

Parkridge/Southside Focus Group

On Thursday, August 3, 2017, focus group participants met at the Parkridge Community Center (591 Armstrong Dr) 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). Group A included individuals who live in the Parkridge/Southside neighborhood whereas Group B included individuals from surrounding neighborhoods and who are involved in the community at large.

Participants overwhelmingly expressed their love for their community, commenting how they feel they can rely on their neighbors and that the neighborhood feels like one big family. Discussion from these focus groups about exclusion, housing, affordability, and neighborhood qualities informed the Assessment for Fair Housing Plan.

Group A

Facilitators: Cherisa Allen (Parkridge Community Center Staff) and Sam Olson (OCED)

Participants: 18

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:

- Municipalities working together
- Kid and senior friendly
- Recreation
 - Several swimming pools
 - Parks and park services
 - Volleyball court
 - Soccer field
 - Walking trails
- Yard space
- Adequate public services: police, fire, garbage pick-up
- Transportation
- Crime free
- Affordable housing
- Porch life after 9pm without gun fire or profanity
- Access to shopping, grocery, restaurants
- Community center with after school programs, mentoring with young and old
- Good school in area
- Handicap accessible
- Library *in* neighborhood
- Nice roads
- Local jobs and job training

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

- Positive attributes in Parkridge/Southside:
 - Walking trails
 - Crime free - no break-ins, quiet neighborhood
 - Affordable housing - new housing development
 - Access to library - not in neighborhood, but nearby
- Participants expressed mixed reviews with the following qualities:
 - Swimming pools
 - Access to shopping, grocery, restaurants - access may be an issue, but the area is close to shopping and grocery stores
 - Community center - could be bigger and with more activities
 - Schools - Neighborhood schools are the biggest thing people look for in an area, especially a school in walking distance

Side conversations conveyed that there isn't a need or want for amenities to be located in the neighborhood. Going out to the grocery store allows them to see other areas and their progress, and if everything was so close by, they'd never have the excuse to go out and explore. There was also a general consensus on how there are other narratives that talk about the neighborhood in a negative light/perception (i.e. crime), but how the perspective of residents is much more positive.

Resources Used

Participants had learned about things like schools, programs, child care, bus routes, and so on through word of mouth, Facebook, Cherisa and the Parkridge Community Center, ewashtenaw.org, being active in neighborhood, the school board meetings, neighborhood watch, and CAB (Community Action Board).

Housing

Seven of eighteen 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: 3
- 6 - 10 years: 1
- More than 10 years: 2

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

- When house was bought, yes; now buying a house- no
- There was also conversation around homeownership programs such as FHA and VA loans.

Five participants currently rent from private landlords. One participant uses a housing choice voucher. When asked if renters consider their monthly rent to be affordable, participants said yes. When asked if they would prefer to own, they also said yes.

Cost of Living

The group 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, and so on. When asked how (if at all) the cost of living in the Parkridge/Southside neighborhood has changed over the past 2 to 3 years, participants shared mixed responses:

- Housing has become ridiculous
 - No place to rent, barely afford what is available
 - No inventory leads to higher rents (\$1,600/month)
- Taxes and insurance is going up
- General consensus that owning is more affordable in this area and in Ypsi than renting

Child support, kids, student loans and tuition, taxes, groceries, car and car insurance, and utilities are among major expenses, after housing.

Looking for Housing

None of the participants actively looked for an apartment or house to rent or own in the last two years. When participants were asked, theoretically, if they were to leave Parkridge/Southside, where would they look for housing, participants mentioned the following areas:

- Out of state/country
- Live in country with acres
- Grand Rapids
- Detroit
- Northern Michigan
- Inkster

Participants were asked about their experience when applying to rent or trying to purchase a home they were interested in, and if they felt like their options were in any way limited or that they had been treated differently. Here's what they shared:

- Barriers
 - Credit is a big issue
 - Expectations are not met: affordable, accessible, safe, bug free
 - Down payment/rent deposit
- Treated Differently
 - Section 8
 - People won't consider
 - Stigma
 - Lack of education
 - History of homeownership, less about credit and foreclosure
 - Letters of expectation
 - Race and age
 - Gender more in renting
 - Renting with kids

Themes & Strategies

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

Themes	Strategies
Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of diversity • Lack of funding • School of choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified teachers with passion • Review school curriculum • Leadership that is invested in the community and families • Have teachers that teach in school and live in neighborhood • Diversify - have a balance of seasoned teachers and new teachers • Bloom where you are planted- Attend PTA meetings • Balance of job availability and hiring process

Lastly, participants shared the most challenging or frustrating thing about living in Parkridge/Southside, and the flip side, the most positive thing about living here.

