SUNSET HILL

Neighborhood Assessment Report

Neighborhood Workshop Date: March 19, 2002

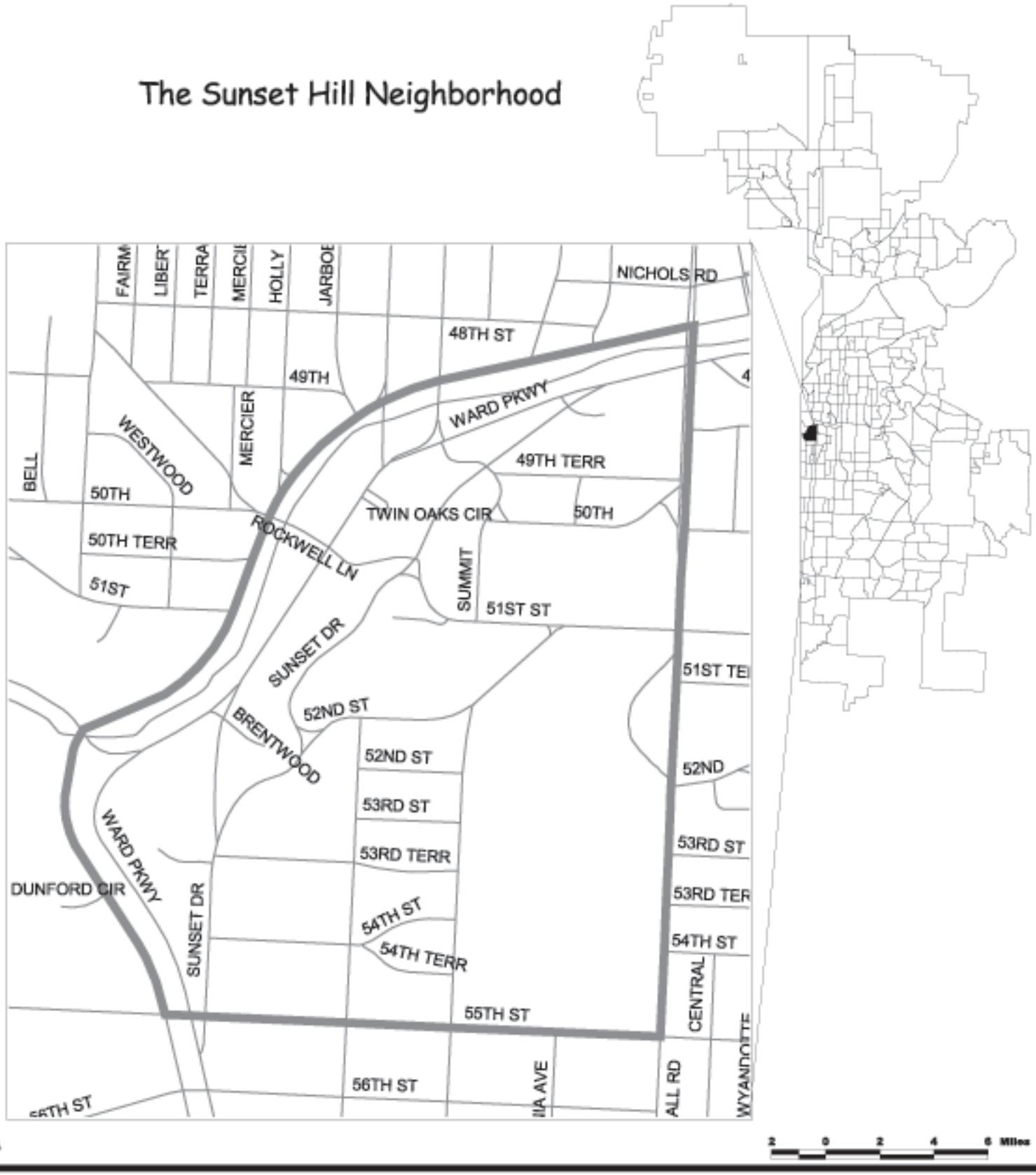
FOCUS Kansas City
City Planning and Development Department
City of Kansas City, Missouri

City of Fountains

Heart of the Nation

Kansas City, Missouri Neighborhoods

The Sunset Hill Neighborhood



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FOCUS KANSAS CITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSESSMENTS

FOCUS Kansas City, Kansas City's strategic and comprehensive plan, recognizes that neighborhoods understand best how to direct their own futures. The first initiative in the *FOCUS Neighborhood Prototypes Plan* is a strategic assessment / evaluation that enables a neighborhood to evaluate its strengths and needs. Through the assessment process, a neighborhood can direct its assets towards its most critical needs. The *FOCUS Neighborhood Prototypes Plan* identifies the assessment format.

There were two objectives for these neighborhoods during the self-evaluation:

1. To self-identify its **neighborhood type** from the *FOCUS Neighborhood Prototypes Plan*.
2. To develop **improvement strategies** that will direct neighborhood improvement, a "To Do" list/Action Steps incorporating participation by the neighborhood, community partners, and the City.

