

NAACP – Albion College Parks Study

2020-2021

*"I think the green spaces offer
an easy space for
collaboration between
different areas of town."*

- Community Respondent

*"Communities do better when
the people come together"*

- Community Respondent



This study was conducted by Dr. Lynn Verduzco-Baker (PI), Dr. Jessica Kane and the students in Albion College's Fall 2020 Qualitative Social Research course. Kalli Allen assisted with data analysis and writing the report. This project was funded by the Gerstacker Grant and the Albion NAACP. Our advising partners with the Albion NAACP include Robert Dunklin, Mae Ola Dunklin and Linda Kolmodin.

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Executive Summary

These findings support the priorities identified in the [City of Albion Parks & Recreation Master Plan 2016-2020](#), particularly around the need for better maintenance of currently-developed parks (Victory/Rieger and Holland) and the need for investment and development in McIntosh Park.

- Respondents almost **unanimously spoke positively** of Albion's parks and like that they provide green space, playgrounds, trails, a place to meet up with friends, and amenities like basketball and tennis courts. Respondents overall preferred the more developed parks (primarily Victory/Rieger, as well as Holland), and only a few referred to other parks.
- **McIntosh Park:** Most respondents agreed that McIntosh Park needed more play structures for children and more seating/picnic tables/shelter for groups. Some suggested a unique amenity like a splash pad, stage, or pickleball court in order to draw people from outside the neighborhood to McIntosh, while others commented the neighborhood itself should choose whether they want the park to become a "destination" for the rest of the city.
- **Park Maintenance:** Respondents were split on whether they found the parks to be well-maintained, with some specifically commenting on parks as tidy and others commenting that tall grass, trash, and branches impede their enjoyment of parks. Many respondents want the bathrooms in Victory Park and Holland Park to be better-cleaned, stocked, and maintained, and want to see more public bathrooms in parks around the city.
- **Events in Parks:** While respondents tended to only visit the park(s) near their own homes, many traveled to another park if there was a specific event to draw them. Several suggested that the city and various organizations in Albion hold community events, meetings, press conferences, etc. in different parks in order to bring people to them.
- **Equity:** Some respondents pointed out the parks that get the most resources are those in the areas of town where more affluent people live and those in the lower income areas are less developed.

Based on community members' feedback, the research team recommends the City of Albion:

1. **Put resources into the development of McIntosh Park with an emphasis on the nearby community members' needs.**
2. **Maintain all parks through more frequent mowing, clean up and upkeep of structures and equipment.**
3. **Increase the capacity of parks across the city to hold small and large events and facilitate these events.**

Please see more detailed explanation of these findings below.

Overview of Study & Respondents *

This Study

In summer 2020, Dr. Verduzco-Baker, Associate Professor of Sociology at Albion College, began working with members of the Albion Chapter of the NAACP to design a qualitative study to investigate Albion community members' experiences with and opinions about the parks in Albion, Michigan. The data collection included two stages:

First, after designing the study in collaboration with NAACP partners, Dr. Verduzco-Baker worked with the students in her Qualitative Research course and Dr. Jessica Kane (Associate Director of Community-Engaged Learning at Albion College) to conduct 22 qualitative interviews. Students in this course completed a preliminary analysis of the interview data.

Second, in order to get information from more community members, Dr. Verduzco-Baker and Dr. Kane created an online questionnaire based upon the interview guide. This online questionnaire ran from late December 2020 through mid-February 2021 and received 53 responses.

Dr. Kane, with the assistance of Dr. Verduzco-Baker and Ms. Kalli Onai (Albion College sociology/ethnic studies student and paid research assistant), analyzed the interview and questionnaire data regarding Albion's parks and wrote the following report.

Note: This is a qualitative study designed to collect and analyze the experiences, feelings and opinions of a range of community members. It is not a random or representative sample nor a statistical analysis.

