How Did We Get Here? Sustainability, Race, and the Road Towards Liberation: Conceptualizing Near East Side's Black Residential Perceptions of Sustainability in Columbus, OH.

Thesis

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Abstract

Conventional efforts to advance sustainable development often emphasize the "economic" and "environmental" aspects rather than the socio-cultural implications of sustainability. Such approaches overlook how racially, and socioeconomically oppressed communities are disproportionally impacted and involved in sustainability decision-making. Given that the intended goal of sustainability is to make the world a better place for everyone and everything, including non-human animals and the natural world, socio-environmental justice must be the nexus used to connect the tenets of sustainability. This study explores how Black residents in the Near East Side community perceive the City of Columbus' decision-making practices and to what degree these practices incorporate their lived experiences. In doing so, just and transformational sustainability, racialized capitalism, and critical race theory are used as tools to guide this process. The results suggest that the Near East Side's Black residential population perceives major shortcomings in city decision-making practices, as many do not feel that their voices are taken seriously in such processes. Moreover, most participants understand that an improved quality of life for Black folks in their community, and those alike, is contingent on systemic change. Due to such perceptions, it is clear that the city's decisions do not (heavily) incorporate their lived experiences. Regarding sustainability, most participants consider it a "reductive practice" meant to protect the planet, reminding us (humans) to

be intentional with everything we do, whether it be the things we consume, dispose of, or the spaces we show up in. Given their lived experiences, many noted that sustainability is important to their lives because they believe it serves as a tool for building resilience, longevity, resourcefulness, and stability within their communities. Albeit this study seeks to assuage the wickedness of sustainability, the hope is to also shift how it is conceptualized and operationalized in higher education and society.

Dedication

To those committed to

moving different(ly),

choosing different(ly),

and improving different(ly)

because being at peace with ourselves means to first live in harmony with the world around us – outside of the human experience.

Particularly, the experiences tied to, and therefore, diminished by

the poison we call the "western way of living."

"The western way of living?"

Yes, some call it Manifest Destiny,

and it's time to leave this way of being behind

to bring forth a new recipe.

Something with a radically new taste in mind,

yet does not forget how we got here.

For memorializing our ancestors will not be trivialized

and we shall persevere.

To those who strive to survive,

but prioritize thriving beyond simply being alive.

Because to live,

to love,

to learn out loud,

means to ignore the demands of our silence and proudly wear our crowns.

Not in the name of capitalism

or any mode of respectability politics.

Because realistically speaking,

marginalized communities are owed way more than this.

Though it would still be the starting point of reparations,

at the very least.

It is up to us to determine how this looks,

for defeating the beast we call white supremacy goes beyond playing by its rulebook.

Audre Lorde said it best “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,”

and to move in resistance, embracing the identities we hold,

demands that we be unapologetically proud

and unapologetically bold.

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Chapter 1. Introduction: Why Do We Care About Sustainability in the Black Community?

Acknowledging Sustainability as a Wicked Problem

"Wicked problems are ill-defined, ambiguous, and associated with strong moral, political, and professional issues. Since they are strongly stakeholder dependent, there is often little consensus about what the problem is, let alone how to deal with it…" (Ritchey, 2013, p. 2).

Society, the economy, and the environment are the three tenets which make up sustainability, a common wicked problem facing our world today (Hopwood et al., 2003; Kulman et al., 2010; Ruggerio, 2021). Due to complications in achieving a consensus on what should be the focal point of sustainability, adequate application and practice of this concept appear to be impractical. Scholars and practitioners, in subfields connected to the three tenets, often frame their epistemologies as the entirety of sustainability rather than utilizing interdisciplinary collaboration for its fulfillment, resulting in epistemic consequences (Vucetich, 2010; Walter, 2013; Stumph et al., 2015; Brightman et al., 2017). Contrarily, the 1987 Brundtland Report's definition of sustainable development, "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," is the most agreed upon aspect of sustainability (though it rejects that there are environmental limits to growth) (Hopwood et al., 2003, p. 39;

Kuhlman et al., 2010, p. 3438; Holden et al., 2014, p. 131). In accomplishing sustainability's objective to develop with the needs of multiple generations (of all backgrounds) in mind, conflicts surrounding what this looks like stem from our inability to agree on how sustainability knowledge can be translated into action. When doing so, we must, first, acknowledge systemic injustices and discrimination towards those with the least advantages in society. Adequately addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups demands that we admit there is a deficiency of benefits and opportunities within communities with negative quality-of-life outcomes. Given the intended goal of sustainability is to make the world a better place for everyone and everything (including non-human animals and the natural world), it is vital that socio-environmental justice be the nexus used to connect the tenets of sustainability.

Sustainability in Columbus, OH

The City of Columbus established the Sustainable Columbus Initiative, Green Community Plan (Green Memo III), and other programs and strategies to improve city operations, environmental stewardship, and the overall quality of life within Columbus. Key priorities identified in the 2020 Annual Report for Sustainable Columbus (SC) initiative include 1) education and engagement, 2) climate and energy, 3) natural resource protection and conservation, and 4) waste reduction (Ginther, 2020). SC's 2030 Agenda entails four overarching strategies and nine goals to put the vision of advancing carbon neutrality, renewable energy, and neighborhood prosperity into action. Of all the strategies and goals listed, none specifically focus on human social dynamics (The City

of Columbus, 2020). Specifically, there is no plan to address racial and economic disparities. As stated above, fulfilling sustainability requires that we develop with a diverse array of needs in mind while being responsible in how we extract natural resources and care for the natural world. Racism is not sustainable and sustainable development as a practice and concept is not exclusive to white or rich communities. Furthermore, discounting racial perspectives on sustainability risks privileging specific voices, skewing the vision necessary for guiding sustainability planning which is implemented through goal development and project implementation.

In the 2020 SC annual report, Mayor Andrew Ginther stated that "the City of Columbus continues to be a leader in sustainability not only in our region but our nation" (Ginther, 2020). While this reflects the city's aspirations regarding sustainability, the latest Sustainable Development Report for U.S. cities and states ranks Columbus as 52 out of 105 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) and Ohio as 39 out of 50 states (with a score of 39.1 out of 100) (Lynch, 2019; Lynch et al., 2021). Note, MSAs are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau and include cities and the surrounding metro area (Lynch, 2019). Columbus' Green Memo III was a five-year plan (2015-2020) meant to serve as a guide for staff to actively engage in creating a more sustainable community established through an intensive public input process (The City of Columbus, 2015). Despite its thorough list of goals, community engagement was one of two that lack baseline measures for one or more of its objectives. This too suggests an aspirational understanding of the importance of engaging local community members to achieve sustainability goals but perhaps a less well-developed plan on how to implement this goal effectively include residents to ensure

their voices are reflected in sustainability planning. To be successful in addressing this goal, it is important to recognize the discrepancies in which Columbus residents have a seat at the table to contribute to sustainability planning; how needs and capacities vary across neighborhoods; and, fundamentally, how conceptualizations of sustainability may differ. The City of Columbus' success in implementing more robust systems of sustainable development depends on meaningfully engaging diverse community members in planning and implementation. Emphasizing the importance of engaging local communities in municipal planning efforts, Holley's 2016 report on the Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement found that localized understanding and interventions were stronger influences on performance than the size, goal, or location of the city (Holley, 2016; Lynch, 2019). Conflict over SC's past decisions (e.g., rain gardens, transportation planning) provides local examples of the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for engagement at the local level.

Moreover, as easy as it sounds to incorporate discourse and action toward mitigating racial and economic disparities, Dewey (1954) noted that it is paramount to recognize that today's circumstances stem from the overall system itself. The biases in the system leading to today's inequalities are still present and must be recognized and accounted for if future actions are going to result in different outcomes. In other words, one cannot consider any specific initiative in isolation. The discussion is greater than the SC Initiative, and with varying bureaucracies in place – especially in today's political climate – internal and external forces may influence the focus of the Initiative away from a focus on social sustainability despite the stated goals or intentions of SC employees.

After all, with business and economic growth being the central goal of the overall system, deviating away from the status quo or challenging it is an arduous and often dangerous task (Dewey, 1954; Burdge, 2015). Though true, this has not stopped people from demanding better from the U.S. government. In fact, without pushback from the people the abolition of slavery, the acquisition of LGBTQIA+ rights, etc., would not have taken place.

Dewey (1954) stated that because there are discrepancies with the conceptualization and operationalization of the public (due to its scattered nature), the consequences are amplified at unconscionable levels, fueling the wicked problems we are faced with. In other words, "publicness' needs to be further defined so that understanding how it operates is clear. On one hand, scholars argue that genuine publicness indicates that there is noticeable autonomy allowing people to exist free of societal heteronomy; while on the other hand, it is believed that without a structured public, it fades to a crowd, generating a lack in fundamental responsibility with each other and the community (Ventriss, 1999). Furthermore, in understanding "genuine publicness, Dewey (1954) emphasizes the need for constructive engagement; communication and awareness; democratic participation; problem-solving and adaptation; and openly critiquing modern media and institutions. Ventriss (1999) noted that ideas on the public have now shifted to discourse around public and private sectors, emphasizing the role of the government to bridge these constituencies. Identifying what the public, or at least what values are held in the public, can facilitate more productive conversations around management, and therefore, sustainable outcomes (Moulton, 2009).

Research Purpose and Questions

This study utilizes a transformational sustainability approach to address sustainable development issues within Columbus, Ohio. Albeit this study seeks to assuage the wickedness of sustainability, the hope is also to shift how it is conceptualized and operationalized in higher education and society. Though the exacerbation of the planet's environmental problems is not equally distributed across all communities, humans are responsible for the dilapidation of the Earth's health, so it is vital that systemic change be made so addressing larger anthropocentric-induced matters, like climate change, can be easier to address. After all, how can we take care of the environment and operate as functioning members of society if the well-being and longevity of all communities – especially those that are underrepresented and impoverished – is not simultaneously prioritized?

Moving towards transformational levels of sustainability in Columbus, OH, requires that a baseline measurement of sustainability perceptions within under-resourced communities be explored. With that, the purpose of this research is to explore how Black residents in the Near East Side community perceive the City of Columbus' decision-making practices, to what degree these practices incorporate their lived experiences, and their perceptions on sustainability as a concept and practice. Furthermore, the following research questions will be used to assist in the exploration of said efforts:

- How do Black, under resourced communities perceive their treatment and involvement in the development, implementation, and enforcement of neighborhood projects, plans, and efforts?
- How do Black residents in the Near East Side community perceive the way the City of Columbus includes their voices in the decision-making process and the development of what constitutes sustainability knowledge?
- How do Black residents in the Near East Side community articulate their views on sustainability?
- How do sustainability perceptions of Black residents in Near East Side community align or differentiate?

Chapter 2. Literature Review: Where Did "Sustainability" Come from and How Has it Changed?

Recognizing Those Who Came Before Us

To adequately speak to the evolution of sustainability, it is paramount to acknowledge that it was practiced by Indigenous peoples around the globe predating its nomenclature. Eyong (2007) noted that those who are considered an Indigene 1) have resided in a nation-state for thousands of years prior to its formation (pre-invasion and pre-colonization); 2) are culturally, linguistically, socially, and ethnically distinct from dominant society; and 3) are vulnerable to development processes given their a) political non-dominance and b) existence depending on local resources. Indigenous knowledge, defined by Mishra et al. (2024, p. 4521), is:

> …the collective wisdom, traditions, and practices deeply rooted in the cultures and histories of Indigenous communities worldwide. […] As its interpretation varies depending on the context, it is widely accepted to represent local or traditional knowledge that native people passed over from earlier times through oral tradition.

Furthermore, such practices, albeit not referred to as "sustainability" in historical contexts, reflect a profound understanding of the need to harmonize human activities with the natural world.

Sustainability Post Invasion and Colonization

Fully conceptualizing sustainability requires knowledge of the term's origins. The German term for sustainability, "nachhaldigkeit," was first introduced in 1713 in a forestry treaty titled, "Sylviculture oeconomica" or "A guide to the cultivation of native trees," written by Hans Carl von Carlowitz (Brightman et al., 2017). The goal of sustainability was to promote long-term thinking to balance human infrastructure with natural resource consumption so the use of wood could be sustained over time. Foresters John Evelyn and Hans Carl von Carlowitz are known for sparking this discussion throughout the 17th and 18th centuries due to heightened concern for forest resources that were dwindling across Europe (Grober, 2007; Purvis et al., 2019). In the 18th century, natural resource management took off and the focus of sustainability shifted from balancing human needs with natural resource limits to subjugating nature for human needs (Brightman et al., 2017).

During this period, ecology evolved as an alternative perspective claiming that ecological relations are the infrastructure needed for a sustainable economy. This perspective is foundational to modern discourse on deep ecology philosophies (Hopwood et al., 2005; Brightman et al., 2017). Purvis et al. (2017) found that in the 1950s, following the Second World War, economic development became almost synonymous

with economic growth to inform western economic policy (though this idea was first used to "aid" the development of over exploited and under resourced countries). The economization of nature then inspired the 1960s and early 1970s modern environmental movement, spreading the popularization of conservation from Europe to the United States (Brightman et al., 2017; Purvis et al., 2019). During this time, well-known publications and environmental disasters, such as Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962), Paul Ehrlich's 'The Population Bomb' (1968), the Santa Barbara Oil Spill (1969), and The Ecologist's 'A Blueprint for Survival' (1972) came about (Purvis et al., 2019).

Along with the formation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1948, the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) (established in 1961), amongst other well-known non-governmental organizations (NGOs), were founded. The IUCN, in collaboration with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and WWF, also established influence in international policy circles with ties to acclaimed documents such as the 1987 Brundtland Report, Our Common Future, and 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Brightman et al., 2017). After the 2015 Paris Agreement, sustainability was, again, dominated by economics aspect shortly after being standardized (although it has been found to be incompatible with the other sustainability tenets on multiple occasions) (Purvis, et al., 2019). With the focal point of sustainability changing throughout time, getting to the root of its three (most widely accepted) tenets – society, the economy, and the environment – has been difficult, to say the least. Purvis et al.'s (2019) literary analysis found that the origin point of these three pillars have been assigned to the 1987 Brundtland Report, Agenda 21 (which detailed the United Nation's

17 SDGs), and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (though there is no clear framework or theoretical background provided). The social, environmental, and economic aspects of sustainability have also been considered separate "schools of thought" outside of their traditional interconnected nature. Rare tenets considered in sustainability literature focus on institutions, culture, and mechanics (technical) (Purvis et al., 2019). This study is not focused on this additional criterion as tenets; however, that does not dismiss their relevance to this research. Finally, recent sustainability and development discourse highlights equity and justice as tools to assuage the wickedness of problems tied to sustainable development and other conflicts in environment and natural resources.

Brief Review of Sustainability Tenets

Environmental Sustainability

While environmental sustainability is the original tenet associated with the Brundtland definition of sustainability, its construal over time has changed. Moldan et al. (2012, p.6) describes the environmental aspect of sustainability as:

Sustaining the biosphere with adequate provisions for maximizing future options includes enabling current and future generations to achieve economic and social improvement within a framework of cultural diversity while maintaining (a) biological diversity and (b) the biogeochemical integrity of the biosphere by means of conservation and proper use of air, water, and land resources.

Economic Sustainability

Bonevac (2010) describes economic sustainability as the maximization and maintenance of income flow generated from a stock of assets (capital). For this study, material well-being that is sustained over time, is considered the same as economic sustainability. Income, wealth, employment, housing prices and affordability, business activity, access to jobs, and locality of jobs, training, and skills are common examples used to understand economic sustainability or material well-being (Berardi et al., 2015).

Social Sustainability

The aim of social sustainability is to "confront risk while addressing social concerns," (Eizenberg et al., 2017, p. 6). Key challenges inhibiting social sustainability stem from ever-changing risks and vulnerability caused by social divide, increased poverty, conflict and violence, terrorism, and climate change (Eizenberg et al., 2017). Risk involves anthropocentric, environmental, and anthropocentrically induced environmental threats. The challenges stemming from such risks makes it more difficult to fulfill the economic and environmental aspects of sustainability. Pulling from Berardi et al.'s (2015) and Eizenberg et al.'s (2017) studies on social sustainability, social inclusion, quality of life, eco-prosumption, and sustainable urban forms are four common factors used to conceptualize social sustainability (see Table 1.). Eizenberg et al. (2017) stated that when utilizing social sustainability, radical new forms and values are essential criterion when considering the long-term or future. Given the values at the starting point of sustainability discourse are drastically different than where it is now, it is vital that we align our sustainability conceptualizations so that current and future generations of all backgrounds

can actually benefit from it. After all, Thomas Jefferson argued that the "dead should not govern the living," and the same should apply to sustainability/sustainable development (Ginsburg, 2009, p. 1).

Table 1. Social Sustainability Components

Concept	***Summary***
Social Inclusion	Sense of community and belonging; place attachment; social cohesion and equity; accessibility to resources, political power, and the ability to network with others.
Quality of Life	Health, education, safety and security (for humans and non-human species), work-life balance, and political well-being.
Eco-prosumption	Methods used to consume, produce, and gain values in socially and environmentally responsible ways (e.g., walking, biking, recycling, reduced energy consumption, clean energy use, etc.).

Source: Berardi et al., 2015; Eizenberg et al., 2017

Conceptualizing the Approaches to Sustainable Development

This work is informed by Hopwood et al.'s (2003) article highlighting the approaches to sustainability and sustainable development, as well by as Agyeman (2007; 2008) and colleague's (2002; 2003; 2016) research throughout the past two decades centered around just sustainability and environmental justice.

With the goal of making sustainability as a concept more digestible, Hopwood et al. (2005) noted that status quo, reform, and transformation are the three categories used to conceptualize approaches to sustainable development. Those who identify with the status quo approach believe that economic growth and business drives the change needed to fulfill sustainability, disregarding the need to act on social and environmental problems (Hopwood et al., 2005). Additionally, supporters of this approach believe that technology

can be a substitute for nature (Hopwood et al., 2005). Governments, businesses, and other elites (considered a part of the status quo) that work within parameters of power and have close connections to decision-makers, allowing them to control the world in which we operate (Molotoch, 1976; Hopwood, et al., 2005; Burdge, 2015). Molotch (1976), Wright (2011), and Burdge (2015) found that those who have a higher socioeconomic class in a community dominated by political elites are more likely to be aware of economic shifts, political affairs, and planning, while those who are in socioeconomically disadvantaged ones are merely moving parts exploited to keep the growth machine (capitalism) going. Moreover, this approach equalizes capitalism with sustainability, emphasizing that developing countries need to be 'saved' from hunger and poverty through assimilation to western understandings of growth and affluence, which, in this case, is considered more sustainable (Hopwood et al., 2005; Purvis et al., 2019). This thought process reemerged in 1945 following World War II, where there was an urgent need to advance the development of poorer countries with that of the western world (Purvis et al., 2019).

Banerjee (2003) associated this way of thinking with the "White Man's Burden"— a popularized idea common to the early stages of colonization used to strip non-white people around the world of their resources, rights, and culture. In 1898, this concept was first introduced in Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden," as a suggestion for Theodore Roosevelt (and the U.S. government) to gain control over the Philippines and other non-white populations in India and Africa (though Roosevelt was already planning to do so) (Bratlinger, 2007). Bratlinger (2007) found that this idea, stemming from racism and white supremacy, has been refurbished throughout time in

national and international contexts. Bratlinger (2007) too recognized the delusion in the U.S. thinking their invasion and occupation of foreign lands would be good for both parties.

On the other hand, reformists acknowledge uprising problems and are alert to current business and governmental policies and societal trends, yet do not consider 1) fundamental change as necessary and 2) the possibility of socio-ecological collapse (Hopwood et al., 2005). Reformists explore the imbalances in information and knowledge within society rather than pinpointing the root to such problems because they posit that significant turns in policy and lifestyle will eventually need to take place, creating balance over time. Technology, science, and the role of government are assumed to be the keys to moving towards the achievement of sustainability. Hopwood et al. (2005) noted that this group, though versatile, is primarily made up of academics and mainstream NGO experts. Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and WWF are well known environmental reformist groups. Reformists, much like those in status quo, often neglect the connection between disproportionate social and environmental disparities within or caused by the developed world. Today, especially in the U.S., we are developmentally somewhere in between the status quo and reformist approaches though different movements, like the Environmental Justice and Climate Justice Movements, lean towards transformation or transformed reform approaches.

Transformationists recognize the need to act on social and environmental problems, perceiving society and/or the environment as vital elements for achieving sustainability (Hopwood et al., 2005). Sub-categories to the transformation approach

include transformation without sustainable development and transformation with sustainable development. Transformationists unconcerned with sustainable development are either considered deep ecologists or social cornucopians. Deep ecologists are known for putting human needs after environmental needs.

Hopwood et al. (2005) noted that in the eight points of deep ecology platform in 1989, little to no discourse included human needs and equity. Deep ecologists are frequently believed to be the bridge connecting green and fascist thinking (Hopwood et al, 2005). Deep ecologists that do exhibit concern for humanity combine ecocentrism and commitment to socio-economic equity, keeping in mind that the Earth can withstand human actions, but humans cannot survive the Earth's response to the damage inflicted upon it. Social cornucopians defend the need for social transformation to diminish social and economic inequalities. They believe that the amelioration of human skills and freeing ourselves from capitalism are paramount for conquering all problems, rarely acknowledging environmental issues (Hopwood et al., 2005).

Transformationists that consider sustainable development believe that dilemmas in society and the environment are interconnected and are at risk if radical change does not take place (Hopwood et al., 2005). They believe that a small minority of people who hold power in society are responsible for most, if not all, problems, especially regarding the exploitation of people and the environment. Social equity is central to this approach, emphasizing that access to a better livelihood, good health, economic and political decision-making power, and other resources are utmost important for fulfilling sustainable development. Those who identify with transformationist perspectives

informed by sustainable development consist of social ecologists or dialectical naturalists (argue that environmental concern should be rooted in social criticism and reconstruction); ecofeminists (contend that 'maldevelopment' and degradation of the environment are tied to the subordination of women); ecosocialists (believe disparities and environmental damage are directly connected to capitalistic exploitation of people and the environment); and so on (Hopwood et al., 2005). The diversity and evolution of concepts within this approach complicates classification yet adds value to the ideas and practice. This study is informed by a transformational approach that considers sustainable development using the Just Sustainability Paradigm and Critical Race Theory (discussed later).

Who is Sustainability For?

Major debates in sustainability literature and practice surround questions about who owns, determines, and needs sustainability. Regarding sustainability's ownership, Byrnes et al. (2021), Guha (2021), and LeVasseur (2021) noted that failing to cultivate conversations centering equity, justice, and power in environmental and sustainability curricula while otherizing non-western and non-white voices emboldens the idea that sustainability is solely a white concept, perpetuating injustices. Moreover, the intentional alienation of non-western and non-white thinking further complicates sustainability as a practice because students seeking to practice it professionally have only been taught from one perspective (Brynes et al., 2021). Coincidentally, Nasr (2009) declared that there will be an increased need for individuals leading organizations seeking to navigate the

complex transition to sustainable production practices due to 1) field discrepancies that complicate workplace prerogatives and 2) multistakeholder participation being needed for its fulfillment. Addressing these issues calls for the decolonization of sustainability as a concept and practice through the immersion of topics encompassing race in and beyond academia (Byrnes et al., 2021; LeVasseur, 2021). Acknowledgement and accountability are important first steps towards achieving sustainability that centers justice. Acknowledgement, defined by Govier (1999, pp.16, 21) is,

> …admitting as significantly related to oneself that something is known. Thus, acknowledgement requires truth. When we acknowledge, we attend to some reality. […]. For victims of serious wrongdoing, to receive acknowledgement is soothing, healing, and supportive. It contributes to their restoration and healing which are necessary for their full functioning in society.

Accountability, on the other hand, is responsible, answerable, trustworthy, and liable (see Table 2. below for further details) (Gawadekar, 2017).

Table 2. Facets of Accountability

Concept	***Definition***
Responsibility	A duty that binds to the course of action/reaction.
Answerable	Being called to account.
Trustworthiness	A trait of being worth trust and confidence.
Liability	Being legally bound to a debt or obligation.

Source: Gawadekar, 2017, p. 14

Furthermore, outside of whiteness' impact on sustainability, understanding who or what determines its achievement appears to be impossible due to constant relational changes and negotiations (Hallin et al., 2021). Hallin et al. (2021) concluded that there is

a need to shift towards the conceptualization that sustainability is performative because in practice, it is more malleable outside of the ostensible definition. In other words, sustainability has different meanings depending on the local context, temporal scale, and politics that reflect distinct values and perspectives. Price (2002) suggests that sustainability be considered a tool rather than a stopping point due to humankinds' regular advancement with unsustainable developments. This would require defining the period in which sustainability is being measured. Regulatory bodies are also perceived as tools to address unsustainable development (specifically the overconsumption of resources along with masquerading the preservation of individual benefits as environmental concerns by privileged communities) (Price, 2002).

Finally, being able to distinguish who "needs" sustainability is utmost important for change. In certain cases, scholars emphasize the obligation to focus on underrepresented and impoverished populations given their needs are least likely to be met, therefore preventing future (related) generations from meeting theirs (Fatti et al., 2021). In fact, Wright (2011) argues that sustainability serves as a justice principle put in place for future generations. Before labeling sustainability's niche as such, it is important to acknowledge that bad outcomes or externalities – such as gentrification and other forms of racial displacement – can stem from sustainable development.

