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BUILT ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

For us, by us



TUBMAN CENTER FOR
HEALTH & FREEDOM

Our Mission

The Tubman Center for Health & Freedom addresses health and wellness from both systemic and clinical approaches. By practicing medicine from the intersection of health and freedom, we address both the health of our patients as well as the factors that determine their health.

Tubman Health provides primary and preventative care, community resources, social services, political education and advocacy.

Community-Led Research

As an organization working to create new systems and models, Tubman Health conducts quantitative and qualitative community-based research to identify community needs, priorities, strengths, and aspirations. Our research focuses not only on inequities but also on community assets, health strategies, and solutions. We aim to not simply close the gap on health outcomes, but to develop new, standard-setting models of care.

Designing a community-based health center that seeks to meet the needs of those most marginalized from the current medical model requires antiracist, community-based, and patient-centered health justice frameworks. Tubman Health's community-directed approach to research is rooted in respect for, and comprehension of, community interests and values.

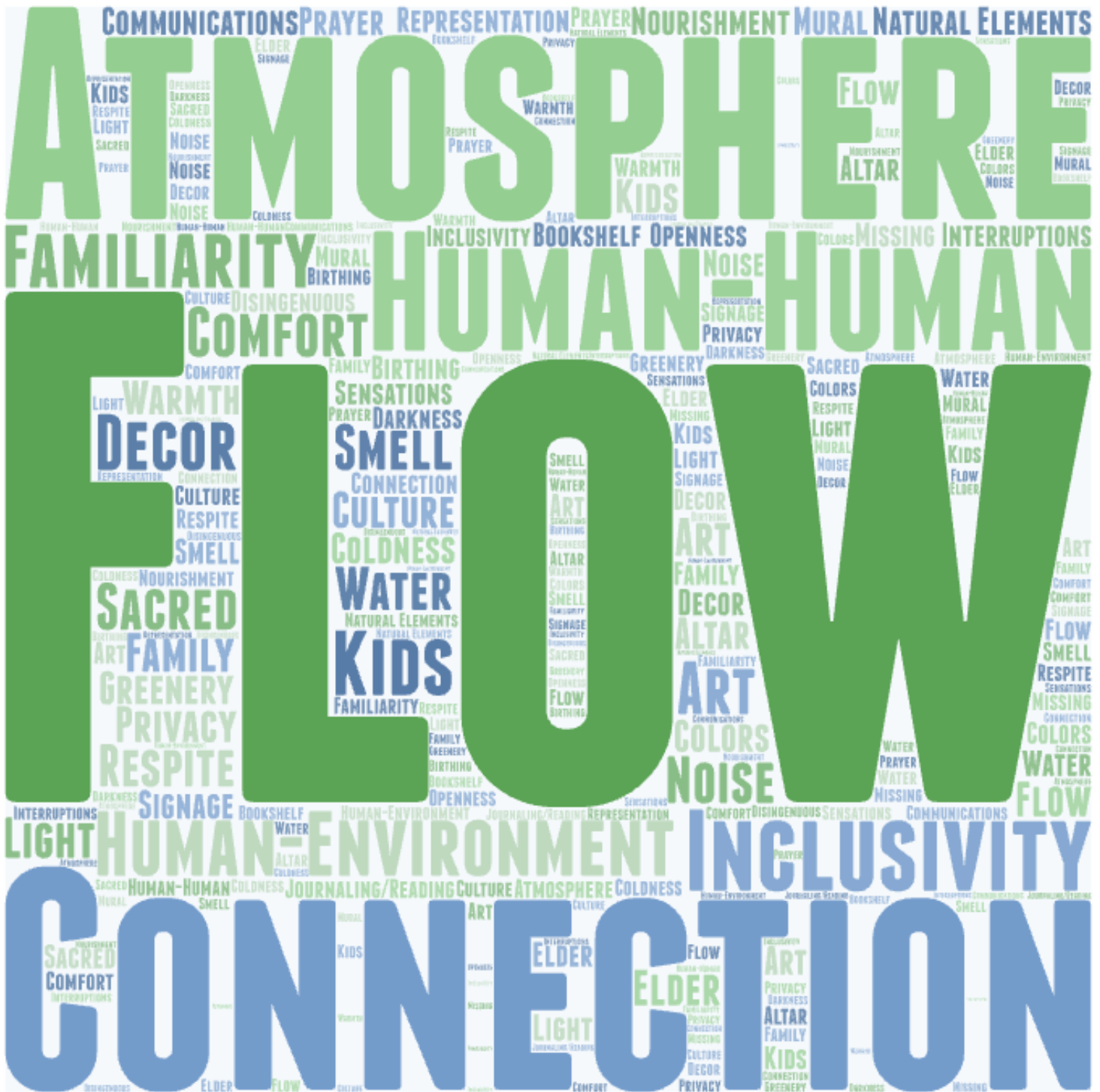
Research Question

What are Black, Indigenous and otherwise marginalized community-identified built environment components that create a nourishing, healing space for community to live, receive care, and connect?



