



Easton Matters: Evaluation Report

Prepared for

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Executive Summary

Nurture Nature Center (NNC) is a science-based community organization located in Easton, PA. NNC works to engage the public in learning about local environmental risks, and uses a multi-pronged approach that incorporates art, science, and dialogue. Founded in 2007 after repeated flooding in the Delaware River Basin in 2004, 2005, and 2006, NNC’s initial focus was flooding, and the organization is considered a national leader in flood education. NNC completed a multiple-award winning flood education campaign, Focus on Floods, conducted in partnership with the National Weather Service and developed a new model for community dialogue programs, From Risk to Resiliency, with support from National Science Foundation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Risk to Resiliency model allowed for insightful and productive dialogue about flooding, and has since been successfully used to engage communities around a variety of environmental topics, including food access, climate change and fracking.

The **Risk to Resiliency** model draws on interdisciplinary methods including appreciative inquiry, personal artistic expression, deliberative democracy, public engagement with science, and public hazards education. It is a replicable process which facilitates community learning about environmental risks and taking appropriate actions to lessen the loss or mitigate the problem.

The model is based in a bottom–up approach and is comprised of five key elements illustrated below. A natural extension of the Risk to Resiliency model is a more formalized community needs assessment – an approach that NNC developed and tested in Easton with the support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The community needs assessment project was called Easton Matters and its success and the lessons learned from its application provide guidance for other science centers and museums that wish to replicate the model to better engage with residents and build resiliency to environmental risks within their community.

Risk to Resiliency Model



The Easton Matters Project

Easton Matters was a two-year project intended to refine the Risk to Resiliency model by formally conducting a needs assessment among Easton’s four neighborhoods. The project sought to identify environmental topics of greatest concern to residents and to enable thoughtful dialogue about those concerns. Additionally, the

project explored residents' preferred communication and participation format, providing NNC with valuable information used to improve the types and focus of programming offered.

Easton Matters was structured in five phases:

1. A postcard/online survey gathered data (383 respondents) about Easton area residents' environmental concerns and the basis for those concerns.
2. NNC staff interviewed 16 city officials (representing the mayor, planning department, public works, city council, and city arborist) and 18 representatives of 10 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) active in Easton neighborhoods about environmental concerns and priorities.
3. Based on interview and survey findings, two rounds of focus groups were held with residents in each of the four neighborhoods (total participants: 38) to discuss and refine priority concerns identified in the surveys and interviews; participants were also invited to use photography to document their environmental priorities. Participant reflections and comments were included in a final photo/graphic exhibit of concerns in each neighborhood.
4. Data from the focus groups and a second set of interviews with 8 City officials and CBO representatives informed the planning of a public forum on the identified environmental concerns. The forum featured: an exhibit of neighborhood photographs taken by residents who participated in the focus groups; a presentation of key findings by neighborhood; and facilitated small group discussions. The public forum drew 86 participants, not including staff, facilitators, photographers, and translators.
5. Following an analysis of data collected at the forum through participant and facilitator notes and a brief survey, NNC staff presented the Easton Matters findings to the Easton City Council. The presentation generated widespread and positive attention and invitations to consult with City planners and other local organizations, and to explore programming with neighborhood groups. Another outcome of the forum was a series of walking tours in each of the four neighborhoods, supported by NNC and led by neighborhood residents who were recruited as Easton Matters ambassadors.

Project Outcomes

In addition to offering valuable insights and refinements to the Risk to Resiliency model, the Easton Matters needs assessment project generated positive outcomes in terms of NNC's organizational capacity, Easton community social capital, and neighborhood social capital.

Impact on Easton Community Social Capital

By listening to and analyzing residents' concerns, Easton Matters provided the context for participants to identify, evaluate, prioritize, and suggest solutions to their environmental concerns. It also enabled participants to articulate what they valued in their neighborhoods, such as their neighbors, historic buildings, parks, and proximity to the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers.

The public forum used the shared experience of the Easton Matters project to create common ground and it positioned and valued residents as experts. This allowed residents and civic leaders to engage as equals in the focus group discussions. The forum elicited widespread expressions of affection for and commitment to Easton and for greater City – citizen communication.

Impact on Neighborhood Capital

The project reflected assets and challenges in each of the city's four neighborhoods. Sharing ideas through focus groups and photo-documentation appears to have generated some neighborhood pride and solidarity. This is suggested by the interest in the neighborhood walking tours, which attracted between 10 and 14 participants in each neighborhood.

Led by neighborhood leaders and supported by NNC, the walks engaged residents in continuing to assess their neighborhoods, raising issues for possible NNC programming, mobilizing residents for a neighborhood improvement effort, and bringing some neighborhood-specific issues to broader attention.

Impact on NNC Organizational Capacity

Situating the location of focus groups in neighborhoods to ground environmental conversations in specific places, NNC demonstrated its commitment to reach audiences that may not have been previously inclined to attend events at the Center. NNC “reintroduced” itself to many citizens as a valuable resource for information, learning, and community action. Overall, the engagement strengthened the public perception of NNC role as a well-informed, credible, neutral institution where people could expect to learn science, make or appreciate art, and contribute to local dialogues about the future. It elevated NNC’s public role as a solutions-oriented resource.

Engaging CBO representatives in reflective interviews about the neighborhoods and residents they serve, NNC stimulated a great deal of interest in cooperative, synergistic ventures that could magnify improvement impacts in Easton. The conversations with City officials re-affirmed the Center’s value to the City as a source for objective, credible information about issues that concern citizens; it also enabled officials to hear, in a systematic way, what kinds of changes residents want to see in their community.

NNC gained insight into what local publics saw as environmental concerns and assets to help shape future programming. A key insight arising from the Easton Matters project was that participants identified “environment” broadly. Air and water pollution were concerns, but so were transportation, safety, and personal health. This broader definition suggests new ways NNC could frame how it invites participation in fulfilling its mission of providing science learning, art experiences, and public dialogue.

Finally, Easton Matters enabled NNC to test and advance application of its Risk to Resiliency model. Specific recommendations for using the model follow, organized around the five steps of the model identified above.

Recommendations

Learn about the community and identify issues

The more detailed the understanding of an organization’s community, the better it can address the community’s needs and interests; organizations should actively participate in community events. Inviting open conversation that respects community members’ experience and expertise builds authentic relationship and rapport. Such conversations help create a sense of community identity and solidarity. It is critical to learn how community members prefer to be reached, through traditional media, email, social media, etc. Having project organizers and ambassadors walk through neighborhoods and talk with residents at the street-level has also proven highly effective for recruiting participation.

Plan a forum: bring experts and citizens together

The forum is the main event. It has considerable impact on public perception of the organization and should be planned carefully. Providing food and drink, handouts, and/or goody bags communicates to attendees that their time and participation are valued. A forum presentation should serve to establish a shared knowledge base, typically by a scientist or other expert. Structured, facilitated dialogue in small-group discussion should be designed to focus on sharing and listening rather than reaching consensus. Volunteer facilitators may be found through local colleges or civic organizations and may be easily trained to serve as effective guides for conversation. NNC makes a facilitator guide available on request. Conducting a brief survey at the end of events helps gauge an event’s success and stimulate future participation. Gathering notepaper on which participants and facilitators have recorded their reflections and responses is another valuable source of data.

Review forum outcomes and findings.

This is where the organization makes meaning of the data it has collected. Even simple analyses of the number of people who named an issue can help distinguish useful from extraneous data; surveys offer

opportunities to report statistics. Graphics and visual materials are effective in communicating findings, and can be used with participants to help refine and clarify topics of concern.

Report findings to local decision-makers

The opportunity to be heard by decision-makers is a powerful impetus for people to speak. Work with relevant decision-makers in advance of the forum to identify what sorts of information can be useful and actionable to them, and help structure the forum to provide meaningful input. After the forum, findings can be presented to decision-makers by delivering and/or presenting a formal report that defines community concerns and recommendations clearly and accessibly. Such an occasion is a media opportunity as well. Numbers, stories, and graphics all help convey community priorities.

Conduct follow-up actions

Repeated exposure creates familiarity. Actions that grow out of a forum – such as specific follow-up meetings to study a specific topic in more depth, or a particular education campaign on an environmental issue - communicate to participants and the larger community that an organization's interest is genuine and the participant's time was well spent, encouraging continued engagement with the organization. Holding such follow-up events and discussions in local neighborhoods signals openness and commitment, provides project organizers with new perspectives, and strengthens connections, trust and rapport. Follow-up actions increase the level of an organization's engagement with residents, and can help move communities toward resiliency to identified areas of concern.

Introduction

Easton, Pennsylvania, is located at the confluence of the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers in eastern Pennsylvania. The city proper comprises four neighborhoods (shown in Figure 1 and described below), and is bounded by a number of adjacent towns commonly considered part of the Easton area. This “inner ring” includes: Forks, Palmer, and Williams townships and the boroughs of Glendon, West Easton, and Wilson.

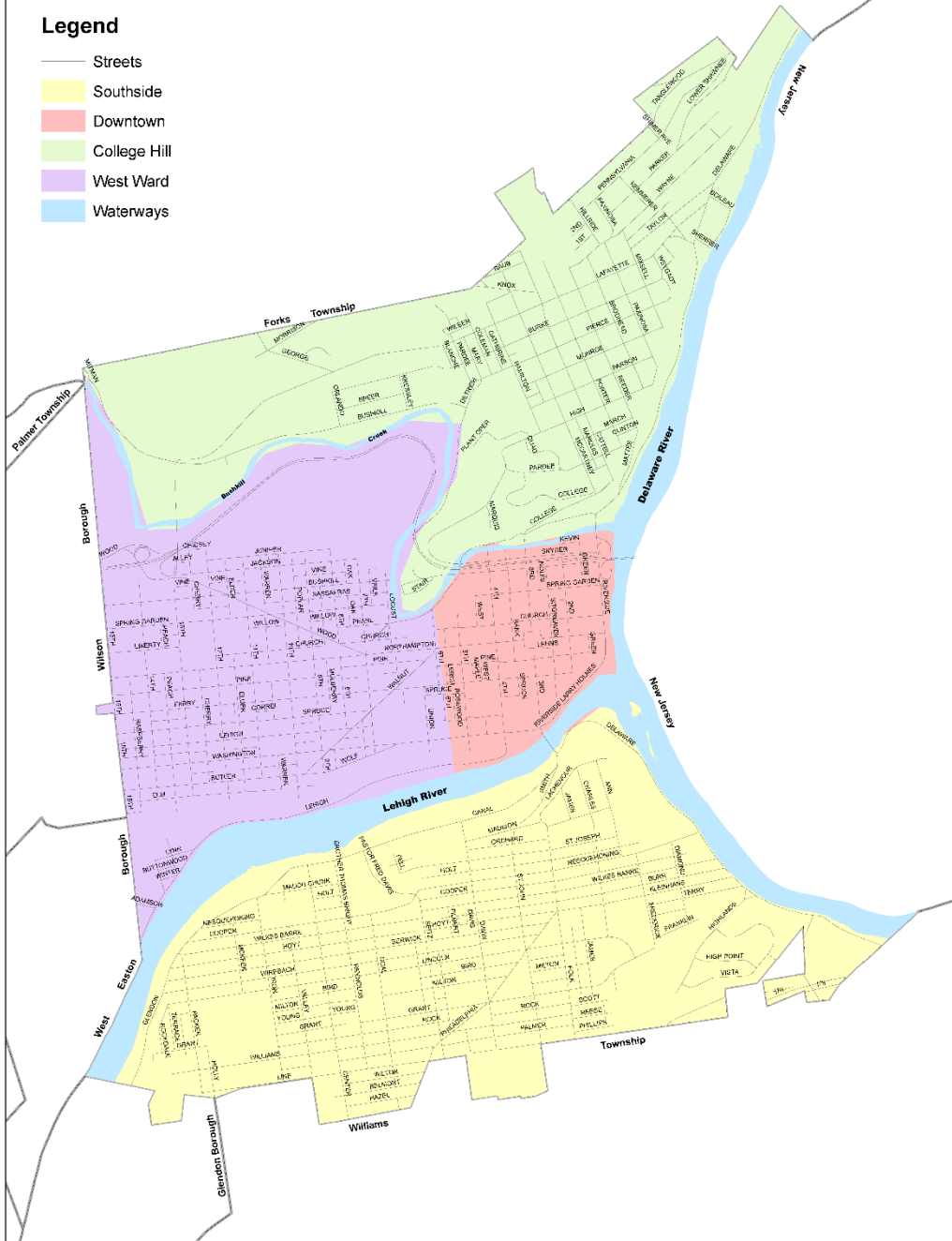
- Downtown - north of the Lehigh River and west of the Delaware, continuing west to Sixth Street
- West Ward - between Sixth and Fifteenth Streets
- South Side - south of the Lehigh River
- College Hill - hilly area to the north of Downtown and home to Lafayette College.

City of Easton
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

NEIGHBORHOOD MAP

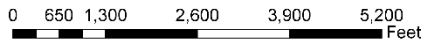
Legend

-  Streets
-  Southside
-  Downtown
-  College Hill
-  West Ward
-  Waterways



CITY OF EASTON

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Website: <http://www.easton-pa.gov>



1 inch equals 692.945754 feet

Map Date:
November 21, 2007

Map By:
Debra Ann, J. Planning & Codes
City of Easton

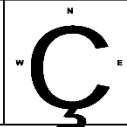


Figure 1. Map of the four main neighborhoods of Easton. Courtesy of the City of Easton.

Located at the confluence of the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers, Easton is vulnerable to flooding. The most devastating flood, in 1955, crested at nearly 44 feet; between September 2004 and June 2006, Easton suffered three major floods, two exceeding 37 feet. Flood stage for Easton is 22 feet, and these major flood levels caused significant damage to residential properties and the entire historic downtown district.

Thus flooding was a focus for Nurture Nature Center, Inc., (NNC), which began developing a science-centered museum in downtown Easton following the 2006 flood. Nurture Nature Center's facility opened in 2011 and the organization has gained widespread recognition for its creative programming and model of community engagement around environmental risks.

With this initial focus on flooding, NNC began developing its **Risk to Resiliency** model, designed to bring scientists and other experts together with citizens to share knowledge about environmental risks and to share ideas and solutions. This model was funded in its inception by National Science Foundation, and early focus groups used a photo-elicitation process with flood-affected residents to understand what floods and life on a river mean to residents; their comments provided deep insight into the appeal, and danger, of living on a river and were subsequently used in a traveling *Focus on Floods* exhibit funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as part of a larger flood education campaign.

NNC has grown significantly since its first projects. NNC's programming engages art alongside science and dialogue to engage a broad cross-section of community members in a range of environmental topics. Today, NNC's facility includes four gallery spaces showcasing local artists on environmental themes and is also a workshop setting where visitors use art to explore environmental questions. NNC also hosts a Science on a Sphere® (SOS) exhibit – a large globe suspended from the ceiling on which a diversity of weather, space, and earth science datasets (from NASA and NOAA) can be shown as science education programs to school groups and the general public. NNC developed a SOS program about flooding risk and climate change, titled 'Rising Waters' which was made available to the more than 100 other SOS sites around the world, and continues to host programs addressing flooding and other environmental issues of consequence to the region.

