



Olneyville Sustainable Communities

Building Relationships & Identifying Local Leaders

Results of a Neighborhood Interview Process

March 28, 2009

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About this document

This document is a summary of responses from over 100 interviews containing over 2,200 comments. It includes a wide range of perspectives and diverse opinions. It aims to capture the common themes that were identified in the interviews in order to understand what interests and concerns folks in the neighborhood share with one another. It also aims to identify which areas are priorities in order to facilitate action. Therefore, this document contains conflicting statements and seemingly contradictory findings. What one person may have seen as a strength may have been mentioned as a weakness by someone else – or even by the same person. These results reflect the realities of the neighborhood – the tensions and dynamics that co-exist. The comments below can be regarded as opinions of the individuals who participated, and not the views of Olneyville Housing Corporation or the Olneyville Collaborative. A diversity of comments were included, regardless of the opinions they expressed, except for responses that were factually incorrect or those that compromised the anonymity of the interviewee.

Overview of the interview process

A team of 20 community volunteers – including residents, staff and board members at Olneyville Housing Corporation (OHC), and Olneyville Collaborative members – conducted one on one interviews with over 100 community stakeholders in Olneyville from October 2008 – February 2009. These stakeholders included residents, business owners, churches, non-profit organizations, neighborhood activists, and community leaders. The people interviewed are not a random sample of the neighborhood, but every effort was made to reach and talk to people from a variety of different backgrounds who could offer different perspectives and who were regarded as leaders by others. The initial list of interviewees came from a brainstorm of community leaders by the Olneyville Collaborative and OHC board members, and was then added to through each interview.

Interviewees were asked the following questions:

1. What are the strengths of the neighborhood?
2. What are the weaknesses of the neighborhood?
3. What opportunities is the neighborhood facing?
4. What threats is the neighborhood facing?
5. What positive activities already happening in the neighborhood would you like to see more of?
6. What new ideas would you like to see neighbors working together on to benefit the entire neighborhood?
7. Who else should we talk to? (Who do you consider to be a leader in the neighborhood that we should talk to?)

Over 2,200 individual comments in response to the first six questions were recorded. Comments that interviewees made were then sorted into themes for presentation in this document. The themes were not predetermined – themes were identified by reviewing interview comments. While not every single comment is reported in this document, every theme that was mentioned by multiple people is here, along with a representative sampling of individual comments around that theme. The sampling of individual comments is roughly ordered with the most frequent or all-encompassing remarks at the top of the list.

Executive Summary

Below, we summarize the main themes that emerged from the conversations.

The physical fabric of Olneyville

Interviewees value the unique physical fabric of Olneyville: its setting among hills and valleys along the Woonasquatucket River; its mix of homes, historic mill buildings, and parks and green spaces; and its convenient location and walkable layout. Olneyville's location at a crossroads contributes to its convenience but also generates traffic congestion that many interviewees see as a weakness; traffic safety issues and road and sidewalk conditions must also be addressed. Interviewees see a lot of potential for the neighborhood to grow by capitalizing on opportunities such as rehabilitating mill buildings, using the river greenway as a catalyst for new development, developing underutilized spaces, and promoting "green" development. They also hope to bring more life to the neighborhood's beautiful network of parks by developing a wide range of activities in them.

Housing / the housing market

Interviewees were pleased with the new homes that have been built in the community, and would like to see work continue to improve and beautify homes, increase homeownership, and provide and maintain affordable housing. Abandoned homes, the foreclosure crisis, and absentee landlords are major concerns for the community. At the same time, abandoned and foreclosed homes present an opportunity to act and make progress towards the community's housing goals.

The Olneyville economy

Interviewees are intensely concerned about how the economic crisis and rising costs are affecting Olneyville - already a poor community. Many people are troubled by deepening losses of businesses, jobs, and services in the community. At the same time, people are proud of the mix of businesses that are in the community and the recent investment that has occurred. Interviewees would like to continue to bring in a mix of new businesses and help existing businesses, especially small and locally owned businesses, to grow and generate jobs for residents.

Safety and health

Safety issues and community/police relationships are widely seen as a critical weakness of - and threat to - the neighborhood, with particular concerns about gangs, violence, drugs, prostitution, and property crime as well as community / police relations. However, many interviewees also made comments about the neighborhood safety and police initiatives as a strength. Interviewees made a number of suggestions to improve community safety including increasing police patrolling, community efforts to help the police, increased police engagement with the community, and neighbors looking out for one another. Health and the environment were also topics of concern for a number of interviewees, namely about pollution and rats.

The social fabric of Olneyville

Interviewees greatly value the diverse mix of cultures and people that is present in Olneyville, a mix that may be threatened by gentrification and current policies and attitudes towards immigrants. Comments by interviewees also suggest a seeming paradox about Olneyville: community pride, social capital and civic engagement is one of the most frequently cited strengths of the neighborhood, but also one of the most frequently cited weaknesses. Of particular importance to people is bridging divides between different groups of people in the neighborhood, promoting that neighbors get to know and help one another, and building more engagement from neighbors in improving the community. People identified a number of positive actions and new ideas that can be grown and put in place to build community and deepen civic engagement in Olneyville.

