



SUNNYSIDE AND SOUTH PARK COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA REPORT

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“Sunnyside and South Park Comprehensive Needs Assessment Data Report”

Background

In a unique collaboration between Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, the Houston Area Urban League, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Interdisciplinary Research Leaders program, and Sunnyside and South Park leaders, this “Sunnyside Strong” survey was conducted from October 2018 to February 2019 in the Sunnyside and South Park neighborhoods of Houston, Texas. Because we examined Sunnyside and South Park jointly, hereafter we refer to both areas as “the neighborhood” or “Sunnyside.”

Sunnyside, established in 1912, is the oldest historically African American community in South Houston, and has a unique “rurban” style, with a mix of rural and urban structural characteristics. Small, tidy row homes are interspersed with large, empty lots where horses sometimes graze. Gentrification has just begun in Sunnyside, which has a desirable, close-in location, and current residents are keen to revitalize the neighborhood but also keep its heritage intact. To aid their efforts, this survey was conducted to provide local leaders and policymakers with data about neighborhood concerns, well-being, and strengths.

Specifically, this survey included a random sample of 417 households within eight randomly selected Census block clusters in the neighborhood. The survey was conducted by community members who were trained in survey administration and research ethics. The community researchers were paid a living wage and were an integral part of the research team. We used a community-based participatory research approach, which was essential to ensuring the research process was equitable, and included the voices of community members throughout. We also established a community advisory board (CAB), which held researchers accountable to the community; the CAB informed survey design, survey administration, and the dissemination of research findings. Ultimately, the team reached 417 heads of household, representing 1,812 total residents. In all, 24% of sampled residents agreed to participate and completed the 40-minute long survey. Survey participants were compensated \$50 for their time.

The Sample

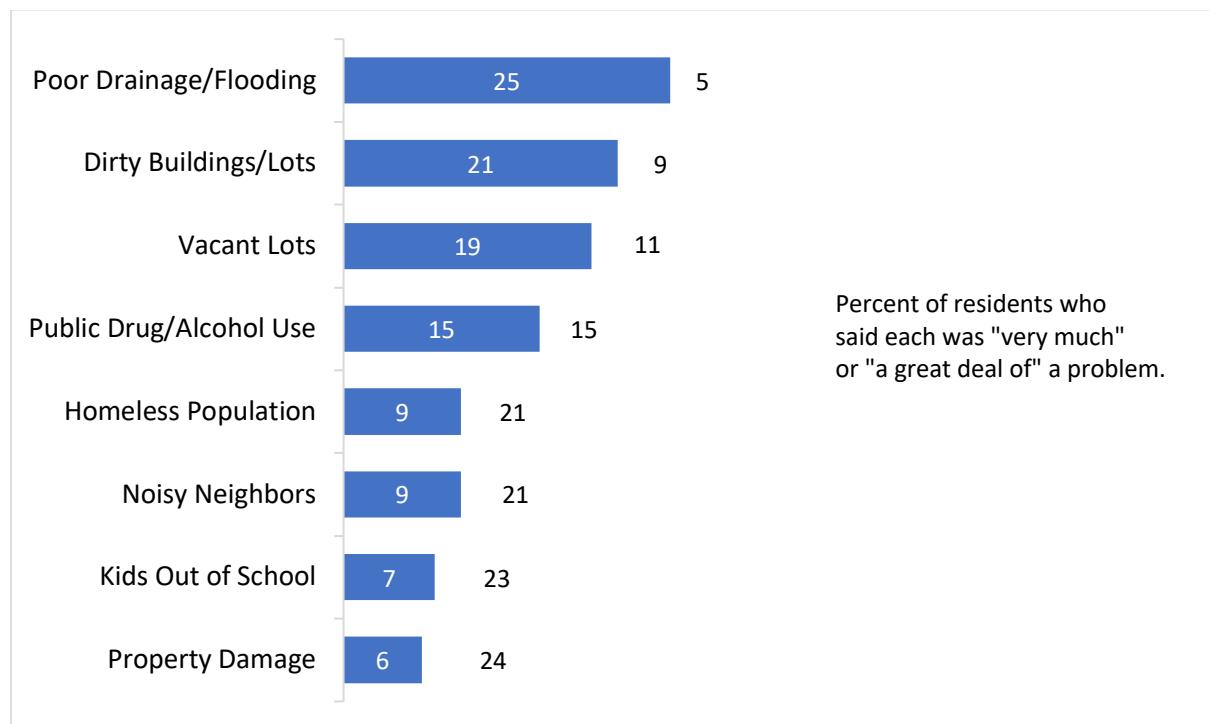
Residents who responded to our survey had a median age of 50; 58% were female and 95% were African American. In addition, 29% of respondents had at least one child under the age of 18 living in their household. In terms of educational attainment, only 9% of respondents had a bachelor’s degree or higher; another 9% of the sample did not have a high school degree. More than a third of the residents surveyed had an annual household income of less than \$20,000. Compared to U.S. Census data from the American Community Survey (2012-2017) for the entire neighborhood, our sample group was older (median age for the entire neighborhood was 35), slightly more female (the neighborhood was 54% female), and more African American (the neighborhood was 83% African-American). The sample also over-represented homeowners, because of the difficulty we encountered gaining access to gated apartment buildings. Importantly, however, our sample represented the neighborhood as a whole on several critical factors; it closely mirrors U.S. Census data on educational attainment, income, and the presence of children in the neighborhood.

Results from Key Topical Areas

Neighborhood Concerns

Survey respondents were asked about neighborhood problems, which covered general neighborhood characteristics such as vacant lots, and also social concerns such as noisy neighbors or children being out of school. Residents were asked to rate these possible concerns as “not a problem at all,” “a little bit of a problem,” “somewhat of a problem,” “very much of a problem,” and “a great deal of a problem.” The survey results are displayed in Figure 1. Three of the possible concerns stood out as “very much of a problem” or worse. Flooding (25% of respondents), dirty buildings or lots (21%), and vacant lots (19%) were the biggest concerns, while other issues such as noise, alcohol use, the homeless population, and students not being in school were not as problematic to residents.