Green gentrification, according to the Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Environmental Justice & Sustainability (BCNUEJ) (2018), are "processes started by the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to green spaces that lead to the exclusion and displacement of politically disenfranchised residents." Sustainability

being portrayed as an “aesthetic” or “luxury” need tends to improve the quality of life while driving up the prices of property values, (Yang et al., 2014; BCNUEJ, 2018). This forces poorer residents out, reinforcing environmental injustices (BCNUEJ, 2018). Haglund (2019) asserts that the occurrence of such outcomes verifies that threats to human rights and access to healthy environments are inherently connected. Moreover, the misuse of sustainability needs leads to performative environmentalism and greenwashing (Hallin, 2021; Anantharaman, 2022). Performative environmentalism describes the performance of individuals’ idealized versions of themselves as if they are doing what is necessary to surpass social expectations with pro-environmental behaviors (Anantharaman, 2022). Greenwashing is a tactic, typically employed by businesses or companies, to present as if they are doing what is necessary to be morally aligned with pro-environmental values (de Freitas et al., 2020). Conceptualizing one’s approach to sustainability can help clarify how “needs” are defined and whether the fulfillment of sustainability is possible.

Theoretical Overview

Here, The Just Sustainability Paradigm and Critical Race Theory are used as theoretical and conceptual tools necessary for sustainably transforming our world.

Just Sustainability Paradigm

Just sustainability is defined by Agyeman et al. (2002, p. 78) as “the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems.” Although justice and equity are focal to just sustainability practices, the environment’s significance is, in no

way, minimized. This concept is said to be the bridge between the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) and Environmental Justice (EJ) (Agyeman et al., 2002; Agyeman et al., 2003; Agyeman, 2005; Agyeman, 2007; Agyeman, 2008; Agyeman et al., 2016). The NEP is a tool used to measure the shared relationship between humans and the environment through the exploration of environmental attitudes (Ntanos et al., 2019) while EJ is a tool to ensure all individuals and communities are fairly treated and meaningfully involved in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies (Agyeman et al., 2003; EPA, 2022). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (2022) notes that EJ will be fulfilled when everyone has 1) the same level of protection from environmental and health hazards and 2) equal access to the decision-making process needed for cultivating a healthy environment to live, work, and play.

EJ literature over time has shifted from solely highlighting issues tied to hazard proximity and socio-spatial patterning to investigating the processes that have led to said matters and more. Holifield (2001) and Fernandez et al. (2021) noted that studying the processes that lead to the disproportionate distribution of environmental amenities, rather than merely questioning outcomes tied to distribution itself, is significant for fulfilling EJ given they are products stemming from social structures, cultural beliefs, and institutional contexts. Holifield (2001) also noted that it is especially important to examine how governmental environmental justice programs impact the geography of industrial development, environmental risk, and grassroots activism.

Discourse on the relationship between human and non-human sustainability is perceived as a newer element of EJ discourse and practice (Agyeman et al., 2016). Agyeman et al. (2016) found that just sustainability is a major field relevant to EJ scholarship because it is a much-needed paradigm necessary for addressing the equity deficit in environmental sustainability discussions. In doing so, it is important to define environmental racism. Following the 1982 protests against the dumping of PCB-contaminated soil in Warren County, North Carolina, Benjamin Chavis – the United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice's former head – defined environmental racism as:

> […] racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life-threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership in the environmental movement (Holifield, 2001, pp. 83).

Just sustainability literature is rooted in four main ideas (not all equally represented by NEP and EJ): (a) quality of life and well-being; (b) multigenerational equity (on both intra- and intergenerational levels); (c) justice and equity that considers recognition, process, procedure, and outcome; and (d) living with the consideration of ecosystem limits (Agyeman, 2005; Agyeman, 2008; Rose et al., 2018). Food, energy, climate, urban design, policy, gentrification, and displacement are common topics discussed in just sustainability literature.

Occasionally, just sustainability has been synonymized with transformational sustainability or merged to create new terminology, "just transformations to sustainability," (Agyeman, 2008; Bennett et al., 2019). Just transformations to sustainability, like just and transformational sustainability, has the goal of generating balanced and beneficial outcomes for social justice and environmental sustainability by radically deviating from current socio-ecological systems. The focal point of just transformations to sustainability is the emphasis on the four dimensions of EJ: distributive justice, procedural justice, recognitional, and interactional justice (see Table 3 below) (Bennett et al., 2019).

Table 3. Dimensions of Environmental Justice

Concept	Definition
Distributive Justice	"Fairness in the distribution of benefits and harms of decisions and actions to different groups across space and time. Need, equality, and justice are indicators of distribution."
Procedural Justice	"The level of participation and inclusiveness of decision making and the quality of governance processes."
Recognitional Justice	"[…] the acknowledgement of and respect for pre-existing governance arrangements as well as the distinct rights, worldviews, knowledge, needs, livelihoods, histories, and cultures of different groups and decisions."
Interactional justice	"…the principle that individuals should perceive green spaces as welcoming environments where they can recreate and engage with others in a manner that is reasonably safe, respectful, equal, and just. […] interactional justice describes a condition in which marginalized populations experience latent and overt forms of discrimination and exclusion while visiting green spaces."

Source: Peters, 2015, p.27; Bennett, 2019, p. 4 & 5; Fernandez, 2021, pp. 212.

Why Just Sustainability?

The overall purpose of sustainability approaches centering justice, transformation, and like viewpoints, is to ensure sustainability is operationalized in a redistributive manner. (Justice-focused) sustainability scholars argue that if sustainability discourse does not prioritize justice and equity, the chances of resolving it and other wicked problems – like climate change, education, or health care disparities – will be slim (Agyeman et al., 2002; Hopwood et al., 2003; Agyeman, 2008; Fatti et al., 2021). Fatti et al. (2021, p. 22) noted that a key challenge of applying just sustainability is identifying those that have the least advantages in society. Doing so (especially within the United States) demands that we collectively acknowledge, and therefore, act on the disparities racially and socioeconomically impoverished communities face then create a multi-step action plan to put a stop to and prevent the regeneration of such injustices.

The Veil of Ignorance as a Hurdle to Reaching a Sustainably Just World.

Rawls' popularized idea, the veil of ignorance (VOI), is a concept meant to promote impartial decision making to prevent bias in who should benefit the most or the least in society (Rawls, 1971; Muldoon et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2019; Töns, 2021). Muldoon et al. (2013) and Töns (2021) noted that a person or agent acting under a VOI is supposed to be free of self-interest due to the established unawareness of their social, generational, gender-specific, or racial stature within society. They also do not know their talents, abilities, interests, or psychological makeup (Töns, 2021). Essentially, the possibility of one's self-interest hindering their ability to reason is impossible with a VOI. While some believe this is a powerful tool, opposing perspectives argue that defenders of the VOI are far more problematic than realized because they cannot be used to guide

one's moral compass in pluralistic or multicultural societies (Crenshaw, 1995; Muldoon et al., 2013; Davies, 2019; Töns, 2021). Töns (2021) stated that it is difficult operating under a VOI when it comes to practical policy because there would need to be a radical shift in society's structure so that it conforms to Rawls's principles of justice which highlights granting each person equal basic liberties while prioritizing social and economic inequalities so that all offices and positions are fair and of equal opportunity and to the greatest benefit of those who are the least privileged in society (Rawls, 1971; Muldoon et al., 2013; Davies, 2019; Töns, 2021). Furthermore, Davies (2019) stated that the VOI approach has and continues to disregard many injustices tied to racism, sexism, and other modes of discrimination. Both Davies (2019) and Töns (2021) found that with the VOI, no work is done to eliminate deeper sources of disagreement or let alone fix said injustices, perpetuating colorblind, and other discriminatorily blind, ideologies.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), first established and practiced by legal scholars in the mid-1970s, emerged from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (Khan, 2016). CRT is a structural critique centered around challenging how race and racial progress narratives are represented and constructed in the United States' legal system and society due to the intentional delay in racial reform (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ray et al., 2017; Bell, 2018; Fernandez et al., 2021). Ray et al. (2017) noted that CRT is an approach to racial progress typically avoided by sociologists who study race and ethnicity (in the Western world) due to the traditionally optimistic, albeit restricted, lens to progress. For example, it was found that typical narratives to racial progress (in

the U.S.) were determined by one's assimilability and proximity to whiteness (Ray et al., 2017). CRT perceives progress as nonlinear given it is contingent and reversible. This is especially applicable to the reversals of policies and practices such as the Voting Rights Act (Ray et al., 2017). Fernandez et al. (2021) stated that CRT too recognizes that numerous policies and practices are colorblind, treating the implementation of legislation as if the impacts are equally distributed across all communities. Many CRT scholars have a mutual opposition to colorblind ideologies and commitment to liberating forms of pluralism, emphasizing the importance of embracing cultural differences rather than denying them (Khan, 2016; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019).

Khan (2016) noted that CRT is also an essential theory for scholars interested in exploring the intersections of race class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and so forth. Though originally theorized for African Americans, CRT is also interested in what ways disenfranchised populations are deemed visible versus invisible and is encouraged to be used as methodological and theoretical toolkit in context-dependent manners (Khan, 2016). At the end of the day, factors that make up a society (social, culture, political, gender, or circumstances) do not stem from the production of sole or independent actions. Khan (2016, p. 3) stated that "All human beings are interdependent and thus the societal problems arising as a consequence are also interdependent. Therefore, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, health, education, and the social justice system cannot be studied in isolation." In fact, Decuir-Gunby et al. (2019) noted that intersectionality of race and racism (with other forms of subordination) is one of the 10 widely understood principles amongst CRT scholars (see full list of principles in Table 4 below).

Table 4. Widely Accepted CRT Principles

Principle	Description
The Centrality of Race and Racism	"Race remains the dominant and consistent, yet sometimes elusive, factor that influences laws, policies, relationships, and practices in education."
U.S. Society is based on property rights	"This proposition postulates that it is essential to examine social inequities, particularly educational inequities, from the understanding that racism is systemic and whiteness has value."
Intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination	"Racism is intricately woven within all aspects of society and actively interacts with all forms of subordination."
Challenge to dominant ideology	"A major goal of CRT is to question and challenge the status quo or majoritarian perspective. CRT promotes skepticism towards how the law operates in terms of neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness (being influenced by race)."
Myth of meritocracy	"This principle questions the existence of meritocracy or the idea that advancement in society only occurs because of hard work and ability."
Commitment to social justice	"CRT is a liberatory, transformative and emancipatory theory that focuses on racial justice (Peller, 1990). The ultimate goal of CRT is to end racial oppression and other forms of oppression through systemic change."
Centrality of Experiential knowledge	"CRT analyses highlight the importance of voice and focuses on the experiences of People of Color."
Transdisciplinary knowledge	"In utilizing CRT, there is a focus on a contextual yet historical interpretation of the law. It is essential to apply a CRT analysis taking context into perspective."
Crosses epistemological understandings of race	"CRT stresses the importance of connecting with other disciplines in order to address racism because of its complexity and
Reinterpretation of civil rights outcomes	"CRT examines the social and political outcomes of civil rights law to explain current institutional and structural components of racism."

Source: DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019, p. 5-6

Crenshaw et al. (1995) and Malagon (2009) acknowledged that though there is not an authorized set of methodologies CRT scholars ascribe to, there are two commonly

shared interests in this work. The first interest is centered around understanding the regime of white supremacy and its maintained subordination of communities of color while the other seeks to move beyond understanding the troubled bond between law and racial power by changing it (Crenshaw et al., 1995). With this, Fernandez et al. (2021) discovered that storytelling and counter-stories are needed CRT methodologies essential for demonstrating how racism is perpetuated on varying levels. Moreover, grounded theory, theoretical sampling, conditional matrices, and collaboration are well-known methodologies or tools employed by CRT scholars and others centering social justice in their work (Malagon et al., 2009). Akkari et al. (2022) noted that CRT is needed for analyzing the complexities and dynamics of inequality and discrimination, allowing research, like this, to further confront cultural challenges like racism, and other forms of discrimination.

Centering Resilience and Liberation in Sustainability Efforts

Resilience, in social-ecological terms, is considered "the capacity to adapt or transform in the face of unexpected changes in ways that continue to support human well-being," (Estoque et al. 2024, p. 2). In building resilient communities, it is paramount to utilize cultural and communal resilience strategies in moving towards liberation, and thus, equitable and sustainable cities within (and beyond) the United States. Though nuanced, resilience, when focusing on adaptation within a system or in relation to human systems, requires an understanding of various social barriers and structural inequities given the difficulties that come with resilient urban planning (Collier et al. 2013). Collier

et al. (2013) notes that a community's capacity to adapt and influence adaptive processes, local planning policies, and community capital to the relative size of the area are a few examples which demonstrate this. On the other hand, historic origins, infrastructural development, geopolitical and geographical location, and ecosystem processes are too considered underpinning barriers to urban resilience planning (Collier et al., 2013; Clarke et al., 2020). Though underpinning barriers to resilient planning, Clarke et al., (2020) noted that such topics are required for informing contemporary development strategies to make cities sustainable. In addition to considering social barriers and structural inequities, building resilient communities calls for inclusive decision-making that engages diverse stakeholders, particularly marginalized communities who are most likely to be affected by social, economic, and environmental injustices.

Chapter 3. Methods

Research Design

This qualitative community case study aims to uncover the Near East Side's Black residential perceptions regarding the City of Columbus' decision-making practices, to what degree these practices incorporate their lived experiences, and their perceptions of sustainability as a concept and practice. Smith et al. (2016, p 1) noted that community case studies can take many forms, describing it as "a description of, and reflection upon, a program or practice geared toward improving the health and the functioning of a targeted population." It was also acknowledged that "community" can also be defined by geographic boundaries, demographic characteristics, and common settings or affiliations (Smith et al. 2016). For this community case study, the Near East Side neighborhood – bordered by Interstate-670 to the north, Interstate-70 to the south, Alum Creek to the east, and Interstate-71 to the west – will be the community case of focus (City of Columbus, Department of Development, Planning Division, 2005). In exploring the sustainability perceptions of Near East's Black residents, it is paramount to understand their lived experiences in relation to local decision-making processes. Fatti et al. (2023) found that achieving the coupled goal of just sustainability requires theoretical and practical efforts that address the conflicts between justice and sustainability, but also the everyday practices and decisions that impact such outcomes.

Rationale

Using a qualitative community case study approach for my research design is advantageous for several reasons. First, case studies allow for an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, offering rich and detailed insights that may not be captured through other research methods (Weiss, 1994). Chopard et al. (2021) stated that this design, commonly used in criminal justice research, is also a method of analysis used for administering empirical inquiry. Case study research requires multiple sources of evidence ranging from documents, direct observations, or systematic interviews needed for examining a program, place, events, and so on for various purposes. By concentrating deeply on a single case (Near East Side), the extensive data highlighting the perspectives and experiences of community stakeholders was collected through in-depth interviews to shed light on community needs and resources, decision-making practices, sustainability perceptions, and so forth. Furthermore, Dredge et al. (2012) noted that community case studies are advantageous because they raise questions around literary discrepancies by fostering engaging critical reflection of theory. In fact, critical theory approaches to community case studies recognize that history and social ordering have resulted imbalances in power, culture, race, ethnicity, and gender (Dredge et al., 2012).

Selection Criteria

Columbus' Near East Side neighborhood was selected for its rich historical and cultural context, which provides a unique lens through which to examine sustainability and decision-making perceptions. The Near East Side is an area undergoing significant

transformation, characterized by a blend of historic and new development projects (City of Columbus, Department of Development, Planning Division, 2005). Additionally, the community's historical significance, along with its ongoing, revitalization efforts reflect broader trends in urban sustainability and social equity. By focusing on this area, I can gain insight on sustainability and decision-making perceptions and practices. This exploration can reveal important patterns and practices possibly applicable to similar communities undergoing change.

Community Case: Near East Side

Historical Context and Background

In working to amplify the narratives of Black individuals within the Near East Side community, it is vital to understand and recognize which laws shaped their history and, therefore, positions within their communities today. Knowledge from local activists and historians highlights the Housing Act of 1949, Brown v. Board of Education (i, 1954; ii, 1955), and the Highway Act of 1956 as major legislations responsible for worsened conditions within their communities. Despite such legislation exacerbating the conditions for Black folks within and beyond the Near East Side, this community is testament to resilience, community spirit, and cultural richness of African American migrants who shaped its vibrant history. Furthermore, to adequately incorporate theories on race, such Critical Race Theory, community history and legislation impacting those in the Near East Side mush be detailed.

According to Gerber (1976), throughout the 1860s and after the Civil Wars' end in 1865, there was a drastic influx of Black migrants seeking opportunities away from

racial segregation and limited economic opportunities in the South. During this time, African Americans made up less than three percent of Ohio's population, yet nearly doubled in size from 36,673 to 63,213 Black folks throughout the region. 1860 marked Ohio as the fifth ranking northern state with the highest Black population and third in terms of percentage Black folks within the total population (Gerber, 1976). Black migrants in Ohio typically settled in regions with prominent Black populations, particularly in central and southern counties. Following the Civil War and passing of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, Columbus attracted African Americans who settled primarily along (downtown) East Long Street or nearby neighborhoods. Columbus' Black migrants typically lived closer to neighborhoods near downtown, illustrating residential preferences tied to comfort and living close to work (Gerber, 1976;). Around 1870, racially and socioeconomically mixed neighborhoods along East Long Street and East Spring Street in Columbus housed approximately 650 Black residents, comprising 35% of the city's total Black population (Columbus Landmarks Foundation, 2014). Though the downtown East Long Street area had the largest concentration of Black folks, six to 10% of Columbus' Black population resided in individual wards within north, south, and east Columbus (Gerber, 1976; Griffin, 2005). From late 19th to early 20th centuries, Columbus' Black population in 1870, at 1,847, had a net increase of 10,892 during intercensal decades, totaling 12,739 individuals in 1910 (Gerber, 1976).

Simultaneously, at the beginning of the 20th century, Jim Crow laws emerged as a system of legal and extralegal racial segregation based in the American South. Columbus' earlier African American settlers were determined to build a community less

constrained by Jim Crow laws dominant in other regions of the country. Although Jim Crow was not sanctioned by law in Ohio, African Americans still faced negative impacts stemming from the color line. The term "color line" refers to racial segregation between white people and persons of color, specifically Black people, in the U.S. during the 19th and 20th centuries (Gerber, 1976; Griffin, 2005). The color line itself represents social, economic, and political barriers used to separate races, enforcing inequality and denial of rights and opportunities to non-white peoples.

As the Black populations grew in at different points in Ohio, their struggles did too. As Black populations became established and continued to grow, they were met with hostility and violence due to their upward mobility. For example, during the Civil War and First World War, African Americans were more likely to migrate, seeking better conditions and opportunities (Gerber, 1976; Trotter Jr., 2001; Griffin, 2005). The First Great Migration simultaneously occurred as World War I. In fact, Trotter Jr. (2001) and Griffin (2005) found that World War I catalyzed new opportunities for African Americans in the U.S. due to increased industrialization following President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war on Germany in 1917. After President Wilson stated his aim to secure the "foundations" of "political liberty" many African Americans got on board fearing victory for Germany would stagnate their ability to achieve equality, freedom, and democracy for racially oppressed communities (Trotter Jr., 2001). Griffin (2005) affirmed how powerful World War I and wartime Black migration were in affecting Black Ohioan's experiences from 1915 to 1920, as Ohio's Black population increased by 67%, at 186,187 (though 98.6% of this growth took place in cities). With the exponential

stress on wartime labor needs, industrialists sought out southern Black workers to make up for the men who left the workforce, thus mobilizing for war. Due to drastic increases in migration, African Americans were often met with racial hostility in response their success in the industrial sector. Trotter Jr. (2001) emphasized that despite Black folk's escape from the South, urbanization over time presented itself as a blessing and challenge.

The Great Migration is deemed the reason for the Black urban working class's development and evolution in the U.S. (Griffin, 2005). This is especially true for the Black migrants to Columbus. Columbus' Black population rose to 22,181 individuals by 1920, resulting in 355 Black-owned business, churches, and other establishments popping up throughout the city (Griffin, 2005; The Columbus Landmarks Foundation, 2014). A few prominent examples included 90 ministers, 75 churches, 27 physicians, 20 lawyers, 17 dentists, and so forth. Within what is now known as the Near East Side, Mount Vernon Avenue soon became a business hub for Black folks though the community was racially and ethnically diverse. The Columbus Landmarks Foundation (2014, p.17) provided a quote from one of Columbus' longtime locals, Thomas (Tommy) Campbell, which illustrated this:

> The Avenue was that great…everybody was looking to open a business. They wanted to own a shop on the Avenue […] Mt. Vernon was a mixed area at the time. It wasn't all black. It had Italians, blacks, Jewish people living in the area, as well as, working in the area. And all owned property, from the railroad tracks on the north to Broad Street on the south, Taylor Avenue on the east and

> Hamilton Avenue on the west. It was like a pocket in itself, and it was a business area in itself. And everyone worked together, hand in hand. […] You didn't have to go anywhere else to buy anything. (Columbus Landmarks Foundation, 2014, p. 17).

Early Black settlements in Columbus, Ohio, such as those in the Near East Side, emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as African American communities sought refuge from racial discrimination and segregation prevalent in other parts of the city. These neighborhoods, including those around the historic African American community of King-Lincoln Bronzeville, became vibrant centers of cultural and social life, fostering a strong sense of community and resilience. Despite facing significant challenges, including economic hardship and social marginalization, these settlements developed rich cultural traditions and community institutions that played a pivotal role in shaping the identity of Columbus's African American population.

The mid-20th century brought significant legislative changes that impacted these communities. The Housing Act of 1949 aimed to improve urban housing conditions but often failed to address the needs of low-income Black residents effectively. The landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education (1954, 1955) declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, yet the implementation of this decision was slow and uneven, affecting educational opportunities for Black students (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Additionally, the Highway Act of 1956, which facilitated the construction of interstate highways, often led to the displacement of Black neighborhoods, further exacerbating the challenges faced by these communities. These legislative and judicial

actions collectively influenced the development and transformation of early Black settlements in Columbus, highlighting the complex interplay between policy and community resilience.

Housing Act of 1949

The Housing Act of 1949 aimed to address housing shortages and improve living conditions across the United States, including in communities like the Near East side in Columbus, Ohio (Triece, 2016; Cox 2021). For Black residents, who had long endured housing discrimination and segregation, this legislation offered hope for better housing opportunities and urban renewal. It provided federal funding for slum clearance and public housing projects, intending to replace substandard housing with modern, affordable homes. Throughout the United States, Housing Act initially promised revitalization and improved living standards, offering Black families the prospect of safer, healthier housing options and a pathway out of overcrowded and dilapidated conditions (Triece, 2016).

However, despite the intentions of the Housing Act of 1949, its implementation posed significant challenges resulting in externalities. Urban renewal projects often displaced residents, predominantly Black families, without adequate provision for affordable replacement housing or meaningful community input (Triece, 2016). As a result, many residents experienced forced relocation, disruption of social networks, and loss of cultural and historical ties to their neighborhoods. Moreover, the promised revitalization efforts did not always materialize as envisioned, leaving behind pockets of poverty, disinvestment, and housing instability in parts of the community (Trotter Jr.,

2001; Cox, 2021). Today, despite the passage of the Housing Act over half a century ago, Near East and similar neighborhoods still grapple with housing inequalities, reflecting broader systemic issues of racial and economic justice that continue to shape urban development policies and practices (as discussed by participants).

Brown v. Board of Education (i, 1954; ii, 1955)

Despite the monumental impact of Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, schools in the primarily Black neighborhood of Near East in Columbus, Ohio, continue to face significant challenges today (Botti, 1989). Decades after these landmark legislations were passed, systemic inequalities persist, manifesting in disparities in educational resources, funding, and outcomes. The schools in Near East, serving a predominantly Black population, often grapple with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, and a lack of access to advanced coursework and extracurricular activities compared to schools in more affluent areas of the city (Trotter Jr., 2001; Griffin, 2005; The Columbus Landmarks Foundation, 2014). Despite efforts to desegregate and ensure equal educational opportunities, socioeconomic barriers and historical injustices have entrenched unequal access to quality education for Black students in this community.

Moreover, the legacy of segregation and discrimination has left a lasting impact on the socioeconomic conditions of the Near East Side. Persistent poverty and limited economic opportunities exacerbate the challenges faced by schools in the area, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage for Black residents (Trotter Jr., 2001;). While legislative victories have dismantled legal barriers, the struggle for true educational

equity and social justice continues in communities like Near East, where residents and advocates work tirelessly to address systemic issues and ensure that children receive a quality education and life outcomes regardless of their zip code or racial background.

The Highway Act of 1956

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, often referred to as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, had profound implications for communities across the United States, including the Near East side community in Columbus, Ohio (Cox, 2021). This legislation aimed to create a vast network of interstate highways, intended to enhance national defense capabilities and facilitate economic growth by improving transportation infrastructure. However, the construction of these highways frequently intersected with predominantly Black neighborhoods, leading to significant disruptions and negative consequences for residents (Trotter Jr., 2001; Triece, 2016).

In Near East and similar communities, the Highway Act of 1956 often resulted in the displacement of Black families and the destruction of vibrant neighborhoods. Highways were sometimes built through these communities, fragmenting once-cohesive neighborhoods and severing social and economic ties (Triece, 2016; Cox, 2021). The construction of highways also exacerbated issues of environmental justice, as these projects often led to increased pollution and noise levels in already marginalized neighborhoods. Moreover, the highways facilitated suburbanization and white flight, contributing to economic disinvestment in urban cores like Near East (Trotter Jr., 2001; Triece, 2016; Cox, 2021).

