering place for the community as a whole. However, a decentralized approach would underline the differing contexts and assets of each neighbourhood.

In the end, the location may not be as important as the practice itself. We propose that, should the Wishing Wall be implemented, it should be done regularly. The themes and topics of wishing wall are not limited to the planning issues as we have used it for this project: the Wishing Wall could also be adapted to explore other topics with more personal relevance to the community.



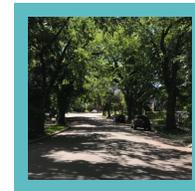
# POSSIBLE SITES FOR INTERVENTION



Benches



Tables



Trees



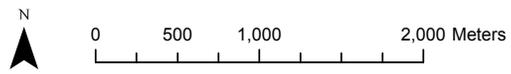
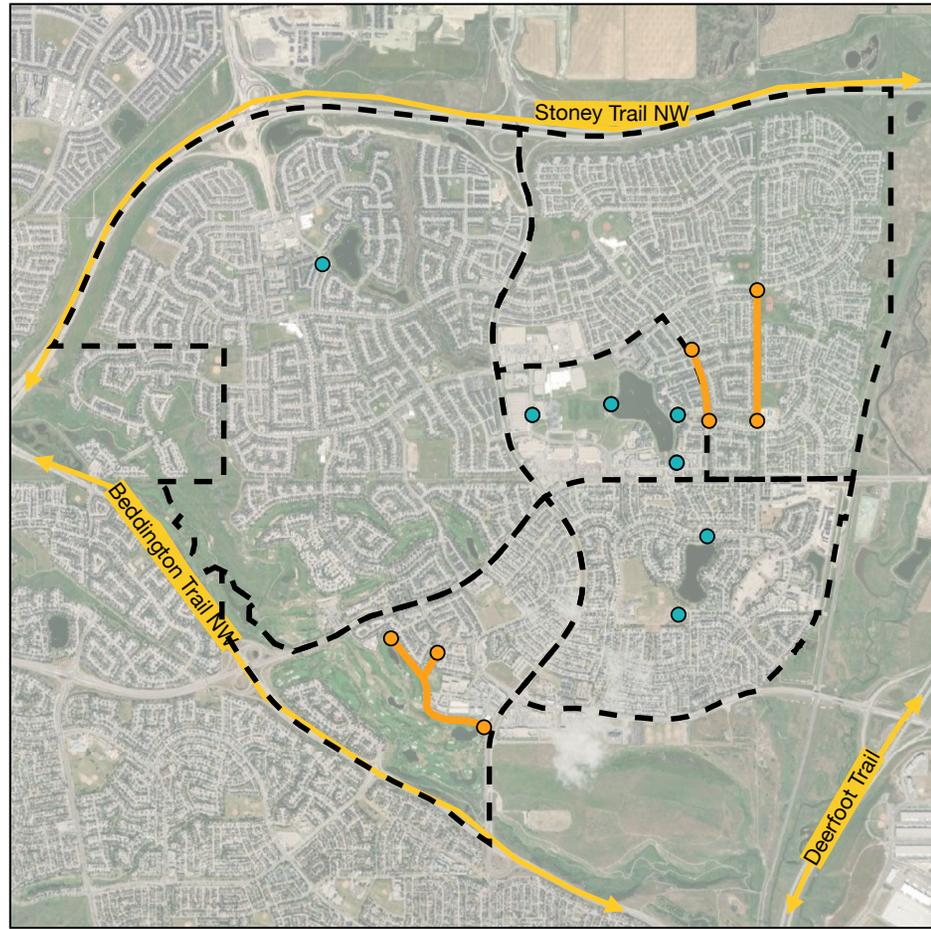
Murals

## Programs for Pond Areas

Markets

Outdoor Theatre

Free Little Library



● Pond Areas  
● Traditional Pathways



Lighting



Art & Sculpture



Painted Pathways



Planted Flowers

Street Party

Cycling Groups

Scavenger Hunt

## Programs for Traditional Pathways



# 7. REFLECTION

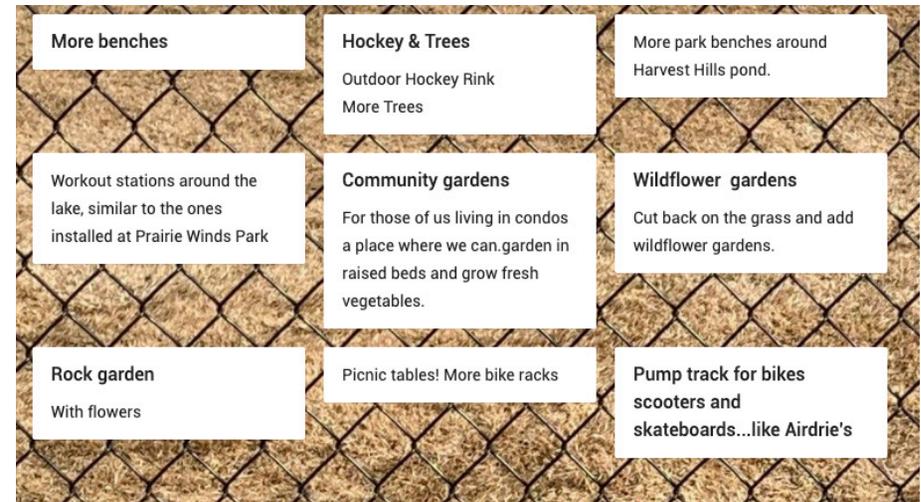
## VALUE OF WISHING WALL

The Wishing Wall has value as an art piece by:

- Creating an identity for the space around it
- Transforming a mundane feature of the environment into something that can leave an impression
- Reflecting the thoughts and desires of the community in the moment

The Wishing Wall has value as a planning tool by:

- Allowing social interaction during a time of uncertainty and restriction
- Encouraging a sense of ownership over the community's growth
- Being accessible to all residents



## SUCCESS & CHALLENGES

Overall, we feel this project succeeded in reaching all neighborhoods in the community and attempting to create dialogue with the community as a whole. We are grateful for the support of the NHCA in carrying out this project and would not have had the opportunity to realize a physical intervention without their assistance in obtaining permission.

If we had the chance to redo this project from the beginning, we would have made a greater effort to capture a larger portion of the total population. We would have liked to build more direct engagements for the various ethnic and cultural groups in the area, and conduct more workshops in real time. Finally, there were many opportunities to partner with more community interest groups that we did not have the time to arrange. These changes would have allowed us to build a closer relationship with the community.

We hope our proposal for the Wishing Wall in the Northern Hills community, and the small collection of feedback with gathered, will have a meaningful impact on its future development.





# 8. REFERENCES

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