Word Cloud

This word cloud shows the components of the built environment that participants in our community design process prioritized (the larger the word in the cloud, the higher the frequency the code was applied).



Findings

Themes are presented in this section in order of domain. These themes relate to community-directed visions for the built environment of the Flagship Clinic.

Theme 1: Atmosphere - Duality of privacy/openness with options to choose either/both (circular openness specifically)

Community highlighted the desire to be centered in their care and in their physical environment. Centering meant the freedom to choose privacy or openness in the space; there must be a mixture of both elements and types of spaces for their wellbeing. A community member explains:

"It would be having multiple touchpoints across between the moment that I walk in and the second that I leave, and then also recognizing that some people may not want to be spoken to and so that's when the space you know, the meditation space or maybe just to private rooms where people can go in to collect themselves and, you know, perhaps there's a there are writings or there are blank pieces of paper for them to write or, you know, just I'm thinking about how we can have multiple touchpoints for people to get access to what they need, socially or not socially, spiritually."

To create openness, community continually referred to shapes like ovals, spheres, domes, and C forms. Mentioned with the circular shapes was a request for high ceilings and wide hallways. Complimenting this openness is requests for thick walls that protect privacy. As stated:

"How sometimes there's a circle in the middle and people can be, you know, welcome there and, you know, but still private because you know, you have those privacy things, but, you know, but then I don't know that the services are emanating from the circle yet. I'm thinking about my right and so now I'm thinking about a dome, right, because then we have this high ceiling"





Theme 2: Atmosphere - Engagement and interaction of multiple senses to create ease

Community emphasized the importance of comfort and ease in the environment. To create this feeling, community often mentioned engagement with the five senses, specifically focusing on noise, smell, and sight. Water sounds in the background were a common request, specifically sounds of the ocean and waterfalls; smooth jazz was the next most requested sound. As explained by a community member:

“Thinking out of the box what about creating an environment when they come in that helps lower their make helps them relax. So whether it's the lighting, music, whatever, something that's allowing them to have a soul train line and really be thing they'll be doing a roving. So but just kind of more just like I think someone was saying, you know, they want to hear like the waterfall. And you know, the music and just comfortable with nice, comfortable chair. So if you've been running, right, you've been trying to get through traffic and everybody's slow today driving, like, you know, whatever. And you run it up escalators and running over people to get to some point where you can just go into this atmosphere where, you know, you can just distress sit in a nice, comfortable chair, listen to some music.”

Complimenting sound was a request for specific warm scents, like cinnamon, orange, and eucalyptus, and calming scents, like lavender, grapefruit, and vanilla. Colors paired with these scent requests, but with a broader range. Most community members saw warm, earthy, and autumn colors and tones. Others envisioned bright colors like yellow, soothing blue-green pastels, or bare white walls for imagination. As envisioned by a community member:

“Okay, when I first walk into a clinic, I want to smell that's my first thing is when I walk in, I want to smell earthy tones, things that grounded me and keep me resonated with nature and feeling to smell earthy tones, things that grounded me and keep me resonated with nature and feeling secure. So like, let's say was saying eucalyptus, like cinnamon, orange, things like that. And when I opened my eyes, I expect the tones to kind of resonate off of those smells, you know, earthy tones, things that keep you grounded, that are warm and inviting. I'm not too much into bright. It kind of makes me feel like sterile or fake. So something more neutral and natural. And taste. If those are the same things really calms, you.”

Theme 3: Familiarity - Visual expression and community-based art that represents diverse experiences within the community

To feel ownership of the space, welcomed to the space, and a part of the space, community requested arts-based representation of the diverse, intersectional experiences that exist within the Black community and allied cultural identities. Examples community provided included colorful murals and community pictures, art & poetry. A community member shares:

“You know, for me, it's really like if these that are in this space represent me or the community that I'm a part of, right. So things in my language right or things that resonate with me or my generation or my kid's generation or whatever, you know, it's not always gonna be the same so maybe a little picture you know, or something from Africa. Or something from Asia or something from India, that people can really like, oh, I know where that's from. Oh, that's from my culture. Oh, that's from my culture. I don't know how that's how I would like it is just to be open. And when you see other people, you're still connected with them, but you still have enough space in between and so that's what I would like.”