The Sunset Hill neighborhood conducted the neighborhood assessment workshop with assistance from City staff. Residents, business people and people who work in local institutions provided input. These community members mapped their community, and identified assets and priority issues in their neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Type

The FOCUS Neighborhood Prototypes Plan recognizes that not all neighborhoods in Kansas City are the same. The character and condition of where we live varies according to age, history, type of housing and other factors. Each community has different strengths and opportunities. Each has different assets and priorities that drive unique strategies for improvement. FOCUS developed four unique Neighborhood Types that generally describe Kansas City neighborhoods. Each Neighborhood Type suggests what actions are required for an area to become or stay healthy. These four Types (assigned the colors Blue, Orange, Purple and Green in the Neighborhood Assessment workshop) are:

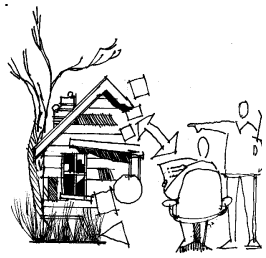
Developing Conservation Stabilization Redeveloping

The Assessment is a beginning point from which the community can move forward and achieve quality living environments through a commitment to continuous improvement. The descriptions for these four Neighborhood Types are contained in the FOCUS Neighborhood Prototypes Plan, Appendix A, "General Neighborhood Description / Types."

In the workshop, participants defined the tools, actions and strategies for improving their community. They will use this information to strategically apply public and private resources in a way that is based on existing conditions, trends, opportunities, strengths and needs. Once other neighborhoods identify their Type, then similarly "typed" Kansas City communities can connect and partner around common issues and projects while assisting each other in developing their organizations.

Councilman Jim Rowland attended the FOCUS Neighborhood Assessment for Westwood and Sunset Hill.

The Sunset Hill Perspective

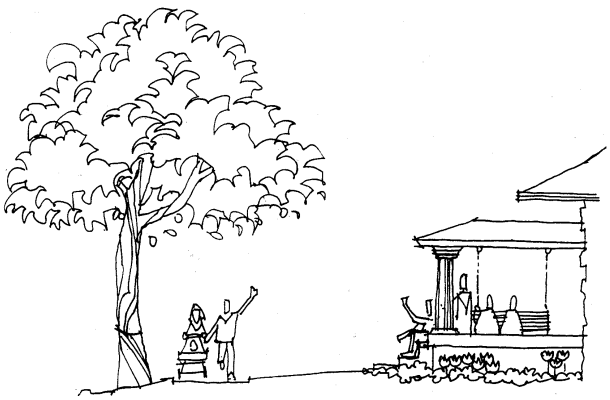


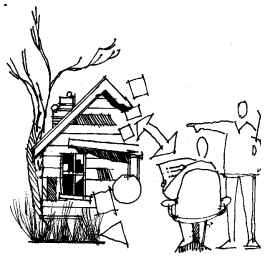
On Tuesday, March 19, 2002, a FOCUS Neighborhood Assessment Workshop was held for the Sunset Hill neighborhood. The boundaries include the area south and east of Ward Parkway, north of 55th Street, and west of Wornall Road (see map on page 10 for details).

The workshop began with a quick ice-breaking exercise, where participants brainstormed several slogans to represent their neighborhood. "The Hills are Alive!" was the selected slogan that reflects the hilly topography of the neighborhood and the character that it lends. Residents said they enjoy being in the center of Kansas City near its many amenities, and also enjoy being in a community-minded neighborhood.

Sunset Hill has many greenspaces in and around the neighborhood that make it a beautiful and fun neighborhood to live in. Loose Park provides a recreational area for neighbors to meet as well as a great place to walk their dogs. Tree-lined streets, winding roads, architectural variety and landscaping throughout the neighborhood make it a very pleasant place to live.

Residents enjoy many of Kansas City's major attractions right in their own backyards. The Country Club Plaza provides a variety of shopping, dining, and entertainment amenities. The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art and the Kemper Gallery are both within close proximity. Pembroke Hill Day School is an excellent educational institution in the neighborhood.



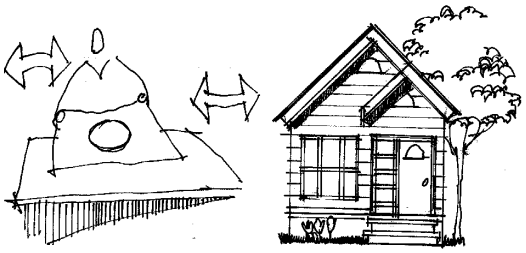


One of Sunset Hill's greatest assets is its sense of community. Residents described the physical density of the neighborhood that gives it an urban feeling. They also mentioned the sense of closeness they have with their neighbors. Many intriguing and influential people live in the neighborhood and the neighbors' personalities are evident in their homes; there is variety in the style of architecture and landscaping, and some neighbors even have sculptures in their yards. The Sunset Hill Neighborhood Association keeps neighbors in touch with one another.