Figure 1. Top Neighborhood Problems



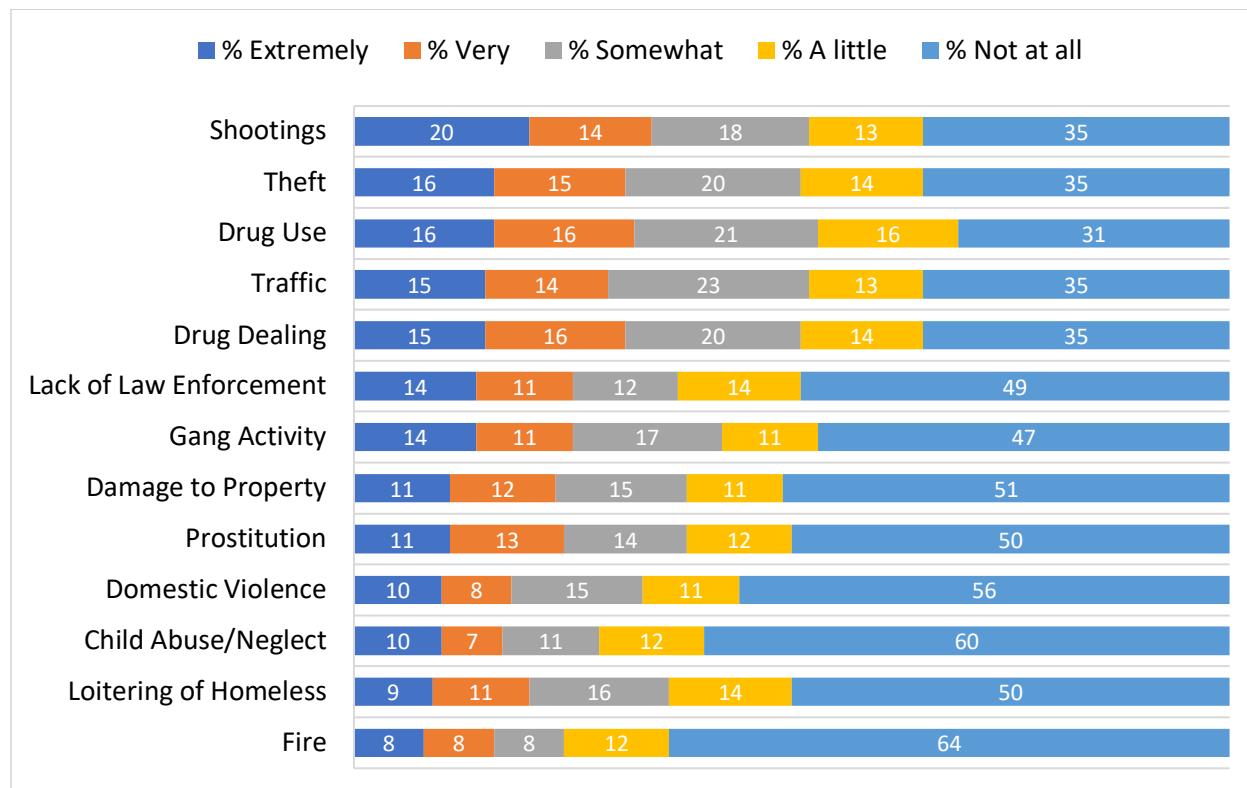
Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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Safety and Security

Respondents were asked detailed questions about their level of concern regarding safety and security issues, and the survey results are displayed in Figure 2. Respondents were most concerned about drug use, drug dealing, neighborhood shootings, traffic, and theft. Additional safety and security questions revealed that when walking alone in Sunnyside, residents generally felt safe in the daytime, but less than half of the respondents said the same about walking alone at night. In fact, more than three-quarters of the respondents reported limiting the places they go because they were afraid of crime; 45% only limited places they would go at night, and 31% limited places they would go during the day *and* night. Not many people reported having personally experienced violence or abuse (12%), or having witnessed a murder or shooting (15%), but the overwhelming majority of respondents had heard gunfire in the past year (84%) in their neighborhood. Residents of Sunnyside and South Park also reported a low level of trust in the Houston Police Department, with only 34% reporting “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of trust.