Importantly, the art and displays should be truly from the community and representative of the rich experiences, histories, and stories of community members. As community described:

“I think the idea of representing all black people in diaspora would be nice and not in the way of displaying like the white people hospitals. I work in the hospital system so like you don't have exactly not only even that even you job it has like different like cultural stuff. Like it has Somali things as almost like so they display it, but not necessarily. It doesn't feel like mine. So I would want it to be community based. It's like art that comes from the community if that makes sense. Rather than just saying, hey, we acquired this.”

Theme 4: Familiarity - Personalized and tailored mixed-use décor

To convey information and communications, community asked for integration into the design and décor. Specifically, these décor pieces were envisioned as interactive elements that serve an educational purpose and allow for connection. Examples provided include a bulletin board that can provide an update of community events, displays of Knick knacks to play with, art from providers, chalkboards for kids to draw on, and boards with education on the clinic itself. As described by a community member:

“I was thinking of a bulletin board that has community like events or what's going on in the community because I think a lot of times, I'm constantly searching for that. But if there is a community space, like, can we show what's going on so people can see and be like, oh, I want to go here. I want to go there.”

For these displays and other signage in the space, community emphasized the importance of language justice – the inclusivity of multiple dialects used by community. Community also asked for ways to be reminded of their own bravery in showing up for themselves in their healing. As described by a staff member during internal conversation, they wanted words encouraging community to meander. This inclusivity is illuminated by a member of community as:

“I also think that there should be affirmations or, or words of that invite and remind us of our own preciousness in that space. Is that when I come in is that I remind myself why it is that I come to care for my body. And my kids, you know, and I care for myself because I care for my community. And so I think that we have words that have expressions that that it reminds me why come to these spaces.”

Theme 5: Inclusivity and Accessibility – Consideration of intergenerational needs and accessible connection with each other in the space

Community emphasized the need for the space to accommodate the whole family, while supporting individual members to get the care and services they planned for. Families, from elders to kids, will visit the clinic and often times, together. Having a place for all age ranges to engage is important to facilitating connection to each other and independence at the same time. As one community member expressed:



“And then like, how do we communicate with each other while again, having our own privacy? That okay, I've gone off to the garden or I'm grounding in the garden or I've gone to do talk therapy with an elder you know, like, how do we have communication within when you come in as a unit that people can just freely choose their own journey, and have the time to do that but also stay connected with their family member who's also in the building?”

To create spaces that support intergenerational needs, specific design should focus on the user experience of specific individuals. For families, including viewpoints from children complements design for parental needs.

This parent from the community remembered their best experiences in kid friendly locations

"I was thinking a lot about like because I go everywhere with my kids. So accessibility with kids is I'm all about it. So if I know that it's a safe space to my kids. I'm all about so I don't know I envision wherever, you know, like, I feel like a doctor's office should have like, spaces for kids like you know like not like unsanitary areas where my kids are gonna go play and pick up books, right? No, I don't want that. I want to make sure that like it's nice, it's clean. It's welcoming to my kids. It's accessible for both me and my kids so I can focus on what I need to do, and they can have their space to play."



Spaces dedicated to youth should be complimented by spaces dedicated to elders; this can include spaces dedicated to both age experiences. The pandemic has drastically heightened the social isolation and loneliness our elders have been feeling; creating spaces for elders and others to connect is a health intervention in and of itself. Another member of the community shared their recognition of these needs of elders within the community:

"Like if you just had like a little area that said, hey, you know, like a little space where you just have your volunteers are like, if you want to come talk, come talk to me. I'm like borderless. Let's have a conversation. I think that'd be great for older folks and stuff. I mean anybody actually, but I just noticed that elders get really lonely and even a grocery store. You can notice they're trying to make conversations, but no one's really listening."

Theme 6: Inclusivity and Accessibility - Different spaces for different needs and spaces meeting different needs

With the broad range of atmosphere requests mentioned above in relation to senses, there was also an important call for desensitized spaces that are free of fragrances and absent of noises that can be overstimulating for individuals with neurodivergence. Our queer and transgender friends within the community highlighted inclusive design practices, like safe restrooms. For marginalized people within marginalized communities, it is important to understand and universally design to support a range of needs - this is truly meeting community where community is at.