Although neighbors enjoy Brush Creek and its walking path, many people are concerned about its appearance. There are areas near Sunset Hill with crumbling surfaces, large blocks of concrete, and debris that make some parts of the creek near Westwood an eyesore. An eight-year plan is in place for overall improvements to the Creek, but neighbors want to see more immediate improvements to its appearance.

Overall, residents are very happy and proud of their beautiful neighborhood. Sunset Hill has the safety, security, and cohesiveness of a small town along with the access to the cultural amenities, shopping and entertainment of an urban neighborhood. In addition, with its active Homes Association, Sunset Hill's many great features are sure to be preserved for many years to come.

During the workshop neighbors came together to develop strategies to preserve or improve their own neighborhood. The following report documents their vision for the area, including the assets they would like to preserve, as well as the plan for making improvements. The inside back cover provides a directory of frequently used City and agency services.



PRIORITIES

Sunset Hill neighbors named the following priority issues:

Create a Short-term Plan to Beautify Brush Creek

The Public Works Department has developed an eight year plan to re-build the crumbling infrastructure of Brush Creek. Residents feel that some smaller, short-term efforts could be made that would have a positive impact on the appearance of Brush Creek. Large blocks of crumbling concrete and debris have made parts of Brush Creek an eyesore, and the removal of these would be a great improvement to the neighborhood.

Push the Brush Creek Project for an Early Completion Date

Neighbors are pleased with the Public Works Department's Brush Creek Improvements Plan, but feel the eight year timeline is too long. They would like to see the department work more efficiently in order to meet an earlier deadline.

Fix and Maintain Curbs Along Ward Parkway

Ward Parkway is one of the City's scenic byways traveled daily by many Kansas Citians. Sunset Hill residents would like to see the City better maintain the curbs and sidewalks, and they would also like to see faster response time to crumbling curbs.

Chart Notes

The Sunset Hill Neighborhood Assessment boundaries are: Ward Parkway on the north, 55th Street on the south, Ward Parkway on the west, and Wornall Road on the east.

Neighborhood Slogans

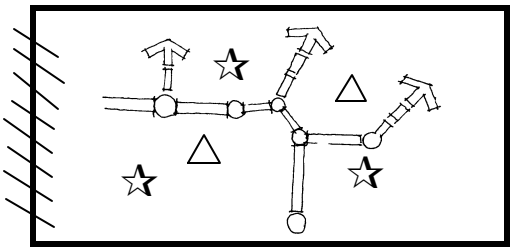
The attendees brainstormed several slogans to describe their neighborhood. The slogans helped the participants to identify how they viewed their community. The selected slogan was:

The Hills Are Alive!

Other suggested slogans:

- Sisters Across the Creek
- Big Homes, Big Taxes
- A Place To Call Home
- Used To Have Big Trees
- Big Taxes, No Services
- Everyone's a Neighbor

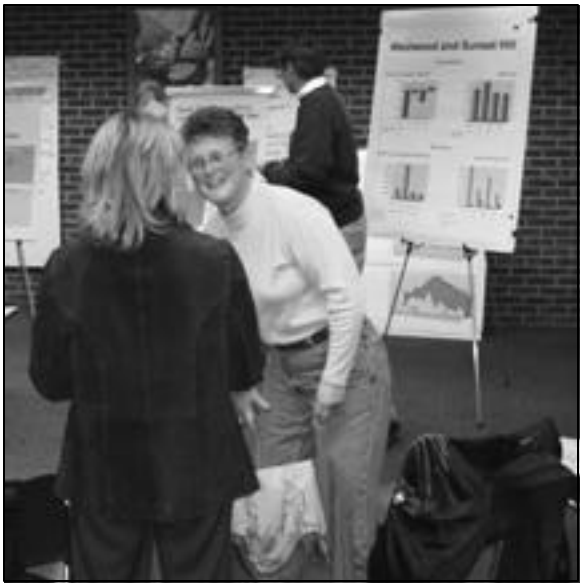
One of the many beautiful and historic homes in the Sunset Hill neighborhood.



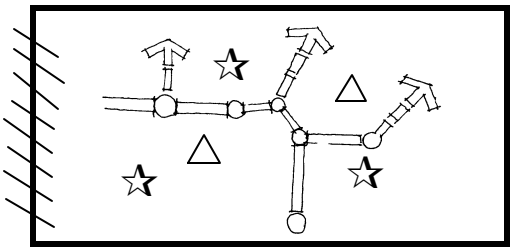
STEP 1: My Neighborhood Is

Workshop participants identified how they experience their neighborhood, and considered those things they want to protect, preserve or enhance. They thought about the landmarks, paths, activity centers, districts, edges or barriers, and features. These were noted on a wall map.

- △ **Landmarks** — significant physical objects, like buildings or signs
- ++ **Paths** — routes people use to get places
- ○ **Activity Centers** — gathering places to do some activity
- ▭ **Districts** — areas of recognizable character
- \\\\ **Edges or Barriers** — a limit or boundary that prevents people from enjoying the neighborhood or something in it
- ★ **Features** — things people like and would like to preserve or enhance



Neighbors from both the Sunset Hill and Westwood neighborhoods got to know one another and discussed neighborhood issues and concerns.



