

# METHODOLOGY

FALL 2016 BESTER NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY



Bester Community of Hope (BCOH) is an initiative of San Mar focused on positive outcomes for the children and families located in the Bester Elementary School neighborhood in Hagerstown, Maryland. Our focus is to catalyze a community driven process for social change and to ensure that none of our efforts are pursued without the feedback and ownership of local constituents. Patiently listening to those most affected by our work created a shared understanding and being consistently responsive built the necessary trust to implement our effort. Therefore, to better understand the strengths and challenges of the community, we pursued a community wide survey during the fall of 2016.



Prior to conducting the full neighborhood survey, three other data collection efforts were conducted to get a better understanding of strengths and needs in the catchment. After Bester was identified, we turned our energy away from the provider community towards the Elementary school children and their families to hear firsthand their hopes and dreams and gain a better understanding how we can be a partner. After a large community event, we first surveyed all the children of the school with three basic questions: 1) What do you hope to be when you grow up? 2) What do you hope for your community? 3) What do you think we should do about it? The answers were often profound asking for the community to come together to address significant social problems. It was through those inspiring words “from the mouths of babes” served as a call to action to the community at large, as kids were telling the adults loud and clear that some things needed to change.

In the spring of 2016, a survey was sent home with each Bester Elementary student focused on systemic needs in the domains of health, education and neighborhood connections, all of which were identified as priority in our logic model created with community partners in January of 2016. A total of 117 families returned their survey to the school, helping us to capture a snapshot of areas to focus our energy. (Appendix I)

The third data collection effort was conducted on August 20, 2016 by five Bester Community of Hope representatives during our event, the South Side Community Block Party, located at Bester Elementary School. The 20 question survey (Appendix II) was created with input from a subcommittee from our Community Advisory Board, which consisted of representation from the faith community, local businesses, community groups, local agencies and residents of the community. The questions posed were directly from the interests of community leaders and partners in an effort to gain insight in the categories of the community’s perceptions of safety and trust, social cohesion and efficacy, economic needs, education and resources. Over 1,000 people attended the community gathering located in the heart of the Bester Community of Hope catchment, and a total of 129 responses were collected utilizing iPads during the three hour event. Respondents identified the specific neighborhood they currently lived in and the data was broken down by neighborhood as well as presented in aggregate form. Key findings included: Areas where there was an active neighborhoods group or an active tenant association had a greater sense of positive relationship with their neighbors; Affordable housing and opportunities to expand skills were lacking; Only one third of the respondents had reliable internet access; three quarters cared about how others perceived their neighborhood. Residents also gave important feedback to the “Field of Dreams” development project where the community expressed a desire for improved spaces for children to play including recreational resources.

To complement those initial survey efforts designed by neighborhood leaders, BCOH aimed to balance that organic and tangible feedback with a broader and more scientific approach by going door to door across the entire Bester Elementary district. We explored a variety of proven instruments in order to get a more precise representation of each neighborhood. Adam Roberson, Acting Executive Director for the Community Free Clinic and a partner in our initiative, suggested the Sense of Community Index 2. The survey is managed by Community Science of Gaithersburg, MD, which Adam had discovered in the course of his Doctoral research at Liberty University. The Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2) measures the psychological essence of a community and is comprised of four elements as described below.<sup>1</sup>

Reinforcement of Needs: This element examines the person-environment fit and how well the individual member's needs are fulfilled through the resources available within the community. Needs are more than basic for this index as this element looks at more intimate needs such as status, shared values, and mutual benefit.

Membership: Membership explores the community and individual definition of boundaries, identification with the community, personal investment and emotional safety. Boundaries, in terms of membership, are not about geographical lines but rather who belongs and who does not. It also examines if there are expressions of membership or a symbol system that codes belonging.

Influence: Influence within a community flows two ways. Each individual member has the potential to sway the community one way or another and the community as a whole has the potential to impact each individual. Both perceived power and conformity play a role in influence.

Shared Emotional Connection: This element explores the frequency of interaction among members, the quality of the interaction, and how deeply members connect with the history of the community, however recent, and with each other.

Technology played an essential role to easily collect information digitally and upload to an online platform for ease of analysis. After reviewing several options, Survey Analytics by QuestionPro was chosen. QuestionPro provided the opportunity to format the responses to each question in a way that would provide relevant data, allow the collection of information offline and to group the data into separate neighborhoods. Additionally, Survey Analytics provides a myriad of options for tabulating and analyzing data as well as presentation of results. The SCI-2 is not available through an online platform, therefore, it was built onto Survey Analytics' system so that surveyors could utilize iPads to collect information offline while going door to door and then upload the responses to the platform. Survey Analytics provides the ability to format validation, logic and scoring in a variety of question types. In addition, the ability to subdivide data based on variables is available.

Lieutenant Thomas Alexander, Ph.D of the Hagerstown Police Department offered guidance on generating a representative sample for our efforts. Lt. Alexander holds a doctorate degree in Research Methodology from University of Maryland. It was his suggestion to use an evidence based tool that led us to the Sense of Community Index 2 in order to have a level of integrity in our research. To generate a random representative sample, a list of all residential addresses within the catchment area of Bester Elementary was requested and received from the City of Hagerstown. The list totaled 1,792 addresses which were provided on an Excel spreadsheet. *It is important to note that some of these addresses reflected one structure, not the total number of units that could be located within that building.* To

reiterate, that means we did not generate a representative sample by the total population of people but rather by the total number of residential addresses as provided by the City of Hagerstown. Due to the significant amount of transiency, it would be difficult to have a precise population count of the area. Using a 5% interval margin of error with a 95% confidence rate, Custom Insight ([www.custominsight.com](http://www.custominsight.com)) generated the random sample to be 317 addresses. We then utilized the random number generator through the University of Alberta (<http://www.augustana.ab.ca/~mohrj/algorithms/randpick.html>) to generate random numbers which were then correlated with the numbers on the Excel spreadsheet to select the addresses which would be surveyed.