Challenging/Frustrating	Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusting new residents • Next door neighbors • Dog poo on lawn • Not being able to use resources (for example, maintenance for the ball park) • Lack of neighborhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Church is across the street with large parking lot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly neighbors in cul-de-sac • Saying hello • Love from neighbors = family • Neighbors and connections been around for a long time • Close to family • Everyone knows each other • Small town feel • Ask who is who- want to be in the know

Group B

Facilitators: Teresa Gillotti and Tara Cohen (OCED)
 Participants: 5

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:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Schools • Churches • Cleanliness • Good grocery stores • Parks and gardens • Accessibility - i.e. close to a major road or freeway entrance • Community Centers • Families with kids/Multi-generational households- Kids bring a certain energy to a neighborhood • Small businesses/Community-driven entrepreneurship/Thriving longstanding "Mom & Pops" - creates agency and voice for residents in the neighborhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity • Art & Education • Promotion/education about neighborhood history • Places in walking distance • Amusement/Entertainment - i.e. live music/theater venues, clubs, lounges • Growth • Transportation |
|---|--|

When asked about how their neighborhood(s) compare to these ideal neighborhood qualities, participants noted their neighborhood(s) has public schools, churches, parks, families with kids and multi-generations, small businesses, is accessible and diverse, but lacks community centers and entertainment/amusement options.

Resources Used

Participants had learned about things like schools, programs, child care, bus routes, and so on through the following outlets:

- Facebook/Social Media
- Word of mouth
- Bulletin boards at: Ypsi Food Co-op / Public Library / EMU
- Ypsi First Fridays newsletters
- Neighborhood newsletter (quarterly)
- City website (online social calendar)
- Google for local/Ypsi events
- Radio – 97.9, 92.3, 105.1, 107.5, 102.7, NPR stations (88.3, 91.7, 89.1)
- Marquees at: Senior Center / High School / UAW Hall
- Print newspaper – Ann Arbor News

Housing

Two of 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: 0
- More than 10 years: 1

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

- Yes; we had renters until just a few years ago to make mortgage affordable.
- No (emphatic); inherited family home, mortgage is higher than s/he can afford.

Three participants currently rent from private landlords. When asked if renters consider their monthly rent to be affordable, participants generally said yes; one explained that rent has become more affordable due to a new job and another participant splits the rent (by renting out rooms in a large house). Participants had mixed feelings when asked if they would prefer to own or would consider owning a home, sharing that they would consider it, but haven't thought much about it, that it is an eventual goal, but not ready for the upkeep of homeownership, and lastly, that they understand the challenges of homeownership and the possibility of losing a home, but ultimately, it would be nice to have a place to call home and fix up.

Cost of Living

The group switched gears to talk a little more about affordability and the cost of living. When asked how (if at all) the cost of living in their neighborhood has changed over the past 2 to 3 years, here's what they shared:

- Stayed about the same: 2
 - Stayed about the same
 - Haven't noticed anything change other than rent (varies by apartment)
- Risen some but not enough to affect having or wanting to move away: 2
 - Made our duplex into a single family home a few years ago, so housing costs rose with loss of renter
 - Overall cost of living has risen, but also my income has risen
- Risen quite a bit to the point of thinking about moving: 0

Travel, entertainment, food and dining out, transportation, and property/building a house are among major expenses, after housing.

Looking for Housing

Three participants actively looked for an apartment or house to rent or own in the last two years. When participants were asked, theoretically, if they were to leave Parkridge/Southside, where would they look for housing, participants mentioned the following areas:

- Normal Park or Historic Southside or Depot Town
- 1 Barton Hills Drive (smallest, most affordable house in Barton Hills)
- A “big, nice house neighborhood”
- Maybe a slightly nicer apartment than where I am now
- Never want to move

Participants were asked about their experience when applying to rent or trying to purchase a home they were interested in, and if they felt like their options were in any way limited or that they had been treated differently. Here are some barriers they discussed:

- Credit Score
- Sexual orientation
- Income
- Privilege
- Location (self-imposed limitation)
- Looked for diversity and other people of color/people who like me; wouldn't feel safe in a predominantly white area.

Themes & Strategies

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

Themes	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and color boundaries • Privilege • Timing and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming/Community Centers/Education to learn about others • Financial literacy workshops • Homeownership workshops • More educational opportunities/Mixers-for socializing • Neighborhood Facebook pages • More festivals with wide reach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the events as close to your target audience as possible • Use of church and community center's buses/vans

Participants in Group B concluded their time together with the following statements and ideas:

- It was promised that jobs created by the Parkridge Homes project would be given to local residents, but hiring has not been local enough. A local construction company may have employed more local residents.
- The “Break Up” of original Parkridge Homes – the tear down displaced a lot of people for more than a year, and some are still couch surfing now. Timeline has not been consistent with what was promised, nor have families been provided subsidized housing for the interim until new homes are ready to move back in.
- Another participant agreed that he’s noticed a lot of kids are gone from the neighborhood now, as result of Parkridge Homes redevelopment.