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The 2005 Benson Residents Survey

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THE 2005 BENSON RESIDENTS SURVEY

Summary Report
April 15, 2006

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Public Affairs Research and the Urban Studies Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha organized a telephone survey of Benson-area residents. The survey identified various neighborhood perceptions and activity patterns of alliance residents. The interviews occurred between November 20 and December 4, 2005, with 387 interviews being completed.

Surveying area residents provides invaluable information regarding their views on various issues such as the best and worst aspects of the area and the most important problems it needs to address. Having this type of information is critical in forming a development plan for the area as any such plan would need to address the key issues in the area and in ways that area residents are likely to support. Without surveying residents, items such as the satisfaction with area services and the outlook for the area's future would be largely unknown.

While surveys have limitations such as question nonresponse and budgetary time constraints, they do provide a representative profile of the views and concerns for the area as a whole. The 2005 Benson Residents Survey identified several key issues that should be addressed as the development planning process moves forward. These items are highlighted below.

It is important to note that the alliance area was defined as "from 45th Street to 72nd Street east to west and from Sorensen Parkway to Western Avenue north to south". This area was referred to as the Benson Neighborhood Alliance in the survey, as the discussion over the alliance name and eventual determination of the "Benson-Ames Alliance" had not yet occurred at the time the survey was conducted.

Findings Regarding the Respondent's Neighborhood

- When asked about the part of Omaha in which they lived, alliance residents primarily identified with two distinct areas – North or North Omaha (35 percent) and Benson (31 percent). A geographical representation of the responses showed that only three respondents identifying with "Benson" resided north of Ames Avenue, implying that those residing in this geographic area have limited associations with Benson and the so-called "Benson Alliance".
- Respondents generally had favorable views of their specific neighborhoods, as about three in four respondents agreed that the neighborhood's future looks bright, the neighborhood is an ideal place to live, and that they planned on staying in the neighborhood. An even higher 86 percent agreed that they felt safe in their neighborhood.
- Alliance residents indicated they were quite active, as 70 percent participated often or sometimes in healthy lifestyle activities such as walking, jogging, or biking in their neighborhood. Over half of those participating often or sometimes in these activities felt that something about the neighborhood should be changed to increase participation or generally improve healthy lifestyle activities, citing improving area sidewalks, reducing crime, and making new trails as specific examples of possible positive changes.
- A small majority thought their neighborhood would change over the next five years versus remaining the same. Those expecting change most often specifically indicated that the neighborhood would likely get worse or go downhill. However, when the expected changes

were categorized as generally positive or generally negative, over half of the expected change responses had a generally positive tone.

Findings Regarding the Entire Alliance Area

- Respondents viewed the alliance area's central location and proximity to major destinations within Omaha as its primary attribute. Other best aspects of the alliance included the areas neighborhoods and being a good place to live, the businesses and shopping within the area, and the quality and well-kept nature of the area's housing.
- Crime and violence were overwhelmingly viewed as the worst aspect of the alliance area and the most important problem for it to address. A geographic plot of these responses showed that crime was a common concern throughout the alliance and not concentrated in a particular part of the alliance area.
- Alliance residents tended to be satisfied with area services. Respondents were most satisfied with fire protection, graffiti cleanup, and health and wellness services while they were least satisfied with trails, interesting fun things to do and interesting fun places to go.
- Alliance residents indicated they shopped most frequently at the Benson Park area at 72nd Street and Ames Avenue, the Saddle Creek area north of Dodge Street, and the Irvington area Super Wal-Mart on Military Avenue near 99th Street on both a weekly and monthly basis. A relatively high number also shopped weekly at Baker's Place at 50th Street and Ames Avenue but 45 percent of respondents indicated they did not shop at this area located within the alliance boundaries. For comparison, while the scope of shopping (products and stores available) differs, more alliance residents went to shop at the distant Oakview Mall at 144th Street and West Center Road than at the relatively close Baker's Place location.
- About half of the respondents (48 percent) indicated that they made 50 percent or more of their out-of-home purchases from stores and businesses in the alliance area, showing that a large number of residents make a majority of their purchases within the alliance.

ALLIANCE PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2005, Omaha by Design partnered with the City of Omaha Planning Department, the Neighborhood Center for Greater Omaha, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha to help facilitate the formation of an alliance in the Benson area to create a comprehensive development plan. An alliance of neighborhood associations, community organizations, and business groups in the Benson area was formed to better influence public investment, identify housing needs, determine the form of development and renovation in the area, and promote the community's economic and social vitality. This effort is officially referred to as the Benson-Ames Alliance.

The alliance building project began as one of the Neighborhood Omaha goals identified in the Omaha by Design plan adopted in 2005—Creating Neighborhood Alliances to:

- Function as planning districts to provide input to help address planning needs and address problems for geographical areas;
- Foster the improvement of individual neighborhoods; and
- Improve the capacity of neighborhood associations.

The Benson-Ames Alliance builds on efforts initiated and experiences learned through the 2004 Destination Midtown project that facilitated the organization of the Midtown Neighborhood Alliance, a group of 11 neighborhood associations, and formed a community-based organization to implement a comprehensive area development plan formulated for the area. A community-based citizen group from the broader Benson area serves to advise and help lead and promote the Benson-Ames Alliance.

The Benson-Ames Alliance is defined by the area bounded by 72nd Street on the west, Sorensen Parkway on the north, Fontenelle Boulevard on the east, and Western Avenue on the south. According to the 2000 Census, this area contained nearly 37,000 residents and more than 15,500 housing units.

Faculty and staff from the College of Public Affairs and Community Service and graduate students from the Urban Studies Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) engaged in several sets of activities as part of the Benson-Ames Alliance project. The research conducted by UNO was completed before the official title of the alliance project was changed to the Benson-Ames Alliance. Thus, research components conducted by UNO refer to the area under the original name of the Benson Alliance. The research completed by UNO for the project has five distinct components as briefly described below.

1. A neighborhood survey of a random sample of alliance area residents addressed several relevant issues including:

- The outlook for the respondent's neighborhood;
- The best and worst things about the alliance area;
- What problems the alliance area should address;
- An evaluation of services in the alliance area.

2. A survey of business owners and operators identified issues critical to the business community in the Benson-Ames Alliance. UNO faculty and staff, working with the Benson business association, developed and delivered the survey to businesses in historic downtown Benson as well as the entire alliance area.

3. An inventory of housing conditions rated the exterior conditions of a sample of the housing in the area. The data collection, using students from UNO and Benson High School, encompassed a set of 26 exterior conditions assessed by Omaha Planning Department housing code enforcement staff, and developed in conjunction with Omaha Neighborhood Scan¹. Results identified major exterior housing rehabilitation needs, including types of needs, identification of geographic area differences, and overall potential costs. This information can be used to guide housing rehabilitation strategies and efforts.

4. A demographic study, using Census information, described the existing characteristics of the population, the structure of households, and the nature of housing units in the Benson-Ames Alliance area. Trends and changes over time were identified also.

5. An economic and business study, using Census data and business lists, described the economic structure of the Benson-Ames Alliance area. Types of businesses and characteristics of businesses operating in the area were listed. Mapping technology was employed to display the information. Employment trends and patterns were identified and recommendations for policy actions suggested.

¹ Omaha Neighborhood Scan (ONS) is a collaborative service of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the City of Omaha, and helps neighborhoods assess and monitor important conditions such as housing, weeds and litter, and environmental problems. See the ONS web page at: <http://neighborhoodscan.unomaha.edu/>

SURVEY OVERVIEW AND RESULTS

The 2005 Benson Residents Survey was conducted through telephone interviews with adults from a random sample of Benson Alliance² households. The sample was drawn from the core Census Bureau block groups residing fully or primarily inside the Benson Alliance boundaries. The MSR Group, a professional survey research company, was contracted to conduct the survey. They purchased a list of telephone numbers for households residing within the relevant Census Bureau block groups in order to contact only those residents living within the alliance area.

Approximately 400 interviews were desired to achieve an acceptable reliability level for the survey. Professional interviewers from The MSR Group conducted the interviews between November 20 and December 4, 2005.

The 2005 Benson Residents Survey was designed to obtain alliance resident perceptions and participation in various activities. With that in mind, the survey was structured so that perceptions would not be influenced by items mentioned previously in the survey. The order in which questions are asked can influence responses later in a survey. Therefore, the question order was scrutinized at great length.

Specifically, the survey started by asking residents questions about “your neighborhood, that is the area in which you live”. Then the concept of the broader Benson Alliance was introduced by describing the alliance boundaries and inquiring about a series of items regarding the alliance. Finally, the survey asked a set of demographic questions to learn about the respondents and the characteristics that might be influencing response patterns.

In order to show the flow of the survey and to give the reporting of results a practical, unbiased order, the summary of responses will be ordered per the chronological sections of the survey. Thus, this report will first focus on neighborhood items, and then move into aspects regarding the Benson Alliance. A detailed description of the survey and its methodology can be viewed at the end of this report.

Part A: Neighborhood Perceptions and Outlook

Neighborhood Identification

After briefly describing the survey to the appropriate household member completing the interview, the survey began by inquiring about the respondent’s neighborhood. A simple, easy to understand, and unintrusive question started the survey: “If someone asked you what part of Omaha you live in, what would you say?”. Responses are summarized in the following table:

² This report will primarily refer to the alliance area as the “Benson Alliance” as the official “Benson-Ames Alliance” name was not determined until after the survey was conducted. The survey referred to the alliance area as the “Benson Neighborhood Alliance”.

Category	Percent
North/North Omaha	34.7
Benson	31.1
Central/Middle/Mid City	10.5
Midtown	8.7
Dundee	6.1
North Central/Northeast/Northwest	5.8
Country Club	2.1
Other (landmark, street, etc.)	1.1

Two major response patterns emerged: Benson and North/North Omaha. The ties to Benson are clear and understandable given that respondents were from the greater Benson area. The level listing North/North Omaha was somewhat surprising, showing that more people related with or perceived they lived in this geographic area rather than “Benson”. The respondent’s relative location largely influenced their response. Map 1 shows that those citing Benson primarily clustered between Ames Avenue and Blondo Street, which includes the historic Benson business district, while those saying North/North Omaha mainly were north of Ames Avenue. Only three respondents residing north of Ames Avenue cited Benson as the area in which they live. These perceptions show a major challenge for the Benson Alliance as those located further north likely have weaker ties or sense of belonging to a “Benson Alliance”.

