

Oakland Housing Focus Group Report

**For the University of Pittsburgh Community Outreach Partnership Center
Working Group on Housing; Oakland Planning and Development
Corporation; and Oakland Community Council**

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Executive Summary

Oakland is a diverse community consisting of institutions, long-term homeowners, college-aged apartment renters, and households of multiple ethnicities and income levels. As Oakland's academic institutions have expanded over the years, the community's residential neighborhoods have changed from single-family, owner-occupied dwellings, to multi-unit apartment houses. Some pockets of Oakland have remained tight-knit enclaves of homeowners; others have become dominated by young, single, undergraduate students.

In the summer of 2001, Oakland Planning and Development Corporation, Oakland Community Council, and the Community Outreach Partnership Center of the University of Pittsburgh began a dialogue to address the housing issues facing Oakland. The decision was made to conduct a series of focus groups to address the quality of Oakland's housing stock and life. Questions focused on what types of housing attracted residents, the issues current residents faced, steps taken previously to improve the quality of life, and what should be done to enhance the quality of life for homeowners and renters alike. The focus groups were conducted between November, 2001 and February, 2002.

In the focus groups, common themes arose. The largest area of concern was absentee landlords, followed by student rentals, trash, absence of amenities, such as grocery stores, and home ownership opportunities. Recommendations developed as a result of the dialogues with the focus groups include:

- Open dialogue with multiple-property owners in the area in order to determine their attitudes towards the neighborhood.
- Encourage student tenants and neighbors to work with the University of Pittsburgh's Housing Resource Center in the effort to identify problem landlords.
- Employ community partners, such as OPDC and OCC, to assist in convincing these landlords to abide by the spirit as well as the letter of the law regarding landlord responsibilities.
- Increase advocacy regarding code enforcement and property upkeep on the part of residents, community groups, and non-profits in Oakland.
- Continue "Code Walk," a periodic patrol of the neighborhoods of Oakland by OCC staff.
- Coordinate code enforcement efforts with other neighborhoods.
- Improve resident education regarding building codes.
- Distribute 'responsibility' information to students regarding tenant/landlord relationships.
- Provide a central housing office (similar to the Housing Resource Center on Atwood Avenue implemented by the University of Pittsburgh, COPC, and OPDC) that provides students with information concerning available apartments in the area.
- Implement home-buyer workshops to encourage and educate potential home-owners about ownership opportunities.
- 'Re-hab' older homes in Oakland to improve existing housing stock, decrease the possibility that they will be turned into rental housing, and increase home ownership in Oakland.

Some of the recommendations that arose out of the focus groups can be implemented in the short-term, while others will need sufficient time to plan, organize, and carry out. To preserve the uniqueness of Oakland, however, it will be well worth the effort to undertake them.

I. Introduction

Oakland is a diverse community consisting of institutions, long-term homeowners, college-age apartment renters, and households of multiple income levels. Few neighborhoods in the City of Pittsburgh embody such diversity. Oakland has experienced the benefits as well as the continual struggle that this diversity can create. Community groups, such as Oakland Planning and Development Corporation (OPDC), and residents alike, must balance the needs of institutional growth and convenience for transient students with protection of the quality of life for residents.

As Oakland's academic institutions have expanded over the years, many of the community's residential neighborhoods have changed from single-family, owner-occupied dwellings, to multi-unit apartment houses. Some of these apartments are owned by responsible landlords; others are not. Some pockets of Oakland have remained tight-knit enclaves of homeowners, while others areas have become dominated by young, single, undergraduate renters. It is in this context that OPDC and the University of Pittsburgh's Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) undertook an initiative to study the wide-ranging housing needs of the diverse range of residents residing in the Oakland community.

In the summer of 2001, OPDC, Oakland Community Council (OCC), and COPC recognized the need to address the housing issues facing Oakland. Long-term residents expressed the feeling of being overpowered by large institutions and the ever growing number of students renting in their neighborhood; student renters new to apartment life felt they were being taken advantaged of by absentee landlords; and many people in general were concerned with the number of visible code violations throughout the Oakland community. To address these issues, the initial idea was to plan a "housing summit." As envisioned, this summit would provide a forum in which residents and community groups in Oakland could approach City Planning, the Bureau of Building Inspections, and the elected officials of City Council with their housing concerns. However, as planning for the summit progressed, OPDC found a wide range of opinions, needs, and ideas in different pockets of Oakland. There appeared to be no single clear voice representing all of the diverse needs of the community. It became apparent that preliminary steps had to be taken in order to fully understand, appreciate, and coordinate the variety of ideas generated by the stakeholders taking part in the summit planning.

In the face of such daunting challenges and questions, OPDC and COPC made the decision to conduct a series of focus groups. Each group would focus on a different residential section of Oakland with two additional groups for students. A broad outline of questions was created for the groups with a focus on the quality of Oakland's housing stock and quality of life: what types of housing attracted residents; what were current residents' complaints; what steps had been taken to improve the quality over the years; and, finally, what should be done to enhance the quality of life of all Oakland residents, renters and homeowners alike. The focus groups met between November 2001 and February 2002. The following report presents the findings from these focus groups. The methodology section provides a description of the sub-neighborhoods that were targeted and explains how participants were recruited. The third section provides a summary of each focus group, including a description of participants and an overview of strengths and weaknesses that were mentioned during each session. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations in the fourth, and final, section.

II. Methodology

Oakland is geographically divided into four distinct neighborhoods: North, West, Central, and South. Within the boundaries of these four neighborhoods are sub-neighborhoods that have their own identities, largely determined by ethnicity and income. The two primary neighborhoods chosen for the focus groups were Central Oakland and South Oakland.

A large portion of Central Oakland is occupied by undergraduate students. The area, bounded by Forbes Avenues to the north, Bates Street to the south, Bouquet Street to the east, and McKee Place to the west, has changed from an owner-occupied neighborhood in the late 1960s, to a neighborhood dominated by student renters. Over the years, student renters have replaced most homeowners. According to the 2000 Census, 88.3 percent of Central Oakland's occupied housing stock is renter-occupied. Table 1 shows the change in home ownership rates from 1980 to 2000. Table 2 shows the percent of rental units that are occupied by residents between the ages of 15 and 24 as of the 2000 census. A recent study by the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs identified a large number of properties owned by a handful of landlords who control multiple properties in the neighborhood. In some situations, owner-occupied properties are entirely surrounded by student tenants.

South Oakland has a larger population of stable owner-occupied single-family dwellings than Central Oakland. However, despite the strong neighborhood attachment among families who own their homes, there appears to be a growing number of rental units as well as deteriorating housing on Frazier Street, Juliet and Romeo Streets, and parts of Ward Street. While the proportion of housing units that are renter-occupied is much lower here than in Central Oakland, there are still a high number of rentals. According to the 2000 Census, 53.6 percent of South Oakland's occupied housing units are renter-occupied.

Table 1 – Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Rates

	Owner-Occupied (%)*			Renter-Occupied Units (%)*		
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
Central	19.1%	17.8%	11.7%	80.9%	82.2%	88.3%
South	47.6%	56.2%	46.4%	52.4%	43.8%	53.6%

*% of occupied housing units

Table 2 – Percent of Renter-Occupied Units rented to 15 to 24 year olds, 2000

Central	65.8%
South	36.2%

A list of questions classified into three broad areas of interest was created to help guide the focus groups. The three areas were quality of housing and neighborhood; access to rental housing, ownership opportunities, and amenities; and safety in Oakland. Although the discussion was guided by these questions, participants were free to discuss issues that were important to them. The questions can be found in Appendix A. Transcripts of the focus group dialogues can be found in Appendix C (on-line at www.pitt.edu/~copc).

Pier Street Area

The first focus group consisted of homeowners and one landlord located in Central Oakland. This focus group was created to obtain input from permanent residents in Central Oakland who are surrounded by students. OPDC's community organizer walked the neighborhood's streets to distribute information regarding the focus group to residents who appeared to be homeowners. In addition, the community organizer recruited a neighborhood leader who assisted in encouraging homeowners to participate.

Student Focus Group

Of concern to OPDC, COPC, and the University of Pittsburgh is the quality of rental housing that students can obtain in Oakland. To gather the concerns of this population, OPDC and the Student Government Board (SGB) of the University of Pittsburgh organized a student focus group. The group consisted of nine student participants. These students were recruited through the student newspaper as well as SGB.

Frazier Street Area (South Oakland)

The Frazier Street area was targeted for a focus group because of: (1) the deteriorating housing stock (2) the mix of both rental and owner-occupied units and (3) concern over the growth and quality of the rental housing stock. As with other focus groups, OPDC worked with an institution that has strong community ties in the neighborhood to recruit participants, New Light Baptist Church.

Parkview Avenue Area

The Parkview Avenue area of South Oakland is similar to that of the Frazier and Ward Street area. There are a strong number of homeowners dedicated to their community. At the same time, the supply of single-family dwellings is threatened by conversion into multi-unit apartment dwellings. Working with St. Regis Church, the focus group targeted homeowners in this area. Information was distributed through word of mouth, the church bulletin, and a mailing to known homeowners.

Behavioral Health Population

The presence of strong medical and psychiatric institutions in Oakland makes it a hub of services for the behavioral health population. One issue of particular importance to these residents is the supply of adequate housing that provides easy access to services. Because Oakland is a hub of services for the behavioral health population and a number of them reside in the neighborhood, a focus group was targeted on this population. People's Oakland, a community MH/MR organization, recruited Oakland residents to participate in the focus group.

International Students

International students have language and cultural difficulties in addition to the housing problems that American students experience, making it potentially more difficult to find adequate rental units. They may be unaccustomed to our customs and the process of finding an apartment. While some international students may be able to find housing information through the internet, others are unable to search for an apartment until arriving in Pittsburgh. Being forced to find an apartment as soon as arriving in the City, with little information, may lead to bad housing decisions and allow scrupulous landlords to take advantage of unknowing students. After

hearing stories of international students having to pay exceptionally large security deposits or needing to pay for multiple months of rent up-front, OPDC decided to target this population for an additional focus group. International students were recruited by working with the University of Pittsburgh’s Office of International Services and email correspondence to international student groups.

III. Focus Group Summaries

The following table summarizes the results of the focus groups. Additional detail can be found in Appendix B.

Table 3 – Summary of Focus Group Findings

Focus Group	Date	Participant Information	Strengths of Neighborhood	Weaknesses of Neighborhood
Pier Street	December 4, 2001	18 homeowners (4 single owners, 7 couples), 1 landlord; primarily Italian heritage	Clean Sweep; Community Involvement; Bouquet Gardens; immigrant population	Absentee landlords; lack of code enforcement; lack of police presence; students; limited parking availability; lack of amenities such as grocery stores.
Students	November 7, 2001	5 females, 4 males; 7 white, 1 Asian, 1 African-American	Access to school, libraries, museums, park, public transportation	Absentee landlords; safety; affordability; neighborliness; lack of shopping opportunities
Frazier Street	January 25, 2002	5 males, 15 females (8 of whom were homeowners); African-American	Family-oriented; community networks; safety	Absentee landlords; lack of youth activities; lack of amenities; limited parking availability; trash/litter
Parkview Area	January 29, 2002	9 females, 7 males. All homeowners. Caucasian.	Community; Access	Absentee landlords; lack of code enforcement; lack of police presence; students; difficulty attracting homeowners
Behavioral Health	February 11, 2002	5 males, 1 female (2 homeowners). 4 caucasian, 1 African-American, 1 biracial	Access to amenities	Absentee landlords; high rent; stigma; discrimination; transportation; access to information
International Students	February 19, 2002	10 males, 1 female. 6 Asian, 3 caucasian, 2 Latino	Amenities and location; safety; diversity; development	Lack of quality housing; discrimination; lack of information; trash/litter

As can be seen in the above table and in the appendices, common themes arose from the focus groups. One major theme discussed by each group was the issue of absentee landlords, rental property owners who do not live in the neighborhood. Absentee landlords were listed as a weakness in every session. Participants of the focus groups believed that the poor conditions of some of the dwellings were the result of landlords who did not properly maintain their properties because they did not live in the neighborhood.

Related to the first theme is the issue of code enforcement. Participants believed that the City was slow to respond to complaints regarding code violations and landlords willingly did not keep properties up to code. One focus group reported that the City was not fulfilling its duty of code enforcement and a more proactive role was needed. Because of continual violations by certain landlords and the slow enforcement by the City, residents felt that many buildings were being allowed to decline into disrepair and spoil the image of the Oakland community.

Other issues discussed by the focus groups included the lack of parking, minimal police presence in certain areas, shopping, student renters, trash on the streets, and affordability of housing. Based upon the comments and insights provided by the participants in each focus group, a series of recommendations have been created to implement in the future.