Who Talked to Us

There are 75 total respondents: 53 responded to an online questionnaire and 22 Albion residents participated in interviews. It is possible some people participated in an interview *and* responded to the questionnaire, so the total number may be an overcount. Of the 75 total respondents, 71 respondents made comments about the parks and 4 respondents did not.

- Most of the respondents, 63%, are white and 29% are people of color (POC), most of whom identify as Black.
- 61% of the respondents are women.
- The largest age group is over 50 years old, 44%, while 16% are in their 40s, almost 11% in their 30s and 29% are 18-29 years old.
- Respondents live across the city with precinct 3, 5 and 6 the most represented.

* Please see the **Appendix** at the end of this document for more information about the sample and research methods.

Findings

McINTOSH PARK

Very few respondents reported using McIntosh Park, but most were supportive of upgrades being made to it. Most respondents tend to use Victory/Rieger Park because it is close to their homes, large, and has a number of amenities (play structure, seating, stage, disc golf, etc.). A number like the play structures in Holland Park and commented they go there for events.

This indicates location, amenities and events draw people to parks and, therefore, increased amenities and events at McIntosh Park would likely increase its usage.

Five of the 71 respondents live near McIntosh Park. One of those five suggested BBQ grills, and a second one suggested a stage. The other three did not make specific recommendations. The remaining respondents had a number of ideas about what could be done to improve McIntosh Park, but the common thread was a desire to see some kind of amenities there, particularly for the neighborhood children. The most common suggestions included:

- Updated/expanded playground equipment
- Seating/picnic tables & BBQ grills
- Basketball court
- Power outlets

"More playground equipment. Maybe power outlets for vendors to use to attract more people."

Most respondents emphasized that the neighborhood should be able to decide whether the park is turned into a destination location. Some suggested more unique amenities that might draw people from outside the neighborhood to McIntosh Park, for example:

- Splash pad/water feature
- Pickleball court
- Stage
- Smaller fenced-in dog park

"At one time, they would have soccer games...played there, but they no longer do that. There's a swing set there, and they don't have a slide...none of those bouncy things ... you sit on and kind of rock ... they don't have a well-maintained basketball court."

Respondents also suggested that the city and local organizations hold events, press conferences, and meetings in McIntosh Park to draw people from outside the neighborhood.

"[I would like to see] the same thing that they did in Holland. Because that would be dope for those for those children to have a real nice recreational place to go. That's right, you know, and just walk across the street and stuff. Yeah, that would be sweet."

"I believe it is absolutely necessary that that space exists, because so many kids live within walking distance of that area...and if a lot of them don't have cars that's the only park that they would really be able to access. I just want to defend McIntosh because I know those kids love running around and playing outside and just having something fun to do in the summer outside of their rooms, outside of their apartments."

Findings

MAINTENANCE & EQUITY

Concerns About Equity

Some community expressed concern that parks in the lower income areas of town are not developed or maintained as well as those in more affluent areas of town.

"... ["Westward park is] a very rundown Park. And I think that's run down because of the side of town it's on and not much care is put into that precinct. At least from what I see. And nobody wants to go to a rundown park"

"McIntosh is used by the kids in the neighborhood but it gets the least amount of attention"

Community Members Like the Parks and Want Them Maintained

Respondents almost unanimously spoke highly of Albion's parks, and most use them at least sometimes, particularly with children or grandchildren.

While some people suggested new equipment to add to parks, most wanted to see the existing equipment and amenities better-maintained and updated.

Suggestions for specific maintenance in Victory Park and Holland Park can be found below.

"I'd like to see the tire swings put back at victory park. It would be cool if more community events happened in the park like sports tournaments. I wish the city would mow the parks in the summer and keep up with the maintenance and actually do what they are paid to do. With those nice lawnmowers they have it doesn't take long."

"I think there's too much of a focus on new things instead of how to keep them functional."

"[I would like] Better upkeep and improved facilities, i.e. Tennis courts, Pickeball Courts...nets and rims on the basketball hoops, etc."