Figure 2. Safety and Security Worries

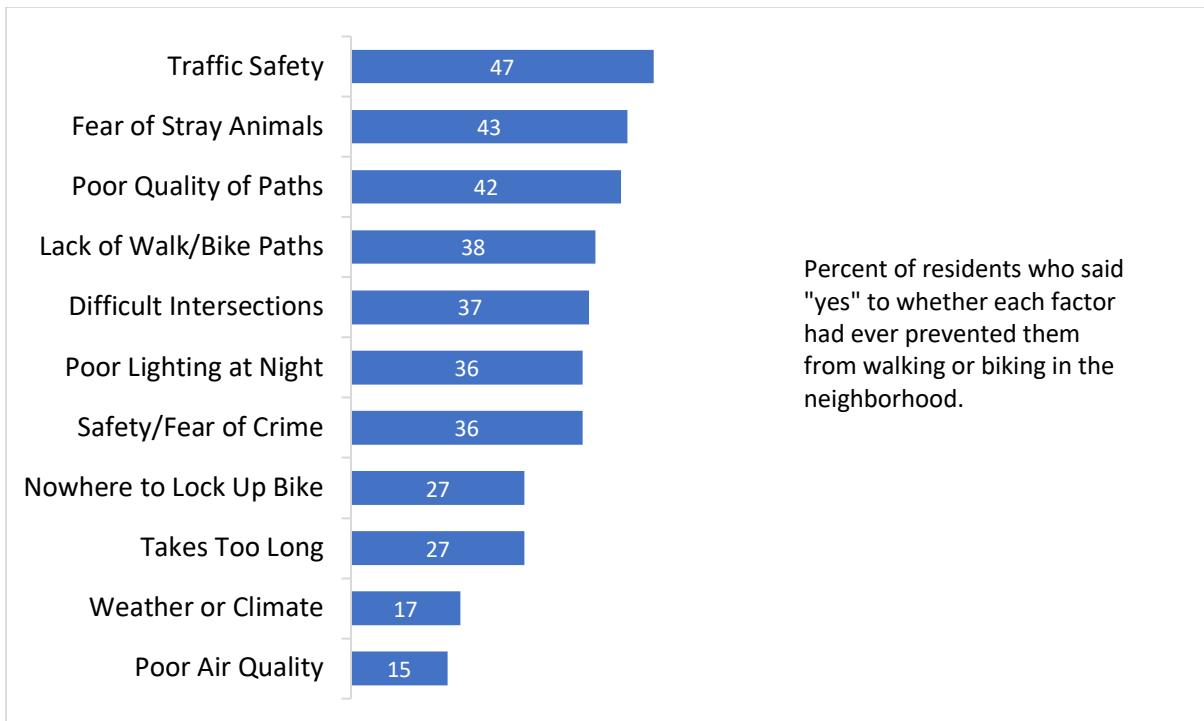


Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

Transportation

The majority (75%) of survey respondents used a car as their main mode of transportation. Other residents took the bus or rail, or got rides from family or friends. A few reported that the cost of transportation kept them from going to places like doctor's office and the grocery store in the past year. Residents were asked about specific problems in Sunnyside that kept them from walking or biking, and the results are presented in Figure 3. The most common answers were high volume and speed of traffic (47%), fear of stray dogs or cats (43%), poor quality of walking and biking paths (42%), and lack of walking and biking paths (38%).

Figure 3. Factors Preventing Walking/Biking

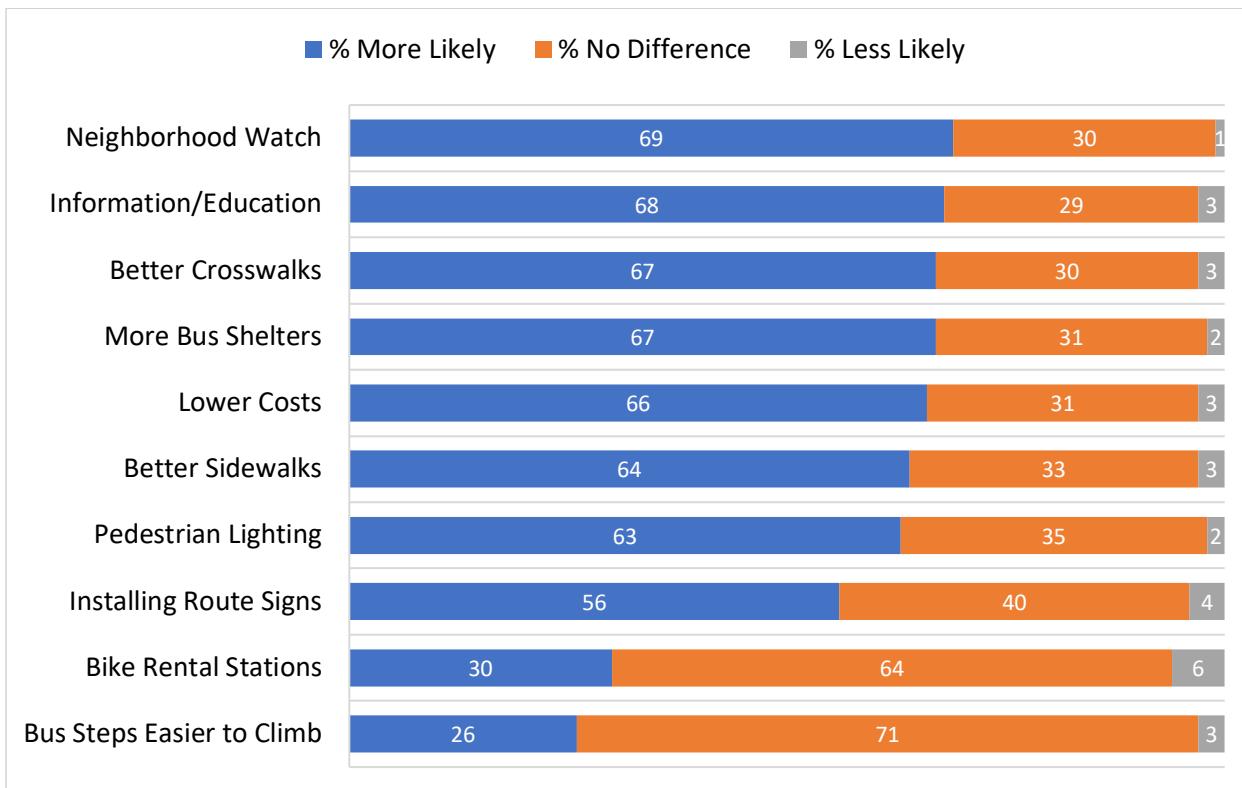


Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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Residents were also asked about changes to the transit system that would make them more likely to use the bus or rail, and survey results are depicted in Figure 4. Residents most often reported that a neighborhood watch or safe walk program would encourage them to take the bus or rail, as would access to information and education such as maps and guides on how to ride the bus or rail, and better crosswalks with appropriate signal timing, clear signage, and striping. That so many residents responded that improvements would make them more likely to use public transit is notable, and suggests ridership could increase significantly with improved information and safety features.

