



IMAGINE ASIATOWN  
VISIONING REPORT 2020

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# WE'RE GROWING HOME

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PRODUCED FOR MIDTOWN  
CLEVELAND, INC.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION | 3

VISIONING PROCESS | 3

RESULTS | 4

Ideal Future & Shared Values

Themes of the AsiaTown

Shared Vision

Community Strengths

RECOMMENDATIONS | 7

CONCLUSION | 12

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# INTRODUCTION

The objective of the Imagine AsiaTown visioning process was for residents and other community members of AsiaTown to articulate a shared vision for the future of their neighborhood in a way that would contribute to community-building. This report summarizes the process and its results under the banner, “We’re Growing Home!”

In 2020, the AsiaTown Cleveland community faced tremendous risk and uncertainty from the global COVID-19 pandemic. Their fears about its implications for individual and public health were compounded by a national economic crisis, isolation imposed by physical distancing, and the psychological, social, and financial effects of a widespread resurgence in violence and hate directed at Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) people. All this occurred against the backdrop of the mass protests throughout the U.S. against

persistent police brutality and systemic racism. AsiaTown’s residents and businesses have navigated these difficult dynamics by showing love and care for each other through growing support networks and neighborhood initiatives like AsiaTown Sweetheart, Feed AsiaTown, and Square Dancing. This time of tremendous change and uncertainty has offered an opportunity to hear what neighbors, families, friends think about the future of the Cleveland neighborhood and discuss the things that matter most to them. The recommendations in this report harness the values and themes of the AsiaTown shared vision to help MidTown Cleveland and AsiaTown community members to design and respond to neighborhood initiatives; to support and sustain ownership, commitment and accountability; and to invite and develop local leadership capacity from the inside out.

## VISIONING PROCESS

The Imagine AsiaTown visioning process was intended to uncover values and practical themes for community development. Its process involved several stages: discovery, design, interactive visioning, review of findings, collective meaning-making and preparing for action. A shared vision was created through a series of public visioning events between August and October 2020. More than 100 community members of diverse ages and races participated through one or more modes of engagement. They included at least 38 AsiaTown residents, 10 business owners, and 20 workers, as well as neighborhood advocates, visitors, and individuals with personal or family roots in the neighborhood.



# RESULTS



**It is intended that the MidTown Cleveland, Inc. team will use the findings in this report to design, select, and implement initiatives in the neighborhood in a way that coheres with the AsiaTown shared vision. Moreover, this report outlines next steps to sustain ownership, commitment, and accountability of community members to the shared vision and projects. Finally, this report describes an approach to community engagement with AsiaTown as home to countless community members past, present, and future.**

*"Go home! Go back to where you came from!"*

Asians and other groups in the United States are all too familiar with being on the receiving end of this painful racist taunt. Its chilling effect has served to reinforce the stereotype of people of Asian descent as perpetual foreigners, not "real" Americans, of not mattering and not belonging. In uncovering the hopes, dreams, values, and future vision of community members through this Imagine AsiaTown project, the shared vision statement "We're Growing Home!" emerged. The statement embodies a determination to dismantle stereotypes and reclaim community pride and a thriving home for all.

We invited people who live, work, shop, and spend time in AsiaTown to engage as a community to imagine its future. They offered heart-warming wisdom and a lens through which to see potential community initiatives as strengths, opportunities for continued flourishing, and antidotes to the multiple specters of the COVID-19 pandemic, gentrification, systemic racism, diluted Asian culture, and a preference of profits over people and place. To hear the voices of AsiaTown is to be welcomed home.

**Ideal future and shared values** -- In a process of emergent learning, we came to understand community members' core values and most heart-felt stories as abiding expressions of home -- despite challenges related to economic pressures, safety, and regret about the people and businesses that had left AsiaTown. They described an ideal future for AsiaTown, Cleveland: it would foster pride for Asian Americans and help show who they are beyond stereotypes; it would be a welcoming and radically connected place, where AAPI people could feel safe, accepted and understood in a country and city where they often aren't; the rest of Cleveland would value it and see it as fundamental to the City. Their ideal AsiaTown would be bustling, full of energy and beautiful flowers. It would be a place all could call home.



## WE'RE GROWING HOME!

The AsiaTown shared vision, "We're Growing Home!" implies a specific place-based set of shared values. Eight core value statements generated high levels of resonance from community members. These values are deeply interconnected; when all eight are actualized, they reinforce one another:

- **Taking care of family, neighbors and community**
- **Connection with our heritage & history**
- **Belonging**
- **Prosperity**
- **Feeling seen & valued**
- **Health**
- **Respect toward elders & leaders**
- **Safety**

## THEMES OF THE ASIATOWN VISION

Theme 1. AsiaTown is a beautiful neighborhood that reflects authentic Asian cultures.

