

Charlotte split into separate communities

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 The results show that while 49 percent of blacks live in Charlotte's urban areas, 26 percent live in the suburbs, compared to 40 percent of whites in urban areas and 61 percent suburban. The polarization is found throughout the study, where the average suburban homeownership rate is double that in urban areas, as is the dropout rate, the rate of births to adolescents and violent crime.

The 2.5 percent change per year in house value in the urban areas is evidence of gentrification. The study, which released in September, breaks Charlotte into three parts: the golden ring of Center City, the urban area, which is a 4.5 mile radius stretching from Trade and Tryon streets, and the suburban area, which makes up the rest of Charlotte. The study also gives the results for each neighborhood quality of life, identifying if it is stable, transitioning or challenged, as well as if it has changed in an upward or downward direction.

"Where you live provides a powerful social context," said Fursueh. "People say where do you live? Your answer becomes a powerful predictor for how they react to you."

It's that kind of perception that has the Clanton Park Community Association worried. The Quality of Life study lists Clanton Park and neighboring Roseland as a transitioning community; a label residents don't agree with.

Association President Dorothy Waddy and other members went to the Charlotte Department of Neighborhood Development in October to find out what could be done.

Waddy, who has lived at her home since 1970, said most Clanton Park residents own their homes, despite survey findings that 47 percent are homeowners. The survey's number is based on the Neighborhood Statistical Area, which created boundaries that included Roseland, where many of the residents are apartment renters.

"This does not give a true picture," said Waddy. "People here have been in their homes for some twenty or more years. They truly care about keeping their house in good condition and their streets clean. We've been working all these years; we feel we are stable. If we're not, prove it. I'm originally from Missouri—show me."

Sharon Sharpe is a city of Charlotte neighborhood specialist and the liaison assigned to work with Clanton Park and Roseland. Her job is to ensure they don't

transition down to challenged. However, the results of the study have already had what neighbors feel is a negative effect, as they've been receiving letters from realtors about selling their property.

"They see that study and think, their quality of life is going down, and we can get their property for nothing," she said.

"The study is looked at by more than just people who live in Charlotte, but also by people who want to live in Charlotte," said Waddy. "Either someone wants to buy a house to live here, or they don't because of the study."

"The same thing that happened at Wilmore will happen to Clanton Park if we let it," said Waddy, to her neighbors. "Wilmore fell asleep at the wheel."

Taking control of their situation, Clanton Park residents are creating a neighborhood survey of specific questions to find out the number of residents owning homes, level of education of residents in household, and other factors. They will go door to door to get the information, and then see for themselves what work they have ahead of them. Yet for Clanton Park and Roseland, as well as the rest of Charlotte, it's about more than what a study says about Charlotte today. It's about what the trends say about the city's future.

Community Building Initiative hosted the breakfast presentation for Charlotte's business community in order to bring attention to the problems as well as encourage solutions.

"Our mission is to achieve racial and ethnic inclusion and equity. We want people to clearly begin to understand the needs of the other group," said Sam Smith, CBI's co-chair. "People in the suburbs are working for resources in the suburbs...but they need to understand and be aware of the needs of the urban areas, and vice-versa. It starts with working as a community to see the needs of both areas, not just theirs."

Newly-elected Mecklenburg County Commissioner Chairwoman Jennifer Roberts said she's seen the division for years in politics.

"We've created an environment where people think it's a zero-sum game; they can't win unless I lose...they get the school, so we lost," she said.

After seeing the presentation, Roberts and others realized it's not so much a question of two communities, but a reality. There are few immediate answers, but

Roberts insists part of the solution is in connectivity.

"I think the business, faith, political communities...they all have to make the case for



how the connections effect all of us," she said. "If I live in Ballantyne, and I never go into uptown, what happens their, still impacts me. It's important to understand we are all connected."

It's these connections that have Waddy insisting that it is important for other neighborhoods to take action, as Clanton Park has.

"I think every neighborhood should challenge the study," said Waddy. "Only then can we move forward. I think each neighborhood owes it to themselves to step up to the plate and find out where they are in the mix, and then do what we are doing. You have to take care of home first."

Waddy is also a member of the West Boulevard Neighborhood Coalition. Comprised of 18 neighborhood groups, the organization lobbies for their interests.

"As we get older, we focus

on other things," said Waddy. "We need to go back and focus on all aspects of our neighborhoods. How is the neighbor-

hood kept up? Look at the schools, at the crime numbers. We can't work with what we don't know."

On the Net:
 Quality of Life study
<http://neighborhoods.chameck.org>

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NORTH CAROLINA

Teens in juvenile court system draws criticism

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half say no they're not," said Rep. Alice Bordsen, D-Alamance, a supporter of raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction. "There's a huge inconsistency in our law. It leads to waste in young people and a waste of money."

That argument has drawn rebuttals from many people charged with combating crime, including prosecutors, judges and local law enforcement officials. They contend reducing the threat of prison time could embolden gangs, burden an underfunded juvenile justice system and show disrespect to the public and victims of crime.

"As a district attorney, I have to be the voice of those who've been wronged, who've been hurt," said Howard Boney Jr., the longtime district attorney for Edgecombe, Nash and Wilson counties. "If we jump into this, then all of a sudden we're going to be giving a pass to people who often probably need a taste of the correction system."

Bordsen argues that such a "taste" of adult prison isn't doing much good. She believes teenagers sent to adult prison or placed on probation for a first offense don't receive the intensive behavioral help needed to keep them from becoming repeat offenders or escalating to more violent crimes.

The study commission came to a similar conclusion in its report, which recently urged next year's General Assembly to raise the age of juvenile court.

According to data compiled by the commission, about 5.5 percent of the 28,734 felons convicted during the 12 months ending June 30, 2005, were 16 or 17 at the time of their crimes. Forty-six percent of offenders who entered adult prison or were placed on probation at age 16 or 17 in 1999 were re-arrested within three years, compared to 38 percent for all offenders.

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