THE ROLE OF THE FRONT YARD
IN A TRADITIONAL
URBAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD

by
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Abstract

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The Role of the Front Yard in a Traditional Urban American Neighborhood

The front yard in a traditional urban American neighborhood is privately owned, but publicly experienced. For this reason, the front yard can be thought of as semi-public space. Neighborhood residents create or place ‘signs of caring’ in this semi-public space. Signs of caring are visual, spatial and practical codes that signal care and commitment by neighborhood residents to an audience of other residents and visitors. This study investigates how front yard signs of caring impact the perception of neighborhood image and identity on Allen Street in Syracuse, New York. The study used direct observation and participatory research to understand and establish the signs of caring for this neighborhood. Understanding the spatial, visual and practical codes that make up the signs of caring is important information for local leaders and neighborhood residents trying to improve neighborhood conditions, and could therefore be an important component to an effective urban revitalization strategy. The study found that individual signs of caring are not noticed as much as the collective effect of multiple signs of caring. The major outcome of this capstone study is a process that can be used elsewhere to investigate and monitor local signs of caring.
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Introduction

Purpose of Research
The front yard in a traditional urban residential neighborhood is privately owned, but publicly experienced. For this reason, the front yard can be thought of as semi-public space (Webber, 6). In its function as semi-public space, the front yard would seem critical to the perception of neighborhood image and identity. What neighbors and visitors see and understand about a neighborhood is at least in part connected to how they perceive the care and use of neighborhood front yards. Therefore, depending on how important front yards turn out to be in the perception of a neighborhood, they could be a critical element in an urban neighborhood revitalization strategy. Unfortunately, front yards have not been studied much from the perspective of care, and are only beginning to be addressed in practical revitalization efforts by community design agencies.

This study demonstrates how front yard ‘signs of caring’ impact the perception of neighborhood image and identity. For the purposes of this study, signs of caring are defined as visual, spatial and practical codes that signal care and commitment by neighborhood residents to an audience of visitors and other residents. In urban neighborhoods, front yard practices are more about a collective gesture to the neighborhood than they are about individual taste (Korman, 2004). Front yards practices mediate the space between the resident of the property and the visitor or neighbor. The collective practices create an image, and that image is what conveys the level of commitment to a place. By communicating a level of commitment, this image is critical to urban revitalization. This image, created by signs of caring, is one way to encourage people to return to city neighborhoods.

Background and Context
Many American cities have been losing population since World War II. Glaeser and Shapiro state that “between 1950 and 1990, the share of Americans living in (Northeastern or Midwestern) cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants fell every decade from a high of 17.54 percent in 1950 to 12.09 percent in 1990” (139). Syracuse, New York, although not in the category of having more than 500,000 inhabitants, is no different. Census data for the region show that city population in 2000 was at a record low (Driscoll). But it is not the loss of
population alone that is the problem; rather, it is the larger set of problems that have accompanied this population loss that have been more troubling. The loss of population is a symptom of the disenfranchisement, disinvestment, and physical deterioration that has resulted in many American cities. Most of the people that our cities have lost are people with education and resources, who are able to make the choice to live elsewhere, and who have the means to leave.

In the face of this deterioration, many city governments and urban improvement organizations in the United States are trying to revitalize American cities by encouraging a renewed interest in city living. The expectation is that by promoting city living, some of these same types of people will return to urban neighborhoods. Cities need people who have resources, who care about and will fight for urban improvements, who can pay taxes and will care for their properties. Cities need people who are engaged in improving the city. Revitalization efforts have taken many forms, from housing rehabilitation to streetscape improvements, from neighborhood cleanup to community gardens. Some of these efforts have been successful, while some have not. All of these are useful and important areas to address. Front yard improvements also present a good opportunity to revitalize urban neighborhoods. Unfortunately, little interest has been shown in using front yard improvements as a revitalization tool, or in studying the urban vegetation of private lots (Zmyslony and Gagnon, 1998, 295). The literature that does address front yards is described in the next section, as well as literature regarding block dynamics and the aesthetic of care.
Literature Review

Popular Literature
Front yards have been studied and discussed from a few different perspectives. Popular literature, such as Better Homes and Gardens, Sunset and other gardening magazines, as well as gardening books, such as Front Yard Gardens: Growing More than Grass (Primeau, 2003), Taunton’s Front Yard Idea Book (Webber, 2003) and The Front Garden: New Approaches to Landscape Design (Smith, 1991) present ideas to the general public about the design and use of front yards. Many of these ideas are about “front yard makeovers” and “recaptured front yards”, and describe ways for a homeowner to reclaim their front yard, and use it for more than just a welcome mat. Some literature discusses the possibility of planting something more than grass, and encourages homeowners to get rid of their lawns. A small percentage of this literature is targeted at average people with average knowledge, average resources and an average urban lot. Too often, however, the examples are targeted at a wealthier audience with larger properties and more resources, providing suburban examples that mean little to the average urban homeowner.

Vernacular Domestic Landscape
Other literature addresses front yards from the perspective of a vernacular aesthetic. Fred Schroeder traces the history of front yards and discusses the development of a front yard aesthetic for the “25 to 50 foot lot” through Front Yard America: The Evolution and Meanings of a Vernacular Domestic Landscape (1993). J.B. Jackson looks at the evolution of the yard in A Sense of PLACE, A Sense of TIME (1994). He discusses how the area surrounding the home has changed “from a space essential to the welfare and cohesion of the family to a sterile display of close cropped grass and foundation greenery” (132). In another essay, “Ghosts at the Door,” Jackson examines the yard as a miniature landscape reproduction that every American creates to satisfy a love of beauty and a longing for something familiar (1997, 108-109). He goes on to describe the evolution of the front yard from the working field, and discusses the evolution of the enclosed yard.

Block Dynamics and Human Territorial Functioning
Front yards are not only the focus of popular literature and vernacular assessments, but also the focus of other inquiries into human territorial functioning, residential neighborhood effects, and
the aesthetic of care. Some research in the field of environment and behavior has examined street blocks, as well as front yards. Ralph Taylor discusses blocks and yards in a chapter of Human Territorial Functioning entitled “Territorial Functioning in Outdoor Residential Spaces Close to Home” (1988). He states that the block is the “primary or basic container of local group formation and local ties” and for this reason the block is a more important arena than the neighborhood (171). He notes that “local improvement activities are as or more likely to be mounted on the streetblock than on the neighborhood level” (171). Territorial functioning in outdoor residential spaces close to home occurs through three related structures: 1. markers, 2. actual behaviors, and 3. cognitions or attitudes (175). All three of these territorial structures were explored in this study.

1. Markers are physical traces that are the “observable consequences of behaviors such as maintenance, decoration, modification and beautification” (177). Markers can be more or less explicitly territorial. Signs of upkeep and holiday decoration, which are less explicitly territorial, still convey information (177). How markers are understood and decoded depends on the specific person perceiving the information and the context in which the message is sent (177-8). Taylor states that the marker may signal identity (among other things) for the sender, and may signal “caring, vigilance or how to behave appropriately” to the decoder (178). The same marker can signal, or carry a message, for both outsiders and other residents, but the message may differ (178-9). 2. Actual behaviors (or actions) necessary in producing markers, such as gardening and lawn trimming, are also considered territorial behavior (179). 3. The final element, territorial attitudes, “refer to people’s perceptions of their relationship to a particular delimited location, or their perception of conditions in such a locus” (180).

All of these territorial functions can be predicted based on four types of predictors: cultural, physical, social and personality (181). Of most interest here are those of personality: vigilance, homeownership, social class, and urban versus suburban (182-4). Predictors help to predict the type of markers, behavior and attitudes that can be expected from different groups. Taylor finishes the chapter by describing the psychological consequences of territorial functioning: stress reduction, individuation, group level expression, clarification of group norms, cleaning as group-enhancing ritual, vetoing mechanisms, deviation countering, physical reminders of appropriate behavior, and support for the standing pattern of behavior (189-196).
Residential Neighborhood Effects

Front yards are also being studied in a newly emerging area of theory. Research on residential neighborhood effects examines the impact of social interactions with nearby neighbors on residential homeowners’ maintenance decisions. Yannis Ioannides used empirical data from the American Housing Survey on neighborhood clusters in urban areas of the United States to estimate a model of social interactions at the neighborhood level in the context of maintenance decisions (160). In the journal article, “Residential Neighborhood Effects”, he defines a neighborhood as a dwelling unit and its ten nearest neighbors (160). Ioannides found the impact of social interactions to be quite substantial, which provides support to the theory of residential neighborhood effects (160). Thus, “the maintenance behavior of individual homeowners is influenced by those of their neighbors” (160). This supports the idea that “public policy interventions that fix up neighborhoods may bring about urban neighborhood change through a social multiplier” (160).

In two journal articles, Canadian researchers Jean Zmyslony and Daniel Gagnon describe their work in a Montreal neighborhood, Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Zmyslony and Gagnon worked to “understand the dynamics of urban residential vegetation at local scales in order to propose management strategies for the greening of urban environments, centered on resident actions” (1998, 296). In the 1998 article, they observed a “statistically distinct neighbor influence” among front yard treatments (295). This neighbor effect is described as “a contagious form of mimicry where vegetation and non-vegetated area characteristics are repeated at local scales (two to seven front yards)” (305). Front yards in close proximity to one another are influenced by the shape, color and location of the vegetation in nearby yards (306). The authors propose that this “anthropic phenomenon” can be generalized to other types of neighborhoods (306).

In their second article, Zmyslony and Gagnon expand their conclusions about the same study in Montreal. Using causal path analysis modeling1, they show that “proximity, same street side, and similar front yard depths, widths and types within a street section increase similarity in front yard

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1 Zmyslony and Gagnon note that in order to determine which spatial environmental factors induce landscape spatial patterns at the scale of a whole street section, they had to evaluate the contribution of relative distance, street side, depth, width and type of front-yard to front-yard landscape structure (358). To depict all relationships, they constructed statistical causal models using path analysis, a method that allowed them to express the relative structuring importance of the spatial factors described, and to predict the percentage of variation of the landscape structure within a same side street section or a complete street section (358).
landscape” (370). They note that “within most same side and complete street sections the independent effect of relative distance on front-yard landscape similarity remains the most important one” (369). Thus, this article proposes that proximity and similar environmental conditions are now found to be more important than described in their previous article.

The Aesthetic of Care

Front yards are also a key element in research being done to examine the aesthetic of care. Professor Joan Iverson Nassauer in the Landscape Architecture Department at the University of Michigan has pioneered research into the front yard’s ability to communicate care. Nassauer’s work focuses on making residential landscape treatments that improve ecological quality more culturally acceptable by using recognizable landscape language to communicate human intention and care (1995, 161). She proposes that “design can use cultural values and traditions for the appearance of landscape to place ecological function in a recognizable context” (161). As natural ecosystems are often perceived as ‘messy’ and not cared for, this concept proposes placing an “orderly frame” around a messy ecosystem, so that people can see it in a recognizable new way. The order of this “frame” would be derived from the language of care. In “Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames”, Nassauer proposes the elements of such a landscape language, a language that she calls, “cues to care”.

Cues to care are cultural symbols that indicate human intention (167). She notes that “using cues to care in design is not a means of maintaining traditional landscape forms but rather a means of adapting cultural expectations to recognize new landscape forms that include greater biodiversity” (167). The cues that were revealed in her Midwestern studies are mowed grass, flowering plants and trees, wildlife feeders and houses, bold patterns, trimmed shrubs, plants in rows, linear planting designs, fences, architectural details, lawn ornaments, paint and foundation plantings (167-8).

In Placing Nature, Nassauer writes in more depth about the aesthetic of care. She states that “landscapes that we describe as attractive tend to conform to the aesthetic conventions for the display of care, which can be exhibited in virtually any landscape” (67). She goes on to say that “nearly all landscapes are judged and enjoyed according to the degree that they clearly exhibit care…(and) in most settled landscapes, care is shown by neatness” (68). Nassauer points out
that the aesthetic of care “is laden with good intentions and social meaning: stewardship, a work ethic, personal pride, and contributing to community” (68).

She talks more specifically about front yards, saying that “cultural expectations for the appearance of front yards are so uniform, so well-known, and so closely identified with the character of the inhabitant that we violate those expectations only at great social risk” (71). But the reason for these cultural expectations have everything to do with the appearance of care, for the “community values signs of care in the landscape and these signs of care can prevent misuse of nature by showing traces of well-intentioned human action to maintain the landscape” (75). Nassauer quotes Marcia Muelder Eaton, another author in Placing Nature, and their words together really encapsulate this issue of care:

Eaton defines aesthetic experience as ‘perception of and reflection upon…(that which) the community considers worthy of sustained attention.’ Care of the landscape is a form of sustained attention that also invites the attention of others. When people notice landscapes, they are more likely to care about and take care of them. When people take care of landscapes or are flagrantly derelict in their care, people notice them. (76)

Nassauer’s work is focused on a different result and intention than this research study, but the theory describing the aesthetic of care and the methodology used to develop the cues to care are conceptually similar to what this research explored.