Despite the intended benefits of improved transportation and economic development, the Highway Act of 1956 disproportionately affected Black communities, perpetuating spatial inequalities and exacerbating racial segregation in housing and infrastructure (Trotter Jr., 2001; Triece, 2016; Cox, 2021). Today, Near East and other historically Black neighborhoods continue to grapple with the legacy of highway construction, striving to address the environmental, social, and economic impacts while advocating for equitable urban planning and development policies that prioritize community well-being and inclusivity.

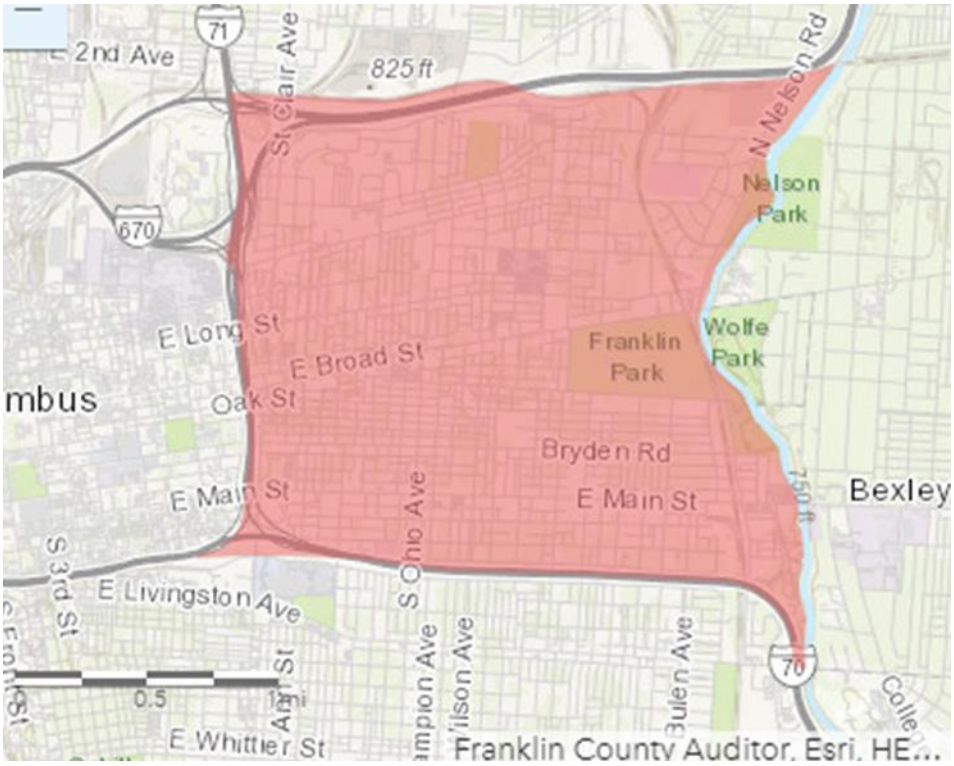

Figure 1. Near East Side community, Columbus, OH Figure 1. Near East Side Community (pictures are not to scale) (Columbus Area Commissions, 2023).

Research Procedures

Recruitment and Participant Demographics

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using snowball, convenience, and key informant sampling to ensure broad representation in age, gender, career, location (within the Near East area), and overall life outcomes. Additionally, a pre-screening Qualtrics survey (see Appendix B) was used prior to meeting with each respondent to retrieve demographic information about their household income, age, gender, race, neighborhood of residence, zip code, and contact information. This survey also served as the main tool to assure Black folks within the area were recruited. Exceptions were made for those who lived in

the same zip code tabulation areas (ZCTAs) like those in Near East (43203 and 43205) or for those who recently lived in this community (a month prior to moving). Participants were also recruited through Instagram and community events.

Participant Recruitment Rationale

In selecting participants, it was paramount to ensure the population demographics aligned with that of the neighborhood and local ZCTAs. Demographic data from the Columbus Planning Division (2021) and U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2022) was considered in selecting participants. The city's demographic data demonstrated that most of Near East's population in 2021 (at 14.1%) was between the ages of 25-34, so most of the participants recruited were within this age range. Additionally, from U.S. Census Bureau (2022), the median age for the 43203 ZIP code was 34 while the median age for the 43205 ZIP code was 32.5. Aside from age, the city's cisgender (someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned with at birth) population is 10,174 women and 9,993 men. On the other hand, ZIP code data shows that the northern part of the Near East Side (43203) has 53% of cisgender women while southern tabulation area (43205) has an even split between cisgender men and women. Racially speaking, 62% of the 43203-tabulation area is Black while 46% of the 43205 ZIP code is Black, so most participants were recruited from the King-Lincoln Bronzeville, Mount Vernon, and Woodland Park areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Finally, though there is not any data on how much of the Near East Side identifies with the LGBTQ+ community, the Williams Institute at UCLA (2019) found that Ohio's LGBTQ+ population is about 4.3%. With Black LGBTQ+ communities particularly in

mind, the Black Futures Lab (2019) report on LGB+ Voices and the Black Census found that Black LGBTQ+ folks are often considered separately from the Black community though Census respondents strongly align with the Black community. Considering this takeaway, it was vital that Black, LGBTQ+ folks were also recruited for this study.

Participant Demographics

For this case, 14 participants were recruited. The ages of the respondents ranged from 25 to 86. Among the sample of participants, seven identified as women, five identified as men, and two identified as non-binary (though four participants identified with the LGBTQIA+ community). Six of the participants are considered key informants for this research. Key informants, in this study, are folks who are considered well-connected leaders known for their organizing efforts within in the Near East community. Table 5 below details overall demographic information collected from participants. Please note that pseudonyms are used in place of their real names in the findings to protect their identities.

When asked about how much they make considering Columbus' median household income of $58,575, four participants noted that they make significantly higher, three said slightly higher, none made around that amount, four stated slightly lower, and two noted they made significantly lower. The number of persons in each household ranged from two to eight people. Finally, the Near East subcommunities that participants lived in included the King Lincoln, Mount Vernon, Woodland Park, Old Town East, Franklin Park, and South of Main (Street). One participant with the 43205 ZCTA came

from Old Oaks, which is just below Old Towne East in the Livingston Avenue neighborhood.

Table 5. Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristics	All (N=14)	Percent
Age		
25-34	5	35.7
35-44	4	28.6
45-54	2	14.3
65-74	2	14.3
65 and over	1	7.1
Income (Columbus' median household income of 58.6k)		
Significantly higher	5	35.7
Slightly higher	3	21.4
Slightly lower	4	28.5
Significantly lower	2	14.3
ZCTA		
43203	8	57.1
43205	6	42.8
Gender Identity		
Man	7	50.0
Woman	5	35.7
Non-binary	2	14.3
Identifies with LGBTQ+ community?		
Yes	4	40.0
No	10	71.4
Near East Side & Shared ZCTA Sub-Communities		
Near East Sub-Communities		
King-Lincoln / Bronzeville	2	14.3
Mount Vernon	2	14.3
Poindexter Avenue	1	7.1
Woodland Park	3	21.4
Franklin Park	2	14.3
Olde Towne East	2	14.3
South of Main	2	14.3
Shared ZCTA: Livingston Ave Sub-Community		
Old Oaks	1	7.1

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study because, as mentioned above, storytelling and counter narrative development are crucial for defining one's

reality in social justice research considering CRT (Milner IV, 2007; Ray et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2021). This section details data collection procedures and the interview instrument necessary for doing so.

Interviews

For this study, 60-160-minute semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 14 participants. These interviews took place at The Ohio State University's African American and African Studies Community Extension Center, the Martin Luther King or Main branches of Columbus' Metropolitan Libraries, or at their place of residence (due to transportation and mobility hardships). All locations resided within or nearby the Near East Side community. At the Extension Center and local libraries, separate rooms were reserved to ensure comfort and confidentiality for each respondent. Interviews were conducted after the Interview Review Board approved all procedures, protocols, and interview instruments (IRB ID #: 2024E0067). Prior to interviews taking place, participants were sent an email containing a consent form (see Appendix C.) which detailed the intentions of this study. Once we came together to conduct the interview in person, informed verbal and written consent were obtained from each participant, outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as the participant, and the confidentiality measures put in place. Furthermore, interviews were audio-recorded with participant's consent. The audio-recording facilitated data collection given it allowed for accurate transcription and detailed analysis. Detailed notes were taken to supplement the audio recording to further capture non-verbal cues, contextual information, and the interviewer's reflections. Respondents were also provided a map of the area to label

(based on the questions asked) during the interview. Upon the conclusion of each interview, participants received $100 Visa gift cards for their time.

Instrumentation

Interview Guide

The interview guide for this project was developed throughout the extensive review of literature and theories. A series of open-ended questions in the guide were used to explore participant's narratives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the social, economic, environmental, and justice conditions within the Near East Side and adjacent communities. Specifically, their personal stories and understanding of their community's goal setting, characteristics and justice conditions were explored alongside the relevance of sustainability to their lives, and knowledge of Columbus' Sustainability Initiative, Sustainable Columbus. A mix of broad and overarching questions were used to initiate discussion while more specific probes were used to encourage deeper conversations that connected back to related themes.

Moreover, developing this guide required a very iterative process of refinement in which measures were taken to ensure the questions were clear, comprehensive, and connected back to the four central research questions. Practice interviews were conducted with Near East, Downtown, and Livingston Ave residents to test the effectiveness of the interview guide and identify any arising issues or areas that needed improvement. Feedback from these practice interviews led to few clarifying questions being added and minor wording adjustments being made to improve clarity and flow. As the interviews took place, reflexivity was maintained in the design and use of the guide though

flexibility was integrated to allow for spontaneous exploration of emerging themes and ideas when the opportunity presented itself during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Transcription, Coding, and Thematic Analysis

After each interview took place, audio recordings were transcribed using MAXQDA software. Transcripts were then coded using thematic analysis techniques necessary for identifying key themes and patterns within the data. Initially, open coding was conducted, whereby transcripts were analyzed line by line to generate a comprehensive list of initial codes. Next, axial coding was performed to group similar codes into broader categories and subcategories. Finally, selective coding was applied to identify overarching themes that encapsulated the essence of the data. Themes were refined through iterative discussions among the research team to ensure consensus and trustworthiness. Coding was done by hand through MAXQDA software, allowing for systematic organization and retrieval of coded segments. Moreover, to ensure intercoder reliability, coding was done alongside another graduate student. Following the completion of transcriptions, the documents were emailed to participants for member checking. Finally, participants were then emailed the results section to ensure accuracy of their quotes, and thus, the overall story.

Statement of Positionality

Nero (2015) acclaimed that holding an identity means to exist in a multitude of ways in the world at different points in time for different purposes. She continued to

explain that this is certainly applicable to researchers across all fields, as we negotiate who we are when it comes to preparing for the research process and conclusion. Given I am discussing touchy topics such as (the delusion of) white supremacy, anti-Black racism, and so forth, it is expected that I as the researcher clarify my values, assumptions, and biases.

As the primary researcher for this study, it is important to acknowledge my own positionality and its potential impact on the research process. I am a Black, neurodivergent woman originally from Denver, Colorado, with a middle-class background. This positionality influences my perspective and interactions within the research setting in several ways.

My identity as a Black woman provides me with an inherent cultural and racial understanding that aligns with the participants in this study. This shared racial and cultural background fosters a sense of commonality and empathy, which can enhance rapport and trust with participants. However, I recognize that each community and individual have unique experiences and challenges, and my background does not encompass the full spectrum of experiences within the Near East Side neighborhood.

Growing up in a middle-class family in Denver, Colorado, I am conscious of potential differences in socioeconomic and cultural experiences compared to those of the residents in the Near East Side community. While my middle-class upbringing provides me with certain advantages and insights, it may also create gaps in understanding the nuanced economic and social challenges faced by the participants. I am committed to

acknowledging these differences and approaching the study with sensitivity and openness to the diverse realities of the community members.

My positionality necessitates an ongoing reflection on power dynamics and potential biases throughout the research process. I strive to engage with participants respectfully, acknowledging both shared identities and differences. By maintaining reflexivity, I aim to minimize the impact of my personal background on the research findings and ensure that the voices of the community are represented authentically and accurately.

In summary, my positionality as a Black, neurodivergent woman from a middle-class background influences my approach to this study, shaping both the interactions with participants and the interpretation of data. I remain committed to a reflective and ethical research practice that honors the lived experiences of the Near East Side residents while recognizing and addressing the limitations and perspectives that my background brings to the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings

Findings

The interviews for this case study provided an in-depth understanding of community needs, resources, and current and desired future social, economic, environmental, and justice conditions. Participants shared their personal stories and perceptions of and involvement with community decision-making, landscape development, social and environmental justice, and sustainability. Respondent perspectives helped develop racial progress sustainability narratives considering the three traditionally accepted sustainability tenets – society, environment, and economy. Drawing on the reviewed literature and as proposed in transformational approach that considered sustainable development, justice was considered an additional tenet of sustainability for this research. Ultimately, each narrative intersects to create a comprehensive understanding of the complexities tied to Columbus' sustainability and justice-related practices specifically in the Near East Side community.

Three overarching themes, directly related to the research questions, emerged from this research. First, a divergence in sustainability perceptions demonstrates a range of understanding among the participants in how sustainability is conceptualized and put into action. Second, an imbalance in decision-making processes between the community

and the city highlights the need for institutional commitment and sustained efforts to meaningfully address the ongoing mistreatment of marginalized populations in the Near East Side. Finally, the absence of city support in combination with intracommunal conflict, based on race and socioeconomic status, reveals ongoing resistance and insufficient backing vital for meeting the needs of marginalized populations. Findings are presented below according to these themes; each section includes an exploration of sustainability perceptions in connection to the realities of participants' lived experiences within the Near East Side.

Trigger and Content Warning: Prior to reviewing participant responses, please be advised that the content includes discussions of police harassment and violence, gender-based violence, and sexual violence. Additionally, explicit language is employed in various instances.

Conceptualizing Near East Side's Black Residential Views on Sustainability

Perceptions of Sustainability as a Concept.

Definition, Relevance, and Discourse Situational Contexts

When asked what came to mind when hearing "sustainability," participants provided a wide array of responses, as anticipated. Some individuals had a harder time describing their thoughts on sustainability while others had a lot more to say given it is language they and others they. Here, the perspectives of Louise, Chloe Lorde, Gwendolyn, Bobby, Destiny, Sojo, and Rhonda are shared, illustrating a range in understanding of sustainability. Note: when asked what comes to mind versus how they

define sustainability, most participants said that what comes to mind when hearing this term was synonymous with their personal definition.

Louise (86), a former postal clerk, now retired Black woman, noted that nothing particularly came to mind when hearing the term sustainability because she did not know much about it nor had been in any spaces that used this term. Thus, she was uncertain if sustainability was relevant to her or not. Aside from these topics, Louise had more to say about sustainability in the latter portion of our conversation. Prior to discussing sustainability, she discussed how faith and care for elderly communities are important to her and believes they need to be prioritized more in society. In fact, when asked who she thinks benefits from sustainability Louise mentioned that sustainability benefits government officials and leaders financially, but not spiritually because "the price of stuff goes up and we [Black and elderly folks] don't seem to benefit from it at all. I just say spiritually because if they did anything spiritual it [the system] would be equal."

On the topic of religious faith, Chloe Lorde (38) – an urban grower, community healer, lawyer, and more – noted that when she hears the term "sustainability" being used, she hears it at work, within the community, and lately, in church. She stated,

> I hear it all the time. I mean, at work, community – it's starting to become something discussed in church because, what do they call it? Creation care. (Chloe Lorde)

When asked what comes to mind when she hears "sustainability" she mentioned that "I think sustainability, obviously in terms of the environment, but also sustainability in terms of longevity, comes to mind." When defining it, she stated,

> Longevity, and relevance together. So, making sure you exist, but you're also being responsive and shifting. So, you're being able to sustain operations and partnerships [within the community]. (Chloe Lorde)

Additionally, Chloe Lorde mentioned that sustainability is relevant to her because as a fundraiser "I'm always looking at ways to sustain efforts and projects and high impact practices [even at the environmental level]." Chloe Lorde's understanding of sustainability is informed by the many roles she plays within the Near East community, her education, family values, motherhood, and her activism.

Similarly, Gwendolyn (74), an urban grower, community leader, and lawyer, had a more established understanding of what came to mind when hearing this term, therefore facilitating her ability to define it. She noted, "It's [sustainability] an integration of resources that anticipates, a lifespan of several generations." Gwendolyn, when asked if and why sustainability was relevant to her, she stated:

> Yes, because the activities that I'm involved in, speak to – hopefully – actions that will be available to the community or develop resources that become available to the community over several generations. (Gwendolyn)

Gwendolyn's understanding of sustainability is directly informed by her work in the community, education, and interactions with other Black urban growers, community leaders, and local legislators. Additionally, she mentioned that though she hears this word in most spaces she is in, she recognizes that it is a context-dependent code word given in certain circles, sustainability philosophy, practice, and behavior can be affected by one's perspective, which can be tied to what they do. Ultimately, because of this, Gwendolyn mentioned that sustainability is not a fully developed philosophy. She described:

> First, let me limit it to certain circles or environments, all right? Okay, so within those circles, sustainability becomes a code word for certain kinds of philosophies, practices, and behaviors. And so, when you hear 'sustainable development,' 'sustainable livelihoods,' sustainable, you know, whatever, then the assumption is that people believe in a certain way about – have a fundamental perspective on how the world should work and in whose interests the world should work. And in order for that philosophy to be realized, then certain practices and behaviors have to exist, and so there are assumptions that people will observe, you know, will observe that in relationship to what it is that they do, okay? And that there's a realization that it [sustainability] is not necessarily a fully realized philosophy, neither is it a fully realized set of behaviors, but there is an effort to understand and effectuate an increasing number of those behaviors [within this practice]. (Gwendolyn)

Gwendolyn continued, describing what she believes would be a more holistic way to approach sustainability:

> So we say for instance – so sustainability, sometimes gets translated – well as, you know, 'reduce, reuse, recycle,' and I always encourage people to say it should begin with 'rethink.' 'Rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle.' I say we rethink what it is that we're trying to achieve, then we will have a better understanding of what it is that we can reduce using, and then given what we read, what we do use, how can that further be addressed by recycling? Reduce, reuse, recycle. Reuse – and okay, so we go reuse. What do we need to reuse? What do we need to reduce? And then what do we need to recycle? So, but we begin by rethinking what it is we're trying to do, why we're doing it and what you will actually do because sometimes it does get pie in the sky [having false hope]. 'Oh, you know we're going to turn the world around. We're going to save the oceans. We're going

> to do this…' No. Can we just not use plastic bags? Can we just separate our garbage? Can we just, you know – and so the rethinking part is really about what will I as an individual actually commit to given who I am. […] It's just like doing a change in your dietary practices. You know, it's hard. And if you say 'I'm going to decrease use of sugar.' Well, you have to decide [by asking yourself] 'Okay, what is it or how do I actually take in sugar? And what is it that I like about the way I take in sugar.' If I actually reduce the use of it, then what do I put in it's place? Or do I need to replace it? Or how does it affect, you know, my whole diet. You know? So as opposed to I'm just going to stop eating sugar. Because it doesn't work that way. So then it's a flip flop and then a month later you'll be back. That's what – that's the whole January [resolutions] thing you know. (Gwendolyn)

Bobby's (36), understanding of sustainability was also informed by the work that he does and his educational attainment. As an entrepreneur and menswear tailor, Bobby noted that he thinks about upcycling and recycling when thinking about or defining sustainability. Specifically, Bobby stated that sustainability, to him, means:

> The ability to upcycle and recycle. […] Is it good for the planet? Does it do harm, or does it create more opportunity, or can it withstand elements? And not just earth elements, but elements of time and you know, humans. (Bobby)

Bobby noted that though nuanced, sustainability is relevant to him albeit not in every aspect of his life.

> I try to believe it does. […] I would be lying if I said I recycled. I don't [laughed]. But even just in my clothes [made for customers], I try to make sure it's something that's of natural fiber. Of course, because I work in the industry, so I know what I'm looking at. Do I have things from Asos and Fashion Nova [common fast fashion companies]? Sure

> [laughed], yeah, but I like to believe that it's important. I like to believe I'm doing some [good] things. Am I Captain Planet? Absolutely not [laughed]. You know, I like fur and leather, but that's a whole different conversation. (Bobby)

Moreover, Bobby noted that he primary hears the term "sustainability" used within the context of fashion world.

> So, I hear – again because I make clothes – I hear it in the fashion world more than anything. […] that's [sustainability] a huge factor in how people support clothing labels now. (Bobby)

Destiny (33), an auto insurance agent described that she hears the term "sustainability" as having a long-term focus in terms of housing market infrastructure as well as usability and ethical consumption. She noted:

> I would probably say I hear it the most in regards to the housing market. [For her] it was finding sustainable housing, finding apartments, or finding homes that are going to last and like keeping people in their homes. And then in like the fashion world, I hear it talked about a lot, or something akin to it really. And creating clothing and materials that aren't being worn once or twice and then thrown away. (Destiny)

Reflecting on how sustainability was relevant to her life, Destiny expanded on the conversation of consumption describing how in her 20s that was something she did not pay much attention to but is now something she tries to practice in various ways.

> I definitely think that I was in a space like in my 20s where I over consumed, and I over consumed because I was buying into the Shein's and the Fashion Nova's [common fast fashion companies] and things like that. And so now, I look more for things that, like I

> said, will last – things where I might pay a little bit more now, but I'll get more from it in the long run. And that's from like anywhere from like my clothes to my car to even the food I buy. […] I try to buy from like the local gardens or the farmers markets, so then that way I can reuse those seeds. And I have, my own little, small plots, and that way, I'm not constantly, at the grocery store. And I can feed my family and I can teach my kid. And that's sustainability in its own self, teaching her how to feed herself versus always having to rely on stores. (Destiny)

This all is in alignment with Destiny's personal definition of sustainability, which is "making and creating things or places that are going to last." Destiny's understanding of sustainability is informed by her involvement in community green and growing spaces and her role as a mother cultivating a better life for her daughter.

Sojo (32), a non-binary/transgender activist, had similar sentiments in defining sustainability, noting "When I hear sustainability, I think of something that is built to last. I think of something that is strong and resilient." Sojo's understanding of sustainability is informed by their community work in combination with being brutalized for their gender-identity. When asked if sustainability was relevant to them, Sojo stated, "Yes. If what I'm doing is not sustainable, then I'd be dead." In other words, survival is paramount and sustainable for them given where being brutalized as a non-binary/transgender individual has positioned them. Experiencing violence led Sojo to disassociate from the LGBTQ+ community due to pervasive racism and diluted organizing practices plaguing such spaces. Sojo stated:

> I mean I could see me getting grouped with them [LGBTQ+ community], but I'm not really with the rainbow stuff […]. Why not just [remember] the history? A lot of white

> gays are racist. A lot of them are, like, very violently racist. The first few marches after the Stonewall riots, they banned trans people and drag queens because they wanted to them look normalized and pushed for marriage equality. And the drag queens and the trans women are the ones who started throwing rocks and bottles and Molotov cocktails at the police in the Stonewall riots. So, to tell them [transgender folks] they can't come to the march in the parade and stuff and just commercialize it [Pride] and whitewash it and water it down into this like 'parade' is wild to me. I cannot, I cannot take it. (Sojo)

Following this, Sojo then discussed that they started wearing all Black, non-flashy clothing because they were shot for (formerly and) openly identifying as a transgender Black woman. This led them to live in fear while resenting white folks in the LGBTQ+ community because they feel white folks in this space can exist out loud compared to Black folks. Despite Sojo wanting to exist out loud like their white counterparts, they noted they regularly minimize their existence, yearning for a community-wide revolution to take place, so all folks in this community can be openly comfortable with who they are. Furthermore, Sojo noted that they more so identify with LGBTQ+ trailblazers like Marsha P. Johnson or Miss Major, well-known African American transgender women and activists known for their community work to fight discrimination towards those in their community.

> Who Miss Major, right. Very much. Boots on the ground. Grab a stick, grab a bag, grab a brick and get to work. Because, yeah, it's not time to, like, wave rainbow flags when they're trying to kill us. This time to fight like the police is coming after us. Trade is coming after us. We come after each other. It's not time to blow bubbles and wear booty shorts and platforms. And it's not, it's not. It's not giving all that because they're still like

> murdering trans people and gender non-conforming people. And most of them are black, and some of them are from the police. And it's not they're still locking them up in jails and putting them in men's prisons, and they're getting raped every day and they're not having access to their medication. They're getting like discriminated or abused by the guards, by the inmates. It's not time. It's not time to march. And what y'all proud of. You proud of what you got gay married and what. Now you can get gay fired. There's no protections like for housing or employment or public accommodations. So yeah. Who is who going to bake you a cake. That's what they just went to the Ohio Supreme Court for. And so much of like y'all, threw all these trans people out in the forefront and use them advantageously and now they're banning drag queens. You can't, I think, you can't have drag queens in a library. You can't have drag queens around children. You can't… It's like a criminalization of people's identity and like their expression, and it's wild to me, which is another reason I guess I stopped wearing colors and dresses and shit because I can see where it's going. It's not going to be good. Those. If you have a target on your back, you're going to get shot and I've already been shot. (Sojo)

Ultimately, Sojo's understanding of sustainability is a reflection of who they are and their persistence to keep going regardless of everything they have been through.