Landmarks

- Loose Park
- Brush Creek
- Neighborhood marker at 433 Ward Parkway
- Historical markers in Loose Park

Paths

- Brush Creek
- Loose Park walking path

Activity Centers

- Loose Park Garden
- Tennis courts in Loose Park
- Tennis courts beside Brush Creek
- Fairmont Hotel
- High Hat Coffee Shop

Districts

- Country Club Plaza
- Rockwell Homes Association (50th Street and Summit)

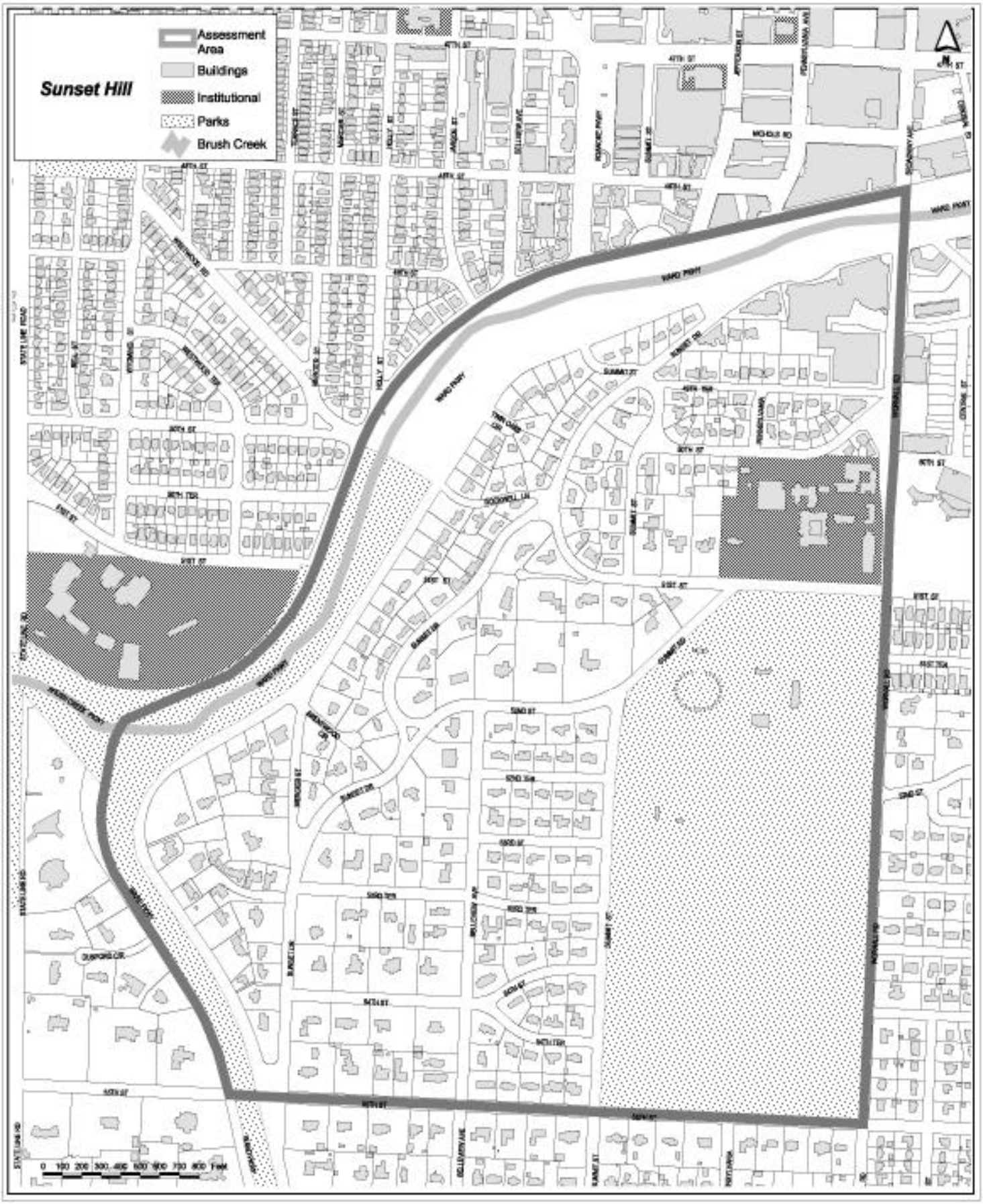
Edges or Barriers

- Brush Creek
- Intersection of Shawnee Mission Parkway & Ward Parkway
- Rockwell bridge

Features

- Rockwell bridge
- Historical markers in Loose Park
- The Rose Garden in Loose Park

Tom Kimes from Kansas City's Public Works Department presented the Department's future plans for Brush Creek.


Sunset Hill
Assessment Area
Buildings
Institutional
Parks
Brush Creek
WARD PKWY
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 Feet

Sunset Hill Images

Landmark and Path:
Sunset Hill residents enjoy access to Loose Park and its pedestrian trail.

Activity Center:
Loose Park's tennis courts are another wonderful amenity in the neighborhood.