Knowing the data gathered would be especially useful to neighborhood based organizations, we added an initial question to identify the location of the home in one of seven distinct block groupings. The overall catchment area was broken down into seven sectors based primarily on the boundaries of the five Neighborhoods First groups in the Bester Elementary catchment area. Neighborhoods First, of which there are thirteen total, is an initiative which partners the City of Hagerstown with neighborhood based citizen groups to contribute to the overall look and feel of their unique area. The other two remaining locations without a neighborhood based group received their own boundary based on the remaining geography.

Surveyors set out on September 30, 2016, to begin the work by going to the pre-selected addresses. To help people recognize and become familiar with who we are, surveyors wore green t-shirts with the BCOH logo. If no one was home, a slip was left stating the address had been selected to participate in a neighborhood survey and they could call to set up a time to meet or we would be back another day. Several challenges were presented with this approach. For example, there were a total of 21 addresses within sector E and over the course of one week, 19% completed the survey, 1% refused participation, 1% were inaccessible due to pipeline repair work, and 57% were not home at the time of the visit. We realized that utilizing this method would be extremely time consuming and require frequent regeneration of random addresses to reach the full number of 317 completed surveys within the catchment area if we were unable to connect with the residences selected.

There was concern that there may not be true representation of each sector through the random selection of the whole address list and some of the addresses pre-selected were abandoned or vacant properties. Also, while going to the pre-selected addresses, we were passing people who were home and approachable but not selected. As the number of vacant properties presented a major issue as well as the other factors, the necessary decision was made to knock on all doors in each section; an imperfect scientific decision but a necessary one.

We then reorganized the master list of 1,792 addresses into the seven neighborhoods to get the total number of residential addresses in each sector. By dividing the number of addresses in each sector by the total number of addresses in the catchment, a ratio of addresses to sector was generated. Using that ratio, we were able to understand how many of the 317 (representative sample) were required in each sector to have a true representation of the larger catchment area.

Example: There were 163 listed addresses in one sector.  $163 \text{ divided by } 1792 = .09\%$

$.09\% \text{ of } 317 = 28$ . Therefore, 28 addresses within that sector were required.

The identified ratios per neighborhood sector are as follows: (A) Elizabethtown West -28; (B) Historic Heights – 48; (C) North Central – 3; (D) Locust Point – 120; (E) Frederick Street Corridor – 15; (F) South End – 50; (G) Historic City Park – 50. (Appendix III)

Shortly after this decision was made, a front page article in The Herald-Mail was published on Sunday, October 9, 2016, reading “Vacant Hagerstown buildings count: 1,000+”. As we recognized the impact vacant properties had on our process, we felt it was necessary to understand how much so. A Public Information Act Request Form was submitted to the City specifically for addresses of known vacant properties within the Bester Elementary School catchment area. On November 2, 2016, a listing of approximately 602 “vacant residential blighted” and “vacant residential non blighted” properties identified by the City was received. A total of 17% of the properties listed in the document are located within the BCOH catchment area and of the 204 residential properties listed with the City as blighted, 24% are located in this community. These numbers did not significantly impact the overall number required to have a representative sample from each neighborhood, but many community members did cite the vacant properties as a community issue during the course of the survey. Community members stated these properties were often vandalized, frequented by homeless individuals, used as hang outs and were poorly maintained. Community members were concerned that blighted properties were decreasing the overall value of their home and attractiveness of their neighborhood.

With a better understanding of how to best achieve the required number of respondents, surveyors began knocking on every door and not just pre-selected addresses, allowing for those who were home and willing to participate to do so and for surveyors to pass abandoned or vacant properties. Surveyors had the ability to talk with residents of the sector who may be walking their dog, doing yard work, visiting a neighbor, or sitting on their front steps. Surveys were conducted at various times during the day including mornings and evenings during the week as well as weekends to be most available to a variety of community members.

Each address that participated in the survey was recorded for several purposes. First, it was important to know which addresses had been approached so that we did not duplicate responses. If the resident(s) of the address refused participation, we did not want to revisit that address and these were noted as well. At the conclusion of the survey with each resident, an opportunity to be entered to win a Shop n’ Save gift card was provided. We purposefully did not include this information prior to the completion of the survey so that participants were not swayed into participation by the chance of winning something. Rather than present the opportunity to win a gift card as an incentive, it was provided as a way to thank the participant for their time and attention and give them a reason to stay tuned into our effort. Participating addresses and, if permitted by the resident, the name of the resident were recorded so that we would know where and to whom to deliver the gift card. Although QuestionPro provides the number of surveys completed in total and by sector, recording the addresses was a valid way to track our process and ensure actual residential addresses and residents were being surveyed. In addition, it provided BCOH a mechanism to follow up with community members regarding the release of survey results, planned activities and events.

Community members in all neighborhoods expressed a variety of strengths and weakness pertaining to their particular neighborhood. There were concerns regarding crime related incidents and a perceived lack of police response. In one primarily residential neighborhood, residents felt that crime had increased in the past year and they are seeing more theft. In some neighborhoods, members reported an increase in homelessness and vagrancy with unknown individuals present at different hours. In many neighborhoods, members reported substance use and distribution and could point out the addresses that were of concern.

