

Rosemount Woods Neighborhood Assessment

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Resilient Communities Project

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Introduction

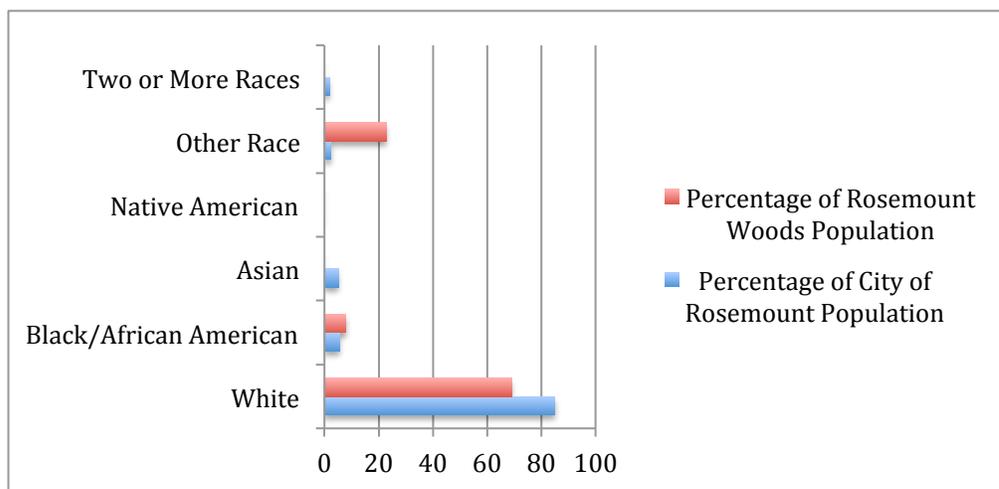
This report includes the findings from our assessment of the Rosemount Woods community and our recommendations for further collaboration with the residents of Rosemount Woods. Our assessment included research using existing data; interviews with key city officials, staff of community agencies, and Rosemount Woods management; and conversations with residents of Rosemount Woods.

Community Assessment

Demographic Overview

Rosemount Woods is located in Dakota County Census tract 610.08, block group 2, according to the American Community Survey and the US Census Bureau. The total population of this census block is 1,200, and it contains three apartment buildings/condos, including some subsidized units (A. Cox, personal communication, March 3, 2015). Alan Cox, communications coordinator for the city of Rosemount, noted that the American Community Survey has a large margin of error. Because the data from these sources is not specific to Rosemount Woods and has a large margin of error, the data may not be an accurate representation of the Rosemount Woods community. The lack of specific and accurate data contributes to challenges in effectively engaging and serving the residents of Rosemount Woods. According to the American Community Survey (2013), 7.9% of the residents of census tract 610.08 identify as Black or African American; 69% identify as white, and 22.74% identify as other race (excluding Native American, Asian American, and two or more races). According to the Metropolitan Council (2013), the population of Rosemount Woods in 2013 was 465 people. Residents of Rosemount Woods account for roughly 2% of the city of Rosemount's total population. The city of Rosemount's residents are 5.56% Black/African American, 84.84% white, 2.45% other race, 5.1% Asian, 0.09% Native American, and 1.8% two or more races (US Census Bureau, 2013). The racial makeup of the community, and how it is similar and different from the larger city of Rosemount, is important to understand when planning future outreach. The graph in Table 1 compares the racial makeup of the population of Rosemount Woods to the population of the city of Rosemount.

Table 1



Income and Housing Data

According to the American Community Survey (2013), the median family income for the city of Rosemount was \$95,805, but only \$36,250 for census tract 610.08 (US Census Bureau). The disparity between the median income for the city of Rosemount and the median income for the Rosemount Woods area is alarming.

In 2013, 5.18% of the housing units in Rosemount Woods were unoccupied or vacant (Metropolitan Council, 2013). This is the highest vacancy rate for all housing types in the city of Rosemount. The average number of occupants per housing unit in Rosemount Woods is 2.852 (Metropolitan Council, 2013). While the average number of occupants per housing unit for Rosemount Woods is similar to the larger city of Rosemount, this data poses a qualitative concern. The size of housing units in Rosemount Woods is significantly smaller than housing units in the rest of the city. Residents of Rosemount Woods have fewer square feet per person in their homes than the rest of the population of Rosemount.

According to MHVillage, there are currently three homes for sale in Rosemount Woods. The agency listed prices for four homes in the community (three that are for sale and one that recently sold): \$24,000; \$11,500; \$28,900; \$19,000 (2015). In comparison, the median value of a home in Rosemount is \$242,300 and the median price for homes that are currently listed for sale is \$299,900 (Zillow, 2015). The median price of rent in Rosemount is \$1,335/month. According to Zillow (2015), the value of homes in Rosemount has gone up by 8% in the past 12 months, and is expected to continue to increase by 2.2% over the next 12 months. This data is in-line with the disparities in median family incomes between the city of Rosemount and Rosemount Woods; housing units in Rosemount Woods are worth significantly less than housing units in the larger city of Rosemount.