Landmark, Edge/Barrier, and Path:
Brush Creek is used as a recreational path and is a well-known landmark, but it is also a barrier because some areas have broken concrete and debris.

Sunset Hill Images

Feature & Edge:
The recently reconstructed Rockwell Bridge has helped to beautify Brush Creek and provided a feature in the neighborhood.

Activity Center:
The Rose Garden in Loose Park attracts many visitors and is often the location of weddings and other events.

Feature:
Pembroke Hill Day School is a respected academic institution located near the neighborhood, as well as an involved partner in neighborhood issues.

STEP 2: If I Could Fix One Thing

In every neighborhood there are some things that need to be changed. These issues can inhibit residents from enjoying their neighborhood and from doing the things they like to do. Below is the list of "fixes" that workshop participants said they would like to see in the Sunset Hill neighborhood.

- Eliminate speeding on 50th Street between Mercier Street and State Line Road
- Enforce leash laws in Loose Park
- Eliminate begging and panhandling on Ward Parkway bridges and the Plaza
- Install bars across dangerously large catch basins
- Include materials such as cardboard and Styrofoam in the curbside recycling pick-up
- Wading pool in Loose Park was open inconsistently last summer and opening did not follow printed schedule; residents would like to see it open according to posting
- Install dog pick-up bag dispenser in Loose Park
- Clean up broken concrete along Brush Creek
- Shorten timers on extremely long lights along Ward Parkway
- Enforce speed limits along Summit Street and Sunset Drive
- Repair the rail that obstructs the driver's view at Rockwell bridge & 50th Street
- Modify street lights with shields to re-direct light away from homes
- Enforce speed limits on Wornall Road between 51st Street and 55th Street
- Improve response to dangerous ice conditions on 50th & Wornall Road, and on Sunset Drive and Rockwell Lane

HNTB and the City's Public Works Department shared informational boards regarding plans for the development of Brush Creek.

STEP 3: My Neighborhood's Assets

Workshop participants identified assets in their neighborhood. These qualities include places, groups, organizations, equipment, skills, abilities and any other feature that adds value to the neighborhood.

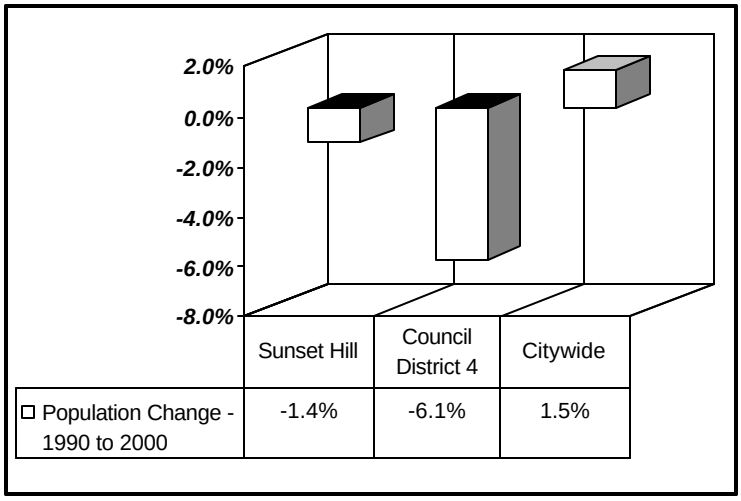
- Geography (hills, bluffs)
- Kauffman Gardens
- Dogs
- Historical markers and artifacts
- Walnut trees
- Central location in the City
- Accessibility to Nelson Atkins Museum, The Kemper Gallery, etc.
- Movers and shakers are in the neighborhood
- Parks and green space
- Rock walls in the area
- Diversity of housing styles
- Brush Creek
- Loose Park
- Pembroke Hill School
- Mature trees
- The Plaza
- Loose Park Garden Club
- Loose Park Homes Association
- The Rose Garden in Loose Park
- Rockwell Homes Association and its website

Workshop participants mentioned the variety in architectural styles as a neighborhood asset.

STEP 4: Facts About My Neighborhood

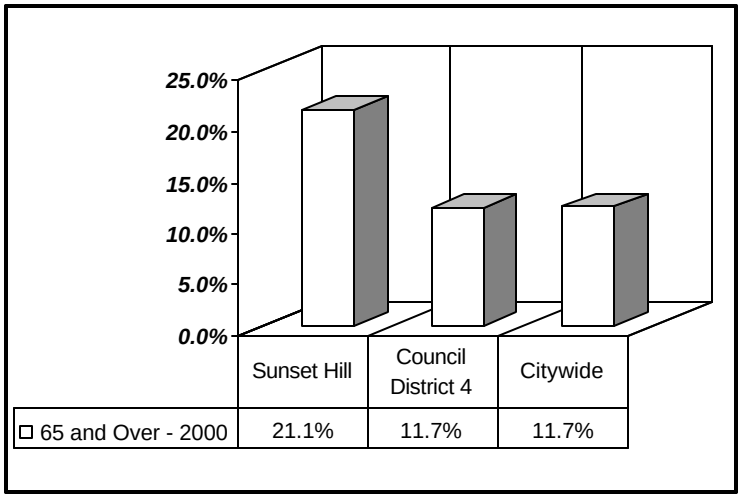
The data presented at the Sunset Hill Neighborhood Assessment was from both the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census, and from 2000 information from the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department and the Kansas City, Missouri City Planning and Development Department. Below are the facts the participants said were surprising or noteworthy. (See the neighborhood assessment workbook for more detail.)