Similarly, high school teacher and community resource case manager Rhonda's (35) understanding of sustainability is informed by her life experience, involvement in Black women-centered outdoor spaces, and injustices her and her family have faced, including the loss of her father to police brutality (to be discussed later). Growing up in different sub-communities in the Near East Side, Rhonda mentioned that prior to her

father purchasing a home in Olde Towne East through an income-based assistance program, her family spent a lot of time in houseless shelters and hotels. Rhonda noted that sustainability is important to her because financial growth and stability (within a community) came to mind when hearing this term. Recently purchasing a home and having something of her own represents stability, therefore making sustainability somewhat relevant to her. Rhonda explained that the specific topic of sustainability arises when organizing around resourcefulness to generate stability with other Black folks in the community.

> When we have our, Black nature events, we can talk about […] just ways to build that stability in the community or when you're doing the community things with the people in the community, you might run across that [term] where we're talking about ways to build that within the community. But most of the time I don't really [hear it a lot]. (Rhonda)

Shortly after, Rhonda mentioned that outside of striving for stability for herself and other Black folks within the community, she noted that though sustainability is somewhat relevant to her it also does not mean much to her because "…I kind of feel like certain words were just meant for them [white people]." She went on to explain:

> We [Black people] keep fighting for a system that was never built for us, and as long as we keep fighting for a system that was never built for us, we're never going to go nowhere because no matter what they change in that system, it's still never going to be built for us. (Rhonda)

Shortly after describing how the system does not have Black folks in mind, and the need to have autonomy over life outcomes within her community, Rhonda mentioned

that sustainability is one of those things she believes was not made for Black people. Rhonda stated:

> I don't know. I just don't feel like it's not for us. When you talk about the word [sustainability], I think that that word was invented by a white man to help a white man. If that makes sense. (Rhonda)

Moral Obligation to Be Sustainable and Onus to Achieve Sustainable Outcomes

Overall, when asked about this directly, nearly all of the participants believed there is a moral obligation for people and society to be sustainable. When discussing this topic, participants described issues commonly associated with sustainability regarding the health of the planet and overconsumption. Additionally, concerns, less commonly associated with sustainability (yet still hold significance), were raised when discussing this topic. Such issues included communal barriers and hardships tied to generational, socio-economic, and political disparities. Particularly, some participants noted that though everyone is responsible, those who have more privileged backgrounds should bear most of the responsibility in doing so. There was less agreement among participants regarding who is responsible to achieve sustainable outcomes. With all of this in mind, perspectives from Nora, Will, Greg, Martin, Chloe Lorde, Thomas, and Rhonda are highlighted.

Nora (33), an entrepreneur, dance and yoga instructor, choreographer, and community educator, noted that it is a moral obligation to be sustainable:

> …because the planet is dying. Like, just operating on this need for, like, more and more and more rather than reusing and really like – what's the word? We're not using things to their full potential, I think. (Nora)

Nora provided an example portraying that even when it comes to the little things that we (humans) buy, there is little intention with how attentive we are to conserving resources while they seem abundant but are only motivated to do so when they are scarce. Nora mentioned earlier in our conversation that intentionality with resources, the spaces we show up in, and so forth, are practices that speak to what sustainability constitutes for her, thus influencing why she believes there is a moral obligation to be intentional with what we consume to therefore engage in sustainability. Nora described:

> Say, you're almost out of toothpaste, right? So, it's like when you're out of toothpaste, you're like, this is all I need, you know, to […] expand this over the next few days till I get to go to the store. And then when you have toothpaste, you're real generous with it. Just like, you know, I'm good, I'm good. But then it's like you also realize you don't need that much to brush your teeth. You know what I'm saying? It's like you're doing this because it's like – it's not like desperation or you're trying to preserve, you know, your resources, but now it's like now that you have it, it's just like you're going off. It's like, do you really need that much? You know what I'm saying? So, it's just like thinking about, yeah, just thinking about the use, like our usage of things and is it necessary? And what are some things that we can reuse? What are some things that can have like a long-lasting effect where some things that are only need like for short term. […] I think if we have, like, a moral – if it [sustainability] was one of our values, like we use that in a way that we look at life in a way that we make decisions and everything else. I think it would shift everything, and not just [focus on getting a] win. (Nora)

Aside from being more responsible with our resource use, Will (25), a graduate student and food systems researcher, mentioned that despite one's positionality in the

world, everyone should do their best to play their part because is simply is the right thing to do. He noted:

> I feel like a lot of people – when they think of the role that rich people play in this – I feel like people use it to almost absolve themselves of the personal obligation. You know, like, 'What does it matter? It's not going to matter at all.' I still think, you know, the refrain of, 'What does it matter? What use is it?' To me, it DOESN'T MATTER. I'm not doing these things for a reward or anything. Like, yeah, like I'm just doing these things because I think this is how I should operate. So, that's what I'd say to that. I'd say everybody does have a moral obligation, and I wish more people recognized that. I especially wish those other [rich] folks recognized it. (Will)

In the same line of thinking with both Nora and Will, Greg (28), a freelance artist and local creative, noted that there is a moral obligation for people or society to be sustainable though the responsibility to achieve sustainability outcomes should not be equally disbursed, but the larger load should be lifted by those who have benefitted from current practices. He stated, "We're all going to face the effects of – we already are facing the effects of climate change." Greg continued:

> I do think that a bulk of the responsibility should be put on people who have the access and privilege and the money. And white people who have the resources – HOARDED resources at that – [need] to, you know, step up to the plate, take some responsibility. If it's supposed to be all of us [practicing sustainability], and it's like, "Okay, 50/50." No. In reality, this shit is more like 75/ 25 percent because this society, in general, was not built with us [marginalized communities] in mind, so like, it would be RIDICULOUS for me to be taking on more when I'm already quote unquote DISRENFRANCHISED. So, like going, 50/50 sometimes it needs to be 60/40 [and so on]. (Greg)

Moreover, Martin (48), a local tech entrepreneur and community leader, mentioned that because of the hardships he faced as a young Black man growing up in Chicago, he believes that it is a moral obligation to be sustainable because he wants to ensure his daughters had a better life than he did.

> Sure. […] It just comes down to kids. I feel like people that can't understand that – not you [laughed]. You know? Like people that don't like organically understand that because they don't have kids or have never thought about things from a perspective of youth and, and upbringing. Now, right now, our kids are in a mental health crisis across the board. And, you know, in neighborhoods like this, [sighs] God, I can't even I can't imagine. I mean, I grew up in a neighborhood like this 15 years prior to now, what it looks like now, back when there was still a lot of gangs, drugs, guns, violence, like all that stuff is the type of environment I grew up in, and I can look back and see like the impact that that had on me and like things that I'm still fighting against as an old[er] man. All from that time as my youth. And so, I'm very passionate about making sure my kids don't have to deal with those [same challenges]. Now, there's other things out there like, you know, they didn't have – I didn't have this [holding/pointing to a cellphone] growing up. There's plenty of other distractions out there. But I think, again, going back to that community thing, when you've got more engaging, better things to do, you spend time, less time, on this [cellphone], you spend less time out in the street. All of the other distractions are reduced when the community is strong, so you have that network and that community. (Martin)

Furthermore, Martin noted that while everyone plays a part in achieving sustainable outcomes, city and civic leaders have the power to instill change through providing leadership to engage the community to make progress. He also describes the

role of the community to do their part when legitimate plans have been developed. Martin stated:

> Well, everybody. Everybody's got to play their part. Again, you could have a plan, but if nobody follows the plan, then it's a waste, so I think the city and civic leaders have a responsibility to identify gaps and put things in place to fill those gaps. […] But like, I think they [council members] are trying to put forth the effort, but the other side of it is the people have to follow the plan. And they voted these folks in the office, so when the plan comes out, like either follow the plan or suggest a new one or, you know, whatever. And I know that it's more nuanced than that, but yeah, so it definitely takes a community to play along, too, and it goes right back to the beginning like the communication, the collaboration, the community aspect, like all of those things have to be there because most people either don't know about the plan or they don't feel like they have the capacity to play their role in the plan because we're all thinking about 'What do I have to do individually?', because we're not thinking about, you know, 'Well, it's not just me. It's also my neighbors that are going to be taken apart.' So, if we all do our part, that's a very small lift on my part. That's just not how we see it, because a lack of community. (Martin)

When considering who is responsible to achieve sustainability outcomes, Nora had similar sentiments as Martin. She explained:

> It could be me; it could also be the community; it could be the people with the means. I don't know, it just seems like a blanket question depending on the topic at hand. I guess if it's something that the community wants, like, if it's something that we want, then we have to be responsible to make sure that we can sustain it by reaching out, by supporting, by like making sure we stay on it, you know what I'm saying? So just like our

> responsibility. If there is like a business [striving for sustainability], then it's their responsibility. (Nora)

Somewhat like what Martin and Nora stated, Will mentioned that politicians, and especially rich folks, are responsible for sustainable outcomes, at the end of the day. He too mentioned that it would be nice to say that the community has power, but that is just not realistic. Will declared:

> I mean, in terms of like actually achieving the outcomes, I would say it is unfortunately the rich people. It is, unfortunately, the politicians which, you know, tend to go hand-in-hand. So, you know, I would love to say like, 'Oh, the people have the power.' We really can do it. But I do think that, you know, as much as we're [the community] doing, these people [in power] are going to do things to spin the face of it [life] and make it way worse. And until we do something to control that, no matter how much we do as an individual or make better, you know, eco smart choices, it's not really going to make a dent into what they're doing. (Will)

Like Will, Martin, and Greg, Chloe Lorde noted that everyone plays a part in achieving sustainability though those with power are more responsible for ensuring sustainable outcomes are achieved. Additionally, she noted that because of the power that property developers have in these communities, they could play an important role in meeting community goals if their priorities aligned with the community. She stated:

> I think all of us contribute to sustainability, but I think responsibility, largely rests on entities that have power. Entities and individuals who have power. So, for instance, I think if all these developers that were just being concerned about getting their properties built up and they, you know, came together, and said, 'We will not be doing any more

> projects until there is a light rail system.' We would have a light rail system. (Chloe Lorde)

Furthermore, when describing why she believes it is a moral obligation to be sustainable, she emphasized it should be innate to respect the environment. Chloe Lorde explained:

> I think in part just because growing up in the church, I think it should just be human nature anyway. But just like this isn't how you treat what is given to you. Well, so I think that that's just [a respect thing]. (Chloe Lorde)

In other cases, some folks mentioned that the community is responsible for achieving sustainable outcomes. Thomas (65) – an environmental scientist and soil chemist, retired biology schoolteacher, businessman, and community leader – mentioned that the community is responsible for achieving sustainable outcomes because the community should determine what sustainability looks like for them and then initiate the process of working towards their goals. He stated, "The community- the people. They must identify that [sustainability] and know what it is and bring the partners in. That will help create sustainability.

Similarly, though Rhonda mentioned early on that she thinks sustainability is for white people, she noted that Black people should take responsibility in achieving such outcomes (even going beyond the discussion of sustainability):

> People in the neighborhoods. I feel like we… That's the thing. It's like even though as a Black person, we are faulting other races for our way of living. But in the same sense, I think we could do more to help ourselves. (Rhonda)

This comment connects to her earlier statement explaining that we need to stop fighting for a system not built with Black folks in mind, but rather focus on what certain things, like sustainability, mean for the Black community. Furthermore, it appears that Rhonda was more critical towards other folks in the neighborhood who blamed their struggles and ability to improve their way of living on others rather than themselves. Additionally, when asked who she thinks benefits from sustainability, she noted that Black folks do not.

> Not us [Black people]. The people who are putting the most money into the communities. The people who are more beneficial to the communities. And I'm not saying beneficial as regards to the things that people do. I'm talking about beneficial as regards to who bringing in more money into the communities.

Potential Harms Caused by Sustainability and Sustainability's Beneficiaries

Additional sub-themes under divergent sustainability perspectives highlighted participants' perceptions of who benefits from sustainability and whether sustainability can cause harm. Most participants noted that everyone benefits from sustainability while the responses on how sustainability can cause harm varied. Responses from [add names after rearranging things] are included to represent the diversity of perspectives for the related set of questions.

Sustainability Beneficiaries

Donna (50), a business manager of risk management, noted that future generations are the beneficiaries of sustainability. She declared, "Current and future generations. Maybe the future generations more than current." When asked why, Donna mentioned:

Because the things that we do now will have an impact down the road as opposed to [now] – like I don't necessarily think we're [currently] seeing the results of our sustainability efforts. (Donna)

Following this, Donna, like Destiny, mentioned that she does not think that sustainability can cause harm. Bobby, on the other hand, noted that sustainability can cause harm in terms of affordability:

> I guess if you again, are looking at it from a sense of affordability. Because that means if it costs a little bit more to be sustainable, that means someone can't have it. You never see a co-op in the hood, so… (Bobby).

In terms of who sustainability benefits, Bobby stated:

> Everybody. Companies who don't have a sense of sustainability often chop it up to cost well. We're going to pay a little bit more if that means it's sustainable [even] if it means it's coming from someone that provides you [higher quality products]. Because something with higher sustainability also is just a better product. So, if I'm going to pay for quality that means this farmer from the better farm is getting money, which means their life is a little better, which means the people they're paying to work on the farm have a little [bit] better life. In theory, yeah, not what's happening, but in theory. In theory, that's how it's supposed to work. You know, the whole trickle-down effect, right? (Bobby)

Both statements are affirmed by one of Destiny's earlier quotes describing why sustainability was relevant to her life noting that she is willing to pay more for sustainable food and clothing because it often is of higher quality and will last longer.

Thomas had similar thinking as Bobby regarding who benefits from sustainability, particularly focusing on economic viability:

> Yeah, not only the residents of the community, but the adjacent communities AND the city itself […] because that means that you are generating economic wealth for the environment and for the city, for taxes. You remember, I said Cesar- don't play with his taxes. You can do whatever you want, but you pay them taxes. (Thomas)

When asked if sustainability can cause harm, Thomas explained:

> It presents challenges because you can get so set in [the moment] that you don't want to change as things are changing, so you have to [create] balance. There's no two sunsets that look alike. So, we can get comfortable in the sustainability mode and miss an opportunity to grow, so we have to balance that. (Thomas)

Gwendolyn, on the other hand, mentioned that sustainability can cause harm, depending on the perspective and which resources are at stake, of course. She mentioned:

> Depends on the perspective because decisions have to be made about the use or non-use of resources. And people, who are attached to those resources may feel negatively impacted because they wanted to do something else with them. (Gwendolyn)

Martin illustrated this in his answer demonstrating how sustainability, from a business standpoint, has caused harm with the bussing system as a community resource in Columbus:

> Yeah, I suppose so. If, you know, data collection hasn't been done right, if assumptions are made and they haven't been vetted, it [sustainability] inadvertently could [cause harm]. For example, the bus system, you know. They were trying to move to a cashless process. Everybody would use their phone, right? Preload, whatever. They even thought about, 'Oh, we'll make it so people that have subsidies so whoever can use it.' But what

> they didn't account for was like some people's phones just weren't powerful enough to run the app, or it didn't have the technology to do near-field communication or whatever. And so, it was an effort towards sustainability by reducing costs and providing, you know, an "easy" method to utilize the transportation system, but it ended up ostracizing some people and frustrating the hell out of other people. Like they just couldn't do it, especially like a lot of folks that would live around in this area [points to map], or the Poindexter, folks from the elderly center there. So, [this would be considered] as an example of [sustainability causing harm]. (Martin)

In addition to resource use and economic viability, Will – when asked where he hears this term used – implied that sustainability can cause harm from a marketing standpoint as well.

> I feel like it's a buzzword more than anything. Like a marketing thing. I mean, like, again, I'm probably not the best person to interview for this because of my planning knowledge, but, there's a really great planner I talked to who called it buzzword bingo – kind of just meaningless placeholder words that almost like you're saying everybody can have their own definition for and almost like hiding behind the ambiguity to say, 'We could put this term up there that represents a bunch of different things for a bunch of different people, and we won't ever clarify. And we're hoping we could coast on that.' And I think that's where I see sustainability used. 'I'm not going to describe what sustainability is. I'm not to describe how it is sustainable, but I'm going to tell you it's sustainable and you're going to trust me on it.' (Will)

Furthermore, when asked who benefits from sustainability, Will said:

> All of us, ideally. If it's especially that kind of meeting in the middle of, like, we don't have to pick either side of 'Is it this way? Is it that way?' If it's really done in a way that

> isn't costing, you know – there's no human life costs going into it. I think all of us should benefit from sustainability. (Will)

In addition to human life, Sojo and Greg noted that non-human, living organisms too benefit from sustainability. Sojo stated, “Everybody benefits from sustainability. Our planet, animals, trees, people – everybody benefits.” Furthermore, Greg went into great detail problematizing humans consistently placing ourselves at the center of things, recognizing that though certain issues, like environmental racism, are relevant, it is important to simultaneously view things outside of the human experience. Greg mentioned:

> I would say everybody. And I also think that – this is random – but like even animals and insects as well, because we think in such human terms about all of this stuff, where it's like if we don't stop thinking of it as either black and white or JUST HUMANITY [things will not get better]. This planet is an ecosystem on top of ecosystem, on top of ecosystem, to where there's several different groups of BEINGS being harmed and affected and like, yeah. I just genuinely think it's bigger than just like, ‘Oh, environmental racism and they fucked it up.’ Sure, that's a thing, but, like, fucked it up for WHOM? And I'm not saying I'm the owner of the whole planet, nobody is. It's more so if we want to help out future generations, if we want BEES to, like, flourish and exist and then us not get fucked over that [the potential extinction of bees]. So, there's so many things. And planting all these trees is not going to recreate the same ecosystem that took thousands of years to organically form, so like you can tell me you're planting all these trees after you destroyed X, Y, and Z. That's not going to do the same thing. I'm not saying don't plant trees, but I am saying that [it’s not the same effect]. (Greg)

Moreover, Nora noted that while she believes it is possible for sustainability to cause harm (not exactly knowing how), she described that though everyone, in theory, should benefit from sustainability, that is not always the case because with capitalism someone is always has to suffer. Nora clarified:

> Everybody…Oh I get some people don't. […] I doubted my answer when I was thinking about the capitalistic frame of it, you know what I'm saying? But if I don't think about that. Then everybody should benefit because it's like, 'Oh, well, there's more time at home and there's more time with the family.' But it's also like, 'How are they going to be making money and how we're like…' I'm just thinking about the effects, the domino effect of if everyone was [living like] this, but I think it will shift. It'll shift everything though. Yeah, but [I am] dreaming again. […] I said everybody would benefit because there's a lot of, like, unnecessary everything, you know what I'm saying? There's, like, unnecessary usage, there's unnecessary working. There's like – we're still talking about child labor laws. We're still talking about unhealthy work environments and toxic work environments and everything else I'm thinking about, like, the production of items, the production of food, like just. And I think, like if we all had like this sustainable mindset and doing things for ourselves and not everything being outsourced and or like just even connecting with each other to be like, 'Well, what are you good at? What are you good at? What are you good at?' And then we are actually working together. That can be a benefit for everybody. And it will cut out a lot of like middlemen and like top people who don't really care about, like the numbers on their sheet that are actually people and like community and families. But then when I say not everybody is because the people who are actually depending on this machine [capitalism] to work, that's how they're getting paid, that's how they're making money, that's how they're supporting their families. And

> it's like if that was cut off, like, and of course, things don't happen like that overnight, right? But it's also like there because of how the world is, somebody is going to suffer. And that's what I mean by like not everybody, you know what I'm saying. But I'm like, that's what I'm dreaming. It could be like, well, this is wrong. This is right. Let's just adopt this, you know? But that's why I was saying, like, not everybody, but that's like this capitalistic, mindset of, like, 'In order for this to happen, this has to happen – that has to happen. Then you make money and then we need this money to be able to support this over here and this.' All of that. So yeah, that's what I mean. (Nora)

Rhonda, contrary to all the other responses, noted that Black people do not benefit from sustainability because we do not have stability in our communities, which was something very important to her. She declared:

> Because we don't have that stability in the communities, so we ain't really – you know – we can't build that stability without having these things [resources] in our community. So, until we get that [stability], then there's no way for us to have that [sustainability].

Realities of Sustainability in the Near East Side

The next two themes to emerge include 1) the imbalances in decision-making processes between the community and the city and 2) the lack of city support along with intracommunal conflict stemming from racial and economic tensions. The theme focusing on disparities between the community and the city's decision-making processes underscores ongoing efforts to organize and collaborate around the mistreatment of marginalized populations in the Near East Side. Moreover, the final theme, the lack of city support and intracommunal conflicts, unveils continual resistance and inadequate support for marginalized populations. Among these themes, I uncover Black residential

perceptions of how they are treated and involved in the development and implementation of projects, plans, and efforts and how their voices are amplified in the City of Columbus' decision making processes. Due to the significant overlap between these two themes, they will be discussed in tandem. Under these emerging themes, community decision-making efforts, city-decision-making efforts, and collaborative efforts between each group are discussed. Furthermore, gentrification, though a major sub-theme brought up in most interviews, will be addressed integrally rather than being confined to a single section, in alignment with the contexts in which it is discussed. Perspectives on gentrification and displacement from most, if not all participants, are included. With most participants discussing gentrification, displacement, or conflicts with land use availability, other issues – such as green space accessibility, fresh food availability and access to grocery stores, changes in police presence, and fluctuations in racial violence – arose. While some of these concerns will be described in instances where participants describe displacement and land use availability, they will not be explored in depth within the scope of this thesis.

Decision-making imbalances and intra/intercommunal conflict.

Community decision-making and efforts

When discussing community goal setting, participants were asked about how decisions are made in their communities, how they are engaged in those processes, and so forth. Most responses under this sub-theme selected for this section highlight a mix of key-informant responses and non-key informant responses to shed light on the different levels of involvement and engagement in community decision-making processes. Some

participants mentioned that certain entities or individuals drive the decision-making process within the community. In contrast, others were not as familiar with how decisions are made due to them not getting out into the community as much as they'd like. This section includes thoughts from Gwendolyn, Chloe Lorde, Nora, Tobias, Greg, Destiny, Sojo, and Bobby.

Gwendolyn first noted that she is involved in many spaces in the community to amplify the community's voice and ensure transparency when communicating information back to other residents. She noted:

> I'm involved in various ways in, articulating the community voice. So, [for example, I have been] playing a role on various committees, bringing other people into the communication process, and ensuring that there is as much transparency as possible. (Gwendolyn)

Following this, Gwendolyn described how decisions are made within her community noting that some efforts are connected or play certain roles while other entities act as an island within the community. Gwendolyn stated:

> There are several different ways in which communities get decisions get made within the community. First, it is those people who take an interest and act as key stakeholders. A problem may be known, a situation may exist, but it's really those who take the initiative to step forward to manage it [to ensure] that in the end, it gets addressed. It doesn't necessarily have to be an [individual being] decision holder. There is a Near East Area Commission, and they have become, and I stress, become a very responsible group because for years they really were not but they have become very responsive. They have tried to be strategic and somewhat visionary and understanding the needs of the

> community and then being proactive in meeting those needs. That is one group…and they can't address everything, right? There are some, individual, faith-based leaders who step forward, I think, more out of self-interest particularly around areas such as housing for seniors, because their own congregations are becoming, really age based, and so in an effort to, you know, retain their congregations as well as to encourage others, they're, you know, looking at their specific needs as well as generating income because the loss of the congregation, both by the decisions people made to join another [congregation] as well as just death. That's natural. […] And then there are some business-based networks that play a role in the discussion. I think it's unfortunate that although there are, seven schools, the leadership of those schools aren't actually as involved in the community as I would like them to be. So, they manage the school as an institution, but that institution exists more as an island rather than being integrated with, the community. (Gwendolyn)

Gwendolyn then discussed that despite all the community efforts taking place, there are still hardships community members face due to active and systemic resistance (additional sub-themes common throughout the data):

> There have been a number of community driven efforts that have succeeded within limits or failed completely in part because the powers at be simply didn't want it to happen. I know, for instance, that, one cultural group was interested in purchasing property, and a representative of the city bluntly told them that their ownership of that property was not part of the city's plan for the area. And even though the group was, you know, completely prepared, ready to do what needed to be done, it was as if this [building] was being parceled, but that was anticipated to be given to some other group. So, it seems as if there are ideas, plans, concerns, strategies, by other players and that then blocks what's coming up from the community or what tries to come up from the community. So, I wouldn't say

that the failure to implement is solely due to a lack of capacity on the community. There have been very serious efforts to block, involvement.

