

Aldine Pedestrian Bridge Wayfinding Report

Union Park District Council

October 17, 2017

Introduction

In June 2017, Union Park District Council received funding through **Ramsey County Public Health and the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership** to increase wayfinding to the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge across I-94 at Aldine Street. The bridge is usually hard to find, and therefore, it is underutilized. The area around the bridge has poor visibility, there is a lack of signage about the bridge, and a confusing path leads to the bridge: a railway bisects the neighborhood at a diagonal, disrupting the street grid and creating a circuitous route to the bridge through residential streets, over the rail line, and down a dead-end street. There are, however, compelling reasons to increase awareness and use of the Aldine bridge. The bridge is the only place to cross I-94 between a state highway and a collector road a half-mile to the west. The bridge is also part of the formal bicycle network endorsed in the city's bicycle plan. And, residents in the area have a strong desire to better connect communities north and south of I-94.

Through the SHIP project, Union Park set out to solve wayfinding issues related to the bridge in a variety of ways, as described in this report. Overgrown foliage near the bridge was removed. The existing Aldine Pedestrian Bridge Mural was extended from the bridge down to Concordia Avenue, increasing visibility of the mural and bridge from the south. Wayfinding arrows were painted on the sidewalks connecting Aldine Park and the bridge. Wayfinding signage from "Walk [Your City]" was installed at ten intersections with heavy bicycle and pedestrian use, indicating the route to the bridge. A community event was held on Thursday, July 27 on Aldine Street adjacent to the park to increase community awareness of the pedestrian bridge, receive feedback on wayfinding and creative placemaking, involve resident volunteers in painting the sidewalk wayfinding, and inspire neighborhood interest and involvement in future projects in the area. And lastly, staff and interns conducted outreach at Merriam Park, the Merriam Park Library, and at the corner of Snelling and Marshall to get resident feedback on the project and to help increase awareness about the bridge.

Neighborhood Profile

The relevant area for this wayfinding improvement project is bounded by Selby Avenue to the south, Fairview Avenue to the west, Snelling Avenue to the east, and University Ave to the north, with a particular focus on the target area south of I-94 and north of Marshall. For the purpose of census data, this area is best represented by census tracts 333 and 334.

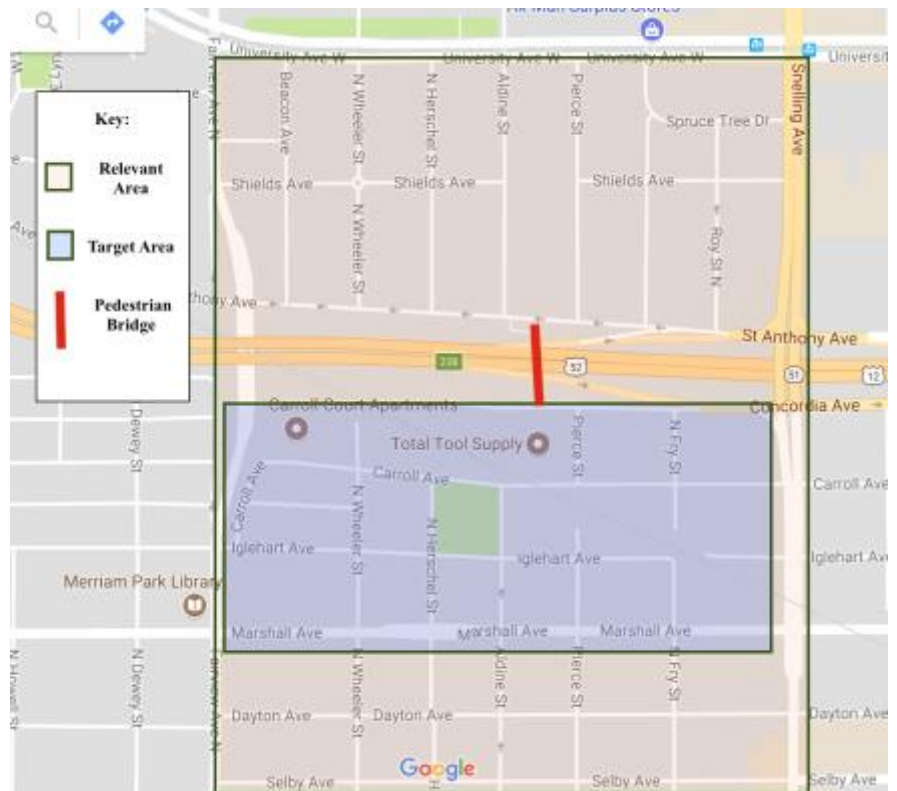
The target area of this project is geographically isolated. To the north, I-94 creates significant barriers to community connectedness, and restricts access to locations across the divide, particularly for pedestrians and bikers. Public transit users who live south of I-94 must cross this freeway divide to reach the Green Line.

