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A Strategy for the Cultivation of Community Strength

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A Strategy for the Cultivation of Community Strength

By: Jessica Turner

**Professional Plan
Spring 2019**

**Master of Urban and Regional Planning
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs
Virginia Commonwealth University**

A Strategy for the Cultivation of Community Strength: Community-based plan for the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove in Richmond, Virginia

Prepared For

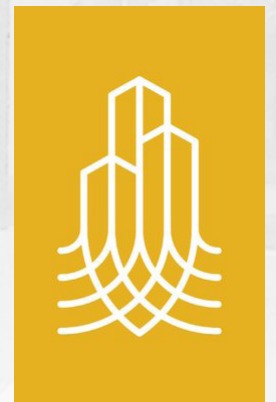
Thriving Cities, Virginia Community Voice/RVA Thrives and
The sixth District of Richmond Virginia

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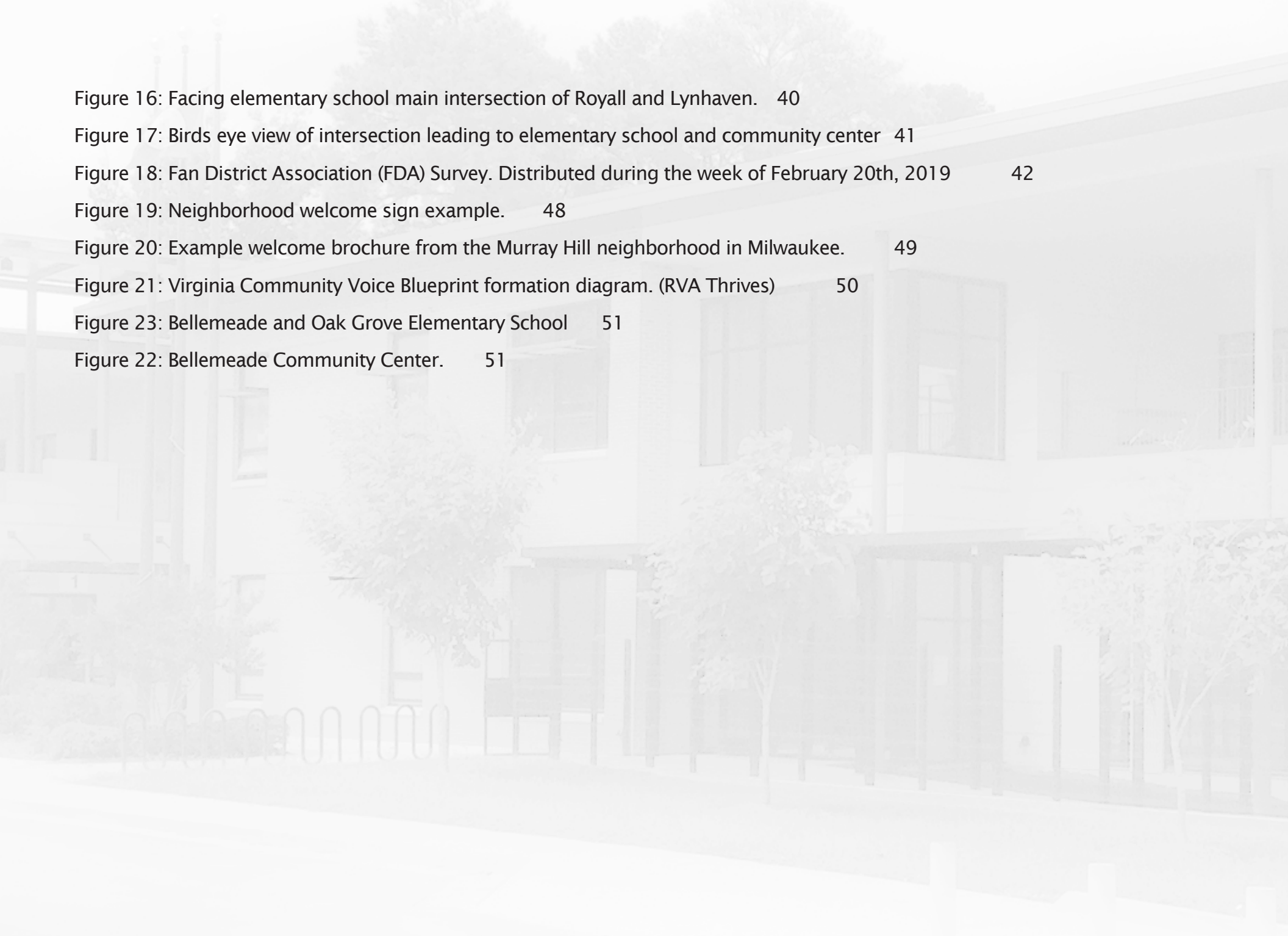


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Introduction

Plan Purpose

The newest migration trend has urban communities busting at their seams with an influx of young population. At the same time, long term residents are trying to age in place to retain their family and community ties (Parker 2018). This plan focuses on community asset utilization and community-based urban design to cultivate families with children and seniors who have the opportunity to age in place. This template is versatile enough to adapt to the context of each community it is being used in. This plan uses the example of the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods of Richmond, Virginia. Found in the south side of Richmond, these communities have faced significant change over the past decade, including a large shift in population as well as age and demographics.

Within these specific areas, there are learning-based assets that can be utilized in the creation of a learning community. A learning community in its most common context is a group of people who have similar visions and goals that are all academic based and most commonly found in educational and professional settings. Although this is the most common definition the multitude of definitions of the word “community” that are given by Richard West can be broken down into four different meanings all determined by the context of the conversation it is being used in: access, relationships, vision, and function (West, 2017, 4). All of these definitions are adaptable enough to be used in this plan as a living real-world community that is not academically based. This plan is primarily focused on this educational asset, but it is important to note that it is not the only asset that will be utilized in these neighborhoods with this template. This plan therefore focuses on three main points; housing affordability, intergenerational living or ageing in place, and child-based urban design. These three points help the community evolve into a neighborhood that can help keep the influx of population in the urban area instead of people leaving to raise children in a suburban community (Parker, 2018). It is important to note that this plan focuses on the community coming together to create these changes. This engagement focuses on preventing and managing over development or gentrification which could lead to not only physical displacement of current community members but also cultural and emotional displacement (Kim, 2011).

Client Description

The client for this plan is Thriving Cities, a nonprofit agency that specializes in using technology, research and data to create plans for communities in need. Thriving Cities has created a smaller organization that specializes in community engagement within Richmond city specifically, called RVA Thrives. The organization began by surveying the communities all over Richmond to find three important aspects that can help evoke change in the city. These three priorities are job access, neighborhood beautification, and neighborhood safety. RVA Thrives focuses on being a community tool for people who live in the south side of the Richmond area. This organization focuses on making community leaders completely equipped with tools that can help them facilitate change in their own neighborhoods.

RVA Thrives has expanded on their community outreach efforts during the year of 2019; the organization has added a section of their organization called Virginia Community Voice. This section strategically focuses on teaching not only communities but also government officials how to do the best form of community outreach efforts. They have created an instructional document called the Virginia Community Voice Blueprint for community outreach; this booklet does an over view of how doing the most fulfilling community outreach can change the outcomes of urban plans and policy for neighborhoods in need. This document allows for the community to take charge of what happens in their neighborhood and should be used within the template of this plan as a tool for community connection.

The Blueprint is organized into four sections Listen, Connect, Craft, and Reflect all of which make up how to do the most fulfilling community outreach as they define it. The Listen section involves two large aspects such as the “Data Sweet Spot” and “Data Storytelling” these two areas combined can help with the over-all knowledge of the community. Having a complete understanding of where the community was before and how they got to where they are now is an important part to this type of outreach. The Listen section of the Blueprint has been the most utilized in this plan and the Blueprint will be used as an asset for all aspects of the plan actions and implementation. (Virginia Community Voice, 2019)

Plan Implementation

The implementation of this plan will require the cooperation of two key groups, the communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove and the facilitators RVA Thrives. RVA Thrives will be the head facilitator and is the overarching organization that will manage the groups. The Maggie Walker Land Bank and Trust will be a secondary organization that will be needed in the completion of the recommendations. The organization has been created to address many issues within the realm of affordable housing's distribution, vacant land reduction and permanence of affordable housing.

RVA Thrives will use civic engagement to center the plan on the community. They will also use their administrative support and execute the plan in the most organized fashion. The neighborhoods have the potential to qualify for multiple funding grants from the federal or state government. In July of 2018, the Community Foundation awarded RVA Thrives a grant that is geared towards the economic advancements of the area. This plan would serve as the documentation that would allow for RVA Thrives as they apply to multiple types of grants outside of the economic development realm.

Outline of Plan

This plan focuses on using Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to create the following attributes within the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove: a utilized educational asset community, housing affordability, opportunities for intergenerational living or ageing in place, and a neighborhood designed to support families with children. This plan attempts to explore the best practices for learning communities in nonacademic settings and the preservation and creation of affordable housing. The design elements are all created with the intent of them being created by and for the community members. Through community outreach techniques the creation of spaces that will cultivate families with children as well as allow for members of the community to age in place will be a prominent part of the research methods of this plan.

Background

Plan Context

The neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove are located just south of the James River in the city of Richmond, Virginia. These two neighborhoods are south of a former highly industrial area called Manchester shown in figure 1. Within the last five years, the Manchester area has gone from industrial to residential with the addition of many large apartment buildings. Due to the influx of young professionals in the ever-climbing rental prices in urban areas including Manchester, the Oak Grove and Bellemeade neighborhoods have seen a growth of younger population. Many people aim to rent in these areas due to the reasonable rental prices and close proximity to the downtown area of Richmond.

Oak Grove and Bellemeade started out primarily white with many families working in the tobacco factories for companies like Lucky Strike and Phillip Morris. In the 1940's "White Flight" started and lead to the white population to move to the suburban areas outside of the city to buy homes and land while African Americans moved into the city and were only able to buy in specific areas due to redlining. As population diminished the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove were designated for African Americans only and was one of very few areas where they could buy or rent homes (Trammell, 26).



Figure 1: Defined study area map of the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods in Richmond, VA.

The neighborhoods stayed primarily African American through the 1950's and continue to this day, as time went on the neighborhoods went through some hard times. With lack of investment in the infrastructure of the area and high crime rates, the population was slowly diminishing. As the population went down the homes and land that were left went into disrepair, which has led to high amounts of vacant properties and land. These vacant properties that are found in neighborhoods all over the city of Richmond sparked the creation of the Maggie Walker Land Bank and Trust. The Maggie Walker Land Bank and Trust has been created to address many issues within the realm of affordable housing distribution, vacant land reduction and permanence of affordable housing. These vacant homes and land can be seen in the city of Richmond as a whole in the map in figure 2. The neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove are circled in yellow and then seen in figure 3, this information is from 2015. The most recent total amount of vacant properties found within both neighborhoods since October, 2018 is 647.

