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### Help us grow the movement

- **Donate** to Great Lakes Urban to support our neighborhood strengthening activities.
- **Get to know** your neighbors.
- **Like and follow** Great Lakes Urban on Facebook!
- **Watch and share** our Lunch+Learn recordings and blogs with your networks.
- **Encourage** your church, business, etc. to get involved with a local neighborhood.
- **Visit our website** at: GreatLakesUrban.org to learn more.
- **Share** your ideas with us by emailing: info@greatlakesurban.org

To change how you receive this newsletter, or to talk with someone at Great Lakes Urban, send an email to: info@greatlakesurban.org or call 937-935-4844

## Blueprints and Flourishing

A series of insightful blueprints, advisories, and papers have recently been produced that speak to the importance of focusing on neighborhoods and social connection. We will cover a couple of these recent publications, and the research behind them, in this newsletter. To whet your appetite, here's a quote from Vivek Murthy, our US Surgeon General.

"We are called to build a movement to mend the social fabric of our nation. It will take all of us – individuals and families, schools and workplaces, health care and public health systems, technology companies, governments, faith organizations, and communities – working together to destigmatize loneliness and change our cultural and policy response to it."

The key takeaway for me from all of the research and evidence is this: **our approach to cultivating connection and change in neighborhoods, cities, and communities is both timely and on point.**

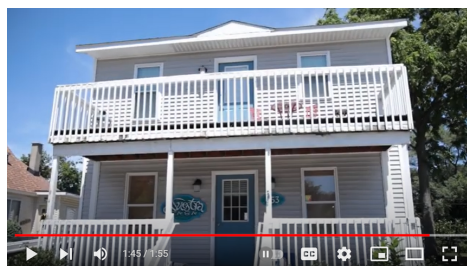
However, it's about more than research; it's also personal. I'm convinced that we are on the right track because of the numerous stories from the field that we have the privilege to be a part of.

For example, read on to hear about how our work in the south side of Holland, Michigan, is impacting lives. We are deeply grateful to both the City of Holland and the Community Foundation of the Holland Zeeland Area for their support as we deepen the work in a historically underserved locale. Stories like these are also made possible by the generous support of people like you. In fact, you are the heartbeat of our growing movement.

You can be a part of transforming lives by participating in our 9th annual Restoring Our Cities family-friendly cycling fundraiser. To find out how, see page 4 of this newsletter. Additionally, get to know Dave Veltkamp, one of Great Lakes Urban's board members on page 4. If you come away from this newsletter feeling inspired, contact me at [esmith@greatlakesurban.org](mailto:esmith@greatlakesurban.org) to explore the ways you can make a difference.



**Eric Smith, Director**



Holland, MI featured in new Nuestra Casa video

## Flourishing Round-Up

*In an occasional series we bring you a round-up of some of our staff's favorite resources on connecting and flourishing.*

**Watch:** In partnership with UnoDeuce Multimedia, Great Lakes Urban recently released a new 90-second video on how Neighborhood Connectors improve a place's physical and social environment. Check out the video, which was recently nominated for an award, at <https://youtu.be/4hg8gwBH0Uw>.

**Read:** McKnight & Russell discuss in their book, *The Connected Community: Discovering the Health, Wealth & Power of Neighborhoods*, the basic building blocks of change. A recent blog post describes how our work catalyzes these building blocks. McKnight & Russell also discuss the seven super powers of a connected community. Have you thought about your neighborhood having super powers? We discuss these these seven functions and more at [GreatLakesUrban.org/blog](https://GreatLakesUrban.org/blog).

# Blueprint for Neighborhood Flourishing

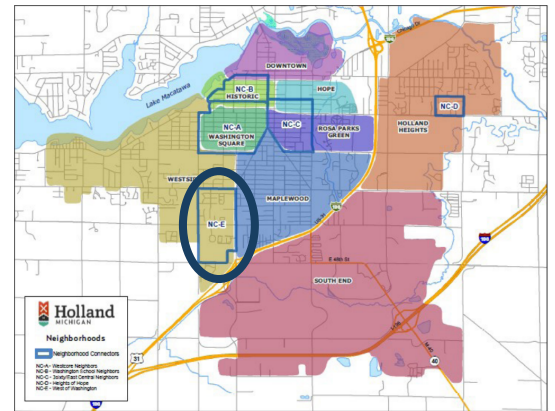
In 2022, the City of Holland set out to write what would become the *Blueprint for Flourishing Neighborhoods*. As the blueprint reads,

*The report that follows seeks to provide a framework and roadmap for Holland's neighborhoods to advance toward greater flourishing. A place that is flourishing, in this context, means one that is thriving, resilient, inclusive, and one that offers an equitable opportunity for all to prosper.*

The blueprint analyzes local data and national best practices across the following six elements that significantly influence individual and neighborhood flourishing: Connectedness, Engagement, and Inclusiveness, Safety and Resilience, Diversity, Sense of Place and Character, Accessibility of Amenities, and finally, Economic Vitality and Opportunity

The review of the data and analysis of best practices culminates in a list of 39 prospective strategies deemed likely to improve the strength and health of Holland's neighborhoods. These strategies are categorized according to implementation priority. One top priority is to, "support the expansion of the Neighborhood Connector network within interested neighborhoods."