In 2014, NNC received funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to refine its model of community engagement through a formal community needs assessment of environmental concerns. This report describes the Risk to Resiliency Model and the two year community needs assessment supported by the IMLS grant.

The Risk to Resiliency Model

A guide to the model produced by NNC in 2013 is available online: <http://nnc.uberflip.com/i/114789-from-risk-to-resiliency-guide>.

Drawn from interdisciplinary methods such as appreciative inquiry, personal artistic expression, deliberative democracy, public engagement with science, and public hazards education, the Risk to Resiliency model facilitates community learning about environmental risks and appropriate actions to lessen loss. Recognizing that public attention is riveted by severe weather disruptions, the Risk to Resiliency model was first used to address flooding and has since engaged the Easton area community in deliberations about climate change and food security.

The graphic below is a simplified version of the progression of a Risk to Resiliency project:

1. Learn about the community in order to identify issues of community concern, gather information, and set topic; conduct intensive outreach and promotion about the project

2. Plan a public forum event featuring facilitated dialogue and small group discussion; focus the forum on creating a shared knowledge base between a topic expert, typically a scientist, and forum participants.
3. Engage experts and citizens in deliberating on the topic issue, valuing citizen knowledge alongside expert knowledge.
4. Develop a report to local decision-makers on the forum deliberations, with citizen-generated priority issues and recommended actions.
5. Support follow-up actions by community groups.

Figure 2. Risk to Resiliency Model



The Easton Matters Project

Easton Matters was a two-year project intended to refine the Risk to Resiliency model by formally conducting a needs assessment among Easton’s four major neighborhoods to identify topics of greatest concern to residents and to enable thoughtful dialogue about those issues. More specifically, the goals were to:

- ▶ Institute a protocol and methodology that can be used to assess risk topics that concern residents, particularly those who have not yet participated in NNC programs.
- ▶ Discern how publics become aware of risks, identify baseline knowledge levels and FAQs, and understand factors that support or impede risk awareness and preparedness.
- ▶ Query all audiences about preferred formats and times for program delivery and gauge levels of satisfaction with NNC’s needs assessment process, including focus groups, dialogue events, and a community exhibition.

NNC contracted with RMC Research, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to conduct an evaluation of the two-year Easton Matters project. NNC and RMC generated a set of evaluation questions:

- ▶ **What environmental issues concern residents?** How are issues distributed across Easton’s four neighborhoods? Do residents living in the same neighborhood tend to share similar concerns or is there wide variation of risk perceptions in each neighborhood?
- ▶ **What factors/experiences prompt resident concerns?** Is it personal experience, media reports, advice from healthcare providers, or talks with family, friends, and/or neighbors? In what ways are perceptions of risk related to concerns about health, physical safety, financial security, family well-being, neighborhood cohesiveness, and other personal/social factors?
- ▶ **What do residents feel they need to know and where do they currently go for information?** Which community-based resources are valued and trusted by residents? What educational and communication strategies are most useful in participant attraction and retention?
- ▶ **How well served are existing stakeholders (NNC, the City of Easton, the Easton Environmental Advisory Council, existing alliances with Community Based Organizations, and most importantly, residents) by this project?** What are attendance and retention rates regarding citizen involvement in the two-year process? Does the needs assessment process build trust? Do community members feel they are being heard and their viewpoints valued and taken seriously?

Easton Matters was structured in four phases:

1. A postcard/online survey asked about Easton residents’ local environmental concerns and the basis for those concerns.
2. NNC staff interviewed 16 city officials (representing the mayor, planning department, public works, city council, and city arborist) and 18 representatives of 10 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) active in Easton neighborhoods.
3. Based on the interview and survey findings, two series of focus groups were held in each of the four neighborhoods with residents to discuss and expand upon priority concerns identified in the survey; participants were also invited to use photography to document their environmental priorities as well.
4. Data from the focus groups and a second set of interviews with City officials and CBO representatives informed the planning of a public community forum on the environmental concerns, featuring small group discussion and an exhibit of resident photographs elicited during the focus groups.

NNC staff presented the Easton Matters findings before the Easton City Council, for which it received widespread and positive attention and invitations to consult with City planners as well as the Easton Main Street Initiative and to explore programming with neighborhood groups. Another outcome of the forum was a series of walking tours in each of the four neighborhoods, supported by NNC and led by neighborhood residents who were recruited as Easton Matters ambassadors.

Organization of This Report

This report is organized into four parts. Part 1 discusses the community-wide surveys and civic leader interviews conducted at the project’s beginning. Part 2 concerns the two series of neighborhood focus groups conducted to clarify environmental concerns identified in the survey and to engage participants in documenting their neighborhood environmental concerns through photographs. Part 3 describes the community forum event which brought Easton residents together with City and other civic leaders to

prioritize key environmental issues and responsive actions. Part 4 provides a summary and a set of recommendations for replication to other organizations seeking to utilize the Risk to Resiliency model.

Part 1: Public Surveys and Interviews with Civic Leaders

Easton Matters rolled out the public online and post-card surveys in December 2014. The surveys (see Appendix A) were structured to capture information about environmental issues in each of Easton's four neighborhoods (Downtown, South Side, West Ward, and College Hill). Brief and semi-structured, the survey's open-ended questions asked participants to identify neighborhood environmental concerns, describe how they learned about the issue, and briefly explain why it is a concern. Quantitative data were also collected on neighborhood of residence, age, gender, home language, and interest in taking part in focus groups to be held in the fall. Together the two surveys generated 383 responses between December and early August 2015.

Coincident with the survey process, NNC staff interviewed 16 City officials (representing the mayor, planning department, public works, city council, and city arborist) and 18 representatives of 10 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) organizations active in Easton neighborhoods. These interviews explored perceptions of high priority environmental concerns in Easton as a whole and of the role NNC might play in addressing these concerns.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and qualitative data with Atlas Ti. Quantitative data on environmental concerns were produced by counting the number of interviewees who identified a specific concern. Multiple mentions by a single interviewee were counted as one mention for purposes of this analysis.¹

Resident Survey Findings

Demographically (see Table 1), most survey respondents were between the ages of 35 and 64; both College Hill and the West Ward had somewhat higher numbers of residents younger than 35 and South Side and the Inner Ring of adjacent towns were somewhat older. Overall, two-thirds (66%) of respondents were female and one third were male.

Survey participation was strongest among West Ward residents, followed by College Hill, Downtown, and South Side residents. Nearly all respondents indicated English as their primary home language.

¹ Although most interviews were one-on-one, in some instances, as many as five representatives of a community organization participated in the interview; teasing out the number of interviewees to whom the mention of an environmental concern was inexact.

Table 1: Easton Matters Survey Respondents: Demographic Data						
LOCATION						
	Downtown	South Side	West Ward	College Hill	Inner Ring	Other
Neighborhood distribution (n=383)	18% (68)	16% (60)	25% (95)	23% (88)	16% (61)	3% (11)
Neighborhood without Other (n=372)	18%	16%	26%	24%	16%	-
Easton Neighborhoods Only (n=311)	22%	19%	31%	28%	-	-
AGE RANGE (n=383)						
<18	<3	<3	<3	5% (4)	<3	<3
18-24	<3	<3	5% (5)	19% (17)	<3	<3
25-34	16% (11)	10% (6)	15% (14)	8% (7)	15% (9)	<3
35-44	19% (13)	32% (19)	19% (18)	25% (22)	23% (14)	<3
45-54	30% (20)	17% (10)	26% (24)	15% (13)	21% (13)	<3
55-64	21% (14)	27% (16)	14% (13)	15% (13)	18% (11)	40% (4)
65-74	<3	<3	14% (13)	10% (9)	20% (12)	<3
75+	<3	<3	<3	<3	<3	<3
GENDER (n=383)						
Female	63% (41)	69% (40)	57% (53)	74% (65)	79% (48)	50% (5)
Male	37% (24)	31% (18)	43% (40)	26% (23)	21% (13)	50% (5)
HOME LANGUAGE (n=383)						
English	96% (22)	97% (32)	96% (44)	98% (49)	100% (39)	100% (6)
Spanish	<3	<3	<3	<3	-	-
Other	-	-	<3	-	-	-

In designing the survey, Nurture Nature Center staff left the definition of environmental concern open, although examples were given: flooding, mold, access to fresh local food, and air quality. Responses, therefore, extended beyond more typically narrow environmental concerns to include social factors such as personal health, traffic, crime, and trash.

In all neighborhoods, water quality, air quality, access to food, and trash were the top environmental concerns. For purposes of analysis, water quality included a range of concerns: fracking, pipelines, crude oil transport, pesticide and herbicides, stormwater runoff, and the general health of rivers and streams in addition to concerns about drinking water. Health issues such as allergies and asthma, which may be linked to air quality, were counted with other health concerns; air quality here pertains to air pollution.

Concern about water quality was highest among College Hill and Inner Ring respondents; air quality also registered as a notable concern among College Hill respondents. Food access was mentioned by nearly twice as many respondents from Downtown, College Hill, and West Ward compared with South Side respondents. Trash emerged as a concern among greater numbers of South Side and West Ward respondents than Downtown or College Hill respondents. There were also more mentions of crime in the West Ward, and flooding in Downtown, College Hill, and the Inner Ring. Mold received more

² <3 indicates three or fewer respondents.

mentions than any other health concern and was especially pronounced among Downtown, South Side, and West Ward respondents. Table 2 shows survey respondents' environmental concerns by neighborhood.

	Downtown n=68	South Side n=60	West Ward n=95	College Hill n=88	Inner Ring n=61	All n=372
Water Quality	13% (9)	18% (11)	5% (9)	44% (39)	30% (18)	23% (68)
Air Quality	19% (13)	17% (10)	17% (16)	28% (25)	18% (11)	20% (75)
Food Access	22% (15)	10% (6)	24% (23)	19% (17) ¹	11% (7)	18% (68)
Trash, Litter	7% (5)	23% (14)	25% (24)	14% (12)	10% (6)	16% (58)
Crime, Drugs	12% (8)	7% (4)	27% (26)	8% (7)	<3	14% (53)
Flooding	15% (10)	7% (4)	2% (2)	15% (13)	25% (15)	12% (44)
Health Concerns	3% (9)	8% (5)	11% (10)	8% (7)	8% (5)	10%(36)
"All"	-	≤3	-	-	≤3	≤3
"Doing a great job"	≤3	-	-	-		≤3
No concerns	≤3	-	-	≤3	≤3	4

City and CBO Interview Findings

The only demographic data collected on City and CBO representatives was gender: City officials comprised 12 men and 4 women and CBO representatives comprised 5 men and 13 women.

The data reported below were drawn from interviews conducted with 16 City officials and 18 representatives of community organizations by NNC staff. Concerns are identified here based on the frequency of mentions among City officials and CBO representatives. Flood and water quality emerged as the strongest concerns among City officials, while trash emerged as the strongest concern among CBO representatives. Table 3 below shows key environmental concerns among the two groups.

<p>Among 16 city officials interviewed, key concerns were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Flooding (50%) ▶ Water quality (50%) ▶ Stormwater Runoff (44%) ▶ Access to Food (38%) ▶ Air Quality (38%) ▶ Trash (25%) ▶ Trees (25%) ▶ Walkability (25%) ▶ Climate Change (25%) ▶ Transit Options (25%) 	<p>Among the 18 representatives of CBO interviewed, concerns were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Trash (50%) ▶ Flooding (39%) ▶ Water quality (39%) ▶ Recycling (33%) ▶ Stormwater runoff (33%) ▶ Trees (33%) ▶ Parks (33%) ▶ Crime (28%) ▶ Access to Food (28%)
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Interviews with City officials and representatives of community organizations conducted by NNC staff elicited a wealth of qualitative data about high priority environmental issues and the challenges and opportunities those issues present to Easton. Details of interviewee responses are shown in Table 4

below; potential solutions offered by interviewees appear in Table 5, and reflections on the role NNC could play in addressing these issues are shown in Table 6.

Table 4: Environmental Priorities among Interviewees	
<p>City Officials</p> <p><i>Non-Local Origins of Environmental Concerns</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Issues such as air quality transcend local boundaries; interviewees cited the lack of regional coordination and planning as a challenge. <p><i>Awareness and Commitment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Interviewees asserted that the environment was a low priority for many residents, contending that personal safety and economic concerns outweigh environmental concerns. ▶ Others remarked that Easton as a whole does not have a strong culture of environmental awareness. This was seen as a communication issue—ameliorative measures such as stormwater treatment and tree canopy may be “invisible” to residents—as well as one of some internal (City) resistance. <p><i>Water Quality</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Challenges related to water quality concerned pollution from stormwater, herbicides and pesticides, medication dumping, and fracking. Removing dams responsibly was also mentioned. <p><i>Tree Canopy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ It was noted that many people regard trees as a nuisance (e.g., leaf litter, tree root incursion into sidewalks). <p><i>Financial Constraints</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Monetary issues include a lack of City funding for tree maintenance and other environmental oversight positions and limited financial support from utility providers for replacing City street lights with LED lights. <p><i>Recycling</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ It was asserted that the recycling rate today (30%) is considerably lower than it was in 1980 (58%) when the recycling program began, suggesting a sharp decline in public enthusiasm. <p><i>Other Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Also mentioned were sinkholes, illegal dumping, and a transient population. 	<p>CBO Representatives</p> <p><i>Recycling</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recycling was a strong interest among CBO representatives, with a range of barriers to greater recycling success cited: the lack of a recycling culture, ignorance of how to dispose of trash, regular theft of recycling cans, the necessity of separating recyclables, and the lack of a community composting system. <p><i>Tree Canopy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Challenges cited concerning trees were insufficient manpower and the lack of systematic tree maintenance. <p><i>Social Challenges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Nearly half of CBO interviewees identified social factors as the greatest challenge Easton faces in addressing environmental concerns. ▶ Related challenges included a lack of public dialogue and citizen engagement, particularly among rental residents who do not feel part of the community, and hard-to-reach older residents. ▶ Larger social factors cited were the overall unsustainable nature of American society, particularly the “disposable” society. ▶ It was also suggested that boundary issues between the city and neighboring municipalities inhibited more town-to-town environmental collaboration.