For residents living within the target area, the only nearby options to cross I-94 are Fairview Avenue, the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge, and Snelling Avenue. Each one of these options poses significant safety concerns for pedestrians and bikers.

The underpass at Fairview Avenue has long been seen by the community as unwelcoming and unsafe, particularly at night, and it is not ADA accessible. The Snelling Avenue bridge over I-94 is relatively new, but it has no dedicated bicycle facility and is extremely congested and feels unsafe for pedestrians. Although the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge is not ADA compliant, it is the safest way for bikers and pedestrians living in the target area to cross I-94.

The target area is represented demographically by a large contingent of low income residents, a large portion of non-white residents, and a large percentage of renters. According to MNCompass data, 50.9% of target area residents make less than \$35,000 per year. About 35% of neighborhood residents are persons of color, and almost 67% of residents are renters. Further, residents in these census tracts are more likely as a whole to use public transportation and walk or bike to work.

It is important to note that low-income residents, non-white residents, and renters are less likely to be involved in district council committees or boards. Nonetheless, as a neighborhood organization, it is Union Park's responsibility to serve the needs of *all* members of the community. Projects like the one supported by this SHIP grant aim to fulfill the mission of Union Park District Council by addressing the needs of traditionally underrepresented residents, inspiring residents of these areas to become involved in issues pertaining to them, and by gathering input from underrepresented areas of the community in order to better serve them at the district council level and beyond.



Wayfinding Streetscape Improvements



Union Park District Council aimed to increase knowledge of and use of Aldine Pedestrian Bridge through a wayfinding improvement plan. The plan included three primary kinds of streetscape improvements: A mural extension, wayfinding arrows on the sidewalk, and “Walk [Your City]” wayfinding signs.

Mural Extension

The Aldine Pedestrian Bridge Mural was designed and painted under the creative supervision of Emily Hoisington, a local artist who lives within a few blocks of the bridge. The bridge was painted on June 3rd with funding and volunteer support from HealthEast, whose offices are located just north of the bridge. Emily’s design required staff and volunteers to trace continuous lines on images of the bridge and the area around the bridge. Those lines were then used to create the shapes in the mural.

After receiving the SHIP grant, Union Park contacted Emily again to provide design support to extend the mural southward. We determined that one of the best ways of drawing attention to the bridge would be to extend the mural from the end of the bridge down to the sidewalk along Concordia Avenue. That way, vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians passing near the bridge’s entrance would be drawn into the concept and would be able to locate the



bridge more easily. Union Park collaborated with representatives from Minnesota’s Major League Soccer team, Minnesota United, to involve team staff in a day of community service contributing to this project. Staff members from the team – and even starting defender Jerome Thiesson – joined Union Park staff and Emily to paint the mural extension as part of this project.

Wayfinding Arrows

Union Park also collaborated with Emily Hoisington to create unique wayfinding signage to the bridge itself. To find the bridge from the nearest major arterial, Marshall Avenue, a pedestrian or bicyclist starts on Herschel Street and head north, turn east on Carroll Avenue to cross the railway, then travel north on Pierce Street, and finally head west on Concordia Avenue, where the bridge entrance is located. Emily designed four different arrows to be painted on the sidewalks of these four streets. Each arrow contains a continuous line drawing, depicting a map from the location of that arrow to the bridge. These arrows incorporate the color palette of the bridge mural, and are accompanied by the text “To Aldine Bridge.”

These arrows were installed by Union Park staff and neighbors during the community event (described below) as well as on designated paint days. Emily encouraged residents to paint abstract connecting lines between the arrows in designs inspired by their surroundings. There is potential to expand these arrows and connecting lines along other relevant sidewalks in the area.



Walk [Your City] Signs

Walk [Your City] is an online tool to create temporary wayfinding signage campaigns. Signs are created on the online interface by inputting information including the sign’s location, the destination, and whether people are walking or biking. Each sign is QR accessible, linking to a map that directs residents to the intended destination.

Union Park made ten signs using Walk [Your City] and placed them in strategic locations around Union Park, including along the Marshall Avenue bicycle corridor, at Green Line Light Rail stops, at Aldine Park, and other high-traffic locations. Union Park gathered input on the signs throughout the course of this project to help us assess the success of this wayfinding campaign.