"I have noticed that the tennis courts at Victory park got new nets. That's great! It would be nice to clean up and make the old sand volleyball pit useable and make the basketball courts there nicer."

Findings

DRAWING PEOPLE TO PARKS

As mentioned above, respondents tended to use parks closest to their homes but also those that had unique amenities and events.

Many respondents mentioned unique play equipment and the infrastructure for large and small gatherings as ways to make the parks more attractive for families and organizations to gather.

Additionally, the events held at Holland Park were cited as important ways to bring the community into the parks. Expanding the number of city and organizational events held in parks across the city would encourage community members to explore and become familiar with other parts of the city. Some ways to encourage more events at parks are:

- Maintenance of existing structures and amenities in currently well-used parks
- Add more of infrastructure and amenities to less used parks such as McIntosh Park including: BBQ grills, picnic tables, stages and electrical outlets.
- Model this by holding city sponsored events in various parks, not only Victory or Holland Parks
- Encourage community members and organizations to hold their events in parks

"[I recommend] A couple more open, protected meeting areas like the one next to the children's play equipment--additional areas for family gatherings and small group meetings."

"[Parks] are gathering places, to enjoy the outdoors, engage in social and recreational activities, and support community causes."

"Hopefully there will be more outdoor and community events this year."

"I think ... [parks] are used is in an organic way by community organizations and groups [but not] by the parks and recreation department. I see Parks and Recreation, staff and vehicles doing maintenance, but not providing activities or ways in which to use the spaces"

Findings

SPECIFIC PARKS / RECREATIONAL AREAS

Victory Park

Respondents tended to use Victory/Rieger Park the most out of any park in Albion, in large part because it was the closest park to their house. They praised the amenities and variety of ways to engage with the park, particularly the playground equipment, but want to see it maintained better. The most common suggestions included:

- Updated basketball and tennis courts
- Better-maintained bathrooms
- More consistent mowing/trimming
- Skating rink/snack shack/something with the hockey rink

Holland Park

Respondents who live near Holland Park tend to go there for the playground equipment, basketball courts, and seating area. They praised the amenities and recent updates to the park, but want to see it maintained better. Respondents who do not live near Holland Park tend to go there for specific events. The most common suggestions included:

- Updated basketball courts
- Better-maintained bathrooms
- Maintenance of book boxes (they get insects)
- A few respondents wanted more social control around basketball games/tournaments in Holland Park, and commented that there had been previous conflicts

Findings

SPECIFIC PARKS / RECREATIONAL AREAS

Albion River Trail / Trails

Respondents like the trails and enjoy using them for exercise. They didn't tend to have suggestions about the trails, other than wanting more connections to other trails.

"I personally really appreciate the growth of the Albion River Trail and the connecting points it has to the Lake to Lake trail, the Iron Belle trail and the North Country trail."

Whitehouse Nature Center

Respondents cited the Whitehouse Nature Center as a place they could go to get away from everything. They like the trails and the trees. They didn't tend to have suggestions.

Ketchum Field

Respondents liked the open space Ketchum Field provides. They suggested more frequent mowing.

Dog Park

Respondents like that the dog park provides a large area for their dogs to run around. Some were concerned about the lack of maintenance and the prevalence of dog waste on the ground, with one unwilling to take their dog there for fear of the dog getting sick.

Recommendations

Based on community members' responses, the research team *recommends the city of Albion*:

- 1. Put resources into the development of McIntosh Park with an emphasis on the community's needs.**
 - 1.1. It will be important that staff speak with residents, including children, parents of young children and elderly people living near McIntosh Park to assess their needs and wishes.

- 2. Maintain all parks through more frequent mowing, clean up and upkeep of structures and equipment.**

- 3. Consider ways to increase the capacity of parks across the city to hold small and large events.**
 - o With regards to material changes, installing picnic areas, shelters, BBQs and power outlets would be especially important to this effort.
 - o Encourage local organizations to utilize the parks for events through outreach and information distribution (especially with regard to the amenities of the parks and the process to reserve spaces)

Appendix

Sample & Method

Respondents were recruited through announcements in Albion e-News (email based news service), Albion Recorder (weekly newspaper), Marshall Ad-Visor, Battle Creek Enquirer, NAACP members' Facebook pages and community organizations' newsletters.

