Community Conversations

East African Discussions

October 2021

ISSUED BY
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Note Taker
Kamil Jamac
Introduction & Background

A discussion around equity in St. Peter was held by the East African Community at the Hikmah Center in St. Peter in response to a request from Todd Prafke and the City of St. Peter. The discussion was facilitated by Mohamed Abdulkadir, assisted by Kamil Jamac as note taker. The event was held on October 9th, 2021, at 5pm.

In total, there were 28 attendants who completed a survey and 20 participated in the discussion. There were 8 follow-up in-depth conversation regarding the topic of this report. In certain sections, survey data will appear in line with the discussion points.

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Project Description

Primary Question of Discussion is as follows:

1. Central Question: What obstacles prevent equitable opportunity to participate in/have access to/use the service area.

2. Secondary Question: How do we create an environment that is welcoming and provides equitable opportunity to participate in/have access to/use the service area?
Project Survey Data

The scope of the Community Conversations project encompass the East African Community from varying ranges of age, gender, housing, etc. All information was self-identified.

Survey Results

1. What is your age?
   - 20 and below: 6
   - 21-30: 2
   - 31-40: 5
   - 41+: 14

2. What is your gender?
   - Male: 12
   - Female: 16
   - Other: 0

3. Marital Status
   - Married: 15
   - Single: 11
   - Divorced: 1
   - Prefer not to say: 1

4. Country of Origin
   - US: 2
   - Somalia: 20
   - Kenya: 1
   - Ethiopia: 2
   - Other: 3

5. Home Language
   - English: 7
   - Somali: 24
   - Swahili: 2
   - Arabic: 1
   - Other: 2

6. Housing
   - Own: 3
   - Rent: 23
   - Mobile Home: 0

7. Religion
   - Islamic: 27
   - Other: 1

8. Do you feel welcome in St. Peter?
   - Yes: 18
   - No: 5
   - Not Sure: 5

9. Do you feel safe in St. Peter?
   - Yes: 23
   - No: 4
   - Not Sure: 1

10. Have you or someone you know been a victim of discrimination in St. Peter?
    - Yes: 17
    - No: 9
    - Prefer not to say: 2
Discussion/Listening Session

The Service areas in which East African community members have faced obstacles which prevent equitable opportunity to participate are detailed below as well as suggestions on how to create an environment of welcome and provide better solutions:

11. In what service areas have you faced the greatest obstacles in St. Peter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Opportunities</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laws</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Discussion

### Housing

13 of the 28 respondents identified this area as an issue.

Housing is the 2nd most challenging service area for the community.

- Lack of large family units
- Some landlords are not providing proper notice for lease termination and/or eviction
- Lack of empathy for challenges faced by single parent households by landlords.

**Comment:**
Sometimes landlords neglect to perform maintenance tasks in a timely manner (doesn’t know who to turn to). I have asked them many times to fix.

**Solution(s):**
- When approving new apartments, ensure there is a requirement for more large family units
- Make a city resource available to help facilitate communication and ensure everyone is treated fairly

### Recreation

Of the 28 respondents, 1 cited issue with recreation.

**Comments:**
- There are times when the lights in the parks are shut off while the families are actively utilizing the service.
- We don’t experience any issues accessing parks, the Community Center, Library, etc.

### Land Use/ Property

Of the 28 respondents, only 2 currently own their own property in St. Peter.

- The community, although interested in purchasing property, are blocked by a lack of financing which does not include interest.
- Lack of education around home ownership in general
## Comments:

- “We have good credit but cannot find appropriate financing.”

## Solution(s):

- City built housing which can be bought by the community from the city directly
- City partnership with local Non-Profits to provide property purchase opportunities.
- City offering housing grants to support down payments
- City offer loans at reduced interest

### Law Enforcement

Of the 28 respondents, 5 cited law enforcement as an obstacle.

- The main cause of the friction is traffic stops and how people are treated once they are pulled over.
- The youth especially feel they are singled out.
- There was an example presented of one individual who was patted down for walking down the street.

### Solution(s):

- Community engagement initiated by law enforcement
- Build a relationship of trust
- Police representative who is present at community events

### Utilities

Of the 28 respondents, 4 cited Utilities as an obstacle.

