

# BROOKLYN CENTER HOUSING REPORT

LIVABILITY, AFFORDABILITY,  
ACCESSIBILITY, AND SAFETY

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# Overview

1. Our Research Approach
2. Project Overview & Goals
3. Methods
4. Participant Demographics
5. Findings
6. Recommendations

# CURA: Centering Community Voices

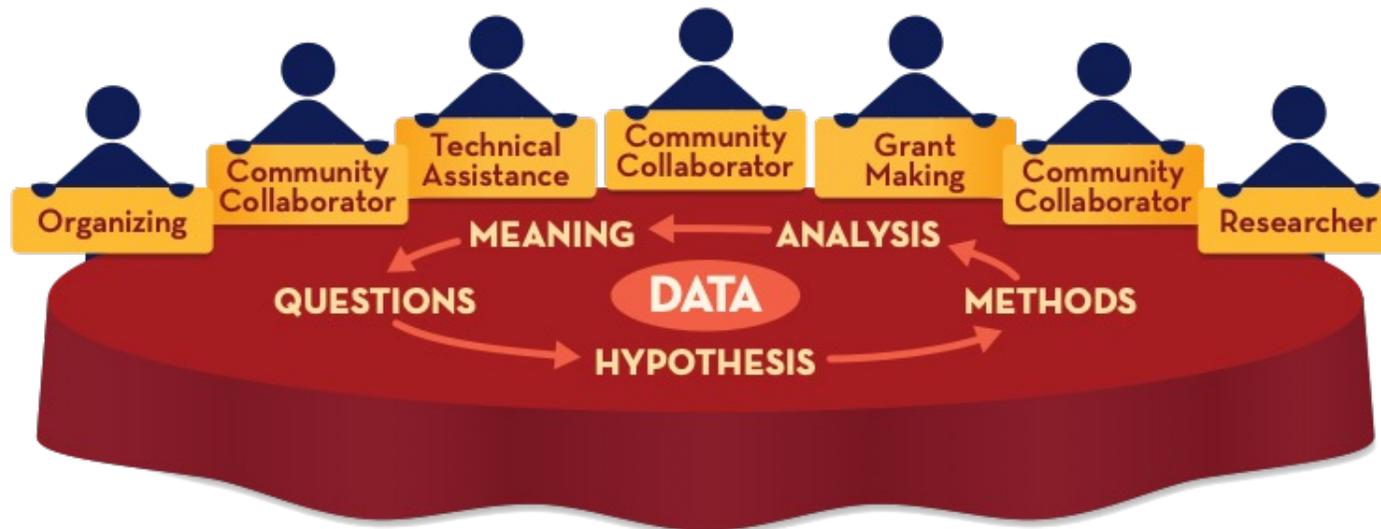
- Housing is an anchor for stability
- All people should have full and equal access to stable housing, with the option to live in the communities they desire
- It is critical that we center the voices of those most impacted by discriminatory housing practices, because they are the experts on housing injustice in this country



# CURA's Community-Engaged Action Research Model

Research Aimed to:

- build community power
- assist local grassroots campaigns and local power brokers in reframing the dominant narrative
- produce community-centered public policy solutions that are winnable



# CURA's Community-Engaged Action Research Model

A Racial Equity Framework that Asserts that we must:

- Look for solutions that address systemic inequities
- Work collaboratively with affected communities
- Add solutions that are commensurate with the cause of inequity



# OVERVIEW

# Introduction

Brooklyn Center, Minnesota is a growing community and one of the most diverse suburbs in the Twin Cities metro area. Like many growing metropolitan locales, they face the challenge of providing current and future residents with stable, accessible housing options, while actively addressing issues of growing gentrification and affordability concerns. The city reached out to the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to design a study that would aid their urban planning efforts and begin to head off current and future housing concerns.

# Goal of the Project

The central objective of this project is to aid Brooklyn Center's planning efforts by addressing issues of growing gentrification and accessibility concerns faced by current and future residents of the city.

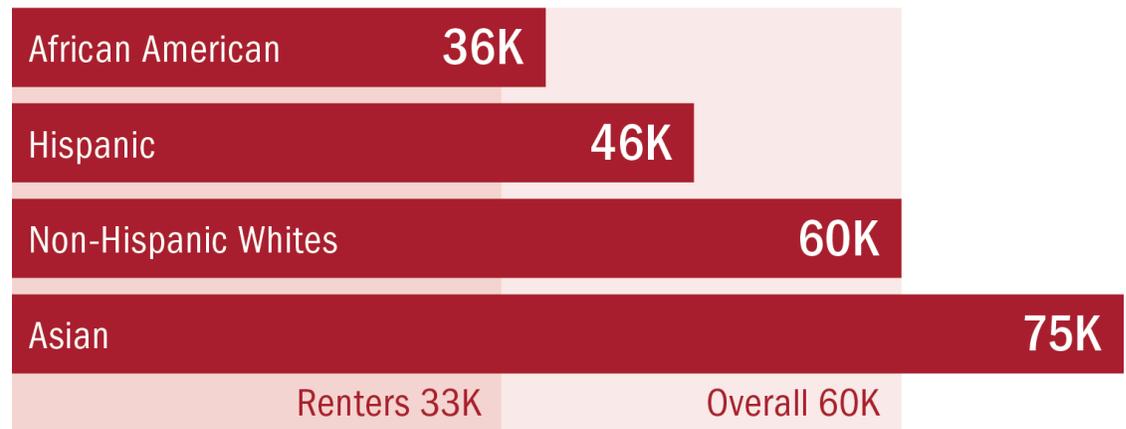


# A Holistic View of Brooklyn Center (Initial Quantitative Study)

Among 34 suburbs in the Twin Cities metro, Brooklyn Center ranks near the bottom of median household incomes, both overall – about \$60,000 per year—and among renters—about \$33,000 per year.