In the majority of neighborhoods, community members described the increasing number of rental properties as opposed to home owner occupied properties as problematic. One resident is quoted as saying, "homeowners are more invested in the property and neighborhood than renters are, so now we have more renters than homeowners and this is a problem" and another as saying "I'm from DC. This is more affordable, sure, but landlords here are sloppy. They want full rent but they don't want to fix anything around here." Many of the rental properties in the area are handled by property management companies as opposed to independent, local landlords.

The last survey was completed on November 23, 2016, a total of 55 days after the process had begun. Our goal was to complete canvassing as well as analyzing data and distributing reports within six weeks, however, we dramatically underestimated the amount of time and energy that was required. Surveyors went out in teams of two or more for safety purposes, therefore, surveying time had to be scheduled in advance in order to ensure manpower was available. The survey team was comprised of four staff, an AmeriCorps VISTA, and two MSW interns all who were also fulfilling their responsibility associated with their role within the organization and therefore the core team was comprised of four of these individuals. Efforts to recruit volunteers through local partnerships were made with little results which was surprising given the amount of interest in developing this plan. We did benefit from one volunteer for a few hours one day through the United Way's Day of Giving and would have had more had the event not been postponed due to inclement weather. Future survey work will definitely require us to gain a deeper understanding of why efforts to recruit volunteers proved unsuccessful.

With the survey work completed, we then began the task of breaking down the data into meaningful groupings for interpretation and analysis. (See profiles and Appendix IV) Through Survey Analytics, we were able to have one larger report detailing the responses for the overall catchment area and to be able to divide and group the data to get a deeper look at each unique area and gain insight to the sense of community within each neighborhood. We combined that aggregate data with a few other data sources that we had available to us for each profile.

We felt it was important to look beyond the percentages and numbers provided by the survey data and explore the roots and growth of each neighborhood for a more intimate understanding of its narrative. We met with Stephen Bochmiller, City of Hagerstown Planning and Zoning Administrator as well as local historian and author, to provide the historical context of each neighborhood. We purchased a subscription to Mission Insite and partnered with PolicyMap to capture supporting demographic and social indicator data for the catchment area as well as the City, County and State for comparison. (See Appendix V) We also used our boots on the ground to collect as much neighborhood asset information as possible to highlight the great strengths that exist in each community.

Looking back, we set out to accomplish a straight forward task of surveying the community and collecting data to identify strengths and needs and establish a reference point to use when measuring

outcomes. What actually happened was we developed a much deeper understanding of “the feel” of each street in the neighborhood. More than numbers and percentages, we built relationships and began establishing trust with people who ultimately are our partners in this work. Over the course of our survey work we met so many incredible people and were placed in a variety of unique situations. There were times we were told “it’s getting dark, you guys need to go” or came across clear areas of need, but also had heartwarming and funny conversations with local residents. There are too many stories to try to include in this summary but one indicator of the trust we were able to establish was shared by a teenager near Elizabeth Street who we will call “John”.

John: “Who you be?” (Approaches surveyor with a defensive posture)

Surveyor: Explains survey and the purpose of our work. “I’ve heard a lot of things about this community but I’m not from here.”

John: “What kind of stuff you hearing?” (It appeared that this individual was evaluating the surveyor and playing a role of gate keeper)

Surveyor: “I’ve heard there’s guns and there was a recent shooting. People say it’s not safe to be here. I need to know if it’s okay for me to be here.”

John: (fist bump) “I’m gonna tell my friends the green shirts are aight.”

*Special thanks to: Dr. David Chavis and Ryan Schooley of Community Science for their helpful consult, Purujith Gautam of Question Pro for the generosity in extending the life of our subscription when we hit delays, Chuck Salter, President of Mission Insite for helping us mine community data, City of Hagerstown staff Alex Rohrbaugh and Erin Anderson for supporting Public Information Requests such as property listings and Stephen Bochmiller for providing the important historical information for each neighborhood.*

What are your hopes for your community?

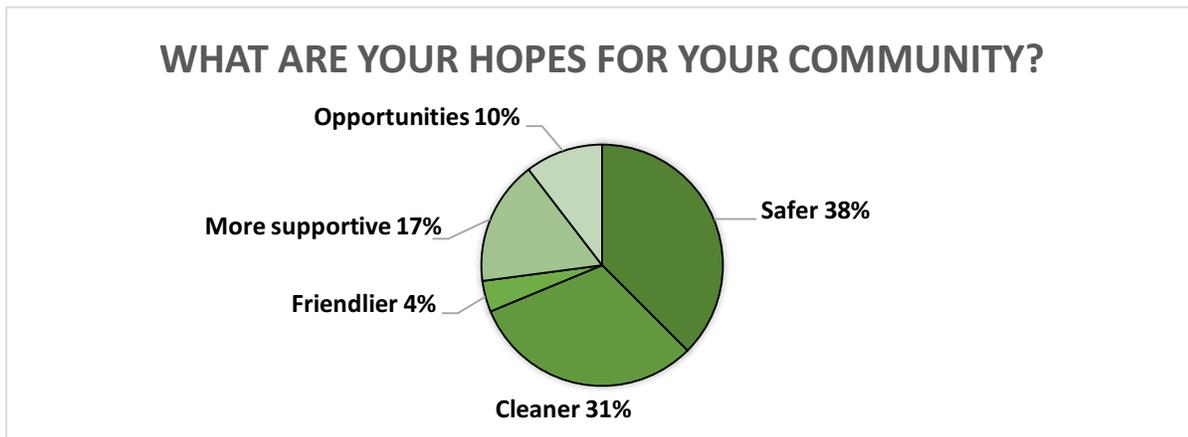
Increased opportunities: more computers, technology and learning; more doctors, hospitals, service providers; more help for the needy and the poor.