IV. Conclusion/Recommendations

Absentee Landlords:

For all of the groups, absentee landlords presented the largest area of concern. These landlords are seen as having weak ties to the community, and are intent only on making money at the expense of the remaining owners and student tenants, with little regard for safety of residents and renters alike. Recommendations for this area include:

- Open dialogue with multiple-property owners in the area in order to determine their attitudes towards the neighborhood.
- Attempt to work with these owners to improve the appearance of the properties as well as the safety of tenants and homeowners;
- Encourage student tenants and neighbors to work with the University of Pittsburgh's Housing Resource Center in the effort to identify problem landlords.
- Employ community partners, such as OPDC and OCC, to assist in convincing these landlords to abide by the spirit as well as the letter of the law regarding landlord responsibilities.

Encourage Code Enforcement:

Code enforcement was an issue in each focus group. Even when tenants, neighbors, or organizations take action against code violations, they are met with a process seen as slow, unresponsive, frustrating, and generally ineffective within the City of Pittsburgh.

Recommendations for this area include:

- Increase advocacy regarding code enforcement and property upkeep on the part of residents, community groups, and non-profits in Oakland.
- Continue "Code Walk," a periodic patrol of the neighborhoods of Oakland by OCC staff.
- Coordinate efforts with other City neighborhoods as code enforcement is an issue in many older neighborhoods throughout the City.
- Improve resident education regarding building codes.

Dissemination/Distribution of housing information:

In regard to students, there appears to be an educational need regarding landlord/tenant relationships as well as garbage pick up. Residents complain of students not putting trash out on appropriate 'pick up' days. In addition, students need to have more education in how to deal with landlords not responding to necessary repairs, security deposits, and leases.

Recommendations for this area include:

- Distribute 'responsibility' information to students regarding tenant/landlord relationships.
- Provide a central housing office (similar to the Housing Resource Center on Atwood Avenue implemented by the University of Pittsburgh, COPC, and OPDC) that provides students with information concerning available apartments in the area.

Increase Homeownership Opportunities for Families:

A general feeling that absentee landlords result in deteriorating living conditions dominated the focus groups. Long-term residents, particularly those concerned with the influx of student renters, fear that an increasing number of homes are being turned into rental units. Homeowners in Oakland saw increased home ownership as a means of improving the stability and quality of life in Oakland, particularly South Oakland. Recommendations for this area include:

- Implement home-buyer workshops to encourage and educate potential home-owners about ownership opportunities.
- 'Re-hab' older homes in Oakland to improve existing housing stock, decrease the possibility that they will be turned into rental housing, and increase home ownership in Oakland.

The focus groups provided insights into residents' concerns regarding housing and living conditions in South and Central Oakland. The issue of absentee landlords and their relation to inadequate housing conditions, student rentals, and code violations was the major theme in each focus group. A second issue appeared to be access to neighborhood amenities such as shopping and transportation. Some of the recommendations that have arisen out of these groups can be implemented in the short-term, while others will need sufficient time to plan, organize, and carry out. To preserve the uniqueness of Oakland, however, it will be well worth the effort.

Appendix A – Questions to Guide Focus Groups

I. Homeowners: Pier Street Area; Frazier Street Area; Parkview Avenue Area

Quality

1. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in Oakland? Why or why not? What are the issues you feel are most important to address?
2. What are some community strengths and connections, what are some weaknesses?
3. What kind of diversity do you see in Oakland? How do the different ethnicities or races interact together?
4. Do you feel that there is a problem with absentee landlords in Oakland, if so in what ways? Do you feel there are responsible landlords in Oakland? Please explain.
5. Do you feel the spread of off-campus student housing is a problem, why or why not?
6. What is your definition of blight? Have you seen it in Oakland? How can rehabbing existing housing improve your neighborhood?
7. Do you feel the proposed Mon Fayette Expressway will affect the houses in your neighborhood? (if appropriate)
8. What is your opinion of the cost of living in Oakland compared to other neighborhoods in the city?
9. Do you feel there is a strong church and social connection in your neighborhood, why or why not?
10. Do you think your neighborhood stays clean year-round, why or why not?
11. Do you feel that there should be more institutional development in your neighborhood, why or why not? What would be welcome, what would not, in the way of institutional development?

Access

12. What do you feel about increasing owner occupancy in Oakland?
13. Do you think the home ownership along (your neighborhood streets) should be preserved and/ or grow? why or why not?
14. What can Oakland do to attract new homeowners to (your neighborhood)? What can other institutions do – university, hospital, city government, realtors?
15. There are seniors in your neighborhood that want to sell. Are there young families that want to buy? Are there others that want to buy? Who are they? How do you think we could help you in attracting new owners to the area?
16. Do you feel there are long-time renters in your community that would consider homeownership? Why or why not? Would long-time renters be interested in programs that assist them to move to homeownership? Why or why not? What barriers exist or persist for them?
17. Do you have any issues with transportation/ parking, if so what?

Safety

18. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood, why or why not?

II. Student Focus Group

Quality

1. What do you like and dislike about living in Oakland?
2. In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your apartment? Why?
3. If you've had complaints, how has your landlord responded?
4. Have you ever had problems getting back your security deposit? If so, please explain.
5. Do you live near other students? If so, have you experienced any problems?
6. Do you live near homeowners? If so, can you describe your relationship with them?
7. Was your apartment clean when you moved in?
8. Would recommend your apartment to a friend? Why or why not?

Access

9. How did you find your apartment?
10. Do you know of resources you can use to locate apartments?
11. What types of stores or services do you feel have a strong presence in Oakland?
12. What types of stores and services do you feel have a weak presence or are absent?

Safety

13. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Why or why not?
14. Do you feel that your apartment is safe?
15. Have you or someone you know ever had an incident (in Oakland) in which you felt unsafe? If so, please explain.

III. Behavioral Health Population

Quality

1. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in Oakland? Why or why not? What are the issues you feel are most important to address
2. What are some community strengths and connections, what are some weaknesses?
3. Would you recommend your apartment to a friend?
4. Have you utilized any supportive housing in Oakland? If so, would you recommend it? Why or why not? Do you feel there needs to be more supportive housing in Oakland?
5. How well do you know your neighbors?
6. What kind of diversity do you see in Oakland? How do the different ethnicities or races interact together?
7. Do you feel the spread of off-campus student housing is a problem, why or why not?
8. Do you feel that there is a problem with absentee landlords in Central Oakland, if so, in what ways? Do you feel there are responsible landlords in Central Oakland?
9. What is your opinion of the cost of living in Oakland compared to other neighborhoods in the city?
10. Do you feel there is a strong church and social connection in your neighborhood, why or why not?
11. Do you think your neighborhood stays clean year-round, why or why not?
12. Do you have any issues with transportation/ parking, if so what?

Access

13. Do you feel that by living in Oakland you have access to the services that you need? What do you feel could be improved and what do you think works well?
14. Do you feel that you have the resources you need to find housing? Why or why not?
15. If you rent, how did you find your apartment? How have people you've known found their apartments?
16. Do you feel like you've ever been discriminated against in housing?
17. What do you feel about increasing homeownership in Oakland?
18. Do you feel there are long-time renters in your neighborhood that would rather rent than own? Why? Would long-time renters be interested in programs that assist them to move to homeownership? Why or why not? What barriers exist or persist for them?
19. Do you feel that there should be more business development in your neighborhood, why or why not? What would be welcome, what would not, in the way of business development?
20. Do you feel that there should be more institutional development in your neighborhood, why or why not? What would be welcome, what would not, in the way of institutional development?

Safety

21. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood, why or why not?
22. Have you ever had an incident (in Oakland) that made you feel unsafe? Please explain.

IV. International Students

Quality

1. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in Oakland? What issues are important to you?
2. How did you find your apartment?
3. Have you ever had a landlord you've never met?
4. Has anyone had problems with security deposits or costs that you weren't aware of? Please explain.
5. Have you ever had problems with your landlord? Like not fixing things?
6. Do you think your neighborhood stays clean year round, why or why not?

7. How do you feel about how the different ethnicities interact together? Are people separate or do they blend together?
8. How do you see yourself getting along with your neighbors? Do you live around other students?
9. What types of stores or services do you feel have a strong presence in Oakland? What types of stores and services do you feel have a weak presence or are absent?

Access

10. Do you feel like you've ever been discriminated against?
11. Has anyone had like subtle discrimination where the landlord hasn't done anything or said anything but there's an attitude?
12. Do you feel there are a lot of students or families, maybe your own, that would rather own than rent?
13. Do you connect with the international student groups? Do you find them helpful? Do you get a lot of information from them?

Safety

14. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Why or why not?
15. Do you feel that your apartment is safe?
16. Have you or someone you know ever had an incident (in Oakland) in which you felt unsafe? If so, please explain.

Appendix B – Focus Group Summaries

Pier Street Focus Group

December 4, 2001

Capturing: Oakland Ave., Pier Street, S. Bouquet, Atwood and Dawson (Central Oakland)

CO worked with a new community leader (found during the walk through survey) to recruit residents to participate in the focus group. Community leader and CO recruited through word of mouth and a mailing.

Participant Information:

Three younger, single homeowners; 7 older couples (6 homeowners and 1 landlord); and 1 senior homeowner. Most participants had Italian heritage.

Strengths:

Clean-Sweep and community involvement: Residents appreciate OPDC's clean-sweeps and want to become more involved in activities. They also expressed appreciation for a student group 'kappa' that keeps a street clean in Central Oakland.

Immigrant population: An idea was put forth that the influx of immigrant families into Oakland might be a good population to which homeownership can be marketed.

Bouquet Gardens: Participants seem to appreciate Pitt's upkeep of Bouquet Gardens. It was stated that Pitt has responded to calls from residents about problems with students and have taken care of them. They feel Bouquet Gardens, operated by Pitt, is much better than apartments rented out by absentee landlords who are slow to respond to complaints, by tenants and by neighbors.

Weaknesses:

Absentee landlords and code enforcement: Residents feel that absentee landlords are a problem affecting Oakland. These landlords live in nicer areas and do not care about the living conditions in Oakland. They believe code enforcement is weak. The city needs to take a more proactive role in enforcing the codes and holding the absentee landlords accountable. They also feel that if landlords take responsibility for the upkeep of the property students will become more attached to the area and therefore have more respect for the area. This group of residents repeatedly identified absentee landlords as the root of Oakland's problems, not students.

Students: Participants expressed frustration and concern over students' behavior. They claim that loud parties occur until 2 or 3 in the morning. Also, they feel students do not follow the 'trash' rules and put it out at wrong times. One participant felt as though students do not care about or appreciate their neighbors.

Garbage: Participants believed that their neighbors (particularly students) were unwilling to put their garbage out at the proper time. This makes a mess and attracts rats.

Police Presence: Neighbors would like to see an increase in police presence in Oakland (community orientated police no longer exist); this would be an opportune project for a block club. Residents suggested that having more police in the neighborhood would deter vandalism, crack down on loud student parties, and improve enforcement of permit area parking.

Limited Parking: Participants complained about the lack of parking in Oakland. They feel that long-term residents are treated unfairly by the authorities. Visitor's pay a limited fee to park while permanent residents often have difficulty finding a place to park.

Community involvement in planning: Residents would like to be more involved in the development plans of institutions. For example, they really like Pitt's Bouquet Gardens (student housing) because it replaced deteriorating properties and absentee landlords. Also, if they need to make any complaints they can contact Pitt. Although they have positive feelings about Bouquet Gardens they feel they should have been contacted about it prior to development.

Amenities: Residents know that increasing homeownership will 'save' Oakland but they think that it will be difficult to attract families to Oakland without an elementary school and grocery store.

Student's Focus Group

November 7, 2001

Capturing: College students living off-campus in Oakland.

CO worked with Student Government Board to recruit students to participate in the focus group. SGB recruited participants through email and advertising in the Pitt News.

Participant Information:

All of the participants were students at the University of Pittsburgh currently living in Oakland. There were five females and four males; 7 white students, 1 Asian, and 1 African-American.

Strengths:

Access: These students like living in Oakland because of the 'good' public transportation system and the close proximity to school, libraries, museums and the park. They feel they have access to other areas of the city (i.e. downtown) due to Oakland's location and transportation.

Student interest in neighborhood: Students are energetic to hold landlords accountable for their properties.

Weaknesses:

Absentee landlords: Students expressed their frustration with repairs being made to their apartments in an untimely manner, not getting their security deposits back and the overall living conditions (hazards at the time of move in, health dept. concerns: holes in walls, filth, etc.). There seemed to be a dominant theme of landlords not taking care of problems when they say they will, and refusing to make necessary repairs. However, it is important to note that not every

landlord/student relationship is like this. Students did point out that there were some decent landlords.

Safety: Students expressed safety concerns. These concerns were primarily related to the absentee landlord situation because of broken locks and un-repaired windows in apartments. Some participants had been robbed multiple times.

Affordability: Students felt that the cost of living in Oakland was too high because of their rent costs and the lack of a grocery store. Buying food from Rite-Aide and Eckerd can become costly.

Neighborliness: Some students said they got along with their non-student neighbors, but the majority said their neighbors don't like them because they have too many loud parties.