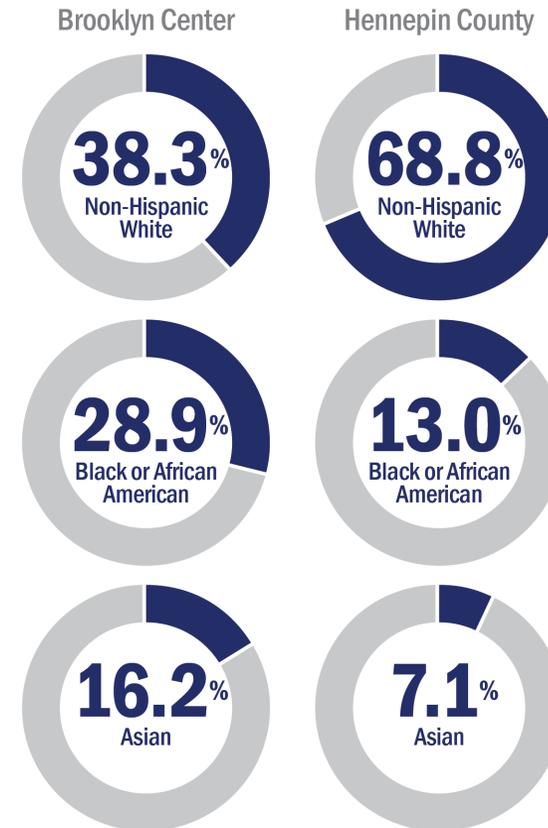
Meanwhile, because median gross rent is near the middle of the pack at \$1,083 per month, a large share of Brooklyn Center renters—who comprise 39% of the city’s households—are paying more than 30% of their monthly income on housing.

## Median Household Income



# A Holistic View of Brooklyn Center (Initial Quantitative Study)

Only about 38% of its population identifies as non-Hispanic white, compared to 69% of Hennepin County residents. Conversely, 29% of the city's inhabitants identify as Black or African American and nearly 16% as Asian, both of which are more than double the county averages.



# Advisory Council

The Advisory Council was composed of a wide variety of Brooklyn Center stakeholders, which included residents, landowners, members of government, and members of various community organizations who do community-engagement work in Brooklyn Center.

The Community Advisory Council focused on:

 Livability

 Affordability

 Accessibility

 Safety

# Mixed Methods Study (Part 2)

- The focus of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of renters, homeowners, and landlords in Brooklyn Center. Through our engagement with community stakeholders, we identified gaps in affordability along with racial disparities in incomes and key housing outcomes.
- We utilized a combination of quantitative data, a survey, and focus groups with the advisory council as the backbone of the analysis. Mixed methods built upon the established partnership with the city and combined experiences of renters, homeowners, and landlords in Brooklyn Center while also filling in gaps with quantitative analysis.

# Research Design & Method

- **Step 1:** Survey conducted with 373 responses, however there was a lack of representation of Black/African American, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and other POC voices.
- **Step 2:** Focus Groups conducted to fill this gap: consisting of Hmong homeowners & renters, Latinx homeowners & renters, Black (African American & West African) renters, and landlords from different backgrounds and levels of scale.
- **Step 3:** A more targeted analysis of demographic and market data utilizing a variety of public and proprietary data sources to more specifically investigate the advisory council's concerns.

# Survey Demographics

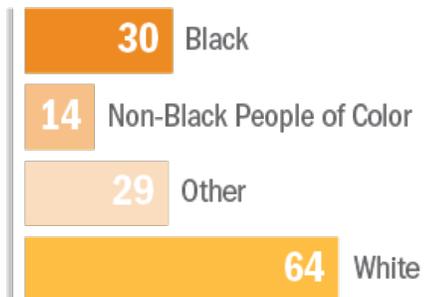
373 Participants



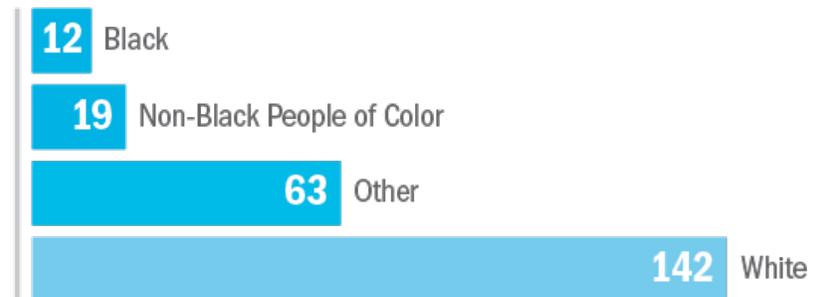
Gender



Race/Ethnicity of Renters



Race/Ethnicity of Homeowners



# Focus Group Demographics

- 10 landlords in three separate groups
- 8 Southeast Asian residents, 2 Latinx residents, 3 West African residents, and 1 African American resident

# FINDINGS

# Research Themes



**Livability**



**Affordability**



**Accessibility**



**Safety**



## Livability

**Livability:** In terms of the home: Is the structure comfortable? Is there access to fresh air and good sanitation? In the neighborhood: How safe is it? How accessible is it? Are there social amenities? Are there outdoor spaces? Is there access to schools? Looking into the future: Is it possible to live comfortably? What's the tenable condition to live there in the future? Ultimately, both the natural and built environments are equally important to determine livability.

