

DRAFT 2/15/17

Shaping our Future Together
Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church
Spring 2017

Table of Contents

Summary of the Discovery and Planning Process	2
Observations and Insights from Looking Outward	3
Observations and Insights from Looking Inward	4
Overview of the Mission Planning Team Action Plan	5
Appendix 1: Mission Planning Team Action Plan Ideas	6
Appendix 2: Creative Action Team Action Plan	16
Appendix 3: Frequently Asked Questions.....	18

Shaping Our Future Together
Neland Avenue CRC
Spring 2017

Neland has a long history of working to make the gospel a reality in our congregation, our neighborhood, our city, and our world. Neland also has a history of continually striving to improve our ministry and our life together. The congregation cares deeply for each other and for the neighborhood and the issues that affect this place. We recognize our relationship with the neighborhood has helped form us as a faith family, yet we struggle with how best to be a good neighbor. The Shaping Our Future Together (SOFT) initiative was formed to study how we are viewed by our neighbors, how we view ourselves, and what this means as we continue together in this place.

Summary of the Discovery and Planning Process

In the late spring of 2015, the council approved an action planning initiative rooted in a discovery process that included extensive listening to community stakeholders and to congregational members. SOFT took shape in the form of two teams: A Creative Action Team (CAT), discussed later in this document, and a Mission Planning Team (MPT), led by Kara Van Drie and Rhonda Lubberts. Other members of the team included Pearl Banks, Heidi Hofman, Beryl Huguen, Jeff Van Winkle, Dean Ward. Wayne Squires of Great Lakes Urban (GLU) was asked to provide coaching and consulting assistance.

The community listening (or “look outward”) incorporated:

- *four neighborhood walks (completed in September/2015; 60 congregational participants)*
- *a neighborhood meal and forum in November/2015 (25 total participants)*
- *stakeholder interviews (completed in December/2015; 20 interviewees)*
- *an assessment of up-to-date demographic data (completed in late January/2016)*
- *the interpretation of all neighborhood/community feedback by the MPT (completed in February of 2016)*

The congregational listening (or “look inward”) included:

- *a ministry capacity survey taken by 244 members in March/2016*
- *personal interviews with 84 members (completed in June/2016)*
- *a ministry audit with council and ministry leaders (completed in September/2016)*
- *an online spiritual gifts assessment taken by 96 people in October/2016*
- *a process of interpreting all congregational feedback (finished in November/2016)*

Members of the Mission Planning Team met together for two retreats, one in mid-November and the other in early December of 2016. At these retreats, team members integrated findings, identified patterns of insight, and drew conclusions, leading to this plan. This work represented countless hours of prayerful, thoughtful, collaborative efforts over several months. The living process that this document represents will continue to change and grow to reflect the energy of those who receive it.

It should be noted that that a Creative Action Team (CAT) was also formed at the same time the MPT took shape. The purpose of the team was to identify an immediate opportunity for community engagement. The CAT proposal to build relationships with business leaders and more intentionally support local businesses was approved by the Ministries Committee and the Council in March of 2016. (See Appendix 2) The Creative Action Team was led by Katy Hoffman and involved Bob Dekker, Keith Helferich, Evan Koons, John Kuiper, Mary Jane Pories, Pat Westveer, and Pearl Banks as contributing members, again with the coaching support of Wayne Squires. Upon approval, the

CAT implementation team (Cheryl Scott, Bob Dekker, Katy Hoffman, and Tim Meyer) has initiated activities to put the plan into action, such as the 30 days/\$30 challenge.

Insights from Discovery Activities

Looking outward	
Observation	Insight
Few family-friendly gathering spaces exist in the immediate neighborhood and many neighbors already recognize Neland Church as a safe place and positive influence.	Opportunity to open our doors in ways that foster community hospitality and deepen relationships. Changes to building architecture, along with interior design upgrades, would literally help create a more welcoming environment. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 5/Objective 2, Goal 6)
A number of organizations are already doing good work in SE GR and residents and institutional leaders share areas of concern (ex. educational progress, safe and affordable housing, reduced crime rates, access to meaningful work and decent jobs, and improved health outcomes).	Opportunity for enhanced collaboration. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 6)
The significant presence of children and young people (under 18) affirms Neland Church’s history of working with younger generations. However, there are many adults who desire connection.	Opportunity for relationships that foster diverse networks of mutual support and understanding. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 2)
Among long- term residents, there is a strong desire to strengthen neighbor-to-neighbor relationships and to work on simple improvement projects.	Opportunity to work with neighbors on improvement projects ranging from relationship-building to beautification to infrastructure betterment to social justice. (Ex. Objective 2, Goal 4)
A pervasive, underlying anxiety exists about the vacant Alexander School property.	Opportunity for contributing to a broader, collaborative effort to repurpose the vacant school building and improve the condition of land and equipment. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 5)
The Neland neighborhood is becoming more culturally and racially diverse with a growing Latino presence and an influx of Anglo couples/families. African-American residents remain a significant majority (66%). Neland's congregation is predominantly white.	Opportunity for our congregation to listen to, learn from, and work alongside our neighbors. (Ex. Objective 1, Goals 2, 3, 6)
There are many registered businesses on the perimeter of the neighborhood.	Opportunity for pursuing creative partnerships with those in the business community. (Ex. Objective 2, Goal 5)