A community member with autism shared:

"So those, you know, being aware of the setting is also I didn't get to say that earlier, but like lighting, you know, fluorescent lighting is really it can be overstimulating for a lot of folks, fragrance free environments are really important for folks who have sensitivities."

A community member with neurodivergence shared:

"So having different avenues, you know, for different people to navigate just like people with on the spectrum or for autism, or different types of disabilities or, you know, just even anxiety, right, sometimes there's just too much, too much going on, right?"

A community elder, who is the mother of a Black transgender child shared:

"As a parent of a black transgender child. I feel like maybe some gender-neutral bathrooms or single stall bathrooms something that says it's welcoming for our family members who are black queer folks and trans folks. And so I think that that's super important."

Theme 7: Natural Elements - Draping greenery that creates vibrancy

Community loved greenery in all spaces, with different types of greenery to create vibrancy and breathe life into the space. Specifically, community requested draping greenery on the walls that accented areas. As shared by community:

"I definitely agree with everybody when they were talking about the foliage because like even here, I think of Imagine if you had all these cool plants draping and then the lighting is not bright like bright bright, it's bright but not you know the bulb hanging, filtering through so it's kind of like being welcomed and warmth and surrounded by growth and life."





Theme 8: Natural Elements - Multi-use community garden for grounding, for medicine, and for food

The connection between the Earth, nature, and people was emphasized in visioning sessions; meaning a return to the soil and our roots. Many community members talked of community gardens with vegetables growing, medical herbs, Indigenous plants, edible greenery, and Zen Garden details like gravel. As this community member describes:

“Then the other thing that I thought about is having like a community garden or something in the back where we can grow food with each other. And then we can put our hands in the dirt and then we can bring healthy stuff so that we can come to the clinic and maybe plants and maybe bring things home so those were the things that came to me”

This communal green space serves multiple purposes, including creating a healing connection between body and Earth, as shared by this community member:

“And then when the system was talking about the outdoor space like the garden, right, so like grass, where you can like take off your shoes and ground and connect with the earth”

Theme 9: Natural Elements - Hydration of the body and environment

When talking about tea and water for the body, community also highlighted water within the environment. It was important for the sounds and water in the environment to be clean, fluid, running, and natural like the ocean and waterfalls.



A community member imparts:

“When you go and see a provider a lot of times you feel anxious about what they're going to say to you or how they're going to touch you or test they're going to run so a calming tea or a warm drink of water, Something like that really resonates with me. And what I like to hear is I really love sounds that keep me calm to like water sounds or certain acoustics.”



Not only did community request water sounds, but also water installations that grab attention. Ideas for water features ranged anywhere from fish tanks to water fountains, to the water shows famous on the Las Vegas Strip. As this community member shares:

“To expand on the like water like station like if there's, like way of having water and also hot water and like tea, like I thought, I think that would be really sweet. Like, in the area, like where folks have to sit. And the other thing I was thinking like, I think something that, like is soothing to me is if there's like the sound of running water so if there's like a water feature, that to me would like just change the ambiance of the space. Because I think some clinics feel so dry and I think like our water, that plants really help me feel more grounded in the space.”

Theme 10: Natural Elements - Natural and filtered lighting that inspires relaxation and safety

Community asked for light features focused on inviting natural, neutral light into the space through design features like skylights and large windows. These natural lighting features were often talked about in relationship with the structural design and shapes of the space as a whole. As these two community members collectively imagined:

“So it may be set up in like a C form or a half oval. So it's very encompassing, still very inviting, but it hits the walls and just the right way. Much like I think when you go into like the long houses even though they look long, a lot of the walls are curved. So the sound hits off in a certain way. I like open windows and skylights. So this is like a natural lit room. I like those walls that are covered and plants like neat, not the messy ones.”

“So for sight. I like a clean, large open space with high ceilings, kind of like what we have here in greenery, all white furniture and bare walls for imagination and sort of architecture a pill that emphasizes natural light.”

The lighting requested from community was directly tied back to the atmosphere created. To make spaces feel safe, relaxing, and comfortable, community asked for natural lighting that kept spaces well lit. This community member expresses:

"The place where you go to get care should be should have natural light and be beautiful. Because like, I really think that that impacts people's like, level of comfort and like how, like, how valued they feel. You know, like if you're sitting in a hellhole, you're gonna be like, get me out of here like, you know, you're right sitting in the emergency room, right, versus sitting in the, you know, I'm thinking about Swedish. They have like the beautiful views of the city, right."