**Relevance to Research on ‘Signs of Caring’**

The research and writing of Taylor (1988), Ioannides (2002), and Zmyslony & Gagnon (1998, 2000) support the idea of addressing a residential area by block, due to the impact of local group formation and social ties (Taylor), social interactions on maintenance decisions (Ioannides), and distinct neighbor mimicry in front yard treatments (Zmyslony & Gagnon). For these reasons, the data for this study was collected on an individual property level, but analyzed for patterns on a block level.

The front yard aesthetic has developed over a relatively short period of time in the United States. For this reason, front yards have been examined from the perspective of popular garden literature and vernacular landscape studies, as well as from the perspective of human territorial functioning and from an aesthetic of care. This study investigated the elements described in
human territorial functioning, but instead from a perspective of care. Signs of caring were the elements used to understand the manner in which front yard practices can communicate care and commitment. Human territorial functioning theory describes markers, behaviors and attitudes that can be observed in outdoor residential spaces close to home, such as the front yard (Taylor). Markers and behaviors are observable phenomena that carry a message for both visitors and other residents, while territorial attitudes relate to perception and can be understood by talking to the resident (Taylor).

Nassauer, in theorizing an aesthetic of care, describes ‘cues to care’, which are cultural symbols that indicate human intention. Nassauer proposes that cultural expectations play a critical role in front yard appearance, and that landscapes are judged and enjoyed by the degree to which they exhibit care. She proposes that understanding the cultural symbols that communicate care in a particular place be considered in new front yard designs. Taylor’s ‘markers’ and Nassauer’s ‘cues’ are similar types of observable behavior. What both authors see in these physical traces is somewhat different, but related and both relevant to this study, which examines the signs (cues, markers, traces, codes) of caring on an older urban residential street in Syracuse, New York.
Site Background

Allen Street, in Syracuse, New York, was selected by the investigator as the study site. Allen Street is a residential street that cuts through three distinct neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city. Allen Street runs north to south for approximately one mile, crossing over six blocks between East Fayette Street and Euclid Avenue. Allen Street was selected for four reasons: scale, range of conditions, diversity, and accessibility.

Allen Street is an appropriate size for a study of this small scale. The number of properties was expected to be a manageable amount for a researcher to investigate within one academic year. The scale of the street was also appropriate in the way that it transects a range of conditions. Without leaving Allen Street, a visitor can travel through various neighborhoods, and observe a range of property types and practices. The properties exhibit this range of conditions primarily by block. The people that live on Allen Street are a fairly diverse mix of people, which was desired by the investigator for the depth that it would provide for the study. Allen Street is also accessible for the investigator to visit frequently and do site observations.
The dwelling conditions on Allen Street range from well-maintained to fairly well maintained to decent to poor.

Figure 2: Dwelling Conditions on Allen Street

The properties on Allen Street have a range of front yard conditions. Properties range from only grass to beautiful gardens to naturalized plantings.

Figure 3: Front Yard Conditions on Allen Street
Research Question

This study proposes that the aesthetic of care is critical in transitional urban neighborhoods, and that this aesthetic of care can be observed in signs of caring. It is unknown what front yard practices signal care to neighborhood residents and visitors. It is also unknown whether single-family, owner-occupants will be more likely to create signs of caring than renter occupants or occupants of multi-family dwellings. Often, renter-occupied dwellings and multi-family dwellings are present in transitional urban neighborhoods. All residents in transitional neighborhoods could be an audience for encouraging signs of caring. Therefore, this study was centered around the following question: What are the visual, spatial and practical codes that signal commitment by neighborhood residents, and how might understanding these codes inform a larger urban revitalization strategy that encourages signs of caring?

Goals and Objectives

Goal One: To document the existing conditions, use, and care of front yards and front facades on an urban residential street.

Objective 1: To observe existing conditions of front yards and front facades on Allen Street.

Objective 2: To document existing conditions with photographs and field notes that can be used later for observer coding and analysis.

Objective 3: To inventory and analyze ‘signs of caring’.

Objective 4: To investigate quantitative data regarding property value, date built, dwelling type and renter/owner status.

Goal Two: To explore the motivation of residents for doing what they do (or don’t do) in the care of their front yards and front facades.

Objective 1: To initiate a discussion on Allen Street about front yard care.

Objective 2: To inventory the motivations, capabilities and perceptions of Allen Street residents.

Objective 3: To understand how residents use, maintain and improve their front yards, and why they do certain things.
Goal Three: To uncover patterns and correlations between residential front yard practices, and resident motivations, challenges and perceptions.

Objective 1: To determine the connections between practice, perception and motivation.

Objective 2: To understand what actions, services and displays are expected and encouraged on this street.

Objective 3: To analyze the differences from one block to another on the same street, and understand the causes for the different levels of care.

Goal Four: To understand the connection between signs of caring and the perception of neighborhood image and identity.

Objective 1: To understand what non-Allen Street residents recognize to be the signs of caring on Allen Street, in Syracuse, New York.

Objective 2: To understand whether the signs of caring that residents believe they are communicating are being understood by other people from inside and outside the street/neighborhood.

Objective 3: To understand whether ‘signs of caring’ are important and have an impact on the perception of a place.

Goal Five: To design a method that can be used in other places to analyze the signs of caring.

Objective 1: To summarize the ‘signs of caring’ and what they look like.

Objective 2: To consider whether ‘signs of caring’ can be encouraged, or if they are only a phenomenon that happen on their own.

Objective 3: To evaluate the process that was used to determine local ‘signs of caring’ and suggest a method that could be used by other places to determine their own local ‘signs of caring’.
Methods

Methods of Site Inventory and Analysis

An inventory of the existing property conditions was performed in order to establish baseline data for the front yards on Allen Street. This inventory included unobtrusive site observations and photographic inventory. As the study progressed, more specific conditions were observed and recorded at various points between September 2003 and April 2004. Property profiles were also examined in the city tax assessment records.

Property Conditions

Purpose: To document the existing conditions, use, and care of front yards and front facades on an urban residential street. (Goal One, Objectives 1-3)

The existing conditions of all front yards and front facades on Allen Street were recorded through site observations. Each property was observed and photographed in the late summer or early fall, prior to winter weather conditions. Zeisel states that “observing (physical) traces is an unobtrusive method… unobtrusiveness is particularly valuable when gathering data about which respondents are sensitive” (92). People were indeed somewhat sensitive, and seemed to be uncomfortable if they saw the investigator looking at their house, taking pictures and writing notes, so she tried to be as discreet as possible. When appropriate, residents were given a verbal
explanation of the research. Conditions that were observed included: yard and dwelling maintenance, presence and layout of vegetation, presence of potted vegetation, and resident behavior (i.e. gardening, sweeping, painting, or repairing). An important part of the observation process was taking photographs of each property. The photographs were used later to observe some of the signs of caring that were visible.

As the study progressed, the general baseline observations were supplemented by ongoing site observations during different weather conditions and at different times of the year to observe such things as snow shoveling and spring flowers. Based on community perceptions of important characteristics, it became more apparent which conditions were important in understanding the signs of caring, and these conditions were observed. For example, the presence of trash was more important to the local residents than the investigator once thought.

Property Profiles
Purpose: To investigate quantitative data regarding property value, date built, dwelling type, and renter/owner status. (Goal One, Objective 4)

The City of Syracuse hosts a web page that contains all the property assessment records for city properties. An example of a property record can be found in Appendix A. The investigator conducted a search for each Allen Street property, and retrieved data regarding the assessed property value and the date the residence was built. The records also stated whether the property was currently single-family, two-family, multi-family, or an apartment type dwelling.

In addition, the property records state the address of the property in question, as well as the address for the property owner. If the addresses were different, the investigator concluded that the property owner did not reside at the property. If the address was the same, but the investigator had interviewed the resident, she could determine whether the property was renter or owner occupied. If an interview had not occurred, and the property record was not entirely conclusive, the investigator used the local telephone book as a second method to determine the property’s occupancy status. This information, along with dwelling type, was then mapped on a plan view of the street to later inspect for patterns.
Methods of Community Research

A critical dimension to understanding the impact of ‘signs of caring’ on neighborhood perception was to talk to people who live on Allen Street, as well as people who were not Allen Street residents but lived on neighboring streets. The residents of Allen Street and of the surrounding Westcott neighborhood were participants in the community portion of the study.

Allen Street Resident Perspectives

Purpose: To explore the motivation of residents for doing what they do (or don’t do) in the care of their front yards and front facades. (Goal Two, Objectives 1-3)

An exploration of the practices, actions and motivations of Allen Street residents included interviews and focus groups. Prior to approaching any residents, the investigator introduced herself and the research by sending a letter to every Allen Street resident on SUNY-ESF letterhead, signed by her and her major professor, Dr. Elen Deming. The letter was sent to residents in the week preceding the first round of interviews. A copy of the letter can be found in Appendix B.

Allen Street Resident Perspectives: Interviews

During several weekends in February, the investigator interviewed residents at one-third of the properties on Allen Street by going door to door with a short survey. The survey was pre-tested with two Allen Street residents to determine if the survey questions would produce an effective dialogue. Following this test, the interviews were conducted over three weekends. The
investigator approached residences between 1 and 5pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Properties were selected randomly by going to every third house. If the door was not answered, the investigator continued on to each consecutive house until the door was answered. After completing a survey, the investigator continued on to the next ‘third house’. Care was taken neither to under- nor over-represent corner lots. The resulting sample is a random distribution of residents at one-third of the properties in each block.

When they answered the door, residents were asked if they were willing to spend five to ten minutes talking about front yards. The letter had been a successful gesture, and many people were not surprised to see the investigator at their doorstep. Few residents turned the investigator away, and many invited her into the house to get out of the cold weather. Some residents only spent five minutes talking at the door, while others spent nearly 60 minutes providing detailed information and thoughtful perspectives. What was intended to be a brief survey turned into more detailed interviews, with the average interview lasting about 10 to 20 minutes. The interview followed a pre-determined set of questions, in order to maintain consistency.

The residents of Allen Street were asked to respond to the following open-ended questions:

1. Do you rent or own the home that you live in?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Why did you choose to live on this street?
4. Who takes care of your front yard and the exterior of your house?
5. What is it that you/they do (to care for your yard and house)?
6. Why (do you/des that person) care for your yard and house?
7. What rewards are there in caring for your front yard and house?
8. What challenges are there in caring for your front yard and house?
9. Do you care about the neighborhood? How do you show that you care?
10. Do you think that your neighbors on Allen Street care about the neighborhood?
11. How can you tell?
12. In your opinion, what makes a good front yard?
13. Are there things that people do or don’t do that detract from the neighborhood?

If the response to the question indicated that the interviewee had not entirely understood the question, the investigator tried to rephrase the question. For most interviews, the investigator met with the resident(s) alone, conducted the interview and took notes on their responses. For interviews in the 200 and 300 blocks, an additional interviewer assisted the investigator, due to
personal safety concerns regarding the 200 block. For all blocks, if a resident was approached and expressed interest in the study, but was unable to talk at the time the investigator approached the residence, the resident was given a survey with an addressed and stamped envelope, to return at their convenience. Some residents contacted the investigator to express their interest after receiving the letter, but the investigator only interviewed such residents if their address was randomly sampled.

Following the interviews, each participant was designated a code number, and the responses for each question were entered into separate spreadsheets. Each spreadsheet was then color coded to identify common responses that were present. For an example of a completed interview sheet, please see Appendix C.

*Allen Street Resident Perspectives: Focus Groups*

In the way that Zeisel suggests, the interview responses were used to refine the investigator’s ideas prior to the focus group (157). The investigator coded and summarized the interview responses, but as an outsider, could not establish any hierarchy of importance in the data. The focus groups were designed to have the neighborhood residents confirm and organize the responses from the interviews in a way that an outsider could not do. The investigator confirmed the results of the individual interviews by having a group of residents review the responses, and make sure they were correct and complete. The investigator organized the signs of caring by having these same residents sort the responses into four categories and thus, determine which responses were the most important.

To encourage attendance, the focus groups were held in residents’ homes in anticipation that this would be most convenient and comfortable for residents. Every Allen Street resident was sent a hand-addressed invitation inviting them to one of the focus groups. The three focus groups were held as follows:

- 200 and 300 blocks, hosted by Janine Hill, 321 Allen Street, March 8, 2004
- 400 and 500 blocks, hosted by Jane and Sam Feld, 528 Allen Street, March 9, 2004, and
- 600 and 700 blocks, hosted by Tod Rutherford, 758 Allen Street, March 10, 2004.
Each focus group had between six and eight residents, including the host. Some focus groups participants had been interviewed, but many had not been part of the random sample, and were providing their input for the first time. Each focus group was held in the evening for 1.5 to 2 hours, and refreshments were provided. Attendees were asked to participate in two activities. In one focus group, two people had to leave early and only participated in the first activity.

