

# A HIDDEN GEM IN CHICAGO

A Calumet Connect Qualitative Community Needs Assessment of the Southeast Side



Conducted by  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Collaboratory for Health Justice

In Coordination with  
Calumet Connect

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Alliance for the Great Lakes

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**SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH**



## **Calumet Connect Qualitative Community Needs Assessment**

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## Introduction

City of Chicago planning processes on neighborhood land use largely take a conventional approach to decision making, rarely involving resident voices and priorities. Planning processes may use community-level environmental and health statistics that are increasingly available at the community level, but they tell a limited story. Residents' lived experiences, perceptions and ideas are necessary to identify strategies to reduce social and health inequities experienced across Chicago neighborhoods. We conducted a qualitative community needs assessment to characterize residents' experiences, perceptions and ideas for solutions for residents of community areas that encompass the Calumet River Industrial Corridor: South Chicago, South Deering, East Side and Hegewisch. These insights provide critical context for a predominantly quantitative Calumet Industrial Corridor Community Report that will be recommended to be used to support the City of Chicago Industrial Modernization Planning processes.

## Methods

Our team was composed of University of Illinois at Chicago faculty and student (doctoral and masters' level) researchers from the School of Public Health from SPH divisions of Community Health Sciences and Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, through the Collaboratory for Health Justice, and an environmental social scientist partner from Alliance from the Great Lakes. Faculty brought expertise in community health sciences and environmental and occupational health sciences. Two student moderators were bilingual. One was a resident of the southeast side. The qualitative research aspect of this collaborative effort incorporated focus groups as the primary data collection methodology. Focus groups are an appropriate approach to this needs assessment as they allow for the discovery of insights through group discourse from a set of people sharing a social context in a familiar setting (Dreachslin, 1998; Liamputtong, 2011). We incorporated participatory research approaches in both the project design, by integrating input for the non-profit and community advisors of the project who are experts in their own communities, and within the focus groups themselves through participatory mapping. The research design was informed by the aforementioned input and from scientific best-practice as recommended by the literature as well. In response to a set of predetermined questions presented by the focus group moderators, focus group participants offered insights on their experiences, perceptions and ideas for solutions with a primary focus on health conditions and environmental determinants of those conditions, use of the Calumet River, and impacts of local industry on residents.

### **Focus Group Guide Development**

#### *Domains*

A focus group guide (Appendix A) was drafted with three major domains, residents' experiences, perceptions and ideas for solutions. The domains were informed from community partners priorities. Specifically, the Calumet Industrial Corridor Working Group, a subset of the Calumet Connect Advisory Committee, Southeast Environmental Task Force and the Coalition

to Ban Pet Coke have identified areas of residents' experiences that need explication to better inform planning processes. The questions within each domain were drafted to build on several themes that emerged in a subsequent story telling collection with southeast side residents, in partnership with the UIC SPH, the Southeast Environmental Task Force and StoryCorps Chicago, Inc. Faculty in environmental and occupational health sciences and community health sciences reviewed and provided feedback on the data collection instrument.

## **Mapping**

Co-research or the co-production of knowledge between “experts” and local stakeholders has increased in predominance to inform policymaking. Participatory mapping is a tool used to merge local expertise with dominant knowledge systems, like researchers and policymakers, and is valued for its ability to establish a foundation of common knowledge between experts, bureaucrats and stakeholders (Edelenbos, Van Buureen, & van Schie, 2011). In the case of this project, participatory mapping methodology was incorporated as a secondary approach to collect information from residents and also to provide an avenue for spatial reference for residents during focus groups. A map was produced using GIS software that included the four target community areas and featured water bodies, the industrial corridor, parks, schools, main streets and industrial businesses. Shapefile layers of building structures and side streets were included, but overlaid with a white, transparent layer to help the viewer with spatial recognition of the area (see Appendix C).

During focus groups, a blank, poster-size map was centered at the table and 8x11 printouts were provided to each participant along with markers. Four questions were asked that invited focus group participants to write or draw on the maps: 1) where do you live; 2) what is your favorite hang-out spot or valued gem in the area; 3) where do you see or experience flooding; and 4) where have you smelled odors around the area? At four of the six focus groups, a co-facilitator documented residents' comments that arose concerning space on the poster size maps. This “translation” of verbal information to spatial information included comments around locations of odor, trucking corridors, sources of pollution, recreational activities and predominance of air particulate matter. After the focus groups were completed, the spatial data collected on paper-based maps were converted into shapefiles in GIS software.

## **Moderator Training**

Four focus group moderators were trained in focus group methodology. The moderators were faculty and graduate students from UIC SPH. Two of the moderators are bilingual, English and Spanish, and one is also resident of the southeast side. After training, the moderator readiness and the focus group guide was piloted with in a mock focus groups with volunteer UIC master's students and staff.

## **Recruitment**

Six focus groups were conducted throughout February in 2020 with residents from the four

community areas that encompass the Calumet River Industrial Corridor: South Chicago, South Deering, East Side and Hegewisch. We wanted to make our best effort to have some diversity of representation of the study area. This consideration, combined with the best practice that individual focus group participants share a common characteristic (Halcomb *et al.*, 2007), informed the recruitment approach. Focus group recruitment strategies vary, but the use of local contacts or partners is widely recommended to find participants (Nyumba *et al.*, 2018) and is especially beneficial when recruiting individuals from marginalized populations like older adults or racial and ethnic minority groups (Northridge *et al.*, 2017).

In order to accomplish this, we identified a number of our local partners on Calumet Connect leadership who: 1) served or represented a subset of stakeholders from across the local geography; 2) could potentially have space at their facilities to host a focus group; and 3) who might have the capacity to recruit their constituents for focus groups. Inquiries were made with partners via phone or email. If a partner confirmed they could recruit, dates and a focus group location were identified. In two cases the partner could recruit but not host, and we had to find an alternative site within that community area in order to be accessible to local residents. Recruiting partners were asked to recruit no less than six and no more than 10 participants, and were given a short recruitment script to use, including the topic, who the research partners were the date and location, and the payment for participation (\$50).

### **Focus Group Administration**

Each focus group had one primary moderator and an assistant moderator. Most also had a field note taker, whose insights are useful for interpretation. Five of the focus groups also had the Calumet Connect representative observing, and all focus groups also had project staff present.

All focus groups had food and beverages for participants to enjoy prior to the start of the focus group. When the focus group started, the study team introduced themselves and administered a study information sheet (Appendix B), maps of the southeast side (Appendix C), and a name plate and a marker. The moderator briefly talked through the study information sheet and asked participants if they had any questions. Upon resolving any questions, the focus group began and was recorded. All focus group participants were compensated with a \$50 gift card at the end of the focus groups, after the recording ended.

### **Analysis**

Focus group recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim. Before analysis, the study team cleaned transcripts with standard procedure, removing names of participants and study staff and correcting sections that were unintelligible to transcribers. All cleaned transcripts were imported to Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis platform, for analysis.

We employed a thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019) of the focus group data using a codebook that was developed in three stages: stage 1, the identification of a priori deductive codes aligned with domains of interest on the focus group guide, as well as inductive

codes identified in the memoing process during the cleaning of the verbatim transcripts; stage 2, discussion of initial codes with Alliance for the Great Lakes Calumet Connect and Southeast Environmental Task Force community partners; and stage 3, finally we drafted and tested a codebook that included code source, code type, code definition, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and exemplar text excerpts. See codebook in Appendix D. There are three code types: 1- a priori, 2 – inductive, more focused, and 3 – utilitarian (useful to flag content for additional analysis). And initial and focused codes. Three members of the team then coded the data in dedoose, meeting weekly to troubleshoot challenges with the coding. Coders established a .80 inter coder reliability statistic. Once the data were coded we explored relationships and patterns in the coded excerpts and used clusters of codes to identify themes and organize subthemes.

## Results

Focus groups were conducted in the evening at the sites between January 27, 2020 and February 11, 2020. A total of 47 southeast side residents participated in the six focus groups (Table 1). Focus groups participants were recruited by partner community organizations to ensure that the sample included participants with diverse experiences of South East Chicago. One focus group was mainly older adults (over 60), one was mainly youth (18-25), while the four other focus groups had participants of varying age. Participants were also diverse in terms of gender, life stage (single or parenting), and race and ethnicity, reflecting the diversity of the South East side. Focus groups were conducted in English with one discussion moving in an out of English and Spanish, the bilingual moderator accommodating language accessibility for all. This transcript was then translated all into English for the analysis.

