Research Report

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Residents' views about assets, challenges, and renewal options in the Brooklyn, MD community

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Introduction

This report summarizes the activities and results from research conducted during the Fall 2019 semester as part of a graduate course at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). The researchers Melanie Bovard, Audrey Denakpo, Maia Punksungka were MA students in the Applied Sociology program and their work was performed under the direction of Marina Adler, Ph.D. and John Schumacher, Ph.D., who were the course instructors. Relationships established in South Baltimore since 2015 led the instructors to meet with Brooklyn, MD community partners Janet Eveland and Michael Dorsey, the CEO and President of Action Baybrook respectively, to develop a research plan. Based on the needs and goals of Action Baybrook, students used various asset-based and community-based research methods to collect data in Brooklyn.

Students were particularly focused on community well-being with special attention given to residents' perceptions of vacant properties; neighborhood conditions and safety; community assets; and, changes that residents would like to see in Brooklyn. Students collected data through various methods (e.g., administered an online and in-person survey, observed and listened to residents), volunteered in the community, documented assets and challenges, mapped vacant properties, developed an action plan, and made recommendations for change. At the conclusion of the study, students presented their findings and recommendations to the community.

The general questions guiding these research efforts were related to sense of community and community engagement in Brooklyn with a focus on the following:

1. **What is the relationship between neighborhood sense of community and residents' views of assets and challenges in Brooklyn?**
2. **What are the attitudes of residents toward housing conditions, cleanliness, and safety in the community of Brooklyn? What are the differences in these attitudes among residents?**
3. **How are 311- and 911-concerns related to vacant properties in the community of Brooklyn?**
4. **What are general changes that residents would like to see happen in the community of Brooklyn?**

This report begins with background information on Brooklyn and neighborhood observations. It includes a community asset map, a vacant housing map, and presents the community survey results, including open-ended survey comments from key stakeholders and residents. The report concludes with our overall findings and suggestions for continued community restoration and action.

Overview and Brief Profile of Brooklyn, MD

Although there were originally five neighborhoods on the southern peninsula of Baltimore, today only Brooklyn and Curtis Bay are surviving neighborhoods in the area (King 2014). Brooklyn was originally annexed by Baltimore City from nearby Anne Arundel County in 1919 and it is physically separated from downtown Baltimore City by the Patapsco River. This separation from the City may have made Brooklyn an attractive location for industrial development. As such, Brooklyn has historically been the site of waste disposal and chemical production and storage (King 2014). The peninsula has suffered from economic decline since the 1950s and former industries have left lasting environmental damage in the region (King 2014).

Figure 1 illustrates an aerial map of Brooklyn, MD. Brooklyn is located at the southernmost point of Baltimore City and shares a boundary with Anne Arundel County. Highway 895 and Maryland Route 2 (also known as Governor Ritchie Highway) border the northern and western sections of Brooklyn.

Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey (ACS) were used to create a demographic profile of the Brooklyn neighborhood. Due to its rich history and unique geographic location, the data from Brooklyn's two census tracts (2504.01 and 2504.02) were used in order to obtain the most accurate information. The combined borders of census tracts 2504.01 and 2504.02 are Chesapeake Avenue on the north, 10th Avenue on the east, the Harbor Tunnel Throughway (Highway 895) on the west, and the southern border runs diagonally from Frankle Street, 4th Street, to Ruth Street. The ACS total population estimate for this area is 8,056, which likely in 2019 is somewhat higher.

Table 1 shows that in Brooklyn, housing units are much more likely to be renter-occupied than owner-occupied (about 40%). With 26.6% vacant properties, the homeowner vacancy rate is estimated at 7.8. The median home value is just below $100,000 and the median rent around $919. The median household income is $45,137 and the per capita income is just under $22,000. Twenty-six percent of residents live below the poverty level and about one third of receive food stamps or SNAP benefits.

In terms of demographics, the Brooklyn population is only slightly more female than male at about 51%. It is a racially diverse community with about a 42% white, 35% black, and a 16% Hispanic or Latino population. Finally, Brooklyn has a foreign-born population estimate of 13%.

Figure 1: Map of Brooklyn, MD

Table 1. Key U.S. Census data for Brooklyn, MD
Total population = 8,056

| Indicator	
Housing:	
Owner occupied units	39.4%
Vacant housing units	26.5%
Homeowner vacancy rate	7.8
Median value owner occupied	$96,850
Median gross rent/month	$919
Income and Benefits	
Median household income	$45,137
Average per capita income	$21,774
People w/income below poverty level	26.3%
Food stamp/SNAP benefits*	33.0%
Persons with health insurance	84.5%
Demographics:	
Female population	50.9%
Foreign born	13.0%
African American/Black	35.3%
Asian	3.9%
Hispanic or Latino**	16.0%
White	42.3%
Internet access:	
Households with a broadband subscription	63.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

*Food stamp/SNAP benefit estimates are for the previous 12 months

**Total Hispanic or Latino population estimates reported are for any race

The research project in Brooklyn began with a series of meetings with Action Baybrook leadership to hear about their needs and goals. Figure 2 showcases the subsection of Brooklyn in which the researchers worked most intensively. This area was identified by Action Baybrook as a potentially high-value area for both housing development and business investment. This subsection includes the area between Maude Ave and East Jeffrey Street and 3rd Street to 6th Street.

