

Community Values Mapping for Apache Junction

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Introduction

The City of Apache Junction, AZ (AJ) partnered with Arizona State University's (ASU) Project Cities program in 2017 to receive help and expertise in developing a more livable community. Several ASU classes are working on projects that will be produced and delivered to AJ. One of the ongoing programs is the Positively Apache Junction rebranding program. The aim of this program is to help the city develop messaging to improve its reputation in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area and to increase economic development. The sustainability challenge is to reverse negative reputation and stereotypes about the city, which has a lower socioeconomic status than the average of the metro area. The intervention point was to identify and compile local residents' most valued locations in and around AJ for promotional and development purposes. AJ's desired future state is a positive reputation that actively promotes economic development through tourism and its natural, cultural, and built-environment amenities. The goal is to attract new residents and have visitors stay to visit AJ itself, not only drive past it to attractions just outside of city limits.

Methods

This Culminating Experience (CE) project acted as a preliminary case study for a Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) methodology that was expanded upon by ASU's online HST 485: History of the Wild class, taught by Dr. Joshua MacFadyen. The primary goal of PPGIS is to link geographic locations with an individual's values. The aim of the methodology was to compile a data set of valued locations through public participation. The project was separated into 3 Phases, each building off of the next. Phase 1 was an update of OpenStreetMaps by adding popular mixed-use trails on the platform. Phase 2 was to create historical base maps for the HST 485's historical project; this was done using ArcMap 10.5 software. Phase 3 was the PPGIS survey conducted at public events about residents most valued locations, during which they placed colored stickers on a large paper map. There were 5 colors representing the following values: Recreational, Cultural, Aesthetic, Spiritual, and Special Place values. The benchmark for success for this CE project was to generate a map of residents' values, identify any valuable hotspots, and provide this information to the City of AJ to promote these highly valued locations.

Outcomes

Phase 1 was completed by adding unmarked mixed-use trails to OSM. Phase 2 was completed by building and providing historical aerial maps of AJ in 1985 and 2004 to the class. Phase 3 was completed by conducting 3 survey sessions and gathering a total of 186 values with stickers and maps. Within the 186 values were (number of values): Recreational (62), Special Place (46), Cultural (30), Aesthetic (27), and Spiritual (21). Data was uploaded to Maptionnaire online survey, density analysis performed, and 6 highly valued locations were identified (number of values): Superstition Mountain and Lost Dutchman State Park (40), Public Library and Multigenerational Center (19), Superstition Mountain – Lost Dutchman Museum and Elvis Presley Memorial Chapel (17), Prospector Park (16), Flatiron Park (14), and Los Gringos Locos Restaurant (6). Now, the City of AJ has a pilot example of gathering public participation data to geographically identify locations that are particularly valuable to the community. The gathered information has both values and location, which can be used across different mediums. This CE project, combined with the findings from the HST 485 course, were presented to City of AJ officials on April 25th 2018 at the Project Cities Showcase. The city can utilize this information as a pathway to sustainability by incorporating this information into its efforts to improve its negative reputation. In practice, this means developing promotional materials that incorporates positive values from the community to positively represent AJ. The project approach was validated by measuring qualitative data, like values, by placing it on a map and making those locations and values promotable outside the community.

Future Steps

This CE project addressed the partner's sustainability challenge. The project opened up a pathway to sustainability by providing the City of AJ with personal values data from residents. Highly valued locations have been identified, it is up to the city to effectively share this information with the outside world. There is an opportunity for the city to perform the same survey for a longer period and in an online format, generating a much larger data set and finding other highly valued places in the community. The city should bring these highly valued amenities to current areas of the city that are lacking, and invest in connecting these locations with multi-modal transportation trails for easier access. As the city develops empty land, they now have a framework of values and amenities to include with urban growth. Future investment should prioritize characteristics of favored sites identified by residents, like community centers and maintained grass parks. These new locations must improve the wellbeing of the community, which will aid goal of attracting new residents and tourism. This project would be improved by gathering a place history from residents. It would be powerful to attach locations on the map with entire histories and experiences. Resident stories were heard during the survey process of this CE project, but were not written or quantified. This could be further incorporated into decision making for development by the city. A major opportunity for improvement, and a sustainability communications project, is the development of marketing materials from data gathered in this project. To achieve the full potential of this CE project, marketing materials need to be created that incorporates insight, stories, and empathy from stakeholder engagement and promoted. Web pages, videos, travel guides, and place histories are all viable options.