Organizational relationships and resources

Interviewees are proud of the network of local organizations serving the community. They would like to see these organizations grow and increase their capacity and efforts, especially with more programs for youth, art, employment, adult education and training, promoting self-sufficiency, and human services. They point out that while there are many organizations and resources in the neighborhood, there is a need for increased awareness and outreach because not many people know about what is available. Many people want to see organizations overcome divisions and work more closely together. They would also very much like to see increased engagement and investment in the community from government officials at all levels and from all branches of government.

The physical fabric of Olneyville

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Geography of neighborhood

The unique geography of Olneyville was mentioned 23 times as a strength, including:

- Close to downtown
- Compact – can walk to anything, anywhere
- Beautiful neighborhood – the architecture of the houses and mill buildings, and also geographically very pleasing with the hills and valleys
- Geographically it is a crossroads – lots of people come through
- Olneyville Square is a central location for businesses and socializing
- Mix of open space, industrial, and houses

Parks & recreation

Parks and recreation were mentioned 27 times as a strength of the community, including:

- The bike path – “always good and clean;” “creates relationships between people from different areas;” “provides a commute for bikers”
- Riverside Park
- Donigian Park – “gives you sense of community, many people use this park”
- Merino Park – “accessible”
- The Woonasquatucket River, and the fish ladder in it; “an ecological resource – lots of wildlife, birds and fish”

- Hidden beautiful green spaces and nature

Parks and recreation were also mentioned 44 times as positive things happening in the community which people would like to see more of:

- More usage by folks of the parks
- Community activities that activate the parks
- Evening bike rides; canoe rides; get more people out walking; bike club
- Community sports; More soccer tournaments; Martial arts
- More organized activities; including non-sports programs; activities for kids
- See people using public space more – parks, but also on the streets, in the Square
- More fish ladders
- More bike paths
- Baseball field in/near Manton Heights

Traffic/streets

Traffic and streets were mentioned 36 times as a weakness of the community:

- Congestion; traffic patterns are poorly designed; “you avoid Olneyville because of the traffic”
- People only see the Square as a place to get through, not to stop. Olneyville doesn’t feel like a “Square” because of the bad traffic.
- Streets are in bad shape; “atrocious,” potholes
- Sidewalks are broken
- Cars are driving fast in the neighborhood; no speed bumps are available; dangerous to kids
- Not enough parking; No parking available for residents – affects beauty and properties as people pave over yards to create parking spots
- Flea market generates a lot of traffic.

Traffic and streets were also mentioned 13 times as a threat to the community:

- Not enough street signs; traffic signals are inadequate
- A lot of traffic accidents by Valley & Delaine, and Atwells & Harris Ave.

- Speeding on Manton Ave and Delaine Street; people drive bad in the Square
- Late night car racing in the neighborhood
- Bus route does not serve the new Price Rite location
- Bridge by FOP should have lighting for public use at night

Several opportunities and new ideas were also mentioned that were transportation-related:

- Lift off-street parking ban, with resident permit parking on condition that people turn parking lots back into yards; create more parking
- Put light at Manton and Pope to slow people down;
- Streets should continue to be fixed more often; new sidewalks
- Need more bus stops and better routes; New bus stops in the Square are cool

Potential for growth & (re)development

The potential for growth and development (or redevelopment) in the neighborhood was mentioned 11 times as a strength and 28 times as an opportunity.

Strengths:

- Architecture of the neighborhood – historic mill buildings and factories; industrial buildings still left in the community; industrial heritage
- A lot of potential in unused spaces.
- The neighborhood has lots of potential – “the sky is the limit.”

Opportunities:

- Open up Olneyville Square, push buildings back to the river
- Opportunities for green development
- River could stimulate development as part of revitalization efforts
- If mills are rehabilitated we could have more job opportunities in them; provide living-wage jobs where people can walk to work
- Available land – room for development; open spaces could be used for industries and businesses

- Slow development currently in the neighborhood can be an opportunity for folks to prepare for the future, and not get steamrolled by rich developers
- If St. Teresa's church closes, the building could possibly be used for an after school program

At the same time, abandoned mills and the abandoned Price Rite were mentioned 4 times as weaknesses of the community:

- Old mill buildings are extremely contaminated
- Abandoned Price Rite
- The abandoned Mill in Riverside Park is an eyesore and attracts trouble; YMCA offices will not benefit neighborhood there if they are only offices. [Note: the current plan for the YMCA building in Riverside Park is to have offices on the second floor and community programs on the first floor.]

Housing / the housing market

Housing is also a part of the physical fabric of Olneyville, but deserves special attention due to the large number of comments interviewees made about the housing stock and the housing market.

