

# NOAH – “Success Measures” Survey Analysis

March 2014

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*Conducted by the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing, Inc. (NOAH) as  
part of the NeighborWorks® America Community Impact  
Measurement Program*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the final quarter of 2013 the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing, Inc. (NOAH), as part of the NeighborWorks® America Community Impact Measurement initiative, conducted a survey of residents of East Boston living within a designated six block radius. The survey area encompassed Meridian Street between Princeton Street and Trenton Street, Princeton Street between Meridian Street and Brooks Street, Brooks Street between Trenton Street and Princeton Street, Trenton Street between Brooks Street and Meridian Street, Marion Street between Trenton Street and Princeton Street and Lexington Street between Meridian Street and Brooks Street (see attached map at Appendix for visual aid).

This comprehensive study covered four major topics related to the overall condition of the neighborhood: (1) The physical condition of the six blocks in question, (2) The physical condition of various buildings within the relevant six block area, (3) A survey of residents' experience living in the community, and (4) External stakeholders' perception of the community. The purpose of the survey was to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the condition of our neighborhood. NOAH will use the data obtained from these surveys to shape future programming and to continue to improve the services we offer to our constituents.

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

The resident survey was completed by 182 East Boston residents living in the six block focus area. The resident survey was conducted with the help of half a dozen experienced poll-takers, who went door-to-door in the Fall and Winter of 2013 to obtain answers to the resident survey questions. The majority of respondents were renters living in multi-unit homes (mostly duplexes and triplexes). Specifically, of the respondents 74% rent their home, while 25% are homeowners and the remaining 1% live with family or friends. Further, 63% of respondents were families with at least one child under the age of 18 residing in the home. The age of the respondents varied widely, with the youngest respondent being 16 years old and the eldest being 85 years old. No single age group was over or underrepresented. Among the 182 respondents, 40% self-identified as male, while 60% self-identified as female. Of those respondents, 79% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. When asked to self-identify their race, 7% of respondents identified as Black/African American, 45% identified as Caucasian/White, 14% identified as Asian, and 34% identified as Mixed Race.

In addition to the resident survey, a block condition observation was completed for each of the abovementioned six blocks, and within those blocks 120 buildings were individually evaluated by NOAH staff members between July and December of 2013. NOAH staff used the NeighborWorks® America survey model as a framework for evaluating each individual building. Characteristics evaluated included the general appearance of the building, the

upkeep of the yard and outbuildings (if any), the prevalence of trash and/or litter adjacent to the building, the condition of the roof, exterior windows and doors, the buildings primary use, and the apparent level of "pride in ownership" based on the condition of the building. All 120 buildings were surveyed by the same NOAH staff members, using the same criteria, to ensure the reliability of the results.

Finally, nine external stakeholders were interviewed at length by NOAH staff members regarding their opinions and perceptions of East Boston. Each of the nine stakeholders was asked the same thirty questions, and their responses were recorded and catalogued for further analysis. The stakeholders interviewed include local business owners, staff members of state officials, community activists, school personnel, staff members of human services or health agencies, members of community development corporations and local landlords.

## **SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

### **Resident Perception of the Community of East Boston**

The respondents to the Resident Survey were asked about their overall level of satisfaction with the community of East Boston. The responses available included "very satisfied", "somewhat satisfied", "somewhat dissatisfied", and "very dissatisfied." Of the 182 respondents who were asked, 180 supplied responses. Among those who responded, 38% reported being very satisfied, 59% reported being somewhat satisfied, and 3% reported being somewhat dissatisfied. No respondents indicated that they were very dissatisfied.

Respondents who answered this question were then asked an open-ended follow up question about the reason for their answer. Common themes among those who were satisfied with the community included: the school system is good, the neighborhood is safe for children, the housing is affordable, East Boston is close to downtown, there are many neighborhood conveniences, access to parks and public transportation and good medical centers. Among those who were somewhat dissatisfied with the community common reasons included: the abundance of litter on the streets, lack of residential pride, feeling unsafe at night, poor quality of homes, lack of public green space, and irresponsible drivers.

