

# DID CITY MISLEAD, DOWNPLAY PUBLIC INPUT ON 38TH & CHICAGO SURVEY?

Analysis shows city disregarded comments and downplayed calls to keep intersection closed

By **Jill Boogren**

Since late 2020 Mayor Jacob Frey has made known his intent to reopen the intersection at 38th St. E and Chicago Ave. S. When interim design surveys were returned in spring 2021, he and city leaders were quick to announce public support for doing so. But a close analysis of the postcards shows the city's announcement and report misrepresented survey results and significantly downplayed calls to keep the intersection closed.

The survey, which was sent to 4,000 households in a half-mile radius of the intersection, asked residents to select between one of two options. One, to move the fist sculpture out of the intersection and onto Chicago Ave. Two, to create a roundabout around the fist at the center (as it now is). Each would reopen the intersection to two-way traffic, and no other option was given – a point that was roundly criticized.

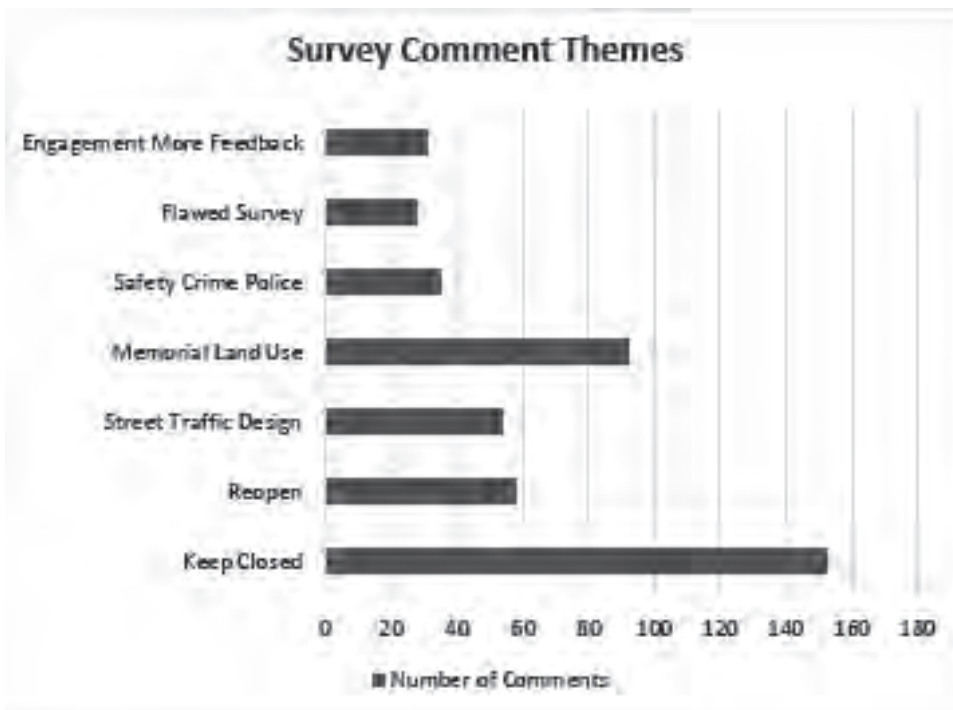
"I did not choose either of the design options, one or two, because neither of them gave the option to continue the street closures and to have any type of option for not allowing regular through traffic, which was a pretty big sticking point," said Katie Dillon, a resident of the 3800 block of Chicago.

Dillon was not alone; some 21% of respondents didn't select an option, with many calling it a false choice or creating and checking a box and calling it a third option.

The city's announcement was based on the total number of responses that had selected one of the two options – 81%, which the city declared as support. But according to Rossana Armson, senior project manager with the University of Minnesota's Office of Measurement Services, combining results in this way was a misrepresentation of the survey and indicative of bad questionnaire design.

"Because you didn't give them any options on the other side. And you're supposed to have balanced choices," said Armson, who was given only the survey structure and generic results, not specific details, for this conversation.

In other words, if the goal was to determine whether there was support for reopening the streets – the outcome announced by the city – then an alternative needed to have been presented. For Dillon, framing the question as they did was by design.