Table 5: Interviewee Suggestions for Meeting Environmental Challenges

City Officials	CBO Representatives
<p>Water Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Interviewees prioritized water quality, calling for the City stormwater authority to incentivize homeowners to capture and conserve water and to prevent the storing of toxins near the river. ▶ Also suggested: rebranding the street sweeping program as a “keep the river clean” initiative, creating a program for turning in unused drugs, and ensuring responsible development of floodplains. <p>Master Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Greater citizen outreach (and documentation of said outreach) on the City’s master plan was encouraged in order to represent environmental concerns “robustly.” <p>Recycling</p> <p>Ideas included developing a long-term recycling plan, converting the city to a recycling cart system (similar to Palmer Township), and efforts to incentive recycling.</p> <p>Walkability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ To promote walkability, interviewees called for a City walkability plan and related measures to preserve the City’s compact footprint, limit vehicular traffic, and promote multi-modal transportation. ▶ It was also proposed to fine drivers who do not stop for pedestrians. <p>Financial Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Interviewees called for a rain tax on impervious surfaces and a fine for littering, and anticipated a utility tax in the future. <p>Green Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Support for environmentally sensitive building included a call for energy-efficient buildings, City forestation, better code enforcement, and replacing the City’s 150-vehicle fleet with cars that run on natural gas or electricity. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ More miscellaneous suggestions included year-round street sweeping to deal with snow, a municipal tree watering program, and increasing residents’ access to fresh food, especially in the West Ward. 	<p>Citizen Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ City officials were encouraged to reach out to community members. To encourage citizens to speak out, community meetings should provide child care and tailor messages to neighborhood concerns. ▶ A related suggestion was to expand communication efforts to include print (e.g., newsletters) as well as social and other media, produce bilingual community materials, and hold community potlucks and public meetings. <p>Traffic/ Transit Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ideas to reduce traffic included creating car share locations, offering free bus passes to students, and designing better bus loops, including an intra-city bus loop that could build community and reduce the stigma of riding the bus. <p>Public Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In addition to a call for public art, suggestions included redesigning the Center Square to be more beautiful and pedestrian friendly, creating more public spaces (e.g., green space, dog park), using the riverfront more effectively, and offering downtown restrooms. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The wide range of other ideas included a rain barrel program, banning plastic bags, using e-documents for City communications to save paper, finding creative solutions to dog waste, and initiating a recycling program operated by students for nonprofits.

Table 6: Interviewee Reflections on the Role of NNC in Addressing Easton Environmental Concerns

City Officials	CBO Representatives
<p>Outreach to Business Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ NNC is seen as a well-respected community institution and a neutral third party, well-positioned to be an effective conduit for educating businesses, developers, landlords, and City Council members about environmental sustainability. <p>Outreach to Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ With the premise that children not only absorb messages about environmental stewardship, but convey them to their families, there were suggestions for NNC partnerships with local schools, such as creating an environmental curriculum (with weather as an entry point) and promoting school gardens. <p>Outreach to the Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In addition to praising NNC’s work on flooding, interviewees identified other topics NNC could present: food access, fracking, crude oil transport, and stormwater management. A suggestion for NNC to gather public feedback and host annual input events was coupled with one to engage a broader public. <p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ It was proposed that NNC partner with other CBOs on writing grants. 	<p>NNC as Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ NNC is seen as a community leader, a credible, well-trusted institution that is effective in bringing citizens into conversations and empowering them to make changes. It was also suggested that NNC expand the community it speaks to, venturing into community rather than drawing people to its building. In addition, NNC should conduct focus groups with citizens to foster citizen leadership and expand participation in NNC events. <p>Collective Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ It was suggested that NNC hold an event to bring CBOs together to share what they do and how they can further collaborate. <p>Educational Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Suggested topics for NNC educational programming included: stormwater management/ pervious surface demonstrations, waste and reuse, recycling and its health benefits, and health literacy with ancillary materials. <p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Proposals for educational alliances included inviting school science teachers to visit even if they don’t have field trip budgets, so they can educate and urge students to visit NNC on their own, as well as: ▶ Strengthening NNC’s partnership with the environmental studies program at Lafayette College ▶ Providing programming at community organizations such as Safe Harbor ▶ Partnering with Crayola to sell combination tickets ▶ Working with SPCA and 4-H on a spay/neuter clinic ▶ Conducting surveys and focus groups during Project of Easton classes. ▶ Given NNC’s success in hosting community forums, it was also suggested that NNC offer a workshop on community dialogue for Lafayette students. <p>Physical Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Suggested uses for the NNC building included making more use of the ballroom (e.g., dog shows), expanding the NNC urban garden to the city, and considering hosting a “Green Fest.”

Discussion

Flooding, water quality, stormwater runoff, access to food, trees, and walkability emerged as concerns in both groups, identified by one-quarter or more of interviewees. Air quality, climate change, and transit options emerged among City officials but not CBO representatives; parks, recycling, and crime emerged among CBO representatives and not City officials.

Additionally, City officials and CBO representatives differed somewhat in how they framed public participation in civic life. In their discussion of social factors, City officials appeared to characterize the public in terms of apathy or lack of interest in environmental issues or apathy. By contrast, CBO representatives characterized the public in terms of voiceless and lack of influence.

Ideas for addressing environmental concerns tendered by City officials emphasized plans, processes, and systems; CBO representatives focused more on activating citizens' voice in public affairs and providing amenities such as more green space and parks, better traffic control, and easier access to the riverfront.

While City officials and CBO representatives saw NNC as primarily an educational institution, City officials stressed NNC's potential to educate business and civic leaders on environmental issues; and CBO representatives cast the NNC role as combining advocacy with education.

It should be noted that interviewees in both groups stressed positive environmental actions that had been taken in Easton. CBO interviewees pointed to the strong cooperative attitude among Easton CBOs that supported City benefits, such as securing a Green Streets grant and improving the downtown area through the Ambassadors program. City officials identified actions the City has taken with respect to water quality and recycling in addition to passing a solar ordinance, improving building stock as a result of code enforcement, programming traffic lights to reduce idling, planting more than 1,000 trees in the last decade, and working with Lafayette College to install pedestrian safety lighting at three crossings.

Part 2: Focus Groups and PhotoVoice

RMC and NNC staff conducted two rounds of focus groups in September 2015, two weeks apart. The purpose of the first round was to discuss neighborhood environmental concerns and priorities, including verifying and expanding on responses identified through the survey process and identifying new concerns raised by focus group participants. The focus groups also served as a mechanism to introduce the Easton Matters project to neighborhood residents, including a description of the April 7, 2016 photo exhibit and citywide forum and the PhotoVoice process (see discussion below).

Part 2 also contains findings from a second set of interviews conducted with 4 City officials and 4 CBO representatives.

Round 1 Focus Groups

Based on the survey and interview findings, NNC’s Art Director Keri Maxfield created several graphic representations of residents’ and city and CBO representatives’ concerns. These graphics were used with Round 1 focus group participants as a starting point for discussions. In both sets of images below, the size of the bubble or word indicates greater numbers of survey respondents or interviewees who identified that concern. Figure 3 shows concerns identified in surveys for each of the four neighborhoods; Round 1 focus group participants saw the “bubble” representation relevant to their neighborhood. Figure 4 adds findings from interviews with City and CBO representatives to show the relative importance of concerns within each neighborhood and civic leaders interviewed.

Figure 3: Frequency of Environmental Concerns Mentioned by Neighborhood

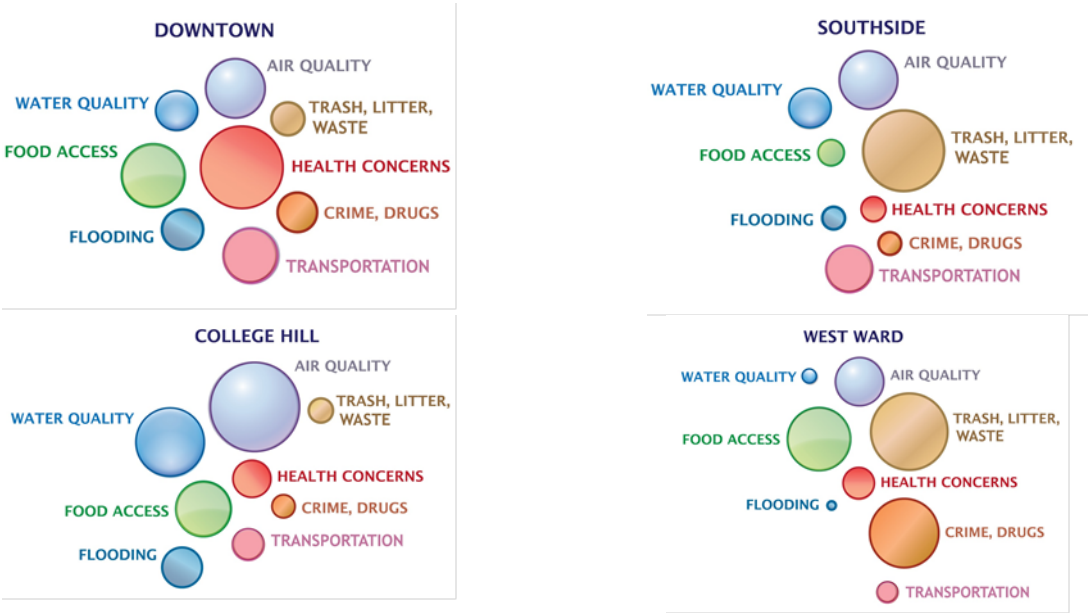


Figure 4: Frequency of Environmental Concerns Mentioned by City Officials and CBO Representatives



Following an introduction by NNC staff, RMC staff led one focus group in each of the four neighborhoods. Participants were asked to identify environmental concerns and priorities in their neighborhood and then to evaluate the graphic representations of citizen and City concerns. Following this discussion, RMC researchers introduced the PhotoVoice process and invited PhotoVoice participation. PhotoVoice is a participatory visual methodology pioneered by Wang and Burris³ and is often used to engage study participants in visually documenting their surroundings, adding a more nuanced layer of interpretation to traditional interview and focus group techniques. The PhotoVoice technique has been found to enhance a community’s understanding of its assets and needs, while also leading to the empowerment of participants⁴. See Appendix A for the focus group protocols, evaluation surveys, and the PhotoVoice documentation used in the focus groups.

Participants responded to both graphic representations shown above. Most recognized and articulated a key difference between neighborhood and City official/CBO representatives’ concerns—that is, that residents typically focus on immediate issues, such as food, health, and crime, while City officials and CBOs tend to take a more “global,” “big picture” view. The key concerns raised in each neighborhood focus group are presented below.

³ Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24 (3), 369-387.

⁴ Catalani, C., & Minkler, M. (2010). Photovoice: A review of the literature in health and public health. *Health Education & Behavior*, 37 (3), 424-451.

Downtown. (n=4)

- ▶ The chief concern was **traffic**, a problem on a number of fronts: heavy traffic, driving speeds, and noise. Noise received the most discussion, for example, the continuous “hum” of Route 22 traffic as well as its proximity to the Bushkill Creek and its negative effect on property values.
- ▶ A related concern was **air quality**, particularly pollution associated with buses and “horrible fumes,” tempered with recognition that Easton has a “fantastic bus system.” It was suggested that buses be diverted from the Center Square.
- ▶ Another concern was the sustainability of the Easton Ambassadors Program, which cleans up **litter and trash** downtown.
- ▶ Participants also discussed **oil runoff** from “Do it yourself” car repairs (“a small but hazardous issue”).
- ▶ They expressed a wish for greater **recycling** participation.
- ▶ Participants ranked **intermodal transportation** their environmental priority and also addressed **food access**, comparing notes on mobile food source (the “Veggie Van”) and community gardens distributed around the city for easy access. Participants agreed that the Easton Farmers’ Market provided good food but it was expensive.
- ▶ Asked to comment on the graphic, they raised some questions about what “air quality” and “development” meant in this context; overall, they saw Easton as a great city undergoing expected “growing pains.”

College Hill. (n=9)

- ▶ The universal concern was **traffic** on Cattell Street, specifically driving speeds, which were compared to high-speed German *Autobahn* highways. Cattell Street was characterized as one “you can never cross safely, especially with children.” Participants saw their “walking neighborhood” threatened by traffic speeds on Cattell Street as drivers head for Route 22. They felt stymied by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, which prohibits local police from using radar to track car speeds.
- ▶ **Litter** was seen as a consequence as well: drivers passing through College Hill often discard food packaging and other litter along the streets and sidewalks.
- ▶ Participants also expressed concern about the number of **older trees** that had not been replaced and about the use of **herbicides** near roadways that drain into the rivers.
- ▶ Asked to define “environment,” the most resonant definition was “the totality of your living experience.”
- ▶ Participants also commented on the graphic, expressing surprise that water quality was an issue on College Hill and that Inner Ring adjacent communities registered food access as an issue—“that’s where all the grocery stores are.”
- ▶ They also added **truck traffic** to the traffic concern on the graphic.

South Side. (n=5, 2 residents, and 3 who live elsewhere and work in South Side.)

- ▶ An immediate topic was the sense that the South Side neighborhood is **isolated** by the Lehigh River from the rest of the town—“It seems far when driving, but walking is even harder,” said one participant. Others wished for a return of the pedestrian bridges to relink South Side and the West Ward, for example.
- ▶ Related to this concern was the **health of the river** itself. “It could be used like a vein,” remarked one participant, “but it’s used like a pipe instead.”
- ▶ There were calls for more **parks and open space**, especially near the river.

- ▶ **Traffic** was also an issue; participants pointed to a main through street as “created to get people to [Route] 78, not for residents to walk” and noted the abundance of dangerous intersections in their neighborhood.
- ▶ South Side is also near a **landfill**, and participants expressed curiosity about its contents, whether it leaked, and where **leaked material ended up**.
- ▶ **Recycling** also came up, and one participant described how a local business had radically reduced its waste footprint.
- ▶ **Food access** is theoretically less of a concern here—South Side has a grocery store—but participants saw the store as inadequate to their needs.
- ▶ There was a great deal of enthusiasm for **gardening** and locally grown food.
- ▶ Asked to reflect on the graphic, participants were glad to see the river as a prominent concern. They also commented on the different lenses residents and City officials/CBOs use: residents’ concerns were more local, immediate, and actionable, compared with broader concerns raised by City officials/CBOs, such as climate change.

West Ward. (n=9)

- ▶ **Trees** emerged early as a topic of concern. Participants cited the many benefits of street trees, from shade and “calming sophistication” to increased property values but saw street tree maintenance as a pressing and contentious issue. Homeowners, they explained, are expected to maintain street trees, but in a neighborhood with high numbers of rental units, tree maintenance did not keep pace with the need. “Trees outlast tenants, landlords, and businesses,” noted a participant.
- ▶ **Walkability** also emerged as an issue, particularly in connection with food access (and the ability to physically walk to obtain fresh food) but also in connection with badly maintained sidewalks.
- ▶ Other concerns included a need for more **walking trails, bicycling, green space, stormwater runoff, and traffic noise and fumes**; **feral cats** were briefly mentioned.
- ▶ Cognizant of the West Ward’s reputation, two participants proposed renaming it “Uptown” to give the neighborhood more cachet.
- ▶ Asked to reflect on the word cloud graphic, participants concurred, “It looks pretty right” and noted that the environment becomes a greater concern when crime is under control. One participant observed that on the graphic, the West Ward’s concerns were the reverse of City priorities. In general, participants explored the difference between the City’s broader, more long-term concerns, and their neighborhood need to address “things we need [immediately] with active attention.”