## \$ Affordability

**Affordability:** “Affordable” housing is something that is different for everyone since it depends upon a person’s income. We view it as “what's left over” after spending money on housing. Is there “enough” left over for other things like food, transportation, childcare, etc.? Those elements dictate what is “affordable” for any particular individual, household, or family.



## Accessibility

**Accessibility:** Knowledge of available rental or homeownership options. The ability to utilize financial literacy and housing programs to access either option. Being able to find affordable, accessible (regardless of physical abilities), and functional housing when it is needed. Housing access is the ability for a household to find, obtain, and retain housing that is affordable to them.



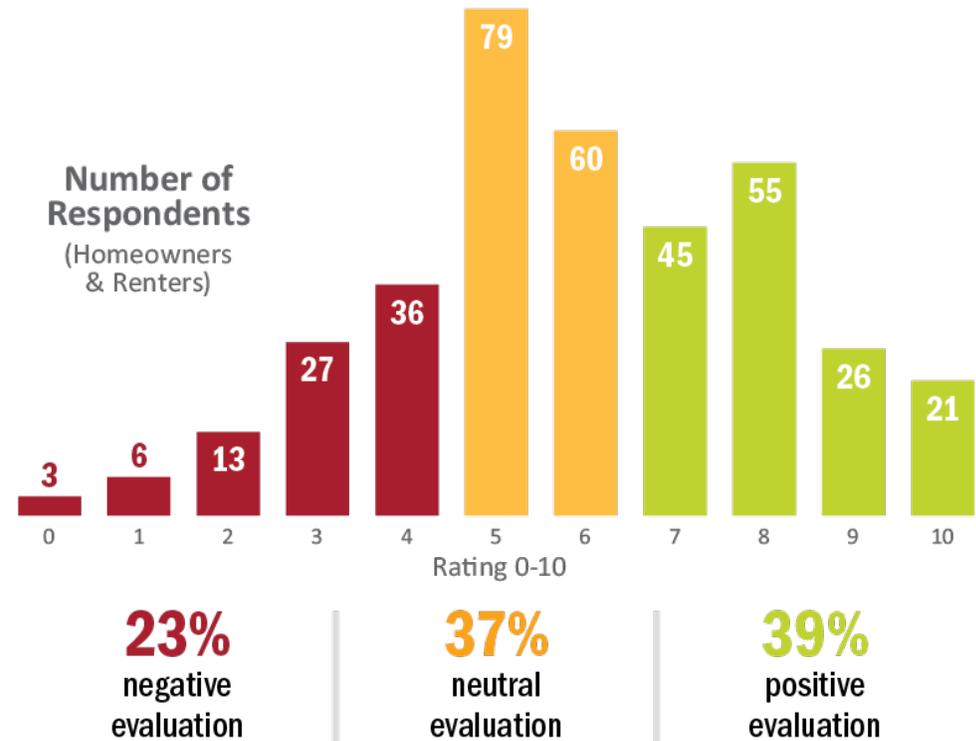
## Safety

**Safety:** Feeling safe and comfortable living in a place, without fear of being a victim of crime or bullying. Having trust that the resources and strategies used to provide a safe community are responsive to the community's needs.



## Livability

When respondents were asked how livable Brooklyn Center was on a scale of 1-10, 85 (23%) respondents gave a negative evaluation, with 139 (37%) giving a neutral evaluation, and 147 (39%) with a positive one. A significant number of both renters and homeowners discussed the condition of their housing, with 130 homeowners in the survey talking positively about their housing condition and 17 renters talking negatively about their housing condition.



# Livability: Focus Groups

In the focus groups we found a discrepancy between landlords/property managers and tenants. Landlords and property managers reported covering maintenance within a timely and reasonable manner to maintain their properties, while tenants in our focus groups have not had timely responses to their maintenance requests.

*“I mean, if it’s routine maintenance, it gets fixed. A tenant broke it and it’s obvious or they say, “Hey, my toilet won’t flush.” And go down there and there’s five diapers down there, they pay for it. I mean, we try to be realistic about it.” (Brooklyn Center Landlord).*

*“One time I had a door that it was broken, and it took him three months of trying to get it repaired until I finally decided to call the city. And as soon as they got the letter for the city, immediately the door was fixed.” (Latinx Renter).*

*“I would say renting in Brooklyn Center is pretty bad. Maintenance wise, I have to do mostly everything myself and it’s just the house itself when I moved in was already in pretty bad shape.” (Hmong Renter)*

# Inspections & Affordability

Landlords reported that the city was “by far...the hardest city to pass an inspection” and the hardest city to get through licensing inspections.

