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Study for the Kingswood Neighborhood Association: Community Needs, Problems and Resident Recommendations for the Work of the Group

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A STUDY FOR THE KINGSWOOD
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION:
COMMUNITY NEEDS, PROBLEMS,
AND RESIDENT RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE WORK OF THE GROUP

By

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March 2, 1982

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INTRODUCTION

The Kingswood neighborhood is located between 132nd and 139th Streets from West Center Road to Spring Street. The officers of the neighborhood association stated that approximately 400 households are in this area. The community began as a speculative housing development in the mid-1960's. At that time the house prices ranged from \$16,000 to \$20,000. These houses now sell for \$45,000 to \$50,000.

The neighborhood organization began in 1980 as a series of small get-togethers in homes to discuss concerns about undesirable changes occurring in the area. One of the persons involved in these early informal meetings said, "Some residents had perceived that the area was beginning to go downhill and they wanted to work together to reverse this." Another resident said that she had observed the neighborhood change from a stable area of young, traditional families to a neighborhood of working persons with developing community problems.

These concerned residents formed the Kingswood Neighborhood Association and held an election of officers. The officers contacted the Center for Applied Urban Research in the summer of 1981 for assistance in building an effective neighborhood organization and to determine possible projects and programs to help solve current problems. One of the problems was how to involve more residents in the work of the neighborhood association.

A representative of CAUR met twice with the officers of the newly formed community group. At the first meeting the

representative discussed the community development process and successful neighborhood organizational methods. An officer of the Bemis Park Neighborhood Association, an older successful neighborhood group, accompanied the CAUR representative and shared some of the group's experiences and successful projects and programs. The Kingswood Neighborhood Association officers decided to have a get-acquainted social event in the fall and then to conduct a community needs and attitudes survey as the first phase of their community development work.

The CAUR representative arranged for two members of the North Omaha Community Development Corporation, an inner-city neighborhood coalition, to meet with the Kingswood executive board to share their successful experiences in planning community-wide fund raising events and also to discuss some of their community problem-solving theories and methods.

A flea market and pot luck dinner were sponsored by the Kingswood group at the neighborhood school in the fall. A month after this event, the CAUR representative again met with the officers and discussed the procedures for conducting field research. The sample for the community needs and attitude survey consisted of 134 residents representing each part of the neighborhood. The Kingswood executive board assisted the CAUR representative in constructing the survey instrument. After the Kingswood workers collected the completed questionnaires, they were returned to CAUR for tabulation and analysis. The following report on the findings of the research was prepared by CAUR for use by the Kingswood Neighborhood Association.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Kingswood Neighborhood

Demographic Characteristics

Kingswood could be described as a community of white (98 percent), married (88 percent) homeowners (98 percent) who have one or more children (66 percent). None of respondents lived in apartments, and only one lived in a duplex. Of the 134 residents participating in the study, one was black and one was Asian. Four percent each were widowed, separated/divorced, or single. While the majority of households contained two adults (80 percent), others contained one (9 percent), three (4 percent), four (5 percent), or five (2 percent). Forty-two percent of the residents with children had two, 27 percent had three, and 22 percent had only one. Five percent of the families contained five or more children.

The Kingswood community has experienced some turn-over in population in the past few years, with 43 percent of the residents having lived there less than five years. About one-third (33 percent) have lived in the area between five and 15 years, while one-fourth have been residents for over 15 years. Almost three-fourths of the households contained women who worked outside the home. In 54 percent of the households both female and male residents contributed to the household support, and 9 percent of the homes were supported by the female householder only.

Satisfaction with the Community

Residents considered Kingswood a good place to live, with 95 percent of the 134 area respondents indicating that they were either very satisfied (29 percent) or satisfied (66 percent) with

their neighborhood. Only one person responded that he/she was very dissatisfied with Kingswood as a place to live.