- Even for individuals who have never missed any payments, they have never felt welcomed when they visit to make payments.
- There is a fear that missing or even being 1 payment late will result in immediate disconnection.
- Utilities are expensive.

## Comment:

- “When I go in and hand off my check for the month, I am not acknowledged. I have been making personal visits there for years.”
| Business Development & Opportunity | Of the 28 respondents, 3 cited obstacles to business development.  
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The main challenges are financial support or education on how to</td>
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<td>navigate the system – banking, loans, city requirements, zoning,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Legal help in the formation, registration, and permit filings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>remain a confusing obstacle for many.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution(s):</td>
<td>• More outreach from SBA and other non-profit organizations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Language                          | Of the 28 respondents, 17 cited challenges with the language barrier.  
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They shared what happens when they visit offices or stores:</td>
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<td>• This is the biggest pain point for the community.</td>
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<td>• Social services do not provide in-person translation, leading to</td>
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<td>the community members consistently feeling alienated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Not only Social Service but many government buildings do not</td>
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<td></td>
<td>have bi-lingual staff.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sometimes the translated document provided is not an accurate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>translation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Many who speaks very good English feel others withdrawal from</td>
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<td></td>
<td>conversations because of the accent.</td>
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<td>Solution(s):</td>
<td>• Hiring Interpreters will ease the tension.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dealing with accent:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Calm down
2. Simply apologize and ask them to repeat
3. Ask politely if they could spell or write

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Of the 28 respondents, 10 cited school as an obstacle.</th>
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<td>- This is the 3rd most challenging service area.</td>
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<td>- There is only 1 liaison who is responsible for all 3 schools</td>
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<td>- There is a general lack of support from school staff when it comes to disciplinary situations.</td>
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<td>- The school police officer is seen as taking a stance against Somali students in every situation. They do not believe he is there to help their children.</td>
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<td>- This was a heated discussion as multiple families had recent encounters in which they felt their children were mistreated.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The community believes the school does not take their concerns seriously, nor do they actively listen when students complain.</td>
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**Comment:**
- Parents encouraged to discipline their children.
- Example: One parent said our children are not angels, too. We need to educate our children how to respect officers, how to deal when incidents occur in the school sites and speak clearly and share what happen for the school staff, like if someone wants you to fight in the schools.

**Solution(s):**
- Members of the community have acknowledged that there has been a marked improvement in their relationship with the school district.
- A more collaborative decision-making process among the school staff, school resource officer, and students/parents when it comes to disciplinary actions.
- The students’ voices should be respected and not disregarded. This will dramatically lessen the alienation students feel towards school authority.

**Challenge and Solution Statements**
Community identified solutions to current challenges, along with their accompanying metrics for measurement:

1. Our community is less welcoming than we desire, exemplified by a lack of interpreting services. By hiring a liaison at each government facility (social services, City Admin, School System) we may be able to reduce the number of people that feel unwelcomed and increase everyone’s ability to participate in/have access to a community that is safe and easy to live in.

2. Our community is less welcoming than we desire, exemplified by law enforcement using biased tactics ("terrorist", constant traffic stops, poor rhetoric) when dealing with Somali students. By becoming more involved in community events and receiving cultural training, we may be able to reduce the number of people that feel unwelcomed and increase everyone’s ability to participate in/have access to unbiased treatment from law enforcement.

3. Our community is less welcoming than we desire, exemplified by Property/Housing. By providing more access and education towards first-time homeowner resources, developing apartments with more bedrooms for larger families, along with finding grants (federal, state, or local), to assist with down payment assistance and availability to buy affordable housing, we may be able to reduce the number of people that feel unwelcomed and increase everyone’s ability to have access to safe and affordable housing.

4. Our community is less welcoming than we desire, exemplified by limit of work availability in St Peter. The lack of employment opportunities among non-English speaking community members is a constant concern. By establishing dialogue and conversations between the community and employers, with a particular emphasis in the Human Resources personnel at the work place we may be able to reduce the number of people that feel unwelcomed. This increases everyone’s ability to participate in/have access to a fulfilling and sustainable job.

5. Our community is less welcoming than we desire, exemplified by a lack of supporting Somali Organizations existing in St. Peter Area. By creating a “Supporting Community Centers” we may be able to reduce the number of people that feel unwelcome and increase everyone’s ability to participate in/have access to the City’s resources.