The last part of all four focus groups served to introduce the PhotoVoice process. Participants were shown sample photographs and signed up to receive a disposable camera and a stamped envelope with which to return the camera to NNC. NNC oversaw the processing and labeling of all photographs. Images submitted in time for the second round of focus groups were combined into PowerPoint presentations for each neighborhood.

Round 2 Focus Group Discussions

In addition to responding to the graphics, Round 1 focus group participants contextualized the environmental issues, raised some priorities that had not emerged in the surveys, and proposed some solutions. Based on these discussions, RMC researchers developed a model to situate environmental issues in a larger context that also included how issues manifested in the neighborhood, their long term consequences and, occasionally, potential remedies offered by focus group discussants. NNC staff revised categories of concerns and priorities, and Art Director Keri Maxfield created new graphics that took into consideration comments by focus group participants and was based on the RMC model. Each

new graphic accompanied the discussion of a neighborhood-based Round 2 focus group and are included below.

Round 2 focus groups—which included some participants who had attended a focus group in the previous round—were similar to Round 1 in further clarifying neighborhood concerns/priorities and gathering feedback on the revised categories and graphics; they also served to show and discuss PhotoVoice images taken by neighborhood participants. Apart from the South Side focus group, relatively small numbers of photographs were available for Round 2—9 in Downtown, 8 in College Hill, 15 in the West Ward, and 30 in Southside. However, focus group participants and other Easton residents were invited to continue to submit photographs into December and ultimately 180 photographs were submitted. Comments from the focus group discussions about photographs are addressed in the PhotoVoice analysis.

Tom Maxfield, a local Easton artist and art teacher, offered a brief presentation on a large-scale illustration he had created to highlight environmental issues in the Lehigh Valley. This presentation was intended to engage participants in thinking about environmental issues, how they may be portrayed, and how individual issues could be shown in a larger context. The issues discussed in the second round of discussions are presented below.

Downtown. (n=4)

- ▶ Discussion focused on the graphic’s three main Downtown concerns, **traffic**, especially as a cause of **noise pollution, trash, and food access**. The traffic discussion was brief, chiefly noting problem areas such as the Centre Square and Canal Street, but one participant added, “After this meeting, we definitely are paying more attention to the traffic. We are now questioning if tractors trailers are allowed down our street.”
- ▶ On trash, one participant noted Canal Street as a site for both litter and pools of oil; another praised the Easton Ambassadors’ clean-up effort as an asset to the neighborhood. There was little discussion of food access.
- ▶ Asked about other topics, participants asked whether Easton was prepared in case of a fire associated with **crude oil transport** and observed that a large **tree stuck on the Lehigh River dam** could be a hazard to kids, and to the dam itself.

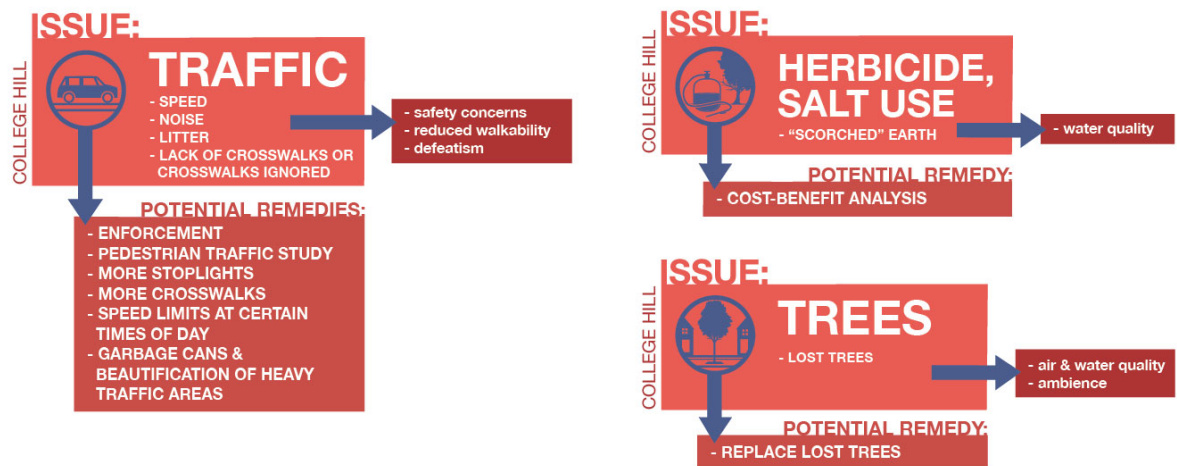
Figure 5: Focus Group Findings from Downtown Participants



College Hill. (n=9)

- ▶ Discussion focused on the three main topics raised in the first round of focus groups: **traffic**, **trees**, and **herbicides**. It began, however, by noting that litter should be removed from the traffic category and given a category of its own, arguing that there are many other sources of litter beyond that which drivers throw out of their cars on College Hill streets and sidewalks.
- ▶ The traffic discussion reprised the state’s role in the context of what the City could do—rumble strips? Raised crosswalks? Cones marking crosswalks? They agreed the issue continues. There was some talk of buses idling for extended times during school hours, although one participant noted that when asked, a bus driver stopped idling the bus.
- ▶ On the subject of **trees**, participants identified problem trees, raised the responsibility issue (City vs homeowner) that also galvanized West Ward participants. College Hill is a desirable residential area, “mostly due to the trees, but it’s a mixed bag because they cause power outages,” noted a resident.
- ▶ A participant involved in the City’s environmental activity noted that the City no longer uses chemical **herbicides**, replacing them with integrated pest management; the larger issue is residential use, which can be sloppy and ill-informed and leach chemicals into the waterways. But it was also noted that communities in Pennsylvania cannot legally regulate residential pesticide/herbicide use.
- ▶ One participant raised the question of whether rain gardens could be established, and another proposed that quality of life issues could be addressed by environmental design.

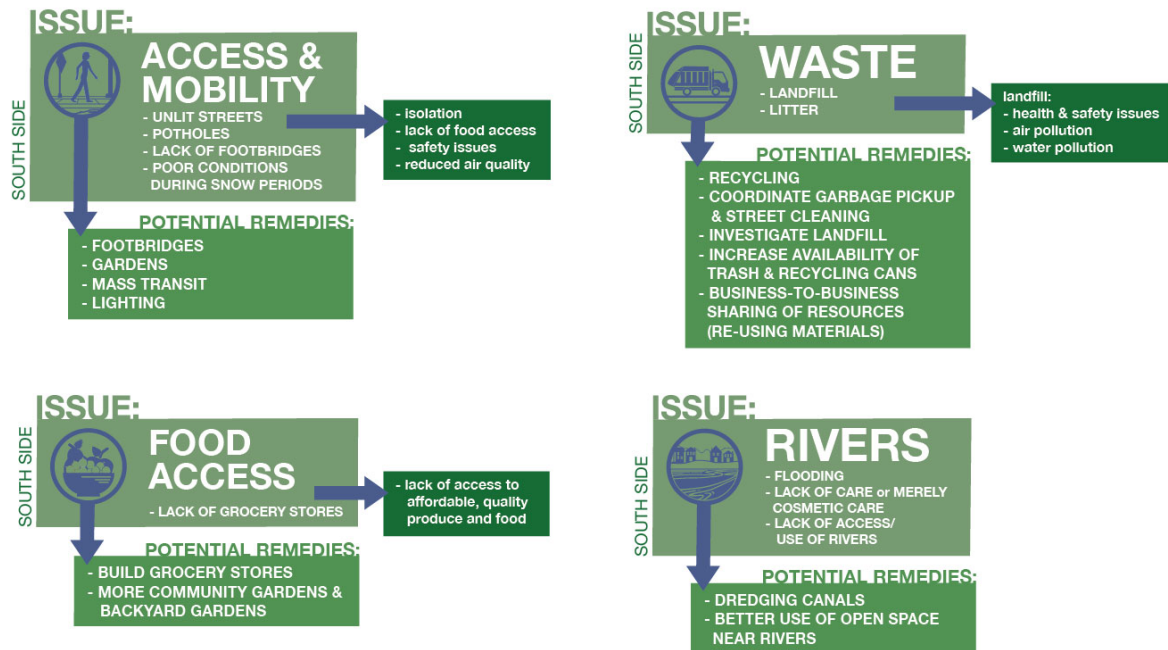
Figure 6. Focus Group Findings from College Hill Participants.



South Side. (n=7)

- ▶ Rather than speaking to the topics listed on the graphic, participants shared observations. For example, one participant explained, “We’ve been saying since we’ve lived here that there is **no access**. No parking, **no safe legal access to the canal/Lehigh River**. It’s not good for foot traffic.”
- ▶ Another noted that with respect to **food access**, the local grocery store was “improving.” Another suggested that more people need to be aware of the farmers’ market.
- ▶ Asked what South Side issues were missing from the graphic, participants were quite vocal, naming **dangerous street crossings**, a need for more **street lighting**, particularly along Canal Street, **blight**, worsening **allergies**, **litter**, **lack of building code enforcement**, **dog waste** in open spaces, **feral cats** at the former Silk Mill, and the need to feel **connected to downtown Easton**.

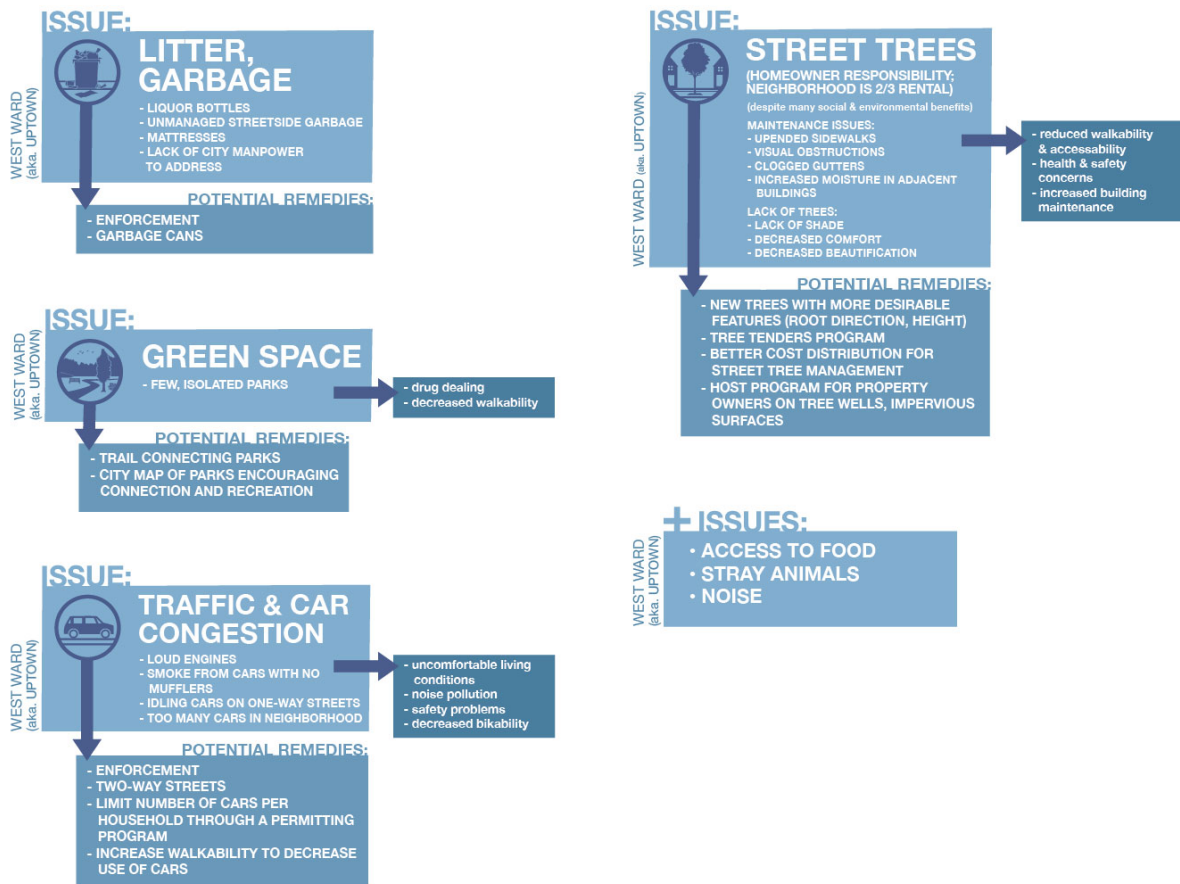
► Figure 7. Focus Group Findings from South Side Participants



West Ward. (n=6)

- Participants began by reflecting on the graphics, concurring on the key topics: **traffic, trash, street trees, and green space.**
- Discussion of traffic was brief—“red is the new yellow,” noted a participant on traffic light regulations—but participants discussed the other three topics in some detail.
- A major trash issue in the West Ward has been the removal of **a large number of trashcans** from the streets; participants also called for renewed **recycling** efforts for businesses and schools as well as residents. Participants continued to express frustration with **maintenance of street trees**, particularly with arranging assistance from the City.
- There was a general call for **lighting** on dark streets and in parks—suggesting cost savings such as solar lighting. Asked about other issues, participants brought up **crime**, chiefly drugs and shootings, and called for **greater law enforcement.**
- Participants discussed individual photos and made suggestions such as, the “City should create packages of ideas [about **tree care**] for homeowners.” One participant noted in closing, “There is value in these **historic places** [in the West Ward]. You can’t get that in a development” and called for greater celebration of the neighborhood’s positive features.

Figure 8. Focus Group Findings from West Ward Participants



Focus Group Survey Findings

After each focus group in Rounds 1 and 2, participants were asked to complete an evaluation survey. Questions included feedback about the discussion as well as enumeration of additional environmental priorities. Twenty-five Round 1 Focus Group participants responded to a survey, as did 23 Round 2 participants. Of those 23, 10 had attended Round 1 Focus Groups.

Neighborhood	All Participants (n=38)	Round 1 Focus Group Participants (n=25)	Round 2 Focus Group Participants (n=23)
Downtown	11% (4)	16% (4)	17% (4)
College Hill	34% (13)	32% (8)	35% (8)
South Side	18% (7)	20% (5)	30% (7)
West Ward	32% (12)	32% (8)	26% (6)
Other	<3	<3	<3

Attendance at a specific neighborhood focus group does not mean all attendees were from that neighborhood; some attended focus groups in neighborhoods other than their own for logistical reasons, and a small number of respondents lived outside of Easton itself. Of those who lived outside of Easton, respondents attended neighborhood focus groups where they worked.