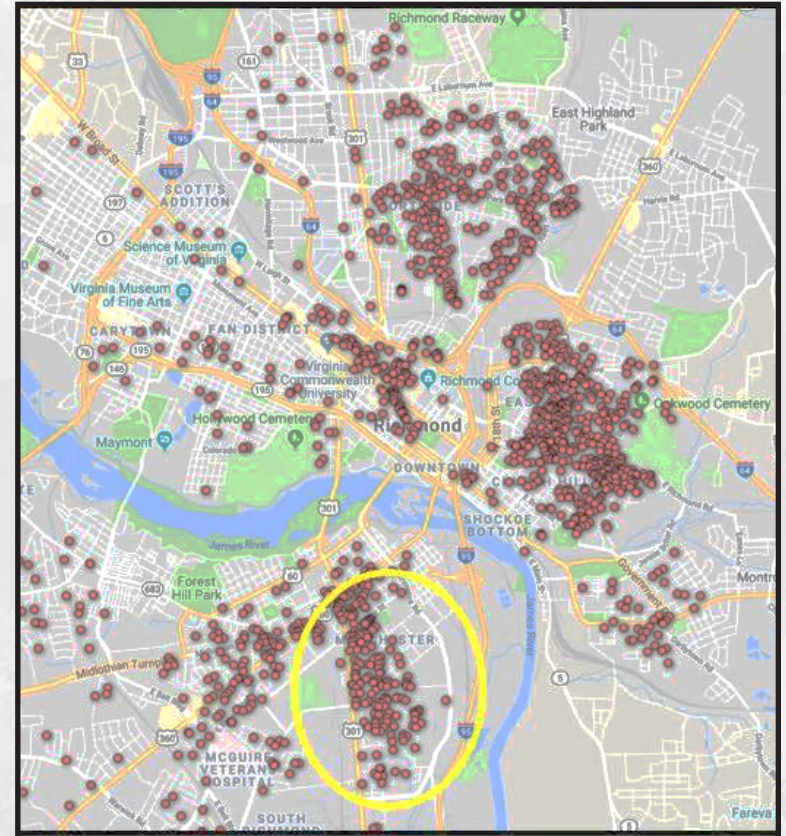


Figure 2: Map of Richmond, Virginia vacant properties from 2015. (John M. 2015)

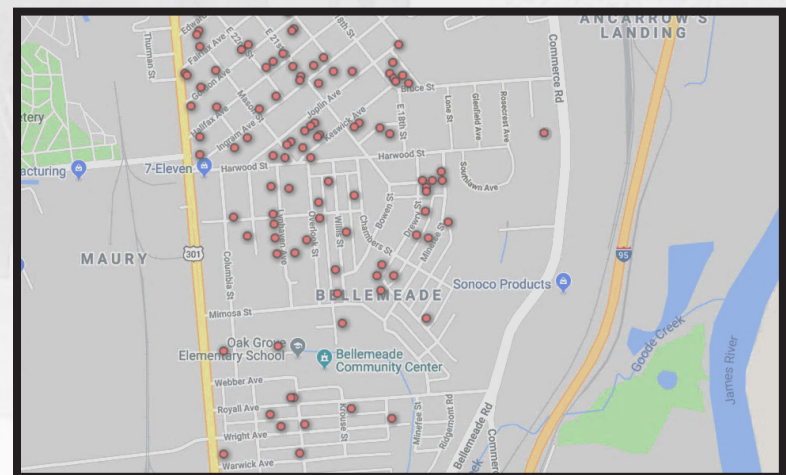
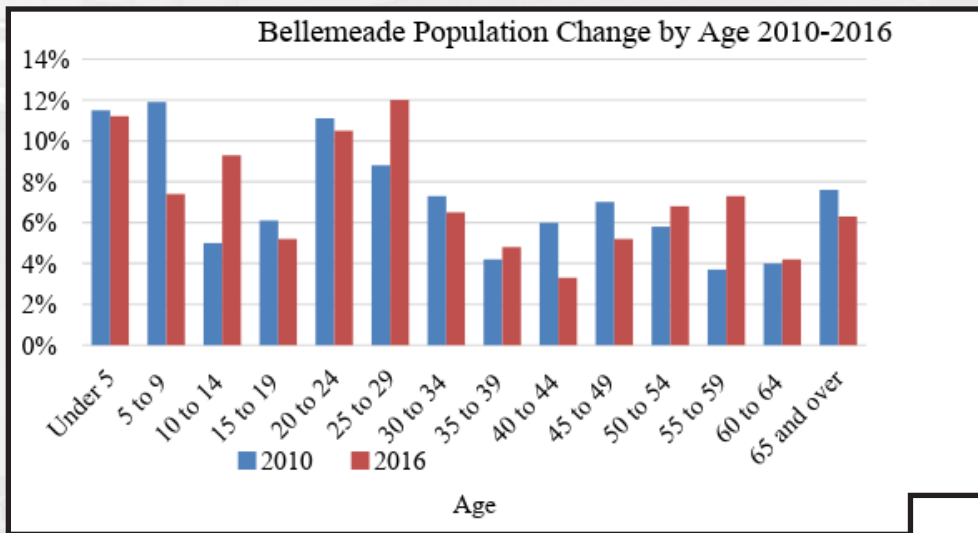


Figure 3: Vacant Properties in Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods of Richmond, VA 2015. (John M., 2015)

Community members have begun to see the population rise in the Manchester area; due to high rental prices many people are looking in the surrounding areas for more options. The neighborhoods of Oak Grove and Bellemeade have had an influx of population which has led to some political interest to improve the neighborhood's infrastructure. In the two graphs in figures 4 and 5 you can see the change in population by age, Bellemeade has stayed consistent in its young population of children but Oak Grove has a significant decline. In Table 1 you can see the median age of people you live in Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhood and how the age has become younger from year 2010 to year 2016.



Year 2010	Oak Grove	Bellemeade
Median Age (Years)	37	27.6
Year 2016	Oak Grove	Bellemeade
Median Age (years)	35.7	26.8

Table 1: Median age of the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove in 2010-2016. (US Census, 2010-2016)

Figure 4: Population by age in the Bellemeade neighborhood of Richmond Virginia from 2010-2016. (US Census, 2010-2016)

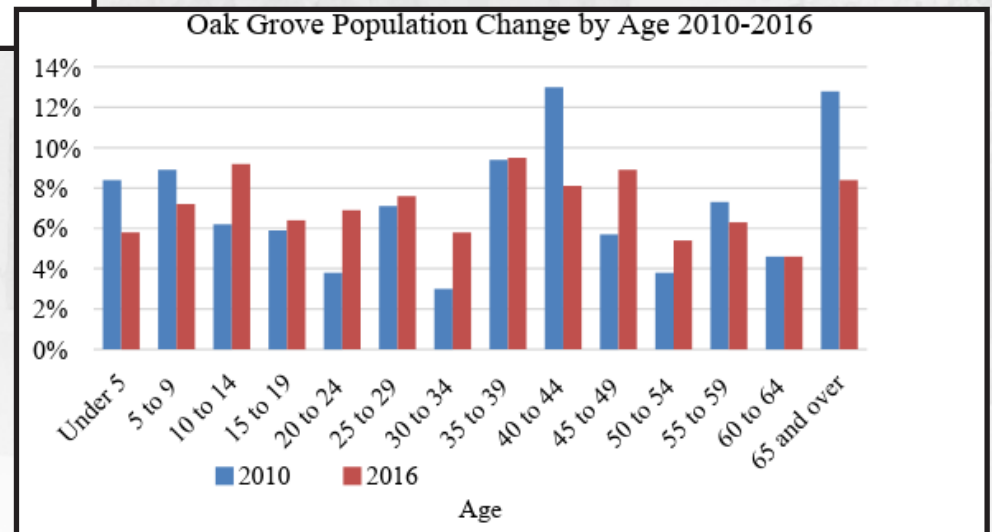


Figure 5: Population by age in the Oak Grove neighborhood of Richmond Virginia from 2010-2016. (US Casus, 2010-2016)

Figure 7 displays the population by age that are under the poverty line in the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods. The graph shows that Bellemeade has an extremely high number of children under five years old that struggle in poverty. Poverty plays a large part of where people can afford to live, this demographic shows the need for affordable housing in this area. It is important to know the current status of public education in the city of Richmond because education is a main reason why people move from the city to the suburban areas. Public education in the city of Richmond has been lacking for many years now due to a multitude of reasons, one including the decline of young population in urban neighborhoods like Bellemeade and Oak Grove. In the map in figure 7 you can see the high school graduation rate from 2014, the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove are in the sixty-five to seventy-five percentile of high school graduates. This information can be useful to see how many people in these neighborhoods might have had an unsteady foundation due to under performing elementary schools.

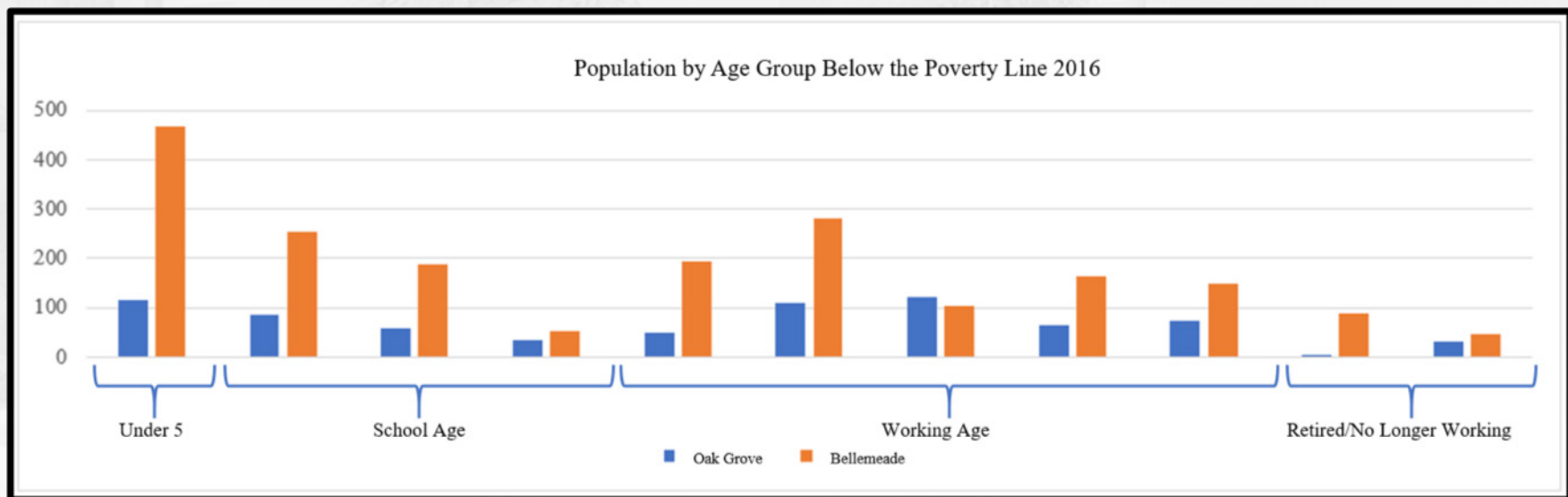


Figure 6: Population of Bellemeade and Oak Grove by age groupings under the poverty line. (US Census 2016)

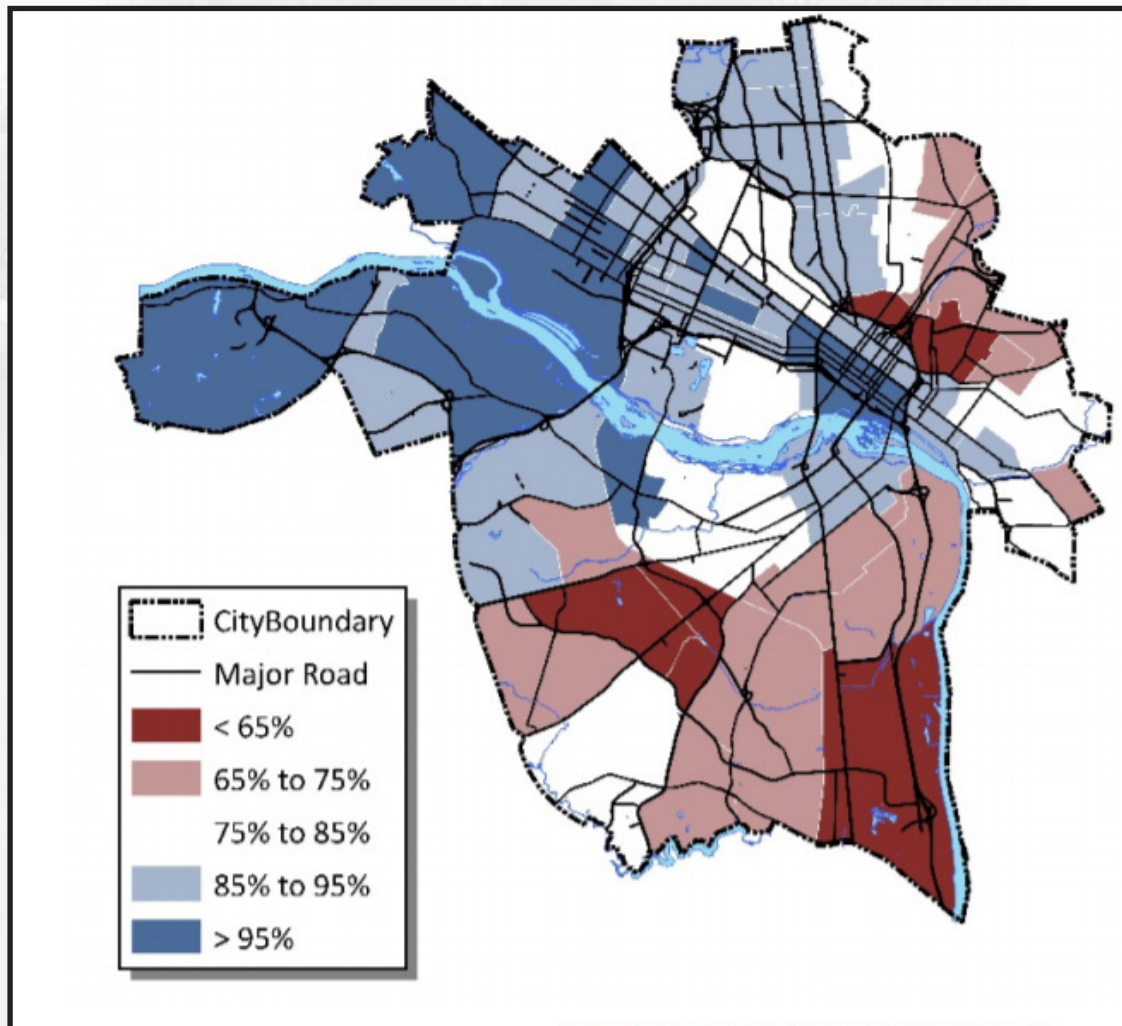


Figure 7: High school graduation rate 2014. (Richmond City, 2017)

The community crime map of the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods in figure 9 shows documented crimes that happened in one full year. The icons found in the map are defined as: red is aggravated assault, light blue is burglary in home, green is burglary from car, and the dark blue is robbery of an individual. The crime in this area is minimal when compared to the other areas of Richmond and that is an aspect of Bellemeade and Oak Grove that should be better represented. In the map of Richmond as a whole in figure 8 the two neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak grove are outlined in green.

