

Bryant Focus Group

On Wednesday, July 19, 2017, residents of the Bryant Community in Ann Arbor met at the Bryant Community Center (3 W Eden Ct.) for a housing and neighborhood focus group. Due to the size of the group, participants were split into two focus groups (Group A and Group B). Overall, participants expressed their love for their community, and shared appreciation for the Community Action Network (CAN) at the Bryant Community Center. Discussion from these focus groups around housing, affordability, and neighborhood experiences informed the Assessment for Fair Housing Plan.

Group A

Facilitators: Sam Olson and Teresa Gillotti (OCED)

Participants: 8

Ideal Neighborhood Qualities

When asked, "If you could live anywhere and money was no object, what would you look for in a neighborhood?" participants described the following neighborhood qualities:

- Dogs on leash
- Well-maintained yards
- Trees trimmed
- Parks/playground/green space
- Family-friendly
- Close to schools
- No vacant homes
- Affordable
- Accessible to center
- Good location
- Food bank/ pantry
- Residents have jobs
- Close to transit (both sides of subdivisions)
- Friendly
- Diverse
- As nice as west side
- Bryant Center great for kids
- Quiet
- Schools
- Community standards
- Safety
- Proximity to stores

When asked about how Bryant compares to these ideal neighborhood qualities, here's what people had to say:

- Close to transit
 - Bryant is between two bus lines, making it easy to get to.
 - Bus routes need to run later at night and more frequently on Sundays.
- Bryant is a quiet neighborhood.
- Schools had mixed reviews.
- Community standards also had mixed reviews. Participants vocalized that the annual neighborhood clean-up is critical.
- Bryant Neighborhood is safe, and neighbors look out for each other.
- Participants shared that nearby stores (a Kroger and shopping center) are not close enough to walk, which is challenging for those without a car.

Resources Used

Participants had learned about things like schools, programs, child care, bus routes, and so on through Skylar at the Bryant Community Center, their neighbors, schools, the community newsletter, and elsewhere.

Housing

Four of eight participants currently own their home. Here's the breakdown of how long they have been a homeowner:

- Less than 2 years: 0
- 3 -5 years: 1
- 6 - 10 years: 0
- More than 10 years: 3

When homeowners were asked if they consider their home as affordable (including mortgage, property taxes, and insurance), there was a mix of responses, including:

- Yes, all paid off.
- Yes and no, with mortgage paid off.
- No, it is expensive.

Two participants currently rent from private landlords. When asked if they consider their monthly rent to be affordable, here's what they shared:

- It's ridiculous to rent or buy, not to mention if the home needs renovation.
- Houses range from \$110,000 to \$115,000 without a basement.
- Rents (and homes) are on the high end.
- Extra utilities make it more expensive, ranging from \$1,100 to \$1,200 to \$1,500 a month.

Cost of Living

Facilitators switched gears to talk a little more about affordability and the cost of living, for example, monthly mortgage or rent, utilities, transportation costs, child care, et cetera. When asked how (if at all) the cost of living in the Bryant neighborhood has changed over the past 2 to 3 years, participants shared mixed responses:

- The increase in cost of living is gradual and consistent.
- It depends; utilities vary with weather.
- Mention of the [Burrito Cost Metric](#).

Loan debt (student loans, specifically), child care, utilities including cable and internet, food, and insurance/car insurance are among major expenses, after housing.

Looking for Housing

For participants who moved to the Bryant neighborhood less than 2 years ago (rent or own), they said they moved from the Packard Road area and the Pine Lake area.

One participant said they actively looked for an apartment or house to rent within the last 2 years. They mentioned it was expensive everywhere when looking for a 2 bedroom, 1 bathroom place.

When participants were asked, theoretically, if they were to leave Bryant, where would they look for housing, participants mentioned the following areas:

- Ann Arbor - the West Side and North Maple areas
- Dexter
- The other side of the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport for bigger house sizes
- Nowhere - nowhere to move, all too expensive and might find something smaller and more pricey

When looking for housing (in the last 5 years), participants were asked about their experience when applying to rent or trying to purchase a home they were interested in. Two participants said they had a good experience and had help looking around in Ann Arbor. One participant mentioned it was easier to get a loan when they had looked for a home back in 2005. Other participants shared they had no desire to buy and that there were limitations with money/costs.

Themes & Strategies

Participants brainstormed themes that came up in discussion, as well as some strategies to address the themes.

Themes	Strategies
Rent is outrageous everywhere in Ann Arbor. People are moving to surrounding areas, making these areas - like Saline- more expensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a second or third job. • Manage money well. • Having roommates help with bills, but sometimes homes are too small for roommates.
Most properties are well-kept, but some need more attention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlords need to care for their rental properties. • Community Action Network (CAN) can support community and give assistance. • Christmas in July is an example of the Senior Center help in Bryant.
Child care is expensive everywhere	CAN has a great afterschool program, with snack, homework help, and different activities for kids.

When asked if there was anything else OCED staff should know about the Bryant neighborhood that hadn't been covered yet, participants mentioned these two situations:

- Areas of flooding - luckily in the yard and not in the house. Homeowner has worked with the City of Ann Arbor about the flooding on two occasions.
- Snow removal service is needed for sidewalks.

