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## Neighborhood Perceptions In The Near South Side Neighborhood Of Grand Forks, ND

Mikel Elizabeth Smith

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NEIGHBORHOOD PERCEPTIONS IN THE NEAR SOUTH SIDE  
NEIGHBORHOOD OF GRAND FORKS, ND

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Boise State University, 2010

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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May  
2014

This thesis, submitted by Mikel E. Smith in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

Older neighborhoods across the country are at risk of collapse. In response, city governments are taking a renewed interest in their older inner-city districts. Urban Neighborhood Initiatives (UNI) is one way local governments are renewing and revitalizing these neighborhoods. This is happening in Grand Forks, ND. Consequently, this study's focus is on the perceptions of residents in the Near South Side neighborhood (NSS).

Data was collected through a questionnaire survey. A total of 203 replies were received from the pool of 740 surveys distributed in the Mayors Urban Neighborhood Initiative and the attached historic district. The four research questions focused on conditions and quality of life issues. Results indicate that the NSS neighborhood is a vibrant and safe neighborhood. This study adds to the knowledge MUNI and NSS neighborhood association have of their residents. The data collected here can be used to guide future efforts of both the NSS association and MUNI. This research can be used as a framework for future investigations into MUNI neighborhoods in the future.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview of the Issue

As our cities are growing and spreading to the outskirts, older inner city neighborhoods are sometimes forgotten and left behind without the resources to keep up their housing stock. Consequently, in response to such a trend, the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota began an Urban Neighborhood Initiative (UNI) in 2007. Recently, the focus of the Mayor's Urban Neighborhood Initiative (MUNI) in Grand Forks shifted focus to the historic Near South Side neighborhood (NSS). As a catalyst and a tool, the MUNI assists in developing grass roots solutions, community-wide collaboration while ensuring that one of our community's most established, historic and important neighborhoods remains a vital place to live for our current and future residents. UNI initiatives are a way city government attempts to combat the downslide of inner-city housing. A similar process is happening in Grand Forks. The town is spreading outward and city officials want to ensure older neighborhoods are not forgotten and remain prized for their historic features and access to recreation.

The NSS neighborhood in Grand Forks began the early stages of creating a neighborhood association in the summer of 2012, by working with a representative from the city through the MUNI initiative. This association elected association officials, began fundraising for a community mural, and is starting to brainstorm more ideas.

Though the association attendance numbers fluctuate, there are a core group of members, around ten to twelve residents that continually attend meetings and have been an essential part of planning events and setting goals. Currently, the city has been making a renewed effort to recruit more residents from the MUNI area into the association. The NSS is split into two distinct areas. One is the designated MUNI area, chosen by the city of Grand Forks. The other area is the historic district of Grand Forks, known for its historic designation by the National Register of Historic Places.

### Research Purpose and Research Questions

My research will focus on perceived neighborhood characteristics from the residents who live in both of these areas. The way a neighborhood is perceived is indicative of quality of life in the area and will be useful to the new neighborhood association in its beginning stages. It is important to gain an understanding of the perceived neighborhood characteristics from both the historic district and the MUNI district, especially since the MUNI area lacks strong citizen representation at MUNI meetings.

The specific research questions introduced in my research methods section focuses on determining the perceptions of the NSS neighborhood residents. The research questions are the following:

*Question 1. What do you feel are some of the best things and/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood?*

*Question 2. What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve?*

*Question 3. What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear?*

*Question 4. What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood?*

My research questions attempt to answer the question of how people perceive the NSS neighborhood and how people living in the same area and having similar experiences may still perceive the neighborhood differently. This research will show what makes the NSS special, unique, and what attracts people to live in the neighborhood. It will also show where the neighborhood needs some assistance and what could be done to keep the neighborhood a vital place to live.

With this information, the NSS neighborhood will be able to focus its efforts on issues important to the residents. The city and NSS will also gain a greater understanding of the needs of Grand Forks as a whole, and the difference in perceptions depending on where citizens live (MUNI district vs. historic district). The following section will present more about study location and the general historical geography.

### Site and Situation in a Historical Geography Context

Grand Forks is located in the glacial Lake Agassiz Plain at the confluence of the Red River of the North and the Red Lake River. This site is historically flood-prone and difficult to inhabit because of its continental climate, which is noted for short hot summers and long bitter winters. However, this land is extremely fertile and has been productive going back to the earliest inhabitants who were associated in the post-contact period with the Chippewa and the Metis (Tweton and Jelliff 1976). These people were connected to the Europeans with the fur trade, which emphasized harvesting beaver, muskrat, and bison. Gradually, the Americans recognized the area's potential for agriculture, and it became part of the wheat frontier as transportation shifted from the use of the oxcart to the steamboat and finally to the steam railroad. The area around Grand

Forks was one of the destinations in the great immigrations of Europeans coming to the region to be farmers during the 1870s through WWI on the northern plains. Grand Forks emerged as a key center for railways, retailing, agricultural processing, and an education, particularly the latter with the University of North Dakota. During the 1920s through the 1940s, Grand Forks managed to maintain its regional economic prominence for northeastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota, but it could not compete successfully with Fargo, which had emerged as the statewide wholesaling and retailing capital for North Dakota (Wilkins and Wilkins 1977). This was possible because the surrounding area of Grand Forks shifted into sugar beet, potato, and other specialty crops to supplement wheat production. During the Cold War, Grand Forks benefited from being selected for the Strategic Air Command's airbase located 14 miles west of the city. The 1950s through early 1970s saw growth associated with the baby boom. However, flooding remained a consistent problem, particularly in 1950 and 1979. By 1997 Grand Forks had been expanding already to the south, but then experienced a cataclysmic flood that year. The city's response to the 1997 flood was to deal with the river by creating the Grand Forks Greenway, which was a flood mitigation action that resulted in a great deal of housing stock being removed in neighborhoods adjacent to the Red River of the North. Also, after 1997, commercial interests focused more to the southwest and south in the community and residential expansion occurred to the southeast, south, and southwest (Tweton 2005). The central business district and inner city neighborhoods had been most adversely affected by the flooding, and in the decade after the flood, it became evident that a different approach would be necessary to dealing with older neighborhoods. Thus, the Mayor's Urban Neighborhood Initiative (MUNI) was created in June of 2007.

## The First Mayor's Urban Neighborhood Initiative

The Mayor's Urban Neighborhood Initiative (MUNI) was created in June of 2007 to help improve and revitalize older neighborhoods within Grand Forks. The MUNI set clear objectives in the beginning of its formation as guidelines to follow according to the MUNI website. They are as follows: 1) provide a model for future neighborhood initiatives that will create and sustain neighborhood communication and organization; encourage neighbors to strengthen their neighborhoods by taking an active role in the future of their community 2) raise awareness of the existing resources available to the Near Southside neighborhood 3) provide a focus on traditionally older neighborhoods to keep them a thriving and vital part of the community and 4) provide a mechanism to work hand-in-hand with similarly focused partners throughout the community (City of Grand Forks 2007). MUNI initiates the creation of a neighborhood association within the chosen neighborhood. The association is then allowed to create goals and a future vision for their area.

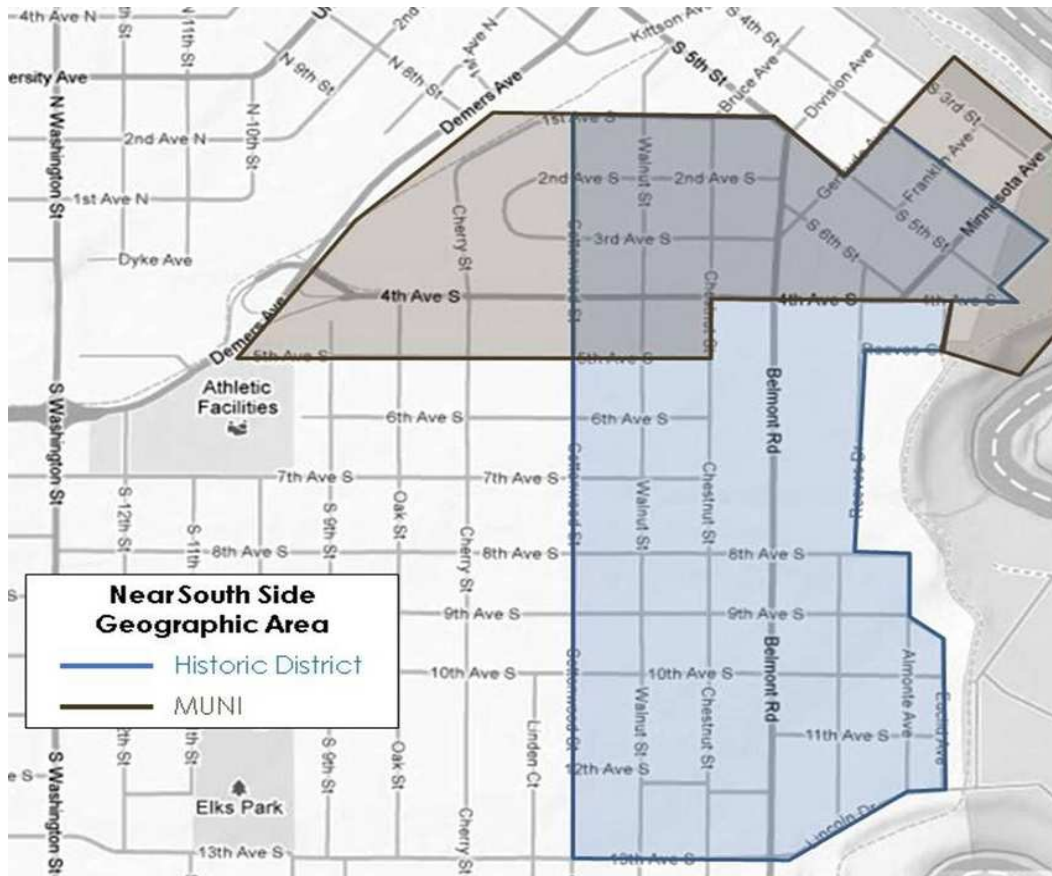
The MUNI was initiated in the Near North Neighborhood (NNN) of Grand Forks. MUNI spent five years in the NNN and accomplished several goals, however many others were left untouched. A neighborhood walking tour was completed along with brochures put together by University of North Dakota students. Banners were created with a logo for NNN, as well as, some signage, which indicates boundaries and is a visual representation for citizens to know when they are entering or exiting the neighborhood. The NNN MUNI experience was a learning process and great start to the initiative, which will surely guide city officials and community members while in the NSS neighborhood.

This study takes place in the NSS neighborhood of Grand Forks, North Dakota.