Within these two areas, you can see pockets of higher crime towards the south end of Oak Grove and the north side of Bellemeade. In comparison, figure 8 you can see the largest areas of crime are located in the North and North West sides of Richmond rather than the South Side. In the past the downtown and the south side of Richmond was plagued with high crime rates and has led to people leaving the area if they have the means to do so, especially if you have children. It is important to rebrand the area from this old view in order to fully gain cultivation of young families with children.

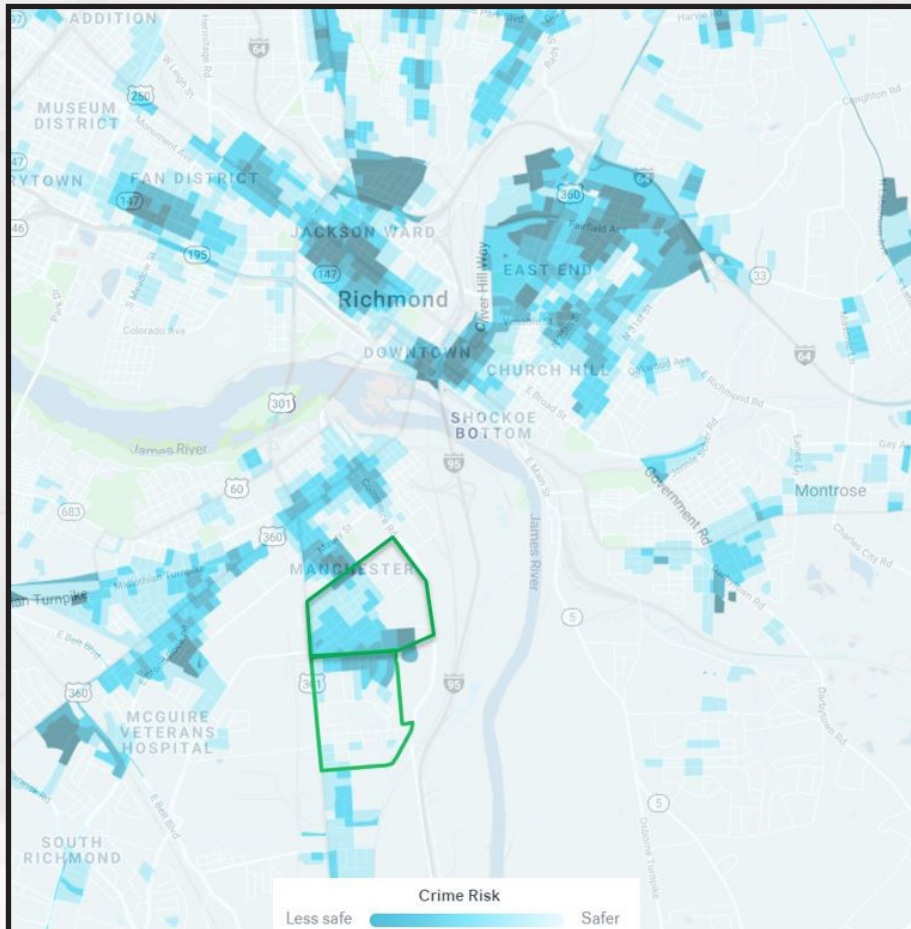


Figure 8: Map of crime rates in Richmond, Virginia. (Trulia, 2019)

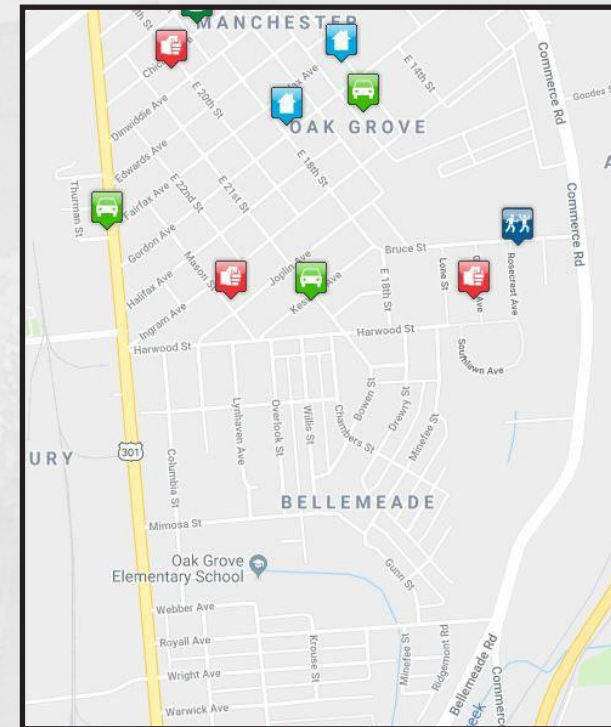


Figure 9: Crime map showing crimes from December 2017-December 2018 in the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods. (Community Crime Map, 2018)

Due to this area of the Richmond region having these troubling statistics of losing population there have been a multitude of non-for-profit agencies as well as broad city agencies that have invested in these two communities. Below in figure 10 you will find a large outline of the city of Richmond, highlighted in green are the two target neighborhoods that are also the focus of many organizations. The organizations on the left side that are covering the city of Richmond as a whole are just a few agencies that look at Richmond as a whole. The organizations on the right are agencies that have strategically focused on not only the study areas but also the southside as a whole. Understanding the intentions of these organizations and what areas they put their main focus on allows for the overall understanding of where the ongoing projects may or may not be currently happening.