Figure 2: Map of Subsection Studied in Brooklyn, MD
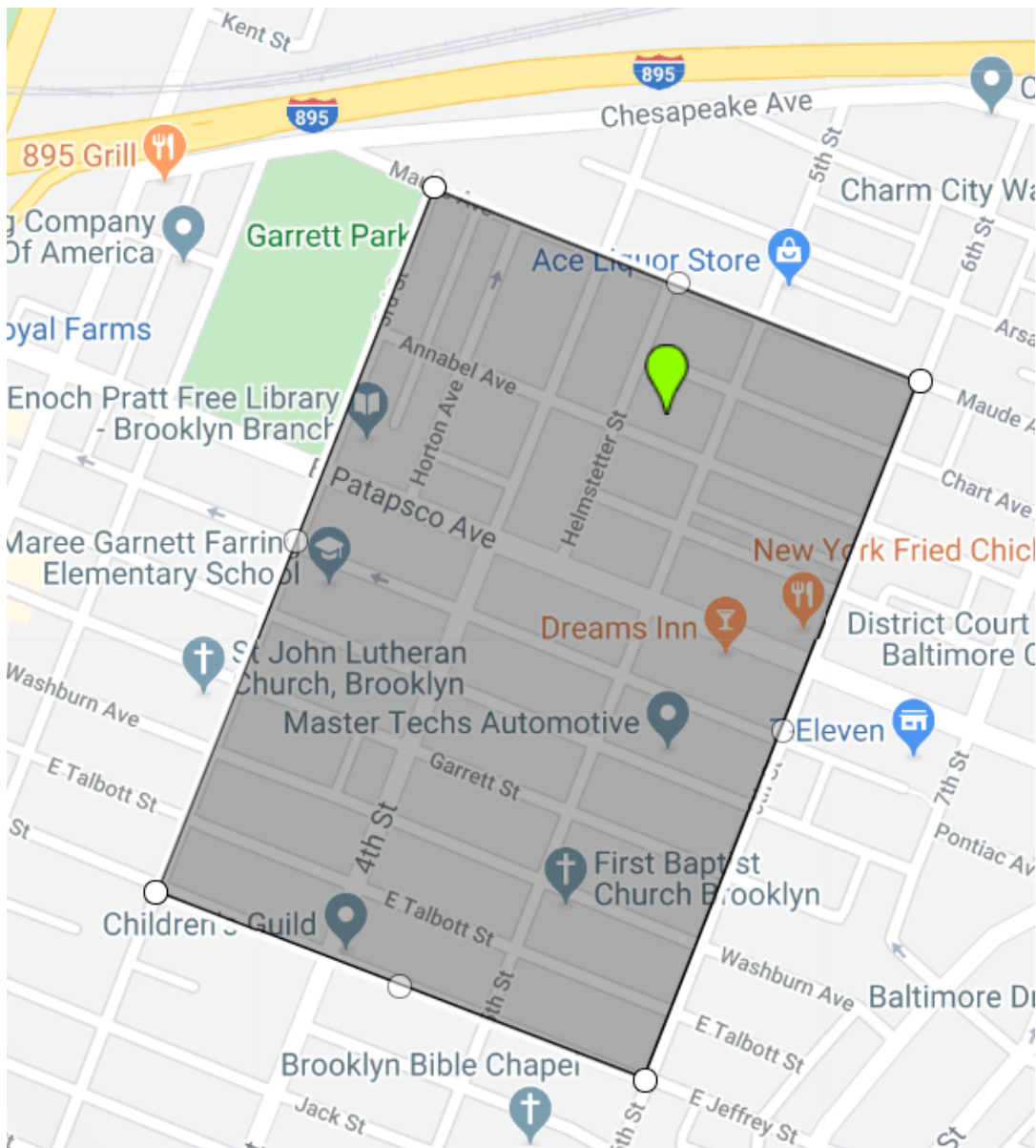
Relevant Literature

Sociological neighborhoods research confirms that trust and interaction among residents increases community engagement and thus can lead to community improvement. Civic engagement, a sense of community, and collective efficacy have been linked to the resilience of communities (Leykin et al. 2016) and can be used as quality of life and community well-being indicators (Collins, Neal, and Neal 2014; Talo` et al. 2014; Altschuler et al. 2004; Mannarini and Fedi 2009).

<u>Civic engagement</u> activities include "volunteering, political participation, group membership and different forms of community action" (Scrivens and Smith 2013: 20). Participation in community events and meetings allows residents to work together toward a shared goal. These interactions among neighbors can affect the sense of community and the level of collective efficacy felt among residents.

<u>Sense of community</u> refers to residents' feeling of being connected to a community. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) a sense of community includes four components: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection. This includes feelings of attachment, feelings of belonging, and common bonds and behaviors involving neighborliness.

<u>Collective efficacy</u> involves the general ability and likelihood of groups working together to benefit the community. Specifically, collective efficacy refers to the willingness, expectations, and/or likelihood that community members will mobilize and cooperate to solve a local problem (Foster-Fishman and Behrens 2007). It also includes individuals' confidence in the group's capacity to take action. Both are part of the relationships among individuals and/or organizations based on trust that can increase the capacity for action towards a common goal.

These three concepts are empirically related (see Hines, 2017). Previous research shows that perceptions of neighborhood conditions is the strongest predictor of whether residents become civically engaged (Foster-Fisher and Behrens 2007: 91). Some residents are activated to engage in community projects because they want to improve neighborhood conditions while others regard neighborhood conditions positively and seek to maintain them (Hays and Kogl 2007; Hassen and Kaufman 2016; McCrea et al. 2014). While poor neighborhood conditions may dissuade residents from making use of public spaces, a sense of community in neighborhoods can serve as a buffer and protect shared neighborhood spaces (Hassen and Kaufman 2016). In addition, community connections increase feelings of safety and are strongly tied to feelings of belonging (Altschuler et al. 2004). Neighborhood cleanliness and property maintenance are positively related with feelings of safety, belonging, and civic engagement in residential communities. Research has shown that the physical neighborhood characteristics are important for resident well-being. Physical disorder, such as unoccupied properties and trash, increase residents'

levels of stress, heighten fear of crime and increase social isolation (Henderson et al. 2016). The literature also shows that housing tenure has an effect on residents' assessment of their neighborhood, sense of belonging, and willingness to invest in community improvement.