The MUNI area, which was designated by the city, is separate from the historic district. But, both are included in the neighborhood association. Due to both districts participation in the association, both are included in my study. Figure 1. shows where the MUNI designated neighborhood overlaps with the historic district.

#### Near South Side Neighborhood Historic District

The NSS neighborhood maintains a historic housing stock. Some are restored and have a very high home value while others are in need of revitalization. The historic district includes 427 contributing properties (houses, churches, granitoid, and statues) and 183 non-contributing properties (including Phoenix Elementary) according to Peg O'Leary at the Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission. The MUNI district stretches primarily from 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. up to 1<sup>st</sup> Ave and from Demers to 3<sup>rd</sup> St. (Figure 1.)



Source: City of Grand Forks  
 Figure 1. Map of MUNI and Historic District in NSS neighborhood

The history of the NSS neighborhood is as old as the city itself. The NSS neighborhood is located along the Red River, expanding as the city grew. Grand Forks started out first as a river town and later grew into a railroad town. As expanses of land were turned into agricultural land and the railroad arrived, the city grew. Early homes in the NSS neighborhood were built mostly for upper class financiers, lawyers, doctors, and the city's most successful residents. According to the Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission, sixty-nine homes in the NSS date back to the 1880s, constructed in the Victorian style or Front Gable style, a style popular in that era. The oldest and grandest of the homes were located on South 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> streets, and on the northern limits of



Belmont Road and Reeves Drive, north of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. Recognizing flood potential of the Red River, these homes were built on high foundations and raised yards (Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission). Most homes are still kept in beautiful condition and preserved in the same style they were originally built. The trees have matured along Belmont and Reeves, forming a beautiful canopy in the summer months and a turning over in the fall.

In 1904, Grand Forks installed a trolley system to serve the neighborhood and spur growth in the area. Then, in 1910, the granitoid pavement was installed in the northern part of the district, encouraging several gas stations to serve the area, including Cities Service Oil Co. that is now Odin's Belmont Service Station. This station served customers using the Meridian Highway (Belmont Road), which ran from Winnipeg, Manitoba to Mexico City (Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission). The NSS neighborhood is full of homes built in Queen Anne, Italianate, Mansard Second Empire, Tudor Revival, Gothic Revival, Art Deco Style, Folk, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival Style. This historic diversity makes the NSS neighborhood an asset of Grand Forks and a great reason for the MUNI to enter the neighborhood.

#### Near South Side Neighborhood MUNI District

The MUNI designated neighborhood is technically the only neighborhood included in the MUNI by the City of Grand Forks. According to the City of Grand Forks, the NSS neighborhood is a much smaller neighborhood with a higher home value when compared to the NNN, but still in need of revitalization and attention from the city due to the older housing stock. The MUNI area consists of a majority of single-family homes with twenty percent of those single-family homes occupied by renters. As of summer of

2012, there were still forty-two vacant lots in the MUNI district and six vacant commercial lots (City of Grand Forks).

**Table 1. Comparison of NNN and NSS**

	<b>Total Prop.</b>	<b>Res. Prop.</b>	<b>% Res.</b>	<b>% SF</b>	<b>% SF Rental</b>	<b>Age &lt; 60</b>	<b>Age &gt;60</b>	<b>Value &lt;100K</b>	<b>Value &gt;100K</b>
<b>NNN</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>NSS</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>54%</b>

Source: City of Grand Forks Summer 2012

MUNI district also has 34 apartments in the neighborhood, 41 duplexes, and five triplexes. There is also two group care homes located in the district and Northland Rescue Mission which sits right outside of the MUNI boundaries but is an aspect of the NSS MUNI area, and frequently mentioned on the NSS survey responses. Table 1 shows over half the home values in the MUNI area are valued above 100,000 dollars. This is higher than the first MUNI neighborhood in the NNN, and presents a different environment for MUNI to exist. The area also includes eight parks within its boundaries, providing green space for children in the area. The parks also offer a valuable opportunity for the NSS neighborhood association to use their energy in working with the city to revitalize and revamp the area. Below, Table 2 shows housing information for the MUNI neighborhood gathered by the City of Grand Forks in the summer of 2012. The NSS neighborhood was chosen because of its older housing stock, almost forty-five percent of the homes in the neighborhood were built between 1878 and 1899 (Table 2).

**Table 2. MUNI Housing Information**

<b>MUNI Properties</b>			<b>Properties by year built-Residential</b>		
Rental-Residential	118	33%	1878-1899	122	44.5%
Owner-Residential	156	43%	1900-1924	89	32.5%
Non-Residential	40	11%	1925-1949	26	9.5%
Vacant Lots	48	13%	1950-1974	15	5.5%
Total = 362			1975-Present	22	8%
			Total = 274		
<b>Residential Properties</b>			<b>Rental Properties</b>		
Owner	156	57%	Apartments	34	29%
Rental	118	43%	Duplex	41	35%
Total Residential Properties = 274			Single Family	38	32%
			Triplex	5	4%
<b>Residential Property Values</b>					
\$17,500 - \$49,999	15	5%			
\$50,000 - \$74,999	51	19%			
\$75,000 - \$99,999	60	22%			
\$100,000 - \$124,999	64	23%			
\$125,000 - \$149,999	30	11%			
\$150,000 - \$174,999	21	8%			
\$175,000 - \$200,000	10	4%			
\$200,000 +	23	8%			

Source: City of Grand Forks, Summer 2012

### MUNI in the Near South Side Neighborhood

The NSS neighborhood was affected in the flood of 1997, which wiped out several homes in both the MUNI neighborhood and historic district. Now, the neighborhood has a series of floodwalls and dikes, forming the eastern boundary and protecting homes from future flooding. The NSS neighborhood still has empty plots of land, which older housing stock once occupied before being torn down after sustaining significant damage in the 1997 flood. In 2010 the community land trust (CLT) began in

the NSS. The goal of the Grand Forks CLT is to provide affordable home ownership opportunities and they have successfully built upon some existing vacant land in the NSS neighborhood. Their first build was in the NSS neighborhood and they are currently working on another home on Walnut Street. Another project started in 2010 also utilizes a vacant lot in the NSS. An empty plot was acquired by community members in order to start a community garden. In the June of that year, the garden was up and running, since then it has become an asset for the NSS neighborhood.

More projects taken up by the NSS association since the start of MUNI include the painting of 10 Walnut Storage Unit. The storage unit mural was accomplished through a partnership with UND artist, Joel Joneintz, neighbors, and other community members. A design contest for a NSS logo was held, with several artists entering their design ideas. The association members voted for a beautiful design, which reflects the neighborhood (Figure 2). The winning design will be placed around the neighborhood as street signs, as well as, concrete stamps in the sidewalk.



Source: [www.gfnss.com](http://www.gfnss.com)

Figure 2. NSS Association Logo Contest Winner

A landscaping plan was introduced by a NSS neighborhood association member for the area around the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) statue. A partnership with the Grand Forks Parks District helped to revitalize the area around the statue. A community foundation grant was received to have a re-dedication party celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GAR memorial. The celebration was a success and showcased what the NSS neighborhood association could do. Currently, the association was approached about adopting a portion of a bike path that runs along the railroad tracks, under the Demers overpass. Neighbors would help with upkeep and make the area into a more desirable place for recreational activities. Chapter III will introduce literature and research previously conducted about neighborhood revitalization and community development.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

America's older urban neighborhoods have experienced decades of population changes, economic shifts, and major swings in the percentage and type of employment available. America's federal policies have also had unintended consequences in our city neighborhoods (Judd and Swanstrom 2012). First, a discussion of federal housing programs and their consequences will be reviewed. Then, community-based initiatives and grassroots movements at the local level are reviewed, as well as, urban neighborhood initiatives (UNIs) and their successes and failures. The literature gives a broad overview of community development initiatives from the Depression era up until the present day. This review will mainly focus on housing programs, even though many other factors such as business development, downtown revitalizations, and employment growth are major issues in community development.

City planners understand that viable neighborhoods are important in keeping the entire city healthy and thriving. An overview of how urban problems develop and the history of federal and local policies enacted to counter the problems will provide a sense of the unintended consequences that come with policy and how it has affected our neighborhoods and communities.

## History of Federal Housing Policy and Urban Development

The American Depression wreaked havoc across America, including the infrastructure and residential areas of our cities. Growing concern for the state of our dilapidated cities during the 1930s helped to elect Franklin Roosevelt as America's president. He ran a campaign promising to fix the economy and straighten out the problems affecting our cities (Herson and Bolland 1999). Roosevelt's New Deal policies changed the way the federal government operated and how far they could reach into local government issues. Up until this time the federal government operated on the grounds of not interfering with free market or business operations. After several years of New Deal policies, the federal government took on a very different role. Kennedy (2009) argues through the years of the New Deal was crowded more social and institutional change than in any comparable time in the nation's past. New Deal policies not only included new fiscal and banking programs, but also social programs such as the 1937 Public Housing Act to provide low-rent housing in urban areas. The act provided low interest loans for the construction of affordable public housing. The act created the U.S. Housing Authority (USHA) to oversee public housing with local governments creating their own housing authorities and were given the option to opt in or out of the program. Local authorities designated areas as blighted, slums were cleared, and new units built. Although the federal government gave small yearly contributions toward these housing units, most maintenance and operating money came from tenant rents (Heathcott 2012).

The 1949 Housing Act put in place during the Truman administration, was intended to provide a decent home and suitable living environment for every American

family. This act also involved federal government in slum clearance and the construction of new public housing units. No policy comes without unintended consequences, especially a policy so sweeping and controversial. Hoffman (2000) contends that:

“Twenty-five years after its passage, many observers concluded that public housing and urban renewal programs were fostering the slums and blight they were meant to eradicate. Even as policy makers abandoned the methods the act prescribed and adopted one housing and redevelopment program after another, they adhered resolutely to its goals. Hence, although its programs have been deemed failures, the vision of the Housing Act of 1949—to revitalize American cities and provide a decent home for every American family—remains undimmed” (Hoffman 2000, 316).

Some critics find that the term urban renewal in the 1949 Housing Act really meant “negro removal,” since the act bulldozed many primarily African American neighborhoods and rebuilt modern sky-rise buildings and many times never rebuilt, leaving people without homes (Fisher 2000). Furthermore, Fisher (2000) and Hoffman (2000) argue that the act bulldozed historic properties of cities, contributed to racial segregation, and hurt small business downtown. The Housing Act of 1949, however well intended, actually tore down more units than could be built back up again. Leaving many poor residents without homes to live and placing even more of a burden on an already struggling urban poor. The act itself was not intended for segregation or the reinforcement of existing ghettos, and in fact was supposed to help alleviate these urban ills. However, the racial aspects of the act were largely ignored and many localities used it to sustain racial segregation (Hirsch 2000).