Interviewees were pleased with the new homes that have been built in the community, and would like to see work continue to improve and beautify homes, increase homeownership, and provide and maintain affordable housing. Abandoned homes, the foreclosure crisis, and absentee landlords are major concerns for the community. At the same time, abandoned and foreclosed homes present an opportunity to act and make progress towards the community's housing goals.

Housing

Housing was mentioned 18 times as a strength:

- New homes in the community; new homes for low-income residents; rebuilt homes
- Riverside Townhomes look like “another world”
- More homeownership – we were going in the right direction (until the mortgage crisis)

It was also mentioned 25 times as an opportunity:

- Opportunity to buy foreclosed homes; federal funds for redevelopment of affordable housing could come for foreclosures; increased rates of homeownership instead of absentee landlords
- Help owners get affordable houses; opportunity for more homeownership
- Repair homes that are in disrepair; beautify homes
- Redevelop properties for people who care about them; for people who need affordable housing

Additionally, housing was mentioned 21 times as a positive thing happening in the community which interviewees would like to see more of:

- Should continue to build more houses / condos; build more affordable housing
- Make it easier and more affordable to buy / rent a house
- Would like to see more rehab of homes; housing improvements

Abandoned buildings/absentee landlords

In addition to the housing issues mentioned above, abandoned buildings and absentee landlords were mentioned 31 times as a weakness of the neighborhood and 16 times as a threat:

- Abandoned homes, boarded up houses; vacant houses vandalized
- Absentee landlords; a lot of homes here are owned by outsiders / Boston buyers; absentee landlords don't care who they rent to; we need more landlord presence
- Dilapidated and foreclosed properties

Better housing/management

Ideas for improving housing and the management of housing were mentioned 12 times, including:

- More owner-occupied properties
- Decent and better housing codes and standards; create better laws surrounding absentee landlords
- Give incentives for people living here already to buy a house and rent it out
- Safe and stable housing for low income families
- Housing co-ops – opportunities for people to buy a house together and fix it up
- Artists need a place to feel safe and a place to live
- Landlords should run criminal background checks on people moving in

Foreclosures

Foreclosures were mentioned 17 times as a threat to the neighborhood:

- Rampant foreclosures; mortgage crisis; bankruptcies
- Foreclosures – abandoned homes; creates blight and negative feelings
- Once the bigger wave of foreclosures hits it will be worse here
- Foreclosures – crime increases because of abandoned houses

Affordable/low cost of living

The affordability of Olneyville was mentioned 7 times as a strength of the neighborhood:

- Affordable place to live; cheap rent
- Some families are very stable – cheapness of neighborhood allows people to stay for a long time
- Affordable space for artists

Many interviewees also made comments about gentrification (low-income people being forced out of the neighborhood) as a weakness of or threat to the neighborhood. Gentrification is discussed in the section on “The Social Fabric of Olneyville.”

The Olneyville economy

Interviewees are intensely concerned about how the economic crisis and rising costs are affecting Olneyville - already a poor community. Many people are troubled by deepening losses of businesses, jobs, and services in the community. At the same time, people are proud of the mix of businesses that are in the community and the recent investment that has occurred. Interviewees would like to continue to bring in a mix of new businesses and help existing businesses, especially small and locally owned businesses, to grow and generate jobs for residents.

Economic hardship

Economic hardship was mentioned 64 times as a weakness and 89 times as a threat to the neighborhood. The themes below were generally mentioned as both a threat and a weakness:

- Unemployment in the community; no jobs in the community; loss of manufacturing jobs; not enough work for neighborhood residents; people leave to other communities / states for work
- Loss of businesses; especially locally-owned family businesses
- High taxes; companies are moving out of RI because of it
- Small businesses are struggling; factories are closing down; not enough open space or location for business growth
- Poverty; Olneyville is a poor community; there are many low-income workers and their families that don't make enough to support themselves; people live paycheck to paycheck
- The cost of living is going up, making it hard for folks to live here; property taxes are rising; food prices are increasing; people cannot afford day care; RIPTA bus rates are too high
- Foreclosures; people are working a lot and can't maintain housing
- Programs are getting cut (e.g. at Nickerson House); ESL classes and computer classes at the library were cut due to lack of funds; organizations look for community input but there's no money to get things done; schools have less funding due to the bad economy
- St. Teresa's church closed [note: St. Teresa's food pantry remains open and Immigrants in Action continues to meet]
- Low income families need services, support, and housing

Mentioned as threats:

- State of economy; global and national economic situation

- Cycle of poverty and sense of hopelessness; “the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer”
- Instability of homeowners and tenants due to poor economy
- Predatory lenders
- People are leaving the neighborhood because of the poor economic situation – will make the neighborhood look worse
- “What do we want the neighborhood to look like” is a luxurious conversation to have right now – things are more life-or-death; “people are one paycheck away from homeless”
- Crime due to the failing economy