Table 1: Focus Group Characteristics

Focus Group	Community Area	Common Social Identities/Experiences	Number of Participants	Date	Duration (mins)
#1	South Chicago	Senior, South Chicago resident	9	1/27/2020	90
#2	Hegewisch	Environmental Justice Advocate	9	1/29/2020	109
#3	East Side	Mother of high needs child	6	2/3/2020	95
#4	South Deering	Jeffery Manor/South Deering resident	6	2/4/2020	97
#5	East Side	Youth, East Side resident	8	2/10/2020	80
#6	South	Artist	9	2/11/2020	85

	Chicago				
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Results are presented below first by the major take aways and second by strong cross-cutting themes that emerged from the coded excerpts.

### **Common Story of the Southeast Side**

According to focus group participants, the common story of the Southeast side is one that references beauty, a strong community, a history of industry, and an experience of physical isolation from the rest of the city and exploitation by industry.

Participants describe the Southeast side as a diverse community of people who represent their area proudly and continue to thrive despite any obstacles.

“...it's got a lot of, like [Participant] said, resilient people that have a lot of pride still. I think we're pretty unique because we have a little bit of everything.” FG0129AG

Residents of the Southeast side see themselves as a place worth investing in. The common story of the area is that the area is filled with resources, including parks, art, and small businesses. Some residents regard the Southeast side as a hidden gem in the city of Chicago:

“We would just describe it, definitely a hidden gem. Like you have to come out and let like let somebody that's from here show you around to really understand it.” FG0211AG

The sense of community on the southeast side is strong, as participants described how community members can rely on each other and neighbors would “call one another, each other, help out.” The residents we spoke to commonly described how community members identify with each other and have strong relationships with each other.

“I would like to say that, um, it's a very tight-knit community. I think, um, we, everyone pretty much, you know, even from, people from the outside always say we have a different personality in our community because we're so cl-close and tight-knit. Like we, a lot of people, parents, um, come together for their kids and for events in their community and we try to just stay together. A lot of people have grown up here, stayed here so that makes it quite, uh, close, tight-knit as well I think.” FG0203JM

The Southeast side is marked by a history of and relationship with industry. Residents say that it was better in the past and older focus group participants reflected with nostalgia of a community that was economically thriving when the steel mill was operating.

“Compared to the East Side when I was eight, compared to it now, this area is totally different. And it, when I say, when like what she had said about being unkept I do see the

difference and change from being upkeep but that's also the community, the people have changed.” FG0203JM

Members of the communities report feeling disconnected from other areas of the city and feeling physically isolated from the rest of Chicago. One focus group participant described:

“Yeah. It pretty much is a cut off from [everybody]. There's like three bridges that connects this piece to Chicago.” FG0211AG

In certain areas such as the 10<sup>th</sup> ward, residents felt like the neighborhoods “...are like siloes.” (FG0129AG). Movement in and out of the Southeast side is reliant on the bridges and if they are not functioning, which they often are not, there is no way out of the area. Residents say that it is easier to go to Indiana and shop than it is to north in Chicago.

A result of this physical isolation is that residents express feeling forgotten. Residents reflect that the Southeast side has been seen as “other” and not integrated with the rest of Chicago. They described feeling forgotten by the rest Chicago because many outsiders think they are not a part of Illinois:

“But unfortunately I'd also describe it as kind of like a forgotten area because not a lot of people know, you know, like the East Side, Hegewisch, it's all right by the Indiana border, or by the Horseshoe Casino. So it tends to be, it's close-knit as it can be, it can also be like forgotten a lot of times by almost the rest of the city.” FG0203JM

Because the southeast side is perceived as forgotten, residents note that there is a lack of resources through no fault of their own:

“...but also we do not get a lot of things given to us on the far South Side because, like she said, we're forgotten, we don't get anything, nothing gets put here, we get new nothing.” FG0203JM

Community members acknowledged that there are signs for change, but they see their community as being exploited in this process. One resident described that their area is “considered a dumping ground”, (FG0129AG) and others reflected on the name of Slag Valley.

Residents reflected that they are treated this way by the City and by industry possibly because people who live here have a lower socioeconomic status than those closer to downtown Chicago.

“Um, I mean, it would also be, like, uh, economy, I guess, like, financial status. Um, because looking at people, like, that live here, we're more lower income and class, maybe.” FG0210DM

Residents note that the industry in the area also impacts the environment and reflect that it does not need to be this way:

“but when you go up to, like, places like Chicago Ridge and stuff like that, like downtown, like, you'll see that it's more [up-kept] or, like, the environment isn't as hurt, or they have some piece of the environment to keep alive there.” FG0210DM

## **Health Priorities, Concerns and Perceived Causes**

Several health concerns were noted among residents who live in the proximity of the Calumet Industrial Corridor. The main health concerns residents have are cancers (i.e. Lung Cancer, Breast Cancer), respiratory diseases such as asthma, and the air quality, noise and odors in the community.

In the focus groups, we saw that residents related specific locations to pollution and illnesses like lung cancer, breast cancer, and asthma. One resident mentioned the effect of industry on their health and said,

“Oh, they-they do -- they do believe from all the factories and everything that we do have here that there was a -- that there's so many cases of breast cancer with the women that are here, or, you know, have lived here their lives, um, and it-it does seem to be kind of true like in a sense because everyone I know that is like my mom's age all had some type of breast cancer, like it's, so I don't know if it's .” FG0203JM

In particular, the Ford Company was mentioned several times as being a place where residents “saw pollution” and/or associated that pollution with health issues. Residents also mentioned salt piles stored on the river at 106th street and described how they associated this with health:

“...when it gets windy. And-and it-it'll pick up whatever kind of piles of stuff you got and blow that through the neighborhood.” FG0129AG

Also, many residents stated that they have had respiratory diseases that were caused by air pollution from industries:

“one cause of all these problems in this area is air pollution because you're breathing everything that the factories, that the-the cars you just mentioned and trucks, the cars that have this smoke that comes out[...] all the communities that live around that area that does this production, it's affecting everybody differently.” FG0203JM

“asthma is a big thing, because my dad actually got it, um, as a result of when Petco was still around. Um, so he spends a lot of time outside you especially during the summer, and so, a lot because we live on 106th, and Petco was only, like, maybe two or three blocks away. Um, whenever there was high winds, um, a lot of that stuff would fly over to us, and so he got asthma as a result of that.” FG0210DM

Residents also mentioned how the industry activities and operations had a negative impact on health outcomes:

“And if you talk about the dredging that's being done and then being dumped out on --

right on the lake, or like Cal Park.” FG0129AG

“I just don't think it would be that good to keep on hailing inhaling, uh, that, uh, that pollution from those trucks and from those freight those trains on a daily basis.”  
FG0210DM

Odors were also commonly named as a perceived cause of health problems. People described a chronic concern for bad smells made worse seasonally when adaptive behaviors, like keeping windows closed, could not be practiced.

Residents described a chronic concern for unpleasant smells made worse seasonally when adaptive behaviors could not be practiced. The chronic nature of this problem was discussed by several residents. One young resident stated:

“And it’s always bad...And it smacks you in the face...Because you have to breathe, no matter what you have to breathe so you’re going to have to breathe that. All that in. Like if like when they were saying when we go outside, and it smells like death...you have no choice you have to breathe so we’re constantly breathing in.” FG0203JM

The persistency of bad odors arose in all focus groups. This persistence of bad odors negatively impacted the quality of life of the residents. Such impacts might include physical health symptoms and socio-emotional issues. Several focus group participants spoke to the negative effects on their physical problems:

“I feel like those smell and they know the smell is there, but I feel like it also, like, prevents them from, like, smelling, like, other, like, odors that are probably bad, which is coming from, like, the polluted air, probably. So if, like it causes, like, a block for other things that you're probably used to already.” FG0210DM

“And if you talk about walking as a solution [to poor health], but then you're going to get some other thing in your system.” FG0129AG

Another negative health impact discussed was the socio-emotional impacts by noxious odors. A specific example of the socio-emotional impact included the effect of odor on facial expressions. One participant spoke to their emotional expressions that were affected by unpleasant odors when they said,

“but also like that's not a nice way to start your day that way. Like you know, it's just -- it's-it's hard to keep that smile on your face when y -- you know, could be in the middle of summer with your windows down. And all of a sudden, you've got to roll your windows up.” FG0211AG

These quotes acknowledge that residents perceive that they bear a disproportionate burden of the negative health outcomes of air pollution from the industrial corridor/surrounding area.