In addition to those citing North/North Omaha, slightly more than five percent described where they lived as being north central, northeast, or northwest. These descriptions were viewed as a separate category of responses but related to the larger North/North Omaha category. These responses were somewhat scattered throughout the alliance, but about half were located north of Ames Avenue.

Other neighborhood descriptions had relatively low response percentages. Fewer than 10 percent cited midtown, Dundee, or the country club neighborhood area, with those saying Dundee tending to be located south of Hamilton Street.

The geographic identifier of being located in the central or middle part of Omaha ranked as the third highest response category with more than 10 percent of responses. Those describing their location with these geographic terms generally were located south of Maple Street.

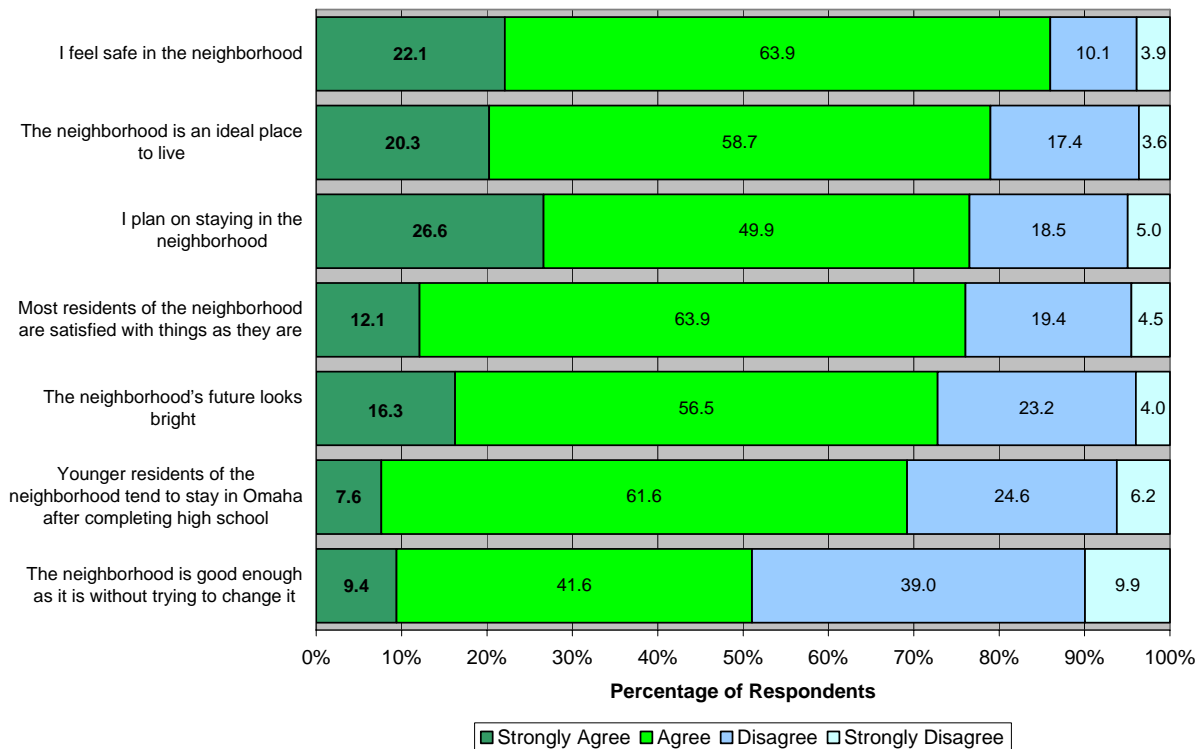
Neighborhood Views and Outlook

A series of questions sought to form the basis for the level of agreement or disagreement with general statements about the respondent's neighborhood. Responses to the seven items are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Respondents tended to have favorable views of their neighborhood. About 3 out of 4 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the neighborhood was an ideal place to live, they planned on staying in the neighborhood, and that the neighborhood's future looked bright. An even higher 86 percent agreed that they felt safe in the neighborhood. This high level of perceived safety was not expected given underlying area crime factors.

Nearly half of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the neighborhood was good enough as it is without trying to change it. This shows that residents likely support neighborhood improvement efforts and may be willing to be active participants in making improvements rather than standing passively by.

Figure 1: Responses to General Neighborhood Statements



Ratings of Neighborhood Conditions

The survey's next segment dealt with rating the condition of various neighborhood items. The survey asked respondents to rate the conditions as excellent, good, fair, or poor. Figure 2 summarizes responses to these questions.

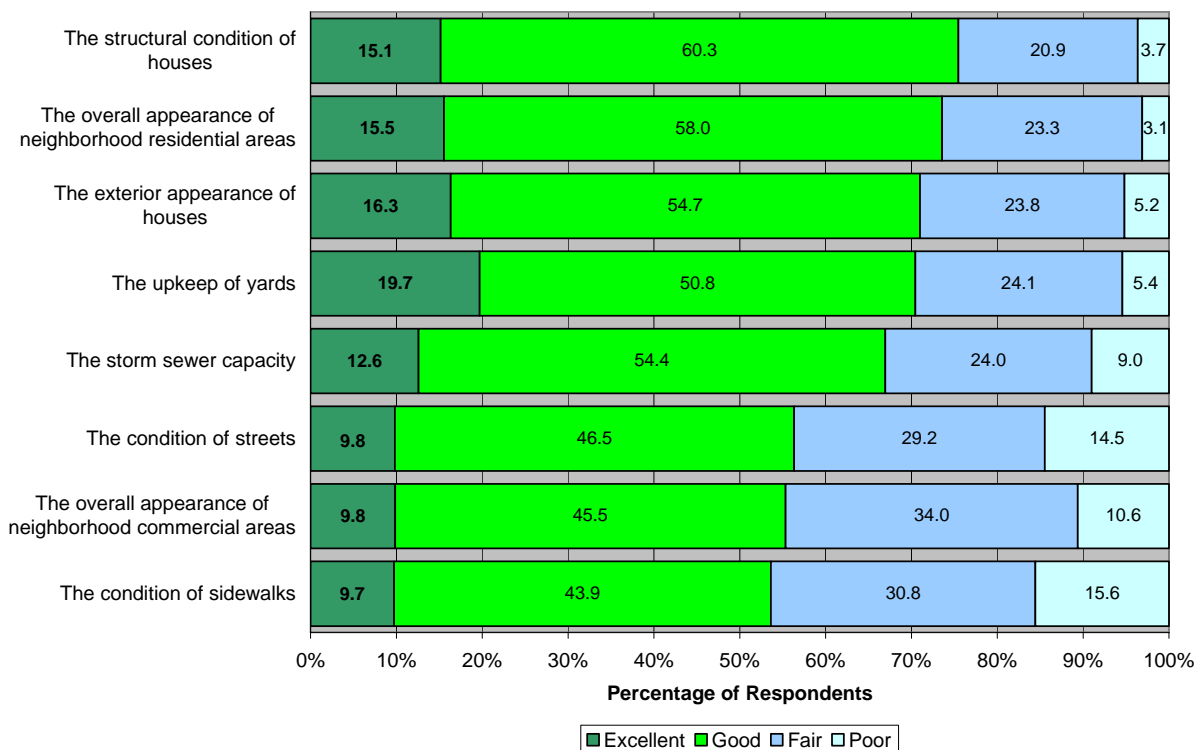
Four aspects of residential housing received the highest marks, with over 70 percent rating these items good or excellent, led by the structural condition of houses and the overall appearance of neighborhood residential areas. The "curb appeal" items regarding the exterior appearance of houses and the upkeep of yards followed close behind. Nearly 20 percent of respondents rated the upkeep of yards as excellent, the highest excellent rating of any item.

The condition of sidewalks and the condition of streets received some of the lowest marks. Approximately 15 percent of respondents rated these items as poor. These items, along with the overall appearance of neighborhood commercial areas, had the lowest combined good or excellent ratings, at just more than 50 percent.

The storm sewer capacity was considered a problem by some residents, with nine percent rating this item as poor. Storm sewer capacity concerns appear concentrated in certain, specific locations such as in lower-lying residential areas near creeks and waterways, and are not a widespread issue throughout the Benson Alliance.

These ratings show an apparent divergence in issues of concern for neighborhoods. Housing was not a dominant neighborhood issue for the alliance area; infrastructure issues (sidewalks, streets, and for some areas storm sewer capacity) were the primary concern. Residents would also welcome improvements to the appearance of commercial areas throughout the alliance.

Figure 2: Ratings of Various Neighborhood Conditions



Participation in healthy lifestyle activities

The survey next asked a couple questions regarding participation in healthy lifestyle activities in the neighborhood. Benson Alliance residents tended to be quite active, as 70 percent indicated they participated “often” (37 percent) or “sometimes” (33 percent) in activities such as walking, jogging, or biking in their neighborhood (See Figure 3). Slightly more respondents indicated they participated “rarely” (16 percent) versus “never” participating (14 percent).

The survey’s design asked separate questions to those who indicated they participated often or sometimes versus rarely or never. Over half (54 percent) of those participating often or sometimes indicated that there was “something about the neighborhood that should be changed to increase participation or generally improve healthy lifestyle activities”. Those indicating something should be changed were asked what that change should be. Responses to this open-

ended question were classified into categories and are ranked in Table 1. Respondents often mentioned infrastructure items such as sidewalks, trails/paths, and roads/streets. Healthy lifestyle participants also cited safety issues (reducing crime, slowing traffic, improving lighting), having better neighborliness including group walks or other scheduled activities, and beautifying the area.