Safer Community: drug free; less crime; no bullying; more crossing guards and police

Cleaner environment: keep it clean and don't litter; protect nature; more trees and parks; recycle

More Supportive: Help for people in need like elders and the poor; more houses; more churches

Friendlier: everyone gets along; to make friends



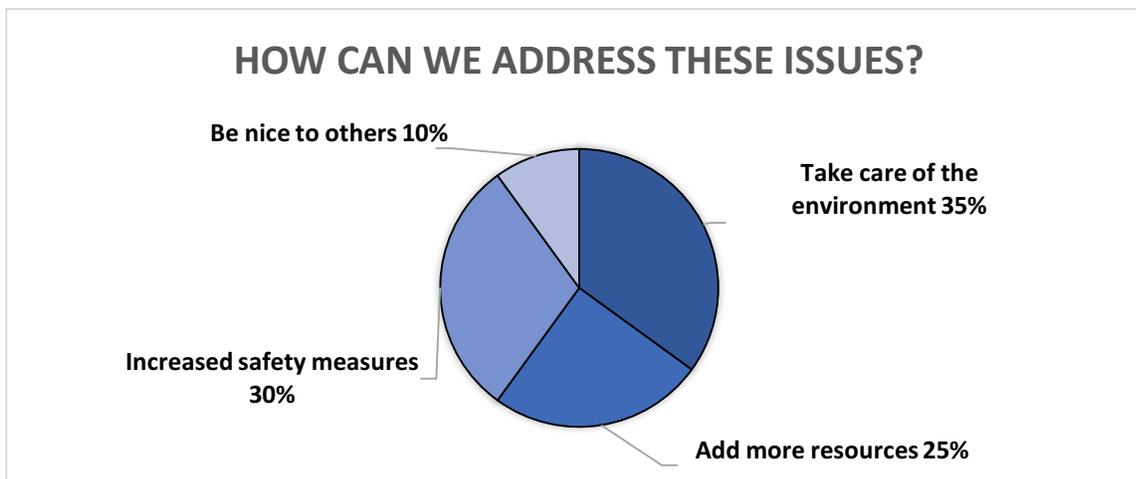
What can we do to address these issues?

Add more resources: find homes for people; give more food away; help people like the sick, elders and families; help people find babysitters

Increase safety measures: more police; install cameras; make it drug free; stop bullying; stop crime

Take care of the environment: put in more parks; clean up the trash; recycle

Be Nice to others: be nice to everyone; greet people; shovel for others; make people happy



## **Southside Community Block Party Survey Results**

### **Safety and Trust**

Despite the overall majority of respondents relaying they feel safe in their neighborhood, more than half do not feel there are safe play areas for children. The neighborhoods closest to city center express more concerns regarding personal safety than those further out. Those communities that have regular neighborhood meetings through either the Housing Authority or Neighborhoods 1st express a greater sense of positive relationship with their neighbors. Many do not feel they can rely on their neighbors.

54% say they feel safe in their neighborhood

57% no safe play areas for children

57% positive relationship with neighbors

65% cannot rely on neighbors

### **Social Cohesion and Efficacy**

Overwhelmingly, people care about the perception of and have pride in their neighborhood and participate in activities and events. However, many do not feel connected to their neighborhood and do not believe they can rely on their neighbors. The majority of respondents' state they are not connected to a group or religious organization and feel there is a lack of helpful organizations or people in their neighborhood.

73% care about how others view their neighborhood

47% feel connected to their neighborhood

45% state there are helpful people in their area

62% are not connected to a group

### **Economic Needs**

In all neighborhoods, respondents stated there was a lack of affordable housing and opportunity for individuals to become employed or expand their skills. Local businesses are important to respondents, but the majority feel they could do more to support the neighborhood. Respondents recognize their neighbors struggle to get by each day on some level.

60% do not feel their neighbor's daily needs are met

68% shop at local businesses

70% say housing is unaffordable in their neighborhood

69% little opportunity for skill expansion

### **Education and Resources**

The majority of respondents state there is a lack of opportunity to expand education or skills in their neighborhood on top of little opportunity for job attainment or skill expansion. Roughly 1/3 do not have reliable internet service in their home and 1/5 do not have reliable transportation to travel out of the neighborhood for assistance and services.