Another prominent health concern mentioned was noise pollution that emitted from industrial corridors. Residents described annoyance and lack of sleep due to high levels of noise exposure

in their neighborhood from trains, trucks, and other industry activities. For example, one resident said,

“I guess there's a company that breaks down cement, and we hear pounding. And that's annoying because you don't get restful sleep when you're hearing pounding. And it's not like -- it's to the point where you could hear it and it's constant.” FG0129AG

## **Residents' Ideas for Addressing Concerns**

Very readily, residents expressed a desire and need for change in their community.

“Yeah, and we're not the forgotten South, far South, you know, East Side is, it would be really nice to, you know, eventually see some-- something in our community, I don't care what it is at this point as long as we get something.” FG0203JM

Many residents described the need to identify solutions that can coexisting with industry, as they considered the prospect of removing industry from the southeast side as unrealistic.

“I think as a positive, we know we're never going to get rid of this industry. But it would be better if we can find and make sure that-that the EPA and whatever regulations they need to impose, that they follow through, because they're never going to leave. But at least we could try to make them a little bit cleaner and a little bit safer. And for the lands that we could, it would be nice to get some of that revenue.” FG0129AG

“I can't see how we're going to, you know, get them out of there or move them out of there and own it. But we own this. We own that park. We own this. We own this.” FG0129AG

There was not a consensus on specific changes that should be made, but residents offered creative ideas:

“And they come -- they bring their kids to Eggers. [...] But I think we should take what's there, what's available, the turning basin. We should look at the things that are available because the other areas, that's all industry. That's all privately owned.” FG0129AG

“Well, I think [another participant] mentioned it, you know. There's a park, uh, I think it's Park 451. And it's a -- it houses rowing skulls. It's teaching people how to -- how to get in and row on the -- on the river. We could start with small things like that to educate and to recreate, you know, and use the river like, uh-uh, just like [Participant] said, uh, use these parks that we have that are adjacent to the river to establish parks like that where we're instructing on climate change and environmental things, and, uh, offering rowing classes.” FG0129AG

“Uh, we do have two -- this spot, uh, at, uh -- on the river, uh, next to, uh, Hegewisch Marsh. We have a big area next to the river. Being practical, that would be like my-my first place that I would like to have -- see something go on [at]. The children are be -- are

having education in this area.” FG0129AG

Specific areas that residents presented as areas for beginning to address their concerns included community organizing and creating spaces for more detailed dialogue and planning.

### *Community Organizing*

Residents in the focus group described the need to invest themselves and their resources in the effort to change the Southeast side of Chicago. They recognize that there is much needed organization and activism around community participation and engagement. As noted by these residents:

“Our community's really missing community engagement, and then like activism. Like we're here but like this is probably the most activists you'll see in a room in this neighborhood.” FG0129AG

Coming together as one community was also identified as crucial for organizing.

“So that has to be a big part of it. And we have to have people -- and we definitely need people like [Participant]. [Participant], I -- you know, my hat's off to you. But you also have to have people that have lived here, that have experience, that are willing to work because we have to work together. At the beginning when we started, I said that we-we live like in silos. This one doesn't talk go this-this community, that one. We can't do that. And we have to be organized.” FG0129AG

Community involvement is also important for resource allocation. Residents are aware of a lack of resources and systematic disinvestments in this area of the city. As such as residents see the need on more involvement in all areas, especially when it comes to voting and census.

“I think community involvement, especially voting, census-taking, people getting involved with that, because if people don't vote, and we've got a notorious history of not voting in this community, of not getting involved with the census. I think, uh, the alderwoman said that this area of the 10th Ward was the worst in the city. If people do not come out and participate, we are going to be left behind. And all these thoughts and great ideas are going to waste.” FG0129AG

The census is perceived as an opportunity of community participation that can bring resources to the Southeast side. These resources can aid in regenerating and revitalizing a community that possess potential for growth.

### *Spaces for Dialogue*

Open communication and opportunities and/or spaces to share concerns and suggestions resonated throughout focus groups. Spaces suggested by residents took on various forms, from large forums to small group meetings. Some focus group participants believed that appointing small groups would work more efficiently and a town hall would be complicated, because of the

amount of people participating.

“I think, realistically, a town hall meeting would be too messy. Uh, I think we have -- we would honestly -- uh, I don't know -- because there's too many people in the neighborhood in general. But somebody or a small group would have to be appointed.” FG0211AG

Regardless of the format, residents agreed that any efforts to present and mobilize the community would be a good investment.

Residents expressed a need for communication efforts to be diverse and include young people, families and students to share ideas, concerns, and knowledge. In particular, residents most commonly highlighted the potential of high school students and young people in this community:

“So this is an opportunity for people like [Participant] who are young, that have a voice, and thank God there's people like this because without the youth who are going to inherit all this, if they don't open up their mouths, get involved, vote, make themselves known, then this area's going nowhere.” FG0129AG

“Here's an opportunity where, if you want to do it right, you demonstrate the power of solar, the power of wind, the power of hydro -- uh-uh, hydroelectric. And I don't think that's on the table over there. And this is an opportunity to educate the kids in this area, uh, the whole city. Demonstrate it. Show the, uh, the, uh, the potential of it because, you know, people like [another participant] here, 22 years old, this is going to be his area. We're going to be gone, and [another participant] will be here.” FG0129AG

In these spaces, participants express that in order to develop good solutions, there should be a component that educates and raises awareness of the issues surrounding pollution:

“I think it's, uh, if we create a space, I think it's-it's-it's supposed to look -- I think it-it has to be a place that envisions the future. So the way I would look at it is creating a-an area where, um, people can come and learn about pollution and seeing the solutions towards it, because if you're, uh, creating a solution then about creating awareness and creating a facility where people can learn, um, but you also create a solution to get people involved, because I think that's what we're really missing.” FG0129AG

Several residents also discussed that it might be useful to talk to those who are involved in planning on the ground, to ensure that proposed solutions are feasible.

“So before I could tell you what I want, I have to -- I have to see what is doable, actually talk to -- talk to a planner and just say, you know, "This is what we're -- this is what we'd like to see, you know. What would it take?" And maybe he'd say, "Ah, you'll never do it." Well, then I don't want to talk to you. You're not a good planner. I want to talk to a planner that is willing to open up and see what our ideas are, you know, because we talk about the -- we-we talk about the corridor and everything.” FG0129AG

Residents were excited at the prospective opportunity to give specific recommendations about

developments along the industrial corridor:

“I would love to have like a part in like the whole design aspect if we could give like, hey, this would be cool. We could put a center here. We could put, you know, a path here. I would even go out there [and build that].” FG0211AG

“So this is what I would want before we do anything, you know. Get a list of what we want. Get a planner because that -- I-I love those planners. I wish I-I was young again so I could go to school and be a planner. But I think that we have to start somewhere where we can come together, agree, and be committed, you know. And we're all -- I'm retired but I'm still busy. But if we really want this, and like [Participant], I think you said it or somebody said -- well, I might not be around, but my kids are still going to be around, and my grandchildren, and new people.” FG0129AG

Community organizing and creating spaces for dialogue are the two main ways that residents of the southeast side expressed the possibility of making their ideas a reality in their community. In these efforts, participants described involving individuals across ages, race/ethnicities, genders, and life stages should be a priority.

### **Cross Cutting themes**

#### *Southeast Side is a Hidden Gem, with Resilient Residents Despite Evidence of Systematic Disinvestment*

Residents easily recall the assets of the southeast side, but these descriptions are a stark contrast to evidence of systematic disinvestment, reflected in the physical signs of social disorganization, as well as in the relationship with the rest of Chicago and sentiments of building power among residents for advocacy and community improvement.

Focus group participants identified and described in great detail the gems of the southeast side in terms of people, places – natural (e.g., the Big Marsh....) and manmade (e.g., favorite eating establishments) and cultural norms. Calumet park and the river were commonly mentioned as gems. People referred fondly to interacting with the river in the past:

“I think one of the cool things about the river -- and this is -- it-it actually does connect up to the Mississippi at some point. And you know, and from the Mississippi, you go down to the Gulf and you're free [laughs]. I mean, go anywhere you want in the world.” FG0129AG

In particular, parks were a gem for the community. To residents, parks are more than just a place for recreation for residents on the Southeast side of Chicago. They are resources that promote a safe space, provide learning opportunities, and allow for community engagement.

