

La Mesa Neighborhood

A. Healthy Communities (34 surveys)

1. Summary of respondents – resident/business, owner/renter, general duration

There were 34 Healthy Community surveys were submitted. Of the respondents, the majority were longtime homeowners in the neighborhood. About 8 lived in the neighborhood 10 years or less. Two lived in the neighborhood between 11 and 19 years. And 18 respondents have lived in La Mesa at least 20 and up to 50 years. Five respondents were active in the neighborhood through their church and/or work, but were not residents or owners of property. There were about 4 respondents who were business owners and two who were both business and homeowners in the neighborhood. Two residents renting property responded to the surveys.

2. Summary of “what does healthy communities” means to community

Respondents said a healthy community had a diverse population; was free from drugs, violence, crime, pollution and nuisance; was safe at all times of the day; was an active, caring and united neighborhood with good attendance at association meetings; had good schools; was close to shopping, grocery stores, restaurants, and employment opportunities; was cleaned of dumped furniture and weeds; had less car-sales properties; had a reduction of alcohol-sales establishments; had access to parks and lots of green areas and gardens; had recreation opportunities and access to healthcare facilities; had decent housing, pedestrian-friendly streets and bike lanes, and low-impact landscaping in public spaces.

3. Summary of Public safety issues and Pedestrian Safety issues

Most respondents rated the crime in their neighborhood as 3, but there were a substantial numbers who rated crime in La Mesa as 4 and 5. The types of crime experienced included home burglaries, vehicle theft, vandalism, substance abuse, prostitution, zoning infractions, murders, and gang violence. Speeding and loose dogs in the neighborhood were also listed by a couple of people. The suggestions given to reduce or eliminate crime were to form a neighborhood crime watch; enforce zoning regulations; start clean-up campaigns; increase police surveillance; improve lighting; reduce the number of apartment complexes and demand better maintenance of these properties; increase home ownership; clean the roundabouts in the neighborhood; provide new sources of local employment and services; and close businesses selling liquor and adult amusement.

The majority of respondents said that they feel safe walking in some areas of La Mesa. A significant and almost equal number of respondents either said they do feel safe or they don't feel safe walking in La Mesa. A significant number of respondents indicated that they feel safe walking during the day but not at night.

Challenges to pedestrian safety included: lack of street lights, pavement quality,

overgrown plants in sidewalks, trash and furniture on sidewalks, speeding, drivers running stop signs, no 4 way stops, shady people walking by, crumbling curbs, streets and curbs need painting, loose dogs, traffic barriers, no crosswalks, gang violence, lack of connections to commercial services around edges of neighborhood, too many transients, loud music, too much traffic, speeding by parents dropping kids off at La Mesa Elementary, and too many curb cuts at multi-family properties.

Streets residents use for walking include: Fruit, San Juan, Roma, Guaymas, Utah, San Pablo, Mesilla, Espanola, Grove, Charleston, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Marquette, Pennsylvania, Grand, Virginia, Domingo, Central, San Pedro, and Chama.

The majority of respondents reported that they walk for exercise. A large number reported that they walk around Mesa Verde Park for exercise. A significant number of respondents said they walk to destinations. These destinations include: Mesa Verde Park, the Fairgrounds, Caravan, Fair n' Square, church, school, community center, and work.

Changes that would make it easier to walk to stores, restaurants, school, work etc. include: better paving, reduction in trash, crosswalks, more stop signs or roundabouts, lighting-particularly in the middle of the blocks, get rid of traffic barriers, better sidewalks, police patrols, crime reduction, slow traffic, more stores and less auto parts stores, improve design standards for multi-family housing (curb cuts etc.), change zoning to allow more walkable businesses, beautify the neighborhood, and putting 4 way stops on Copper from Louisiana to Espanola.

4. Summary of Exercise and access to healthy food

Many of the respondents exercise regularly, at least twice a week. Walking, jogging, and bicycling were popular forms of exercise. Many respondents also use a gym and play a recreational sport. Several opted to use a private gym or a public gym (Manzano Mesa Multigenerational Center) outside their neighborhood and noted that Mesa Verde Community Center's hours of operation were inadequate, closing too early, or that the center lacked adequate exercise programs and equipment in the workout room. One of the greatest impediments for walking is safety and more particularly, respondents were concerned about the potential for violence, especially at night, and speeding vehicles, especially near La Mesa Elementary. Possible solutions that were provided included improving lighting; installing wider sidewalks, traffic calming devices and four-way stops; and in one case, narrowing a street (Mesilla). One participant suggested closing Tennessee at San Juan Rd. to reduce pedestrian and vehicular conflicts.

Participants were mixed in their responses to access to healthy food. Some felt that they did have access to healthy food and it was more a lifestyle choice than an accessibility issue. Others felt that there was not enough access within their own neighborhood and felt it a challenge to drive longer distances to obtain healthy food at groceries, restaurants, and farmer's markets. Many purchase their groceries at Smith's, Trader Joes, and Sunflower Market. Others go to the base, Talin Market, Fair N Square, Whole Foods and Cosco. Many respondents felt that it would be beneficial to encourage community gardens and a farmer's market in their neighborhood.

B. Zoning (30 surveys)

1. Summary of existing zoning according to residents – zoning areas of concern, restricted/limited uses, new uses.

Among uses that residents would like to see limited are car sales establishments, halfway houses, adult-entertainment, gun shops, and package liquor sales. Uses that were listed as positive and to be encouraged included storage facility, schools, parks, community center, employment uses, and new multi-unit housing. Zoning and land use issues that were raised included the odd mix of commercial and residential along Louisiana, from Lomas to Central; the car dealership's use of residential streets for test-drives and parking; cars being repaired out of homes; a great number of home-based childcare businesses within the neighborhood; and the need for zoning enforcement, particularly on apartment properties. One respondent suggested that fines should be given to property owners providing sub-standard apartment housing in the neighborhood. Residents generally had a desire to see private property improvements (more xeriscaping and less weeds).

C. Economic Health (30)

1. Summary of how economic health has been affected according to respondent. In what way – businesses opened /closed.

Respondents who felt that the economy has taken a toll on the neighborhood indicated evidence of this by the increased crime (private property theft), panhandling, homelessness, homes for sale for long periods of time, and seeing more people wandering the streets. Residents desired a grocery store, nice restaurants with patio, and small/local businesses in their neighborhood. Many seemed to lament the closing of Dairy Queen.

2. Summary of interest in opening a business (only use people interested) type of business, challenges, home based business issues.

Existing business owners or potential entrepreneurs in La Mesa stated that the negative perception of the neighborhood (as the "War Zone"), actual crime, disinvestment, prostitution, transients and zoning were obstacles to having a business here. No specifications were given as to the zoning obstacles.