Thriving local economy

Despite the economic hardships described above, there were 56 comments talking about the thriving local economy of Olneyville as a strength:

- Many different types of business and industry; mixture of businesses; small businesses are expanding and growing; a lot of Hispanic businesses
- Still have manufacturing / supply industries like Industrial Welding Supply
- Olneyville Square businesses are consistent and open; traffic is good for businesses in Olneyville Square; people selling mix tapes in the square, making the space for themselves; “always busy, a real neighborhood center.”
- The food/restaurants in neighborhood are very good; different banks are available in the community; have a few Laundromats; small markets on every corner and new market at Atwells and Valley; “everything you need is close to home.”
- The flea market
- A lot of investment has happened to improve the neighborhood; buildings are coming back; Struever Brothers has made good progress; new businesses coming into the neighborhood like United Way and Rising Sun; ALCO project is creating a “green” (LEED certified) neighborhood.
- “The changes that have happened in Olneyville – it was dirty; it’s been rehabilitated.”

Another 37 comments talked about opportunities to support a thriving local economy:

- A good place for small business growth; Good community for Hispanics to open and grow businesses; need more of a concerted effort to promote small businesses, a “Buy Olneyville” campaign
- Opportunity to bring industry / businesses here – increase production and small manufacturing – we have the space for it, individual enterprise can flourish here
- Restaurants could do a “taste of Olneyville”
- Need good businesses in the square; start up stronger businesses to make it a destination
- (Several comments referred to recent investments as generating opportunities for the neighborhood): Rising Sun Mills development; Eagle Square; revitalization of the area – new stores
- “La Cocina Comunitaria” (community kitchen); local farming – good to secure local sources for food to feed local residents

Another 17 comments talked about positive things that are already happening that people would like to see more of:

- Flea market; would be positive to have a flea market run by and for residents
- New restaurants opening; street vendors – people selling food, especially fruits and veggies
- Would like to see more businesses come in; new investments coming into the Square;
- More support for local businesses; women and enterprise idea / capacity building trainings – keep it connected to community but grow with more resources; producer co-op
- Keep businesses open longer
- The development of the mills behind Wes’s could create possible jobs in Olneyville

Finally, 26 comments talked about new ideas people had about how neighbors could work together to support a thriving economy:

- Revive the Olneyville Business/Merchants Association
- Create a business listing / directory for Olneyville residents to support local businesses; Have a food map of restaurants and taco trucks in the neighborhood
- Create a local market plaza in the mills near Wes’ Rib House to bring in more businesses

- Farmers market; create a flea market / food market co-op, maybe in old Price Rite building; year-round permanent farmer's market
- Producer co-op (for example, for food service businesses)
- Day laborer center – place for people to get jobs and get workers and at the same time teaching worker rights
- Have more local businesses partner with individuals / organizations on community projects
- Retail stores, like before; new businesses; small manufacturing back into Olneyville; job opportunities for the neighborhood
- Need more of a mix of people here – mixed incomes, education levels

A number of interviewees also made comments about certain investment and development activities as a weakness or threat to the neighborhood because they feel they are not benefitting the neighborhood and its current residents. These comments are included under the “gentrification” section of “The social fabric of Olneyville.”

Safety and health

Safety issues and community/police relationships are widely seen as a critical weakness of - and threat to - the neighborhood, with particular concerns about gangs, violence, drugs, prostitution, and property crime as well as community / police relations. However, many interviewees also made comments about the neighborhood safety and police initiatives as a strength. Interviewees made a number of suggestions to improve community safety including increasing police patrolling, community efforts to help the police, increased police engagement with the community, and neighbors looking out for one another. Health and the environment were also topics of concern for a number of interviewees, namely about pollution and rats.

Safety & community/police relations

Safety and community/police relations concerns were mentioned 114 times as a weakness (the largest number of mentions of any weakness) and 80 times as a threat.

As a weakness:

- Need for security; can't walk in neighborhood; don't feel safe; violence – people fighting on the streets; drugs; gangs; shootings; robbery; prostitution;
- Destruction of property; vandalism; graffiti; youth hanging around
- Not enough police presence; poor policing, don't crack down on crime; police should watch more at night; police dispatchers don't take all calls seriously; patrolling in the winter isn't as good as it is in the summer
- Courts don't enforce laws; people get arrested and are on the street the next day
- Lack of community policing; Police don't follow procedure and don't make community feel safer; cops harass people of color but not white people and artists; racial profiling; when you report a crime you have to give your name – discourages immigrants who want to speak up
- Some areas are not well lighted
- Poverty leads people into crime

As a threat:

- People don't feel safe around here; high crime; can't walk alone on the streets
- Gangs; drugs; violence; prostitution
- Youth stealing; youth destroying properties; teenage gangs; under-age drinking
- Police relationship with the community – no people skills, no relationships with community; Problems with the police; target Latinos; community police are less active than they used to be