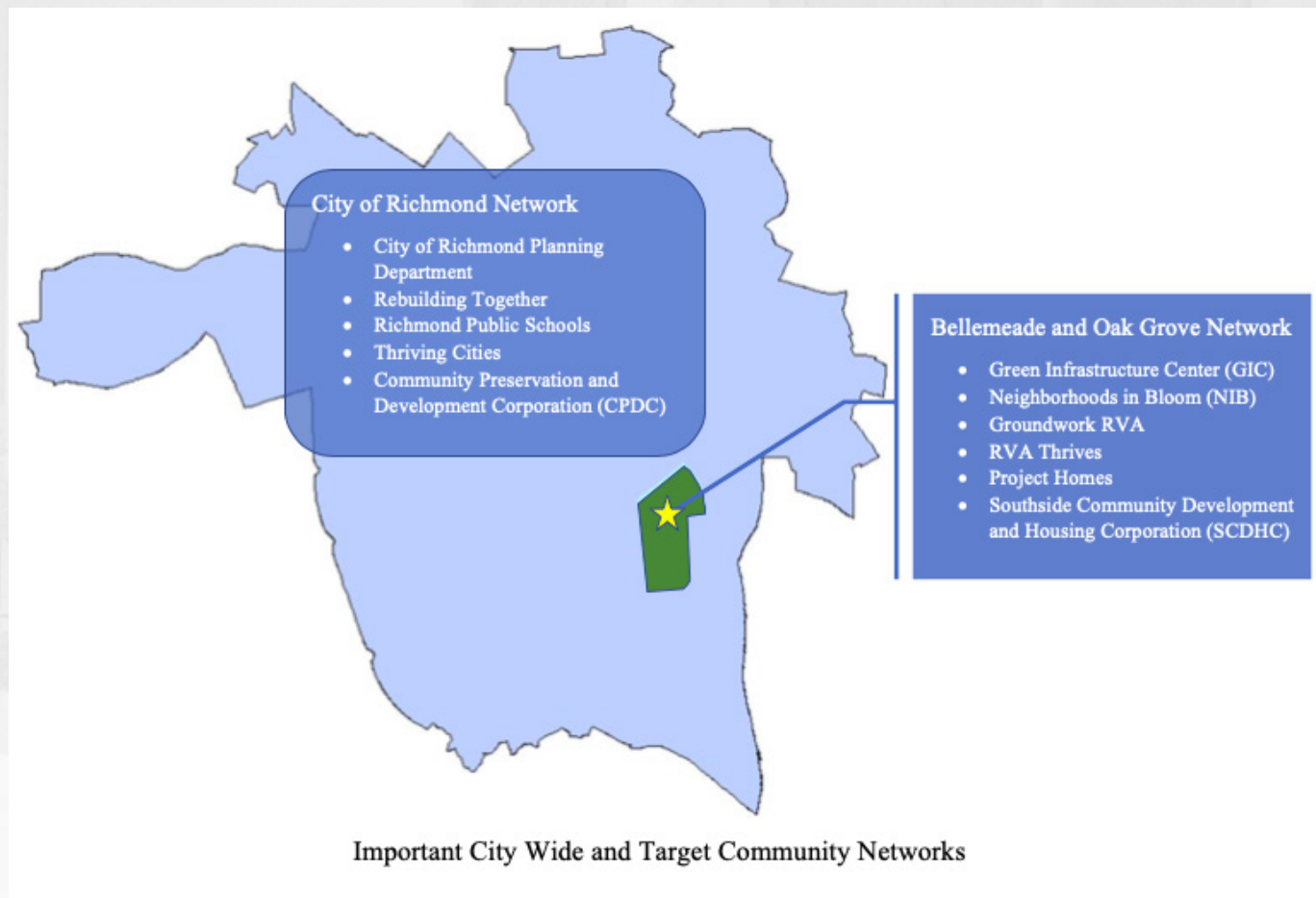


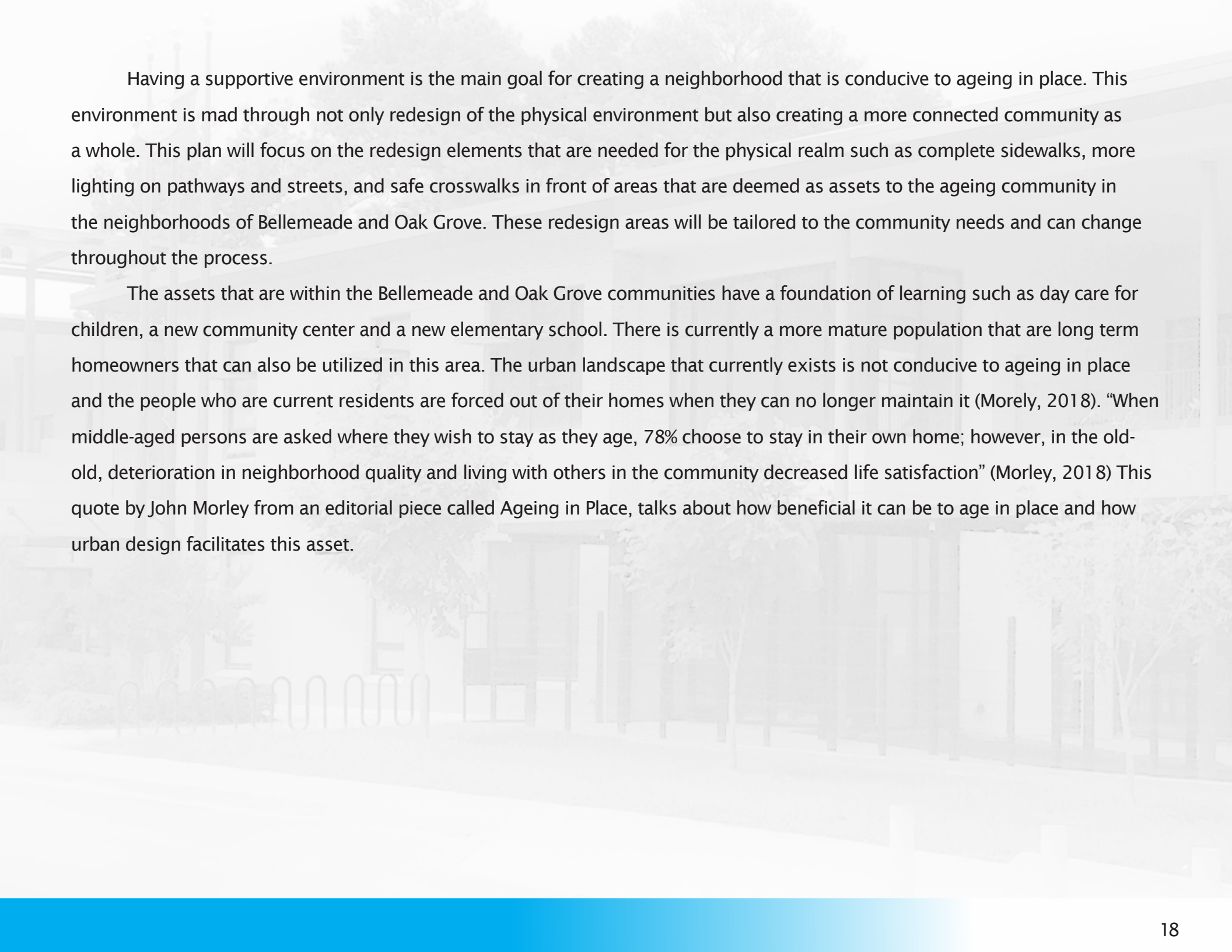
Figure 10: Network of partners in the city of Richmond as well as network partners specific to Bellemeade and Oak Grove.

Existing Knowledge

The overarching purpose of this plan is to cultivate families with children to a specific area of the urban environment, in order to achieve this the existing knowledge needs to be based in the elements that attract and detract this demographic from these areas. The elements that will be analyzed for attracting this demographic are: urban design that transcends age, formation of a learning community, and affordable housing. Within these elements there are negative elements that have historically deterred families from the urban landscape. These themes of deterrence have literature and best practices associated with them that will help determine appropriate solutions. The three themes that I will analyze are: aging in place issues, neighborhood abandonment due to family growth, and housing issues.

Aging in Place

Designing these two neighborhoods for an inclusive set of ages is a priority for this plan to be successful. Intergenerational living is a concept that many neighborhoods aim to accomplish but, in most cases, the older population is a missing link. One of the biggest priorities for people who are entering the mature phases of life is that they will not be able to care for themselves and their homes and they are forced to enter a care facility. Ageing in place is currently a privilege for the wealthy due to the high price of in-home care and also home maintenance. There is literature that goes into the analysis of what equitable ageing in place can do for a city and that information will be analyzed as well. Giving the mature population an option to grow old in the home they own can turn into a more common circumstance with the help of the design of a neighborhood. Hong wrote about how to age in place for low-income homeowners specifically studied in Richmond, Virginia. The most effective model for aging in place is built on relationships and the idea that through those relationships are transactions through economic, health, social support networks and physical support networks (Hong, x). Ageing at home can help seniors maintain stability in a world of uncertainty. This uncertainty comes in forms of loss; loss of physical health, loss of mental health and loss of loved ones. The loss that is suffered can also stem from loss of familiar physical environment which comes from areas rapidly changing due to gentrification.



Having a supportive environment is the main goal for creating a neighborhood that is conducive to ageing in place. This environment is made through not only redesign of the physical environment but also creating a more connected community as a whole. This plan will focus on the redesign elements that are needed for the physical realm such as complete sidewalks, more lighting on pathways and streets, and safe crosswalks in front of areas that are deemed as assets to the ageing community in the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove. These redesign areas will be tailored to the community needs and can change throughout the process.

The assets that are within the Bellemeade and Oak Grove communities have a foundation of learning such as day care for children, a new community center and a new elementary school. There is currently a more mature population that are long term homeowners that can also be utilized in this area. The urban landscape that currently exists is not conducive to ageing in place and the people who are current residents are forced out of their homes when they can no longer maintain it (Morely, 2018). “When middle-aged persons are asked where they wish to stay as they age, 78% choose to stay in their own home; however, in the old-old, deterioration in neighborhood quality and living with others in the community decreased life satisfaction” (Morley, 2018) This quote by John Morley from an editorial piece called Ageing in Place, talks about how beneficial it can be to age in place and how urban design facilitates this asset.

Neighborhood Abandonment Due to Family Growth

The neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove already offer opportunities for children, they span from day care child facilities to a new elementary school with a community center next door, unfortunately the population has gone down for young children. This dilemma is analyzed in many news articles as to why people move away from the city when looking to raise children. An article from the New York Times reporter and author Jennifer Miller talks to a couple about why they chose to stay in the city to remain in close knit communities rather than move to the suburban areas of specifically New York and risk losing those human connections. The main elements that drive people to move from the city to the suburbs is the lack of quality education for the young population (Miller, 2015) and lack of child friendly design. This element is the driving force for many families and is sometimes the only force that makes them want to move out of the urban areas. This plan does not aim to be a solution to this over all issue within a public education system, it can be used to jump start the population growth that will help in the creation of funds that are allocated to education. This allocation of funds can be seen in a supply and demand format, the more population of children the more money that goes towards education for them. If a community is consistently declining in population of young children those funds can be seen as unnecessary.

Another contributing factor for families abandoning their city neighborhoods is the lack of child friendly design, safety, learning-based accents such as libraries and community centers and child based outreach. A case study done in Eindhoven, Germany offers insight into the type of designs that are considered and proven child-friendly. This case study goes through all aspects of child-based design that can benefit and attract families to a community. The case study also moves through different contexts, from two different countries Jerusalem, Israel and the city of Eindhoven in the Netherlands on how they compare and differ. The research goes through the connections of community outreach methods and how those methods can shape the types of responses you receive (Krishnamurthy, 2018). These two cities could not be more different in all aspects such as religion, politics, and overall way of life. Despite all of these differences that exist in the study areas it shows that children still want and need similar things when living in the urban landscape. The experience of a child is drastically different than the experience of an adult and the study shows that the wrong type of community out-reach is where the miscommunication lies (Krishnamurthy, 2018).

A way to reach the child community is through art work; engaging children in projects such as playground design can give just enough direction to stay within the lines of park planning. They were also allowed to explore their imaginations and show their point of view, then they were asked to draw a picture of their favorite parks in their community. Many of the children were unable to do this due to the lack of parks in their communities (Krishnamurthy, 2018). This case study placed a high importance on green spaces being readily available to children of all ages as well as the design aspects of that green space. The design of the green spaces adds to many different aspects that a neighborhood wants to highlight, in this specific area of Richmond learning will be an area of focus.

Housing Issues

Among the design aspects of why people move to the suburbs when raising children is the issue of affordable housing and housing type. Affordable housing can be analyzed through case studies found in other cities in the United States and academic research-based literature. One case study done in Portland, Oregon that focuses on the description of gentrification and the causes of displacement and goes into detail about the steps to creating more affordable housing in Portland. The author offers helpful tools such as “anti-displacement tools” that will be able to be used in the creation of this plan. Creating affordable housing that is for not only homeowners but also renters is a main priority and this case study gives many tools that can be utilized.

The word gentrification is analyzed further in a journal by Rosie Tighe and Joanna Ganning called Housing Policy Debate. Tighe and Ganning define gentrification as “The process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood” (Tighe, 2016, 785). Gentrification and transportation are intricately linked due to transportation effecting the type of job you have the opportunity to have. Not owning a car closes the door on many types of jobs offered in areas with little or no public transportation. If you own a car it allows to have the opportunity to obtain any job within driving distance. The Richmond bus system has been redesigned in the last two years and still does not have complete coverage to all suburban areas of the region. This issue leads lower income families to reside closer to the city, but due to the rising housing prices gentrification might push them out. The solutions to affordable housing in this article are based with in public policy (Tighe, 2016, 792) which is beyond the scope of this professional plan, but the solution that can be used is the Maggie Walker Land Bank and Trust which has been discussed in the Plan Context section. The neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove are at a place in time where the vacant land can be utilized in creating permanent affordable housing.

The types of affordable housing can also be a problem for parents raising children in urban environments, lack of space and efficiency of that space (Miller, 2015). With a lack of housing options within the budget of a growing family in an urban landscape many families would choose to move to the suburban areas. As the newer generations begin to start families, they are now looking to cities to raise children due to the close-knit communities they have become a part of. A quote from Dr. Golia found in the same New York Times article referenced above the style of housing can also dictate whether a family will leave or stay. “The nature of the brownstone is that they encourage constant communication with your neighbors,” said Dr. Golia, director of public history at the Brooklyn Historical Society. And especially at the turn of the last century, when neighborhoods were grouped by regional as well as national origin, “there might have been a more communal or clan-based approach to child rearing.” (Miller, 2015) The style of the homes that families are choosing to live in allow for the communities they have become a part of to grow and support one another. The connection these families have made in the buildings is becoming more important than anything else for these generations of new parents.

For many planning interventions case studies can give solutions to similar issues that may be in your city, these solutions are taken from best practices. One of the main best practices that will be utilized in this plan is the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach specifically for the creation of the learning community. The general definition of a learning community can be seen in many academic settings. The connotation of the two words evoke an educational and academic feeling. These assumptions made about a learning community can hinder what people perceive the outcome of possibilities to be. Due to this common misunderstanding of the words together, the connection between ABCD and a learning community has been made. This connection is an effort to explain that the learning community is a result of the assets that are currently in the neighborhoods, which are specialized to these communities. The definition of a learning community within academics can be generalized as a group of people who share similar values and who are in-route to achieve a similar end goal. This idea is within the Cohort method that most academic institutions use that has a high rate of graduation (Sullivan, 94). The attributes found within the learning communities are versatile enough to be utilized as a community asset.

The elements that families use to guide where they will raise their children are vast and vary based on preference, one element that is consistent is education. The exploration of the connections between education and housing issues is done by authors Gingrich and Ansell. They argue that housing allows for richer populations to have restricted access to higher-quality public education by targeting their money directly towards education funding (Gingrich, 2014, p.336). The research done was based in England and the way education is funded does differ from the United States. Although the allocation of funds is different, the notion of being able to afford homes that are priced higher than those in another area allows for more options. Those options lead to different school districts which then lead to different qualities of education. Lower income families who cannot afford housing in more expensive neighborhoods are forced to send their children to schools that under perform.

In 2007 the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system embarked on one of the most intense public education reforms made in the United States (Osborne, 2015, III). The effort put a focus on the creation of more charter schools and using the framework of charter schools to help improve the failing public schools. A charter school that uses the unified governance model that is maintained, staffed and run by the Public Charter School Board. The unified governance model identifies the stakeholders of the school such as teachers, parents, students and family members to name a few. These stakeholders are then integrated in a unified manner into as many aspects of the school as possible. By inviting the community members to be a part of the school the stakeholders form a learning community that has similar values and end goals of an education base. Aspects of this model will be utilized in this plan in a way that can go beyond the schools and into all assets of the area such as day cares and play grounds.

A current plan from Washington D.C has a focus on Education Facility Planning, this education improvement design focuses on the creation of new facilities and the complete utilization of current facilities. The new facilities will be comparable to the charter and private schools of the area. Making the public schools just as connected and fully updated as the selected schools has the possibility of making the options more equitable for all incomes (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2018, 1-6). Being able to connect the gap between these two types of schools allows for the entire youth of the city to have the human right to receive adequate education.

It is important to understand that although the general idea of this public education plan sounds ideal. The plan has just been implemented in the last year, the outcomes are still to be seen. It is also extremely important to know that public education reform is a long process and takes many years to implement. Although this type of case study is out of the scope of this plan it is informative to know that the public education system has solutions that are being used and tested.