Business Development: These students want to see business development in Oakland, in the way of different, eclectic stores, that would provide more appeal to the community.

Frazier Street Area Focus Group

January 25, 2002

Capturing: Frazier Street, Ward Street, Whitfield, etc. (South Oakland)

CO worked with New Light Baptist Church's Reverend and new community leader (found through church) to recruit residents to participate in the focus group. Community leader and CO recruited through word of mouth and the church bulletin.

Participant Information:

5 males, 15 females: 2 married couples, 2 married females (husbands not present), 3 single young males, 4 senior females, 7 young females. All participants had families, 8 of the residents are homeowners (the 4 senior females and the 2 married couples), and the rest of the participants rent in the South Oakland Frazier Street area.

Ethnicity:

African-American

Strengths:

Close-knit, family-oriented community: The neighborhood is a close-knit, family-orientated community. Residents want to stay in their neighborhood and raise their families.

Community networks: The neighborhood is very connected to the church and the churches' social network. These connections can be beneficial in establishing a community watch or block club, which then connects them to into a bigger entity (residents would rather form a S. Oakland community group and send a representative to the Oakland Community Council). They feel their needs are large enough for their own group and feel separate from the rest of Oakland. This would increase their power as a unified neighborhood.

Safety: Participants feel safe in their neighborhood. Their only concerns were safety issues for their children: having to cross the Blvd. to get to school and not having enough activities to do in their free time.

Weaknesses:

Garbage: Participants were very concerned with garbage left out by rental tenants on non-garbage days as it attracts pests and causes general issues with aesthetics as the bags are broken open and scattered through the neighborhood.

Absentee landlords: Residents feel that absentee landlords are a problem affecting Oakland. They believe code enforcement is weak. The city needs to take a more proactive role in enforcing the codes and holding the absentee landlords accountable. Many of the people in the community rent, hence this is a huge issue.

Increase Homeownership: Neighbors would like to work to increase homeownership among community residents, including themselves. Residents want a neighborhood held homebuying workshop (this was scheduled and held on March 12, 2002). There was a general feeling that students had begun moving in larger numbers to South Oakland and this was resulting in a deteriorating neighborhood, particularly in reference to trash.

Youth Activities and Recreation: Residents want more for their children, including an elementary school and a community youth center. Residents would like the University of Pittsburgh to give back to the community by donating computers and tutors for a church-based after-school program. In addition, residents want the University to do something with Marino field, apparently it's in decaying shape.

Access to grocery store and shopping: Participants did mention the lack of a grocery store and want more business development in South Oakland.

Parking: Participants complained about the limited parking. They feel that with 3 or 4 students living in one unit, each one has a car and this is causing the parking problem.

Parkview Area Focus Group

January 29, 2002

Capturing: Parkview Avenue area (South Oakland)

CO worked with the pastor of St. Regis and OPDC's board president to recruit residents for the focus group. Recruited through word of mouth, mailing and church bulletin.

Participant Information:

9 females, 7 males. 2 younger males, 6 older couples, 2 older females All participants were homeowners.

Ethnicity:

Caucasian

Strengths:

Close-knit community: Residents know one another and can depend on one another. These connections can be beneficial in establishing a community watch or block club, which then connects them to into a bigger entity such as Oakland Community Council.

Access: Access was another point made consistently, that in Oakland they are close to everything.

Staying in Oakland: These residents want to stay in Oakland. This is their home and they would not sell, unless they could be moved to a senior apt. *in* their neighborhood.

Weaknesses:

Absentee Landlords/Code Enforcement: Residents feel that absentee landlords are a growing problem in the neighborhood. They believe code enforcement is weak and that the city is too slow to respond to 'problem' buildings. The city appears to be ignoring their duties and needs to inspect buildings, fine landlords, and take them to court.

Growing concern regarding students: They are not so much concerned about students currently in the neighborhood; they are more concerned about the influx of more students into the neighborhood.

Police Presence: Neighbors would like an increased police presence in Oakland. Residents suggested that having more police in the neighborhood would serve to deter vandalism and would crack down on the loud student parties and the enforcement of permit area parking. The current lack of presence has kept the homeowners united and involved in regularly contacting code officers and police. One participant felt Pitt's police should make some patrols in the neighborhood as more and more Pitt students are moving into the area.

Difficulty attracting new homeowners: Residents believe that increasing homeownership will 'save' Oakland but they think that it will be difficult to attract families to Oakland without an elementary school and grocery store.

Behavioral Health Focus Group

February 11, 2002

Capturing: Behavioral Health Population in Central and South Oakland

CO worked with People's Oakland to recruit residents to participate in the focus group.

Participant Information:

5 males, 1 female: 1 married male and 1 married female (spouses not present). All participants were middle aged, 2 of the residents were homeowners (inherited homes), 1 lives in a personal care home, 1 lives in a group home and 2 rent apartments.

Ethnicity:

4 White, 1 African-American, 1 mixed

Strengths:

Access to amenities: Residents felt that, in general, Oakland's location is key. It's close to amenities (parks, libraries, shops, etc.). Further, the setting is a neighborhood with a 'cultural and city feel'. Participants feel they are close to the hospitals and doctors they need.

Long-term residents: Many of the participants have lived in Oakland for a long time (one individual being the 4th generation in his house, another a resident for 19 years).

Weaknesses:

High Rents: Residents find the rents are too high for people who receive SSI (all of the participants receive SSI). Residents claim there is only one high-rise in Oakland that takes low-income individuals. It is also hard to pay a security deposit and first month's rent if you receive SSI (not making enough money to save). One resident commented that if one is in transitional or CRR, "they take your money, you don't get it, most of your check goes to housing, you get \$30 - \$60 left, although you get your meals and meds."

Housing Search Assistance: Residents see the need for more systems like Western Psych.'s housing referral to ICMs and from ICMs to personal care homes. People's Oakland has listings and Pitt has listings but it's not enough to help the number of people coming out of the state hospitals. Residents claim there are more people coming out of institutions than there is supportive housing. "They shut down state hospitals, the money should follow the consumer around, dollar for dollar. I hope the information you're getting does something for mentally ill and mentally retarded, cause we're having a heck of a time finding places to live down here." "My husband and I were trying to get into supportive housing but there hasn't been an opening."

Stigma: Participants spoke also about issues of stigma: "I live in a personal care home and they told us not to talk to the neighbors because the neighbors don't want a personal care home in their district." "There's a lot of stigma around, if they know you're mentally ill, if people discover, like my downstairs neighbor, he avoids me."

Discrimination: They also mentioned times they felt they had been discriminated against: "I was living in an apt. back in 91 and the landlady discovered Frank (husband) and I were mentally ill and gave us 30 days notice." Another participant commented, "They kicked me out of McDonalds because of epilepsy, I had a seizure, my wife was sitting right next to me, a mild seizure I had, they threw me out, is that right? I don't go in there anymore, they have no right kicking someone out because they have an illness, that would be like kicking someone out if they had one leg or something."

Transportation: Residents would like to see more bus routes, especially from South Oakland to North Oakland. They claim that since the grocery store (which they very much depended on to eat economically) left the bus routes have declined. "Giant eagle moved away and everyone felt that, we used to have two bus lines and now we only have one, we have to go to South Side to get groceries."

Absentee landlords: Residents do feel that absentee landlords (they refer to as slumlords) are a problem in Oakland. Yet, they also feel students are too loud and litter too much. They also claim that the city is not doing enough in regulating plumbing and water pressure.

Lack of trust on part of businesses: Participants expressed that the businesses that have been here for a long time trust them, but the bigger chain businesses do not. “The businesses that are established and have been here for a long time know people like us. There’s a difference between the big businesses that just want your money and don’t know you. There is a distinct difference between big stores and stores like Derante’s Grocery.” “The retailers in Oakland all know me, they know I have mental illness and they all treat me very nice. As a matter of fact, Leonard’s Men Store, two years ago, gave me a \$1,000 worth of clothes for \$500 and I could pay it back month to month and I had no credit reference, nothing. One time I was in the bakery and I bought the donuts and didn’t have enough money to get home. They gave me the money to get home and I paid them back, they trust me.” “Do you know Sir Speedy? He puts me on trust, he says if I need copies of pictures he’ll make the pictures for me and then he’ll say to me when you get your SSI check you pay, the guys so nice to me, he knows me so good, he knows me.”

International Student Focus Group

February 19, 2002

Participant Information:

There were 6 Asian students, 3 White students, and 2 Latino Students. There were 10 males and 1 female. 8 were between the ages of 25 and 35 and 3 were between 35 and 45.

Strengths:

Amenities and location: The participants felt Oakland is a good place to live because of the prevalence of restaurants, bars, and museums. They also liked that they were close to the school and did not need a car. They mentioned that there are grocery stores that are easy to get to.

Safety: Students generally feel safe in Oakland, particularly because there are so many people around.

Diversity: Students feel Oakland is a diverse neighborhood where the different ethnicities mix and interact. The participants said it is nice to know your neighbors and felt they had good relationships with their neighbors.

Development: Students felt there is a market for graduate students and if they were planning on staying in Oakland, they would consider buying a house here. Business development was also welcome.

Weaknesses:

Information: Students felt there was lack of information on available housing which makes it difficult to know where to look. They would like to see more information and greater communication (from the school) before arriving here. They suggested that Pitt provide

temporary housing for students while they look for a permanent place to live. Also mentioned was how difficult it is to secure an apartment without having established credit and a bank account.

Cleanliness: This focus group felt trash should be picked up twice a week and an increase in receptacles provided would help alleviate the trash problem.

Lack of quality housing: The participants felt that they would consider buying a home in Oakland, provided there was better housing available. Several students mentioned being here with their families and if they were going to be here for a long time, they would consider buying a home in Oakland. They feel much of the current housing is in need of renovations.

Discrimination: A couple of students felt that they had been discriminated against based on their nationality.

Appendix C – Summarized Transcripts of Focus Groups

Most of the following transcripts were not edited, except for moments when the words on the tape could not be deciphered. The only edited transcription is of the International Students' Focus Group. In this case, the comments are paraphrased rather than direct quotes.

Pier Street Area Focus Group

Q: How do you feel about increasing home ownership? Do you feel there are too many renters and not enough homeowners?

A: The more homeowners we have, the better.

The problem is, when you have the renters, they abandon their house, and they don't keep up with their house, and then they live in higher classes (Mt. Lebanon, upper Saint Claire). They [landlords] take care of their house in upper St. Claire or Mt. Lebanon but they forget, they think Oakland is trash so let's damage Oakland and you know students live there so let's trash it.

Q: So you're talking about absentee landlords?

A: Yeah (several people agree), that's the whole problem.

Q: Let's talk about absentee landlords. Are there any landlords in the room?

A: (A few people nod)

People begin to talk about students staying up until 3 or 4 in the morning as well as putting their trash out too early. At this point everyone is talking at once and it is impossible to hear what people are saying for a few seconds. They blast the radio 1,2, 3:00 in the morning. What the heck is going on? Why do they have to have their radio so loud?

5 guys are screaming outside, I say, What is going on? I opened the door and look at them, 4 in the morning. I wake up and can't sleep anymore.

I live on Atwood St. We're called a commercialized street. Well, there's a store called the Indian Garden restaurant. For some reason, they got permitted to open a bar right across the street from our house and they're open Monday – Sunday and I don't think they're permitted to open Sunday but they run from 5:00 until 2 in the morning. At 2:00 when they let the people out they have problems throwing people out of the bar and the cops are there with paddy wagons. It's a whole ordeal. You look at 2:00, open the window and you see the same thing. Every 2:00.

Q: When do the students start partying? Is it Thursday?

A: Thursday.

I think they party everyday.

...between Pier and Oakland Ave. on the second floor. No control at all.

Q: Do you think the University should take control? Who do you think should handle it?

A: I think they should do something.

I don't know what this means, or is about, some kind of study or something, but as far as I'm concerned, I've been around here for 70 years and Oakland has been going down hill for the past 70 years. In fact our good Calagiri (spelling?) sold Oakland out to the university when he got in power. He gave Oakland to the universities. He was responsible for the number 4 police station being out of here. We have no police protection. We have no dogs walking these streets at night with a cop to control it.

Q. Where was it?

A. Down on Semple Street. We need police protection, number one, to go around and curtail most of these problems. If we had a couple beat policemen walking around here day and night, that would solve half of the problems.

Q. Lets talk about safety issues. (Megan explains the purpose the purpose of the focus group and clarifies that our research is to be used to actually do things to make Oakland better. Explains bag project) Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?

A. I have to leave at 5:30 with my mother because she fears for her life. And I don't need to go to work until 8 in the morning. She starts at 6 so I leave at 5:30. She can't walk by herself. She's afraid to leave the house, she needs

my dad or my sister in law to drive her to work. And there's no one there, there's not a car.. I'm going on 2 years, walking at 5:30 in the morning, there's not a university cop or a city cop ever on the street. Ever.