Chloe Lorde also mentioned that though there are a lot of players involved with the community's decision-making efforts, she has had the opportunity to contribute to conversations and spaces where certain community issues were addressed:

> Well, I guess I've gained exposure as a result of the community gardening to the layers of decision making that go on here. There's the Near East Area Commission, which, from what I understand hears like zoning requests and makes some decisions about, the impact, like regional planning, or they do listening sessions and all of that. And then there's a network of nonprofits that are in communication with those commissions like that. And also…well, like other government representatives…so, the state representatives and whatnot [are also involved]. So, Ohio State has a presence here, so they'll be aware of their government relations team and kind of fostering that communication. And then there's – I call them more grassroots initiatives, some of which might be official organizations. Some of them, like my non-profit, are more, kind of volunteer led, efforts that have a backing from a nonprofit and mostly administratively, because we still do our own fundraising. But even though we don't make decisions per se, we do get asked to a lot of conversations and tables for our input. So we share that, there. (Chloe Lorde)

Nora, like Chloe Lorde, mentioned that she has gone to the Near East Area Commission meetings and been apart of discussions regarding traffic management and historical preservation within Bronzeville. Nora stated:

> So, we have like a Near East Side [area commission where] there's meetings like monthly where we talk about things to like adding stop signs or taking away stop signs. Also like, what are we going to do with this space? There's a house right now that's like a big

> debate. ‘Should we tear it down? Should we use it as a historical landmark?’ And because the owner didn't like African Americans in the past it’s like this split decision. So, like, decisions are made by bringing a community together, talking about it and hearing like, feedback and then making those decisions. Then there are – so that's one [example of community involvement and engagement in decision-making processes]. And then there's community – like I won't say they’re decisions I made. [I know] how they're made. I know how they're discussed, but how they're made, I think, like, they're opening up to the community to see what, like, thoughts are being had. Sometimes meetings are held within like a community extension center. Sometimes they have the [meetings at] churches. But yeah, I just think, like, getting that community feedback and then taking it to the city or whoever is in charge of whatever decision, and making it pass through from my knowledge. (Nora)

Similar to Gwendolyn, Chloe Lorde, and Nora, Tobias described how his leadership journey led to his involvement in many neighborhood discussions within and beyond the Woodland Park sub-community. Tobias noted that when he moved back to Columbus in 2008, he knew being involved was important. His support from United Way’s Pride Leadership Program was paramount for his growth as gay Black man in Columbus, influencing his pursuit of other leadership programs, such as PACT’s Near East Side Leadership Academy (NESLA). These experiences led Tobias to join the boards of other youth organizations to ensure young adults received the same support he did. Tobias then mentioned that because of his broad leadership experience, he was ready to focus more on what could be done to support his community, Woodland Park. In doing

so, he detailed his perspective on how decisions were made in the community and some examples of decisions made by the Woodland Park Neighborhood Association:

> […] And so I was able to complete that program [NESLA] and really got to see my neighborhood differently, so that's kind of why I began to appreciate the way we make decisions versus the way a lot of decisions are made [outside of the community's control] don't include our voice at all. And then, so I got to experience a lot of that. And but really appreciated knowing that you really can't be living in a neighborhood and not active if you're going to be concerned about these things, so really trying to figure out how do I stay connected in that way. And so then that's what encouraged me to also stay connected with the neighborhood, so the neighborhood association and just get involved in that and then just recently, because of both of those connections, we've had some historical houses and things that were being described and discussed about what the future of them are going to be, and I've been called upon to represent either the neighborhood or just my experience in the neighborhood, and so I think 2 or 3 times they've called upon me to be on this ad hoc committees as well. (Tobias)

When asked to expand on certain folks' voices within the community not being heard, Tobias explained that certain community members were never presented with the opportunity to buy the house they rented for generations resulting in their lives being uprooted after someone literally knocked on their door one day asking to take a look inside stating, "We just bought the place." Tobias said that though he understands that it was not his current neighbors' fault, he cannot help but think about how whiteness has been introduced to predominantly Black spaces, eradicating their voice

> […] So because of that, I started to also think about like how many other conversations are being had about what's going on in the neighborhood that we're never really made aware about. And then I started thinking about when community gardens pop up, or when they do all of the nice little, flower beds and then in the middle of the road, like, what are those things really mean? And who's asking for those things? What does it signal? And usually what it signals is that they're trying to prepare it for a changing of the neighborhood. And it's – these aren't things that you all [Black people] needed, but the people who are coming in might need these things. And so fortunately, even in that same space, I would say that our neighborhood association was involved in some of the conversations and just having a presence, I was really happy to know that, like one of those tree areas, they're like, 'Yeah, we wanted to build it right on Broad Street, but we're going to ask you all to water it.' Nobody's going to water trees on Broad Street [laughs], like people are driving down Broad Street really fast, first of all. But if it's a city initiative, why wouldn't the city be doing that? And so it was just all these things that really began to make me think about [how] there's so many parts of this conversation that if you're not paying attention, some of it looks really good, but it usually isn't for all the people who are currently there, and so just being skeptical at times [about current community needs being addressed]. (Tobias)

Tobias, echoing similar sentiments as others above, also noted that when it comes to decision-making within the community, some folks are more eager to step in and play a role within the community decision-making process compared to others emphasizing the need to make the structure of the Woodland Park Neighborhood Association (and other neighborhood efforts) more welcoming. He stated:

> I think that there are a lot of attempts to make decisions collaborative, and so, I think that – like through our neighborhood associations and then the just general kind of city governance structure, people attempt to be well connected. However, those structures also cater to specific types of people who find that kind of engagement important. And so, like, I've been a member of my neighborhood association and even engaged in leadership in it for a while and saw that most of my neighbors weren't going [because they] didn't see any value in it. And so, when they were using that as an outlet to seek neighborhood opinions, they weren't getting it. They were just getting a few people who valued that structure. And I think that's the limitation of our decision-making, is that we rely on those types of bodies, and we know that we haven't talked about their value enough to the common person. Like, for example, in my neighborhood, on my street specifically. [...] So on the block that I live in, most of the individuals are homeowners, but we do have a few renters, and we had a neighbor who was a renter and was probably one of the more engaged individuals. So, after the community meetings, they were – they're very vocal, and whenever they weren't present, I would hear conversations about how 'Well they're talking about all this stuff, but should their opinion even really matter since they don't own in the neighborhood?' But I'm like, that's such an elitist way of speaking and thinking. And it excluded a lot of our neighbors. And so, trying to make sure, again, as we're thinking about how we are making decisions, that we're really thinking about who's in our neighborhood and how do we reach them because I don't know that we do a great job of doing that. (Tobias)

Ironically, Greg spoke on experiencing similar instances of elitism from homeowners within Olde Towne East, explaining that behavior from (white) homeowners within the area demonstrates how they want to preserve their way of life

rather than caring about the needs of everyone in the community. This, in turn, deters them from getting involved in community decision-making processes. Greg explained:

> Yeah, not the one [group] that's on my street, but the Olde Town East Facebook group where I live it seems like their efforts are really much trying to preserve THEIR WAY OF LIFE and how THEY see the community and where they want the community to go, but I'm not super hands on in that – it just is disinteresting – not that environmental or sustainability is not an interest of mine, but, SOME of the times you can get a feel that your voice wouldn't be heard or, "Oh, well, you don't own property, so why would we listen to you? How much money are you putting into what we're even invested in?", [said imitating homeowners]. Listen, I don't know. I don't know where to start, and some of that is just, like, not overwhelming, but just like, yeah, do I want to put in the effort to like do- like almost like an uphill battle with folks that you don't know yet, and so some of it could be my own misjudgment of these people, and that's okay too, I'm cool with the learning, but like, yeah, a lot of the times, I'm being PAID [laughs] to interact with folks who I wouldn't even want to interact with or talk to, and doing that as, like a voluntary free labor thing when it comes to the Old Towne East, closed groups and stuff, yeah, I just hadn't really taken- taken that up to, you know, put my foot out there and try and be a part of it, so I think some of it's probably my own lack of effort when it comes to some of these groups, just based off of prejudgments and seeing how people move off the bat. It's like, well, I'm not moving like that, and so why would I try and fight that […]. (Greg)

Greg had also mentioned that a major part of them not wanting to get more involved with the homeowner group was because of how he saw one of his (white) neighbors, who also happened to be a homeowner, call the police on a Black man for trying to sell water and candy bars to her husband. Greg illustrated:

I know that there's places like San Francisco and probably Colorado and Portland, Oregon, for sure, where those communal type things expand and get so much bigger, but like, I don't know, sometimes Columbus doesn't have that leeway of like you try to get to know your neighbor. The lady next door, I've witnessed her have a Karen moment and that made me steer – not in my apartment building, but the home next to me. She seemed really kind and cool off the rip, and then, I don't know, I just witnessed some shit that was just like FOUL and could have gotten ME killed and that man killed because she called the cops and like over dramatically raised CONCERN that wasn't happening, and her husband just like tucked his tail and like went with her – went with it. And it was just like, WOW, I'm WITNESSING this and getting SECONDHAND TRAUMA and SCARED, and then this dude leaves. And so, seeing that, she's always been nice to me SINCE; she's always been nice to me beforehand too, but like, I SAW THAT. I saw the true colors of- what the fuck- WHAT WAS THAT like? And if I got out of line, or if I just spoke my mind to you, would you ever snap that way and call the cops on me? So, seeing that that's somebody who's on my street and she lives next door to me- we're cordial, but it's not going any further – FOR MY SAFETY. We're not no community, not no environment. I'm not going to die over that shit. So, I saw what you could do and how you act. I'm going to steer clear, and I think she understood [laughing outburst] why I don't engage the same way I used to engage with her. [...] Yeah, and so she's always witnessed me as, oh, cool, calm, collected, funny, and professional for a lot of the clothes that she would see me coming home in and 'Oh. Hey, Greg!' 'Oh, hi!', [imitating neighbor's greetings towards them]. Whatever, that kind of thing, so she didn't perceive me as a threat. Just, 'Oh, you look educated.' Well, what about when I looked like – If I looked like the man that you called the cops on? He was trying to sell her husband a

> bottle of water and, like, candy, and her husband was ABOUT TO BUY IT, and she comes RUNNING OUT OF THE HOUSE, 'GET THE FUCK OFF OF MY LAWN! GET THE FUCK OFF OF–", And I'm sitting there on my patio because I'm up like- I'm not on the second floor, but I'm on the first floor. But the way our building is set up, I have a nice little [patio]. It's kind of raised and I can SEE into the STREET in my little MOUND – FRONT YARD, and then her building next door – HER HOUSE, and I'm just, like, WITNESSING this from my patio, and she didn't recognize that I was sitting there, and so it's all just taking place, and I'm just hearing the threats, hearing the bullshit, hearing the [reenacting looking around shocked]. WHOA. WHERE THE FUCK DID THAT COME FROM? So it was just like- and this was two years ago. [...] It's like white homeowners- and I'm almost positive she's one of the people in that damn Old Towne East [Facebook] group because, you know, so it's like just knowing that, okay, she's probably one of the homeowners [laughing] INVOLVED, and so just yeah, certain things like that just are red flags for me to stay away from, for real, for real. (Greg)

On the other side of the Black folks within the Near East Side's involvement in decision-making, both Destiny and Bobby – though not as involved in such processes like Gwendolyn, Chloe Lorde, Tobias, and Nora – described (like Greg did above) what they understand about decision-making with their communities and how to make change.

Destiny, explaining her understanding of how decisions are made within Olde Town East are made, noted that she does not feel as though her and others' voices within the community are heard. Destiny stated:

> So, it's been my experience in my specific community that the neighbors, at least up until maybe like the past year, haven't really had much of a say and haven't really engaged much in what's going on. It's kind of been just watching things happen to the

> neighborhood versus actually being a part of things that have happened. Now, I will say that the library specifically has been a good resource for kind of keeping up with things that have been going on in the community. And I've seen not many [community events], but I've seen like 1 or 2 events being hosted by leaders in the community to talk about the changes that we've seen specifically at the library, but I can't say that I have interacted with my neighbors, or that the people in Olde Towne East have really gotten together to have a conversation about what's taking place. (Destiny)

Sojo had similar sentiments as Destiny, noting that decisions happen behind closed doors and for the community to get their voice heard, they would have to protest. When asked this, Sojo stated:

> [Decisions are made] under the rug, behind closed doors, under the rug, behind closed doors, in, closed door meetings that the public is not even informed of. By the time you find out about a decision, it has already been ratified, adopted, agreed upon, sold, traded, negotiated, and it feels like there is no way that we could have our voices be heard other than, like, protesting. Like showing up at city council members' homes and being like, 'No, we need housing right now.' (Sojo)

Bobby, on the other hand, spoke about individual actions that contribute to decision-making on local and larger scales and key organizations within the Bronzeville and Mt. Vernon areas:

> I mean, balance is the main thing like everything in the country. If you need something to change, you put it on the ballot. With the Urban League there [Mount Vernon], it's a great hub of mobilizing political activism and other little organizations that work inside the Urban League, because since it is now the space where a lot of building and growing grassroots campaigns take place. That's the main - That's always - I do notice, you know,

> even just mobilizing little task forces not even before we even get to a voting thing, you know, just little [efforts or smaller groups of] people [within the community] who are really trying to [organize] whether it is financial means or just cleaning. You know, I've noticed that [smaller efforts taking place] heavily in that area. There's still – the chunk of Mount Vernon that we live on – there's still community pride and belonging. (Bobby)

It is important to note that within the Near East Side community, not every sub-community has resources (for Black folks) like the Mount Vernon or (King-Lincoln)-Bronzeville community (per its history). Greg, after discussing the Facebook group in Olde Towne East, mentioned how they enjoyed riding through the King-Lincoln District because the population appears to be more in touch with the houseless populations and preservation of Black history within this area. He stated:

> Yeah, and I think also of the King Lincoln District, which is right by Old Towne East right here. That area is like predominantly – historically Black. I don't live there, but I enjoy riding my bike through there. I've been a part of, you know, like – there was an arts meeting with GCAC and like, that area seems a little bit more in touch with even like the houseless population, with preserving the historical and- Blackness of the whole region if we're being honest, but Olde Towne East feels like it's slowly trying to become like, yuppie central and like very almost corporatizing slowly. (Greg)

City decision-making and Efforts

Following the discourse on how decisions were made within the community, participants were asked how the city engages them in decision-making, to describe a recent decision the city has made within or generally affecting the Near East Side, and whether they believe city and local leadership reflects that of the community. Some

participants under this theme mentioned feeling or being directly engaged while others noted not feeling engaged enough. Community leaders, like Gwendolyn and Tobias spoke on how the big players (dominating in land development) affect how decisions are made throughout the Near East Side, either harming or helping the community. Others, like Nora, Rhonda, Greg, Martin, and Sojo provided experiences that spoke to Gwendolyn and Tobias' insight and more.

In understanding how decisions are made in the community, Gwendolyn, Tobias, and Thomas spoke to Near Easts' key players known for impacting decisions around land use and availability. During our conversation, Gwendolyn mentioned that in addition to the city's presence, key players, such as Ohio State, the school board system, and Airbnb, influence decisions made in the area. She too noted that previously, these entities would make decisions on their own, but because the community felt frustrated, annoyed, and overall mad, they began to demand their voices be included, shifting things in a better direction. Gwendolyn noted:

> What I didn't mention was the key institutions that – the role of key institutions – which also play a role in decision making simply by the power of their presence. […] Ohio State, the school district, they're a player […] Yeah, just to those two Ohio State and the school board. And it's really because they make key decisions about land, land use availability, accessibility, all the above. […] Traditionally they made the decisions on their own. That is changing now because the community is demanding a voice in the decision-making process. (Gwendolyn)

After describing Ohio State and the school board as main land development players, she then added the Airbnb industry to the list, "Okay. This is a hard sector, but this is

influential. Just put the Airbnb industry." Following this, Gwendolyn began to describe why each of these entities were key players, first detailing what made Ohio State a key player:

> So, I said before Ohio State…let's start with Ohio State. Ohio State is the largest landowner. Ohio State has created a presence through the OSU East and Carepoint East on Taylor. So this is, OSU. This is Mount Vernon, and so this is OSU [writing on map]. Okay, so here's what happens, most people, whether it's employees or visitors, come in off of [highway] 670 and they come down Taylor, they go to OSU – go to Carepoint East or come down to OSU East, which is the hospital. This building that we're in now [MLK Library, right across from the hospital] was originally the site of the original library was here [points to map]. OSU bought it, and they bought Two houses between Long and Broad Street. Okay, so this is OSU [points to map], which is right across the street here, right? Okay and they bought the two houses between Long and Taylor and Broad Street because they had people coming down broad and then turning into Taylor to go to OSU. And they put a big sign here in the corner, it used to be right down there, the sign is still there. But it used to say, you know, '1460 East Broad Street' because they wanted OSU to have a Broad Street address because they wanted – they didn't want to scare people away and say they were on [neighborhood streets such as] Taylor or Hawthorne or Crawford or whatever it is, so that sign used to have the address that said Broad Street. Now, it just has OSU East there, okay? So, from the beginning there was a perception that this [area and the community makeup] was different. That you came in, you went to OSU East, and you went back. So even now, they've got all these employees, they come in off of 670, they come in off Broad [Street], they go to their office, they come back, they leave. And so, our discussion [in the community and with OSU] has been, 'How do

> you get OSU into the community?', because the only reason they come in[to the Near East Side] now is to go to Wendy's. (Gwendolyn)

Gwendolyn then stated that where one works typically has immediate needs accessible in the area around you, therefore, making you go out and interact within the community. She mentioned that in collaboration with folks at OSU East, she was met with backlash from OSU and the community after bringing this their attention. The community was more so worried about expanding employment opportunities. She continued:

> Yeah, but when you worked, didn't you tend to have those needs met near where you worked? Okay, so you come in and you're like, 'Okay, let me, you know, I'm going to call, let me get my gas, I'm right here or I gotta – let me stop here,' because that is a natural phenomenon. To look around you. The OSU employees don't do that. The only reason they come to the Near East side is to go to Wendy's for lunch. That is safe. That is known, okay? I had an argument with a woman, a VP. She's like, 'No, no.' I was like, 'Come on,' you know, I was trying to tell her something about the community. She's like, 'No, no, no, no.' I was like, 'Are you mad?' 'Well, I've been down, and I never saw it.' I said, 'It's been there for ten years. How do you know if you didn't see it?' I'm just saying she was trying to tell me that something didn't exist. I said it had been there for ten years and she's like, 'I've been down in Mount Vernon. You always talk about people. I've been down Mount Vernon.' I said, 'But you drove with blinders on.' You had blinders! So, a year ago I asked OSU for - because there's this other project taking place, big struggle, and the community came to me and said I was wrong because bringing in this project would mean employment. I said, you're wrong, and I'm going to prove it to you. So, I asked OSU for the employee figures for the Near East Side. I said, how many people from the Near East Side work at OSU East or Carepoint East? Because you're bringing in

> this new facility in, and they wanted to build a new thing that would have 200 [positions]. And I wanted to know how many of those 200 potentially could be Near East residents. And so, out of 23,000 employees citywide, 376 are Near East Side employees CITY WIDE. So out of that 376, then maybe 30 are actually from the Near East Side. So I went back to the community and said, this is wrong. Okay? So, we have to actually look at this and see how can we create a workforce development plan for where OSU actually looks at the community for its workforce so you actually live and work in the community because right now that's not happening. So that's our whole thing is like, how do you get OSU down Mount Vernon? That's what our term, how do we get them [to spread their support and resources] down Mount Vernon? Because they just come in and go, come in and go. Just up Taylor, out; down Taylor, out. That's it. (Gewndolyn)

After describing how Ohio State is a player within the Near East Side and how things need to change, Gwendolyn then went into detail on how the school system has been a key player, yet still a problem, within the community:

> And so the Airbnb industry is different. Okay, let me start the schools. So, the schools…they're an issue because, part of the problem of the Near East Side is that for urban renewal, property was destroyed and/or abandoned or neglected, but – or cleared. The land was just cleared. They're like 20 acres of land which is vacant. And so that created like a natural hole. And people were like, 'Well, there's no place to shop here or that house is gone. Let me move because…' Okay, and that just was a ripple effect. The school board is playing a similar role now in the vacant schools. That's what I meant about Monroe, that they now have, Monroe, Pilgrim, and […]. Monroe is here [labeling map]. I'll put the X and then pilgrim. I'll put X. …these are some very serious [sized] properties. They're just sitting [there abandoned]. And we begged. This one, Pilgrim; [the

fight for] Pilgrim was hysterical. I just sat back I said y'all please. Y'all, think we don't think ‘What is this?’ Pilgrim was owned by Columbus City Schools. I guess I should back up, right. Okay, so Pilgrim was owned by Columbus City Schools. Columbus City Schools sold it to Ohio State. So it's not a school, it's Ohio State’s property. Pilgrim sold it to Ohio State. OSU owns it now, and it was supposed to be workforce development. We had all these plans, blah, blah, blah. Empty. Vacant. Sad, sad. We kept saying, ‘What's happening? What's happening? And they came up and said, ‘Oh, we're sorry, but [the building has] asbestos and we can't afford abatement.’ And we said, wait a minute, and we didn't know, so we didn't include that in our [community writeup]. What I was like, wait a minute, you're THE Ohio State and THE school board. Yet all y'all do is property, and you're going to tell me that I, as a homeowner, if I were buying property – I would have read, I would’ve had a checklist, I would have had lead abatement, asbestos, whatever and you're going to tell me that you didn't have this on your list ahead of time when you knew that any building built before 1950 had a possibility of lead or asbestos? You’re gonna tell me you didn't know? They swore up and down they didn't know. They didn't have the funds, that's why it had to stay [vacant]. So then about a year or two years ago, they supposedly remediated. There was some work going on, but it's still empty, so every time we say, ‘Well, what's that?’ Same with Monroe. Monroe is still owned by the school board. We're like, ‘What's happening? Why do you keep having these [situations]?’ There was another one down here at Douglas. They've turned that into a senior citizen [center], and they're working on that right now, and you can see Parks and Rec has it, and it's a senior citizen [center]. I mean, it's going to be a senior citizen. Senior center. Senior center. The judge's mansion. It is, right about here; this is Douglas. It's right behind the BP [British Petroleum gas station]. 17th and broad, right behind the BP

> is, [where Douglas is located]. […] So, by not acting on the property, by leaving property vacant, this is a repeat of the urban renewal process from the 50s and 60s that led to the decline, because having such large expanses of property, such solid buildings right in the middle, still empty, just boarded up, you know, has a detrimental effect. (Gwendolyn)

Moreover, Gwendolyn went into detail about how the Airbnb industry has played a role in the community's land use, shedding light on how corporatizing the housing market too contributes to gentrification:

> Now differently, is the Airbnb industry, and it's because they are not, for the most part, local players. These are companies, many of which are, some of which are outside of Columbus. Some of them are local people, but they aren't residents on the east side, the[y are originally from] other parts of town. And it's not the individual who buys a property as part of their investment in the [neighborhood and to stay there]. It is the corporate takeover of multiple properties that are not managed on site. That is a problem for us, okay? So, owner occupied or owner in the community, they can go by and check. That's one thing. But when you have a company that is literally buying up these homes and then turning them into Airbnb, two things: one, it reduces housing stock for people who would be permanent members of the community and engage actively, you know, in all aspects. […] [I do] not [know which specific companies] offhand, but you know, people have done a study, NEAC [Near East Area Commission] we actually, did a study and did a letter, and we're going to have a discussion at some point. But we did – we wrote a thing to City Council. We did a petition to city Council to, you know, [do] something to regulate somehow. Short-term rentals is what it's called. The short-term rental industry. To regulate it. And we've got 2 or 3 other area commissions have signed on. So, one, it reduces the housing stock, so then when you complain about, 'Well people aren't

interested. Well - or people can't [buy a home]', you know, - and then they drive up the prices, so if people did want to buy, they're locked out of their market. And then next, it brings in the short term, folk who really don't care about the community and they allow their properties to be abused. And I was shocked, I really, you know, but then when I thought about it I began to understand a bit more. But they – if people don't have access to other resources, they use what they have. And it is difficult to find some place to socialize…reasonably. So if you can rent a place for 100, 150, I think there's one next to me is that goes for 200 or something, which amazes me, but it's owner occupied, so that's no problem. But many of these overnight rentals are just, you know [a hit], so I rent it, I bring it all my friends have a party, and leave the next day. You know? I give them a credit card [to put on file]. That's a low limit credit card or a debit card or whatever, and I [illustrating how other folks typically renting these houses out] have no financial accountability. They trashed the neighborhood, they bring in cars, they party all night, and some of these owners actually allow it. They, they, they, they say it's okay. We, you know, 'We get our money, we don't care.' And they're actually known for it, so it's a real problem for the neighbors. So not only do they not have a family that would add value to the community, but they have people coming in who are destroying the [community's] fabric, and then those people get annoyed, and they want to move out. So, it's a ripple effect that way. So, we really are struggling to say, 'Yes, anybody has a right to own property. You want to, you know, do this, whatever…' But there should be some recognition of the community context and work with the community, you know, so that you have your financial gain, but we also have a stable community. And so that's what this, short term rental, proposal before city council speaks to. (Gwendolyn)

Similarly, Greg shared a similar instance of corporate gentrification with the Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens privatizing certain areas of the park formerly open to the surrounding, and predominantly Black communities:

> That area [where events are now held] used to be OPEN to EVERYBODY and not on the property, but they gated it off to where now it's just for the Franklin Park Conservatory, if you pay to get in and have a wedding. Beforehand, I was working where it was janitorial work and wedding planning, and you get to see hands on that was before there was any gates, so I'm assuming that the profits and the complaints was mainly coming from brides and weddings and a lot of white people that were getting into the venue. And this is just facts. They didn't want the neighborhood of people to be in the background of their pictures, to be fucking with their weddings, or to be just messing up the aesthetic that they were purchasing. And so, Franklin Park said, "We got the money, and we have the connects. We'll go ahead and get this off.", and like, STEEL STEEL gated it off to where you can't go into that area, and if you jump it then it's technically trespassing, so it's like y'all took a chunk of the park from people, so yeah. And I'm sure there was complaints of maybe houseless people sleeping or something crazy like that, but like, where else are they going to go? Like, I don't know, but that was definitely a thing that I saw firsthand [when gentrification was on the rise]. Gentrification happened where that just seemed like one of those things of like, dang, this community had this whole park for more than 20 years, and now there's a chunk of the park that you can't explore or access, so yeah. (Greg)

Tobias, on the other hand had similar understanding with Gwendolyn that OSU East (and their other medical branches) has a big presence within the area. To Tobias, all the health facilities in the area are somewhat alarming to him simply because of the

message he feels they are trying to convey regarding the health of the community. Tobias explained:

> What I see a lot of, though, is OSU presence with hospitalization and health care. But really, I feel like to me that signals health management That you realize there's chronic illness. And so we need to have proximity to that, which for me is an encouraging. It's not encouraging to me to have the hospital and then the outpatient center. And then they're talking about building another center as well. And all of these things signal that the community isn't well. And we're going to help you manage your issues. But it just wasn't a reason that we got the Healthy Community Center or something like that. Just to say that we're going to help you live healthily so that you shouldn't need the hospital or big pharma like those type of things. I think the communication segments to me say, we expect for you not to be well, we're going to help you manage that part and not we're going to help you live better. […] So the Healthy Community Center is an initiative through OSU that really is supposed to be an outreach for people coming in, learning about health techniques. There'll be a rotating business in there that kind of help incubate small business with thinking about healthy eating and all that, and so I think at its mission and its core really is to bring health to the community and to just connect it to OSU and their effort to say, 'We want to spend some of our energies in ways that are positive.' So, I think that that has a potential to be extremely positive, but it's supposed to be new it's on Taylor Avenue. And then right kind of next to that they're talking about – they were originally planning to tear down the historic big building that's right there at the corner, and they were going to use that extra plot to enhance the parking for the extension center for the OSU hospital Outpatient Center. And then they're also going to be building a more residential space for people who needed some more long-term care. Not necessarily

like they're going to be living there, but if you need to be in care and observed for up to 90 days, they would have a number of beds there to be able to assist, so that part of the conversation is where they brought us back in and said that we want the community's voice to understand how to do that. We still value and think it's important, but not so important that it needs to destroy one of the homes that was there and has historic values, and so they're now looking at different places to put that. But that's still a huge initiative to try to think about how do we deal with the extended care needs. So I think I think that's going to be right here [points to map]. The idea for the new hospital, that's not going to happen there anymore. So, I'm not sure where it's going to be. So, this is – I believe this is where the current outpatient is – stay-in space is. And they were talking about having that whole block be a medical something... (Tobias)

Continuing, Tobias discussed a collaborative experience with OSU East, echoing what Gwendolyn and other community members have been noting OSU needs to work on more: establishing its niche in relationship to the Near East Side community (despite its reputation). Intentionality with building use was also discussed. He stated:

> So as a Buckeye. I have an affinity for OSU, I do. But I also understand the history of research in black communities. And so there's some skepticism. So OSU East has a as a hospital doesn't have a great reputation. In fact, many times people are like, only send me there if you want me to die. And so so that's a huge presence. And so to have that on one of the main corners and that directly across the street from our school. East High School like that, that says something. And then a few blocks down, it's where this other complex is, where we're talking about. And so, OSU has that presence. What I, what I appreciate more, especially with the conversation of the new facility that we're thinking about OSU has been leading, coming to some of the conversations around [the community keeping in

mind], ‘If we're showing up, how are we showing up, how are we perceived?’ And in the beginning, I was just like, this is smoke and mirrors. Just to be able to allow us to have some conversations that can do what they were already going to do, but then making the commitment to not have the center here just because of our community conversation, and then say they want to use that community conversation as a model on how they really come into communities to say, ‘this is what we hope to do. This is the “why.” Help us think through that. And then if it's not right, know that we still think we're going to do this because it's necessary based on our research. But if this isn't the right way then let's figure out a different way. Like that changed some things for me. Like I really was encouraged by it, and I and I feel like something about this feels right. It feels like there could be something that is worth looking into trusting, believing, or at least following it through and see if it can be okay. So for me, for right now, that's been the present. I don't know that they have, I don't know of a larger engagement strategy that they have here in the community, except for their partnership with PAC. And sometimes people are not understanding. Is PAC part of OSU or are they different than OSU? And I still really don't know, even though I've received some grants and benefits from PAC myself, I'm like, I still think of OSU is just under a different name? […] This entire conversation has been in the last year. And so, I was introduced to the conversation probably last February, and then we've committed – we're still having meetings now to talk about now that we're not going to have –we know that the building is going to stay. But, you know, the issue is also being invested in saying we found value in this building. What are we going to use it for? How is it going to meet the needs of the community? How are we engaging the community to understand that? So that's ongoing. (Tobias)

Additionally, when asked to recall a recent decision the city made, Tobias stated that he wanted to discuss a how the city decided not to add a stop light on a very dangerous portion of Long Street in Woodland Park (ironically between the hospitals):

> Would not putting up traffic lights be a decision that [the city made]? […] Specifically in that corridor on Long [street] that goes through close to East High School. That [section of Long Street] is a race car area, and so we have two lights that exist, but then there's a lot of residential community in between those two lights. And so, I think people try their best to zip through and see if they can get through both lights really quickly, and we've had lots of issues with – we have one where pedestrians were hit pretty frequently, but it was like diagonal from the school. And so, the individual and their animals, were killed. The person was just injured, but then it brought up, 'This is across the street from our schools.' We need to do better, and we need to – we ask the city for lights or calming something. And they were like, 'It's not a long enough strip to put anything through.' (Tobias)

Similar issues and conversations around traffic safety and management showed to be prominent in the Mount Vernon and Olde Towne East subcommunities within the Near East Side. Earlier, when discussing how decisions are made within the community, Nora noted sharing such concerns as a homeowner, mother, and active community member working with the local area commission, which is connected to the city and local legislators, to make decisions around traffic safety, historical buildings, and so forth. Following this, when asked to recall a recent decision the city made, she described that the city went out of their way make the one-way street she lives on a two-way street without despite the conversations with community stakeholders. Nora stated:

> Oh, yeah, trying to turn it [the road I live on] into a two-way street. Yeah, they even, put the [opposite facing] stop sign up on the other side of the street. They took it down now, but it was like we were having meetings to DISCUSS it, but they had the stop sign up as if like that was a formality. So, I was like, is this meeting a formality or are y'all going to do it anyway? Because the stop sign is UP. It was up [in the past], but [while this was taking place] they had the stop sign covered with the bag. But it was like because it's a one-way street, why is there a stop sign facing this way for the cars? You know what I'm saying? So, it was like, what is really happening? So, it was like, so you're saying it is a formality, and you're saying that it's going to pass, or what's happening? (Nora)

Ironically, as traffic safety issues came up throughout our discussion, she noticed someone, in real-time, speeding from the incorrect side of the street stating,

> You see how they're going the wrong way on this one-way street? You see what I'm saying? And like, SPEEDING. So, if we had a speed bump, you know, it's just it's stuff like that [that would be beneficial for the residents on the street]. (Nora)

Nora then discussed that the rapid development and destruction of older buildings in the area is too an intentional decision made by the city:

> Yeah, this whole the end, the end of this block, past Spring [Street was torn down]. But yeah, on Long and Monroe, that entire infrastructure of like where Waves Bar is where these apartments like, all of that just went up [pointing to map]. THIS was a decision because this was just an empty lot. It was just empty. It was just green space, and it was beautiful. It was beautiful. (Nora)

Like Nora, Rhonda also discussed complications in receiving support for traffic management by the city unless when white residents move into the neighborhood. When asked how decisions are made in the community Rhonda responded:

> I think decisions are based on who lives there. So, for example, right, we lived in a house for multiple, multiple years, and we asked so many times, 'Can we have a stop sign? Can we have a stop sign? Can we have a stop sign?' My brother got hit by a car in that same spot…right here [pointing to Sycamore Street on the map]. […] So, for Elsworth [Street], it was more like, okay, we started seeing people put stop signs up when we started seeing white women walking their dogs in our neighborhood. And with Trevitt [Heights], it was more so like because white people never came to our neighborhood, the worse it got. It just started losing stuff. Like it wasn't like - they didn't put money back into it. Once it was a wrap, it was a wrap. You know what I mean? […] Listen, we [the community] knew that life was changing – I'm not trying to be funny – when I seen a white lady walking her dog up the street. And then at first it was just like, okay. What really got it was the fact that we had been asking for a stop sign on that street for years, and all it took was a white lady who recently, she just moved out there. She drove up Ellsworth the wrong way, and instantly we got a stop sign. Instantly. Like, just when I literally say it was just like within that that next three days we had a stop sign. (Rhonda)

Due to this, Rhonda then mentioned how over time not receiving support or resources from the city to care for public areas in the neighborhood leads to completely dilapidated, and therefore dangerous, areas soon to be torn down. She noted that when was a child, she had a dangerous experience at a local park that landed her in the hospital. Before the park was torn down, kids were afraid to go to this park, finding activities elsewhere to participate in. Rhonda stated:

> Before I started teaching middle school math, I taught at a high school for a few years, and even still, just like sometimes kids can be a little bit, you know,

disruptive and destructive. And I think that their mindset is like let's say if it was somewhere in a area where there were more white people, if somebody was to tear something up. Somebody could call and say, hey this is messed up. And then they'll have the city come out, they'll have the resources. You know what I'm saying. They'll have that to get it fixed. Where in our neighborhoods it's just like, 'Oh okay, well thank you for letting me know. We'll get to it when we can.', and then they never get around to it. And then what happens is it just keeps getting older and older and older. Just like the park, right? So eventually they just take it down. Now the kids don't have a park to play at anymore. But they tore that down and they put a family dollar up because I believe that it was other people moving into those areas now. So, it's like, 'Okay, well now we got to make it more friendly for THEM [incoming white folks].', you know what I'm saying? And they don't want their kids outside playing with other kids, you know, especially in that [kind of] neighborhood. You know what I mean? And then also in Trevitt [Heights, Near East sub-community] was where I had the accident, that park there is all gone. It's all – It's just gone. It's just grass. (Rhonda)

Rhonda continued:

It [the playground] was already not in the best space. So, I still got bruises, like, on my face. So, it was glass everywhere. The reason why I HAD the incident, which, this is another thing, too. So, people complained about the monkey bars being loose, and that's actually how I got into my accident, because it was like it never got fixed. And me and my sister, we went outside to see who could jump to the farthest bar. And I jumped to the fourth bar. And when I jumped, it twisted like this [out of place], and then I fell on my

face, so I like I had I got a bald spot here and a bald spot here from where I had to get surgery and stitches. And then I had like glass fragments in my face and stuff like that. […] Yeah, but it's kind of like after I got out of the situation, we still lived there for a little while and got to a point where I seen the transition. It was like people started being scared to play at the park, right? So, then I started noticing like the young men across the street. Instead of them meeting us at the park, they'd meet somebody else somewhere else. And then I started noticing them getting into bad stuff [i.e., drug abuse and gang violence]. You know what I'm saying? Like, it's like the transition started it. It's I feel like because we didn't have those resources that we didn't have those things that the kids could do. They found fun elsewhere. […] So, it was just kind of like, you see, like you don't think about that. You don't think about how not having certain things in the neighborhood can cause other things [to take place or get worse]. But for every, you know, cause there's an effect. So, it's like, yeah, if we had a [higher quality] playground, maybe we wouldn't have been out there doing that. We could…you know what I'm saying? Or if we still had access to places like the neighborhood house or Sawyer [Rec Center, people may not have gone down certain paths], you know, now these places are closed. (Rhonda)

Shortly after this, Rhonda noted that the lack of the city's care and support in predominantly Black and under-resourced neighborhoods leads children, like her students, in these communities to believe that they should also not care about their community. Rhonda stated:

> Our kids are the future. And if our kids are being let off on the wrong foot, then they're going to be making these wrong decisions because they can feel that nobody cares. They can feel, you know how many times I heard a student say they don't care about us? That's

> why they don't give it to us. You know what I'm saying? Or it's like they'll throw trash outside and it's like, why are you littering? [Kids respond with] 'Who cares? They don't care about our neighborhood. It's trash everywhere.' And it's just like, those are the things that you hear. (Rhonda)

In addition to the city's lack of support with traffic management and upkeep of public spaces, Rhonda spoke to what Gwendolyn discussed above regarding housing disparities down to a block level. She also described how home developers and companies acquired most of the houses in the neighborhood and tried to pay her mother $5000 for hers. Because she waited, the company, instead, gave her a non-refundable loan to then make exterior changes. Rhonda stated that she believes that the developers did not do this with her mother in mind because to them, she will not be there forever, so they are doing this with incoming white residents in the long run. She said:

> So, I feel like going this way is where you see like more like local high school students, more Black people, more of the – I hate to call it dirty, but more of like the rundown areas, but there's way more Black people definitely here. So, let's say the students that go to the local high school right here. So, this would be the school right here, right? So, this would be the high school. A lot of our students come from this area – these areas [i.e., Olde Towne East, Bronzeville, and Trevitt] right here. Yeah, yeah, all of them. So, we have tons of students from Bronzeville. We have tons from Olde Towne East, but not more so the heart of Olde Towne East. It's more so the outskirts of Olde Towne East. And then EVERYBODY from Trevitt, right? So going this way, I feel like from Broad Street – and I can show it to you, you'll see like it's more like the bigger houses. So let me say it perfectly better like this. You go this [opposite] way, right? You'll see more like wrecked cars. Cars with no insurance. Older cars, right? But you going this way towards this way

with them big ole' houses, you'll see Benzes all these things like that. Yeah, here. And you can see too, when they change it. So, you can see where they keep the good at. And then like you can see where the next street over it goes right back to, you know, trash. You know what I mean. So, or like let me tell you something else about this one[area]. So, my mom has been living here since '99, right? So let me say this, ten years ago, they offered her $5,000 for her WHOLE home, for her home, right? 5000, I kid you not. White people start moving in [and] my mom's [home value] prices start going up. And I was telling her like, 'Mom, you should wait, because if you wait a little bit longer, you're going to get a easy $300,000." Her house right now, is probably about 257,000 right now. Mind you, this is, how can I say it? Okay, let's say it like this. My mom's house has been maroon and raggedy, for a very long time. We never had resources, right? We couldn't do the loans. We couldn't do – there are a lot of people on the street who couldn't do stuff like that because we didn't have the resources. And it's because of the type of neighborhood that we were in. When the white people started coming in – my mom's house is white now because they offer people in the neighborhood loans. They said, 'Hey, if we fix your house up and we pay to get your house fixed,' and make it look better to bring my people in, right? 'You lived there for ten years, and you don't got to pay it back.' Yeah, so her house is remodeled now. Now it's flipped. So, she got new lining on her house and all that stuff. And they only did it because they're trying to make the neighborhood more LIKEABLE to people who are not us. It worked though because when they did that change them houses filled up so fast. Filled up so fast. And that's why they're trying to get like, my mom, Mr. Robinson, the police officer on the end [of the block], all the ones that's like – who's been in those houses for a long time, they're getting [snaps] hounded [snaps] left [snaps] and right because they [the developers] want them

> [Black residents] out of there. […] We had to – so like this, my mom, she'll call me and be like, 'Sweetie, can you tell me how to block numbers?', right? ON HER CELL PHONE? We block probably like maybe three numbers a week. So, then they call her house, and she just lets it ring. She'll get voicemails and they'll be like, 'Hey, I was just wanting to know, are you selling your house?' One time, my mom, we walked outside, my mom got a sticker on the window like, 'We buy old houses,' and it's just like, you can tell that they want the people out of there to bring the other people in, and they're doing everything they can like even offering them lots of money to get them up out of there. Because it's like at the end of the day, it's going to be more beneficial. Like, yeah, 'I'm giving you this money, right? To get you going for now. But once they [white people] come in, it's going to bring us more money anyway.' (Rhonda)

Following this, Rhonda noted how it is not hard to tell that developers' intentions are not pure:

> And the only reason why they're coming in here now making these changes. It's not because they care about us, but it's because they care about what they want it to look like, to bring people in. Like, it's not like, 'Hey, I'm fixing your house because I care about you, and I want your house to look nice.' It's more so like, 'Listen, I'm trying to bring these white faces in to bring this money into this community. I need to fix your house. So that way it looks appealing to them. You down or not?' Like, that's kind of how it is. It's not like, 'Hey, I genuinely want this area to look neat – nice and neat, be safe, [and so forth].' (Rhonda)

Rhonda then described that she has seen these changes happen in different areas around town, specifically around the Nationwide Children's Hospital, who she noted was

a key player in buying and developing houses in the Olde Towne East and Livingston Avenue areas:

> They're fixing up these houses now too [pointing to map]. And yeah, so that's kind of how it started. So, the center of downtown, you got north, south, east, west [of downtown], right? The center of downtown, they started with, Northside first, right? Then they took it down into the south and then the east, and now they're working on the west side, right? And if you look at what they're doing, they're looking at – Children's Hospital bought up the surrounding areas. So, Children's Hospital bought up every house and every building that they could from Children's Hospital all the way to Alum Creek [Road]. So, Alum Creek and Livingston [Ave], Alum Creek and Main [Street], and Alum Creek and Broad Street Children's Hospital owns everything from there to where they are right now. (Rhonda)

Despite everything Rhonda has gone through, she acknowledged that since white folks have moved into the area around her mom's house, things have gotten better (though she understands the betterment of the area is more for white folks), specifically with police brutality, drug dealing, and gun violence:

> It [police presence] has decreased, though. It has decreased, yes. And now, I can say that the amount of things that we dealt with, like all the drug dealers, have moved off my mom's street. So that that's beneficial, but I also think it's like, I know why they moved up the street because, yeah, you know, they ain't want to get snitched on, but it's just like…yeah. So, I can't say that that's not a bad thing. It's not a bad thing because you got to think, those are the same people that had a shootout where seven bullets went through my mom's house and four went through her car on accident. (Rhonda)

Other participants, like Donna, Will, Thomas, and Martin shared similar thoughts as Rhonda, mentioning that though nuanced, gentrification can be a good thing. Donna noted that gentrification makes things thrive, but not necessarily for Black communities because they typically are not invested in. She stated:

> I feel like gentrification makes it thrive. I feel like if these communities were to remain predominantly Black, I don't think there'd be as much investment. I think that the ones that are thriving are because they're being gentrified. (Donna)

Will mentioned that as a planner, studying gentrification versus living through it are entirely different things given the coded language incoming entities use to advertise before entering under-resourced areas is often followed by harmful developmental patterns. He also described the things he notices while living in a community that is actively being gentrified (acknowledging that he too is technically a gentrifier). Will stated:

> […] But at the same time there's definitely like – I don't know, as a planner, I've definitely studied gentrification a lot. I've seen gentrification, but it's another thing to like, live in it. And when I was first looking at places [to live] there. That was something retailers kept saying, like almost like a dog whistle of like, 'Oh, this is an up-and-coming neighborhood!' And it was always kind of like, what do you mean exactly by that? And especially knowing, you know, the history that universities tend to have with neighborhoods – that hospitals tend to have, like, and just seeing the same pattern over and over. Yeah, it's definitely a trip to live through. Like the corner store by me sells, you know, like bootleg DVDs and T-shirts and stuff like that and that, like literally […] my apartment is more so in the back alley here. And that is like where everything comes to a

head, like I'll go in the corner store, you know, I'm getting, like an Arizona [tea] or something for the night, and there's, like, bootleg DVDs. Everything is, like, behind glass. But then the person next to me is like a shirtless white man with his, like Labrador jogging in the neighborhood [who] stopped in to grab a drink that it's like… I mean, I'll say, granted, like I am the gentrifier too, right? Like I'm in one of these newer apartment buildings. Yeah, just because I'm Black doesn't really change the dynamic that much. But it definitely – there's something I will say about, I guess being a good neighbor, I'll say like I try to, you know, if I see my neighbors in the hallway, 'Hey, how are you doing?' If there's, like, community events, I try to go to those. I love the ones that Franklin Park does. I don't think they've started up for the summer yet. But Franklin Park [during the] the summer, and kind of parts of the fall, they do a farmers' market there. That is really beautiful. [I] Have had really nice relationships to some of the people who have stands there. And then just kind of seeing, like we went to the Asian Festival a few weeks ago, and I just really like being able to like, 'Hey, you know, what is there to do this weekend?' And there being stuff in my immediate area that also feels – I don't want to say authentic either – but like it feels better than just 'Here's a festival that there's a bunch of [random things], we got a big speaker, and we got a bunch of food trucks.' Like, that's not just a festival to me. I need to see people who – there's things to do besides just buying stuff, right? And this neighborhood definitely has that. There's always something going on. There's always people that you can go to. There's always a new resource. Somebody's trying something new that I greatly appreciate. (Will)

He then discussed that he is not necessarily against newer developments and gentrification as long as there are protections for the long-time residents:

> So that's the thing to me of like [development] – I'm not against these things. I'm not against even like the quote unquote gentrification aspect of it, as long as it's done with protections, and I don't see any of the protections. And I think we're going to keep seeing a lot more unhoused people as it keeps getting worse. As far as I know, there is no plans to end the tax abatement program, and it's already been kind of running rampant. (Will)

To protect the "legacy" community members (as Will and Martin described), Thomas declared that as long as the community gets to drive the bus, being actively involved in decisions made in the neighborhood, newcomers are welcome to get on the bus because they have resources:

> So, we have a thing here that we don't care who gets on the bus as long as we are driving the bus. Because to get on the bus, you have resources. And some of these people that are moving in have resources that we need. So, we want them to get involved as long as we are driving the bus. We don't care who gets on as long as we are driving. In order to drive the bus, you have to be organized. […] Well for us, them moving in, and because we have a plan and we're building, we're doing things. So, they're moving. They'll come in and see what we're doing and enhance where we're going. They're moving in. They're not they're not in a position to stop the bus. So, they can get on again or still they can come in with resources and help us. Because we already have a trajectory. So, we're not we're not threatened by them coming in. The question is we have to get our people to do it. And I made a rhyme one time. I was so angry. I went to this meeting, and I was going home right at the corner of Monroe and Long I came up with this rhyme and it stuck with me. I say, 'When we African Americans see the mess in our neighborhood, they don't invest. They run north, east, south and west, searching for the best. When the others [developers]

> see the mess, they know it's the best, therefore they invest, making a way for the rest of them. (Thomas)

Martin noted that as an incoming resident (and technically a gentrifier), he wishes that there was a program instilled to build community between newer residents and long-standing ones:

> Yeah, there's definitely good people in the neighborhood, as in any neighborhood. But we don't we don't have opportunities to get to know each other. And in the situation where so many people have moved out the neighborhood and there's so many new people, obviously a lot of gentrification, I'm one of those people gentrifying the neighborhood. There's no bridge to connect the new residents to the existing residents, because there's a very rich and storied history in this neighborhood, but there's no bridge to connect [folks within the community] that I'm aware of anyway. To connect the, you know, legacy residents to the new ones and for the, like, short term folks, there are a few short-term residents, right? Like people that are engaged with one of these local hospitals. Things like that. But most of the people in this neighborhood are like long term residents, whether they just moved in or not. And there just doesn't seem to be anything in place to kind of bring it all together. (Martin)

Aside from the narratives above highlighting how the city and connected entities make decisions regarding land development, housing, traffic management, and so forth, Martin discussed a more general observation of decisions the city has made, noting how he believes that trash collection and recycling practices are not the best due to inconsistencies, sanitary conditions, lack of guidance on how to recycle, and lack in transparency on the lifecycle of recyclable items. He stated:

Thinking about trash collection. I mean, trash [collection practices] has been poor, but I think they've done a better job this year. Like, they were really bad before. They weren't consistent on when they did pickup. Which I mean, just as a sidebar - that goes back to the consistency thing, right? Like, if I'm expecting you to do trash pickup on a Friday and I make it a point to bring everything out Thursday night, put it out there, but then you don't come until like the next Tuesday. And our trash can doesn't have a lid, which was the case. Then now you've created a situation for more rodents for this, that and the other. […] Same with recycling or whatever which is actually "wish cycling". But that's a whole 'nother – It's a whole other conversation. Like it's not what people believe it is. I'm not saying that people are advertising it incorrectly even though they are in intent. But like the idea that comes to mind is like, 'Oh, I'll put this cardboard in a box, and then it goes and gets recycled and it's going to be a new piece of cardboard somewhere.' It's not what happens. A lot of it actually gets just put in the dump. There's a huge cost that comes with recycling. And so, and then also at no fault of the recycling entities, like as a society, we just aren't disciplined on how we sort. And I say this being in Germany where like one year they were like, look, we're capping the landfills, recycling everything. You're going to get fined if you don't like [improve waste management]. We need that type of thing. But in America, we're Americans. So that's not going to happen because everybody's got to have the freedoms and all that. So, people will throw anything in the recycling, which makes it useless. So that's why I call it 'wish-cycling' [because I] wish I was recycling. So, I'm only doing it at this point to keep my kids in the habit of [understanding that] there's a such thing as separating your stuff [laughing]. Yeah, but I don't have any illusions that it's actually getting recycled. (Martin)

As a home renter, Sojo mentioned similar frustrations with the city's changes in trash and recycling practices. Specifically, they feel as if the city is just trying to monetize on people's mistakes, setting folks up for failure. Sojo noted that such "mistakes" stem from the city recently switching from 300-gallon community containers to 96-gallon containers individual containers to manage illegal waste dumping. This led people to start putting their waste in other's bins or simply not separating their trash and recycling (not using the recycling bin), which is why Sojo got a fine from the city. They mentioned that the city also set time frames for people to bring out and take their bins inside to manage the illegal, dumping, but no one really followed it, exacerbating trash accumulation in the area. Sojo detailed:

> …as far as the city of Columbus, they just went on a dumping campaign to end like illegal dumping in the alleys. And so, we used to have the 300-gallon containers and up and down the alley, and they just took those away and gave everybody 96-gallon containers that are tied to your house. But it's just another way to like monetize people's mistakes, because, I got a notice saying that I didn't do the recycling right, and that the next time it will be a fine and they will send it to the house, and it would be like attached to the address. [There was] Trash in the recycling bin that was connected to my house, but they just dropped those off when they dropped off the 96-gallon containers [off]. And I didn't put any trash in there. I didn't put nothing in the recycling bin because that's not my job. I don't work for Rumpke. Y'all can y'all can sort through recycling and trash over there on 12th or 11th, or y'all have people that do that. That's not my job. I did not put [the trash in my recycling bin,] somebody else did. It's [the bins] in the alley. Everybody's putting stuff everywhere in the alley. If yours is full, you put it in the next one because

we were used to just putting them everything in 300-gallon containers. Oh, but now that there's single family or single home containers, you're supposed to take yours back up to the property so no one else has access to it, and then put it back out in the alley. Not before 7 p.m. on the day before your collection pickup date, and then remove it by 2 p.m. or 6 p.m. on the day that it was picked up. Like it's not allowed to stay in the alley, but nobody's removing it. And then some of my neighbors in the front, they have theirs on the sidewalk, so you can't even walk on the sidewalk. You have to step into the street to pass theirs, and I think they still get emptied. (Sojo)

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

This research explored the Near East Side's Black residential perceptions on communal and city decision-making practices, the degree to which these practices include their lived experiences, and their perceptions of sustainability as a concept and practice. With not much literature emphasizing the importance of addressing racism and other modes of discrimination as a part of sustainability's social dimension and overall work, this study intends to contribute to such discourse. Additionally, this study intends to reshape how we think about, and therefore approach, sustainability, so that everyone (no matter the context or positionality) can get their needs met. With that, the research questions (restated below) for this study were framed around social and environmental justice and sustainability perceptions.