Theme 2. AsiaTown is walkable and safe for people of all races.

Theme 3. AsiaTown attracts and keeps residents of all races.

Theme 4. Our businesses lead to prosperity for all.

Theme 5. In our diverse neighborhood, an ethic of care strengthens bonds.

Theme 6. Everyone throughout the city and beyond knows AsiaTown as a welcoming place.

**Themes of the AsiaTown Vision** -- During the interactive visioning process, the core values combined to reveal several themes that describe a desired future state built on a rich foundation of a beloved home. The themes can foster initiatives that are informed by the vision and spirit of AsiaTown Cleveland. They are also a foundation for community members to work out differences as they propose and evaluate initiatives:

Theme #1. AsiaTown is a beautiful neighborhood that reflects authentic Asian cultures. This theme was expressed in statements such as: “AsiaTown is growing and thriving. Families and residents walk around the neighborhood and think ‘where I live is beautiful!’” and “AsiaTown is a model of an equitable Asian immigrant neighborhood in the US.”

Theme #2. AsiaTown is walkable and safe for people of all races. Without doubt, a home that is beautiful and where its residents feel like they belong is also a safe place.

Theme #3. AsiaTown attracts and keeps residents of all races. This theme imagines characteristics of a thriving and caring community as a significant attractor of young families and immigrants.

Theme #4. Our businesses lead to prosperity for all.

Many respondents imagined a resurgence of thriving community participation: “A supermarket has brought the foot traffic back. There’s more shopping: grocery stores with low prices that carry everything, serving neighborhood needs.” Theme #5. In our diverse neighborhood, an ethic of care strengthens bonds. This theme imagines a future AsiaTown where basic needs are met and neighbors help neighbors, reducing root causes of housing insecurity and crime.

Theme #6. Everyone throughout the city and beyond knows AsiaTown as a welcoming place speaks to a collective desire to preserve the neighborhood’s existing culture and to uplift long-time residents and businesses.

**Community strengths** -- Respondents offered to contribute skills and strengths such as financial services, mentorship, teaching about culture, helping to create a more caring community, advocacy and activism, contributing knowledge and skills (such as yoga, tai chi, social work, beekeeping, legal services, cooking traditional cuisine) and offering ideas and participation in events and neighborhood meetings.



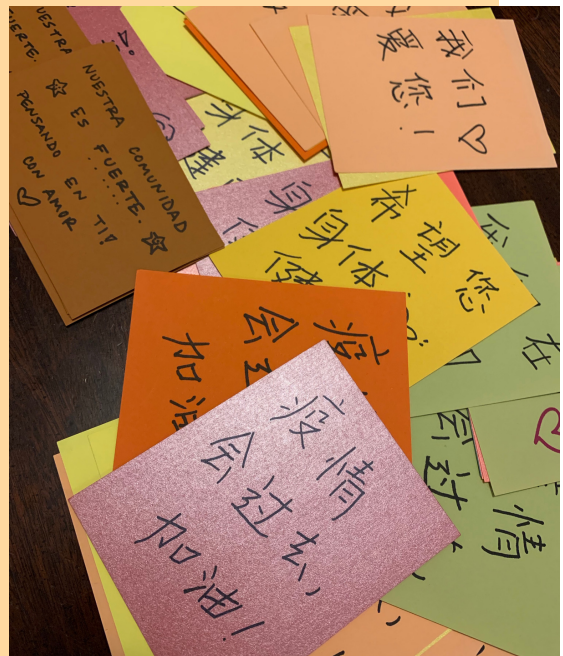
# RECOMMENDATIONS

Now that a diverse representation of AsiaTown community members have articulated their shared vision and values, what will increase the likelihood that neighborhood initiatives and decisions will be acceptable to them and others who have a stake in the area? Can future decision-making processes be trusted to engage a diversity of people and produce outcomes that demonstrate to all that, in AsiaTown, “We’re Growing Home?”

Our recommendations align with outputs from the 2020 MidTown annual meeting, which highlighted that circumstances this year are calling for us to “be more innovative than ever” and put into practice “true collaboration for catalytic change.” We recommend several actions to be taken over time to invite desired changes in the physical environment as well as in the processes used to make decisions and

engage community. Applied together as part of a strategy, MidTown -- partnering with community members -- can amplify the AsiaTown “ethic of care” and strengthen its reputation and feeling of a “welcoming place.” We recommend a community-orientation that reinforces the stated desires and vision of AsiaTown stakeholders to always be growing itself as a home -- where residents, workers and visitors feel welcome and radically connected, accepted and understood when they often aren’t in the bigger world. It continues the visioning process of Imagine AsiaTown by inviting the voices of the often voiceless, who can consistently have a say in building a reality that moves beyond stereotypes. Developing relational capacity and neighborhood leadership in stages can deepen a spirit of goodwill and grow the community’s ability to navigate differences.