Positive Characteristics

The convenience of the Kingswood location was the characteristic that the residents liked most. Over one-half (54 percent) responded with that attribute when asked, "What do you like most about our neighborhood?" Proximity to shopping and schools was often specifically mentioned while the closeness to services, employment, restaurants, churches, and Interstate 80 access were other attributes listed. One resident commented, "Kingswood is close to everything". Another 13 percent of the respondents wrote that the Kingswood location was the area's outstanding characteristic, without specifically mentioning convenience. One of these persons commented that the neighborhood was "ideally located," while another liked Kingswood being situated in "a nice part of Omaha."

Friendly, helpful neighbors made Kingswood a good place to live for many residents. Over one-third (34 percent) of the respondents identified these qualities of their neighbors as being their best-liked community characteristic. One resident said "Whenever help is needed, you can get it."

Another quality of their area that Kingswood residents appreciated was peace and quiet. Twelve percent of the residents used these two words to describe what they liked most about their neighborhood. Seven percent specifically mentioned the quality of the schools and school system as being one of Kingswood's most positive characteristics. Mentioned next most often was the residents' maintenance of their property. Six percent of the

persons participating in the study wrote that they appreciated the appearance of the homes and yards, described as clean, well kept, and very neat. One respondent wrote, "Most people keep their lawns in good condition," and another commented, "Most (residents) are property conscious."

Two percent of the respondents liked the low housing cost or low house payments in Kingswood, and one percent each responded that they liked the personal safety provided by the area; the trees, shrubs, and plantings; and the athletic association.

Table 1 shows these resident responses.

TABLE 1

Positive Characteristics of Kingswood:
 "What do you like most about our neighborhood?"

	N	%
Convenience (shopping, schools, services)	72	54
Friendly, helpful neighbors	46	34
Location in City	17	13
Quiet, peaceful area	16	12
Quality of schools	10	7
Clean, well kept appearance	8	6
Low cost of homes	3	2
Safe area	2	1
Trees, shrubs, plantings,	2	1
Athletic association	2	1

Negative Characteristics

When asked, "Is there something that you dislike about our neighborhood?" 39 percent of the residents could find no fault with the Kingswood area. The other 61 percent list 16 different negative characteristics. The traffic situation in Kingswood

appeared to be a real concern of many residents. Fourteen percent wrote of the lack of enforcement of residential speed limits in the area, while others specifically mentioned speeding vehicles and motorcycles through areas where children regularly played or boarded and disembarked from school buses. Several respondents mentioned the speeding on Kingswood Drive and Spring Street.

Unsupervised youth was another negative situation identified by the participants in the study. Eleven percent reported that they disliked being disturbed by noisy teenagers who congregated on street corners late at night. They also were concerned about younger children and toddlers whom they felt were not receiving adequate supervision and guidance. Some residents mentioned being treated rudely by children who played in yards without permission or who climbed fences and went through yards on the way to school. One respondent wrote, "Too many teenagers are out at night at the end of 134th and Westwood Drive." Also related to the youth problem was the incidence of vandalism in the area, which was mentioned by 11 percent of the respondents.

Four neighborhood problems were each named by 7 percent of the residents. These were the irritants of unsightly, parked vehicles, unkempt property, stray pets and barking dogs, and the lack of friendly neighbors. Residents detailed their dislike of boats and campers parked in driveways, inoperable vehicles left on the streets, and the lack of street space with cars parked on both sides. Several wrote that only a few residents are not maintaining their houses and yards, and one person wrote that two such persons were on his/her block. Respondents who disliked the lack of friendliness often detailed their feelings.

One wrote, "People make it hard for newcomers to fit into the neighborhood," and another perceived "A lack of unity--no central function that draws neighbors together." One respondent wrote, "Kingswood residents have never been very friendly. No coffees or good times." Another lamented, "Like most cities, after residing many years, you rarely get to know your near neighbors."