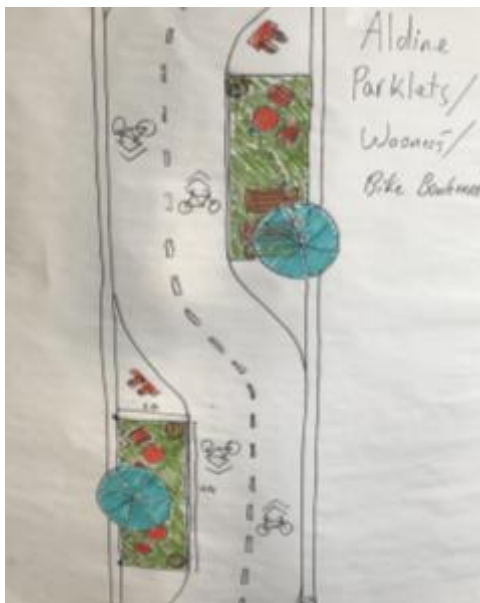
Direct Community Outreach and Community Event

As part of this project, Union Park wanted to directly involve community members in implementing some of the wayfinding techniques, especially the sidewalk arrow painting. And, we also wanted to draw attention to the bridge in a more personal way, beyond streetscape wayfinding. So, we hosted a community event to directly engage with residents with the bridge and our wayfinding efforts. We door-knocked and flyered the neighborhood to invite residents.



This event was held on Aldine Street between Iglehart and Carroll Avenues. This particular block has no sidewalks, yet it is a key access route for pedestrians and bikers to the Aldine Pedestrian bridge. In fact, Aldine is indicated on the city's official Bicycle Plan as a key north-south bicycle boulevard, leading bicyclists to the Aldine bridge and points north. However, cars passing down this section of the road often drive erratically, at times attempting to avoid the congestion at Snelling and Marshall, endangering pedestrians and bikers in the process.

Thus, to enhance our wayfinding efforts to the bridge, we demonstrated pedestrian and bicycle friendly features in this area. On part of the street, we demonstrated a bicycle boulevard. This concept combines a central grass median enhanced with places for pedestrians and bikers to sit and relax. Since there is no sidewalk along this stretch, the grass median can be used as a pedestrian path as well.



Some of the most positive feedback Union Park received during its community engagement was regarding this space. Residents were excited about the conversion this area to a pathway for bicycles and pedestrians directly to the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge, especially because it demonstrated a roadway exclusively for pedestrian and bicycle use.

On another part of the street, we demonstrated a design that allowed the street to continue to be used by vehicle traffic. Bike lanes were painted onto the street to direct bicycle flow and detract from a vehicle-centered focus.

The inclusion of parklets in the street, moreover, would force vehicles to drive more slowly and attentively. This implementation of placemaking was also well-received in the community.



Union Park successfully engaged event participants in the sidewalk arrow project as well. Emily encouraged residents to paint and taught them how to use the stencils and other tools. This project inspired residents to participate in the creative process of improving their own neighborhood, rather than having an organization or the city do it for them. We also had a creative wayfinding activity for children, allowing them to create their own wayfinding signs to learn about and share information about the concept of wayfinding. Over 100 people attended the community event, demonstrating excitement regarding our project.

Following the community event, Union Park continued to engage with residents to determine the impact of the wayfinding improvements and continued to raise awareness about Aldine Park and Aldine Bridge. We conducted a significant amount of engagement with residents at Merriam Park Library, which is within four blocks of Aldine Park. We also engaged with residents about our wayfinding efforts and the bridge at other events near Aldine Park, including a Paint-the-Pavement event on August 27th at the nearby intersection of Herschel and Iglehart. Union Park staff and interns also used the eye-catching bistro chairs and tables to set up pop-up spaces to draw attention to the bridge and create a space for pedestrians to answer our survey.

Data collected from these conversations and from surveys we created provide an insight into the effects of wayfinding improvements in the neighborhood. Our conversations revealed a large number of residents who were completely unaware of the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge before this project.

Survey Methodology

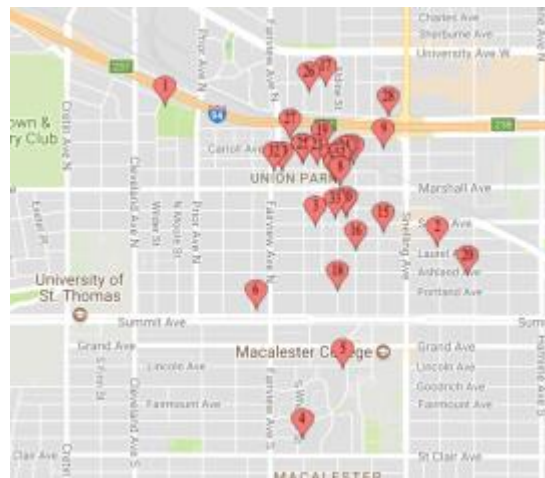
Union Park created a three-page survey to be distributed at the community event to receive feedback on the bridge and our wayfinding efforts. This survey contained four sections: Aldine Park, Aldine Pedestrian Bridge, Wayfinding, and Image Gallery. The image gallery contained 14 images of creative placemaking and wayfinding ideas, and residents were asked to rate their top three and bottom three ideas. We collected 27 completed surveys at the



