Dania Hall, a West Bank landmark, was built by Danish immigrants in 1886 as a community gathering place.

In 1998 the West Bank Community Coalition (WBCC) and the West Bank CDC created a plan to renovate the building in honor of the global diversity brought to the neighborhood by immigrants over the past 100 years.

The community voted to spend $1.5 million of NRP funds on the project. These funds guaranteed that community members could use the theater/auditorium space at affordable rates. It also returned $30,000 per year to the WBCC to support its on-going operations. The Minneapolis Community Development Agency (now CPED) contributed the building and $500,000 to the project and the federal government committed $300,000.

Tragically, the building was consumed by fire on February 28, 2000 while under renovation. At a community memorial service, prayers from Africa, Asia and America were offered to address the great grief that everyone felt.

In this spirit, the Dania Hall Community Art Project was born. A mosaic pillar was constructed featuring cultural symbols of past and present immigrant populations as well as symbols representing the West Bank's commitment to progressive social movements.

Neighborhood residents made the panels under the guidance of artists John Pitman Weber, Marilyn Lindstrom and Chong S. Shin.

Over 300 residents celebrated the mosaic pillar on October 28, 2001, standing on the site once occupied by Dania Hall. The pillar is symbolic of our shared vision of constructing a new Dania Hall and creating a community where world peace is a daily reality.
The Dania Partners were formed in 2004 when twelve organizations serving immigrant communities in Cedar Riverside joined the West Bank CDC in a pledge to work together to rebuild Dania Hall. We signed a Memorandum of Understanding describing our commitment to include the full diversity of the neighborhood in an effort achieve a common goal.

This Roadmap for Citizen Engagement was developed by the Dania Partners as the process for creating a citizen-based development on the Dania Site. It is offered as a guide for organizing the community around any issue of community concern.

“We understand our strength as a neighborhood depends on our ability to embrace our great diversity . . . to speak in many languages, but to speak with one voice.”

Dania Partners Roadmap for Citizen Engagement

1. Begin with the immigrant Community

The process is designed to insure the voices of immigrant communities are heard commensurate with their presence in the neighborhood.

The process begins with the immigrant voices to insure they are heard, but extends to all community members in an effort to truly reflect the will of the whole community.

2. Include Everyone
Outreach at “People Places”

The outreach will begin with focus group-type meetings in places where people already congregate— “People Places.”

They will be conducted in the native language of most of the people in the meeting.

Convene Round Table

The voices heard in these small settings will be brought to “Round Table” meetings which will be conducted in English with translation as needed.

Solutions and proposals from the Round Table will be brought back to the People Places for review and approval.

The Dania Partners will monitor the process to ensure that immigrant voices are heard and will not advance a proposal that, in their judgment, does not adequately reflect the voice of the immigrant communities.

Dania Partner Member Organizations: African Development Center, Abubaker Cultural Center, Brian Coyle Community Center, Confederation of Somali Community of Minnesota, Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Cultural Center, Family Opportunities Living Collaborative, Korean Social Service, Oromo Community of Minnesota, Riverside Plaza Tenants Association, Somali Action Alliance, Women of Africa Resource Development Association, West Bank Community Coalition, West Bank Community Development Corporation
Citizen Engagement Process Criteria:
The Dania Partners developed the following criteria to assess our citizen engagement process.

- Clarity of purpose and process
- Universal application
- Builds political clout
- Reflects different leadership styles/models
- Inclusive
- Develops new leaders, strengthens neighborhood democracy
- Anticipates and addresses potential barriers