Five percent of the respondents disliked the poor condition of the streets and the lack of adequate snow removal. Four percent appeared to have strong feelings about the noise created by teenage groups at night, squealing tires, speeding cars without mufflers, and racing motorcycles. One percent each reported that no park was available and that commercial building was occurring too close to the residential area. The negative characteristics of Kingswood are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Negative Characteristics of Kingswood:
 "Is there something you dislike about our neighborhood?"

	N	%
traffic problems, speeding	19	14
unsupervised youth	15	11
vandalism	11	
parked, inoperable cars	10	7
unkept yards, houses	10	7
stray pets, barking dogs	10	7
lack of friendly, helpful neighbors	10	7
poor street condition/maintenance	7	5
noise	5	
commercial building close to area	2	1
lack of available parks	2	1

Resident Ratings of Community Characteristics

The quality of youth education and the cooperation of the school system with the parents and community received the highest rating of all of the characteristics of the Kingswood neighborhood. These characteristics received 86 and 85 percent excellent/good ratings, respectively.

Kingswood residents also valued the appearance of their community, giving the condition of the houses (73 percent) and property maintenance (72 percent) the next highest number of excellent/good ratings. Friendliness of the residents (70 percent) and the street lighting (69 percent) of the neighborhood also were appreciated by the persons living in Kingswood.

Strong concerns of Kingswood residents indicated by the percentage of poor/terrible ratings of community characteristics included recreation for senior citizens (61 percent) and the youth vandalism occurring in the community (40 percent). Other problems important to Kingswood residents were the lack of recreation for adults and families (37 percent) and the stray pets in the area (32 percent). The resident ratings are presented in Table 3.

The Neighborhood Organization

Recommended Work

One of the questions asked was, "Which two neighborhood problems should the neighborhood organization address this year?" Residents recommended that the group should begin working on neighborhood vandalism (18 percent of the respondents), traffic control (16 percent), and the parked, inoperable cars on the

TABLE 1

RESIDENT RATINGS OF COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

	Excellent/ Good Combination Percent	Excellent		Good		Fair		Poor		Terrible	
		Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
1. quality of youth education	86	32	39	54	65	11	14	1	1	2	2
2. school cooperation with community	85	29	33	56	64	13	15	1	1	2	2
3. condition of housing stock	73	9	11	64	78	25	31	1	1	1	1
4. resident maintenance of property (cleanliness, paint and upkeep of homes, care of lawns)	74	8	11	64	84	26	34	1	1	2	2
5. friendliness and neighborliness	70	21	28	49	66	24	32	6	8	0	0
6. street lighting	69	10	13	59	75	25	32	2	3	4	5
7. police protection/law enforcement	52	0	0	52	67	32	49	8	10	3	4
8. employment opportunities	52	7	8	45	53	36	42	7	9	5	6
9. city services (trash/snow removal)	49	6	8	43	55	37	48	11	14	3	4
10. recreational opportunities for youth	49	9	11	40	47	28	33	18	21	6	7
11. community pride and spirit	48	4	5	44	58	41	54	9	12	2	3
12. city maintenance of park	46	4	4	42	50	36	43	12	14	6	7
13. resident participation in neighborhood projects and programs (i.e., Cub Scouts, neighborhood organization)	45	5	6	40	46	40	47	14	16	1	1
14. city maintenance of vacant property	42	0	0	42	44	40	42	15	16	4	4
15. quality of neighborhood park (areas/equipment to serve community)	39	4	5	35	43	40	49	16	20	4	5
16. traffic control	39	4	5	35	46	36	47	19	25	6	8
17. recreational opportunities for adults and families	35	5	6	30	35	28	33	30	35	7	8
18. crime prevention	34	0	0	34	41	51	62	12	15	2	3
19. willingness of residents to work together on community problem solving	33	3	4	30	36	45	56	18	22	3	4
20. city maintenance and management of swimming pool	33	2	2	31	38	36	43	22	27	9	11
21. parking (on street, personal property)	33	1	1	32	42	34	44	20	26	13	17
22. stray pets	32	4	5	28	36	35	45	16	21	16	20
23. parental supervision of youth	29	3	4	26	34	41	53	22	29	7	9
24. youth vandalism	22	2	3	20	25	37	46	25	31	15	19
25. recreational opportunities for senior citizens	16	1	1	15	15	23	23	40	40	21	21