Change in Population 1990-2000



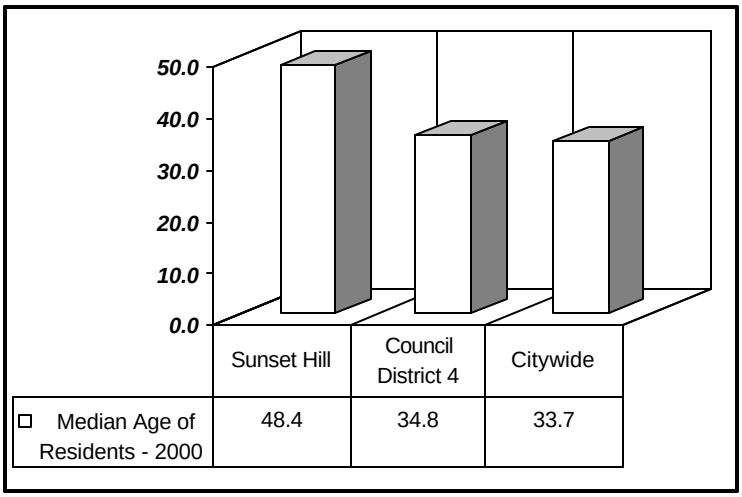
Residents commented that the decrease in population is a result of increasing numbers of "empty nesters."

Persons Age 65 and Over - 2000



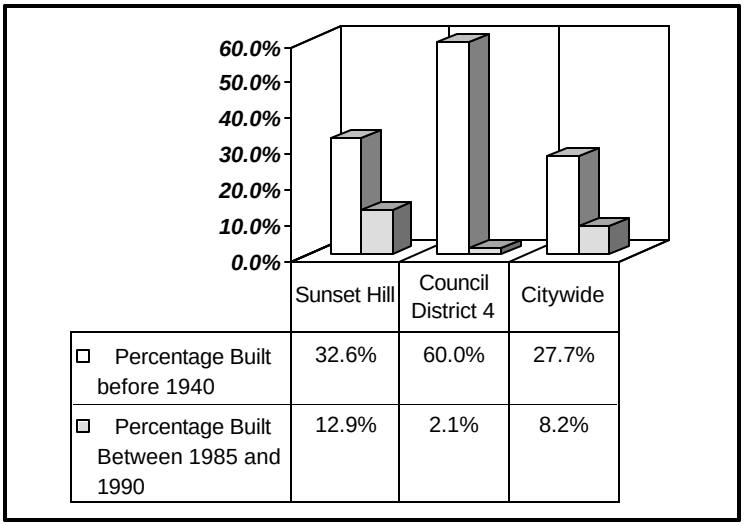
Workshop participants noted that the number of persons age 65 and over could be because there is a decrease in the number of families with children moving in. They would like to compare the 2000 statistic with the 1990 data.

Median Age - 2000



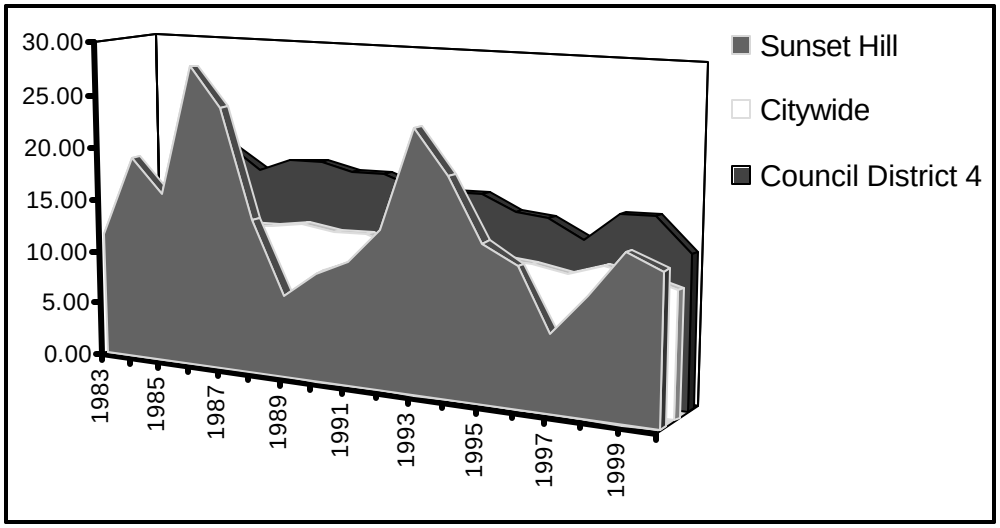
Neighbors said the higher median age is a result of an older neighborhood.