Q. And the fear is of students? Or other people?

A. Everyone. It could be students drunk or you know someone who's just like, 'oh, I see someone lets follow them, or anything. I mean, you don't even see one cop. I'm not expecting every day but I have for 2 years not seen a cop yet.

Q. Do you ever call the cops about noise?

A. Oh yeah, I call the university cop and they say its not their responsibility. The university cop don't want nothing to do with it. And the city cop comes in and says, 'break it up' and they leave.

Q. What about Bouquet Gardens? What do you think, was it a good idea, a bad idea?

A. We don't have any complaints about Bouquet Gardens.

Good idea.

They [university] keep up with it. What we're left with was absentee landlords anyway. It's not like it drove away the good people. We have no problems with that [Bouquet gardens]. They keep their property up nice, and if there is a complaint we can go to them. It's the absentee landlords that we have a problem with.

Back to the question about cops. Every time you call the cops, Lets say you make 2 or 3 phone calls...they charge \$1 per call. They charge directly to the phone bill.

Q. If you call 911?

A. Yes, \$1 a call.

Down on Pier Street on my side, its no parking at all. Park on the other side, not on my side. Some times 3 or 4 cars are blocking the sidewalk. You try to call them. You call one time, they say one hour. They never come out. And you call the second time. 'Oh, should be there soon.' So every time you call they charge you a dollar. I cannot afford to spend 3 or 4 dollars because there's cars on the sidewalks. We had a fire on that street too. If they are parked on that side, the fire engines are not going to be able to make it down.

And there are homes. You know, we live there.

Q. Do you have any issues with transportation or parking?

A. There's no parking.

You can't park in front of your house.

On every corner, you're taking your life into your own hands coming out onto Bates St. because the cars are parked right up to the end. There should be a yellow line for at least 15 feet. Going down onto Bates St., you cannot see to get out of there. You take your life into your hands on every corner in Oakland to get out of an intersection and that should be curtailed. All of your first year students should not be able to have a car in Oakland like they do at Penn State. That's a rule they should put in. At Penn State, first year students are not allowed to bring their cars on campus or in the vicinity.

If everyone has a vehicle, where are we gonna put them? On top of the roof? That's why we have no where to park ourselves.

Everyone in the world has a dollar pass, a visitor's pass it's called. So a visitor, you know, they go and they leave. No, every student has one and they park there, you're allowed to park up to five days, all day, for one dollar. And us who are owners pay \$20 because we can't use the visitors but we don't have parking on our street. We have to pay to park in a garage but the city thinks its ok because I tried to get a car towed from our house and they says 'oh no, they're allowed five days, all day. They paid a dollar.' Well, why are we paying \$20? And every student has a visitors pass.

We have to have a garage. And you're lucky if you can find one in Oakland area because everyone wants garage.

There are too many vehicles on the street. From the students.

People agree that they've never seen street sweeping.

The day its supposed to be street sweeping, they should tow everyone and that's how you'll get a clean street. But they don't do that. The city doesn't do things like that.

We're also finding a problem with rats.

We live on bate's street and they do clean it every Thursday. They ticket the cars. Across the street from us is an apartment with 53 units. And when they built them they said we're providing parking. So then we find out later

they're charging them \$60/ month to park there so of course they're not parking there. They're in front of my house. I can't even wash my car.
Even if you provide paid parking for these students, they're not going to pay it. They'll park in the street. They'd rather park on the street for nothing. They'll park right on your side walk if they have to.
We live here for so long, and cannot park.

Q. What about other transportation issues like the Mon Fayette expressway?

People start talking at once for a few seconds which leads to the next question.

Q. Do you know of any seniors that might be wanting to sell? Explanation of OPDC's plan.

A. You bought a house on Oakland Ave. You robbed it for \$42,000. You never fixed it up and went to the courts because they changed their mind at the last minute. And I don't know if there's people living there yet. There's a reason for that. I think there's asbestos or lead pipes and stuff. They can't rent it out. So they're just waiting to get a couple more houses, tear it all down, and then they can build new.
Children's hospital wanted to buy _____. You know what they wanted to give the people? \$17,000. What can you buy for \$17,000? A bunch of boxes of cigars. You can't buy a trailer for \$17,000.

Q. How can we attract homeowners to Oakland? I know UPMC has a program where if on of their employees buys a house in Oakland they'll help them with the down payment or closing cost.

A. Get graduate students interested in going to school here and bringing their families with them. Get some families back in here, with responsibility. Like you're Oakland Ave. plans were guided to be. If you want to use that format, that's a good start. But you guys own that so I'm a little skeptical.

Someone else tells him we're not from Pitt and he says

We're in a building that Pitt owns right not.

No, Oakland Planning owns this building.

Explanation of OPDC and funding source.

We don't have a school here, that's the bad part. We have no elementary school to bring children here to raise families. We had a task force working on it but it just fizzled. It seemed like at one time it was going to be feasible and then all of the sudden there was nothing left.

There weren't enough kids.

So you have to attract families with kids but you need a school to do that but to get a school you need kids.

The university has eradicated any family interest around here. There's no such thing as a family base anymore to talk about.

Q. How do you feel about institutional development like UPMC and Pitt? What kinds of development do you want to see?

A. Whatever they do, they ought to do something good for us.

I'll give you an example- Mazaraski field. That was given to the city by the Shenley's, Shenley park that's supposed to be not Mazaraski field. I contend what they should do with that center, they should involve CMU, University of Pittsburgh, and all the other colleges, they ought to make that an information center right where that wall is. There's a beautiful glass building there, domed over. And have it be a center for information. In back of it they can put their little sports place. The citizens and the children have a right to that field before Pitt. Because I think the city is treading on some crazy ground trying to give it to Pitt one way or another. That property belongs to the city. It was granted and willed to be people of Pittsburgh, no institution and their encroaching on there just like they tried to encroach on there 20 years ago when they put up the art building, Mrs. Frick's art building, and after they put it up they threw the old lady out. And I know that for a fact because she cried right in front of the Carnegie library and told me all about it. She was a near sighted old woman, broken hearted. They threw that poor old lady out of her own property. Mrs. Frick. I can tell you a lot of things, I know where all the skeletons are buried.

Q. What is your opinion of the cost of living in Oakland?

People ask for clarification. For example, if you're buying groceries from a smaller store sometimes its more expensive.

A. Everyone agrees that there needs to be a grocery store.

They made a mistake when they took the Giant Eagle out of here.

They took it out because too many people robbed it.

They couldn't control it so they closed the Giant Eagle. And then the owners of Oakland suffer. We suffer for everything they do here.

A grocery store would attract families.

We need a Giant Eagle. We don't need no Uni-Mart. We need a Giant Eagle that has economy prices. You can go buy milk at a reasonable price. The Uni Mart charges \$2.10 for a gallon. They need a Giant Eagle here.

There's a lot of people who don't drive [making it difficult to go shopping].

Q. Do a lot of people take the bus to Centre Ave. to go shopping?

A. Oh, they have to. Either that or South side or they have to go to Greenfield. That's the only close location. Or they have to go to Foodland in Bloomfield. And that's about it. For people who drive, it's not too bad but senior citizens they don't drive. Where are they gonna go? They getting older, not younger.

Someone asks about a shuttle that took people who weren't able to drive to the grocery store.

At one time one of these organizations, I don't remember the name, Jonathan Robison...there was supposed to be an agreement that the shuttles that Pitt has, the older Oakland citizens were supposed to be able use it to but it never came to. The understanding was, when those shuttles were put in they were supposed to serve the citizens around here to.

Q. So people think if you live here you should have to right to parking permits and a bus pass?

A. People agree.

Q. There is a lot of diversity in Oakland, a lot of different ethnicities. How do you see how they interact together in your neighborhood? Are you seeing an influx in immigrant populations? Or any families that way?

You do see that but its usually with students.

Like when a kid comes and he brings his mother and father.

Q. So they renting? Do you think we could attract them to purchase homes?

Someone asks, "why do the students prefer to pay rent and live outside their own campus atmosphere living in private homes rather than live in the dorms?"

More freedom and also because its cheaper to live off campus. (Kelly)

I think most students like to be off campus because then they can have their playground. They can study during the day and then they can raise hell at night and to hell with everyone else who lives there. That's what its all about.

Last Saturday, about 100 people in Oakland! 3:00 in the morning.

Q. Is the graffiti caused by college kids or someone else?

If I could see again like I used to I guarantee there'd be no graffiti in Oakland. I'd have taken care of it.

We need more police, that's the bottom line.

We need police protection around here, that'd solve 50 percent of the problems. With your grafitti, your noise, your people that are scared to go to work. Put some beat patrolmen in here. Bring the police back to Oakland. Pitt doesn't care about us. They want us to get out of here so they can put up more of their buildings.

There is some discussion over the jurisdiction of pitt/city police.

I had my granddaughter over the other day, they're making so much noise and she can't sleep. What am I going to do?

More discussion about students making noise and staying up late.

Q. So you have tried to approach students?

A. Yes

They don't care.

She [member of focus group] confronted him [student] and he said 'this is a Pitt area' in her neighborhood. She's been there for 30 years and he tells her it's a Pitt area.

What it comes down to, you need to come down hard on the landlords. [everyone agrees].

When they have to pay enough money, they're going to do something.

More discussion about students being loud.

You need to owner to the property.

Not too long ago I went and shopped at Giant Eagle. When I came back I park half on the sidewalk, half on the street. I take the groceries to the house. I went back after I took the first two bags, I had a ticket. \$46.00. I ain't

going to pay this. I went downtown to the traffic court. They said, 'what happened?' I said, 'you ain't gonna blame me. I'm telling the truth. I said, I went shopping. I put the vehicle on top of the sidewalk, opened the trunk to take the groceries out. The girl passing by gave me a ticket for \$46.00. That's a shame. Every other day the vehicles are parked all day and no one will tag them. Then I park for a few minutes, I pay \$60/month for the garage. He said, you know why you had a place to park? Its spring break. That's what he told me. That's why you find parking. We have laws. We have to get our police to enforce the laws. The laws are there. They're not allowed to have so many people in one house at one time. Even the firemen. I've called them and said that house is full of kids down there. If there's a fire or something, they're not allowed... I don't know what the number is. But they don't enforce they laws, that's a big problem.

People talk amongst themselves about a landlord Eckenroh.

He own's every property on Atwood Street.

They thing they do about garbage too, that's the whole problem with landlords. Garbage day in Oakland...we got a paper from the city - 7:00 at the curbside. Garbage in Oakland is mon-sun on the street. Let's throw our garbage on the street. No container is pulled in. there should be a fine. Everybody should get a fine. You know, the city all they want is there money. They should go after the landlords and tell them, if you want to own this house, clean up, if not we're putting your house on sale to another family. They don't know how to run this place. That's the bottom line, they don't.

People leave the garbage out all week, then there's rats running around trying to find food.

Put your garbage out at 7:00....what's so hard about that? They just want to own properties in Oakland and destroy everything. My mom and dad bought our house when I was born and I'm going on 36 years. You know what's a disgrace? It's the landlords. Its nothing else. If the landlords took control, it would do. I've called Bob Eckenroh, oh I'll take care of it. He doesn't take care of it. Guess what? He gets another house. And he destroys it. And he gets another house. And he destroys it. He's a millionaire cause he owns houses and doesn't have to keep up with them. And guess what, he won't get in trouble. But we own a house and they came in and inspected our house and we're the ones who kept it up. We had to buy a fire door. We had to buy exit signs. We had to buy lights and we live there! We live there night and day. These owners like Bob Echenroh, he controls the whole area. His house was bombed with a coke bottle. He built it again. There's a house on fire in Oakland on Meyran Ave. They destroyed it. I mean, its students. Some students are good and some are not. That's the bottom line. How did the fire start? I don't know. I heard a coke bottle with a bomb. They did it themselves. It's obvious its landlords. If no body realizes that, I don't know what else. Oakland will never be the same. Its between Pitt and landlords. They need to take control. They shouldn't sell another house in Oakland. If you live in Mt. Lebanon... I asked Bob Echenroh, 'how many people to you have in your apartment?' and he said, 'I don't know, the check just comes to my house. Oh, I'll check it out tomorrow to see how many is in my house. He didn't check it out. As long as he's getting that rent and paying his bills, he's fine. And then I tell the boys, who we know, they cuss my mom and dad out because they can't speak English. Its disrespect.

Q. What about the community conections? Like if you need something can you go right across the street..?

A. there is no community.

Pitt wrecked it, there's nothing here.

People begin talking about a lot (right next to the post office on Bouquet) where some trees have been cut and say they appreciate the cutting but the job is not done.

Q. What about church connections or social connections?

A. most of us go to St. Paul's cathedral of fifth ave.

Q. How do you feel about the character of Oakland Square and how do you think that can be preserved?

A. Oakland Square no trouble.

If students come to me and ask if I have house in Oakland Square, I say no. I have a house there.

More discussion about students not following the rules with trash.

