

## Comparative Analysis of Casino Road Research

### Executive Summary

Several independent reports have sought to identify and examine both needs and strengths of the Casino Road community. These sources range from Census and school district data to in-depth interviews with community residents. Overlaps between these documents were identified to help draw attention to those areas most often referenced and discussed. The data extracted from these sources were then condensed into overarching themes, and 4 topics emerged as the most commonly discussed:

- (1) **Shared space.** This topic broadly encapsulates community discussion around areas such as pools, parks, and a community (resource) center.
- (2) **Sense of community.** Several of the research reports discussed issues of both (dis)connection and collaboration within the Casino Road community, often drawing connections to issues such as lack of a community hub and the need for different/expanded services.
- (3) **Community services/resources.** Services (including programs) and resources available to and within the Casino Road community were consistently referenced, most often focusing on adult education, assistance for English Language Learners (ELL), and activities for children and youth.
- (4) **Safety/security.** Findings related to safety/security included crime, home violence, and community walkability/traffic safety.

These four topics encapsulate a substantial portion of themes identified throughout the data. Although additional research could provide further insight into these topics, the consistent identification of these issues in existing research (which spans nearly 10 years) suggests that other major themes are unlikely to emerge assuming the community does not experience radical changes.

**Recommendation:** Considering each of the sources, the area most in need of attention is related to shared/community space, for two reasons:

- (1) The need for community space was the top response in the National Night Out survey in response to two key questions: “What do you wish this community offered that it does not?” and “If you had a million dollars to invest in this community, what would you spend it on?” Space was also prominent in the Casino Road Conversations, where one-quarter of the biggest gaps identified directly reference need for community or program space. Finally, the Volunteers of America Western Washington South

Everett Community Resource Center Planning devoted its entire RFP to offering justification for and exploring the needs of a community center, suggesting ample time has already been devoted to understanding this issue.

- (2) The need for shared space is likely foundational to at least two of the other themes, specifically sense of community and services/resources. By addressing the need for greater community space (likely in the form of a center, but also potentially through areas like parks and community gardens), it is possible to see improvements in program capacity (as lack of space was mentioned as a challenge) and sense of community, as there will be an identified hub to access resources and connect with other community members.

This report will briefly introduce each of the data sources consulted, then present the identified themes as well as additional detail regarding their context as well as key takeaways (and, in some cases, areas for additional consideration) for each theme.

## **Research/Data Sources Surveyed**

### **Casino Road Area Overview (Overview)**

A series of one-pagers, these documents utilize data from both the U.S. Census and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to explore poverty and educational achievement in the Casino Road neighborhood. These documents were constructed in 2016.

### **Casino Road Conversations (CRCs)**

These were a series of conversations with residents of the area. Two local community groups participated – Hand in Hand Coffee Moms and YMCA Embajadoras; feedback from 27 individuals was included in analysis. These conversations were conducted in 2016.

### **Mukilteo Family YMCA: Casino Road/S. Everett Task Force (Task Force)**

This informal needs assessment consisted of interviews with 12 leaders in the Casino Road community, including representatives from the school district, community organizations, and local churches. Interviews were conducted between December 2009 and January 2010.

### **Mukilteo School District 2017 Parent Survey (Parent Survey)**

The Mukilteo School District conducts an annual survey to better understand what parents think of the schools. The Parent Survey was conducted online over a 36-day period that began on March 31, 2017, and ended on May 5, 2017. A total of 2,309 parents completed the 2017 Parent Survey, which represents about 20 percent of households in the school district.

### **National Night Out Survey (NNO)**

These surveys were collected during National Night Out event on Casino Road in August 2017. Surveys were collected at the library and at the Boys and Girls Club. Surveys asked three primary questions: (1) What does this neighborhood already offer that meets [your] needs? (2) What do you wish this neighborhood offered or had? (3) If you had \$1 million to help your neighbors/neighborhood, how would you spend it? 133 responses were provided for analysis.