“The Cub Scouts are kindergarten through fifth grade, and my son is out of college. But I

still do Cub Scouts so that when I take them out to Hegewisch March in their backyard and show them what's out there, and they're like, "Wow, this is really cool. This is -- this is the best day of my life." And when I can have a little kid who can tell me that, and we've just walked out at Big Marsh or wherever, um, that is why I still do it because, you know, there's so many kids in this neighborhood who don't know this stuff exists." FG0129AG

Although many resources were mentioned as a gem, residents had concerns about accessing the park due to safety and accessibility concerns and pollution, signs of systemic disinvestment. Overall, residents noted a lack of quality parks on the Southeast side and reported going to parks outside of their community.

Safety concerns about going to the park included fear of gangs, as well as the walkability to get to the park:

"...people [could] have access to [fishing and Torrence Avenue] by building more, um, sidewalks because [my friends' son in a wheelchair] cannot access it. He cannot go in there because there's no access except if you have a car." FG0203JM

More generally, residents mentioned frustrations that the river is not accessible for recreation such as fishing, boating, swimming, or even walking:

"I think it's just -- it's-it's a waste. And it-it's not that it's a waste. It's historical. It was an industrial river to support the steel mills at the turn of the century. And they're gone, and you've got, you know, various industries still there. You know, it's not this great job creator that it was, um, last century. And it's just a waste. There is no access. Or he gets on it on a boat. Like I said, I've lived here 65 years. I've never been on it. I cross it. It's-it's just -- there's no access." FG0129AG

Residents mentioned foam buildup, mysterious bubbles in the water, oils, and sediments in the water at Cal Park. These indicators of pollution are primary reasons that people do not use the park as often as they could:

"You could see all those -- you know, you're on the beach. You see all those factories right there. So again, that alone -- it just doesn't feel healthy being in the same water where there's -- a giant oil refinery is just there, you know." FG0211AG

"Like, in Cal Park, we see that the lake is very dirty. Like, you don't even want to go swimming in there. I remember, back then, like, I wouldn't mind going swimming there. And now I see it. I'm like, "I don't want to go." FG0210DM

Sidewalk quality, social disorganization, and pollution are all signs of systemic disinvestment. Aside from impacting how residents access the gems in the community, these disinvestments were seen throughout and impacted the whole community. Residents noted abandoned buildings, specifically around 69th and Marquette and unfinished roads (Burnham Greenway) as an

opportunity for improvement:

“I would tear all those abandoned homes that are there, there's a zillion of them, and I would take all that stuff out. I would, um, make all this a-area, and clean it all up, there's so many, whatever structures are not being utilized tear them down, get it out of here, all the empty businesses or whatever[...]" FG0203JM

Residents also reported flooding, which impacts how residents move about their neighborhood. When roads flood, residents drive on curbs, just wait to get splashed by trucks, or they have to go all the way around the intersection with flooding. Flooding was reported around avenue O near Pete's, Guadeloupe Church, going down Torrence to 130<sup>th</sup> to get onto the expressway, 106<sup>th</sup> and Torrence by the railroad tracks, 85<sup>th</sup> and Houston, and 104<sup>th</sup> and Oglesby (see image XX).

In addition, participants mentioned the bridges—the 100<sup>th</sup> street bridge specifically—needing maintenance because they could see that there is a lot of oxidized iron. The bridges were frequently mentioned how the bridges and lack of maintenance were intrusive to their daily routines:

“The bridges and trains definitely like -- there was a point where the 130th brid -- uh, the T -- the bridge on Torrence was closed. Uh, the bridge on 102nd was closed. And 106th -- you know, if it was in use and I -- like since I'm in South Deering, if I'd be coming back from South Deering and that bridge was up, I didn't even know how I was going to get back to my house.” FG0211AG

“And there's been times where I've been trapped in between the bridge and the train. And where are you supposed to go from there?” FG0211AG

One focus group participant linked this uncertainty with the bridges as a source of acute stress when trying to get to and from work. This persistent source of stress can impact both physical and mental health in the long term.

### Relationship with rest of the city

Throughout the focus groups, there was a clear contrast between the southeast side and other areas of Chicago. One focus group participant described the southeast side as being so physically disconnected from the rest of the city:

“that's another joke, we say if all of -- if [not for] all the, um, if all the bridges and everything we'd be an island.” FG0203JM

One of the reasons reported a disconnect from the rest of Chicago was that people outside of the community were not familiar with the southeast side:

“Like this area, it's like, okay. You say South Chicago. Most people think like South Side

of Chicago. Like I've went like as far north and west as you can go. And people don't even know the East Side exists. Like when you say East Side, they think like downtown like Lake Shore Drive." FG0211AG

"So it tends to be, it's close-knit as it can be, it can also be like forgotten a lot of times by almost the rest of the city." FG0203JM

Some described that it is because of the large presence of industry on the southeast side that they are less well known, even though it is the industry that has made Chicago the powerhouse that it is.

In addition to being forgotten by the rest of the city, residents described feeling neglected by the North Side of Chicago. One resident framed it this way: "We're considered a utility" (FG0129AG).

Residents were frustrated that other communities, namely the North side, have more resources:

"You get jealous when you go to other places. It's-it's-it's -- [...] I couldn't believe it when I went there, I said, wow, why can't we have this. The sad thing is, is we don't have to go very far to see the difference." FG0203JM

Recent events that have led to the relocating of industry from the northside to the southeast side has provided evidence that compliments residents' persistent feelings of the southeast side being a dumping ground for the rest of the city.

"Slag Valley literally means like industrial waste valley because that's what it is. In-in Europe, uh, you know, that's-that's slag. It's industrial waste. So to have a neighborhood named after that, again, is just, you know --" FG0211AG

"I don't see a vision because we're still fighting another dumpsite that wants to come from the North Side over here because we've got seven. They're trying to get rid of one and put it over here like we're nothing but dead bodies over here already. So why not worry about -- don't worry about keeping it nice and clean. Bringing it to the dead bodies over here because they've got industry. They're dying of pollution. It doesn't matter that we have another dumpsite." FG0129AG

Despite the feelings of marginalization compared to other areas of Chicago, residents identified a need for citywide unity on environmental justice.

"Um, sorry. Um, well, I like, relating back to what she said about industries, um, like, lately, there's been a lot of, like, push from residents, maybe from the North Side, to, like, take the industries out of their community, but at the same time, like, that's not solving the problem, because they want to send them over to, like, communities over here on this side[...]So it doesn't really solve the issue, and it actually creates a bigger distance between us and them. Like, you know, we're never going to be able to connect if, you

know, we want to solve our problems, by sending them over to someone else.”  
FG0210DM

### Building Power of Residents

Despite the recurring signs of systemic disinvestment, residents of the Southeast side are resilient. As mentioned above, community organizing was one of the categories of solutions that residents presented as being essential to addressing the systemic disinvestment of the southeast side. Several focus group participants described the need to build power among residents to have a more opportunity for decision making that occurs outside the area but that impacts their health:

“People have to get involved. And if they don't get involved, we will always be considered the toilet of the city.” FG0129AG

There was an overall recognition that residents need to build up their power for advocacy, but the systematic disinvestment was a barrier to building this power. Some felt that residents would rather leave the community rather than struggle for its betterment:

“So there's not really incentives for people to stay, there's a hundred reasons for them to leave but is there reason for them to stay.” FG0203JM

Residents also identified system-level barriers to building power and make a lasting change in the community. Building power was approached with a sense of futility described by some:

“But if you're too aware, then there go your property taxes, I mean, your property values. So do you want -- you know, do you want anyone to know that you live next to a Superfund? No, not if you're going to try and sell your house or --. So that's a -- that's a --Dilemma.” FG0129AG

### *“Nose-Blind”: Normalizing Pollution*

Throughout every focus group, participants mentioned bad odors, particulate matter, and other signs of pollution. Pollution was described as persistent, and we noted patterns in how residents normalized pollution because it was a constant reality of their daily lives. A young adult focus group participant reflected about how they did not notice the pollution when growing up:

“I never even questioned [the pollution] because I think [Participant] mentioned earlier it's normal. So everything like that we're used to is normal. Pollution, we're used to it. Like fumes, it's-it's -- everything is so normal until you start questioning it. So we -- I -- after school, we just -- like me and my friends, [...] we just go to Coal Hills and hang out. Um, and we'd just be on top of the rocks and just like hanging out. And it's so weird looking back. You know, I'm like I was literally. Like if I was sick now, I'm like damn.”  
FG0129AG

Several participants described the fact that residents are so accustomed to environmental concerns, like odor, because it is routine:

“[...] this dust is still out there, and these piles they're not they haven't gone away, so, like, the smell is still constant. And someone that comes from a different neighborhood they probably realize that, "Oh, it smells bad," but we won't really know, since we got used to it.” FG0210DM

“I mean, uh, whoever is right there and lives closest by and smells it every day -- they're probably used to it...But I'm sure it's like -Nose blind...” FG0211AG

Focus group participants recounted how outsiders to the community perceive the southeast side as smelly or are shocked at the smells. To residents of the southeast side, the odor and pollution is normal, and this is further demonstrated in residents' adaptive behaviors and perceptions of the source of pollution.