- Crime due to failing economy
- Reentry from prison – highest rate in state

At the same time, 33 comments talked about community strengths around this issue:

- Policing is constant; police station helps a lot; police respond to calls; police presence is huge and proactive; police are engaging with the neighborhood; police work with folks side by side
- Less drugs; less prostitution; violence and crime levels have improved
- Calm and quiet neighborhood; safe
- Crossing guards – very important for safety for kids before /after school

Interviewees provided 24 comments about new ideas for how neighbors could work together to promote safety and better community / police relations:

- More police involvement; extensive police patrolling; we need officers
- Find ways to help the police patrolling; Crime watch; other programs like “street workers”; neighborhood watch with walkie talkies linked to a command post
- More trust with the police; police being more involved with the community; police should get involved in sports activities in the neighborhood
- City should enforce curfew during the week for youth
- Domestic violence – increase awareness and know who to call

Health/environment

Four comments mentioned health and environment issues as a threat:

- Rats / roaches in homes and streets
- River is contaminated
- Pollution
- Brown water comes out of pipes
- Old mill buildings are extremely contaminated

Several comments were also made around positive actions and new ideas to promote health. These comments related to increasing activities in the park (see the Parks section of “Physical Fabric of Olneyville”), and ideas for recreation programs (see the Local organizations / resources section of “Organizational Relationships and Resources”).

The social fabric of Olneyville

Interviewees greatly value the diverse mix of cultures and people that is present in Olneyville, a mix that may be threatened by gentrification and current policies and attitudes towards immigrants. Comments by interviewees also suggest a seeming paradox about Olneyville: community pride and civic engagement is one of the most frequently cited strengths of the neighborhood, but also one of the most frequently cited weaknesses. Of particular importance to people is bridging divides between different groups of people in the neighborhood, promoting that neighbors get to know and help one another, and building more engagement from neighbors in improving the community. People identified a number of positive actions and new ideas that can be grown and put in place to build community and deepen civic engagement in Olneyville.

Strong culture & diverse community

Interviewees mentioned the strong cultures and diversity of Olneyville 46 times as a strength:

- A lot of diversity in the neighborhood; “there’s a whole world here” from Africa, Asia, Latin America and some Caucasians – they all help one another and get along
- Mix of people – Olneyville serves as an intersection between different communities: old valley residents, newer immigrants, newer arts residents
- Different economic classes
- Different interests and ideas
- Strong art community
- Very culturally rich – has evolved into a community that has a well defined feeling
- Rich history of industry and working-class immigrants; unique structures

Community pride/civic engagement / social capital

Comments around community pride, civic engagement, and social capital were made 127 times as a strength:

- People take ownership of their neighborhood; People take pride in their neighborhood; community unity
- See neighbors sweeping; business owners are keeping their property clean; neighbors keep the street clean, sweep the sidewalks, keep their houses and yards looking nice

- Public art emphasizes community pride; strong sense of ownership among people in the neighborhood - seen thru murals, artsy stop signs, people using the parks, the planters, public art
- Children participated in planting trees and plants along the Woonasquatucket River greenway; planters in Olneyville square; planting of trees
- Seasonal festivals; ethnic festivals; the Posada at the Holidays with people walking and singing; community events at Donigian Park
- Help from neighbors; people here are examples of the saying it takes a village to raise a child; family oriented neighborhood; neighbors look out for each other; People know who each other are – protect each other
- A lot of friendships; people know each other; closeness of the people who live here; “the friendliness of neighbors would attract anyone to live here;” everyone recognizes each other
- People want to stay now, they are buying homes and looking to make this a long term address; homeowners taking pride in community and taking more action in community
- Everyone wants to help the neighborhood and make things better; residents that are engaged or volunteer with churches, boards, associations
- Hard working community, people here work for their families, work 2-3 jobs if they need to
- The people here – everyone has different skills

At the same time, a lack of community pride and civic engagement was also mentioned 82+ times as a weakness and a few times as a threat:

- Sense of powerlessness; many residents don’t know how to organize to get things done; people don’t get involved to improve the neighborhood; lack of education and initiative; Not as much community organizing as before when we went house by house; lack of awareness / engagement
- Not enough unity in neighborhood between different groups / cultures; Disconnection between different communities in the neighborhood (artists, latinos, working class whites, gentrifiers, others...); people who live in Rising Sun don’t go out in rest of Olneyville; separation of artists living in mill buildings, “above the rest”; a lot of animosity in the neighborhood; polarization; “Lonelyville”; some people only want to be around people who are like themselves
- Communication is challenging due to languages; poor communication between neighbors about what’s going on in the neighborhood; lack of information;

community is uninformed of events in the neighborhood; resources available not being used enough; a lot of misinformation goes around