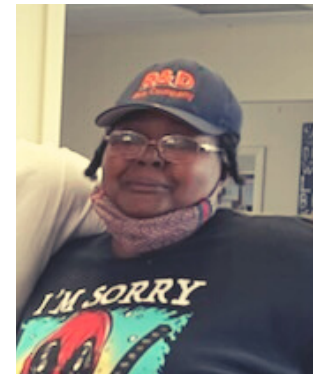
Great Lakes Urban supports this priority through a partnership with the city in an area known provisionally as West of Washington (circled in blue on the map). Below we discuss some of the achievements, challenges and exciting news about the work here. Learn about the City of Holland's neighborhood development resources at <https://qrco.de/be610s>.



## Deepening Flourishing in Southern Holland

Southern Holland has unique characteristics. It has the greatest socio-economic and cultural diversity within the city. It is geographically and socially disjointed, which adds complexity to any effort to cultivate connection and change. It is against this backdrop that we at Great Lakes Urban are deeply grateful for the recent grant awarded by the Community Foundation of the Holland Zeeland Area. This grant will infuse \$15,000 per year for two years toward building on current organizing work and establish a permanent Neighborhood Connector program.

Below are some of the successes that residents have achieved with the support of Great Lakes Urban organizer, Jonna Johnson. Through foundation funding, a permanent Neighborhood Connector program will be added to an existing network of five established or emerging neighborhoods in the city. Neighborhood Connectors discover capabilities and assets, connect residents to each other and to resources, and mobilize residents to work together for the common good of their neighborhood.



**Renee Jennings**

One resident that's taken up the cause in southern Holland is Renee Jennings. Renee coordinates regular community meals with her neighbors at Meadow Lanes Townhomes. She loves feeding people, especially soul food. She also helps with food distribution and other connections. When she heard that Great Lakes Urban was setting up a Neighborhood Connector program, she stated, "I'm eager to join the Connector team. After dabbling with community work and coordinating community meals I'm excited to join a group of Connectors working and learning together." With great neighbors like Renee, southern Holland is sure to change and grow!

- Neighbors have self-organized into interest groups, such as crafting and game clubs.
- Opportunities to gather have increased, such as potlucks, monthly meals, coffee outings, ice cream socials, and more.
- Action teams have also formed to improve coordination among the resource partners serving the area.

## Blueprint for Social Connection: U.S. Surgeon General Advisory



**Dr. Vivek Murthy**  
19th & 21st Surgeon General

In May, the U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, released an Advisory on the *Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. Why is this issue important enough to warrant an Advisory? Here are some statistics to consider.

- Strong social connections **improve population health**, reducing the risk of premature mortality, diabetes, stroke, heart and more.
- Immersion in local activities and relationships significantly increases the likelihood of unemployed individuals **becoming employed**.
- Adults who report rarely feeling lonely experience **better mental health**. Adults who report often feeling lonely are twice as likely to develop depression.
- Children and adolescents who enjoy positive relationships experience **improved academic outcomes**.

Against this backdrop, the Advisory lays out some key findings, including:

- *We are wired for social connection, but we've become more isolated over time.* Today, loneliness is more widespread than other major health issues in the U.S. Our epidemic of isolation is a major public health concern.
- *Social connection significantly improves the health and well-being of all individuals.* Social connection reduces the risk of premature death, predicts better physical and mental health and educational and economic achievement.
- *Social connection is vital to community health and success.* Socially connected communities enjoy better population-level health. They are more resilient when disaster strikes, and they experience greater economic prosperity and reduced levels of crime and violence.
- *Together, we can advance social connection and improve our nation's public health.* Our actions today can create sustainable changes to society and bring better health to all.

Based on these findings, the advisory puts forth the Six Pillars to Advance Social Connection, as noted to the right. Critical to this strategy is strengthening social infrastructure in local communities and building a culture of connection. This is exactly what Great Lakes Urban has been advocating for and working on. Our strategy of equipping and deploying Neighborhood Connectors is **crucial to catalyzing the healing effects of social connection and the power of community**.



The following six pillars describe key areas of intervention to build social connection and wellbeing.