Theme 11: Sacred Space - Dedicated spaces for prayer and honoring of the ancestors

An embrace of the ancestors and reminder of spiritual connection is central to community. Tubman Health often talks about being on ancestral assignment; community also asks for connection and protection from the ancestors. One example of a physical reminder of this connection and way to celebrate our connection is an altar. As community conveys:

"The first thing that I saw was an altar when you walk in, so that you know when you walk into this space and that space is protected by our ancestors and just the conjoining of those spirits and those whose shoulders we stand on and glide with I feel like there was something else."

"Spiritual Center to be a place for pouring out libations, meditating, prayer, calling ancestors into space, belonging, Sankofa."

Specifically, many members of the community asked for dedicated prayer spaces for different religions. Namely, there were requests for devoted spaces for those from the Muslim community to pray. This community member imparts:

"Another thing that I would really appreciate and want to see is that having some sort of reflection room so we could be inclusive for all so for Muslim you know, community they want to pray."



These places to write, read, and learn for all ages can be connective spaces or more private. Having these options meets readers and learners from community where they are at. As noted by this community member:

"I know some folks in our community are readers, and so it'd be nice to have different books of all sorts of genre. Also a kiosk would be nice for folks that don't like to interact with people."

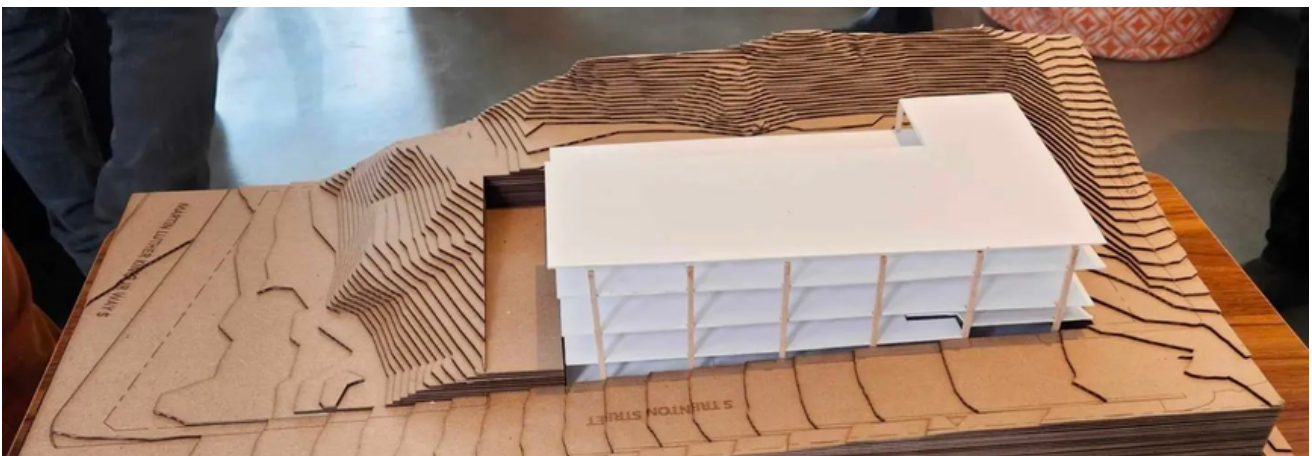
Theme 13: Spatial Flow - A range of comfortable spaces to sit and stop for a range of bodies

As part of the atmosphere of comfort and warmth, community requested spatial flow that leads them to ranges of seating, both built into the physical structures and freestanding. Community described sitting spaces that are filled with familiar fabrics, worn-in softness and comfort, chairs that can fit one or multiple people, and places to recline. As this community member envisions:

"I think in this space is that it's accessible to like all bodies have like chairs with arms, chairs without arms and like I love the variety of seating in this space as well. So we have kiddos that can sit on the beanbags. But we also have like chairs without arms for folks with bigger body so that we are like really supportive of all body types."