### **Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction data (OSPI)**

This document compares enrollment, program and assessment information for three schools in the Mukilteo School District: Horizon Elementary, Explorer Middle School, and Mariner High School. These data cover the 2015/2016 school year.

### **Volunteers of America Western Washington South Everett Community Resource Center Planning (VOAWW)**

This Request for Proposals provided summary data of Casino Road attributes (e.g. median age, percent in poverty, density) and summarized data from listening sessions with local residents, including both youth (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> graders and high school students) and adults as well as a survey of local service providers. This RFP was completed in 2015.

## Common Themes

### (1) Shared Space

The need for shared community space was a prominent finding in the NNO surveys. While many participants identified parks as an existing strength of the community, the need for more (or better) parks, playgrounds, and pools was the top response for a neighborhood need. Furthermore, shared space (parks/playgrounds/pools) was one of the top 4 areas where community members would invest a million dollars. Coupled with responses related to a community center or community-based activities (including a community garden), the desire for shared space was the preference for investment (noted by 41% of respondents). There were some demographic differences in responses, but none were substantial: 45% of adults and 32% of youth expressed a desire to invest in shared space, as did 42% of all English speakers and 39% of all speakers of other languages.

Beyond emerging as a key finding within the NNO surveys, the desire for safe, shared space was also articulated in the CRCs. Lack of activities for youth (including space to hold them), lack of a place to gather, and lack of program space were three of the most referenced reasons why needs were not currently being met. VOAWW's report echoes this, writing that "effective endeavors are hampered by a lack of physical space to house and coordinate community and agency efforts, services and projects." Lack of space did not feature prominently in the Task Force report, although the nature of the questions may not have elicited feedback on this topic.

**Key Takeaway:** Need for a shared space was a consistent finding among reports. Based on how this topic was discussed by both providers and residents, this issue appears to be foundational to the other themes identified in this summary, including sense of community, activities for youth, and, in some cases, safety.

### (2) Sense of Community

In the NNO surveys, the most common response to the question "What does this neighborhood already offer" was some variation on the theme of community. Responses in this vein included characterizations of the people in the neighborhood as friendly, nice, and as "good neighbors". This echoes a finding from the CRCs that "residents pull together when something big happens" and a statement from VOAWW that "the South Everett area has great capacity for collaborative and effective community development to address the numerous needs and build on the strengths among its residents and community partners." This was evidence, in part, by a large number of NNO respondents (20%) saying they would invest their million dollars on those most in need.

However, the CRCs suggested that one of the community's biggest needs is a way to address disconnection from the community, a sentiment echoed in some parts of the Task Force report. Although this may seem at odds with the previous statements, it becomes understandable once we explore responses by demographic categories. For example, the bulk of respondents naming community (or some variant) as an existing strength in the NNO surveys were almost entirely English-speaking (or at least completed a survey in English): only 2 of 25 respondents noting community as a strength filled out a survey in either Spanish

or Russian.<sup>1</sup> Notes from the CRCs suggest that community disconnection is potentially a function of language barriers and immigration status (in addition to other factors), offering support for VOAWW's argument that Casino Road's Hispanic community is "linguistically isolated."

**Key Takeaway:** Community connection was discussed in some fashion throughout all most reports, but their findings are not consistent. This is possibly a function of demographic differences in respondents (service providers vs. recipients, English speakers vs. speakers of other languages, etc.). This topic is likely best explored as a function of other themes discussed here, including shared space and services/resources.

### (3) Services/Resources

Across all sources, there was discussion of difficulties connecting individuals and families with the services and resources they need. Beyond general comments about challenges with program capacity (including space for these programs) and resident knowledge of services, there were three specific service areas that emerged in most discussions: adult education, ELL classes, and youth activities.<sup>2</sup>

*Adult education.* Educational opportunities for adults was the top identified need (referenced by 62% of participants) in the CRCs. Identified education needs included assistance with English (discussed below in greater depth), parenting assistance, system navigation, and employment preparation (including GED courses). Many of these categories were echoed in other reports: VOAWW reported a strong desire from parents for parenting classes, counseling, and job assistance; the task force Although jobs (including opportunities and training) were mentioned by NNO survey respondents when asked about community needs, it was not a common theme (only 10 respondents across both questions).