Looking inward	
Observation	Insight
Our busy pace of life hinders listening and relationship-building.	Opportunity for cultivating within our gatherings (ex. programs, committees, households, leaders) space for being together. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 1/Objective 2, Goal 1)
Most of the congregation lives and works outside the Neland parish (Hall, Fuller, Franklin, Eastern).	While we want to maintain our unique call as participants in the Neland parish, we can also affirm the ways in which we live out our faith beyond these boundaries. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 4)
While we share a common mission and vision, we do not share a common language for articulating it.	Opportunity to further develop a memorable mission, vision, and values. (Ex. Objective 2, Goal 2)
Many members have experienced joy and personal transformation through leadership involvement and ministry participation, yet the pool of leaders could be broader.	Opportunity to significantly improve identifying, training, and developing new leaders. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 3/Objective 2, Goal 2)
We find fulfillment in "doing ministry" and having many of them.	Opportunity to create space for reflecting on whether our ministries fit into our shared purpose. (Ex. Objective 2, Goal 1)
A widespread desire exists for sustaining the welcome and acceptance initially experienced by church members.	Opportunity to develop deeper relationships and expand across cultures, and to place a greater emphasis on mutuality in the work of service and leadership. (Ex. Objective 1, Goals 1, 2, 6/Objective 2, Goal 3)
Neland members take great joy in and are spiritually fed by celebrations of faith formation, such as baptism, catechism, and profession of faith, as well as active involvement in one or more of the following: worship services, Bible studies, educational offerings, cross-generational interaction(s), community-oriented ministry, and cultural engagement emphasizing social justice.	These celebrations and activities offer opportunities for storytelling to further inspire and strengthen our faith. (Ex. Objective 2, Goal 3)
The gifts of administration, giving (i.e. financial support for kingdom work), faith, and serving are strongly represented, as are pastoring, teaching, and mercy gifts. There also seem to be an unusually high number of skills/talents connected to music and the creative arts.	An awareness of people's gifts will allow us to be intentional about encouraging people to use their gifts in ways that bring joy. (Ex. Objective 1, Goal 3)
The specific neighborhood location of the building/campus is widely seen as a key dimension of shared identity and local mission. Place-based engagement is highly valued, and there is expressed hope for more effective interactions with individuals, families, churches, nonprofits, schools, and businesses in the area.	Opportunity for fostering an equipping style of pastoral leadership and a commitment to greater racial and cultural diversity in hiring staff leaders and developing community partnerships. (Ex. Objective 2, Goals 2, 4)

Overview of the Mission Planning Team Action Plan

The comprehensive feedback and discernment process overseen by the Mission Planning Team confirmed that Neland Church finds a source of its identity in being part of this neighborhood. It also found that most people have similar hopes and expectations about our life as a faith family. These collective, God-given dreams are reflected in the objectives and goals listed below.

As a reminder, here are the current mission and vision statements:

Congregational Vision: To live faithfully in light of God’s amazing love as shown through the gift of Jesus Christ. This means building Christ-centered relationships that disciple and encourage all God’s people as we worship, serve, and grow in this place.

Statement of Mission: To make the gospel a reality in our congregation, our neighborhood, our city, and our world.

Objective 1: to pursue a spiritually-vibrant way of life and presence that prioritizes love for God and neighbor by:

Goal 1: Recognizing the opportunities we have in our small groups, ministry teams, committees, council, etc. (“where two or three are gathered”), for developing intentional relationships, ongoing spiritual growth, and effective mission

Goal 2: Building upon Neland’s blessing of being a diverse community (age, race, gender, socio-economic, life experience, etc.) by creating more opportunities for making connections

Goal 3: Implementing a gifts-based approach to ministry and mission participation

Goal 4: Affirming the ways in which church members are good neighbors where they live, work, worship, and engage the world

Goal 5: Increasing relational presence and strengthening neighbor-to-neighbor connections in the Neland neighborhood