In the first activity, participants reviewed a sheet with the responses that were summarized from the interview questions. The categories that were discussed were motivations and rewards, challenges, and preferences. Participants were asked to review the list of responses, and either a) circle responses with which they agreed, b) cross out responses with which they disagreed, or c) write in answers that they felt were missing. The investigator then facilitated a discussion regarding their thoughts, and which responses they felt were most important. A copy of this activity sheet can be found in Appendix D.

In the second activity, participants were asked to read through a list of 40 practices that were developed from the interview responses regarding ‘signs of caring’. Example responses include painting the house, having potted plants, and mowing the lawn. After reading through the list, they were asked to state any other practices that might be missing from the list. They were then asked to organize all the signs of caring into four categories, based on expectations. The researcher had defined the following categories: ‘absolutely expected’, ‘moderate care’, ‘optimal care’ and ‘not noticed’. Using dot stickers on a large chart, each person was asked to place one dot next to each sign of caring in the category they felt most accurately described their perception of the ‘sign of caring’. The chart was laid on a table, and participants went two or three at a time, placing their dots on the chart. Other residents chatted while they waited for their turn to place the dots.

**Neighborhood Perspectives (Non-Allen Street Residents)**

Purpose: To understand the connection between signs of caring and the perception of neighborhood image and identity. (Goal 4, Objectives 1-3)

An exploration of non-resident perspectives included a library display with surveys targeted at people who walk in the neighborhood, and are familiar with Allen Street. The Petit Branch
Library is located on Victoria Place, a side street adjacent to the study location. The small display was placed immediately next to the main door used for entering and exiting the facility, near the library circulation desk. The display had small, eye-catching, lime-green signs that asked library patrons, “Do you walk in the Westcott Neighborhood? Do you have five minutes to fill out a survey?” The display remained in place for five weeks in February and March.

The neighborhood surveys were placed on a small table, with a box in which to return the completed surveys, as well as a cup of pens and pencils. Each survey had a cover sheet that introduced the study and provided the investigator's contact information. The survey itself had a list of questions on the front and a neighborhood map on the back. A copy of the neighborhood survey and cover letter can be found in Appendix E.

The survey asked the residents of the Westcott Neighborhood the following questions:

1. Do you rent or own the home that you live in?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Do you walk in the neighborhood? For exercise or to get to a destination?
4. Do you walk on Allen Street? Which sections?
5. Why do you/don’t you walk on Allen Street? What do you like/dislike about it?
   Please be specific.
6. Can you trace your route in the neighborhood on the map on the back, or describe where you walk?
7. How would you describe Allen Street?
8. Do you think the residents of Allen Street care about the neighborhood? How can you tell?
   Again, please note specifics.

After the first week, the investigator reviewed the completed surveys to determine if the responses were addressing the intended issues. When the responses were found to be somewhat general, the survey was adjusted to include statements that encouraged participants to “please be specific.” During the five weeks that the surveys were displayed in the library, 24 surveys were filled out and returned.

**Methods of Summary and Analysis**

To uncover patterns between residential front yard practices and resident responses, the interview and focus group data was analyzed at the block level.
Purpose: To uncover patterns and correlations between residential front yard practices, and resident motivations, challenges and perceptions. (Goal 3, Objectives 1-3)

Interviews. In order to understand the comments from the Allen Street resident interviews, the responses were coded and analyzed. Each participant was designated a code number, and the numbers were organized numerically to follow the block breakdown. For example, numbers 1 through 4 corresponded with the 200 block, and 5 through 9 corresponded with the 300 block, and so on. The interview questions yielded data regarding the following categories: signs of caring, motivations/rewards, challenges, preferences, actions/practices, and signs of neglect. The responses for each question were entered into separate spreadsheets. For example, one spreadsheet contained all the responses to a question about the ‘challenges’ that residents face. All the responses for each question were put together for ease of analysis and comparison.

Each spreadsheet was color coded to identify the common responses that were present. Going through each spreadsheet, the investigator grouped similar ideas together by coloring like responses the same color. For example, regarding ‘challenges’, similar responses relating to lack of time were all colored green. The investigator tried to find the areas where responses grouped together. After all the groups of responses were identified, the rest of the individual responses were listed, too. Some responses, although only mentioned once, identified important concepts, and were kept in the summarized list to be reviewed by the focus groups.

Using this process, the interview responses were summarized into the following sets of data:  
  a) 40 signs of caring  
  b) 20 motivations and rewards  
  c) 25 challenges  
  d) 39 preferences  
  e) a general list of front yard practices  
  f) 26 signs of neglect.

Focus Groups. As described in the previous section ‘Methods of Community Research’, the results for a, b, c, and d were confirmed and organized by the focus groups. The focus group participants did not review the responses for e and f.
To understand the results from the focus groups, the responses were quantified and analyzed. For the information gathered in b, c, and d, the participants reviewed a list of responses. The investigator summarized their input on those lists by counting the number of people who agreed or disagreed with each response. If a majority of participants agreed with the response, it was added to the summary list (i.e. ‘challenges’). If a majority of participants disagreed with the response, it was added to another list (i.e. ‘not a challenge’). If the number of participants was split evenly between agreement and disagreement, the response was added to a third list (i.e. ‘challenge for some, not others’). This information was analyzed separately for each 2-block focus group. For example, the results for the 400 and 500 focus group were analyzed separately from the results for the 600 and 700 group.

The second activity at each focus group resulted in an organized signs of caring list. The list from each focus group was analyzed by counting the number of dots that participants had placed in each category. This quantity of dots determined where each sign of caring was categorized. Again, the results for each focus group were kept separate from each other. If a majority of dots was placed in one of the four categories, then the investigator noted which group (i.e. 600/700 blocks) had placed which sign of caring (i.e. mowing the grass) in which category (i.e. absolutely expected). Not every sign of caring had a distinct majority in one category. The investigator attempted to categorize each sign of caring in the category closest to the majority of responses. If the responses were spread over a number of categories, the investigator selected a response in the middle of the spread. If the responses were split evenly between two categories, the investigator categorized the sign of caring in the lower category. For example, if the split was between absolutely expected and moderate care, the sign was placed in absolutely expected, the lower category.

Following this organization based on expectations, the investigator also sorted the signs of caring into eight different themes. The investigator recognized the themes where the signs of caring started to group together into similar types of responses. For example, the following six signs of caring were grouped together into the theme ‘maintain yard’:

a) tidy, not necessarily clipped;
b) no weeds;
c) mow lawn
d) trim hedges, prune;
e) rake leaves, and
f) maintain yard.

All 40 signs of caring were sorted into eight different themes. A list of these themes and signs of caring can be seen on page 31 in the results section.

Neighborhood Resident Summary (Non-Allen Street Residents)
Purpose: To understand the connection between signs of caring and the perception of neighborhood image and identity. (Goal 4, Objectives 1-3)

The neighborhood resident survey was the key element in understanding the signs of caring that are understood by people living outside of Allen Street, as well as understanding how they perceive Allen Street. Asking “Do you walk in the Westcott neighborhood?” was a way to target the appropriate audience for the survey: people who are familiar with Allen Street and the surrounding neighborhood. Pedestrians move at a slower pace than people riding in vehicles, and as a result, notice specific details about the places through which they travel.

Signs of Caring. A list of the signs of caring noticed by neighborhood residents was formulated using survey responses to the following questions: “Do you think that your neighbors on Allen Street care about the neighborhood? How can you tell?” These questions resulted in a number of different responses that were summarized into a list of 13 signs of caring. To summarize, the investigator went through each of the neighborhood surveys, and listed all the responses on a separate sheet of paper. Responses that were similar were grouped together. Each response was recorded, even if it was only mentioned once, and did not fall in a group.

All of these 13 signs of caring overlap with the 40 signs of caring already established in the resident summary. Please see Figure 14 on page 36 in the results section. Participants noted five of the signs more frequently than the others. These five signs were used later in the process to guide the analysis of the signs of caring inventory.

Perception of Allen Street. The perception of Allen Street was gauged in the survey using the following questions: “What do you like/dislike about Allen Street?” and “How would you describe Allen Street?” The responses to these questions were analyzed and summarized into a
series of 14 different types of responses. To summarize, the investigator went through each of
the neighborhood surveys, and listed all the responses on a separate sheet of paper. Responses
that were similar were grouped together. Each response was recorded, even if it was only
mentioned once, and did not fall in a group. Some of the responses were more general details
about street character, and some responses were more specific. Participants noted four of the
responses more frequently than others.

**Methods of Analysis and Synthesis**

As an exercise to better understand the signs of caring, the most frequently noted signs of caring
were selected from the neighborhood survey and used to assess each property on Allen Street.

*Synthesize Results*

Purpose: To understand the connection between signs of caring and the perception of
neighborhood image and identity. (Goal 4, Objectives 1 and 3)

Assessing every property on Allen Street based on all 40 signs of caring became an overly
detailed and laborious process for the investigator, so an alternative method was sought. Rather
than using all 40 signs of caring, the results of the neighborhood survey presented a small set of
frequently noted signs that could be used instead. These signs were useful because: 1) the list
represented a small set of the larger list, 2) the list was distributed in a way that covered most of
the eight themes, and 3) the list hypothetically represented the signs of caring that are most
noticeable and important to outside observers. Two other signs of caring, taken instead from
the Allen Street resident list, were also used in site observations. These additional signs of caring
were used primarily to compare the results from using characteristics defined by neighborhood
residents with those found by using characteristics defined by Allen Street residents.

The investigator used two methods to analyze Allen Street properties for these signs: photo
analysis and site observation. Some signs of caring were better suited to one method or the
other, while some signs of caring benefited from multi-seasonal evaluations that could be found
by using both measures. These observations were performed in order to determine whether the
signs of caring are present and visible. Some signs of caring were strictly a yes/no evaluation,
such as snow shoveling. Other indicators required a more qualitative analysis of the property
that observed to what degree the sign of caring was present. For example, with house maintenance, the investigator determined if the house maintenance was done well, fairly well, decently or poorly. The results of the signs of caring inventory were analyzed on a block level to try and understand patterns in block dynamics that were evident from one block to another.

Post-Project Critique of Methods
With the intent that other people might use these methods, the process was evaluated for use in future applications in Syracuse as well as other places.

Purpose: To design a method that can be used in other places to analyze the signs of caring.
(Goal 5, Objectives 1-3)

Following the study, the investigator and the research committee evaluated the research methods and determined how the process could be improved in future applications. These recommendations are based on challenges of participatory research in urban neighborhoods, areas where the method did not produce adequate results, and areas where the investigator would have liked to do more. These recommendations are described in the discussion.
Results

Allen Street Overview

The physical site inventory and the community research provided a vivid picture of Allen Street and the people who live there. In general, Allen Street represents a wide range of property types and is representative of several different neighborhoods. Each block is somewhat different from each of the other blocks, and this became apparent in the analysis of the results. The 200 and 300 blocks are part of the Near Eastside neighborhood. The 400, 500 and 600 blocks are part of the Westcott neighborhood. The 700 block is part of the University neighborhood, as well as part of the Westcott neighborhood. Each of these neighborhoods has a different character, and a different mix of residents. The following overview describes the characteristics of each block based on observations, property profiles, and community comments.

Figure 6: Block Overview and Participant Comments for the 200 and 300 Blocks of Allen Street
200 Block

The 200 block runs between East Fayette Street and Lexington Avenue, and is the most challenged of the six blocks on Allen Street. There is a high incidence of vacancy, which is evidenced by the number of vacant lots, dwellings, and apartments. Most of the properties in this block are renter-occupied, multi-family dwellings. The dwellings were built between 1880 and 1945, with 1920 being the most frequent date properties in this block were built. The assessed value for these properties is the lowest on the street, with a range between $30,000 and $86,900, and an average of $53,650. The dwellings are a mix of architectural styles. The close proximity to Sunset Terrace, a public housing project at the end of Allen Street, significantly influences the character of this block. During interviews, residents noted that some of their primary concerns are related to vandalism, trash, drug dealing and safety.