In 1965, President Johnson enacted sweeping legislation called “The Great Society.” This was President Johnson’s agenda to end poverty in America, fight segregation, and employ urban renewal policies. Providing low-income housing for the



poorest families was a high priority for President Johnson and he began the largest number of housing initiatives in America's history. President Johnson launched the Housing and Urban Development office (HUD), which survives today and addresses housing needs and ensures fair housing laws. Although some high profile public housing has drawn attention for being crime ridden and run down even to the point of demolition, researchers found that President Johnson's initiatives did help to improve the living conditions of poor families (Olsen and Ludwig 2013).

Great Society policies produced mixed results and many factors played a role in the success and failures of different public housing projects. Certain public housing failures served as whipping posts for critics. The Pruitt-Igoe building in St. Louis for example, highlights some of the failures under President Johnson's urban development policies. The Pruitt-Igoe building was a shining display of modern architecture and was promised as the fix for public housing problems. Some think that this was its downfall, i.e., too high of expectations that they could never be attained to the degree that was promised (Von Hoffman 1996). Some others believe that the failure of some public housing projects was not because of policy or programs but was symptomatic of a much larger problems occurring at the time: capital flight, disinvestment, suburbanization, and population decline of many northeastern and midwestern cities (Heathcott 2012). The major failure of a minority of public housing projects helped to fuel the decisions of the next political policy-makers.

Under President Johnson's administration, programs like Community Action Agencies, and the Model Cities Program established "maximum feasible" or "widespread" citizen participation in their implementation. Planners and scholars were

starting to see the involvement of the citizenry was helpful in garnering their support. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, urban planners realized citizen participation was actually vital in successful, long-term results. Urban planning shifted its outlook on the citizenry's involvement in community development and decided to accept and actively involve citizens in the process (Von Hoffman 2009). At the same time, citizens of these neighborhoods saw the limited success of traditional economic and community development initiatives and decided to try their hand at it themselves.

### Community Based Organizations

There are various community-based organizations (CBOs). Such groups typically are nonprofit, community-controlled development organizations dedicated to the revitalization of poor neighborhoods. Green and Haines (2012 pg. 16) state, "CBOs are rooted in place and have extensive contacts and information about the neighborhood. Their primary mission is aimed at the community; they emphasize the importance of place over other goals. Also, in ideal situations, CBOs are controlled by local residents."

CBOs are any groups participating in community-based development activities, including neighborhood associations, which are discussed at the end of this section. Although community development corporations (CDC) and CBOs are sometimes used interchangeably, CDCs have become the primary organization for carrying out development activities and are included under the large umbrella of CBOs (Green and Haines 2012). A CDC as defined by Green and Haines (2012), focuses upon a community-controlled board that emphasizes housing, industrial, and retail development. They undertake physical revitalization as well as economic development, social services, and organizing and advocacy activities.

### *Community Development Corporations*

Community Development Corporations started cropping up in the 1960s and 70s. Though, many business ventures set up by CDCs at this time failed. CDCs in this era were considered ‘grassroots’ movements but developed into more of a business model. The 1990s saw a reemergence of these CDCs and other types of CBOs (Schill 1996). Vidal (1992) was one of the first to conduct a study of CDCs, which many other researchers have cited when looking into the efficacy of CDCs. The study was titled “Rebuilding Communities” and studied 130 different CDCs in various cities across America. Vidal (1992) found that CDCs were very effective in changing neighborhoods and thought other low-income cities may find CDCs as a way for positive change to happen. At the time of Vidal’s *Rebuilding Communities*, CDCs had still not achieved their fully developed role, where they partner with other institutions to help them develop their capacity (Frisch and Servon 2006).

Because public services for poor communities are fragmented across multiple agencies and levels of government, CDCs often are the only institution with a comprehensive and coordinated program agenda (Walker 2002). CDCs have been considered more successful than previous development initiatives. CDCs are found to work much better when developing partnerships with non-profit, government, and for-profit entities to develop capacity (Glickman and Servon 2003). Although some find that CDCs partnerships with these institutions sometimes forces them to focus on short-term outcomes rather than the long-term development process (Hunt 2007). Still, CDCs are quite successful in building and managing low-income housing, providing services,

stabilizing neighborhoods, and re-creating local market demand (Porter 1997). It all depends on how a CDC sees itself, or what goal it has set out to accomplish. Frisch and Servon (2006) describe evaluating CDCs based on their goals and incentives. A CDC that sees itself as a non-profit developer (first) will have a different outlook than a CDC that has a more holistic mission. A CDC's mission will depend on where it is located and what the community needs. For example, a CDC with a specialization in housing shortages will not work in an area with an overabundance of houses.

Currently, these community development organizations work in many areas of the community and have developed the strong partnerships they need. One problem that CDCs try to correct is the erosion of social capital in the urban core, which draws people from urban neighborhoods to move outwards towards the fringe of cities. Research by Southworth and Owens (2007) discovered suburbia does indeed have implications for the eroding public street framework in the inner city. The study concluded that the shift in movement of people toward the urban fringe has an effect on the character, convenience, and adaptability of new urban environments. So what can neighborhood residents, planners, and politicians do to stem the exodus of residents to suburbia and start rebuilding social capital across America? CDCs try to use their power to make positive changes within an area struggling with this problem. CDCs use their power to do things such as build or reinvigorate affordable housing for lower income residents, clean up blight, and effect positive change on the area. CDCs are found to have a positive impact on the building of affordable housing, but do not necessarily help enhance social capital in the area when compared to neighborhoods without CDCs (Knotts 2005).

Affordable housing is a major issue across the country and certainly in the Mid-western region in many neighborhoods. To understand housing in any community, one needs to understand the local housing markets. A housing market occurs within a region and is shaped by an interaction of demand, supply, and institutional forces (Green and Haines 2012). CDCs do their best to develop affordable housing in an area but research has shown that affordable housing needs to be dealt with through the cooperation of regional policy-makers along with CDC efforts. Salsich (1999) says extensive efforts to integrate urban schools and reduce dependency on the public welfare system, coupled with some failures of isolated urban housing developments have led to a general recognition that affordable housing cannot be developed in isolation, but must be part of a coordinated strategy to create communities that are sustainable. This suggests changes in policy in certain regions so that CDC's can work more efficiently.

### *Neighborhood Associations*

Also, under the umbrella of CBOs are neighborhood associations. Neighborhood associations work toward similar goals of advancing a neighborhood, forming partnerships, and working with city officials to promote a higher quality of life for their community. Neighborhood associations have been found to promote the relationship between city officials and community members by giving residents a way to organize and communicate (Logan and Rabrenovic 1990). Neighborhood associations have also been found as a way to increase self-efficacy and sense of community in low-income neighborhood residents in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Ohmer 2007). This means, neighborhood associations not only benefit the community as a whole but also contribute to individual quality of life and sense of control.

Quite a bit of time and research have gone into understanding the organizational structure of a neighborhood organization (Tretheway 1999). Authors have written about neighborhood organizations under the pretense that they exist as rational entities without emotion or irrational behavior (Mumby and Putnam 1992), as well as, challenging the role of rationality within organizations (Brunsson 1985). Koschmann and Laster (2011) analyze the tensions shaping a neighborhood organization located in the American southwest, finding that disagreements within organizations help to shape the organization. The authors also detect methods the organization uses to manage tensions and sustain participation of residents. A major problem with neighborhood organizations can be to create a sustainable structure in which neighbors want to participate. Wandersman et al. (1987) studied who does and who does not participate in neighborhood organizations across America and Israel, finding that those who were rooted in the neighborhood were more likely to participate than those not as rooted in place.

Other researchers have also delved into problems of grassroots organizing and stages of neighborhood organizations. Chavis and Wandersman's (1990) research on community participation discovered three important components that influence a residents participation in neighborhood organizations: 1) perception of the environment; 2) one's social relations; and 3) one's perceived control and empowerment within the community. If a resident does not have the feeling of empowerment, or feeling as though they matter, why would they want to participate within an organization? Also, how residents perceive their environment will influence participation. Does their

neighborhood have aspects they want to preserve? Is there something they want changed? Residents may be more likely to actually participate if they feel they are heard.

### Asset-Based Community Development

CDCs developed from a grassroots type movement into a major player in the field of community development and neighborhood revitalization. It seems obvious that the participation of residents in the revitalization process of their own neighborhood would be a much-needed bonus, if not vital for real change. Asset Based Community Development is the term used for community development as “a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life” (Green and Haines 2012, 9). Through this definition we see that to develop a neighborhood’s assets, they must be defined for the area. These community assets can be things such as an areas culture and history or a local bank that may make loans to area businesses. A community usually has many assets that they have not identified or do not know how to connect to their community-based organization. An individual in the neighborhood with special gifts or skills, which can be drawn upon, can also be considered a community asset.

In the area of community development there has been a shift in thinking from a ‘needs based’ approach to this ‘asset-based’ based approach. Needs-based thinking focused on what a community is lacking whereas an asset-based approach focuses on what is already there and that can be used. It is argued that the needs-based approach promotes a welfare mentality. According to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) a needs based approach supports dependent thinking; public, private and non-profit human service systems, teach people the nature and extend of their problems, and the value of services as the answer. As a result, many lower income urban neighborhoods are now

environments of service where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their wellbeing depends upon being a client of these human service systems (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). Kretzman and McKnight founded the Asset-Based Community Development Institute and promote its use by neighborhood organizations and CDCs across America. The asset-based model was considered one of the best ideas in the last 100 years in a publication of the National Civic League for the way it fundamentally changed the way people work in and with low-income communities and disassociating place and circumstance from individual capacities (Morse 2011).

This does not necessarily mean that traditional urban development programs and asset-based or grassroots policies cannot mesh. In fact, when these traditional programs (public intent) and citizen participation come together, public policy is more likely to be sustained. Evaluating the impact of policy type and target groups can be measured by studying the interconnectedness or the strength of relationship between government and the target group (Arefi 2004). Burkett (2011) highlights some issues when recalling the role of government in community development, and the tension that can arise when moving community development focus from professional to citizens. City politicians realize their focus must shift from bringing in professionals to these low-income neighborhoods and instead help neighborhood residents set up organizations. Neighborhood organizations must then realize the assets they already have so they can use these assets to their advantage and build upon them.