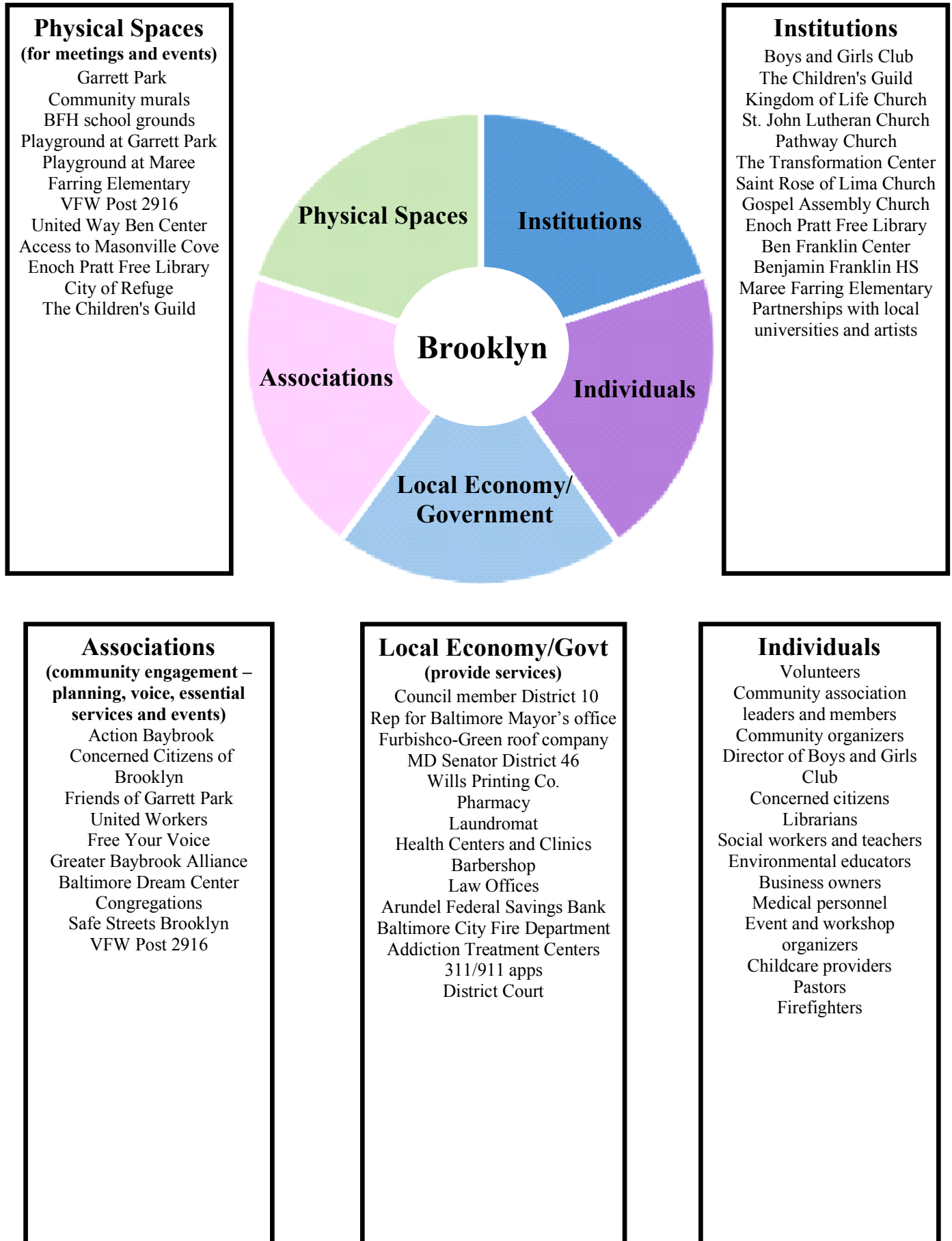## Asset-based and Community-based Research

Unlike conventional research that focuses on the "deficits" of urban communities, the approach taken in this research is asset-based community development (ABCD) (see Mathie and Cunningham 2003; Collaborative for Neighborhood Transformation) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) (see Hacker 2013). This approach starts with the existing strengths and assets of the community rather than narrowly focusing only on existing challenges. It also ensures that the research is community driven. The work originates with the needs and goals of the community. Thus, it is collaborative and aims to assist community partners in advancing positive changes. Therefore, researchers recorded individual and physical community assets, community organizations and leadership in order to recognize them as resources for improved community well-being. These resources can include:

- Individual assets (e.g. capacities, abilities of residents, leadership skills, time)
- Physical assets (e.g. parks, libraries, schools)
- Economy (e.g. local businesses)
- Associations (e.g. community associations)
- Access to other local organizations (non-profits, colleges, media)
- Culture, heritage, resilience

Assets were identified through participant observations (walking around and observing the community), field surveys (in-person and online), and via an in-depth interview with at least one key stakeholder. Assets were broadly defined as having a positive contribution to the community or being a positive resource for the community.

Figure 3 highlights the abundant number of assets in Brooklyn. These assets include Garrett Park, The Children's Guild, and United Way Ben Center, the Enoch Free Pratt Library, and various churches and schools – physical spaces that can be used for meetings and public events. Other assets include Action Baybrook, Concerned Citizens of Brooklyn, Friends of Garrett Park, Greater Baybrook Alliance, among other community associations that can be used to engage residents in neighborhood events and act as platforms to voice the concerns of residents. Also, Brooklyn has a large network of individuals who can be identified as assets, including volunteers, community organizers, business owners, religious leaders, educators, social workers, and librarians. Overall, Brooklyn is relatively rich in assets compared to other historically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Baltimore City. Interactions with residents found that awareness of assets was mixed.

Figure 3. Brooklyn Asset Map

Physical Spaces
(for meetings and events)
Garrett Park
Community murals
BFH school grounds
Playground at Garrett Park
Playground at Maree
Farring Elementary
VFW Post 2916
United Way Ben Center
Access to Masonville Cove
Enoch Pratt Free Library
City of Refuge
The Children's Guild

Institutions
Boys and Girls Club
The Children's Guild
Kingdom of Life Church
St. John Lutheran Church
Pathway Church
The Transformation Center
Saint Rose of Lima Church
Gospel Assembly Church
Enoch Pratt Free Library
Ben Franklin Center
Benjamin Franklin HS
Maree Farring Elementary
Partnerships with local
universities and artists

Physical Spaces — Institutions — Individuals — Local Economy/Government — Associations — **Brooklyn**

Associations
**(community engagement –
planning, voice, essential
services and events)**
Action Baybrook
Concerned Citizens of
Brooklyn
Friends of Garrett Park
United Workers
Free Your Voice
Greater Baybrook Alliance
Baltimore Dream Center
Congregations
Safe Streets Brooklyn
VFW Post 2916

Local Economy/Govt
(provide services)
Council member District 10
Rep for Baltimore Mayor's office
Furbishco-Green roof company
MD Senator District 46
Wills Printing Co.
Pharmacy
Laundromat
Health Centers and Clinics
Barbershop
Law Offices
Arundel Federal Savings Bank
Baltimore City Fire Department
Addiction Treatment Centers
311/911 apps
District Court

Individuals
Volunteers
Community association
leaders and members
Community organizers
Director of Boys and Girls
Club
Concerned citizens
Librarians
Social workers and teachers
Environmental educators
Business owners
Medical personnel
Event and workshop
organizers
Childcare providers
Pastors
Firefighters

Mapping Unoccupied Housing

The community of Brooklyn, while having a set of major assets, has a recent history of blight, unoccupied properties, and social and physical isolation from the rest of Baltimore. As part of several efforts to improve the neighborhood's physical appearance, the CEO of Action Baybrook initiated a "Vacants to Homeowners" (V2H) Program in which vacant, or unoccupied properties, are identified, restored, and sold to potential homebuyers or investors at affordable or reduced prices (Action Baybrook.org). Research conducted by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA) suggests that neighborhoods in Baltimore City aim for an unoccupied housing rate of 4% or less, which may be a level correlated with population growth (2018).

Part of this research included a needs assessment of the specific geographic area identified by the community partners as having the potential for housing re-development and business investment (see Figure 2.). Based on the CEO's request, vacant proprieties in this subsection of Brooklyn were mapped. Researchers walked this area to verify existing unoccupied properties (officially recorded) and to identify additional vacant properties based on a set of systematic criteria developed by Action Baybrook. Because the researchers were on foot, they had the opportunity to interact with some residents and hear about their concerns and perceptions regarding the neighborhood. In this process, residents suggested additional assets while also confirming many assets that had already been identified at the start of the research.