300 Block

Up the hill from the 200 Block, the 300 Block runs between Lexington Avenue and East Genesee Street. Most of the properties are owner-occupied, single-family dwellings, and only one property is vacant. The dwellings were built between 1890 and 1940, with 1940 being the most frequent date that properties in this block were built. The assessed values for these properties range between $51,000 and $86,900, with an average of $72,554. The 300 block acts as a transition between the most well-maintained block (400 Block) and the most poorly-maintained block (200 Block). The residents said that they love this block, but that they have to walk a line between making their property look “welcoming but not wealthy.” They noted that they try not to make their yards look too nice, lest anyone think they are wealthy and decide to look inside for more. The homes have architectural interest and character, and in general, are fairly well-maintained.

400 Block

(Please see Figure X on the next page.) Across 4 lanes of traffic on East Genesee Street, past two large medical offices, is the 400 block of Allen Street. The 400 block is one half of a long block between East Genesee Street and Harvard Place. Most of the properties are owner-occupied, single-family dwellings. The dwellings were built in a short time period between 1900 and 1930, with 1900 being the most frequent date properties were built. The assessed values for these properties are the highest on the street, ranging from $75,000 to $140,200, with an average
of $107,916. This portion of Allen Street has a distinctive character. Most properties have beautiful, well-maintained Victorian homes, and many have welcoming front gardens. Often, people can be seen on the 400 block, either gardening, painting, working on their home, or out for a walk. Participants frequently mentioned the care that their neighbors show in maintaining their houses and yards. Residents also mentioned the importance of maintaining the character of the street.

400 Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Built</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Value</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>$140,000</td>
<td>$107,916</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"People garden and upkeep this part of the neighborhood..."

"I like the old houses in this neighborhood."

"Paint homes appropriate to the vintage of the house..."

"Need to be considerate of your neighbors..."

500 Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Built</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Value</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"We want to show we aren't just careless students."

"We're committed to living here, in the city..."

"Landlords don't do the same things as other owners"

"I want to keep the character & quality of the neighborhood looking good."

Figure 7: Block Overview and Participant Comments for the 400 and 500 Blocks of Allen Street

500 Block

The 500 block is the other half of a long block between East Genesee Street and Harvard Place. Most of the properties are owner-occupied, single-family dwellings. The dwellings were built over a much longer time period than the 400 block. Dwellings were constructed between 1889
and 1955, with 1920 being the most frequent date properties were built. The assessed values for these properties range between $65,000 and $102,800, with an average of $89,095. The length of time over which these properties were built is apparent, as the character of the architecture is somewhat eclectic. Similar to the 400 block, there are some lovely Victorian homes, but they are mixed in with a variety of other types. The block is generally pleasant and tidy, with a mix of yards ranging from just lawn to beautiful gardens. Residents mentioned their plans to improve their properties, and also noted that landlords do not maintain their properties as well as other homeowners. Residents were concerned about the character and quality of the neighborhood.

Figure 8: Block Overview and Participant Comments for the 600 and 700 Blocks of Allen Street
**600 Block**

The 600 block runs between Harvard Place and Clarke Street. Most of the properties are owner-occupied, single-family dwellings. The homes were built in a short time period between 1902 and 1930, with 1920 being the most frequent date homes were built. The assessed values for these properties are some of the highest on the street, ranging from $75,700 to $143,900, with an average of $99,537. The character of Allen Street changes as it crosses over Harvard Place, for the properties start to get a bit smaller and closer together. The character is quite distinctive in the summer, for the wonderful tree canopy overhead makes this block a favorite destination for joggers and parents with baby strollers. This block, like some of the others, is quite pleasant. The homes have a coherent mix of architectural styles, and the front yards have some variety. Holiday decorations can be seen at various times of the year. Residents of the 600 block noted that this area feels like a true neighborhood. They mentioned that they appreciate the elements of the street that give it this neighborhood character: front porches, street lights, street trees, interesting homes and yards.

**700 Block**

Sloping up the hill from the 600 block, the 700 block runs between Clarke Street and Euclid Avenue. With a high presence of student renters, the 700 block is most representative of the University Neighborhood. Thirteen properties are owner-occupied, single-family dwellings, six properties are owner-occupied, multi-family dwellings, and nine properties are renter occupied, multi-family dwellings. One property is vacant. The dwellings were constructed between 1895 and 1932, with 1920 being the most frequent date properties were built. The assessed values for these properties range between $60,000 and $111,000, with an average value of $84,432. Two characteristics create the image of the 700 block: the significant increase in density, as compared to the rest of Allen Street, and the mix of people. The block is not only home to students, but also a number of families with children, in addition to a mix of other people. The block is somewhat transitional, and properties are fairly well maintained. There is a mix of front yard types, and a collection of vernacular architectural styles. Residents mentioned concern about landlords. Several residents noted that they care for their own yard mostly out of a feeling of responsibility. A number of participants said they could tell that their neighbors care about the neighborhood by the way that people know and care for each other.
Community Research

Allen Street Residents

Analysis of interviews with Allen Street residents led to a series of 40 different signs that represent the signs of caring for Allen Street. Through coding, the 40 signs were sorted into eight themes, as a way to organize and understand the signs of caring more clearly. The themes are: 1) basic property care/codes, 2) maintain yard, 3) adding decorative elements, 4) maintain house, 5) respect & strengthen neighborhood character, 6) care for the public realm, 7) social actions, and 8) capital improvements. The signs of caring and themes can be seen below, in Figure 9.

During the focus groups, participants organized an unsorted list of signs into four categories of expectations: absolutely expected, moderate care, optimal care, and not noticed.

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2 Residents of the 200 block were invited to attend a focus group that was held nearby on the 300 block, but none of the residents chose to attend. The results for the 200 block were based only on the interview data, and should not be compared as an equal to the other block group data.
During the focus group, participants were given the opportunity to add additional signs of caring to the list of 40. Very few new responses were added to the list. During the course of the activity, very few clarifications were needed regarding the definition of each sign of caring. It was difficult for the investigator to tell if the process of evaluating expectations as a group influenced the responses of the community participants.

Figure 10: Focus Group Results: Signs of Caring Organized by Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>200 Block</th>
<th>300 Block</th>
<th>400/500 Blocks</th>
<th>600/700 Blocks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick Up Trash</td>
<td>Pick Up Trash</td>
<td>Pick Up Trash</td>
<td>Pick Up Trash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep Property Clean</td>
<td>Keep Property Clean</td>
<td>Keep Property Clean</td>
<td>Keep Property Clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Park On Lawn</td>
<td>Don’t Park On Lawn</td>
<td>Don’t Park On Lawn</td>
<td>Don’t Park On Lawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Yard</td>
<td>Maintain Yard</td>
<td>Maintain Yard</td>
<td>Maintain Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mow Lawn</td>
<td>Mow Lawn</td>
<td>Mow Lawn</td>
<td>Mow Lawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidy, Not Necessarily Clipped</td>
<td>Tidy, Not Necessarily Clipped</td>
<td>Tidy, Not Necessarily Clipped</td>
<td>Tidy, Not Necessarily Clipped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain House</td>
<td>Maintain House</td>
<td>Maintain House</td>
<td>Maintain House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick Up After Dog</td>
<td>Pick Up After Dog</td>
<td>Pick Up After Dog</td>
<td>Pick Up After Dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want N’hood to be attractive to others</td>
<td>Want N’hood to be attractive to others</td>
<td>Want N’hood to be attractive to others</td>
<td>Want N’hood to be attractive to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Care</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moderate Care</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moderate Care</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moderate Care</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Yard</td>
<td>No Weeds</td>
<td>No Weeds</td>
<td>No Weeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trim Hedges, Prune</td>
<td>Raked Leaves</td>
<td>Mow Lawn</td>
<td>Maintain Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers, Decorative Plants</td>
<td>Garden/Landscape Front Yard</td>
<td>Tidy, Not Necessarily Clipped</td>
<td>Trim Hedges, Prune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain House</td>
<td>Flowers, Decorative Plants</td>
<td>Raked Leaves</td>
<td>Garden/Landscape Front Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to Know Your Neighbors</td>
<td>Paint House</td>
<td>Gardens/Landscape Front Yard</td>
<td>Flowers, Decorative Plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigilant</td>
<td>Porch Care, Clutter</td>
<td>Holiday Decorations</td>
<td>Paint House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care about Older Homes</td>
<td>Preserve, Restore Older Homes</td>
<td>Potted Plants, Small Decorations</td>
<td>Porch Care, Clutter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Lighting</td>
<td>Built Garage that Fits Neighborhood</td>
<td>Paint House</td>
<td>Preserve, Restore Older Homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave Light on at night</td>
<td>Want N’hood to be attractive to others</td>
<td>Built Garage that Fits Neighborhood</td>
<td>Built Garage that Fits Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go For Walks in Neighborhood</td>
<td>Good Lighting</td>
<td>Wood Fence</td>
<td>Go For Walks in Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk to Know Your Neighbors</td>
<td>Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td>Want N’hood to be attractive to others</td>
<td>Talk to Know Your Neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing to Stay, Live Here</td>
<td>New Driveway</td>
<td>Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td>New Driveway</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Optimal Care**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>200 Block</th>
<th>300 Block</th>
<th>400/500 Blocks</th>
<th>600/700 Blocks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday Decorations</td>
<td>Tree Arrangement</td>
<td>Tree Arrangement</td>
<td>Tree Arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Flourishes, Impressve Gardens</td>
<td>Little Flourishes, Impressve Gardens</td>
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<td>Little Flourishes, Impressve Gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tree Arrangement</td>
<td>Bushes</td>
<td>Bushes</td>
<td>Bushes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in community, WENA, UNPA</td>
<td>Involved in community, WENA, UNPA</td>
<td>Involved in community, WENA, UNPA</td>
<td>Involved in community, WENA, UNPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Driveway Pavers</td>
<td>Special Driveway Pavers</td>
<td>Special Driveway Pavers</td>
<td>Special Driveway Pavers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Not Noticed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>200 Block</th>
<th>300 Block</th>
<th>400/500 Blocks</th>
<th>600/700 Blocks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Absolutely Expected</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in Neighborhood</td>
<td>Invest in Neighborhood</td>
<td>Invest in Neighborhood</td>
<td>Invest in Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td>Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td>Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td>Mow Strip Planted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigilant</td>
<td>Vigilant</td>
<td>Vigilant</td>
<td>Vigilant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The results for the 200 block are compiled based only on individual interview data. Residents were invited to a focus group for the 200 and 300 blocks, but none chose to attend.
In the focus group, participants also reviewed the interview responses regarding what motivates people to care for their properties, and the rewards they feel they receive for doing so.

Following the focus group, these responses were reviewed and organized by the investigator into four categories, based on the motivating conditions related to neighborhood and community. These categories are 1) personal interest, 2) obligation to community, 3) wanting to be considerate of the community, and 4) wanting to contribute to the community.

Figure 11: Focus Group Results: Rewards and Motivations

In addition, focus group participants reviewed interview responses regarding challenges that people face in caring for their yard and home. These challenges were then sorted into categories by the investigator based on who controlled the issue. Some challenges were self-controlled, some were controlled by other people, and some were controlled by nature. Neither the review by the focus group, nor the sort based on control, revealed any patterns. People seem to be
challenged fairly consistently by many of the same factors. Please see Figure 12 for a sorted list of the challenges faced by Allen Street residents.

