Neighborhood Planning

for Community

Revitalization

A Method of Measuring
Community Empowerment

Conducted on behalf of

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I.   Introduction

The purpose of this report is to create a method for gathering baseline data on the level of empowerment in the Frogtown Neighborhood (District 7). District 7 with a population of 14,540 (1989) is bounded by the Burlington Railroad to the north, University Avenue to the south, Lexington Avenue to the west, and Interstate 35E to the east. Through speaking with several residents, some of whom both live and work in the Frogtown community, the definition of empowerment slowly emerged[1]. For evaluation purposes empowerment will be defined as the ability to make your own decisions, be involved in the decision-making process and most importantly, to intentionally impact the decision-making process and see tangible results of your efforts.

Through numerous literature reviews[2] and the interviews mentioned above, several indicators emerged that seemed useful in measuring empowerment in District 7. These included factors both internal and external to the individual such as demographic characteristics, home ownership, participation in other community organizations, sense of community, community behaviors, and environmental factors. Community behaviors and cognitions as well as environmental factors will be defined below.

Frequently mentioned by those who work in District 7 is the importance of race in predicting participation. This is especially significant in terms of the high Asian, particularly Hmong, population residing in Frogtown. It was noted that aspects of their culture keep them from participating as much as their black and white counterparts. However, what may be more significant is the language barrier in general and how long an immigrant has been in the country. This may not hold as much for the younger

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generations but will probably be significant with older generations. First generation immigrants are probably less likely to participate as second and third generation immigrants who have had time to adapt and accept the dominant culture.

While much research was found that contained definitions of empowerment and its importance in the decision-making process, few studies were found that attempted to measure the level of empowerment in a neighborhood. Two major studies will be used as reference points throughout this report. The first was conducted by Douglas Perkins, Barbara Brown and Ralph Taylor who analyzed indicators useful in predicting participation in community organizations across three cities; New York, Baltimore, and Salt Lake City were compared at the individual and block levels. The other is a Community Indicators survey done in numerous counties across the United States by the James L. Knight Foundation. The study included Ramsey County in its report, and data from the citizenship portion of the study will be used as a reference point in this report.

II.   Key Concepts

Demographic Characteristics

Many demographic characteristics may be useful in determining a person's level of empowerment. According to the "Community Indicators" report put out by the James L. Knight Foundation, age and income were related to residents' familiarity with their neighbors. Older residents and those with higher incomes tended to know their neighbors more than their younger and less well-off counterparts. In most cases the older an individual is, the more likely he or she will be involved the decision-making process. Education is another factor that is often indicative of empowerment. Again, the James L. Knight survey indicates that individuals with higher levels of education, particularly

those with some college education, are more inclined to state that they feel they can have a positive impact on their community.

While income and education can be important characteristics in determining levels of empowerment, it is also important to consider other demographic factors that go across educational and financial boundaries. This is particularly important in District 7, where the median household income is $16, 645 annually (12.2% are unemployed) and where approximately 63% of residents have a high school degree or higher, but only 9.5% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.[3] In an area that has relatively low educational and income levels, it is important to consider other factors that might lead to their empowerment rather than assuming that levels of empowerment will be low due to these characteristics.

Examples of other demographic characteristics to consider include home ownership, minority status, residential stability, and political ideology. Theories underlying the former characteristics are that homeowners will be more inclined to participate in the decision-making process than renters because they are less transient and have more of an investment in their community. This was found to be the case in both the Knight study and the study by Douglas Perkins et al. on predicting participation in community organizations, the two major reference points for this paper. However, the Perkins study finds this relationship to be positively but inconsistently related to participation.

It is also often assumed that minorities are less likely to participate in the decision-making process and that racially homogenous neighborhoods are more likely to exhibit higher levels of participation. However, the Perkins study again finds minority status to be positively but inconsistently related to participation. The Knight Foundation

study reports that those living in racially homogenous neighborhoods are more likely to participate and have a connection with their neighbors. These findings in addition to the opinions of those interviewed in District 7 give an unclear picture of the impact of race on participation.

Residential stability is again reported in the Perkins study as positively but inconsistently related to participation and the study did not consider political ideology in its research. The Knight Foundation study did not discuss residential stability as an indicator of citizenship, but the Knight report does consider political ideology. The results of their research point to self-described liberals as feeling they can have a bigger impact on their communities than moderates and conservatives.

Community Behaviors

Community behaviors can be defined by such factors as knowing one's neighbors and volunteering in the community. In the "Community Indicators" report put out by the James L. Knight Foundation, indicators affecting these relationships were addressed; however, their impact on empowerment was not discussed. For example, as indicated in the demographics discussion above, the study reported indicators such as age, income, homeownership, and racial makeup as being related to residents' connection with their neighbors. Older residents and those with higher incomes tended to know their neighbors more than younger residents and those with less education. Also homeowners tended to know the names of their neighbors more than renters and those residents living in racially homogenous neighborhoods also know their neighbors more than residents living in racially mixed neighborhoods. However, the study did not connect knowing one's neighbors with empowerment. Similarly the Knight study looked at factors influencing personal efficacy (having a positive impact on one's neighborhood) such as income,

education, parental status, volunteerism and political ideology but again did not tie these directly to empowerment.