Goal 6: Addressing local systems of injustice and advocating for those most affected by them

Objective 2: to evaluate and improve organizational structures and support in order to meet Objective 1 by:

Goal 1: Evaluating decision-making processes and ministry systems in order to assure they are inclusive, empowering, and relational

Goal 2: Increasing the effectiveness of all leaders, as well as broadening the leadership base, guided by a clearly defined and articulated mission, vision, and values

Goal 3: Creating more opportunities for sharing our stories as a way to deepen relationships and to inspire and encourage each other

Goal 4: Establishing and sustaining working partnerships with local organizations for the purpose(s) of spiritual and social transformation

Goal 5: Actively supporting local businesses in or near the Neland neighborhood

Goal 6: Engaging in ongoing evaluation and improvement for how our physical building fosters hospitality, learning, and service

*The action plan (Appendix 1) provides specific suggestions and potential ways for meeting the objectives and goals. These are merely ideas to prompt us to think and act creatively in faithfulness to God’s call. **The MPT recommends that Council appoints of a five to seven member catalyst team to discern if, how, and when strategies will be applied and to ensure appropriate follow-up responses.***

Shaping Our Future Together
Mission Planning Team Action Plan Ideas
(May 2017 – May 2020)

The MPT has drafted these strategies and tactics as suggestions to be improved upon by the Catalyst Team.

Objective 1: To pursue a spiritually-vibrant way of life and presence that prioritizes love for God and neighbor

Goal 1: Recognize the opportunities we have in our small groups, ministry teams, committees, council, etc. (“where two or three are gathered”), for developing intentional relationships, ongoing spiritual growth, and effective mission

Note: A small group refers to any consistent gathering of 4-15 people for agreed-upon purposes. A supper circle or a Bible study or life support group are good examples. A ministry team refers to a group of people who serve together in an established program area while also seeking to deepen their relationships and levels of spiritual encouragement. A good example is an established committee that intentionally carves out time for personal interactions and spiritual practices. [See the core habits of small group life listed below.]

Strategy 1: ensure leadership involvement and focus on small group life & ministry

- increase the number of staff hours devoted to enhancing team ministries and small group life; this may mean linking oversight responsibilities to a pastoral role or hiring a small groups coordinator for 15-20 hours per week
- integrate elder responsibilities with small group involvement
- adjust or restructure current staff roles considering this strategic priority
- form an active advisory team to support the work of the identified staff leader

Strategy 2: develop a wide spectrum of small groups that allows for multiple entry points (i.e. everything from seasonal “fellowship groups” to longer term, more intensive home-based groups)

- include this expectation in the job description of the identified staff leader
- emphasize the “open chair” approach to developing leaders and forming new groups
- use as many communication vehicles as possible to tell the stories of life-change connected to small group participation
- consider an annual congregational initiative that highlights the value of group involvement (i.e. a small group Sunday or small group month)

Strategy 3: integrate small group dynamics (i.e. the core habits of praying, sharing, supporting, serving, and celebrating) into all team-based ministries

- include this expectation in the job description of the identified staff leader
- equip all ministry team leaders to initiate or facilitate core habits of small group life
- adjust ministry expectations, responsibilities, and budgeting support as appropriate

Goal 2: Build upon Neland’s blessing of being a diverse community (age, race, gender, socio-economic, life experience, etc.) by creating more opportunities for making connections

Strategy 1: increase leadership involvement and focus on the spiritual formation of young people and adults

- increase the number of staff hours devoted to cradle-to-grave spiritual formation activities
- adjust current staff and council responsibilities considering this strategic priority (e.g. catechism instruction and profession of faith)
- strengthen team dynamics with current leaders and volunteers

Strategy 2: further develop a cross-generational life-mentoring model that fits the Neland environment

- facilitate discovery, brainstorming, and planning work with current leaders and volunteers around this recommended strategy
- complete a best practices research process with key leaders, volunteers, interested parents, and interested students (i.e. visit churches and organizations who have effectively implemented some form of cross-generational mentoring and then capture insights that can be applied to Neland)
- identify helpful resources and training processes for potential mentors and mentees alike
- initiate a pilot project (over a designated period of 6, 9, or 12 months) that helps establish one-to-one mentoring connections, provides ongoing coaching support for all mentors, and allows for consistent sharing and storytelling
- adjust and provide structure for sustaining this life mentoring/coaching model and integrating it more fully into youth ministry and congregational life