You look at the streets that are clean, Parkview ave., Oakland square, harket. Property owners living there.

That's all family. Its clean. Everyone knows each other. They keep up with the houses.

A lot of these students pay their rent, they have parties. People pay a buck to drink beer and that's how they raise the money to pay their rent. They have beer blasts and people come from all over the city to come to these parties. Students can get away with it and everyone looks the other way.

It took me 5.5 hours to scrape off all the eggs they threw on Halloween.

You can't say that all students are bad, they're not.

It still boils down to go after the landlord.

If the students aren't doing what they are supposed to, fine the landlords. One of the people that was coming here tonight was Kim Wong or something like that. He owns a lot of property and he takes really good care of his property. He tells them when they go in, there are no parties. He says, if there's going to be a party here, I don't want you here. And that's it. We have never had any problems with his property. Like I said, it's not all the students.

Q. What do you think about increasing homeownership in the hollow or preserving homeownership? What are your views of the hollow?

A. It's beautiful down there. It's clean.

It's families down there.

They had some problems down there but they took care of 'em themselves.

They don't have the problems that we do with garbage and noise.

They had one family down there that was all trouble but they're outta there now.

Q. What are the community strengths of your neighborhood?

A. There's no strengths.

There's no neighborhood. I'm here alone on bouquet street.

You know what they do? We're on a commercialized street. I don't know why they made it commercialized but they have restaurant owners, first of all they own a business there's no where to park so how can you open a restaurant? And then we have a handicap spot that was for my father that I went to the city to argue to get me one and guess what. The restaurant parks their cars there so they can do business. The restaurant should come to our community and say we're going to open a restaurant, we need a meeting together. I mean that's mad mex, that's India garden, that's la fiesta. India garden, I've already been there, the owner can't even come face to face with me, oh call, call. I've left him a number of messages on the machine. The day I see someone parking in my handicap space I'm going to the restaurant and I'm going to make a scene at the restaurant. I will. I mean you can't open a business.

At this point, everyone starts talking at once about cars not getting tagged and how it costs \$1 every time you call 911.

This past semester we had a young lady move into the house next to me. Students have been pretty good in my neighborhood lately...

More discussion about students being loud.

I put the water in the plants and they put the chlorox. The next day I went to water the flower and I see all the foam coming out of the top. What's going on here? Some body must have put soap in. every one was dead. One person was on the street.

Q. what about theft? Are there any issues with theft?

A. Not really.

Not that bad.

In closing, thanks for coming out. Anything else you want to cover?

The crew in the green suits, god bless them. They have picked up the garbage, that's the only thing good to come from Oakland. I mean, they have a lot to clean but at least it looks presentable.

Q. So maybe if there could be something mimicked of what they do in the community?

There's a kappa group from Pitt, they're all female, and there's a sign on my street that says they clean up. Well, they come Sunday, they wear rubber gloves and they got garbage bags and they belong to Kappa and there is a sign that says, 'we're from Kappa, this street is adopted by the Kappas and they clean. The guys that are upstairs [OBID] or wherever, they clean a lot. I mean that's who puts the garbage in the garbage can, they don't move it to curbside but they put it in the can so there's no garbage on the floor. That has helped us a lot too.

In the summer a lot of these students sublet their property and a lot of riff raff comes in so you gotta know that. And there not even Pitt students, some of them are high school students. It's a playground...they don't care, they're just hear for the summer. I think, I'm paranoid, but I think Pitt plants them here to disgust the residents. I've been here over 30 years and they're still doing it. They pay people to come in here and make trouble. They want to wipe us all out of here.

A resident complains about the late hours of the private trash pick up behind the Indian store. It is very loud and they do it very late at night they say.

Student Focus Group

Question 1: What do you like and dislike about living in Oakland?

“We live above CJ’s, on Forbes. We like the proximity to campus, to college, and [the] off-campus apartment feel. We do not like that our landlord is a slumlord and that there is a squatter that lives in our hallway. There are several squatters.”

“I also like the proximity but I dislike the fact that my house was broken into 6 times this summer and my landlord refuses to change the locks and that’s like, why all of our stuff got stolen. And I don’t like the fact that when we started renting the house from him, our rent was 1600/month for 8 people and then he raised it after living there for 2 months to 1750 w/o any prior notice, I don’t know if he’s allowed to do that. (F: What’s the name of your landlord?) Frank Risotto. And um, I don’t like that since the dryer isn’t his, he won’t fix it and it is broken and since it’s not his, he won’t fix it, it was just left in the house. I don’t know if he has to fix it. There’s a lot that I don’t like about him.”

“I don’t like the parking situation, I don’t like street cleaning” (F: Where do you live in Oakland?) The corner of Oakland and Bates.”

“I don’t like how you can’t get a S.Oakland parking pass living on Forbes Ave. you’re not considered S. Oakland and your forced to pay \$75-100 /month to park in a garage.

Question 2: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied w/ your apartment in general? When you moved in what was your apartment like?

Responses:

(laughter)

“We didn’t get to move in until late at night on the night we were supposed to move in because the people that were moving out were still moving out. There was no cleaning done. We had to clean everything.”

“There were like 8 guys that lived in our house before we moved in and they had been evicted by the landlord and they were still there the day we moved in which is fine because we knew them so it was ok but they just like, took their stuff and left. The place was a disaster, it was such a mess, the wooden floors were black, there was stuff all over the walls, all the landlord should’ve had it cleaned or had them clean it. It wasn’t fair that we...my parents saw me move into this house and they were like, ‘you’re paying how much money to live here? They should be paying you to live here, it was a complete disaster. (F: It was not prepared?) “Yeah”

Question 3: If you’ve had complaints, which it sounds like you have, how responsive has your landlord been to your complaints?

“We have several. Part of our (lease) is that we have a fully functional kitchen, which probably everyone has, w/ a stove and all of that. We spent most of September not eating regularly b/c she [landlord] couldn’t hook up the gas because she doesn’t have the blue prints anymore for the building. nShe goes by 2 names either M. Sickler which is what I address my rent to but she introduces herself as Mrs.Gold so I put both of them down on the sheet [demographic form]. We just call her Satan. We spent all of September, my roommates and myself, on the phone w/ the gas company trying to set up a meeting w/ her and them. She felt that it was our responsibility to figure out where the gas comes into the building. So, we finally had to break down around the end of September and get meal plans which we didn’t want to do. Then, so we didn’t have any gas for the stove, then one of the windows in the bathroom broke b/c the windows are on sash weights which we didn’t know. The window collapsed and exploded. The past week its been like 30 degrees outside and we just don’t go in our bathroom and our whole apartment is cold. It was broken for a month. We called her at least once/ week and she didn’t send anyone to fix it until today and that was b/c our parents called and said they would no longer send the rent until it was fixed so she finally sent over this dude and he put in like a piece of garbage bag plastic. What else happened? Our sink is broken and she won’t fix that. When we moved in my father was helping us intall the lights and everthing and he got electrocuted b/c there were all these live wires coming out of thse outlets. And he knows whats he’s doing. What else? Oh yeah, we put a light bulb in one of our lights; it exploded and electrocuted my roommate when he tried to change the bulb. What else? The list goes on and on. We pay for 3 bedrooms. My bedroom is actually, if you were real people not college kids, it’d probably be a dining room but I use it as a bedroom and it has no doors. So my room is this casual breeze hallway [?] between the kitchen and the rest of our apartment and I said to her, I’m like, ‘Well, I’d like doors and she’s like, ‘well you don’t need one off the kitchen and you don’t need one w/ a lock for your room, I’ll send my man over. That was you know 2 months ago so I finally called her and said I’ll get my own door and just take it off my rent and she’s like, ‘Well make sure you get a cheap one and don’t get one w/ a lock b/c that’s extra money. What else? That’s about it.

“The guys that live above us have a ceiling fan and everytime they [would] turn it on it would short circuit our entire building and they called the landlord repeatedly she finally came and charged them b/c she said they must’ve broken it b/c they had beer cans on their coffee table and said they were rowdy and they had a party and so she charged them to fix the fan. Then their refridgerator completely broke down so they called her and were like, ‘we need a fidge.’ So she gave them a mini fridge like for a dorm until all their parents called screaming and threatening to take her to court and then she came in and sent this rickety old man who just sort of jerry rigged their current fridge so at any point its going to die again.”

“That’s the thing w/ repairs, I feel like landlords just send the most random people who probably couldn’t be less qualified like I feel like my little brother might be able to fix stuff better than them. I would just like to see a real repair man instead of like some weirdo that I don’t even know if is affiliated or not.”

“I actually moved back on campus due to a lot of the problems I faced when I did live off campus last year at Mckee Place apartments. When we signed our lease, we had an option to wait a week so we could get new carpeting, the walls painted, and have the apartment cleaned. Now, in doing so, we missed the first week of school. We had to crash w/ friends for the first week and then move in on labor day weekend. However, when we did move in, it turns out they hadn’t done anything to the apartment yet. When we opened the door, there were 3 holes in the wall. One hole was about 6 feet wide and you could see from the hallway into the next bedroom. They had just started to lay the carpet which didn’t really make too much sense to lay the carpet before they fixed the walls and painted it. Basically, when we moved in that day, we placed all our furniture, all of our beds, everything we had in the middle of the room and we had to live around it b/c it took them a month to fix all the walls, to paint the walls, and then once they did paint the walls they got it all over the new carpeting, it wasn’t very high quality carpeting it was just some ugly brown (F:indoor/outdoor?) yeah, and then they charged us for not cleaning the carpets b/c there was paint all over it. We didn’t have to pay rent for the first month but at the same time, we couldn’t live there. Our stove wasn’t hooked up. The refridgerator that we had was from about 1963 where it didn’t have the freezer door on it, it was one big door and then the little silver thing inside.”

“My landlord has been pretty quick in fixing things. (F:Who is your landlord?) AR Building Co. We’ve had no real problems. I wouldn’t call it a major problem but they didn’t tell us when our rent was due, they never sent it down or anything, I guess we were supposed to know, but we were expecting it to be sent down and it never came. We still haven’t gotten an electric bill and we have to pay all of our utilities. (F:Where do you live?) North Neville.

“I live on melwood and I feel that my landlord is responsible. I had one thing broken and he took care of it. I told him and he came the next day. I think it is too expensive, the price is not realistic. (F: how much are you paying per month?) for efficiency, \$470. (F: How much was your security deposit?) security deposit is same as rent, \$470.

Question 4: Have you had problems getting your security deposit back?

“My security deposit is \$1500/3. I rented from her last year and this year again, I don’t know why I did that. She sent me my security deposit from last year’s apartment, which was downstairs, I think in the beginning of September. I got all but I think \$60 back for my share of the carpet cleaning. Out of my 500 I got 434. The money she took out was for carpet cleaning and general repairs, but I am best friends w/ the guys who live in my old place and the carpet still hasn’t been cleaned probably since the building was built. I mean the walls, they [the tenants] just painted which was a violation of our rent contract or whatever but they just painted instead of trying to deal with her. Patched their own walls b/c they were sick of the cracks. She takes money out to do like menial repairs but it never occurs so. Other than that, its not really a big deal.”

“I got it back eventually but it wasn’t within the one month period that it’s supposed to be returned. (F: So, did you have to go through some heartache and struggle to get that back?) A lot of phone calls and it got to the point where it was 1 ½ month late and I needed that security deposit to pay my next month’s rent. It got to the point where voices were raised and she actually hung up on me which was kind of funny b/c I just kept calling back (F: And you guys had cleaned the apartment and everything correctly to get the deposit back?) Everything except the professional cleaning of the carpets.”

Question 5: We want to know about your relationship with your neighbors. Do you live around other students or do you live around homeowners? How do you think you get along w/ your neighbors?

“My neighbors are great. I live around a bunch of kids [students] and then on the left of us is people who we thought were probably not going to like us at all, a single mother and her son who is probably like 15 or so, probably 14 or 15, and she dates a judge or something so we figured they were going to like hate us, b/c we make noise a lot, you know what I mean? But they’ve been really cool; we’ve never gotten into trouble with them. They have a dog that barks a lot.”

Do most of you live in areas that are primarily students?

Everyone nods yes.

Question 6: Do you feel you've ever been discriminated against in housing?

NO

Question 7: Are there any landlords that you know of that you would not rent from? Or are there any that you would rent from? Or recommend?

"I have had 2 really good landlords. Dellius. They are strict if you mess up...They are 2 brothers and one is like the peace-maker and the other will just like, go off. They are really good.

"I've had a good landlord too, Eric Gardner. He gives his cell phone number and responds to everything. He was great."

"I've had [a good] one. Is it Slavadon Machechovich? We called him Mac. He owns 315 Meyran, the one that just got burned in that fire...it was a really nice house; he has a son who was on top of everything...I think he owns some properties on Bates too. He was pretty good."