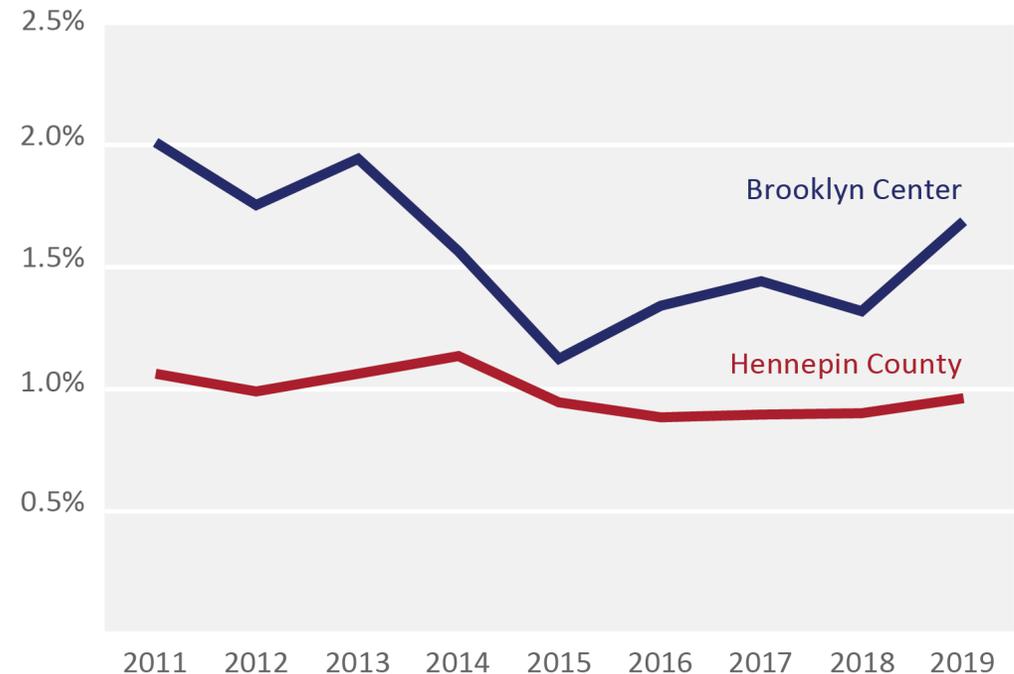
Tenants, on the other hand, felt like not enough was being done in inspections.

*“The city inspectors, I blame them for most of the problem, because they come, they see the problem. They do nothing. It’s either they know the management and they don’t know the renters. So they approve them and they keep it moving when they need to fail them on what they’re not doing. So that was one of the problems we were trying to find the last time we met was why our city inspector giving people clean bill of health, management company clean bill of health, when they can literally come into an apartment and see the things that are not working, see the things that’s not functioning...I think the last time somebody said they wanted proof that there was a rodent in your house, I think you’re supposed to catch it and then keep it there until they come to evaluate. So I blame the inspectors, because I think that’s where the city can make a difference.” (West African renter)*

# What's Missing? Evictions

Brooklyn Center's elevated eviction rate relative to Hennepin County as a whole: between 2011 and 2019 the rate of eviction filings in the city was on average 1.8% points above the county-wide rate.

The rate of filings ending in an eviction judgment also exceeded the county-wide rate every year over that span, with 594 total judgments—assuming each judgment is for a unique household—means that at least 16% of all renters were evicted from their homes over those nine years. This of course excludes all “informal” evictions.

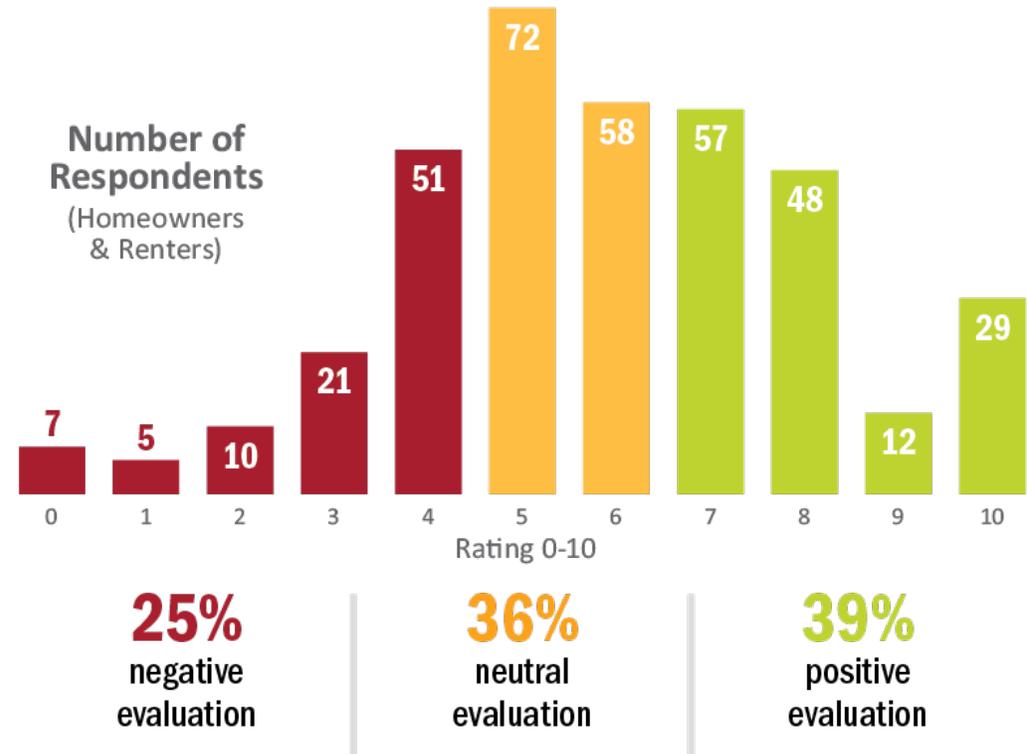


Eviction Filing Convictions  
Brooklyn Center, Hennepin County 2011-2019



## Affordability

Of the respondents, 94 (25%) felt that the city was not affordable, 133 (36%) were ambivalent or neutral, and 146 (39%) felt positively towards affordability.



# Affordability

In terms of important deciding factors in moving to Brooklyn Center, respondents cited price as a main motivating factor (162 homeowners and 74 renters, for a total of 236) as well as proximity to work (131 homeowners and 72 renters, for a total of 203). Respondents also found price to be important, as well as the size of the unit (125 homeowners and 53 renters, for a total of 178) and the proximity to their families (110 homeowners and 61 renters, for a total of 171).

