

Strawberry Mansion: Coronavirus Testing For An Underserved Neighborhood

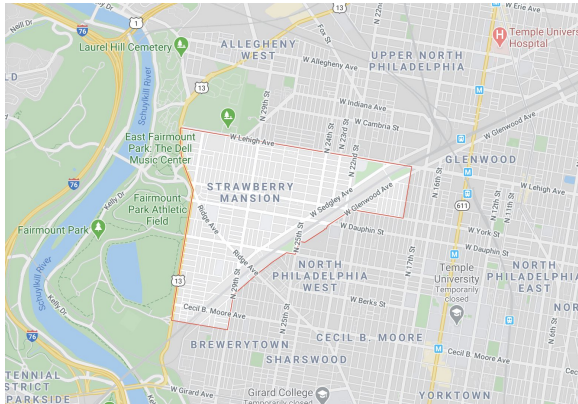
N380 Philadelphia Neighborhoods Moving Forward

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## Community Background



Currently, Strawberry Mansion (ZIP code 19121) has a population of over 32,000 inhabitants, 94% of whom are Black or African American (Close to Home, 2019). The median age is 33, with 35.9% of its population in the 18-34 year old range (Statistical Atlas, 2018). The neighborhood is

located east of the Schuylkill River and borders Brewerytown, North Philadelphia West, Upper North Philadelphia, and Allegheny West.

Although Strawberry Mansion was an affluent streetcar suburb throughout the 1800s and 1900s, it experienced a change in demographic as its Jewish community moved to West Philadelphia. By 1890, Strawberry Mansion had become a thriving neighborhood for middle-class African Americans. However, the real estate market collapse, factory closures, and white flight following the Philadelphia Race Riot of 1964 have also made the community vulnerable. (Edin & Kefalas, 2011) More recently, Strawberry Mansion lost 20% of its population between 2000 and 2017, the highest rate of loss among Philadelphia's zip codes (Newall, 2020). Despite some of these challenges, Strawberry Mansion is an important Philadelphia neighborhood with a resilient community and a rich historical legacy.

## Community Needs

Strawberry Mansion is a neighborhood of many needs. The Department of Public Health and Drexel's Urban Home Collaborative put together Close to Home: The Health of Philadelphia's Neighborhoods, which reveals high rates of poverty, unemployment, building vacancy, violent crime, homicides, and incarceration (Close to Home, 2019) (Inmate Statistics,

2019). All of these statistics contribute to the low level of safety in the neighborhood and may explain why the community is at higher risk for certain health conditions. A diminished supply of primary care physicians is reflected in the 2,585.1 ratio of residents per physicians. They rank as the worst neighborhood in Philadelphia for obesity rates (44.8% of adults) and asthma rates (14.7% of adults). Furthermore, data shows that 38.3% of adults are physically inactive, 33% smoke, and 10.4% have a diagnosis of COPD (Close to Home, 2019). In the Lower North District, which encompasses Strawberry Mansion, 41.4% of adults have high blood pressure or hypertension and 15% of adults have diabetes (Community Health Explorer, 2012-2015).

In light of the current COVID 2019 pandemic, we have narrowed the needs of this community to those that are at higher risk for severe disease in relation to COVID-19 such as those with asthma, chronic lung disease, diabetes, and obesity; all conditions that are prevalent in Strawberry Mansion (Groups at Higher Risk for Severe Illness, 2020). The northwest region that encompasses Strawberry Mansion has only administered a total of 14,023 COVID tests, making this region the lowest tested in the city (COVID-19 Data for Pennsylvania, 2020). This is problematic because a large percentage of the population is considered vulnerable and should be prioritized in getting tested. The shortage of primary care physicians becomes an even bigger issue when faced with a pandemic. Due to this shortage and lack of testing, distributable resources such as thermometers and masks and accessible walk-up COVID testing sites are needed in this community.