Prior to mapping the vacant properties, the properties had to first be identified and verified. To this end, an official vacant properties list was obtained from the City of Baltimore. Due to many factors, including the lengthy bureaucratic process of declaring a property vacant, the Baltimore City list is incomplete. Therefore, Action Baybrook provided researchers with a list of addresses of properties that were identified by current community organizations and residents as vacant. The status of these community identified vacant properties was verified in person by the researchers using the set of systematic criteria. Finally, while systematically walking the subsection of Brooklyn shown in Figure 2, additional potentially vacant properties were identified using Action Baybrook's criteria. The systematic criteria for vacant properties included items such as: boarded doors and windows, structural damage, marked difference between the subject and immediately neighboring properties, an abundance of trash on the premise, and bulk furniture (mattresses, couches, appliances) on the property. In total, 66 vacant properties were identified and verified: Baltimore City's 26 official properties, Action Baybrook's 14 community-identified properties, and 26 additional vacant properties identified by UMBC researchers.

Next, GIS Mapping software was used to create a visual display of the three types of vacant properties (ArcGIS.com). The list of vacant properties was broken down into three layers based on three data spreadsheets prior to being

uploaded to GIS Mapping. The first layer included the official vacant properties, the second layer included the resident-identified properties, and the third layer included the researcher-identified properties. The following data elements were included in each layer in order to allow GIS Mapping to pinpoint the exact location of these properties: property number, street name, city and state, latitude, and longitude. Figure 4 plots all three layers on a map of Brooklyn with official vacant properties color-coded as blue, resident-identified properties as green, and researcher-identified properties as orange.

Figure 4. Map of Vacant Properties in Study Area
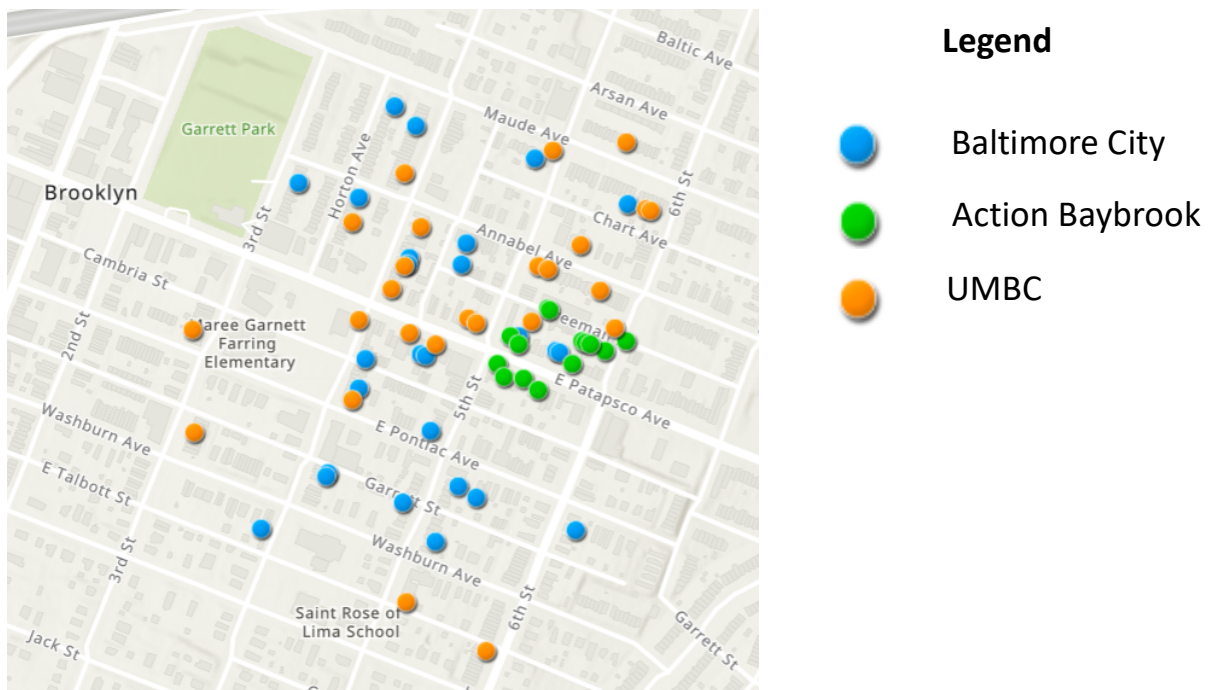
Overall, neither the official nor the UMBC identified properties showed a particular pattern of dispersion or density. The community- identified properties are clearly clustered around Patapsco Ave between 5th and 6th Street.

Additionally, the community partners requested an analysis of the relationship between vacant properties and either 311 or 911 calls. Researchers gathered a list of 311 and 911 calls between January 1 and September 30, 2019 from Open Source Baltimore (data.baltimorecity.gov). To narrow the list of 911 calls, the community partners identified calls involving the following criteria as key elements: armed person, aggravated assault, common assault, burglary, disorderly, narcotics, prostitution, armed robbery, unarmed robbery, and shooting. There were no limiting criteria for the 311 calls. Figure 5 shows a map

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of vacant properties with the 311 overlay and figure 6 shows a map of vacant properties with a 911 overlay. A "heat map" was used for both figures to depict the intensity of the calls. The calls are illustrated as "clouds" around the vacant properties and the color of the clouds range from blue to red with blue meaning a low volume of calls and red meaning a high volume of calls.

Figure 5 suggests that there is no clear pattern indicating a relationship exists between 311 calls and vacant properties. While there are many 311 calls, very few of those calls are closely aligned with or in proximity to the list of vacant properties. It is important to note that there is at least one "hotspot" location in which the 311 calls and one vacant property overlap: this location is near 6th Street between Talbot Street and Jeffrey Street. However, there is not enough evidence to explain this hotspot.

Figure 5. Map of Vacant Properties with 311 Calls

Figure 6 shows that there is a pattern indicating a relationship between 911 calls and vacant properties. Unlike the heatmap of the 311 calls, the 911 call appear to 911 align closely to the list of vacant properties. There is one major hotspot area that is important to note because it has several vacant properties and high call volumes. This location is between 5th and 6th Street on Patapsco Avenue. Patapsco Avenue is a busy thoroughfare with many active storefronts: a barber

shop, a church, a daycare, and several fast food establishments. While Figure 6 suggests that there is a relationship between vacant properties and 911 calls, it also suggests that the businesses situated around this area are likely to call 911 if they observe disruptions.