Figure 3: Level of Participation in Healthy Lifestyle Activities

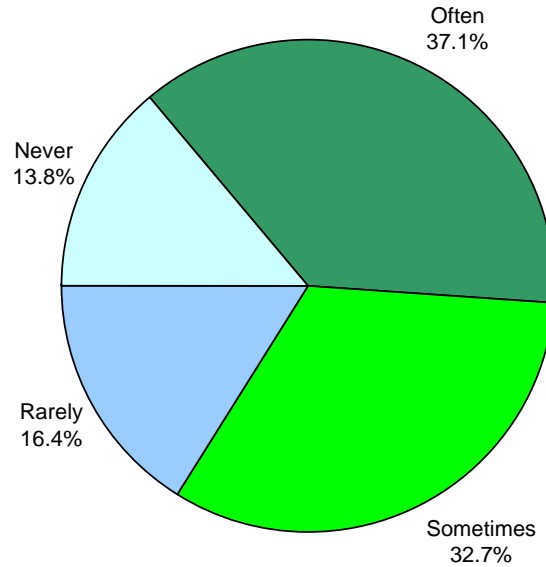


Table 1: Ranking of Responses Regarding "Improving Healthy Lifestyle Activities"

Rank	Description of Specific Response Category	Percent*
1	Improve sidewalks	17.6
2	Reduce crime/gangs/drugs	14.3
3	Get new or improved trails, paths	12.6
3	Neighborliness, improve involvement/cooperation	12.6
5	Neighborhood beautification, maintenance, clean-up	10.1
6	Improve road/street conditions	9.2
6	New activities/programs	9.2
8	Control speeding, slow down traffic	8.4
9	Better lighting	7.6
9	Improve parks and playgrounds	7.6
11	Facilities are too distant, need to be closer	3.4
11	Improve area's look/appearance	3.4
11	More police, police patrols	3.4

* Percent of 119 Valid Cases. Percentages will not sum to 100.

As mentioned, the survey’s design asked a different question to those who indicated participating in healthy lifestyle activities seldom or never: “Is there something about the neighborhood that prevents you from these activities?”. Only 35 percent of those asked said “yes” to this question. Those saying yes were asked a follow-up, open-ended question regarding the nature of the preventing item. The dominant response regarded not feeling safe in the neighborhood or aspects of crime. Other top responses regarded the area being hilly, poor sidewalks, and physical conditions or disabilities that limited activity levels. The latter item is considered more of a personal ailment problem rather than a neighborhood aspect that prevents participation in healthy lifestyle activities in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Change

When asked about their neighborhood over the next five years, 45 percent thought it would remain the same while 55 percent said it would change in some ways. Those indicating a change would occur were asked what they thought would happen. Responses to this open-ended question were classified into categories and are ranked in Table 2.

The most common response regarded the neighborhood becoming worse. Many respondents thought their neighborhood would “go downhill”. More than 20 percent of those asked this question listed a response classified in this category. The next most common response by slightly fewer than 15 percent of respondents related to a component of population change—that the neighborhood would become relatively younger. These responses took two forms: one where there would be fewer older persons, either from moving out of the area or the eventual passing away of current residents. Additionally, there was a view that relatively younger persons would be moving in as housing units change ownership. Both of these aspects are related and show a perception that the neighborhood’s current residents will not be there forever.

Table 2: Ranking of Responses Regarding How the Neighborhood Will Change

Rank	Description of Specific Response Category	Percent*
1	Neighborhood will go downhill/get worse	21.7
2	More younger people/fewer older people	14.1
3	Decline in housing (worse upkeep, more rentals)	12.0
3	Housing improvements	12.0
5	Neighborhood will improve	10.9
6	Business/Industrial growth	8.7
6	Population will change (general)	8.7
8	Crime/Gangs will worsen	6.0
9	Neighborhood will become more beautiful	4.9
10	Housing growth	4.3
11	More kids/children/families	3.8
12	Ethnicity or race of population will change	3.3
12	Infrastructure/Road improvements	3.3

* Percent of 184 Valid Cases. Percentages will not sum to 100.

Ranking third were two aspects of housing change. The same percentage of people thought that housing conditions would improve and decline. Thus, if combined, aspects of housing change would rank as the most commonly mentioned item (24 percent). This shows that changes

in housing conditions, whether improvements or declines, were viewed as likely to occur during the next five years.

The type of change listed 5th most frequently regarded neighborhood improvement. More than 10 percent of respondents said that they expected their neighborhood to improve in some way. However, this percentage of persons saying specifically that the neighborhood will improve was only half of the percentage saying it would decline or get worse (22 percent).

Other items mentioned dealt with other aspects of population changes and types of neighborhood growth (housing, business). Six percent believed that crime and/or gangs in the neighborhood would get worse, ranking this as the 8th most frequently mentioned item.

In general, the responses to the expected specific neighborhood change tended to take on either a positive or a negative tone. The neighborhood would get better or become worse; housing would either improve or decline. Thus, an analysis by grouping the responses into generally positive or generally negative categories provides additional insight.

Three categories of responses were viewed as negative: the neighborhood getting worse, declines in housing conditions, and crime/gangs worsening. The category regarding the neighborhood getting worse included those responses that related to declines in population. Thus, the negative statements focused on something in the neighborhood becoming worse or depopulation occurring. Conversely, population growth and other types of growth were viewed as positives. Economic development is often defined by increases in the number of businesses, population and/or housing units.

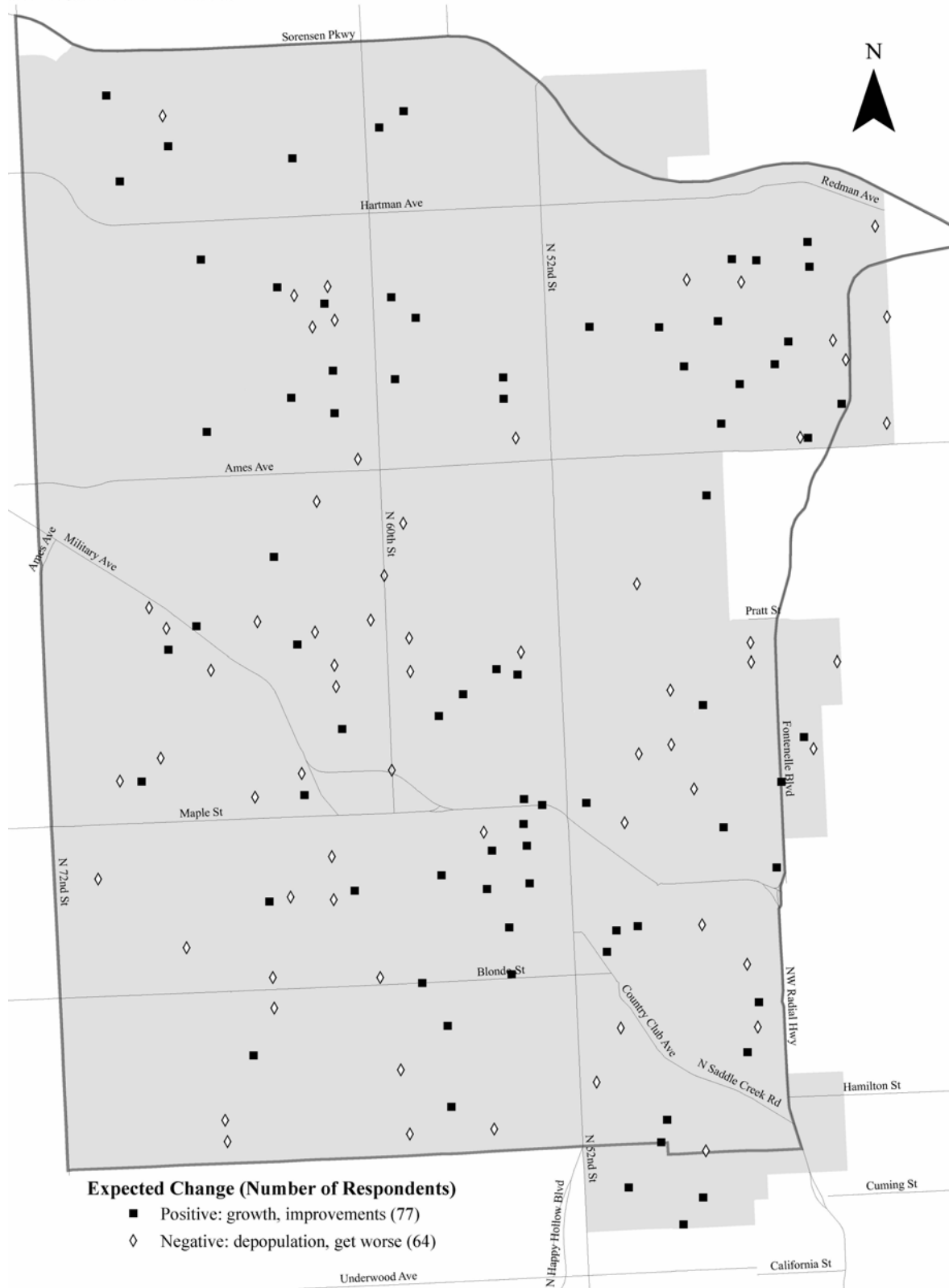
Expected improvements were also viewed as positive changes. This included housing and general neighborhood improvements along with the belief that the area would “become more beautiful” during the next five years. Thus, positive statements focused on growth and various improvements.

Categories reflecting changes in population components were not assigned to either the positive or negative groups of responses. Population changes such as becoming relatively younger or more ethnically diverse are not clearly defined as being desirable or undesirable. These changes do not necessarily make an area better or worse; such an interpretation is largely dependent on the situation of the observer. For example, having more families with children move into an area might be viewed positively by some by making the area more vibrant, while others might view this change negatively under an assumption that more children might necessitate school expansion and associated higher taxes. For these reasons, the statements regarding various types of population changes were not classified as positive or negative and were excluded from this analysis.