Figure 4. Factors Increasing Likelihood of Using Bus or Rail Public Transit



Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

Housing

Most Sunnyside and South Park residents in our sample had lived in the neighborhood for more than 15 years, and many had been in their current homes for about that long. The majority of respondents lived in a single-family home (83%) or townhome (14%), and the median number of bedrooms was three. Most residents owned or were buying their homes (59%), while the others were renting (41%). The average mortgage payment for survey respondents was \$715 and the average rent was \$806. When asked about problems with their homes in the past year, survey respondents most commonly reported rats or other pests (24%), interior water leaks (22%), or wide cracks in the walls (22%). Nearly a third of the respondents said that their homes had been damaged by a natural disaster in the past 10

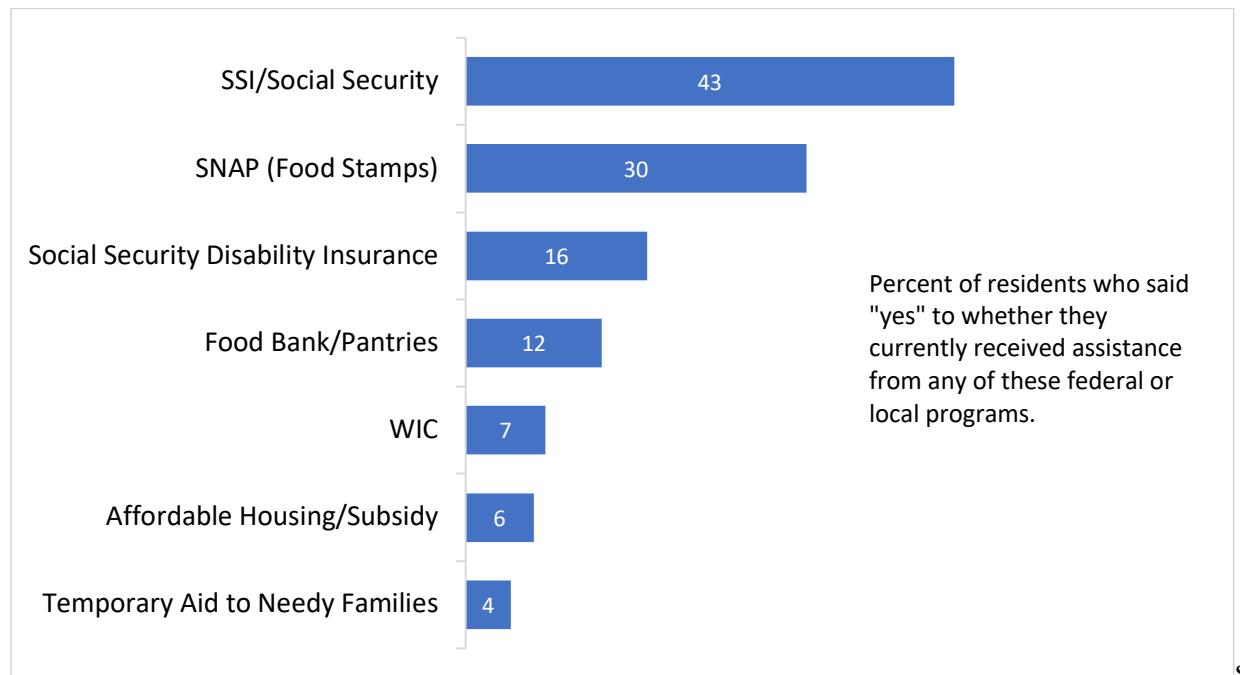
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years; of this group, 64% reported damage from Hurricane Harvey (2017) and 30.6% reported damage from Hurricane Ike (2008). Almost 40% of those reporting damage said that their homes had not been repaired.

Food Insecurity and Access

The surveyed residents of most often purchased groceries at a major store like HEB or Fiesta (73%). Others purchased groceries at small grocery stores in the neighborhood (6%) or large retail stores like Walmart or Target (11%). Sunnyside residents mostly got fruits and vegetables where they purchased other groceries, rather than at farmers markets. As part of our survey, we screened for food insecurity using questions that were both sensitive and specific to food insecurity.¹ We asked whether respondents ever worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more, and whether the food they bought just did not last and they did not have money to buy more. If respondents answered "Yes" to either question, they were classified as food insecure. While the majority of respondents did not qualify as food insecure based on their answers to these questions, 40% did. In terms of local or federal assistance programs (Figure 5), the two most common indicated in our survey were Supplemental Security Income/Social Security (43%) and the Supplemental Nutrition Food Assistance Program (SNAP) (30%). In addition, 16% of residents reported someone in their household received Social Security Disability (SSDI) benefits, and 12% of respondents said they had received help from a food bank or pantry.

Figure 5. Social Assistance Programs



Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

¹ Erin R. Hager, et al., "Development and validity of a 2-item screen to identify families at risk for food insecurity," *Pediatrics* 126, no. 1 (2010): e26-e32.