Figure 6. Map of Vacant Properties with 911 Calls
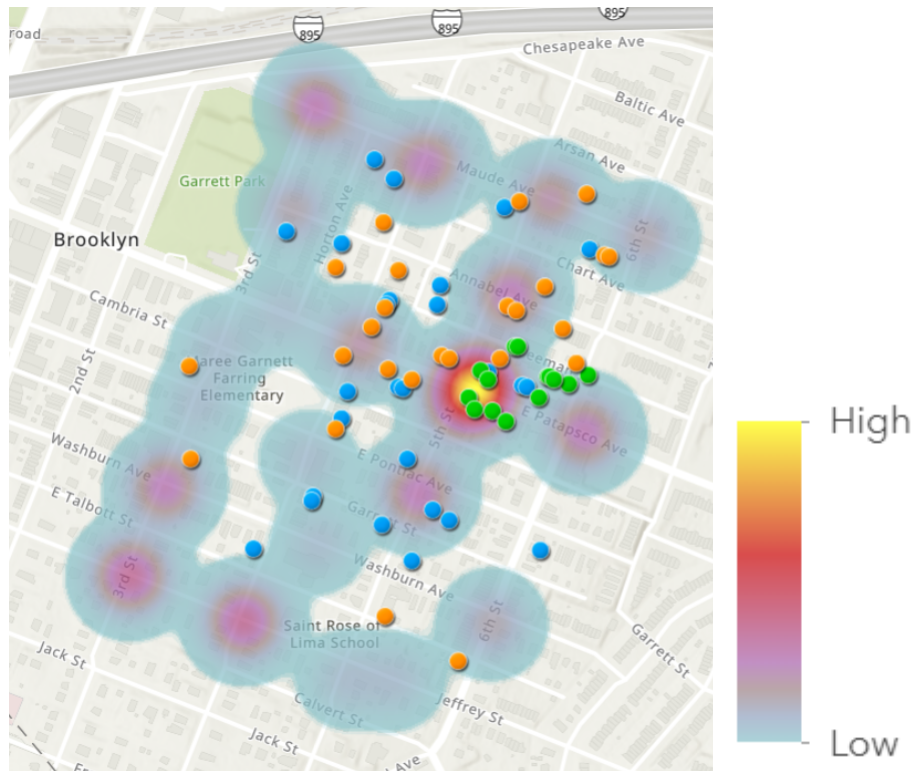
The Brooklyn Community Survey 2019

Based on the relevant literature, the researchers selected various questions for the community survey to better understand feelings of civic engagement, collective efficacy, and general perceptions of their community (see the survey in the appendix). In addition to general demographic information, survey respondents were asked questions about their perceptions of the appearance of the community, their feelings of safety and neighborliness, and what types of assets they would like to see in the future.

Various questions related to a sense of community, trust, and neighborliness. Neighborhood attachment was gauged by asking respondents whether they intend to remain living in Brooklyn. Questions regarding a willingness to volunteer for one hour per week and/or attend community events as well as questions regarding a willingness to work together to solve neighborhood-specific problems

were intended to measure the level of civic engagement and collective efficacy. The survey was also designed to capture respondents' perception and use of assets, neighborhood conditions, and their concerns about overall neighborhood safety. Questions about concerns surrounding unoccupied properties and what changes residents would like to see in Brooklyn were also included. The survey also provided respondents with the opportunity to elaborate their views with open-ended comments.

Method

The community survey was initially fielded on September 28, 2019 at the Brooklyn Centenary Celebration at Garrett Park. An electronic copy of the survey was formatted using Google Survey and researchers used their cellphones to input participants' survey responses. The survey administered at Garrett Park yielded 26 surveys. In addition, researchers fielded the survey online in a self-administered format from October 18 until November 1, 2019. The online survey yielded an additional 67 surveys. An analysis comparing the results of the two samples showed no significant differences.

The Survey Sample

The characteristics of the 93 survey participants are shown in Table 2. On average, respondents were around 50 years old and had lived in Brooklyn about 15 years. In terms of race and sex, 32% were non-white and 81% were women. Roughly, 67% of respondents were homeowners as opposed to renters, and 63% of respondents said they plan to stay in Brooklyn. According to this non-random sample, respondents are quite engaged within their community, with 87% of respondents reporting that they do attend community events. Furthermore, at least 49% of respondents say they are interested in getting involved in a community improvement project for about one hour per week.

The results also show that the sample includes many relatively older residents who have roots in the community. The distribution of renters and owners is uneven, and minorities and men were underrepresented in this sample. While most respondents do attend community events, only a small number of respondents reported making use of community assets. Ideally, the next survey should be administered to a random sample.

Table 2. Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 93)

	Mean (SD)	Median
Age	47.87 (13.15)	50
Number of Years Lived in B	19.57 (17.50)	15

	Percent (%)
Women	81.4
Nonwhite	32.3
Rent	33.3
Own	66.7
Plan to stay in Brooklyn	63.2
How often R attends community events	
Never	12.8
Sometimes	34.6
Often	52.6
If R is interested in being involved for 1 hr/wk	49.3

The Survey Results: Individual Perceptions of Brooklyn

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of respondents' attitudes and perceptions on various survey items. These survey items include appearance of community, neighborliness as it promotes safety, vacant properties as it attracts crime, and future assets that residents would like to see in Brooklyn. In terms of community appearance, only 26% and 24% of respondents thought the cleanliness of streets and the appearance of storefronts respectively were fair or good on a 4 point scale that included anchors of excellent and poor. However, regarding the cleanliness of yards and the maintenance of public spaces, about 70% and 63% respectively say that the appearances of these areas were fair or good. In walking the target zone in Brooklyn, researchers identified some "pockets" of physical disorder, which may have reduced the positive assessment of community appearance. Both public and private spaces will continue to benefit from ongoing revitalization efforts.

With respect to neighborliness and safety, a sense of neighborliness exists in the community, but it is currently not strong enough to promote the general sense of safety within the community. On the positive side, 41% of respondents thought there is a strong feeling of neighborliness in Brooklyn, and at least half (50%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that neighbors can be counted on in emergencies. Unfortunately, only 18% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that residents can cooperate to solve problems. These results suggest that there is untapped potential for the community to pull together and invest in collective revitalization efforts. However, there is clearly concern about trust and safety: only 35% think most residents can be trusted. The percentage of respondents who feel safe to walk around in the neighborhood appears to be relatively low and, again, is likely related to the "pockets" of social disorder in the community. Interesting, 90% of respondents are worried about traffic safety in Brooklyn. Future targets of community work to consider are issues surrounding overall resident safety, feelings of trust, and traffic safety.