The flow of sitting, stopping, meandering, and resting spaces is complimented by a human-to human interaction. While some of these spaces can be dedicated to privacy and self, others can be about self in relationship with others. This member of community shares an example:

"In many parts of Africa that's been pioneered there because there was like one psychiatrist for like 40 million people. So all of the folks that need severe or even mild support with mental health. Don't get it. So there's this process where they train peers, like community kind of felt like aunties and grandmas to be specific. And that's what the friendship based the friendship bench is like, your like grandma's will sit in a bench in a park and people will come and just like talk about their problems and they're like, they're trained for some kind of mental health intervention"



Theme 14: Spatial Flow - Natural funneling that invites connection and slows down the pace

Community emphasized that the flow of the space must intentionally recognize, greet, and slow down the pace that life often takes us on. As a part of healing journeys and receiving health and wellness, community members are often rushing from place to place, as stated:

"I believe that information or vitals are never correct at the doctor's office. Because you have anxiety to get there. You're trying to get there so you don't miss it right? And then you're running back, put all your stuff and then you're putting it down, then you're stepping up on the scale, then you're sitting down, then the MA literally has three to five minutes with you. So they're running through all your vitals, well you just ran up the escalator and down the street."

Contrasting to this uncomfortable, rushed experience is a strategic flow that really sees people, offers touchpoints, and allows community to catch its breath. These two members of community highlight what they experience should feel like:

"Walking into this space is like just to be seen and to be acknowledged in various different ways, even from like staff and like how we acknowledged folks on when they walk in, but also like, again, representation in that space to know that I am seeing in that way. I think that's something that will really want to feel walking into the room."

"I think just an opportunity to be acknowledged every step of the way because sometimes you come in and maybe someone greets you, and maybe they don't, but even if someone greets you, you sign in, and then you're sitting there and who knows why you're there. Who knows how your day was before you got there, and who knows what fears or excitements you're carrying in that moment."

Being seen and having these touchpoints are especially important for intersectional lived experiences and individuals who might not otherwise receive any type of care and connection. For elders and others who are isolated, the Flagship Clinic may be their only point of contact. This community member shares on her loved one's experience:

"You know, my sister's perspective of a person who is living with a disability, and like has experienced isolation and like will go to the hospital, like for, for nothing, but for like that human connection. Right. So I think I love what you're missing out because we need to create spaces all throughout our community where people can just drop in and just say what's up, chop it up? section of your, you know, your clinic, so that they're not, you know, utilizing resources that somebody else could really be utilizing right, to get that human connection and attention."

Theme 15: Spatial Flow - Places to be held and loved, by self and by others

As a part of our collective healing and liberation, community asked for dedicated spaces to be held and loved on by self and by others in community. These relationships are nourished by spaces that allow for self-care practices like yoga, meditation, stretching, and reflection. This community member describes being physically held and embraced by providers:

"You gotta talk talking about the meditation room. I could see like some hammock swings, right or some type of swings that like you can just chill and just be rocked, you know for a minute you know and then a space where we're also embracing, like natural healing like the medicine cabinet from the earth, right? So there's an herbalist that's bringing in, you know, different herbs to help us with our situations."

Community asked to be received and held from the moment they walked into the space. The flow of the space must support providers and staff meeting community where they are at. As imagined by this community member:

"Then the last thing was like when you were talking about how do you want to be greeted and you don't like the Tubman Center, like she went and got us. She went and got us. So unlike we need greeters to go to the parking lot to get our elderly and get our men and women with children that need help and just help them with their bags and build that relationship, but she went and got us. So we need to we need to go in the parking lot."



Current System Critiques

Uneasy Feelings - Steer clear of sterile, sharp spaces that make people feel rushed and interrupted

While community lived mainly in the dream and imagination space, there were also clear aspects of current health systems that individuals did not like such as fluorescence, barriers intended to keep people out, antiseptic smells, cold clinical spaces, dark garages, sudden doors opening, and sterile environments. These made participants feel cold, rushed, and abruptly interrupted. As this community member juxtaposed:

"I love the greenery aspect instead of the kind of like the cold clinical garage aspect of a lot of clinics where it's really kind of intimidating and there's like some old broken Fisher Price toys in a corner and like a, an old Redbook magazine that's sitting on the counter that has like, somehow maple syrup on the cover of it."

Lack of Consideration - People lose engagement when spaces are in name only

Another important aspect of spatial flow to steer clear of is the stress created from being and feeling unseen. Community shared about negative experiences where there was of intentional engagement and fake representation in displays that ended up being tokenizing. As these two community members recalled:

"So when we talk about going into clinics, it's there's always some trauma even for me. What do I have to fight for in that space?"

"I think there's a stress it's stressful. It's stressful to be in a system where you are not like seen."

Thank you!

Thank you for engaging in this process with us! Thank you for sharing your experiences, wisdom, insights, dreams, hopes, and visions. Thank you for pouring your energy into dreaming with us. Let's continue to build together and bring this model to life through Tubman Health's flagship clinic.





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