streets (14 percent). While the residents had few specific suggestions for action to be taken to solve the problems of vandalism or parked, junky cars, they had many ideas for traffic control. These included enforcing the speed limit, installing speed bumps on Kingswood Drive and 134th Street, installing a traffic light at 132nd and Kingswood Drive with a warning light on 132nd, getting the light between Kingswood Drive and Spring on 139th Street repaired, eliminating parking on one side of each street, and working with the city to solve the entrance/exit problem at the intersection of 134th and Kingswood Drive.

Residents recommended that the neighborhood group also address the problems of unsupervised pets (12 percent), youth (10 percent), improved street surfacing (8 percent), better snow removal service (4 percent), and maintenance of private property. Other problems that the residents perceived as being possible objectives included improving the swimming pool's poor hours and management, increasing neighborliness, and decreasing noise (3 percent each). Suggested by 2 percent of the respondents were improving police protection and street lighting. Table 4 shows the resident perceptions of problems that should be addressed by the neighborhood organization.

TABLE 4

Resident Perceptions of Problems That Should Be Addressed by the Neighborhood Organization

Vandalism	24	18%
Traffic/Speeding	21	16%
Parked cars on street	19	14%
Stray pets, barking dogs	16	12%
Youth supervision	14	10%
Street conditions	11	8%
New park or better maintenance of existing facilities	7	5%
Snow removal from street	6	4%
Cleanliness of neighborhood	5	4%
Noise control	4	3%
Swimming pool hours management	4	3%
Lack of Neighborliness of area	4	3%
Police protection	3	2%

Residents' Personal or Family Needs

Kingswood residents identified eight different areas in which they personally could use assistance from the neighborhood organization. Sixteen persons would like to have the group help them with baby sitting problems, and 15 would like to see the establishment of a youth job service. One wrote, "It would be nice to have a directory of Kingswood youth interested in babysitting, mowing, driving, etc." Ten persons would like to be assisted in establishing a school car pool. Four perceived a personal or family need for improved recreational facilities, and three would like to have neighborhood-sponsored social activities. Improved bus service was needed by two persons and one resident would like assistance with stray pets. One recent arrival to the community wrote, "We just moved here, and I would like to see a Welcome Wagon approach to newcomers."

Neighborhood Programs Residents Would Like to Attend

Fifty-one of the respondents (38 percent) listed 20 different types of meetings that they would like to attend, while seven persons (5 percent) replied that they would not like to attend any meetings. The type of meeting listed by the most residents (nine persons) was community problem solving sessions. Listed by seven persons were sporting events, such as softball games. Six persons would like to attend social events such as block parties and neighborhood picnics, and five persons would like to have the neighborhood organization sponsor drug awareness and prevention programs. Suggested as possible programs by four persons each were crime and vandalism preventive programs, such as neighborhood watch organizational sessions; and meetings that would feature special guest speakers, such as political candidates. Other programs that residents would like to attend were related to a neighborhood clean-up (three persons), a first aid/CRP training session, and a special "get to know us" meeting to learn about the neighborhood organization (two persons).

Suggested Special Events or Projects

Fourteen different types of special events or projects were suggested by 68 of the respondents. Mentioned most often were social events. Twenty-seven of the residents suggested various types of get-togethers, with potluck dinners and with block parties being suggested more than any others. Other social events suggested were a carnival or bazaar, a family snow event, a pool party, a get-acquainted dinner dance, and a "get to know your neighbors" special event.