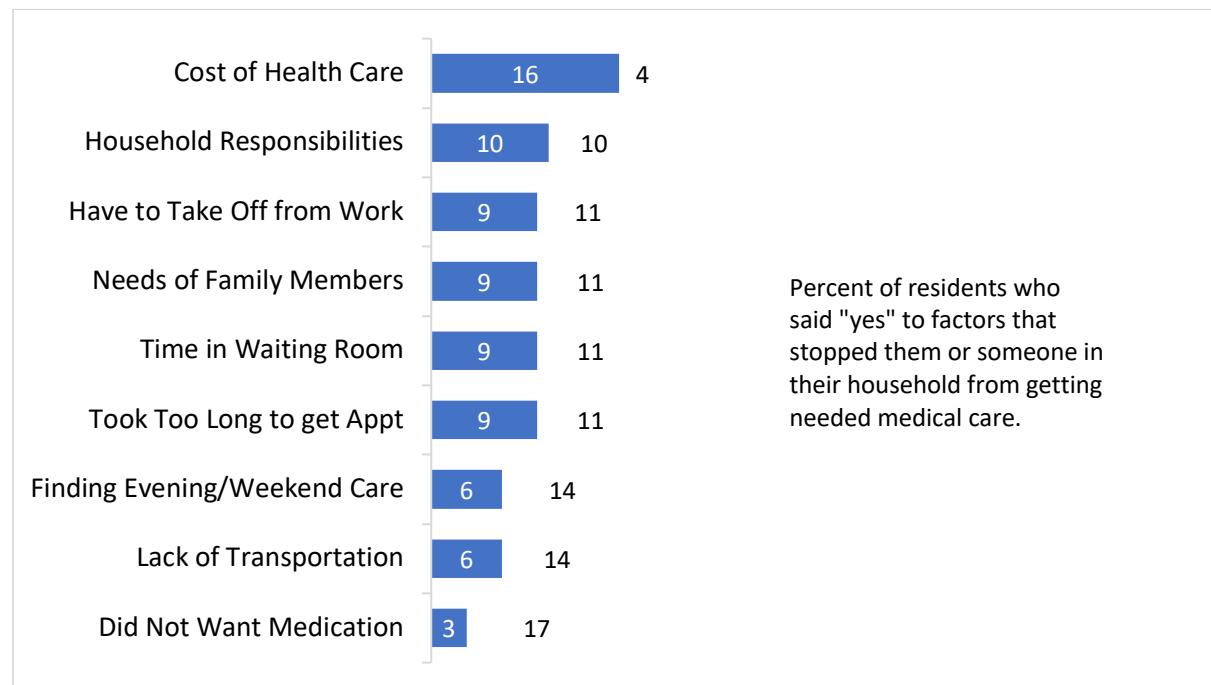
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Health and Health Care

Respondents were asked about the types of health insurance they and the other adults in their household received, and they were able to report multiple sources of health insurance. While 14% of the residents reported that no adults in their household had health insurance, 32% of households had at least one person with employer-based coverage; 33% reported an adult was covered by Medicare; and 32% reported an adult was covered by Medicaid. In all, 86% of residents reported that at least one adult in their household had health insurance.

Three-quarters of the respondents said that they had a primary care provider, and the majority reported a doctor visit within the past year (58%). The survey asked respondents whether any factors had prevented them, or someone in their family, from receiving needed medical care (Figure 6). Respondents indicated that factors like the cost of medical care (16%), household responsibilities (10%), having to take time off work (9%), or having to take care of other family members (9%) prevented them or someone in their family from receiving health care.

Figure 6. Barriers to Needed Health Care

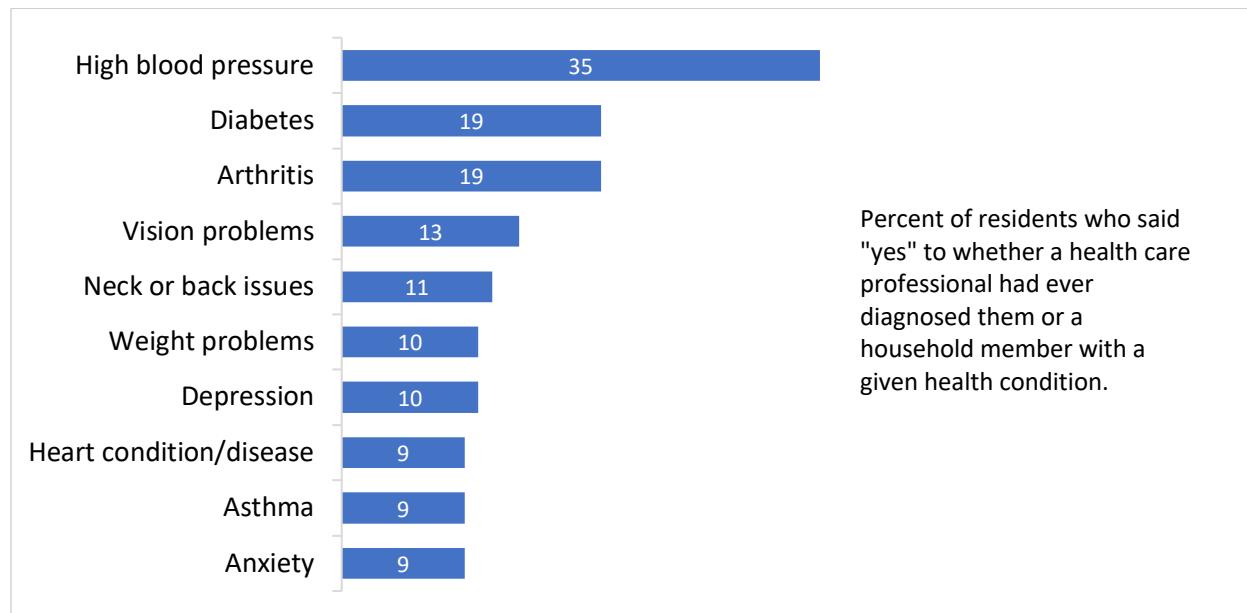


Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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Respondents were also asked to rate their health on a scale from “Very Good” to “Poor.” Only 13% of residents said their health was “Very Good.” Most residents rated their health as average or good, while 19% of residents rated their health as fair and 6% rated their health as poor. In terms of physical activity, most residents indicated that they did a moderate to high intensity activity regularly (52% moderate, 21% high). A few respondents (7%) indicated that someone in their household needed mental health treatment or counseling, but did not receive it. The most common reasons for not receiving mental health care were cost (35%); they did not think treatment was necessary at the time (39%); and they were worried that other people would find out that treatment was necessary (40%). Respondents were also asked to report whether they or someone in their household received a diagnosis of any of the conditions listed in the survey. The most commonly reported health problems are displayed in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Most Commonly Reported Health Conditions