Age of Housing Units - 1990



Residents recognized that more homes were built before 1940.

Non-Violent Crime 1983-2000



Neighbors believe the peaks in the number of non-violent crimes are result of a crime spree that occurred in Loose Park in those years. Neighbors feel safe in their neighborhood, but stated that because of this history of crime they have some of the highest car insurance rates in the city.

STEP 5: Describing My Neighborhood

Those who attended the workshop were asked to vote on the Neighborhood Type that best described the area. The majority chose Conservation.

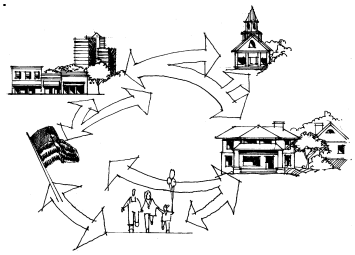
Conservation

My neighborhood has been developed for some time. Established businesses and institutions are located in the neighborhood. Places of worship, schools, recreational and entertainment facilities, and businesses provide many opportunities near my home.

Tree-lined streets, historic structures or qualities, public art and/or other amenities characterize the neighborhood and give it a sense of place. Most of the houses are occupied. Little demolition has occurred here and vacant land is scarce.

It appears that both public and private areas are well-maintained, although a house or business periodically falls into disrepair from a lack of routine maintenance (painting, yard upkeep, awning repair, etc.). Some infrastructure repairs may be needed to keep the neighborhood attractive. Generally the problems that do come up can be addressed by our neighborhood association, by a call to the City, or through neighbors getting together to help one another.

Neighbors got together to think about their neighborhood and discuss solutions to its problems.



STEP 6: Making My Neighborhood Better

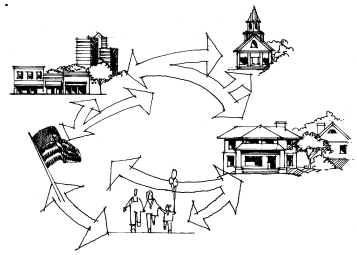
Neighbors talked about specific actions their community can take to address the issues and challenges identified earlier in the Assessment. They brainstormed ideas, concentrating on those actions that can be performed by the community to improve the neighborhood. Below is a list of all the ideas mentioned by workshop participants. They voted on the ideas they most want implemented to make their neighborhood better.

Things we can do **Ourselves**:

- Encourage our neighbors to park cars in their garage to ease traffic flow, and allow for emergency vehicles to easily access the neighborhood
- Petition the city for "No Parking" signs along residential streets

Things we can do with a **Partner**:

- Partner with the Fairmont Hotel to address neighborhood concerns
- Design bridges in partnership with the city
- Install curbs and sidewalks through PIAC (Public Improvements Advisory Committee)
- Partner with Pembroke Hill to alleviate the parking problem during special events along 50th Terrace, 50th Street, Westwood Terrace between 50th Street and 51st Street, and Wyoming Street between 50th Street and 51st Street



Things the **City** should do:

- Restore street lights as promised in the 2001 contract
- Create a short-term plan to beautify Brush Creek separately from the 8 year project
- Install a stop sign at 50th and Wyoming
- Re-assign city maintenance crew to work upstream of Brush Creek
- Push Brush Creek Project for an early completion
- Extend the existing walking path along Brush Creek
- Fix and maintain curbs along Ward Parkway
- Build an unleashed dog park in Penn Valley Park
- Create a partnership with the City to sponsor improvements to Loose Park
- Establish a sponsorship for improvements to Westwood Park and Loose Park
- Parks and Recreation repair the walking trail in Loose Park (one section floods during rain)
- Parks and Recreation make improvements to Westwood Park, water the trees and flowers regularly
- Replace the broken wood on the bridge at State Line Road and Ward Parkway
- Parks and Recreation Board meet with neighborhood regarding park improvements
- Remove the broken concrete along Brush Creek
- Hire more police officers for the KCPD
- Install "No Parking" signs on one side of the surrounding streets during Pembroke Hill's events
- Improve the public schools
- Work with neighborhoods on the design of the bridges along Brush Creek
- Plant living trees along Ward Parkway

Twelve Ways to Improve Your Neighborhood Right Now!

The KC Safe City Initiative encourages neighborhoods to adopt the following ideas for increased safety and involvement, which are based upon the KC Safe City Initiative Principles.