Classifying the expected change statements into positive and negative categories showed that of the 184 respondents who responded validly to the change question, 77 stated a positively-toned response (42 percent) while 64 had a negatively-toned response (35 percent). The remaining 43 respondents (23 percent) stated an aspect of population change that was not classified as either positive or negative. Thus, among those specifically classified as positive or negative, 55 percent cited a positively-construed response.

Map 2 shows the geographic distribution of the positive and negative responses. Several notable patterns exist. First, respondents located north of Ames Avenue tended to have positive responses. Almost 70 percent of responses were positive in this area. This patterns hold for both those located east and west of North 60th Street, which when combined with Ames Avenue, approximately breaks the Benson Alliance boundaries into northeast and northwest segments.

Map 2: Positive and Negative Outlooks for Neighborhood Change during the Next Five Years



Note: Question only asked of those who indicated a change would occur. Responses that related to aspects of population change were not classified into either the positive or negative change categories.

Responses in the southwest section of the alliance, defined as south of Maple Street and west of North 60th Street, were largely negative. Twelve of fifteen responses in this area had a negative classification. Additionally, the west central part of the alliance west of North 60th Street between Ames Avenue and Maple Street had primarily negative responses. Of the 22 responses in this area, 15 had a negative change outlook. While the specific numbers in certain locations are small, they do show general trends regarding the outlook over the next five years.

Another identifiable pattern shows positive outlooks for those living in the county club neighborhood area, roughly defined as along Country Club Avenue between Blondo and Maple Streets. All but one response in this area had a positive tone.

Responses in other areas tended to be more scattered, or not deviating greatly from the average across the entire alliance area. The east central section located east of North 52nd Street between Ames Avenue and the Northwest Radial Highway had somewhat more negative responses when compared to the relative percentage across the alliance.

In summary, more survey participants thought their neighborhood would change than remain the same over the next five years. The five most commonly cited specific changes included aspects of neighborhood decline or improvement, housing condition declines or improvements, and a demographic shift to a relatively younger population. Expected changes cited that conveyed a positive tone outnumbered those with a negative tone. The northern part of the alliance as well as the country club area tended to expect positive neighborhood changes while the southwest and west central areas of the alliance were more negative in their outlook.

Interest in Neighborhood Problems

Respondents believed that most residents were greatly interested in neighborhood problems. When asked to choose from four levels of interest, 80 percent of respondents said that most residents were either “very interested” (29 percent) or “somewhat interested” (51 percent) in neighborhood problems. Only five percent believed that most residents were “not at all interested” in neighborhood problems.

When compared across the self-identified part of Omaha the respondent lived in, some differences in response patterns were seen. Those who indicated Dundee and Country Club, when combined, said somewhat or very interested 90 percent of the time. In comparison, those who said they lived “North” (North Omaha, Northeast, etc.) indicated somewhat or very interested 76 percent of the time.

Part B: Perceptions of the Benson Alliance Area

After completing the section regarding the respondent’s neighborhood, the survey moved into inquiring about an alliance within the Benson area. The concept of the “Benson Alliance” and its boundaries needed to be formed clearly in the respondent’s mind so that they could understand and accurately answer the questions. The survey introduced and described the alliance as follows:

“Now I would like to move beyond asking about your neighborhood to a broader area. We will refer to this broader area as the Benson Neighborhood Alliance, which includes both your neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods. Specifically it is from 45th Street to 72nd Street east to west, and from Sorenson Parkway to Western Avenue north to south.”

Additionally, if the respondent did not hear of fully understand those street boundaries, the interviewer was instructed to repeat the boundaries or add one or all of the following descriptive statements: “Immanuel Hospital and Roncalli High School are on Sorensen Parkway”; “Holy Name Church and Fontenelle golf course are on 45th Street”; Creighton Prep High School is on Western Avenue”. No statement was specifically made regarding 72nd Street as it was believed that all alliance residents would be familiar with the location of this major street.

The first set of questions regarded resident’s perceptions about the best and worst aspects of the alliance area as well as the most important problem for it to address. Additionally, the survey inquired about awareness of the effort to create the alliance and support for its formation.

Best Aspects of the Benson Alliance Area

The first question stated “In your opinion, what is the one best thing about the Benson Alliance area just described?”. Table 3 ranks both broad categories of mentioned responses and those specific items listed by three percent or more of respondents. The broad categories group similarly-focused items, such as aspects of living in the area like schools and churches, to show relatively how often similar specific items were mentioned when grouped together. The broad categories aggregate all items mentioned, including those listed by fewer than three percent of respondents not shown on the ranking of specific items.

The most commonly listed responses regarded attributes of the alliance area’s neighborhoods and people. Characteristics of Benson such as its downtown area followed close behind along with the alliance’s central geographic location within Omaha and environmental attributes. Each of these broad categories of items was mentioned by roughly 3 in 10 respondents. About half that number listed something related to living in the area (shopping, eating/drinking places). Twelve percent listed an item related to the economy or commercial aspects of the alliance, the only other major category of items to be listed by more than 10 percent of survey participants.

The Benson Alliance’s central location and close proximity to principle destinations such as downtown Omaha or the airport topped the list of specific best aspects. Many responses included in this category conveyed the area’s convenience or that “everything” they needed was located there, often within a few minutes walk. Nearly 1 in 5 respondents mentioned this specific item.

Following the location were aspects of the neighborhoods. People tended to view the area as “a good place to live” and having good neighborhoods. Several people mentioned that their area was “quiet”, another perceived positive regarding their neighborhood. About 1 in 8 respondents mentioned this specific item.

About 10 percent of respondents mentioned that the shopping was the best aspect of the area or that they liked the local businesses. This aspect of the broad category of living in the area was the only living item ranked in the top 15 of specific items compared to the overall living category having a relatively high number of mentions.

Quality housing and beautiful homes ranked as the 4th most mentioned specific item while the downtown or main street of Benson rounded out the top five. Other commonly mentioned items regarded residents being interested in the area or trying to improve it along with a sense of community or people working together. People viewed the “small-town” feel and charm of the area as positives as well as the friendly people. Other people cited the ease or quickness of traveling around the area or its potential for growth and economic development. Being a low crime or safe place to live was mentioned by less than five percent of survey participants. Respondents’ views of crime and safety will be further discussed in the following sections.

Table 3: Ranking of Major Response Categories to the "Best Thing About the Benson Alliance Area" Question

Rank	Major Category Description	Percent*
1	Neighborhoods and People	33.0
2	Benson Characteristics	31.4
3	Geographic/Environmental	27.2
4	Living	14.9
5	Economic	12.0
6	Safety	5.2
7	Government	1.6

Ranking of Specific Responses to the "Best Thing About the Benson Alliance Area" Question

Rank	Description of Specific Response Category	Percent*	Major Category
1	Centrally located, proximity, convenience, "everything here"	18.8	Geographic/Environmental
2	Good neighborhoods, good place to live, quiet	12.3	Neighborhoods and People
3	Shopping, businesses	9.7	Living
4	Beautiful houses, quality homes, kept up housing	8.4	Neighborhoods and People
5	Downtown, main street	7.1	Benson Characteristics
6	Interest in the area/trying to improve the area	6.8	Benson Characteristics
7	Friendly people	5.8	Neighborhoods and People
7	Size, "small-town" feel	5.8	Benson Characteristics
9	Clean, beautiful, trees, charm	5.5	Geographic/Environmental
9	Older/established neighborhoods, stable	5.5	Neighborhoods and People
11	Ease of travel, short distances/travel times, streets	4.5	Benson Characteristics
11	Feeling of community, people working together	4.5	Benson Characteristics
13	Growth/development, economy	4.2	Economic
13	Low crime, safe	4.2	Safety
15	Affordable housing	3.6	Economic

*Percent of 309 Valid Cases. Percentages will not sum to 100.

Worst Aspects of the Benson Alliance Area

Having asked about the best aspects, the survey then changed to focus on the opposite end of the spectrum. Specifically, the next question stated "In your opinion, what is the one worst thing about the Benson Alliance area?". Table 4 ranks both the broad categories and specific items mentioned.

Aspects relating to safety led the broad categories, with one in three respondents mentioning something related to safety. The frequency of mentioning safety was much higher than that of the next most mentioned categories—aspects of neighborhoods and social issue items. Less than one if five respondents mentioned items in these categories such as noise in the neighborhood or income disparities within the alliance. Closely following were aspects of infrastructure (sidewalks, parking) and economic issues (attracting new businesses), mentioned by about one in six respondents. Categories mentioned least frequently related to government services and the needs of children.

Crime and violence topped the list of specific worst aspects. More than 20 percent of respondents mentioned this item, more than three times the level of the next most-frequently mentioned items: the neighborhood needing to be cleaned and/or maintained better and the lack of neighborhood involvement. These “neighborhood” items were the only specific items classified in the broad neighborhood group mentioned by more than three percent of respondents.

Government services such as snow removal were the fourth most-mentioned item. The early winter timing of the survey somewhat increased the mentioning of this item; snow removal would not have been cited as frequently if the survey had been conducted during the summer.

The economy within the alliance rounded out the top five most often mentioned items. Some respondents felt the business environment was not very strong, while others sought economic development including job creation. Separately, some respondents felt retail shopping needed improvement and for a “revitalization” of businesses to occur, especially former business areas in downtown Benson that were currently vacant.

Residents also noted problems with housing and rentals as well as street and traffic issues.

Table 4: Ranking of Major Response Categories to the "Worst Thing About the Benson Alliance Area" Question

Rank	Major Category Description	Percent*
1	Safety	33.1
2	Neighborhoods	19.2
3	Social Issues	18.0
4	Infrastructure	16.5
5	Economic	16.2
6	Government	6.0
7	Children's Needs	4.1

Ranking of Specific Responses to the "Worst Thing About the Benson Alliance Area" Question

Rank	Description of Specific Response Category	Percent*	Major Category
1	Crime/violence	22.6	Safety
2	Neighborhood clean-up, beautification, maintenance	6.8	Neighborhoods
3	Community relations/involvement	6.4	Neighborhoods
4	Services provided (snow removal, parks, etc.)	6.0	Government
5	Economy, economic development	5.6	Economic
6	Housing problems/issues	5.3	Social Issues
6	Roads and streets (condition)	5.3	Infrastructure
8	General or other infrastructure issues	4.5	Infrastructure
8	Improve retail shopping	4.5	Economic
8	Traffic and traffic flow	4.5	Infrastructure
11	Apartments and rentals problems/issues	4.1	Social Issues
11	Revitalize businesses, maintain (current) business	4.1	Economic
13	General safety issues	3.4	Safety
13	Poor, blighted areas	3.4	Social Issues

*Percent of 266 Valid Cases. Percentages will not sum to 100.