Goal 3: Implement a gifts-based approach to ministry and mission participation

Strategy 1: establish leadership support for gifts-based ministry and mission

- identify a staff “champion” for overseeing a comprehensive implementation process
- revise staff role descriptions as appropriate
- incorporate “completion of spiritual gifts assessment” into council role expectations
- include gifts-related questions in home visitation templates (for elders)
- create reflective, brainstorming space in council meetings and retreats for looking at ministry and mission through the lenses of recognized individual, congregational, and community gifts

Strategy 2: form a 5-7 member advisory team to help with the achievement of this goal via the following activities:

- identify age appropriate assessment tools and processes (e.g. head-hands-heart framework for children, “network” for youth, and an online “spiritual gifts test” for adults)
- work with key ministry leaders to ensure periodic assessment work and the incorporation of appropriate coaching strategies

- include spiritual gifts assessment in the welcome and training of new members
- offer periodic biblical teaching and assessment opportunities in small group, classroom, and corporate worship settings
- link a growing understanding of gifts with community engagement and cross-generational mentoring

Goal 4: Affirm the ways in which church members are good neighbors where they live, work, worship, and engage the world

Strategy 1: design an annual congregational event (e.g. a *friendship or good neighbor* month) that includes a message series, small group learning, training support, hospitality and serving opportunities, and creative storytelling in worship settings

- identify key leaders and form an event team
- design and plan the event (i.e. provide administrative and organizational support)
- implement event initiatives and activities
- evaluate the event's success through the lenses of relationship-building and life transformation
- pursue follow-up activities for developing good neighbor practices

Strategy 2: support the development of small groups in which members have a geographical affinity and desire for neighborhood engagement

- provide periodic training on the neighborhood as a primary context for spirituality and mission (e.g. a 3-4 week series on Sunday mornings or evenings)
- develop and update a visual map identifying the places where Neland members live
- encourage the formation of place-based small groups focused on neighborhood involvement
- identify leadership support and oversight for these groups

Strategy 3: make "love of neighbor" a key theme of household visits

- incorporate a modeling expectation for elders around neighbor relationships
- provide mentoring, training, and resources for elders in this area
- develop a home visit template of appreciative questions that includes a focus on good neighboring practices
- schedule time in elder meetings for neighbor/neighborhood engagement stories ... and prayerful response(s)

Strategy 4: affirm and promote the practice(s) of being a good neighbor in the workplace and other vocational settings

- identify and share "faith in life" stories from the vocational experiences of Neland members
- encourage participation in workplace groups, neighborhood and business associations, civic organizations, education boards, and home-based service

Goal 5: Increase relational presence and strengthen neighbor-to-neighbor connections in the Neland neighborhood

Strategy 1: form a neighborhood walking team to consistently stroll through the parish area, talk with neighbors, observe activities, and pray together

- identify willing leaders and participants (including neighbors)
- set up a basic framework and conduct initial training
- initiate walking team activities
- create feedback loops to staff and council members
- develop an inventory of neighbor/neighborhood stories, gifts, and resources

Strategy 2: place greater emphasis on neighborhood/community hospitality

- create a position on council for a neighborhood elder
- form a Neland community hospitality team that includes interested neighbors
- reach consensus on simple, helpful, encouraging events for relationship building (e.g. cookouts, dinners, breakfasts, picnics, block parties, game nights, concerts)
- involve other community organization stakeholders as appropriate
- assess activities and events from a “having fun” and “building trust” perspective ... and make necessary adjustments
- invite greater utilization of church space by local groups and organizations (note: this may call for a clarification or revision of building use policies)
- create space for Neland to be a catalyst/facilitator/connector for addressing concerns in the neighborhood (ex. Alexander school property)

Strategy 3: hire a “community connector” in partnership with other neighborhood organizations to bring needed energy and oversight to parish relationships and initiatives

- develop a proposal and job description in conversation and cooperation with other interested organizational partners
- create a simple charter for a neighborhood collaboration focused on connecting activities
- access needed funding for a minimum 20 hours per week role and basic program support for neighborhood activities & initiatives (over an initial period of two years)
- complete a hiring process that identifies a person who is a good fit with the qualities, skills, and responsibilities outlined in the job description

Goal 6: Address local systems of injustice and advocate for those most affected by them

Strategy 1: involve the Social Justice Committee in prioritizing local justice pursuits and advocacy opportunities and taking next steps

- build on MPT feedback from local stakeholders (which identifies shared interest in improving educational achievement, improving access to living wage jobs, increasing the availability of safe and affordable housing, and expanding mentoring strategies with young people)
- continue to get feedback from interested stakeholders and potential partners

- evaluate the current involvement of Neland Church members in justice initiatives and identify areas of shared commitment
- build capacity around existing activities (e.g. participation in Micah Center advocacy groups)
- develop a roadmap identifying specific ways members can participate. The map should be revised annually in light of new pursuits and opportunities.