"Our landlord also has a son and he'll take care of issues like we'll call him but he won't tell her what's going on so she doesn't know like, she'll send him, he'll take care of things. He's a really nice guy and he'll come write things down when something needs fixed but he won't tell her anything we we'll call her or she'll call me and I'll be like, 'you know, this didn't just happen once, I gave this to you son a week ago' and she'd say, 'well you're not renting from him so how would I know?' (F: So, these are family owned properties and communication is...[participant: "poor"].

Question 8: The next topic we want to talk about is safety. In general, do you feel safe in your neighborhood? If not, why? What is about your neighborhood that makes you feel safe or unsafe?

"We've actually had people shot at...and ran through our basement with cops chasing them through our apartments back door to the front door" (F: Do you think these people are students or..?) "The late night O crowd. And then 2 weeks ago, I heard gun shots and then the cops came... when the guy got shot at the O, I don't know when that was, 3 weeks ago? The cops, the police officers came up, they thought I had called in. I had police knocking on my door all night, so that's just not safe."

"The apartments were broken into in our building[cannot understand the rest on the tape]

What about walking through the streets of Oakland at night?

"I don't feel safe. Last year, I was walking, it was only like 6:00 at night, I was right in front of _____, [cannot understand on tape] ... it ended up they were only trying to sell me something but it scared the crap out of me. Even if you go to the library late at night, and you want to walk home...I have to walk through allies to get home (F: Do you try to go in couples and stay together that way?) Yeah...".

"I don't feel that unsafe myself and I don't know if its just that I'm naïve or whatever, like, I really never feel unsafe but my roommate was attacked maybe like 2 months ago, like it was like early in the morning too and the guy tried to rob her. She didn't have anything with her so like, but they hit her in the stomach and then she doubled over and they kned her in the face. Its scary and I don't know why it doesn't have an effect on how I feel about walking places or whatever. (F: **Do you feel it's well lit?**) Um, not really, I guess, the most well lit part of around where I live, I live on Meyran, is that parking lot between Atwood and Meyran that everyone walks through. Its pretty well lit, that's the best well lit area there. When it comes to our house, we were broken into 5 times in 2 weeks this summer. They came in through a window that had come off the tracks and we called our landlord who refused to fix it b/c he said it was our fault, somehow it was our fault. So, the first time he came in through the window and just little things were missing, I mean they didn't take anything big, just like cell phones, jars of change, then they left. They came back another day through the window. And we weren't sure if maybe we just misplaced stuff or if the window blew open so finally we got the window fixed but before that they came in one more time and stole of our keys, our house keys. So then they had the key to our backdoor and front door. The next time they came back, they came through the back door and then they tried to come back through the front door also. (F: Does your landlord provide padlocks?) No. We asked to have our locks changed and he said he'd have to charge us for it b/c it's our fault our keys had gotten stolen. And he said it would take while to get around to it. So, I went to the store and bought a deadbolt and tried to change that... I ended up breaking the whole thing anyway...it took them so long to getting around to fixing all the things that needed fixed that we were seriously robbed 5 times. I feel safe now because we have all our locks fixed.

At this point, tape ended and was off for a few minutes before being turned over. The responses missed were about car theft. There were several incidents reported of car theft.

Question 9: What stores and services do you feel have a strong presence in Oakland? What stores have a weak presence or are absent?

“There is no where to buy produce.”

F: What else? Is clothing an issue? Would you like to see Old Navy or Gap or...?

“I think there’s too much open space on Forbes. I live on Forbes so I see this every day, there is just like this army or dirty squatters. Since the Beehive closed down, the X, all this stuff is closing down, they just break into these abandon buildings.... they need to put retail or thrift shop or I don’t know... something. This is a main strip on a college campus they need to have something some cool little shop or something. I don’t like to walk out of my place and trip over some dirty hippy. (F: **So you think there are a lot of squatters in Oakland?**) Oh, there’s an army. (F: **Where are these squatters living?**) My hallway, above the X.”

“Our building has a basement...we will have to go in there sometimes if we need like a phone line installed or if the gas company comes.. and we’ll go in there and there will be a bunch of scary homeless people yelling at us.”

“I would love a Dunkin’ Donuts!”

“I feel like retail would be nice here but I think it takes away from the college atmosphere. I just don’t want...not that Oakland is like so different or whatever but I just don’t want to see Oakland overrun by like Gaps and Banana Republics. It would be really cool if some cool little stores opened with like eclectic neat stores. That would be awesome.”

Question 10: Are there any other pressing issues? Do you have any other comments about living in Oakland? What about Transportation?

“The whole bus thing is awesome. I worked downtown last year and it was really easy [to get there and back].”

Frazier Street Area Focus Group (South Oakland)

Q. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in Oakland? Why or why not?

We need more school around here that our children can go to instead of being sent out of Oakland when there’s already school in Oakland that they could go to. And if they don’t meet a certain criteria for the school board they have to go either to the hill district or Greenfield when there’s a school right there on 5th Ave. I don’t understand that.

I would like to see the neighborhood be cleaner than what it is. I really am upset that the college students are across the Blvd. [Blvd. of the Allies] now. I’m tired of picking up cans and bottles and sweeping; they are so lazy they set their garbage out and the neighborhood looks horrible. I think there should be some way that the new people that you’re bringing in be screened better than what they are. I also would like to see improvement on the sidewalks. There used to be different types of programs and I’m not talking loan programs, I’m talking grant programs where you could get your sidewalk done for free. You have a lot of elderly people, blind people old people. Years ago, there was a law. ... Mayor Calaguiri, even on your property you could not let your bushes or trees grow out cause that’s when the robberies was taking place. And they could hide behind them. Now you can’t walk on Dawson without going into the middle of the street because it’s on the sidewalk. It’s coming out of the yard. And I mean you can just walk down the street. The garbage men come, they drag the trash in the middle of the street.

Q. Some people feel there should be 2 garbage pick up days in Oakland not just one.

There should.

When I had a complaint with the mayor, I live on Wakefield St. my complaint with the mayor was a long time ago when we had meetings when they tore down Holmes school. What are they going to put in place of Holmes school? And I think that’s when the deterioration started coming in Oakland. Our children did not have any place to put all that extra energy. Then we had a building that we were going to have right there on the corner and they sold that to someone else. We have gotten to a point where the political status here has come in money. Money takes over everything. Money has come into place where they don’t have anything about our children. Money has taken over and our children are the ones that are being captive in here. So, I think what everyone is trying to say is we have to have something where it brings something back into South Oakland for our children. 10 or 15 years ago when they tore down all of these places I think there was something where the college kids were only supposed to rent the other

side of the Blvd. they were not supposed to come over to this side. Now I can't remember just what date it was that that was pending. ..we on the other side of the Blvd. got caught in the place where they signed where Pitt could come over to the other side. And that's when the landlord's came and rented to them and live somewhere else. They don't care anything about us as the people who live in Oakland and have to put up with all of this. It must've started in the 1980s. Just recently when I was talking to the mayor at the Shrine my thing was we have a bunch of bushes and groundhogs and everything else down there so we're still fighting with him 'cause when Joanne Fountain had the children and Mayor Caligiuri had a lot of things planned when he died and down it went. The children from Oakland had a summer job. And that was one of their summer jobs. To clear up everything and they got paid by the city. Now Mayor Murphy has the city workers paid to do that and as far as I'm concerned the workers don't do anything for the city. They don't do anything for their pay. And we are caught in the middle here and I try to tell the mayor that. We're caught in the middle here and in Oakland and we have all this rubbish, all this stuff going on. Now we are supposed to pay these taxes which are going up all the time. We are not getting anything for our taxes. Our assessments are terrible. I'm appealing mine. I don't whether Oakland planning committee [OPDC] can do anything about some of this stuff going on but I think everyone here will tell you that's what's going on. Our children are being hostage here because of the fact that they have no where else, they have to go out. They don't have anything in S. Oakland close to their home. They don't have a building or something where they put all that energy where they can go have an art class and dance class and music class and something else to keep them home, where they won't have to go anywhere else.

And since you're into building and planning... look at the field house. The field behind it belongs to the city. You can make it larger. The floor are filthy we can't even hold a community meeting in there. The smell is filthy. Improve that. That alone would help the kids. Put up basketball courts. All we're getting is Pitt, Pitt, Pitt. Pitt should be out in Plum borough, in the woods somewhere. I'm sick of it.

(I know that Pitt is developing up behind the stadium and they're trying to pull them out)

Next to the field house is an open lot. Extend that building out. Make it nice looking. Clean them floors. It stinks in there. Pitt's trying to take that over every time you look up. I have asked them to improve that field. It's a big brown hole full of water. Anything the people over here have, Pitt wants. Its' the whole neighborhood and I'm deteriorating with it.

Q. I picked up on a strength, that this is a family oriented community. What other strengths are there?

Our church community is really nice. It does a lot for the community and it's nice orientated here. All of us that are here, we know each other in some way or another because our faith is strong. Our faith has always been strong, that's the one thing that's better than anything else in the world is our faith in Jesus. And that keeps us going. But we still need Oakland Planning people to give us some kind of insight on how we can get say, the field house and some other things closer for our children.

And if they really wanted to help us there should be some type of program in our neighborhood. They [Pitt] should offer our kids computer classes. Do something for our kids. Keep them out of the streets.

We need something state of the art. The field house is nice but the field house is over...I'm not going to say how old it 'cause that'll say how old I am but it was here when I was a kid and it has not improved or changed. They put Dan Marino's name on Frazier St. and I'd rather they take it off and put it back to Frazier field because he has done nothing for the community. We definitely need a facility in the heart of South Oakland that can service our children, that can offer everything.

Q. Do you think that can be rehabbed?

It can be rehabbed but it can also be extended. I just think we need a state of the art new building. Why can't we have that? We've been here as citizens of Oakland for the majority of our lives which are many many years. We deserve to have a facility. With Pitt being the way it is, not only Pitt, but think about all the colleges we have, 7 right here in Oakland? You have Carlow, Chatham, CMU, Duquesne, you have enough resources right here in this area to service that. All the other areas they have a facility. Make it like a Boys & Girls club where the Pitt students volunteer their time. I want meaningful activities. I want computer class, language class. Let me tell you about Frick. Frick has a quota according to race. They have so many slots for Afro- American, so many slots for international and this and that but the Afro- American slot is the least amount. They do not want the afro Americans w/n the community to go into Frick. It is harder for us to get our children in than any other group which is unfair. Why are our children not entitled to a quality education w/n their community? That I know to be a fact. In the book it tells you. We must leave slots open for new people and people moving in but what about the children of the parents that dedicate their lives in the community and pay the school taxes. What about their children? We need a new facility to service our children which they do deserve to have. The children that are here right now. Our kids

have nothing to do. The field is messed up they can't really go down there and do anything. They need a building they can go to all year round and they deserve that building. Oakland Development can do it, they have the money, the resources, all they have to do is petition for it. We need to have something like that for our children. We should bring in more business. Like a nice community store because... why should our children always have to cross the Blvd. to get something that they should be able to get right here in their community. Cause we do pay taxes. Pitt takes everything away from us. They just take and take and take. And don't pay any taxes. It's time for Pitt to give back to the community.

Q. What kinds of diversity do you see in your community? How do you see the different races and ethnicities getting along?

I have no problem with the different ethnic groups in Oakland.

Q. Do you notice a lot of Hispanics or Asians in this area?

No. It's mostly students.

Q. Is there cohesiveness among the different groups?

We're all separate.

That's one thing I like about Oakland, the different groups. The only problems is we're all separate. Like, there are Chinese people who live in S. Oakland and there are a lot of Muslim people who live in S. Oakland, well I guess they're Arabs or whatever but we're all separate. We have African American in one, but we don't communicate. And I would like to see that. And even with building a building and a center even like with religion, it would be wonderful for our children to learn all religions. If we had a place where all those ethnic groups could get together and communicate together I think it would be wonderful.

Q. Do you feel there's a strong connection between your neighborhood and the rest of Oakland?

...will push us further out. We're homeowners and we don't intend to leave. I'll go back to that community center, I think that it's very necessary. How can you bring a people together? Go to any neighborhood around the city, you'll see a community center. I totally believe in state of the art. We need a place to educate our children other than the church and our school. Schools can't handle all the diversity that's going on with our children. Neither can the church. We need other outlets for our children to get to. Last year our daughter had to go to trees hall to a program up there, for a summer program.

People start talking about Lawn Street and programs at the community center.

Q. Have you ever heard of Oakland Community Council?

Years ago.

Are they still in existence? I thought they all died out.

In the past, city council was here for that. That was years and years ago.

Q. How do you feel about increasing and sustaining homeownership in your neighborhood? Are there long term renters that want to buy homes?

I've talked to people who say they want to buy houses.

I looked at the house on Frazier and saw the floor plans and everything and it was like \$89,000. you had to have lived there for 99 years and...

If someone wanted to own a home there are different programs out there you can work with.

[A woman tells her story about going to classes for a week, paid 50, saw the floor plans and then never heard back from anyone. They were supposed to work with me to get me credit report cleaned up and it was a done deal.]