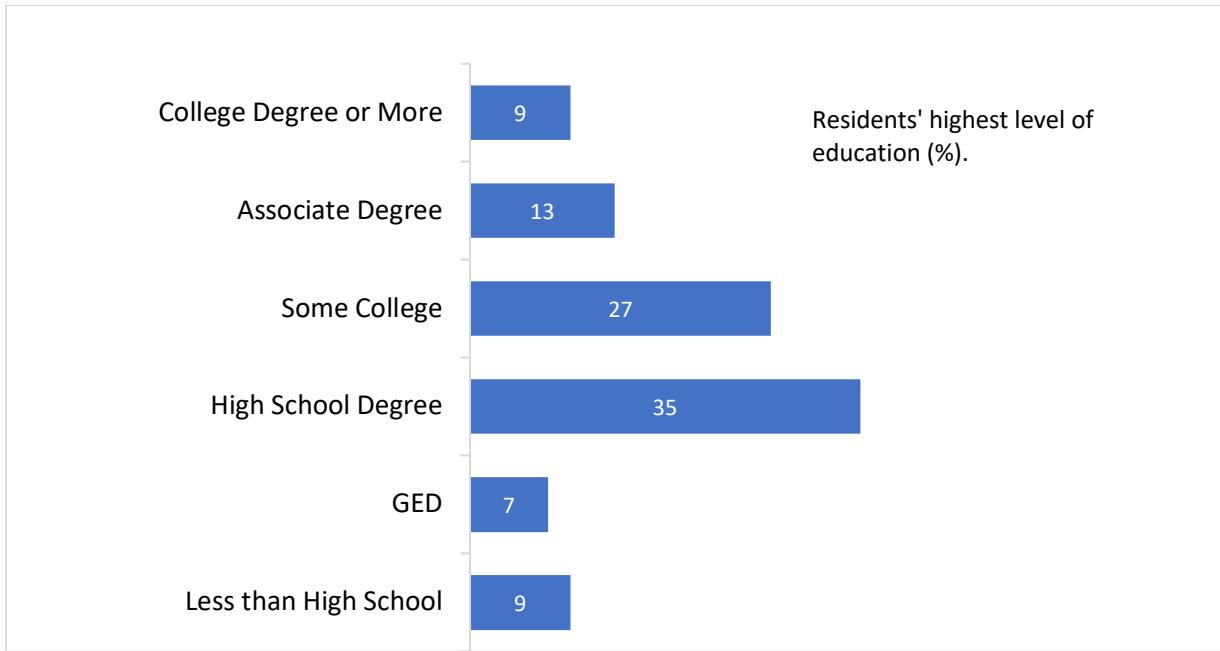
Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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Education

Educational attainment in the neighborhood was relatively low. Most of the respondents had at least a high school diploma, but less than 10% of residents had a college degree. These data are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Educational Attainment

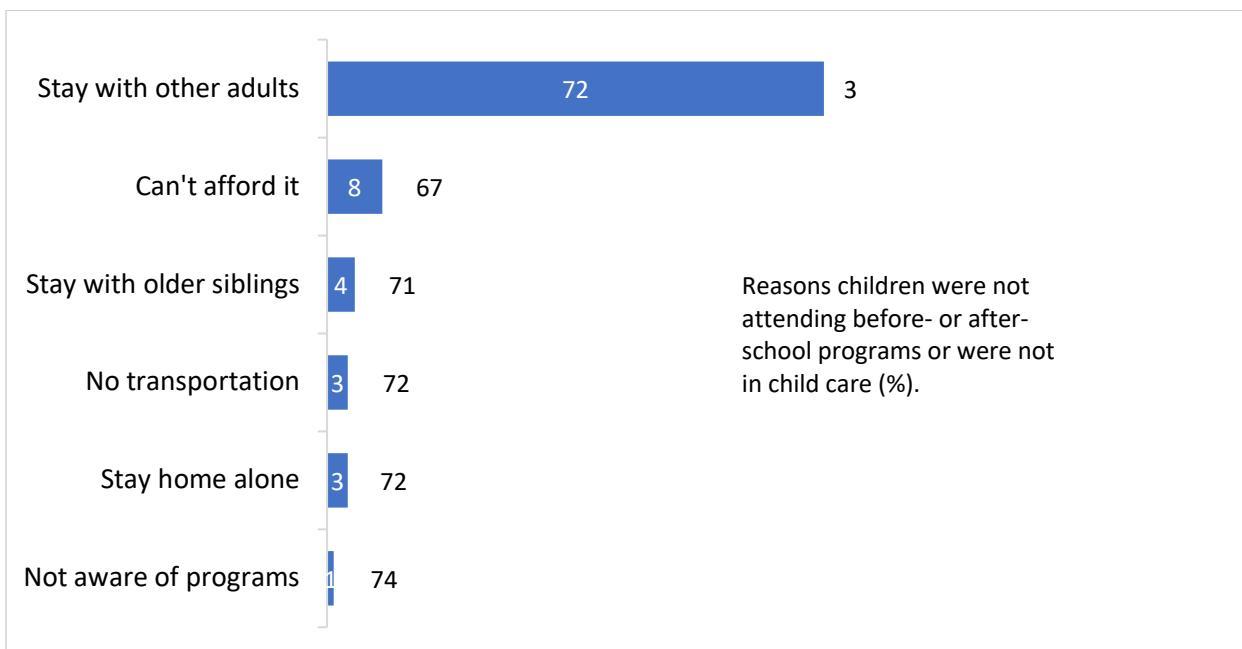


Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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If a household included a child (115 households included a child), the respondent was asked to report information about their child's school. Most of the children in the neighborhood attended public schools (73%), while others attended charter schools (19%) or private schools (5%), or were homeschooled (3%). Over half of children attended school in Sunnyside (62%), and the rest attended school outside of the neighborhood. Most of the children did not attend before- or after-school programs or child care (62%); the top three reasons for not attending the programs, displayed in Figure 9, were that the children could stay with adults at home (72%), the respondent could not afford the programs (8%), or the children could stay with older siblings at home (4%).

Figure 9. Why Are Your Children Not Enrolled in Before- or After-School Programs or Child Care?