Strategy 2: consistently and sensitively provide training opportunities for increased awareness and competency across racial, cultural, and economic boundaries

- raise awareness of the history of racism. For example, visit the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University; read *A City Within A City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan* by Todd E. Robinson
- host and/or sponsor inclusion training events to heighten awareness and skill for participating in a diverse cultural context
- form short term “healing racism” groups with willing neighborhood churches and organizations
- schedule periodic, interactive learning events where insights from the ongoing Generous Spaciousness conversation can be shared
- incorporate cultural intelligence training into expectations for all staff and council leaders (e.g. participation in the Eracism Experience or certification by the Cultural Intelligence Center or workshop involvement at the Woodrick Center for Equity and Inclusion)
- host and/or encourage participation in a poverty simulation facilitated by Access of West Michigan [on an annual basis]

Objective 2: To evaluate and improve organizational structures and support in order to meet Objective 1

Goal 1: Evaluate decision-making processes and ministry systems in order to assure they are inclusive, empowering, and relational

Strategy 1: commission a 3-5 member task force to help simplify the overall organizational structure, clarify leadership roles and responsibilities (both staff & non-staff), integrate (or eliminate) current committees and programs where possible, and create an empowering environment for all who lead and serve

- identify and recruit a leader and key members for the task force (preferably a staff person, a representative from the administrative council, and two or three church members gifted in developing effective organizational systems)
- review previous work done by staff and council leaders to improve organizational structure and evaluate the helpfulness of current processes
- develop a series of recommendations to improve organizational effectiveness in supporting those directly involved in ongoing ministry and mission initiatives; this includes making it easier for new initiatives to take root
- get needed feedback from leaders and members as appropriate, make revisions, and gain council blessing ... recognizing the adaptive nature of the process (i.e. that there are very few “fixed” and permanent recommendations to be made in light of constant organizational change)

Strategy 2: wisely implement recommendations for greater organizational effectiveness with a view toward responsive, empowering decision-making

- engage members of the leadership community (i.e. staff members, committee chairs, team leaders, council members, etc.) in identifying opportunities and challenges in the change process
- create spaces for prayer and discernment around organizational transitions
- make needed changes (e.g. write or rewrite role descriptions, develop a new organizational chart, revise bylaws, adjust budgeting processes, or edit written policies)
- provide mentoring or training to key leaders that brings clarity and a renewed sense of empowerment in fulfilling their call(s)

Goal 2: Increase the effectiveness of all leaders, as well as broaden the leadership base, guided by a clearly defined and articulated mission, vision, and values

Strategy 1: complete a clarifying process that brings renewed, deeper understanding of Neland Church's vision, mission, and values

- hire a skilled facilitator to move through a comprehensive re-visioning process
- schedule an appropriate event (or series of events) with identified leaders to reach consensus on the nature of the church's unique call, its preferred future, and its shared ideals
- compose a written document reflecting this consensus and move through a congregational affirmation process that invites thoughtful feedback and incorporates helpful modifications
- utilize the document as a consistent starting point for leadership conversations
- update all communication vehicles to reflect this renewed sense of purpose and priorities

Strategy 2: consistently equip, encourage, and support elders and deacons in their shepherding and serving responsibilities

- work through a developmental resource on an annual basis (e.g. the elder's handbook, the deacon's handbook, *Toxic Charity, When Helping Hurts*)
- schedule at least one leadership retreat per year for prayer, learning, and team-building
- provide hands-on training for household visits and care at the start of each ministry season
- identify those in the congregation with shepherding and serving gifts and train them to provide additional help in key areas...as appropriate

Strategy 3: form an apprenticeship strategy for all council and ministry leadership roles

- create overlapping elder and deacon relationships (of either 3 or 6 months) so that short term mentoring connections can be established between outgoing and incoming leaders
- form a long-term coaching team (of former deacons and elders) ... whose members are available to support, encourage, and challenge current or potential council members

- encourage and equip all ministry leaders to develop apprentice leaders in their given ministry area(s)
- incorporate this leadership development strategy into role descriptions for all ministry leaders (including staff members)
- create clear expectations for ministry leadership transitions (i.e. identify tasks and activities associated with “handing off” leadership responsibility)

Strategy 4: ensure organizational focus on developing and equipping all those serving in some leadership capacity