The same respondents were also asked how likely they would be to recommend the neighborhood at present. Respondents were able to choose "definitely would recommend", "probably would recommend", "probably would not recommend", or "definitely would not recommend." A total of 160 of the 182 respondents replied to this question, and among them 38% said they would definitely recommend East Boston, 56% said they would probably recommend, 6% probably would not recommend and 1% definitely would not recommend. Common responses given for why residents definitely would or probably would recommend East Boston as a good community to live in included: East Boston is

affordable, there are many good restaurants, the neighborhood is diverse, East Boston is a good community for families, everything is close and convenient, lower rent and housing costs as compared to other neighborhoods close to Downtown Boston, the neighborhood is safe, and public transportation is accessible. Among those who would probably not or definitely would not recommend East Boston some of the prevalent reasons included: that the neighborhood is not as safe as other neighborhoods in the area, and that the community is lacking social gathering places for young professionals.

Respondents to the resident survey were also asked a series of questions regarding their level of community involvement and their general feelings about the role of non-profit organizations like NOAH in the community. Specifically, respondents were asked how often they participate in certain key community activities such as volunteering to help others in the community, participating in a community improvement project, supporting local business events, participating in an organized community social event, supporting a local political organization/candidate or participating in an advocacy group. For each of these activities respondents were asked to select how often they participate, possible answers were "often", "sometimes", "rarely", and "never." The results revealed that for each category 75-83% of residents said they never participate in the given community activity (see chart below for complete breakdown of responses).

Respondents were then asked how much of a positive difference they feel that they personally could make in the community. The data indicates that 27% of respondents felt they could make a great deal, 38% felt they could make a fair amount, 24% felt they could make some difference, and 11% felt they personally could make little or no difference. Meanwhile, when asked how willing they were to participate in the key community involvement activities of working with others to make things happen, running meetings so that tasks and goals are achieved, helping groups sort out differences or deal with conflict, and increasing leadership skills, only 9-12% of residents indicated that they were "very willing" to participate in these activities (see chart below for full breakdown of responses).

Next, respondents rated the police response, fire department response, ambulance response and trash collection services in East Boston. Respondents rated these services as "very good", "good", "fair", or "poor." Approximately 32% of respondents ranked police response time as very good, while an additional 39% ranked this service as good, 20% ranked it as fair and 2% ranked it as poor. Regarding the fire department response in East Boston, 35% of respondents rated the service as very good, 44% as good, 12% as fair and no respondents indicated that it was poor. Among those respondents that addressed ambulance response time, 29% stated that it was very good, 52% stated that it was good, 8% stated that it was fair, and no respondents indicated that it was poor. Finally, with regards to trash collection services, 27% of respondents indicated that these services were very good, 36% stated that they were good, 28% stated that they were fair, and 5% stated

that they were poor (see full chart below). When asked in general about their responses to these questions, respondents who indicated that the any of the public services were fair or poor tended to focus on the issue of trash collection. Those respondents stated that they were dissatisfied with trash collection because the community is polluted and has been for many years, there is frequently trash left on the curb, and that street cleaning and snow removal are poorly managed in East Boston.

In addition to public services, respondents to the resident survey were asked their opinions about safety in their neighborhood. When asked how safe they feel in their home during the day, 66% said they felt very safe, 33% responded that they felt somewhat safe, and only 1% of respondents said they felt somewhat unsafe (note that no respondents indicated that they felt very unsafe). When asked the same question about the safety of their home at night, 52% of respondents indicated that they felt very safe, while 46% indicated they felt somewhat safe, and 1% indicated they felt somewhat unsafe (again no one responded that they felt very unsafe). Next, respondents were asked how safe they feel walking in the community during the day, to which 33% replied that they felt very safe, 58% replied that they felt somewhat safe, 8% responded that they felt somewhat unsafe and 1% replied that they felt very unsafe. When asked how safe they felt walking around the community at night, 10% of respondents said they felt very safe, 43% said they felt somewhat safe, 39% said they felt somewhat unsafe, and 7% said they felt very unsafe. Finally, when asked about how safe they felt in local parks, playgrounds and other outdoor recreational areas, 53% of respondents indicated that they felt very safe, 43% said they felt somewhat safe, and 2% said they felt somewhat unsafe and very unsafe respectively.

Finally, resident survey-takers were asked how the community has changed in the past three years and also how they believe the community will change in the next three years. As to the first question, 28% of respondents indicated that the community has improved a lot in the past three years, while 34% said the community has improved some, 30% said the community has remained about the same, 7% said the community has declined some and 1% said the community has declined a lot. The common threads among the responses indicating that the community has improved were that the police force is very active, the medical center has improved quality of life, there are more parks and recreation areas, and the school system has improved. Among those who felt the neighborhood stayed the same or declined, typical complaints were that everything has remained the same and that there is a lack of unity among community members.