Group B

Facilitators: Tara Cohen (OCED) and Skylar Woodman (CAN)

Participants: 7

Ideal Neighborhood Qualities

When asked, "If you could live anywhere and money was no object, what would you look for in a neighborhood?" participants described the following neighborhood qualities:

- Quiet
- Schools
- Cleanliness
- Safety
- Proximity to stores
- Mass transit

When asked about how Bryant compares to these ideal neighborhood qualities, here's what people had to say:

- Bryant is a quiet neighborhood.
- Schools had mixed reviews. A few people said they were happy with the schools, one said her child had a unpleasant experience at Bryant elementary, but good experiences in middle and high school.
- Cleanliness also had mixed reviews. Participants vocalized that the annual neighborhood clean-up (a CAN-sponsored event) is critical.
- Bryant Neighborhood is safe, and neighbors look out for each other. Participants spoke about a tragedy in the neighborhood (circa 1990) and how the neighborhood needed to heal from that.
- Bryant isn't close to stores. Kroger is not close enough to walk, which is challenging for those without a car. There is a shopping center in proximity to walk to, but there isn't much there. Participants were appreciative of CAN's food pantry for neighbors who have a hard time getting to a grocery store.
- Mass transit (i.e. buses, light rail) had mixed reviews. On the plus side, Bryant is between two bus lines and are easy to get to, but bus routes need to run later and more frequently on Sundays. One participant said she bought a car for her daughter because she couldn't reliably get to and from her job on the bus.

When asked if there was anything else participants like and appreciate about Bryant that isn't covered in the lists above, participants noted there are tons of parks in Bryant.

Participants were asked if - looking at these items above- they would say Bryant is one of the best places to live in Ann Arbor:

- Several participants said "yes" right away- because of affordability and great value.
- One participant said yes because he was born and raised here.
- One participant said yes- if one hasn't lived too many other places.
- Another mentioned that there are some boarded up homes.

Resources Used

Participants had learned about things like schools, programs, child care, bus routes, et cetera, through CAN, the Ann Arbor Observer, and word of mouth.

Housing

Five participants currently own their home. Here's the breakdown of how long they have been a homeowner:

- Less than 2 years: 1
- 3 -5 years: 0
- 6 - 10 years: 2
- More than 10 years: 2

When homeowners were asked if they consider their home as affordable (including mortgage, property taxes, and insurance), there were a mix of responses:

- Yes: 4
- No, as a new homeowner, one participant spoke about the taxes seeming outrageous, however, other participants immediately responded that they are very low compared to other areas in Ann Arbor.

One participant currently rents from a private landlord. When asked if they consider their monthly rent to be affordable, they said their rent has been the same for many, many years.

Cost of Living

Facilitators switched gears to talk a little more about affordability and the cost of living (i.e. monthly mortgage or rent, utilities, transportation costs, child care, etc.). When asked how (if at all) the cost of living in the Bryant neighborhood has changed over the past 2 to 3 years, participants shared mixed responses:

- Stayed the same: 1 participant
- Risen some, but not enough to affect having/wanting to move away: 4 participants
 - Utilities, internet and taxes have increased
- Risen quite a bit to the point of thinking about moving: 1 participant
 - One participant explain they are retired and want to downsize as their current house is too big.
 - They are on a waitlist for senior housing on South Maple Road in Ann Arbor.

Auto expenses, including insurance and car payments, utilities, home maintenance, and child care are among the major expenses, after housing.

Looking for Housing

None of the participants said they actively looked for an apartment or house to rent within the last few years. One homeowner said that landlords are being more selective these days and no longer going to court for evicting tenants.

For participants who moved to the Bryant neighborhood less than 2 years ago (rent or own), they said they moved from Ann Arbor-Saline Road area, Woodland Mews Condos (behind Busch's), and Dallas TX (originally from Michigan).

When participants were asked, theoretically, if they were to leave Bryant, where would they look for housing. Participants mentioned the following areas:

- Out of Ann Arbor
- Jamaica
- Southwest Ann Arbor or Scio Township (Jackson/Zeeb Road area)
- South Maple Road
- Geddes Road, considering a house that's for auction that would be close to the hospital (husband's work) and would be quieter and more spacious between lots compared to lots in Bryant.

Themes & Strategies

Participants brainstormed themes that came up in discussion, as well as some strategies to address the themes.

Themes	Strategies
More child care is needed in Bryant. There is currently none in the neighborhood, but two participants are retired from running day care programs in the neighborhood. One noted she has people showing up at her door, asking for child care, and she could offer before and after school care.	Child care options through University of Michigan employment and after school programs
Transit: there is a need for more routes that run later to ensure people can get to and from work at early/late/weekend hours without needing a car. Sunday routes are currently only once on the hour.	
Access to jobs: one participant said they moved to Ann Arbor specifically for the access to jobs at the University of Michigan and other corporations in the area.	
Ann Arbor Police Department/Community engagement: the nearby police force was cut and there is no more community policing, neighborhood watch, or safety liaison. Safety Town is no longer in Bryant as it rotates to different parts of the city. There is a need for community engagement for when police are present in Bryant.	Citizens Police Academy is a free program with training (food provided) to foster community involvement.
Other safety: there is a need for speed bumps on Champagne (main road in neighborhood) to slow down both buses and cars speeding through. Participants were told there was a several-year waiting list to get speed bumps installed.	
Recreation/organized sport teams: One participant said they'd like to see more sports in the neighborhood for children and youth.	Utilize the elementary school gym for more recreation activities (in evenings/weekends)

Before finishing the evening, when asked if there was anything else OCED staff should know about the Bryant neighborhood that hadn't been covered yet, participants mentioned:

- There is a big age disparity/gap (few middle-aged residents)
- The neighborhood doesn't have the greatest image - image of low-income and Section 8 housing, which is no longer true
- Residents could do more to promote the Bryant area.