You could bring someone in that could inform people on the classes. I think what happens is people look at house and the first thing they say is look at this, it's out of our reach not understanding that there are programs that you can go through. You do not have to pay that amount of money yet you can purchase that home. It saddens me that we have people that live here and they allow so many other people to come into the community and buy homes and then they wonder, how did this person get his home and why didn't I qualify? When in actuality you do qualify, you just don't know about the programs... UPMC gives that grant to people that work there. I assume there's people in Oakland that also work for UPMC that could get that \$5000 but the important thing though is they need to be informed. We need to have someone here to let people know that there are programs that they do qualify for and that these homes are not out of their reach.

Q. So do you think we could do like a home buying workshop at the church and have people come in to talk and have pictures of properties and have people from the banks there and people from Fannie Mae.

Not just Fannie Mae but also we have the Oakland Redevelopment downtown on Smithfield st. with Lamont. We also have the one through Dollar Bank right here in Oakland and all of them are very informative and they are free and you do not have to pay any money to go the classes and you qualify for a certificate and you get an A-1 credit rating and they follow you all the way through. They let these people know that you are eligible and you can get this. I try to tell people that it's within your reach but sometimes you are misinformed. You don't know about it. The first thing you see is that it's \$89,000 and you're turned off. I think the literature should be reworked to say that there are special grants available to reduce the price. Because that's what sticks in their mind, \$89,000. It's like they're trying to erase the word grant completely. All they know is loans, loans, and more loans. And I know there's some grants out there.

[Explanation of the façade grant.]

Someone asks about fencing and sidewalks.. grant to cover?

Q. Are there any other barriers to home ownership?

Income.

Q. Is there more rental or more home ownership?

Rental.

Q. Are there a lot of seniors that own homes in this area?

Yes.

Q. Do you think any of those seniors would like to see their homes so they can move somewhere else or live in, I mean is it too much to take care of?

Someone asks about senior affordable housing. "OPDC has Parkview Manor"

You have seniors that may want that affordable housing because maybe their income isn't as high, taking care of their utilities and everything. They could see their house and move into a nice complex or something.

Ms. Moore on Dawson St. wants to sell. Pitt made her offer. I told her to contact OPDC because her house is big and can be made into a duplex. Reconstruct it and keep it a home for people in the community as opposed to allowing the students in.

Those landlords are charging those students a lot of money. They have to go 3 in an apartment in order to pay that 5-600 dollars.

And then each of them has a car, that's another problem.

Q. Do you know of any properties that you're really worried about? Maybe something abandoned or an absentee landlord not keeping up the property?

3753 Frazier.

The big blue one on the corner is vacant. Kids are starting to come through there.

Q. Do you feel that the proposed Mon Fayette expressway is going to have an impact on your community?

[There is some discussion about what will actually be affected. Concerns include: traffic, the shrine, taking away parts of Wakefield].

Q. What do you feel the Cost of Living is like, living in Oakland? People mentioned not having a grocery store in past focus groups. What about buses? What about parking?

People mention that there is not good bus service.

It's [parking] ridiculous. You've got 3 or 4 kids in a building and each of them has a car.

I saw a girl the other day park her car and get on the bus.

A lot of people from different neighborhoods come here and park their car so they can take the [Pitt] shuttle.

Q. What kind of business development would you like to see?

A grocery store, a clothing store.

North Oakland has a Giant Eagle.

A convenience store in South Oakland.

I wouldn't feed a dog out of that. Do you know they have mice running around the aisles. The hot dogs could be turning red on one side and I wouldn't feed a dog out of there.

Q. Do you know if section 8 does anything to help you get into home ownership? Do they have a program that they promote?

It's some type of program that you put money into escrow to help build money. I've been on section 8 since 1995. I know there was a house on Childs and the landlord did not want to go through section 8 at all. And she was charging \$700 for a 2 bedroom where my mortgage is about 1/2 of that but she would not even look into doing section 8.

If they rent to college kids they can rent to section 8.

You have to be under a certain income guideline. If you make too much... the more money you make, the more they raise it. For a 2 bedroom unit section 8 can't ask for anything more than \$330. For 3 bedrooms they can't ask for more than \$500. My house that I'm living in now, my landlord decided that he couldn't keep up with the house so he took himself off of section 8 and left me with rent for \$550. He lives in Phoenix. So you figure, my house is a mess but that's whole different... Every time an inspector comes in they can find anything wrong with the place. The landlord has to fix it w/n 2 weeks and if he doesn't then they're not getting paid for it.

Section 8 is trying to offer decent housing to people and they have raised their prices. That I know for a fact too. They're paying the landlords more. They're paying as much as \$700 for a 3 bedroom place. That all comes from section 8. you have to look at everything as pros and cons. If you have a place and it's section 8 and they may want you to pay half the rent. Well if you still have to pay \$300 and the place is actually worth maybe \$700, you're still getting a bargain. You've got a decent home, you're meeting the guidelines. Sometimes landlords are misconstrued, they think, once you approved for section 8, you basically have a decent place to live. They think most people living there are welfare or no income. That's the misconception. These programs are trying help everyone have a better standard of living. For those who don't have a lot of money. Those people here kind of know about that and understand it. Maybe they should have a program where they educate landlords. That's one of the things you need to do. You have a program for homeowners and educate them to the program so they understand what they're doing.

Q. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Why or why not?

I feel safe.

I walk the streets all the time.

I lived up there on Mckee and I walked home all the time.

I don't sleep on no body but I feel safe.

Q. Any other comments?

Garbage collection. I think people need to be fined because I think it is an ordinance about putting out your garbage before garbage pick up. And I know on Parkview it's definitely being abused.

[Explanation of bag project, which included information about trash pick up.]

They drag the bags and the tear and whatever falls out, they just leave it...they used to have a broom on the side of the truck. I bet they don't leave Squirrel Hill looking like that. I bet you they don't. And Oakland is good for field mice. And if I see a mouse I'm going. I kid you not. I'm going.

We live in Oakland, and there's a pool right over there, and our children have to pay to swim. I have a huge problem with that. All the money we spend in taxes? Our kids can't go to Shenley pool and swim for free? Why not?

Parkview Area Focus Group

Q. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with living in Oakland? Why?

Satisfied. It's convenient. The park is close. There are some things that I don't like. I don't like some of the people that come in and don't take care of the property. People that buy home for their children and friends come and live with them.

They buy homes and put a bunch of college kids in, it's like a dormitory.

Transportation is all directions. There are no stores. There is no grocery store.

The Giant Eagle used to be here. We heard there was too much stealing and that's why it left. I heard they wouldn't come here because taxes are too high. They weren't making money, that's why they left.
I don't like slum landlords.

On our street, everyone takes good care of their property except 2. The few that are renting, there's garbage. Everything is a mess. They take their garbage out 2 weeks before it's supposed to go out.
We love Oakland.

The giant eagle closed because there was a lot of stealing among the employees.

The quality of life in S. Oakland has deteriorated. Shenley park has been taken over the the populous and is being used as a daycare center. It's an open air daycare center. Access of students has increased. From the Blvd. down has become a dormitory area. Pitt buses block off-street parking. The university has done little to improve area. They've taken advantage of but are not asking community for support or supporting community.

We're all homeowners and we keep our houses immaculate. The ordinance laws have been here. If the laws aren't enforced what can we do? In Toronto, they have an inspector for the neighborhood. He makes sure people take care of their homes. If not, they send a truck of guys to do it, send him the bill and if he doesn't pay it he goes to jail. Politicians will not enforce for fear of not being reelected.

Q. Do you find a lot of ethnic/racial diversity in your neighborhood? How do the different races interact?

Our street has all different kinds of races. We all get along. We have no problems at all. There is Asians, Blacks, Whites, Italians, Polish, [Cato/Ward corner]
There is lots of diversity. It's always been that way.

Q. Do you think there needs to be more homeowners in your neighborhood? If so, how can we attract more homeowners?

They way Oakland is right now, it doesn't attract families. People come for school, work at hospital. Young families won't move here. There's nothing for kids to do. There's no grade school because there's not enough people here. It's not attractive. It looks like hell.

Our City council man? I haven't seen him since he was elected. Oakland is dirty. For example, the entry from Bates St., Those 5 ugly houses that are all ripped up. Someone is not doing their job. I used to go to code enforcement meetings. A total waste of time. Here's my suggestion, give the garbage men a shovel and a broom b/c after they come through the neighborhood it looks like a tornado hit. That's the biggest problem. I own a property on Ward. I go there to pick up paper 2 or 3 times a week. I could go every day and do that. Why don't they give them a shovel and a broom so when they drop something they can pick up and put it and the truck? That's a simple little thing that would make a big difference.

Dumpsters are overflowing with garbage. Pick up the dumpsters more often or provide more.

Oakland isn't Oakland from years past. There used to be kids everywhere. Not anymore. There are no schools here. Families don't want to be here. It's all students. Not that they're all bad. We have no problems on our street. They used to have a sidewalk inspector. You had to repair broken sidewalks.

Coltart was really cleaned up. All the trash was picked up and all the trash was taken off the porch. The upper part was terrible. I don't know what happened there. We need more of that.

The city is just waiting for this area of the city to be economically viable to buy. At the bottom the hill, there are 5-8 new building that employee people. They said they were going to clean up Frazier and install transit. The city just wants Oakland to deteriorate. Then it's easier for Pitt to buy the property. We have fought to maintain ourselves. The city has done nothing to support us. Our city councilman is from the S. Side. We are not represented by anyone. We have no representation in council. Oakland is broken up into 3 districts. We as a community can't do anything. Get on the back of the Univ. of Pittsburgh and tell them to come in here and take care of their business. The Univ. patrol doesn't come into this area. They drop their garbage and beer cans. We used to have a police station. We have 80.000 students and no police station. The school has been gone for a decade and ½. There is no elementary school.

Q. Do you feel there are problems w/ absentee landlords in Oakland? Do you think there are responsible landlords in Oakland?

They're never here, they just collect the rent.

They bring bags of garbage from their homes.

We try to approach them. We try to get their plate numbers..

I live on Childs. St. and up at the end, there's garbage everywhere not even in cans. I don't know if anyone complains. A house is boarded up. Whoever has it should be made to do something. There could be rats.

Louisa and Mckee apartments are disgusting. There are overflowing dumpsters. The city steps are littered with broken bottles. Perfect example of absentee landlords. The City is derelict in their duties. We're paying taxes. If it takes every week, send someone. Cite landlords, fine them, take them to court. Those meetings are waste of time. They all want their titles and respect but they don't do their jobs. If city did their part, maybe the neighbors would sweep up. It all comes down to the city. We have no representation.

[A good landlord in the room is pointed out]. The other landlords they don't live here.

This is not a family oriented community anymore. It's all students now. This is Pitt's responsibility also. They should have their police here.

Q. How do you feel about off campus housing behind the stadium to pull them out of here?

The property you're building is for grad students.

I'm angry w/ the students' lack of responsibility. But it's not all the students. It's the city.

It took them [the city] 12 years to tear down a house that was set on fire twice.

The City has gone into Garfield and cleaned it up. It doesn't care about this community. Nothing will happen until the city does something. The community can't go in and buy properties and rehab them. 5 years ago we had kids on the corner selling drugs. The city finally came in and arrested them. A lot of what happens in the community is the responsibility of the community but they can't do things themselves. They need the support of the city government. They should hold slum lords accountable. We can't do it ourselves. If the city cared about Oakland they wouldn't let them put in the Mon Fayette expressway in our back yard. They've written us off 2 decades ago.

Greenfield gets everything they want. They built that swimming pool. It's a joke it's so small. It's not a community pool; they bus kids in.

This will never turn into a family community again.

Q. What about attracting homeowners through programs like UPMC's home purchase grant?

The real estate value of some of these properties is so high but the properties are deteriorating. You have to pay a lot of money but you have to pay another 80,000 to make it livable. No parking, no back yard. Oakland is unique. It doesn't lend itself to attract people like the suburbs do.

Q. What about the Carnegie museum and the park and all of these great things around?

That's what's nice about Oakland. It's close to everything.

The area itself is fine. You need an entity to come in and rehab. The houses in this area are multiple dwellings.

They are ideal for apartments. Holmes place as supposed to be family housing. Its housing for people that are single or professional, which is great. People find Oakland a very attractive place because of the proximity to everything.

Oakland is the hub of the city. I know that. That's why I stay here. We can't do anything about the condition of the housing unless it's done on a broad scale. Why doesn't Univ. of Pittsburgh buy property rent and it out themselves? That would improve the quality of housing in the neighborhood. Control the students who live there.

There are a lot of people who have tried to rehab. But they're huge homes. They are not for 1 or 2 people. The housing stock is great but it takes a lot of money to renovate big houses.

Q. Do you think seniors in your area need assistance in up keeping the outside of their homes?

That is a great need. The children aren't necessarily available to help their parents. A lot of the housing has to have painting done. Seniors have no way of doing that. There should be a database available that you can use to find good contractors.