When this charter school model in public schools was first adopted it was thought to be the golden arrow for the failing public schools of D.C. In July of 2017 ten years after it was implemented the Washington Post (Brown, 2019) did an investigation into the suspiciously low amount of school suspensions coming from the newly reformed schools. What they found was that these new schools although they took on the charter school model they also took on a brand new poorly distributed budget. The better the schools did on tests and low suspension numbers the more money they received, which is one aspect that is not in the charter school model as discussed earlier. This detail was swiftly taken advantage of, in March of 2018 the Washington Post came out with another article highlighting the multitude of scandals that has left the once praised public education reform plan in hot water. The issue stems from the ultimate power of the public educational system in the hands of the newly elected mayor, which has led to more issues of misleading data. In the end, this information leads me to believe that the new public education reform might have worked if it was done correctly and budgeted in a noncompetitive nature. When you have the schools fighting against each other for more funding you have the issue of creating a hostile education system that can lead to these types of scandals. In the future, if this charter school model should be implemented in a public school it needs to be based in a non-monetary format. This non-monetary format would mean that the budget that goes towards the school will not be based on test scores or suspensions, it will be allocated and distributed evenly or on a greatest need basis in order to move towards absolute educational equality.

The themes that were previously discussed; ageing in place, housing issues and neighborhood abandonment due to family growth are all impacted by the issue of lack of social capital. When people interact in a community the being to create the human connections that lead to an immense connection they attribute to the neighborhood itself. When people think of human connection they tend to reference homeownership, but this stereotype is debunked in a writing by Denise DiPaquale a researcher from Boston, Massachusetts and Edward Glaser from Harvard University.

DiPasquale and Glaeser investigated whether there is a correlation between homeownership and the growth or formation of social capital. They used multiple housing market statistics and local amenity data from the US General Social Survey to help have quantitative data to support any claim they could (DiPasquale, & Glaeser, 1999). In the end they found evidence to support the claim that there is no correlation between homeownership and social capital, there is a correlation however between local amenities and social capital. When a neighborhood member has a connection to a local amenity such as gardening club or civic association, they are more likely to have more social capital in the area. Social capital has shown to lead to accountability in the sense of having mutual respect for the community or neighborhood they socially invest in (DiPasquale, & Glaeser, 1999).

The term local amenities in this case is defined as something that a community member can join or use to be more connected to the community. In this plan the term local amenities can also mean community assets, these assets are shown graphically in the asset mapping research findings area of this document. DiPasquale and Glaeser talk about the connection of home prices and local amenities or assets, if the community has more local assets it is more likely that people will own homes in the area. They also go into the idea that although homeownership might not directly correlate with social capital growth there is a correlation between social capital growth and “community tenure”. The term community tenure means a long-term resident and the issue of renter or homeowner does not come into play although long term residences are more likely to own their homes. The longer people stay in one place the more social capital they gain, if they choose to move after having connection to multiple local amenities they also pass this on to the new tenants that might come in. This idea of almost transferring these local assets rights cause the neighborhood to continuously grow in social capital, if the resident leaves with no community connections they don't have them to pass along therefore the cyclical process progresses and continuously gets worse.

The area that is lacking in literature and case study research is the connection that should be made between the existing knowledge and the elements that force people into suburban areas. These connections will allow for the existing solutions of similar issues to be altered and used to solve the problem described in this plan. The neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove will be stepping into uncharted territory, which will allow for innovative urban planning that could be what the Richmond Region as well as other communities suffering from this problem are currently missing.

Theoretical Framework

The theories that will be used in this implementation plan for Bellemeade and Oak Grove will be based in the Communicative Action and the Just City Theory. The theory of Communicative Action revolves around the importance of community engagement and how the people of a community can use their voices to change the spaces around them (Innes 179). The Just City theory centers on the creation of a city that is designed for all types of people and centers on three key principles democracy, diversity, and equity (Fainstein 29). These two theories will provide my plan with a well-rounded methodology and background that will allow me to create a neighborhood that can be accessible by all types of people from all walks of life.

The Communicative Action theory puts the power in the hands of the lifelong residents of the community by using different methods of community outreach. This theory is used to allow the community members to take charge of where they live and work and can allow for them to create more inclusive communities by making the people a priority. Quick and Feldman talk about this theory in a scope of participation and inclusion that related directly to who is involved in the planning process. “Our use of the community of practice perspective enables us to distinguish participation and inclusion by analyzing public engagement processes as they relate to community building over time.” (Quick. Feldman 274) This quote speaks directly to the importance of participation and inclusion and how they don’t always mean the same thing. The Communicative Action theory is only a template and the participants are at the community or the planner’s discretion, the focus is on how to make it as inclusive as possible. There might be a large effort of participation by community members, but that does not mean that the participation is done by the people living in the community. The participation does not always directly represent the inclusion of all members of the community. Many issues of past planning can be directly related to the people creating the plans and them not fully representing the demographics of the community members. This issue is that the design of spaces and housing are not affordable for the current residents or the spaces are not conducive to the needs of the community members. Neglect of these important community connections can lead to gentrification and displacement.

The theory of the Just City will allow for the use of creation of an equitable and fair neighborhood design that allows for accessibility in all forms. Susan Feinstein goes through the evolution of the Just City theory and the following quote represents this professional plan. “Demands for greater democracy, undistorted discourse, and recognition of difference seemed to promise greater equity as a consequence of the stronger representation of the interests of nonelite groups.” (Feinstein 29) This quote focuses on the issue being that the elite groups of people or the groups of people who are of higher economic status tend to have the loudest voice in the planning format.

The theory of the Just City focuses on taking that power away from the rich and giving it to the people who actually live in the area in the most equal way possible. The methodology of this plan will consistently keep the idea of democracy and equitable neighborhoods in the forefront of the project, in one way by focusing on affordable housing for renters and homeowners. Also, by making all community outreach as accessible and inclusive as possible with the organization RVA Thrives programming each event in an effort to prepare the most equitable plan possible. The communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove have had a troubled history of residential segregation in the form of redlining (University of Richmond, redlining map). This form of segregation has a multigenerational impact on the people who have lived in this community due to not being able to buy homes that would produce family long term wealth. These neighborhoods were hit extremely hard by many recessions, lead to infrastructure neglect, and now has many vacant lots and dilapidated homes. This history of racial injustice has left the community with massive distrust in government policies and city planners. The Just City theory focuses on the rehabilitation of these community wounds and this theory can ultimately prevent history from repeating itself.

The research questions for this plan address the issues that come with new migration trends, the declining aging population and the cultivation and maintaining of young population with families.

I will investigate and analyze:

1. What are the locations and characteristics of the current assets in the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods?
2. What are the opportunities to leverage the current neighborhood assets in Bellemeade and Oak Grove to better support elementary aged youth education?
3. How can the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods use improved neighborhood-level educational infrastructure to attract and retain families with children?

Many communities just on the edge of highly urbanized areas are seeing an influx of population (Figure 6). This population increase could be due to the rising housing prices that are found in the downtown areas of Richmond due to overpopulation and lack of affordable options. Cities are becoming more popular now and as these areas grow the fringe communities need to prepare for an increase of population. By using this implementation plan the neighborhoods will be able to cultivate a new community of intergenerational populations. The methodology comes from the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) structure which is based off the idea of identifying individual community assets that can be utilized to transform the community (Kretzmann, 1993). By highlighting the assets that currently exist in these two communities there will be a better understanding of how to connect them. This connectivity will be accomplished by redeveloping the infrastructure of the neighborhoods to be more walkable and safer. The assets of the area will be shown on a map that can designate the location of resources currently available and what kind of walkable development should be created to achieve ultimate asset utilization.

The cultivation of families with children needs to be analyzed from two perspectives, the renter population and the homeowner population. I believe that these two demographics can coexist like many other areas of Richmond do, with the needs of the elderly being similar to the needs of families. The homeowners in these areas tend to be much older and much more long term, while the renters in this area are young and they spend as little time in these homes as possible. It is important to note that the correlation between homeownership and old age is not an overall trend, but it is slightly more popular in this area.

It should be a reoccurring thought that the ageing population is consistently brought to mind when creating change in these neighborhoods. The changes being made to cultivate children and families are also positive changes for the ageing community. The methods of finding these connections of ages should be done with community outreach to the older community members that currently live there and to compare and contrast them with the needs of children and families. The idea of an intergenerational community is not a new idea but using the assets of the community to achieve this multi aged community will be one difficult to find best practices for. Due to the minimal amount of best practices found on this specific subject I will need to look into other forms of methodology. A learning community is commonly created and used in an academic realm, but its attributes will be able to be utilized in the creation of this plan.

Methodology

Research Questions

For the formulation of proper research questions, the information that must be gathered is based on the utilization of different assets found in the community. Asset based development can be utilized in many different forms to specialize it so that it can be used in the best way possible. The specific things that should be focused on within this type of planning is the youth and the seniors. In many communities, the youth is seen as a burden rather than an asset these communities do not value children and that is why many parents do not move to those areas. This plan is shaped around the importance of youth, this idea will set these areas apart from many other places in a city, the correlation of youth's needs and the ageing population's needs will also be investigated(Kretzmann. 29).

The asset utilization tool that will be used in this plan has many different methods that can be used to make sure all of the assets are highlighted. One method is Asset Mapping (Burns, 2011), this method of community outreach is a way to find what people define as an asset in their community through not only public outreach but also through written publications. An example of Participatory Asset Mapping can be found in figure 10 below, this map shows how community members can place small dots on what they define as a community asset. Participatory Asset Mapping can also be done through the collection and research of multiple data sources. The definition of a community asset is basic but also subjective, the assets might be defined through

other qualitative methods such as one on one interviews with long term residences or surveys. “Community Assets include citizen associations and local institutions. Citizen Associations reflect informal and formal institutions found within a community, such as social groups, recreation programs, churches, and book clubs.” (Burns, 2011). This quote comes from a community outreach tool kit created by the Healthy City project by the company Advancement Project. The tool kit allows community leaders to organize community members in a constructive way that lends to the ABCD process. The goal of asset mapping is to create a connection between how an outsider defines an asset and how a resident defines it. This method is a key element of this plan in order to start with a base of assets that can shape the recommendations made alter on. This process will also define what needs to be focused on in order for the end goal to be achieved. The assets will understandably vary based on the specific location of the neighborhood that is being redeveloped, but the methodology should stay the same for this tool kit.

The methodology of asset mapping does not hold meaning unless the definition of assets is specifically defined to adhere to the values of the neighborhoods. In this case with Bellemeade and Oak Grove education is a value they have chosen to highlight within the study area boundary. Other important aspects they want to highlight should be discovered through one on one interviews as well as surveys. As explained earlier in this document the long-range goal of public education reform is beyond the scope of this plan. Due to this plan not revolving around this reform of education the assets must be defined in other ways. There are three main topics that will make up the defined assets in this professional plan: human, physical and cultural. These three ideas allow for the values of the community to help define the assets of the area.

Figure 11: “Mapping the Community Assets” example of asset mapping done at community meeting.



Human

Using the topic of human as a value to define assets of this community can help create a human based community. The human based community is the idea of having all basic human right being met within this area. The idea that all humans need resources to live such as food, shelter, other human interaction and knowledge. These human needs can help create an area that is pleasant to live in and can help define assets that meet this need. To each person a basic human need will be differently defined which is what asset mapping is about. Allowing the community to define these human needs can allow for my recommendations to be shaped for the people who live in the area.

Physical

The physical design of the community is another topic that can help define assets of the area by being another attribute that can make the area cultivate more people. Allowing residents to define what design aspects of the area they find appealing can help me cerate recommendations for more area similar to what they enjoyed. The physical area can also mean accessibility which can be defined as what roads are the most walked on, or what areas do people feel safest on at night. These areas can be assets and can be defined in any way a community member sees fit.

Cultural

The culture of a community is defined by the people who live in it and those people can see certain areas as places of cultural enhancement. The idea of a cultural asset is that it helps the people of the area create ownership of the spaces. A monument or a park named after a prominent manner of the community can be an easy way to show cultural ownership. If an area is a cultural asset that means that area allows for people to feel that they are being represented in the space and that their culture is being respected.

RVA Thrives and council member of the 6th District will be important stakeholders that will open the door for in depth community outreach efforts proposed by this plan. There will be efforts that span from community meetings and one on one conversations to written in person surveys. The stakeholders will expand from the current residents to the prospective residents to gain a better understanding of what needs to change. New methods of engagement should be tried in order to receive the most results.

The foundation for the community engagement for this plan is found within one on one interviews conducted with long term current residents of the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods. The interviews should be conducted in a manner that allows for comfortable human connections to be made effortlessly in hopes to promote absolute candor. The conversations should give historic background that differs from readings and photographs due to the experiences being first person. The interviews should be done in a setting that is most familiar to the interviewee to allow memories to be easily recalled. The interviews conducted will be the corner stone of this plan and all other plans that are being formulated with this similar template. By creating these social connections from the planner to the back bone of the community which are these long-term residents, the potential plan that can be formulated has the highest possibility of success.