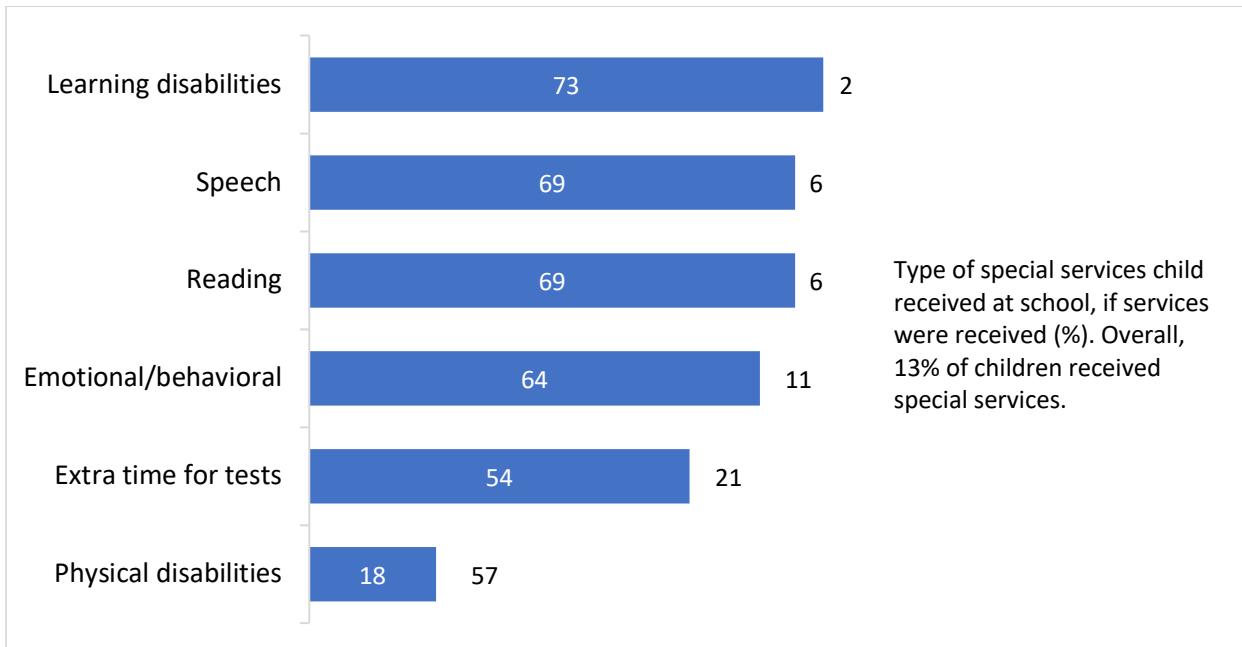


Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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Respondents were also asked about any special services their children might receive at school. Overall, 13% of respondents reported that their child or one of their children received special services. For the 13% of children who received special services, the most common services received, presented in Figure 10, were help for learning disabilities (73%), assistance with speech (69%) and reading (69%), and emotional or behavioral support (64%).

Figure 10. If Child Received Special Services at School, What Type of Services?

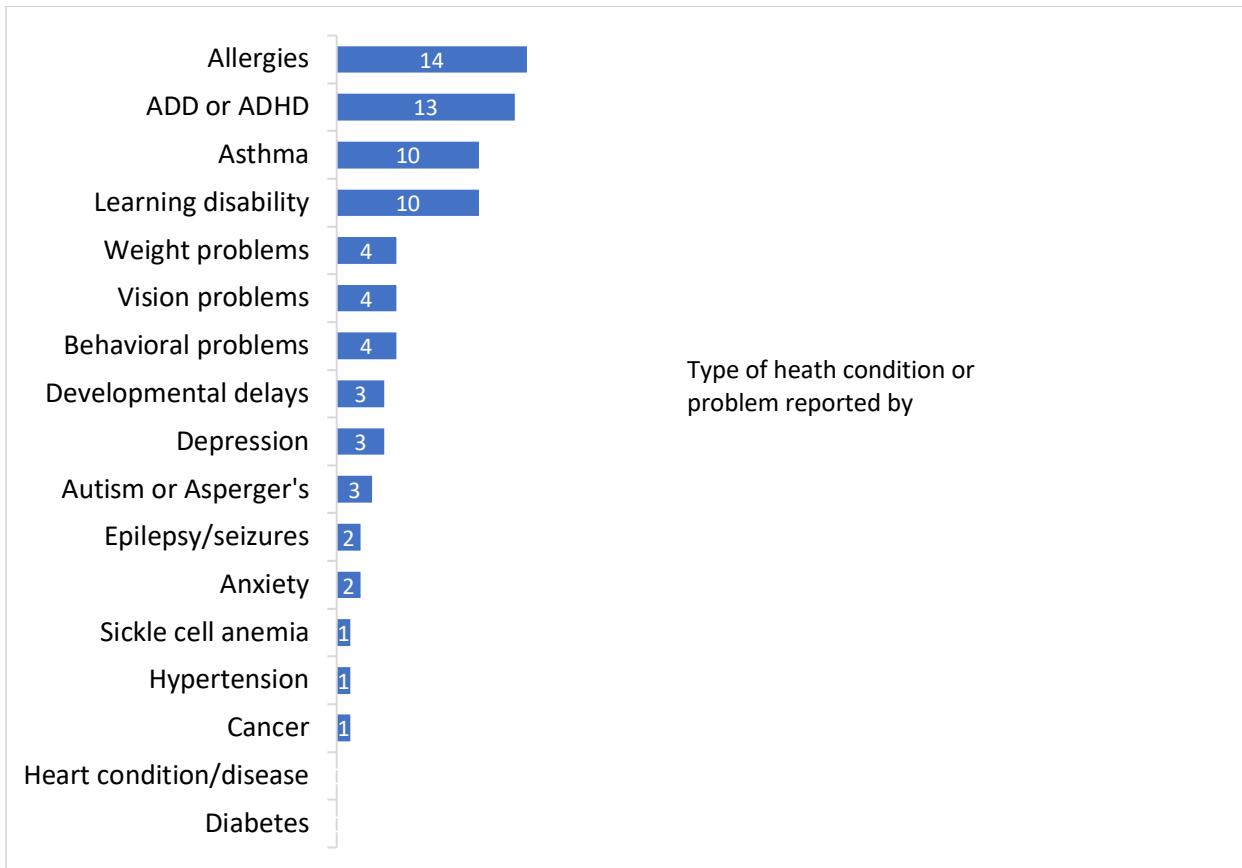


Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

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Respondents were also asked whether a doctor, nurse, or administrator had ever told them that their child or children had a health condition or problem, and were given a list of conditions. The most common health conditions or problems, depicted in Figure 11, were allergies (14%), attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (13%), asthma (10%), and a learning disability (10%).