Q. Have you heard of our façade program?

I have used it. I had a good experience.

[explanation of grant]

How do we know about these programs?

Q. Do you know about reverse mortgages? (Explanation by another participant.)

Big money talks. And the small guy walks. They don't care anymore. Pitt is big. They want people out of here.

When you see they're crying for money, that's when new buildings go up. Frick fine arts buildings, Pitt took it.

That was Mrs. Shenley's property. The stipulation was the public could use it.

Pitt isn't in a very good position. It's an urban school. Property is expensive. They should learn from Temple and work with the community rather than antagonize them.

Q. Do you know of seniors in the neighborhood that want to sell their homes? Do more people want to sell or stay?

Most people want to stay.

This is their home. This is what they're used to. The people that are still here want to stay.

Q. What do you think about the COL in Oakland? What about not having a grocery store?

Most of us own our homes.

You have to drive to Greenfield or S.Side for groceries. It's inconvenient but I don't think it affects the COL, I think if you wanted to rent in Oakland, it'd be more expensive than other parts of the city. If you own a home I don't think it affects you.

It's too expensive to shop in Oakland compared to Greenfield or S.Side. since it's a college community. You go to the corner store and pay \$2 for a gallon of milk and you could get it for \$1.50 at the grocery.

Oakland is no longer a community, it's a place where people live. You have fast food and beer joint. When we grew up there were restaurants, little stores, 5 and 10, there were places to go, things to do. Everything now is geared to the students.

Q. Do you feel there is a strong church or social connection in your neighborhood? Why or why not?

Yes.

We could call on each other with a problem.

There used to be a synagogue and there used to be a Jewish community here.

Q. Do you have issues w/ transportation or parking?

The sticker parking solved a lot of problems. Now the people that work in Oakland can't just park on your street. The sticker parking has been a huge help.

It only works if you allow a car per sticker. The visitor's pass sits in people's windows for days. That's never enforced.

They enforced it with me.

I've gotten tickets when I've had the sticker in the window.

Q. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?

We had a lot of problems before. If it's late at night we don't walk. It was worse before. There were gangs. Now it's quieter.

Q. Who do you think is doing the graffiti?

Don't know.

They're starving artists who don't know what to do with themselves.

International Student Focus Group

The answers to the questions are not direct quotes; the comments are paraphrased.

Q. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in Oakland? What issues are important to you?

I am really satisfied. I am here with wife and child. Everything is close, it's very secure so my wife can go out and walk with the baby. We are close to the supermarket. It is convenient. You don't need a car to get around.

When I lived in Oakland, I did not have a car. I didn't need one. Everything is here, supermarket, restaurants, bars, museums... everything is really close. Once I bought a car, I didn't need everything to be so close so that's when I moved from Oakland. For people who don't have cars, Oakland is a really great place to be.

Why I stay in Oakland, is because I don't have a car. There are a lot of old houses here. There are cockroaches. There is garbage everywhere. It's hard to have so many people, mostly students, in such a small place. There should be some law about how the building should be and what the landlord has to provide. They took care of the cockroaches in one apartment but didn't think about the other apartments. If you have a house with 6 units, you have to exterminate all. If you take care of one apartment, after 1 or 2 weeks the cockroaches will come to mine. I think it is really hard to find a nice place in Oakland. I moved here a month ago and I was looking around at places. I don't need anything that big or luxurious, just something comfortable, like an efficiency or studio. I

wanted something clean, nice and located not too far from the university. Some of the buildings were in very bad shape.

Q. How did you find your apartment?

Luck. It was a house owned by a landlord. He moved out and owned one house and four beside. He did some development outside Pittsburgh so he decided to move and sell his houses. I moved in December of 2000 and he sold my house one week later and the person bought it as an investment. They (the original reality company) had great infrastructure for taking care of the houses. The landlord was great. You called him and he sent trucks and people and he had a lot of equipment to take care of everything. The new people who own the houses are individuals. They just hire people when something needs repaired. So you don't have anyone to really go to in order to solve problems.

Q. Have you ever had a landlord you've never met?

No

Our landlord is very good. It is a reality company. If something needs fixed, and I call, they come the same day. I came to Pittsburgh in Sept. and I was lucky enough to find an apartment owned by the university. I can't afford it for long b/c it's quite expensive. It's difficult to find an apartment because there are so many hidden costs that the international students don't know about.

Q. Has anyone had problems with security deposits or costs that you weren't aware of?

You are told you have to pay for gas and electricity separately. You are told it will be \$50-\$60/ month when it's really \$150 or \$200. You tend to plan your budget when you come as a student. You don't expect unexpected expenses. Maybe there should be some sort of consensus on the maximum expenses on a house. They told me security deposit is 2 months rent plus one month in advance. It's would've been a total of 3 months rent. But because I had a co-signer, I only had to put one month.

Q. Have you ever had problems with your landlord? Like not fixing things? Do you feel like you've ever been discriminated against?

I called some companies about apartments. They asked me where I am from when I told them I was from Eastern Europe they said 'Oh, we have no apartments and they are expensive.' Then I asked a friend to call and they said they have apartments available. This is just after one day. I think they thought because I am from Eastern Europe I don't have the money to pay for an apartment.

Q. Has anyone had like subtle discrimination where the landlord hasn't done anything or said anything but there's an attitude?

Some of my friends have had landlords tell them they don't have money to repair things. But I think rent is kind of high in this area. How do they not have money to fix things?

Q. Are many of you renting from people who live in the community and own houses or is it more like a company?

Someone from the neighborhood.

Q. Do you feel there are a lot of students or families, maybe your own, that would rather own than rent?

It depends how long you want to stay. If you are going to stay 5 or 7 years you may think about wanting to buy. If you are student, how can you show the bank that you have a high enough income to buy? If you are an international student, you don't have a long credit history. That's something we don't have in my country.

Q. Do you think your neighborhood stays clean year round, why or why not?

I don't think they should only collect trash once a week. I try to keep my trash in my house until the night before trash day. Many people put their trash out all week. During the winter, it's not a problem because it will freeze up. But in summer the smell is so bad, you can't go out of house. Maybe in the summer they could pick up twice a week or tell people not to put it out other than the night before.

Also, when there's so many students are crammed into one house, they create a lot of trash. There are usually more people living in the building than it was designed for. There is an insufficient number of bins for all the people creating trash. Even if students do care, the landlords don't provide facilities to store their trash.

The cans outside are so small, you see these blue bags floating everywhere. At big apartment buildings, they have dumpsters and you don't see trash everywhere. The owner of the apartments should provide enough trash cans for how many people live there.

Q. There are a lot of different ethnicities in Oakland. How do you feel about how the diff. ethnicities interact together? Are people separate or do they blend together?

In Oakland, people are not too separate. If you go to suburbs, you'll see the separation.

Q. Do you connect with the international student groups? Do you find them helpful? Do you get a lot of information from them?

There is not one student group, there is a different group for different countries.

There is a chapter of the Society for Hispanic Engineers. We brought it to University of Pittsburgh. One of the things we try to help with is, when you come here, you're thrown into a big city and you don't know where to go. I went to the housing resource center and they are very helpful. They tell you not to move to certain areas and you don't have any idea so they are helpful. They tell you what landlords to avoid.

Q. Do you feel safe in Oakland?

I feel safe where it is well lit.

When I am around the business district, I feel safe. As you get further away from them, I don't feel so safe.

Q. What about safety in the way of theft? Has anyone been robbed or anything?

I feel Oakland is safer compared to other places further from the university. My wife is going to join me in May so I'm looking for a suitable apart. I know this area because there are a lot of people around, I feel safe and don't have to worry about my wife and family when I'm at the university. Somehow you feel safe if there are more people around.

Some of my friends told me S. Oakland is the worst place to live. They said it's not safe and neat. After I've lived here for 4 months, I think it is ok. At night when I come back to my apartment, I feel safe. Now I'm looking for a nice apartment for my wife and family for when they come here. I will find a nice 1 bedroom for my family. One week ago I found a one bedroom. The landlord asked me to pay \$25 application fee. He didn't provide me the apartment. I know he didn't do anything with the \$25. He said it was to check my credit status. I told him I didn't have credit.

If you tell them you don't have credit, why do they charge you to check it?

He had already decided who could have the apartment. He took my application fee and didn't spend it.

One more thing about safety: There is not enough information about where to live in this area. I called a friend and she told me where I should live. I can't afford to pay to come here to look around. There should be information on where to go and what to check out.

The last week of Aug. they have something for international students.

What about if you come in September or January?

You can look on the internet and see pictures of beautiful houses but you get here and it's a dumpster. It says it is new, maybe it was new in 1901.

One thing they need, the three hotels you find here are over \$100/night. The University doesn't provide any temporary housing for graduate students.

When I was here for the summer, I stayed in the towers for 2 weeks. My department put me in touch with them when I was coming here to interview.

There's the Pittsburgh Visitors Bureau. They try to put people in touch with families here. But we don't find out about it until after we are here. I was lucky I had people in the department to help me out. When I came here to start school, one of them put me up in their apartment for 2 weeks.

It seems the university should help accommodate international students because they know what a big change it is coming here. They could provide a room for 2 weeks or some kind of short term housing. There's also the issue of furniture. In my country if you rent an apartment it is fully furnished. When I was looking at apartments, I was surprised when they were empty. For the first month you're just starting to see how things work. It would be very helpful if the university could provide short term housing.

When you come to this country as an international student, you have lots of other things to take care of. After landing here, you can't just go out and look for housing. You have to register yourself, get a bank account, get a credit card, register for classes, there are so many things to do. You need time. You can't just jump on whatever [apartment] comes first.

We rely on students that are currently in the program. We have a group of students that volunteer when international students come in. so they may put them up for a couple weeks.

I was told the housing resource center was the place to go. I was lucky. My boss told me to just stay in my hotel for a week and find an apartment and I didn't have to come to work. I spent the first week searching. What would have I done with out that?

We have an organization for graduate students coming from India. What we are doing now is approaching each and every school and asking for the list of students coming from India and sending them e-mails before they come to USA. That way, they can contact us and we can help accommodate them. Its all students that do this.

Something that could be done is if you have a list of landlord or properties that will be available when the school year starts, if you could get that out before the year starts that would be helpful.

The housing resource center has that. Maybe it needs to be promoted.

Q. How do you fee about business development in Oakland?

I know they had tried to have a Giant Eagle but it closed. They wanted a bigger parking lot but the community was really against it.

That kind of doesn't make sense. The point of having a grocery store here is to serve the community and the people who don't have cars. If they had cars, they could drive elsewhere and wouldn't need a grocery store. If they have a car, they don't need a store here.

Q. Do you think C.O.L is higher? It can sometimes cost more if you're eating out a lot or buying food from the convenience store.

The 54C runs regularly and hop on that and go to the strip district which makes it easy to buy groceries.

Q. Any other business development?

I would like a cinema.

Q. Is there anything else you want to bring up?

Most of the properties you see are falling apart and are old. I think there is a lack of investment. A lot people buy the houses for the income. A house is like a car. You can't buy a car and keep it for 100,000 miles without changing the oil.

Landlords know there are enough (undergrad) students who don't care what their properties look like and so they'll always be able to rent to them. They don't care about renovating. But there are also a whole lot of people, myself included, that would love to move back to Oakland but there are just not nice places available.

There is a market for the graduate students and a market for the undergraduates. I am a graduate student and I am not going to move my family into an apartment that's falling apart.

Q. Do you feel there are could be graduate students who would want to buy?

Depends on how long they are planning on being here. .

I know graduate students who have bought houses in Swissvale but not in Oakland because they've never found a nice enough place. I think there is a market, if the quality of housing were better.

If they had a nice building like there is down here for graduate students they would be happy to live here. It would be convenient since they are here all day long.

South Oakland, behind Windham Gardens is terrible. There are some places that would be close to where I work but the buildings are terrible.

If you are buying houses and renovating them, it would be best to attack it a block at a time or a row at a time because even if there was a nice place but the houses around it were run down I wouldn't live there. It's not just the single property.

If you could do something like Bouquet Gardens for graduate students, that would be very nice. There are a lot of graduate students who would love to live in something like that.

When I went to Germany for one month to study the apartment was very good and clean. And it had furniture.

Before I came here, I was told to bring furniture. I though it was not necessary but then I came here and saw there was no furniture.

If you are only going to be here for a year, you don't want to buy a whole bunch of furniture. I was lucky, someone gave me furniture.

If you have to buy furniture, what do you do with it after you leave? Sell it?

Q. How do you see yourself getting along with your neighbors? Do you live around other students?

When I lived in Oakland, I know all my neighbors. It was a mix of students and residents, people who had gone to Pitt and now they have jobs and are staying in Pittsburgh for awhile. It was great. Now that I live in Shadyside I don't know any of them. I do miss that. I would move back if I could find a nice place.

Q. What about employment?

We work as part of our [graduate] programs.