Most Important Problem for the Benson Alliance Area to Address

The final open-ended question stated “In your opinion, what is the single most important problem the Benson Alliance area should address?”. This question is a logical follow-up to the worst aspects, as people often want to improve what they view as being worst. However, responses to the worst-aspect question often tend to be complaint based (snow removal is poor) while the most important problem question delves deeper and often obtains a more carefully “thought out” response, finding what the respondent values or prioritizes. Thus, this question helps sort out the differences between items that are not ideal but often can be lived with and those items that matter most to the respondent.

Safety was again the broad category that respondents mentioned most often. Just fewer than half the respondents listed an item that was classified in the safety category (45 percent). This level was more than double that of the next most-frequently mentioned category: economic items (19 percent). Thus, safety items dominated the responses regarding priority problems to address. Respondents cited safety items more often regarding priority problems than the preceding question on worst aspects (33 percent).

Infrastructure items had the third-highest number of mentions followed by neighborhood items, with both being cited by about 15 percent of respondents. Compared to the worst aspects, neighborhood items were mentioned less often regarding problems to address, by about five percentage points. Conversely, mentions of children’s needs as priority problems tripled compared to their mentions as a worst aspect of the area. Children’s needs ranked as the fifth most mentioned broad priority problem category after being last regarding worst aspects. Children’s needs was the only other broad category to be listed by more than 10 percent of respondents.

These response patterns show personal priorities within the area—feeling safe, having a good economy and/or high-quality job, traveling easily on streets in good condition, having a clean, close-knit neighborhood, and providing for children. Most would agree that these are common and desirable goals for an area. The relative rankings show what is most important in the Benson Alliance area and comparisons to the rankings from the worst aspects provide additional insight. Safety ranked first in both questions but was mentioned much more often as a priority problem. Economic issues were the second highest priority category versus fifth highest regarding worst aspects. Social issues were mentioned far less often regarding priority problems than worst aspects and ranked as sixth highest versus third respectively. In summary, broad categories of responses show differences between items Benson Alliance residents view as the worst aspects of the area and the most important problems for it to address.

Crime and violence again led the list of specific items mentioned and again was mentioned more than three times more often than the second ranked item. The view to address crime was consistent across the alliance as Map 3 shows; respondents citing crime were spread throughout the alliance and not clustered in any certain area.

Several other safety items placed in the top 15—generally wanting to feel safe, gangs, drugs, and the need for policemen. These items are all related, and led to safety being the most frequently mentioned broad category. While not shown on Map 3 for clarity purposes, respondents citing these items were also spread throughout the alliance area.

Four economic items ranked in the top 15 priority problems. Improving area shopping as well as maintaining and creating new businesses were emphasized.

Two children’s needs items ranked in the top 15. The perception that youth were loitering and/or causing problems was cited along with a proposed curfew to reduce this problem. Others

felt that there needed to be more youth activities and quality ways for young people to spend their free time. Both of these items were mentioned by around 5 percent or 1 in 20 respondents.

When compared to the listing of worst aspects, prioritizing fixing roads and streets rose from the 6th most cited issue to second. Conversely, cleaning and maintaining the neighborhood fell from second to the 7th most mentioned priority problem.

Table 5: Ranking of Major Response Categories to the "Most Important Problem for the Benson Alliance Area to Address" Question

Rank	Major Category Description	Percent*
1	Safety	45.4
2	Economic	18.9
3	Infrastructure	15.7
4	Neighborhoods	13.6
5	Children's Needs	12.5
6	Social Issues	8.6
7	Government	4.3

Ranking of Specific Responses to the "Most Important Problem for the Benson Alliance Area to Address" Question

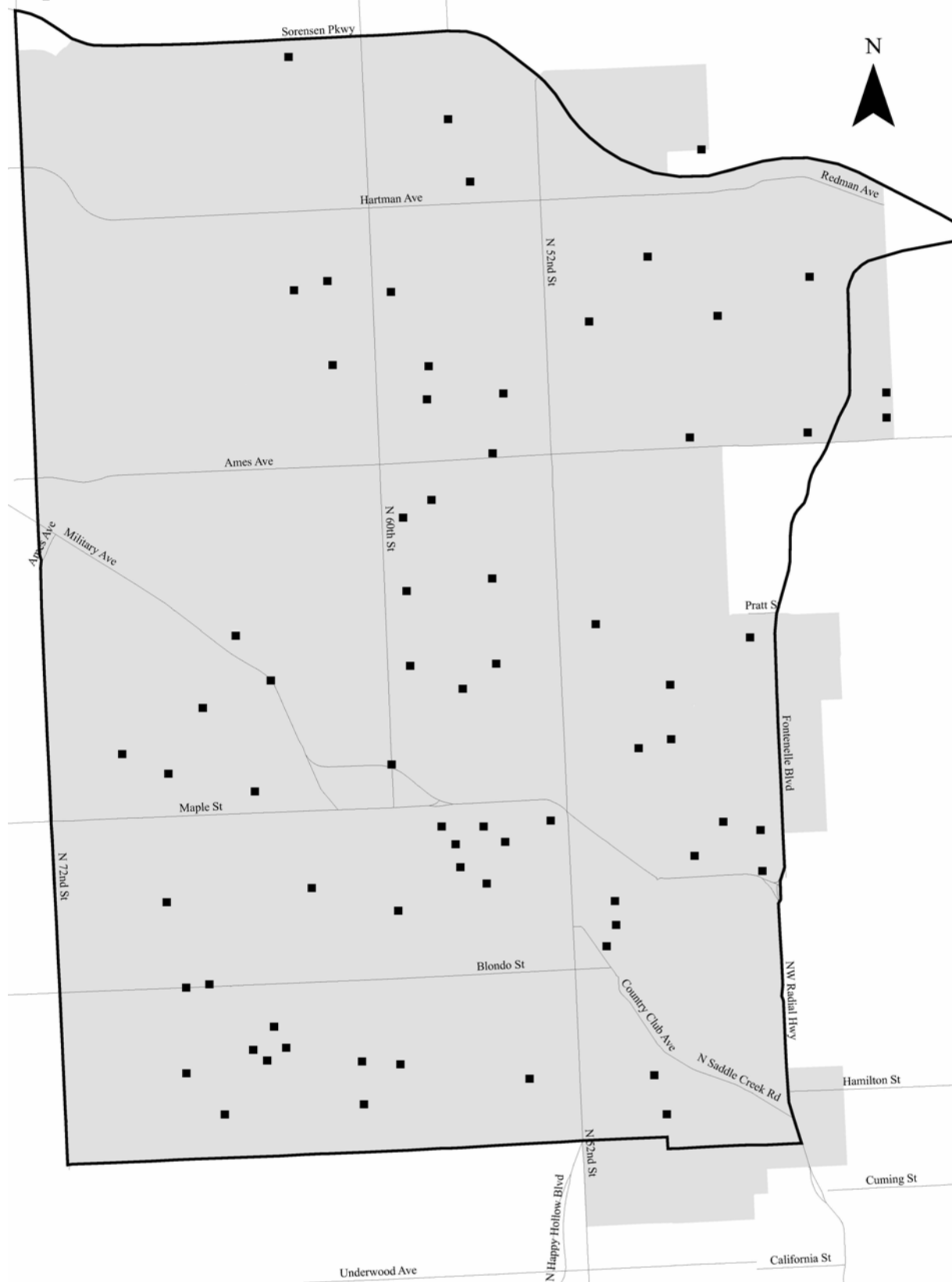
Rank	Description of Specific Response Category	Percent*	Major Category
1	Crime/violence	25.0	Safety
2	Roads and streets (condition)	6.8	Infrastructure
3	General safety issues	6.4	Safety
4	Improve retail shopping	5.4	Economic
4	Revitalize businesses, maintain (current) business	5.4	Economic
4	Youth involved in bad activities, need curfew	5.4	Children's Needs
7	Activities for youth	5.0	Children's Needs
7	Neighborhood clean-up, beautification, maintenance	5.0	Neighborhoods
7	New business development, attraction	5.0	Economic
10	Gangs	4.3	Safety
10	Services provided (snow removal, parks, etc.)	4.3	Government
12	Drugs	3.6	Safety
13	Economy, economic development	3.2	Economic
13	Housing problems/issues	3.2	Social Issues
13	Need more police/firemen	3.2	Safety

*Percent of 280 Valid Cases. Percentages will not sum to 100.

Awareness of and Support for the Benson Alliance

Gauging respondent awareness of the alliance effort at the time of the survey and whether they supported the idea was important to know. About one in five respondents indicated they were aware of the effort by Omaha by Design and the city of Omaha to create the Benson Neighborhood Alliance (22 percent). Even given somewhat low awareness, the support for creating the alliance was nearly unanimous, as 94 percent of those stating an opinion either agreed (56 percent) or strongly agreed (38 percent) with the effort to create the alliance.

Map 3: Spatial Distribution of Respondents Listing Crime/Violence as the Most Important Problem for the Benson Alliance Area to Address



Part C: Evaluation of Services

The 2005 Benson Residents Survey assessed satisfaction with various local services and facilities within the alliance area. The survey included questions about services in public safety (e.g. fire protection), daily needs (shopping facilities), leisure time (parks and playgrounds), and neighborhoods (litter control).

Evaluations of services by local citizens play an important part in any effort to better understand and improve public services. They provide a “consumer perspective” of services for which the consumer often has no alternative choices. In most cases, surveying citizens is the only way this information can be obtained.