- increase the number of staff hours devoted to leadership development; this may mean linking oversight responsibilities to a pastoral role or hiring a director of leadership development & equipping ministries for 15-20 hours per week
- include the previous two strategies in the job description
- form a support or advisory team to enhance the work of leadership development & equipping ministries
- adjust or restructure all staff roles considering this strategic priority
- establish a two-hour VHS (vision, huddle, skill) event for all those in some form of leadership; this will include a motivational time connected to the shared congregational vision and mission, a time of small group(s) encouragement and prayer, and a time of practical learning and reflection
- utilize more adult education settings to allow ministry leaders (and those who serve with them) to share what they are doing and learning and to get good feedback on “next steps”; this encourages an action-reflection pattern of spiritual growth (i.e. affirms that true learning and positive change comes via participation in ministry/mission)

Strategy 5: ensure an appropriate level of staff oversight for ministry/mission priorities

- initially schedule consistent interactions between catalyst team members, administrative council members, and members of the organizational simplification task force to review and affirm staffing recommendations, identify budget implications, assist in writing/rewriting job descriptions, and assist in the hiring processes

Note: The following major areas of shared life and mission have been clearly identified in this action plan as needing staff leadership: a) small group life and team ministries, b) cross-generational spiritual formation, c) leadership development and equipping ministries, d) administrative and technological support, and e) neighborhood connecting/parish ministry. In addition, it is recommended that the whole spectrum of community ministry (i.e. everything from the food pantry to social justice initiatives and community partnerships) receives the attention of a supportive, team-building staff leader...for at least 20-25 hours a week. As has been indicated, some of these areas of responsibility can be embedded in pastoral roles (given a two-pastor model), and perhaps this is somewhat dependent on the individual gifts and passions of chosen pastors (i.e. role descriptions can be written based on the skills and experiences of gifted individuals). However, there is clearly an opportunity to also hire directors or coordinators in these areas needing focused, energetic leadership.

- develop a clear, consistent process in which existing staff members are evaluated and affirmed and new staff members are recommended [connected to previous bullet point]; this will likely involve the following activities: *reviewing current evaluative strategies and processes, adjusting evaluation approaches in light of equipping expectations for all staff, identifying “tipping point” dynamics or indicators for hiring new staff considering congregational life and community ministry priorities, revising hiring processes and procedures as appropriate, and forming helpful feedback mechanisms and communication methods around staffing needs and possibilities.*

Goal 3: Create more opportunities for sharing our stories as a way to deepen relationships and to inspire and encourage each other

Strategy 1: form an active group of storytellers and artists

- identify a skilled, gifted communicator to serve as leader
- establish consistent patterns of meeting & interacting and include basic group dynamics (i.e. praying, sharing, supporting, serving, and celebrating)
- focus on capturing and “telling” personal, congregational, and community stories of struggle, growth, and transformation
- utilize all available forms of communication to tell these stories (e.g. a page or blog link on the website, a monthly newsletter, a verbal presentation in a worship or educational setting, or a posted video on Facebook)
- develop new forms of storytelling (e.g. an annual anthology of essays or short stories, a quarterly community meal & storytelling forum, seasonal dramas, or short videos/films)
- provide training(s) and resources for effective verbal and written storytelling

Strategy 2: design worship gatherings for increased sharing and storytelling

- work with current worship planners and leaders to establish time allotments for personal, practical, yet creative narratives of “faith in life”
- develop and approach or “system” by which stories of life-change are identified and people are effectively prepared to share
- establish a wide creative spectrum for sharing and storytelling (i.e. everything from individual “testifying” to professionally produced videos)
- draw upon the work of the storytelling and creative writing group

Strategy 3: increase overall technological support and capacity

- identify a technologically skilled person to serve as technology coordinator for 6-10 hours a week; this can be a paid or nonpaid staff position
- form a 4-7 member “adaptive technologies” advisory team to support the work of the coordinator; priorities include website development and maintenance, social media involvement and development (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), data base development, software and hardware recommendations for staff leaders, and ongoing evaluation of corporate communication strategies and audio/visual capacities
- adjust existing staff or leadership roles as appropriate

Goal 4: Establish and sustain working partnerships with local organizations for the purpose(s) of spiritual and social transformation

Strategy 1: convene a community collaboration task force to build on the community discovery work of the MPT

- affirm and build capacity around current partnerships
- review feedback from stakeholder interviews with MPT representatives
- follow up with interested organizational representatives as appropriate
- continue and broaden the stakeholder interview strategy to cultivate friendships and clarify potential collaborative opportunities
- develop other simple, interactive feedback strategies with potential partners
- create a volunteer “partner liaison” role to strengthen support of local organizations & ministries and coordinate volunteer opportunities
- hire a part-time “community connector” in partnership with other neighborhood organizations to help meet this goal [see objective 1, goal 5, strategy 3]

