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More 'great ideas' offered for West Broadway makeover

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North Minneapolis is mulling over a lot of bright ideas on how to better the neighborhood. Neighbors got a chance last Thursday, March 27, to pick their favorite idea at The Great Idea! Exchange held at the Blue Scene Coffeehouse on West Broadway.

The event was a culmination of many ongoing community efforts to help support the local art scene and give the neighborhood an artistic boost. The University of Minnesota's College of Design, Juxtaposition Arts, the Hawthorne Area Community Council and the West Broadway Coalition all co-presented the

The organizations have been working together for the past several years to think of art-focused and youth-oriented ideas that will better the neighborhood's main street, the West Broadway corridor.

"Students have come up with some really interesting ideas," said Marcy Schulte, adjunct faculty member in the U of M's Design Institute, a think-tank based at the College of Design. "We believed we could make some of these ideas happen by bringing art organizations together."

The Great Idea! Exchange was free and open to the public. During the event, people reviewed displays of youth-oriented art proposals for the neighborhood and were asked to vote on which one they favored. With funding set aside from the U of M, Hawthorne Area Community Council, and the West Broadway Coalition, the winning idea will come to life later this year.

One proposal included an Art Shelf — a place where local artists and art organizations would donate art supplies for neighborhood kids to utilize. Another plan was a community kiosk that posted upcoming neighborhood events and happenings.

Street banners and arches created by local artists was another idea to help better the West Broadway streetscape, and a sculpture walk from the Mississippi River to the Robbinsdale border was yet another proposal to add energy to the heavily youth-populated North Minneapolis.

"I think what this area needs is resources," said Yana Galloway, a North Minneapolis resident and mother of two young children. "resources to go toward building things my children can someday go to, like maybe a bookstore, a skating rink or movie theatre. We need places to go."

Minneapolis City Council Member Don Samuels (Fifth Ward) agrees: "I'd like to see all of the available spaces filled with a variety of businesses that will serve the needs of the community. Ideally, it would be nice if the people who lived here never had to leave the community to find what they're looking for."

West Broadway is the central focus of North Minneapolis. The curvy three-plus-miles stretch is a busy avenue, and fast drivers

contribute to an unsettling feeling for the area's young pedestrians.

"West Broadway is a county highway that is currently a cold, hard and narrow street," said DeAnna Cummings, executive director and co-founder of Juxtaposition Arts, a local youth-focused nonprofit arts organization. "With an area of so many kids, we want to create an environment that is more conducive to the community."

The event also showcased work from Streetlife/Remix, an interdisciplinary partnership between Juxtaposition Arts and the U of M College of Design. The work included 16 students who showcased 16 ideas to help better understand the complex problems and opportunities along West Broadway.

As a part of Streetlife/Remix, one student designed a pamphlet for kids. It's a colorful representation of the vibrant Northside community that includes serious lessons with memorable phrases: Drugs are for thugs. Watch out for traffic. Avoid danger.

"This provides a sociology perspective of West Broadway," said Schulte of the U of M. "The neighborhood just needs some attention in order to make it better," she adds. "There have been lots of plans to make positive changes to West Broadway. Now we just need to see those plans put into action."

The North Minneapolis community selected an HIV/AIDS Prevention Sidewalk as the winning proposal for The Great Idea! Exchange. The sidewalk will include HIV/AIDS messages designed by local artists to educate young people about HIV/AIDS prevention, confronting the HIV issue in North Minneapolis.

"Arts can make a community more beautiful and safer," noted Cummings. The HIV/AIDS prevention sidewalk project selected as the number-one great idea for the night should contribute to the North Minneapolis's safety as well as enhance its appearance. Work on the sidewalk will begin later this year.

Felicia Shultz welcomes reader responses to fjubratic@comcast.net.