1.5% of the adult population in the city of Albion* participated in this study and the reported race of the respondents is very similar to the demographics of the city. The key to generalizing results from a sample of respondents is not the total number of participants, but rather the demographic characteristics of the participants. When the rates of various characteristics in a sample are similar to the rates of those characteristics found in the population as a whole, the sample can be used to make generalizations about the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the population in question.

As the data below demonstrates, our sample's racial/ethnic rates are very similar to the 2019 US Census's estimates for the city. The respondents, therefore, can be considered a representative sample of the city's adult population, and it is safe to assume the findings of this study accurately represent the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of Albion's adults within a small margin of error.

In other words, it is safe to assume the findings of this study accurately represent the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of Albion's adults.

** Based on 2019 census estimate for Albion, Michigan.*

Adults living in Albion: 5,151

White population in Albion: 63%

Black population in Albion: 30.9%

Respondents in the study (all adults): 75

White respondents in the study: 63%

Black respondents in the study: 29%

The census estimated there were 6,151 total adults in Albion including Albion College students who don't otherwise live in the city. Here we've deducted 1,000 (conservative estimate) from the total to account for students who don't otherwise live in the city.

At the same time, **this is primarily a qualitative study** and

"it is important to remember that, first and foremost, unlike quantitative research, inquiry conducted in the qualitative tradition seeks to answer the question 'What?' as opposed to 'How often?'. Qualitative methods are designed to reveal what is going on by describing and interpreting phenomena; they do not attempt to measure how often an event or association occurs. Research conducted using qualitative methods is normally done with an intent to preserve the inherent complexities of human behaviour as opposed to assuming a reductive view of the subject in order to count and measure the occurrence of phenomena." (S. Agius, Cambridge University Press, Jan 2018).

Because we (the researchers and the NAACP) were most interested in understanding "what" Albion community members were experiencing/thinking about the parks and not "how often" they experience/think something, qualitative research was an appropriate choice for this study. We did not deliberately try to draw a representative sample of Albion adult residents, but as the aforementioned data demonstrates, we received something very close to a representative sample.

Qualitative interviews and questionnaires are open ended and allow the respondents to go into more detail and to decide for themselves which aspect of the issue is most important to them. This allows the respondents to bring issues to the forefront that the researcher might not have been aware of.

The findings from a qualitative study are "deeper" in that they give respondents the opportunity to provide as much detail as they like and go in whatever directions with the topic they like. Qualitative researchers analyze this data to find patterns of opinions, experiences and ideas.

As a result, qualitative studies can uncover concerns within the community that community leaders and researchers weren't aware of or didn't consider a priority.

The fact that these qualitative findings are drawn from a quantitatively representative sample of the population should only give more weight to the validity of the findings presented in this report.

Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned in the beginning of this report, the data collection included two stages:

First, after designing the study in collaboration with NAACP partners, Dr. Verduzco-Baker trained and advised the students in her Qualitative Research course and Dr. Jessica Kane as they conducted 22 qualitative interviews.

Second, in order to get information from additional community members, Dr. Verduzco-Baker and Dr. Kane created an online questionnaire based upon the interview guide. This anonymous online questionnaire was open to anyone with the link from late December 2020 through mid-February 2021 and received 53 responses.

Students in the Qualitative Research course completed a preliminary analysis of the interview data in December 2020. Guided by grounded theory methods, students used Dedoose, data analysis software, to identify themes and patterns in the interview data.

Dr. Kane with the assistance of Dr. Verduzco-Baker and Ms. Kalli Onai analyzed the combined interview and questionnaire data. Qualitative findings were identified using grounded theory methods and were agreed upon by all three researchers.