Cities have started to use asset-based community development to revitalize neighborhoods and gain public participation. A valuable tool in asset-based development is “community mapping.” Community mapping is a tool city governments use to record



and promote the city's social, environmental, economic and cultural assets and also as a tool to increase the public's participation in the development process (Fahy and Cinneide 2008). This does not mean asset-based development and the participation of residents is easy to achieve. Several challenges have been laid out: understanding the role of the external agency, fostering inclusive participation from all social classes, fostering community leadership, selecting enabling environments, and being able to handle the ups and downs of associations (Mathie and Cunningham 2002). These are just a few of the tensions needing to be addressed when trying to implement asset-based development. Many times, even when an opportunity is presented to everyone, only a few take it. In asset-based development, the goal is to pull residents in from all social classes and make sure they have a say about revitalization efforts. Without the voices of the entire neighborhood, it is hard to know if you are listening to opinions that promote the entire neighborhood, or just a few residents.

As good as it seems to involve the public in the planning process, there is argument over this shift. Scholars Hasson and Ley (1994) believe this transference of responsibility from the urban government to citizens is problematic. Specifically, that urban government is using these organizations to promote local government policy. Public participation in the community development effort may mean these neighborhood organizations are just reproducing neoliberal priorities and policies, while other organizations are actually challenging and revising neoliberal policies. By studying collaborative revitalization programs in Minneapolis scholars have found that both can be true (Elwood 2002). Although these two arguments seem to be conflicting, they can actually exist and prosper in the same organization at the same time.

## Urban Neighborhood Initiatives

Through the asset-based approach, many urban governments are promoting urban neighborhood initiatives (UNI). Four examples are highlighted below: Minneapolis; Los Angeles; Seattle; and Grand Forks. These locations illustrate that UNIs can be implemented by cities of varying sizes. UNIs are used by cities such as Grand Forks and used rather effectively in terms of neighborhood revitalization. UNIs take a collaborative approach to try to bring as many valuable institutions together to focus on a single neighborhood.

Minneapolis is an example of a city that took asset-based community development to heart in their Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program. Arguably one of the most successful of the urban neighborhood initiative programs in the United States, Minneapolis empowered citizens to participate in the process of neighborhood revitalization. The activities of neighborhood organizations have an effect on patterns of participation and inclusion, though not all neighborhoods placed a big emphasis on engaging residents. A reason identified for Minneapolis's UNI success: the availability of resources and provision for continuous resident participation at the neighborhood level (Fagotto and Fung 2006). Through the examples set by previous neighborhood revitalization programs, it can be established that community participation is extremely important. The study analyzed participation rates at actual neighborhood meetings for neighborhood residents and individuals already engaged on community boards and organizations. They also studied where the money allotted to the UNI went and to whom, finding that not all neighborhoods received equal amounts.

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI) was started in 1994, a popular decade for neighborhood initiatives. Under LANI the city and Los Angeles Transit Partnership chose low-income neighborhoods in need of revitalization to participate in the program. The neighborhood organizations that continued to be successful even as funding and the LANI initiative ended, had several important commonalities. They focused on enhancing social capital, image building, and capacity building (Arefi 2003). Image building in this scenario was to accomplish short-term goals and build confidence and motivation within the organization, while capacity building refers to building relationships with institutions in the area. Data for this study was collected through twenty-nine in-depth interviews with individuals closely involved with LANI. They expressed their views regarding what worked and what didn't work during the LANI process. The authors also used the "snowball" method to find and interview individuals with opposing opinions about LANI. The small number of interviews was useful for qualitative analysis of differing views involving the initiative.

Seattle successfully implemented Seattle's Sustainable Urban Neighborhood Initiative in 1994, revitalizing diverse neighborhoods using asset-based development, as well as, partnerships with city, residents, planners, and local institutions. Seattle's comprehensive planning initiative was sustainable and inclusive, two things which have proved difficult for other organization (Hunt 2007). So how did Seattle accomplish relative success when other methods and cities have failed? The authors conducted a series of thirty-three interviews with current and former planners, officials, and neighborhood activists. They also viewed a selection of neighborhood plans, other planning documents, and newspaper coverage of the planning process. Through the

research, the authors attributed the city's success to substantial investment in planning staff that served as intermediaries to all the organizations involved (neighborhood association, city departments, city council, and business interests). Another reason Seattle succeeded is because Seattle developed a set of tools and resources empowering the citizens while also holding them accountable to meeting broader planning targets (Sirianni 2007).

Grand Forks, ND initiated a UNI in 2007, referred to as the Mayor's Urban Neighborhood Initiative (MUNI). The Near North Neighborhood (NNN) was the first to be recognized by MUNI in 2007 with much excitement from the neighborhood residents, University community, and City of Grand Forks. It is a unique area of the city with a mixture of renters, owners, commercial properties, and a historic area. Three hundred and fifty-four properties in the NNN are owned and 122 properties are rentals according to a communication plan conducted in 2008 by a community relation's class at the University of North Dakota.

The NNN used grant money to sponsor two charrettes, or brainstorming sessions, in May and June of 2008 (Neighborhood Communication Plan 2008). The charrettes were used to identify goals, problems, and areas in which they could find ways to improve or foster better communication among the neighbors. A communication plan for the NNN was conducted to enhance community communication and resident interaction. A three pronged approach of: social interaction, civic conversation, and public communication were suggested. (Rakow, et. al. 2008) Communication and the participation of residents in the NNN factored greatly in the communication plan.

Grant money paid for two charrettes (workshops) in the NNN. The goal of the

charettes was to help the neighborhood envision their future goals for the NNN. The charette identified six areas for further study which included establishing a community center, updating and maintaining housing in the area, creating an identity for the neighborhood, creating design standards and transition zones between residential and other use zones, improving safety and aesthetics along the railroad tracks, and improving neighborhood recreation opportunities. The neighborhood vision plan also brought up ways the neighborhood could work with the City of Grand Forks to reach goals such as improved sidewalks, upgraded safety along railroads, and a recycling program throughout the neighborhood. Lastly, the vision plan highlighted other institutions such as community groups and organizations throughout the city which the neighborhood association could align with to accomplish their goals (Near North Neighborhood Vision Plan 2008).

The NNN developed a walking tour of the neighborhood, drawing attention to historic and architectural aspects of the area. The NNN Association also decided to use signs and banners to identify the neighborhood to the public, provide a “neighborhood flower” for the area, and start a project focusing on front porches in the area requiring maintenance. These all help create an identity for the NNN and were a major focus of the neighborhood association.

The four previously highlighted examples demonstrate that there is the emergence of community initiatives around the country. Scholars are doing their best to understand all the issues that can occur during implementation. An analysis of governance among neighborhood-based initiatives was undertaken by Chaskin and Garg (1997). Neighborhood initiatives were quickly emerging as the popular method of neighborhood revitalization. Specifically, the authors looked at three areas of governance in initiatives:

issues of representation, legitimacy, and long-term viability. Unfortunately, sometimes analysis can leave us with more questions without enough information to answer them. Chaskin and Garg (1997) called on more analysis of individual neighborhood initiatives in order to gather more information to make better understanding of different structures and relationships.

### Quality of Life and Neighborhood Perceptions

Although the goals of a UNI may focus on housing, revitalization, and comprehensive planning, the overall goal of UNI is to improve the quality of life for residents in these areas. But how do we measure quality of life? How do organizations and planners know what really affects quality of life? From previous studies we know the more control one feels over their environment, the more satisfied they are (Mercier and Martin 2001). This makes a good case for neighborhood organizations and comprehensive planning processes. Rather typical and expected quality of life indicators were researched and found to be real factors in resident's happiness, quality and affordable housing, transportation, green spaces, cultural integration, a safe neighborhood, and community engagement (Eby, Kitchen, and Williams 2012).

In an era where people can connect with each other at any moment through phone messages, Facebook, and even technology such as Skype, there is still a reported feeling of loneliness among the most technologically connected (Skues, Williams and Wise 2012). A sense of community is a good predictor of a high self-rated quality of life and participation and interaction with fellow neighbors leads to a feeling of community and connectedness (Eby, Kitchen, and Williams 2012). The fact is quality of life is dependent upon many things, including the quality of ones' neighborhood. Older neighborhoods are

especially in danger of losing their vibrancy and attractiveness, which brings in a healthy subsection of the public to the area.

The quality and condition of urban neighborhoods is maybe a more influential factor in other social ills than city governments take into account. In fact, the way a person perceives their neighborhood has a significant correlation with their perceived quality of life and self-rated health. The magnitude of this influence vary depending on living in high versus low-income neighborhood. (Muhajarine, Labonte, and Williams 2008). Even the level of parental participation in schools can be affected by the location of that school (Cohen-Vogel, Goldring, and Simrekar 2010). The importance of increasing neighbor participation in these low-income areas then becomes very important for the health of the neighborhood infrastructure, as well as the health and happiness of it's residents. Even an increase in the feeling of 'community' within an area has shown a correlating increase with participation of its residents in neighborhood associations and help in the development process (Chavis and Wandersman 1990).

Of course, resident's perceptions of their neighborhood can differ greatly from the actual livability and safety of the area. Okulicz-Kozaryn (2011) investigated the relationship between livability and satisfaction within cities. Findings indicate livability of an area (infrastructure) doesn't always have a high correlation with satisfaction of residents. When studying a neighborhood, therefore, the resident's perceptions of place matter. For example, resident's perceptions of crime in their neighborhood can be dramatically overestimated when residents draw on physical signs of disorder (Drakulich 2013). Many factors can play a role in resident's perceptions and satisfaction of their neighborhood or community. Perceptions of social control, as well as social cohesion are

associated with greater satisfaction of neighborhood, whereas perceptions of social support do not show an effect on satisfaction (Dassopoulos and Monnat 2011). The importance of community perceptions documented through health researchers in recent years show resident's negative perceptions of crime and disorder in their neighborhood have even been linked to higher levels of depression (Latkin and Curry 2003).

Understanding these perceptions can help neighborhood programs understand where the focus needs to be. Whether they should focus on crime watches, park improvements, or community support groups can be determined by understanding perceptions. Scholars and planners may call into question how greatly individual traits and predictors might influence results of perception studies. The first part of this section of literature review has given context to what is quality of life, the remaining piece of it highlights three pertinent examples. A study conducted by Pampalon et al. (2007) using a mix of survey responses, focus groups, and interviews in three contrasting Quebec neighborhoods has shown place perception of problems in a neighborhood can be used as a contextual variable in understanding a neighborhood even after individual attributes were taken into account, and also, those perceptions actually have a correlation to health. Perception of social cohesion and perceptions of problems both social and environmental in a locality has been shown to be a predictor for people in self-rated health, feeling of powerlessness, and sense of community.

Perceptions can have such a strong effect on community members that negative perceptions can even foster depressive symptoms in some individuals. A study (Wilson-Genderson and Pruchno 2013) focused on the older population in New Jersey (ages 50-74) found violent crime and perceptions of safety do impact mental health and depressive



symptoms. Using telephone interviews with 5,688 persons between fifty and seventy-four years old, the authors used multilevel structural equation analysis to test their hypothesis. These results may indicate to planners in New Jersey that they need to concentrate at the neighborhood level on violent crime and partner with the police department, youth groups, or local CDCs to implement this intervention.