### Residents' Adaptive Behaviors

With signs of pollution invading the daily lives of residents, many reported how they adapted to these conditions in their daily lives. Aside from avoiding areas exhibiting signs of pollution, such as Cal Park or the river due to foaming water or dead fish, participants changed their individual, daily behaviors to cope with pollution. Several participants described having to adapt to chronic bad odors on the southeast side by closing their windows,

“[...] when her kids are playing outside it smells, the smell is so strong that they have to -- they have to run inside because they're smelling that. And make sure the windows are closed too.” FG0203JM

People also close their car windows when driving through certain areas:

“Because I go that way quite frequently, and you can smell it. I had my window rolled up in the car, but I had to roll it down to get some air then put it back up.” FG0127JHB

The bad smells are particularly bad during the summer, and residents say that some choose to not use their air conditioner so that they can keep air from outside coming in. Residents also reported that even with closing windows and vents inside a house, the smell can still be present indoors. Some residents also reported having to wash their cars and clean houses more frequently:

“[someone I know] lives around the area where the mountains of salt are that every morning when she wakes up and she washes her car [...] when she wakes up there's like dust on all the cars that are around that area. She was also talking-talking-talking about her children, that she has kids, and she worries that that does, like they're breathing that in and getting it into their system. [...] She cleans her house like every day but there's still a lot of dust especially when she opens the windows. And it looks like it's two, one to two years that she hasn't cleaned the house but she literally cleans like every day. But the dust

is so much that-that it stays in the house[...]" FG0202JM

In some cases, adaptive behaviors affect other activities that are essential to maintaining physical and mental health. Participants discussed how they could not enjoy the outdoors or their property. Specifically, one focus group participant explained how children are not able to play outside as they should.

"[...] sometimes the parents are like, "Uh, I don't want them to play outside today." And it's like, well, we can't -- like you have to deny like kids playing outside because of like how crappy the air is. So -- yeah. It affects a lot." FG0211AG

Participants also mentioned the normalcy of noises impacting their behaviors. Specifically mentioned were trucks on 106th street and the noises of trucks hitting potholes particularly in the middle of the night. In addition, residents mentioned other noises like construction, and sometimes not being able to identify where it came from. The noises caused residents to keep their windows closed and night, and many reported that they could not sleep well with these noises.

"There's a place on 106th and [Wheaties] Drive. And, uh, on a summer night, it's got such a high pitched shrill, you can't leave your window open. Does anybody know about that sound?"

#### Where does it come from and who is responsible?

Residents frequently linked industry and pollution to the particulate matter and dust that they reported.

"The dust from these plants are getting in my windows. You can see it. You can wipe it off my window on the inside." FG0211AG

Residents also associated the bad smells with industry and sometimes with specific locations.

"I've heard that, um, those smells are usually correlated to sulfur, and sometimes there's high piles of sulfur in that area, so yeah." FG0210DM

Participants identified specific streets or intersections with bad smells (Figure XX). Specifically, participants mentioned bad smells at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup>, State line rd, the 95<sup>th</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>, and 106<sup>th</sup> street bridges, 105<sup>th</sup> where SH Bell Is, Slag Valley, and Torrence between 100 and 103<sup>rd</sup>.

Although sites of bad smells were identified, as one participant stated, "None of us know where the odors come from". One focus group described how they tried to identify the source of a persistent bad smell one day:

"I was trying to track it. I was driving, and then I thought it was this company, and no, it wasn't that one. I came to this one, and it wasn't." He goes, "I couldn't identify it," and then all of a sudden, it dissipates. So it's like they do it maybe for a certain amount of

time, then they stop because then you can't find it. It's like it's hiding.” FG0129AG

Ultimately, residents recognized the bad smells as so persistent and normal due to the overwhelming presence of industry in the area. Residents said that the odors and pollution were so bad because industries were not monitored and held to a high enough standard.

“And, uh, a lot of the people who, uh, have had health problems couldn't identify exactly what was happening simply because they were allowed to operate unchecked. No one was measuring, or monitoring, or even having a clue of what kinds of toxins these companies were eliminating because they were making donations to the political people. And the donations gave them a lifetime permit to operate unchecked. Are you kidding me [...]” FG0204AG

Residents frequently alluded that the city should hold the industry accountable for the normal, everyday impact that the pollution has on their lives.

“Horrible, horrible. I mean, it's un-unbelievable that this company is allowed to interfere with my daily life. There are days where I can -- I have to leave my garden in the summer because of the over -- just the stench that the city pl - and the city does nothing.” FG0129AG

### *“A double-edged sword”: Contested Relationship with Industry*

Participants described a long history of tension between need for and pride in industrial roots and concerns for health of residents.

“So I think it's-it's kind of like a love-hate relationship, because it's like, well, on the one hand, it's, like, it's kind of like a love-hate relationship, like it causes pollution, but on the other hand, it's like, a lot of people's livelihoods.” FG0210DM

Residents recognized that the neighborhood exists as it does because the river and the industry have brought people and jobs to the community. In the past, the industries were important to the local economy and supported the livelihoods of community members:

“it's kind of what really brought people to the East Side to begin with, um, because, without the Calumet River, you wouldn't have those industries coming to the East Side to kind of set up here and bring jobs to those immigrants that were coming to the area. Um, so I feel like, in itself, it is a gem, but I think we take it for granted nowadays, um, especially because it's been kind of overrun by those industries that were originally here to begin with.” FG0210DM

Today, residents see that the industry does not yield as many benefits and note that the industry is not primarily benefiting the community anymore due to the concerns around health and pollution:

“I think it's a double-edged sword at the same time because like for example with [Company's name], you know, they're creating 500 new jobs so there are people here that are going to need those jobs. But at the same time they're not providing good working conditions, they're putting pollution into the air, into the river, right?” FG0203JM

“I think, being residents of the area, it went from a positive thing to something negative because it does make our area look ugly. And it does make it smell ugly. And this is what turns a lot of people off from coming here, you know, whereas before it was beneficial because it created jobs. But now, like you said, they're not even hiring people from this area. So how is it benefitting us at all?” FG0211AG

Residents also expressed frustration that the industries that are now in the area do not hire from the community, but that companies tend to hire residents from Indiana.

“But it's kind of like in the same -- and like they-they did create jobs but I can't even tell you, I don't know how many people in the area actually get an opportunity to work there.” FG0203JM

“And I think it's because, um, despite the industries being like, as despite the industries being around our area, they don't offer really as many jobs as we think, and some of the jobs that they do offer require more training than what the residents may have. So they're really not com like, not all the jobs are completely accessible to the residents of the East Side. So they may be there and they may offer tons of jobs, but at the end of the day, most of us have to go outside of the East Side to even work a job.” FG0210DM

Some residents also connect the feelings of being disconnected from the rest of Chicago as being caused by the dense presence of industry.

“I-I think, because of all this pink right here [the industrial corridor], that's why we're so disconnected from the rest of Chicago.” FG0211AG

### Distrust of Industries and Regulating Bodies

The complicated relationship with industry is intertwined with distrust of the industries and the government who is responsible for enforcing regulations.

Residents' distrust is rooted in uncertainty. Residents say that there is an overall lack of transparency and they do not know the specifics about what kind of chemicals were being produced by industries:

“I think they're unknown to us [laughs]. I think that, you know, with a lot of the industries, you know, look at the-the Shroud -- the Shroud property that is -- you know, nobody quite knows what's exactly in there. I mean, they've got shrouds. I mean, yeah, there's testing and stuff. But you know, all of these dangerous chemicals that are in there,

you know.” FG0129AG

“And then, I don't know if the-the current companies are here, uh, that-that are here if they're producing m-more chemicals or worse chemicals, but the-the, um, the-the, um, efforts that they make to limit the spr -- the-the spread of those chemicals, I don't think that they watch them as closely as they did.” FG0204AG

Residents described not being sure what mechanisms were in place to protect their health, if industry was being held accountable for their health harming actions and even what industries are still relevant on the southeast side.