**PUBLIC WORKS GENERAL** Foreman Denny Thoreson (left) tells Resident Katie Dillon Sept. 14 that he is leafletting car windshields that warn vehicle owners that they will be issued citations within a few days if they don't resume parallel parking on Chicago Ave. Changes are being made at 38th and Chicago without getting input from residents. (Photos by Jill Boogren)

"They got responses back that they could interpret to align with their agenda, and that's the information that they published," said Dillon.

### AN OVERLOOKED OPTION 3

What the city failed to mention – and which is not reflected in their survey summary – is that nearly half (49%) of the postcards contained comments on the optional feedback lines. It shows either that choic-



es were not clear or that something else was on people's minds, according to Armson.

"Wow. HALF of them. That's really a lot," said Armson, who as a survey designer would not expect to have more than 10 or 15% of respondents offer extra feedback, and even that would be a pretty big number. "Once it gets up into the 30 to 50%... 50% is ridiculously high. Anything over 30 is really high."

And if those comments included a "write-in" Option 3 that was frequently volunteered?

"That's also an indication that something should have been included as a choice," said Armson. "Because if everybody had an opportunity to respond to that Option 3, who knows what the results might have been."

In this case, Option 3 was clear: comments that favored keeping the streets closed outnumbered those in favor of reopening them by more than two and a half times. Still, despite limitations with the survey, the city chose to combine two of two options and claim it as support.

"I would like to say I think the responses overall indicated a strong two options and good support in the area for reopening the intersection," said Interim Public Works Director Brette Hjelle at an Apr. 1 briefing. The original announced result, that "Eighty-one percent of respondents supported the city's proposed interim design options to reopen the intersection," is still posted on city's 38th & Chicago web page.

"I think it's really telling that they left out that other, that very different - and I would say very critical - piece of information," said Dillon.

### FRESH TALLY

Adjusted to include postcards that arrived after the initial two-week deadline, of 821 total surveys, the percentages of those that had selected Option 1 or Option 2 low-



## ▶ 10 THEY TOOK HER CHILDREN

ual rights in Minnesota, but they don't have the right to come home," said Starr.

Mia spent nine months in treatment and then returned to her dad's for a short time before leaving again. She spent nine days at a homeless shelter. She's now staying with her godparents as she completes her junior year.

She recently got an harassment restraining order against her dad (that he is fighting) because he kept reporting her missing and having police hunt her down. She also witnessed him abuse his teenage son and saw ongoing neglect of his now one-year-old baby, Grace. She's worried about how his inability to cope with a baby crying has continued.

Caroline was in treatment for over a year. Once she got out, her step-mom picked her up and dropped her off at a homeless shelter because she refused to return to her



dad's house. She moved from couch to couch, and landed with a grandparent who helped enroll her back in school where she's a sophomore now.

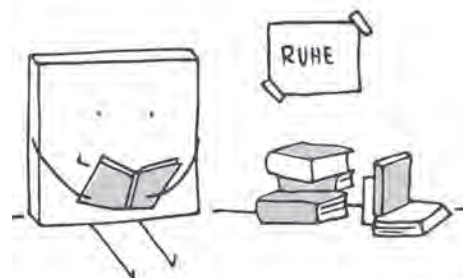
Both girls remain officially "homeless and highly mobile youth." They live in fear every day that he could cause more problems in court and try to force them back. They continue to deal with a lot of anxiety.

When interviewed separately Mia didn't feel ready to share her experience out of fear. "I just wish he hadn't ruined my childhood," she said.

They're all counting down the days until they turn 18 and can move back in with mom.

## School Guide

Coming in January.



**CONTACT US TODAY!**

**Ads@SWconnector.com | 612-345-9998**

**FIND OUR FULL SPECIAL SECTION CALENDAR ONLINE @ WWW.SWCONNECTOR.COM**

## 12 DID CITY MISLEAD?

ered slightly but remained roughly even.

A key finding, though, is that 405 of 821 postcards contained additional feedback. Of these comments, 153 explicitly favored keeping the streets closed (even on some surveys with an Option 1 or Option 2 selected), while 58 favored reopening them.