Thirty-seven respondents answered demographic questions. Respondents were overwhelmingly female (73% to 27%) and most were well-educated: two thirds (67%) indicated they held a bachelors or post-graduate degree. Most (59%) had lived in their neighborhood eight or more years; just under one quarter (22%) were relative newcomers, living in their neighborhoods less than three years. With respect to respondents' ages, 54% were between 30 and 49 years old; 22% were between 60 and 69. Participation by residents younger than 30, between 50 and 64, and older than 70 was minimal.

Table 8: Survey Respondent Demographics						
Neighborhood						
	Total (n=37)	South Side (n=7)	College Hill (n=13)	West Ward (n=11)	Downtown (n=4)	Other (n=<3)
Gender						
Female	73% (27)	57% (4)	62% (8)	91% (10)	<3	<3
Male	27% (10)	<3	38% (5)	<3	<3	-
Education						
High School/GED	<3	<3	-	-	<3	-
Associate's Degree	24% (9)	57% (4)	-	36% (4)	<3	-
Bachelor's Degree	24% (9)	<3	38% (5)	<3	<3	-
Post-Grad Degree	43% (16)	-	62% (8)	45% (5)	<3	<3
Length of time in Neighborhood						
<1 year	<3	-	<3	<3	-	-
1-2 years	14% (5)	<3	<3	<3	-	-
3-5 years	16% (6)	<3	<3	<3	<3	
6-8 years	<4	<3	-	-	-	-
8 + years	59% (22)	<3	69% (9)	54% (6)	<3	<3
Age						
20-29 years	<4	<3	-	-	-	-
30-39 years	27% (10)	<3	38% (5)	<3	-	-
40-49 years	27% (10)	<3	<3	<3	<3	-
50-59 years	11% (4)	-	<3	<3	<3	<3
60-69 years	22% (8)	-	<3	<3	<3	<3
70+ years	11% (4)	-	<3	<3	-	-

Awareness of Focus Groups

Thirty-seven survey respondents indicated how they learned about the Focus Groups, with three of the top four sources deriving from the Nurture Nature Center:

- ▶ NNC Facebook page (cited by 32% of respondents),
- ▶ NNC email newsletter (cited by 24%), and the
- ▶ Easton Matters survey (cited by 22%).
- ▶ Thirty percent (30%) of respondents learned about the focus groups from family or friends.

NNC outreach appears to have been strongest in College Hill:

- ▶ Fifty-four percent (54%) of College Hill respondents learned about the events through the NNC Facebook and 38% through the NNC email newsletter.
- ▶ Thirty-six percent (36%) of West Ward respondents learned from the Easton Matters survey, and
- ▶ Fifty-seven percent (57%) of Southside respondents learned from family and/or friends.
- ▶ Twenty-seven percent (27%) of West Ward respondents learned about the Focus Groups through a community event.

Motivation for Attending

Asked what motivated their attendance, responses were fairly consistent among all four neighborhoods, with “sharing concerns” mentioned most often (49%) among 37 reasons cited. Other motivations included making a contribution to the community (20%), the prospect of having a voice in City affairs and decision-making (20%), and specific environmental concerns: a rental apartment in need of care, West Ward issues (11%).

Community Involvement Levels

Thirty-seven respondents rated their community involvement. Overall, the greatest proportion (30%) of respondents self-identified as “somewhat involved.” Among the neighborhoods, nearly two-thirds (63%) of West Ward respondents rated themselves “highly involved” or “involved,” as did 50% of Downtown respondents, 42% of South Side respondents, and 31% of College Hill respondents.

Value of Focus Group Discussions

Respondents chose from a proffered list of things they valued most about the focus group; questions varied somewhat between Round 1 and Round 2. In Round 1, a total of 25 participants valued the elements of the focus group discussion as follows:

- ▶ Hearing about other concerns/experiences—93%
- ▶ Having an opportunity to talk & think about environmental concerns—83%
- ▶ Having a chance to contribute to neighborhood improvement—75%
- ▶ Having a chance to have a voice in my neighborhood—63%
- ▶ Gaining a better understanding of my neighborhood—54%

Looked at through a neighborhood lens, nearly all (96%) Round 1 Downtown and South Side respondents valued sharing with others; indeed, South Side respondents were almost unanimous in valuing all components of the focus group. Most Round 1 respondents also valued the opportunity to talk and think about environmental concerns; although interest in this was weakest in the West Ward, more than half of respondents valued this focus. College Hill and West Ward respondents seemed least

drawn to greater understanding of their neighborhood. The appeal of a deeper understanding of the neighborhood itself was strongest among South Side respondents.

Round 2 focus group participants valued the discussion elements as follows:

- ▶ Hearing about and seeing others' concerns/priorities—96%
- ▶ Having an opportunity to talk and think about environmental concerns—83%
- ▶ Having a chance to contribute to neighborhood improvement—74%
- ▶ Having a chance to have a voice in my neighborhood—65%
- ▶ Gaining a deeper understanding of environmental issues in my neighborhood—52%
- ▶ Taking photographs of my concerns and priorities—43%
- ▶ Sharing and discussion the photographs—43%
- ▶ Contributing to a public exhibit—30%

Taken as a whole, Round 2 respondents' valued the focus group discussions similarly to Round 1; they also took the opportunity to weigh in on the additional elements having to do with photo documentation. Although taking photographs elicited some responses, the other options—discussing photographs and contributing to a public exhibition—were perceived as of lower value than options related to speaking, listening, or making an active contribution.

Post-Discussion Intentions

Four-fifths (82%) of all respondents indicated that, following the focus group, they would share the information with family and friends; three-fifths indicated they would get more involved in their neighborhood (63%) and get involved in community planning or attend meetings related to environmental concerns (61%). Just under half (45%) of all respondents noted that they would seek further information. Among "other" actions, respondents wrote:

- ▶ Get out and do something!
- ▶ Share these events on social media to further spread the word
- ▶ Student project ideas
- ▶ Take photos
- ▶ Take pictures and submit them

Bearing the small sample size in mind, all Round 2 Downtown respondents valued information-sharing and indicated they would share information from the focus group with friends and family; the numbers for the other options were too low (<3) to be included. College Hill respondents favored sharing information and getting more involved in their neighborhood; again numbers for the other options were too small to be included. West Ward respondents indicated intentions to get involved in community planning and attend meetings and to seek further information. South Side respondents indicated intentions to pursue all options except for contacting city officials. Indeed, numbers for contacting City officials were too low to be included for any neighborhood.

Again, the sample sizes are small, but it appears that greater numbers of Downtown respondents planned to take some kind of action. Information-seeking was lowest among College Hill respondents and highest among West Ward respondents. More Downtown respondents appeared ready to contact City officials, while no College Hill participants expressed an intention to do so. The "other" category also included action-oriented steps, although none were suggested by Downtown respondents.

Familiarity with NNC

Eighty-four percent (84%) of all respondents indicated they were aware of Nurture Nature Center (NNC) prior to attending the focus group discussions and had attended events; another 11% said they were aware of NNC but had not attended any events. Fewer than three respondents said they were not aware of NNC.

Guest speakers and community forums topped the list of types of NNC programming respondents preferred, with 41% of all respondents naming both. Broken down by neighborhood, 75% of Downtown respondents were interested in guest speakers, as were 57% of South Side respondents. Half (50%) of Downtown respondents indicated interest in community forums, as did 47% of South Side respondents.

While films only drew 35% of all respondents, 75% of Downtown and 43% of South Side respondents expressed interest, a pattern repeated with hands-on workshops: 35% of all respondents indicated interest, compared with 57% of South Side respondents and 50% of Downtown respondents. Slightly over one-third (36%) of West Ward respondents also indicated interest in hands-on workshops.

Family events appeared popular with Downtown residents (75%), but drew negligible interest from the other three neighborhoods.

Topics of Interest for NNC Programming

Respondents were offered a list of environmental topics to choose from to indicate their interest in future Nurture Nature Center programming.

- ▶ A majority (85%) of all respondents indicated **Transportation** (i.e., traffic, bicycling, walking, parking, roadways, and transit options) was a topic of interest, with the strongest interest (100%) from Downtown respondents, followed by West Ward (91%), South Side (86%) and College Hill (85%).
- ▶ **Recycling** was identified by 57% of all respondents; again, Downtown respondents were most enthusiastic (75% named recycling), followed by South Side (57%), College Hill (54%), and West Ward (45%).
- ▶ Just over half (51%) of all respondents named **Food Access**; interest was strongest among South Side (71%) and West Ward (64%) respondents; 50% of Downtown respondents named food access, while less than a third (31%) of College Hill respondents did.
- ▶ **Air Quality** was named by just under half (49%) of all respondents, although interest was considerably higher among South Side (86%) and Downtown (50%) residents. Interest among College Hill and West Ward participants was less than 40%.
- ▶ **Climate Change** was named by 46% of all respondents, but responses varied widely among neighborhoods, with 71% of South Side respondents and 62% of College Hill respondents naming it; climate change was named by only one fourth (25%) of Downtown respondents and only 18% of West Ward respondents.
- ▶ **Water Issues** drew 43% of all respondents, with interest highest among South Side respondents (71%), followed by College Hill (46%), West Ward (27%) and Downtown (25%).
- ▶ Sixteen percent of all respondents offered “other” topics: funding for improving “Elm Street” (a state program to enhance the residential district surrounding the downtown shopping core), animal welfare, neighborhood health facilities and doctors’ offices, green space, population, resource management and distribution, and less concrete in streetscapes.

Civic Leader Interview Findings

In November, RMC staff conducted follow-up interviews with four City officials and four representatives of Community-Based Organizations who were among those previously interviewed by NNC staff. See

Appendix A for the interview protocol and the graphic interviewees were asked to respond to. The purpose of this round of follow-up interviews was to assess the Easton Matters community needs process itself and the role that NNC held in the process, as well as NNC's role in the community. The interviews also explored how interviewees framed the idea of "environment" and understood the graphic—Figure 4 above, which shows environmental concerns by neighborhood, City officials, and CBO representatives. To maintain objectivity, NNC was not included in these interviews.

Representing the City were the mayor, director of public works, fire chief, and a representative of the Easton Environmental Advisory Council (EAC). Representing Community-Based Organizations were ProJeCt of Easton, Easton Area Neighborhood Center, Easton Main Street Initiative, and West Ward Neighborhood Partnership.

Definitions

Several interviewees found the terms used in the graphic too broad. Some found it hard to respond to generalities. A City interviewee asked, "Does 'water' mean the rivers or drinking water?" and, "Does 'health concerns' mean respiratory health concerns? It could also mean access to clinics." For another city leader, there was an understandable difference between residents' concerns about their immediate environment and his view: "I have to look at the much larger city as a whole," explaining that his or her focus was necessarily on the future of Easton's natural resources, energy, and air and water quality.

The representative of a CBO raised the issue of what "environment" means, defining it holistically as "everything—social, economic, physical," noting that other people "may think of the environment as physical and not social." Identifying concerns such as poverty, health, food, crime, and water quality are interrelated, the interviewee noted that there is a "reflex to restrict" environment to physical surroundings. A City official raised a similar concern. "I know people think of the environment as air, water, food, and so on, but quality of life and health" were also related. For another City leader, many of the environmental concerns were "old school," 1970s environmental concerns—problems that can be resolved through information and enforcement. The problem is "generational amnesia," the interviewee said, recalling that massive public efforts Denver, Colorado resulted in removing the dense smog that once blocked the view of the Rockies. A CBO representative noted that "environment" is a scientific word for community. "Environment is a great metaphor....How is our health?"

Blight

Concern was expressed about a number of empty buildings that formerly housed light industry. "What's in them?" a CBO interviewee asked, noting that "the Silk Mill was incredibly polluted." Remediating the soil was one issue; empty standing buildings posed their own threat, as blighted and/or vacant buildings invite illegal activities. Furthermore, the interviewee noted, many of these buildings were dangerous—"no floors, no plumbing"—and had been left "to fester;" many pose a lead paint hazard for children and the river system. It was suggested the City acquire these buildings through the legal system and prepare them for rehabilitation and sell them (at favorable, "fire sale" prices) to residents who would agree to live in the buildings for five years and rehab them so that [the buildings] became a stable part of the neighborhood." Unsalvageable buildings should be torn down and remade as pocket parks, the interviewee added.

Crime

There was concurrence with the graphic representation that crime is a concern in the West Ward but also noted that some of this concern is media-driven; the crime rate has lowered in the West Ward. Said a CBO interviewee, "There is crime and we have drugs, but people feel safe here. We are getting people to turn their porch lights on," noting that walking partnerships and street safety programs were being developed. A CBO interviewee described the neighborhood as formerly "a middle class, blue-collar,

mostly single family neighborhood,” and many elderly feel embattled in their changing neighborhood. The increase in rental units has brought other problems, “like bad landlords and high density,” the interviewee said. A City official also noted that the West Ward crime rate was down and saw the media as somewhat inflammatory.

Development

This issue was raised in connection with Easton’s growing prosperity; an interviewee noted that in Easton “a lot of neighborhoods are improving, but may be displacing people into one ward” and expressed concern that neighborhoods could become “more and more of a pressure cooker of people who are not upwardly mobile.”

Food/Gardens

One City official also noted food access as an issue, calling it “a problem throughout the city” when there is only one 50-year old grocery store in town. The interviewee discarded the Farmers’ Market as too expensive for most people, aimed at people with disposable income, not “the typical resident.” A CBO representative described food access in the West Ward as “very much of a problem,” positioning it as a transportation issue. “We are talking about families of five or six going by bus to get all their groceries and lugging them back in little plastic bags.” The interviewee observed that the neighborhood has an active Easton Hunger Coalition and “people are very aware of food and health here.” The value of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) cards is now enhanced at the Farmers’ Market through the Double SNAP program, making food there more available to West Ward residents; SNAP cards may also be used for seeds and growing materials.

This interviewee described the City as “amazingly supportive of the gardening programs,” noting a state award and the fact that Easton’s urban agriculture coordinator now addresses conferences across Pennsylvania and beyond. The interviewee praised the Department of Public Works (DPW): “The DPW is a great partner in its leaf mulching program and the urban farm.” Another CBO representative found that the Easton Matters project had opened new ways of thinking about issues such as food access, remarking that, “The solution is not always money,” and articulating a vision for greater garden and urban farm participation by clients and residents.

Green Space

One CBO interviewee initially noted that while environmental concerns were of interest, “It’s not our mission. We are looking to build economic stability and vitality.” However, the interviewee saw overlap in several domains, green space among them and compared Easton’s “very little green” with Allentown and its “incredible” park system. Another CBO interviewee also saw green space as a clear need: “We know that hanging around trees and sitting on the grass is healthy,” but, “Kids have nowhere to go.” This interviewee characterized the West Ward as “high rental, people on top of each other, cars are everywhere. It can get intense, and without the calming effect [of green] and community gathering spaces, there’s nothing to dissipate that.” Noting some efforts to “promote the green space we have” by turning “not so useful pocket parks” into space for events, this interviewee suggested that NNC could help with programming in these community gathering spaces.