1. **Report crime promptly.** Neighbors sometimes don't report criminal activity because they don't want to bother the police; they assume police are too short-staffed to respond, or they believe that there isn't much an officer can (or will) do about a given problem anyway. Whether the issue is graffiti, petty vandalism, or something much more serious, police cannot act without first hearing about the problem from citizens.
2. **Report nuisances and other non-criminal problems promptly.**
3. **Take away the opportunity for crime.** Lock your car and never leave valuables, even for a few minutes, in the car where would-be thieves might see them. Trim bushes or trees on your property that offer too-convenient hiding places. Make your front porch visible and make sure your home looks like someone lives there.
4. **Meet the youth who live on your block and greet them by name.** This ensures that each adult is better able to help in an emergency and is better prepared to discuss problems immediately as they arise.
5. **Make a list of the names and phone numbers of every neighbor on your block.** Unless you know neighbors' names and numbers, you can't call them about a concern or let them know about a neighborhood problem.
6. **Make a list of landlords in your area.** As owners of property in the community, landlords are responsible to the neighborhood and most are rightly concerned about the health of the community in which their properties stand.
7. **Turn your porch light on.** Crime tends to decline in neighborhoods that are well lit. Turning on porch lights is a simple way to start this process.
8. **Walk around the block.** It sounds simple enough, but neighbors benefit over time when more responsible citizens walk about more (particularly those who are comfortable doing it) at night, every night, around their block.
9. **Drive slowly on neighborhood streets.** You can take the lead in slowing down traffic in your neighborhood and those around you.
10. **Pick up the litter near your home, even if you didn't put it there.** You can help stop the growth of trash in your neighborhood by taking away the existing litter that attracts it.
11. **Stay where you are.** Stable neighborhoods are built on the commitment of long term residents who would rather live in a healthy community than move to a bigger house.
12. **Help your neighborhood association or similar groups.** If leadership isn't your desire, at least make sure someone in your household attends local neighborhood association meetings. You'll be kept better informed of the issues facing the neighborhood and how you can help and, perhaps more importantly, you'll have the chance to shape, guide, and participate in the future of your neighborhood.

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Sunset Hill Neighborhood Assessment Participants

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Katheryn Shields
Marie Smith
Karen Sprinkle
Chuck Stewart
Tom Suthern
Susan Truog
Fred Truog
Kelly VanElders

Sponsors and Contributors

- Pembroke Hill School

Getting Involved

For more information about neighborhood organization, contact Kansas City Neighborhood Alliance at (816) 753-8600, the City's Neighborhood and Community Services Department at (816) 513-3200, or the Mayor's Neighborhood Advocate Office at (816) 513-3500.

The Sunset Hill neighborhood is in the 4th Council District. Your Council Representatives are:

Councilman Evert Asjes III, Fourth District-at-Large: (816) 513-1616
Councilman Jim Rowland, Fourth District: (816) 513-1617

Acknowledgements

The Honorable Kay Barnes, *Mayor*
Robert L. Collins, *City Manager*

City Council

The Honorable Ed Ford
First District-at-Large

The Honorable Teresa Loar
First District

The Honorable Bonnie Sue Cooper
Second District-at-Large

The Honorable Paul Danaher
Second District

The Honorable Troy Nash
Third District-at-Large

The Honorable Mary Williams-Neal
Third District

The Honorable Evert Asjes III
Fourth District-at-Large

The Honorable Jim Rowland
Fourth District

The Honorable Becky Nace
Fifth District-at-Large

The Honorable Terry Riley
Fifth District

The Honorable Alvin Brooks
Sixth District-at-Large

The Honorable Charles A. Eddy
Sixth District

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City Support

- Terrie Scott, *Action Center, City Manager's Office*

Service	Agency or City Department	Phone
City Services	**Action Center**	**513-1313**
Abandoned Cars on Private Property	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-9000
Abandoned Cars on Public Property	Kansas City, MO Police Department	234-5000
Abandoned Homes	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-9000
Air Quality	Health Department	513-6314
Animal Control	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-9800
Building Permits	Codes Administration	513-1500
Bulky Item Pick Up	Environmental Management	513-3490
Curb Reconstruction	Public Works	513-2590
Dangerous Buildings/ Demolition	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-9000
Housing Code Violations	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-9000
Illegal Dumping Hotline	Environmental Management	513-3485
Neighborhood Assistance/ Services	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-3265
Paint Program	Neighborhood and Community Services	513-3266
PIAC (Public Improvements Advisory Committee)	Public Works Department	513-2617
Parks and Community Centers	Board of Parks and Recreation	513-7500
Potholes	Public Works - Street and Traffic	513-2777
Senior Citizens Transportation	Share-a-Fare/ATA	842-9070
Sewers – Problems	Water Department After Hours	513-2180 513-2109
Sidewalks – Repair	Public Works	513-2602
Storm Drains	Water Department	513-2180
Street Light Repairs	Kansas City Power and Light	654-1400
Weatherization Program	Housing and Community Development	513-3015

THE VISION OF

FOCUS KANSAS CITY

We, as Kansas Citians, envision our city as a people-centered community. From economic development to the readability of street signs, we consider people first. Kansas City shapes and guarantees its future by examining first and foremost the impact of every decision on future generations.

We, as Kansas Citians, are full of hope. We demonstrate this hope through our investment in our families, our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, our businesses and our city.

For more information about **FOCUS Kansas City**:

- call the office at **513-2822**,
- visit **www.kcmo.org/focus/**, or
- e-mail **focus@kcmo.org**.

To reach the Neighborhood Assessment Team, call **513-2909**.

FOCUS - **F**orging **O**ur **C**omprehensive **U**rban **S**trategy