*“Brooklyn Center is within my income range, [but] sometimes I struggle to pay my bills.”*

*(Resident)*

# Affordability: Focus Groups

In the focus groups, landlords and renters again had differing views on the role of affordability. Landlords in our focus groups blamed the government for the lack of affordability in the city of Brooklyn Center.

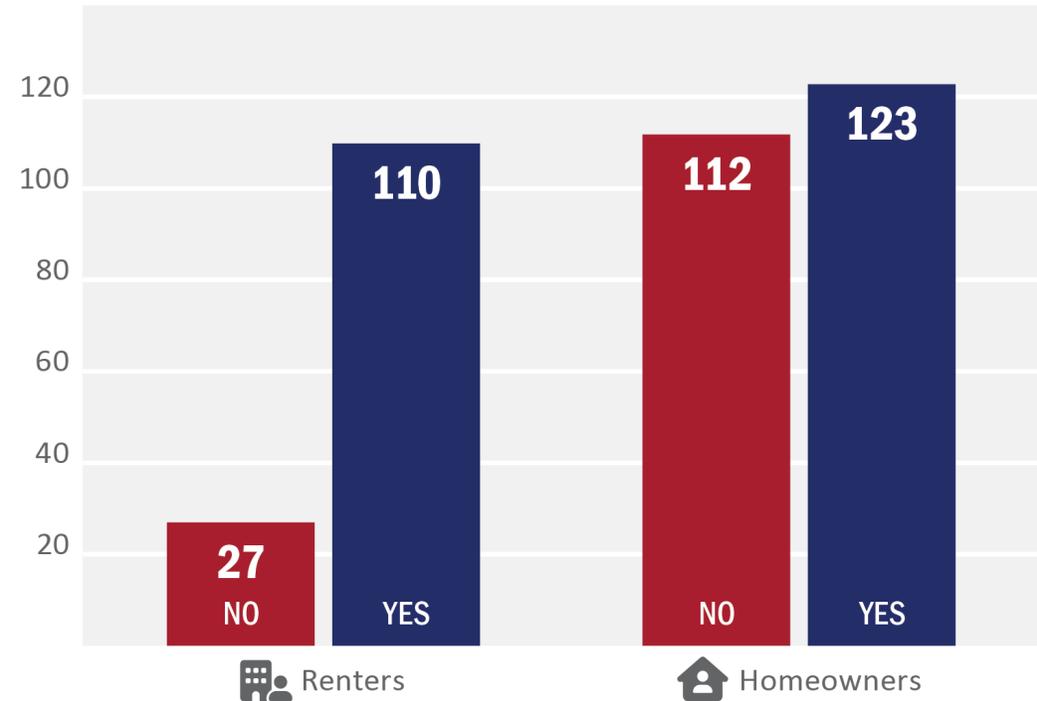
Renters, on the other hand, felt extremely cost-burdened in multiple different ways.

*“I try to keep it affordable and I also try to make sure I’m not losing on the properties. I will say, I have a very small margin and I still, I do say I’m doing this for the community. And so, I’m not out there just to make a lot of money, but it’s getting really hard to keep it affordable for the people.”  
(Brooklyn Center Landlord).*

*“My husband hasn’t left the job he’s in now. He hasn’t gotten a raise in there. So for our rent- and he’s in school, and school tuition is going up. It seems like \$600, \$700 every semester. So for us, it seems like, okay, when’s going to be the cap? How much can the rent go up for our one bedroom in Brooklyn Center?” (West African Renter).*

# Affordability

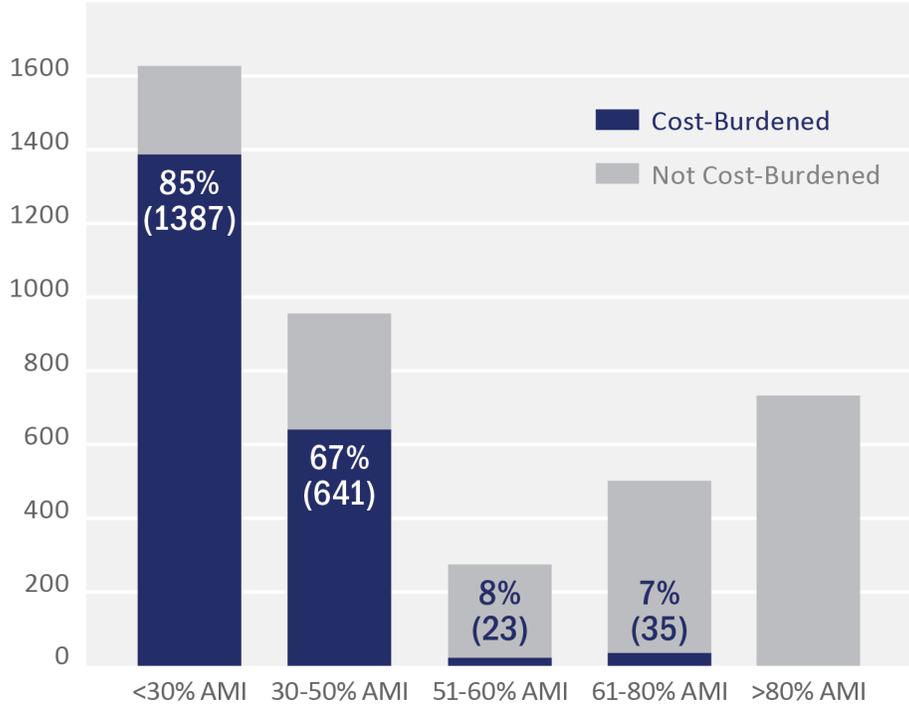
Respondents were also asked whether they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs, and 62% of the survey respondents said that they did. While homeowners were pretty even between who spent more than 30% on housing costs and who didn't, 80% of renters reported spending more than 30% of their income on rent.