The Perkins study, however, looks at knowing one's neighbors and volunteerism as factors that directly influence one's level of empowerment and participation. The study finds these factors to be significant in most of its analyses. People who know their neighbors and volunteer in other community organizations are more likely to be involved in the decision-making process.

The Perkins study also considers factors termed "community cognitions" in determining participation and empowerment. The term community cognitions encompasses factors such as sense of community, community satisfaction, and civic responsibility. These factors were found to be positively and consistently related to empowerment and participation at both the individual and block levels. These factors, along with neighboring and volunteering were the only ones consistently found to impact participation in the decision-making process. These would likely have been found to be significant in the Knight Foundation study as well as community cognitions in the Perkins study were similar to the personal efficacy indicators discussed in that report.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors that might be significantly correlated to participation and empowerment are the presence of gardens and streetlights and the absence of litter and vandalism. These factors were considered in the Perkins study, but were not discussed in the Knight report. The Perkins study considers these factors because they are often the most stable attributes of a community. It divided environmental factors into two categories: defensible space and incivilities. Defensible space includes factors such as narrower streets, outdoor lighting, as well as real and symbolic barriers that define shared

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space. These factors are thought to be indicative of community; the more well kept residents keep their properties and have outdoor lighting, the more community behaviors are thought to be present. Incivilities include things such as litter, vandalism, and dilapidation and the intuition behind these factors is that the less a neighborhood has problems with them, the more likely it is that the residents have been empowered to keep it clean and prevent these things from happening.

In order to present a more objective measure of environmental factors, the Perkins study brought in trained raters to assess these conditions in the neighborhoods it studied. It combined these results with perceptions obtained from the resident survey it conducted in order to determine the relationship between environmental factors and participation. The perceptions gathered from the resident survey were about residents' opinions regarding their own properties and not those of their neighbors. The environmental factors were found to be significantly correlated with participation although in some instances they were positively correlated and in others negatively.

III. Measurement

In order to evaluate the level of empowerment in District 7, a survey was created that asked residents and those who work in District 7 a variety of questions based on the indicators noted above (See Appendix A). Questions were drawn and adapted from two independent surveys, the James L. Knight survey and a survey done by the Wilder Foundation to evaluate their Weed and Seed program. The questions attempt to get at demographic indicators along with indicators on environmental factors, community behaviors, and most importantly a person's sense of community.

IV.   Conclusion

The process of defining empowerment and its indicators involved meeting with people who work and reside in District 7 in order to understand what empowerment means in their community. In addition, numerous research articles and books were looked at in order to determine indicators of empowerment. Two studies, one by Perkins, Brown and Taylor and the other by the James L. Knight Foundation, stood out as having attempted to measure empowerment in various communities. Most prominent among the indicators are income, education, knowing one's neighbors, volunteering, one's sense of community, one's satisfaction with their community, and one's feelings of civic responsibility. By conducting the survey using a simple random sample of residents in .District 7, one should get a sense of the level of empowerment in the District 7 community. The results of the survey will also point out areas that need to be addressed in order to empower the residents of District 7 to become involved in the decision-making process. This survey can then be repeated over time in order to assess if the level of empowerment in District 7 is changing.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

- **How long have you lived in your current neighborhood?**

  a. Less than a year
  b. 1-5 years
  c. 6-10 years
  d. 11-20 years
  e. More than 20 years
  f. Don't know

- **Overall, how would you rate your neighborhood as a place to live?**

  a. Excellent
  b. Good
  c. Fair
  d. Poor
  e. Don't know

- **How safe would you say you and your family are from crime at each of the following locations? Are you very safe, somewhat safe, not too safe, not at all safe, don't know** *(Please choose one and write it in the space provided for each of the following).*

  a. At home during the day _____
  b. When walking in the neighborhood during the day _____
  c. At home at night _____
  d. When walking in the neighborhood after dark _____

- **In general, in the past two years, would you say this neighborhood has become a better place to live, a worse place to live, or stayed about the same?**

  a. Better
  b. Worse
  c. About the same
  d. Did not live here two years ago
  e. Don't know

- **In general, how responsive are the police in this neighborhood to community concerns? Are they...**

  a. Very responsive
  b. Somewhat responsive
  c. Somewhat unresponsive
  d. Very unresponsive
  e. Don't know

- **During the past two years, have you attended or participated in any of the following events in this neighborhood?**

	Yes	No
Community Celebration & Organizations' Elections	1	2
Spring Community Clean-Up	1	2
Taste of Frogtown at Wilder Foundation	1	2
Frogtown Festival and/or Parade	1	2
Peace Celebrations	1	2

- **In general, how satisfied are you with the availability of the following in this neighborhood? Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?**

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
Referrals to Community Programs					
Assistance to address neighborhood issues					
Opportunities to have input into government decisions (city,county,state,fed)					

- **Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?**

  a. Big impact
  b. Moderate impact
  c. Small impact
  d. No impact at all
  e. Don't know

- **Some ways people can have an impact are by volunteering their time, getting others involved, complaining to the authorities, giving money. Can you think of other ways to have an impact? What would you be most likely to do to have an impact yourself?**

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- **Do you know the names of your neighbors who live next to you, or not? If yes, all of them or only some?**

    a. Yes, know them all
    b. Yes, only some
    c. No, do not know any
    d. Don't have neighbors close by
    e. Don't know

If none or only some, what barriers have prevented you from getting to know your neighbors?