As to the question of the future of the neighborhood in the next three years, 25% of respondents indicated that they believe that the community will improve a lot, 42% indicated that they believe the community will improve some, 26% indicated that the community will stay about the same, 7% indicated that the community is likely to decline some, and no respondents indicated that the community will decline a lot. Respondents

elaborated on their answers by indicating that the community will likely improve because it's less expensive than other cities close to Boston and therefore young professionals want to move to East Boston, and because new homebuyers will take better care of their homes in the neighborhood. Additionally, a few respondents noted that the planned development on the waterfront in East Boston will likely improve the neighborhood. A number of respondents also noted that much will depend on whether or not a casino is built in or around East Boston.

### **External Stakeholders' Perception of East Boston**

A total of nine external stakeholders were interviewed at length about their perception of the community of East Boston. Although each individual stakeholder had a unique perspective on the community some common threads from these interviews are worth noting.

First, the majority of external stakeholders perceive East Boston as a diverse, family-oriented neighborhood with many community activists. While most external stakeholders noted that East Boston is a very diverse community, they also pointed out that issues such as public green space, the need for better trash collection/litter control and the need for more development seem to unite the community. When asked to describe East Boston one external stakeholder said: "[i]t is an excellent community to live in; it is one of the only true neighborhoods left in Boston. If you live here you will learn that it a very united community, and also a very diverse one. East Boston has welcomed every wave of immigrants that has arrived, including Europeans, Hispanics and now most recently immigrants from the Middle East. It is a community that is rich with culture and very family-oriented."

In addition, each of the nine external stakeholders interviewed indicated that they perceive East Boston as a safe neighborhood and all nine also indicated that they believe that buying a home in East Boston at this point in time would be a good investment. Further, the majority (all but one) of the external stakeholders indicated that the community has improved in the past three years, and all but one interviewee believes that the neighborhood will continue to improve in the coming years.

Finally, much like the resident surveys, the one major issue that the external stakeholders were united around was the issue of trash collection in East Boston. The majority of the interviewees identified trash collection and/or litter as a major issue in East Boston that needs to be addressed in order to improve the quality of the neighborhood.

## **Block Conditions and Building Conditions**

The block condition report revealed that each of the six blocks in the survey area was primarily residential and contained multi-family dwellings; 4 out of the 6 blocks contained single-family dwellings as well. Additionally, 5 of the 6 blocks contained commercial and/or office space as well, although commercial use was not the predominant use of any of the blocks in question. None of the blocks in question contained any buildings used for industrial purposes, however 4 of the 6 blocks contained buildings used for institutional purposes (such as libraries, schools and churches). Of the six blocks surveyed, only one block contained an open space such as a park or field, and only one block contained a playground.

The public infrastructure such as the street surface, sidewalks and curbs were well-maintained or adequately maintained on all six blocks however, there was a lot or some trash/litter/debris on each of the six blocks. Despite the litter and trash, there was no visible graffiti or illegal dumping within the focus area. On a scale of very attractive, somewhat attractive, somewhat unattractive and very unattractive, each of the six blocks in question was rated as somewhat attractive.

NOAH staff members also surveyed 120 individual buildings within this six block radius. This survey confirmed that the majority of the buildings within the focus area are multi-family dwellings with 2-4 units, although there are larger multi-family dwellings as well as single family homes. Of the 120 buildings evaluated, only 1 was determined to be vacant.

Based on an exterior evaluation only, each building's condition was ranked as either "good condition and needs no repair", "needs minor repair", "requires at least one major repair", or "requires comprehensive renovation." Of the 120 buildings evaluated, 80 were deemed in good condition with no need for repair, 38 needed minor repair, 1 required a major repair, and 1 required comprehensive renovation.

NOAH staff also noted whether or not each building had any trash and/or debris on or around the property. The survey data reveals that 75% of the buildings evaluated had at least some trash on or around the property. Next NOAH staff evaluated the lawn and/or landscaping around each building, and determined that 37% of the properties were well maintained, 60% were adequately maintained and only 3% were poorly maintained. Further, each building was rated on its overall attractiveness. The data indicates that 23% of buildings were rated "very attractive", 62% were "somewhat attractive", 14% were labeled "somewhat unattractive" and less than 1% were deemed "very unattractive."