With regard to vacant properties, residents in Brooklyn strongly perceived vacant properties as areas for criminal activities and disorder. Generally, 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that vacant properties are a concern; 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that unoccupied storefronts are a concern; and, 92% of respondents reported that vacant properties attract crime. Additionally, there are high concerns with illegal dumping (94%) and loitering (85%), and many respondents have reported that they have witnessed illegal activities (82%). At the same time, there is a high percentage of respondents (85%) who would like to see vacant properties turned into affordable housing units, which suggests the hope that if these properties were occupied, crime may decrease. These findings support the patterns found in the vacant map with regards to the 911 calls and how "pockets" of disorder are closely tied to vacant places. Revitalizing vacant properties into useable and attractive spaces is a high priority for residents of Brooklyn.

Despite residents' concerns over appearance, safety and crime, residents in Brooklyn have high aspirations for their community and this may explain the high number of residents who plan to stay in the neighborhood. Regarding future assets, residents in Brooklyn agreed or strongly agreed that they would like the following items: recreation center (93%), senior center (90%), more cultural activities (e.g., arts and music festivities and venues) (94%), more restaurants (85%), and more small parks and playgrounds (91%). Future community work could focus on efforts to bring these establishments and spaces the neighborhood.

Based on the survey results, it is also important for community leaders to continue to reach out to residents with information on meetings and events and promote their relevance. The feedback from respondents suggests that a need for an online directory with resident information and a community calendar would be beneficial.

Table 3. Perceptions of Survey Respondents (N=93)

Appearance of community	% fair or good
Cleanliness of streets	26.1
Cleanliness of yards	70.1
Public space maintenance	63.2
Appearance of store fronts	24.1

Neighborliness and safety	% agree or strongly agree
Neighbors can be trusted	35.2
Neighbors help in emergency	50.0
Strong feeling of neighborliness	40.7
Cooperate to solve problems	17.7
Worry about traffic safety	89.6
Feel safe walking around	14.1

Vacant properties and crime	% agree of strongly agree
Concerned about illegal dumping	94.2
Concerned vacants attract crime	91.6
Vacant properties are a concern	88.4
Concerned about unoccupied stores	90.5
Vacants should become affordable housing	85.2
Concerned about loitering	85.0
Seen illegal activities	82.1

Future assets wanted in Brooklyn	% agree of strongly agree
Recreation Center	93.2
Senior Center	90.7
More cultural activities	94.3
More restaurants	85.3
More small parks and playgrounds	91.0

The Survey Results: Comparing Resident Perceptions

Several perception indexes were created using the theoretical frameworks of collective efficacy, sense of belonging, and civic engagement. The researchers created six indexes: 1) Perceptions of Trust Index, 2) Perceptions of Vacant Properties Index, 3) Perceptions of Safety and Crime Index, 4) Perceptions of Cleanliness Index, 5) Index for Future Assets for the community, and 6) Index for Current Assets Used in the Community (see Table 5). The first index, **Perceptions of Trust Index**, was shown to be a reliable measure (Cronbach's alpha = .815) and is composed of four survey items related to the degree to which residents trust, help, and feel safe around their neighbors. The second index, **Perceptions of Vacant Properties Index,** was also reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .846) is comprised of four survey items related to the degree to which

residents perceived vacant properties as a concern, especially as it pertains to crime and illegal dumping. Third, the **Perceptions of Cleanliness Index,** which consists of four survey items related to the degree to which residents perceived the streets and alleys, front yards, public spaces, and the appearance of storefronts to be clean and is reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .736). The fourth index, **Perceptions of Safety and Crime,** includes three survey items related to the degree to which residents had strong concerns about loitering, traffic safety, neighborhood safety, and illegal activities. The Perceptions of Safety and Crime Index was reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .684). Fifth, the **Perceptions of Future Assets Index** is composed of five survey items related to what residents wanted in Brooklyn (i.e., recreation center, senior center, more cultural activities, more restaurants, more parks and small playgrounds) and was a reliable measure (Cronbach's alpha = .725). Lastly, the sixth index, **Perceptions on Current Assets Used Index,** contains two survey items related to the degree to which residents visited Garrett Park and the Enoch Pratt Free Library (Brooklyn Branch) and this was a reliable measure (Cronbach's alpha = .717).

Table 4 displays the descriptive information for the six indexes. For the **Perceptions of Trust Index**, which ranged from 4 (all items score lowest at 1, meaning low trust) to 16 (all items score high at 4, meaning highest trust), the average was 8.54 (SD = 8.54), which is in the middle of the distribution. The **Perceptions of Vacant Properties Index**, which ranged from 6.00 (lowest concern) to 16.00 (highest concern), the average was 14.36 (SD = 2.34), which indicates a high concern for vacant properties. The **Perceptions of Cleanliness Index**, which ranged from 4.00 (poor condition) to 12.00 (excellent condition), the average was 6.21 (SD = 1.82), which is middle to low range of the distribution, meaning there is an assessment as relatively poor. The **Perceptions of Safety and Crime Index**, which ranged from 6.00 (low concern) to 12.00 (high concern), the average was 10.55 (SD = 1.45), which indicates a high concern for safety and crime. The **Perceptions of Future Assets Index**, which ranged from 7.00 (low preferences for changes) to 20.00 (high preferences for changes), the average was 16.94 (SD = 2.51), which indicates a high preference for the future assets mentioned in the survey. Finally, the **Perceptions of Current Assets Used Index**, which ranged from 2.00 (use almost never) to 6.00 (use often), the average was 3.44 (SD = 1.72), which is in the low to middle of the distribution, indicating "sometimes."

Table 4. Description of the Six Indexes

	Mean	(SD)	Min.	Max.
Perception of Trust	8.54	(2.66)	4.00	15.00
Perception of Vacant Properties	14.36	(2.43)	6.00	16.00
Perceptions of Cleanliness	6.21	(1.82)	4.00	12.00
Perception of Safety and Crime	10.55	(1.45)	6.00	12.00
Perceptions of Future Assets	16.94	(2.51)	7.00	20.00
Perceptions of Current Assets	3.44	(1.27)	2.00	6.00

With these indexes, the researchers were able to examine the differences in residents' perceptions by gender, race, age, homeownership status, length of residency in Brooklyn, and plans to stay or leave Brooklyn (as shown in Table 5). There is no remarkable variation across the means of the six perception indexes between men and women, non-whites and whites, and homeowners and renters. In other words, men and women, non-whites and whites, and homeowners and renters on average had the same level of trust for their community, concerns for vacant properties, concerns for cleanliness, concerns for safety and crime, aspirations in terms of future assets, and current assets used. These results show that community residents share the same concerns and they have similar aspirations for the future of the community. This homogeneity in perceptions is important information for community leaders as they plan projects to increase community well-being.