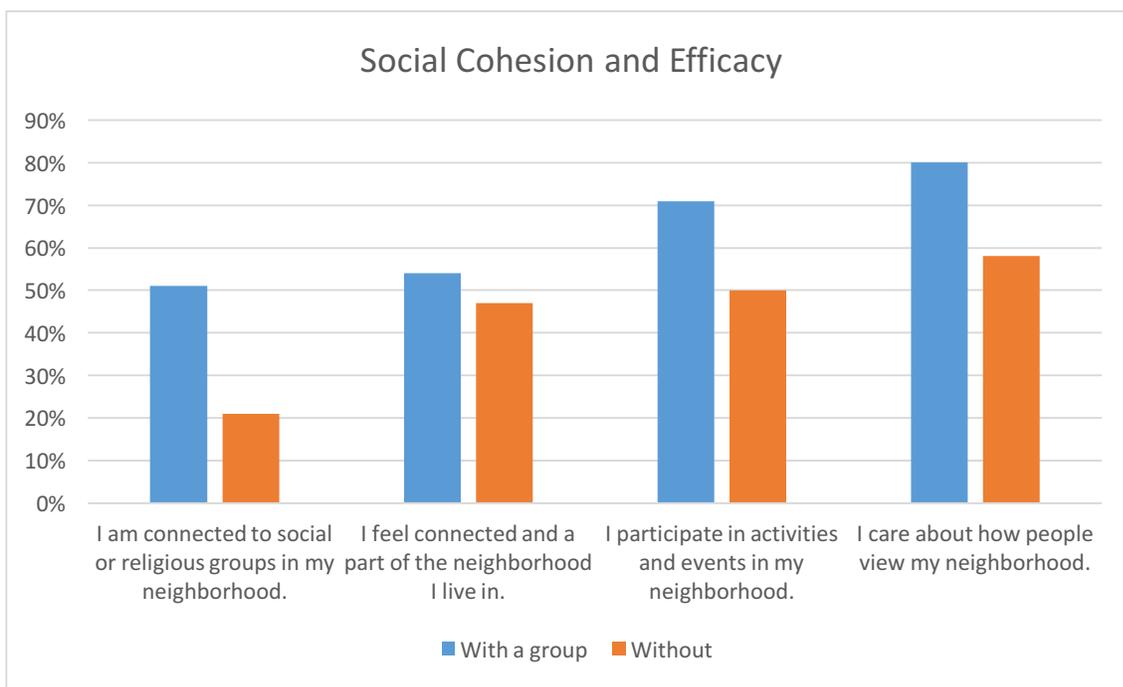
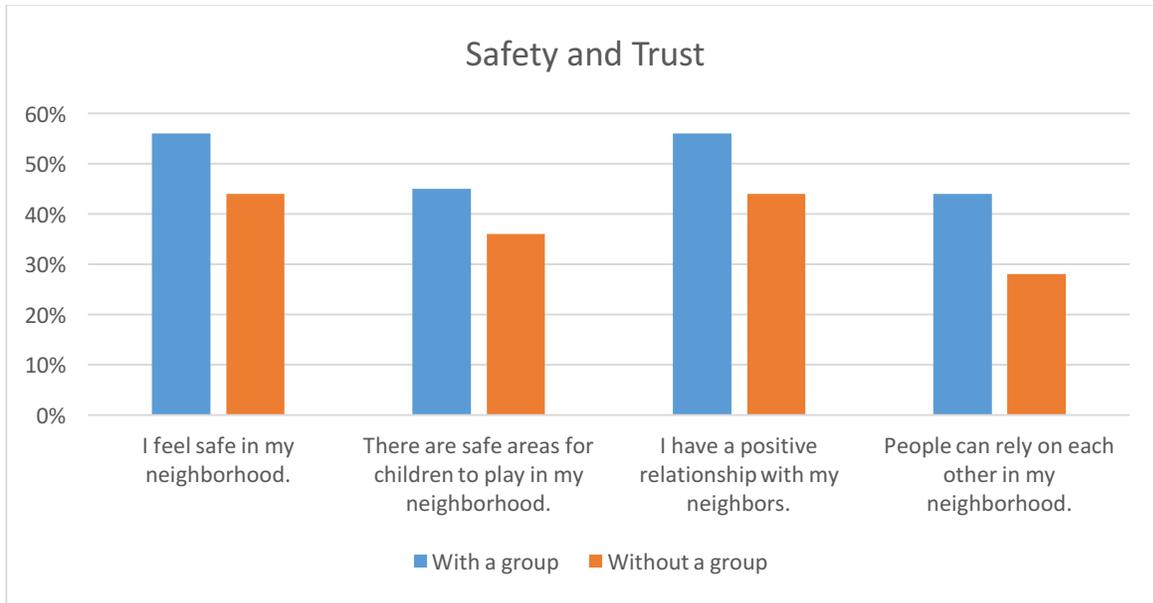
69% no opportunity to expand skills in the neighborhood