*ELL classes.* As mentioned earlier, VOAWW reported that "linguistic isolation" was a substantial challenge for the Casino Road community, a comment echoed (in some fashion) in other sources. For example, Task Force members drew connections between language barriers and lack of knowledge of available services/resources and residents in the CRCs suggested that language barriers could be a source of community disconnection/isolation.

*Youth activities.* This desire for more youth activities (both in scope and duration) was a consistent theme across sources. The Task Force report identified several challenges Casino Road youth are facing, identifying the lack of a safe place to go outside of school hours as a top concern. Additionally, in this report, the YMCA was advised to "provide safe, structured activities" for youth as the number one way to respond to community

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, both surveys were completed in Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the need for a comprehensive medical clinic was strongly articulated by NNO respondents: medical or dental clinics were mentioned 10 times as an existing community need and multiple times regarding the million-dollar question. The need for health care was also mentioned in VOAWW's "Service and Program Ideas" section, but this was not ultimately included in the community center vision. Health was also not discussed in the CRCs and only briefly touched upon the Task Force report, which is why it is not identified as a major service sub-theme here.

needs. Finally, NNO respondents named kids as one of the top areas of investment overall, named by 28% of English respondents and 40% of non-English respondents.

Despite findings across sources that suggest service/resource challenges, it is important to note that when asked how well the community currently met their needs, NNO respondents assigned a score of 3.9 out of 5. Overall, youth rated this category higher than adults, with an average score of 4.2 compared with 3.8. Spanish speaking participants were within a close range – youth rated it 4.1 and adults 3.9. The English range was larger: adults rated the community as 3.7 while youth rated it a 4.2.<sup>3</sup> Youth rated this category higher than adults across all categories, suggesting youth feel the community meets family needs better than adults do.<sup>4</sup>

**Key Takeaway:** Casino Road already offers a substantial number of services and programs to the community, but three areas – adult education, ELL classes, and youth activities – were consistently identified for further attention.

#### **(4) Safety/Security**

Concerns about safety and neighborhood security were prominent in the NNO survey results. Security issues were almost exclusively mentioned by adults: 27 of 31 respondents (87%) who cited safety/security as a concern were adults. There was no substantial difference in rate between English and non-English speakers. Task Force findings also identified gangs, crime, and home violence as substantial issues facing the community. Finally, safety was referenced in the VOAWW report by both students and parents when discussing the principles and philosophy of the community resource center. According to that report, incidents for robbery and burglary in 2012 were substantially higher in South County (of which Casino Road is a part) than in communities in the north. Lastly, parents on the east side of the Mukilteo School District (of which Casino Road is a part) were less likely to report that their child feels safe at school when compared to their west side counterparts.

In contrast, the CRCs did not surface substantial concerns around security as a major need. Although there was a recognition of safety issues, there were few specific mentions of gangs. However, the CRCs did identify the need for a safe place to gather, which will be further discussed within the Parks/Community (Resource) Center theme below.

**Key Takeaway:** Safety/security emerged as an issue in all four of the community reports surveyed, although the extent to which it was a concern differed. Most of the concerns

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<sup>3</sup> Russian speakers rated needs met most highly in both categories, with scores of 4.0 and 4.5 for adults and youth, respectively. However, because there were so few Russian speakers who completed surveys (only 4 of 133), these responses cannot be meaningfully compared to other groups. For this reason, throughout this report responses will be broken into English speakers and Spanish/Russian speakers. Although this report uses the term “speakers”, it is important to note that individuals only completed one survey each. Bilingual individuals had to select a survey in a specific language, meaning that strictly categorizing individuals as “English” or “Spanish/Russian” speakers is not necessarily accurate. However, given that language barriers (including specific mention of Spanish and Russian families) are referenced in other reports, this categorization seems appropriate for our purposes.