Rivers

Acknowledging that NNC is strongly identified with rivers and flooding, a City official expanded the concern about rivers, noting, “There is a direct relationship between litter, dumping, and water health.” Litter always ends up downstream, he said, as do paints and varnishes that are poured down drains, ultimately either in the ground water or the river. While this interviewee saw Nurture Nature Center as a highly effective outreach mechanism, solving the problem would necessarily involve government. A

CBO interviewee was excited to hear people talking about the river and found people willing to question the status quo. For example, there might be “ways to better use what’s here and not develop [new] infrastructure.”

Trees

An interviewee who is an enthusiastic tree-planter reported finding it “a hard sell,” explaining that homeowners are reluctant to take on the responsibility, and decline tree plantings because of problems with fallen leaves and sidewalk breakages: “I don’t think [the City] can continue the policy [of assigning tree responsibility to homeowners]” the interviewee said, adding that streets that once had tree canopies are now “barren and hot.” It was also suggested that the lack of trees communicates neglect and that a neighborhood that “doesn’t care about itself.” City officials were urged to tackle the tree problem holistically.

Transportation

A number of downtown concerns about transportation, such as parking, through-traffic, travel speed, and bicycle and pedestrian friendliness have been identified and addressed in the Easton Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) report *The Greening of Easton*. One interviewee had also facilitated an independent study program at Lafayette College that examined pedestrian friendliness and safety, with a focus on nearby Cattell Street, identified as a “big, big issue.”

Another City official noted that, “mass transit could decrease our carbon footprint,” then conceded, “This area is not big on mass transit. We hear of people who can’t park outside a restaurant, they don’t go.” Vehicles were the biggest concern of another city official, who framed the issue in terms of safety and quality of life. “The biggest complaint is speeding,” the interviewee said, noting—as others had during focus groups—that “Pennsylvania is the only state in the US that prevents locals [law enforcement] from using radar.” The interviewee contrasted Easton, a 250-plus year old urban core, with surrounding townships, whose populations doubled between 1995 and 2005. “We’re their flyover country,” the official said, with driving getting “out of control,” neighborhoods will suffer. Noting that over the past decade the City has developed a trail system and provided access to the rivers and the waterfront—“but you have to be able to get there safely.” The official called for “some kind of comprehensive vehicle management system,” noting that, “People don’t realize how accessible transit is.” For a CBO representative, transportation was an area of opportunity, noting that the walkable nature of downtown was a selling point for new residents.

Water

A City interviewee expressed some surprise about the basis for concerns about water quality: “We have very good water quality,” explaining that the City samples 116 outfall sites twice a year and sweeps streets of leaves and litter (using the leaves as compost) regularly. Another city official expressed similar surprise, citing awards the City has earned for its water. This official suggested that well-informed people tend to raise concerns about air and water quality (e.g., fracking) because their basic needs have been met. Stormwater runoff was also identified as a “huge” issue coming up.

Litter

A City interviewee found litter controversially linked with traffic in depictions of College Hill, arguing there were plenty of other litter sources. However, the interviewee did note an increase in “fast casual takeout containers” on the road to and from Forks Township, evidence that commuters and others are discarding their litter—Styrofoam now, formerly cardboard—as they pass through College Hill. Invoking a “chain of custody”—“You are responsible from when you purchase [an item] and when you dispose”—the interviewee described trying to encourage police to issue littering citation. “The way you know we

have a real plastics problem is to look in any bird nest. They're all using plastic!" the interviewee added. Another City interviewee noted that walking around has increased his or her awareness of litter: "Driving in the car you don't see it."

Dumping

Easton has several dumping "hot spots," maintained a City interviewee, citing South 10th or 11th Streets [in the West Ward]—dead-end streets where the "No Dumping" sign is ignored—as well as "off 25th Street [West Ward], right next to a city park in the north end of the city." This interviewee argued that unregulated dumping—everything from construction waste to old electronics and bulky items—will exact long-term costs in terms of clean-up, and also noted that dumping sites have social costs as well: "It's clear this is an authority-free zone" because the areas are neglected. Another City interviewee characterized dumping as a big problem that isn't talked about much and saw the problem broadly as one of disposal. Per Pennsylvania law, trash haulers are prohibited from picking up electronics, the interviewee explained, and the county stopped electronics recycling because it was too costly. Framing dumping as an education issue, the interviewee noted that options for the city to communicate and educate were limited and hampered by a prevailing "anti-government sentiment," adding that enforcement, perhaps with cameras, might be the only way to deter dumping.

Trash

A City interviewee initially saw Easton's top environmental concerns as flooding and climate change, but said that after studying the graphic, "trash, litter, waste, recycling" emerged as more of a problem. "We need to engage neighborhoods," the interviewee said, noting that some renters don't have a commitment to their neighborhood and tolerate garbage. He went on to describe an incident of paint spilled across a sidewalk and road; the spill clearly began at a particular house on the street "but there was no indication of anyone trying to clean it up." A City interviewee also cited first-hand knowledge of some dwellings that were extremely poorly cleaned and maintained.

Part of the trash issue, a City interviewee said, was a lack of receptacles: "We have to make it easy for people to do the right thing—and shameful not to" and suggested that other countries have addressed the problem more effectively, citing London's institution of block by block trash containers so that people in small dwellings don't have to "wait a week to take the garbage out." Conceding that it was likely that construction waste will find its way into street-side containers, the interviewee argued that that was an improvement over throwing waste down the side of a hill and proposed that the City develop a better, more universal trash pickup solution.

Trash arose as a "hot" issue specifically between the West Ward and City, which removed several hundred trash cans from the West Ward before the Easton Matters project launched. A City interviewee explained that West Ward cans were not originally City cans, but part of an Adopt-a-Can program that fell out of use. The City placed trash cans in the neighborhood to deal with street litter, not household garbage, which the City picks up regularly. To a CBO interviewee, removing the cans because they were abused did nothing to deal with the reality that litter that is not picked up washes down storm drains and affects the rivers. Despite the fact that the City and neighborhood representatives had conflicting interpretations of the issue, both expressed strong interest in entering a dialogue on improving waste management in the neighborhood.

Possibilities for Action

One City interviewee suggested a follow-up push-style survey so that people could rate the importance of an issue, describing the multi-step process the EAC went through in preparing its report: a community forum (40 – 50 participated) with seven stations at which to gather public input on issues and patterns the Commission had identified. "[Ranking concerns] is key if you are going to develop priorities." This

interviewee framed environmental concerns in terms of a need to develop new social norms through both education (Public Service Announcements) and enforcement, noting that, “There’s a \$300 fine for littering in Easton but it’s not enforced,” adding, “It doesn’t have to be a fine; even an inconvenience might teach [someone] a lesson.” Another City interviewee concurred about the value of education and enforcement, particularly with respect to high driving speeds and named some positive tools, in addition to education, such as off-road connections, traffic calming measures, and lobbying.

A representative of the City expressed openness to a dialogue with West Ward residents over the ongoing misunderstanding between the City and the West Ward over trash cans.

NNC Role

One CBO interviewee was highly impressed by NNC’s venture into neighborhoods and proposed that community organizations, such as the Easton Area Neighborhood Center (EANC), could bring NNC programming into the neighborhood. Identifying a primary concern as incorporating the urban farm into “South Side awareness,” this interviewee saw NNC as playing a role in supporting organic home gardening and the South Side garden behind the EANC, which is characterized as “borderline between small backyard gardens and a large agriculture enterprise.” Another NNC endeavor could be in supporting composting and seedling programs for South Side gardeners, the interviewee said. Another CBO representative agreed that NNC offers “top-notch” teaching on planting and gardening and stressed that “people listen” to NNC: “They are very well respected in the community and people don’t dismiss [what they say].” This interviewee also saw a role for NNC in the urban garden and urged NNC to “lead the charge” on gardening issues. A third CBO representative described NNC’s gardening classes and overall support for the West Ward’s food access project, noting that the neighborhood’s 14 community gardens produce hundreds of pounds of vegetables.

A City interviewee encouraged NNC’s participation in addressing environmental concerns, “If they choose to take it on,” cautioning against the difficulty of changing behavior and observing, “We can plant more trees, but human behavior—that’s a lot tougher.” Another interviewee had attended a few NNC events and discussed the transportation of crude oil with NNC as a strong concern. This interviewee noted that audiences at NNC events did not seem to be majority Easton residents. City interviewees expressed enthusiasm for NNC involvement on environmental issues; said one, “I have the highest respect for NNC. They do great work.”

A CBO interviewee whose chief interest was in developing an organization model, or template, for mobilizing collaborative, collective action, suggested that NNC was a potential model. Many organizations are created to meet certain needs, this interviewee explained, and inevitably find themselves in struggles to survive financially when the larger task is “finding ways to improve and empower elements in this system” of social supports.

Collaborative Opportunities for NNC

City interviewees appeared open to dialogue on issues of interest such as trash cans in the West Ward, and named several topics the City might pursue with NNC, including “water quality, air quality, trash, recycling, and green spaces.” A CBO interviewee concurred that green space projects were a possible area of collaboration, as were projects such as creating public murals and little free libraries. Another CBO interviewee stressed that the key City department was Public Works and spoke enthusiastically about the DPW’s work with playgrounds, citing a local interest in building playgrounds on sustainability principles: “It would be great to be working with [the DPW].”

Easton Matters Participation and New Thinking on the Environment

A City leader who has been involved with these issues for a long time did not necessarily hear anything new from the surveys or focus groups—but did “hear more voices that had a different priority

perspective”—and stressed that environmental issues are “universal to every resident. It’s not like we suddenly had a new industry...or a new development that changed the landscape. It’s ongoing.” For another, the Easton Matters project induced greater interest in ways to educate citizens and stressed that residents with questions should call or email the City. Whatever people are nervous about—“water, air, litter,”—this interviewee said, “We can educate them or tell them where to get [information].” Another City interviewee remarked that involvement with Easton Matters had stimulated a deepening interest in crude oil transport; a research project revealed that should an accident occur, one of the teams to control such an event is in Bethlehem. This interviewee also noted that trash and litter now register as bigger concerns, based on resident responses.

A CBO interviewee situated Easton Matters as part of ongoing efforts to keep the environment healthy. “It’s always on our minds,” this interviewee said, “[We] are always thinking about water, how to catch it and use it,” and avoid runoff. A number of concerns raised as part of Easton Matters were already on this interviewee’s agency’s work plan and five year goals, such as promoting traffic patterns (traffic calming, a return to one-way streets) intended to slow drivers and improve air quality. For another CBO interviewee, adding an environmental lens to the social service view stimulated new thinking, particularly in looking at strategies to meet social needs without new funding.

Other Thoughts

Although the topic was incidental to the focus group he attended, a City leader was intrigued by a discussion following the College Hill focus group among residents who sought to organize their neighborhood community in order to “age in place” rather than enter nursing homes. A CBO interviewee, noting how broad the issues were, suggested some kind of “health of the community” report that would attract attention, particularly if the information were “highly digestible.” Recognizing that there were so many issues, another CBO interviewee proposed picking “two or three things and making headway on them....It’s better to have a concerted application of effort on one or two [issues].” This interviewee emphasized the need to be intentional about collecting data on any such efforts.

PhotoVoice Analysis

Seven Round 1 focus group attendees submitted a total of 67 photographs for discussion during the Round 2 focus groups. Following the second round of focus groups, 11 participants (four were additions to previous submissions, one participant each from the West Ward and South Side and two from Downtown) submitted another 115 photographs, for a grand total of 182 photographs. A number of photographs were submitted by NNC staff or volunteers from Lafayette College; these photographs, 93 in total, were omitted from the analysis in order to focus on concerns surfaced by focus group participants only. Eighty-seven photographs were thus available for analysis.

All photographers were asked to include comments with their photographs; photographers complied in varying degrees, with all of College Hill and South Side participants offering comments, half of Downtown participants included comments, and a quarter of West Ward photographers. Comments were important in understanding a photographer’s intent. Where possible, the researchers inferred a photograph’s meaning from the image content, but for the most part, the PhotoVoice analysis relied on photographer’s comments to understand what a photograph was intended to represent. Photographs and comments used in the exhibits prepared for the April community forum event are shown in Appendix B.

Part 3: Community Forum and Photo Exhibition

The culminating event of the Easton Matters project was a community-wide forum on environmental issues in Easton neighborhoods. The forum was held April 7, 2016 at NNC. The event content was shaped by findings from earlier phases of the project: the citywide public survey, interviews with City officials and representatives of Community-Based Organizations, focus group discussions, and images submitted by Easton residents as part of a PhotoVoice process. Following a format used in previous NNC forums, tables were set with envelopes containing recording forms for facilitators and forms for individual participant reflections on each discussion question prior to structured small group discussions. At the conclusion of the small group discussions, facilitators reported on table conversations. In order to measure participant satisfaction with the event, likely actions they would take as a result of participating in the forum, and their preferences for NNC programming, RMC Research developed a survey form distributed to participants at the end of the session.

An hour before the April event began, eight table facilitators attended a training session with NNC’s Executive Director Rachel Hogan Carr and Science Director Kathryn Semmens. As identified in prepared Facilitator Notes and articulated during the training, the April 7 Community Dialogue event was designed as part of Nurture Nature Center’s Risk to Resiliency model: that is, the dialogue was intended to improve community capacity to respond to environmental risk, to help individuals become involved in efforts to improve the local environment, and to inform elected and appointed officials about critical concerns facing the community so they can respond appropriately.

In presenting the dialogue protocol, Carr and Semmens characterized NNC’s approach as combining four threads: deliberative democracy, public hazards education, information science education, and appreciative inquiry.

The foyer leading to the dialogue space, where participants signed in, displayed a series of photographs of Easton residents by Lillian June Robinson, an Easton photographer, along with a “Green Map of Easton” provided by the Easton Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) that highlighted “green” places in the City. The space also displayed model graphics of neighborhood concerns that emerged from focus groups (see Figures 5-8) and a sign-up board for those interested in particular issues.

Eight round tables were arranged and participants were encouraged to sit with people unfamiliar to them. An exhibit of photographs by Easton residents of environmental concerns and features worth preserving in their neighborhoods, arranged by NNC’s Art Director Keri Maxfield, filled two walls in the room. Each neighborhood treatment included brief statements of neighborhood concerns that surfaced

in surveys and focus groups as well as commentary and quotations from Easton Matters participants. The photographs were arranged topically; for example, the topic of trees in College Hill was represented by five photographs and resident commentary. (See Figure 9 below).

Eight-six (86) participants, not including facilitators, RMC observers, NNC staff, and a Spanish translator, attended the forum. The Mayor of Easton, Sal Panto, offered opening remarks and detailed numerous steps that Easton has taken to promote a healthier environment, among them, LEED certification for City hall, the planting of more than one thousand trees in Easton, the use of all LED lighting in the new



Figure 9. Part of the College Hill PhotoVoice exhibit

parking garage, and the promotion of a new recycling program.