Similar studies have been done that also contrast the perceptions and self rated health of people in socially contrasting neighborhoods. Four socially contrasting neighborhoods were analyzed in Glasgow, Scotland using face-to-face interviews, as well as postal surveys. Using a three-point scale, respondents addressed local problems by giving them a rating from “not a problem” to “serious problem.” After accounting for individual predictors such as age, sex, and social class, it was found neighborhood of residence still predicted perceptions of problems and neighborhood cohesion in an area (Ellaway, Macintyre, and Kearns 2001). This tells planners a sense of community cannot be ignored, and indeed must be fostered even more in neighborhoods with indicators of low to moderate income. Fostering a sense of community can be tricky when neighbors are reluctant to come to community meetings or UNI meetings, or even participate in community events. Understanding perceptions gives community leaders and planners an indication of what direction they need to take in order to move the neighborhood forward. Whether it is more low-income housing, a better sense of community, or safer streets, a perception study can show where the majority of neighbors lie in their beliefs. The next chapter will provide an overview of research methods use to understand NSS perceptions.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODS

Data for this study was collected through survey questionnaires and the authors attendance at NSS association meetings for the purpose of understanding resident's perceptions about the NSS neighborhood. Contacts with the city were made through Andrea Laraway, the Community Betterment Specialist, with the Office of Urban Development. Andrea Laraway also attended all NSS association meetings as the specialist for the city. An internship with the NSS councilmember, Brett Weber, also assisted the author in understanding neighborhood perceptions through conversations with residents about their feelings of the community.

#### Groundwork and NSS Association Meetings

Before the formation of a questionnaire or gathering data began, an effort was made by the author and her advisor to become an active participant observer in the NSS association meetings beginning in September of 2012. This also included attending NSS association sponsored events, such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) memorial rededication party. This helps the author become part of the association and understand their goals and intentions. The NSS association meets monthly with attendance fluctuating at most meetings. There are only a few residents who attend every month, and these residents make up the core of the association. Other residents tend to drift in and

out of association meetings when they have ideas to introduce. Efforts have been made by the city to increase participation in the association by sending postcards to MUNI addresses. This increased participation throughout the winter of 2013. The author and her advisors make up part of the core of the NSS association and have been allowed to participate as more than just active observers in the association.

Participation in the association meetings led to introductions and contacts, which furthered the author's opportunities for research. Further participation in the neighborhood as the NSS councilmember, Brett Weber's, intern was undertaken for several months. This provided the author with access to the problems, assets, and concerns in the NSS neighborhood. It also provided a chance for door-to-door, interpersonal discussions with neighbors living in an apartment complex in the NSS.

Through participation in the association meetings and interning with the NSS councilman, the author was able to gain an understanding of the NSS neighborhood that otherwise would have been impossible. This work set the stage for acceptance of the survey questionnaire throughout the neighborhood and showed good intentions toward the NSS neighborhood and their association.

### Data Collection

To understand the NSS resident's perceptions of their neighborhood, a survey was chosen as the primary means of gathering data. This was chosen as the best method to understand the way people have different perceptions about the same neighborhood. A survey using primarily qualitative questions was designed to explore citizen perceptions and help researchers understand where or why citizens felt differently than their neighbors in the NSS neighborhood. There are several positive attributes of using a

survey to gather information. Surveys provide insights into relevant social trends, processes, and interpretations (McGuirk and O'Neill 2005). Survey research was the best method to use to pair with research collected at neighborhood association meetings and one-on-one talks with citizens of the NSS neighborhood. Survey research method is also a reliable method of collecting personal information from a large group of individuals (Rea and Parker 1997). The NSS neighborhood, made of both the historic district and the MUNI district, is a large group to collect information from. A questionnaire survey was a reliable and fast method to reach the greatest percentage of residents within the amount of time available to collect data for analysis.

A neighborhood perceptions survey adapted from Dr. Devon Hansen's community development class, which was used in the Near North Neighborhood (NNN), was chosen to survey perceptions for the NSS neighborhood. This will be valuable as a benchmark to allow for direct comparison between any further MUNI neighborhoods within Grand Forks. The survey was adapted to reflect concerns in the NSS neighborhood, where their location and unique housing will bring different assets and different problems. The survey was also adapted to directly answer the author's research questions of perceptions in the neighborhood.

The questions chosen for the survey were clear and easy to understand. The NSS survey also eliminated information that was not pertinent to the research questions to keep the survey under two pages in length ensuring it fit with guidelines for a questionnaire (McGuirk and O'Neill 2005). The questionnaire was then reviewed and filled out by several association members to ensure clarity of wording. This pre-testing ensured its appropriateness to the audience, and whether it would achieve the author's

aims. Having association members fill out the survey also helped the author predict how NSS residents might answer the questions and if further instructions were needed in order for residents to easily understand what is being asked. Open-ended questions allow participants to craft their own responses, whereas structured questions offer a limited set of responses that are more pertinent to the research (McLafferty 2010). After adapting the questionnaire, it was presented to the NSS association members for final review and to gather any further comments.

The survey consisted of fourteen questions regarding resident's perceptions of the NSS neighborhood (Appendix B). Eleven questions had structured answer choices while one question was open-ended format, and the other two had a mix of open-ended questions and structured answer. No questions on the survey asked for demographic data such as gender, marital status, age, or income. One question asked for information regarding the survey respondent's knowledge of MUNI in the NSS neighborhood and whether they have attended any association meetings. Two questions asked regarding the respondent's length of time in the neighborhood and whether they were a renter or owner. It also gave the respondent a chance to tell the author why they decided to live in the neighborhood, as well as, their chance of buying a home in the neighborhood if they were a renter currently. Four questions directly answer the author's research questions regarding resident's perceptions (benefits of the neighborhood, aspects you would want to preserve, neighborhood complaints, and areas of improvement). Two questions concerned physical placement within the neighborhood, one asking whether the respondent lived north or south of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, a dividing line between the MUNI district and historic district in the neighborhood, and the other concerned closest major intersection.

Lastly, the final question gave the respondent a chance to tell the author anything further about their neighborhood that was not directly asked in the survey.

The four research questions addressed by the study's survey include:

*Question 1. What do you feel are some of the best things and/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood?*

*Question 2. What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve?*

*Question 3. What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear?*

*Question 4. What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood?*

The survey passed through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and was approved in the early spring of 2013. The IRB oversees research at the University of North Dakota with human subjects. The study of human subjects, even through mail-out surveys, requires the IRB to weigh any risks and benefits the proposed research may pose to the study group. The study purposes and goals were explained thoroughly. Study procedures, study sites, data storage, and subject population were all disclosed to and evaluated by the IRB.

A list of addresses for all residents of the NSS neighborhood was obtained through City of Grand Forks by Andrea Laraway, the community betterment officer with the Urban Development Office, and was given to the UND Post Office to be mailed out with pre-paid envelopes for the residents to send back. Questionnaires were sent to all addresses listed for the NSS neighborhood, rather than taking a random sampling. Seven hundred and forty surveys were sent out to NSS neighborhood residents in March of 2013. Residents were given one month to return the survey in order to have it included in the research. Two hundred and three surveys were returned for a response rate of twenty-

seven percent. Although a research subject and interview consent form was sent out with the survey (Appendix A), which clarified who was conducting the survey and for what purposes, the author's opinion is that many who received the survey were not aware of its purpose, and thus did not want to fill out their response. Several returned surveys indicated the responder believed they were in contact with the city. Data from the returned surveys was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and coded for analysis. This allowed the data to be formed into descriptive statistics and helped the association members see the aggregate data in a complete form.

As a supplement to the survey, discussion of resident responses during the NSS association meetings provided a wealth of descriptive data. Assets and problems mentioned in the greatest percentages in the surveys were then discussed in association meetings. The initial purpose of discussion was to assist the NSS association in planning, and was greatly helpful to the author's continuing research of the community. Some themes started to emerge through analysis of survey results and discussion with the NSS association. Many times, problems and assets with the greatest survey responses were mirrored by the discussion with association members. In other words, association members were in agreement with resident survey responses. Chapter V shows the results from this survey.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire survey sent out to the MUNI and historic district areas of the NSS neighborhood. The chapter is divided into two major sections. First, the author presents results of contextual questions, which were not part of the four major research questions. These consist of survey questions eight through thirteen. Second, results are shown for the four major research questions introduced in Chapter IV. Out of 740 surveys mailed out to residents, 203 replies were received. Of all the replies on the survey, close to 84.1 percent were returned from residents south of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and 15.9 percent returned from residents north of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave (the dividing line between MUNI district and historic district).

#### Survey Questions: The Context

Residents were asked if they knew or had heard about the MUNI moving to their neighborhood. As seen in Table 3, a majority of residents were unaware of the MUNI being in the NSS neighborhood. This question was first on the survey so several residents seemed to pass it over without filling it out. When asked whether they had attended any NSS neighborhood association meetings, the answer given by 85.6 percent was never.



Only one and half percent of residents answering said they regularly attend association meetings. This is reflected in the next question, asking residents who responded to not attending association meetings, why they choose not to attend. Nearly 64 percent responded they were unaware of the meetings.

**Table 3. Resident’s Knowledge of MUNI**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Are you familiar with MUNI in this neighborhood? N= 145</b>		
Yes	44	30.4%
No	85	58.6%
Other Response	16	11.0%
<b>Have you attended any NSSN meetings? N= 195</b>		
Regularly	3	1.5%
Sometimes	25	12.8%
Never	167	85.6%
<b>If not, why not? N= 146</b>		
Unaware	93	63.7%
Schedule Conflicts	16	11.0%
Lack of Interest	14	9.6%
Too busy	17	11.6%
Other	6	4.1%

Only four surveys responses were received from residents that rent in the NSS neighborhood area, whereas 191 survey responses were from those who own their home in the NSS neighborhood.

The respondents who own their home were asked why they chose to make a home purchase in this area (see Table 4). Nearly 31 percent said they bought one in the NSS primarily because they liked the neighborhood. Close to 26 percent bought their home because it was in the right price range, and 16.7 percent bought a home here because they liked the house. Just over 16 percent responded they chose their home for the location within Grand Forks, which is another positive sign that the NSS is an attractive neighborhood for residents. Renters were then asked why they chose to locate in the NSS neighborhood. Half of them (2) said that it was the best available option for them, and the other half (2) chose other. Lastly, the renters were asked if they would purchase their current rental if it came on the market. Two renters said yes, while one responded no, and the other said possibly.