- Lack of pride, communication and self respect amongst community; people just don't want to do anything; some people don't care; low level of resident involvement; no pro-active folks in community
- Instability; people move in and out so it's hard for people to remain involved; People are so busy with their own lives, working hard
- Those "representing" the neighborhood don't believe in the possibility of changing the neighborhood, not looking out for neighborhood's best interests
- Attitude problems – it can be intimidating to people to go out (unfriendly); Crime shows rifts in the neighborhood
- Trash – litter; not very attractive – makes it look like people don't care about it; not enough neighborhood clean-ups
- Bad reputation; outsiders have a negative stereotype of "Olneyville" stigma of drugs, crime, prostitution
- Need to work on bonding kids from Manton and Hartford

Interviewees made 72+ comments identifying positive things already occurring that build community pride and civic engagement which they'd like to see more of:

- Community events and activities
- More community building – block by block, street by street; meetings and get togethers – one on one conversations like this; develop neighborhood circles to continue these conversations; build individual relationships to make people feel more interested in the process and progress in the neighborhood
- More informal interactions and relationship building; more small informal "neighbor helping neighbor" community; know your neighbors and help each other; create friendships, say hi
- Fall festival; Movie nights in the park; Polish festival; more outdoor concerts; more cross-cultural shows; block parties; Latino celebrations; festivals celebrating each nationality; hot dog day with PHA
- Clean-ups; clean-ups with cookouts; decorating the Square during Christmas time; more public art, creative signage

- Planting trees; green spaces; Bird houses that Youth Build built; get people to commit to taking care of planters; need to involve more people from the neighborhood in the community gardens – go door to door to recruit gardeners
- Tours of the area – would be cool to do more things like that
- More artist involvement in community projects
- Crime watch
- Connect with other neighborhoods: Mt Pleasant and Silver Lake, etc.

Finally, interviewees made 109 comments offering new ideas for how neighbors could work together to build community pride and civic engagement:

- I wish there were opportunities for networking and making connections; opportunity for interaction – on streets and at events; need more community activities to get people together; get to know others as family
- Get neighbors who have same / similar ideas to get together
- Public art; more beautification; clean up buildings and properties; more trees, flowers and other plants; community cleanups (& more consistent); clean up graffiti
- More gatherings / social events; neighborhood festivals – every season; block parties – on Manton Ave. or in the Square; community picnics; parades, carnivals, fairs; more positive activities at the park; bike club
- Would like to see more mixing cultures; more tolerance and openness to other opinions and lifestyles; seek ways to get people of different ethnic groups interacting positively
- Advocacy – go to the state house; need to work together and mobilize; make politicians be more involved in the community; Western Union boycott
- More action groups to fix neighborhood; start a PTA at school; neighborhood meetings (not just protests); push for more community involvement
- Create crime watch group; everyone should be more aware of what is going on; create cautious neighbors to look out for one another
- Annual calendars of Olneyville for publicity

Gentrification

Gentrification (when low-income people are forced out of the neighborhood by rising rents and housing prices) was mentioned as a weakness in 12 comments and as a threat in 31 comments.

As a weakness:

- Outside influences encroaching; change-over of culture – new faces coming in
- Beautification of neighborhood does not solve problems of inequality but instead paves the way for gentrification
- Speculative development in the past; building buildings for the rich, not poor (ex. Rising Sun Mills); property taxes increase and people are displaced

As a threat:

- “Improvements” in the neighborhood may drive out businesses; mills getting fixed provide jobs for outsiders, not residents
- Housing development by outside developers is not really affordable; threat of condo-ization is that mills will be lost to expensive housing when they should be used to create local industry and jobs
- External developers without sense of neighborhood; Struever Brothers / other developers might gentrify neighborhood; not offering employment to local residents
- Latino community can’t afford to live here; Development of mills into high-end condos was a threat to artists; Condos are too expensive (Rising Sun Mills); Rising Sun Mills- raised taxes for homeowners
- Now it’s less of an issue because developers backed down since the condo / loft market crashed and they wouldn’t be able to profit

Immigration

Current policies around immigration were mentioned 18 times as a threat:

- Immigration policy is a threat to neighborhood cohesion; anti-immigrant sentiment
- People living in fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and government; Governor Carcieri’s executive order & E-Verify; people are afraid to go outside, go to work, take the bus – afraid of immigration sweeps & being jailed
- Harassment of undocumented immigrants; policies create a culture of fear & prevents immigrants from getting involved in civic action
- No health care for undocumented families and their children
- Ethnic status/ legal status/ language barriers make people unable to advocate for themselves; not enough education about immigration laws and what resources are available

Organizational relationships and resources

Interviewees are proud of the network of local organizations serving the community. They would like to see these organizations grow and increase their capacity and efforts, especially with more programs for youth, art, employment, adult education and training, promoting self-sufficiency, and human services. They point out that while there are many organizations and resources in the neighborhood, there is a need for increased awareness and outreach because not many people know about what is available. Many people want to see organizations overcome divisions and work more closely together. They would also very much like to see increased engagement and investment in the community from government officials at all levels and from all branches of government.