Research Questions (RQ)

- RQ1: How do Black, under resourced communities perceive their treatment and involvement in the development, implementation, and enforcement of neighborhood projects, plans, and efforts?
- RQ2: How do Black residents in the Near East Side community perceive the way the City of Columbus includes their voices in the decision-making process?

- RQ3: How do Black residents in the Near East Side community articulate their views on sustainability and what constitutes sustainability practice?
- RQ4: How do sustainability perceptions of Black residents in the sub communities of the Near East Side community align or differentiate?

Interpretation and Explanation

Summary & Interpretation of Findings

Divergence in Sustainability Perceptions

Responses indicated a divergence in perceptions about sustainability, which suggests that their understanding of sustainability is directly informed by their positionality in the world. Positionality, according to Bayeck (2022, p. 1), focuses on the situatedness of one's various social identities (race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, geographical location, education, income, etc.) "that are fluid, context-situated, and inform the positions from which they engage with and make meaning of the world." These identities and their intersections not only influence ones understanding and engagement in the world, but they shape their knowledge, perspectives, practices, or involvement with certain topics, like sustainability. With a range of understanding of sustainability, most participants believed that sustainability, as a concept and practice, means well because it intentionally considers the health of the planet and those with marginalized identities, like themselves.

Definition, Relevance, and Discourse Situational Contexts

Furthermore, contrary to prior research debates on what constitutes sustainability, many within this sample connected sustainability back to social issues, the planet, their community, and justice. All the topics brought up when hearing "sustainability' include longevity, recycling, resources and resourcefulness, resilience, relevance (keeping up), housing, energy use, community, safety, economic viability, business, marriage, relationship building, intentionality with the spaces we show up in or things we do and improving the environment (or related topics). Though there were both similarities and dissimilarities in participant's conceptualizations of sustainability, all participants mentioned that it was relevant to their lives. As such, the narratives within this theme underscore the idea that defining sustainability and understanding its relevance to someone connects back to their values, which are influenced by their lived experience and, again, positionality. In fact, Hallin et al. (2020) found that sustainability, from a performative perspective, is a concept holding meaning throughout time. In other words, one's understanding of sustainability is local, temporal, and political given it is situated in a particular spatial context and time while particular values and perspectives are expressed.

Moral Obligation to be Sustainable & Onus to Achieve Sustainable Outcomes

Overall, though most participants believe that there is a moral obligation for society to be sustainable, the narratives within these sub-themes reflect that the conversation becomes more nuanced when determining who is responsible for doing so. Some stated that realistically, everyone should do what they can but must understand that the power lies in the hands of those who financially and politically have the means to

make change, while others say the power lies in the community's hands to make change themselves, and so forth. Despite the positive impact of grassroots and community organizing, research illustrates that nations or communities with the financial and political means to achieve such outcomes are the determining forces for reaching a more sustainable and equitable world. At a transnational scale, Dunlap et al. (2012) and Fletcher et al. (2024) found that the ecological footprints of those in lower-developed, less affluent, nations are significantly lower than those who are wealthier. This is also applicable to the nations' citizens. Moreover, the social and economic burdens tied to climate change emissions was noted to be majorly carried by the poorest and most vulnerable in human society, especially racially or ethnically underrepresented communities concentrated in developing countries (Fletcher et al., 2024). From a national perspective, it too is recognized that historically marginalized groups within the U.S. typically suffer the most from climate change and are often excluded from the community planning efforts while likely facing displacement from revitalized healthy, and therefore sustainable, communities (Botchwey et al., 2024).

Sustainability Beneficiaries and Potential Harms

The narratives under these themes demonstrate a need for more equitable and realistic conversations around who realistically benefits from sustainability compared to what sustainability simply strives for. Despite most participants noting that sustainability benefits everyone All the potential harms that it can cause (based on the approaches centered in these sustainability-focused conversations) need to be further explored in connection to this as well. Furthermore, accountability measures need to be instilled to

ensure an accessible and balanced understanding of sustainability so everyone can contribute to these conversations, allowing this concept to evolve further.

Decision-making imbalances and intra/intercommunal conflict.

Community decision-making and efforts

Similarly discovered by Botchwey et al. (2024), many within this sample expressed that though there are wonderful and essential community efforts taking place throughout the Near East Side, there are still major barriers within and beyond such spaces that inhibit their ability to meet their needs, and thus, certify that their voices will be heard in the decision-making process. As demonstrated, key informants, such as Gwendolyn, Chloe Lorde, Tobias, and Nora are more involved in these conversations and efforts connected to decisions being made in the Near East. Others in the community, like Destiny, Sojo, Bobby, and Greg, are aware of what is going on and either are waiting to be more actively engaged in once active community-driven efforts; protest to demand their voices be heard; choose to keep to themselves; or simply choose not to get involved due to racial and economic tensions that drive them away from such practices. This all was anticipated by Burdge (2015) and Molotoch (1976), as it was noted that when individuals are positioned as a leader in the community, they have a higher likelihood of being more directly involved with decision-making processes.

City decision-making and Efforts

Despite the key community members being more engaged in the city's decision-making processes than others, there are still tensions around land use and availability inhibiting the community's immediate needs from being addressed. This ranged from

getting a stop sign to receiving transparency on abandoned buildings within the area. Gentrification is a major issue that influences all of this, as participants understand that there needs getting met or taken seriously depends on white folks moving into the area. Even with white folks moving into their neighborhoods, most participants also understand that resources suddenly popping up has more to do with the city's future plans likely not including Black folks. With gentrification not entirely being perceived as a "bad thing" participants understand that community revitalization needs to be done with protections and transparency so that legacy residents are able to maintain their community's social dynamics (Burdge et al, 2015) and experience healthy communities (Botchwey et al., 2024).

Study Limitations

While qualitative research can offer profound insights into personal experiences and community dynamics, the study of 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black residents of the Near East Side in Columbus, Ohio, is not without its limitations. The richness of the data gathered from these interviews provides a deep dive into individual narratives, yet this very depth also reveals inherent constraints.

First, the sample size of 14 participants, though valuable for its detailed accounts, may not encompass the full diversity of voices within the Near East Side community. Each interviewee brings their own unique perspective, shaped by various factors such as socio-economic status, educational background, and length of residency. This small sample size, while allowing for detailed exploration, may only reflect a subset of

experiences rather than capturing the broader spectrum of views across the entire community. As a result, the findings may be skewed, inadvertently emphasizing certain perspectives over others.

Moreover, the subjective nature of qualitative research introduces the potential for researcher bias. From crafting interview questions to analyzing responses, the researchers' own biases and assumptions can influence the data collection and interpretation processes. For instance, if the questions are framed in a way that leads respondents toward certain answers, or if the researchers interpret responses through their own lenses, the findings may not fully represent the participants' genuine views. To mitigate these risks, researchers must remain vigilant, employing strategies such as triangulation and member checking to enhance the study's credibility and ensure a more objective interpretation of the data.

The context-specific nature of the Near East Side further limits the generalizability of the study's findings. The community's unique historical, social, and economic background creates a particular setting for the residents' experiences. While these details enrich the study, they also mean that the insights gained might not be easily transferable to other neighborhoods or communities with different characteristics. The nuances of the Near East Side's context are specific and may not reflect the experiences of similar communities elsewhere, highlighting the need for further research in diverse settings to explore whether similar themes emerge.

Additionally, the temporal and historical factors influencing the community's experiences during the interview period are crucial to consider. Changes in local policies,

economic conditions, and social dynamics over time could impact residents' perceptions and experiences, making it important to understand how these evolving factors shape the study's results. A longitudinal approach might offer deeper insights into how such factors develop and affect the community over time.

Finally, the challenge of maintaining methodological transparency cannot be overstated. Ensuring that the study's procedures and analytical processes are well-documented and transparent is essential for addressing concerns about validity and reliability. Researchers must provide a clear account of how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to allow for peer review and replication.

In essence, while the qualitative approach provides invaluable, context-rich insights, it is crucial to acknowledge and navigate its limitations. The constraints related to sample size, subjectivity, context specificity, and methodological rigor highlight the complexity of qualitative research. Recognizing these limitations not only reinforces the credibility of the study but also paves the way for future research that can build upon these insights and address these challenges more comprehensively.

Theoretical Contributions and Recommendations for Future Research

Just Sustainability Paradigm

In examining the data relative to the principles of just sustainability reveals that social justice topics should be given the same care as environmental ones in the field of sustainability. Participant narratives clearly touch on all principles of this paradigm, as participants discussed issues regarding them and their community's quality of life; meeting the needs of present and future generations; justice and equity; and living within

ecosystem limits (Agyeman, 2005). Such principles also align with social sustainability components in described in Table 1. Aligning the data with the Just Sustainability Paradigm highlights participants' desire to balance ecological health with social justice.

Critical Race Theory

Applying CRT to the data highlights how racial disparities are deeply embedded in The City of Columbus' decision-making practices. Through participants' lived experiences and insights, it is evident that addressing community needs and acting on their understanding of sustainability requires a focus on race and its intersection with class, gender, and other factors collectively shaping individuals' experiences. Inequities tied to one's identity is therefore shaped by power dynamics and systemic discrimination. Referring to Table 4, most participant narratives spoke to many of the widely accepted CRT principles. This includes centralizing race and racism; intersectionality of race and racism within other forms of subordination; challenging the dominant ideology; the myth of meritocracy; a commitment to social justice; and centralizing experiential and transdisciplinary knowledge (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019). The data reveals that when examined through a racial lens, sustainability as a concept and practice must confront structural inequalities so that the needs of marginalized communities can be met. Incorporating CRT and intersectionality in our sustainability efforts can ensure that concerns for the planet's health are met while confronting and rectifying varying modes of social injustice.

Emerging Theories

At the opening of chapter one, the definition of the term, "wicked problem" was provided. Education, poverty, healthcare, employment, housing and houselessness, climate change, systemic racism, and so forth, are traditionally considered wicked problems because they are often associated with strong moral, political, and professional issues that are all stakeholder dependent (Ritchey, 2013). Many of these issues were discussed by participants throughout their interviews. Given this study argues with a transformative approach to sustainable development, it is important to put forward solutions that address wicked problems' obscurities so that academics and practitioners can progress towards equitably transforming our world. At the end of the day, as a graduate student, I do not have the power alone to change our sustainable development approach from status quo or reformist lenses to transformative ones, for we are all in this together.

With that, I developed The Cell of Human Social Problems Paradigm (see Appendix F.) to shed light on the fact that sustainability is a special type of wicked problem. By that, I mean we as researchers and practitioners must recognize that sustainability is a utilitarian principle meant to meet the needs of current and future generations. Jikai (2024) noted that utilitarianism (commonly known as beneficence):

> …advocates for the pursuit of maximum happiness and became a formal philosophical theory in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, mainly represented by the British philosophers Bianchin and Mill, whose basic principles are that an action is right if it contributes to the enhancement of happiness, and wrong if it

> leads to the production of something contrary to that happiness, and that happiness involves not only the person involved in the action, but also everyone affected by that action. (p. 2)

With this paradigm, I argue that sustainability operates as a "nucleus" amongst all the other wicked problems because it is an ongoing tool, not a target, meant to help address injustices within other wicked problems so they can eventually be freed from The Cell of Human Social Problems. Until these other issues are removed from the cell, sustainability will not be able to be removed from it. In doing so, academics and practitioners must acknowledge that white supremacy, capitalism (or meritocratic systems), colonialism, and the patriarchy are the root cause of such conflicts and moving past the arbitrary nature of wicked problems (to liberate ourselves from maintaining said systems) is paramount for making transformative change. Furthermore, we do not have the time to be incrementalist in how these issues are addressed, so we must include liberation in our understanding of sustainability. After all, Tankwanchi (2018, p.5) noted, "liberation is the connective tissue and transformative dynamic linking oppression and wellbeing."

Here, I too present a new concept, "liberated sustainability," which is defined as sustainability that recognizes the need for transformative change, and therefore, strives to be free from oppressive systems (upholding white supremacist, capitalistic or meritocratic, colonialist, and patriarchal ideologies) so that everyone – no matter the race, ethnicity, nationality, age, generation, ability, gender, sexual orientation, creed, income

status, citizenship status, education, and physical features – can not only meet their needs, but also live fulfilling lives.

Furthermore, given liberation from such oppressive systems is not an easy task, I also developed the Equitable and Inclusive Sustainability Knowledge and Practice Paradigm (see Figure 2) as a first step to act towards freeing ourselves from the delusion of white supremacy. In examining sustainability conflicts and perspectives, this framework recenters community needs, amplifying marginalized voices by providing them the opportunity to contribute to discourse around what constitutes sustainability knowledge and practice. The first cycle (a.) shows where we currently are with including community members, particularly marginalized groups, in what constitutes sustainability knowledge and practice. Academics and practitioners are the major beneficiaries of sustainability while the community is not (though they are acknowledged and engaged with). The second cycle (b.) highlights that when the perspectives of those in communities with the least advantages are placed at the forefront of sustainability pedagogy, knowledge, practice, and plans. As the findings illustrate, participant's perspectives on sustainability vary, but still connects back to the health of the planet and justice for their communities, so it is paramount that racialized, gendered, socioeconomic, and cultural understandings of sustainability, continue to be explored going forward. Once the voices of marginalized communities show up in what constitutes sustainability knowledge and practice, they too will undoubtedly be beneficiaries alongside academics and practitioners. Purvis et al. (2017) discovered that indicators of poverty,

unemployment, and inequality provide a more accurate depiction on the state of ‘development’ or ‘progress’ being made today.

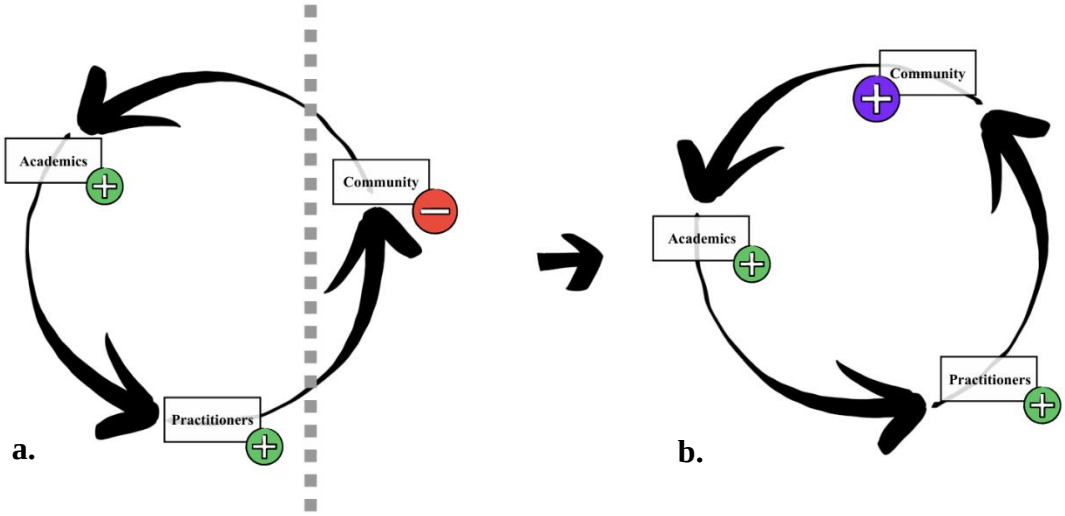

Figure 2. Equitable and Inclusive Sustainability Knowledge and Practice (EISKP) Paradigm.

Future Recommendations

To advance the study of sustainability and its intersection with marginalized communities, several key recommendations emerge from the current research. First, it is crucial to further clarify and define what constitutes “future generations” within the context of sustainability. This involves specifying who these generations are and how their needs and aspirations might differ based on current and historical inequalities. By refining this definition, researchers and policymakers can better tailor sustainability initiatives to address both present and future inequities.

Second, there is a pressing need to develop more culturally competent language that connects marginalized communities to sustainability in a way that acknowledges their unique positions without positioning them merely as beneficiaries. Instead, the focus

should be on how sustainability efforts can be framed to resonate with these communities' values and experiences, thereby fostering a more inclusive approach that recognizes their integral role in shaping sustainable futures. This perspective shifts the narrative from a view of benefit to a recognition of mutual contributions and shared responsibility.

Additionally, exploring and integrating forward-thinking and race/system-conscious theories in conjunction with sustainability offers a promising avenue for future research. Theories such as Afrofuturism, Degrowth, Afro-Pessimism, Eco-Critical Race Theory, and Wallerstein's World Systems Theory provide critical frameworks for understanding sustainability through lenses that incorporate race, historical systems of power, and global inequalities. By incorporating these perspectives, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of how sustainability practices can address systemic issues and create more equitable outcomes. For instance, Afrofuturism's emphasis on imagining and creating futures that transcend current limitations can inspire innovative sustainability solutions that are both culturally relevant and transformative.

Incorporating these diverse theories into sustainability research can enrich the dialogue and drive more holistic and inclusive approaches. As Ostrom (2009) highlights, understanding and managing complex socio-ecological systems require a multidimensional perspective that considers various theoretical frameworks. Embracing this diversity of thought will help ensure that sustainability initiatives are not only effective but also equitable, addressing the needs of all communities while striving toward a just and sustainable future for all.

Chapter 6. Conclusions

In summary, this case study explored the Near East Side's Black residential perceptions of the city's decision-making practices, whether those practices incorporate their lived experiences, how sustainability is conceptualized, and therefore, possibly connected to their lives. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, key findings from 14 participants living in shared ZCTAs and different subcommunities within or adjacent to the Near East Side illustrated the challenges and complexities of living while Black (amongst other intersections) in the Near East Side. With that, three main themes were identified: 1) divergence in sustainability perceptions; 2) imbalances in the community versus the city's decision-making processes; and 3) the lack of support from the city and within the community (given conflict between different racial and socioeconomic groups). The findings indicate that the Near East Side's Black residential population perceives major shortcomings in city decision-making practices, as many do not feel that their voices are taken seriously in such processes. Moreover, most participants understand that an improved quality of life for Black folks in their community, and those alike, is contingent on systemic change. Due to such perceptions, it is clear that the city's decisions do not (heavily) incorporate their lived experiences. Regarding sustainability, most participants consider it a "reductive practice" meant to protect the planet, reminding us (humans) to be intentional with everything we do, whether it be the things we consume, dispose of, or the spaces we show up in. Given their

lived experiences, many noted that sustainability is important to their lives because they believe it serves as a tool for building resilience, longevity, resourcefulness, and stability within their communities. Aside from the outliers, a majority of the participants believe that at the end of the day, sustainability has them and their needs in mind. As sustainability researchers and practitioners, we must ask ourselves how sustainability meets the needs of marginalized groups beyond theoretical implications. Again, Fatti et al. (2021) stated that the biggest challenge to sustainability is identifying which communities have the least advantages. Taking this a step further, this study illustrates that the biggest challenge to sustainability is acting to address the challenges of communities who have the least advantages.

With that, developing sustainably within and beyond the United States, especially in densely populated and heavily developed areas, requires that we transform how we conceptualize and practice sustainability, utilizing racialized and intersectional lenses. In doing so, issues in defining sustainability must be addressed. For example, who or what constitutes "future generations?" We live in a multigenerational society and people are born every day. Meeting the needs of future generations is not far-fetched, given future generations (expected to shape the world in due time) are also here now. Furthermore, meeting the needs of upcoming and unborn generations too demands that we cater to the needs of earlier ones. As this study demonstrates, folks within each generation are not getting their needs met. As discussed earlier, previous literature suggests that how sustainable a society depends on how people with the least advantages are treated. In other words, until the needs of marginalized populations are addressed, we must

acknowledge that realistically, being “sustainable” under a capitalistic system is another unsolved oxymoron.

Overall, making the world more sustainable means centering disadvantaged communities’ understanding of what constitutes sustainability knowledge and practice in such conversations. Until we recognize that white supremacy is the root of all wicked problems (while working to dismantle it), any attempt to solve wicked problems – such as climate change, ecosystem depletion, disparities in education, housing, healthcare systems, and so forth – will show to be a temporary solution. At the end of the day, there needs to be more culturally competent language to connect disadvantaged groups back to sustainability – not for their benefit, but for the benefit of sustainability.

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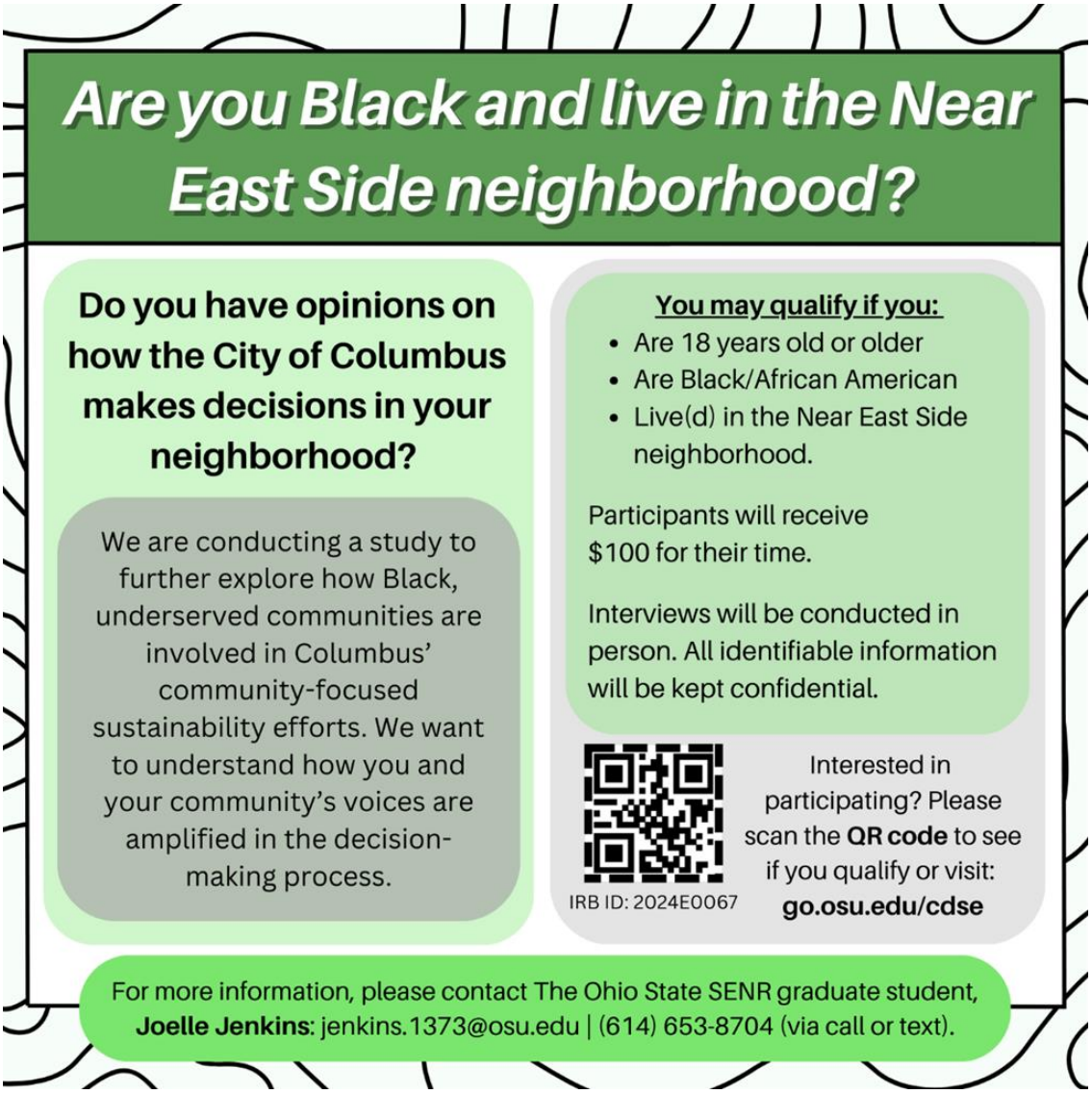
Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Flyer



Appendix B. Participant Recruitment Pre-Screening Qualtrics Survey

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Start of Block: Pre-Screening Survey: Community Development Sustainability Efforts

Thank you for your interest in this research study. This survey will gather demographic information from individuals interested in participating in this project and will assist in finding the target populations needed for this research.

[Purpose]: We are conducting this study to further explore how Black, underserved communities are involved in Columbus' community-focused sustainability efforts. We

want to understand how you and your community's voices are amplified in the decision-making process.