Properly collected survey data can be far more representative of community feelings than complaint data. It is also more reliable than personal observations by government employees and elected officials who hear mainly from dissatisfied persons or those representing special interests.

Using a survey taps the opinions of a representative sample of the population, including both those satisfied and dissatisfied with the selected items mentioned in the survey interview. The opinions of satisfied persons are especially important as relatively few residents contact their local government officials for any reason, and would not be represented in complaint or personal observation data.

Evaluations of services by local citizens do have several limitations. One major limitation is that different individuals may have varying expectations of a given service. Thus, two people might rate the same service differently even though they received identical treatment. Additionally, not all services are used by each citizen. A third consideration is that citizens often differ in the priority or importance they attach to a given service. Each of these factors can affect the perceived satisfaction level of individual respondents.

Obtaining responses with the Benson Alliance in mind was an important aspect of the service evaluation section. Thus, the section was framed in the following manner:

“Now I would like to ask you about certain services. Thinking about the broader Benson Alliance area described previously, are you currently *very satisfied*, *satisfied*, *dissatisfied*, or *very dissatisfied* with each service? How satisfied are you with [the item]?”

If the respondent needed to be reminded about the major streets bounding the alliance, the interviewers were instructed to repeat the necessary information.

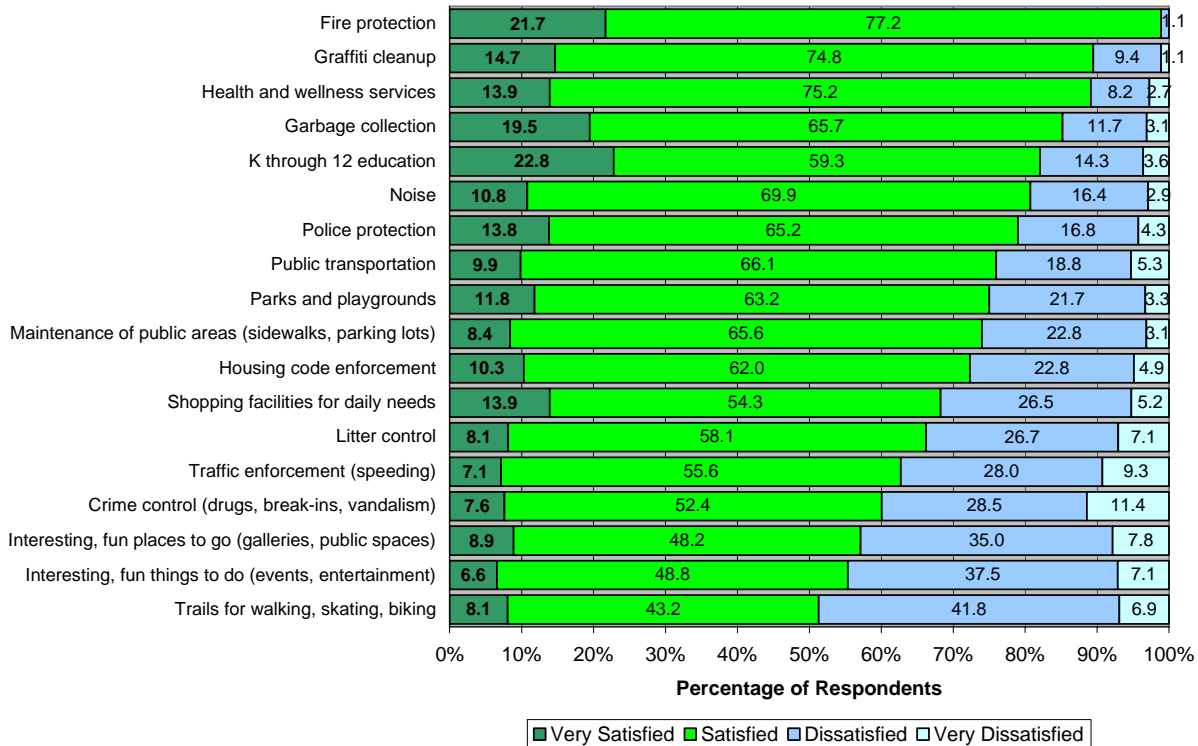
Figure 4 graphs the distribution of responses. At least half of the respondents indicated they had “satisfaction” with each service, but a large range in the level of satisfaction existed. Those with satisfaction (either very satisfied or satisfied) ranged from 99 percent for fire protection to only 51 percent regarding trails for walking, skating, and biking. Thus, while respondents had satisfaction with all services, they were relatively more satisfied with certain services.

Six items were rated with more than 80 percent satisfaction, led by fire protection, graffiti cleanup, and health and wellness services. K through 12 education also received more than 80 percent satisfaction and had the highest percentage in the very satisfied category (23 percent).

Residents were least satisfied with trails, interesting fun things to do and interesting fun places to go. Each of these items had less than 60 percent satisfaction and dealt with leisure time and entertainment. The next two lowest rated items, crime control and traffic enforcement, had

the highest “very dissatisfied” ratings, at approximately 10 percent. These related services also had among the lowest levels of those “very satisfied”. Hence, alliance residents were relatively dissatisfied with recreation and safety items, consistent with other survey sections regarding improving healthy lifestyle activities and priority problems to address.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with Various Services in the Benson Alliance



Part D: Shopping Patterns

Shopping Frequency at Various Locations

The survey’s final major section sought to gauge alliance resident shopping patterns, regarding both where the residents tended to shop and their percentage of purchases that occurred within the alliance boundaries.

The first topic regarding shopping frequency at various locations showed relative preferences and shopping tendencies. The determination of the relevant shopping locations stemmed from logical major shopping area within the alliance, those major shopping areas near the alliance, and major shopping malls within Omaha. These additional shopping areas outside of the alliance allowed for making comparisons among all major shopping areas and also set up comparisons for residents in other areas as the alliance formation process continues throughout the city.

The survey design sought to inquire about recent shopping patterns, the most relevant time period for the scope of this study. Recent was defined as the last year or two. Several choices were given regarding how often shopping occurred at each location. These choices more clearly defined each frequency to the respondent and increased the accuracy and specificity of the

responses attained. Additionally, shopping was viewed as going to the specific location and not necessarily defined by making a purchase there on each visit. Thus, these factors led to the following specific question wording:

“Now I would like to ask you a few questions about places where you might shop. In answering the following questions, think about the last year or two. Regardless of whether you bought anything, have you shopped at the following locations *about once a week, about 2 or 3 times a month, about once a month, about 2 or 3 times per year, about once per year, or not at all?* How about [the location]?”

When listing the location, the name of the shopping area and the intersection of nearby major streets were listed. In addition, the interviewer had the name of a major store at most locations if the respondent could not place or picture that exact area.

Figure 5 displays the shopping frequencies. To simplify the chart, the 2 or 3 times a month and once a month categories were combined to define shopping “monthly” and the 2 or 3 times per year and once per year categories were similarly combined to define shopping “yearly” at each location. The chart is ranked according to shopping at least monthly at each location.

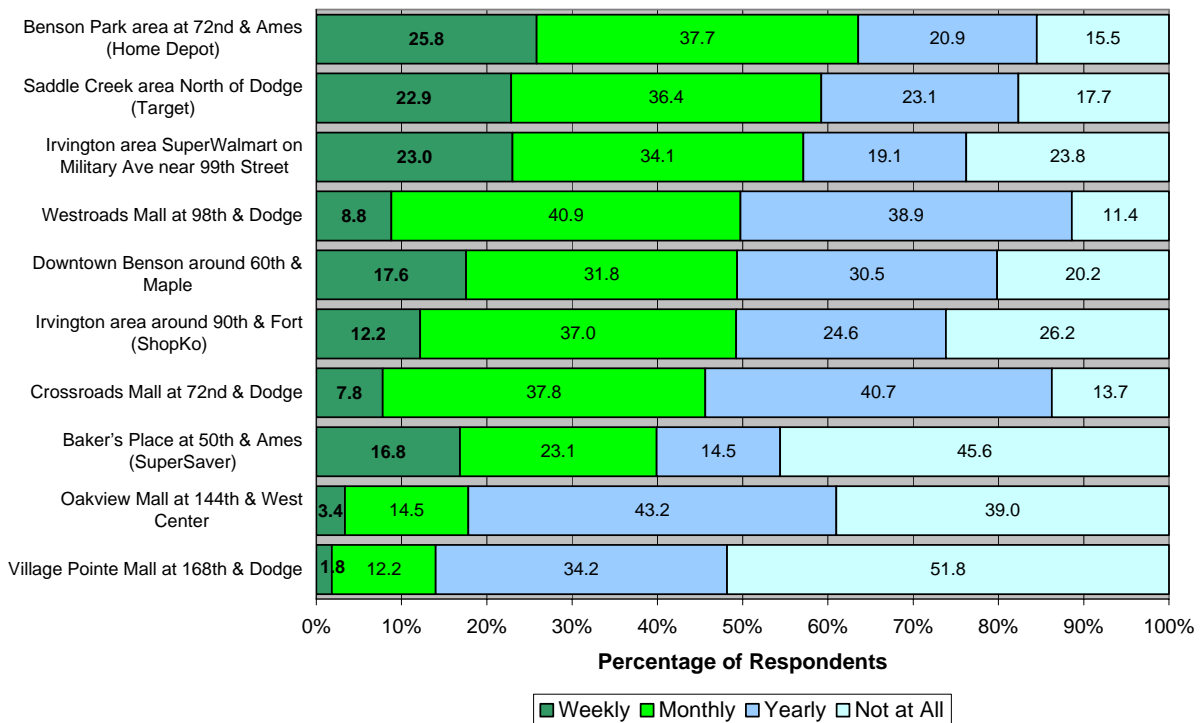
More than half of the respondents shopped at least monthly at three locations: Benson Park at 72nd Street and Ames Avenue, the Saddle Creek area North of Dodge Street, and the Irvington area SuperWalmart on Military Avenue near 99th Street. These figures were driven by these areas having the highest percentages shopping “weekly” at these locations, with approximately 25 percent indicating weekly trips to these shopping venues.