“I had no idea like we were heavily industrialized, because you can tell just by looking at the structures and stuff that are, because you don't know, at least I don't know like as far as what's open, what's not, what's still running.” FG0203JM

“I feel like it's real secretive. Like you don't really know what's going on there. Even though there's a big factory there, like you really have no information of what's going on [...]” FG0211AG

Residents had firsthand experience of pollution and were frustrated that there were no signs about pollution. Residents reported that some people fish in the river and could be putting themselves at risk for health issues, unknowingly.

“[...] the river is contaminated and that sometimes people go on the bridges and they're fishing from there. But she wonders why it is not, no one tells them don't fish there because the water is contaminated because all of the -- because of all the industries that are-are around the riverbank [...]”

Participant: I agree with that. Um, kind of like whether they would, should have like a site or designated area like somebody else was saying, um, like from here, you know, fish at your own risk.” FG0203JM

The inaction by the government to address environmental and health concerns was a common frustration expressed by focus group participants.

“Horrible, horrible. I mean, it's un-unbelievable that this company is allowed to interfere with my daily life. There're days where I can -- I have to leave my garden in the summer because of the over -- just the stench that the city pl - and the city does nothing.” FG0129AG

Residents described the need for increased accountability and monitoring by the government. They recognized that as individuals, they could not hold industry accountable. In their experience, however, the governing bodies did not prioritize the needs of the people:

“And it was -- it was only up until like a few years ago that they were -- I mean, I g -- I

guess breaking law -- their own laws or breaking laws of like not having their stuff contained or covered. And you know, it was only until people from the neighborhood starting sending videos of just big whirlwinds of it blowing in the wind that they actually did something about it. So that -- right off the bat, [just you know], like they'll get away whatever they-they want to as long as -- until they get caught or whatever. You know, so they're just like [that alone they're just kind of like], uh, yeah. Th-they're not respecting th-the river, you know. What can we do about it? [They're some big] companies.”  
FG0211AG

Distrust of the government was referenced by participants who felt that their health was at risk as a result of political pressures and corporate greed.

“They can't put anything on it because it has all of this waste that's so toxic that nobody can-clean it up, and you want to tell me that that's smart to have right next to your fresh water, and not help people who live over there, and not help communities who are still supporting this industry? Apparently, they still need our tax money. We don't live over here for free. We pay property taxes. Uh, why should they -- why should their interests be so much more than mine?” FG0204AG

“And they had the stench and that smell was going on, uh, in the summertime. You couldn't enjoy your outdoors and your property. You have to run from your house to your car. It smells like dead stuff and-and-and bad stuff mixed together. And, uh, a lot of the people who, uh, have had health problems couldn't identify exactly what was happening simply because they were allowed to operate unchecked. No one was measuring, or monitoring, or even having a clue of what kinds of toxins these companies were eliminating because they were making donations to the political people. And the donations gave them a lifetime permit to operate unchecked. Are you kidding me?”  
FG0204AG

Even when industry had been held accountable for its pollution, residents described the actions as simple band aids to a complex problem, designed to quiet the complaints rather than solve them.

“I experience the same thing though. The dust from these plants are getting in my windows. You can see it. You can wipe it off my window on the inside[...] And they've actually ha-had to come to our whole block and change everybody's windows out of their house because of the lawsuit. And it hasn't changed, still [see the build up].

Participant: Yeah. It was just a Band-Aid.

Participant: Yeah. Basically, here's some new windows. Be quiet.” FG0211AG

This lack of action by the government results in a sense of futility by some residents, as one reflected: “and unfortunately, my complaints about that over the years have been met with a lot of indifference because people feel that it's much more important to have companies in the

neighborhood.”

Overall, residents were skeptical the city’s commitments to the industrial corridor renovations, as expressed by one resident:

“it's hard for me to see the City would do anything for us because they've already got plans. And it's not for us. It's about us, but it's not for us. I don't see it at all. I don't.”  
FG0129AG

### Possibility of Coexistence

While acknowledging the industries that are in the Southeast side of Chicago, residents note about a possibility of coexistence, if there are more guidelines and monitoring by the EPA to make these industries more environmentally friendly.

“Some way -- some way that is what I've always said is that industry has to coexist with the environment. Or we have to all coexist, if that's still going to, you know – [...] There's no reason why we couldn't have that same thing here.” FG0129AG

“I think as a positive, we know we're never going to get rid of this industry. But it would be better if we can find and make sure that-that the EPA and whatever regulations they need to impose, that they follow through, because they're never going to leave.”  
FG0129AG

Residents reflect that this coexistence could benefit the community and provide economic benefits to the community.

“But at least we could try to make them a little bit cleaner and a little bit safer. And for the lands that we could, it would be nice to get some of that revenue.” FG0129AG

Suggestions by residents that involved industry in the community included the possibility of industries hiring more local residents, investing in the community through fundraising and donations, and increasing their presence in community projects, and becoming more environmentally conscious.

“you think they would sponsor more community events to get on our good side. [...] you never hear of like Ford sponsoring a team or something like[...].” FG0211AG

With some hope, residents see the possibility that the industry can have a positive role in the revitalization of the Southeast side.

## Conclusions

Our qualitative community needs assessment revealed that residents have a deep connection to and identify with the Southeast side, which they feel is underappreciated by the rest of Chicago. Particularly unknown is the important history of industry in the area and its contribution to

Chicago's greatness. Residents of the Southeast side express a difficult relationship with industry since its strong industrial roots are also mixed with real concern that the health of residents are put at risk by lack of industry and government regulation. Odors and noise were mentioned as chronic health concerns. Residents believe they may be a great risk of diseases due to these environmental hazards. Focus group participants described that residents do not trust that adequate protections are in place to protect their health. There was a clear sense of enthusiasm for change and the possibilities of working with city planners to improve health opportunity on the Southeast side. Innovative ideas were shared about industry being incentivized toward sustainable, health promoting options. Residents were described as being resilient and adaptive in dealing with chronic environmental concerns. More organizing and power building was named as important to make sure that residents' voices and concerns were heard by decision makers, and that there are more opportunities for residents to be at decision making tables with respect to their own neighborhoods.

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this qualitative study. In terms of data collection, we have a lack of dialogue about residents' experiences with industrial corridors. When being asked questions about the industrial corridor, residents often stated they had difficulty accessing this area and could not share their experiences of interacting with the industrial corridor. The limited access to the industrial corridor might prevent our research team from providing a richness of their interactions with this area. Also, there is a lack of diversity of experiences about access to the industrial corridor. It means that old residents may have higher hurdles of interacting with the environment compared to young residents since they spent most of their time inside, leading to a significant obstacle in finding a meaningful relationship.

The absence of translators during the focus group interview could impact our data collection and analysis. Due to the limited financial resources, we were not able to accommodate the translation services during focus group interviews. There were residents that were monolingual Spanish speakers and might struggle with understanding research terminology and questions, making it imperative that language translation needs to be included during the study in order to avoid misinterpretation.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Focus Group Guide



#### The following is to be followed at each Focus Group session:

- As participants arrive, the Moderator, Assistant Moderator will greet them and invite them to have a beverage/snack.
- The Moderator will provide copies of the Information Sheet.
- When all have had time to read the participation form, invite and answer questions.
- The Moderator will state, “If you are comfortable with participating in the focus group we will begin. If you have any questions, please let me know and I will be happy to answer them first.”

#### Introductions

**M-** Thank you all for making time to be here today.

**M -** Let’s begin by introducing ourselves. My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

**M –** And we have \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ here as well who will be observing today. They will be taking some notes, but they will not be writing down anyone’s name.

**M -** We are working on community needs assessment for Calumet Connect (briefly describe Calumet Connect).

We are interested in three topics today. First, we want to hear about your experiences living on the southeast side and how you experience the environment around you. This includes the air, water (including the river) and soil. Second, we want to know what you think about these experiences that you have. Last, we want to hear your ideas about how to address some of the issues you raise. Basically, how could things be better. We expect you will have some key solutions to some of the issues you raise.