There is a significant relationship between adults aged 55 years and older versus adults aged 54 years and younger with perceptions of trust. Generally, adults aged 55 years and older have statistically significantly higher levels of trust in their neighbors than younger adults ($p < .01$). However, perceptions across these two groups are similar in distribution for all other indexes. This suggests that community leaders might consider activities or events that focus on increasing trust among younger residents, such as single mothers or young parents.

There is a significant relationship between perceptions of cleanliness and length of time residents have lived in Brooklyn. Residents who have lived in Brooklyn for

5 or more years (x = 6.08, SD = 1.77) consider the appearance of Brooklyn less positive on average than residents who have lived in Brooklyn a shorter time (x = 6.41, SD = 2.21, p < .01). However, perceptions across these two groups are similar in distribution for all other indexes.

There is also a significant relationship between perceptions of vacant properties, cleanliness, and safety and crime with whether or not residents plan to remain in Brooklyn. Generally, residents who plan to stay in Brooklyn (x = 13.81, SD = 2.83) are statistically less likely to be concerned with vacant properties than residents who plan to leave Brooklyn (x = 15.18, SD = 1.59, p < .01). For perceptions of cleanliness, residents who plan to stay in Brooklyn (x = 6.40, SD = 1.83) are statistically less likely to be concerned with cleanliness than residents who plan to leave Brooklyn (x = 5.39, SD = 1.13, p < .01). Lastly, for perceptions of safety and crime, residents who plan to stay in Brooklyn (x = 10.41, SD = 1.45) are statistically less likely to be concerned with safety and crime than residents who plan to leave Brooklyn (x = 11.07, SD = 1.18, p < .05). Thus, it is possible that those who are highly concerned about vacant properties, neighborhood appearance and safety do not plan to stay in Brooklyn. In order to prevent residents, especially younger people who want to raise a family, from leaving it is imperative that these issues are addressed.

There are some interesting findings for residents who display some civic engagement and the perceptions they have toward their community. As mentioned, civic engagement is measured by attending community events and getting involved in community improvement projects for at least one hour per week. Residents who attend community events (x = 13.98, SD = 2.64), including neighborhood association meetings, report having statistically significantly less concern for vacant properties than residents who do not attend community events (x = 15.40, SD = 0.97, p < .01). This suggests that residents who are already engaged may be more aware of efforts underway to address various concerns. Furthermore, residents who are willing to contribute at least one hour per week on a community improvement project (x = 17.80, SD = 1.97) are statistically significantly more likely to desire future assets (i.e., recreation center, senior center, cultural activities, more restaurants, and more small parks and playgrounds) for Brooklyn than residents who are not as willing to contribute to a community improvement project (x = 16.00, SD = 2.69, p < .01). This suggests that the residents who are willing to volunteer are a great resource for community development projects.

Table 5. Comparisons of Perceptions of Residents by Characteristics

Variables	Men	Women	White	Non-white	Age 55+ Years	Age 54- Years	Renters	Owners	Lived 5+ Yrs	Lived 4- Yrs	Plans to Stay	Plans to Leave	Events (Yes)	Events (No)	Vol. (Yes)	Vol. (No)
Percp. of Trust	9.50	8.30	8.45	8.78	10.14**	8.02	8.12	8.82	8.65	8.13	9.04	7.79	8.27	8.89	9.23	7.94
	(2.53)	(2.69)	(2.81)	(2.25)	(2.50)	(2.55)	(3.00)	(2.54)	(2.79)	(2.33)	(2.41)	(2.92)	(2.61)	(2.85)	(2.70)	(2.75)
Percp. of Vacants	14.80	14.31	14.36	14.38	14.38	14.33	14.40	14.47	14.34	14.38	13.81**	15.18	13.98**	15.40	14.86	14.46
	(1.52)	(2.59)	(2.42)	(2.53)	(2.36)	(2.55)	(2.33)	(2.37)	(2.27)	(3.24)	(2.83)	(1.59)	(2.64)	(0.97)	(2.13)	(2.27)
Percp. of Cleanlines	6.94	6.04	6.08	6.52	6.05	6.30	6.42	6.14	6.08**	6.41	6.40**	5.39	6.23	6.00	6.17	5.62
	(2.41)	(1.65)	(1.70)	(2.08)	(1.32)	(1.92)	(2.08)	(1.77)	(1.74)	(2.21)	(1.83)	(1.13)	(1.92)	(1.63)	(1.69)	(1.19)
Percp. of Safety & Crime	10.69	10.54	10.67	10.28	10.29	10.59	10.38	10.62	10.68	10.53	10.41*	11.07	10.55	10.50	10.68	10.68
	(1.08)	(1.55)	(1.39)	(1.59)	(1.35)	(1.53)	(1.75)	(1.35)	(1.49)	(1.28)	(1.45)	(1.18)	(1.52)	(1.08)	(1.43)	(1.45)
Aspirations	17.87	16.69	16.74	17.46	17.50	17.07	17.15	16.79	16.98	16.33	17.13	16.43	16.73	17.78	17.80**	16.00
	(1.76)	(2.62)	(2.52)	(2.47)	(1.85)	(2.27)	(2.26)	(2.71)	(2.43)	(2.32)	(2.43)	(2.49)	(2.33)	(1.92)	(1.97)	(2.69)
Assets Visited	4.00	3.33	3.51	3.28	3.77	3.40	3.70	3.30	3.51	3.24	3.35	3.21	3.29	3.60	3.64	3.22
	(1.31)	(1.25)	(1.31)	(1.17)	(1.41)	(1.26)	(1.27)	(1.27)	(1.30)	(1.15)	(1.08)	(1.45)	(1.21)	(1.35)	(1.22)	(1.31)

Notes: Events (yes/no) asks if respondents attend community events; vol. (yes/no) asks if respondents are willing to volunteer in a community improvement project at least 1 hour per week; numbers outside of paretheses indicate mean; numbers in parentheses indicate standard deviation; * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Recommendations

Our 2019 asset-based research project examined the current sense of community and community engagement in Brooklyn, MD in the context of residents' perceptions about housing conditions, safety concerns, and options for future renewal.

Our findings suggest that Brooklyn already has the conditions in place to go forward with continued neighborhood revitalization efforts, particularly those focused on housing conditions. The community has a relatively large number of assets, some of which are underutilized. Awareness of the strengths already in the community can be an incentive to participate in improvements and in attracting new residents. Across gender, age, ethnic background and homeowner status, community members have very similar perceptions about the challenges and future options of their community. They appreciate good neighbors, safety, and clean housing conditions. Most welcome various forms of community revitalization and would help bring it about. This is a major advantage and resource to begin projects that will vitalize this community.

While most residents and community leaders care deeply about their community long-term, unfortunately some younger people do not plan to stay in Brooklyn. In order to retain young residents and/or attract young families to Brooklyn, housing conditions have to be addressed, but also how to increase the trust among neighbors. This can only be accomplished by harnessing the existing assets and by increasing the connections among residents.