Housing Costs Across Renters and Owners  
Do you spend >30% of your gross income on housing costs?

# Affordability

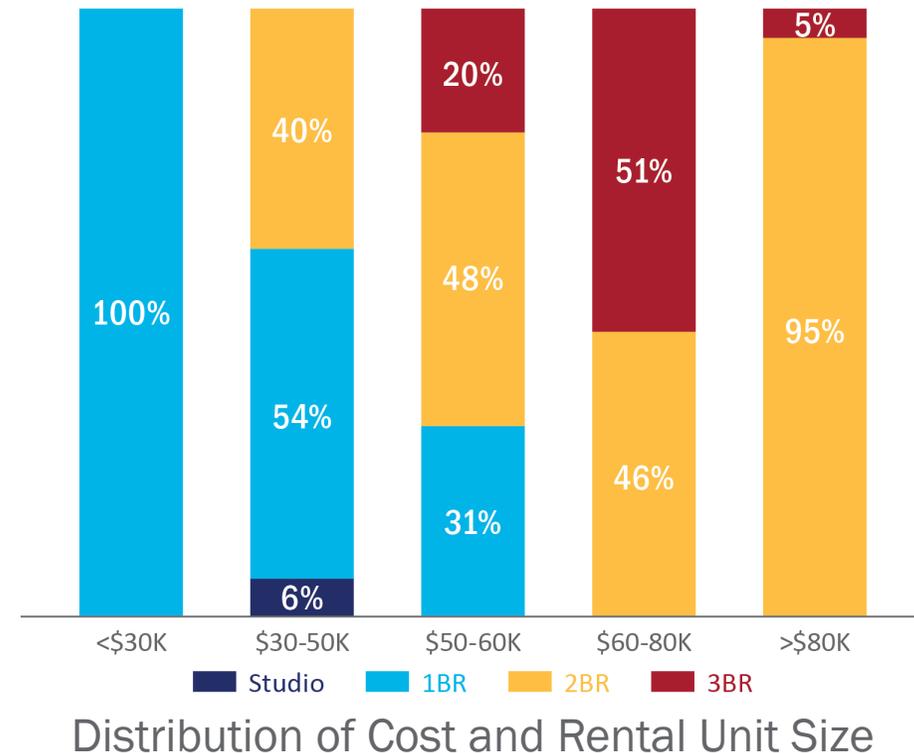
Brooklyn Center’s affordability challenges can be summed up in one statement—there are fewer deeply affordable units than households that need them. We were able to determine that only 180 rental units—and only 24 market-rate units—are affordable to the more than 1,600 households earning less than \$30,000, or 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI) for a family of three, so it is no surprise that 85% of those households are cost-burdened.



Percentage of Renters and Owners Cost-Burdened

# Affordability

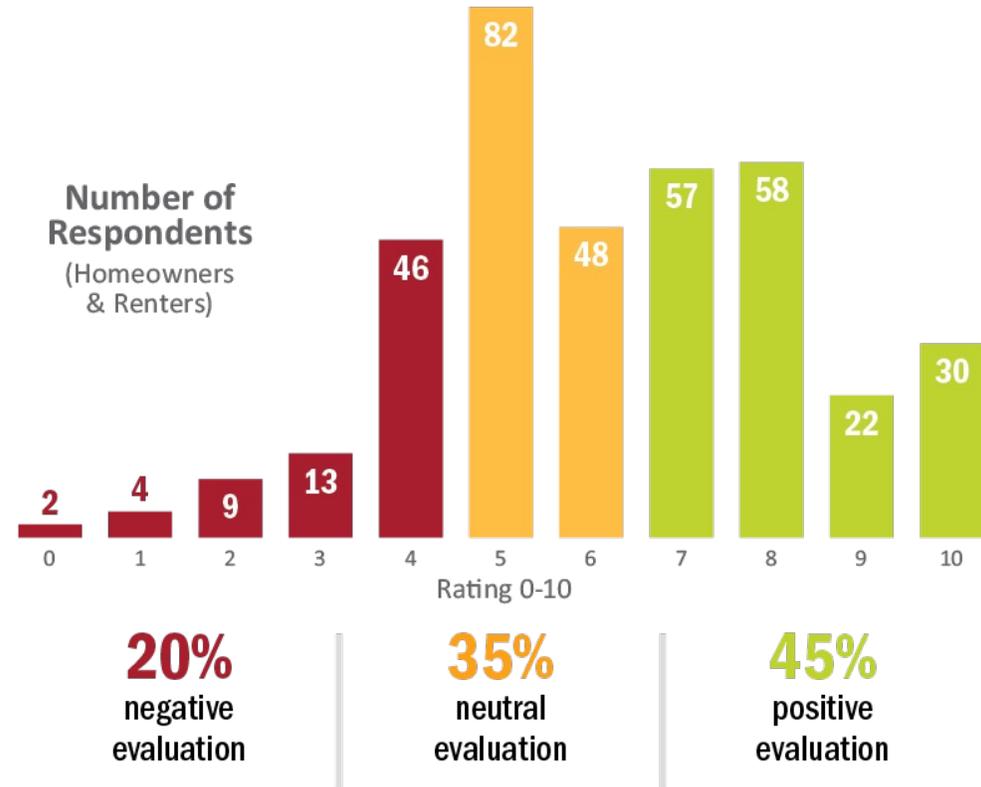
Additionally, even in affordable rental units, there is a notable lack of diversity in size: Every one of the 156 subsidized units available to \$30,000-and-under households is a one-bedroom apartment, and no apartments with more than two bedrooms are affordable to households in the \$30,000-\$50,000 range.