Figure 12 Focus Group Results: Challenges

Focus group participants also reviewed the list of interview responses regarding front yard preferences. Figure 13 illustrates the patterns in the responses from all the blocks participating in the focus groups. The number of items preferred by more than half of the participants at all three focus groups was surprising in the consistency from one block to another. Many participants had the same general ideas about what they liked to see in a front yard. However, in interviews, a few people went out of their way to mention that they didn’t think that a manicured front yard was necessary, while a few people were very clear on the fact that they did not appreciate wild yards. One participant at a focus group was well known on the street for his
forested front yard, and he had a different perspective to share about what appeals to him. In one interview, a resident said that they appreciated that neighbors were tolerant of his yard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred by All Blocks</th>
<th>Some Blocks Preferred, Some Did Not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green, healthy, cut grass</td>
<td>Bushes Trimmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean: No Trash, Clutter or Random Objects</td>
<td>Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Clear Passage, Clear View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks Cared For</td>
<td>Not a Forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neat, Tidy, Well-groomed, Not Overgrown</td>
<td>Natural Looking and Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming, Inviting, Pleasing</td>
<td>No Vehicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard Complements House and Neighborhood</td>
<td>Decorative Things, Urns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice Landscaping</td>
<td>Bushes, Small Trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks Planned, Consciously Arranged, Has Style</td>
<td>Rock Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoveled and Clean Sidewalk</td>
<td>Nice Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint</td>
<td>Low Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowering Trees</td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Blooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Looking Plants</td>
<td>Things That Did Not Matter to Anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Things that Grow</td>
<td>No Weeds, No Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porch in Good Shape</td>
<td>Not necessarily manicured and fancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know There are People Who Live There</td>
<td>Winter Plant Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Height, Symmetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unenclosed Porches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bigger Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lots of Stuff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Focus Group Results: Preferences

An unexpected result of the focus group process was the social aspect. The investigator wrongly assumed that people living on the same block or a nearby block would already know each other. This was not the case. In some instances, people knew each other, but many people did not, even though they had been living there for a number of years. Increasing community connections was one added benefit. Another was the creation of a temporary community forum to discuss neighborhood issues. One woman was organizing people to go to the neighborhood association meetings with her. Others just seemed to enjoy talking to neighbors about things that they noticed going on in the neighborhood. At the end of each focus group, the investigator presented seed packets to the participants and gardening books to the hosts, to thank them for their participation. The attendees were all quite pleased to receive a gift they could take with them. However, the participants probably got more (and will continue to get more) out of the act of forging new community ties than they will from a packet or two of seeds.
Neighborhood Residents

The surveys that were placed at Petit Branch Library were used to understand the perception of Allen Street by people who do not live on Allen Street, but are still generally familiar with the street and the neighborhood. The purpose of the survey was to identify which signs of caring are communicated to an outside audience of visitors, as well as investigate these outsiders’ perception of image and identity. Twenty-four surveys were returned and, at the first glance, the responses appeared to be somewhat scant. Following a more thorough review, the results from the neighborhood survey were determined to be significant and very useful. The fact that there were a limited number of responses meant that those responses regarding signs of caring were critical, and probably the most noticeable signs of caring to an outside audience. The results of the neighborhood survey are presented in the following two figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multiple Responses</th>
<th>One Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* House Appearance, Maintenance</td>
<td>Lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Yard Appearance, Maintenance, Mow Lawn</td>
<td>Sidewalks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Snow Shoveling</td>
<td>People Around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Pick Up Trash, Have Clean Lots</td>
<td>New Garage-Matches Neighborhood Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Flowers, Gardens, Shrubs</td>
<td>How Residents Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House- Repaint, Improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porches, Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Neighborhood Functions</td>
<td>* indicates several responses (4 or more)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14: Neighborhood Survey Results: Signs of Caring

** Lovely, quaint, interesting, stately, architecturally interesting, attractive, choice spot
* Mix of nice and not so nice properties
  Renters don’t show that they care/Ugly rental properties

* Quiet, less/slower traffic
* Nice trees, streetlights and sidewalks
  Generally safe
  Good location
  Mostly families, some students
  Larger houses than surrounding streets
  I like front porches
  Other side of Genesee is OK, but tougher when you get to Fayette St.
  Looks unfriendly, unconnected to the community

** Majority of residents
* Several residents

Figure 15 Neighborhood Survey Results: Perceptions
The signs of caring noted with a star (*) in Figure 14 became essential to the study. These signs are: 1) house appearance/maintenance, 2) yard appearance/maintenance, 3) snow shoveling, 4) trash in yard/clean lot, and 5) flowers, gardens, shrubs. These five signs were used in the signs of caring inventory to evaluate the properties on Allen Street. They were useful because they were distributed throughout the eight themes. In addition, two other signs of caring were used, to compare the type of results were revealed by the neighbor-defined criteria. These two other sign of caring were 1) potted plants, and 2) planting in the mow strip. The results found in using these signs of caring to structure the inventory are presented in the following section.

**Signs of Caring Inventory**

All of the signs of caring found from the neighborhood residents overlapped with the signs of caring found from the Allen Street residents. The signs of caring that were most frequently noted on the neighborhood survey were used in the inventory. Each sign of caring represented a theme that emerged from the signs of caring summary.

- *Absence of Trash* represents ‘Basic Property Care’.
- *Yard Maintenance* represents ‘Maintain Yard’.
- *Presence of Flowers* represents ‘Adding Decorative Elements’.
- *Potted Plants, Window Boxes and Hanging Baskets* represents ‘Adding Decorative Elements’.
- *House Maintenance* represents ‘Maintain House’.
- *Shoveling the Public Sidewalk* represents the ‘Care for the Public Realm’.
- *Planting the Public Mow Strip* represents the ‘Care for the Public Realm’.

Themes that were not represented in the inventory are ‘Respect & Strengthen Neighborhood Character’, ‘Social Actions’ and ‘Capital Improvements’. ‘Social Actions’ was determined to be a difficult category to inventory, and ‘Capital Improvements’ was not one of the critical themes identified by neighborhood residents.

The signs of caring inventory was based on a visual assessment of site conditions that was performed by the investigator. The graphs presented in the following pages display the results from the signs of caring inventory in a block format. Following the six block graphs is a description of the results broken down by each sign of caring.

---

3 The investigator would have liked to use a sign of caring to measure ‘Respect & Strengthen Neighborhood Character’, but ran into some difficulties in doing so. Most of the signs in this category are subjective, and others are difficult to observe as an outsider.
Signs of Caring in the 200 Block

- Percent of Properties with Trash Absent: 30%
- Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance: 10%
- Percent of Properties with Bulbs Growing: 10%
- Percent of Properties with Potted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes: 33%
- Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance: 0%
- Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared: 100%
- Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted: 100%

Figure 16: Signs of Caring Inventory Results: 200 Block

Signs of Caring in the 300 Block

- Percent of Yards with Trash Present: 62%
- Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance: 69%
- Percent of Properties with Bulbs Growing: 23%
- Percent of Properties with Potted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes: 8%
- Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance: 100%
- Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared: 100%
- Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted: 100%

Figure 17: Signs of Caring Inventory Results: 300 Block
Signs of Caring on the 400 Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Trash Absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Bulbs Growing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Potted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18: Signs of Caring Inventory Results: 400 Block

---

Signs of Caring on the 500 Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Trash Absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Bulbs Growing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Potted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 19: Signs of Caring Inventory Results: 500 Block
Signs of Caring on the 600 Block

Figure 20: Signs of Caring Inventory Results: 600 Block

Signs of Caring on the 700 Block

Figure 21: Signs of Caring Inventory Results: 700 Block
Absence of Trash in the Yard

Trash was easiest to find on the 200 block, with only 30% of the properties free of trash. The 300 block had the next highest amount, with 62% of properties free of trash. 80% of the yards in the 500 block were free of trash. The 600 and 400 blocks had 89% and 90% of yards free of trash, respectively. The 700 block had 96% of the yards trash-free.

Yard Maintenance

Yards were evaluated according to several factors: what vegetation was present, how it was laid out, and how well it was maintained. Yards that were paved or a mess of weeds were poor. Yards that had just grass, grass and a hedge, or shrubs, were rated minimal. Yards that had small plantings or foundation plantings received a moderate rating. Yards with attractive landscaping, a well-planted garden, or a tidy wild garden were rated at the maximum level. These evaluations were made with the assumption that more care and effort is shown by a resident as their plantings become more elaborate.

The 200 block had no yards that illustrated the maximum level of care, and only 17% were moderate. The 300 block also did not have any yards at the maximum level, but the majority, at 85%, were moderate. In the 400 block, 61% of the yards were rated at the maximum or moderate level. In the 500 block, 60% of the yards were at the maximum or moderate level. In the 600 block, only 11% of the properties were rated at the maximum level, with 59% at the moderate level. In the 700 block, 19% of the properties were at the maximum level, with another 37% at the moderate level of care.

Flowers

Flowers were strongly represented in the feedback from both the Allen Street residents as well as the neighborhood residents. Therefore, the investigator observed the presence of flowers using photographs from the late summer, and doing further site observation in the spring to see emerging bulbs. The 200 block only had flowers growing on 10% of the properties. The other blocks were all within the same range of each other, with the 500 block the next lowest at 65%. In the 300 block, 69% had flowers, while in the 700 block, 71% did. 79% of residents in the 400 block and 85% of residents in the 600 block had flowers.
**Potted Plants, Window Boxes and Hanging Baskets**

The presence of potted plants was determined using photo analysis. 10% of the residents of the 200 block had potted plants. Only 15% of the 500 block residents had potted plants, while 23% of the 300 block had potted vegetation. 33% of the residents of the 400 block, the 600 block, and the 700 block all had potted plants.

**House Maintenance**

Houses were determined to be well, fairly well, decent or poorly maintained using photo analysis and site observation. The dwellings were evaluated based on overall appearance and general evidence of maintenance and care. The characteristics used to guide the evaluation were: peeling paint, broken windows, sagging porches, rotting wood, and porch clutter. In the 200 block, only 20% of the houses were fairly well maintained; the rest were decent or poor. No homes fell in the poorly maintained category except for those on the 200 block. Every other block had between 78 and 85% of the homes in either the well or fairly well maintained category.

**Shoveling of the Public Sidewalk**

Houses were evaluated for snow shoveling based on site observations. In caring for the public realm, the 200 block was again rated the lowest with only 33% of the sidewalks cleared. Again, the 500 block scored fairly low, with only half of the sidewalks shoveled, but this time they were accompanied by the 600 block, which had scored quite high on other indicators. The residents of the 700 block had 82% of their sidewalks shoveled, with the 400 block scoring similarly at 84%. The 300 block scored the best on this indicator, with 100% of their sidewalks shoveled. This fits with their philosophy of “welcoming, not wealthy.”

**Planting the Public Mow Strip**

Planting in the public realm between the curb and the sidewalk is not something that everyone feels is appropriate, but several people noted in interviews that they see it as a gesture to beautify the neighborhood. Once again, the 200 block scored the lowest, with none of the mow strips planted. The 300 block had only a few properties (8%) with mow strip plantings. The rest of the street all had approximately 20% of the properties with planted mow strips.
Discussion

Community-based research produces a great deal of data and information. The richness that comes from people’s own words is necessary in qualitative work, but can often make the results difficult to analyze and comprehend. The following discussion attempts to present the quantity of information in a way that does not compromise the richness of the individual responses, but summarizes in a manner that allows patterns to emerge and the results to become more clear.

Signs of Caring: Participant Responses

Several patterns emerged when the focus group responses were charted as they have been in Figure 10, on page 32. However, in general, the focus group expectations regarding signs of caring are fairly similar. The first pattern is quite simple: certain things are absolutely expected on all blocks: pick up trash and keep your property clean. This common list might have been longer, had the residents of the 200 block participated in a focus group. However, based on the results at hand, these are the minimum expectations on all blocks.

As you travel along the street from the 200 block to the 700 block, the number of minimum expectations increases. If the street went from the worst to the best conditions, then this pattern might have been predictable. However, the 400 and 600 blocks, found in the middle of the study area, scored the highest on many of the signs of caring, and have some of the highest property values. A possible explanation for this pattern is that the 700 block is somewhat transitional, and the residents who attended the focus group for the 600 and 700 blocks represented the homeowners, and they might have higher standards due to concerns over the stability of the block.

The results for the 400 and 500 blocks indicate that they have higher minimum expectations for neighbors in social actions than the other block groups, but they have lower expectations for yard maintenance. In particular, every block group felt that mowing the lawn was absolutely expected except the 400/500 group. A possible explanation for this pattern might be because the yards are already quite well maintained, and residents may not feel that they have to expect such behavior, since residents already do so. The 600 and 700 blocks, however, have higher minimum expectations for yard maintenance. This might be explained by the fact that fewer
yards are as well maintained. The 600 and 700 group also had higher expectations for the manner in which their neighbors care for the public realm.

Two themes, ‘Adding Decorative Elements’ and ‘Capital Improvements’, did not appear in the expectations until the moderate or optimal category. None of the items in these categories were deemed ‘absolutely expected’ by focus group participants. ‘Respect and Strengthen Neighborhood Character’, however, appeared in the absolutely expected category for both the 400/500 group and the 600/700 group. For the 300 group, codes relating to neighborhood character did not emerge until the moderate care level.

The focus group participants for the 300 block were the only ones that had a majority of people rank any items in the optimal care category. Many of the items that they categorized as ‘optimal’ were categorized elsewhere (i.e. ‘absolutely expected’) by the other groups. Some participants in the other focus groups ranked items in optimal care, but not a majority of the participants.

**Signs of Caring: Overlap**

Signs of caring were investigated from two perspectives. The first is the perspective of the Allen Street resident, who is more aware of the signs of caring that can be seen on Allen Street. The second perspective is that of the neighborhood resident, who is familiar with Allen Street, but does not live there. Each of these groups of people were asked to describe the practices that communicate to them that someone cares about the neighborhood. The residents of Allen Street were also asked to describe their own actions in showing that they care about the neighborhood. The responses resulted in two lists: signs of caring from inside and outside Allen Street. These two lists overlapped; in fact, the smaller list from the neighborhood residents was a subset of the longer list from the Allen Street residents.

