

# NEIGHBORHOODS

## INTRODUCTION

A neighborhood is typically defined as a number of persons living near one another or in a particular locality.<sup>1</sup> Even though technically correct, this definition does not fully reflect how citizens of Vandalia described their neighborhood. Citizens expressed pride in their community and portrayed a very positive image of life in these neighborhoods.

The neighborhoods of Vandalia vary greatly. Some neighborhoods consist of older post WWII single-family housing, with multi-family housing mixed throughout. These homes provide a solid base of starter and intermediate housing for young families and older residents. Some neighborhoods consist of new up-scale single family housing while others are a mix of upscale single-family housing mixed with condominiums.

The City of Vandalia wants to preserve the integrity of these residential areas and promote neighborhood pride. To understand what is important to the residents and what the main issues are within each neighborhood, an extensive neighborhood survey was conducted. After the results were compiled, the responses were studied and used to develop several of the recommendations found here.

## CITIZEN INPUT

### NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

Citizen participation is an important part of the comprehensive planning process. Therefore, citizens in Vandalia were surveyed about their opinions and suggestions regarding their neighborhoods and the City as a whole. The City was divided into eleven districts and representatives of each district were contacted to complete the citizen survey. The resulting information obtained and presented in this summary includes both a compilation of all survey results and commentary on individual neighborhoods. The detailed survey data, demographic information, and neighborhood map are located in Appendix 1.



New development on Bolton Abbey Lane.

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<sup>1</sup> Random House College Dictionary - 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

Citizens were initially asked what they liked most about living in Vandalia. Over 25 percent of the respondents cited that they most liked Vandalia's location, convenience, accessibility, and proximity to everything they needed. Another 20 percent indicated that they enjoyed Vandalia's small town atmosphere above anything else. Other common responses included mention of the City's good schools, city services, and police / fire / EMS. Still others said that they liked Vandalia because it was quiet, peaceful, and safe.

There was not much variation by neighborhood as to what citizens liked most about living in Vandalia. Respondents from each neighborhood mentioned the same characteristics as were previously mentioned such as small town feel, convenience, schools, and city services.

The next question polled how the respondents defined their neighborhood. Over 40 percent defined their neighborhood using positive adjectives such as "good," "nice," "pleasant," and "great." The next most common answer was that their neighborhood was quiet and peaceful. Other repeated responses included that their neighborhood was friendly, safe, and they had good neighbors. This question did not specify whether to use physical or social characteristics to define the neighborhood. Interestingly, most of the respondents chose to answer the question using social features in their definition. Those who answered in physical terms used phrases such as "older houses," "new development," and "good location."

Once again, most of the sampled neighborhoods had many shared responses. In neighborhoods 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8, words such as "nice," "good," and "great" were frequently used to define the neighborhood. In contrast, very little consensus was seen in neighborhoods 5, 6, and 7. In fact, six respondents in neighborhood 5 did not know how to define their neighborhood or did not answer the question. The lack of response may be an indicator that the neighborhood lacks distinct features. The continuing development in the neighborhood may also contribute to the current lack of identity. Respondents from neighborhoods 9, 10, and 11 were less abstract in their statements citing convenience, city services, and good schools as defining characteristics.

The next question determined what the respondents liked most about living in their neighborhood. Nearly 45 percent of the residents said friendly people and good neighbors were what they most liked. Another 19 percent liked the convenience, location, and accessibility most about their neighborhood. As previously mentioned, respondents also liked the fact their neighborhoods were quiet and peaceful, safe, and well patrolled.



Commercial strip along Bohanan Drive.

In neighborhoods 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11, respondents cited people / neighbors as what they liked most about living in their neighborhoods. Convenience and accessibility were also common answers in neighborhoods 2, 3, 5, and 8. In contrast to many other neighborhoods, citizens in neighborhood 5 most enjoyed the privacy and seclusion of their neighborhood. Residents of neighborhood 6 cited safety, as did neighborhoods 3 and 10. There was no one most popular response in neighborhood 7.

The next two questions were designed to focus the respondents' attention on the physical attributes of their neighborhood environment. They were asked to name three positive physical characteristics of their neighborhoods. The two most common responses were accessibility / convenience / proximity to everything and well-maintained homes and properties. Other characteristics that were frequently mentioned include trees / natural features, good neighbors, and cleanliness. It is interesting to note that although the respondents were asked to name physical characteristics, they often responded by naming social characteristics such as nice people, safe / well patrolled, etc. This indicates that for a significant number of the respondents, their social environment was more important to them than their physical environment.

Locational factors such as convenience, accessibility, and proximity to needs were highly rated in neighborhoods 3, 4, 7, and 9. The physical characteristics most mentioned in neighborhoods 4, 10, and 11 were well-maintained homes, properties, and streets. Cleanliness was the most frequent positive physical feature for residents in neighborhoods 1 and 8. Also, neighborhoods 2, 5, and 10 cited natural features and parks as positive characteristics. While the



The Sports Complex – view from Ricci Street.

most frequent responses varied by neighborhood, the responses as a whole were generally the same. Based on this information, there does not seem to be any locational trends in what Vandalia's residents believe are positive physical features.