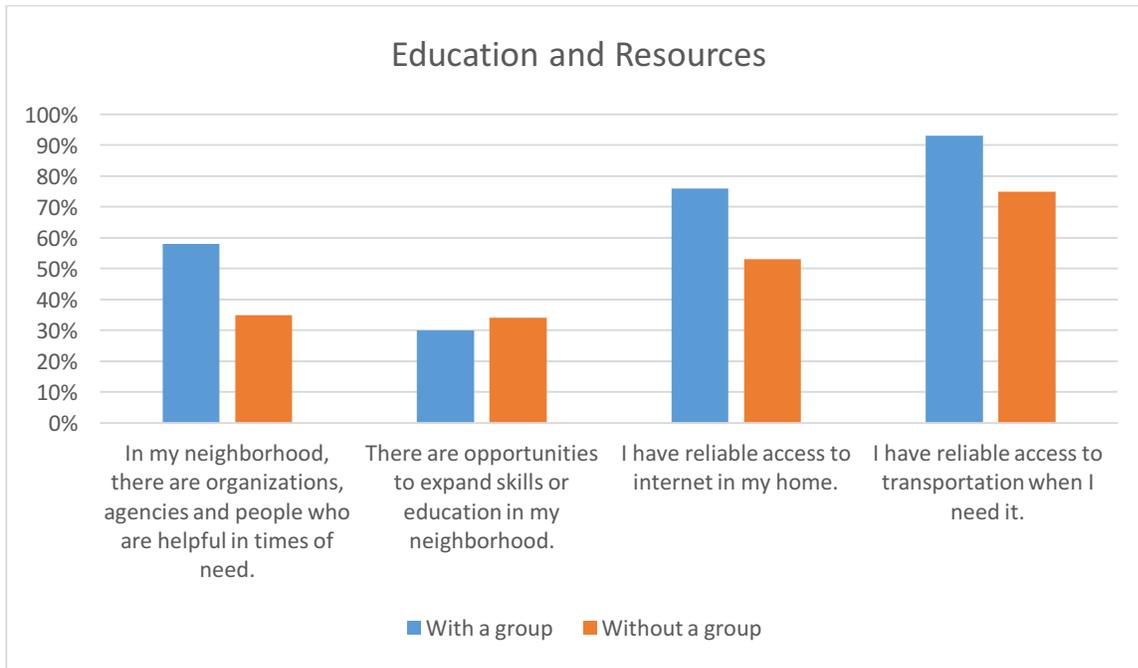
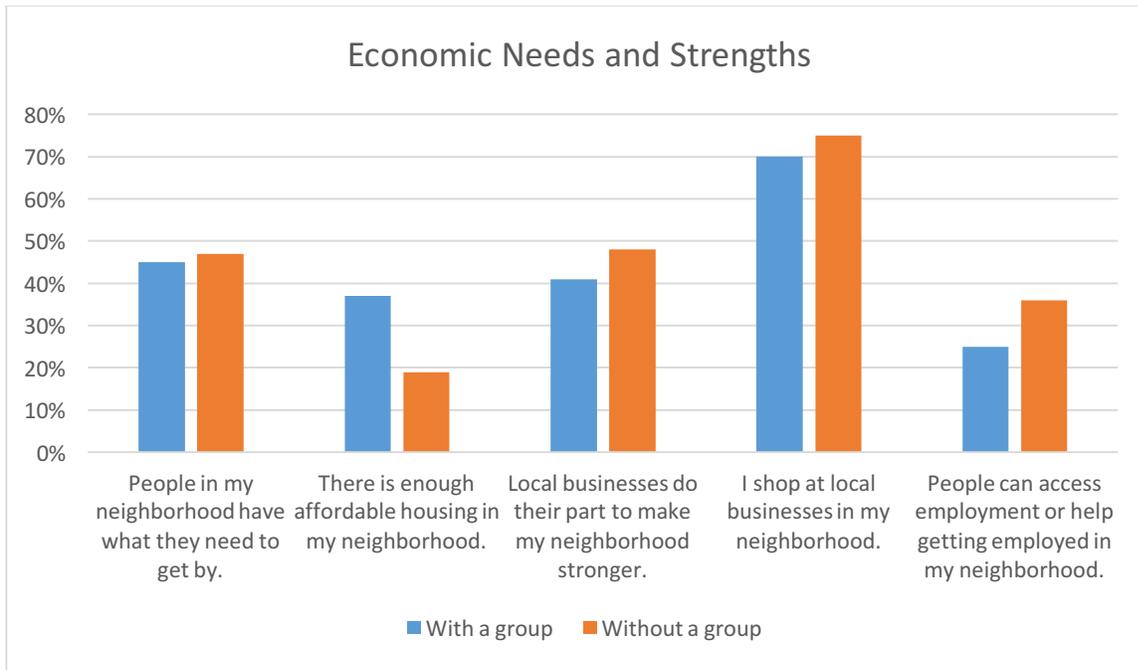
80% have reliable transportation

64% have reliable internet service at home

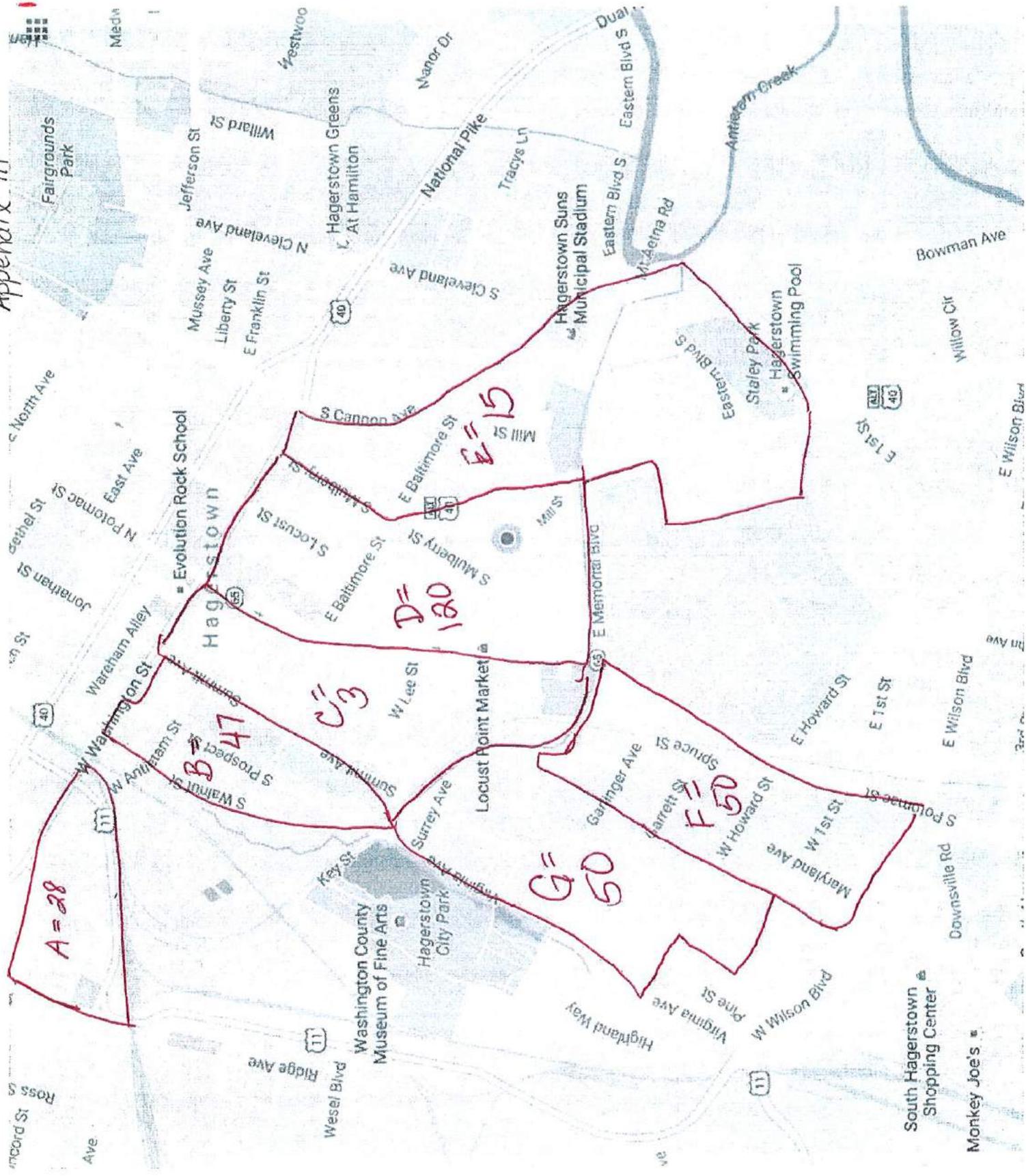
Comparison of Neighborhoods with Established Groups vs No Established Group

