



RVA Thrives Summer 2017 Survey: Jefferson Davis Corridor Neighbors

We have been exploring the results of the 2017 community engagement survey. We've seen that neighborhood beautification, neighborhood safety, and access to jobs are key issues to residents, and we've looked at the pride the respondents express about their community.

In this post, we're going to turn our attention away from the potential of the neighborhood to focus on the people who make up the community. The individuals who reside in the neighborhoods are the ones who must work together to create the change they want to see in their community.

Community solidarity starts with seeing oneself as part of a community. Most commonly this happens through the relationships one forms in a community. Survey respondents say they actually aren't that connected to the people that live around them. Most commonly they say they know a handful--certainly less than half--of the people that live on their immediate block. This is true regardless of the neighborhood on the southside, and regardless of the activity level of civic associations. The one outlier is the Blackwell neighborhood where 24 percent said they knew a handful of their neighbors but were more likely to say they knew none (44 percent).

While they may not know many of their neighbors, they often wish they knew more. One woman, a 20 year resident of Oak Grove, explains it this way:

My thing is this, with me and my husband. I work and come home. I probably know more of the kids than I do adults, to be honest with you. My thing is, I do nursing. He's a griller at Waffle House. So when he gets off at 9:00, it's shower, whatever, go to bed. My thing, when I get off, I make sure the kids straight, make sure they done washed up, took a bath, whatever, ate, y'all go to bed. So my

outside time normally is like on a Friday when I spend it with my girls, doing girls night out. Other than that I don't [spend time out of the house].

While she would like to be more involved in her community the demands of everyday life--caring for children, work, etc.--make it hard to fully engage. Another woman, who has lived in several neighborhoods along the Jefferson Davis Corridor over the last decade, also faces these everyday barriers to knowing her neighbors but from a different perspective.

Honestly ... I don't really know anyone by name because even if you try, automatically, that barrier comes up as though, "Oh, even if I do try to talk to them today, they'll be fine today, but then tomorrow is a whole 'nother ballgame." So, me personally here, I feel as though I've never had a real encounter of sitting there, saying, "Hey, how are you doing? Such and such and this and that."...

While she tries to connect with her neighbors, she struggles to form meaningful connections as they each go about the routines of daily life. The desire is present, but more immediate pressures dictate how they spend their time.

This disconnection from neighbors has a direct relationship on how much respondents say they can trust their neighbors.

Residents don't see their neighbors as trustworthy, but they aren't untrustworthy either.

When asked if "people in this neighborhood can be trusted," the most common response was to neither agree or disagree (43 percent). It isn't that they actually distrust their neighbors--their neighbors haven't done anything to them to erode their trust--but they aren't willing to trust them either.

Instead of generally trusting their neighbors, residents seem to reserve that for people they actually know. Survey respondents who say they know the names of the majority of their neighbors are more likely to say that people in their neighborhood can be trusted, as opposed to those who know none of their neighbors (41 percent vs. 8 percent).

But trust isn't necessary for people to get along

While most residents don't know many of their neighbors, and are hesitant to trust, they are more than four times more likely to agree that "people in this neighborhood generally get along with each other" than to think there are problems with people relating to one another (52 percent vs. 11 percent). In all neighborhoods, few people think there is discord between community members. However, how willing they are to say that people actually get along varies by neighborhood. In Oak Grove (58 percent), Bellmeade (64 percent), Davee Garden (79 percent), and Manchester (72 percent) people overwhelmingly say that neighbors get along.

One Manchester resident describes the neighborhood dynamics this way:

There are tons of people that whether I know their name or not, I know their faces. They know my face and my daughter's face. I feel comfortable walking around at any given time, which is important because this is a high crime area but I feel comfortable being outside, I feel comfortable going for runs at night or in the morning or walking around the neighborhood at any given time with my daughter...

While she doesn't know her neighbors, there is enough goodwill that she feels comfortable moving about her community. But not all neighborhoods along the Jefferson-Davis Corridor see the same level of community harmony. In Hillside Court (47 percent) and Blackwell (39 percent), respondents most commonly say that people aren't fighting but aren't getting along either. They don't see discord in the community, but respondents aren't willing to go so far as to say that people in the community get along.

Moving to Action

So what should we do with all of this? If residents only know a handful of their neighbors, struggle to make connections with each other, and don't really trust those around them, how does a community create a sense of shared identity? One place to start is on a collective project that has an immediate impact on the quality of life. On Saturday, 2 June, the neighborhoods along the Jefferson Davis Corridor will come together for the second clean up. Come out! Meet your neighbors! And dream about what the neighborhood should be!