The city's report, "Interim Design Survey Engagement Summary," contains a page of themes from the feedback provided by respondents, but none are sorted by frequency. The theme, "Do not implement any design changes until the 24 demands for justice are met," which appeared as a comment in some form more than 100 times, is given similar weight to "Integrate memorial planning efforts into the 38th Street Thrive, Cultural District Plan," which is not written on a single survey card.

Likewise, "Concerns of over-policing occurring in the area" appears alongside "Desire to see an increased police presence in the intersection." Yet of 22 specific references to police, 17 called for police accountability or less police presence while five wanted a greater police presence.

It is noteworthy that relatively few respondents mentioned crime as a reason to reopen the streets, despite repeated assertions by the mayor that the streets must reopen for safety reasons (the idea that crime was going up in George Floyd Square before the city doubled down on its calls to reopen the streets is not supported by MPD crime data, as was reported in the July 2021 *Longfellow Nokomis Messenger*).

"Restore vehicle access, especially for public transit and emergency response vehicles" is listed as a theme. There are eight total mentions of transit or buses and five mentions of safety vehicles. Fifty-four comments addressed street/traffic design, including the viability of a roundabout and pedestrian access to the fist sculpture. Ninety-two gave feedback on the memorial itself and offered suggestions for use of space, including using the church parking lot, the former Speedway (Peoples' Way) and nearby parks.

See "Summary" sidebar at right for the new tally of results. All comments are online at [SWConnector.com](http://SWConnector.com).

### A PATTERN OF EXCLUSION

If the survey comments indicate a hunger for participation, keeping them under wraps demonstrates the city's pattern of keeping residents of 38th and Chicago at bay.

In the April 1 media briefing, Hjelle said their next step is to refine both of the interim options and work "closely with community and city leaders to determine the best option moving forward." The survey summary states under Next Steps that "Public Works will utilize the feedback received to further the interim design."

But as of mid-November – eight months past the survey deadline and five months after the streets

were reopened – there has yet to be a single meeting with residents about how to design the space. This is extremely frustrating to Dillon, who has lived on the block for 10 years and has been asking for over a

“

I didn't choose either of the design options, one or two, because neither of them gave the option to continue the street closures and to have any type of option for not allowing regular through traffic."

Katie Dillon



**38TH AND CHICAGO** survey responses are stored in bundles at City Hall. Comments were offered on nearly half of the 38th & Chicago postcard surveys. (Photo by Jill Boogren)

year for a meeting.

"It's really disappointing. We know that the postcards are not at all indicative of comprehensive community engagement, we know that those fell short. If that's the only mechanism the city has used

to try to communicate with us, that's definitely lacking. It just feels like they've left us completely out in the cold," she said. "It just feels like no one is making it a point to listen to the folks that actually live here in the community, and are ready and willing to have a conversation."

Denny Thoreson, general foreman in the public works department who is frequently on site, said in September that meetings would take place by the end of that month. Now Sarah McKenzie, media relations coordinator responding on behalf of 38th and Chicago Project Contact Alexander Kado, said by email, "The city is planning on holding listening sessions with community stakeholders later this year. A full community engagement process will begin in early 2022." (Oddly, the Capitol Improvement Project PV177 page names Phillips but not Bryant as one of four affected neighborhoods; Bryant meets Bancroft, Powderhorn and Central at 38th and Chicago).

### CITY CONTINUES OPENING SQUARE

Meantime, with neither community input nor notice, work plows ahead at 38th and Chicago. The reopening took place in June without notifying the George Floyd Global Memorial, the board of which is co-chaired by family members of George Floyd. On Sept. 14, residents of the 3800 block of Chicago were suddenly given warnings via leaflets on vehicle windshields to begin parallel parking again or they would be issued citations (for the past year they had been parking at an angle to create space).

Asked why now, Thoreson said the traffic division wanted to get the road back to its original width. But whether that's what it should be hinges on plans for the road, which have yet to be shared or discussed with residents. As of 2016, Minneapolis follows a "complete streets" policy, which "prioritizes pedestrians first, followed by bicycling and transit use, and lastly, motor ve-

“

It just seems like no one is making it a point to listen to the folks that actually live here in the community, and are ready and willing to have a conversation."

Katie Dillon

hicle use" – which impacts street width and design. Though the policy is mentioned on the project page, no details are given as to how this might be implemented at 38th and Chicago.