## Accessibility

Of the respondents, 74 (20%) reported that they do not feel Brooklyn Center is accessible, 130 (35%) felt neutral or ambivalent, and 167 (45%) felt positively that Brooklyn Center is accessible.



# Accessibility

Renters reported concerns related to rising rent and housing prices as well as credit scores and income restrictions affecting the accessibility of the city. Homeowners cited similar problems such as housing prices, social stratification with respect to housing, and finding nicer homes to move to.



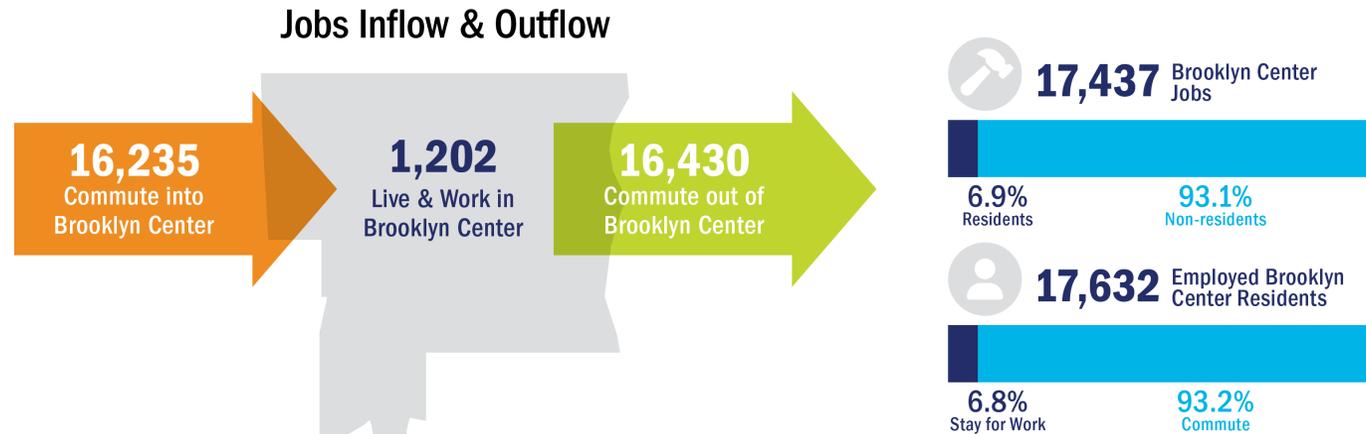
# Accessibility: Focus Groups

The convenience of Brooklyn Center was remarked on by many, noting that it is in the center of everything: close to the highway, close to transit. Ethnic stores such as African stores and other cities such as Brooklyn Park were close by. Another respondent recounted that anywhere they wanted to go was within a fifteen-minute distance.

*“Anywhere I want to go is like 15 minutes.” (West African Renter).*

*“Me, personally, I feel like Brooklyn Center don’t have a lot of job options compared to Brooklyn Park. For example, if I was to check indeed.com, I...ask for you to put your zip code or what area you’re interested in, if I put Brooklyn Center there’s probably one to two jobs out of probably 50 jobs that’s available. It’d be nice to have more jobs that’s not fast food, but it’s more industrial jobs that’s available to us, because most of the jobs that’s available is all the way in Brooklyn Park.” (Hmong Renter).*

# Accessibility

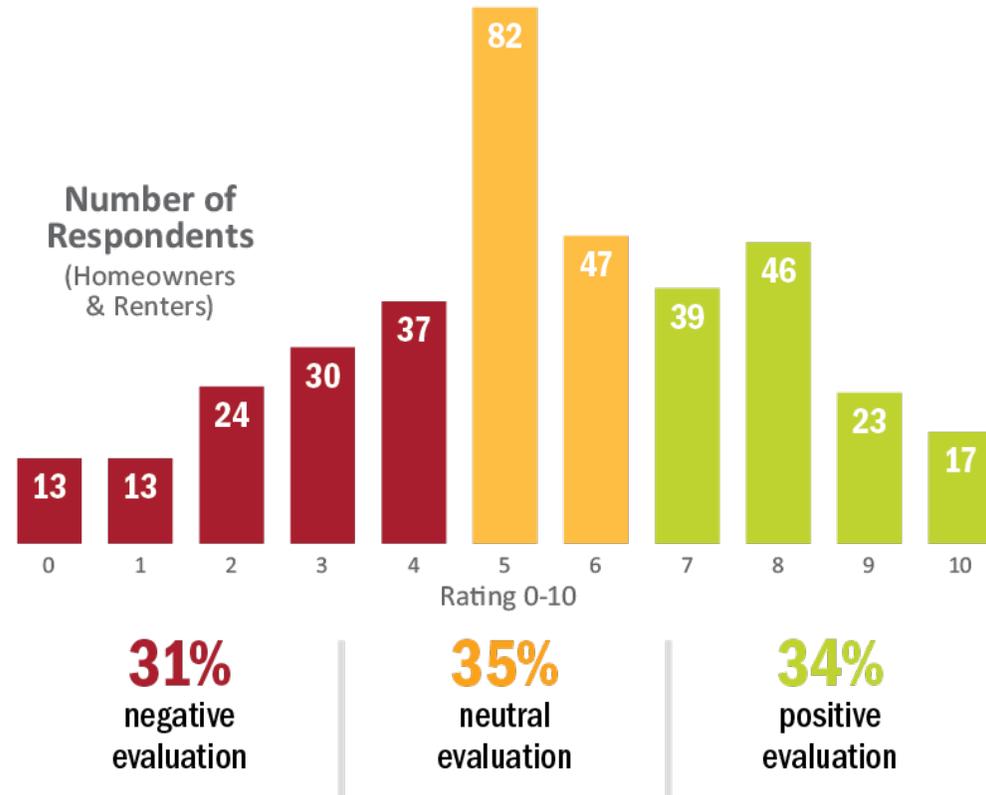


We have found that Brooklyn Center has an equal mix of both employed residents and the number of jobs, with surprising alignment between the industries that people work in and jobs that are available. Also notable is the fact that residents have much shorter commute times than metro averages. However, we also notice that the wages paid by local jobs are lower than those of Brooklyn Center residents. This means that a large number of people are forced to leave the city every day to find higher paying jobs in neighboring communities.