#### Ground Rules

1. There are no right or wrong answers. We expect that there will be a lot of different ideas and experiences shared today. Don't hesitate to tell us what you think, even if it is different from that of others in the room. Be as honest and candid as you can.
2. We hope to hear from everyone, so let's be sure to listen and give everyone a chance to speak. Let's practice "stepping up and stepping back." There may be times when I will ask each individual to respond and other times when I may not, depending on what you are comfortable sharing. If I ask you anything directly and you do not wish to answer you can just say I pass or I do not have anything to say or add.
3. We need to remember to protect each other's confidentiality. What we say in this room stays in this room. Can we all agree to that?
4. We will be recording our discussion so we don't miss anything you say, but we will not include your names in any of the transcripts or reports. Also, we often just nod to agree or disagree. But, we cannot record when you nod your head "yes" or "no," so if you can say "yes" or "no" out loud, that will be very helpful.

Before we introduce ourselves, I want to talk a little bit about the maps in front of you. We're going to use them in a couple ways, for example we might use this big map here to help orient us or help us understand the location of something we're talking about. There will be a few times that we will ask you to mark something specific on the map, but for some of you who are more fond of maps you might have an urge to mark something down when others are talking. That's great. Feel free to draw or write something on your map anytime. We just ask that if you draw or mark something, that you explain what it is somewhere on there.

Any questions?

[Moderator will announce that the digital recorder will be turned on and the moderator will turn on the recording devices in the room.]

Alright! Let's get started.

We're going to begin by going around the room and introducing ourselves. But first let's take a brief moment to mark where we live on the map, you can draw a little house or put an X, again just make sure you write down that it's your home on the map. Also, you can put a heart on your favorite hang-out spot on the southeast side.

Okay, shall we start here? What's your first name only, where do you live, and what's your favorite hang out spot?

Great, thank you everyone for sharing.

## EXPERIENCES

Let's first get started by thinking about the southeast side.

- How would you describe this area and its people to outsiders? (motion to visual prompts) [South Deering (including the neighborhoods of Slag Valley, Jeffrey Manor, Vet Park), Hegewisch, East Side, South Chicago (including the neighborhood Bush)]
  - ➔ PROBE: Is there a "common story" that residents of the southeast side have?
  - ➔ PROBE: What are the gems of the southeast side?
  - ➔ PROBE: Someone did or didn't mention the Calumet River in their description. Does the Calumet River come to mind as a gem?
  - ➔ Do residents take advantage of community resources?
  - ➔ PROBE: Let's look at the section in pink on the map. Do you interact with this area and how so?

[Moderator] So now I'm going to ask you about your perceptions about some things on the southeast side. Before I do, let's check in with Nicole. Nicole, did you have any additional questions about their experiences?

[Moderator] Great!

## PERCEPTIONS

So one of the first things I'm going to ask are your perceptions around health. And when I say "health," I'm thinking of things that are bigger picture that affect the health of the whole community.

- With that, what do you feel are the top health issues and concerns for you and your neighbors in the southeast side?
  - ➔ PROBE: How do these issues affect you and your neighbors?
  - ➔ PROBE: Are there ways in which the environment affects your health?
  - ➔ PROBE: What are the causes of these health issues?

[Moderator] Thank you for sharing, those were really helpful thoughts.

Now we also want to ask about your perceptions about the river.

- How would you describe the Calumet River and the riverbank to someone else?
  - ➔ PROBE: Those were great descriptions of the river. Your descriptions made me think about the five senses. Are there any additional things you see, smell, hear and even has anyone ever touched the river?
- How do residents use the river?
  - ➔ PROBE: Do you know of anyone who uses the river or maybe did?
- Do you think the river impacts health?
  - ➔ PROBE: Would you say the river is healthy habitat for wildlife?

→ PROBE: Is it a healthy place for people to recreate in?

[Odor was or wasn't mentioned.]

- PROBE: Where do the smells come from?
  - PROBE: Can you mark on the map where you most often smell unusual odors?
  - PROBE: How do odors and unusual smells affect residents?

[Flooding was or wasn't mentioned]

- Is flooding an issue? How so OR can you tell me more about that?
- How does it impact people on the southeast side?
  - PROBE: Can you mark on the map the areas or intersections that experience the most flooding?
  
- Is climate change something you think about affecting the southeast side?
  - PROMPT: If so, why?
  - PROMPT: How?

Now we want to learn about how you perceive the industries in this area. By industry, I mean like the factories or plants in the area. The southeast side is rooted in a history of industry, but I want to ask some questions about local industry today.

- What can you tell me about local industry on the southeast side?
  - PROBE: What do you notice about local industry?
  - PROBE: How would you describe industry in the area?
- What is the impact of industry on your life or your neighbors' lives?
  - PROBE: How does local industry affect the health of the community?
  - PROBE: How important would you say local industry is to the local economy?  
[Jobs sub-probe]
  
- How are the issues that residents of the southeast side face different than those in other areas of Chicago?

## IDEAS FOR SOLUTIONS

[Moderator] So the next thing we want to talk about are your ideas. We find that the best ideas come from the people who are their own experts in their communities. Let's do another check in with Nicole real fast. Nicole, did you have any additional questions about their perceptions?

Okay great! So if you could step into your creative hat for this next section.

- In thinking about the southeast side and your community, are there changes that you'd like to see that would improve your quality of life?
  - PROBE: These could be things like employment, education, transportation, housing, public safety, local opportunities for business, recreation.

- PROBE: What does a sustainable southeast side look like to you?

Now I'd like to think a little bit smaller and focus again on this pink area on the map we talked about earlier.

- If you had an opportunity to convert this area into your dream area, what does that look like?
  - ➔ PROBE: Would you change anything about it? What would you put here or take away?
  - ➔ PROBE: Would you want any amenities here?
  - ➔ PROBE: Do you see any public access sites to the river?
  - ➔ PROBE: Is industry in your vision?
- If the city or community partners created a space for you to be involved in planning of this area, what would that look like?
  - PROBES: Forums, taskforce, so on.
- So we've just been talking of a sort of wishlist, of all the things you've suggested today, if you were the decision-maker, what is the top action you would take or what change would you make first?
  - ➔ PROBE: What strengths exist in the community that can be strengthened more?
  - ➔ PROBE: What investments need to come to the southeast side?
  - ➔ PROBE: Are there other opportunities not mentioned yet, like policies, that could help the community?

## CLOSING

We want to thank you for your participation today. We truly appreciate your time and your thoughts on these issues and topics.

- We're about to turn off the tape recorder, but before we do **is there anything that I didn't ask about that you'd like to bring up at this point?**

This has been most helpful. We are going to turn off the recorders now.

[Overview of next steps, who people can reach out to if they have questions about the topics that came up.]

**Thank you again for participating in this project.**

**We really appreciate your sharing with us and helping us get more information about this important topic.**

## Appendix B- Focus Group Information Sheet



### Calumet Connect Community Needs Assessment Focus Group Information Sheet

#### **What is this?**

University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health faculty and staff are partnering with the Alliance for the Great Lakes and Calumet Connect to conduct a community needs assessment of the southeast side of Chicago. We are interested in residents' experiences, perceptions and ideas for action to address concerns related to the environment.

#### **How many people will you talk to?**

We will host 6 focus groups with about 6-8 participants each for a total of about 50 residents of the southeast side.

#### **How will this be used?**

A summary of themes identified across all 6 focus groups will be integrated into a report that will be presented to the city of Chicago Department of Planning for use in land use decision making for the southeast side.

#### **Why am I being asked?**

You were identified as someone whose perspectives of the experiences of residents with the environment in the southeast side is valuable to this community needs assessment.

#### **Will my name be used?**

Your name will not be included in the final report. However, we may use verbatim the language you use in the focus group to characterize what concerns/priorities residents of the southeast side identify.