Interview with Sheila Rabinowicz, Rosemount Family Resource Center

An interview was conducted via phone with the Executive Director of Rosemount Family Resource Center (RFRC), Sheila Rabinowicz, on Thursday, March 5, 2015. Rabinowicz explained that RFRC is a 360 Communities program and is the only nonprofit/social service agency in the city of Rosemount. 360 Communities is an organization committed to preventing violence, promoting self-sufficiency, and ensuring school success, with locations across Minnesota. RFRC has an extensive history of interaction with the Rosemount Woods neighborhood through their food pantry and financial assistance programs, as well as outreach events and other programs. Rabinowicz noted two outreach programs previously held on-site at Rosemount Woods. The first program, "Community Convening", is a routine social event intended to gather residents for an ice cream social and informal safety training. The second program, "Homework Help", was intended to provide additional support to children residing in Rosemount Woods in the form of a productive after-school activity as well as academic assistance. Rabinowicz further explained that this program was created to meet a growing concern about children completing homework and preparing for school, since many of the families in Rosemount Woods have parents who work two to three jobs. Rabinowicz explained this program was mostly successful, but due to the lack of meeting space in Rosemount Woods the program was held in a storm shelter, which was later deemed unsafe and inappropriate.

RFRC is working to further assess the needs of the Rosemount Woods community. Rabinowicz noted that the community's "needs are very complex and difficult to assess," but she identified trends of increased domestic violence and sexual assault, needs for financial

assistance, and poor educational outcomes. According to Rabinowicz, “We need to get to the heart of what’s going on” (S. Rabinowicz, Personal Communication, March 5, 2015).

Rabinowicz noted that a majority of residents are families with young children; some households are Latino and Spanish-speaking. Rabinowicz noted that assets within the community include the support that people give one another, the small-town environment of Rosemount as a whole, and the Rosemount school district. Rabinowicz stated that while the community of Rosemount Woods faces many challenges, she feels as though the city “keeps on evolving and reaching out” (S. Rabinowicz, Personal Communication, March 5, 2015).

Interview with Paul, Rosemount Woods Manager

Paul, Rosemount Woods manager, noted that he typically has little trouble communicating with the residents of Rosemount Woods. He uses several means of communication including phone, mail, and door-knocking. Paul stated that residents are up-front with him if issues arise in the community such as concerns about maintenance or problems paying rent. Paul explained that if a financial issue arises, such as not having enough money to pay rent, he refers residents to RFRC.

When prompted about residents’ current and unmet needs, Paul noted financial difficulties, saying, “Within the past two years, I’ve noticed more people unable to pay their rent than I ever have before” (P.M, Personal Communication, March 5, 2015). Despite this, Paul states that the community is secluded and private and residents have close-knit relationships. Paul expressed interest in creating more opportunity for communication between management and the residents through a monthly newsletter, and he believes that this could also be a strategy for effective communication between Rosemount Woods and the city of Rosemount.

Additional Concerns

An additional challenge that should be noted from the history of Rosemount Woods is a mercury spill that occurred in 2005. According to a report from the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), two teenagers broke into an industrial site at Brockway Glass Company and brought almost a quart of mercury to a basketball court in Rosemount Woods, about a quarter mile away from the site (USDHHS, 2005). Sixteen children played in the mercury over the course of two hours before a parent noticed the situation and contacted local authorities. Thirty-eight individuals were displaced from their homes on the first night for decontamination, and it took twenty-two days for all families to be able to return to their homes. The mercury contamination was determined to be an Urgent Public Health Hazard, as defined by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (USDHHS, 2005). Since the incident, the city of Rosemount has worked with several different agencies for consultation and review of their procedures. Although this event happened ten years ago, it is still cause for concern, and our group did not have enough information to fully understand the long-term effects of the incident on the Rosemount Woods community.

Engagement with Residents of Rosemount Woods

Methods

In addition to gathering census data and conducting interviews about the Rosemount Woods community, our group engaged a portion of the residents of Rosemount Woods through door-to-door canvassing. It was important for us to learn about the perspectives and insights

from the residents themselves in order to gain an accurate understanding of Rosemount Woods. We canvassed the community on Saturday, April 25th around 1:00pm when the temperature was approximately 65 degrees. Our group was split into two pairs of canvassers who knocked on a total of 33 doors and engaged 6 Rosemount Woods residents. Because only 33 out of 172 houses were knocked on, and only 6 houses were engaged, the findings from this canvassing attempt should be understood as individual perspectives that may or may not be generalizable to the entire community. Bilingual flyers in English and Spanish were left behind at houses that did not answer, which explained the Resilient Communities Project and encouraged residents to contact us via phone or email to provide feedback about their community; however, no responses were received. A Google email account and a Google voicemail account were created specifically for this purpose.

Findings

As noted above, we engaged in conversation with six Rosemount Woods residents. We asked residents about what brought them to the community, what they liked about their community, and what things they would like to see improve. Some conversations moved further into talking about issues such as the best means of communication for the city to connect with Rosemount Woods residents and broader issues that arose through candid conversation. Overall, responses were overwhelmingly positive and ideas for improvement were voiced in a thoughtful and constructive manner.

