

NJIT Campus Gateway Survey
Executive Summary
by
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Introduction

To provide input on the needs of MLK section of the James Street Historic District, and to help guide planning for the proposed Campus Gateway project, Jones Lang LaSalle conducted a survey of neighborhood stakeholders, including NJIT administration, NJIT Greek system members, NJIT faculty and staff, neighborhood residents, St. Michael's representatives, and other interested parties including area employers and employees and Rutgers' students. The 27-question survey, which was conducted between May 16 and May 21, was conducted online, through on-the-street polling, and through outreach by the Historic James Street Commons Neighborhood Association.

Overall, the survey demonstrated that among students, faculty and staff there is a strong desire for increased retail opportunities, most notably cafes, restaurants and a grocery store. Area residents are less interested in retail. The community as a whole does not use mass transit, and while transportation patterns may change if additional housing options are offered, it appears likely that automobile traffic and parking will play a significant role in any neighborhood evolution.

Safety was a top-of-mind issue for students and a top priority for the St. Michael's Hospital community. While safety was important to the area residents, historic preservation and preservation of the traditional community structure held a higher priority.

Respondent Profile

Of the 731 total survey respondents, 58.7 percent were students attending NJIT (and Rutgers), and 32.6 percent were NJIT (or Rutgers) faculty and staff members. Workers and employees in the neighborhood accounted for 10 percent of those who took the survey. A very small percentage of respondents, 1.8 percent, were non-student residents in the MLK section of the James Street Historic District, while 1.1 percent were business owners and 1.2 percent were property owners, respectively. The responses of these groups were not large enough to impact significantly the results of the survey. However, the ongoing, in-person interviews will enable the priorities of these groups to be reflected in the planning effort. A full 17 percent of non-student residents have lived in the area for more than 10 years.

Amenities

When asked about amenities, 59 percent of respondents characterized parking as "very" important to quality of life in the neighborhood, and a total of 82 percent characterized

parking as either “very” important or “somewhat” important. Likewise, half or more of respondents stated that retail and public transportation are “very” important to quality of life. While only 13 percent of respondents stated that hotel accommodations are “very” important to quality of life in the neighborhood, more than 54 percent host out of town visitors. In fact, nearly 30 percent of those who host out of town visitors do so more than five times a year.

Retail

A remarkable 73 percent of respondents felt that restaurants are important to quality of life in the neighborhood -- only 2 percent felt that a restaurant was “not important at all.” The prospect of cafes and coffee shops was equally popular -- 70 percent of respondents said they were “very important.” Similarly, 73 percent of respondents felt that a grocery store was at either “somewhat” or “very important” to their quality of life. The importance of convenience retail outlets such as banks and dry cleaners, scored remarkably high, with 44 percent saying it was “very important.” A drugstore and pharmacy is also on the minds of respondents with 46 percent rating this service as very important. A movie theater was a lesser priority to respondents; 26 percent said it was “very important” and 34 percent said that a movie theater was somewhat important.

According to the survey, respondents shop in a variety of stores throughout the year. The vast majority, 77 percent, shop at discount department stores such as Target, Kohl’s and TJ Maxx, while 70 percent also shop at general department stores like Macy’s and Lord & Taylor. The next most common shopping outlets were national chains such as Gap, J. Crew and H&M. Boutiques were not characterized as frequent shopping choices.

As for dining out, 90.2 percent of respondents go out for dinner at least once a week, and 17.4 percent go out three or more times per week. The majority of respondents, or 52 percent, spend approximately \$11 to \$20 per person when they do go out for dinner. However, 24 percent of respondents who go out for dinner spend \$21 to \$35 per person.

Considering the large student population, it was surprising that 54 percent of respondents said they seldom or never go out to bars, lounges or live music. However, this is likely a reflection of the lack of nightlife options in the MLK section of the James Street Commons Historic District. A combined 78 percent of respondents said a bar, lounge or live music was either “very” or “somewhat” important. Of the respondents who do have an active nightlife, 28 percent said they go out once a week on average. As a whole, local bars/pubs seemed to be the most popular kind of nightlife destination, with 40 percent of respondents frequenting them. The next most popular destination was a live music venue or dance club, which are visited by 30 percent of respondents.

Transportation

A significant majority, 64.2 percent, of respondents drive themselves to work and school, while only 13.7 percent take the train and 8.2 percent walk. Thus, it is not surprising that 57 percent of respondents felt that automobile traffic was heavy in the neighborhood and

that 92 percent felt that pedestrian traffic was light to moderate. Overall, respondents were disappointed with parking options in the area; 77 percent stated that parking is either “not very accessible” or “not at all accessible.” Respondents seemed to be relatively content with public transportation in the area, with nearly 20 percent characterizing as “accessible” and 52 percent stating it was “somewhat accessible.”

Quality of Life

Most respondents, 85 percent, said that safety and security was “very important” in their decision to live/work/attend school in the area. A full 47 percent of respondents said they felt “somewhat safe” in the neighborhood, and while 37 percent said the neighborhood is “not very safe” and nearly 11 percent said it was “not at all safe.” A full 57 percent felt that the neighborhood’s character was “very” important, and 47 percent felt that town-university relations were “very” important. Responses on affordable housing were mixed: 32 percent of respondents felt that affordable housing was “not very” or “not at all” important, and 41 percent felt that it was “very” important.

Personal Information

For this survey, nearly 41 percent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25. The next largest age group was 45 to 54, accounting for 14 percent of respondents. There was a significant gender disparity: 65 percent of respondents were men and 35 percent were women.

A majority of the population, or 35 percent, lives with related or unrelated roommates, and nearly 28 percent of the households are comprised of couples with children. Most, or 56 percent, of respondents live in homes with three or more bedrooms. Nearly 40 percent of respondents get their news about the area from student newspapers, while 29 percent find news in the Star-Ledger.

Students, Faculty and Staff Subset

Nearly half, or 45 percent of students, faculty and staff rent or own apartments or houses outside the MLK neighborhood, and only 4 percent live within the neighborhood. Of these respondents, 18 percent live in on-campus housing. Of the students, faculty and staff who do not live on-campus or in the MLK neighborhood, 37 percent said they are “not likely at all” to move to the neighborhood if there were more housing options available, and 14 percent said they would be “very likely” to move if there were more options. Most, or 63 percent of students, faculty and staff, spend less than one hour each day in the MLK neighborhood. Many vocalized that they merely pass through on their way to work or class. Those who spent five or more hours in the neighborhood did so because they held jobs or lived in the neighborhood.