### **Community Resources**

Strawberry Mansion benefits from lifelong residents committed to supporting their community through local organizations. One community leader is Tonnetta Graham, President of the Strawberry Mansion Community Development Corporation (CDC). Within the CDC, the Strawberry Mansion Neighborhood Action Center (SNMAC) offers daily services including

vacant land inquiries, job opportunities and budget counseling. Kevin Upshur leads the Strawberry Mansion Community Learning Center which provides tutoring, mentoring, healthy meals, and summer camp opportunities to local students (Newall, 2019). Since the start of the pandemic, the center has been closed, but they have offered online classes and opened an outdoor library.

Leaders also exist within the religious community, like William “Billy” Thompson--a leader at Faith Temple and founder of the Strawberry Mansion Faith Based Coalition, which brings together civic and community organizations with religious leaders to improve quality of life for the community (Philadelphia Neighborhoods, 2014). Many of these churches still offer virtual sermons during the pandemic, and those that explicitly engage in civil rights activism like the Church of the Advocate are speaking out and offering support in response to the recent protests.

Regarding health resources, the community benefits from the centrally located Strawberry Mansion Health Center. This low-cost city health center operated by Philadelphia’s Department of Public Health provides a full range of primary medical and support services (Board of Health, Dept of Public Health, 2020). The health center’s location in the heart of the community is an asset because it is accessible to residents, as is Oak Street Health, which primarily serves Medicare beneficiaries. The last large health resource in the neighborhood is Horizon House, a not-for-profit group that offers programs for behavioral health needs, disability, and homelessness. For emergent or acute medical events, the closest hospital is Temple University Hospital (TUH), located northeast of Strawberry Mansion.

### **Recommendation**

Our recommendation is to implement coronavirus testing in Strawberry Mansion. We make this recommendation for two important reasons: the low prevalence of testing and the

comorbidities of the residents. Our plan is to partner with Black Doctors Covid-19 Consortium. They coordinate testing with predominantly African American communities at churches in poor zip codes and provide free nasal swab testing to symptomatic residents. Specifically, we would look to partner with Billy Thompson, leader at Faith Temple.

In addition to testing at Faith Temple, our intervention would include coronavirus kits and educational materials. These kits would include supplies such as thermometers, surgical masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant products. Educational materials could be distributed and taught by clinic representatives while patients wait in line for tests. Lastly, we would be inclusive of disabled patients and non-English speakers with resources such as phone consultations and audiovisual materials in different languages. Costs would be kept low as we would leverage existing materials from the clinic. Additional funding could be obtained from a grant from the Philadelphia Public Health Department. We envision this testing initiative to take place every other Sunday at churches in Strawberry Mansion, and we can use the religious communities to let others know about upcoming testing days.

Our primary outcome is to increase testing. Other desired outcomes include increased awareness of coronavirus symptoms and mode of transmission, early detection and initiation of care, increased prevention practices, health promotion and maintenance for comorbidities, and continued access to support systems. While we propose education and kits, a potential consequence could be implementing a short-term intervention that creates more needs. Without necessary follow-up more residents could test positive and have no path or guidance forward for care. Another consequence could be mistrust in outside partners or irreverence to testing given racial injustice protests the loosening state policies (counties moving into green and yellow zones).

**Group Reflection**

Through online research we were able to learn a considerable amount about both the assets and needs in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. It became clear to us that our virtual exploration of the neighborhood only gave a partial picture of the community. Without being able to physically visit the neighborhood and speak with the residents and leaders, we felt uncomfortable determining which need would be considered most important to the community. For our recommendation we prioritized the urgency and seriousness of COVID 19. We agreed that limiting the spread of the disease would be most beneficial to the community at this time. It was also important to us to choose a recommendation that allowed us to work with organizations and leaders who are already well established in the community, because they have the experience and knowledge necessary to make our intervention effective and sustainable. We acknowledged that the protests against police brutality currently taking place may be a prominent concern for much of the community. We hope that our recommendation complements these concerns as well because it is possible that participating in protests may lead to a spike in the prevalence of COVID 19, and therefore it will be particularly important to increase access to testing.

Many of the needs in Strawberry Mansion are intensified by the current pandemic. While we hope our recommendation will provide some additional support and benefit to the community, there is still a lot of work to do moving forward. Upstream factors such as income inequality, poor education system, and lack of access to healthcare will all need to be addressed in order to improve the overall health of the neighborhood.

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