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We recommend several ways to grow home, consistent with the AsiaTown values and shared vision:

1. Develop community leaders grounded in the AsiaTown shared vision
2. Train AsiaTown and MidTown staff to use the Vision-in-Action tool and community-oriented facilitation process
3. Engage and build a caring community
4. Evaluate neighborhood projects for their alignment with the shared vision
5. Customize initiatives to the AsiaTown shared vision
6. Communicate progress on how “We’re Growing Home!”

At the core of our recommendations is a community-oriented tool which arose out of the visioning process. The Vision-in-Action Compass is a flexible tool for strategy, assessment and decision-making customized to the AsiaTown shared vision. It offers a practical way for MidTown Cleveland and AsiaTown community members to consistently orient community development decisions to the shared vision. It is designed to enable mutual accountability and transparency, as well as productive feedback. The Compass is intended to evolve as the community applies the tool and learns through its own feedback how to improve the tool to better meet emerging needs.

The Compass lists the themes of the AsiaTown shared vision and amplifies each one with specific descriptions against which projects can be evaluated. This specificity turns the vision into criteria for design, selection or decision-making. For example, the theme “AsiaTown is a beautiful neighborhood that reflects authentic Asian cultures,” translates into the following criteria: Culture and history reflected with authenticity and care, Beautiful decorations representing a diversity of Asian cultures, Uplifts voices or affirms humanity of residents / Asian people, Visibility / impact

beyond the AsiaTown neighborhood. Future versions of the Compass could include additional values/criteria that MidTown Cleveland, Inc. brings to designing, assessing, and prioritizing project ideas. These could include elements such as environmental sustainability, current funding strategies, political support, etc.

**The Vision-in-Action  
Compass is a flexible tool  
for strategy, assessment  
and decision-making  
customized to the AsiaTown  
shared vision.**

AsiaTown and MidTown team members can use the Compass in several ways:

1. Develop community leaders grounded in the AsiaTown shared vision
  - Neighbor-Led Action Project ideas — Apply the Vision-in-Action Compass to specific actions community members want to initiate and create together. Use the Compass to inspire creativity to bring the shared vision to life. Define roles, resource requirements, and sources of mutual support.
  - MidTown-Led Initiatives — Co-design and prioritize community development options. Invite community members to actively contribute to the design, assessment and prioritization of projects (community-building and physical improvements) in the MidTown portfolio using the Vision-in-Action Compass. This extends beyond the usual “public meeting” to gather feedback and input. This process moves towards supporting community

## REINFORCING THE ASIATOWN SHARED VISION

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5. Engage with differences to customize initiatives
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members to be genuine design and implementation partners, based on the gifts they currently bring and those they want to develop.

- Support Home-Grown Leadership — Help community members identify and define roles needed to implement projects and invite them to self-organize, take responsibility, and choose accountability for serving in those roles. Support a process for a neighborhood network to provide mutual support and learning where capacity is under-developed. Start modestly, supporting skill-building with Neighbor-Led Action Projects. Gauge readiness and interest in taking on roles defined for AsiaTown Projects.

2. Train AsiaTown and MidTown staff to use the Vision-in-Action tool and community-oriented facilitation process.

- Orientation session — Get a brief overview of

the Vision-in-Action Compass to learn how to use the tool to identify and rate neighborhood projects to keep the shared vision in mind.

- Vision-in-Action workshop and coaching — Participate in workshops and coaching sessions support staff to both apply the tool and facilitate conversations that seek common ground in the AsiaTown Vision. Practice combining the Vision-in-Action Compass with Convergent Facilitation, a decision-making process that looks beneath the surface to find commonalities.
  - Additional training for MidTown staff — Increase your mastery of values-led collaborative design and project portfolio decision-making through “Community Conversation Deep-Dives.”
3. Engage and build a caring community.
    - Community Conversations — No doubt, different members of the community have expressed desired futures which may seem contradictory. The opportunity is to see these differences as key data that can create a more robust project portfolio that integrates these differences. MidTown’s role as facilitator and “neutral broker” can help the community find shared understanding and agreement based on that understanding. In this convergent process participants share what matters to them and translate their differing views into deeper principles that they all agree on. Using those principles, the group harmonizes existing proposals or comes up with new proposals. Finally, they use their newfound mutual understanding to craft a collaborative solution.
    - Hosted gatherings — Follow up community conversations with gatherings during which community members can offer their gifts and share the ways in which they want to contribute to neighborhood initiatives.