Local organizations/resources

There were 99 comments describing local organizations and resources as strengths of the community, and 62 comments describing opportunities related to those organizations and resources. There were 102 comments mentioning things that local organizations were doing in the community that people would like to see continue or expand, as well as 106 comments describing new ideas for things that local organizations could do.

Given the large number of comments in this area, and as a way of facilitating action planning, we have organized comments by issue area. Basically, these issue areas are areas where interviewees expressed a desire for local organizations to continue and expand their efforts, or establish new efforts:

Youth Programs

- More programs for youth; Youth driven programs
- Mentor activities; teach positive things for youth; teach youth self-esteem, personal hygiene
- More summer youth jobs
- Develop other programs outside of just Boys & Girls club; Girl Scouts or other activities for girls; Summer / afterschool programs in Manton Heights admin building and schools; more teen church functions; youth soccer program; basketball, baseball; help with schoolwork; train kids how to keep the river clean; Martin Luther King Day soccer tournament
- Need two different rec centers for youth who don't get along

Support for local organizations

- Many organizations were identified as strengths, opportunities, and positive things in the neighborhood to grow: Olneyville Housing Corporation; Olneyville Homeowners Association; Olneyville Neighborhood Association; Olneyville Health Center; Olneyville branch library; The Institute for the Study & Practice of

Nonviolence; Nickerson House; YouthBuild; Building Futures; Joslin Rec Center; Joslin Community Development Corporation; The Steel Yard; English for Action; YMCA; Dirt Palace; the Hive; Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council; United Way; River Rangers; St. Teresa's food pantry; Volunteers In Providence Schools; churches; William D'Abate Elementary School

- Hope the Olneyville branch library stays open; need more support for library
- Find a way to maintain Joslin Community Day Care
- Church/faitth community is a strength; St. Teresa's; Catholic Church needed in community since St. Teresa closed
- Expand the Merchant's Association; Olneyville Businessmen's Association to come back into Olneyville
- Continue the work of the Olneyville Collaborative

Art

- Open arts drop-in center where people can draw, paint write
- Art classes for youth and adults, and a gallery featuring neighborhood artists; art gallery and events; mort art space for artists to display work
- Youth art programs

Self-sufficiency

- Community gardens
- Food sharing – combine contents of people's pantries to make food for everyone; "La Cocina Comunitaria"; Food pantry at St. Teresa's church
- Book collection and give away
- Teach sustainable and self-sufficiency skills
- Thrift store or clothing exchange

Employment

- Low cost skill-based education programs (mechanics, alternative medicine, etc.); PHA should train people to be plumbers, carpenters, etc.;
- expand job corps program to provide skilled training
- jobs and training for men out of prison

(Adult) education and training

- Political education; neighborhood organizing; ONA's information to the community about immigration
- English classes, reach out to more people, offer more sites and times
- Training on how to grow your business in a bad economy
- Foreclosure / property tax classes
- How to bank
- Education about recycling; anti-litter education in schools

Other human services

- Urgent care clinic; free clinic in Olneyville
- Community Center / Drop-in center to find available resources; community center to help folks with resources (diapers, food, etc.)
- Create substance abuse programs
- AIDS outreach and testing at a center for prostitutes

Interviewees also made 46 comments about local organizations and resources as a weakness of the community:

- Not enough opportunities for youth
- St. Teresa's church closing
- There could be more community organizations
- Organizations not helping and doing their jobs
- Recreation centers are not efficient – in disrepair; no funding for recreation centers
- School systems need more funding; a lot of dropouts roaming; D'Abate school needs a better gym; Inadequate education; public education system failing;
- Olneyville branch library might close

Organizational relationship building & collaboration

Relationship building and collaboration was mentioned 17 times as a strength, 21 times as an opportunity, 65 times as a weakness, and 7 times as a threat. Interviewees also made 29

comments about positive things happening with relationship building that they would like to see more of, and 42 new ideas about how to strengthen relationships and collaboration.

Organizational relationships and collaboration

Strengths and Opportunities:

- Good communication; unity; camaraderie; better communication amongst organizations
- Olneyville Collaborative – folks are working together to create more opportunities
- Dedication of some leaders who think “outside the box” and connect people together

Weaknesses:

- Organizations don’t work together – they have different approaches on different issues; no collaboration; a lot of what’s happening in neighborhood is in isolation; organizations fight with each other; lack of common ground or unwillingness to work together around controversial issues
- Magnification of friction between different groups causes lots of controversy – things become extremely dramatic; when you’re doing good within organizations you have others who try to slow it down and they put a negative effect on it; burn out in public process
- Instinct of activism is knee-jerk reactions – don’t give the chance for real dialogue or willingness to compromise
- Issues like the Plant create lots of controversy – anything involving Struever; knee-jerk reactions to anything Struever does creates divisiveness and unwillingness to work together
- Schools and churches aren’t as involved in the community anymore
- Business people are not looked at as community leaders – not invited to participate

Positive actions and ideas:

- More outreach about what’s going on in the neighborhood; information about activities happening in the community; publish activities that different organizations and/or committees have
- More communication between organizations; provide information about the existing organizations; more meetings/events co-organized by leaders of different groups to encourage bridging divides
- Organizations located in Olneyville should focus more on the community – develop better relationships with residents in the neighborhood

City/state/federal resources

The lack of city/state/federal resources was mentioned 30 times as a weakness, and a potential decline in these resources was mentioned 26 times as a threat.