<sup>4</sup> Because there was such a wide range in the number of respondents by zip code, comparisons between zip codes may not be meaningful: 98204 has 61 responses (average score: 3.6); 98203 has 18 (average score: 3.8), and 98208 has 8 (average score: 4.3). Zip code information was not collected from youth.

seem to generate from adults and providers (who offered some of the strongest language), although some youth did mention it in the VOAWW report. Note: “safety” is a term that is highly influenced by context. Some residents referenced walkability as an issue of safety in the NNO survey, while the Task Force discussed safety in terms of home violence and gang activity. These differences must be carefully considered and may explain variation in frequency of mention between sources (e.g. CRCs). Efforts to address “safety” should formulate a more specific definition of the term as well as focus on experiences of those living in the community rather than relying on perceptions from outside individuals.

## Other Notes

### Schools/Education

Although concerns around test scores/education was a focus for the Overview (and the education pipeline referenced for VOAWW), it was not a major focus for most reports. This is not to say that schools/education were not discussed in these reports, but rather that the tone or focus of these conversations differed. Whereas OSPI data highlight challenges for the Casino Road community around test scores, NNO respondents overwhelmingly discussed schools in a positive tone. For example, schools were referenced 21 times by respondents when asked what the community already offered (which the survey writers constructed as a strengths-based question). Although these responses did not specifically comment on the quality of education, their inclusion here suggests some satisfaction with schools/education.

School-related responses also emerged regarding the other two questions, “What would you spend a million dollars on?” and “What do you wish this community offered?” For the latter, two respondents specifically called out higher quality schools, but only three people overall brought up anything regarding children’s education. Regarding the million-dollar question, 16 respondents would spend money on schools; only one participant specifically addressed school quality (“better schools”). Other respondents either offered generic responses (“schools” or “education”) or specifically called out the desire for more after school activities (“good safe place for children to go after school”).

**Key Takeaway:** Concerns about schools/quality of education did not strongly surface in either of the qualitative findings, although education and educational pipelines were referenced in other reports (Overview, Task Force, and VOAWW). Community members seem to emphasize the need for more support for overall youth activities rather than emphasizing concerns focused more specifically around education.

### Poverty

Although commonly discussed in each of the reports, poverty was not identified as a specific theme for two reasons. First, in many of the research reports analyzed for this summary, poverty is a latent, rather than explicit, construct, particularly when examining resident comments. For example, analysis of NNO survey results,<sup>5</sup> poverty was primarily mentioned in relation to other concepts: “helping those in need”. Participants in the CRCs did identify financial hardship and

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<sup>5</sup> This is the only source that provided raw data, which allowed for axial coding.

affordability as a challenge, but notes attached to this theme<sup>6</sup> suggest more a more nuanced definition may be necessary. Poverty is a consistent theme in external reports (e.g. Overview), but even here the issue is primarily discussed in conjunction with other factors (e.g. Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity; Poverty and Educational Achievement). Furthermore, this summary centers resident voices as most important in understanding the issues affecting and opportunities available to the Casino Road neighborhood, an important approach given CRC feedback that residents are not empowered to play a role in community decision-making.

The second, and more pragmatic reason why poverty is not identified as a major theme, relates to the existing focus of surveyed sources and apparent focus of future action. The research reports and data provided for this summary suggested an emphasis on families and individuals experiencing poverty. Thus, surfacing poverty as a “common theme” seemed duplicative to current efforts and understanding.

**Key Takeaway:** Financial hardship is certainly an important facet of understanding the Casino Road community; data sources such as the Census demonstrate poverty’s prevalence, particularly in comparison with other neighboring areas. However, based on the data made available for this summary, residents discussed poverty primarily in conjunction with other issues (many of which, like shared space and services/resources, are identified as common themes and are clearly influenced by financial hardship) rather than on its own.

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<sup>6</sup> The notes for the CRC theme are as follows: “Poverty; people are stretched financially. People don’t have back-up plan, get behind easily” and “Housing conditions and affordability not improving.” This additional context suggests additional constructs beyond just “poverty.”