**Table 4. NSS Resident's Answers to Renter/Owner Survey Questions**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Do you own or rent your home? N= 195</b>		
Own	191	97.9%
Rent	4	2.1%
<b>If owner, why did you decide to buy a house in your neighborhood? N=186</b>		
Price	48	25.8%
Location	30	16.1%
Liked the House	31	16.7%
Liked the neighborhood	57	30.7%

**Table 4. Cont.**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
Need/Availability	6	3.2%
Other	14	7.5%
<b>If renter, why did you decide to locate here? Are you satisfied with your landlord? N= 4</b>		
Best available option	2	50%
Other	2	50%
<b>If renter, would you be interested in buying this property if it were for sale? N= 4</b>		
Yes	2	50%
No	1	25%
Possibly	1	25%

Table 5 shows the resident's answers to questions 8 through 13 on the survey. Residents were asked how they would rate the NSS neighborhood as a place to live on a scale: excellent, good, fair, and poor. The majority of residents rated the NSS as an excellent neighborhood and 42.1 percent rated it as good. Only 6.1 percent stated the neighborhood was fair and only 1.5 percent rated it as poor. When asked how well they know their neighborhood 69 percent, or 131 residents, stated they knew their neighbors pretty well. A little more than 18 percent said they knew their neighbors very well, and 12.6 percent stated they did not know their neighbors at all.

NSS residents were asked if they would like to participate in a neighborhood watch if one was created. The answers were almost split. Fifty-four percent said yes, and 46 percent said no. When asked what would increase their desire to walk or bicycle in the

neighborhood 39.4 percent said improved sidewalks would increase their desire to walk. Improved lighting was chosen by 31.2 percent. Close to 18 percent chose pedestrian and bike pathways and 11.5 percent chose bike lanes.

**Table 5. Neighborhood Characteristics**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
<b>Overall, how would you rate your neighborhood as a place to live? N= 197</b>		
Excellent	99	50.3%
Good	83	42.1%
Fair	12	6.1%
Poor	3	1.5%
<b>How well do you know your neighbor? N= 190</b>		
Pretty well	131	69.0%
Very well	35	18.4%
Not at all	24	12.6%
<b>Would you be interested in being a part of a Neighborhood Watch? N=180</b>		
Yes	97	53.9%
No	83	46.1%
<b>Would any of the following increase your desire to walk/bicycle in your neighborhood? (Participants could check all that apply) N= 269</b>		
Improved Sidewalks	106	39.4%
Improved lighting along sidewalks	84	31.2%
Pedestrian & Bike Pathways	48	17.8%
Bike Lanes	31	11.5%
<b>Are you located North or South of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave? N= 195</b>		
South	164	84.1%
North	31	15.9%

## Research Questions

*Question 1. What do you feel are some of the best things and/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood?*

Table 6 presents the responses to the following research question. Respondents were able to check all the benefits of living in the NSS neighborhood they felt applied. Thirty-five percent of the responses selected location as one of their choices. The historic housing received 126 responses, for a 27.2 percent of all responses, coming in as the second ranked perceived asset in the neighborhood. One hundred and twenty-three respondents cited friendly neighbors, to become a close third for greatest perceived asset in the NSS neighborhood. Fifty-one people, or 11 percent of those who answered, marked 'other' as one of their choices. Some of the benefits in the 'other' category that respondents mentioned were: the diversity in the neighborhood, which is seen as an asset/benefit of living in the south side. Both diversity of housing and diversity of people were indicated as valuable to life of the community. Unsurprisingly, mature trees alongside the streets in the NSS neighborhood that form beautiful canopies over the street, specifically the historic district, were marked on the survey as a very big asset in the neighborhood.

Seven people that responded to the survey failed to respond to this question. One of the surveys sent to the county office building and returned, some were returned with a note explaining the resident did not want to complete the survey, and some questions were merely skipped over when respondents answered the survey.

**Table 6. Greatest Benefits of Living in the NSS Neighborhood of Grand Forks, ND**

	Number of Responses *	Percent (%)
Location	164	35.3%
Historic Housing	126	27.2%
Friendly Neighbors	123	26.5%
Other	51	11.0%

\* Participants were able to check all that apply (N=464)

*Question 2. What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve?*

Table 7 shows resident responses to research question 2. Safe streets and sidewalks were the number one quality neighbors in the NSS neighborhood would want to preserve. With 166 indicating it was something they enjoy about the area. Safe streets and sidewalks received 28.9 percent of responses overall. It makes sense that a friendly community and neighbors would receive the next highest amount of responses. Friendly community and neighbors received 147 (25.6 percent) responses, only nineteen fewer than safe streets and sidewalks. Safety and a friendly community both received a large number of replies from residents. Historic housing again receives a high number of responses from residents with 135 replies, or 23.5 percent of all replies. School within distance did not receive a large amount of responses from residents, with only ninety-three replies, or 16.2 percent of the overall. ‘Other’ received only thirty-four replies for 5.9 percent of the total responses. In comments made by those who chose ‘other’, the words mentioned the most were: charming, walk-able area, and close to Greenway.

**Table 7. Qualities in the NSS Neighborhood Neighbors want to Preserve**

	Number of Responses *	Percentage (%)
Safe Streets & Sidewalks	166	28.9%
Friendly Community/Neighbors	147	25.6%
Historic Housing	135	23.5%
School Within Distance	93	16.2%
Other	34	5.9%

\* Participants were able to check all that apply (N=575)

*Question 3. What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear?*

Table 8 shows resident responses to research question 3. The number one concern for those residents who answered the survey question was traffic and speeding concerns. This is a concern reflected in many association meetings. One hundred and seventeen residents marked speeding and safety concerns as a complaint they hear, which is over half of all who answered the question (57.1 percent). The second highest response was ‘other’, reflected in comments such as citizens driving the wrong way on a one-way street, poorly cared for rental homes, and homes that have not been kept up properly. This relates to the third most tallied complaint residents hear, which is housing problems, with 16 people (7.8 percent) responding. Trash and recycling collection was reported by fourteen residents, or (6.8 percent) of those responding as being an issue in the neighborhood. Lastly, railroad issues were only reported by nine residents (4.4 percent), as being an issue they hear about in the NSS. A significant portion of respondents either

did not answer this question at all, or left comments about how wonderful their neighborhood is.

**Table 8. Most Frequent Neighborhood Complaints in the NSS Neighborhood**

	Number of Responses *	Percentage (%)
Speeding/Safety Concerns	117	57.1%
Other	49	23.9%
Housing Problems	16	7.8%
Trash/Recycling Collection	14	6.8%
Railroad Issues	9	4.4%

\* Participants were able to check all that apply (N=205)

*Question 4. What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood?*

Table 9 shows resident’s responses to the research question 4. Street and sidewalk repairs were indicated as the highest priority for improvements in the neighborhood, 43.5 percent of residents. Thirty-two percent of respondents marked upkeep of homes as an aspect of the neighborhood they would like to see improve. Fifty-one residents marked ‘other’ as their answer. Mainly comments were made on alleyway repair, rental upkeep, and speed monitoring. Twenty-one people (7.1 percent) marked residential activities as what they would like to see improve in the NSS neighborhood. The next chapter provides discussion of these results.



**Table 9. Aspects of the NSS Residents Would Like to see Improved**

	Number of Responses *	Percentage (%)
Street/Sidewalk Repairs	128	43.5%
Upkeep of Homes	94	32.0%
Other	51	17.4%
Recreational Areas	21	7.1%

\* Participants were able to check all that apply (N=294)

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The perceptions of the NSS Neighborhood residents are examined to understand their thoughts and feelings about living in the historic and vibrant area of Grand Forks. These perceptions and feelings about the NSS can then be compared to the perceptions of the residents in the NNN, the previous MUNI area. First, discussion of the results of the contextual questions that were not part of the four main research questions will be presented, then, the four research questions will be discussed in depth.

#### Survey Questions: The Context

Table 3 in chapter 5 presents resident's answers to survey questions about their knowledge of MUNI or if they had attended any NSS association meetings. Nearly 60 percent of residents had never heard of MUNI or knew MUNI is currently in their neighborhood. This suggests more effort could be put toward advertising MUNI and the goals of the city in initiating it. Even more residents state they had never been to a NSS association meeting, close to 86 percent, while only three people said they regularly attend. One comment from respondent #176 said, "not really, I don't feel informed currently." While MUNI has the city's involvement, recruiting more residents into the NSS association should be a priority if changes are to be sustainable (Arefi 2004). When asked why residents haven't attended NSS association meetings, the majority state they

were unaware, while only a little less than 10 percent said they were not interested. These answers suggest more residents would attend meetings if they had more information about it and a better understanding of the organizations goals (Mathie et al. 2002).

Residents were asked how long they have lived in the NSS neighborhood. There was a nice range of responses, showing the neighborhood is thriving. Almost 23 percent have been in the neighborhood between eleven and twenty years and 13.5 percent have lived there over forty years. The results show that residents are very rooted in place, meaning they are more likely to participate in neighborhood associations (Wandersman et al. 1987). The author wanted to understand perceptions of the neighborhood through both renters and owners. Unfortunately, only a fraction of renters in the neighborhood responded to the survey. Just 2 percent responded that they rent in the neighborhood, coming out to a total of only four people. When asked why they decided to locate here, half said that it was the best available option while the other two chose the option of other. One comment stated the rental was available, right size, and in good shape, which shows the renter was satisfied with the condition of their rental property. The renters were also asked if they would choose to buy their rental if it became available. Half said yes, one respondent said possibly and only one said no.

Homeowners were asked why they chose to purchase a house in the NSS area. Almost 31 percent responded they liked the neighborhood and close to 26 percent liked the price. Close to 17 percent chose this neighborhood because they loved the house and 16.1 percent chose it for the location. Resident's choices such as, location, love of the neighborhood, and quality and affordable housing have been shown to be indicators of quality of life (Eby, Kitchen, and Williams 2012).

On the questionnaire residents were almost split between wanting a neighborhood watch program and those not wanting a neighborhood watch program, with 54 percent saying yes and 46 percent saying no. Several of those that declined added additional comments such as one from respondent number 177, “I’m not aware of a crime problem in this neighborhood” and a comment from respondent number 85 stated, “I feel safe where I live and always see cops go by, which is nice”. A reason for residents feeling safe in the area may be the high percentage of residents indicating that they knew their neighbors fairly well.

When asked how well they know their neighbors, 69 percent of respondents said “pretty well”, with only 12.6 percent answering “not at all”. These answers suggest residents feel safe and comfortable living in the neighborhood. A perceived sense of community and social cohesion is associated with greater neighborhood satisfaction (Dassopoulos and Monnat 2011) indicating why the residents of the NSS neighborhood would want to preserve this feeling of community and friendliness. Also, one’s social relations within their community, has been shown to influence their participation within that community, such as with a neighborhood association (Chavis and Wandersman 1990).