Vandalia citizens were also asked to name the negative physical characteristics of their neighborhood. Thirty-four percent of the respondents indicated that there were no negative physical features in their neighborhood. Another 20 percent said that they did not know or could not answer the question. The negative characteristics that were mentioned include traffic problems caused by the airport, dissatisfaction with snow removal, and the effects of construction in their neighborhood.

Negative physical characteristics were more locational than the positive characteristics. For example, residents of neighborhoods 1 and 10 cited traffic, noise, and smells associated with the airport as negative physical features. As neighborhood 1 borders the airport on the east, and neighborhood 10 borders it on the south, it is logical that these two neighborhoods would have more complaints about airport nuisances than any other area in Vandalia. Residents of areas 4 and 7 disliked the impacts of continuing construction in their neighborhoods. These two neighborhoods are located near the I-70 and I-75 interchange. Citizens in neighborhood 4, which is located just south of an industrial area, commented on the negative characteristics associated with the industrial development. They cited increasing traffic and inadequate enforcement with regard to the impacts of development.



Area under construction off Brown School Road.

The next question posed was whether the respondents believed there were any specific negative features about their neighborhoods or the City other than physical features. Over one-third of the citizens responded that there were no specific negative features. An additional 17 percent did not know or did not answer the question. Of those who did cite specific negative features, the most common responses included the school board, the airport expansion, and insufficient shopping / retail in the downtown.

There was little distinguishable neighborhood trend in what citizens believed to be negative features in their community. Residents of neighborhood 4 cited too much police patrol of Brown School Road while neighborhoods 8 and 9 cited the school board as negative community features. Otherwise, the negative attributes mentioned by respondents were not tied to any specific neighborhood.

Respondents were then given the opportunity to suggest improvements they would like see added to their neighborhoods in the next five years. The most common responses were either that no improvements were needed or the respondent did not know the answer to the question. However, the majority of the respondents did have suggestions for improvements. The most cited suggestions included street repairs, adding shopping / retail, improving / expanding parks, adding speed bumps, adding traffic lights, and constructing wider streets with more sidewalks. As one can see by these responses, the citizens' suggestions tended to focus around traffic control and street maintenance.

In older areas of the City, such as neighborhoods 2, 9, and 10, street repair and maintenance was of foremost concern. Residents in neighborhood 1 cited a lack of adequate lighting. Also, respondents from neighborhood 5 saw their future as uncertain due to relocation of a highway interchange. Aside from these issues, there was no further distinction between respondents' suggestions for improvement in different neighborhoods.



An older neighborhood in the northwest section of Vandalia.

Next, citizens were questioned as to where people in their neighborhoods congregate. Half of the respondents said that people either did not congregate or they did not know where people congregated. Other frequent responses included their house / neighbor's house, outside on the street or sidewalk, in the parks, and at the sports complex.



Duplexes at Waldsmith Way and Palomino Avenue.

Large proportions of respondents from neighborhoods 6, 7, 8, and 10 as well as others from the remainder of the neighborhoods stated that people do not congregate much. A couple residents of neighborhood 2 said that people congregated at Frickers. This may be reflective of the establishments close proximity to the neighborhood on National

Road. Many residents in neighborhood 3 indicated that they congregated at the Cassel Hills swimming pool in their development. Residents in neighborhoods 5, 8, 9, and 11 interact with others outside in their yards, walking along the streets or at each other's homes.

Finally, respondents were asked if there was anything else that they would like to say about their neighborhoods. While most citizens had nothing else to add, the comments that were given were generally positive. Respondents said that they liked their neighborhood, enjoyed living there, and that it was a nice place to live. Some of the

negative comments included complaints about the difficulty of finding information in the City, concern about taxes, and dislike of the City's many fast food establishments. There was no locational bias as to the citizens' additional comments.

## **FOCUS GROUP**

In addition to the citizen surveys, town meetings were held in Vandalia where participating residents were divided into focus groups, each discussing a different topic. In a focus group concerning City neighborhoods, residents were asked if Vandalia's neighborhoods are healthy. Similar to the survey responses, many agreed that neighborhoods are well maintained and that there are no specific problem areas. Others said that streets could be better maintained. Furthermore, the airport expansion is considered to be a conflict or problem for many neighborhoods.

Focus group respondents were then asked to respond to the citizen surveys that indicated a majority of residents saw no negative characteristics in their neighborhood. The respondents again said that neighborhoods are well maintained, there is not a "bad element" in the City, and that Vandalia is a wonderful town. One issue of concern raised was leadership in the school system.

Focus group participants were asked if they had any additional concerns that were not being addressed by the City. The greatest number said they needed to communicate better with Butler Township. Improved communication with the townships could include developing a comprehensive plan or working together to develop parks. Finally, respondents were concerned with the replacement of the City's trash collectors. They believe the City should have taken into account performance as well as price in making the switch.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Create distinctive street furniture, signage, and neighborhood entrances; incorporate way-finding signage and erect at least one neighborhood gateway sign that identifies the name of the neighborhood or subdivision.
2. Develop a public information program to sustain and support neighborhood interests (written material, newsletter "highlight," electronic, and print media).
3. Create community focal points through the use of plantings, structures, and banners.
4. Incorporate the use of traffic calming techniques on neighborhood streets where appropriate.
5. Actively enforce the property maintenance code.
6. Enhance neighborhood recreational opportunities through the creation of pocket parks in older neighborhoods.