Figure 11. Has a Doctor, Nurse, or Administrator Told You that Your Child Has Any of the Following Health Conditions or Problems?



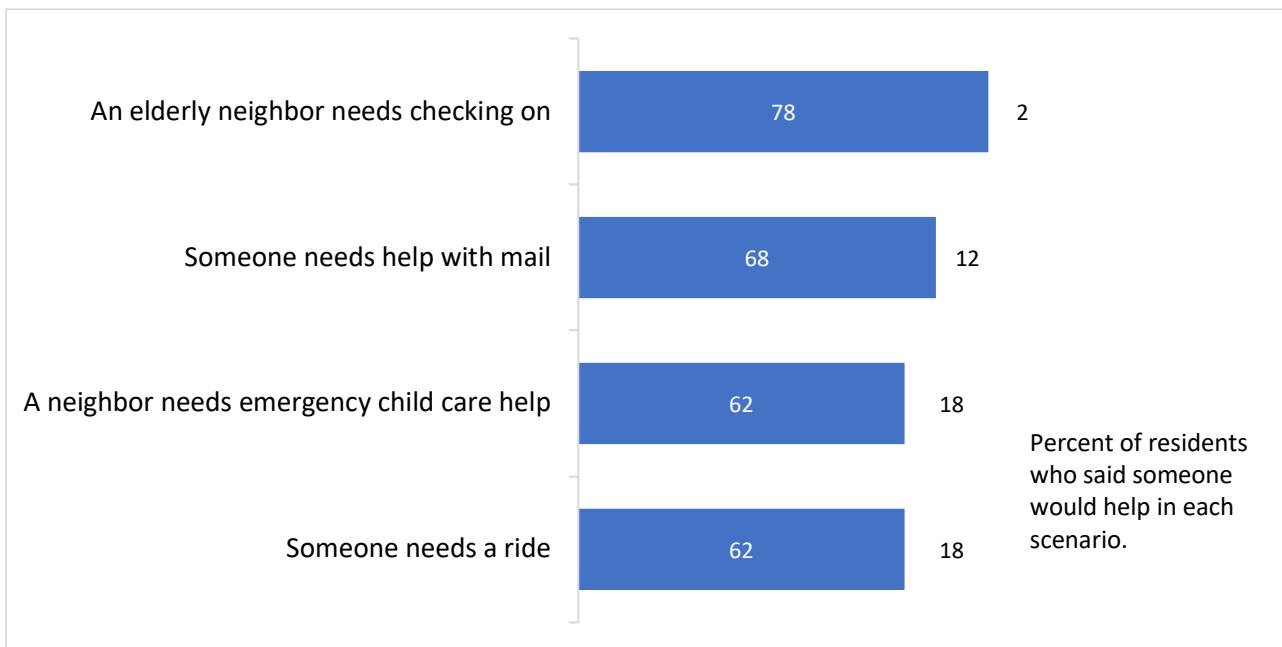
Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

Respondents were asked whether any of their children had experienced bullying from other students, and 11% of respondents answered that they had. In terms of outdoor play, respondents reported that their children play outside frequently, with 23% saying five days per week or more; 28% saying 3-4 times per week; 30% saying 1-2 times per week; and just 19% saying their children never play outside. Respondents with children were also asked about their college expectations for their child, as well as the child's own expectations. Almost all of the parents expected their children to attend college (98%). Respondents with children also indicated that almost all of their children hoped to attend college (97%).

Neighborhood Strengths

Although Sunnyside faces challenges, neighborhood satisfaction was high (60%) among respondents, and 73% of parents believed it was safe for their child to play outside. Further survey results indicated that community cohesion in the neighborhood was strong: 18% of respondents participated in a civic organization and 79% voted in the most recent presidential election. Collective efficacy, or the extent to which respondents believed their neighbors were helpful and looked out for each other, was also high. When asked to rate the likelihood of neighbors helping each other in a time of need, the majority of respondents indicated that their neighbors would be likely to do so. Over 60% of residents agreed that their neighbors would be willing to help with emergency childcare, help an elderly neighbor, get someone's mail, and give someone a ride.

Figure 12. Collective Efficacy



Source: Sunnyside Strong Survey

Conclusion

Top concerns in the Sunnyside neighborhood included crime and safety; structural characteristics of neighborhood, such as dirty buildings and vacant lots; and housing concerns related to hurricane damage and leaks inside homes. Residents also were concerned about the lack of accessible and safe transportation. Chronic health conditions were an additional concern, with more than one-third of residents reporting high blood pressure, and one-fifth reporting arthritis and diabetes. Most residents, however, had a regular medical care provider, and most had some type of health insurance. While the neighborhood faced challenges, the fundamental social structure in the neighborhood was strong, as measured by civic participation, collective efficacy, and the high expectation of parents that their child will attend college. While our survey reveals some significant worries and concerns of residents, it also shows the strong potential for neighborhood revitalization. Sunnyside is, indeed, strong.

Sunnyside Strong Community Advisory Board

Jo Ann Burbridge, Sunnyside Community Redevelopment Organization
Sandra Massie Hines, Honorary Mayor of Sunnyside
Mary Roberts, Area 237 Civic Club
Jarvis Taylor, Project Canvas
Debra Walker, Sunnyside Community Redevelopment Organization

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