Each other location besides two distant malls had at least 40 percent of alliance residents shopping there monthly. Two locations within the alliance boundaries had the next highest levels of weekly attendance: Downtown Benson around 60th and Maple Streets and Baker’s Place at 50th Street and Ames Avenue. Around 17 percent of respondents frequented these locations weekly.

The two major shopping malls located relatively close to the alliance had the lowest percentages regarding never shopping at the location. Less than 15 percent indicated that they never shopped at Westroads Mall (98th and Dodge Streets) and Crossroads Mall (72nd and Dodge Streets), meaning that more than 85 percent of respondents had shopped at least once at these locations in the past year or two. The two more distant malls placed at the opposite end of the spectrum. Approximately 40 and 50 percent of Benson Alliance residents did not shop at Oakview Mall (144th and West Center Road) and Village Pointe Mall (168th and Dodge Streets) respectively.

Baker’s Place at 50th Street and Ames Avenue had the second highest percentage of respondents who never shopped at this location. A little less than half of the respondents (46 percent) indicated that they never shopped at Baker’s Place, a shopping location within the alliance. In fact, a higher percentage of respondents “shopped” at the distant Oakview Mall (144th and West Center Road) than at the relatively close Baker’s Place location. The distribution of responses regarding Baker’s Place was unique as it had a fairly high percentage of weekly shoppers, relatively low percentage of monthly shoppers, the lowest level of people shopping yearly, and the just mentioned relatively high level of those never shopping at this location. Thus, if the resident did not have a routine (weekly) pattern of shopping at Baker’s Place, they were not very likely to go to Baker’s Place at all.

Figure 5: Benson Alliance Residents' Shopping Patterns
Frequency of Shopping at Various Locations



Percentage of Purchases within the Alliance

Knowing shopping frequency defined how often residents went to certain shopping venues. Knowing how much they purchased within the alliance as a whole provided additional valuable information. This level of purchases showed aspects of “loyalty” to local businesses and the ability and/or willingness to travel further distances to make purchases.

Having the respondent clearly understand and consider fully the broader alliance area was an important aspect in the design of the “level of purchases” question. Thus, the exact alliance boundaries were listed in the question even though the respondent had already answered several questions with the entire alliance area in mind. Another design aspect to consider was defining the shopping levels to inquire about. Asking about the 50 percent level of purchases was deemed the most relevant and easy to understand means of defining the purchasing level, with branched follow up questions on the 25 and 75 percent purchasing levels for those who indicated purchasing under and over 50 percent respectively. Thus the exact question text read as follows:

“If you think about the Benson Neighborhood Alliance area, that is from 45th Street to 72nd Street east to west and from Sorensen Parkway to Western Avenue north to south, about what percentage of all of your out-of-home purchases are made from stores and businesses in this area – would that be *over* or *under* 50 percent?”

Those answering 50 percent or more were asked: “Would it be *over* or *under* 75 percent?” while those answering under 50 percent were asked “Would it be *over* or *under* 25 percent?”.

These two questions set up two measures for analysis – those above and below the 50 percent level and those in the four quartiles from zero to 100 percent (four groups at 25 percentage point intervals).

Respondents split about half and half regarding making 50 percent of their purchases within the alliance boundaries. A slight majority (52 percent) indicated that they made less than 50 percent of their purchases within the alliance while 48 percent said they made more than half of their purchases from alliance stores and businesses.

The branched follow-up questions showed somewhat more differences between the categories. The two lower spending categories, under 25 percent and under 75 percent, were selected by about 6 in 10 respondents in each follow-up question. Thus, when combined into a group, relatively more people indicated they spent less than 25 percent in the alliance versus the other extreme of 75 percent or more. The table below details overall response percentages. The under 75 percent subcategory, asked only of those who indicated they made over half their purchases in the alliance, made a category of those who overall purchased between 50 and 74 percent of their items in the alliance. Similarly, those indicated more than 25 percent in the follow-up question asked only of those spending less than half in the alliance, comprised a 25 to 49 percent category overall.

Percent of all out-of-home purchases made in the Benson Alliance	Percent of respondents in each category
Less than 25%	30.3
25 to 49%	21.3
50 to 74%	27.9
75% or more	20.5

Of the four categories, respondents most typically indicated they spent less than 25 percent of their out-of-home purchases within the alliance. Thirty percent identified this level of purchases, about 1.5 times the number that belonged to the other category at the extreme end of the scale: 75 percent or more.

Among the middle two categories, respondents more commonly spent 50 to 74 percent in the alliance versus 25 to 49 percent. This shows that certain individuals are more likely to spend within the alliance than others, as the distribution of respondents did not become steadily smaller (stair-step downward) at increasingly higher levels of spending within the alliance. Overall, nearly as many respondents spent between 50 and 74 percent in the alliance as those spending less than 25 percent. Thus, the distribution is not bell-shaped either, as more individuals identified with the smallest category and not the middle levels of spending. One would expect that smaller percentages would exist at the higher local spending categories as relatively few people make all their purchases in one area, given all the possible locations to shop. These data show that a large number of residents make a majority of their purchases within the alliance.

The two spending measures, above and below 50 percent and the four 25 percentage point categories, were mapped to view if spending patterns were dictated in part by the area where the respondent lived. No distinct patterns were identified. Relatively high and relatively low levels

of spending were scattered quite uniformly throughout the alliance area. The hypotheses that people living near downtown Benson would spend more overall in Benson and that residents on the border of the alliance would spend more outside the alliance did not prove to be true. Thus, it appears that personal preferences and situations (income levels, ability to travel, etc.) play a larger role in explaining the individual level of local spending than does location itself.

SUMMARY

A survey of nearly 400 residents of the Benson Alliance area showed various perceptions and activity patterns. Having this information will be beneficial as the alliance building and development plan formation processes move forward. Items from the residents survey that leaders will want to pay particular attention to include the name of the alliance area and how residents will identify with it, a perceived need for improved streets and sidewalks, desires to improve the area's trail system, crime and safety issues, recreational activities, and identified shopping trends and patterns.

Surveying the residents of an area details their views and issues that are of primary importance to them. Thus, residential surveys provide invaluable information for those desiring to improve an area and plan its future direction. The best plans from a development prospective will not have the desired effectiveness if the area's residents do not support certain procedures or practices or if the plan does not address the area's priority issues. The 2005 Benson Residents survey provides the link between the views of area residents and the planning process so that the most appropriate development plans can be derived. The goal of the survey to provide additional information on the "profile" of the Benson Alliance area will hopefully better all the efforts in the alliance building process.

A great deal of time and effort was placed into developing a survey instrument that would capture the various relevant perceptions and patterns of activity that would relate to the formation of a development plan for the area. With that instrument now created, the survey process could be replicated rather easily in other parts of Omaha that will be aspiring to form an alliance and compose a corresponding plan for that specific area. Utilizing the available resources developed with the alliance building process in mind will help ensure the success of future efforts by Omaha by Design and the City of Omaha to form such neighborhood alliances throughout the city. Such success will provide lasting benefits for residents of Omaha for generations to come.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Many factors influence the design of a telephone survey. One such aspect influencing the 2005 Benson Residents Survey's design was the possibility of replication in other parts of Omaha. The Benson Alliance was to be the first of fifteen proposed alliances across the city of Omaha. Hence, a survey of residents might prove beneficial in some or possibly all of the other alliances. In order to make accurate comparison across alliances, question wording would need to be as similar as possible, and more importantly, all relevant questions would need to be asked on the Benson Alliance survey since a survey is a one-time event and additional questions on other issues cannot be asked once the survey is completed. Hence, the designers tried to incorporate major city-wide issues that might exist, not necessarily only those topics of specific interest to the Benson Alliance. Thus, data presented on some items might seem somewhat irrelevant to the specific Benson Alliance, but may provide valuable insight as Omaha's alliance formation process moves forward.

Survey designs are also largely determined by the constraints of the available budget for conducting the survey. Contracted surveys have significant completion costs and the type and number of questions asked influence these costs. Therefore, not all relevant questions can be asked or asked in certain manners given the survey's time constraint. Given the survey's budget and nearly 400 interviews needing to be completed, the survey's desired length was limited to approximately 10 minutes. Given introductions, instructions, and having to possibly call the appropriate household member to the phone to complete the interview, the ten minute time span dwindled quickly. To summarize, the budgetary time constraint restricts the number of questions asked and the way in which they are asked, impacting overall survey results.

Interview Process

After making contact with someone at a selected telephone number, interviewers asked to speak with the person who was 19 years old or older and had the next birthday in the household. Interviewers asked for the adult with the next birthday to avoid biasing the sample in favor of persons more likely to be at home or answer the phone. Interviewers made at least two callbacks if the correct household member was not available.

Interviewers told respondents that their responses would be confidential. In addition, any respondents concerned about the legitimacy of the survey were given the telephone number of the survey's lead agency, the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Spanish-speaking interviewers were available to complete interviews if necessary. Surveys were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). The CATI system rotates the order of sub-question lists such as rating several neighborhood services to randomize the order in which lists are read and eliminate associated biases from question order. The MSR Group provided CPAR with separate data files of closed-question and open-ended responses. CPAR completed data cleaning, coding, and analysis.

Error and Confidence Levels

As with all sample surveys, the 2005 Benson Residents Survey results are assumed to contain some degree of error. The reliability of survey results depends upon the degree of care

exercised during survey administration, the sample size, the extent to which the sampling frame corresponds to the population, and the amount of nonresponse.

Survey Administration

Errors can creep into data in a number of ways during survey administration. For example, respondents may misunderstand questions, or interviewers may misunderstand or misrecord responses. The extent of such errors cannot be estimated. Survey researchers made every effort to minimize the potential for these types of errors throughout the survey process, and their effect on the results of the 2005 Benson Residents Survey is likely very small.