When asked what would increase resident’s desirability to walk or bicycle in the neighborhood, most respondents said improved sidewalks and street lighting. Several residents also commented that they already walk and bike in the neighborhood. Those comments suggest that the neighborhood is quite active and concerned with keeping their streets and sidewalks in good repair and a safe place for recreational activities. Research has shown that resident’s perception of safety and walkability of their neighborhood

(lighting, aesthetics, and traffic) can have an affect on their sense of community (Wood, Frank, and Giels-Corti 2010).

One question on the survey was used to indicate those responding north of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and south of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. This question was used to understand perception in the MUNI district compared to the historic district. A large percentage of the surveys (84.1 percent) came from the historic district. Only 15.9 percent answering the survey responded from north of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. Although a definitive reason for this cannot be known, it has been shown that resident's community participation can be influenced by perception of their environment, social relations, and their perceived control within the community (Chavis and Wandersman 1990).

### Research Questions

*Question 1. What do you feel are some of the best things and/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood?*

Out of 464 responses, 164 chose location as one of the greatest benefits of the NSS neighborhood. This would suggest that neighbors in the NSS area enjoy being close to downtown. The NSS neighborhood is located very close to the downtown area of Grand Forks, which has coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and shops, as well as, an organic food market. The downtown also has many events during the summer season including a farmers market every weekend and jazz and art festivals. The NSS is also located right along the Greenway, with access to parks and recreation. The large number of responses received for location of the NSS neighborhood indicates that, even though the city of Grand Forks is starting to spread to the outer boundaries, the inner city neighborhood of the NSS has not experienced the serious social erosion. This goes against research done

on other inner city neighborhoods with spreading boundaries (Southworth and Owens 2007).

Historic housing was chosen by 126 residents to be an asset of the NSS. Even though the NSS is divided by the officially recognized historic district and the MUNI area, the MUNI district is also a very old part of the city. The MUNI area of the NSS has a majority of historic homes and the recognized historic district cuts through the middle of the MUNI as well, making it a large feature.

When comparing the previous survey done in the NNN, the two areas are similar in some aspects. Both neighborhoods responded to the questionnaire, answering that historic housing was a top asset to their area. The NNN is located near the Greenway, citing location as the greatest asset, just as the NSS responded. The NSS mentioned other benefits as well, such as trees and diversity of neighbors, whereas the NNN perceived affordable homes as a greater asset. This may be because a majority of residents in the NSS (55.5 percent) responded to having lived in the neighborhood over eleven years, with many (13.5 percent) living in the neighborhood longer than forty years, making affordable housing less of an issue.

*Question 2. What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve?*

Safe streets and sidewalks were chosen as the top quality that neighbors in the NSS would most want to preserve. This suggests NSS residents perceive their neighborhood to be very safe for themselves and their family. The NNN in Grand Forks also chose safe streets as a top answer to this question, suggesting that Grand Forks overall is perceived as a safe city to live and raise a family. Perceived crime and violence

in a neighborhood is a key indicator of “urban unease” and the survey responses from the NSS show that residents feel comfortable and at ease in the area (Lee 1981). This has not necessarily been the case in other UNI neighborhoods across the country such as the Los Angeles LANI (Arefi 2003).

Friendly community and neighbors received almost as many votes as safe streets and sidewalks. Only 16.1 percent of respondents thought school within distance, was a quality they wanted to preserve, suggesting the school is not a feature that plays as highly in the neighborhood as assets such as historic housing and friendliness of community. Though research has shown quality schools increase home values in a neighborhood and are an important asset to people looking to buy a home in an area (Hayes and Taylor 1996). When comparing these answers to the NNN, the two areas were comparable in their answers. The top answers for the NNN were friendly community and neighbors, safe streets, and historic housing, which mirror the responses given by the NSS survey respondents.

*Question 3. What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear?*

Speeding and safety concerns topped the list of neighborhood complaints in the NSS neighborhood (57.1 percent). Speeding and traffic safety are perceived as a major nuisance and safety concern in the neighborhood by many residents, and is a concern reflected by residents attending NSS neighborhood association meetings. Comments on the survey from residents about speeding, parking issues, alleyway maintenance, and street cleaning were pervasive. Though, 50.3 percent of residents rated the NSS neighborhood as an “excellent” place to live, indicating that although traffic and safety

concerns are an issue, the NSS is still perceived as a good place to live.

Housing concerns received a surprisingly low amount of responses (7.8 percent) from NSS residents. This suggests that rentals are not as much of a perceived concern in the NSS neighborhood as they were in the previous MUNI in the NNN. Some comments in the NSS were received from residents about poor upkeep of rentals, as well as, homes, which, were not kept up to standards of other neighborhood residents. When comparing responses from residents North of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave from residents South of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, there was a slightly higher rate of housing concerns in the northern end of the neighborhood (20 percent) compared to the southern end (5.5 percent) (See Appendix C). There was also a higher rate of negative comments from residents in the area about housing such as one from respondent number 157: “Too many slum lords who don’t monitor their rental property”, “rentals not being maintained” and respondent number 104 stated, “Don’t feel it’s safe or well kept. You will never get a return on investment in this neighborhood, wish I had done research before buying”. This compares to the NNN, who rated rental property concerns quite high on their list of neighborhood complaints. Residents with a higher perception of physical disorder show considerably less satisfaction with their neighborhood than those who do not (Hipp 2009). This research indicates that MUNI district may have less satisfaction with their neighborhood than historic district and gives the NSS association an area to focus their efforts.

*Question 4. What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood?*

Street and sidewalk repairs had the highest response rate to this question, with 43.5 percent of people surveyed wanting to see them improved in the NSS. Several



comments were received about the historic granitoid pavement on the streets needing to be removed. The historic granitoid pavement was also mentioned in several NSS neighborhood association meetings. Residents were concerned about the state of the granitoid and the fact that it is beyond repair. Other residents have mentioned the historic designation of the granitoid, and how difficult it might be to try and get the city to remove it.

Comments on the survey also concerned upkeep and maintenance of alleyways in the neighborhood. When residents in the NNN were surveyed, their highest responses were for upkeep of rental homes and street lighting. Upkeep of homes received the second highest response rate on the NSS survey, with 32 percent of respondents wanting to see improvement. Comparing the overall percentage of residents concerned with upkeep of homes to the percentage given by residents north of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, the MUNI district ranks slightly higher with 36.4 percent wanting to see improvement. Again, this suggests that the residents in the MUNI area have a slightly higher perceived need for home and rental improvement. Upkeep of homes has been a priority in other UNI programs such as the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program, started in the early 1990's in Minneapolis (Fagotto and Fung 2006).

Recreational areas received the least amount of responses for improvement in the neighborhood, indicating the residents of the NSS neighborhood are mostly content with their options for recreation. Their location puts them within walking distance of the Greenway along the Red River as well as many parks. Safe green spaces such as these have been found to be quality of life indicators for resident's happiness and contentment in their neighborhood (Eby, Kitchen, and Williams 2012). The survey responses indicate

that as a whole, the NSS is happy with the amount and quality of parks and recreational options available to them. Although, when residents questioned by city staff on what updates they would like to see happen in green spaces and parks around the neighborhood, there were a few comments received. Specifically, more lighting was requested, mostly to provide extra light during winter walks when the sun goes down early. Also, some residents wanted to see fruit trees planted, or even another garden space for residents to tend. The city staff and NSS neighborhood association working together on issues such as these, any changes are likely to be more sustainable than if the two groups were not working together (Arefi 2004). The final chapter (Chapter VII) discusses the significance and limitations of this thesis, as well as, the author's final remarks on NSS perceptions.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This study examines resident perceptions of the Near South Side Neighborhood in Grand Forks, ND. Literature and empirical evidence are presented to provide a basis for this research and to help place it within the wider context of community development and neighborhood revitalization. Perceptions about neighborhood were studied in an attempt to understand where further time, money, and effort could be invested by the city during the MUNI phase and by the recently created neighborhood association. This research will help the MUNI understand perceptions for the neighborhood as a whole, as well as, how perceptions differ between the MUNI area and the historic district.

#### Summary and Findings

The beginning of this thesis provides an overview of research conducted on the history of federal policies on urban renewal and development to give context to the issues and problems facing community development professionals. CDC's and the theory of Asset Based Community Development are examined to show how community revitalization transitioned from a primarily federal issue to a primarily local and neighborhood level. UNI's conducted and documented in other cities was analyzed and

provided a basis for understanding the Grand Forks MUNI. Lastly, people's perceptions and how they affect quality of life and neighborhood was investigated to better understand perceptions of the NSS residents.

The city's MUNI initiative and NSS neighborhood presented the author with a wonderful opportunity to study perceptions and apply findings to help the NSS neighborhood association. A survey was created for use in the NSS neighborhood. Those questions were then reviewed by the NSS association and changed to fit the assets and problems for the NSS. The data gathered from residents of the NSS was analyzed and reviewed to uncover recurring themes and answer the four main research questions. The entire data collected in the NSS neighborhood was compared against survey data collected in the NNN previously. The data was also split into residents living north of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and residents living south of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave to try to understand any differences between the designated MUNI district and the historic district (Appendix C).

The NSS neighborhood in Grand Forks received a highly positive reaction from residents living in the area. Most comments received on the survey were of praise for historic homes, diversity, and recreation available. These comments were reflected in answers given by most NSS residents on the survey. Overall, the NSS residents have an excellent perception of their housing stock, neighbors, and location within the city of Grand Forks. Residents tend to stay in the neighborhood for many years, indicating they are quite happy there. When residents were asked on the survey, why they bought a house in the area, several comments received indicate the house was sold to them, or passed down, from their parents or other relatives. This shows a highly positive attachment to the area. The residents were very specific about their love for the big historic trees that line

much of the NSS area, as well as, the historic homes. The history of the NSS gives it the character and diversity residents are attracted to and want to preserve. The NSS residents also want to preserve their safe streets and sidewalks. The residents made it clear how important it is to keep the neighborhood safe for their children and family. Currently, the NSS is perceived as being safe by the residents living there.

Although the neighborhood has positive perceptions overall, there are problems, such as a higher perceived issue with housing from those living north of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. This indicates the MUNI initiated NSS association could put extra time and effort into getting more members from the MUNI area. In turn, this would help form ideas and problem solving techniques for that area of the neighborhood. Overall, there was a high perception of problems with traffic and speeding in all areas of the neighborhood. The most common complaint in the questionnaire survey, as well as, residents attending NSS association meetings was traffic issues. Speeding was by far the most agreed upon problem for the neighborhood.