Kathryn Semmens, NNC Science Director, introduced the Easton Matters project and reviewed the environmental concerns (and potential remedies) that emerged in surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Her discussion touched on key issues in each of the four neighborhoods—Downtown, College Hill, South Side, and West Ward—as well as those raised in interviews with City officials and community-based organizations. She also highlighted previous work the Center has carried out to promote public information, dialogue, and deliberation on topics of environmental concern, including one that arose out of an Easton Matters focus group, on rail transportation of crude oil through Easton.

Semmens described the evening’s deliberative process: participants were asked to respond to a set of questions, first in private reflection and second in group conversations, developed by NNC staff with RMC input. Those discussions, all together lasting about an hour, were followed by reports from each table about key ideas that arose in the discussion. Participants were also assured that their input at the event would be used in preparing a formal report for City decision-makers. Semmens used a PowerPoint presentation to cue participants to each phase of the deliberation.

Participants were asked to reflect on and discuss four questions:

1. What drew you to this event?
2. What do you most value about your neighborhood?
3. What single priority would be valuable to focus on first to improve Easton?
4. What’s the role of the City/my neighborhood/me in making this happen?

Following lively discussion of these questions—observers and table facilitators noted that conversations were strikingly on-topic—a facilitator from each table reported on key issues raised in the table discussion. **Walkability** was the first item mentioned by three of the eight table facilitators and **traffic** was the first item mentioned by two. Two facilitators identified **water quality** first; one named **littering**. Other topics that emerged in table discussions included code enforcement, home ownership, vacant buildings, electronics and other recycling, trash, invasive species, access to Philadelphia, and potholes.

Participants were asked to record their immediate reflections on sheets of paper for each question as the event progressed. NNC staff conducted a qualitative analysis of 61 participant reflections that were gathered at the end of the event. Participants could offer more than one response to a question.

The focus of the qualitative analysis was to identify what participants valued most of their neighborhoods, what was the highest priority action to improve the city of Easton, and what the City officials could do to assist that improvement.

What Participants Valued Most about Their Neighborhood

Sixty-one participants completed, at least in part, the response sheets to forum questions. Because not all responded to every question, and some gave multiple answers to a given questions, numbers below refer to the number of responses. Aspects of their neighborhoods that participants indicated they valued fall into three broad categories: social, cultural, and physical.

Social

Participants expressed strong appreciation for a sense of belonging.

- ▶ Neighbors were named 23 times
- ▶ Sense of community, named 19 times and
- ▶ Safety, named 5 times

- ▶ More than three-quarters of all responses named some aspect of social connection to others, whether to specific people or to more general sense of solidarity and security (“we’re in this together” and “we watch out for each other”).

Physical

Responses also spoke to how participants valued some aspect of their neighborhood’s physical environment:

- ▶ Walkability, named 19 times
- ▶ Trees, named 13 times
- ▶ Greenspace/parks/trails, named 10 times
- ▶ Clean/street sweeper, named 7 times
- ▶ Gardens, named 6 times
- ▶ River, named 5 times
- ▶ Architecture, named 4 times

Cultural

A smaller number of responses named some cultural feature:

- ▶ Access to Downtown/shops, named 6 times
- ▶ Events/activities/excitement, named 6 times
- ▶ Arts, named 5 times
- ▶ Farmers’ Market named 5 times
- ▶ Historic named 5 times

Valued cultural aspects named three or fewer times include:

- ▶ Multicultural/diverse
- ▶ Proximity to college
- ▶ Convenience
- ▶ Culture
- ▶ Public transportation
- ▶ Access to New York City
- ▶ School

Participants’ Single Highest Priorities for Improving Easton

Participants often mentioned more than one priority, for a total of 76 priorities named. Areas of highest participant priority are discussed in turn; each is followed by participants’ suggestions of actions the City can take to address these priorities. Percentages are not calculated for potential City responses because the numbers of responses varied by topic.

Traffic and Walkability

43%⁵

Participant Priorities:

Walkability/pedestrian safety/sidewalks were together mentioned 23 times (30%); and **traffic** (a related priority focused on the walking/driving nexus), 10 times (13%). Nearly half (43%) of the responses were related to one of these issues.

Potential City Responses:

Actions Easton officials could take to address issues of walkability and traffic included traffic control systems, and access to sidewalk repair contractors. The most-often named action was pedestrian access/walkability/traffic control, mentioned 17 times. More specifically, participants suggested traffic control actions such as more speed bumps, banning trucks from downtown, promoting biking and walking, reducing volume through alternative routes, decreasing car speeds, reducing lanes, and instating traffic guards.

In terms of walkability, participants suggested dedicated pedestrian lights (i.e., petition Penn DOT to introduce a walk-only period at traffic lights). Pedestrian bridges and crosswalks (particularly on the South Side, where a major thoroughfare bifurcates the neighborhood) were additional suggestions. Related to pedestrian access, a suggestion was made to construct a walking bridge over the canal to the towpath; it would create more walking opportunities and better river access, participants said.

Suggestions named three or fewer times included **street repair** and **improved signage** for pedestrian right of ways. Noting that broken sidewalks presented walking hazards in many parts of the City, participants suggested that the City provide a list of **recommended sidewalk repair contractors**, perhaps with prices negotiated at a discount due the volume of work.

Building Stock

22%

Participant Priorities:

Vacant/blight[ed] buildings was identified in 5 responses (7%), and **code enforcement** was named a priority 4 times (5%), as was **neighborhood pride** (5%). In the context of the table report-outs, **economic development/revitalization**, named 4 times (5%) may be associated with housing. During the table reporting, the argument was made that better jobs and higher incomes would allow more families to own houses and thereby reduce transiency and deepen households' commitment to their block and neighborhood. Taken together, housing-related priorities were identified in 17 responses (22%).

Potential City Responses:

Code enforcement, understood as a tool to address blight and vacant buildings, was identified 14 times while [dealing with] **blight/abandoned lots** was named 7 times. There was also a desire to **increase home ownership**, especially in the West Ward, with a high population turnover. City incentives for Downtown building renovations and rehabs were suggested as a possible way to increase home ownership. One participant pointed to the Pennsylvania Land Bank as a resource for dealing with this issue. This legislation, enacted in 2012, authorizes cities with populations greater than 10,000 to remove problem properties and return them to productive use through homesteading and other mechanisms. Related suggestions made by fewer than four people include **local ownership of property, landlord control/engage rental community**, and **economic development**. To the latter point, some participants recommended a focus on attracting businesses to Northampton Street, bringing jobs and more residents. In a related note, a participant singled out Larry Holmes Drive for redevelopment, including a

⁵ The percentages are calculated based on 76 mentioned priorities.

possible Riverfront Promenade of businesses accessible from the river. The lack of physical and visual access to the river was seen as a loss, both economically and socially.

Litter and Recycling 21%

Participant Priorities:

The topic **trash cans/littering/recycle/compost** was named in 16 responses (21%). Concerns about trash were ongoing, raised by survey respondents, focus group participants, and the event attendees. **Trash cans** are an ongoing West Ward issue in particular; that is, the trash cans were removed a few years ago that were intended for street litter (and were used to some extent for household trash). **Recycling** received strong support in interviews and focus groups. **Compost** as a priority may be linked to increasing numbers of community gardens or offered as a practice more people should undertake.

Potential City Responses:

Eight responses suggested **more garbage cans**, particularly for their restoration in the West Ward. Some actions named in connection with buildings, such as **code enforcement and fines** may also affect this issue. This issue is ripe for neighborhood – City dialogue. Suggestions, included in that section, may also be relevant with respect to promoting positive (anti-littering, pro-recycling/composting) behaviors.

Crime and Safety 18%

Participant Priorities:

A small number of responses (5 mentions or 7%) identified crime and safety as a priority. **Crime/drugs** were mentioned 5 times (7%) and **safety/more visible police** was noted 4 times (5%).

Potential City Responses:

Participants proposed increased monitoring and greater police presence on the ground in neighborhoods; one suggestion was to make City employees part of an overall reporting team, such that parking enforcement officers would report other violations noted to the City or police, or street sweepers would report potholes and other needed street repairs. **Patrol/bike police/Block Watch** was mentioned 8 times in this context. **Lighting** was a related safety suggestion, named 4 times (5%) and detailed in terms of repairing lights and converting to LED lighting, which has a longer functional life than sodium lights (10 and 5 years respectively), is 50% more energy efficient than sodium lights, and improves visibility by making colors easier to see and enhancing drivers' peripheral vision.

The Natural Environment 8%

Participant Priorities:

Although 6 responses (8%) named **water quality** as a high priority, the natural environment did not come up as a priority topic, apart from comments made by fewer than three participants: **air quality**, **invasive species**, and **parks/green space**.

Potential City Responses:

Five responses offered suggestions for City action: **water quality**, **plant more trees**, and **maintain parks**. Comments about water quality included a suggestion that the City remove fluoride and chlorine from water treatment or to offer low-cost filtering systems for households. **Trees**, a prominent topic in focus group discussion, and **maintaining parks**, both frequent subjects of resident photos, received very few mentions in participants' reflections.

Communications

7%

Participant Priorities:

Except in connection with public education and signage, here reported in connection with littering, this topic did not emerge among participant priorities. However some participants offered ideas.

Potential City Responses:

The suggestions made three or fewer times, included **signage, increased Downtown Ambassador presence, positive PR, and public education**. Participants' comments about positive public relations included some detail. Several participants suggested the City conduct a public relations campaign to counteract negative media representations of Easton. Increasing Easton pride and connection could further be enhanced through themed community days or clean-ups, and "walking days" where everyone in one neighborhood walks to another.

Another communication strategy suggested was a monthly **City newsletter** with key information—what residents need to know and what the City is already doing to improve the quality of life in Easton. Many in Easton were unaware, for example, that the City was already converting to LED lighting, and communicating this positive message was seen as a "relatively easy and effective means to connect to residents." Additionally, hosting a **Q&A or informational discussion** every few months between City officials and residents was suggested as a way to reduce the City – resident communication gap and foster better relationships.

Forum Survey Findings

Following the discussion, participants were asked to complete a feedback survey and provide information to inform NNC future programming. Sixty-four, or 74% of all participants (n=86) completed surveys. The majority of survey respondents, 30%, identified the West Ward as the neighborhood where they lived, followed by College Hill (23%), South Side (20%), and Downtown (19%). Eight percent identified other towns: Easton Heights, Palmer, Phillipsburg, or out of town (visiting).

Event Awareness

NNC's Facebook page received the most mentions (52%) of how respondents learned of the event. (Respondents could name more than one source).

Table 9: How Participants Learned of Forum

Source	Mentions
NNC Facebook	52%
Family/friend	41%
NNC email newsletter	22%
Flyer	14%
Easton Matters survey	10%
Visit/event at NNC	8%
Community event outreach	5%

Most Valued Part of Forum Experience

Respondents were asked to indicate what they valued most of the event and could name more than one feature. Most (86%) respondents valued hearing about other people's concerns and experiences at the event. More than half valued the PhotoVoice exhibition, the opportunity to talk and think about local environmental concerns, and the opportunity to contribute to a report for community decision-makers highlighting results of the discussion. Other valued aspects mentioned (by 9% of respondents) were meeting people in their community and meeting others interested in the same issue.

Table 10: Forum Elements Valued by Participants

Forum Element	Mentions
Hearing about other people’s concerns/ experiences during the discussion	86%
Seeing and learning about other people’s concerns/experiences through the photo exhibition	61%
Opportunity to talk and think about local environmental concerns	56%
Contributing to a report for community decision-makers highlighting results of the discussion	55%
Expressing my views	47%
Gaining a deeper understanding of local environmental issues	45%
Learning more about NNC	27%

Focus Group and PhotoVoice Participation

A majority of respondents (68%) did not participate in any of the September 2015 Easton Matters focus groups. Of those respondents who did attend focus groups, 63% submitted photos for the PhotoVoice exhibit.

Future Actions

Asked about actions they were likely to take as a result of their participation in the event, respondents were able to name more than one. Two thirds (66%) indicated they would attend an NNC neighborhood walking tour, 63% planned to attend future NNC events, and 60% said they would advocate for an issue or public policy.

More than half indicated they would talk with family and friends and/or would attend town meetings. About one-fourth would change their behavior (e.g., recycle more).

Table 11: Participant Intentions for Future Actions

Future Action	Mentions
Attend a walking tour	66%
Attend future NNC events	63%
Advocate for an issue or public policy	60%
Talk with family and friends	55%
Attend town meetings	53%
Use traditional or social media to express a viewpoint	42%
Join a neighborhood association to make positive changes	32%
Contact an elected official	27%
Change my behavior (e.g., recycle more)	18%

NNC Event Topics of Interest

Respondents were invited to check all NNC topics that interested them the most. More than three-quarters (79%) named transportation, which comprised a host of issues: traffic, bicycling, walkability, parking meters, roadways, and transit options.

Other topics of interest cited were: litter and recycling, greenspace, food access, water issues, air quality, and climate change. Other topics identified included, composting, gardening, safe biking paths, stream and river health, and landlord-tenant issues.

Table 12: Topics of Interest for Future NNC Programming

Topic	Mentions
Transportation (e.g., traffic, bicycling, walkability, parking meters, roadways, transit options)	79%
Litter/recycling	66%
Green space	64%
Food access	56%
Water issues	54%
Air quality	52%
Climate change	46%

NNC Event Types of Interest

Respondents checked all types of programming of interest. More than half named: guest speakers (73%), films (64%), walking tours (60%), community forums (54%), and hands-on workshops (53%). One third noted interest in family events (34%).

Event Preferences

Nearly all respondents (95%) were familiar with NNC before attending this April event. Of them, 83% had attended previous events at NNC and named a host of events: art openings and shows, Sphere presentations, climate change presentations, community meetings or discussion (e.g., Easton Block Watch Meeting), gardening and/or community gardens classes, flood forums, healthy cooking demonstration, Easton Hunger Coalition, bee workshop, rain barrel workshop, and teacher trainings. A number of respondents praised NNC for the excellence of its offerings.

A majority (71%) indicated they would be more likely to attend NNC events in their neighborhood.

Maintaining Contact

Email was the preferred means of staying in touch with respondents, cited by 84%. Respondents could name more than one method; others were social media (38%), telephone (20%), newsletters (18%), or flyers (7%).

Other Community Outreach on Environmental Issues

Respondents also offered suggestions for further outreach:

- ▶ Use yard signs (similar to political signs) to publicize NNC events, posted in the Centre Square at prominent intersections
- ▶ Organize a Broom Brigade cleanup
- ▶ Q and A with panel of city officials

Other Comments

In addition to positive comments about the event and appreciation for NNC's bringing people together for the discussion, respondents added related ideas:

- ▶ Push back guard rail on 611 - for biking and walking to Downtown, foot bridge to the tow path for walking and biking to the Downtown
- ▶ Save the river, clean the city, please clean the riverfront (what a great place)
- ▶ Rainwater, stormwater mitigation

Part 4: Summary and Recommendations

The April Forum event exceeded expectations. To the Director, it was “all I could have hoped for” and grounded Nurture Nature Center’s presence in Easton with a strong message of caring and commitment to the City. The Center has always had a strong following among environmentalists; this event seemed to strengthen its relationships with a broader community. NNC staff noted that the survey indicated that the event helped participants see the Center in “a new light.” The level of community interest was high, as more than half of those who attended focus groups took part in the forum.