_____
_____
_____
_____

- **Are you now employed full-time, part-time, are you retired, or are you not employed for pay?**

    a. Employed full-time
    b. Employed part-time
    c. Retired
    d. Not Employed
    e. Disabled
    f. Other
    g. Don't know

- **Are you a full- or part-time student?**

    a. Yes, full-time
    b. Yes, part-time
    c. No, not a student
    d. Don't know

- **Are you married, living as married, single, divorced, widowed, separated, or have you ever been married?**

    a. Married
    b. Living as married
    c. Single
    d. Divorced
    e. Widowed
    f. Separated
    g. Never married
    h. Refused

- **Are you the parent or guardian of any children under age 18 now living in your household?**

  a. Yes
  b. No
  c. Don't know

  If yes, how many? _____

- **Are you now registered to vote?   If not, is it because you...**

  a. Are not a U.S. citizen
  b. Don't know how to register
  c. Haven't gotten around to it yet
  d. Don't know why voting is important

- **In general, would you describe your political views as...**

  a. Conservative
  b. Moderate
  c. Liberal
  d. Progressive
  e. Don't know

- **How often do you attend a place of worship? Would you say...**

  a. More than once a week
  b. About once a week
  c. About once a month
  d. Several times a year
  e. Don't go to worship services
  f. Don't know

- **What is the last grade or class you completed in school?**

  a. None
  b. Grades 1 through 8
  c. High school incomplete
  d. High school graduate or GED certificate
  e. Business, technical, or vocational school AFTER high school
  f. Some college or university work, but no four-year degree
  g. College or university graduate
  h. Post graduate or professional schooling after college
  i. Refused

- **What is your age?**

  a. 18 to 29
  b. 30 to 39
  c. 40 to 49
  d. 50 to 64
  e. 65 or older
  f. Refused

- **What is your ethnic identity?** *(perhaps these should be listed by their statistical prevalence in this community)*

  a. Black
  b. White
  c. Hmong
  d. Hispanic
  e. Asian/Pacific Islander
  f. American Indian
  g. Mixed race
  h. Something else
  i. Refused
  j. Don't know

- **Is English the primary language spoken in your home?_____ If not, what is?**

  _____

  How well would you say you can communicate in English?

  a. Very well
  b. Somewhat well
  c. Not very well
  d. Not at all

- **Do you own or rent your home?**

  a. Own
  b. Rent
  c. Other arrangement
  d. Refused

- **Approximately what is your total family income before taxes?**

  a. Less than $10,000
  b. $10,000 to under $20,000
  c. $20,000 to under $30,000
  d. $30,000 to under $40,000
  e. $40,000 to under $60,000
  f. $60,000 to under $100,000
  g. $100,000 or over
  h. Don't know
  i. Refused

- **What is your gender?**

  a. Male
  b. Female

End Notes

[1] Kristen Kidder of the District 7 Planning Council; Robert McClain from the Frogtown Employment and Resource Center; Patty Lammers, Housing Resource Specialist, from the Greater Frogtown Community Development Corporation; Sally Brown, Director of Community Youth Development, from the Wilder Foundation; and Melvin Giles from Catholic Charities Frogtown Center were involved in framing and solidifying the definition.

[2] Perkins, Douglas, Barbara Brown, and Ralph Taylor, "The Ecology of Empowerment: Predicting Participation in Community Organizations"; Peterman, William, Neighborhood Planning and Community Development: the Potential and Limits of Grassroots Action; Speer, Paul, "Community Organizing: An Ecological Route to Empowerment and Power"; Hanna, Mark and Buddy Robinson, Strategies for Community Empowerment: Direct-Action and Transformative Approaches to Social Change; Wilson, Patricia, "Empowerment: Community Economic Development from the Inside Out"; Florin, Paul and Abraham Wandersman, "An Introduction to Citizen Participation, Voluntary Organizations, and Community Development: Insights for Empowerment through Research"; Chavis, David and Abraham Wandersman, "Sense of Community in the Urban Environment: A Catalyst for Participation and Community Development"; Potapchuk, William, "Building an Infrastructure of Community Collaboration"; Cox, Kevin, "Housing Tenure and Neighborhood Activism"; Mesch, Gustavo, "Community Empowerment and Collective Action"

[3] 1989 Demographic statistics from the Urban Coalition website