Residents answering the survey were asked if they had heard about the MUNI in their neighborhood. Almost 59 percent responded they had never heard of the initiative. This shows that the NSS neighborhood association together with the City of Grand Forks may want to consider a renewed effort to gather support from all areas of the neighborhood. This may result in more residents attending NSS association meetings and providing ideas to renew and revitalize the area.

Overall, the NSS neighborhood is perceived as a beautiful, dynamic place to live within the City of Grand Forks. It has diversity of younger and older families, most wanting to carry on the tradition of preservation and neighborhood friendliness. Residents

responding to the survey and attending association meetings have many wonderful ideas to get neighbors interacting with each other more often and create an atmosphere of community. Together with the city, the NSS could take advantage of the MUNI initiative to analyze resident's perceptions of the area and use them to form their revitalization efforts.

### Suggestions

The data presented in this thesis helps to focus attention on areas that need improvement. Since summer 2012, the author has been attending NSS neighborhood association meetings and has become part of the core group of members. In turn, the author has learned how the association operates as well as, how the city operates as a partner. The data from the survey shows a low number of NSS residents are actually aware of the MUNI, and even less attended NSS association meetings. This suggests that the city could make a renewed effort to get the word out about MUNI and its goals and ambitions. A recent post-card regarding MUNI sent out by the city to the MUNI district brought several new members to the association meetings. Another post-card reminder would be a fairly cheap and easy way to get the attention of even more MUNI residents. Also, updated and easy to understand information on the MUNI and NSS association website would also help. Lastly, literature has shown residents are more likely to participate when they feel empowered (Chavis and Wandersman 1990). A way to do this within the association is to start asset mapping. Residents would participate in creating an asset map of the neighborhood and then using that map to help form new ideas.

One of the goals of the NSS association and MUNI is to create a sustainable organization. One way to do that is by creating an organization residents want to

participate in (Wandersman et al. 1987). The association may think about forming several committees where residents could work on certain projects and goals. In this way, residents will feel that they have more power or control over their situation and are more likely to keep returning to association meetings.

The urban neighborhood initiatives highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2) were all considered successful. One common reason was the city putting forward investments in resources, finances, and staff to develop the neighborhood associations and create the partnerships between city, residents, and other community resources such as businesses and non-profits. In an ideal world, a bigger investment in finances and city staff would give MUNI in the NSS the push it needs to create a more sustainable association structure.

### Significance, Limitations, and Future Direction

This study provides useful information for the City of Grand Forks in their work on future MUNI neighborhoods, as well as, provides overall perceptions of residents for the NSS association to utilize when forming future programs and projects. Due to a lack of attendance from the residents in the MUNI district in the association meetings, their input is not heard. This research provides an insight to perceptions of the entire neighborhood. Hopefully, with this information, the association will be able to work toward the better good of the whole area.

The work and research completed for this thesis in the NSS neighborhood during MUNI will provide a framework for future researchers. Previously, survey research was completed in the NNN using a similar questionnaire format. With the continuance of

similar survey research, comparisons can be made between all past, current, and future MUNI neighborhoods. When the MUNI moves to another neighborhood, researchers can use this data to compare and contrast problems in neighborhoods across Grand Forks, and find geographical similarities and patterns. Also, if MUNI is successful in changing resident's negative perceptions about an issue, they can use the successful format in future MUNI endeavors.

Currently, many residents in the NSS neighborhood are not aware of MUNI being in their area. Hopefully, this survey and data collection raised resident's awareness of the city's involvement in the South Side. It should also help citizens feel empowered to make a difference in their own area, which is an important component of a high quality of life.

There are some limitations to this research. Firstly, even though the author met the response rate of over 20 percent, there were still many people that did not answer the survey. There is quite a discrepancy between those renting or owning and those who filled out the survey. An explanation for this could be that renters do not feel as though they are a part of the neighborhood. Also, surveys may not have reached those living in apartment buildings with several units. This means much of the neighborhood continues to be unrepresented, especially the MUNI district, which responded at a much lower rate than the historic district. Also, only a limited number of questions are able to be asked on a mail out survey. Too many detailed questions result in a lower response rate, as people are less likely to fill out a several page questionnaire. As a result, there is less room for detailed explanations and specific examples. Lastly, no demographic data was asked on the questionnaire survey to the NSS neighborhood. There can be no correlations made



between age, sex, or financial information and the perceptions these residents have about their neighborhood.

### Final Remarks

The NSS neighborhood continues to be a thriving area within the City of Grand Forks just as it has been throughout the city's history. Resident's perceptions of this neighborhood are very positive and in turn, the people make this neighborhood a great place to live. Through these resident's ideas and efforts, the neighborhood can be made into an even better place to live. The NSS association needs to make an effort to gather support from more residents living in the MUNI area to ensure widespread participation throughout the neighborhood. Most residents who are aware of the MUNI are excited about the opportunity to take initiative and better their community. The already highly positive perception of the neighborhood alongside the NSS association efforts, show a very bright future for the continuance of a neighborhood association in the area.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Research Subject and Interview Consent Information

Title: Near Southside Neighborhood Resident Survey

Principal Investigator:

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My name is Mikel Smith. I am a graduate student in the Geography Department at the University of North Dakota. As part of a research project to complete my Master's thesis, I am conducting a survey in the Near Southside Neighborhood to gain understanding of residents' perceptions of their neighborhood. Currently, the Near Southside Neighborhood is the focus of the Mayor's Urban Neighborhoods Initiative (MUNI). The MUNI works with residents to ensure established neighborhoods remain viable and vital areas of the Grand Forks community. The findings of the survey will be shared with the neighborhood residents and the neighborhood organization.

I would appreciate your participation in this survey. It should take about 10 minutes. Please return the survey in the enclosed paid envelope to the Department of Geography at the University of North Dakota. Your decision to take part in this survey is entirely voluntary and your information is kept confidential. I will not know who has filled out the survey or where you live. However, this page, with consent information is retained by the participant. Survey forms will be kept in a locked cabinet with only with only the principal investigators and people who audit IRB procedures having access to the data. The survey forms will be retained for the required three-year period and then be destroyed by shredding.

If you have any questions about the survey, please call the Department of Geography at 701-777-4246 or by the email address given at the top of this page. If you have any other questions or concerns, please call Research and Development and Compliance at 701-777-4279.

Appendix B  
Near South Side Neighborhood Survey

**Near Southside Neighborhood Resident Survey**

1. Are you familiar with the Mayor's Urban Neighborhood Initiative in this neighborhood?

Have you attended any Near Southside neighborhood meetings?  
 Regularly       Sometimes       Never

If not, why not?

2. How long have you lived in your neighborhood? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you own or rent your home?  
 Own       Rent

If owner, why did you decide to buy a house in your neighborhood?

If renter, why did you decide to locate here? Are you satisfied with your landlord?

If renter, would you be interested in buying this property if it were for sale?  
 Yes       No

4. What do you feel are some of the best things and/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood? (You may check more than one)
- Location, such as the proximity to downtown, Greenway, work or schools
  - Friendly neighbors
  - Historic housing
  - Other:

5. What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve? (You may check more than one)
- Friendly community/neighbors
  - Safe streets and sidewalks
  - Elementary School within walking distance from home
  - Historic Housing
  - Other:

page

Questions 6-14 on back of



6. What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear? (You may check more than one)
- Trash and recyclable waste collections
  - Speeding along streets or other safety issues
  - Issues with railroad and noise level
  - Housing problems
  - Other:
7. What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood? (You may check more than one)
- Street and sidewalk repairs
  - Upkeep of single family and rental homes
  - Recreational areas for families and children
  - Other:
8. Overall, how would you rate your neighborhood as a place to live?
- Excellent     Good     Fair     Poor
9. How well do you know your neighbors?
- Very well     Pretty well     Not at all
10. Would you be interested in being a part of a Neighborhood Watch?
- Yes     No
11. Would any of the following increase your desire to walk/cycle in your neighborhood? (You may check more than one)
- Bike Lanes
  - Improved lighting along sidewalks

- Improved sidewalks
- Pedestrian and bicycle pathways

12. What is the nearest major intersection you use most often?

13. Are you located North or South of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave?  
 North                       South

14. Finally, if there is anything else you would like to tell us about your neighborhood please do so below.

If you are interested in learning more about the Near Southside Neighborhood or MUNI please visit:  
**<http://www.gfnss.com/index.html>**

Appendix C  
South of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave Responses

**Question 4: What do you feel are some of the best things are/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply): N= 369**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>38.8%</b>
<b>Friendly Neighbors</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>30.1%</b>
<b>Historic Housing</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>29.8%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.3%</b>

**Question 5: What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply): N= 497**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>Friendly Community/Neighbors</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>25.6%</b>
<b>Safe streets &amp; Sidewalks</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>School within distance</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>16.1%</b>
<b>Historic Housing</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>23.5%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5.8%</b>

**Question 6: What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply) N= 201**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percentages %</b>
<b>Trash/recycling collection</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6.0%</b>
<b>Speeding/safety concerns</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>51.2%</b>
<b>Railroad issues</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
<b>Housing problems</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5.5%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>33.8%</b>

**Question 7: What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply) N= 240**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percentages %</b>
<b>Street/Sidewalk Repairs</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>43.3%</b>
<b>Upkeep of homes</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>30.8%</b>
<b>Recreational Areas</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>18.8%</b>

Appendix D  
North of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. Responses

**Question 4: What do you feel are some of the best things are/or greatest benefits of living in your neighborhood? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply): N= 51**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
<b>Location</b>	21	41.2%
<b>Friendly Neighbors</b>	12	23.5%
<b>Historic Housing</b>	16	31.4%
<b>Other</b>	2	3.9%

**Question 5: What are some qualities about your neighborhood that you would most want to preserve? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply): N= 73**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
<b>Friendly Community/Neighbors</b>	19	26.0%
<b>Safe streets &amp; Sidewalks</b>	22	30.1%
<b>School within distance</b>	14	19.2%
<b>Historic Housing</b>	18	24.7%
<b>Other</b>	0	0%

**Question 6: What are the most frequent neighborhood complaints you hear? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply) N= 35**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percentages %</b>
<b>Trash/recycling collection</b>	3	8.6%
<b>Speeding/safety concerns</b>	13	37.1%
<b>Railroad issues</b>	2	5.7%
<b>Housing problems</b>	7	20%
<b>Other</b>	10	28.6%

**Question 7: What would you like to see improved in your neighborhood? (Participants were allowed to check all that apply) N= 55**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percentages %</b>
<b>Street/Sidewalk Repairs</b>	23	41.8%
<b>Upkeep of homes</b>	20	36.4%
<b>Recreational Areas</b>	4	7.3%
<b>Other</b>	8	14.5%

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