

# Light Polls: Illuminating the Vote

## Team Qualifications

The team is composed of Whitney Panneton and Maggie Grady, two St. Louis natives who proudly grew up in the City and who both recently returned after studying urban planning in Chicago and New York, respectively. They share a passion for data, maps, and above all else, St. Louis.

## Whitney

Whitney earned his Masters of Urban Planning and Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). As President of the Masters of Urban Planning and Policy Student Association, Whitney helped develop the urban planning curriculum and foster community outreach at UIC. Whitney gained hands on experience in Land Use Theory and Economic Development through his work with the Village of Tinley Park. Eager to bring his new skills and talents back to St. Louis, Whitney recently returned home and is currently working with the St. Vincent Greenway, Inc. as a policy consultant.

## Maggie

Maggie earned her Masters of Urban Planning at Columbia University where she won the Best Research Design Award for her Thesis, "How Does Food Choice Affect a Neighborhood's Appeal?" After graduate school, Maggie spent four years working in affordable housing development at a large nonprofit in Brooklyn. Although Maggie loved New York, she knew it was time to head back to the polite Midwest when she started ordering in restaurants like a Brooklyn local ("lemme get the..."). She currently works as a Housing Analyst for the City of St. Louis Community Development Administration. She loves cities and has lived in Philadelphia and Shanghai, in addition to New York and her favorite, St. Louis.

## Lot 4 Proposal: Light Polls

After visiting all six lots, we quickly chose Lot 4 because of the surrounding openness, which allows sightlines from many different angles. We spoke to area residents and local business owners and mulled over many, many different ideas for Lot 4: a food truck parking lot; a public stage; a bioremediation pilot project; and an exercise area for the residents of the nearby senior housing development. We evaluated each idea by how well it incorporated what we believe are the three most important criteria for creating sustainable uses on vacant lots: Illumination, Active Use, and Public Participation.

Finally, we hit upon an idea that incorporates all three criteria in equal measure: interactive public polling machines that are, quite literally, poles. The "Light Polls," as we call them, are roughly ten-foot poles that would mimic the look of a utility pole. They would start out dimly illuminated and gently pulsing. A sign next to each Light Poll would display a question or a proposal. People would

push a button on the Light Poll to vote for the corresponding idea. As more and more people cast votes to show support, the pole becomes brighter and brighter and the pulse becomes stronger. A sign would tally the total vote count for each Light Poll.

The Light Poll, as a design element and as a tool for public input, could be used in many ways. For Lot 4, we envision using the Light Poll as a way to illicit input from the community on development ideas for the lot. At the beginning of the project, community members would submit development proposals online or in person at a local store or office. We would pick roughly ten different proposals to use as the ballot measures for our Light Polls, which would be arranged as a sort of Light Poll Forest throughout Lot 4. People would walk on a gravel path through the colorfully illuminated Light Poll Forest and vote for their favorite development ideas. As support grows for a particular idea, that Light Poll would become brighter than the others and its pulse would become stronger so that people walking or driving by would be able to easily tell which idea is in the lead. This public display of support would allow the community to rally around the proposals, to advocate for specific ideas, and to take ownership in the future of the vacant lot. At the end of the voting period, the proposal with the most votes would be declared the winner, and given the public support and publicity generated by the Light Polls, it would be well on its way to becoming a reality.

From a design standpoint, the Light Poles would counteract the darkness and emptiness of the vacant lot with color, light and activity. As a visual destination, they would provoke curiosity in 14<sup>th</sup> Street shoppers and intrigue drivers on North Florissant. They would draw cars and people at Crown Candy down 14<sup>th</sup> Street. They would encourage people to stop and spend time in Crown Square.

The potential for Light Polls is vast. For example, a nearby business could use a Light Poll as a marketing tool by sponsoring the Light Poll for a week and offering a promotion if the Light Poll gets 5,000 votes. Or LRA could sponsor a Light Poll installation on one of its vacant lots every month in order to draw attention to its development opportunities.

We believe that a development idea that arises from the community and has the backing of the community from the beginning will prove to be one of the most sustainable uses for a vacant lot. The Light Poll is a means of fostering this community-driven development process, while at the same time providing an interim use that brings Illumination, Active Use, and Public Participation to vacant lots.