- Multi-generational interviews — Continue to encourage community members to connect with family, friends, and neighbors by using the “What’s Your Story?” Interview Guide used during the visioning process.
- Quarterly Imagine AsiaTown Conversations — Enable members to meet new neighbors and interview each other in partner breakout sessions and whole-group sharing
- Storytelling “Café” Events — Create visibility and pride by encouraging café-style events where people can share their individual stories and stir empathic connection

**Create visibility and pride by encouraging café-style events where people can share their individual stories and stir empathic connection.**

4. Evaluate neighborhood projects for their alignment with the AsiaTown shared vision.
  - Individual project ideas — Community members and other stakeholders can use the Compass to rate individual projects relative to each of the AsiaTown vision themes. The tool lets users enter summary statements for possible actions, which they then rate according to the extent to which the action is likely to fulfill, not fulfill or detract from each design criteria.
  - Project portfolio — Individual projects can be ranked relative to each other. Users can manage the portfolio as a system by determining the extent to which they meet the criteria as a whole, despite whether or not each project meets all the criteria.

5. Engage with differences to customize initiatives.

- Collaborative design brainstorming — Facilitate community conversations using the Vision-in-Action Compass. They can use low rankings and differences of opinion as starting points to brainstorm small changes that can make a big difference in uplifting the spirit of AsiaTown.
- Collaborative idea prioritization — Use the Vision-in-Action Compass with convergent facilitation to shift the focus away from self-interest and toward shared values. The combination can help participants shift either/or thinking toward collaborative community solutions; help them engage with, rather than to avoid power differences; and invite dissent, rather than press for agreement. All of these can make collaboration more efficient by unblocking the flow of a group’s creativity and collective wisdom.

**Use the Vision-in-Action Compass with convergent facilitation to shift [community members'] focus away from self-interest and toward shared values.**

6. Communicate progress on how “We’re Growing Home!”

- Community Updates — The AsiaTown team can build on its practices of transparency and accountability by showing how they are assessing and prioritizing projects using the Vision-in-Action Compass and emphasizing how the community-created vision has specifically informed MidTown’s decisions. They can use the Compass to create a framework for gathering feedback and ideas from community members relative to specific projects.
- Visibility and recognition of community members’ stories, contributions and commitment — A relatively simple tactic to support ongoing and increased community member participation is to visibly recognize contributions of all members, not just those who hold positions of formal political or institutional leadership. This supports community members in claiming their agency and power to take action in shaping their own future.
- Media Strategy — Create a communications strategy to build on the momentum of Imagine AsiaTown using the Imagine AsiaTown website, social media, video channels, newsletters, etc. Create a dynamic strategy that highlights and continually updates:
  - Individual storytelling based on the “What’s My Story?” interview questions from the visioning process
  - #ImagineAsiaTown arts contributions
  - Project idea board, organized by themes. (These might grow into themes for future Community Conversations, with the intention of inviting neighbors to join together to lead efforts and take action.)
  - Endorsements Poster — large colorful posters of the shared vision and values along with resonant images throughout AsiaTown.
- Invite community members to sign and add their comments about the AsiaTown vision or their participation in the visioning process. This would 1) memorialize the specific people who represent and care for the AsiaTown community during this momentous year, 2) express their endorsement of the shared vision, and 3) offer actions or skills they wish to share to step toward their desired future.
- Neighbor-led projects — highlight project champions and contributions of others
- Community contributions to MidTown-led AsiaTown Initiatives
- Insights from community conversations using the Vision-in-Action Compass
- Quarterly themes and questions to pique and maintain interest



# CONCLUSION

This year of 2020 represents a metaphor of Clear Vision. For AsiaTown, particular dynamics of the pandemic highlight, through the challenges it poses, the essence of what's important to community members. In addition to basic and immediately pressing survival issues of food, shelter and employment, the community is experiencing and voicing the capacities for mutual care, resilience, ingenuity, perseverance, and connection that weaves a strong — sometimes invisible — web of support. This kind of support not only equips the community to weather current challenges; it provides the common ground for a strong and healthy home today and in the future.

We hope that the recommendations described in this report will help MidTown Cleveland, Inc. assess AsiaTown's priorities and take steps that increase the likelihood of fulfilling the community-created shared vision. We believe the recommendations will help to support and sustain ownership, commitment, and accountability among community members and local organizations, ultimately aiding in the ongoing efforts to build and strengthen leadership capacity in the AsiaTown community.

Our wish for AsiaTown Cleveland is that it continue its path toward a vibrant, safe, welcoming, prosperous, and community-oriented place that grows home!



**We believe the recommendations will help to support and sustain ownership, commitment, and accountability among community members and local organizations.**

This report was created by WOC Group LLC and space-between.us in collaboration with the AsiaTown staff at MidTown Cleveland, Inc. For more information, contact: Tessa Xuan at [tessa.xuan@gmail.com](mailto:tessa.xuan@gmail.com), Lisa Hong at [space.between.team@gmail.com](mailto:space.between.team@gmail.com) or Argerie Vasilakes at [axv124@gmail.com](mailto:axv124@gmail.com)