## Appendix D- Codebook

Code Group	Parent Code	Child Code	Source	Code Type	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Examples (verbatim)
Group 2: Inductive	Industry	Industry accountability/ monitoring	memoing	focused	references to industry accountability (or lack of) for their business/actions	references to a need for or presence of monitoring, reporting, communicating to residents	community monitoring	industry will do it until they are caught
Group 1: Content	industry	Industry transportation	memoing	focused	references to transportation specifically for industry	references to ships, trucks	local residential transportation	And I think, also, besides, like, the heavy industry, uh, or, like, the powder and stuff, uh, just the-the like, the large amount of trucks and freight trains and boats, uh, especially by the river, that stuff [has got] to take a toll on residents, too, because I know a guy again, I live right by the river. And if it's not the train, it's the boat, and if it's not the boat, it's just like semi after semi on, uh, on 106th Street.
Group 1: Content	industry	Impact on community, jobs	memoing	focused	Positive and negative references to how industry impacts residents	industry brings jobs; and industry won't hire from community	health impacts or pollution	industry doesn't hire our people, doesn't give back; our voices are being bought out, companies not invested
Group 1: Content	Perception of SouthEast	Perception of the Southeast Side	memoing	focused	Participants describe how the	Is a perception by outsiders	Primarily describing a perception	there is reason to move out but no reason to stay. We are a dumping ground

	Chicago				SouthEast is perceived by outsiders		of people who live in the community	
Group 2: Inductive	systemic disinvestment		memoir	focused	Participant implicates systematic unfair treatment by government	Comparison to another neighborhood or that the city isn't doing something they should		slag valley - we exist to get crapped on by industry
Group 1: Content	systemic disinvestment	transportation Issues in SE Chicago	memoir	focused	references to transportation issues in the SouthEast side - walking, bridges, CTA, metra, driving, etc.	about transportation for residents	structural boundaries, barriers or industry transportation	lack of good transportation options congestion
Group 1: Content	River	The River and Health	FG guide	Initial	references to how the river impacts residents health or the perception if the river is healthy	includes guesses on causation of the river causing health issues	excludes discussion of things in the water without participants saying if it's healthy or not	oil in water, foam, what's up with the river
Group 1: Content	River	industrial river	memoir	focused	refers to participants discourse on how the river is used by industry	river use or characteristics that related specifically to industry	health impact of river or pollution (generally)	it's a working river the river is not made for us

					or supports industry			
Group 1: Content	River	Access to or interaction with river	FG guide	focused	references to how residents have access to or interact with the river	whether they have access to river or not, how they access or use the river (includes fishing)	health impact of river	add the problem with the river, of course, is there's no accessibility, you know.
Group 1: Content	River	Visioning, how to use river	memoir	focused	includes references to how participants envision using the river or wish they could use or interact with the river	comparison to another river, things that they wish this river or riverbank had	how the river is currently used	There's a -- there's an area coming down the bridge from 92nd Street. Like I think that would be pretty cool if like people [benefit with that], like a park or-or somewhere to go hang out or a fishing area.
Group 1: Content	Climate Change		FG guide	initial	Mentions about climate change or changes in temperature, air quality, or flooding over the years	climate change emerging from the question or organically (without being probed)	only mentions current climate (no change)	I work, uh -- I work outside. I've been working outside -- uh, outside for a few years now. And I've noticed that, every year, our winters are different. Like there's periods of like hot -- like weird weather. And then, there's periods of like really cold weather.
Group 1: Content	common story		FG guide	initial	responses to question "is there a common story that is known	good or bad story	perception of SE side content	tight knit community

					about SE side?"			
Group 1: Content	health concerns		FG guide	initial	reference to a health issues/concerns/priorities residents face	related to health	causes of health concerns	You have no choice, You need to breathe
Group 1: Content	health causes		FG guide	initial	What participants think are causes of health problems SouthEast side residents face	accurate or inaccurate causes, could be guesses	health issues	Is anybody -- I-I was at Cal Park today. And I was looking over to Indiana and the mills there and the refinery. And I don't know if you've seen those. It's just big plumes of smoke coming up out of there. Well, if you're getting a, you know -- if you get an east wind or a southeast wind, it's blowing directly over this year, you know. So it's -- I mean, it's just the area we live in.
Group 2: Inductive	community health messages/warnings		memoing	focused	Participants refer to messaging or lack of messaging on what is safe to do in neighborhood (e.g., fish, bike, walk, drinking water)	what is or what is not safe	issues referencing distrust of government	They should -- they should -- they should be giving warnings to the neighborhood and the community to please do not fish from there to here and this -- and this may causes whatever it is.
Group 2: Inductive	normalcy of pollution		memoing	focused	references to the experience of	Recognizes pollution as		nose blind

					pollution as part of normal life. Includes references to SE side residents desensitized to common odors.	happening, but not a big deal		
Group 2: Inductive	adapted behaviors		memoir	focused	FG participants references to specific behavior to cope with their environment (as a response to something that's happened)	Something that participants wouldn't normally do	adaptation to non environmental issues	can't play outside; too much dust in house, must clean house
Group 2: Inductive	five senses: odor, air, noise, particulate matter (dust)		memoir	focused	Participants' references to things they smell, hear, see or touch	odor, air quality, noise		"You have no choice, You need to breathe"
Group 1: Content	gem		FG guide	Initial	Participants reference community gems (e.g., resources, institutions)	includes forgotten gems	Gems outside of the SE side	Beautiful parks

Group 2: Inductive	concern for safety		memoir	focused	includes references to safety, broadly defined - violence and infrastructure (unkept street, empty lots, lights)	Physical safety (Street repair, Sidewalk availability/quality, Street signs/lights, safety structure) Violence	environmental hazards; air quality	But I feel like, even if there were a lot of things to do, it's always this question of, like, the violence in the neighborhood.
Group 3: Utility	spatial		field notes	focused	people making reference to a geography or space	Specific mention of a place or intersection		I know sometimes when you go over the 95th Street Bridge, um, especially in the summer like there's a smell that - that smells when you're going over it. And I don't know if it's from the salt hill center there or from the river itself.
Group 3: Utility	recommendations for outreach		partners	Initial	Participants suggest ways for Calumet Connect or other community organizations to engage residents about the industrial corridor or community issues	recommendations for non-governmental groups	references to solutions	A forum would be nice

Group 1: Content	solutions		FG guide	Initial	Suggestions for solutions that are needed to address concerns	ideas to address issues faced by SE Chicago residents (pollution, systemic disinvestment, etc.)	responses to the question that do not address solutions	riverwalk, leverage community business
Group 2: Inductive	government		memoing	focused	References to the role of government, politics, red tape, power imbalances, and decision making processes	What the government does; references to government processes, players	How the government treats the SE side (systemic disinvestment by government)	So it's hard for me to see the City would do anything for us because they've already got plans. And it's not for us. It's about us, but it's not for us. I don't see it at all. I don't.
Group 2: Inductive	structural boundaries, barriers		memoing	focused	Participants refer to physical, structural barriers in SE Chicago	transportation-related barriers or physical divisions in the community	psychological barriers	bridge goes up, you are stuck
Group 2: Inductive	past-present		memoing		use this code to flag references to the past (versus now)	Reference to the past	no comparison to the past	Well, in the '50s, it was the number-one thing. Everybody worked in the factories, everybody's uncles, cousins, everybody, everybody work. But - now, a-a handful of people work.
Group 2: Inductive	confusion,		memoing	focused	Participants share that they	myths and misinformation	disagreement on	Uh, me personally, I mean, I'm not too sure, because, you

	don't know				don't know or that there is confusion on a topic		specifics of an issue	know, I don't I don't know about, like, the ground and stuff, but I'd probably have to say it'd have to do with the soil, maybe. At least, I think.
Group 2: Inductive	lack of transparency, distrust		memoing	focused	Participants feel distrustful of what is communicated about safety and pollution	distrust of the government or industry that what they communicate is true	distrust of other residents	So, what I'm saying is in the residential community which is now more of a residential community the steel mill is not there. There is no reason for anyone to add more heavy industry to an area that is already filled with all sorts of toxic, secret waste sites that are so secretive that even the people who, uh, live and work in the area cannot know where they are.
Group 2: Inductive	sense of futility		partners	focused	Participants report feelings of hopelessness, lack of agency, that their efforts are often wasted	frustration of not being able to accomplish goal	what others think of residents efforts in SE Chicago	And when it ends up, the only ones that's left in the neighborhood is the poor people that can't do anything.
Group 1: Content	flooding		FG guide	initial	causes of or references to flooding	including basement seepage, water blockage, street flooding	flooding outside of SE Chicago area	They put -- they put all new sewers in for East Side. And flooding has been worse ever since they did that.
Group 3: Utility	great quote		apriori	apriori	use this code to flag a	none	none	Because I go that way quite frequently, and you can smell it. I had

				group of word to several sentences that you think is verbatim language from participants that we may want to use as evidence in our report			my window rolled up in the car, but I had to roll it down to get some air then put it back up.
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