The signs of caring noticed by neighborhood residents are fairly well distributed between all the themes, except for capital improvements, which did not appear. The signs of caring noticed by neighborhood residents fall into the following categories:
Response:
1) **Pick up Trash, Clean Lot**  
2) How Residents Park  
3) **Yard Appearance, Maintenance, Mow Lawn**  
4) **Flowers, Garden, Shrubs**  
5) **House Maintenance and Appearance**  
6) **House- Repaint, Make Improvements**  
7) **Porches, Character**  
8) **Built New Garage to fit Neighborhood**  
9) **Snow Shoveling**  
10) **Lights**  
11) **Sidewalks**  
12) **Attend Neighborhood Functions**  
13) **People Around** 

The responses that are highlighted in bold are those that were noted most frequently by neighborhood residents. The fairly even distribution of the “noticed” signs of caring between the different themes validates the use of the themes. This may be a key understanding if the signs of caring are eventually used to develop neighborhood improvement strategies. A strategy may need to be balanced with elements from each of the themes. That is, a successful strategy would not neglect certain components of the neighborhood. It would not address vegetation alone. Rather, it would be comprised of signs of caring that are drawn from each of the eight themes. The strategy would not be the same for every neighborhood, but could follow a similar framework that utilizes the eight themes.

**Signs of Caring: Site Inventory**

As an exercise to better understand the signs of caring and block dynamics, the investigator evaluated the properties on Allen Street to see if the signs of caring were visible. She used five signs of caring that overlapped between the Allen Street residents and the neighborhood residents, and two signs of caring that only appeared in the Allen Street resident data.

**Absence of Trash**

The absence of trash in the yard was one of the most straightforward and useful signs of caring. The 200 and 300 blocks noted that they struggle with trash coming from the flow of people going to and from Sunset Terrace, and this was evident in site observations. The 300 block had half the trash that was present in the 200 block, so people either deposit the trash in the 200
block before getting up the hill to the 300 block, or the residents are more meticulous about removing the litter.

The 20% of yards in the 500 block that had trash present in the yard is not surprising, as the 500 block has some problems with litter from people traveling from Westcott Street along Harvard Place. However, this does not appear to be a problem on the 600 block, which also intersects Harvard Place. This sign of caring is just the beginning of some subtle characteristics that were revealed about the 500 block, which will become evident as the discussion progresses from one sign of caring to another. Compared to the two adjacent blocks, 400 and 600, the 500 block had twice the trash present.

The 700 block had very little trash present. The increased density and high presence of renters would have indicated a higher presence of trash, but in practice, there was little trash to be found. A possible explanation for this is that many people walk along this block, and therefore, might pick up the trash as they walk. Or there might be some dedicated neighbors who pick up the trash on a regular basis.

Yard Maintenance
None of the yards on the 200 block were rated at the maximum level of care and only 20% at the moderate level of care. Again, this may be correlated with the high level of vacancy and a high number of renter-occupants. The results for the 300 block are interesting in the way that they confirm what the residents were saying about making their properties “welcoming, but not wealthy.” None of the yards were rated at the maximum level, but a whopping 85% of the yards were rated as moderate, with the other 15% at a minimum level of care.

When correlated with the higher property values, part of the results for the 400 block were somewhat predictable, with half of the properties rated at the maximum level of care. The other half of the results were somewhat surprising, with only 11% rated at the moderate level of care and a large 39% rated at the minimum level. There are so many beautiful yards in the 400 block that the plain yards fade into the background, communicating little to visitors or neighbors.
The 500 block had 30% of the yards rated at the maximum level of care, another 30% rated as moderate, and 40% rated at the minimum level. Having fewer yards rated in the maximum category starts to define the 500 block as slightly less attractive and welcoming than the 400 block, but still a pleasant block where it looks like some people care about the neighborhood.

Again, when correlated with the higher property values, the ratings for the 600 block were surprising. Only 11% of the yards exhibited the maximum level of care, but a significant chunk, at 59%, displayed moderate levels of maintenance. 26% had minimum levels of care, and there was one property that was evaluated as poorly maintained. The 600 block does not have the same amount of space for front gardens, and the same level of gardening is not exhibited as in the 400 block. The properties are maintained, but there are few impressive gardens.

The 700 block was somewhat predictable, given the number of renter-occupied and multi-family dwellings. Only 19% of the properties displayed maximum levels of care, which is still higher than the 600 block. Another 37% of the properties were rated moderate, and a large number, 44%, were categorized at the minimum level of care.

Flowers
The 200 block ranked low on this sign of caring, with only two properties (10%) growing flowers. The other blocks were all within the same range, between 65 and 85%. The 500 block had the next lowest presence of flowers at 65%, and this again, indicates how the 500 block is just subtly less well cared for. It seems that a threshold exists, and there are enough people in every block, other than the 200 block, that care enough to plant flowers in their yard. Flowers are not considered something that is absolutely expected; rather, the residents of every block note that this is evidence of a moderate level of care. A certain percentage of properties with flowers present could be seen as threshold for communicating care. Flowers are also something that can be fairly easy to do for someone who might not have much experience with gardening.

Potted Plants, Window Boxes and Hanging Baskets
As another measure of ‘Adding Decorative Elements’, potted vegetation was inventoried to see if there was a different pattern from planted vegetation. Some renters noted in the interviews
that they plant vegetation in pots, due to their level of transience. However, a correlation with high levels of renters was not apparent.

The same two properties had potted plants in the 200 block. Few properties (15%) had potted plants in the 500 block. 23% of the properties in the 300 block displayed potted plants. Many of these were window boxes, which are attached to the front façade of the home. A third of the residents in the 400, 600 and 700 blocks displayed potted plants, window boxes or hanging baskets. People on Allen Street are much more likely to have flowers planted in the ground than they are to have potted plants.

*House Maintenance*

The 200 block was the only block that did not have any houses that were well maintained, and the only block to have houses that were poorly maintained. Between 78 and 85% of the properties on each of the other blocks were either well maintained or fairly well maintained. Every other block had at least 40% of the homes rating in the well-maintained category. Home maintenance also appears to be a threshold for signs of caring. Except for the 200 block, the other block groups all agreed that maintaining the house is absolutely expected. Their practices support this stated expectation. Some percentage of the houses on a block need to be well maintained, particularly to provide more stability if there are properties that are poorly maintained or vacant.

*Public Sidewalk Shoveled*

The results of the sidewalk-shoveling inventory are unclear. The 200 block did poorly, with only a third of the residents having shoveled the public sidewalk in front of their house. The 500 and 600 blocks also did not receive a good rating for this indicator, with only half of the sidewalks shoveled. The 400 and 700 blocks had more than 80% of the sidewalk shoveled, while the 300 block had shoveled a full 100% of the public sidewalk. The 400 block generally presents a welcoming, caring image to visitors, and their result is not surprising. The 700 block has a large number of students who walk, as well as rent. Students themselves are typically not good about shoveling, but many landlords have a snow removal service. The residents of the 300 block are a dedicated, enthusiastic group, and shoveling the snow would fit into their attitude of “welcoming vs. wealthy.” The snow shovel inventory was performed late in the winter, when

- 48 -
people might have given up shoveling snow. This measure might be better performed at various times during the winter, or if practices were observed rather than results.

*Planting in the Public Realm*

The results for this indicator contrast well with the results for the previous indicator, which was also used to measure care for the public realm. In comparison, the residents of the 300 block, who were admirable shovelers, did little planting in the mow strip. Only 8% of the properties displayed public planting practices. Residents noted in the focus group that they have had problems with people cutting, destroying and picking flowers if they are planted too near to the sidewalk. This might explain their reluctance to plant in the mow strip. The 200 block did not plant in the mow strip at all.

Another threshold can be seen here. A consistent level of around 20% of the residents on the 400, 500, 600 and 700 blocks had planted in the mow strip. Residents of the 300 block are not able to move to a level of contributing to the neighborhood, but rather are stuck at a level of merely being considerate. This is not by their own choice, but is in the control of others. They can show that they care by shoveling, which is a sign of caring that cannot be destroyed or stolen. But planting in the mow strip goes a step further into territory that may not work on this block, without risking loss.

*Thresholds*

The analysis of these signs of caring revealed certain thresholds that are critical in starting to understand where to encourage neighborhoods to improve. Thresholds are addressed in neither Nassauer nor Taylor’s work. However, this study seems to indicate that thresholds exist. The results suggest that after a certain percentage of individual residents create or place signs of caring on their property, a collective threshold is reached. At some point, there are ‘enough’ signs of caring to convey a higher level of care. This study is not able to quantify where these thresholds might be, but thresholds can be seen in the following front yard practices: flowers, house maintenance, and care for the public realm. The threshold in ‘care for the public realm’ only became visible when the observations for two signs of caring within the same theme were compared. Practices related to planting in the mow strip and shoveling sidewalks revealed different, but complementary data about residents’ willingness to care for the public realm.
These thresholds reveal important information for city officials, neighborhood organizations and individual neighbors who would like to improve city neighborhoods. For example, collective signs of caring are more important than individual ones. The idea of a threshold signifies the need for a critical mass of improvement, and follows the recent community development trend to target block improvements, rather than ‘seeding’ smaller improvements. A threshold might not ever be passed if enough is not going on in a block.

In the neighborhood survey, flowers were one of the most frequently noted sign of caring. Flowers are also an example of where a threshold was observed in the data, for all blocks but the 200 block had a sizeable number of flowers. Flowers are an easy way to make a collective impact in a block, they will be noticed, and they are easy to plant. Flowers are also not something that appears in the data until ‘moderate care’, so by planting flowers, a resident is showing more than the minimum level of care.
Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Working with community residents is always challenging and exciting in different ways. I am constantly amazed by how different people are, and how different group dynamics can be from one group to another, even with the same group process. The interviews and focus groups were no different. Each interview depended mostly on the interest and openness of the resident. The focus group dynamics were very different, and depended on the mix of people, the host(s), and the atmosphere that was created. Although qualitative research is not predictable, as the investigator in a research study, you want to be able to control as many variables as possible. Incorporating other people into the process makes things more difficult, more complicated, more unpredictable, but ultimately, more rewarding.

There were two types of participants that needed to be involved in this study, but were not interested or willing. Few, if any, renters attended the focus groups. The participants were primarily homeowners. The other people that did not participate in the focus groups were the residents of the 200 block, who live in the most deteriorated location on the street. In an attempt to include both groups of participants in the study, the interviews were done first, and both groups were represented in the random sample. This is a challenge of participatory urban neighborhood research, and an opportunity to develop more successful methods to incorporate people from these groups. These groups might feel alienated from the larger community, and no sense of duty towards them.

When they received the introductory letter, some renters called to tell me they were not the homeowner, so I wouldn’t want them involved. I tried to make it clear that all residents were invited to participate, including renters. Possible methods to include renters include specifically holding a focus group for renters, or involving the university population more directly. Student renters are of particular concern in the University and Westcott neighborhoods, and probably could be involved with a fair amount of ease if a different approach were taken.

For example, even though the material was targeted at residents, the language of the letter may have made student renters feel that their input was not useful or desired. They may not be the one to care for the yard, and the language and content of the letter may have unintentionally
excluded them. Many renters probably feel that the yard is not their responsibility, and engaging
them in a conversation about signs of caring might be really productive. The outcome and
methods of this study could easily be shared with student renters through some sort of
university program. But the event might have to find a way into their schedule through a
different route. If a focus group was held specifically for students, and the language invited
students more clearly, they might be more likely to be involved. Or if a focus group was held
on campus, with free food at the end of the event, students would be likely to show up.

The residents of the 200 block are a more difficult target audience, as I am not sure why they
chose not to be involved. Perhaps the challenges they face in such a part of the neighborhood
are more difficult, and the focus group doesn’t register as an important expenditure of time and
energy. More persistence might have been needed to gather up the few people living with this
type of neighborhood conditions who would have been willing to participate. Or greater
incentives might have been necessary to encourage participation. There are fewer residents who
live on the 200 block, and so the small sample might not have been enough to represent this part
of the neighborhood. Holding a focus group in the 200 block might have been successful in
attracting block residents. Phone calls could also have been used to encourage people to attend,
rather than just a mailed invitation. If I could do it over, I would make the extra effort to call
people on this block, now that I know none of them would attend otherwise.

The neighborhood surveys were displayed at Petit Branch Library, near the 600 block of Allen
Street. This location was fairly successful, but in further applications of the method, I would
recommend setting up a display at various locations. The people that came to the library were
mostly familiar with the 400, 500, 600 and 700 blocks. Few people were familiar with the 200
and 300 blocks, and comments about these blocks would have been helpful. The display
worked fairly well, but if there were enough time, I might have tried to go door-to-door for
neighborhood surveys, too. My original idea was to do sidewalk surveys, and talk to people who
were walking on Allen Street. Winter weather did not permit this method, and the library display
was used instead. A more diverse set of neighborhood residents would be useful.