Demographics of the interviewed residents included three European American males, two European American females, and one young Latina girl (approximately 10 years of age). One resident reported living in Rosemount Woods for 24 years and another stated she had lived in the community for 27 years. Reasons that residents identified for moving to Rosemount/Rosemount Woods included a need to be closer to family, a place to live during transition to a new home, a decision to return to their hometown, and the Rosemount school system. When asked about what they liked about their community, three residents stated they enjoy the quiet and peaceful environment of the community. Other residents expressed an appreciation for the “small-town” environment Rosemount has maintained, with one resident specifically stating that he likes the fact that “it hasn’t built up like some of these other towns such as Apple Valley.” Additional reported assets in the community were the stability/consistency of neighbors, the lack of “nosey” neighbors, the playground equipment, and the presence of other kids in the neighborhood.

When prompted about areas of improvement for their community, three residents offered feedback while the other three residents did not have any suggestions. One of the European American females with young children mentioned that there is a lack of free and accessible activities for children in Rosemount that go beyond a one-time-only event. She stated that she often goes to Apple Valley with her children to go to the waterpark or large playground, but states she would rather stay in Rosemount due to convenience as well as overcrowding at the Apple Valley facilities.

Another possible area for improvement noted throughout our conversations with residents centered on the issue of neighbors and connection between residents. One resident expressed disliking her neighbors and not having many interactions with other Rosemount Woods residents in general. Another respondent, an elderly European American female, expressed that when she first moved to Rosemount Woods, she appreciated the fact that her neighbors kept to themselves; however, now that she is facing serious health issues, she wishes she had someone whom she could trust nearby to check on her and help in emergent situations.

Concerning the topic of communication, one resident stated that mail is the best way to contact her and presumed that other residents may feel that way as well. As noted above, we created flyers that had information about our project written in both English and Spanish. Of the six houses who answered their door to us, five households were European American and one was Latino. While the percentage of Latino households in the Rosemount Woods community is unknown and may be somewhat small, efforts to communicate with residents in Spanish as well as English are needed and may strengthen the relationship between residents and the City of Rosemount.

Discussion

During our assessment of Rosemount Woods, we discovered many assets in the community. Rosemount Woods is home to many children and families. Rosemount Woods has well-maintained outdoor recreation spaces, including two playgrounds, and we observed children and families socializing outside. Rosemount Woods has well-maintained infrastructure (including roads, signs, etc.), and many homes are well-maintained with outdoor lighting, porches or decks, landscaping, gardens, and decorations. Rosemount Woods benefits from its location in the Rosemount school district and its access to RFRC programs. Residents identified that they also appreciate the quiet atmosphere in the neighborhood. Our assessment found that residents of Rosemount Woods likely have lower incomes than the larger population of the city of Rosemount, and we also identified socio-economic disparities between Rosemount Woods and the larger city of Rosemount.

We want to highlight that Rosemount Woods has many long-term residents who strongly identify with the Rosemount area as their hometown and intend to live in the area permanently. We also found that although many residents have lived in Rosemount Woods for a substantial amount of time, based on our conversations with residents of Rosemount Woods, we observed that people tended to self-identify as residents of the larger city of Rosemount community, not necessarily the smaller Rosemount Woods neighborhood. In this way, strictly defining Rosemount Woods as a self-contained community may not be the most accurate description of the people who live there. Additionally, since the residents of Rosemount Woods are not self-contained to the geographic area in terms of identity or activity, understanding the assets and challenges of the community is complicated. Further work with the residents of Rosemount Woods should take these findings into account.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our assessment generated several questions for further inquiry:

- Do residents of Rosemount Woods receive the same mailings as the rest of the city?
- If Rosemount Woods does not receive the same mailings as the rest of the city, what can be done to make sure that residents receive information from the city via mail?
- What free or low-cost programs or activities are available for youth and families? How do youth and families hear about and access these activities?
- Do barriers to access exist (such as prohibitive cost, cumbersome registration, lack of information, or inconvenient location)? If barriers exist, what can be done to eliminate them?

We believe that door-knocking is a successful strategy for communicating with the Rosemount Woods community and learning more about the neighborhood. Some residents

seemed willing to engage in their community and wanted information. We found that most people were welcoming toward us, and even when residents declined to speak with us, all residents appeared interested in taking a flyer for later review. In fact, some residents recommended flyers and mailings as one of the best ways to communicate with the neighborhood. In our experience, language was not a barrier for interacting with residents, although we understand that the Rosemount Woods community includes residents who speak Spanish. We recommend translating written materials into Spanish and utilizing Spanish interpreting services.

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Resilient Communities Project

What makes your community a great place to live?

What would you like to see improve?

The Resilient Communities Project is a partnership between the University of Minnesota and the city of Rosemount to find ways for the city to better serve the community.

To comment, voice your concerns, or ask questions contact 612-234-7167 or resilientcommunities.rosemount@gmail.com



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