Work continues incrementally, and – as evidenced by the two-way traffic in every direction – is seemingly designed to put cars first. Asked what directive he is operating under, Thoreson said, "Right now my directive is keep traffic flowin' through here in a safe manner." He said he's also trying to move pedestrians to the sidewalks and keep crosswalks clear.

### MURPHY RANKS MEMORIAL

On Oct. 28, city crews attempted to dismantle the on-street memorial for Dameon "Murphy Ranks" Chambers, who was killed there in June 2020 (calls for an investigation continue to go unmet). A video shared on the 38th and Chicago social media page shows Thoreson telling a resident that the family gave approval, as an audibly distraught person (described as the "family matriarch") is heard off camera saying "No, no I did not. I did not." And later, "LIES!"

The same video includes a clip of the mayor at an Oct. 16 "Mayor on your Block" gathering saying he had no plans to remove the memorial for Murphy Ranks. In another segment he tells the group he shouldn't dictate the look or the feel of the memorial.

"I think we very much should engage with community," said Frey. Yet Dillon said she doesn't feel informed or like she has any input.

"I feel like that's intentional. Because I feel like the city... [has] an idea of what they want to do, and they're going to do it... they'll just come in and do a thing or make a change or what have you," she said. "Even though... they've heard from us enough times, that we want to speak with them. It's incredibly frustrating. Decisions are being made on our behalf for things that affect us literally 24/7, because we literally live here."

Asked who authorized clearing the Murphy Ranks memorial and how the decision aligns with planning underway for the road project, McKenzie wrote: "The city continues to refine the interim design of the roadway facilitating access for the public, emergency vehicles, and transit. Preparing for winter is a priority and we will continue working with the community to respectfully maintain access and ensure snowplows can consistently clear the streets." A planter that was taken from the memorial has yet to be returned.

According to the 38th St. and Chicago

### SUMMARY

821 total surveys were returned, a 20.5% response rate. 405 (49.3%)

Of survey respondents submitted comments, key findings:

- 153 comments stated a clear preference for keeping the intersection closed.
- 116 of the 153 comments expressed No Justice, No Streets and/or Meet the 24 Demands.
- 26 included a link to the document: [bit.ly/georgefloyd-square-a](http://bit.ly/georgefloyd-square-a).

- 58 comments stated a clear preference for reopening the streets.
- 54 comments were street/traffic design considerations, including viability of the roundabout and pedestrian access.

- 92 comments were general remarks about the memorial and/or suggestions for use of space, e.g.:

- 29 suggested moving the memorial to Phelps Park, Powderhorn Park, Say Their Names Cemetery or other location.
- 15 suggested removing the gas station and/or using the church parking lot for the memorial.
- 16 suggested repurposing Cup Foods or closing it down.

- 35 comments mentioned community safety, crime and/or or police.
- Of 22 specific references to police, 17 called for accountability and/or less police presence; 5 wanted more.

- 8 comments mentioned public transit/buses/drivers. 5 mentioned EMS/safety vehicles.
- Of 14 mentions of businesses, 7 suggested reopening the intersection.
- 7 comments suggested waiting to reopen until after the Chauvin trial and/or all four trials.
- 28 commented on the survey as unacceptable or a false choice.
- 31 comments included calls to engage the community plus more feedback.

All survey comments can be found online at [www.SWconnector.com](http://www.SWconnector.com).

Ave. project page, "Public works anticipates preliminary design and public involvement to begin two years prior to the start of project construction." It also lists a project completion date of November 2023. So far, the survey constitutes the most complete gathering of information from neighbors. Yet as of Oct. 7, the postcards were sitting unscanned in paper clipped bundles in file folders inside City Hall.

"I recognize that none of this is easy. But my biggest point is, there's no way that we can go back to May 24, 2020. It's not possible. The city made that not possible when they allowed [Former Officer Derek Chauvin] to kill a person half a block from my house. We can't go back," said Dillon. "And it seems like the city wants to. They need to figure out a different way."

*Editor's note: Katie Dillon co-chairs the Bryant Neighborhood Organization Board, but she was not speaking in an official capacity for this article.*

>> See all the comments online at [www.SWconnector.com](http://www.SWconnector.com)