## Safety

Of respondents, 117 (31%) reported that they do not feel Brooklyn Center is safe, 129 (35%) replied ambivalently or neutrally, and 125 (34%) reported that they do feel Brooklyn Center is safe. These responses were fairly even, showing how different the experiences of safety are across residents



# Safety

- Homeowners and renters rated positively the security of their units and the overall neighborhoods that they lived in, and security in general seems to be an important theme in making sure people feel safe not only in their individual unit or house but within the community at large.
- The second theme that people expressed was positive feelings about crime: people were glad that there was low crime and they felt that the low crime rate contributed to their sense of safety.

# Safety

- The third theme was interactions with police: seven homeowners and five renters had a negative view of police interactions, and this may be a salient topic due to the murder of Daunte Wright. Nonetheless, other citizens still avoided certain areas of the city and cited grievances with the police.
- Both homeowners and renters were concerned about navigating the city at night. In terms of what stable housing meant to the respondents, having a safe neighborhood with low crime rates was the most significant response among both homeowners and renters. Renters also wanted responsive landlords, while both renters and homeowners wanted a good school system and a walkable city.

# Safety: Focus Groups

Safety was a large theme in every focus group. Tenants, homeowners, and landlords all cited increases in crime and vandalism within their residences and properties in Brooklyn Center. In particular, our focus group respondents reported an increase in carjackings and vandalism and an overall lack of responsiveness from police.

*“I just wanted to see if Brooklyn Center can provide a little bit more security to maintain the city, so that we still continue to having the safety in our neighborhood here.” (Hmong Homeowner).*

*“We are very, very concerned about what’s going on in Brooklyn Center. The increase in crime has skyrocketed last three months and I’m not sure the city is doing what they should be doing to address this. It’s getting to the point that we are looking to get out of Brooklyn Center.” (Brooklyn Center Landlord).*

# Safety: Focus Groups

While the racialized groups in our focus groups reported relatively positive experiences with police and wanted more presence, the respondents in our Black and West African focus group in particular had issues with police and actively avoided law enforcement.

*“Someone tried to break in all the units on my floor a couple of weeks ago. We called for help. They didn’t come until about an hour later, but never let us know that they were in the building. We didn’t hear a siren. This man was still in the building going on different floors. We didn’t know. The only reason I know they came in is because I saw their heads go past the peephole. So it’s like, okay, so who’s here to help us? I feel like the ones that are supposed to enforce that on the ground is the police, or some form of policing. But we don’t have that right now in Brooklyn Center. I don’t know if we don’t have enough officers, or they all over north. I don’t know, but when we call for help, they don’t come. And if they do come, they’re aggressive, like you’re the person that is committing the crime. So it’s like, I don’t want call and then you kill me, but I’m calling you for somebody trying to kill me, you get what I’m saying? My kids are terrified of them now. So I don’t know. I don’t know what anybody else feels like, but I try my best to avoid them.” (African American Renter).*

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

# Livability Recommendation

Create a Rental Unit Quality Board with authority to update codes and enforcement procedures, which can be enforced through existing maintenance inspection authorities on an emergency basis.

**Composition and role of the Board:** Whether a new body, or an adaptation of an existing board, the body should consist of representatives from the rental community and property owner and management community, with the balance favoring the less empowered renters, particularly the financially vulnerable renters highlighted by this study, and should focus on the following issues:

- Adapting the rental unit code to cover quality and livability of rental conditions
- Evaluating and updating the current accountability, resident reporting, and inspection process if necessary
- Establishing an emergency repair procedure with authority to make statute-based repairs without the consent of property owners and levy the cost
- Investing in a fund for costly quality repair issues
- Developing a communication plan for the new guidelines and process

# Affordability Recommendations

- Create a Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) Preservation Program to encourage rehabilitation of older units while maintaining **affordability**, particularly in buildings that serve renters earning less than 60% AMI.
- Develop a **data monitoring program** to track changes in key housing **metrics**, including rents and evictions.

# Accessibility Recommendations

- Work with businesses and industry to **develop and maintain living-wage jobs in Brooklyn Center that align with the educational backgrounds and skills of residents.**
- **Connect local transportation infrastructure to incoming Blue Line Extension to streamline commutes.**
- Partner with commercial land trusts to **preserve affordable commercial spaces for local businesses.**

# Safety Recommendations

- **Audit of Policing Practices and Policies:** Task a community-led board to perform a systematic review of crucial areas of police practice and policy, namely response procedures (process, timelines, and utilization of unarmed response teams) and how officers are hired, trained, and promoted.
  - Have the review led by the **Community Safety and Violence Prevention Committee** or by a similar body created specifically for this purpose.
  - Include a majority of community members who have interacted with police: those seeking assistance, informal interactions, participation in protests, arrest or detainment, and those who have supported someone across these interactions.
  - Utilize an outside research/technical team to support the evaluation strategy, and hold regular public meetings to maintain transparency.

# Thank you & acknowledgements

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# QUESTIONS?