For further questions and concerns, please reach Joelle Jenkins at jenkins.1373@osu.edu or (614) 653-8704.

– –

Question 1. What is your gender?

◯ Man

◯ Woman

◯ Gender Non-Conforming

◯ Non-Binary

◯ Transgender

◯ Prefer not to say

◯ Other

– –

Question 2. What is your age?

____

_ _

Question 3. Do you identify as Black or African American?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I am not sure

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you identify as Black or African American? = No

_ _

Question 4. How many people make up your household?

____

_ _

Question 5. The median household income in Columbus, OH makes about $58,575. How does your household income compared to that?

○ Significantly lower

○ Slightly lower

○ About that amount

○ Slightly higher

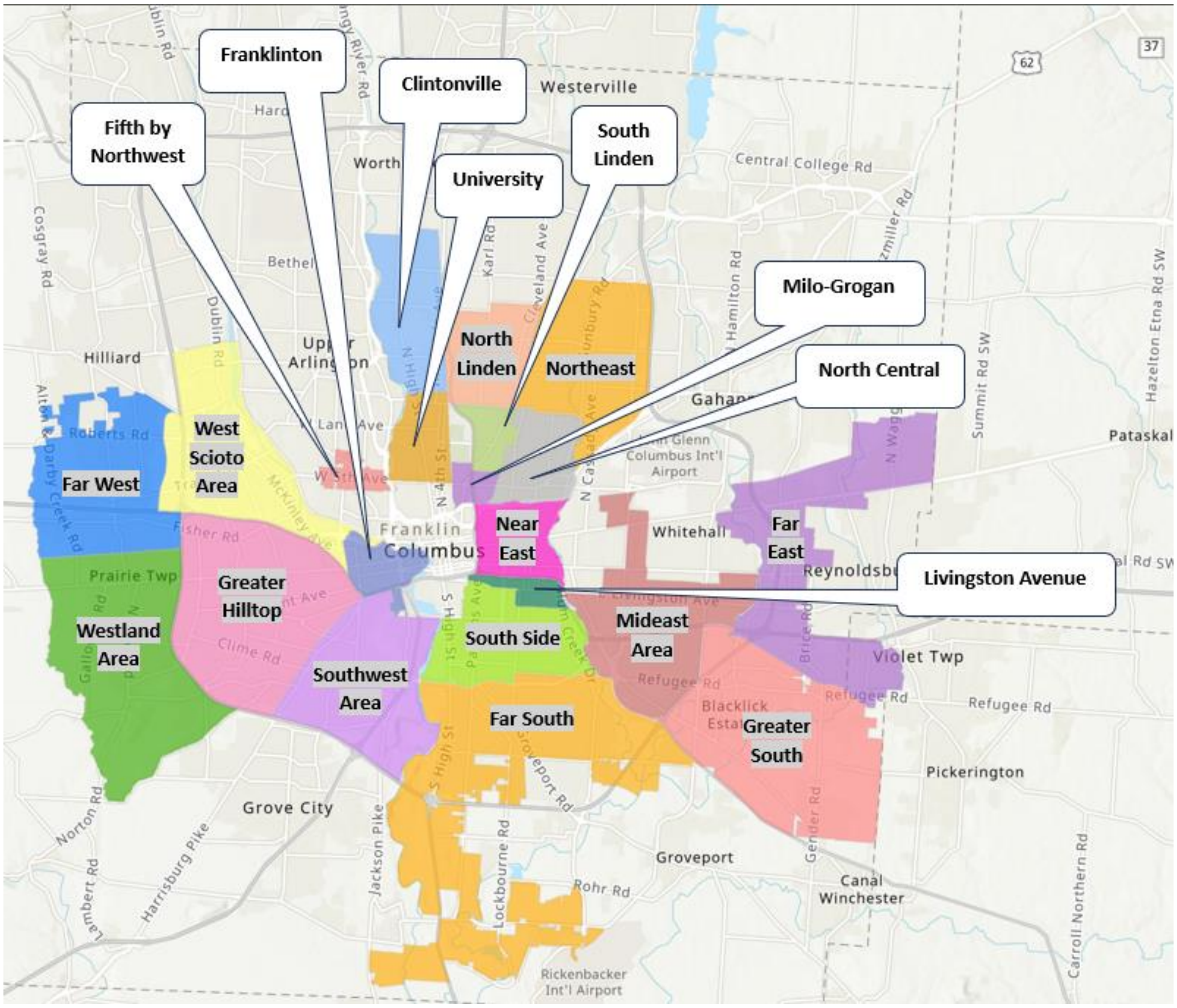
○ Significantly higher

_ _

Page Break ---

Q14. The City of Columbus has designated 21 area commissions, commonly thought of as neighborhoods. Please select your neighborhood from the list below (see image reference below).

_ _



_ _

Question 6. Please select the neighborhood you live in (see the map above):

◯ Clintonville

◯ Far East

◯ Far South

◯ Far West Side

◯ Fifth by Northwest

◯ Franklinton

◯ Greater Hilltop

◯ Greater South East

◯ Livingston Avenue

◯ Mid-East

◯ Milo-Grogan

◯ Near East

◯ North Central

◯ North Linden

◯ Northeast

◯ South Linden

○ South Side

○ Southwest

○ University

○ West Scioto

○ Westland

○ My neighborhood is not listed

○ I do not know

Display This Question:

If Please select the neighborhood you live in (see the map above): = Near East

– –

Page Break ---

Q15. What is your zip code?

____

– –

Page Break ---

Q13 Thank you for your participation in the pre-qualifying survey for this study. Based on the responses you provided, you are a great fit for this research project! Please fill out

your name and add an email address and/or phone number that is best to reach you, and we will get back to you soon.

_____

End of Block: Pre-Screening Survey: Community Development Sustainability Efforts

Appendix C. The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Consent to Participate in Research

The Ohio State University

Study Title: How did we get here? Sustainability, Racism, and the Road Towards Liberation: Conceptualizing Near East Sides' Black Residential Perceptions of Sustainability in Columbus, OH

Researcher: Dr. Jeffrey Jacquet (principal investigator), Dr. Eric L. Toman (principal investigator), and Joelle K. Jenkins (graduate researcher)

Sponsor(s): The Sustainability Institute and the Black Graduate, Black Professional Student Caucus (BGPSC), and People's Climate Innovation Center

Email: Jenkins.1373@osu.edu

Respondent's Printed Name:

_____

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

This study aims to explore how Black, underserved communities are involved in the city's community-focused sustainability efforts. We want to understand how you and your community's voices are amplified in the decision-making process. Additionally, we want to generate a mutually beneficial relationship between sustainability practitioners

and Black, underserved residents in Columbus, OH, by exploring their perceptions regarding sustainable development.

Procedures/Tasks:

You will be asked a series of questions about your experience living in your neighborhood. Then, we will conduct an in-depth interview where you will be asked about your experiences with those in and out of your community. If you choose to participate, you can skip any questions at any time.

Interviews will take place at the selected community location, in which it will be audio recorded using a digital recorder. In the event of publication, your name and other identifiable factors will remain anonymous.

The audio recording will be used only to create a written transcript of the interview, after which the audio recording will be destroyed and only the written transcript will be used for further analysis. Your name or any other identifying information about you will not be listed on this transcript. If you disclose information that could personally identify you or any other person, we will remove this information and replace it with equivalent information that does not identify anyone.

Duration:

The duration of this interview will be 60 to 120 minutes. You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits:

The risks for this study are minimal. There are no financial or legal costs from participating in this study. You may face risk of discomfort due to talking about personal experiences. Some questions and subsequent discussion may make you feel uncomfortable during or after the interview. If this occurs, we will provide you with helpful resources.

There are several benefits to this study. You will help us (researchers), and practitioners, identify ways in which underserved communities can benefit and contribute to the body of knowledge for the field of sustainability. More specifically, your answers will provide a unique perspective regarding, decision making, community dynamics, and empowerment.

Confidentiality:

We will make every effort to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Your personal information and responses to questions will be seen by the principal investigator and graduate student researcher.

- Your personal information will be kept on a secure computer in a locked office on The Ohio State University's campus. Your responses will be kept in this location until data collection is complete.
- If any of your information is shared with anyone outside of the study, your name and other identifiable factors will be removed.
- Your personal information will not be shared in any publications or presentations.
- Confidentiality can only be broken if you report immediate harm to yourself or others.

Additionally, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies.
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices (a committee that reviews and approves research studies);
- Authorized Ohio State University staff not involved in the study may be aware that you are participating in a research study and have access to your information.

Future Research:

Your de-identified information will not be used or shared for future research.

Incentives:

You will receive a $100 Visa digital gift card for your participation to be emailed afterward. By law, payments to participants are considered taxable income. Employees of The Ohio State University are not eligible to receive research incentives.

Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

This study has been determined Exempt from IRB review.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Joelle Jenkins at the email address listed at the top of this letter.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251 or hsconcerns@osu.edu.

Signature of Person Giving Informed Consent

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form**.**

Printed name of participant	**Signature of participant**	
		AM/PM
	Date and time	
Printed name of person authorized to consent for participant (when applicable)	**Signature of person authorized to consent for participant (when applicable)**	
		AM/PM
Relationship to the participant	**Date and time**	

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her/their representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent	**Signature of person obtaining consent**
	AM/PM
	Date and time

Appendix D. The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

How did we get here? Sustainability, Racism, and the Road Towards Liberation: Conceptualizing Near East Sides' Black Residential Perceptions of Sustainability in Columbus, OH.

Date: TIME:

Participant #ID:

Participant stakeholder group:

Interviewer/notetaker:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. The goal of this project is to develop a better understanding of perceptions around development in Columbus with a particular focus on sustainability.

I would like to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers; we are simply interested in your thoughts and ideas. During this conversation we will cover a range of topics, including your perspective on community needs, resources tied to the physical landscape of your community, and strategies to inform external organizations on how to better support your community so that desired future social, economic, environmental, and justice conditions are met.

If you agree to participate further, please indicate that you understand the purpose of this research and that you are a willing participant by answering "yes(__)." With your permission we would like to audio record our conversation to accompany notes that we take during the interview. We will only use this recording to create a written transcript of the conversation. After the transcription is complete, the audio recording will be destroyed. If this is okay, please say "yes (__)." We have here a written description of the project and our contact information, should you want to follow up with us after the interview. It also has the contact information for our university human subjects review board should you have questions or concerns about the research process, and you would rather not speak to anyone on the research team.

Finally, I would like to remind you that we will make every effort to ensure your confidentiality in all aspects of your participation in this project. Your name or any identifying information will not be linked to your responses. if you share any information that could identify you or others, we will replace this information with generic equivalent information that does not identify individuals. You can skip any question for any reason, or choose to stop participating in the interview at any time, for any reason, and stopping your participation will not disqualify you

from receiving the participation incentive or harm your relationship with The Ohio State University in any way.

*[**GO OVER THE CONSENT FORM WITH THE PARTICIPANT HERE**]*

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part 1: Understanding Demographics

Before we get started, I'd like to talk about your story and experiences navigating life in Columbus, OH.

Questions	Notes

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself, what year were you born, and where you grew up?
  o (If not from Columbus) What led you to Columbus?
- Do you have previous history/connection to Columbus, OH?
- Can you tell me about [insert current Ohio neighborhood] and how long you have lived there?
  o What brought you to this particular neighborhood [Near East/ Milo-Grogan]?
- What do you do for work?
- What are your hobbies?	

Part 2: Community & Goal Setting

Now that I know more of your story, I'd like to talk about you and your community's organizing efforts and needs.

Questions	Notes
- How are decisions made in your community? (broad) - How are voices brought into that decision-making process? - How are you engaged in these processes? - Would you say your community is thriving? (X) o Probing question(s) if no:	

▪ Can you tell me more about the issues keeping your community from thriving? ▪ What is being done to address these issues? o Probing question if **yes**: ▪ What are the main factors that make your community thrive? - To narrow down priorities of the community [refer to notes & repeat back to them], what do you think is the most important thing to ensure current and future generations' needs within your community are met? - Are / were there other (current or previous) community-driven efforts taking place in your community? o (***Probing Questions*** - If yes) ▪ Please describe who is implementing them and what they are doing. ▪ How successful would you say they've been? ▪ Have these efforts included a community voice in identifying the challenges or ways forward? - If you were an outside organization looking to work with your community, what would be the most effective way to approach and organize within your community?	

Part 3: Community Characteristics & Justice

Thank you for sharing about your community's dynamics and the issues you and others face in your community. Now, I would like to discuss the characteristics of your community.

Questions	**Notes**
- So, tell me about the different resources you have access to in [insert Ohio neighborhood] (resources being grocery stores, job opportunities, outdoor recreation, medical and social services, etc.) o Do these resources meet your needs as a community member? (Probe: why is that)? o Is there anything that you think would be really beneficial for your community? (Probe: why is that)? - How do you think that the community has changed over the past five to ten years? - Are there new people moving in the community? - What types of people?	

- Are the new people moving into the community making life better or worse?
- Do you think that new people moving in have negatively affected the housing and job markets in the area? (***Probe***: Please describe why)
- Are you a renter or a homeowner?
  o (***Probing Questions – If a renter*****)**
  ▪ Would you say homeownership is a goal for you at some point in your life? ***(Probe)*** Please describe why.
  ▪ Do you think there are factors that make it hard to become a homeowner? ***(Probe)*** Please describe why.
  o (***Probing Questions – If a homeowner*****)**
  ▪ How long have you owned your home?
  ▪ What value do you think there is in owning a home? ***(Probe)*** Please describe why.	

- ***<u>Part 4: Sustainability Relevance</u>***

Thank you. For the next set of questions, we will discuss a topic that has been discussed quite a bit lately and I want to better understand its relevance to you and your community. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers and that we are more interested in what your thoughts and experiences are on this.

Questions	**Notes**

- In this section, we would like to focus on the topic of sustainability. Can you share what comes to mind when you hear this term?
- So, based on what comes to mind when hearing "sustainability" how would you define it? Remember there is no right or wrong answer.
  o Does the concept of sustainability have any relevance to your life? (***Probing Question*** - If yes) could you describe more as to how that is?
  o (***Probing Question*** - If no) could you describe why it hasn't had any relevance to your life?
- Where do you mostly hear this term used? In what contexts/conversations/places?
- Who do you think is responsible for achieving sustainable outcomes? (***Probing Question***, if necessary: please expand on this)?
- Do you think there is a moral obligation for people or society to be sustainable?
- Who do you think benefits from sustainability?
  o (***Probing Question)*** Do you think this [their response] connects to any of the concerns you	

mentioned earlier? ***(Probe)*** Please describe why. (**X**) - Do you think sustainability efforts can cause harm? (**X**)	

Part 5: Sustainable Columbus

Continuing to think about sustainability, we are going to shift to a Columbus organization to better understand your experiences, if any, with them.

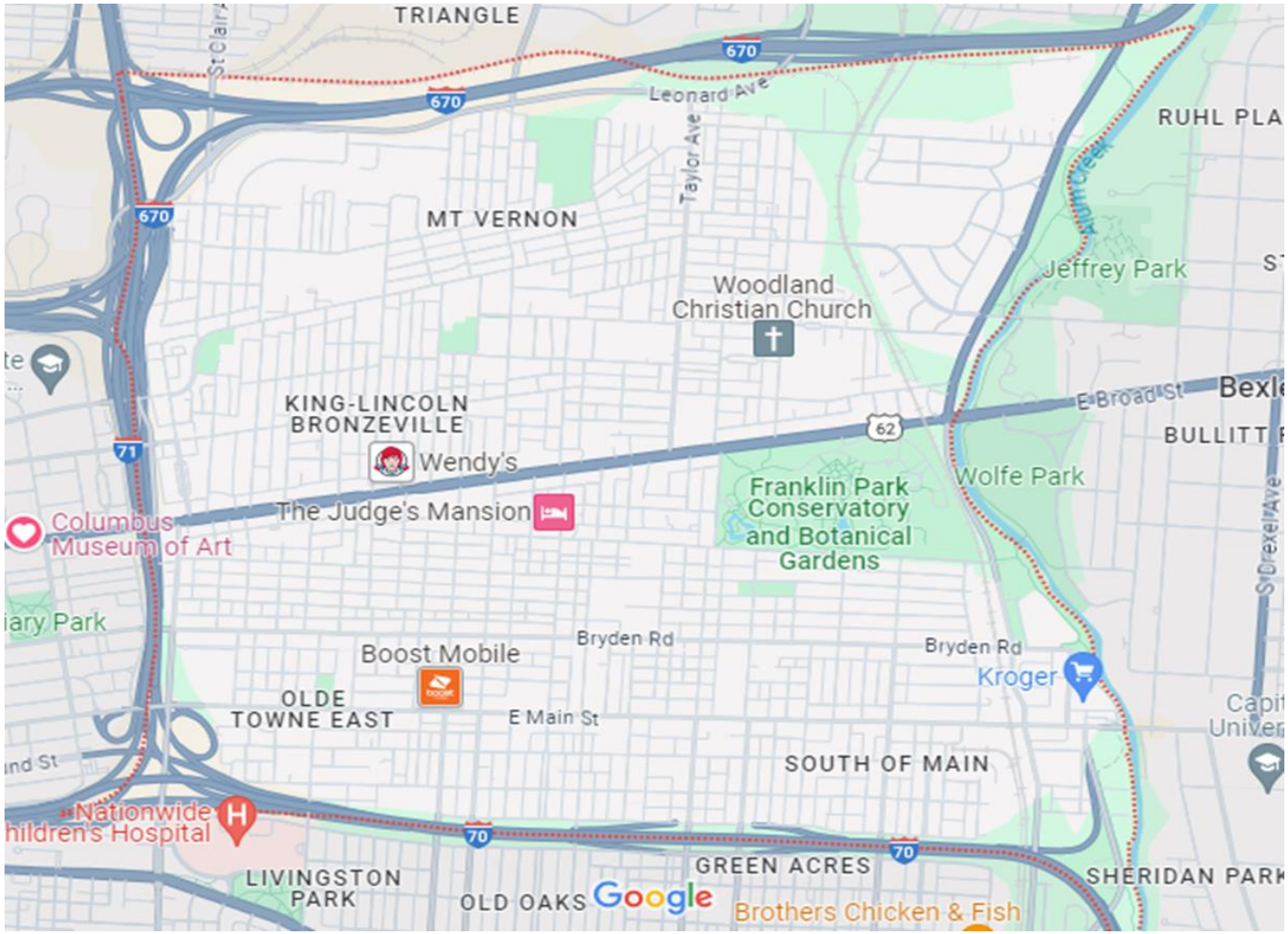
Questions	**Notes**
- Can you tell me about a recent decision that the city has made regarding your neighborhood (example if needed: trash collection or emergency services)? o (***Probe*** regarding trash collection or emergency service effectiveness: Do you feel like [trash collection or emergency services] are effective or beneficial compared to that of other neighborhoods? - How does the city typically engage your community in decision-making? - Do you feel like the city treats your neighborhood differently than other neighborhoods? (**X**) o ***Probe***: (Regardless of yes or no), how and why? - Is leadership reflective of what the neighborhood looks like? Have you heard of Sustainable Columbus before? Yes_____ No_____ a. (***Probing Question*** - If yes) what do you know about them? a. Have you ever been involved in any of their community engagement efforts such as Green Spot, Keep Columbus Beautiful, Climate Action Plan, Equitable Electric Vehicle Adoption, or the Urban Heat Island Project? b. Outside of this, how have they engaged with your community? c. If Yes- can you tell me more about your experiences? 1. Did you feel like they understood your community? Did they have your community's best interests in mind? 2. Additional questions b. (***Probing Question*** - If not): a. Do any community engagement efforts such as Green Spot, Keep Columbus Beautiful, or the Urban Heat Island Project do not ring a bell?	

b. Would you like more information on Sustainable Columbus and their community engagement programs?	

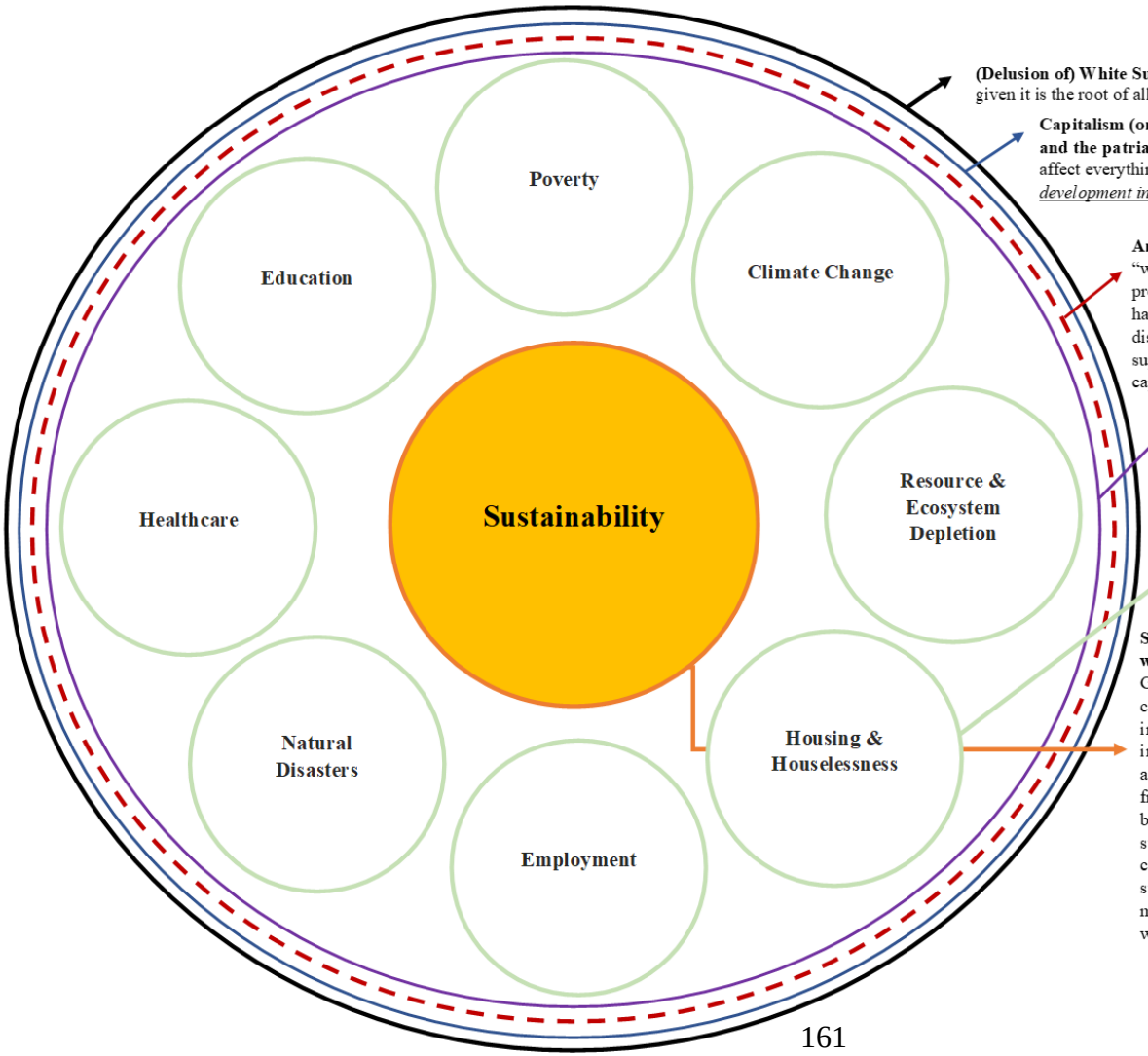
That is all that we have prepared for today. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't covered, or do you have any questions?

Thank you so much for your time!

Appendix E. Near East Side Interview Map


TRIANGLE
670
Leonard Ave
Taylor Ave
RUHL PLA
MT VERNON
Woodland
Christian Church
Jeffrey Park
Alum Creek
KING-LINCOLN
BRONZEVILLE
71
62
E Broad St
Wendy's
The Judge's Mansion
Columbus
Museum of Art
Franklin Park
Conservatory
and Botanical
Gardens
Wolfe Park
Bryden Rd
Boost Mobile
Kroger
OLDE
TOWNE EAST
E Main St
SOUTH OF MAIN
Nationwide
Children's Hospital
70
LIVINGSTON
PARK
OLD OAKS
GREEN ACRES
SHERIDAN PARK
Google
Brothers Chicken & Fish

Appendix F. The Cell of Human Social Problems



(Delusion of) White Supremacy (the ***ultimate* problem** given it is the root of all wicked problems)

Capitalism (or meritocratic systems), colonialism, and the patriarchy (the ***greatest* wicked problems** that affect everything *due to ongoing economic growth and development in tandem with the oppression of others*

Arbitrary boundary representing the "wicked nature" of wicked problems that prevents us from moving beyond their hardships and, therefore, discuss and act on dismantling the ultimate problem, white supremacy, and greatest wicked problem, capitalism.

Systemic racism/injustices (the second largest wicked problem).

***Common* wicked problems** all affected by systemic injustices, capitalism, and (ultimately) white supremacy. These are also all connected to each other in one way or another.

Sustainability (the *special* common wicked problem) as a tool, *not* a target. Given all the wicked problems are connected, there is no way we can be incrementalist (except with sustainability) in how we approach them. Until these are addressed, sustainability cannot be detached from being a wicked problem, as it should be a tool to assuage these issues. Overall, sustainability is meant to be a utilitarianistic concept, and rather than striving to *be* more sustainable or choosing *what* to sustain, we must ask *how* it can be used to make the world a safer and more equitable place.