During the interviews, some of the residents were not specific in their responses, and many
stated, “maintain yard”, “maintain house”, “keep up property”, and so on. At first, I did not
encourage people to elaborate. However, after interviewing a handful of residents, I realized that follow up questions were necessary to help residents bring greater clarity to their answers. For example, a participant might say, “They maintain their yard” in response to “How can you tell (that your neighbors care about the neighborhood)?” I would then ask, “What does a maintained yard look like to you?” or “What do they do to maintain their yard?” This was a fairly successful technique.

As a longtime renter, this study made me realize many mistakes I had made throughout my past seven years renting different apartments in various cities. In reflecting on my time as a college student, and even the last few years, I can look back and see many things I did without knowing it would bother my neighbors, and make them think that I did not care about the neighborhood. I can think of trashcans left at the curb, sidewalks not shoveled, and grass not cut regularly. I knew enough to pick up the constant trash, but even then, I would only do it every few weeks, when there was so much that it bothered me.

I don’t know if everyone recognizes the responsibilities that they have as a resident, whether they rent or own the property. I didn’t. If I had known that other people cared about our yard, I would have done more to contribute to the neighborhood. I think this is a potential direction that the results of this research could address. If I didn’t know, then perhaps there are other naïve renters like me, and this data could be designed to inform such young renters and students.

In addition to learning how to show my neighbors that I care about the neighborhood, this process challenged me to overcome some of my weaknesses. For example, I dreaded going door-to-door to interview residents. The reasons for this are: 1) I am uncomfortable talking to people that I don’t know, 2) I don’t like asking people to go out of their way for me, and 3) frankly, I was concerned that I might put myself in a compromised situation by entering the home of a stranger. The interviews went so much more smoothly than I had hoped. I learned a great deal about the process of talking to people that I don’t know, as well as a great deal of information from talking to people I don’t know.
Conclusions

Signs of caring are noticed. These visual, spatial and practical codes are noticed by neighbors and visitors alike, and signal a level of commitment and care by residents for the neighborhood. This was a hypothesis at the beginning of the study, but the results prove that people notice at least some of these signs of caring, and not only notice, but understand the intended meaning of care and commitment. However, individual signs of caring are not noticed as much as the collective effect of multiple signs of caring.

Some signs of caring are a problem when they are present, but are a positive sign of caring when they are absent. Other signs of caring have a positive impact when they are present, but are not missed when they are absent. For example, most people might not notice if the lawn at a particular property was mowed, but they would notice if it were not mowed. In the same way, people would probably not notice if litter was picked up and not present, but if it were present, then it would be more noticeable. Conversely, if someone did not have potted plants, people would not notice the lack of potted vegetation and think less of the property. But if there were potted plants, that might enhance the image of the property by being present.

Outside problems, such as public housing and related social problems, discourage residents from placing or creating signs of caring on their property. The threat of theft, destruction or vandalism can be too great in some instances, and residents, such as those living in the 200 block, are generally not willing to take the risk or are not committed to the neighborhood. There is a need to address these outside problems first, as signs of caring might not be strong enough to overcome such significant negative influences. Blocks that are slightly more removed from the problem, but still affected, will produce particular signs of caring that cannot be destroyed or stolen. For example, the 300 block shovels snow, but hardly plants in the mow strip. These outside problems can affect different blocks in different ways, depending greatly on the proximity to the problem, and the experiences of the residents.

Signs of caring present an excellent opportunity for city officials, neighborhood organizations, and individual neighbors to encourage residents to communicate their care for the neighborhood, and to influence the perception of their neighborhood’s image and identity. The
methods used in this study could be used elsewhere, as well as the themes framework that could be used to structure a successful urban improvement strategy.
References


Driscoll, Paul. (January 31, 2003) Interview with Sara Mills and Ellen Micoli Soffa at the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency.


Korman, Randall. (February 7, 2004) Interview with Ellen Micoli Soffa at Korman residence on Allen Street. Allen Street resident and Architecture professor.


Appendices
Appendix A

Example

City of Syracuse
Online Property Record
for
420 Allen Street
# Property Description

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## Property Inventory

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View Tax Collection Information for this Property
Return to General Information Page

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Disclaimer Statement
Appendix B

Letter to Allen Street Residents
February 4, 2004

Resident  
Allen Street  
Syracuse, NY 13210  

Dear Allen Street Resident,

I am writing to invite you to be part of a study. I am a graduate student in the Landscape Architecture Department at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Dr. M. Elen Deming, Professor of Landscape Architecture and one of your neighbors, is supervising my work. This winter and spring, I will be conducting a study that investigates the potential for front yard improvements to be used as a neighborhood revitalization technique. We are specifically looking at Allen Street because it has a range of property types and front yard conditions. For this study to be successful, we need to understand the perspective of neighborhood residents like you.

Over the next few weekends, I will approach a select number of houses with a short survey. If I arrive at your door, I would be most grateful if you would be willing to talk with me for 10 minutes. The questions will be easy, and don’t require anything more than your perspective as a neighborhood resident. Thinking about front yards during the winter seems strange, I’m sure, but we’ll have to try to remember what Syracuse is like without two feet of snow!

I will also be conducting focus group sessions in early March. If I have the opportunity to meet with you, I will explain more about these sessions. All the participants will be your neighbors from Allen Street.

The surveys and focus groups are critical research elements in my capstone project for my Master’s degree. If your house is not randomly selected, but you have questions, or are interested in participating, please contact me at 422-2739 or epmicoli@syr.edu.

Any help that you are willing to provide will be greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Ellen Micoli Soffa  
Graduate Student  
Faculty of Landscape Architecture

Dr. M. Elen Deming  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Landscape Architecture

One Forestry Drive  ■ Syracuse, New York 13210-2778  ■ http://www.esf.edu/
Appendix C

Sample

Completed
Allen Street Resident
Interview Sheets
Allen Street Resident Survey

Name: Richard  Address: 440 Allen

Rent or own? How long have you lived here? 27 years

1. Why did you choose to live on this street?
   David lived here - liked n- hood - old houses, was in price range at the time.

2. Who takes care of your front yard and the exterior of your house?
   Self & David, Charlie homes - was tenant, now neighbor.

3. What is it that you/they do?
   Mow lawn, buying - planting plants, Charlie maintains other houses.

4. Why (do you/does that person) care for your yard and house?
   Enjoy yard work, Charlie - so they don't have to.

5. What rewards are there in caring for your front yard and house?
   Looks, been in n- hood long enough - bought props across street - to keep n- hood stable - improving, makes street look better, inspires.

6. What challenges are there in caring for your front yard and house?
   Smaller yards - challenge that way.
   Easy for things to get out of shape, need to be considerate of neighbors.
   What goes right in n- hood - right look, (face would look right - no cut space for yards!)

7. Do you care about the neighborhood? How do you show that you care?
   Yes - buying other props - have sense of comm - known neighbors.

8. Do you think that your neighbors on Allen Street care about the neighborhood? How can you tell?
   Most of them, particularly owner occupied.
   Improve properties, fix up homes, care for yards, respect n- hood.
   Rebuild porches, restore to original. Paint homes approp to vintage of house.

9. In your opinion, what makes a good front yard?
   Straightness, keep original decorative, painted city, Armstrongs.
   Not necessarily traditional clipped lawn & manicured shoud be pleasing & approp to property.

10. Are there things that people do or don't do that detract from the neighborhood?
    Parking - cars parked on too many parts of yard (rentals)
    Increased density of people causes problems.
Allen Street Resident Survey

Name: Natalie Address: 515 Allen St.

Rent or own? How long have you lived here? Since June

1. Why did you choose to live on this street?
   6 people — need inexpensive place, close to bookstore + enough room

2. Who takes care of your front yard and the exterior of your house?
   landlord + roommates
   planted flowers

3. What is it that you/do they do?
   mow lawn $2/month — supposed to
   supposed to rip out weeds, she did it once

4. Why (do you/does that person) care for your yard and house?
   landlord in lease
   house looks — make house
   look nicer
   house is on lease
   has to, may be be what to

5. What rewards are there in caring for your front yard and house?
   personal rewards — made it look better, felt good
   self gratification
   neighbors care, want to show — not just
   careless student

6. What challenges are there in caring for your front yard and house?
   have to remind landlord

7. Do you care about the neighborhood? How do you show that you care?
   yeah — be aware of what’s going on, look out for neighbors

8. Do you think that your neighbors on Allen Street care about the neighborhood? How can you tell?
   yeah — this section to Harvard in particular
   care about how it looks

9. In your opinion, what makes a good front yard?
   clean, no trash, random objects
   shows personality of people, that people like to be around
   “nice girls live here”

10. Are there things that people do or don’t do that detract from the neighborhood?
    yeah — not keeping up w/ yard work
    broken windows, problems not being fixed
    eyesores that take away from atmosphere of neighborhood — people who live here + coming through

   yard is easy way to convey that we are open, happy people
   people
Appendix D

Focus Group Activity Sheets
Front Yards Focus Group
Activity One
March 2004

To represent your own opinion, please circle answers with which you agree, cross out answers with which you disagree, and write in answers you feel are missing.

Rewards/Motivation

Personal Satisfaction & Enjoyment
Other people notice and comment
I/We Like the House
To Improve the Neighborhood
Beauty, To Make it Look Nice
For Economic Benefits
Maintenance and Upkeep
For Kids, Grandkids, or Family
History, Roots, Sense of Continuity
Inspire Others
I Care
Privacy
House is extension of one’s character
Meet people
Aversion to suburbs
Birds and insects
Grew up with gardening
Safety-Make it look like people live here

Challenges

Lack of Respect and Vandalism
Trash
Keeping up with Amount of Work
Money
Knowledge (plant information)
Time
Need low maintenance things
Climate, Weather and Soil
Physical, Age or Energy Limitations
Weeds, Plant Problems, Wildlife
Small Yard, Scale of Plants
Appropriate for Maintaining Character of Neighborhood and Street
Social Pressure, Neighbor’s Expectations
Have Other Priorities
Landlord, Renter, Homeowner Tension
Dogs, Dog Feces
Newness of Homeownership
People Not Knowing, Observing Zoning
Watching Neighborhood Worsen
Tools (Lawnmower)
Design Challenges
Getting it to Look Nice
Lack of Interest
Social Problems of City
Landscape Not Child Friendly
Preferences

Green, healthy, cut grass
Clean: No Trash, Clutter or Random Objects
Flowers
Bushes Trimmed
Looks Cared For
Neat, Tidy, Well-groomed, Not Overgrown
Color
No Weeds
Welcoming, Inviting, Pleasing
Clear Passage, Clear View
Not a Forest
Yard complements house and neighborhood
Not necessarily manicured and fancy
Natural looking and native
Nice landscaping
Looks planned, Consciously arranged, Has style
Shoveled and clean sidewalk
Paint
No Vehicles
Flowering Trees
Spring Blooms
Winter Plant Interest
Height
Symmetry
Healthy Looking Plants
Unenclosed Porches
Decorative Things, Urns
Bigger Yard
Green, Things That Grow
Porch in Good Shape
Lots of Stuff
Bushes

Small Trees
Know There are People Who Live There
Rock Garden
No Grass
Nice Personality
Low Maintenance
Variety
Front Yards Focus Group
Activity Two
March 2004

Please review the following lists and consider whether there is anything missing. Please add any additional responses.

**Signs of Caring Respondents Feel They Show**
- Pick up Trash
- Keep Property Clean
- Maintain House
- Maintain Yard
- Garden or Plant in Front Yard
- Shovel Sidewalks
- Choosing to stay, live here
- Talk to neighbors, people know each other
- Involved in community, WENA, UNPA
- Paint house, maintain original details
- Vigilant
- Investment (buy other properties, spend $)
- Potted plants, small decorations
- Want neighborhood to be attractive to others
- Noise level
- Pick up after dog
- Go for walks
- New Driveway
- Care about older homes
- Built garage that fit neighborhood context
- Bring in trash cans in timely way

**Signs of Caring Respondents Feel Others Show**
- Pick up Trash*
- Keep Property Clean*
- Maintain House*
- Maintain Yard*
- Landscaping, (Plantings*)
- Shovel Sidewalks*
- Choosing to stay, live here*
- Talk to neighbors, people know each other*
- Involved in community, WENA, UNPA*
- (Paint House*) Pick Appropriate Paint Color
- Bring in trash cans in timely way*
- Mow lawn
- Trim hedges and Prune
- Flowers and Decorative Plants
- Preserve and restore older homes
- Porch, care and clutter
- Leave light on at night
- Don’t park on lawn
- Holiday decorations
- Little flourishes, impressive gardens
- Raked leaves
- No Weeds
- Tree Arrangement
- Bushes
- Special Driveway Pavers
- Wood Fence
- Mow Strip Planted
- Tidy, not necessarily clipped
Appendix E

Neighborhood Letter and Survey
Petit Branch Library Display
March 17, 2004

Dear Westcott Area Neighborhood Resident,

I am a graduate student in the Landscape Architecture Department at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Dr. M. Elen Deming, Professor of Landscape Architecture and one of your neighbors, is supervising my work. I am conducting a study that investigates the potential for front yard improvements to be used as a neighborhood revitalization technique. We are specifically looking at Allen Street because it has a range of property types and front yard conditions. For this study to be successful, we need to understand the perspective of neighborhood residents like you. **If you live on Allen Street, please do not complete this survey! I have another survey for Allen Street residents.**

If you are willing, please take a few minutes and fill out a survey and leave it in the completed survey box here in Petit Library. If you have any questions, please contact me at 422-2739 or emnicoli@syr.edu.