Our preliminary results indicate that any plans for neighborhood revitalization and community building should not only focus on the physical conditions and safety in the community, but also on how to increase the level of trust and social engagement among residents.

<u>Specific Suggestions for Action</u>:

- Increased communication efforts directed by informing **all** residents (including renters, younger people, and elders) of positive developments in Brooklyn, such as available grant money, events, community association meetings, etc. Clearly, these activities also should be publicized extensively in order to promote a positive image of Brooklyn. A common newsletter (perhaps both electronic and print) and a more consistent positive social media presence would help.
- Resident engagement in the "Block Ambassador" program may be productive. Trainings are offered in Baltimore and a representative for Brooklyn could share their ideas in a workshop.
- Look into making community meetings more accessible to residents, such as offering more than just one a month, changing the meeting times and days, and focusing more on resident voices.
- Community leaders might consider activities or events that focus on increasing trust among younger residents, such as single mothers or young parents to keep them in the community.
- Sustaining an effort to create a network among the various neighborhood blocks. This may be facilitated by the "block ambassador" model or by having block and backyard parties. To bridge the "pockets of trust" we found in survey comments, creating more connections among residents on individual blocks may be a first step.
- With respect to the unoccupied properties, clearly most residents voiced concern and want more rapid action by the City to make these properties available for resident use. These properties can lead to homeownership, affordable housing, and green spaces. If unattended, they can also encourage people to leave or prevent new residents from settling.

<u>Future Research in Brooklyn</u>

As part of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) community engagement initiatives and specifically the Masters in Applied Sociology Program, we plan to continue our research with the residents of Brooklyn in 2020 and beyond. Because we are dedicated to community-based research, we are open to community partners' suggestions about research that is needed to help improve community well-being. We welcome collaborations with non-profit organizations and community associations.

Our non-random survey sample had only a small number of respondents from the Latin American community. Because this is a growing segment of Brooklyn,

the community survey will be repeated in Spanish and it will include a qualitative interview component. We are hoping to collaborate with multi-lingual residents to complete that project in the near future. Specific questions on what the aspirations Latin American parents have for their children in Brooklyn will be added. One question arising from our mapping efforts is related to safe and unsafe spaces for children in Brooklyn. We are hoping to collaborate with local schools to be able to map this information. A UMBC-led effort to teach a GIS mapping workshop at Benjamin Franklin High School is under way.

Future research could also focus on areas including public health, perceptions of crime and safety, services for older adults, policing efforts, and community-police relations in the area. Informal analysis of comments made during our project reflects residents' concerns about drugs in the community and with community-police relations. The issue of community-police relations can be studied through documenting community perceptions, police ride-alongs, and focused meetings between police officers and residents. Relationships between renters and owners as well as reasons for why people are planning to leave the community should also be investigated.

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Appendix

Brooklyn Community Survey 2019

2019 BROOKLYN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Hello, thank you for participating in this survey. Do you consider yourself a resident of Brooklyn? Your participation in this survey is voluntary and the information you provide will be kept confidential. Please respond to each question to the best of your knowledge. Feel free to comment and elaborate at the end of each question.

1.   We would like to talk to you about the places and services you frequent most in Brooklyn. How often do you visit or use the following places or services in Brooklyn? (Check one for each line)

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Garrett Park			
Brooklyn Branch Library			
Places of worship			
Auto repair shops			
Convenience stores			
Fast food places			

Comment:

_____

_____

2.   We would like to talk to you about the changes you would like to see in Brooklyn. In general, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about Brooklyn? (Check one for each line)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There should be more cultural activities involving art, music, or theatre performances.				
There should be more restaurants in Brooklyn.				
There should be more small parks and playgrounds in Brooklyn.				
There should be a recreational center, such as a YMCA.				
There should be a senior center in Brooklyn.				

Comment:

_____

_____

3.   Please tell us about the appearance of the Brooklyn community. Would you rate each of the following conditions as excellent, good, fair, or poor? (Check one for each line)

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall cleanliness of the streets and alleys				
Overall cleanliness of front yards and porches				
Public space maintenance (grass, trees, playgrounds)				
Appearance of store fronts on E. Patapsco Ave				

Comment:

_____

_____

4. **We would like to talk to you about feelings of safety and neighborliness in Brooklyn. In general, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your neighborhood? (Check one for each line)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Most people who live in Brooklyn can be trusted.				
Most people in Brooklyn usually help each other out in an emergency.				
There is a strong feeling of neighborliness in Brooklyn.				
People in Brooklyn usually cooperate to solve local problems.				
I am concerned about loitering in my neighborhood.				
I am worried about traffic safety on E. Patapsco.				
I have seen illegal activities occur in my neighborhood.				
I feel safe walking around in Brooklyn.				

Comment:

_____

_____

5. **We would like to talk to you about concerns regarding unoccupied properties in Brooklyn. Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about unoccupied properties in your neighborhood? (Check one for each line)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Unoccupied properties are a concern in my neighborhood.				
I am concerned about that unoccupied properties will attract crime.				
I am concerned about unoccupied store fronts in Brooklyn.				
Calling 311 to report a concern with an unoccupied property is effective.				
I am concerned about illegal dumping, like mattresses or appliances on unoccupied property.				
Unoccupied properties in Brooklyn should be turned into affordable housing.				

Comment:

_____

_____

2019 BROOKLYN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Lastly, here are a few questions about you so we can classify the answers:

1. **What is you gender? (Check one).**

   Woman ☐   Man ☐   Other ☐ please specify: _____

2. **How would you classify your ethnic/racial identity? (Check one)**

   African American/Black   ☐
   Asian American/Asian   ☐
   Bi-/multi-racial   ☐
   Caucasian/White   ☐
   Hispanic   ☐
   Other – please specify: _____

3. **What is your age?   _____ years**

4. **Do you rent or own your home? (Check one)**   Rent ☐ Own ☐ Other ☐ please specify:
   _____

5. **a. How many years have you lived in Brooklyn? _____ years, and _____ months**

5. **b. Do you plan on staying in Brooklyn? (Check one)**   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If no, please explain _____

6. **How often do you attend community meetings or events? (Check one)**

   Almost always ☐   Often ☐   Sometimes ☐   Never ☐

7. **If there are additional comments or suggestions, please let us know here.**

Are you interested in getting involved in a community improvement project for about 1 hour a week? Yes ☐   No ☐
If yes, please give us your contact information below:

2019 BROOKLYN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Are you interested in being interviewed in more detail? Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please give us your contact information below:

Name: **Email:**   **Phone:**

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate!

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Marina Adler at adler@umbc.edu or 410-455-31

2019 BROOKLYN COMMUNITY SURVEY