event. There were a total of 62 additional surveys completed from August through October at Merriam Park Library, through our pop-up engagement in the community, and with our online survey. Those surveys did not include an image gallery, but asked the same questions.

Survey Findings from Community Event

- Aldine Park is a well-used by local residents, with over 53% of respondents using the park at least once per week.
- Many residents would like to see the park used more often for social events: responses included community sporting events, neighborhood get-togethers, and picnics.
- A majority of residents walk or bike to locations within the neighborhood (72%).
- The Aldine Pedestrian Bridge was well known by attendees of the event (mostly residents living within a few blocks of Aldine Park—see below map that indicates addresses of participants), with almost 78% indicating that they knew where the bridge was located.
- Two-thirds of survey respondents use Aldine Pedestrian Bridge; however, a third of those respondents use the bridge rarely.
- The bridge is used mostly for health/fitness or recreation/pleasure by survey respondents; 68% of responses combined between these two categories.
- Survey respondents had a diverse set of ideas for how the bridge could be improved. Some highlights include replacing the bridge with something ADA compliant, increasing wayfinding to the bridge, and extending the mural so that it could be seen from I-94.
- When it comes to wayfinding in the area, most residents do not use technology for directions.
- 31% of survey respondents had already noticed the green Walk [Your City] signs, even though they had only been placed two days before the event.
- About 30% of residents say that increased wayfinding signage would increase how often they walked or cycled to locations, and an additional 30% said that it might.
- The idea with the most positive feedback from the image gallery was the in-street rain garden. Residents were attracted to increased natural storm water treatment, more plants, and more habitat for pollinators and butterflies.
- Residents were also strongly attracted to images of artistic archways, wayfinding signage (similar to Grand Rounds signage), and giant chess. They mentioned that these elements were attractive and inviting, put Aldine Park in a greater context, and promote community.



Most importantly, positive feedback was received through direct conversation with residents. For example, while we were setting up for the event, a resident approached us and began a conversation. She lived nearby, and was ecstatic to see Union Park tackling issues relevant to the neighborhood she lives in. This demonstrated the potential of projects like this to inspire

community involvement in neighborhoods traditionally underrepresented on Union Park's board and committees.

Surveys collected from August through October

- About 60% of the people surveyed had never used the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge.
- Less than 45% of people surveyed knew where the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge is located before our conversation with them.
- About 40% of people have used the bridge, but only 20% use it daily, weekly, or monthly. The other 20% only use it rarely.
- From the number of people who use it, 54% of people walk over it and 40% bike over the bridge.
- Most people use the bridge for recreation/pleasure (32%). And about 57% of people who answered this question either used it for commuting, errands, or health/fitness.
- The main improvements people want for the bridge include: better lighting, improved cleanliness, and making the bridge feel safer and less isolated.
- Most people do not use technology most of the time to get around the neighborhood: 30% use it some of the time and 21% use it rarely.
- About 70% of people surveyed would find wayfinding signs to the bridge at least somewhat effective.
- Around 60% of people surveyed either bike or walk to destinations in the neighborhood, but most people did not think or were not sure that signs would help them navigate the area.
- Other suggestions people had for improving the neighborhood: better lighting, traffic, safety, and more community events.

Other Comments and Impacts

In addition to having one hundred people engage with us at our July community event, we received 89 completed surveys over the course of the project, and had many additional conversations with residents about the bridge. We were told by several people that prior to our work, they had no idea that Aldine Park or the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge even existed. As a result of our wayfinding and engagement efforts, we know that more families are walking and enjoying these important neighborhood amenities. One family that lives just a five minute walk north of Aldine Park told us that they now walk weekly across the Aldine Pedestrian Bridge in order to enjoy Aldine Park with their young daughter. Before our community event, they did not even know the park existed.

And, as a result of our efforts to improve the experience walking over the Aldine Bridge, neighbors to the north of the bridge are now planning to extend the mural to St. Anthony Avenue. Neighbors inspired by our work have organized meetings to discuss ways to enhance the experience walking across the Aldine bridge, including initiating the clearing of overgrowth to improve visibility and the feeling of safety near the bridge.