Sample Size

Another source of error stems from using a sample of persons to estimate the characteristics of a specific, larger population. Stating this as a question, how large is the likely difference between the results of the sample survey and the results one would obtain from interviewing the entire population? This difference, or sampling error, can be estimated for a random sample using accepted statistical techniques.

The 2000 Census indicated that the relevant 44 Benson Alliance Census Bureau block groups contained 28,031 persons ages 19 and older. The sample consisted of 387 respondents. Thus, the sample has a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 5.0 percent at the 95 percent level of confidence. In other words, there is a 95 percent likelihood that the true value of an item is no more than 5.0 percentage points higher or lower than the value reported.

This estimate of sampling error assumes a random sample—that is, all members of the population under study had a known, equal chance of being included in the sample. However, telephone surveys stretch the basic assumption of randomness because the sampling frame does not correspond perfectly to the population and due to nonresponse.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame is the list of units from which the sample is drawn. Ideally, the sampling frame consists of all members of the population under study. In practice such a list is rarely available, so a list that approximates the ideal is used. This is the case with the 2005 Benson Residents Survey where the population under study is adults in the Benson Alliance and the sampling frame is a list of telephone numbers. As a consequence, not all Benson Alliance adults had a known, equal chance of being included in the sample. Instead, a person's probability of being included in the sample varied depending on how many telephone numbers served the residence and how many adults lived in the household.

Persons living in households without telephones had no chance of inclusion in the survey sample. The exclusion of persons without telephones can result in the under representation of certain groups, such as those with lower incomes, less education, minorities, and more mobile persons within the area. The 2000 Census indicated that approximately 200 households or 1.3 percent of the households in the relevant block groups did not have telephone service. Conversely, persons living in households with multiple telephone numbers had a greater chance of inclusion than persons living in households with one telephone number.

A person's probability of being interviewed also varied according to the number of adults in the household. For example, a household with one adult living alone would be interviewed with certainty when the phone number was selected. Each person in a household with two adults had a

one in two chance of being interviewed upon having their phone number selected and each person in a household with three adults had a one in three chance and so on.

Nonresponse

Survey nonresponse is the failure to obtain measurements on those selected for sampling. This occurs when an eligible individual is unable or unwilling to complete the interview or to answer specific questions. This type of error is probably the most difficult to work with since the characteristics of the nonrespondents are typically unknown. Researchers took reasonable steps throughout the survey process to minimize nonresponse. For example, at least two callbacks were utilized to complete the interview with the appropriate individual at each selected phone number.

Interview Phases and Adjustments

Procedural steps were taken to ensure the sample of respondents contacted represented the Benson Alliance as a whole. Interviewing occurred in two phases. Phase I consisted of primary interviews and callbacks of those unavailable for interviewing that occurred between November 20 and November 30, 2005. The MSR Group completed 232 interviews in Phase I. CPAR analyzed the demographic characteristics of the 232 respondents, finding that they represented a relatively high number of respondents age 50 and over. “Older” respondents are typically easier to interview as they tend to be more available (physically at home) and able (less often caring for young children) to complete a telephone interview than “younger” respondents. Thus, a sample having a relatively large number of respondents age 50 and over can occur easily.

In order to attain a representative sample that was not skewed with too many respondents age 50 and over, Phase II screened respondents to interview only those under age 50. Therefore, when we combined Phase I and II completed interviews, the total percentage of survey respondents in specific age groups was similar to the corresponding percentage in the Benson Alliance. Without screening in Phase II, the percentage of those age 50 and over in the sample would have been higher than that in the alliance as a whole.

CPAR’s analysis of Phase I interviews also showed that the percentage of Black or African American respondents in the sample was somewhat lower than in the entire alliance. It was believed that the Phase II screening for those under age 50 would help attain relatively more Black or African American respondents, as demographics showed that residents of this racial group in the alliance tended to be relatively younger. However, after approximately 50 Phase II interviews had been completed (nearly 300 total interviews), it became clear that screening for age alone would not sufficiently close the gap in the percentages of Blacks or African Americans in the survey sample and overall alliance.

Having a representative sample of Black or African American respondents was a primary goal of the survey. Thus, in order to improve the likelihood of interviewing Black or African American respondents, 30 interviews were completed via random digit dialing in only those nine block groups where at least half of the residents were Black or African American. This procedural adjustment was expected to interview approximately 15 more Black or African American respondents than if no surveying changes had been made, which would help bring the percentages into line for the survey sample and the entire alliance. Once the 30 interviews were completed, random digit dialing from all alliance block groups again occurred for the completion of the remaining interviews.

The MSR Group completed 155 interviews in Phase II. Thus, approximately 40 percent of the 387 interviews occurred in Phase II.

Respondent Characteristics

An inherent goal when utilizing sampling is to have a representative sample of the overall population. As mentioned above, the exclusion of households without telephones, the overrepresentation of households with multiple telephones, and nonresponse all affect how representative the sample is and overall survey results.

Table 6 compares gender, age, race, and income characteristics of the survey sample to those in the relevant 44 Census Bureau block groups as reported by the 2000 Census. The respondent characteristics in the survey sample are not greatly different from those for the entire area in the 2000 Census.

Table 6: Comparison of 2005 Sample with 2000 Census Data for the Relevant 44 Block Groups of the Benson Alliance for Select Characteristics

	2005 Survey Sample		2000 Census	
	Number*	Percent	Number	Percent
A. Total Persons 19 Years and Older	387	100.0	28,031	100.0
B. Persons 19 Years and Older by Sex:				
Male	157	40.6	12,911	46.1
Female	230	59.4	15,120	53.9
C. Persons 19 Years and Older by Age:				
19-29	64	16.9	6,352	22.7
30-39	87	23.0	6,537	23.3
40-49	96	25.3	5,823	20.8
50-64	69	18.2	4,849	17.3
65 and over	63	16.6	4,470	15.9
D. Persons 19 Years and Older by Race and Hispanic Origin			Figures for 18 and older	
White, non-Hispanic	278	72.6	20,186	72.0
Black or African American	76	19.8	6,850	24.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	1.3	162	0.6
Asian	4	1.0	301	1.1
Hispanic	16	4.2	812	2.9
E. Total Households	387	100.0	16,042	100.0
F. Households by Household Income:				
Under \$25,000	71	20.3	4,874	30.4
\$25,000 - \$49,999	124	35.5	6,170	38.5
\$50,000 - \$74,999	81	23.2	3,041	19.0
\$75,000 or more	73	20.9	1,957	12.2

* Figures from the sample may not sum to totals due to item nonresponse.

Regarding gender, the survey had somewhat more female respondents relative to the percentage of females in the Benson Alliance. In general, women—especially those who are older or widowed—are more likely to be available in the home when called and have the time necessary to complete an interview. Thus, a larger percentage of women in the survey sample often occurs.

By age, younger persons were somewhat underrepresented in the sample while older persons were slightly overrepresented. Those under 30 represented 16.9 percent of the sample versus being 22.7 percent of the population. In contrast, 34.8 percent of the sample consisted of those over 50 while this age category comprised 33.2 percent of the population. The percentages in the 30 to 39 age category were nearly identical. The middle age category of 40 to 49 years was somewhat more represented in the sample. In short, those in their teens and twenties were about five percent less in the sample than in the entire Benson Alliance while those in their 40s were about five percent more. All things considered, these differences were not considered large enough to warrant techniques such as weighting the sample data to better its representativeness; the sample was considered representative of the Benson Alliance regarding age.

Similar percentages exist when comparing racial and ethnic groups. The percentage of non-Hispanic Whites was nearly identical in the survey sample and the entire Benson Alliance. The survey had a smaller percentage of Blacks or African Americans while having a slightly larger percentage of Hispanics. A survey goal of having the sample be comprised of at least 20 percent Black or African American respondents was reached. Given the diversity within the Benson Alliance, achieving this goal was instrumental in attaining a representative survey sample and providing quality results.

For household income, the sample appears somewhat underrepresented in the lower income categories and somewhat overrepresented in the higher income categories. Part of the reason for this includes low-income households being less likely to have telephones and thus being unable to be surveyed. Another reason stems from the 2000 Census reporting income in 1999 and the 2005 Benson Residents Survey reflecting respondents' views of current incomes for 2005 or 2004; the survey's percentages in the higher income categories will be influenced upward due to inflation and typical wage increases over time.

In summary, all major demographic characteristics were similar between the survey sample and the Benson Alliance as a whole. Thus, corrective techniques such as assigning weights to the data were not necessary. Overall, the survey sample achieved the desired traits to be fully representative of the entire alliance and allow accurate conclusions about the alliance to be construed from survey responses.

Methodology for Analyzing Open-Ended Responses

The survey asked several questions in a manner where the respondent could state whatever they wished, rather than having to choose from defined response categories. Open-ended questions allow very specific items to be stated, but can lead to long and complex responses.

To classify the open-ended responses, categories were developed and the responses were assigned to the most appropriate category. Responses that listed multiple separate items were assigned to a maximum of two categories; specifically, the first two separate categories listed in the response were classified, with additional mentioned items excluded from the analysis.

Placing limits on the number of items classified prevents the overrepresentation of one respondent's viewpoints. The first two items mentioned are viewed as having primary

importance, with additional statements related to and often used to further describe the already mentioned item(s). Thus, a hypothetical response such as “all the crime—we need policemen” would be assigned to two categories: *crime* and *law enforcement*. Similar statements like “the crime, we need more police; they say there’s no budget to hire more police” were also assigned to two categories, the first two listed: *crime* and *law enforcement* while the statement regarding the “budget” was not counted or classified in any category.

The summed number of responses classified into each specific category represents the total number of category responses. These category totals were then divided by the total number of persons who gave a classifiable response to the question and multiplied by 100 to express the figures as percentages. The percentages will not add up to 100 percent since some responses were classified into two categories. All of the tables in this report regarding open-ended responses are constructed as a ranking of the various categories’ percentages, indicating how often a category was mentioned relative to all other categories. Each table only lists those specific response categories that were mentioned by at least three percent of respondents.