In the defined catchment area, there are four areas that have regularly scheduled group meetings to focus on resident feedback and group problem solving. Each of these areas have had a group for at least two years. One community is Frederick Manor, a Hagerstown Housing Authority property that is income based and has regularly scheduled community meetings for residents. The remaining three are specific areas with Neighborhoods 1<sup>st</sup> groups, a program supported by the City of Hagerstown. Historic Heights was established in 2005, South End was established in 2005 with a restart in 2014, and Historic City Park was established in 2010.

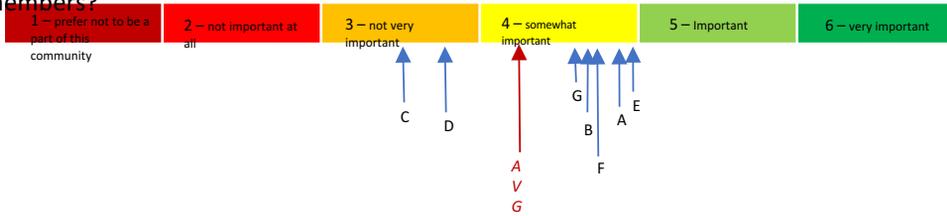




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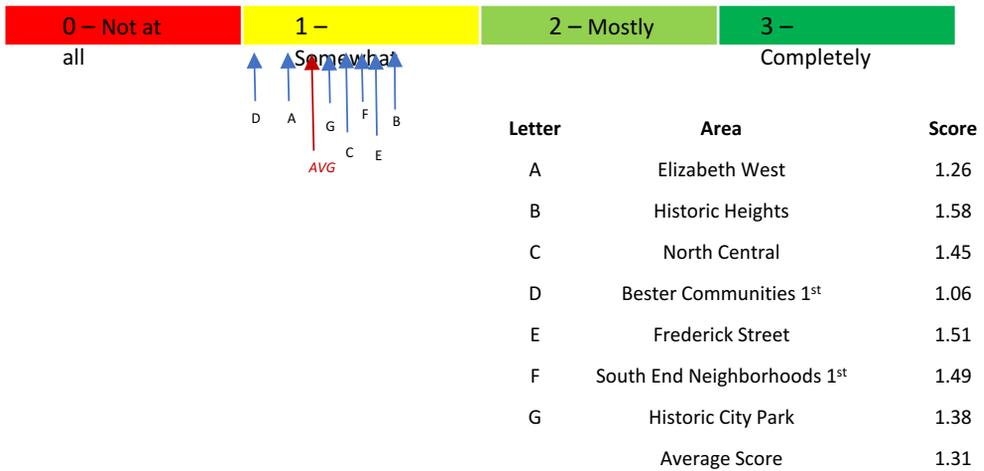
How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?



Letter	Area	Score
A	Elizabeth West	4.89
B	Historic Heights	4.63
C	North Central	3.57
D	Bester Communities 1 <sup>st</sup>	3.79
E	Frederick Street	1.51
F	South End Neighborhoods 1 <sup>st</sup>	4.70
G	Historic City Park	4.60
	Average Score	4.15