Finally, NOAH staff evaluated the level of pride in ownership demonstrated by the overall condition of each building. Based on the results, 23% of buildings demonstrated pride in

ownership to a great extent, 72% demonstrated pride in ownership to a moderate extent, and 6% demonstrated little to no pride in ownership.

## **CONCLUSION**

We will continue to use these conclusions to help shape our community investment strategy now and in the future.

### **Conclusion #1: Trash is one of the biggest areas of concern for East Boston Residents**

The issue of trash/litter was recurrent through each of the four evaluations completed. Both residents and external stakeholders perceive trash as a major issue in the community of East Boston, and NOAH staff members also noticed a lot of litter when evaluating the blocks and buildings in the focus area.

In light of the prevalence of this concern, NOAH has already begun to address the issue of trash collection. Our Youth Crew recently completed a study of trash/litter in East Boston to determine the root cause of the neighborhood's litter issue. The study revealed that the issue is not illegal dumping, but spill off from inadequate trash collection procedure (i.e. individuals putting trash out to the curb in bags, rather than bins). In light of this, our Youth Crew initiated a campaign to educate residents on appropriate garbage disposal methods. This will be a year-long campaign and we will continue to evaluate our progress throughout the year.

### **Conclusion #2: In general, property owners in East Boston care for their buildings**

The evaluation of the blocks and buildings in our focus area revealed that the majority of property owners take pride in owning their property and maintain the buildings to an adequate extent. Some buildings required minor repairs to exterior siding and/or windows, but for the most part the buildings in question were well maintained and adequately secured. NOAH staff note that the overall beauty of the neighborhood could be improved by trash removal, and an increase in green space.

### **Conclusion #3: In general, East Boston is an active and engaged community, but more could be done to engage a larger number of community members**

In some ways the results of our study were inconclusive regarding the issue of community engagement. External stakeholders had a strong perception of East Boston as a highly active and engaged community, yet the majority of the residents we surveyed were not routinely engaged in key community activities. We acknowledge that this result could be because, as compared to the overall population of East Boston, our sample size was relatively small, which might account for the discrepancy.



Nonetheless, as a non-profit community development corporation that has been engaged with the residents of East Boston for over 26 years, our experience teaches us that East Boston is a highly engaged community. The results from this study remind us however, that we can always do more to help our neighbors become more active in the community.

**Conclusion #4: In general, residents perceive East Boston as a community on the rise**

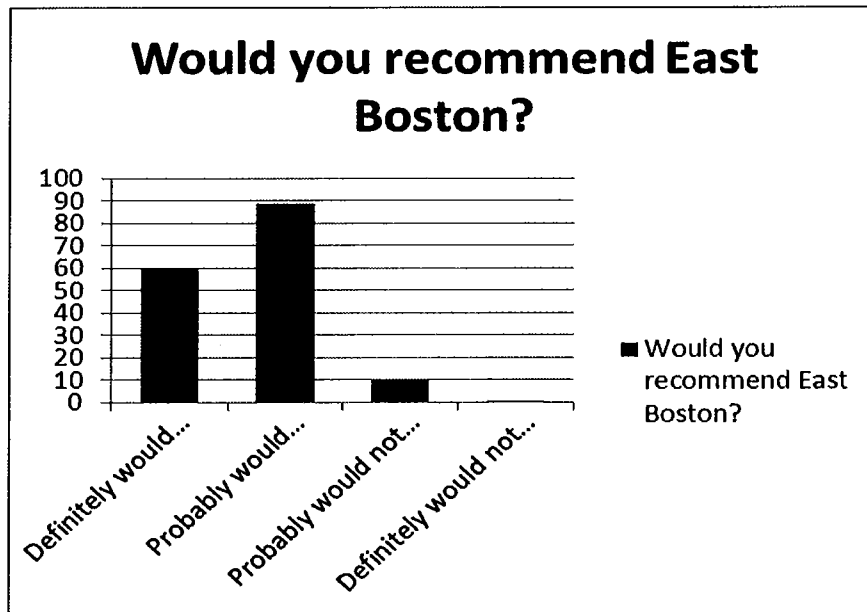
The vast majority of residents and external stakeholders perceive East Boston as a community that will continue to grow and thrive in the coming years. When asked, the majority of external stakeholders indicated that buying property in East Boston at this point in time would be a good investment. Further, the majority of residents surveyed indicated that they believe that East Boston will markedly improve in the next three years. We take this as a positive sign of the impact of organizations like NOAH and of the hard work of community activists. As a community development corporation, we are deeply committed to the future of East Boston and the surrounding communities, and we are pleased that residents acknowledge the improvements and growth of our neighborhood.