After the data is taken from the community, the steps to using the data will consist of many different computer software that can help display information. SketchUp designs to show child friendly streetscape and overall designs of the neighborhood will be essential to the creation of this plan. These designs will be shown in community meetings as well to give the community a better understanding of how it will change. The use of photographs with in a presentation to show empty lots or dilapidated homes that are currently in the neighborhood. Then the next frame could be a SketchUp design of a child friendly park or design that is an opportunity of learning and community members will be able to make comments.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which is a strategic mapping software that can show the overall outline of the neighborhood. The accessibility to the assets of the community is currently a problem; GIS will show the changes that will be made to make it easier to get to the assets of the area. GIS will also allow demographic information to be shown in an easier way to understand the issues of the area. The population increases in the last five years will also be shown to see where the migration is moving in Richmond as a whole.

Research Questions	Community Outreach	Survey	Asset Mapping	Mapping
What are the locations and characteristics of the current assets in the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods?	X	X	X	X
What are the opportunities to leverage the current neighborhood assets in Bellemeade and Oak Grove to better support elementary aged youth education?	X	X		
How can the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods use improved neighborhood-level educational infrastructure to attract and retain families with children?			X	X

Methodology Summary

Although the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove have had a tumultuous past filled with many injustices, it is very apparent to see that the community sees a bright future on the horizon. This plan is community based in all aspects, from the data collection to the design additions the community members are a driving force. RVA Thrives gives the opportunity of redevelopment and revitalization through community participation. The Asset Based Community Development inside of this plan will tailor the community to not only what the current residents want but also to what the potential members need. The population of this area is rising and the connection between the homeowners and renters will be reinforced by this plan.

The themes of affordable housing, asset-based community development in the creation of a learning community, child-based redesign, and intergenerational living are all gaps that can be found in this area currently. The ultimate goal of this plan is to create a community that people of all ages can live and create a home in. The populations that are coming into the city of Richmond will be searching for communities that are suitable to raise children in and the neighborhoods of Bellemeade and Oak Grove have the potential to be on the list of considerations.

Research Findings

The basis of research conducted for this plan is created by defining what constitutes as an asset to the people who currently live in the communities. The broad definitions of the assets were placed into three categories human, cultural and physical. These categories were then further defined by conducting multiple community outreach efforts and design evaluations. The following section of this plan explains all research findings conducted during the research of this plan.

For the families that have stayed in these two neighborhoods they have passed down the tradition of coming back to them once their children got older. Three out of five of the interviews that were conducted the children came back to the area to then continue the tradition of raising children in this area. With the help of the Bellemeade Neighborhood Civic Association three separate interviews were conducted with three members of the community. All three community members were African American women that ranged in age from thirty-five to eighty years old. Three themes arose that surround the issues they felt were most important for this planning intervention to tackle. Accountability, lack of appealing urban design or beautification, and lack of community strength were the three themes that troubled the residences I spoke with the most. These three themes will help shape further research as well as potential planning interventions.

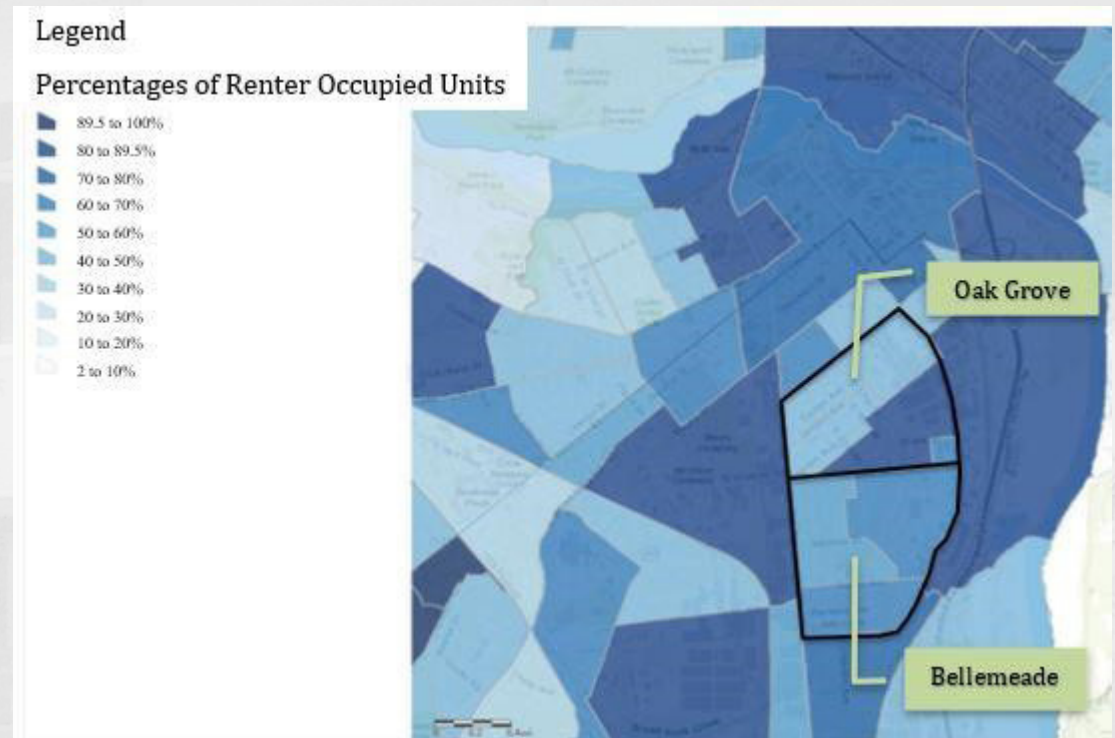
The theme of accountability was the most talked about issue, community meetings as well as intimate one on one interviews this issue was brought up multiple times in the conversations. In the early 1970's residences in Bellemeade and Oak Grove remember home ownership was at an all-time high. This home ownership in the area was enhanced by redlining in the 1960's to late 1970's, the area became primarily African American due to this being one of the only areas they were allowed to own homes. The migration change came after the rise in crime in the 1990's this issue made many people with children sell their homes or put them up for rent. While rental housing generally was not an issue, community leaders were concerned by poor maintenance at many of the rental properties. Beyond the issue of home maintenance is the issue of lack of respect for other neighbors by out of control tenants. One resident of the Oak Grove community remembers when a home was rented to a family two houses away from hers. One day she came home and there were a dozen police cars surrounding her block, the renters had begun to fight each other in the street and caused so much chaos that she sent a letter to that homeowner who actually lives in Northern Virginia.

Another long-term resident from Bellemeade talked about how some renters down the street broke into her house and stole family heirlooms. Both horrible situations and countless more have lead homeowners in the area to have an angst towards any renters. The cultivation of families with children will also lend its self to the ultimate cultivation of renters, it is important to have an understanding of the type of renters this community will cultivate. Focusing on cultivating long term renters as well as home owners should be an equal priority.

Accountability

As discussed in the one on one interviews the issue of accountability was a common theme presented by the community. Accountability had multiple definitions the difference that have been felt between the home owners and renters has been a common thread as well as the people with families or small children and young professionals. To look into the issue of renters and home owners the map found in figure 11 shows the percentages of renters in the area from 2018. This map splits the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods in segments of concentrated renters, these concentrations when compared to the home owners map found in figure 12 you can see that there are distinct areas that have a higher number of renters than homeowners. It is no surprise that these maps show the areas with higher renters have lower homeowners and that the areas with higher homeowners have lower renters. The most important finding from these maps are that the Oak Grove neighborhood has an extremely distinct separation between homeowners in the north side and renters in the south side.

Figure 12: Map of Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods percentages of renter occupied units. (Richmond City GIS open data)



This distinct line could be attributed to multiple things one of them being the gentrification slowly moving towards the south. Once a house is bought and “flipped” which means it has been fully renovated, the house is then sold for much higher to a home buyer. The gentrification is moving towards the south end of the neighborhood and leaves Bellemeade as an almost flawless mix of renter and home owners.

Renters and Homeowner’s Community Tension

When researching accountability further knowing the current ownership of the neighborhoods became a priority for research. In figures 11 and 12 you can see two individual maps of Oak Grove and Bellemeade by parcel and ownership in 2017. In the red areas there are vacancies, green areas are owned by homewoners who do not live in the Richmond City area and the light brown kind of orange color are areas are both. Some inferences that can be made from these maps are that the two neighborhoods have a large amount of vacancies as well as a large amount of home owners who don’t actually live in the area. The issue of accountability is exacerbated by the lack of home owners actually living in the homes they own. Some connections can be made between the amount of people not living in the homes they own in these neighborhoods and the lack of accountability.

Figure 13: Map of Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods percentages of home owner occupied Units. (Richmond City GIS Open data)



Oak Grove Neighborhood, Richmond Virginia

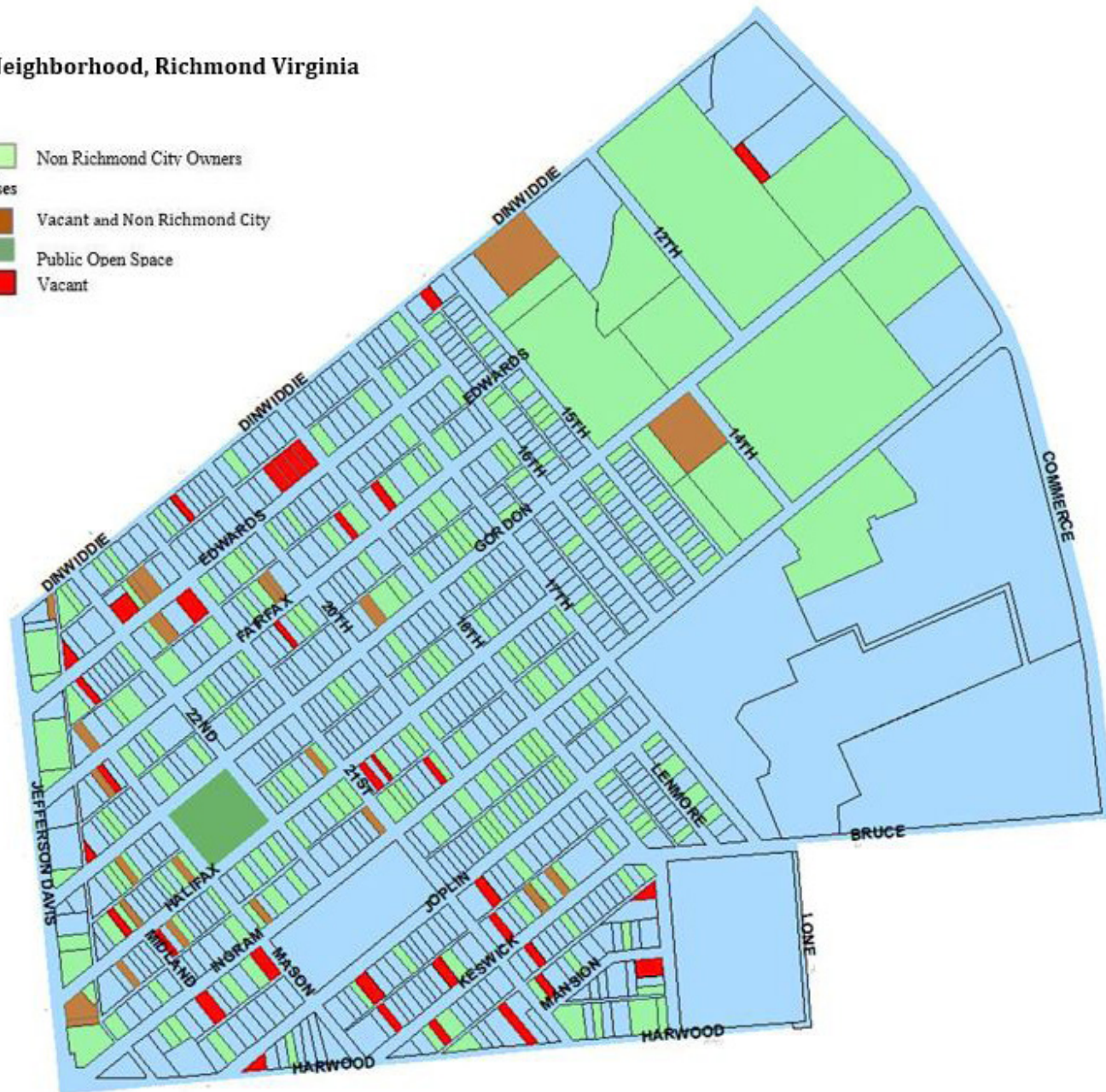


Figure 14: Map of Oak Grove neighborhood, vacancies, green spaces and Non-Richmond city owners. (Richmond City GIS open data)