- **Strengthen Social Infrastructure in Local Communities**
- **Enact Pro-Connection Public Policies**
- **Mobilize the Health Sector**
- **Reform Digital Environments**
- **Deepen Our Knowledge**
- **Build a Culture of Connection**

Learn more about the advisory at: [surgeongeneral.gov/connection](http://surgeongeneral.gov/connection)

## Learning About Blueprints & Flourishing

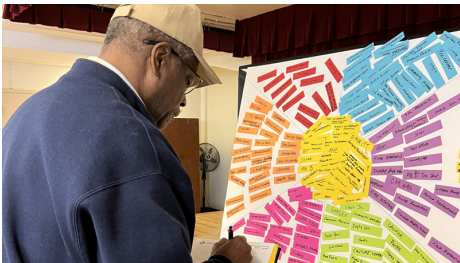


Photo courtesy of featured *Bright Spots* guest, Jennifer Prophete

Great Lakes Urban is committed to equipping people to make a difference where they live, work, play and worship. One of the ways we do this is through our quarterly, free, virtual Bright Spots in ABCD series. We also facilitate, or contribute to, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) workshops and coaching sessions.

So far this year, we have visited with ABCD movement leaders from Neighbor Power and The Hopeful Neighborhood Project. We have also learned best practices from Kitchener and Kansas City. We are on track to exceed last year's performance of **350 people trained** on how to use ABCD to cultivate connection and change.

If you missed an episode, visit [GreatLakesUrban.org/resources](http://GreatLakesUrban.org/resources) to watch a past episode. To sign up for an upcoming virtual episode or in-person workshop, visit [GreatLakesUrban.org/events](http://GreatLakesUrban.org/events). You can be the first to know about our activities and opportunities by visiting [GreatLakesUrban.org/stay-connected](http://GreatLakesUrban.org/stay-connected) and liking our social media pages.

## Rides & Regulars: Funding Flourishing

Great Lakes Urban is positioned to make a very real difference on issues that matter. And, we've seen incredible growth these past couple of years. What makes that possible? Your ongoing support.

By giving of your time, talent, and treasure, you have inspired hope in disconnected environments. **We need your help to keep our forward momentum!** Here are two ways to make a difference.

**1) Help us reach our ambitious \$40,000 goal during our 9th annual family-friendly cycling fundraiser.** This year, ROC (Restoring Our Cities) will take place on Saturday, September 9. Rides start from between 8:00-10:00am. All routes (from 5-75 miles long) start from Johnson Park, west of Grand Rapids.

ROC provides an opportunity for you to experience comradery as we cycle through beautiful West Michigan. As noted on the right, there are a lot of ways to get involved. Visit [www.ROCcycling.org](http://www.ROCcycling.org) for details.

**2) Become a regular donor.** Every gift of \$5, \$50, or more, when contributed regularly, whether monthly, quarterly or annually, really helps! The stability of reoccurring giving helps us plan. You can securely set up a giving schedule at [www.GreatLakesUrban.org/Donate](http://www.GreatLakesUrban.org/Donate). Have questions? Call 937-935-4844.



### ROC Riders & Fundraisers

*Have fun and do good on Saturday, September 9, 2023*

There are several ways you can help fund flourishing through ROC. Visit [roccycling.org](http://roccycling.org) for details.

- Register to ride
- Sponsor ROC and get recognized
- Donate to GLU or a specific rider
- Become a peer-to-peer fundraiser
- Organize a team for your church, company, or organization
- Volunteer before or during ROC



## Boards & Bikes: Meet David Veltkamp

*As part of our regular series highlighting members and volunteers, we recently caught up with Dave Veltkamp. Dave serves on the GLU Board and Godfrey Lee Listeners Board, sponsors, rides in and co-leads the annual ROC fundraiser, and is a monthly donor. Check out our interview below!*

### Can you tell us a little about yourself, Dave?

I am a Partner and Financial Coach with Ideal Life Financial, based in Hudsonville (MI). I'm married to my lovely wife, Becky. Together, we have seven kids, including three daughters-in-law, and eight grandkids. I love my church community, which is in a multi-cultural neighborhood.

### You donate a lot of time, talent and treasure. What motivates you?

A lot of it is my upbringing. My mom lived her faith, and I wanted to do the same. Jesus prioritized loving God and neighbor, and that's what I try and do. After college I spent three years in Nicaragua with World Renew running crews building houses. We used local resources and engaged residents in building their own homes. My time in Central America opened my eyes to the needs in the world. These experiences reinforced a sense that I am blessed to be a blessing.

### There are a lot of groups and causes. Why do you choose to support GLU's mission specifically?

For me, it was meeting Jay Van Groningen (then on staff and now on the board). He walks the talk. But it's not just Jay. Everyone involved with GLU has a good heart. It's also because GLU gets things done. Everyone works hard to make every dollar count. Plus, we're addressing a growing problem: isolation. And it's doing that by empowering people to build community. We're strategic!

### What would you say to others wanting to make a difference in the world?

Ask yourself, 'how am I carrying out the command to love my neighbor?' Find what you care about and where you feel called to give and serve. Get to know GLU in the process and what we're all about. I think you'll find we're making a real difference, and that you can, too!



Dave Veltkamp