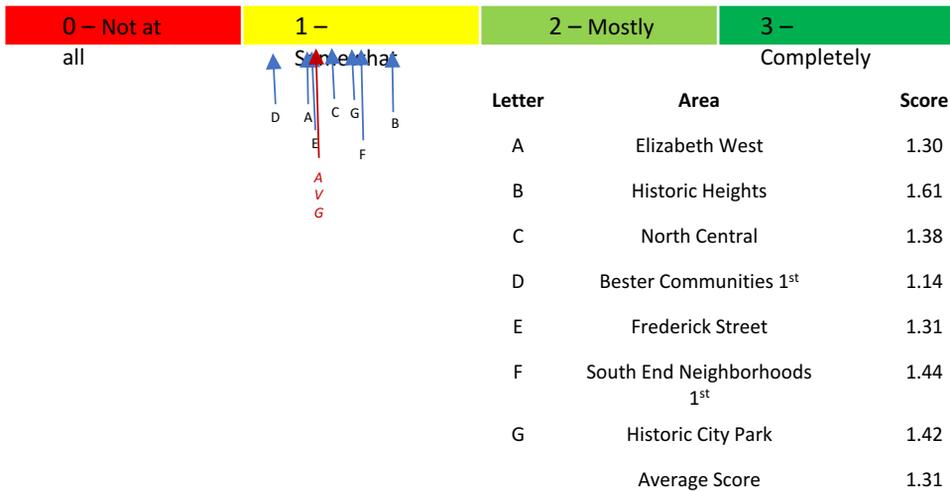
### Reinforcement of

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### Membership

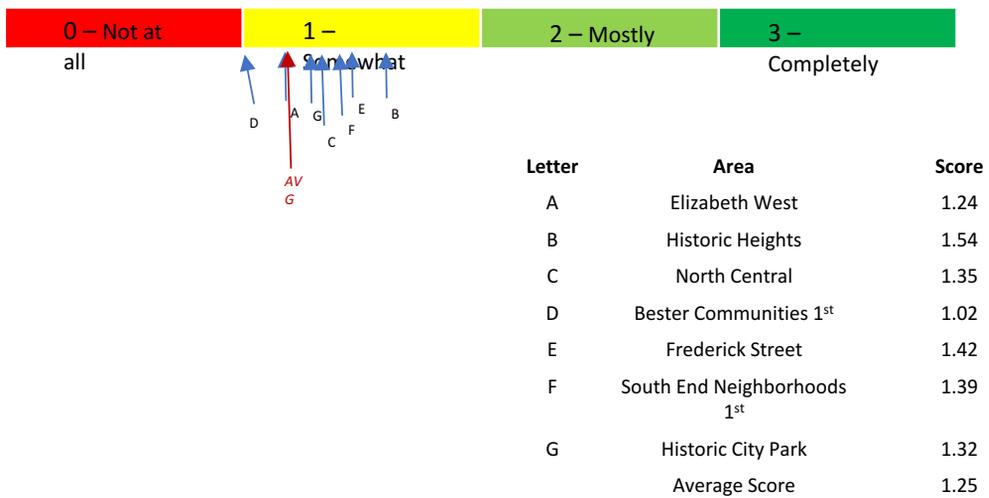
This subgroup explores the community and individual definition of boundaries, identification with the community, personal investment and emotional safety. Boundaries, in terms of membership, are not about geographical lines but rather who belongs and who does not. It also examines if there are expressions of membership or a symbol system that codes belonging.



## Appendix III

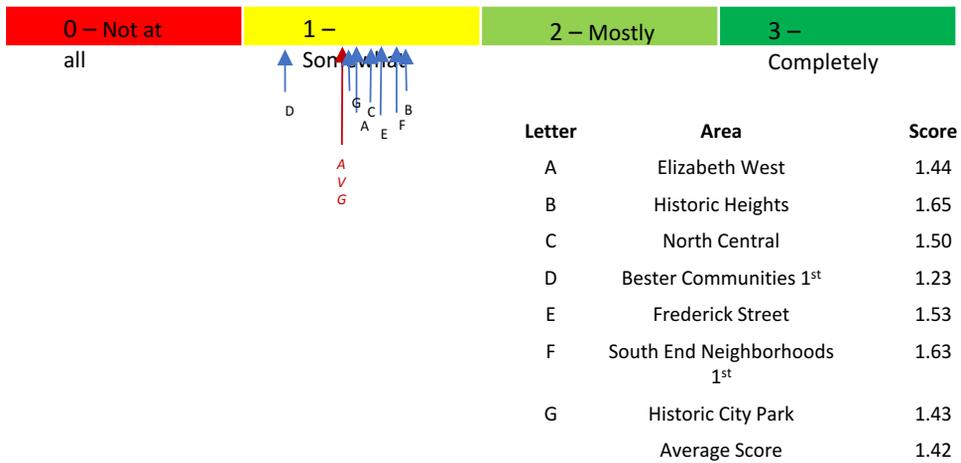
### Influence

This subgroup examines the flow of influence. Each individual member has the potential to sway the community one way or another and the community as a whole has the potential to impact each individual. Both perceived power and conformity play a role in influence.



### Shared Emotional Connection

This subgroup explores the frequency of interaction among members, the quality of the interaction, and how deeply members connect with the history of the community, however recent, and with each other.



## Comparison of Neighborhood Indicators

Data from Mission Insite

Indicator	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Population	715	379	799	1303	514	934	997
Change over 6 years	5.3%	-5.96%	-6.6%	-11%	-8%	1%	
Median Income	24,906	16,332	18,302	20,224	27,249	55,073	57,894
Poverty Rate	39.5%	30.4%	34%	42%	29.7%	12.2%	9.8%
# of Units	291	235	581	725	208	429	498
Owner Occupied	27%	4.7%	4.8%	22%	27.7%	51%	46.9%
Renter Occupied	73%	95%	95.2%	73%	72.3%	49%	53.1%
Blight	14						
White	67.1%	75%	76.1%	77%	73%	83.3%	83.5%
Black	19.6%	17%	16.8%	13%	15%	8.1%	6.7%
Hispanic	6.2%	3.2%	3.8%	3.8%	4.9%	4.2%	5.1%
# of households	282	236	505	634	212	359	421
Avg Size	2.54	1.61	1.58	2.06	2.42	2.6	2.37
# of family households	170	63	158	270	99	199	219
# of family households in district	60%	27%	31%	43%	47%	55%	52%
	14%	5%	13%	23%	8%	17%	19%

**Significant data:**

A = Second highest poverty rate; most diverse; largest density of family households

B = Tied for highest rate of rental with C (both have large low income housing population); fewest number of family households

C = Tied for highest rate of rental with C (both have large low income housing population)

D = largest in population; highest poverty rate; most population of families in the District (23%)

E = Fewest amount of housing units

F = Second highest median income; highest rate of home ownership

G = Highest median income; second highest rate of home ownership; second most population of families in the District