Bellemeade Neighborhood, Richmond Virginia

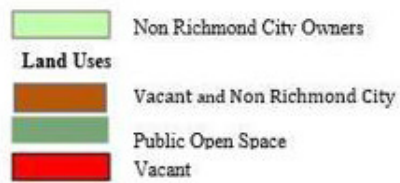
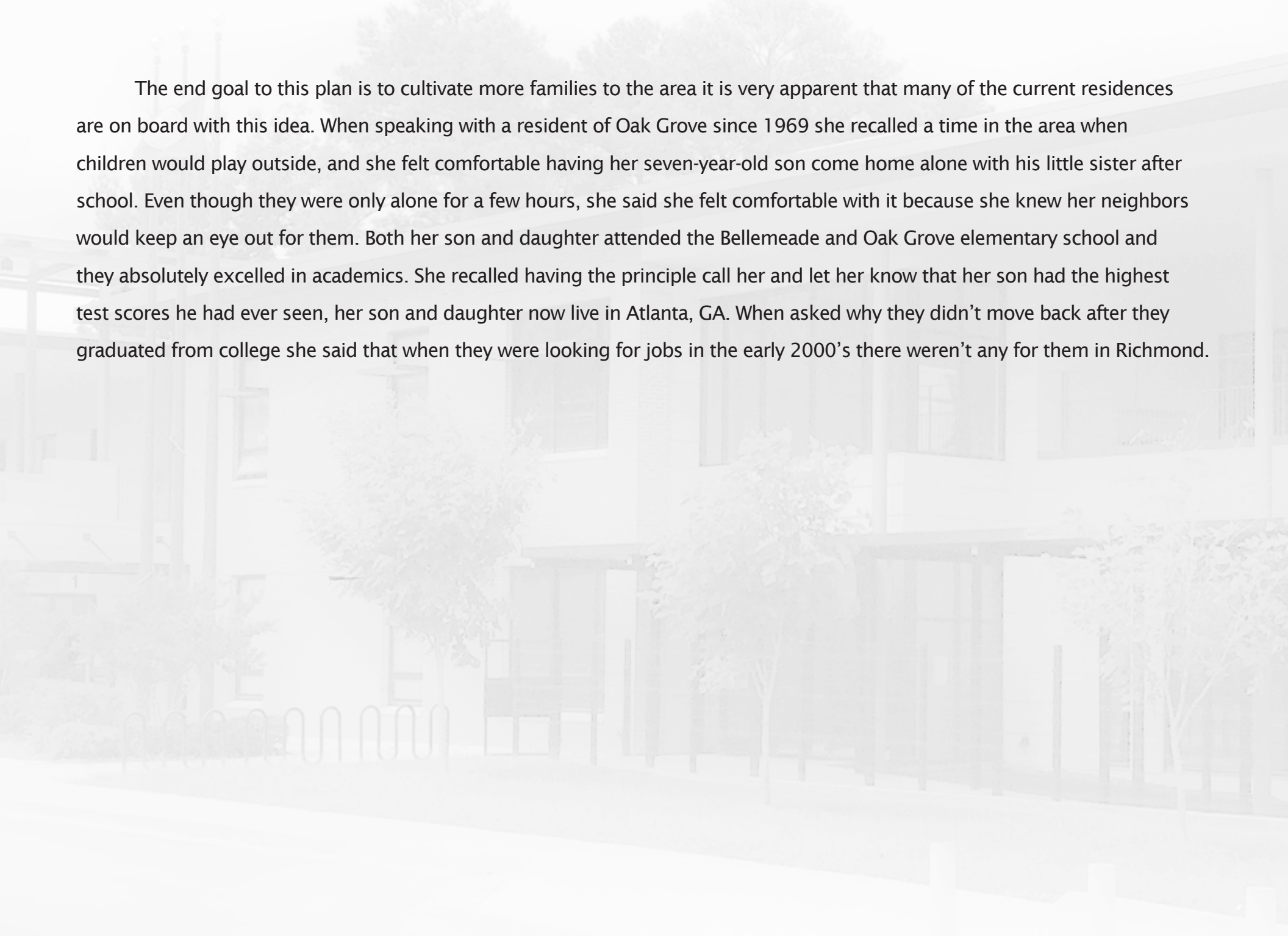


Figure 15: Map of Bellemeade neighborhood, vacancies, green spaces and Non-Richmond city owners. (Richmond City GIS open data)



The end goal to this plan is to cultivate more families to the area it is very apparent that many of the current residences are on board with this idea. When speaking with a resident of Oak Grove since 1969 she recalled a time in the area when children would play outside, and she felt comfortable having her seven-year-old son come home alone with his little sister after school. Even though they were only alone for a few hours, she said she felt comfortable with it because she knew her neighbors would keep an eye out for them. Both her son and daughter attended the Bellemeade and Oak Grove elementary school and they absolutely excelled in academics. She recalled having the principle call her and let her know that her son had the highest test scores he had ever seen, her son and daughter now live in Atlanta, GA. When asked why they didn't move back after they graduated from college she said that when they were looking for jobs in the early 2000's there weren't any for them in Richmond.

Beautification

The next element that the community members commonly brought up was the overall lack of beautification of the neighborhood as a whole. Many people chose to talk about lack of accountability but there was also an overall reoccurring issue of unkempt roads, broken and missing sidewalks, lack of pedestrian friendly design and many safety issues. These issues were fully researched in the design evaluations. As seen in figure 13 is the intersection in front of the Bellemeade and Oak Grove elementary school. Many residences asked for this specific intersection to be focused on due to the high traffic and lack of signage, this could be considered to be the main area because directly beside the school is the community center that can connect the community. By focusing on the urban design of this intersection it will be able to begin the rebranding process that should happen for people to see this area as a viable place to raise children. While the intersection clearly has crosswalks the signage in order to find the elementary school and community center is few to almost none in most places. When conducting the interviews this issue of lack of knowledge was brought up, multiple times and therefore needs to be placed in a beautification design plan. This intersection signals the areas that children are able to have fun and learn in and unfortunately it is extremely un-safe as well as poorly lit and not welcoming. This area will be the epicenter of the place making movement for these two neighborhoods, making this area a destination rather than a failing intersection.



Figure 16: Facing elementary school main intersection of Royall and Lynhaven.

The third element that was reoccurring throughout the resident interviews was the willingness to have a planning intervention done for their communities. Having the will of the community members on the side of change can warrant progressive and innovative ways to help solve the issues of the area. Although the members of the community that were interviewed wanted change they also wanted to be able to keep their homes and enjoy the changes. The overwhelming fear of gentrification and displacement became extremely apparent when during the interviews many of the residences received phone calls and mail private investors requesting to buy their homes. The prices they were giving them were in some cases under one hundred thousand dollars, this amount is slightly shocking due to the homes in this area selling for two hundred thousand. This fear that is sparked by these everyday phone calls is a substantial fear that should be properly dealt with. Investigating how the homes in this area can remain affordable while the changes in the area happen is a priority for this plan and the recommendations will reflect this importance.



Figure 17: Birds eye view of intersection leading to elementary school and community center

Cultivation of Families

For this plan a case study was a difficult task due to the main issue of this plan, which is lack of families in the urban environment, not being a priority for the city of Richmond Virginia. Due to the lack of case studies, an individual case study was conducted in a neighborhood that is in the urban core of the Richmond area that also has a high population of children and families. The Fan neighborhood is an area of Richmond that has an urban design that might be conducive to raising children in an urban landscape. This child friendly design might be due to the amount of accessibility to outdoor space as well as accessibility to child care. To further investigate this thought a survey as created and given to the Fan District Association to be distributed to the community members. Figure 17 shows the questions that were on a survey distributed electronically to the Fan District Association.

**The Fan Neighborhood Family Case Study Survey
Spring 2019**

1. **Do you live in the Fan Neighborhood?**
Mark only one oval.

Yes *Skip to question 2.*
 No *Skip to "Thank you!"*

Current Resident of the Fan Neighborhood

2. **Do you have children that were raised or are currently being raised in the Fan neighborhood? ***
Mark only one oval.

Yes *After the last question in this section, skip to question 4.*
 No *After the last question in this section, skip to "Thank you!"*

3. **Do you live East or West of Meadow Street? ***
Mark only one oval.

West
 East
 On N Meadow

Parents in the Fan Neighborhood

4. **What type of education do/did your children/child receive?**
Mark only one oval.

Public
 Private
 Other: _____

5. **Do you feel safe when crossing the street with your children? ***
Mark only one oval.

Yes
 No

6. **If you chose "No" to the last question, what makes crossing the street dangerous? (i.e. cars driving too fast, not enough stop signs, not enough cross walks.)**

7. **How often do you go to a park in the Fan? ***
Mark only one oval.

I do not go to the parks in the Fan.
 Less than 10 times a year
 1-5 times a month
 More than 5 times a month.

8. **When inside of the park do you feel safe letting your children play freely?**
Mark only one oval.

Yes
 No

9. **Why have you chosen to raise your children in the Fan neighborhood? ***

Figure 18: Fan District Association (FDA) Survey. Distributed during the week of February 20th, 2019

The Fan neighborhood in essence is not an easy comparison to the Bellemeade and Oak Grove area, it is important to note that the reasons as to why families live there are what the focus will be placed on. Due to this, all the questions asked in the survey are based in that idea of why families feel comfortable raising children in the area and not the economic status of the people who live there. The equalization of wealthy community members in a neighborhood and the beautification of the area needs to be severed in order to come to the understanding that no matter what wealth status you are, you deserve to have a neighborhood that is designed for people and raising children. By focusing on the aspect that everyone is deserving of a child based designed community the idea will be a priority when redeveloping older neighborhoods to accommodate for the child-based design. Another aspect of the FDA survey is the importance of parks on their community, many questions were based in this investigation as to whether the parks are used often as well as if they are designed appropriately. Safety is an overwhelming issue that parents focus on when choosing places to live, therefore the survey questions are based in safety as well. The Bellemeade and Oak Grove area struggled with safety concerns in the late 1990's much like all other areas of Richmond Virginia. The neighborhoods are recovering from this and it can be seen from these high crime rates due to the low crime found in figure 8 the existing conditions portion of this document.

The survey was distributed via email to the Fan Neighborhood Association members in mid-February of 2019. The results shed light on some of the priorities of families who live in urban areas and how those priorities determine what neighborhoods they live in. In total seventy-six people who lived in the Fan neighborhood completed the survey, of those 57% were or have raised children in the area. Of the people who raised or are currently raising their children in the Fan more than thirty percent of them attend or attended public school. This amount of people who went to Fox elementary was shocking to me due to the area having a higher income and thus are able to send their children to private schools. It is an interesting finding that most of the people still choose the public school in the area due to location. The next half pf the survey focused on safety, when asked if parents were comfortable crossing the street with their children more than seventy percent said yes. This finding was supplemented by a follow up question if they do not feel safe they were able to write a short answer as to why they felt that way. Some of the written responses said there were not enough crosswalks, not enough four way stops, low visibility and cars driving too fast.

All of the comments made that have to do with the street and car safety correlate with the independent interviews conducted in the Bellemeade and Oak Grove neighborhoods. The recommendations made for the urban design in the target neighborhoods will be connected to this finding.

The last question on the survey asked why the respondent has chosen to raise their children in the Fan neighborhood, this question as created in order to spark a deeper more thoughtful answer as to why the Fan is such a dynamic area to live. The responses were very deliberate in the sense that many of the parents offered insight into why they chose to raise children in the urban landscape. “We thought it would be a stimulating and interesting childhood” (FDA survey, 2019) came anonymously in the fan survey as well as “Diversity, urbanity” (FDA survey, 2019) these two quotes show the main reasons why they feel that the urban environment will be beneficial to their children. One aspect of the survey that was interesting was that many people raised their children in the Fan area in the past and have stayed and plan to retire in their homes. This aspect of feeling like they are able to age in place as well as raise children in this area is something that should be focused on replicating in the target neighborhoods.