Strategy 2: host or sponsor quarterly community forums/roundtables with interested stakeholders for the purposes of networking, relationship building, storytelling, and brainstorming around collaborative opportunities

- link this strategy to the work of the collaboration task force (for communication and planning support)
- find another organization or two to help sponsor and shape these community conversations
- identify key leaders to facilitate these conversations and follow up with emerging opportunities
- create collaborative experiments when appropriate

Goal 5: Actively support local businesses in or near the Neland neighborhood (See Appendix 2)

Note: This goal represents the primary objective of the proposal (i.e. mini-action plan) designed by the Creative Action Team and approved by the Ministries Committee and Church Council in the late Spring of 2016. A business support implementation team is working to meet the goals and recommendations of the CAT proposal. See Appendix A for proposal details.

Goal 6: Engage in ongoing evaluation and improvement for how our physical building fosters hospitality, learning, and service

Strategy 1: build on the recent prioritizing work of the space needs committee

- review and/or revise stated building priorities in light of the action plan
- develop a leadership agreement (i.e. a working document of stated intentions and priorities) around building improvements; this will include a future scenario and an overall timeline for completing core projects in coordination with the building committee and finance committee
- ensure broader communication to members and community partners as appropriate

Strategy 2: develop an “annual project” approach to making needed improvements

- form an ad-hoc capital improvements team to coordinate with the building and finance committees in implementing recommended upgrades
- elicit help from outside individuals and organizations as appropriate
- design annual funding campaigns around the specific projects identified in the agreement; this amounts to a *scaled* approach to building upgrades and invites *above and beyond* giving from congregational members
- involve as many church, denominational, and community stakeholders as possible (e.g. members, Classis leaders/teams, business owners, known philanthropists, and local foundations)
- consider the presence and availability of local assets via other community organizations; this may also involve coming alongside other entities to support their building & physical space improvement efforts

Appendix 2

**Neland Creative Advisory Team Proposal
(Final Action Plan)
Spring/2016**

Statement of Challenge:

We worship in a neighborhood where it is difficult to sustain a profitable business that effectively serves residents and creates meaningful employment opportunities. As members of a church striving to strengthen our neighborhood connections and be a good neighbor, we have an opportunity to more intentionally support and develop relationships with local businesses in a way that builds our community and benefits residents and owners alike.

Response: A Next Steps Action Plan

Primary Objective: actively and consistently support local businesses with a view toward enhancing neighborhood vitality and health

Note: "Local businesses" are enterprises found in or near the area bounded by Franklin (N), Giddings (E), Hall (S), and Madison (W).

Goal 1: increase patronization of local businesses

Strategy 1: encourage support of local establishments through effective, consistent communication and event consideration

- develop and maintain a list of local businesses to patronize
- create a bulletin board with background information, referrals and recommendations, and personal stories from church members
- utilize the website and newsletter to emphasize "business support" opportunities (e.g. a "business of the month" approach)
- highlight local businesses during congregational prayer(s)
- invite local business leaders to "tell their stories" in educational and worship settings (perhaps using a Story Corps format?)
- use local businesses willing to support church & community events (e.g. catering or supplies or equipment or specific services) [note: assessment of support capacity for particular events will be important]

Strategy 2: design an annual congregational initiative (e.g. "Invest in Your Neighborhood")

- develop a message series on the importance of place, the call to serve the common good, and the value of keeping dollars local (i.e. local investment)
- create opportunities for members to patronize local businesses and report back [within a designated period of time]
- initiate communal prayer(s) for local establishments
- encourage experiential storytelling in a variety of settings (i.e. in worship gatherings, Sunday morning classes, and/or group meetings)

Goal 2: form strong relationships with local business owners and managers

Strategy 1: create a 3-5 member “business relationships” team to consistently contact, interview, and follow up with local business leaders/stakeholders (note: this team will be looking to establish relational trust on behalf of Neland Church and to identify opportunities for “practical support” and/or “improvement projects”; team members could also assist with implementing the communication strategy under goal #1)

Strategy 2: host or sponsor quarterly receptions/roundtables for business leaders and representatives to encourage networking, relationship building, storytelling, and brainstorming around improvement opportunities (note: these roundtables can include interested church members and other community stakeholders as well)

Goal 3: continue to identify and pursue employment opportunities for local residents, especially older teens and young adults

Strategy 1: partner with local (and regional) businesses to fill job openings/postings ... as appropriate (note: this strategy will likely emerge when other listed strategies “take root” ... for example, as the steps from a Neland-supported internship to longer term employment are identified)