The Mayor characterized the participants as a good cross-section of the community. Another City official involved in the trash can issue remarked on how positive the event felt; he had anticipated complaints. The forum was intended to “level the playing” field between residents and “experts,” such as City officials and scientists. At the forum, City officials, including the Mayor, sat at tables alongside residents. NNC’s stature as a neutral convener increased through the forum.

In post-event discussions, people who were initially skeptical about the Easton community’s interest in improving the environment were surprised and pleased by the turnout. Others noted that the turnout showed how much people cared about Easton. “People are proud of Easton,” said the Director, citing the hashtag “#iloveeaston.”

The involvement of residents in the PhotoVoice—and the subsequent display of residents’ photographs during (and after) the April forum event—was a powerful new feature, NNC staff observed. It was another way to gather feedback “from the ground up,” said Science Director Kathryn Semmens, positioning it as a powerful engagement tool. At the event, the two walls of photographs kept residents’ concerns visible during the discussions. “People felt that their issues were represented,” said Art Director Keri Maxfield, and noted that the visuals helped people relate to their own experience. The PhotoVoice exhibit also served as a “shorthand” introduction for newcomers.

NNC staff agreed that the evening’s success owed much to its recruiting efforts, which were intensive and ongoing. The recruitment served not only to generate interest in forum participation, but to identify neighborhood leaders who might participate in future actions.

In focus groups and interviews, appreciation for NNC’s siting events in their neighborhoods was strong. Going into neighborhoods has built the Center’s credibility, the Director said, by showing that it doesn’t only serve environmentalists but addresses issues relevant to the whole community. For City officials, it affirmed the Center’s role as a safe place for objective and independent dialogue.

A number of immediate actions were announced in the weeks following the Forum:

- ▶ NNC walking tours of each neighborhood, led by a neighborhood leader in collaboration with NNC staff, were scheduled for all four neighborhoods
- ▶ Representatives of the City’s Economic Development and Planning Departments visited the PhotoVoice exhibit after the forum; in discussion with NNC, the departments will use NNC Easton Matters data in a planned \$100,000 marketing campaign to promote Easton, particularly Downtown, in the larger region.
- ▶ The Easton Main Street organization is also taking advantage of the Easton Matters data, incorporating them into its 10-year plan.
- ▶ The Easton Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) contacted NNC to discuss recycling and littering.
- ▶ NNC Executive and Science Directors presented the findings of the Easton Matters project to the City Council on May 24, which was written about in the local news.

- ▶ NNC is planning follow up programs including a question and answer session with City officials and will release an illustrated public report.

Summary of Project Outcomes

Easton Matters was a valuable contribution to the Nurture Nature Center’s strategic plan and to the Risk to Resiliency model. Positive impacts were seen in the Center’s organizational capacity and in social and neighborhood capital to address common problems together.

NNC Organizational Capital

A primary gain in organizational capital through the Easton Matters project has been in broadening the Center’s constituency. By conducting meetings in neighborhoods and engaging residents in articulating both what they loved about their neighborhoods and what they would change if they could, Nurture Nature Center identified itself as an organization in service to the whole community, not only (as may have been perceived) to people interested in science. This engagement strengthened NNC’s role as a neutral, well-informed, and credible institution, a place where people could expect to learn science, make or appreciate art, or contribute to the local and regional dialogue about the future. Indeed, following the public event and City Council presentation, NNC began to figure in solutions-oriented conversations—the Center was seen as a natural partner. “Bring in NNC; they can help” was how one NNC staffer characterized the new attitude.

Other impacts on NNC itself include gains in knowledge of what local publics saw as environmental concerns: the use of more formal needs assessment tools such as surveys and focus groups has enabled the Center to engage the community in identifying community strengths and assets. NNC’s public outreach has always been strong and vital to the organization’s success; the Easton Matters project formalized that outreach and gathered data and presented it in ways that were easily understood. This had the result of helping City officials and community members recognize common concerns and deliberate on solutions together.

One of NNC’s knowledge gains ensuing from the project was its realization participants understood environment more broadly than the natural world and used environment to mean, as one participant put it, “the totality of my existence.” Social factors such as personal safety, crime, and “quality of life” issues emerged as environmental concerns and may stimulate greater NNC collaboration with social service agencies.

A related gain in organizational capital draws on the findings from surveys conducted throughout Easton Matters to query participants about their preferences for NNC programming, generating valuable information about topics, formats, and scheduled times that would draw them to the center/ appeal to them. This expands NNC’s capacity to address community concerns in future programming.

Impact on Easton Community Capital

Easton Matters empowered community members in a number of ways.

First, the project amplified the “voice” of the city’s publics through its deliberate needs assessment (surveys, focus group, PhotoVoice, public event) which captured residents’ concerns and articulated them through a variety of media, including a public event that brought City officials and residents together as equals in small group discussions.

The project also enabled participants to prioritize the concerns they saw as most urgent and/or actionable and communicate them through personal reflections, small group discussions, and photographs. The public event created a very positive feeling among participants and about Easton, eliciting responses such as “#iloveeaston” and other compliments.

At the same time, Easton Matters initiated a public conversation about environmental concern, thereby raising awareness, and eliciting a host of neighborhood assets and challenges identified by neighborhood residents.

Impact on Neighborhood Capital

The project also shone a light on Easton's neighborhoods as distinct environments with concerns both common to other residents and unique to the neighborhood. Opportunities to share ideas through focus group discussions and photo-documentation of their concerns engaged citizens in reflecting on both positive and negative aspects of neighborhood life. As such, it appears to have increased neighborhood pride and solidarity, as expressed in focus groups and also during the community forum event.

The walking tours of each of the four Easton neighborhoods emerged as a spontaneous "spin-off" opportunity to continue to engage citizens in exploring their neighborhoods. Although NNC initiated the idea of walking tours and created the infrastructure that allowed the walks to be organized, the walks were led by neighborhood residents. Thus the walks had the added value of identifying neighborhood leaders—"local champions"—and potential NNC collaborators. The walks attracted between 10 and 16 residents in each neighborhood.

For example, the walking tour of College Hill generated interest in replacing lawns with other kinds of sustainable landscapes, a topic that was noted for consideration for future NNC programming. In the West Ward, residents raised the issue of the neighborhood's poor reputation and discussed efforts to rebrand the neighborhood from a "problem" neighborhood to "Uptown" or "The Heights." A neighborhood group to mobilize West Ward residents is current forming. At the Downtown walking tour, interest focused on ways to make the riverfront more accessible. The walking tour of the South Side surfaced many of the isolation issues identified in the focus groups, with renewed concern: participants likened the South Side as a "squeaker wheel" that may now receive some efforts to reconnect it the City, both geographically and socially.

Recommendations: Successful Practices for Replication

The Risk to Resiliency model is a flexible tool that museums, science centers, and other informal education organizations can use to increase community members' awareness of and preparation for a range of environmental risks. It describes a science learning and sharing experience that values local knowledge alongside expert or scientific judgments. It engages community members in exploring a topic of immediate interest, builds knowledge and understanding among participants, and articulates community concerns and ideas to help decision-makers understand and address community issues.

As NNC has demonstrated in its 9-year existence, the model can accommodate a range of issues and audiences. Past NNC events have focused on flooding, local food security, climate change, science education and other topics in groups that brought together hydrologists and river dwellers; climate scientists and local residents, emergency workers, and educators; and farmers and consumers.

NNC's Easton Matters needs assessment project offers some refinement of the model that may benefit other organizations committed to promoting community science learning and empowerment.

Refinements to the Risk to Resiliency model are described in the context of the Risk to Resiliency process.

Learn about the community and identify issues

- The Risk to Resiliency model is grounded in community concerns. Easton Matters reflected a more formal or structured process of eliciting ideas and concerns from stakeholders. Where earlier topics

may have been developed based on local news or word-of-mouth, Easton Matters deliberately sought **first-hand knowledge and understanding of concerns**.

- In accordance with earlier Risk to Resiliency projects, Easton Matters invested considerable time and effort in vigorous recruitment of participants. As a result, it engaged more than 400 community members in answering surveys and taking part in focus groups and a community forum; more than 30 City officials and representatives of Community-Based Organizations also offered insights through interviews and participation in the community forum.
- Critically, by not restricting the definition of “environment” in the survey or focus group questions, Easton Matters allowed participants to **interpret the “environment” on their own terms**, raising issues such as traffic and walkability, in addition to more obvious physical environmental concerns.
- The project’s use of multiple methods of information-gathering, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and facilitated small group discussions broadened the representation of Easton concerns and provided **a citizen “voice” to represent concerns to decision-makers**.
- The project synthesized each round of information gathering visually and took the resulting graphics to successive audiences to reflect on the accuracy of the visual portrayal. This iterative process helped build trust among community members by **involving them in refining priorities** and locating them in their neighborhoods.
- The PhotoVoice process enabled Easton Matters participants to assume a creative identity and show priorities through visual means. This could be created in a myriad of other approaches – for instance, the creation of a mural or a community art piece.

Recommendations for replication: Get to know your neighborhood – go to events and out into the community to learn what concerns the residents have. By opening the door to conversation and generating an authentic relationship with neighbors, it will be easier to engage the community. Be open and not prescriptive in these efforts to get to know the community – ask them for their thoughts and needs. Find out how to reach your community – do they use social media? Read the local paper? Frequent certain businesses? Is there a unique way the community can express itself and communicate its identity?

Plan a forum: bring experts and citizens together

- Risk to Resiliency public events feature a presentation, typically by an expert, on the event’s topic designed to establish some measure of common understanding. The Easton Matters forum presentation showcased environmental concerns and priorities in Easton and by neighborhood. The presentation, based on intensive information-gathering in the community, **positioned residents as “experts” and equal partners with City and CBO representatives**.
- Although not specifically mentioned as part of the Risk to Resiliency model, **valuing participants’ time** by providing food, relevant handouts, and giveaways at the forum sent a message of caring and respect to participants.
- The use of photographs by residents was a new element in the Risk to Resiliency model; earlier projects used photography to elicit participants’ ideas and emotions while Easton Matters placed authorship of images in the hands of residents. The use of residents’ photographs and comments in the exhibit at the community forum event served to **engage some participants more deeply and to make community issues specific and concrete**.
- At the public forum event, Easton Matters continued the Risk to Resiliency feature of **listening and respecting other participants’ views without striving to reach consensus**.

Recommendations for replication: The main event is the forum. This is where the community will develop positive or negative perceptions of your organization and effort so it is advisable to put some thought and consideration into its planning and execution. For instance, it is very beneficial to show you value residents' time by providing handouts/goody bags and food and drink. The forum should start by providing a common platform (either an educational introduction or a presentation to get everyone all up to speed) in order to establish a shared baseline knowledge so that discussion can be productive. Be sure to emphasize the Risk to Resiliency model's focus on listening and discussing, instead of worrying about coming to consensus. Urge participants to share concerns as well as assets and to focus on positive, actionable items to move the conversation forward in a productive manner. It is highly recommended to have trained facilitators to help keep the discussion at each table on track – this could be as simple as recruiting volunteers from a local school or university and briefing them an hour before the event about the planned protocol, rules for discussion, and goals of the forum. A facilitator guide is available from NNC upon request.

Review forum outcomes and findings

- In analyzing forum data, the Easton Matters team identified a number of actions suggested by participants, both personal and by the City. An explicit feature of the Easton Matters forum is encouraging participants' reflections on possibilities for action which both affirms the value of participants' ideas and sets the stage for continued involvement.

Recommendations for replication: A key element to the Risk to Resiliency model is its 'bottom-up' approach. By going directly to the community and asking for their perspectives, opinions, and ideas, greater buy-in to programs and events is created. Likelihood of success is increased when program ideas and issues are generated with the help of the community, instead of prescribed. Getting input from residents in all manners of communication (visual, oral, written) can be both enlightening and engaging.

Report findings to local decision-makers

- As in other Risk to Resiliency projects, Easton Matters validated participants' views by clearly communicating that event findings would be relayed to decision-makers. In this instance, Easton Matters findings were delivered in the form of public presentations (with attendant media coverage) as well as traditional print reports. Presentations were made to the City Council which led to local news coverage. NNC staff spoke with several city officials during private meetings to communicate the findings of Easton Matters.

Recommendations for replication: A key element to the Risk to Resiliency model is bringing the audience feedback to decision-makers. This step helps participants to know their concerns and ideas are valued, and encourages them to stay engaged with you. Also, when appropriate, consider working with decision-makers *in advance of* the forum to structure questions that will provide usable feedback to the decision-makers, increasing the likelihood that the information will be seriously considered and/or acted upon. When participants see you as a valuable conduit to action and information they are more likely to keep interest in your organization and attend programs and events. A committed and carried out actionable outcome can come in many forms and can be adapted to meet the needs of your specific community.

Conduct follow-up actions

- Given the geographical nature of the Easton Matters project (i.e., neighborhood focus), a natural outgrowth of the project was the initiation of neighborhood walking tours. The tours were facilitated by Nurture Nature Center staff but organized and led by leaders in each neighborhood.

While other Risk to Resiliency projects could have very different action outcomes, situating the initial follow-up action in the neighborhoods themselves has served to identify neighborhood leaders who could develop future partnerships and lead future actions.

Recommendations for replication: Repeated exposure develops familiarity. Keeping in contact and following up are key to maintaining strong relationships with the community. Continue to take actions – even small ones - in response to the forum, and communicate to the public that your actions are a part of the continued process. This follow-up will help participants to see their time as well spent and will heighten the level of engagement they have with your organization. Further, going into the neighborhoods for events and discussion strengthens the connection to residents and builds trust and rapport.

Final note: The process will look different in each community, and for each organization. A key part of the Easton Matters project was respecting local culture and norms, and being careful that in identifying areas of concern, the project also highlighted areas of pride, and identified what is worked well that should be advanced and expanded. Throughout the process, project staff referred to environmental concerns and priorities, noting that the project was looking to find areas that needed improvement and areas that are assets and should be supported and advanced. This approach is highly recommended for other organizations applying the forum model.

The Easton Matters project helped to build capacity for NNC to engage with residents around environmental risk topics, and to identify pathways toward increased resiliency to those risks. A strong, mutually respectful relationship between the organization and the knowledge and experience of the residents was essential in this process. The Risk to Resiliency model can be an instructive and beneficial platform for organizations seeking to learn more about their community and engage in more meaningful ways with residents.

Appendix A: Survey, Interview, and Focus Group Protocols

Appendix B: PhotoVoice Analysis