Leveragability of Assets

The identification of assets that can be utilized in the neighborhood of Bellemeade and Oak Grove are researched through Asset Mapping. Asset Mapping can be conducted in a multitude of ways as described in the methodology of this plan the asset mapping have been conducted through information from a research point of view. There have been multiple sources such as news articles, community meeting minutes, past survey documentation from RVA Thrives, and conversational surveys. During multiple interviews conducted with long term residences the assets of the community were discussed in great detail and how those assets have changed over time. The current assets the communities have decreased substantially in the last five years due to a multitude of issues. One large issue brought up by many community members is the lack of community involvement due to the turnover of residents. When people move into the area they are quick to move out due to the area not being appealing for long term settlement.

There are two prominent assets that have been discussed with community members the Bellemeade and Oak Grove elementary school and the Bellemeade Community center. These two assets are currently being utilized in a small way by being open to the communities, but many members of the community feel that they can work for the neighborhood in better ways than they are now. One asset that is in the area that is not as well-known is the existence of a Sun Path Urban Farm in Oak Grove, run by a long-term resident. The farm does educational activities with children in the area and might have partnered with the school in the past, but it should be utilized more in an educational view. The farm is now open on Saturdays to the community so they can buy food from them and this could be an area of interest that should be utilized more as well. The urban farm could partner with the community center to be utilized in a more cohesive way in order to create connections.

There are currently seven child day care facilities in the two neighborhoods, some have better reviews than others and they vary on what they specialize in. There is one play ground located in the Oak Grove neighborhood that has some basketball courts, a play area and some green space and Bellemeade has only one green space located behind the community center. These two outdoor recreation spaces are the only ones in these two south side neighborhoods which raises concern in multiple ways. The issue that has come from finding the assets of these communities due to the lack of community strength the assets have dissipated over time and new assets have not taken their place.

Findings Conclusion

The main elements that have been taken from the interviews conducted were used to shape the areas of further investigation. Renter accountability, loss of population, and neighborhood urban design flaws have all played a part in why this community is struggling. The utilization of assets that are currently available will fall short due to the lack of asset replacement over time did not happen. By being able to make connections to the current assets and create new assets in this area in a way that can cultivate more families will help this community come together and strengthen the neighborhood. The recommendations that will be prepared for this plan will look to find solutions for the issues listed above and to place importance on asset replacement over time as well asset creation.

Recommendations

Vision Statement

The communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove are a safe haven for families in the urban landscape of Richmond, Virginia. Populated by long and short-term residents that prioritize intergenerational living, housing affordability, education, and social capital. The Southside of Richmond is a wonderful place to raise children and the communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove have become catalysts in the family oriented urban community trend.

Goals, Objectives, and Actions

Goal 1: Cultivate strong commitment to the neighborhood.

Objective 1.1: Bring community strength to the current residences and prospective residents through the creation of social capital.

Action 1.1.1: The creation of more socializing groups or social opportunities such as gardening clubs or pop up farmers market organized by the civic associations.

Action 1.1.2: Create meetings between current socializing groups such as the urban farm owners, the Bellemeade and Oak Grove school faculty and staff, the Bellemeade Community Center organizers and other organizations interested in creating those connections in the communities.

Action 1.1.3: Create a database of the important organizations in the community and create lines of communication through meetings and online resources.

Objective 1.2: Make the strength of the community a tool of cultivation of families to the area.

Action 1.2.1: Create physical signs that offer warm welcomes as well as directional aides for new residents. The signs can also offer maps to help newcomers get to know the neighborhoods, as well as annual events that might be organized.

Action 1.2.2: RVA Thrives will reach out to local media as well as create a social media presence that will focus on the rebranding of the communities as family-based neighborhoods.

Figure 19: Neighborhood welcome sign example.



Objective 1.3: Make new residents feel welcome and invited when first moving in.

Action 1.2.3: Create a new resident welcome brochure that has all important information about the communities in it with a welcoming message, a map of the community and when and where the civic association meet. The brochure should be made by the community members organized through RVA Thrives. The brochure will also have helpful information about the history of the area to help the new residents get a better understanding of the area.

Objective 1.4: Create partnerships with the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust.

Action 1.4.1: Create regular meetings between Virginia Community Voice/RVA Thrives and the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust in order to raise interest in the target communities for affordable housing projects.

Action 1.4.2: Use this professional plan as a tool to show the need of affordable housing in the study areas.



Figure 20: Example welcome brochure from the Murray Hill neighborhood in Milwaukee.

Goal 2: Prioritize the creation and maintenance of intergenerational asset-based infrastructure.

Objective 2.1: Prioritize the creation of child based urban design.

Action 2.1.1: Create a database of small design additions such as mail boxes, signage and welcome signs that can be added to the neighborhood at times when funding is available.

Action 2.1.2: Apply to new urban design grants and use the design database as a tool.

Objective 2.2: Get the community involved in making the neighborhoods safer through the steps in the Virginia Community Voice Blueprint.

Action 2.2.1: Create a public meeting for each separate neighborhood to decide what streets need to be prioritized for traffic calming or signage additions.

Action 2.2.2: Vigilantly advertise the public meeting at the Bellemeade and Oak Grove School as well as canvassing areas with high population of children such as the community center and parks.

Action 2.2.3: Create removable signs with the meeting date, location and time to be placed in front of civic association members homes or in popular areas.

Action 2.2.4: During the first community meeting prioritize the addition of a school zone flasher at the intersection before reaching the school and community center.

Action 2.2.5: Reach out to the department of Public Works for the city of Richmond to help with the safety of the area such as the addition of speed bumps, speed limit signs and children at play signs.

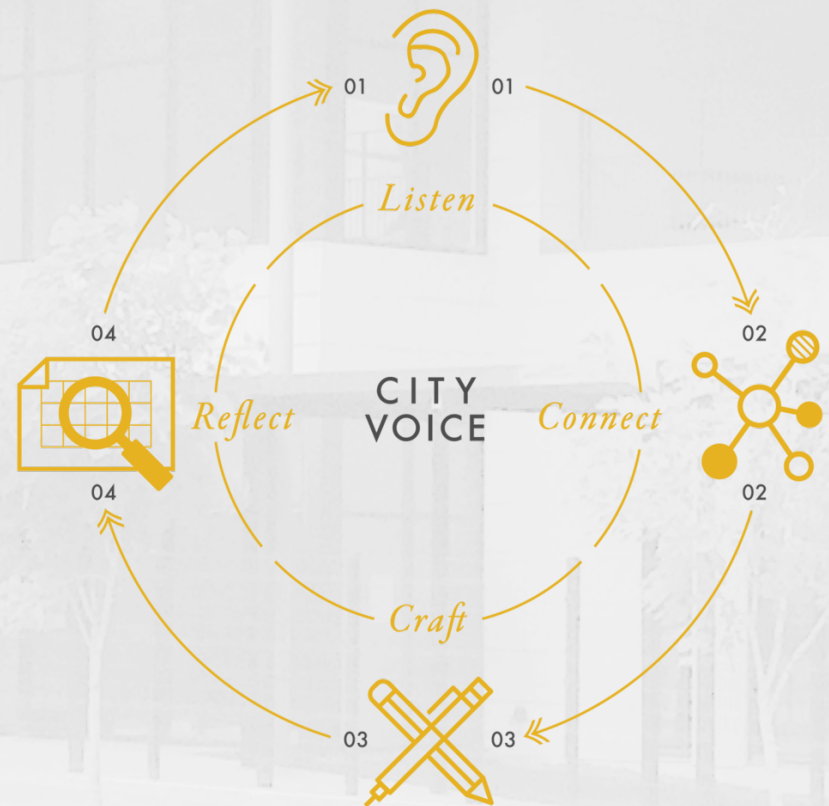


Figure 21: Virginia Community Voice Blueprint formation diagram. (RVA Thrives)

Objective 2.3: Begin a new programming initiative with the Bellemeade Community Center.

Action 2.3.1: Begin highly advertising community meetings at the elementary school and using other ways of meeting advertised as discussed in objective 2.2.

Action 2.3.2: At the community meeting run a small workshop where people can voice what they want to see from the community center and what type of clubs or groups can be started to involve the community more and offer more opportunities of social connection.

Action 2.3.3: Create a handbook for the current and future employees of the community center that highlights the programs that will be organized based on the needs of the community.

Objective 2.4: Utilize all current educational and residential connections.

Action 2.4.1: Involve the Oak Grove and Bellemeade Elementary School in all aspects of community meetings such as advertising them to the parents.

Action 2.4.2: Meeting with the faculty and staff to create connections and to address needs they see in the community.

Action 2.4.3: Designate current resident leaders that can help shape the identity of the community.



Figure 22: Bellemeade Community Center..



Figure 23: Bellemeade and Oak Grove Elementary School

Goal 3: Prepare all future changes in a community-based format.

Objective 3.1: Create pathways to future community-based development.

Action 3.1.1: Create a handbook for the Civic associations that will focus on how to conduct community engagement.

Action 3.1.2: Preserve the historic importance by photographic documentation of all community events through a community album housed in the Bellemeade Community Center.

Objective 3.2: Create connections between the communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove in order to create a larger driving force of change.

Action 3.2.1: Invite the communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove to come together to become a larger driving force of change in the southside of Richmond.

Action 3.2.2: Re-name the Bellemeade Community Center with the addition of Oak Grove, to foster unity of the two communities and to resemble to the elementary school's name.

Action 3.2.3: Create unity of the two communities through the addition of both community names on all future documentation.

Implementation

The implementation of this professional plan is all based within community-based development. Due to the importance of the community being involved in processes the implementation is in a long-term format that allows for the community to apply each action at the appropriate time. Goal number two incorporates immediate actions that can be done in order to create the community-based infrastructure that is needed to build a stronger community. By creating a comprehensive foundation of social community connection, the communities will be able to work on more development needs in the future that can make the area more appealing for families. It is important to note that many if not all of the implementation actions should be done with the full involvement of a non-profit organization or any type of involved organization that can help program the implementation of this plan.

	Phase 1: One to two years	Phase 2: Two to four years	Phase 3: Four to five years	Phase 4: Five to seven years	Phase 5: Seven to ten years and beyond
Goal 1: Cultivate strong commitment to the neighborhood.					
Objective 1.1: Bring community strength to the current residences and prospective residents through the creation of social capital.					
Action 1.1.1: Create more social groups.					
Action 1.1.2: Connections to all current socializing groups.					
Action 1.1.3: Create a database of important community organizations.					
Objective 1.2: Make the strength of the community a tool of cultivation of families to the area.					
Action 1.2.1: Physical signs of a warm welcome.					
Action 1.2.2: Reach out to the media to rebrand the neighborhood.					
Objective 1.3: Make new residents feel welcome and invited when first moving in.					
Action 1.2.3: Create new resident welcome brochure.					
Goal 2: Prioritize the creation and maintenance of intergenerational asset-based infrastructure.					
Objective 2.1: Prioritize the creation of child based urban design.					
Action 2.1.1: Find small design additions to create unity.					
Action 2.1.2: Apply to new types of grants.					
Objective 2.2: Get the community involved in making the neighborhoods safer through the steps in the Virginia Community Voice Blueprint.					
Action 2.2.1: Public meeting for safety changes.					
Action 2.2.2: Advertising meetings to the elementary school.					
Action 2.2.3: Create movable yard signs with community meeting dates and times.					
Action 2.2.4: Prioritize safety changes at the school intersection.					
Action 2.2.5: Reachout to Public Works to apply for safety changes.					
Objective 2.3: Begin a new programming initiative with the Bellemeade Community Center.					
Action 2.3.1: Advertise new programming initiatives from the community center.					
Action 2.3.2: Run small workshop to find best safety changes.					
Action 2.3.3: Create handbook for the community center for programming information.					
Objective 2.4: Utilize all current educational and residential connections.					
Action 2.4.1: Involve the elementary school in all aspects fo the community center.					
Action 2.4.2: Meetig with faculty and staff od the elementary school.					
Action 2.4.3: Designate community leaders within the school.					
Goal 3: Prepare all future changes in a community-based format					
Objective 3.1: Create pathways to future community based development.					
Action 3.1.1: Use the Virginia Community Voice Blueprint for all community outreach efforts.					
Action 3.1.2: Create community historian.					
Objective 3.2: Create connections between the communities of Bellemeade and Oak Grove in order to create a larger driving force of change.					
Action 3.2.1: Have a meeting will both communitites to create unity.					
Action 3.2.2: Re-name the community with the addition of the Oak Grove neighborhood.					
Action 3.2.3: Put both community names on all documentation in the future.					

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