Strategy 2: further develop the “job readiness” coaching team to help interested, willing residents find meaningful work

- establish (or reestablish) a team mandate/framework for this mentoring work
- identify and provide training resources to team members
- create and/or improve needed screening and assessment tools
- continually communicate and invite neighbors/residents into this “come alongside of” ministry

Strategy 3: work with the “Neland Ministries” team to establish an “access to employment” fund so that willing participants can take advantage of internship and training opportunities

- transfer previously budgeted funds (for food truck and/or benevolence) into a newly established account
- review all Neland programs for other potential budget/funding shifts
- identify and follow through with potential donors (i.e. key church members and/or community ministry partners)
- establish parameters and scenarios for fund distribution
- link fund distribution to strategies 1 and 2 under this goal (i.e. goal #3)

Final Recommendation:

It will be important to establish a 3-member implementation team to ensure an appropriate degree of goal fulfillment and strategic accomplishment. This includes a basic commitment to tracking and evaluating progress. Otherwise, the good intentions and recommendations expressed in this document will likely not be “lived out” by key leaders and congregational members.

Shaping Our Future Together
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the key theme that emerged in the SOFT process?

This document reflects a widely-shared desire for stronger and deeper relational connections in congregational life and community-oriented ministries. It also represents an understanding that a deeper connection with God (i.e. spiritual growth) is vital. The document mirrors a consensus that we need each other (including our neighbors) to discern how to live out God’s loving purposes in our particular ministry context. By implication, it affirms Neland Church’s long-term story as a community of Jesus-followers.

2. What are the priorities of the action plan?

The very structure of the plan indicates the top priorities. In other words, the two objectives reflect what is considered most important, the goals are next in terms of main concerns, and so on. As far as priorities at the strategy level, the Mission Planning Team believes the strategies connected to small group life, leadership development, neighborhood engagement, spiritual formation, and community partnership(s) are among the most important. For these and other strategies, however, the catalyst team will help identify which steps to take on in what order.

3. What key discoveries formed the basis for the recommended strategies?

This information can be found in the “insights from discovery activities” section of the introduction.

4. Do I have to agree with or support everything in this document?

No. At least this is the short and rather obvious answer. It is expected that all members will support the two major objectives, that most members will agree with the twelve goals, and that many will participate in individual strategies. There is no expectation that every member will “get behind” everything. That said, it is worth noting that the components of this plan reflect comprehensive feedback from congregational members and community stakeholders. It should also be noted that anything involving staffing, budgeting, or major organizational changes would go through normal channels for discussion and approval.

5. Is there concern that this plan might feel overwhelming and cause frustration?

A little. The Mission Planning Team admits that some recommendations will perhaps stretch Neland Church’s capacities in key areas. Yet, many strategies reflect things already started or underway. All strategies indicate a level of meaningful expectation or passion from several members. Even so, nothing in this plan will be implemented apart from willing leadership and appropriate participation.

6. What are the specific recommendations for additional staffing?

There are a variety of ways these tasks could be accomplished, such as embedding them into current staff or volunteer job descriptions and/or hiring new staff. The following broad areas of staff involvement/oversight have been identified for initial consideration over the next few years: a) Small Groups (15-20 hours per week), b) Leadership Development and Equipping Ministries (15-20 hours per week), c) Cross-generational Spiritual

Formation (15-20 hours per week), and d) Community Ministries (20-25 hours per week). In a two-pastor model, some of these areas of leadership responsibility can be embedded in job expectations. Otherwise, a director or coordinator position (for a particular area) would be appropriate. It should be noted that hiring a part-time Community Connector (20 hours per week) in partnership with other neighborhood organizations is an important factor in developing “love of neighbor” practices (i.e. objective 1, goal 5, strategy 3). It should also be noted a technology coordinator position has been recommended (i.e. objective 2, goal 3, strategy 3) for 6-10 hours a week. This could be filled by a nonpaid staff member (i.e. a gifted volunteer who functions as a staff member). A minimum of a half-time role for basic administrative support is assumed throughout.

7. How will progress be monitored and communicated?

The administrative committee will appoint a 5-7 member task force (i.e. the catalyst team) to oversee the implementation process. This task force will work with staff, council, and ministry leaders to affirm priorities, identify key personnel and resources, ensure needed follow-up, keep communication channels open, and provide congregational updates. It should be noted that the following “growth opportunities” are embedded in the plan: a) stronger relationships, b) increased reflection & discernment, c) more empowered leaders, d) more members joyfully using their gifts, e) increased focus on neighborhood engagement, and f) more opportunities to tell our story.