As a weakness:

- Community is underserved by City; City disregards the neighborhood; Olneyville is “forgotten corner” of the City; City Hall is not reliable; City officials inability or lack of willingness to communicate on common ground
- William D’Abate – not enough funding; lack of education; cutbacks in social services
- Not enough garbage cans; too much trash on the streets; lighting in Donigian Park installed incorrectly; not enough lighting and street lights
- Government should take more of the responsibility for environmental clean-up, makes people/businesses scared to buy properties / create development
- Mismanagement of money by City; money that comes in from the state government is lost

As a threat:

- Government leaders are not involved; don’t want to hear from us; no vision; don’t have a strong voice to represent our neighborhood
- Neglect from financially strapped city government; State budget deficit
- Decaying infrastructure

Interviewees made 32 comments about opportunities for obtaining more government resources. There were also 22 comments about positive things happening using these resources, of which people would like to see more; and 28 comments about new ideas people had for the use of these resources. We have placed many of these comments in other areas of this document that talk about the specific issue areas (e.g. traffic, safety, parks etc.) where people would like to see government agencies get involved. A sampling of comments includes:

- Maybe more funding to come in from federal government; Federal programs will hopefully materialize to offset the economic crisis; outside agencies willing to come in and support because the community is needy
- Federal funding for foreclosures we can hopefully take advantage of
- City’s renewed interest; Mayor seems to care
- Education is needed; we should have more GED programs; more funding for schools
- More policing

Interviewers

Abelardo Hernandez

Alexis Miles

Alma Carrillo

Alvaro Morales

Alyssa Holland Short

Bridget Dignan

Cyndie Wilmot

Danielle Blaszczak

Frank Shea

Gordon Fitch

Jessica Vega

Johanna Walczak

Jose Rolando Vasquez

Luis Pinto

Marie Rivera

Mary Fasano

Robinson Alston

Tom Lopotosky

Waleska Pinto

Yareliz Pearson

Interviewees

Alvaro Morales
Alyssa Holland Short
Andrew Oesch
Anthony Resto
Anthony Solomon
Antonia Garcia
Arte Lee
Bernard "Rick" Mancuso
Bill O'Brien
Brent Kermen
Camilo Gaston-Greenberg
Carlos Fierros
Carmen Rodriguez
Carmen Sostre
Carolyn Johnson
Chris Della Ventura
Clay Rockefeller
Corina & Anthony Ericastilla
Daniel Schleifer
Danielle Blaszczak
David Cartagena
David Dubois
David Sharp
Dino Smith
Elida Aquino
Esteban Sime
Eymer Olayo
Father Camilo
Father Marek S. Kupka
Father Raymond Tetreault
Francisco Molina & Dolila Perez
Frank Shea
Frank Veratti
Gordon Fitch
Greg Stevens
Guia Sanchez
Herman Dekoe
Howie Sneider
Humberto & Olga Castillo
Jaime & Amelia Blancas
Jairo Portillo
Jean Cozzens
Jenine Bressner
Jennifer Perdomo
Johanna Walczak
John Jacobson
Jose "Pepe" Ruiz
Jose Rolando Vasquez
Juan Garcia
Judy Perry
Justin Smith
Kamila Barzykowski
Karen Hooks
Leonard Brown
Liandra Martinez
Lisa McKinnon
Lorraine Burns
Louella Hill
Lt. Dean Isabella
Luis & Waleska Pinto
Luke Krafft
Luz Malave
Marga Pimentel
Marie Rivera
Mark Carlson
Marlon Cifuentes
Mary Dean
Mary Fasano
Maureen O'Brien
Meredith Younger
Michael Guadagni
Michelle Zabrowski
Milvia Morales
Monique Hazard
Nicole Cianci
Norman Ospina

Nuni Tejada
Nyemady Toe
Officer Jason Andrade
Officer Juan Rodriguez
Oscar Lemus
Pam Smith
Paul Ianelli
Paul O'Rourke
Phyllis Hall
Pilar McCloud
Rev. Jeffrey Williams
Richard Grasso
Robinson Alston
Ruth Salvatierra
Shannah Kurland
Silvia Merida
Stacey Anter
Tatyana Yanishevsky
Tom Lopotosky
Tony Bium
Trixy Ferrell
Yareliz Pearson