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Nine persons suggested that the neighborhood organization sponsor fund-raising events for special projects. Possible uses for the monies included recreational equipment and care of needy neighborhood families. A neighborhood clean-up campaign and programs for the youth were suggested by eight each. Three persons suggested sporting events, such as a neighborhood softball tournament. Two persons each suggested a baby sitting service, a garage sale, a special meeting to encourage membership and supply information about the neighborhood group, a vandalism prevention campaign, and a traffic control campaign.

Best Time for the Neighborhood Organization Meeting

Residents indicated that they would prefer to have the organization meetings on either Tuesday or Thursday evenings. The following chart (Table 5) shows the results obtaining from the inquiry about the best time to hold the neighborhood organization meetings.

TABLE 5

Resident Recommendations for Meeting Time

<u>Day</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Monday	19
Tuesday	26
Wednesday	15
Thursday	26
Friday	6
Saturday	4
Sunday	4
<u>Time</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Morning	1
Afternoon	5
Evening	94

Membership and Participation

About one-fifth of the residents participating in the study (21 percent) were members of the Kingswood Neighborhood Association. Those who were not members were asked their reason for not belonging to the group. One fourth (25 percent) of the non-members said that the reason for their not being a member was that they either did not know of the group, had never been asked to join, or were not notified of the meetings. Comments included: "Whats group?" "Have not been invited; not aware of activities." "We have lived here two and one-half years and never knew there was an organization." One persons wrote, "We have not been asked or notified of meetings. We are fairly new... People seem cold and unfriendly."

Another reason for not joining the group was the lack of sufficient time to attend meetings (18 percent of the non-members). Many of these respondents also detailed their reasons: "Divorced and have two small children--no time for meetings," "I work full time and go to UNO classes." "Fulltime students at UNO-- need to wait until we're finished with school."

Two persons each listed other reasons for not joining the group: too old, poor health, and the ineffectiveness of the group. Related to these reasons one respondent wrote, "Being senior citizens living in an area of young working people, we feel we have nothing in common." Commenting on the work of the group, one respondent stated, "just a vicious circle--no problems resolved," and another wrote, "I have attended meetings-- they don't do anything for you except collect a fee."

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents indicated a willingness to serve on a neighborhood organization committee.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Kingswood neighborhood appears to be a good place to live for most residents, with 95 percent of the respondents indicating satisfaction with the area. Residents expressed their appreciation for many attributes of the community, including the excellent, cooperative schools, the convenient location, and friendly, helpful neighbors.

While some of the original residents remember Kingswood as once having a stable population of young, traditional families, the community has experienced an influx of new residents and also some changes in family age composition and roles of family members. With other changes, including the growth of the commercial area to the north, some community problems have developed. Many of the original residents now have grown children with vehicles of their own which create neighborhood traffic and parking problems. While many persons reported their appreciation for good neighbors, other newer residents expressed feelings of isolation and loneliness in an area where most adult residents now are working outside of the home.

However, most of the neighborhood problems could be greatly lessened or alleviated through effective community action. Some could be solved by work within the neighborhood only, while others would require working cooperatively with departments of city government.

The Kingswood Neighborhood Association now has a knowledge of the resident priority of specific community concerns. The group can set goals and specific measurable objectives based

on these identified needs and problems. From the objectives, neighborhood projects and programs can be developed. The residents participating in the study expressed strong support for the neighborhood organization and its community problem-solving work. Thirty-eight percent also indicated a willingness to serve on special committees. The 25 percent resident response of an unawareness of the neighborhood organization or lack of meeting information has implications for increased publicity and promotion by the neighborhood association. While residents listed community, as well as personal and family needs and problems with which they could use assistance, they also placed a high priority on getting to know each other through neighborhood social events and suggested many specific functions in which they would like to participate.