2. Overall Satisfaction with Community of East Boston



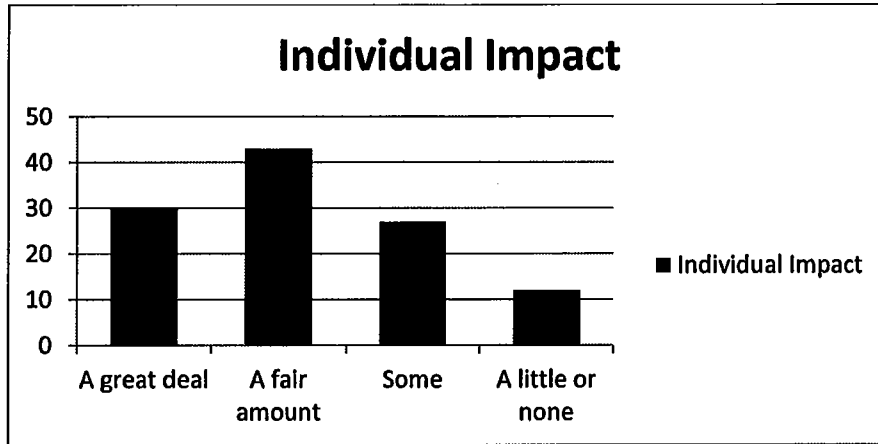
3. Would you Recommend East Boston as a Good Neighborhood to Live in at Present?



#### 4. How often do you participate in the following activities?

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total Number of Responses
	Number of Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses	Percentage	
Participated in a community, resident, or tenant association	17	10%	9	5%	4	2%	146	83%	176
Volunteers to help others in the community	15	9%	12	7%	8	5%	136	80%	171
Participated in a community improvement project, such as a clean-up, community gardening, or other beautification effort	14	8%	8	5%	7	4%	144	83%	173
Supported local business events, such as a sidewalk sale or "shop local" day	17	10%	9	5%	7	4%	138	81%	171
Participated in an organized community social event, such as a festival, block party, or other celebration	23	13%	16	9%	3	2%	129	75%	171
Supported a local political organization, candidate, or ballot initiative	18	10%	18	10%	5	3%	133	76%	174
Participated in an advocacy group, such as a school parent-teacher association, environmental organization, or labor union	21	13%	9	5%	8	5%	129	77%	167
Personally took action to improve the community, such as reporting a hazard or contacting authorities about an incident	21	13%	7	4%	1	1%	138	83%	167

5. How much of a positive difference do you feel that you, yourself, could make in the community?



6. How willing are you to become involved in the following activities?

	Very willing		Willing		Somewhat willing		Not that willing		Total Number of Responses
	Number of Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses	Percentage	
Work with others to make things happen	18	12%	20	13%	30	20%	81	54%	149
Run meetings so that tasks and goals are achieved	15	10%	14	9%	17	11%	104	69%	150
Help groups sort out differences or deal with conflict	14	9%	20	13%	23	15%	93	62%	150
Increase your leadership skills so that you can help influence change	18	12%	18	12%	27	18%	87	58%	150

7. How would you rate the following public services?

	Very good		Good		Fair		Poor		Very poor		Not applicable		Total Number of Responses
	Number of Responses	%	Number of Responses	%	Number of Responses	%	Number of Responses	%	Number of Responses	%	Number of Responses	%	
Police response	51	32%	62	39%	31	20%	3	2%	4	3%	6	4%	157
Fire department response	56	35%	69	44%	19	12%	0	0%	0	0%	14	9%	158
Ambulance response	46	29%	81	52%	13	8%	0	0%	0	0%	16	10%	156
Trash collection	42	27%	56	36%	43	28%	7	5%	3	2%	3	2%	154
Enter other public service (e.g., snow removal, street cleaning)	16	25%	18	29%	14	22%	6	10%	4	6%	5	8%	63