Thank you for your time!

Ellen Micoli Soffa  
Graduate Student, SUNY-ESF  
Faculty of Landscape Architecture

If you have any concerns about the nature of this research, please contact the Institutional Review Board at 443-3013.
**Neighborhood Resident Survey**

Name: Mahar family  
Address: 104 Concord Place

Rent or own? own  
How long have you lived here? 9 years

Do you walk in the neighborhood? For exercise or to get to a destination?

Yes. To get to a destination.

Do you walk on Allen Street? Which sections?

Yes. Section near Concord Place.

Why do you/don’t you walk on Allen Street? What do you like/dislike about it? Please be specific.

We walk there because kids like to ride bikes there. Do not like bumps on sidewalk but, otherwise pleasant.

Can you trace your route in the neighborhood on the map on the back, or describe where you walk?

on back —>

How would you describe Allen Street?

Nice in most properties. Some sections kind of junky.

Do you think the residents of Allen Street care about the neighborhood? How can you tell? Again, please note specifics.

Mostly yes. They care about the properties, plant flowers and pick up trash.
Appendix F

Posters
Final Capstone Presentation
April 14, 2004
Research Process

Research Question: What are the visual, spatial and practical codes that signal commitment by neighborhood residents, and how might understanding these codes inform a larger urban revitalization strategy that encourages signs of caring?

inventory
of existing conditions in multiple seasons

Interviews
During the snowy month of February 2004, residents at one-third of the 160 occupied properties on Allen Street were interviewed in door to door surveys.

Questions
2. Do the residents of Allen Street care about the neighborhood? How can you tell?

For 5 weeks in February and March, surveys were left in a display at the Petit Branch Library on Victoria Place, in a block adjacent to Allen Street. Library patrons were encouraged to fill out the short survey, which was intended to gauge the perception of image and identity of Allen Street by neighborhood residents not living on Allen Street. The results of this survey were a series of indicators that correspond with the themes found in the resident signs of caring. These indicators were used to evaluate Allen Street properties for signs of caring. Two additional indicators were used for comparison.

Focus Groups
In early March, residents in each of the six blocks were invited to attend a focus group at a nearby neighbor’s home. Three focus groups were held: one for the 200 & 300 blocks, one for the 400 & 500 blocks, and one for the 600 & 700 blocks. Using participatory methods, the attendees were engaged in discussion and activities that evaluated and organized the responses found in the interviews.

Neighborhood Surveys
Mostly yes They care about the properties, plant flowers and pick up trash

Indicators
trash in yard yard maintenance & planting bulbs and flowers potted plants house maintenance shoveled sidewalks mow strip planted

Analysis and Synthesis
finding patterns by comparing practices, attitudes, expectations, and property data

The Role of the Front Yard in a Traditional Urban American Neighborhood
Ellen Micoli Soffa, Faculty of Landscape Architecture
Allen Street, Syracuse, New York
# Inventory and Analysis

## 1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Built</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>1955</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Value</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$86,900</td>
<td>$145,900</td>
<td><strong>$53,650</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Proximity to public housing**
- **Vacancy**

**Concerns:** Vandalism, trash, drug dealing, safety

## 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Built</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1955</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Value</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$51,000</td>
<td>$81,900</td>
<td><strong>$72,554</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Resident:** "I love this block!"
- **Transitional**

**"Welcoming Vs. Wealthy"**

**Nice architecture**

---

### Signs of Caring

#### 200 Block

- **Percent of Yards with Trash Present:** 70% 100%
- **Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance:**
  - moderate: 10%
  - minimum: 10%
- **Percent of Yards with Bulbs Growing:** 100%
- **Percent of Yards with Potted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes:** 33%
- **Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance:**
  - fairly well: 33%
- **Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared:** 0%
- **Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted:** 100%

#### 300 Block

- **Percent of Yards with Trash Present:** 38% 100%
- **Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance:**
  - moderate: 23%
- **Percent of Yards with Bulbs Growing:** 100%
- **Percent of Yards with Potted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes:** 100%
- **Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance:**
  - fairly well: 33%
- **Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared:** 8%
- **Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted:** 100%

---

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Inventory and Analysis

People gardening, painting, walking

Interesting architecture

Welcoming front gardens

Beautiful homes

1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Built</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1955</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Value</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>$140,200</td>
<td><strong>$107,916</strong></td>
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1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Built</th>
<th>1889</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1955</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Value</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
<td>$102,800</td>
<td><strong>$89,095</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pleasant

Eclectic architecture

Mix of beautiful yards and simple yards

Tidy

Signs of Caring

- 10% Percent of Yards with Trash Present
- 79% Percent of Yards with Bulbs Growing
- 33% Percent of Yards with Dotted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes

- 84% Percentage of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared
- 21% Percentage of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted

400 Block

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Date Built
1880 1902 1930 1955
Property Value
$30,000 $75,700 $143,900
$99,537

1920
Date Built
1880 1895 1932 1955
Property Value
$30,000 $60,000 $111,000 $143,900
$84,432

Holiday decorations
Front Yard Variety
Pleasant
Nice mix of architecture
Wonderful street tree canopy

Mix of people: children, families, students
Renters and owners
Dense
Transitional

Signs of Caring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Yards with Trash Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maximum</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Care Displayed in Yard Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<td>maximum</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Yards with Busted Plants, Hanging Baskets or Window Boxes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Care Displayed in Home Maintenance</td>
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</table>

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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with Public Sidewalk Cleared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Properties with the Public Mow Strip Planted</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

600 Block

700 Block

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Allen Street, Syracuse, New York
### Research Findings

#### Allen Street Signs of Caring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>200 Block</th>
<th>300 Block</th>
<th>400/500 Blocks</th>
<th>600/700 Blocks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Property Care/Code</strong>&lt;br&gt;don't park on lawn&lt;br&gt;pick up trash&lt;br&gt;bring in trash cans in timely way&lt;br&gt;keep property clean</td>
<td>Absolutely Expected&lt;br&gt;Choose to Stay, Live Here</td>
<td>Absolutely Expected&lt;br&gt;Choose to Stay, Live Here</td>
<td>Absolutely Expected</td>
<td>Absolutely Expected&lt;br&gt;Choose to Stay, Live Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maintain Yard</strong>&lt;br&gt;tidy, not necessarily clipped&lt;br&gt;no weeds&lt;br&gt;mow lawn&lt;br&gt;trim hedges, prune&lt;br&gt;pruning leaves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adding Decorative Elements</strong>&lt;br&gt;garden/landscape front yard&lt;br&gt;flowers, decorative plants&lt;br&gt;potted plants, small decorations&lt;br&gt;tree arrangement&lt;br&gt;little foyers, impressive gardens&lt;br&gt;holiday decorations</td>
<td>Moderate Care&lt;br&gt;Maintain Yard&lt;br&gt;Trim Hedges, Prune&lt;br&gt;Garden/Landscape Front Yard&lt;br&gt;Flowers, Decorative Plants&lt;br&gt;Maintain House&lt;br&gt;Talk to Know Your Neighbors, Vigilant</td>
<td>Moderate Care&lt;br&gt;No Weeds&lt;br&gt;Trim Hedges, Prune&lt;br&gt;Garden/Landscape Front Yard&lt;br&gt;Flowers, Decorative Plants&lt;br&gt;Potted Plants, Small Decorations&lt;br&gt;Paint House&lt;br&gt;Porch Care, Clutter&lt;br&gt;Care about Older Homes&lt;br&gt;Preserve, Restore Older Homes&lt;br&gt;Wood fences, Sidewalks&lt;br&gt;No lawn, Noise Level&lt;br&gt;Good Lighting&lt;br&gt;Leave light on at night&lt;br&gt;Go for Walks in Neighborhood&lt;br&gt;Talk to Know Your Neighbors, Choosing to Stay, Live Here</td>
<td>Moderate Care&lt;br&gt;No Weeds&lt;br&gt;Trim Hedges, Prune&lt;br&gt;Garden/Landscape Front Yard&lt;br&gt;Flowers, Decorative Plants&lt;br&gt;Potted Plants, Small Decorations&lt;br&gt;Paint House&lt;br&gt;Built Garage that Fits Neighborhood&lt;br&gt;Wood fences&lt;br&gt;No lawn, Noise Level&lt;br&gt;Good Lighting&lt;br&gt;Leave light on at night&lt;br&gt;Go for Walks in Neighborhood&lt;br&gt;Talk to Know Your Neighbors, Choosing to Stay, Live Here</td>
<td>Moderate Care&lt;br&gt;No Weeds&lt;br&gt;Trim Hedges, Prune&lt;br&gt;Garden/Landscape Front Yard&lt;br&gt;Flowers, Decorative Plants&lt;br&gt;Potted Plants, Small Decorations&lt;br&gt;Paint House&lt;br&gt;Built Garage that Fits Neighborhood&lt;br&gt;Wood fences&lt;br&gt;No lawn, Noise Level&lt;br&gt;Good Lighting&lt;br&gt;Leave light on at night&lt;br&gt;Go for Walks in Neighborhood&lt;br&gt;Talk to Know Your Neighbors, Choosing to Stay, Live Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect &amp; Strengthen Neighborhood Character</strong>&lt;br&gt;appropriate paint colors&lt;br&gt;care about older homes&lt;br&gt;preserve, restore older homes&lt;br&gt;built garage that fit neighborhood&lt;br&gt;invest in neighborhood&lt;br&gt;wood fence&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>Optional Care&lt;br&gt;Unknown</td>
<td>Optional Care&lt;br&gt;Unknown</td>
<td>Optional Care</td>
<td>Optional Care&lt;br&gt;Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Care for the Public Realm</strong>&lt;br&gt;pick up after dog&lt;br&gt;noise level&lt;br&gt;shovel sidewalks&lt;br&gt;good lighting&lt;br&gt;leave light on at night&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Actions</strong>&lt;br&gt;talk to know neighbors&lt;br&gt;involved in community, WENA, UNPA, TPA, Vigilant&lt;br&gt;choosing to stay, live here, own go for walks&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital Improvements</strong>&lt;br&gt;new driveway&lt;br&gt;special driveway pavers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Indicators

**200 Block**
- Worst rating with every indicator
- Highest level (20%) of homes with trash in the yard
- 27% of residents shovel, 6% garden in mow strip
- 16% have bulbs, 10% have potted plants
- No yards are at the maximum level of care, about 24% are moderately maintained

**400 Block**
- Excellent overall ratings with most indicators
- 10% of homes with trash in the yard
- 82% of residents shovel, 21% garden in mow strip
- 78% have bulbs, 33% have potted plants
- 55% of homes are well maintained, another 22% are fairly well maintained
- 50% of yards have the maximum level of care, another 10% are moderate

**600 Block**
- Very good overall ratings with most indicators
- 11% of homes with trash in the yard
- 80% of residents shovel, 22% garden in mow strip
- 85% have bulbs, 33% have potted plants
- 59% of homes are well maintained, another 25% are fairly well maintained
- 12% of yards have the maximum level of care, another 18% are moderate

**300 Block**
- Very good ratings with some indicators, not as well with others
- 38% of homes with trash in the yard
- 100% of residents shovel, 8% garden in mow strip
- 68% have bulbs, 23% have potted plants
- 45% of homes are well maintained, another 40% are fairly well maintained
- No yards have the maximum level of care, but 85% are moderate

**500 Block**
- Very good ratings with some indicators, not as well with others
- 29% of homes with trash in the yard
- 50% of residents shovel, 30% garden in mow strip
- 69% have bulbs, 15% have potted plants
- 43% of homes are well maintained, another 49% are fairly well maintained
- 32% of yards have the maximum level of care, another 32% are moderate

**700 Block**
- Very good ratings with some indicators, not as well with others
- Lowest level (14%) of homes with trash in the yard
- 82% of residents shovel, 25% garden in mow strip
- 72% have bulbs, 33% have potted plants
- 41% of homes are well maintained, another 37% are fairly well maintained
- 18% of yards have the maximum level of care, another 37% are moderate

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