COMMUNITY NEEDS AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

A. The Neighborhood

1. How satisfied are you with our neighborhood as a place to live?

a) very satisfied _____ b) satisfied _____ c) dissatisfied _____ d) very dissatisfied _____

2. What do you like most about our neighborhood?

a. _____ b. _____

3. Is there something that you dislike about our neighborhood?

a. No _____ b. Yes _____ If yes, what do you dislike about our neighborhood? _____

4. How would you rate our neighborhood in the following areas?

Please circle the number of the appropriate response.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Terrible
a. friendliness and neighborliness	1	2	3	4	5
b. community pride and spirit	1	2	3	4	5
c. willingness of residents to work together on community problem solving	1	2	3	4	5
d. resident participation in neighborhood projects and programs (i.e., Cub Scouts, neighborhood organization)	1	2	3	4	5
e. condition of housing stock	1	2	3	4	5
f. resident maintenance of property (cleanliness, paint and upkeep of homes, care of lawns)	1	2	3	4	5
g. city maintenance of vacant property	1	2	3	4	5
h. city maintenance of park	1	2	3	4	5
i. quality of neighborhood park (areas/equipment to serve community)	1	2	3	4	5
j. city maintenance and management of swimming pool	1	2	3	4	5
k. city services (trash/snow removal)	1	2	3	4	5
l. street lighting	1	2	3	4	5
m. traffic control	1	2	3	4	5
n. police protection/law enforcement	1	2	3	4	5
o. crime prevention	1	2	3	4	5
p. youth vandalism	1	2	3	4	5
q. parking (on street, personal property)	1	2	3	4	5
r. parental supervision of youth	1	2	3	4	5
s. recreational opportunities for senior citizens	1	2	3	4	5
t. recreational opportunities for adults and families	1	2	3	4	5
u. recreational opportunities for youth	1	2	3	4	5
v. employment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
w. quality of youth education	1	2	3	4	5
x. school cooperation with community	1	2	3	4	5
y. stray pets	1	2	3	4	5
z. other _____	1	2	3	4	5

The Neighborhood Organization

1. Which two neighborhood problems should the neighborhood organization address this year?

a. _____ b. _____

2. Do you or members of your family have needs that could be met by the neighborhood organization? (transportation, school car pool, youth job service, neighborhood baby-sitting service)

a. No _____ b. Yes _____ If yes, what are these needs? _____

3. What type of neighborhood organization programs would you like to attend?

a. _____ b. _____

4. What type of special events or projects should the neighborhood organization sponsor?

a. _____ b. _____

5. When should the neighborhood organization meet? Please check one in a. and b.

a. M___ T___ W___ T___ F___ S___ S___

b. morning _____ afternoon _____ evening _____

6. Would you or a member of your family be willing to serve on a neighborhood organization committee?

a. Yes _____ b. No _____

7. Are you now a member of the neighborhood organization?

a. Yes _____ b. No _____ If no, what is the reason that you are not now a member of the group? _____

C. Respondent Information

1. Do you own or rent your housing unit? a. own _____ b. rent _____

2. How long have you lived at your present address?

a. less than a year _____ b. 1-5 years _____ c. 6-10 years _____ d. 11-15 years _____ e. over 15 years _____

3. Which of the following best describes your present housing?

a. single family _____ b. duplex _____ c. apartment _____

4. Sex: a. female _____ b. male _____

5. What is your race?

a. black _____ b. white _____ c. Mexican-American _____ d. Indian _____ e. other _____

6. Is your age: a. under 20 _____ b. 20-40 _____ c. 41-60 _____ d. over 60 _____

7. How many people, including yourself, live in your household? a. adults _____ b. children (under 18) _____

8. What is your marital status?

a. married _____ b. widowed _____ c. separated or divorced _____ d. never married _____ e. other _____

9. Householder contributing to household financial support. a. male _____ b. female _____ c. both _____

Thank you for your assistance with our community improvement effort by giving us your ideas.